



# Civil society and urban poverty – examining complexity

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## I. INTRODUCTION

CIVIL SOCIETY IS increasingly recognized as being critical to the successful realization of development. Grassroots organizations are regarded as a new panacea for people-centred, pro-poor development. But should this be the case? Low-income communities are subject to division due to unequal access to power, prestige, income and capital. Do such organizations really support their poorest members to increase and achieve development options? How do NGOs truly support participatory processes? Do their staff use their professional skills and expertise to enable the poor to control development programmes, or does decision-making remain in the hands of a few? Do grassroots organizations and NGOs reduce poverty, or is their role to reinforce dependency, powerlessness and exclusion? And how does the state intervene to influence these organizations and the way in which they are developing? These are the questions that need to be understood if issues of empowerment and participation are to be addressed.

This paper draws together a wide range of development literature to consider the activities of grassroots organizations and NGOs in poverty reduction in urban areas. It does not attempt to be exhaustive, rather it draws on a range of documents to provide an overview of issues and themes. The focus of the discussion is on the issue of governance and how authority and control are exercised within civil society institutions and between civil society and the state. The discussion begins by introducing the concept of civil society and examines the growing interest in recent years in civil society, NGOs and the related concept of social capital. Later sections explore the nature of participation and governance within grassroots organizations, the relationships between grassroots organizations and NGOs and, finally, relations between civil society and the state. Governance is broadly defined and refers to the process whereby institutions govern themselves, be they nation states or residents' associations. In the case of the nation state, the process of governance refers primarily to relations between citizens (either individual or collectively) and their governments. In the case of membership organizations, it refers to relations between members and leaders.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

THROUGHOUT THE 1970s and 1980s, development professionals began to acknowledge the contribution of NGOs, with particular emphasis on the ability of NGOs to work directly with the poor and with grassroots

organizations (Gorman 1984; Korten 1990; Clark 1991). In the urban context, Turner (1988) and UNCHS (1988) both emphasized the growing scale and significance of NGOs working on a range of housing and neighbourhood development issues in low-income settlements. In particular, NGOs were seen as being more participatory, people-led and responsive to local needs than more formal official development assistance agencies.

The 1980s and 1990s were characterized by a reduction in the role of the state in virtually every area. In general, the ideology was that the private sector should take over state functions wherever possible, moving from a state allocation system to one based on markets. At the same time, short-term recession extended into longer-term economic difficulties for many countries (World Bank 1990). NGO activities grew in scale. Participation was welcomed as a new opportunity for cost recovery. Rather overshadowed by these economic factors was a continuing recognition of the need for the greater participation of the poor themselves in development projects, in order to achieve greater local ownership (Hyden 1998).

It was towards the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s that the focus on NGOs began to shift, with increasing emphasis being placed on the term "civil society" rather than "non-government organization". Whilst this change cannot be attributed to any single factor, a number of factors offer some insights. First, the social movements that were so effective in pushing forward a process of democratic change in the nation states of Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Philippines often did not fall neatly into definitions of voluntary sector agencies. Second, there was a much greater awareness of the importance of institutions and institutional change. The work of authors such as Putman (1993) showed that both non-governmental and non-private sector institutions have an important role to play in economic and political development. Third, there were concerns about the legitimacy and effectiveness of some NGOs as agencies financed by external sources (Hulme and Edwards 1997). Hence, the interest in civil society grew out of the need to extend the concept, both to reflect local action and to better understand the different types of voluntary association and their relationships with each other.

Social capital and civil society have been two closely related terms in the recent literature (see, for example, discussions in Burbridge 1998). The concept of social capital is most commonly used in the sense defined by Putman (1993), that is "*...the features of social organization that ...improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions such as trust, norms and networks*" (page 167). It is termed "capital" to reflect the importance of trust and knowledge within such social relationships, and the length of time that is needed for such trust and knowledge to develop.

Whilst there has been a tendency in the literature to assume that all social capital is good for development and, by implication, good for the poor, substantive issues lie behind such assumptions. Putzel (1997, 942) notes that social capital cannot be assumed to be linked to notions of civic community and its use may be negative rather than positive. More fundamentally, and as already noted above, the concept of civil society has been closely related to the development of capitalism and a liberal democratic state (Hyden 1998).<sup>(1)</sup> However, neither capitalist development strategies nor liberal democracy necessarily have a positive impact on reducing inequality and poverty for every group. When considering urban poverty reduction within a global perspective, the nature of the exploitative economic structures and the inequality and dependency that they create and sustain also have to be considered. Tarrow (1996), in his critique of

1. Putnam links both economic and political progression with social capital through the argument that high levels of social capital are associated with well-developed capitalism and effective policy performance by elected governments.

Putman's thesis, argues that the colonialization processes that have taken place in the south of Italy are an alternative explanation for the low development indicators in that part of the country, rather than low levels of social capital *per se*.

With respect to issues of governance and citizenship, Castells (1983, 14) identifies the city from medieval times onwards as the location for the "...struggle over the definition of the relationship between the state and civil society." It is this relationship between the state and civil society that is a recurring theme in the sections that follow.

### III. GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

AN ANALYSIS OF the numerous case studies of grassroots organizations in low-income urban settlements suggests that, in general, such organizations (otherwise known as residents' associations, community organizations, self-help groups, etc.) are prevalent, although the types of organizations vary considerably.

In the Philippines, Berner's study of grassroots organizations in Manila concludes that "...with the exception of some new squatter colonies and scattered clusters of houses... we found formally organized associations in all squatter slums we visited during our stay in Metro Manila" (Berner 1997, 62). Moser and McIlwaine (1997) identify some 22 community-based organizations in Commonwealth (Quezon City, the Philippines), with just under 8,000 households. In Bangkok (Thailand), Pornchokchai (1992) finds over 30 associations in one large low-income settlement, Klong Toey, (including a number of party political associations). And within the Indian sub-continent, Desai's (1995) study of NGOs and community organizations in Bombay (India) includes a detailed examination of the settlement of Wadala, with 3,500 households and 42 organizations. Fernandes' (1997) study of Lyari in Karachi (Pakistan), points to some of the difficulties in assessing numbers of grassroots organizations; of the 170 organizations found in Lyari, 145 are registered and 25 are not.

Lee-Smith and Stren (1991, 34) argue that "...Africa generally has a wealth of under-supported CBOs." In Nairobi, Lee Smith (1997) found that 27 per cent of women belonged to some membership organization (with the two most common activities being rotating savings groups and trading groups for those illegally brewing beer). Magutu (1997, 315) discusses the emergence of community organizations in a site and savings scheme near Mombasa, another Kenyan city. He identifies a number of groups, including ethnic communities, a committee whose members include those from the ruling KANU party (Kenya African National Union) and kinship ties. Moser and Holland (1997) note that in Chawama (Lusaka, Zambia) there are 21 community-based organizations within a settlement of 60,000 residents.

In the case of Latin America, there has been a more extensive literature looking at the activities of grassroots organizations, particularly residents' associations, and the figures given here are only indicative. Dawson (1992, 94) describes the settlement of San Juan de Miraflores in Lima and identifies more than 1,000 grassroots organizations in a settlement of 300,000 people. These organizations include neighbourhood committees, survival groups (mainly for welfare organizations) and trade associations. Bretas (1996, 222) suggest that there are 1,000 community organizations in Belo Horizonte, a city of 2 million. Jaramillo and Hataya (1996) identified 522

people's organizations for housing alone in Colombia.

What these studies suggest is that in many settlements there may be a multitude of local associations and that the presence of some form of grassroots organizations is the norm rather than the exception. However, surprisingly little is known about the development of organizations such as these. Drawing from a number of studies, several reasons consistently emerge to explain the presence of grassroots organizations. Among the more common factors instigating and then supporting grassroots organizations are kinship, ethnicity, trade union involvement, city-based federations, NGOs, religious organizations, political parties and the private sector. Groups can be catalyzed by need, to secure land, resist eviction, provide themselves with water, manage savings and credit, and a host of other functions.

**Kinship:** Berger (1997) argues that kinship networks are the starting point for many informal networks. In his study of five low-income settlements in Manila, he finds that many such kinship groups consolidate into formal associations about ten years after the settlement is first formed and these associations grow most strongly when collective goods, such as water, are needed. Once these needs are fulfilled (or the association fails to fulfill them), activities die down unless they are vitalized as necessary; for example, following an eviction threat. Hence, kinship links can be important even if they are not immediately associated with collective activity. Other authors also support the argument that kinship is an important source of association (Kim 1995, 191; Blanc 1997, 196).

**Ethnic, tribal and village groups:** Boonyabanha et al. (1998) and Fernandes (1997) both describe how tribal groups move to the city with urban migration. These authors suggest that traditional organizations are mainly concerned with welfare issues, deaths, marriages and religious ceremonies and holidays. Even when the traditional organizations themselves break down, the activities may remain and provide a focus for organization to address other needs. In an African example, Uduku (1992, 59) also discusses how the traditional Yoruba organizations provide communal infrastructure and services.

**Trade unions:** The trade union movement has provided an organizing experience for some low-income residents who have taken the same methods and approaches into neighbourhood organizations. Hence Rahman (1998) explains the significance of the history of Welfare Colony when seeking to find reasons for the organizing capacity in this particular settlement in Karachi. Many of those living in the area work in the wholesale fruit and vegetable market and belong to the market union. Rahman (1998) argues that this helps to explain why the community organizations have demonstrated an unusually sophisticated capacity both to work together to address their own needs through the direct provision of infrastructure and to strategize to secure government support. Pezzoli (1993), when discussing the development of one peri-urban community in Mexico City argues that the trade union movement, and particularly the workers union at the university, has influenced the form of organization that has developed.

**Federations** in the city or region may also support grassroots organizations in specific settlements. As community organizations have grown stronger, several have developed a federating capacity with generally city-based organizations capable of providing support to individual residents associations. Hence, in Fortaleza (Brazil), there are four federations operating at the level of the city with a capacity to support initiatives in indi-

vidual settlements: the Federation of Neighbourhoods and Squatter Settlements; the Union of Communities of Greater Fortaleza; grassroots groups formed within the Catholic parish; and independent groups such as the women's groups or black culture groups (Cabannes 1997, 32). In India, the National Slum Dwellers Federation is now working in 21 cities, supporting several thousand grassroots organizations. These and other federations such as those described in this issue of *Environment and Urbanization* respond to the interest of community leaders, assisting in new organizations and initiatives.

**Non-government organizations:** The role of NGOs in creating and supporting grassroots organizations varies considerably. Some assist with forming community organizations whilst others seek to support those which exist already. Community organizations that are initiated by NGOs may be formed around any one of a number of specific issues such as credit for housing and income generation (for example, income generation by Proshika in Dakar), infrastructure (such as water committees by Care in Zambia) or services (such as the Mother and Child Centre in Barrio San Jorge, Buenos Aires).

**Religious organizations:** The significance of religious organizations in the development of both grassroots organizations and charitable institutions has long been recognized. In the Philippines (as elsewhere), the church provided an organizing platform for squatter communities during the Marcos dictatorship (Carroll undated). Carroll discusses the multiple influences of the church and particularly their role in supporting NGOs and grassroots organizations. Buende (1995) suggests they played a similar role in Namibia during SWAPO's struggle for independence.

**Government agencies:** In a number of countries, state institutions have sought to organize community level groups to provide the lowest tier of government. To give just a few examples, in Colombia (Jaramillo and Hataya 1996), the state has established groups called communal action groups for a number of self-help activities; in 1993, there were some 42,500 such groups, of which 70 per cent were in urban areas. In Tanzania, the CCM (the political party which ruled prior to the introduction of a multi-party system) worked with the "ten-cell unit", the lowest level of government with specific responsibilities such as registering the transfer of lands. Governments may also be involved in supporting grassroots organizations, even without a clear state policy. De los Rios (1997, 88) suggests that the local government in Lima has encouraged the formation of tenant associations in the city, although many such associations have only been spontaneous and short-lived movements and a national federation has not developed. Peattie (1990) describes how the state in Villa El Salvador began to develop community organizations in the new settlements. (Although she expressed some concern about the long-term viability of all these organizations; one organization, she notes, was dependent on a single professional and the project ended upon his death.)

**Commercial developers:** A final category is that of the private commercial land developers. Hasan (1990 and 1997) explains how the private informal developers in Karachi support the setting up of welfare organizations to facilitate the procurement of services and infrastructure, and to enable the community to liaise better with external organizations. Whilst many of these organizations remain weak, they can be important in assisting with the provision of services, and most of the low-income communities established through the informal development of sites now have active welfare associations which have, to varying degrees, secured services.

Grassroots organizations have undertaken numerous activities to address the multiple needs of their members. There is not enough space here to go into a detailed consideration of these activities but there are reports of grassroots organizations being active both at the neighbourhood level and through self-help trade associations. In neighbourhood groups, residents commonly work collectively to obtain access to land tenure, improve infrastructure and services and obtain better housing. Trade associations may be concerned with providing services such as credit and/or defending their trading spaces in the city.

### IV. RELATIONS BETWEEN COMMUNITY LEADERS AND MEMBERS

WHILST MOSER (1997) argues that social capital is an important asset to the poor and that community organizations are positively associated with social capital, this is perhaps too bold an assumption. In particular, questions have been raised about the motivations of leaders within the community and the extent of membership participation.

Scheper-Hughes (1992, 513-4) describes how the elected leader in a small town in Brazil started to control access to community resources, using general meetings for his personal interests. When one such meeting was called, the level of violence was such that the meeting was abandoned and he then declared himself president for life. Scheper-Hughes concludes that the problem is the "lack of basic trust" (page 516), i.e. a lack of social capital, and argues that structural conditions mean that this lack of trust is reinforced rather than addressed through the community organization.

Others have expressed similar concerns that community leaders dominate the organizations that they belong to, reinforcing a belief among residents that they have little control or influence over their lives and their local organizations. See, for example, Burgwal (1995) with respect to the consolidation of a squatter invasion in Quito; Harrison and McVey (1997) with respect to informal traders in the centre of Mexico City; Rashid (1998) with respect to newly formed informal sub-divisions on the outskirts of Orangi and van der Linden (1997) when discussing Karachi in general: "...the leaders are only out to eat our money" (page 97); Hardoy, Hardoy and Schusterman (1991, 97) with respect to a priest who "...gradually destroyed any attempt by the community to get organized"; Klaarhamer (1989) with respect to occupations in Santiago, Chile; Desai (1995, 226) with respect to low-income settlements in Mumbai; and Pornchokchai (1992, 107) who argues that community organizations in Bangkok are unrepresentative, being dominated by élites in the community.

A related issue is that of participation within community organizations. The set of studies recently undertaken by the World Bank on household responses to urban poverty and vulnerability (Moser 1997; Moser and McIlwaine 1997; Moser and Holland 1997) suggest low levels of participation. (They explicitly exclude participation in church activities.) Table 1 below summarizes these findings. Readers should note that this data does not distinguish between single and multiple membership and, if some respondents are members of more than one community organization, the numbers participating are lower than those given here.

The definition of organization used in these studies excludes informal networks and groups; for example, in addition to the groups given here, there are activities such as rotating savings and credit associations.

<b>Table 1: Participation in community organizations (per cent)</b>		
	Women	Men
Commonwealth (Philippines)	16.4	13.2
Cisne Dos (Ecuador)	33.6	18.0
Chawama (Zambia)	13.4	12.0

SOURCE: Data drawn from Moser 1997, Moser and Holland 1997 and Moser and McIlwaine 1997.

However, the figures suggest that many in low-income settlements do not actively participate. Further evidence that community organizations may often not involve many in the community is provided by other studies. Cabannes (1997, 36) describes how one Brazilian NGO identified a group of 50 families to include in a housing improvement programme and found that none were members of the local residents' association or other local movements. Peattie's (1989, 29) conclusion with respect to the residents in Villa El Salvador is that "...passionate activism among the leadership may be combined with disinterest among the mass of people. In my days in Villa El Salvador many persons with whom I spoke seemed to know little or nothing of the political history and present organizational life of the settlement." Magutu (1997, 320) argues that the functions of the committee in the site and services scheme near Mombasa (Kenya) are limited to those that serve the interests of the party and that there is "...a lack of grassroots leadership committed to community development."

A further question is "who participates?" There is a need to consider participation by age, gender and (in some cases) ethnicity. Lack of space has meant this area of consideration is only briefly illustrated through a focus on the role of women. The significance of women in grassroots organizations concerned with aspects of neighbourhood development such as water, sanitation, garbage and other essential services has been noted by many commentators. Castells (1993, 46) describes how one of the leaders of the tenants movement in Mexico sought to mobilize the population of Veracruz in 1923 by calling on the women to convince their men to go on strike. Castells notes that whilst the leadership was male, the militants behind the struggle for lower rents and better maintenance in their rented accommodation were primarily women. Barrig (1991, 68) notes that women in Lima are often involved in defending land (although generally in an accessory role). She argues that the establishment of communal kitchens in Lima in response to a crisis has resulted in tension between traditional community organizations with strong territorial logic and these newer groups managed by women. One consequence of women's greater public involvement has been that women have gained new skills and experience, becoming "... more aggressive about intervening in the spheres of public representation" (page 70).

Hence, we need to recognize that the impact of grassroots organizations on poverty may not always be positive. Grassroots organizations do not necessarily assist in the reduction of urban poverty and vulnerability nor in the consolidation of social capital. The nature of relationships inside the grassroots organizations together with the low levels of participation suggest that they may be limited in their capacity to reduce the symptoms of urban poverty (such as exclusion from access to basic services) as well as to address some of the more structural causes that result in a lack of empowerment and powerlessness. Whilst grassroots organizations may

assist communities in obtaining services, land security and other development benefits, these gains need to be set against some of the issues that have been raised here. However, relations within grassroots organizations are not predetermined but reflect a number of factors, including external pressures on the local leadership and the difficulties of self-organizations. Such relations also reflect the structural conditions faced by the poor, the state control of the land and resources for infrastructure, and other upgrading issues. In particular, they reflect the interface between the state and grassroots organizations.

Prior to looking in more detail at relations between the state and grassroots organizations, the next section considers the contribution of NGOs.

### **V. NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS**

IN THE LAST two decades, NGOs have become an increasingly significant group within civil society and development. Whilst the number of NGOs working on urban poverty issues is hard to assess, many of the larger towns and cities have a number of NGOs actively working in the field of urban poverty reduction. However, in many smaller towns there may be very few or none at all.

NGO activities may include low-income housing, community development, support for micro-enterprises, preservation of the environment, popular education, health care and health-related education, and services for mothers, infants and children as well as projects for research, training and information dissemination (Arrossi et al. 1994). A number of NGO programmes seek to assist low-income settlements to improve their housing through any one of a number of strategies, including loan finance, technical assistance and community mobilization. Loan programmes to assist both upgrading and incremental housing development may be provided to enable people to obtain capital and therefore optimize their asset management strategies (ESCAP 1991, HIC/ACHR 1994, Mitlin 1997). Technical assistance in building and building materials technology may be offered to local residents, either with or without housing loans, to ensure that any money spent on housing improvements and development is spent effectively. NGOs recognize that many of the problems associated with urban poverty are related to a lack of income. Whilst some micro finance initiatives have been associated with rural development (most notably the Grameen Bank), others are rooted in urban areas (Hurley 1990).

There appears to be a considerable diversity in NGO strategies for working with community residents and there is very little systematic information on the use and significance of these different strategies in any specific context. An overview of the experiences of a number of NGOs suggest that there are four main strategies:

- the NGO is demand-led at the level of the settlement, that is they respond to a request from a neighbourhood-level grassroots organization (for example, the work of Cearah Periferia in Fortaleza who work both with individual settlements and city-wide federations);
- the NGO is demand-led at the level of the region or city, that is they respond to a request from a city Federation of grassroots organizations to work in a new area either because the Federation has been asked by

its membership or because it appears to be advantageous to the Federation leadership (for example, People's Dialogue on Land and Shelter in South Africa who work in alliance with the South African Homeless People's Federation);

- the NGO identifies the settlements through some kind of needs assessment (whether formalized or more informally undertaken). For example, Care's work in Zambia – the supply model; and
- the NGO is invited into the area by another external agency (for example, the NGO POP, working with the government-funded Urban Community Development Office in Chaing Mai, Thailand).

Obviously, in the first and second strategies the NGOs are working with previously established grassroots organizations and hence, whom they work with is not such an issue. In the third and fourth strategies, NGOs may work either with existing organizations or they may seek to establish new organizations or work with individuals in the community. Alternatively, they may work directly with local residents, providing health or education, for example. Or they may work through community members who have a particular role designated by the state (such as community development workers or health volunteers).

Many NGOs working directly with low-income communities have the empowerment of the local community as one of their prime objectives and many take these skills for granted. For many years, it was accepted that NGOs (or some organizations within this general categorization) work effectively with local grassroots organizations to achieve participative development (see, for example, Gorman 1984; Hirschman 1984; Clark 1991; Korten 1990). More recently, NGOs have been criticized for doing little to build the capacity of the people they are working with (see, for example, Desai 1995 and Russell and Vidler 2000). Increasingly, it is recognized that difficulties in relations between NGOs and grassroots organizations may be more widespread than was once thought.

One issue of concern is that NGOs impose their own agendas on some of the local self-help organizations with which they are working. Following a study of community development in Kenya, the Ford Foundation has recently established a local foundation to support the work of community-based organizations. The researchers concluded that communities had little control over the development process and gained little useful experience during the implementation of the development project: "...whilst NGO capacity tends to develop over time and with experience, it appears that the communities they work with are not being developed to the same degree" (Thurman 1994, 7). Pezzoli (1993) suggests that another aspect of this problem may be NGOs determining the nature and type of development that takes place regardless of local preferences.

A second issue is that NGOs may be insensitive to political and power struggles within the community, failing to work effectively with existing organizations and/or failing to transform them into more representative organizations. In a study in Mumbai, Desai (1995) reported that some community organizations felt that NGOs were too reliant on the traditional community leadership, who use these contacts to reinforce their own position. Howes draws on a study of eight NGOs who all work closely with membership organizations, to argue that many NGOs who aim to build membership organizations prefer to establish new organizations, ignoring (and therefore undermining) existing capacity within the primary stakeholders (Bebbington and Mitlin 1996). In one of the few studies to further explore these issues, he argues that this strategy is prob-

ably unhelpful and that new forms of membership organization appear to be most effective when rooted in existing structures (Howes 1997). These conclusions are echoed in an early study of NGO initiatives in the urban centres of Thailand, Bolivia and Chile (Christian Aid 1993).

A third issue is that NGOs are "over-active", undertaking most of the activities themselves, with the consequence that the abilities and skills of grassroots organizations are not developed. One commentator on the relationship between NGOs and community organizations in Argentine towns and cities suggests that NGOs develop close personal relations with local authority staff and thereby "...create a form of dependency between NGOs and the grassroots organizations not dissimilar to the clientelistic relations between politicians and voters. . . . there is no systematic transfer of knowledge from the NGOs to the grassroots organizations to enable the latter to deal autonomously with the state" (Gazzoli, 1996, 163).

Taken together, these concerns suggest that NGO staff may be reluctant to delegate power and responsibility to local residents. As a consequence, they may be failing to strengthen independent and capable agencies. Other concerns have been raised about NGOs' ability to provide the necessary support in community development. When the Community Organization of the Philippines Enterprise took a substantive look at their strategies for working with grassroots organizations in 1994, they found that their training programme encouraged community leaders to behave like NGO staff rather than helping them to become stronger leaders in their own right. Together with the communities that they are working with, they devised a new training programme with stronger emphasis on building links between community leaders and the local membership.

There is no clear consensus on the necessary conditions for NGOs to interact positively with grassroots organizations (moreover, there are vast differences in the levels of organization among such organizations). NGOs themselves may be defensive when criticized about their activities in this area. In Kenya, when the Ford Foundation proposed to establish a new local foundation to support community-based organizations, local NGOs were uncertain and critical of the proposal. In South Africa, the People's Dialogue, an NGO attempting to forge a new kind of relationship with low-income communities, found it difficult to have its work and strategies accepted by other NGOs during its initial years.

However, it would be wrong to conclude that the picture is entirely gloomy. Carroll (1992), in a study of civil society organizations working in rural areas of Latin America argues that NGOs, despite weaknesses, are in fact slightly better at service delivery and at reaching the poorest than federations of grassroots organizations. At the same time, some NGOs have sought to develop structures and ways of working to better support grassroots organizations (Gazzoli 1996; Goyder 1995; Bolnick and Patel 1994) and which address the concerns identified above. The organizations described in this issue of *Environment and Urbanization* are not alone in believing that NGOs urgently need to address their relationships with the urban poor.

## VI. CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNANCE: FROM THE BOTTOM UP

TURNING TO THE relationship between grassroots organizations (and supporting NGOs) and the state, the emerging picture is of a complex set

of social relationships with community leaders working with both state officials and politicians to secure access to land, infrastructure and basic services. Such strategies and activities do not (for the most part) challenge the system or the rules by which it operates. Rather, they seek to ensure that the state offers more, rather than less, to the urban poor. And in return for the services they offer, both politicians and state officials commonly seek a variety of personal and political benefits.

It appears that, across all sectors and geographical regions, politicians may try to establish patronage and clientelist relations to further their own advantage with community leaders and, through them, with their organizations. Peattie (1990, 21) when discussing the development of Villa El Salvador (a large squatter settlement in Lima, Peru) argues that in the absence of alternatives strategies to provide housing, "...squatter settlements provided a kind of de facto strategy which governments and politicians in various ways agreed to, supported and even (to some degree) sponsored in return for the political benefits..." This suggests that relationships between civil society (primarily in the form of grassroots organizations) and the state (in the form of local politicians and state officials) both involve and reinforce patronage and dependency within grassroots organizations. Individual settlements may have been successful in securing resources, however these processes may have resulted in substantive gains to the poor beyond a redistribution of resources towards those communities with a leadership that is able to "operate" the political system.

The experience in Asia is similar, with an evident exchange of votes for services. Shamsuddin, a community leader from Ghaizabad (Karachi, Pakistan), explains how he sought to attract some concern for their lack of services and infrastructure: "I went to our local councillor and invited him to our area. At once he replied 'I did not get any votes from your area, therefore it is not my area' " (Fernandes 1997, 38). Douglass (1992, 24-6) describes a similar context in the Philippines when he notes that in Tondo (Manila) the efforts of the community organization to secure land and services were difficult to realize and "the key leaders were coopted" in the process. Beall (1997, 946), in a study of waste management in the city of Faisalabad, also notes the propensity for communities to organize to secure basic services and land tenure, which they received due to the skills of their leadership in trading their votes for services.

One consequence of these processes is "dependency" (mentioned by Castells (1983), Peattie (1990), Pornchokchai (1992), Scheper-Hughes (1992) and van der Linden (1997)), by which is meant the belief among citizens that they are unable to address their problems themselves but have to rely on the intervention of a more powerful agency, often mediated by a leadership that is seen as somewhat distant from the residents themselves and which is recognized not to act in their interests. "The people of the Alto, like the rural poor of the north-east more generally, understand human nature to be flawed and inclined towards treachery. They expect their popular leaders to turn against them if the rewards for doing so are great enough" (Scheper-Hughes (1992, 516). In an Asian context, Desai (1995) believes that residents in Mumbai had little interest in being involved in negotiations with the state as they "...were unwilling to trespass into the domain of 'officialdom' which they saw as the prerogative of community leaders" (page 234). The Orangi Pilot Project (1995), one of the largest-scale NGO initiatives in Asia, noted at the beginning of their programme that a serious obstacle to community improvements to sanitation was the belief that the state would provide, even though residents accepted that this was unlikely.

Some grassroots organizations have sought substantive alternative strategies to offer more to the urban poor. Barbosa et al. (1997, 28) explain the struggle of the union of *posseiros* in Goiania to ensure that low-income renters in the city obtained access to land. Through self-help initiatives, several hundred thousand people were moved out. The union then sought to secure municipal support for changes in city policies that would enable the poor to be active participants in the development process. Whilst some successes were secured, relations with the state were problematic in many respects. However, the union believes that the democratic Partido do Movimento Democrático do Brasil (Democratic Movement of Brazil Party) government sought deliberately to weaken the autonomy of the *posseiros* movement. *"In areas where new urban posse groups are emerging, the state will begin a process of negotiation with the leaders. However, meetings are constantly postponed. This tactic weakens the organization and, usually, the initial leadership is replaced by one more favourable to the state"* (page 28).

In addition to lobbying for services from the state, self-help efforts to improve services and infrastructure in low-income settlements have been recognized as important by NGOs as well as by grassroots organizations themselves. These self-help efforts often exist with the support of the local politicians and officials who provide small grants and facilitate contacts with state bureaucracies (see Dizon (1997) and Hasan (1997) for a discussion of the situation in Manila and Karachi, respectively). Such experiences are important in emphasizing that the relationships between communities and state officials are not predetermined. Altruism exists alongside self-interest. The experience of the Orangi Pilot Project in Karachi reinforces the importance of such local contacts when ensuring that municipal resources are used effectively for the urban poor. The Orangi Pilot Project in Karachi began with the understanding that demonstration projects could reform state practice towards the improvement of low-income communities. However, 18 years after starting work, OPP professionals now believe that this strategy is unlikely to succeed, preferring instead to support communities to negotiate directly with the state in order to gain support that addresses their needs (Hasan 1997, 163).

The discussion on community leaders in Section IV illustrates the ways in which they seek personal benefit, in part, through controlling access to state resources. Latin American experiences also emphasize the depth of political involvement (whether for self interest or not). One indication of the high levels of politicization within community activities in Latin America is suggested by the experience in Huaycan gorge, Lima (Peru). Arevalo T (1997) recounts how the groups in need of land came together in an association. By the time the landless were ready to occupy the site, four political parties plus a coalition (representing a further four political parties) were all active within the grassroots organization. Perhaps not surprisingly, the community leadership was dominated by political disputes.

In a more positive experience, demonstrating how local government can assist in democratic and accountable organization, Abers (1998, 43-3) discusses the experience of the Workers Party administration in Porto Alegre. The methodology of participatory budgeting (which allows the poor themselves to have an input into local authority expenditure allocations) emerged from the earlier struggles of community leaders to ensure government was effective in meeting the needs of the urban poor. Participatory budgeting seeks to change traditional relationships between the state and the citizen through devolving decision-making over local infra-

structure improvements to the people themselves. Abers (1998) argues that it has been successful in many respects and has transformed neighbourhood associations, enabling them to better represent their membership to the state and reduce corruption. She suggests that "...the budget policy is a direct incentive for new neighbourhood associations to emerge and old ones to broaden their membership base... In this context, there has been a marked decline in the capacity of closed clientelist neighbourhood associations to survive" (page 50).

Whilst the state and civil society are two distinct groupings, they are not completely autonomous. The way in which the state interacts with citizens influences the way in which civil society organizations operate, and hence their capacity to represent themselves within engagements with the state. The behaviour of leaders is in part determined by the clientelist nature of the state; which itself reflects the interests of both officials and politicians (as the stronger parties). As shown above, some grassroots organizations have struggled against these relationships and have achieved some success in doing so.

Movements such as Shack/Slum Dwellers International have sought to strengthen grassroots organizations, enabling them to become both more independent of external support and, at the same time, more proactive in proposing alternative models of urban development (Bolnick, Patel and Mitlin 2001). Such strategies have focused – broadly speaking – on asset creation; including assets such as financial capital (through savings and loans), social organization (through stronger more representative groups that are federated both across the city and nationally) and knowledge (through experimentation to develop alternatives such as construction methods or infrastructure installation). Khan (1997) argues that the alliance of SPARC and the National Slum Dwellers Federation has developed strategies that have resulted in them being able to "push through" political change. This NGO does not seek to lobby state officials directly with professional opinion, rather it seeks to secure its impact through enhancing the capacities of local communities and strengthening grassroots organizations to negotiate directly with the state, demonstrating the policy changes they seek.

## VII. CONCLUSION

WITH RESPECT TO civil society's relations with state institutions, Stein (1989, 14) argues that struggles over land and services in San Salvador can be understood as "...areas of confrontation between... the state and an increasingly restless but unorganized majority: a confrontation which represents a challenge to the government's current economic strategies and the political control of the urban élites." However, there is relatively little evidence to show that these conclusions can be generalized. The interaction between community organizations and the state may be better understood as being the means for the distribution of scarce state resources between, on the one hand, a state that is unable to provide comprehensive infrastructure and services and, on the other, urban citizens who seek neighbourhood improvements. Partial, poor quality provision enables improvements to take place but within a context and at a pace that is controlled by either the state or the politicians, to their mutual benefit.

In this context, grassroots organizations can secure improvements to their neighbourhoods but do little to fundamentally address a situation

characterized by extensive poverty, little state capacity and a relatively low level of aspiration among the lower-income groups. Whilst enabling some progress at the level of individual settlements, such grassroots organizations are not in any position to represent the interests of the urban poor and help them to address their multiple needs. What emerges from this analysis is that the problems of leadership and participation within grassroots organizations cannot be separated from the broader context of state officials' and politicians' relations of patronage with community leaders.

Both the conflicts between members and leaders, and the lack of interest in participation, may now be better understood. Linking these experiences together with concerns about dependency, a picture emerges of external groups and community leaders mutually maintaining structures that serve their interests. In this context, there may be little opportunity for strong accountable relationships between leaders and members. The institutions of civil society reflect the society and social processes in which they are embedded and, in this context, grassroots organizations are rarely able to play a transforming role.

Whilst NGOs ostensibly promise to assist the poor to achieve empowerment, on many occasions they are reluctant to relinquish control. With little experience of alternative development models, NGOs may wish to guide and influence community organizations to adopt professional solutions regardless of local views. At the same time, they may pre-empt community level capacity-building as they take over decision-making and negotiating roles. With a low level of community ownership, breadth and spread may be a problem. At the same time, NGOs may be constrained by the difficulties of managing donor finance, with its emphasis on short-term project funds, on financial accountabilities and on tangible outputs.

As a consequence, there may be few opportunities open to community organizations that wish to do things differently. A common link between the grassroots organizations that have sought alternative, more democratic and accountable forms of organization is that of networking or federating. It is isolation that seems to make it particularly easy for relations of patronage and clientelism to thrive. Groups that network and/or federate appear to be able to negotiate better with the state and support each other to be more responsive to the needs of members.

Castells (1983, 210-12) links the dependency on the state of workers living in squatter settlements with the dependency of the state on the world's corporate capital. Whilst globalization offers benefits through improved communication and more open systems of governance by international agencies, the free movement of investment capital makes cities as vulnerable as they ever were and reduces the capacities of city managers to create more choices and listen to the views of their citizens.

The challenges appear to be clear. Despite the enthusiasm of development agencies and other professionals for civil society, many grassroots organizations are more concerned with poverty alleviation than with poverty reduction; with maintaining existing social relationships rather than with securing ones that are more equitable. Whilst some NGOs rise to the challenge of social development, the problems associated with NGO activities that are discussed above suggest that others do little to encourage the urban poor themselves to be more active and empowered. In this context, what needs to be prioritized is a better understanding of how grassroots organizations can be supported to address the needs of their poorest members.

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