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**State-NGO relationships in
transitional democracies:**
The case of CPA-ONG-a government centre for the
advancement of NGOs in Benin

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Tables of Contents

Executive summary

1. **Introduction** page 6
2. **Roles and characteristics of NGOs** page 7
 - 2.1 Roles and functions of NGOs page 7
 - 2.2 NGO's strengths and weaknesses page 9
 - 2.3 NGO-State interaction page 10
3. **The case of CPA-ONG in Benin** page 13
 - 3.1 Background page 13
 - 3.2 Mandate, scope and management arrangements page 14
 - 3.3 UNDP assistance to the current CPA-ONG page 16
 - 3.4 CPA-ONG's accomplishments page 17
 - 3.5 CPA-ONG's constraints page 18
4. **Potential and limitations of CPA-ONG** page 22
 - 4.1 Potential page 22
 - 4.2 Realizing CPA-ONG's potential: Building trust and legitimacy page 26
 - 4.3 Limitations and risks page 27
5. **Possible responses by UNDP** page 31
 - 5.1 UNDP's view on civil society page 31
 - 5.2 UNDP as a facilitator in the case of CPA-ONG and the engaged NGOs page 33
 - 5.3 UNDP support to civil society in Benin page 34
6. **Conclusions** page 37

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Executive Summary



The idea that a government can actively contribute to strengthen Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) through the establishment of a unit in charge of promoting NGOs and enhance policy dialogue is considered controversial by many. It may also be considered as a potential means by which a government attempts to control NGOs. However, in 1999, such a unit, the Centre for the Promotion of Associations and NGOs (CPA-ONG) was established in Benin, a country that has often been cited as a model of democracy within the African context.

This paper focuses on the scope of CPA-ONG. It examines the extent to which this mechanism can reach NGOs in Benin and what the implications are for UNDP.

The research takes place in the context of UNDP's framework on engagement as outlined in "UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Policy Note on Engagement".

The paper starts by looking at the roles and characteristics of NGOs as described in the literature. It describes the three roles attributed to NGOs by Clarke: the complementing, reforming, and opposing roles. Flexibility, voluntarism, closeness to people and autonomy are cited as the main strengths of NGOs. On the other hand, NGOs often suffer from weak sectoral, financial, organizational and institutional capacity, and the government seems to have little knowledge about NGO-related issues.

The paper argues that there is a rationale for a certain interaction between civil society and the State.

Based on a presentation of CPA-ONG and the environment in which it operates, the paper looks at how CPA-ONG has contributed to strengthen the relationship between the State and NGOs in Benin. It has for example opened up channels for exchange of information.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the unit has been limited due to the existence of mistrust, and the lack of focus on harmonization of development activities and of financial resources.

Based on the above, the paper examines the potential and the limitations of the unit as well as the risks associated with it.

It argues that CPA-ONG should only seek to strengthen NGOs performing the complementing role, i.e. NGOs engaged in the implementation of relatively uncontroversial government policies, and which provide better services than the State. Efforts should be

made to build trust between the actors as well as legitimacy of both the actors and the unit. Possible measures are: elaboration of a clear mandate; strong representation of NGOs in the different management bodies; and existence of transparent mechanisms for distribution of benefits and training of staff, both within the unit and NGOs.

The unit should not seek to strengthen NGOs wishing to perform the reforming, i.e. the advocacy and policy dialogue role, and the opposing, i.e. the watchdog role of keeping the State accountable. The autonomy of NGOs is threatened when they interact with the State, either through a formal structure as CPA-ONG or through formal relationships where the State is the dominant player. Political considerations seem to influence the space left for NGOs by the latter.

CPA-ONG then has the potential to improve implementation of development activities more effectively but can, to a much lesser extent, contribute to the consolidation of democracy in Benin.

UNDP recognizes the crucial role of participation in development and has developed a framework for partnership with civil society. As part of its poverty reduction strategy and as scorekeeper of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), UNDP could contribute to the advancement of CSOs at two levels.

First, it could assist the process already started through the creation of CPA-ONG. It could:

- Support the dialogue between the government and engaged NGOs;
- Commission studies on relevant issues, such as needs assessments and evaluations of NGO service provision as compared to that provided by the State;
- Assist the capacity building of the government, the engaged NGOs and the unit;
- Support the establishment of an efficient umbrella organization of NGOs;
- Assist the implementation of reforms.

Second, it could give support to a broader spectrum of civil society in Benin. Acting as a facilitator, UNDP could:

- Commission a mapping of civil society in Benin in order to identify the real civic forces;

- Encourage the inclusion of CSOs in discussions on pro-poor policies by proposing the creation of a forum with representatives from CSOs, the government, UNDP and other partners in development.

In any case, further research into possible means of strengthening civil society and its relationship with the State is needed.

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Introduction

The idea that a government can actively contribute to strengthen Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) through the establishment of a unit in charge of promoting NGOs and enhance policy dialogue is considered by many as controversial and a means by which the government controls NGOs. However, in 1999, such a unit, the Centre for the Promotion of Associations and NGOs, CPA-ONG,⁽¹⁾ was established in Benin, a country that has often been cited as a model of democracy within the African context.

(1) Centre de Promotion des Associations et ONGs.

This paper focuses on the scope of CPA-ONG. What are its advantages and its disadvantages? To what extent can it contribute to the strengthening of NGOs? What are the implications for UNDP? The aim is to demonstrate that the unit can play a role in the development process of the country. However, its effect on the consolidation of democracy, as defined in the liberalist view, is limited.

(2) The focus is on national NGOs as, in general, international NGOs are considered to have stronger capacities and easier access to the state than national NGOs.

The research focuses on the relationship between the State and national NGOs in Benin⁽²⁾. It takes place in the context of UNDP's framework on engagement as outlined in "UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Policy Note on Engagement" (UNDP, 2001). Within this framework, CSOs are considered "a crucial resource, constituency and partner for UNDP" (*idem*, p. 3).

In this paper, NGOs are defined as "private, non-profit professional organisations, with a distinctive legal character, concerned with public welfare goals. In the developing world, NGOs include philanthropic foundations, church development agencies, academic think-tanks, human rights organisations and other organisations focusing on issues such as gender, health, agricultural development, social welfare, the environment, and indigenous peoples" (Clarke, 1996).

The paper takes a broad view of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). They are seen as "a third sector, existing alongside and interacting with the State and profit-making firms" (UNDP, 2001, p. 1). They consist of non-profit organizations and special interest groups, either formal or informal, working to improve the lives of their constituents (UNDP, 2002b, p. 9). The paper is divided into four parts. As a background to the case study, the paper starts by looking at the possible roles and functions of NGOs as described in the literature, their strengths and weaknesses, and provides a rationale for NGO-State interaction. The second part presents the case of CPA-ONG. This is followed by a third part in which the potential of the unit is examined. The fourth part looks at UNDP's potential assistance to the unit and argues for UNDP's need to have a broader view on civil society in Benin.

Roles and characteristics of NGOs

NGOs are considered important players in the development process. In a long-term perspective study carried out in 1987, the World Bank states:

“The aim should be to empower ordinary people to take charge of their lives, to make communities more responsible for their development, and to make government listen to their people. Fostering a more pluralistic, institutional structure – including NGOs...is a means to these ends” (Thomas, A., 1992, p. 133).

This first part looks more closely at the roles and functions of NGOs, their strengths and their weaknesses and argues in favour of a certain level of NGO-State interaction.

2.1 Roles and functions of NGOs

Clarke (1991) attributes three roles to NGOs. Hadenius and Ugglå (1996), from their perspective, see NGOs as having two main functions.

NGOs' three roles

In their relation with the State, Clarke (1991) presents the liberalist view that NGOs can fulfil three roles: complementing, reforming, and/or opposing the State.

The idea of the *complementing* NGOs is one of NGOs as service providers and implementers of development activities. In this case, NGOs fill in the gaps left by public services (Thomas, A., 1992, p. 140). By the 1990s, the prevalent ideology among donors was to see the State as an “enabler” rather than a “provider” (Tandon, R. 1991; World Bank, 1997; Clayton & al., 2000, p. 17-18)⁽³⁾. In 1998, the World Bank wrote: “The message of experience is that the is central to economic and social development, not as a direct provider of growth, but as a partner, catalyst and facilitator” (Pinkney, R., 2003, chapter 5). Pinkney observes that “where the State has not abandoned public services or public enterprise altogether, it has frequently delegated the provision of services to NGOs” (*idem*).

The *reforming* role of NGOs is related to NGOs as agents of advocacy and contributors to policy dialogue. NGOs can represent the interest of the people they work with and, hence, ensure that policies are adapted to ‘real life’. In this way, policies are legitimized. NGOs can also contribute to generating informed public judgement. Tandon refers to this as “mediation” (Tandon, R., 1991; UNDP, 2001).

Finally, NGOs can *oppose* the State, by acting as watchdogs and holding it accountable. This can either be done directly through

⁽³⁾ Kothani calls this “to roll back the state” (Kothani, S., 1999, p. 253).

lobbying, or indirectly by supporting groups that are adversely affected by government policy (Thomas, 1992, p. 140; UNDP, 2001). This can also be seen as “mediation”.

NGOs’ two functions

Hadenius and Ugglå (1996) see civil society, hence NGOs, as having two functions: the pluralist and the educational. The former refers essentially to the external and mutual relations of organizations while the latter looks at their internal life.

The *pluralist* function concerns the distribution of power in society and political life. The idea is that by organizing themselves, people obtain power resources. The outcome of a multiplicity of well-developed associations with access to channels for popular influence, is a balance between power centres, interests and opinion. This ensures the best possible coherence between individual preferences and collective choices (Riker cited in Hernes, 1998, p. 190). The pluralist function is closely related to Clarke’s second and third role.

The basic idea behind the *educational* function is that the “spiritual support for democracy’s fundamental principles” (Hadenius and Ugglå, 1996, p. 1622) can only be created through the experience gained from repetitive participation in democratic structures. This is “socialisation into democratic norms through a process of learning by doing” (*idem*). By being part of a democratic association, people can develop a procedural democratic culture, i.e. get used to confronting divergent and contradictory views, and gain the logic of shifting majorities. They become more tolerant and better at managing conflicts. It is believed that under favourable conditions, it can contribute to a convergence of opinions, and hence their integration into a common system of norms. An extended public spirit is thus created. This is the process of building “social capital” (*idem*; Putman, R. 1992; Hadenius A., 1998, p. 227).

Consequently, NGOs are seen as important implementers of development activities as well as contributors to the consolidation of democracy.

The roles and functions are attributed to the NGO sector on what is perceived as its strengths. Naturally they are then limited by the latter’s weaknesses.

2.2 NGOs' strengths and weaknesses

NGOs' strengths

Flexibility, voluntarism, closeness to people and autonomy are often cited as being the comparative advantages of NGOs.

Fowler notes that the organizational form of NGOs makes them more *flexible* and responsive as compared to the 'uniformity', 'rigidity' and 'command methods' of the more bureaucratic lines of government. This makes them more effective.

Their relation to their beneficiaries is one of *voluntarism* as compared to that of the government, which is characterized by control (Thomas, 1992, p. 134).

They are *closer to the people* and, hence, they have better knowledge and understanding of local situations. As noted earlier, NGOs can be seen as mediators, channelling relevant information between the State and the people. It is how they obtain legitimacy.

Finally, *autonomy* ensures NGOs' reforming and opposing roles and the pluralist function.

The NGO sector does however often suffer from several weaknesses. Some of these are internal to NGOs while others are linked to their relations with external agents, including the government.

NGOs' weaknesses

Internally, NGOs are to varying degrees suffering from weak sectoral, financial and organizational capacities.

The *sectoral* capacity refers to a NGO's ability to have an effect on a specific topic or issue of interest. Weak sectoral capacity is often the result of limited access to information.

NGOs often lack *financial* resources. Consequently, they are dependent on external funding. Several authors note that the activities of many organizations continue to be donor-led in countries in Africa, Asia and Eastern and Central Europe.

Finally, *organizational* capacity refers to an NGO's ability to perform certain functions, such as knowledge management or service delivery. It is related to the concept of internal governance, an issue that has received substantial attention in recent years. NGOs have been accused of lacking transparency and democratic internal procedures, and some even for having hidden agendas. Matembe

mentions NGOs smuggling minerals, game and ivory by camouflaging their true intentions in relief operations. Consequently, some governments and populations have become suspicious of NGOs.

This issue is also related to the question of accountability and democratic mandate, as members of NGOs are not selected through elections. Clayton & al. note that “accountability downwards [from service providing NGOs] to the beneficiaries...is generally weak”, as is their accountability towards the State (Clayton & al., 2000, p. 19). In practice there is a risk that community organizations represent the interest of better-off and more powerful individuals and groups better than they represent the interest of the poorest members of the community (Thomas, 1992, p. 138).

Two weaknesses characterize NGOs’ relations with *external* agents:

First, NGOs suffer from weak institutional capacity. This refers to their position vis-à-vis other actors, such as government, other NGOs, and donors. They often lack the powerbase and skills necessary for negotiation, and few mechanisms for interaction between NGOs and the State exist⁽⁴⁾.

The second aspect is the weak capacity on NGO-related issues within government.

Some NGOs play only one or two of the roles cited above, while others fill them all. Different competencies are needed to play different roles. In any case, there is a rationale for a certain interaction between the NGOs and the State.

2.3 NGO-State interaction

The State is in charge of ensuring “a foundation of law, a benign policy environment, investment in people and infrastructure, protection of the vulnerable and protection of the natural environment” (Clayton & al., 2000, p. 17). Even if NGOs are important actors per se, they are not a “system on their own” operating in a vacuum, but part of a wider environment (Bratton, 1989, p. 581, Biggs, S. & al., 1993). Dialogue between the two is essential. According to Hadenius and Ugla, total independence is virtually incompatible with political influence and the State needs civil society to achieve its objectives.

Hadenius and Ugla take this further by arguing that the State has the ability to strengthen civil society. They define a continuum of five stages from a situation in which the State is hostile to civil society to one of benevolence. The first stage characterizes totalitarian regimes

(4) Pinkney points to the inadequate access to the state in Africa. He notes that attempts are made to build democracy without the elaborate subsystems linking society to the state which were commonly found in the West (Pinkney, R., 2003, Chapter 5).

where all organizational activity is banned. In the last stage, the government actively promotes civil society (see Table 1).

Table 1: State treatment of civil society

Stage	State treatment	Type of State
1	The State does not tolerate independent civil activity. <i>Threshold: de facto right to form autonomous organisations.</i>	Hostile State
2	The State accepts autonomous organisation, but does not provide a space for it. <i>Threshold: state withdrawal opening up a space for independent activity.</i>	Benevolent State
3	A space for independent activity exists, but the practice of governance does not promote autonomous organisation. <i>Threshold: favourable institutional structures.</i>	
4	The State provides favourable structures, but no active support. <i>Threshold: active state programs in support of civil society.</i>	
5	The State actively promotes autonomous organisations.	

Source: Hadenius and Ugglå, 1996.

As seen in Table 1, the different stages are separated by four thresholds. Each of them corresponds to one of the following situations in which the State (Hadenius and Ugglå, 1996, p. 1628-1634):

- *Permits the formation of autonomous organisations;*

- *Leaves space for civil society:*

The State withdraws, either intentionally or otherwise, from various social spheres. As mentioned in 1.1, the State has been incapable of providing basic social services in several countries in the Third World as a result of for instance the structural adjustment programs.

- *Provides beneficial institutional structures:*

In this case, the State can install a facilitative legal-administrative framework (registration/legal status, tax exemption, etc.), mechanisms for solving conflicts and arenas for interactions;

- *Actively promotes civil society:*

There are several examples of countries where the State has initiated programmes aimed at strengthening and assisting civil society. Hadenius and Ugglå cite the example of the Division de Organizaciones Sociales (DOS) programme in Chile, which tried to promote the establishment of independent organizations through information and education (Hadenius and Ugglå, 1996, p. 1632). In Ghana, a draft National Policy on Strategic Partnership with NGOs have been adopted and in South Africa, the National Development Agency's (NDA) vision is to "contribute towards the creation of a healthy economically vibrant and stable civil society" (NDA's webpage). In Canada, the government has recently invested in the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) and has appointed a minister in charge of this sector.

The creation of CPA-ONG can be seen as a measure of active promotion of NGOs by the State. It was created in an attempt to effectively use the strengths and deal with the weaknesses of NGOs in Benin. The crucial question is what impact this kind of mechanism has on NGOs' different roles, and, if it could deal with all types of NGOs? This question is examined after a brief presentation of the unit and the environment in which it operates.

The Case of CPA-ONG in Benin

This brief presentation of CPA-ONG starts by outlining the background for its creation, its role and management arrangements and the type of assistance it has received from UNDP. This is followed by a description of what the unit has achieved since its creation, and of what prevents it from performing effectively.

3.1 Background

Benin is one of the poorest countries in the world⁽⁵⁾, but is often cited as a model democracy in the African context. After more than eighteen years of Marxist-Leninist rule under Mathieu Kerekou, Benin was the first African country to launch the process of democratization by organizing a National Conference⁽⁶⁾ in 1990. This Conference gathered 488 representatives from the ruling and opposition political parties, the private sector and civil society, and served as the basis for debating the outlines of a new democratic political order locally referred to as the “Democratic Renewal”⁽⁷⁾ (Schraeder, p. 274-275, Bierschenk et al., 2002, p. 25-26).

One of the consequences of this transition to democracy was the explosion of the civil associational sector⁽⁸⁾. Article 25 under title 2 of the Constitution that was approved in December 1990 recognizes the liberty of association. More than 140 associations were recognized during 1990 (De Maret, P. and Poncelet, M., 1999), and in 1999, an estimated 5000 NGOs existed in Benin, out of which 3000 were officially registered (UNDP, 2000a, p. 66). A large proportion of these are urban-based. According to numbers from 1997 published by the Ministry of Planning, approximately 68 percent of all NGOs are based in the region of Atlantique, most probably in the economic capital Cotonou (De Maret, P. and Poncelet, M, p. 35).

The Beninese State has shown an interest in these organizations as implementers of development activities. They are especially active in the health, environmental and educational sectors.

However, as in many African countries, the sectoral, financial, organizational and institutional capacities of most Beninese NGOs are weak. There has also been a certain confusion in the framework guiding the interaction between the State and civil society⁽⁹⁾. Several ministries such as the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Planning long claimed responsibility for the State’s relations with civil society. In an attempt to clarify the situation, a new ministry named the Ministry in Charge of Relations with the Institutions, Civil Society and the Beninese of the Exterior, MCRI-SCBE⁽¹⁰⁾ was created in 1999. With the aim of increasing the capacities of NGOs and enhancing policy dialogue

(5) Benin ranked 158 on UNDP’s Human Development Index list of 173 countries in 2000 (UNDP, 2002a).

(6) La Conférence Nationale des Forces Vives de la Nation.

(7) Renouveau Démocratique.

(8) Some of Benin’s associations have roots back to colonial times, and some existed during the revolutionary period. The majority appeared just before or after the democratic renewal in the early 1990s (De Maret, P. and Poncelet, M., 1999, p. 35; Bierschenk et al. p. 13).

(9) Bratton reports of similar “jurisdictional struggles within bureaucracy” in Zimbabwe and Kenya (Bratton, 1989, p. 577).

(10) Ministère Charge des Relations avec les Institutions, la Société Civile et les Béninois de l’Extérieur.

within its mandate for national development, the government also created the CPA-ONG. This is a national autonomous unit placed under the auspices of the MCRI-SCBE.

The State's interest in civil society is reconfirmed in the Government's Second Action Programme for the period 2001-2006 (PAG II)⁽¹¹⁾. In the introduction to this programme document, the government states: "The programme is based on relevant analysis and fertile thinking around the problems related to global and sustainable development, in particular what concerns participation of the population in the national construction and the necessity of a shared vision for the future" (authors translation, Présidence de la République du Bénin, 2001a). The programme is divided into seven parts. The first is entitled "Consolidation of Democracy and Good Governance". Here the government claims to promote civil society and its participation in decision-making.

(11) Programme d'Action du Gouvernement 2001-2006.

According to the government, CPA-ONG will play a crucial role in the process. What is then the role of CPA-ONG? What is its intended contribution to the strengthening of NGOs and the consolidation of democracy in Benin?

3.2 Mandate, scope and management arrangements

Several NGOs in Benin had long wished for a formal mechanism for interaction between the State and themselves. A prospective study was conducted before the creation of the CPA-ONG and the results of this study, as well as the regulations governing the Centre, were validated by representatives of the government and NGOs during a workshop in 2000.

The CPA-ONG was officially created by the Decree n 99-515 of November 1999⁽¹²⁾. Its regulatory framework was approved by the Decree n 2000-491 of October 9, 2000.

(12) This decree states the creation of the MCRI-SCBE.

Mandate and scope

CPA-ONG's vision is "to turn Associations and NGOs into a credible force serving the Harmonious and Efficient Development in Benin" and its mission is to serve as a "framework for the promotion of NGOs and Associations, for consultation and harmonization of activities between them, the State and other partners in development" (author's translation, MCRI-SCBE's web-site).

Based on an assessment of the weaknesses of the associational sector, which to a large extent fits that described in 1.2, CPA-ONG has defined the following eight main objectives (author's translation, MCRI-SCBE's web-site):

(13) According to Bierschenk et al. (2002), public information is not easily available in Benin. They argue that this was a characteristic hindering participation in the PRSP process.

1. Train the NGOs in order to strengthen their performance, specialization and professionalism, so that they can fully play their role in the development of the country;
2. Facilitate NGOs and other partners' access to helpful and reliable information⁽¹³⁾;
3. Encourage frameworks of consultations at the local, regional and national level, and the organization of NGOs into groups by main sectors of intervention;
4. Establish a mechanism harmonizing the activities of NGOs' with that of the government without threatening the liberalization of the former;
5. Evaluate the impact of the activities of the NGOs;
6. Promote transparent management, respect for the texts and internal democracy among NGOs;
7. Encourage exchange of information across nations;
8. Update information on NGO.

Three management bodies are in charge of the functioning of the unit and, hence, the achievement of these objectives.

Management arrangements

The Centre is managed by three bodies:

- o The Executive Board (CA)
- o The Committee for Study and Approbation of Projects (CEAP)
- o The Management Team

The [Executive Board](#) is composed of 15 members: nine representatives from nine different ministries and six representatives from civil society (four from NGOs and two from Development Associations). The Executive Board has two observers: one representative from other partners in development (i.e. donors) and one from the Association of Beninese of the Exterior. The members are nominated by a decree taken by the Council of Ministers upon proposition by the Minister of MCRI-SCBE. The presidency of the Board is allocated to the representative from the MCRI-SCBE. The Executive Board's main role is to orient the activities of the Centre, adopt its budgets, its financial reports as well as its action plans, analyse the activity report of the Direction, mobilize resources for the functioning of the Centre, and, finally, evaluate its performance (Decree n 2000-491 of October 9 2000). Decisions are based on majority vote and, in the case of equality of votes, the President's vote is decisive.

The [Committee for Study and Approbation of Projects \(CEAP\)](#) has five members selected from the Board: three from the government and two from civil society. The presidency and vice-presidency is given to the representatives from MCRI-SCBE and the Ministry of Planning, respectively. This committee examines and selects the projects undertaken by the Centre.

The [Management Team](#) of the Centre executes the programme activities of the Centre, mobilizes resources for the implementation of the programme and presents activity and financial reports to the Board. It is composed of the Director who is nominated by the Council of Ministers upon proposition of the MCRI-SCBE and recommendation from the Board, and the persons in charge of each of CPA-ONG's four departments⁽¹⁴⁾. The latter are recruited through open competition.

(14) Department of administration and finances, department in charge of the harmonization of the actions of NGOs and the state, department in charge of the strengthening of the capacities of NGOs and Associations and department in charge of the monitoring and evaluation of performances.

(15) The first local elections since the Democratic Renewal were held in December 2002.

In an attempt to ensure a participative approach and in line with the current process of decentralization⁽¹⁵⁾, the CPA-ONG has one focal point representing NGOs in each of Benin's twelve regions. These are nominated by the organizations themselves at the local level. A counterpart is selected to represent CPA-ONG at the local administrative level.

Taking into account this ambitious agenda, UNDP has provided some assistance to CPA-ONG.

3.3 UNDP assistance to the current CPA-ONG

UNDP was involved in the creation of CPA-ONG and has provided it with some support. This support has mainly been channelled through the Project for the Strengthening of Capacities and the Framework for Intervention of Civil Society Institutions (BEN/00/002).

The main areas of support are:

- Training

UNDP has supported the training of government officials in activity planning methods taking into account the interest and needs of civil society. It has also collaborated with CPA-ONG in the organization of a workshop for representatives from NGOs specializing in governance issues.

- Exchange of information

A project of elaborating an electronic directory of both international

(16) Centre d'Information Régionales pour le Développement.

and national NGOs operating in Benin has been undertaken by the Centre of Regional Information for Development (CIRD)⁽¹⁶⁾ with support from UNDP, the Ministry of Planning and the MCRI-SCBE. The directory currently contains information about 1155 NGOs and is available on CD-ROM. The directory provides information about the NGOs' activities, objectives, partners, zones of intervention, current projects as well as what CIRD calls elements of professionalism. The latter aims to portray the NGOs capacity to manage financial, material and human resources.

- Mobilization of resources

In November 2001, UNDP supported the organization of a forum where representatives from NGOs, government, the private sector and other partners in development came together to discuss the opportunities for partnership. One of the results of this forum was the elaboration of a Guide on Mobilization of Resources focusing on application methods and donor policies.

- Consultation

UNDP was partnering with CPA-ONG in the organization of the "Workshop on the participation of NGOs in the prevention and management of conflicts in Benin".

A more extensive list of CPA-ONG's accomplishments since its creation is presented below.

3.4 CPA-ONG's accomplishments

Since its creation, the CPA-ONG has focused on the following activities:

- Training

In order to strengthen the capacities of the NGOs, CPA-ONG has organized a series of trainings. In addition to the trainings cited in 2.3, it has organized trainings in techniques of elaboration of project documents as well as in techniques of political expression and negotiation skills. The method used is based on the principle of "training of trainers"⁽¹⁷⁾.

(17) NGOs are trained so that they in turn can train other NGOs at the local level.

- Exchange of information

A major role for the Centre is to improve NGOs' exchange of and access to information. CPA-ONG has an Information Centre where NGOs can obtain information, for instance on procedures of registration. It regularly publishes a bulletin, "Synergie", which contains information such as decrees and project opportunities (for instance donors seeking NGOs for the implementation of their programmes). Information and discussions are also provided through

a television programme, “NGOs and Associations in action” and a radio programme. Every second week, the Centre organizes meetings under the title “Exchange and Information”, a framework for dialogue between NGOs, civil servants and other partners in development. The Centre has recently launched its website providing similar information.

- Mobilization of resources

The best example of resource mobilization is the forum and the elaboration of the Guide on Mobilization of Resources described in 2.3.

- Administrative and legal formalities

The CPA-ONG has lobbied for the effective implementation of the provision in decree n 2001-234 of July 12, 2001 concerning the existence and functioning of NGOs. The texts ensuring this have just been signed.

- Consultation

The CPA-ONG has organized forums of consultations between NGOs, government and partners in development. It has also assisted NGOs’ participation at international conferences.

Despite these accomplishments, several factors constrain the effective functioning of CPA-ONG.

3.5 CPA-ONG’s constraints

In general, CPA-ONG’s effectiveness is constrained by mistrust between the different actors as well as a lack of focus on harmonization of development efforts and of financial resources.

The nature of mistrust

As shown in part 1, NGOs are seen as mediators between the local population and the government. This requires trust at all levels. NGOs may however be suspicious of the government while the local population and the government may be suspicious of the NGOs. This blocks the dialogue between them.

NGOs mistrust of the State

As mentioned earlier, several NGOs had long wished for a mechanism facilitating their interaction with government. These NGOs welcomed the creation of CPA-ONG. However, hoping that CPA-ONG would be an affair of NGOs for the NGOs, they saw it turn into a governmental unit. According to some NGOs, relevant comments which were expressed by NGOs during the validation of the prospective study were not taken into account in the final

(18) While coordination refers to synchronization of activities among independent actors, co-option refers to a firmer form of control in which autonomous organizations are captured and guided by a superordinate agency (Bratton, 1989, p. 579).

documents. Consequently, CPA-ONG has lost its legitimacy among several NGOs who fear that the government seeks to control NGO activity. NGOs engaged with CPA-ONG risk losing their autonomy, i.e. becoming subject to co-option⁽¹⁸⁾ and only playing an instrumental role. They point to the composition of the Executive Board, which is dominated by government officials and the fact that the Director is nominated by the MCRI-SCBE.

Speaking of CPA-ONG's support to NGOs, some NGOs state that there is little transparency in the allocation process and they are suspicious of the mechanisms used for decision-making.

Some NGOs also complain that they are invited to forums or consulted on different issues just for the record. This is the phenomenon of tokenism. As a result of an increasing focus on participation in the development of public policies, the government invites them only to mention their presence in the final reports. Others claim that they are not invited at all. Several NGOs therefore mistrust CPA-ONG.

Both the government and the population may question the legitimacy of NGOs and their internal governance. The population may equally question their autonomy.

The State and the population's mistrust of NGOs

As in most African countries, the Beninese administration absorbed the majority of young Beninese coming out of universities in the first years after independence. However, with economic recession and the structural adjustments imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) employment in the administration was substantially reduced and young professionals had to look for other opportunities. After the Democratic Renewal, the solution to the lack of employment opportunities was for some the creation of NGOs. The democratization process in Benin had attracted the interest of donors and large resources were made available to national NGOs (UNDP, 2000a, p. 66).

(19) Pinkney argues that much of the initial rise of civil society in developing countries in the 1970s and 1980s had less to do with democracy than with personal survival in the face of falling living standards and the inadequacy of state services (Pinkney, 2003, chapter 5). Gibbon states that many associations in Africa are self-seeking and economically oriented as part of survival strategies, and not necessarily capable of or interested in contesting political power relations locally or on a nation-wide scale (Gibbon (1992) cited in Sjogren, A, 1998, p. 17).

Most of the NGOs in Benin are multi-purpose and according to Bierschenk et al. "implement any development project for which they can find financing" (Bierschenk et al., 2002, p. 14)⁽¹⁹⁾. They are not specialized in a specific domain such as education, gender, environment or HIV/AIDS, but intervene in several areas. As a result, the government and the population may question their true intention and devotion, and hence, their *legitimacy* and *internal governance*.

Despite these perceived weaknesses, the government may also see NGOs “as potential challengers in the realm of political leadership” (Bratton, M., 1989, p. 569) and as competitors for funding. Both NGOs and the State seek to mobilize resources for themselves at the level of donors. Consequently, there is a risk of competition for funds between them. This may threaten their willingness to cooperate and to be open.

The population may question their autonomy. It is argued that a great number of NGOs are hardly *autonomous* from the State. “Leaders of many so-called CSOs have multiple identities and straddle within the world of politics and the private sector” (*idem*). De Maret and Poncelet argue that during and after registration, Beninese NGOs seek to multiply their contacts with the State by presenting themselves to the ministries in charge of the domains in which they operate (Pirotte et al., 1999, p. 72). NGOs in Benin seem to focus on the implementation of development activities, which have either been outlined by the State or the donors, or have been elaborated and submitted for financing by the NGOs themselves (De Maret, P. and Poncelet, M., 1999, p. 71). They are to a large extent complementing NGOs and to a lesser extent reforming and opposing NGOs. As noted by both De Maret and Poncelet and Bierschenk et al., Beninese NGOs are generally not militant, not even human rights organizations, whose activities mainly consist of educating amongst others, civil servants, women and children. The idea is: “Civil society and political society, we all have the same objective: the development of democracy” (De Maret, P. and Poncelet, M., 1999, p. 54)⁽²⁰⁾.

(20) Exceptions exist, like the organization “Femmes juristes”, which actively opposes the state on gender related issues (De Maret, P. and Poncelet, M., 1999, p. 54).

The nature of mistrust at all levels blocks dialogue between the different actors, a situation made worse by the lack of organization and, hence, a ‘common voice’, amongst NGOs. Several NGO platforms and networks exist but they are perceived by many as inefficient. This is a threat to the effective functioning of CPA-ONG.

Two other constraints are the lack of focus on harmonization and of financial resources.

Lack of focus on harmonization and of financial resources

One of the more potentially interesting roles of CPA-ONG, the harmonization of development activities, is not explicitly expressed in the list of accomplishments presented in 2.4. According to several authors, the Beninese environment is characterized by an absence of coordination of development efforts, both at the level of the national and local government, NGOs and donors (De Maret, P. and Poncelet, M., 1999; Bierschenk et al., 2002; Paul, E., 2002). The result is the

(21) CPA-ONG was not involved in the elaboration of the PRSP. Participation of civil society in the PRSP process was handled directly by the MCRI-SCBE.

(22) In 2001, 14 out of 22 scheduled activities were undertaken by CPA-ONG (CPA-ONG, 2002, p. 7).

provision of parallel services, ad-hoc approaches and duplication of activities. Both Paul and Bierschenk et al. cite this as a major obstacle to the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)⁽²¹⁾, elaboration of which is currently in its finishing stage.

CPA-ONG is also threatened by financial constraints. The funds allocated by the government are not sufficient to cover the expenses of the identified activities⁽²²⁾, equipment and staff (CPA-ONG, 2002, p. 7). The capacity of the staff is limited and it may not have access to high level appointments in public administration.

Given these circumstances, what is the potential of this unit?

Potential and limitations of CPA-ONG

Autonomy is seen as an essential aspect of civil society and much literature focuses on how it can be threatened when NGOs interact with the State. It would then seem that the argument for and against the unit would revolve around this issue. In this third part, the paper looks more closely at the potential and limitations of CPA-ONG as well as the risks associated with it.

4.1 Potential

From both the developing and industrialized countries, lessons are emerging that one way forward to tackle poverty and unemployment, and to provide basic social services, is through stronger State-CSO, i.e. NGO relationships. This was for instance emphasized at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen (Clayton et al., 2000, p. 19). Such relations could occur in situations where the interests of the State coincide with those of the NGOs and where the latter have some comparative advantages. Hence a unit like CPA-ONG could be a potentially interesting instrument for the strengthening of NGOs whose main activities are defined by the complementing role. It could contribute to improving the interaction between NGOs, the State and other partners in development, lobby for further development of the enabling environment and establish effective systems of monitoring and evaluation. Training of both members of NGOs and government officials could be an important part of these processes (see Table 2).

Table 2: Potential assistance provided by CPA-ONG

	Domain of assistance	Type of activity	Type of capacity addressed
Training	Improved interaction between NGOs, State and other partners in development	Improved exchange of information NGOs-State-partners in development	Sectoral, financial, organizational and institutional capacities of NGOs; Government knowledge and understanding of NGOs.
		Further harmonization of development activities	
		Increased mobilization of resources	
	Further development of the enabling environment	Lobbying for legal-administrative framework	
		Lobbying for mechanisms for solving conflicts	
	Establishment of effective systems of monitoring and evaluation (for instance of the PRSP process)		Sectoral, financial, organizational and institutional capacities of NGOs; Government knowledge and understanding of NGOs and development issues.

Improved interaction between NGOs, the State and other partners in development

With an aim to strengthen the sectoral, financial, organizational and institutional capacities of NGOs as well as to increase the level of knowledge and understanding of NGOs within government, CPA-ONG can play a role in the following areas: exchange of information between NGOs and the State, harmonization of development activities and mobilization of resources.

Improved exchange of information between NGOs and the State

Focal points can be identified within ministries and within the NGO community, both at the national and the local level. One such exchange could focus on the decentralization of resources at the regional or local level. Clayton et al. emphasizes for example the need for CSOs to understand the structure and the linkages between institutions in order for them to decide which government body they should seek to work with and [where the resources are](Clayton, 2000, p. 20). Efforts could be made to properly assess the needs of NGOs. This information could lead towards concrete suggestions to government on how to support NGOs.

Further harmonization of activities

In an extensive review of documentation of CSO service provision in the south of Benin, Robinson and White argue that CSOs are unable to provide an overall framework in which to operate at both national and regional levels, and that this is the responsibility of the State (Robinson, M. and White, G., 1997, p. 45). Through CPA-ONG, NGO-related activities can be harmonized both within the government, i.e. between ministries, as well as externally, i.e. between the State, NGOs and other partners in development. This is interesting for the State as it provides a mechanism ensuring that all development activities are in line with the public policy/development strategies of the country. Hence, ad-hoc approaches as well as duplication and the provision of parallel services are avoided (Clayton et al., 2000, p. 19). Good coordination through participation of all actors in development⁽²³⁾ is especially crucial for the implementation of the PRSP the elaboration of which, as already mentioned, is currently in its final stages in Benin (Bierschenk et al., 2002; Paul, E., 2002). The “underlying hypothesis [of the PRSP] is that participation favours appropriation, which in turn favours the performance of the strategies and the allocated funds” (author’s translation, Paul, E., 2002). Coordinated participation is here seen as a goal at all stages of the process, i.e. during elaboration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP.

(23) Government, CSOs, private sector and multi- and bilateral donors.

Increased mobilization of resources

CPA-ONG can mobilize resources at the level of both the State and the donors. These resources can be used for capacity building as well as for the implementation of development activities.

Further development of the enabling environment

CPA-ONG can lobby for a review of the legal-administrative framework and the provision of mechanism for solving conflicts. The result is a reduction in the operational as well as transaction costs. The latter increases the incentive for entering into cooperation with other actors.

Establishment of effective systems of monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is increasingly seen as an important aspect of the development process. Article 29 in Chapter 2 of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (1995) states that the monitoring of poverty could be done by government “inter alia through...mobilising public awareness, in particular through educational institutions, NGOs and the media, to enable society to prioritize the struggle against poverty, while focusing attention on progress or failure in the pursuit of defined goals and targets”. The same idea underlies the monitoring and evaluation in the case of the PRSP and the MDGs.

Training

In all areas of assistance, CPA-ONG can provide training to members of NGOs and government officials. Training programmes such as project management and government responsive planning could be elaborated.

The interesting aspect of CPA-ONG as compared to NGOs’ own resource centres for example, is that it creates a channel of dialogue and a forum of interaction between the State and the NGOs. It gives NGOs an opportunity to reach government officials, and vice-versa. In line with the educational function of NGOs as defined in 1.1, it is also believed that repeated interaction and positive experiences of collaboration between actors build trust, social networks and a sense of community (Hirshman cited in Hadenius and Uggla, 1996, p. 1624, Putnam, 2002). The aim is better effectiveness in the implementation of policies aimed at poverty reduction.

As shown in 2.5, several constraints must however be dealt with before CPA-ONG can function effectively. These are to a large extent related to the questions of trust and legitimacy.

4.2 Realizing CPA-ONG's potential: building trust and legitimacy

Trust is the foundation of every form of cooperation and the basis for all viable institutions (Hadenius and Ugglå, 1996, p. 1626). Trust is not something you have, but something you gain. As mentioned in 2.5, culture, history and especially the political climate determine the level of trust in a society. Efforts to build trust and legitimacy must be made both for CPA-ONG and for NGOs. These efforts should be accompanied by a push for national level reforms such as administrative reform.

For CPA-ONG

In the case of CPA-ONG, a higher level of trust and legitimacy might be achieved through the restructuring of the Executive Board and the CAEP to make more room for representatives of NGOs and by opening up the position of the Director to competition⁽²⁴⁾. Bringing in other actors from civil society such as researchers could strengthen the Board, as pluralism promotes transparency and accountability. Consultation with NGOs throughout the process is essential.

(24) The same applies to the different bodies created through the concretization of the decree n 2001-234 of July 12, 2001 concerning the existence and functioning of NGOs.

With the support of donors, NGOs could lobby for the adoption of better practices by the government (Thomas, 1992, p. 143). This is exactly what happened in Ghana. In 1993, the government of Ghana tried to pass a NGO Act. This was contested by the NGOs on the grounds that, among others, they had not been sufficiently consulted during the elaboration process and that the place provided for NGOs in the implementing unit was too limited. With pressure from NGOs and the donor community the Act was abandoned in 1994. A new draft proposing a different composition of the board of the unit⁽²⁵⁾ was validated in 2001. In this draft, membership is weighted in favour of NGOs to reflect their majority status and the chairman is selected amongst its members (NCG; Opoku-Mensah, P. and Akwetey, E. (2000); CAF's web-site).

(25) The autonomous unit is called the National Commission on NGOs (NCNGO). It has both policy-related and administrative functions.

The unit should have a clear mandate delimiting the intervention of the government and clear criteria for the selection process of representatives. Mechanisms for the distribution of benefits have to be established. Legal provisions permitting insight have to be ensured.

(26) Or else, "the quest for coordination may end in over-centralised decision-making, bureaucratic decay and suffocation of badly-needed private initiative" (Bratton, 1989, p. 578).

Staff at the centre should be sufficiently trained. Its capacity for coordination should be reinforced⁽²⁶⁾. The capacities of the regional focal points should be strengthened so that local cases can be effectively treated at the local level.

For NGOs

Efforts should be made to improve the internal organization of the NGO sector. Many observers propose the establishment of horizontal linkages among similar organizations and combinations of various smaller groups into overarching organizations. It is stated that the most successful organizations are those taking part in some kind of federation on a regional or national level. These umbrella organizations not only mobilize, but represent a framework for resolving conflicts and reaching agreements, which in turn results in better cooperation and integration of activities (Hadenius et al., 1996, p. 1622 & 1627, Bratton, 1989, p. 583). An efficient umbrella organization of NGOs should therefore be established in Benin. NGOs also have to become more credible and strengthen their internal governance. One of the first tasks of the new umbrella organization should be the promotion of a code of conduct⁽²⁷⁾ (Heap, 2001).

(27) Attempts have already been made to establish and adopt a code of conduct. However, these attempts have not been effective.

Finally, as mediators between the population and the State, the NGOs must reinforce their relationship with local communities.

The need for reforms

All these measures should not be seen in isolation from the efforts needed to implement the various reforms undertaken by the State, such as the administrative reform and the process of decentralization (Hadenius and Ugglå, 1996, p. 1634). One component of the administration reform is to make the civil service more professional. The civil service then becomes less vulnerable to the political environment. In their study of the PRSP-process in Benin, both Bierschenk et al. and Paul see reforms as a necessary condition for the success of the PRSP (Bierschenk et al., 2002, p. 45; Paul, E., 2002, p. 24-27).

However, these efforts seem to address “participation at the mobilising or therapy end rather than the citizen-control end of the spectrum” (Arnstein (1969) stated in Pinkney, 2003, Chapter 5). The outreach of the unit seems to be limited to a certain type of NGOs.

4.3 Limitations and risks

As a result of the governmental nature of CPA-ONG, its outreach is limited to NGOs whose aim is the implementation of development activities and does not include those seeking to perform the reforming and opposing roles. In addition to this, there are certain limitations and risks associated with using NGOs as service providers.

The limited outreach of CPA-ONG

Two main issues limit the outreach of CPA-ONG: political considerations and the question of autonomy.

Michel Bratton notes that in Africa *“the space given or allowed NGOs is determined more often than not by political considerations rather than an assessment of the NGOs contributions to economic and social development”* (1989). Clayton et al. claim that while governments may appreciate NGOs *“carry[ing] part of the burden for service provision”*, they are less enthusiastic about them taking a more political role (Clayton et al., 2000, p. 16). In Bangladesh, for example, the government officially states that NGOs are important actors in service delivery. However, it does not see them as representatives of the people or as a civil society actor (DFID, 2000, p. 31). As suggested in 3.1 the content of the NGOs’ programmes is an important factor determining to what extent NGOs and the State can cooperate as *“conflicting objectives breed conflicts”* (Manuh, 1993). Hence, there is reason to believe that the unit will have difficulties operating in a politicized environment, i.e. one where tension exists between the government and the NGOs. There is, however, increased potential for positive cooperation in cases where there is a political will for and a common goal of human sustainable development.

Autonomy is essential in order for NGOs to perform their second and third roles, i.e. to engage in policy dialogue and ‘watch’ the State. Without this, it is unlikely that NGOs can provide an alternative development agenda for governments as well as donors. Hadenius and Ugglå see autonomy as an essential factor of the pluralist function of civil society. However, this autonomy is severely threatened if the relationship with the State is too strong. The risk of dependency and co-option limits the possibilities for being critical or opposing the State (Hernes, 1998, p. 203).

Hence, the unit should limit its activities to the strengthening of NGOs engaged in the implementation of relatively uncontroversial government policies and should not interfere in the life of the NGOs seeking to perform the second and third roles. The unit can then contribute to making the development process more effective, but to a much lesser extent to the consolidation of democracy as defined by the liberalist view. Consequently, CPA-ONG should be considering a certain type of NGO that can be strengthened: the complementing NGO. There are, however, risks related to using NGOs as service providers.

NGOs as service providers

As noted above, service providing NGOs risk losing their autonomy, and hence, their possibility to act as change agents is substantially reduced. This is however not the only implication of using NGOs as service providers. Two other issues should be raised: the role of NGOs in service provision and the risk of undermining the State.

The role of NGOs in service provision

In their study on the role of civic organizations in the provision of social services, Robinson and White state that “it is not possible to conclude that services provided by civic organisations are uniformly of a higher standard than those offered by the government” (Robinson, M. and White, G., 1997, p. 44). Fragmentation of efforts, technical complexities, high staff turnover in NGOs and lack of sustainability are some factors which limit the standard of NGO service provision in some cases. Consequently, there is need to study and evaluate the specific role of NGOs in service provision and to focus on those who are best suited to provide the services in question, the State or the NGOs. Such evaluations are necessary in order to prevent that “policy analysis and advocacy...[are]...based on ideological predilection and anecdote, not substantive evidence” (Clayton et al., 2000, p. 22). These evaluations are also needed to ensure that service providing NGOs are not undermining the State.

The risk of undermining the State

A satisfactory system of social provision relies on properly constituted state authority and institutions (Robinson, M. and White, G., 1997, p. 45). Hence, in contexts where NGOs have taken over a large part of the service provisions and where the State is weak, there is a risk of undermining the latter. This has a financial aspect related to the collection of taxes upon which governments are so dependent. A decrease in the provision of services by the State may weaken people’s willingness to pay taxes.

Bierschenk et al. describe the political system in place at the local level in Benin as follows (Bierschenk et al., 2002, p. 8):

“One of the major features of this system is its high degree of institutional and legal pluralism. Local political arenas are multi-centred with representatives of the central State unable to impose decisions on powerful local players. Decisions are based on complicated negotiations between local representatives of the State, different segments of local political elites and a multitude of local institutional actors (traditional chiefs, development associations, NGOs, religious groups, local sections of political parties, peasants”

organisations, the security forces, etc.). In the absence of a clear system of rules, regulations and sanctions, and given the number of local vetoing powers, these decisions are notoriously difficult to implement. In other words, the local administration has very weak arbitration and regulatory powers, which contributes to the semi-autonomy enjoyed by local political groups”.

This description emphasizes the need to implement reforms such the administrative reform and the process of decentralization. The aim of the latter is the institutionalization of a representative government at the local level.

This has shown that much effort is needed at all levels to make CPA-ONG more effective. It has also highlighted its limits. What does this mean for the work of UNDP, an organization that considers CSOs central to the success of its development efforts? What could UNDP do in this situation?

Possible responses by UNDP

UNDP could 'intervene' at two levels. First, it could assist the process already started through the creation of CPA-ONG. Second, given the limitations of CPA-ONG and the characteristics of the NGO sector in Benin, UNDP could provide support to CSOs not currently reached by CPA-ONG. The examination of these questions will be preceded by a brief presentation of UNDP's view on civil society.

5.1 UNDP's view on civil society

UNDP recognizes the crucial role of participation in development. This role has become even more important with the introduction of the MDGs, for which UNDP act as 'scorekeeper'.

UNDP on participation

Since the early 1990s, UNDP has stressed the importance of participation in the development process. As for other donors, the idea is to ensure ownership of development activities through empowerment. This does not only apply to the government, but to all actors in society who then become involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policy issues. This approach increases the credibility, legitimacy and accountability of the choices made.

UNDP has developed a framework for partnership with civil society, which aims to integrate civil society at all stages of UNDP's activities and to create dialogue between civil society and the government. This framework is presented in the policy note "UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Policy Note on Engagement" (UNDP, 2001).

UNDP's activities are based on the concept of Human Sustainable Development through capacity building. UNDP's contribution to CSO capacity development "remains a cornerstone of its approach to development and partnership" (UNDP, 2001, p. 5). While it is important that CSOs are present at the policy table, it is equally important to collaborate with CSOs in downstream work. Such an approach builds a link between macro-level policy and pro-poor micro initiatives (*idem*, p. 4).

UNDP, civil society and the Millennium Development Goals

On September 8 2000, 191 countries, Benin included, adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration which sets out eight agreed development objectives to be reached by the year 2015: the MDGs. According to the Administrator, this is "UN's effort to set the terms of a globalization driven not by the interests of the strong, but managed by the interests of the poor" (UNDP, 2003). Country ownership of the MDGs is essential for their success. Hence, the MDGs need to be

“customised and tailored to national circumstances and built into national medium-term goals and strategies” (*idem*). The process of adapting the MDGs to the Beninese context is under way. The national targets for Benin were fixed during a workshop in December 2002 and are now waiting to be validated.

The MDGs set and frame a development agenda but they do not provide exclusive action plans for development. Due to their simplicity and measurability, the agenda is “the ultimate bottom-up, grassroots, pocketbook development agenda” (*idem*), i.e. it can be accessible and understood by a wide range of actors, and makes development local. By focusing on issues that really matter to ordinary people, it allows them the opportunity to monitor progress towards the goals as well as propose alternative policy choices. As stated by the Administrator, “the real power of the MDGs lie in their ability to re-shape the political debate and hence the programmic framework for development planning” (*idem*). UNDP sees the MDGs as both the front-and the back-end of the PRSP, which has become the primary development planning instrument. They provide a participatory mechanism for dealing with the “democratic dilemma” (Mellali, S., Gregoire, L., 2003, p. 42) faced by countries in their attempt to ensure development based on equity and social justice through limited means. Again in the words of the Administrator: “...tough tradeoffs are the nuts and bolts of successful development” (UNDP, 2003).

In this process, UNDP could partner with and strengthen local civil society, especially for two purposes:

- The Millennium Campaign which seeks to build and sustain a popular movement to support the MDGs;
- The country MDG reports

Each country is expected to regularly produce MDG Reports measuring and benchmarking progress. The inputs for these reports will have to come from the local population. As the reports are “simple, easy-to-read, non-prescriptive documents” (*idem*), they become an important tool by which local civil society can monitor the progress itself.

UNDP is thus committed to assisting the inclusion of CSOs in the development process. One way of achieving this is to act as a facilitator in the process of making CPA-ONG more effective.

5.2 UNDP as a facilitator in the case of CPA-ONG and engaged NGOs

One way of overcoming existing structures of non-cooperation and mutual mistrust is to use external agents in the form of facilitators (Hadenius and Uggla, 1996, p. 1633). UNDP's neutrality, relationship of trust with country governments, broad mandate and its coordinating role within the system of the United Nations are aspects that could make UNDP a valuable facilitator (UNDP, 2001, p. 3). As stated in "UNDP and Civil Society: A Policy Note on Engagement", UNDP has the "ability to facilitate constructive interaction between a range of stakeholders" (*idem*, p. 6).

UNDP can contribute in several ways to the strengthening of CPA-ONG and complementing NGOs.

To strengthen the role of CPA-ONG and complementing NGOs, UNDP could contribute in the following areas:

- Support to the dialogue between the government and the NGOs. UNDP could invite the parties to the negotiation table by demonstrating the importance of efficient coordination of development activities and how this coordination could improve by increasing the capacities and the legitimacy of CPA-ONG. UNDP could partner with foreign donors as they can play a crucial role in creating a favourable climate for NGO activity (Bratton, 1989, p. 575);
- Commission of studies, such as needs assessments and evaluations of NGO service provision as compared to that provided by the State. These studies could provide a basis for dialogue;
- Assistance to the capacity building within government, the engaged NGOs and the unit itself. UNDP could support the training of the staff of the unit and the NGOs;
- Support to the establishment of an efficient umbrella organization of NGOs;
- Assistance to the implementation of reforms. Such an approach will be important for the implementation of the PRSP and is necessary in order to reach the MDGs.

However, in its aim to assist the consolidation of democracy and eradication of poverty, UNDP could also back the reforming and watchdog NGOs. As a 'scorekeeper' of the MDGs, it could seek the real civic energy at the local level in Benin, and not just focus on the more urbanized NGOs.

5.3 UNDP support to civil society in Benin

In its wish to support civil society in Benin, UNDP could take a broader view of civil society. As in the case of CPA-ONG, UNDP could act as a facilitator in the process of integrating these CSOs into the development process.

The need for a broader view of civil society

The question of strengthening civil society could be addressed from several angles, of which support to CPA-ONG is only one.

A democracy is characterized by a context in which both civil society and the State co-evolve in tension and collaboration and where the rules of the game and engagement are constantly contested and negotiated. Consensus does not make for change. It is therefore important to support NGOs assuring the advocacy and watchdog roles. Given the type of NGOs present in Benin and the weak level of local governance, great effort could be made to reach out and engage with civil society at the community level, which in many cases operates in the informal sector. At this level, the real sources of civic energy could be identified. As noted by the World Bank in its "Participation Sourcebook" (World Bank, 1996, p. 7):

"The poor face many barriers on a number of different levels that prevent them from having a real stake in development activities. Reaching and engaging the poor requires special arrangements and efforts by the sponsors and designers to go beyond those used to involve government officials and other relatively powerful stakeholders in participatory processes."

This is the process of "demarginalisation" (Mellali, S. and Gregoire, L., 2003, p. 42) that aims for the transition from supply-driven to demand-driven programming. Reaching and strengthening these groups will not only be important for the consolidation of democracy, but, as seen in 4.1, is crucial for the implementation of the PRSP and for reaching the MDGs. UNDP could facilitate this process.

UNDP as a facilitator

UNDP has a key role to play in facilitating the engagement of the State and the CSOs not reached by CPA-ONG, and to encourage the inclusion of these organizations in discussions on pro-poor policies. This could for example be achieved through the creation of a forum where the voices of CSOs are heard. In order to do this effectively, UNDP needs to understand what constitutes civil society in Benin. It could therefore start the process by commissioning a civil society mapping.

Civil society mapping

Currently, UNDP has little knowledge about the constitution of the civil society sector in Benin. In order to better understand what sort of organizations comprise civil society, UNDP could consider commissioning a situation study aimed at mapping the different civil society actors. This mapping could consist of two steps: a general mapping of civil society in Benin and the elaboration of criteria for the selection of CSOs with which UNDP could engage.

The first step is to identify the different types of civil society organizations that exist in Benin in the various parts of the country (trade unions, national and international NGOs, women's organizations, the media, informal groups, etc.). It is important to identify the NGOs that are not focusing on service provision but whose aim is to perform the reforming and opposing roles. NGOs are seen as mediators between the local community and the State. It is therefore crucial to identify those NGOs who have close relationships with local organizations as these can provide valuable information needed for the mapping. Important questions are: How strong, organized and connected are the different organizations? Which areas are the organizations engaged in? Which organizations are working directly with marginalized groups such as the poor, women, children and minorities? What are their relation with the government and political parties?

An attempt to map civil society organizations has already been made in Benin through the elaboration of the electronic directory described in 2.3. This effort could be followed by a study that maps less formal organizations. International NGOs operating in Benin could be a possible resource base possessing relevant information for the study.

This information is not only essential for the establishment of the forum, but could contribute to the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the organizations, and the identification of the gaps in the overall process of strengthening civil society in Benin. A similar type of activity has for instance been undertaken by the country office in Guatemala through a three-stage programme of identifying, assessing and assisting civil society (UNDP, 2000b).⁽²⁸⁾

(28) For further information on this programme, see www.undp.org/csopp/CSO/NewFiles/toolboxcaseguat.htm.

All these questions will have to be managed with sensitivity as questions of this character are "implicitly political in nature" and, hence, potentially a source of tension (UNDP, 2001, p. 4). UNDP should be aware that government can dismiss CSOs as "dancing to the tunes of a foreign donor" (Bratton, 1989, p. 584) while, on the other hand, CSOs can see UNDP, given its mandate, as being too close to

the State. UNDP can also be seen as a competitor in the quest for funding.

The effectiveness of integration of CSOs in the discussions on pro-poor issues will depend on the type of CSOs invited to participate in these discussions. It is important that different voices are heard, especially those of marginalized groups. UNDP will therefore have to carefully select what CSOs to engage with and how (UNDP, 2001, p. 9).

UNDP could consult a cross-section of civil society organizations identified through the mapping and identify, discuss and confirm with them the criteria for the selection of CSOs with whom they could work.

Creation of a Forum

As in the case of complementing NGOs, and due to its mandate as scorekeeper of the MDGs, UNDP could act as a facilitator building bridges between the different types of CSOs and the government. UNDP could seek to partner other donors and invite the parties to discuss pro-poor policies in a forum in which all participants are equal players. In this way, it creates space for the CSOs to participate in the development process.

It could use the method described in 4.4.1.2 to discuss and agree on the terms of reference of the forum (steering committee, working groups, etc) and the criteria of selection of the participants as well as their different mandates. Selected actors should be representative and credible. Such a forum could for example discuss the CSOs' implication in the MDG process.

Conclusion

Civil society and the State gain from cooperation and dialogue. The State can contribute to the strengthening of NGOs devoted to the implementation of development activities, i.e. NGOs complementing the State. The extent to which this is possible depends on the political, economic, regulatory, informational and cultural context of the country in question. However, this relationship cannot solely be imposed by the State but must have its foundation in civil society itself. In Benin, one instrument can be the establishment of a unit like CPA-ONG. The legitimacy of this unit might be through a clear mandate, strong representation of NGOs in the different management bodies, transparent mechanisms for distribution of benefits, trained staff and antennas in local administration.

As part of its poverty reduction strategy, UNDP could facilitate the process and the unit's performance by creating space for dialogue between the State, the NGOs and other partners in development and by providing technical assistance through for instance the commission of studies such as needs assessments and evaluations of NGO service provision. It could also support the establishment of an efficient umbrella organization and the implementation of national reforms. Focus should be put on measures ensuring alternative financial resources as part of the capacity development process.

However, NGOs engaged with CPA-ONG could not be expected to ensure the reforming, i.e. the advocacy and policy dialogue roles, nor the 'watchdog' role of keeping the State accountable. CPA-ONG will therefore have a limited impact on the consolidation of democracy. Other instruments would have to be used for that purpose. The mandate as 'scorekeeper' of the MDGs makes it necessary for UNDP to assist the groups who can effectively play these roles. Acting as a facilitator, UNDP could assist them by:

- Commissioning a mapping of civil society in Benin;
- Encouraging the inclusion of CSOs in discussions on pro-poor issues by proposing the creation of a forum with representatives from CSOs, the government, UNDP and other partners in development.

Much literature is devoted to the need of building a strong civil society as well as the establishment of policy dialogue between NGOs and the State in transitional democracies. However, the means by which this might be obtained remain unclear. Further research into possible means of strengthening civil society and its relationship with the State is needed. The possibility that CSOs can have a political influence at the level of implementation of services needs to be

explored. The evaluation of existing units like the CPA-ONG in Benin and the NCNGO in Ghana as well as the engaged NGOs could be such a step forward.

Table 3: Possible actions for strengthening CSOs in transitional democracies and Benin in particular

Possible actions by UNDP Benin	Creation of space for dialogue between the state, the NGOs and other partners in development
	Provision of technical assistance (studies, training, etc.)
	Support to the establishment of an efficient umbrella organization
	Support to the implementation of national reforms
	Civil society mapping
	Creation of a forum with representatives from CSOs, the government, UNDP and other partners in development to discuss pro-poor issues
UNDP, researchers, donors, governments, etc.	Evaluation of existing units like the CPA-ONG in Benin and the NCNGO in Ghana as well as the engaged NGOs
	Further research into possible means of strengthening civil society and its relationship with the state
Beneficiaries	CPA-ONG and engaged NGOs
	CSOs in general