



# Civil society organisations and good governance in Ghana

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## Abstract

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play useful and influential roles in society. Some of these roles either do complement or constitute significant checks on the activities of governments. And regardless of the form or nature these roles may take, be it, watchdog, advocacy, networking, education, service etc., promoting good governance has become evocative political desideratum. This paper provides contextual exposition about CSOs and broadly explores how CSOs promote good governance. It further discusses briefly the activities of CSOs in pre and post-independence Ghana under both democratic and undemocratic regimes, and puts forward that CSOs are making progressive contributions to good governance in the country. The challenges CSOs in Ghana face and suggestions to strengthen them conclude the paper.

**Keywords:** Civil Society; Organizations; Good Governance; Ghana

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## 1. Introduction

The mundane duties of sovereign governments over the world have been to provide security and better lives for their citizens. These are the rubrics and conventional expectations from all contemporary governments. This conformist viewpoint seems incontrovertible in the political space no matter the governance system and ideological dispositions of a government. Deeply expressed in governments' life therefore is the many functions they perform towards achieving the overall goal of public wellbeing and safety. Wilson (n.d.) classifies the many functions governments perform into constituent and ministrants. In his view, the constituent functions of governments on one hand include the protection of life, liberty, property and all others necessary to the civic organisation of society. The ministrant functions on the other hand, include provision of social amenities, care and protection of the natural resources.

While trying to fulfill these functions, governments all over the world, have pursued policies that were generally considered to be unpopular, insensitive and inimical to public interest. Some governments have also taken certain actions which inadvertently trampled on the rights and liberties of the people. Yet other government policies have been similarly adjudged as environmentally unfriendly. Some government policies may sometimes unleash momentary hardships onto the people and this goes uncontested in reality. But considered on the whole, the long term benefits society may derive from such very policies, sometimes, could be beyond measure.

Several governance issues confront Ghana and many other developing countries. But corruption, an age old phenomenon, continues to generate public outcry and apprehension. Although it is trite to mention that corruption is common among African governments, it is indeed pervasive in totalitarian regimes. It is against this background that the a remark made by a World Bank President, James D. Wolfensohn, for the need to deal with the canker of corruption, so that developing countries could achieve growth and poverty reduction (Bhargava, 2006) cannot elude the conscience of humankind.

In a bid to minimise public corruption therefore, functional democracies, strong institutions and most importantly, good governance have become imperatives. This is because democracy works well only under leaderships that are provided by men who are impervious to instincts such as greed, vanity and unlawful ambitions (Giner, 1976). Leaders with these immaculate attributes may however be uneasy to come by in a world of moral decadence where corrupt institutions tend to corrupt men. Plato (cited in Giner, 1976) is therefore of the view that democracy degenerates because its leaders are not virtuous men. Reflecting on the foregoing perspectives, the public have the propensity to be corrupt even under a thriving democracy, and most especially, where there are no functional institutions and where no one is watching.

It is in the context of the foregoing that I find the Akan adage which literary translates: "whoever making a farm boundary is oblivious that behind him/her the boundary is becoming crooked" very instructive. From the adage, ensuring the straightness of a farm boundary may require curious observation of a by-stander. So that with the vigilance and promptings of a by-stander, the ultimate desire of making an acceptably demarcated farm boundary is achieved. As old though this adage may seem, the underpinning wisdom and philosophy is akin to some of the values and functions some CSOs, especially, those in the media and think

tanks convey. This paper therefore attempts to find answers to the following question: how have CSOs in Ghana promoted good governance?

## 2. Understanding Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

The concept of civil society is accredited to Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) a Scottish philosopher and historian. He saw the emergence of civil society as a way to change the corrupt practices of the feudal system which unfairly appropriated land into the hands of a few by strengthening individual liberties. Although we can truly trace the roots of civil society to Ancient Greece; political theorist like Thomas Paine and George Hegel, nevertheless, are among the early scholars who helped influenced and developed the notion of civil society as a domain parallel to but separate from the state (Cerothers, 1999 cited in Ghaus-Pasha, 2004). The concept of civil society is therefore not new. However, in the recent past, civil society activities have increased in size, scope and capacity. This surge according to Thang (2013) is due to globalisation, preference for democratic governance, advancement in telecommunication and economic integration.

Modern day academic construct of civil societies, however, gained popularity with the emergence of capitalism. Capitalism brought about a clearer distinction between political and non-political spheres and thus prepared the grounds for the emergence of civil society as a domain independent from the state. Many theorists thus see civil society as a 'space' independent of the state and the market. In her view, Ghaus-Pasha (2004), believes democracy and increasing gaps in social services as a result of structural adjustment programmes, opened the space for increased civil society activities. And within this civil society space, are a range of formal and informal organisations called CSOs (UNDP, 2006). White (1996) as cited in Thang (2013) elaborates this by describing civil societies as an intermediate associational realm between the state and individuals, populated by organisations and groups that are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state, and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or advance their interests or values.

There are divergent views on what CSOs are. This apparent semantic and perceptual confusion possibly emanates from the various forms CSOs take, and also, the many activities they perform. CIVICUS (n.d.) report on the state of civil society in Ghana thus concluded that no definition can capture the complexity and fluid nature of civil societies. Even defining the concept, identifying civil societies' essential features, and designing a strategy to assess its state is in itself, a complex and potentially controversial process (Fioramonti & Heinrich, 2007 cited in Thang, 2013).

In the conundrum of definitional ambiguities indicated earlier on, this article aligns itself to the definition offered by Diamond (1999). He sees civil societies as the realm of organised social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating and at least partially self-supporting. Diamond (1999) further indicates that CSOs are autonomous from the state and bound by a set of shared rules. From this perspective, CSOs are regarded as established groups or entities that are neither in the state nor private sector, but are engaged in public activities that are aimed at advancing the interests and values of their members or society at large (GTZ-FRCS, n.d). In its policy engagement with CSOs, the UNDP (2001, cited in UNDP, 2006) defines CSOs as non-state

actors whose aims are neither to generate profits nor to seek governing power. CSOs thus unite people to advance shared goals and interests. Perhaps the most concise definition of CSOs is that provided by Court et al (2006) in the following:

*Any organisation that works in the arena between the household, the private sector, and the state, to negotiate matters of public concern', CSOs include a very wide range of institutions and operate at many different levels, including the global, regional, national and local. Civil society includes NGOs, community groups, research institutes, think tanks, advocacy groups, trade unions, academic institutions, parts of the media, professional associations, and faith-based institutions.*

Ghaus-Pasha (2004) synthesises the core features of civil societies as: separation from the state and the market; formed by people who have common needs and interests and values like tolerance, inclusion, cooperation and equality. CSO is therefore an umbrella name for the several non-state actors or organisations. All non-market and non-state organisations in which people organise towards shared objectives constitute CSOs. However, the many functions CSOs perform, sometimes create taxonomic ambiguities. In bringing clarity to this, Diamond (1999) has suggested seven broad classifications of CSOs.

**Table 1.** Classifications of CSOs

Categories	Description
Economic	Commercial and productive associations.
Cultural	Defend the rights, values, faiths, beliefs, and symbols, totems of religious, ethnic, communal and other similar organisations.
Informational/educational	Produces and disseminate information, news and educate the public on national issues
Interest	Advance and defend the material and functional interests of its members.
Developmental	Mobilisation of resources for infrastructural development, improvement in quality of life.
Issue-oriented	Deals with specific issues such as environmental protection, land reform, consumer protection, rights of children and women.
Civic	Seeks improvements in political systems and democracy, including voter education, monitoring of elections and exposure of corruptible practices.

Source: Diamond (1999)

Others also classify CSOs into humanitarian, developmental, educational, human rights, peace building etc. But no matter the classification system, the rate at which new CSOs are formed and the ever changing activities they undertake has provoked a debate on what CSOs really are. In the opinion of Chandhoke (2005), organisations that are critical of the state are real CSOs, the rest are merely not governmental. Having noted what CSOs are, we shall now turn our attention to good governance.

### **3. Good governance**

Governance takes place at the national, federal and local governments levels. There is also corporate governance in the corporate world, just as many establishments have their own governance structures. The concept of governance is therefore not new. It is the process of making decisions and the implementation or otherwise of such decisions UNESCAP (n.d), and involves the exercise of authority in the name of a constituency, including the selection and replacement of those who exercise that authority (World Bank, 2003). Governance is therefore the way in which power is vested in the hands of a group of people and how such power is exercised in the interest of the public. This includes prudent management of available resources and the involvement of the governed in the governance process. Political power is inferred and also how this power is used to positively affect the development of a country. Although political governance takes place at various spatial units, it is important to note that across human institutions, the power to govern could be abused and governance fraught with corruption. This is the reason why society must always insist on good governance.

Good governance implies governing justly and in a manner acceptable by the governed. This is extremely important and seen as a measure of democratic consolidation. Good governance helps check arbitrariness, facilitates proper procurements and delivery of public goods and services, eschews discrimination, grants equal access to opportunities, eliminates corruption, checks abuse of public offices and ensures prudent management of national resources. Good governance also impacts positively on effective use of aids (Amundsen, 2010), and a prerequisite for development cooperation, combating corruption, and sound financial administration. It is also symptomatic of a functional constitutional state with pro-poverty reduction policies (Bauck, Strand, & Gul, 2011). Commonly, good governance guarantees fundamental human rights, transparency and accountability.

In contrast, bad governance with inherent corruption and abuse of power is responsible for poverty and underdevelopment of many economies, especially, those in Africa. In view of this, many donor countries and international financial institutions are insisting on good governance as a condition for loans and grants. Reinforcing this, good governance was given a special mention in the Twelfth Replenishment discussions for the International Development Association (IFAD, 1999). In particular, Azeem (2014) reported that the European Union, United Kingdom and Norway in year 2013 denied donor support to Malawi due to alleged corruption, and concludes that poor governance contributes to the non-delivery of basic services. Good governance is therefore used mostly in political discourse to convey an image of transparency, accountability and integrity.

Like CSOs, good governance is also variedly conceptualised. This notwithstanding, adherence to rule of law, transparency and accountability are the elemental tenets running through all the different thoughts on good governance. According to UNESCAP (n.d.), eight essential attributes identify good governance. These are: participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. The World Bank (1994) cited in IFAD (1999) in a report entitled "Governance: The World Bank's Experience", complements these attributes by adding public sector management, legal framework for development, transparency and information. The Asian Development Bank (1995 in IFAD 1999) also distinguishes predictability as another quality of good governance, whilst, the African Development Bank (1999), and the UNDP (1997 cited in IFAD, 1999), respectively acknowledge combating corruption, equity and strategic vision as yet other characteristics of good governance.

It is clear from the foregoing that any form of governance that disregards rule of law and or lacks transparency, accountability and the other characteristics mentioned is a pretense of good governance. Some CSOs thus operate to ensure that governments uphold these tenets. The World Bank in its 1992 report (cited in IFAD, 1999 pp. 1), titled "Governance and Development", describes good governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". Good governance could therefore be said to have occurred when people put in position of trust manage state resources in the best interests of majority of the people (Azeem, 2014). Ensuring good governance thus becomes the collective and civic responsibility of CSOs and the public as a whole.

Although good governance may not automatically translate into good policies, evidence has nonetheless shown that good governance mostly results in economic growth and development. This is because more accountable regimes give rise to better policies (World Bank, 2003). Kaufmann et al cited in World Bank (2003) have also observed a positive relationship between good governance and economic performance. In conclusion, when governance is good, revenue from state resources can foster economic growth and reduce poverty, but weak governance may instead cause poverty, corruption and conflict – the so-called resource curse (Bhargava, 2006).

### 3.1. Ways CSOs promote good governance

Ghaus-Pasha (2004, pp.3) summarises the ways civil society further good governance in the following:

*Civil society can further good governance, first, by policy analysis and advocacy; second, by regulation and monitoring of state performance and the action and behavior of public officials; third, by building social capital and enabling citizens to identify and articulate their values, beliefs, civic norms and democratic practices; fourth, by mobilising particular constituencies, particularly the vulnerable and marginalised sections of masses, to participate more fully in politics and public affairs; and fifth, by development work to improve the wellbeing of their own and other communities.*

The traditional functions of CSOs have been to protect the rights, interests and liberties of their members. Many CSOs have however assumed added roles nowadays as a result of changing circumstances of socio-

political dynamics. Court et al (2006) confirm this trend, and indicate that the recent past has seen the role and sphere of influence of CSOs mushrooming. In addition to promoting good governance, as already indicated, some CSOs also provide humanitarian and relief services, while others provide employable skills to young people. It is indeed estimated that NGOs alone reach about twenty percent of the world poor (Court et al. 2006).

Doraiswany (2007) amplifies further the roles CSOs play in promoting good governance in the following: defense against all forms of human right violations, advocate on behalf of the marginalised, agitate for the abused, educate citizens on their rights and entitlements, and mobilise public opinions in support of or against government policies, actions or inactions. CSOs have therefore established a “set of compelling principles which aim to build an international consensus on how states should or should not treat their own citizens” (Chankhoke, 2005 p. 358). Promoting good governance also implies, working to liberate the marginalised in society from the clutches of perpetually subordinated position (social exclusion), and strive to integrate them into the mainstream citizenry - a process Jonathan Fox (in Diamond, 1999) describes as transition from clientelism to citizenship at the local level.

Civil society existence is thus rooted in the belief that problems and grievances of societies could be tackled through common endeavours, strategies and a pooling of energies (Chandhoke, 2005). Consequently, CSOs are very dynamic and plays a critical watchdog role over government policies and actions, including the monitoring of budget implementation (Azeem, 2014). But as Diamond (1999) points out, in democracy, the abuse of power thrives behind a veil of secrecy and opaque procedures. It is for this reason that a vibrant mass media is needed. For instance, it is widely believed that the media was largely influential in compelling U.S. President Richard Nixon to resign in 1974. Proliferation of CSOs has therefore become the hallmark of a country with strong democratic culture.

Key to promoting good governance is ensuring accountability in all three dimensions namely: financial, political and administrative. According to UN (1996) as cited in Idumange (2012), financial accountability refers to public officials reporting accurately on intended and actual use of resources. Political accountability implies resorting to open and transparent methods of sanctioning and rewarding public office holders through checks and balances, while administrative accountability connotes adherence to internal control mechanisms, standards, ethics, codes etc. Jones and Tembo (2008) in a DFID Practice Briefing Paper on CSOs and Good Governance, also elaborate three ways in which civil societies can contribute to good governance. These are: building state capability, accountability and responsiveness.

Other ways through which CSOs promote good governance is by tracking resource allocation and utilisation (social accountability), monitoring programme implementation, public sensitisation, advocacy, engagement in public dialogues and fora, and monitoring of elections. Others include representations to government committees, submission of memoranda and position papers to appropriate sector ministries and state agencies. Researching and publications of research findings, writing policy briefs, taking part in media discussions, holding press conferences and press releases are also other ways CSOs have been promoting good governance. Trade unions also do sometimes embark on public demonstrations to register their opposition to or displeasure against government policies. However, in spite of the growing importance of

CSOs, those from developing countries are partially understood. And according to Ghaus-Pasha (2004), even basic descriptive information about these institutions – their number, size, area of activity, sources of revenue and the policy framework within which they operate – is not available in any systematic way.

### 3.2. CSOs and good governance: The Ghanaian experience

The activities of CSOs in Africa according to Makumbe (1998) can be traced to the period of political movements towards independence. He however concedes that it is only in the past twenty years that CSOs have been able to participate visibly in political engagements and developmental processes. Jones and Tembo (2008) agree with this statement and remark that the transition into multiparty democracy in the 1990s in Africa gave space for CSOs to partake in national governance. But in recent times, other CSOs in the form of think-tanks and NGOs with think-tank-like functions have emerged and sought a much formalised and routine space at political dialogue tables, Jones and Tembo (2008) conclude.

In Ghana, efforts by CSOs in promoting good governance date back to the pre-independence era. During this period, the activities of CSOs were chiefly driven by the uncompromising desire to protect indigenous resources and struggle for political independence. And as one would expect, pressure groups were the significant forces to reckon with in the independence struggles. These culminated in the formation of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society in 1897: - an association of traditional authorities and the elite formed to protest against the Land Bill of 1897 and the Crown Lands Bill of 1896 which the group considered threatening to their traditional land tenure system.

The Fanti Confederacy (1868-1874) was another popular pre-independence movement. Formed at Mankessim, the Fanti Confederacy was a union among the Denkyira, Wassa, Twifo and the Assin. Apart from the demand for right to self-government, the Confederacy also sought to protect the lives and the interests of the people. The preamble to the confederacy's constitution states: "we have united together for the express purpose of furthering the interests of our country". In achieving the objectives of the Confederacy, the kings and chiefs of Fanti formed themselves into a committee as indicated in article two of the Confederacy's constitution (Bartels, 2007). The Fanti Confederacy was therefore an association that evolved from and occasioned by the displeasure of the deplorable conditions under which people lived. It was thought then that the most prudent way to make the voices of the people heard, agitate for improved conditions of life and surmount colonial subjugation was by uniting, hence the Confederacy.

### 3.3. CSOs in post-independence Ghana

The contributions of CSOs to good governance in post-independence Ghana can be looked at from the angle of military and civilian governments. As is commonly acknowledged, the activities of CSOs especially media freedom is typically restricted under military regimes. People's rights and freedoms including free speech are curtailed. To begin with, the media in Gold Coast started with the publication of the Royal Gold Coast Gazette and Commercial Intelligence in 1822. As at the time of political independence, Ghana had about four newspapers. The media were subjected to excessive government control afterwards. Subsequently, some



media houses were closed down, while the surviving ones suffered heavy censorship. The Ashanti Pioneer which had been in operation since the 1930s became a victim of the excessive media control. Legislation like the Rumors Decree of 1966 prevented anyone from suing state owned media.

The Newspaper Licensing Decree introduced by the Provisional National Defense Council government (PNDC Law 211) had a telling effect on private newspapers in the country. According to Aryee (1999), only private newspapers devoted to lottery, sports and entertainment were able to flourish under this decree. Several newspaper editors were also arrested. On the whole, CSOs in Ghana, particularly the media rarely made significant impact on good governance under military regimes as there was little or no respect for media freedom and free speech.

Let us now examine the efforts CSOs have made in promoting good governance in Ghana under democratic rule with particular reference to the forth republic. One such CSO that dared the perilous consequences of its actions and agitated for a change to civilian rule and by implication good governance was the Movement for Freedom and Justice (MFJ). Formed on August 1, 1990, the MFJ comprised of members of the various political parties in the first, second and the third republics. The purpose of the movement was for Ghana to return to democracy after many years of the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) rule.

Ghana's return to multi-party democracy in 1992 has brought phenomenal increase in the activities of CSOs especially the media. By the second quarter of 2017, the National Communication Authority (NCA) had given frequency authorisations to a total of 505 FM Radio broadcasting stations in Ghana. Out of the total number of authorized FM broadcasting stations, 392 stations are currently operational as at end of June, 2017. Deregulation of the airwaves, repeal of PNDC Law 211 and the Criminal Libel and Seditious Laws, undoubtedly accounted for upsurge in media activity. Ever since, the mass media have become the most effective channel through which other CSOs seek to promote good governance in Ghana.

A clear case of CSOs contribution to good governance was seen in the massive protestation by the Civil Servants Association and the Trade Union Congress against the introduction of the Value Added Tax (VAT) and the concomitant price hikes. The Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) increased lorry fares by ten percent following the introduction of VAT. Importers, wholesalers, consumers and many others made incessant calls for its abolishment. These protestations reached a crescendo with a demonstration by Alliance For Change (an opposition pressure group) on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1995 dubbed "Kumepreko" in which human lives were lost.

The series of protestations succeeded in compelling the government to reduce the VAT rate from 17.5% to 15% and its subsequent withdrawal in June 1995 barely three months after its introduction (Aryee, n.d). The Committee for Joint Action (CJA), a pressure group, also staged series of demonstrations christened 'wahala demonstrations' across the country to protest against what they considered over taxation of petroleum products resulting in high fuel prices (Ghana News Agency, 2005).

It is also gratifying to note the involvement of some international CSOs in promoting good governance through their local representatives in Ghana. Transparency International is one such organisation which publishes its findings on perceived corruption. Poor ranking in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of a country gives impressions the public have about the level of corruption in the country. Although the CPI is

based on public perception, a poor score portrays negative image about the extent of corruption in the country and ultimately gives governments' unfavourable publicity. Other international CSOs who are at the forefront in the battle against corruption are: the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiatives (EITI), Global Initiatives and Global Organisation of Parliamentarians against Corruption. Amnesty International is another international organisation focusing on the protection of human rights.

Some CSOs in Ghana are also known outspoken critics of government policies they consider are not in the public interest. Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) is one such organisation. ISODEC for example strongly opposed a proposed water privatisation or private sector management by the President Kuffour's government. This stance was later joined by other CSOs which resulted in the formation of a group called Coalition Against Water Privatisation, and subsequently, an Accra Declaration on the Right to Water on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2001 (Africa Action, 2001).

There are also the emergence of think tanks whose research publications, policy reviews and analysis, press conferences and releases, as well as their involvements in public discussions on national issues go a long way in promoting good governance. The Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) is one such organisation. Formed in 1998, CDD is an independent, non-partisan and non-profit research-based and policy-oriented think tank that is dedicated to the promotion of democracy and good governance. Other think tanks include the Center for Policy Analysis (CEPA), Center for Policy Alternatives, Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG), IMANI Center for Policy and Education, African Centre for Energy Policy (ACEP). Religious bodies such as the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), the Catholic Bishops Conference, Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG) etc. all do contribute to good governance by making public their views and positions on national issues.

The National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) is also a veritable students union quite vociferous on national issues particularly those related to education. In the recent past, NUGS has been very concerned with the management of the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GetFund). At a point, NUGS threatened to take legal action against the government over allegation that the government intended to apply part of the GetFund for purposes other than what is stipulated in the GetFund Act of 2000 (Act 581). Also, the introduction of the Communication Service Tax in the 2008 government budget attracted strong opposition from the leadership of NUGS. In a statement, NUGS reminded the government to recognise the huge number of mobile phone users in the country, many of whom are students who do not earn incomes, and noted that the imposition of the tax would worsen the financial plight of students (Boateng, 2007).

There is also an emerging trend where CSOs who believe in the aphorism 'unity lies strength' have come together to give voice to a common purpose under the umbrella name coalition. An example of this coalition is the Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition (GACC) which comprises of nine organisations namely: Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), National Governance Programme (NGP), Private Enterprise Foundation (PEF), Serious Fraud Office (now Economic and Organised Crime Unit), Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII), and Forum of Religious Bodies (FORB). The GACC's mission is to facilitate anti-corruption activities in Ghana together with its members and in collaboration with other stakeholders. In

particular, the GII, GACC and the CDD have in the past embarked on anti-corruption education campaign in Ghana. They have facilitated the formation and training of Social Audit Clubs and Community Based Monitoring Teams in some districts in Ghana to monitor the use of state resources.

These coalitions tend to build on cross-sectional alliances in their collective efforts to addressing a common social problem. They take inspirations from successes of the coordination of International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and also, the success in bringing the World Trade Organisation meeting to a halt in 1999 popularly known as the “battle for Seattle” against imbalances in the world system.

As mentioned earlier, the mass media provide a platform for the other CSOs to subject governments’ policies and actions to the crucible of public debates and discussions. This particular role of the media is highlighted in the editorial of the maiden edition of the Cape Coast Times on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1874 as follows (Nti, 2002):

*We shall always offer our adherence to the popular view of matters in so far as we can conscientiously believe that we are acting in their interest, advocating their rights, but in instances where the rights and interests of the people are disregarded, and attempts are made to tamper with them, and to put them down with a high hand, we shall be found at our post, prepared to perform our duty fearlessly and independently, regardless of the frowns of King or Kaiser.*

Recognising the important role the media play in fostering good governance, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees media freedom and impartiality. In particular, article 163 of the 1992 Constitution states that “all state-media shall afford fair opportunities and facilities for the presentation of divergent views and dissenting opinions”. Nonetheless, CSOs continue to face many challenges, although they have made inroads towards advancing good governance in Ghanaian politics.

### 3.4. Challenges CSOs in Ghana Face

CSOs are not without challenges. According to Idumange (2012), CSOs in Nigeria are financially constrained and depend on foreign funding. In addition to this predicament, their staff also lack administrative and technical capacity. Jones and Thembo (2008) also mention lack of funding as one of the key challenges CSOs in East and Southern Africa face. The funding challenge is therefore widespread. Idumange (2012) further identifies the ever changing relationship between civil societies and the state as another challenge confronting CSOs. This is because according to him, clearly defined lines of relationships between the state and CSOs are yet to be established in many developing countries.

The ramifications of the funding challenges are numerous. Among these are inability of CSOs to build staff capacity to effectively pursue their research and advocacy activities (Longwe, 2002). The funding challenge also affects the scale and functioning of CSOs in respect of their ability to deliver and maintain services (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004). Related to these are the prevailing economic conditions. This tends to hamper local fundraising efforts, inevitably rendering CSOs to depend mostly on donor funding. Consequently, many CSOs

pursue programmes that reflect donor rather than local interests and needs. Competition for scarce resources is another challenge to CSOs operation (Kaulam, 2007). And because CSOs compete keenly among themselves for the little resources available, they often lose the opportunities for building coalitions or partnerships. Stated differently, competition for influence and funding promotes individualism and lack of sharing. Altogether, these challenges further restrain CSOs ability to adopt a more long-term approach to social, economic and political change (Gyimah-Boadi, 1996).

Apart from the common challenges discussed that are not uniquely identifiable to Ghana, CSOs in the country face many other difficulties. Aryee (1999) for instance argues that although press freedom has generally increased, the contributions of the press towards enhancing accountable and transparent governance is limited. He states for example that the efforts of the media to expose scandals among officialdom are constrained by limited circulation of private papers. Lack of access to diverse sources of information and capacity to undertake investigative and analytical journalism also play a part (Aryee, 1999).

Another critical challenge CSOs in Ghana faced was government interferences. For instance, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government in year 1994 intended to gag CSOs by introducing a legislation that would enable the government control and vet NGOs (Aryee, 1999). This was however met with threats of pull out by the international NGOs, which eventually compelled the government to abandon the idea. The grounds for the attempted control over CSOs were that the government then saw NGOs as threat to its authority and popularity. Public confidence in NGOs was soaring as the rural folks in particular credited NGOs with all development projects. Political instability in the form of chieftaincy and land disputes also poses great challenge to the work of CSOs as field staff of development CSOs are often pulled out from high risk conflict zones.

Like many human institutions, CSOs also have inherent weaknesses. According to Diamond (1999) some CSOs can be distrustful, unreliable, domineering, exploitative and cynical in their dealings with other organisations, the state and society. Other people also use CSOs as launch pads to warm themselves into national politics, a practice that is becoming synonymous with the leadership of the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS). The real intentions of some international NGOs are also sometimes not known. These bring into the discussion the true identity and agenda of some CSOs.

According to Marschall (2002) CSOs have certain advantages as well as disadvantages and further argues that the mantra associated with CSOs: 'on behalf of the people' is false and misleading. Marschall also holds the opinion that CSOs are complementary to and not rival to representative democracy and states that what makes CSOs legitimate is what they do and not representation. What CSOs actually do vis-a-vis their mission brings to the fore the subject of accountability. CSOs obviously owe responsibilities to their stakeholders: partners, funders, members, beneficiaries etc. But Marschall (2002) has observed that this relation is loose and difficult to define. He thus suggests that CSOs build public trust by ensuring full transparency and high standards of performance as the best way to make up the natural "accountability gap". The need for transparency among CSOs has brought into the governance discourse the concept of social accountability.

In many respects, vibrant media and seamless access to uncensored information is required for good governance to thrive. CSOs thus use the influence and the visibility the media provides to intensify the

campaign for good governance. Also whereas corrupt practices are exposed through the media, think tanks and other research bodies also disseminate their research findings and publications on good governance or otherwise through the media. However, not all CSOs have equal access to the media space and prominence because of the mundane reasons of logistical and financial constraints (Chandhoke, 2005). And as a result of that “not every group possesses the necessary vocabulary, the powerful rhetoric, the rich and evocative imaginaries, and the fine honed conceptual tools that are capable of drawing resonances in the public sphere of civil societies” (Chandhoke 2005, pp 360). So in the view of the immense potential CSOs have in influencing governance and the challenges they face, society owes it a duty to strengthen them and to make them effective.

### 3.5. Strengthening CSOs in Ghana

Appropriate policies and environments are needed for CSOs to make desired impact on good governance in the country. To this end, governments’ recognition of the role CSOs play and their willingness to cooperate with them is foremost in the collective efforts to ensuring good governance. Consequently, government ministries, departments and agencies must give CSOs unfettered access to public information. Enactment of the Right to Information Bill intended among other things to give increased public access to information is thus long overdue. With such a legislative backing, CSOs can expect to have unimpeded access to public information that will empower them keep intently watchful eye on government activities. Similarly, public officials will stringently adhere to established work procedures and ethics if they know that CSOs and the public in general can demand to have access to relevant public information.

Intense public education on the Whistleblowers Act (ACT, 720) of 2006 is also recommended as one of the ways to strengthen CSOs in their bid to promote good governance. Thorough knowledge of this law can potentially influence the mindset of the public to expose corrupt practices and wrong doings in society even at the inchoate stages. Another suggested way to strengthen CSOs to enable them play their watchdog role effectively is by building their capacities to undertake research, advocacy and be able to influence public policy. Government can also make funding available for eligible CSOs to access for their work.

## 4. Conclusion

The World Bank (2003) has remarked that sustainable development can only take place if a predictable and transparent framework of rules and institutions exist for the conduct of private and public business. IFAD (1999) also states among other things that good governance can be invoked in a pre-investment assessment process as part of criteria to allocating resources to a particular member state. Implicit in the above is that good governance is needed to catalyse sustainable development and could as well be used as a precondition for assessing the overall performances of governments and improve their chances of accessing loans and grants from these international financial institutions.

It is clear from the foregoing that civically oriented CSOs and others promote sustainable development through their prompting and insistence on good governance. CSOs thus act as either a check or complement to the exercise of government power (GTZ-FRCS, n.d). But in ensuring CSO effectiveness in Ghana, the social, policy and the political environment must be conducive. Besides, the various CSOs must have the right capacities and assertiveness. Azeem (2014) has observed that CSOs in Ghana including anti-corruption organisations do engage actively in research, policy analysis, advocacy activities and processes related to the formulation and development of specific policies and legal reforms. So considering what CSOs in Ghana are already engaged as Azeem has reported, it is important for governments and society to recognise them as integral part of the governance processes, and empower them to further the course of good governance for the benefit of society. Healthy synergy between government and CSOs is therefore capable of stimulating good governance and prudent use of national resource. Based on the historical review, CSOs contribution to good governance in Ghana has been progressive considering our nascent democracy. The momentum needs to be sustained.

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