

**Paper Title:** The Problematics of Civic Engagement in Democratic Governance Reforms: Implications for Civil Society Strengthening for Social Change in post-war Transitional Political Contexts.

by

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### **Paper Abstract/Summary**

Throughout the 1990s and beyond, state, non-state and international developmental actors have experimented new development and governance paradigms that have transcended the traditional statist approach to a partnership model in promoting sustainable state reforms and peace-building. As governance innovations shape the contours of traditional governance, reconfiguring state-society relations while opening up new axes of social representation, power and spaces, the key issue facing these societies is to how to counter poor citizens' engagement and distrusts in social reconstruction as well as enhancing state legitimacy. Donor intervention strategies to strengthen the third sector have quantitatively expanded the range and scope of programs in the third sector, but have had only minimal effects on historic socio-political power inequities that have incubated bad governance practices and hostile state-society relations. Donors' recent shift of strategy from direct support to non-governmental organizations to creating an interdependent support structure to manage state-society relations and interactions as the ENCISS program in Sierra Leone, demonstrate the elusive search for altering the negative texture of state-society relations battered by historic problems of poor governance. The new structure has been fraught with dilemmas and tensions in terms of devising a constructive framework of dealing with state and society alike in fostering the enabling condition supporting sustainable social change. To date, evidence suggests that new democratic spaces pose contradictions and dilemmas in relations to the effectiveness, legitimacy, representation and independence of citizen-led governance approaches. Various issues have stemmed up examining the quality of relations and management of interactions between state and society, the mode of engagement and strategies employed by the state, civil society groups, political parties, donors' agencies and transnational agencies. While post-war societies face unique opportunities to overhauling governance structures brought about by the significant conglomerations of socio-economic, cultural and demographic changes, the missing factor is how do groups cope with the dynamics of governance innovations, let alone engage with it?; what kind of citizen engagement is being pursued by whom and for what? What are the factors underlying the current citizen distrust, apathy and disengagement from political governance reforms? The paper argues that making civil society work in fragile transitional contexts requires deliberate attention to broader macro factors that quick-fix institutional reform measures and other intervention strategies are insufficient to address. Fragile transitional contexts require a mix of strategies that requires a combination of social, political, legal and educational measures imbued with a unique focus on the manner of inter-linkages between civil society groups and other citizen interest-driven institutions such as the Parliaments, the judiciary, the media and other governmental commissions.

