

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT WITH POLITICAL PARTIES DURING ELECTIONS

LESSONS FROM GHANA AND SIERRA LEONE



A Health Walk organized by the Universal Health Consortium of Ghana, Accra, 26 November 2012.

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This study examines the conditions that enable civil society organizations (CSOs) to influence political parties during election campaigns. Drawing on desk reviews and the experiences of CSOs during the 2012 election in Ghana and Sierra Leone, the study found that, for CSOs to have their demands incorporated into party programmes, qualities such as political neutrality, evidence-based data gathering, and consistency in judgments are critical. Furthermore, applying methods such as lobbying and strategic use of media were found to be very effective in engaging political actors. The study recommends that CSOs should be innovative in their strategies with political parties, in order to inject fresh momentum in the way political parties respond to CSOs.

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ACRONYMS

CDD-Ghana	Ghana Centre for Democratic Development
CSO	Civil society organization
FGD	Focus group discussion
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
INGO	International non-governmental organization
NGO	Non-government organization
NPP	New Patriotic Party
PFAG	Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana
UHCC	Universal Access to Healthcare Campaign
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Oxfam commissioned the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) to conduct a study into how civil society organizations (CSOs) can effectively engage with and/or influence political parties during election campaigns. The fundamental question underlying the study was: 'What conditions and contexts facilitate the most effective mechanisms to advance long-term success by CSOs in influencing the political commitments and programmes of political parties during election campaigns?' The study aimed to contribute vital knowledge on this subject, about which there was very little pre-existing documentation, particularly concerning West Africa. The study was based on CSOs' experiences from the 2012 elections in Ghana and Sierra Leone.

FINDINGS

Essential attributes of CSO effectiveness

The following qualities were identified as essential for CSOs hoping to influence political parties:

- *Political neutrality*: Political neutrality is essential for successful engagement. Once a CSO is found to be politically biased, it is shunned by the parties- a situation that is very difficult to reverse.
- *Evidence-based approach*: Political parties prefer to engage with CSOs whose concerns are based on evidence or research.
- *Consistency*: Political parties appreciate CSOs that are consistent about the values and principles which they stand for or advocate.
- *Credibility*: Maintaining credibility should be of concern to CSOs if they want to be effective. Political parties have trust and confidence in CSOs who have invested time and effort in developing long-term working relationships with them.

Methodologies for formulating CSO election demands

CSOs use different approaches to formulate their election campaign demands. Given the differing dynamics around the issues CSOs themselves campaign on, it is impossible to claim one approach as superior to another. The following approaches emerged strongly from the study:

- *Broad consultation with stakeholders*: Some CSOs arrive at their demands by way of broad consultation with their stakeholders. This approach can be effective in situations where stakeholders have divergent views on their needs, as it helps to build consensus.
- *Objective evidence*: Some CSOs determine their demands on the basis of objective evidence derived from analysis of data collected on policy issues of interest. This approach allows them to assess the various dimensions of issues and draw conclusions about what is workable in the short, medium and long term.
- *Familiarity with policy issues*: Some CSOs arrive at their demands on the basis of their familiarity with and experience of the policy issue and how topical they think their demands are.

Strategies that facilitate CSO influence on political parties

CSOs are combining newer strategies with older ones to enhance their influence on political parties. Specifically, the conventional engagement strategies of **roundtable meetings**, **seminars** and **conferences** are being combined with what in African terms are unconventional ones such as **debates** and **petitions**. Other strategies being employed include:

- media engagement;
- pledge cards;
- protest marches;
- street rallies;
- briefing papers;
- social media.

The best time to engage with political parties

Generally, respondents in both Ghana and Sierra Leone agreed that the election campaign period is a unique opportunity for CSOs to pursue the demands of their constituents with political parties, for the following reasons:

- First, engagement at this time means that the party that wins the election may incorporate the CSOs' demands into its national budget and plans.
- Second, this is the period when parties pay most attention to alternative opinions from non-state actors.
- Third, since most political parties' activities, especially for those that lost the election, virtually grind to a halt after the elections, non-state actors are better off engaging with parties at the height of the campaign.
- Fourth, politicians are vulnerable to external pressures and demands during the election period for fear of losing votes.

Who should be the focus of CSO engagement: candidates or political parties?

The question of whether CSOs should channel their energies to influence individual candidates or their parties produced mixed responses in both countries. On the whole, the study revealed that there is no one-size-fits-all answer to the issue of whom CSOs should engaged in order to influence political parties effectively.

Does gender play a role?

Female candidates are perceived to be more receptive to CSOs than their male counterparts. This correlates with CSOs' advocacy on behalf of women. However, women's success in political contests is still low in Ghana and Sierra Leone. Among the reasons identified for the poor performance of women in elections are:

- traditional cultural perceptions that men are more effective than women;
- traditional cultural perceptions that outspoken women are arrogant;
- financial inequality, which makes it hard for women to compete with their male counterparts.

Challenges faced by CSOs in influencing political parties

Challenges CSOs face in influencing political parties can be grouped into two categories:

- *External challenges* include political party suspicion of CSOs, undermining the engagement process between the two.
- *Internal challenges* include fragmentation within the circle of CSOs, poor engagement skills and inadequate human and financial resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- CSOs hoping to achieve long-term influence over political parties should avoid every form of unprofessional conduct and commit more time, attention and resources to improving their internal structures and external relationships.
- CSOs can minimize the risks involved in engaging political parties by avoiding partisanship in all their activities.
- CSOs facing capacity challenges can enhance their effectiveness by working in coalitions.
- CSOs should be innovative in their strategies with political parties, as developing new strategies appears to inject fresh momentum into political parties' engagement with them.
- CSOs need to engage with political parties on an ongoing basis to ensure that the CSOs' concerns remain relevant to the politicians.
- In order for CSO concerns to be taken up by political parties, CSOs need to engage the parties before manifestos or party programmes are drawn up. CSOs should assess every political party to determine which approach is suitable, and in some instances may have to deal both with individual candidates and with their parties.
- To overcome the shortcomings in their engagement with women, CSOs must continually promote gender equality. In addition, CSOs must consult more intensively with women on the formulation of development-related demands, and where possible work to increase women's involvement in the lobbying process.
- A combined effort from both political parties and CSOs is required in dealing with the external challenges CSOs face. Both sides need to be more open and appreciative of the importance of the other in national development. As for their internal challenges, CSOs need to address their divisions as well as concentrating on improving their internal capacity.

1 STUDY CONTEXT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

As part of its commitment to developing and improving the lives of the poor and vulnerable, in 2012 Oxfam supported three nationwide civil society campaigns in Sierra Leone and Ghana. Each civil society campaign was designed to empower citizens and community groups to demand public accountability and improvements in key areas affecting their lives. In Ghana, where two of the campaigns were undertaken, Oxfam supported the Universal Health Care Campaign aimed at promoting a policy of fully free health care, and the Agriculture Campaign aimed at increasing government support for smallholder farmers. The campaign in Sierra Leone focused on improving the quality of and access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). In all three campaigns a variety of tools and strategies was employed to achieve the goal of getting rival politicians and/or political parties to commit to desired changes.

Recognizing that there has been very little documentation by civil society organizations (CSOs) themselves of such campaigns to influence political party programmes, Oxfam commissioned the present study to collect vital knowledge on how CSOs can effectively engage or influence political actors to demand change during an election campaign period. The study also aimed to gather information on the diverse factors that can aid or prevent success. Accordingly, this study sought to review experiences of CSO engagement in Ghana and Sierra Leone during their most recent elections in order to answer the following questions:

- What structures promote CSO influence on political parties?
- What methods are effective or counterproductive in securing political commitments?

Insights from this study are intended to inform the development of a guide to aid future election engagements by Oxfam, its partner organizations and other non-government organizations (NGOs) (including international NGOs or INGOs), as well as to stimulate further research on best practice to be adopted by CSOs and their development partners/donors in engaging political actors for change.

1.2 OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of the study was to conduct an in-depth analysis of the factors that help CSOs to influence political actors during election campaigns. The study examined the structures and strategies that promote sustainable engagement between CSOs and political parties as well as identifying gaps and challenges in such engagements. It focused on the 2012 election campaigns in Ghana and Sierra Leone.¹ The study contributed to the body of knowledge on how CSOs in West Africa and elsewhere can take advantage of electoral competition among political parties to promote their development agenda.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 Research questions and themes

The fundamental question underlying this study was: 'What conditions and contexts facilitate the most effective mechanisms to advance long-term success by CSOs in influencing the political commitments and programmes of political parties during election campaigns?' In order to address this question, a number of themes and sub-questions were developed which aimed at providing multi-dimensional, in-depth responses to the central question. The themes and sub-questions were as follows:

(a) CSO structures and characteristics necessary for effectiveness

- What is the structure of the CSOs? Do they have boards of directors? What is the nature of the chain of command? Do donors/political parties care about the management structures of CSOs that they engage with? If yes, which structures are acceptable and which are not?
- How important is the support of external partners such as INGOs and others to build CSO credibility?
- What credentials do CSOs need for them to be taken seriously by political parties?

(b) CSOs' methodology in formulating their election objectives or demands

- In the campaigns studied, how did CSOs formulate their campaign agenda and policy messages targeted at politicians and/or voters?
- How were constituents engaged in the formulation of election objectives and demands?
- What was the role of evidence-based research in the formulation of the objectives and demands?
- Was the methodology adopted biased towards one political party?
- Did political parties/donors care about how CSO demands were formulated (whether evidence-based, etc.)?

(c) Strategies and processes that facilitate interaction/engagement between CSOs and political parties

- In the campaigns studied, what mechanisms did CSO (including coalitions and networks) use to approach political parties?
- Which strategies and tactics appeared to be particularly effective, and why?
- How were key targets (such as experts who advise candidates, high-profile people close to candidates, etc.) identified and influenced?
- To what extent was the work done at the district and local level useful in influencing political parties or raising awareness among voters?
- Are some CSO actors more important than others? Is it possible to be effective with a small number of the 'right' (depending on the context and objective) CSOs?
- Is the election period the best period to engage political parties to demand change?
- Is there a critical mass of CSOs and NGOs needed in order to provide an effective front during an election campaign?
- What role can the media play in helping CSOs to achieve their demands?

(d) Challenges faced by CSOs in influencing political party programmes, and how to overcome them

- How did the divergence between the views of political parties and CSOs affect the ability of political parties to listen to CSO demands?
- Why were some strategies considered to be ill-judged or counterproductive? What contextual factors can explain why some strategies worked better than others?
- How did CSOs maintain neutrality when engaging with politicians?
- Did political parties prefer engaging with politically biased CSOs?

1.3.2 Research methodology

The study relied largely on qualitative research methods. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources as follows:

(a) Secondary sources of data

Desk research was undertaken in order to review existing knowledge about CSOs' engagement of and relationships with political parties, and in particular the policy choices that inform campaign messages and manifestos, as well as to inform the collection of primary data. This desk study focused on existing knowledge of CSOs' structures and their engagement in governance and with political parties in Africa. The review of the literature included, but was not limited to, studies of political parties in West Africa, the party manifestos of political parties in Ghana and Sierra Leone, electoral processes in West Africa, and analytical papers on CSOs' roles, activities and approaches in democratic contexts. Other documents consulted were NGO and CSO reports on specific experiences during election campaigns in Africa, and programme reports from NGOs, INGOs and foundations in the field of civic engagement and civil society participation.

In addition to the above, the researchers collated and analysed available reports on the CSO campaigns that Oxfam supported in Ghana and Sierra Leone in 2012 – specifically, the project review reports of each campaign as well as national evaluation reports. These analyses were useful in drawing out the similarities and differences in context and in the approaches used in the campaigns.

(b) Primary sources of data

Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with key informants and via focus group discussions (FGDs). Since the research was designed around Oxfam's efforts to support and empower citizens and community groups to engage with political actors and demand public accountability, the research team interviewed key Oxfam staff in Ghana and Sierra Leone about how the 2012 interventions were designed, implemented and monitored. These interviews provided background information about CSOs involvement in developmental issues in the two countries under study. They also provided fresh ideas about which organizations or individuals the researchers might want to designate for further in-depth interviews.

In addition to the above, interview sessions using semi-structured questionnaires² were held with key informants in both Ghana and Sierra Leone. Informants included representatives of CSOs and political parties, academics, representatives of donor and development partners, and the media. The respondents were purposely selected on the basis of information gathered from the desk study and analysis of Oxfam's campaign reports, as well as the interviews with key Oxfam staff in Ghana and Sierra Leone. This approach helped the team to gather a wide range of perspectives. The interviews provided information on the nature, successes and challenges of CSOs' engagement with political parties and, more generally, on the electoral process itself. In total, 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted out of a targeted 30 (i.e. 15 interviews per country).³ Table 1.1 shows a breakdown of the interview respondents by country and category of respondent.

Table 1.1: Interviews per country and category

Category of interview respondent	Planned number of interviews		Actual interviews	
	Ghana	Sierra Leone	Ghana	Sierra Leone
CSO	6	6	6	6
Political party	3	3	3	2
Academia	2	2	2	2
Donor/development partner	2	2	2	1
Media	2	2	2	2
Sub-total	15	15	15	13
Total	30		28	

(c) Focus group discussions

As a means of triangulating and verifying the information gathered through the desk review and in-depth interviews, FGDs of 12 participants were held in each country. Participants were drawn from the same institutions or categories chosen for the in-depth interviews. The FGD method was useful because it served as a platform to validate the findings of the study.⁴

1.3.3 Data analysis

The data gathered was analysed on two levels. First, depending on the data gathering procedure employed (i.e. desk review, in-depth interviews and FGDs), the data was sorted appropriately to identify relevant information. Specifically, data gathered via secondary methods (i.e. the literature review and analysis of materials from the Oxfam campaigns) and in-depth interviews was analysed with the aim of identifying issues to inform-- the research questions. The data gathered via FGDs was synthesized and subjected to discourse analysis by the research team in order to identify key and relevant issues raised. Moreover, the FGD responses helped to address gaps and inconsistencies in the desk review and interviews.

The second level of analysis consisted of a comprehensive thematic analysis of the data sorted by the first-level analysis described above, with responses grouped according to the questions under the four research themes set out in section 1.2.1. Furthermore, the researchers conducted some comparative analyses of the situation in the two study countries, drawing perspectives from experiences sampled from both countries. This allowed for some cross-country synthesis of the research in order to determine how certain factors have contributed to CSO influence in improving the lives of people through political or electoral processes.

1.4 CHALLENGES

As in all field research, some challenges were encountered in the course of the study. However, these challenges were anticipated by the researchers and measures were taken to minimize their impact. For example, since the 2012 elections in both countries, and especially in Ghana, were still subject to some litigation at the time the study was undertaken, the researchers anticipated some challenges in obtaining access to high-level informants or respondents from political parties, as well as other potential respondents who were keenly following the litigation. However, the resulting risk of delay was minimized in two ways:

- The team submitted interview requests to more than the required number of political party respondents in the hope that there would be adequate substitutes for 'no-shows' or late cancellations.

- Where possible, the research team conducted the elite or key informant interviews electronically (via email) or by telephone. This allowed the respondents to attend to the questionnaire at their convenience.

Therefore, although some challenges were encountered, they had an insignificant effect on the study.

1.5 ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

The subsequent chapters of this report present the findings of the study, summarized as follows:

Chapter 2 presents a summary of existing knowledge of key issues examined by the study, including the nature and structure of CSOs in Africa, the strategies used by CSOs in engaging governments and political parties, and the challenges faced by CSOs, among other key issues emerging from the desk review.

Chapter 3 provides in-depth analyses of CSO strategies and experiences in influencing political parties in Ghana and Sierra Leone. It draws comparisons between experiences in both countries and highlights drivers of success and failure.

Chapter 4 outlines conclusions that can be drawn from the experiences in Ghana and Sierra Leone.

2 CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE STATE AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN WEST AFRICA: WHAT DO WE KNOW ALREADY?

There is already an extensive literature on the role of CSOs in Africa's democratic development over the past two decades. Despite this, the extent to which CSOs have engaged political actors during the electoral process and have influenced political parties and governments is largely a grey area. In this chapter, we examine and analyze what we already know about the relationship and the kind of engagements that exist between CSOs and political parties in West Africa, especially during election campaigns. The analysis identifies the factors that have fostered interactions between CSOs and political parties, and also attempts to explain how the former have influenced the latter, and the implications of their co-operation on democratic development in Ghana and Sierra Leone.

While civil society is often thought of as standing in opposition to the state, at a practical level CSOs and the state do not necessarily stand in an adversarial relationship. Indeed, the state's strategy of co-opting CSOs has gradually given way to co-operation in which CSOs and governments engage in areas of common interest such as service delivery.⁵ By co-operating with the state, CSOs gain attention within the circles of power and can then influence aspects of the policy-making process. Similarly, when the state engages with CSOs, governments can gain from expert advice and feedback on their policies from stakeholders, as well as benefiting from the legitimacy that a vibrant civil society gives a political regime.⁶

Many studies have examined the benefits that can be derived from co-operation and engagement between civil society on the one hand and governments and political parties on the other. CSOs have helped to improve the environment for meaningful policy engagement. For instance, CSOs in some parts of Africa have become an integral part of development policy frameworks and processes that were formerly limited to state actors.⁷ In particular, CSOs' policy influence has been more pronounced in the area of donor-initiated macro-level policy processes, such as the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. In terms of contribution to policy-making, more progress has been made in Ghana⁸ and in Burkina Faso⁹ where there has been much improvement in state–civil society relations. CSO participation in policy consultations and official meetings has increased, and in the case of Ghana:

Civil society activities have expanded from purely service delivery initiatives to active public policy advocacy work as a result of global initiatives such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, the Millennium Development Goals and the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) which encouraged and defined the interface between government, donors and civil society organizations.¹⁰

Indeed, a 2012 Oxfam-commissioned CDD-Ghana study of CSO–state engagement across West Africa shows that CSOs have not only been playing a pivotal role in the areas of health and education service delivery, but have also been conducting advocacy for gender equality and citizens' empowerment.¹¹ The study notes that CSOs in West Africa have engaged in four

major activities, including service delivery, advocating for and representing the interests of their constituencies, partnering with government in development planning, and monitoring the activities of governments. In the area of empowering citizens, in particular, the study reveals that CSOs have played an impressive role in promoting vertical accountability. They have amplified the voice of the public and its demands for accountability in government decision-making. Convinced that effective checks on government would prevent the re-emergence of authoritarian rule, CSOs have built grassroots capacity to scrutinize the exercise of power by local office holders, and have monitored the performance of individual government bodies as well as the executive and legislature.

In the area of human development, CSOs in Africa are making significant contributions, especially in the delivery of health and education services and in empowering citizens. The core impact of the CSO sector in Africa, one study argues, remains at the level of service delivery.¹² Another notes that Africa's civil societies have become increasingly innovative in supporting the continent's transformation of supplying public services, such as health care and education.¹³

Nonetheless, while this progress deserves to be acknowledged, CSOs in Africa remain at the periphery of policy-making. As one study notes, they have demonstrated a lack of consistency in their level of direct involvement in the policy process, and few make significant differences to policy outcomes.¹⁴ Most worryingly, in the area of building policy consensus, one commentator notes that consensus between governments and CSOs remains elusive even on such basic issues as fiscal prudence, the insulation of key aspects of economic policy from direct political pressure, and the institution of independent central banks and other independent agencies of restraint.¹⁵

An article published in 1998 notes that the lack of effectiveness of the CSO sector in Africa in balancing the interests of state and society in favour of society stems from several serious weaknesses inherent in Africa's civil societies.¹⁶ It notes further that, not only are civil societies in Africa relatively new, but many African CSOs lack autonomy, are undemocratic, and most worryingly have little knowledge or awareness of the workings of government and the apparatus of state. It recognizes that this last factor is a major obstacle to civil society's effectiveness in Africa today. Most CSOs in Africa, it notes, do not take the trouble to acquire the requisite understanding of how government departments work, how policies are made, and what the full implications of these policies could be for the population as a whole or for their own memberships. While these studies draw attention to important aspects of CSO activity in Africa, with examples from West Africa, they lack a specific focus on what CSOs are doing in terms of influencing political parties' programmes and electoral activities. In this area, Oxfam is the pioneer. In the 2012 study of CSO-political party interactions in West Africa that it commissioned from CDD-Ghana, the contribution of CSOs to the democratic processes in West Africa is highlighted. It finds that not only are CSOs actively directing their efforts towards securing transparent, peaceful, free and fair elections in a number of West African countries, but they have also extended their democracy-building activities to direct engagement with political parties, especially during elections.¹⁷

The study observes that the peak of civil society-political party interaction in West Africa occurs during elections. CSOs have organized their governance programmes to coincide with political parties' election campaigns. Their programmes have highlighted specific national development issues that are of particular interest to citizens. By engaging with parties at the highest level, including meeting senior party executives and organizing roundtable conferences, CSOs have established dialogues with political parties. By means of letter-writing and petitions, CSOs have persuaded political parties to acknowledge citizens' interests at the level of policy and campaign commitments. Using these approaches, some CSOs have managed to influence political parties' manifestos.¹⁸

Other studies have also identified that a strong civil society and well established parties are prerequisites for a healthy and functioning democracy. According to one study this is because, while the actors involved in transitions to democracy vary, consolidation of democracy is not

possible without a strong and independent civil society and representative parties.¹⁹ Another article has argued that political parties and CSOs complement each other, noting that while civil society can initiate a democratic transition, it is only with the help of parties that civil society can institutionalize a democratic political process.²⁰ This calls for close collaboration between CSOs and political parties. While observing that there is a natural tension between parties and civil society, the same article acknowledges a mutual interdependence between them. Both civil society and political parties, it argues, mediate between the individual and the state, but they do so in different ways and have different functions. For instance, “while civil society groups perform valuable functions and can articulate clear messages, they do not seek to gain power. It is political parties, not CSOs, that offer policy choices and options for which they are held accountable in the electoral process”.²¹ Thus, even though political parties are occasionally considered part of civil society because they generally have a large membership base, are ideally embedded in society, and often rely on voluntarism, they are nevertheless distinct entities: parties seek to govern; CSOs do not.

It is therefore important for CSOs and political parties to develop close partnerships as they seek to bring about meaningful changes in the lives of their constituents. As a 2005 study convincingly argues, because CSOs are closely linked to political parties through ideological affinities or material resources, they have the greatest ability to exert policy influence on governments.²² It notes that political parties’ ties and co-operation with civil society allow them to embed themselves in society, which in turn enables them to be informed about voters’ preferences. If a split between CSOs and parties occurs, the latter risk losing touch with the citizenry, not only weakening mechanisms of representation and accountability, but also threatening democracy itself.²³

Nonetheless, while acknowledging an improved level of engagement between CSOs and political parties in West Africa, the 2012 CDD-Ghana study noted that their relationship remains limited.²⁴ In particular, the study mentions the lack of a harmonized political and regulatory framework, technical competence, financial resources, networks and cooperation, and weak CSO institutionalization, as among the myriad factors that constrain engagement between CSOs and political parties.²⁵ It also observes that while the CSO sector in Africa has already made some relatively positive contributions to the continent’s democratic renewal, the structural limitations of civil societies relative to the state in Africa have limited the former’s ability to entrench meaningful changes.²⁶ Consequently, state–society relationships mediated by CSOs in Africa remain precarious.²⁷ Indeed, it has been observed elsewhere that CSO–political party engagements have failed to articulate what an ideal relationship between the two sectors should look like and how they might work together to strengthen democracy.²⁸ One study suggests that CSOs should function as interest groups lobbying political parties to push policy demands. They should provide resources to parties such as information, exposure, and voter mobilization, and they should also monitor parties, holding them accountable to their policy platforms by disseminating information about politicians, legislative actions and voting records.²⁹

In spite of the somewhat bleak picture presented above regarding the abilities of West African CSOs to represent citizens’ interests, recent experiences suggest that CSOs have extended their activities to the electoral process, in such a way as to deepen engagements with political parties in order to promote human development. They are active in building relationships with political parties, including providing support systems for greater engagement between political parties and their grassroots members and supporters.

In the remainder of the present study, we focus on civil society’s influence on the electoral process in Ghana and Sierra Leone. The study examines the extent to which the CSOs in both countries influenced the content of the political parties’ campaigns during the 2012 elections. What strategies did the CSOs use to draft their election campaign demands? How did the political parties respond to the CSOs’ demands? What unresolved challenges remain to be tackled in order to guarantee effective interactions between civil society and political parties during election campaigns?

3 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL PARTIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCES IN GHANA AND SIERRA LEONE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of CSOs' engagement with political parties in Ghana and Sierra Leone, drawing on the primary data collected in the two countries. The analysis is preceded by a brief examination of the scope of CSOs in both countries in order to contextualize the relationship between CSOs and political parties. The analysis itself is structured according to the following sub-headings:

- Structure of CSOs in Ghana and Sierra Leone
- What do CSOs need to do to be taken seriously by political parties?
- CSOs' methods for formulating their election objectives or demands
- Strategies that facilitate engagement between CSOs and political parties
- What is the best time to engage political parties?
- Who should be the focus of CSO engagement: candidates or political parties?
- Does gender play a role?
- Challenges faced by CSOs in influencing political parties.

3.2 CSO ACTIVITY IN GHANA AND SIERRA LEONE

Ghana and Sierra Leone are linked by a common history as former British colonies. Although they are both republics, they retain features of the British colonial administrative system, and both have experienced a chequered political history since gaining independence from the UK.

In 1992, Ghana emerged from long years of military rule³⁰ and has since then made commitments towards democratization and good governance. In the last two decades, Ghana has organized six relatively successful competitive elections, and has twice (2001 and 2009) transferred power peacefully from one party to another.³¹ Ghana is widely regarded as an example of democratic success in the West African region partly because of progressive civil society activities. In this period, CSOs have emerged in Ghana as important actors participating in the democratic and development processes. It is estimated that there are over 50,000 registered CSOs³² playing diverse and important roles in the areas of advocacy, service delivery, policy and government oversight, although not all of them are active.

A 2013 study by CDD-Ghana indicates that 48.6 per cent of CSOs registered in the country have their head offices in the capital, Accra.³³ Ghanaian CSOs pursue various interests, which can be grouped into 17 categories including traders' and farmers' associations, religious and

spiritual groups, youth associations, women's groups, community-based organizations and educational associations.³⁴ In terms of these categories, religious and spiritual groups constitute about 24 per cent of CSOs in Ghana, youth associations about 4 per cent, social exclusion groups about 4.2 per cent, and governance and civic participation groups a mere 0.5 per cent. According to key informants of this study, only a handful of CSOs are vocal on political issues.

Sierra Leone, too, has made significant strides in the development of a stable democratic system. Having emerged from a protracted civil war, it has organized successful democratic elections and created structures that have enhanced a shift from retaliatory politics to political reconciliation. This has spurred civil society activities in important areas of the economy. In response to the invitation for civil society groups to assist in the reconstruction process, CSOs have become involved in the service sector, including health, education and human rights. A 2007 CIVICUS report on civil society in Sierra Leone observed that CSOs are fulfilling roles as advocates, service providers, partners in development planning and watchdogs of government performance.³⁵

The dominant CSOs in Sierra Leone are community-based organizations (50 per cent), professional associations (13 per cent), youth groups (10 per cent), trade unions (6 per cent), religious organizations (6 per cent) and women's groups (6 per cent).³⁶ CSOs in Sierra Leone are spread across the country but those with offices or representatives in urban areas, especially Freetown, are better organized and undertake more frequent political engagement activity. Although the 2007 CIVICUS report mentions that 73 per cent of the population have membership in at least one CSO, it was noted in the course of the Sierra Leone FGD for the present study that: 'A large number of them are not actively involved in the activities of their affiliated civil society groups.'³⁷

Moreover, those CSOs that belong to umbrella organizations, networks or coalitions are often loosely connected and therefore ineffective.³⁸ The need to make progress towards democratic consolidation in post-reconstruction Sierra Leone³⁹ has encouraged CSOs to seize the opportunity to expand their frontiers beyond the provision of social, economic and civic advocacy and into the political arena, where they are influencing the political programmes and activities of the nascent political parties.⁴⁰

3.3 STRUCTURE OF CSOS IN GHANA AND SIERRA LEONE

Most Ghanaian CSOs have a well-developed internal management structure. The registration requirements for CSOs include having a board of directors, though the effectiveness and influence of the board vary from one CSO to another. The boards are usually composed of people with distinguished backgrounds, either socially or academically.

In terms of internal management, four categories of CSO can be readily identified in Ghana:

- i. CSOs that have highly institutionalized structures with active board members, highly qualified senior management staff and competent supporting junior staff. These CSOs are also well departmentalized with clear lines of reporting, and have a relatively high reliance on permanent staff.
- ii. CSOs managed by secretariats of very few staff. These are usually registered CSO coalitions or networks. The work of the secretariat is sometimes supported by staff from the coalition's or network's member organizations.
- iii. CSOs managed by steering committees. These are usually loose coalitions or networks. The members of the steering committees are often drawn from the coalition's or network's member organizations. Usually, the steering committee members serve for specified periods, though they may be eligible to be reappointed depending on the CSO's regulations.

- iv. CSOs, usually single issue-focused community-based groups, whose structures are not as organized as those above. These often have a few staff performing multiple roles and depend highly on volunteers.

According to CSO respondents in Ghana, having efficient structures is very important not only for effectiveness but also for sustainability. They argued that most of the best-known CSOs in Ghana have maintained their relevance partly due to their effective internal structures. Focus group members observed that Given the competitive nature of funding in Ghana, weak CSOs are less likely to receive donor support.

A key informant from one of the political parties noted that in the 2012 election his party preferred to engage with CSOs with a high level of competence or that were well organized, and gave as examples the Institute for Democratic Governance, CDD-Ghana, Third World Network Africa, and the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA).

Informants from the donor community revealed that CSOs with better management and accountability structures were more likely to receive funds than weaker ones. This was corroborated by some academic and CSO respondents who argued that since the financial crisis in 2007, among other factors, donors are more than ever concerned about how funds are used.⁴¹

Generally, CSOs in Ghana are politically neutral and prefer to remain so. According to both CSO and political party participants in the FGD, a large number of CSOs have no political bias and demonstrate substantial neutrality in their work: 'CSOs are independent of the government, opposition parties and state agencies.' A political party representative interviewed confirmed that, 'CSOs are independent of the government, and non-partisan in complexion, even though a few of them have not been politically neutral.'

The study identified that the internal structures of relatively highly organized CSOs placed board members at the top of the hierarchy. Usually, the board members are experienced men and women with a record of achievement in society. However, the daily operations of the CSOs are managed by managers, and in the case of the less highly organized CSOs, and loose coalitions of CSOs, co-ordinators are appointed to manage day-to-day affairs.

As in Ghana, organized CSOs in Sierra Leone have permanent employees of high calibre. These employees constitute the lifeblood of the CSOs and include accountants, programme officers and ICT experts who handle their organization's technical, financial and administrative activities. On the other hand, some respondents noted that less highly organized CSOs are organizationally weak because they depend on inefficient temporary staff.

Generally, there is concern about the management structure of some CSOs in Sierra Leone. Focus group participants bemoaned the low level of organization within the CSO sector in the country. They complained about the proliferation of what they described as 'briefcase CSOs' (see Box 3.1) that are damaging the sector's image. In addition, focus group participants noted that CSOs in Sierra Leone generally suffer from insufficient human and financial capacity to manage their internal activities effectively and efficiently. As a focus group member noted, 'The low level of management found in most Sierra Leone civil society groups accounts for limitations suffered by CSOs in securing substantial amounts for necessary projects.'⁴²

Box 3.1 Briefcase CSOs in Sierra Leone

A 'briefcase CSO', according to focus group members, is a CSO that has registered with the appropriate government agencies or departments, but whose office and operations are actually limited to the briefcase of its founder. Moreover, these CSOs have either fictitious or inactive board members, and their founders sometimes falsify documents to secure funding. When they succeed in doing so, they usually have to rely on family members and/or friends to carry out the CSO's activities. In many cases the founder also functions as director, administrator, accountant and human resources manager. The sole purpose of these CSOs is to serve the interests of individuals.

The general feeling in Sierra Leone is that the best organized CSOs are those that are independent of partisan political discourse. The respondents from political parties indicated that credible CSOs have presented and preserved an image of honesty, independence, neutrality and non-partisanship in their engagements. Similarly, some participants at the FGD explained that 'CSOs must be perceived by political parties to be neutral in the sense of being unbiased'. Some of the political party respondents noted that 'a number of the CSOs are "briefcase NGOs" that have single individuals playing multiple roles, including serving as the director, administrator and accountant'.

According to focus group participants, until fairly recently CSOs in Sierra Leone did not pay particular attention to their internal structures. This situation changed when donors began to stress the need for efficient management systems and accountability structures. As a donor representative at the FGD revealed, 'Donors are particularly keen on the internal governance structures of CSOs, especially those that operate as NGOs and that depend mostly on their funds.'⁴³

Political party respondents agreed with the donors' view that CSOs ought to maintain proper internal structures, indicating that parties preferred engaging with the more organized CSOs because they had an air of seriousness.

Moreover, the respondents argued that the less highly organized CSOs were driven by passion and display very little research or technical competence. Such CSOs were said to be challenged by capacity issues such as lack of financial resources, low-quality staff, high staff attrition rate, poor proposal writing skills, poor project management and accounting skills, and reliance on obsolete working tools, among others.

3.4 WHAT DO CSOS NEED TO DO TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY POLITICAL PARTIES?

CSOs are expected to assume a certain posture in order to be taken seriously by political parties. This subject attracted considerable interest among the participants in the Ghana FGD. The consensus of the FGD was that 'the CSOs should be neutral on political issues, and their activities ought to reflect the overall interests of society rather than those of a section of the public or a particular political party.'⁴⁴

Political party key informants and focus group participants in Ghana agreed that in order to be taken seriously, 'CSOs must extol the virtues of neutrality, independence and impartiality';⁴⁵ that 'respect for the CSOs depends on how they exhibit non-partisanship and objectivity in their programmes and relationship with the political players';⁴⁶ and that 'CSOs do not have to take sides on political issues'.⁴⁷

On the question of whether support for the work of CSOs by INGOs enhances the former's credibility, a political party representative noted that 'CSOs' credibility is measured by the extent to which the public regard their programmes as objective, factual and politically neutral.'

Beyond neutrality, the quality of the information used by CSOs also influences their standing in the eyes of the parties. CSOs that based their election demands on a wide range of sources of information increased the acceptance of the demands. At the FGD, respondents from political parties generally praised the level of objectivity in the requests made by some CSOs in the 2012 elections.

A member of the Manifesto Committee of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the main opposition party in Ghana's 2012 election, remarked in interview that his party 'did not condemn the CSOs' manifestos because the procedure for arriving at the documents eschewed any form of bias'.⁴⁸ He emphasized that one of the factors that motivated the NPP to work with CSOs was the objective and fact-based processes that they used in developing their demands or petitions.

Another political party respondent revealed that some parties have research departments which are responsible for identifying issues affecting citizens and that the parties usually compare CSOs' demands with the findings of their research. The respondent added that political parties sometimes blacklist CSOs whose demands they regard as politically motivated or not based on sound methodology.

The 2007 CIVICUS report identifies that CSOs in Sierra Leone are not well trusted by society as a whole. The report attributes this partly to a perception of corruption within the sector, as well as to poor accountability and poor communication. The Sierra Leone FGD confirmed that the challenge of perceived corruption (including moral corruption) appears to strain the relationship between CSOs and political parties. Accordingly, many key respondents from CSO backgrounds mentioned credibility as an important quality in order to be taken seriously by political parties. In addition, objectivity, legitimacy and neutrality were identified as qualities that CSOs must embrace. According to political party respondents, in addition to these qualities, parties prefer to engage with CSOs whose concerns are based on research and whose constituents are identifiable. They also mentioned that they take CSOs more seriously when they are united on an issue.

3.5 CSOS' METHODS FOR FORMULATING THEIR ELECTION OBJECTIVES OR DEMANDS

CSOs' ability to influence political parties depends on well formulated issue documents that serve as the means for bargaining with political entrepreneurs. At the same time, it emerged in the Ghana FGD that drawing up CSO campaign manifestos that capture the perspectives of an overwhelming majority of their constituents can be a daunting task.

The study identified five approaches used by Ghanaian CSOs to formulate their 2012 election objectives:

- i. Some CSOs created internal 'research teams' while others contracted experts to gather detailed information from their constituents. As one CSO key informant said: 'Our office created a permanent desk that surveyed the governance environment to ascertain the most critical issues that were of interest to its constituents.'

- ii. The use of consultative forums was another important approach for the development of CSOs' election objectives. According to Ghana focus group participants, some CSOs held consultative meetings with their constituents or opinion leaders within their constituencies. From these consultative meetings, the CSOs were able to prioritize the concerns of their constituents. In addition, a number of CSO participants at the FGD said that they held consultative meetings in the form of public durbars, roundtable conferences and forums.

The formulation of election objectives by the Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (PFAG) offers a typical example of this approach (see Box 3.2 below).

Box 3.2 Developing a farmers' manifesto for election 2012

As part of a strong campaign effort to draw the attention of politicians to the plight of farmers in Ghana, PFAG developed the 'Farmers' Manifesto for Election 2012'. PFAG developed this manifesto after engaging in extensive consultations with its stakeholders. According to PFAG's national co-ordinator, 'the manifesto drew on empirical nationwide engagements with all the farmers' groups as well as the political parties and other NGOs/CSOs'. The process involved carrying out several visits to farmers' groups to obtain first-hand accounts of the issues that challenged their survival. The various farmers' groups were invited to participate in farmers' stakeholder forums. According to the PFAG co-ordinator, 'The 2012 Farmers' Manifesto was born out of the nationwide collation of farmers' grievances.'

- iii. Private consultants were engaged by some CSOs to investigate what issues they should pursue. As one CSO interviewee said, 'Consultants were contracted to undertake field studies of the relevant agricultural issues that concerned the various farmers' groups.'⁴⁹
- iv. Evidence-based research also played a role in CSOs' formulation of their objectives, albeit on a limited scale. The CSO interviewees indicated that they used surveys to sample the views of a cross-section of society in order to ascertain the most pressing development and governance issues to be brought to the attention of the political parties. According to one CSO Informant who adopted the survey method, 'our goal was to mobilize opinions on the critical issues that needed to be projected to the political parties during the election.'⁵⁰
- v. Some CSOs were identified to have formulated their policies by means of secondary data sources, notably briefing papers, published books, journal articles, past manifestos of political parties, websites and government documents.

CSO methodologies for formulating campaign demands in Sierra Leone were little different from those of their Ghanaian counterparts. Since the revival of civil society in Sierra Leone, CSOs have used the election process to make demands on government to improve the social and economic well-being of the people. Prominent among the CSO demands have been a call for increased participation of women in government, led by organizations such as 50/50 and the Women's Forum, and the demand for more accountability in the extractive industries, led by the Network Movement for Justice and Development.

CSOs in Sierra Leone relied on various methods to reach out to their constituents in order to pinpoint issues that should be championed in the 2012 election campaign:

- i. Some CSO informants explained that they formulated their issues on the basis of findings from research that they had conducted. Interestingly, CSOs that resorted to the use of surveys and other sophisticated research methods were mostly think-tanks.

- ii. Some CSOs developed their demands on the basis of their field experience. For example, one CSO informant remarked: 'We used our wealth of experience working in these communities... We engage with the affected people and communities on a daily basis; we catalogue their sufferings and their challenges and communicate them to the appropriate authorities.'⁵¹

Some CSOs combined two or more of the methods mentioned above. For example the Sierra Leone CSO coalition WASH-NET (see Box 3.4), according to its campaign co-ordinator, employed a multi-faceted approach including consultative forums as well as surveys.⁵²

Some CSOs were of the opinion that their demands were so topical and/or well-known that there was no point expending resources to identify which concerns to present to political parties or their candidates during election campaigns. These CSOs argued that their demands were so focused that resources were better reserved for promoting the issues to political parties rather than formulating the issues. Examples given included the empowerment of women and unemployment.

Focus group participants observed that the interactions between CSOs and their constituents helped to unearth the social challenges that confronted the electorates. While some CSOs used debates, roundtable conferences and the media to reach out to their constituents, others used meetings, workshops and face-to-face interactions to engage their constituents on issues of social importance.

CSOs in both Ghana and Sierra Leone followed similar methods in formulating election demands but emphasis on research-based issues appears to have been slightly stronger among Ghanaian CSOs than their Sierra Leonean counterparts.

3.6 STRATEGIES THAT FACILITATE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN CSOS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

For a long time in Ghana, CSOs and political parties have worked in harmony at different levels of engagement. In the 2012 election campaign, CSOs devised a number of key methods of engaging political parties. One key mechanism was **dialogue and consultation**. According to one CSO interviewee, 'this approach was intended to invite the political parties' contributions on a wide array of social and economic issues.'⁵³

CSOs' dialogue sessions with the political parties helped them to understand the critical issues that were of great interest to the politicians as well as issues that were important to the electorate and society generally. There was agreement at the FGD with claims by CSO participants that CSO-political party dialogues allowed the two groups to build consensus on the actual issues that should be addressed during the election campaign. Focus group participants confirmed that 'dialogue and consultation with the political parties was a faith-building measure that helped stimulate debates on the important issues that had not received attention by the policy makers.'⁵⁴

Another strategy used by Ghanaian CSOs to influence political parties was **debates**. CSOs organized debates between candidates at both local and national levels. The national level debates organized by the IEA began in 2000 and probably remain the single best opportunity for CSOs (including IEA and its partners) to influence the presidential candidates of the major political parties.⁵⁵ Prior to the 2012 debate, the IEA invited other CSOs to submit issues that they wanted the political parties to consider. These issues were then put to the candidates during the debate.

Other CSOs such as CDD-Ghana organize community-level debates between parliamentary candidates. These debates emphasize local issues and the needs of marginalized people (see Box 3.3 below).

Box 3.3 Using debates to engage politicians

Since 2004, CDD-Ghana has provided platforms for local communities to engage with candidates seeking to represent them in parliament. In the lead-up to the 2012 election, CDD-Ghana organized parliamentary debates in 29 selected constituencies across the country. Prior to the debates, CDD-Ghana held workshops for the candidates to introduce them to key economic, social and political issues in the country. The forum provided a congenial atmosphere in which to draw the attention of parliamentary candidates to the most crucial issues that would require state legislation to deal with.

The debates, which were held in town halls in the principal towns of the selected constituencies, brought together CSOs, traditional leaders, young people, marginalized groups such as people living with HIV and people with disabilities, and the wider electorate. Candidates had the opportunity to explain their policy strategies for dealing with the critical national issues, while groups and the electorate were enabled to question the candidates on controversial issues. CDD-Ghana documented the responses of the candidates, which they intend to monitor.

Source: CDD-Ghana

The use of **protest marches** was another strategy adopted by Ghanaian CSOs, bringing organized groups of CSOs and their NGO counterparts together to demonstrate their specific socio-economic concerns to the political parties. Messages on placards and banners highlighted issues that called for politicians' attention. For instance, the Universal Access to Healthcare Campaign (UHCC) mobilized over 500 women's groups to participate in a march. According to the UHCC co-ordinator, 'the march for universal healthcare publicized the concerns of the group to the politicians and the public.'⁵⁶

Other Ghanaian CSOs explored the usefulness of modern **communication technology** during the 2012 election campaign. CSOs acknowledged the importance of social media as a means of engaging with their partners. For instance, some CSOs (including CDD-Ghana and the IEA) used social networks such as Twitter and Facebook to draw attention to issues and to communicate their demands to the political parties. Use of these networks helped to grab the attention of both the public and politicians.

Lobbying was another instrument used by Ghanaian CSOs to engage with the political parties and their candidates. The lobbying process usually involved senior managers of CSOs advocating their policy documents to very influential party leaders. On occasions CSO leaders met government ministers, Members of Parliament and top political personalities in the parties in order to persuade them to accede to their election demands. For example, the leadership of UHCC lobbied the major political parties as part of a well-planned strategy to get the organization's campaign issues included in their programmes.

One respondent from academia argued that lobbying provided close contacts with individuals and institutions that exercise authority over policy-making. He emphasized that 'getting to the source of power is better than walking the streets with your programme.' Another noted that 'The act of lobbying is productive because it has a greater chance of achieving the goal of the pressure group.'⁵⁷

Some key informants from the political parties sided with these views. One opined that 'Unlike the consultative method that seeks to bring differing perspectives together, the lobbying method can instigate result attainment for the pursuers of the agenda.'⁵⁸

Pledge cards became an important CSO campaign strategy in Ghana’s 2012 election. This innovative approach to reaching out to the political parties involved getting the parties to make solemn commitments to implement the CSOs’ manifestos if they won the election. The way in which CSOs projected national issues helped to draw political parties into their ‘electoral orbit’. As a result, it was the CSOs rather than the political parties that provided direction on some campaign issues. For instance, the co-ordinator of the UHCC explained that it resorted to the use of pledge cards because ‘it represented the parties’ resolve to yield to our demands.’

The **media** were another useful means by which the CSOs set the election campaign agenda for the political parties and their candidates. Many CSOs (including those involved in the Oxfam campaigns) established strong working relationships with the media and this encouraged ongoing coverage of CSO election programmes. Media anchors were encouraged to question candidates on the central issues raised by the political parties. As a result, the candidates and their parties felt hemmed in by the CSOs’ election demands and manifestos. According to one focus group participant:

The CSOs’ media ambush strategy dislocated the parties and their candidates from their original thoughts about the socio-economic problems, because throughout the election campaign period the CSOs gave the parties a new focus on the country’s problems.⁵⁹

Similarly, in Sierra Leone CSOs pursued aggressive campaign strategies to catch the imagination and attention of the political parties. Responses from the key informants revealed that CSOs in Sierra Leone employed diverse strategies to engage political parties, adopting very creative means where necessary. Analyses of the key informants’ responses reveal that some strategies were more commonly used than others. Table 3.1 presents a full list of the strategies used in Sierra Leone to engage political parties, as provided by respondents.

Table 3.1 Strategies used in Sierra Leonean CSOs’ engagement with political parties

Dominant strategies	Less dominant strategies
Roundtable discussions/policy forums	One-on-one discussions with political leaders
Seminars	Contact through party allies/close associates
Press releases	Briefing papers
Media advocacy	Pledge cards
Stakeholder meetings	Election petitions
Radio discussions	Social media
Coalitions	Street rallies

Generally, CSOs in Sierra Leone preferred to use formal platforms to engage political parties. This is evidenced by the nature of the dominant strategies used – many of which would ordinarily require formal invitation. The less dominant strategies, on the other hand, generally require more planning and/or negotiation, thereby making them more costly and somewhat riskier – although some can be very effective in influencing political parties or their candidates (see Box 3.4 below).

Box 3.4 Using less common strategies in CSO election campaigns: The example of the WASH campaign in Sierra Leone

In an effort to get stronger political commitment in tackling issues identified in the WASH sector in Sierra Leone, WASH-NET, a coalition of CSOs advocating for better water and sanitation conditions, embarked on a campaign dubbed 'Voting for Water and Sanitation'.

Among the multi-faceted strategies adopted by the campaign, WASH-NET visited all 14 districts of the country requesting candidates to sign pledge cards containing specific commitments on water and sanitation which they would help address should they be elected to office.

In total, 1,483 pledge cards were signed by candidates across the country. Of these candidates, 326 were elected. Furthermore, in less than a year since the election the WASH-NET campaign has achieved enormous success, as the government has undertaken to commit more resources to the WASH sector, and has created a new government Ministry for Water – detaching it from the Ministry of Health.

Source: WASH-NET, Sierra Leone

Furthermore, some of the less dominant strategies appear to demand special skills which are somewhat lacking in a number of CSOs. For example, engaging political parties through briefing papers requires good research and writing skills; organizing street rallies requires good mobilization skills; and use of social media or online petitions requires internet skills as well as technological resources. All these skills and resources are in short supply in CSOs in Sierra Leone.⁶⁰

Two strategies – media work and use of coalitions – were especially prominent in the responses of participants in Sierra Leone. According to focus group members, civil society organizations are often able to influence political party programmes when their concerns become topical within the public sphere, usually through the media. They mentioned that though some parties become antagonistic towards CSOs when discussion of topical issues appears to criticize their actions, the parties usually end up incorporating some solutions to the issues concerned into their programmes or policies. Hence, focus group participants argued that though developing a strategy can be important, the content and public appeal of the issue being raised or change being demanded also matter (see Box 3.5 below).

Box 3.5 Female genital mutilation: A political no-fly zone?

Despite several efforts by the World Health Organization and its partners to fight female genital mutilation (FGM) in Sierra Leone, the practice remains highly prevalent in nearly all ethnic groups. Sierra Leone has ratified a number of international conventions condemning FGM (including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) but the implementation of these conventions has been a matter of mere lip service. A bill banning FGM was withdrawn at the last minute in June 2007 and has not been reintroduced. According to the 2008 Demographic and Health Survey, 91 per cent of women in Sierra Leone aged between 15 and 49 have had their genitals mutilated.

According to a key political party focus group participant, no matter what strategy is used by CSOs to demand change on such an issue, very little success can be achieved unless there is clear public support for the change demanded. The respondent revealed that the issue of FGM was too rooted in tradition, and so thorny and delicate that it would be politically suicidal for political parties to make firm commitments on the it. Inevitably, political parties are very concerned about electoral gains and losses when dealing with CSOs or CSO coalitions.

Again, participants in the FGD confirmed the utility of the coalition approach adopted by some CSOs. According to them, CSO coalitions allow for a united front in dealing with political parties and symbolize wide and cross-cutting support for the issue(s). As one participant said:

Working in coalition and networks was another strategy used because it gained wide support from the public and the political parties. The coalitions employed an early preparation strategy as a way to influence every stage of the electoral process. Coalitions facilitated local and national engagement, presenting a unified front based on broad consultations to draw the attention of political parties.⁶¹

It is important to mention that some key informants downplayed the effectiveness of coalitions. According to them, some individual CSOs were as effective as coalitions and acting alone did not in any way disadvantage them.⁶² Indeed, as one Sierra Leone CSO respondent indicated, 'A number of the credible CSOs acted alone, put forward their demands alone and pushed for the attention of the political parties.'

3.7 WHAT IS THE BEST TIME TO ENGAGE POLITICAL PARTIES?

CSOs' engagement with political parties in Ghana and Sierra Leone has been continuous. In Ghana, for example, CSOs involve government and political groups in their year-round activities. However, election campaigns have served as occasions for CSOs to consolidate their relations with political parties and to influence them to incorporate their particular development and governance concerns into their manifestos. According to one Ghanaian CSO focus group participant, 'the election campaign period is the best time to influence the political parties.'⁶³

One political party interviewee remarked that 'when the campaign process began, CSOs intensified their political manoeuvrings.'⁶⁴

Generally, respondents agreed that the election campaign period is a unique time for CSOs to pursue the demands of their constituents with political parties, for the following reasons. First, it provides an opportunity for the party that wins the election to incorporate the CSOs' demands into its national budget and plans. Second, it is the period when parties are most inclined to listen and pay attention to alternative opinions from non-state actors. Third, since political parties' activities, particular of the vanquished parties, virtually grind to a halt after the declaration of the election winners, non-state actors are better off engaging with parties at the height of the campaign. Fourth, politicians are vulnerable to group pressures and demands during the election period for fear of losing votes. As a Ghanaian CSO representative at the FGD observed, 'it is palpably difficult to obtain the parties' consent for the CSOs' demands after the election period.'⁶⁵ Indeed, some informants from Ghanaian academia thought that, as one academic interviewee put it:

In Ghana as in many other African countries, politicians of the ruling party tend to develop a snobbish attitude to requests from outside their party, and the opposition politicians pretend to be allies of civil society.⁶⁶

The situation in Sierra Leone is similar to that in Ghana. While working together with political actors, it is during the election period that CSOs intensify their engagement with political parties. CSO respondents indicated that political parties' machinery is more active in election periods. Apart from being receptive to CSOs' requests during elections, political parties also use the campaign period to mobilize diverse interests and incorporate them in their manifesto. Accordingly, CSOs target the manifesto-drafting period to get their demands reflected in the parties' manifestos.

While accepting the fact that the election campaign period is a useful time for CSOs to influence political parties' programmes, the majority of the focus group participants in both Ghana and Sierra Leone cautioned against over-reliance on the election period. They believed that CSOs need to follow up aggressively in order to track parties' commitments to implement their election promises. Indeed, some of the political party respondents noted that elections are a cycle involving several stages – before, during and after – and believed CSOs stand to gain by reaching out to parties at all stages. Respondents from both Ghana and Sierra Leone suggested that CSOs should endeavour to engage political parties over a long period of time rather than limiting their engagement to the election period.

Respondents observed that parties tend to associate well with groups that have a long-term relationship with them, as opposed to those that only emerge to establish relations at the critical period of election campaigns. The latter approach can spark off suspicion. Accordingly, it was suggested by some respondents that, in the words of one, 'CSOs consider establishing long-term associations with political parties to facilitate a channel for influencing the policy-making and implementation processes.' Moreover, respondents from both countries agreed that CSOs interested in getting their demands or concerns adopted into political party programmes needed to engage parties not less than six months before the election, or before the party's manifesto is drawn up (whichever comes first).

3.8 WHO SHOULD BE THE FOCUS OF CSO ENGAGEMENT: CANDIDATES OR POLITICAL PARTIES?

The question of whether CSOs should channel their energies to influence candidates or parties produced mixed opinions in both countries. Some CSO respondents recognized the central role of the candidates (whether presidential or parliamentary) in the election campaign process, and targeted their election manifestos at their offices. In Ghana, for instance, the respondents who expressed this opinion claimed that the candidates are in a position to articulate the parties' election manifestos. Candidates are responsible for projecting the campaign platform and ensuring that their party' ideas and programme are disseminated to its teeming constituents. If the candidates (as in presidential elections) are the lead policy makers and implementers, then CSOs need to capture their attention so that their election demands find a space in the next development plan. As a Ghanaian CSO interviewee noted, 'addressing the candidate directly ensures your message is delivered.'⁶⁷

In Sierra Leone, as in Ghana, some key informants (mainly CSO officials) were strongly of the opinion that candidates should be engaged directly, suggesting that it is the surest way of getting concerns to those with the power to effect change.

However, in both Ghana and Sierra Leone, a smaller number of respondents did not discount the relevance of the party secretariat to disseminating campaign demands. They observed that the parties' structures, which cascade from the national to the grassroots, can be useful for spreading CSO selection message to the electorate. These respondents argued that the election campaign period is a busy time for the candidates (especially presidential candidates) and that they can only be reached through the party secretariat. Accordingly, the party office should be the most effective place to negotiate for the inclusion of CSOs' election demands. Respondents in Sierra Leone argued that although the candidates are the focal point of the parties' election campaigns, the party structure is the instrument for conveying the most critical information on issues that need grassroots support (such as FGM). Others argued that it was important to engage party structures because it offered CSOs the opportunity to meet party financiers, and once the financiers have been influenced the candidate is powerless to ignore their counsel.

There were others in both countries who suggested that engaging both candidates and their parties was the most effective way of getting demands addressed. Participants representing political parties at the FGD in Sierra Leone argued that though it was good to approach party candidates for support for CSO demands, such efforts were not enough to influence well-structured political parties whose party programmes and policies are developed by specialized committees. According to them, demands or requests that are not delivered to the relevant committees of well-structured parties are rarely included in the programmes of those parties. Focus group participants recommended that CSOs that want to influence political parties as part of the electoral process should study and understand the programme/manifesto development process in each party and adopt whichever strategy promises to work best.

On the whole, the responses from both countries reveal that there is no one-size-fits-all answer to the issue of who should be engaged by CSOs in order to influence political parties most effectively.

3.9 DOES GENDER PLAY A ROLE?

Gender concerns have been at the top of many CSOs' election agendas – partly because most issues relating to poverty and vulnerability have gender undertones. Accordingly, gender-related issues were given priority in the CSOs' 2012 election demands in both Ghana and Sierra Leone. Indeed, women's groups were among the stakeholders consulted by the CSOs during their information collation processes. In Ghana, PFAG, in particular, spent time with female peasant farmers. They were invited to participate in the regional forums that deliberated and brainstormed on the critical issues that were restricting farmers' productive activities. In both Ghana and Sierra Leone, Christian and Muslim women's associations were among the participants invited to the CSOs' seminars and durbars on social exclusion and on women's reproductive health and rights.

In the case of Ghana, the UHCC was instrumental in mobilizing women to participate in a forum in Accra to discuss its health care manifesto. Observations made by focus group participants and key informants confirmed that CSOs in Ghana are very receptive and friendly towards women and hardly discriminate against them.

On political participation, some of the CSOs said that they provided support for women candidates during the 2012 campaign. Part of their strategy involved looking for women who displayed a strong interest in standing in the election. A respondent from Women in Law and Development in Africa revealed that her institution provided support to most female candidates by providing them with special training and campaign posters.

3.9.1 What public perceptions influence the appeal of female candidates?

In Sierra Leone gender concerns have penetrated the corridors of many CSOs. Some CSO respondents noted that in 2012 the discussion and consultation sessions which collated CSOs' election demands deliberately reached out to women's associations at both the national and community levels. This strategy was intended to implement the CSOs' overarching objective of encouraging women to present their problems to the parties. Although it was generally claimed that there was no significant difference between how CSOs engaged male and female candidates, it was clear from the FGD that female candidates were more receptive to CSOs than their male counterparts. One key informant argued that 'Female candidates consider themselves as victims of a patriarchal society, particularly during elections, so they engage CSOs more than their male counterparts.'⁶⁸

Another key informant, this time from academia, observed that:

Generally, women are more receptive... women politicians need support from all categories, including CSOs, and will not want to jeopardize any relationship that will turn out to hurt their campaign.⁶⁹

Indeed, the study observed that gender-based CSOs tend to favour female candidates over male ones. In the lead-up to the 2012 election in Sierra Leone, for example, a large number of gender groups targeted only female candidates for engagement and support.⁷⁰ Yet, as a gender advocate key informant remarked, 'most of the time people end up voting for male candidates.'⁷¹

Since 2002, every election in both countries has been accompanied by strong demands for selection and election of more women to important positions. However, this has failed to achieve significant results.⁷²

In the case of Ghana, a number of key informants argued that female candidates continue to suffer from negative public perceptions, though the situation appears to have improved over the years. A CSO representative interviewed argued that female candidates have less public appeal because 'People think men are more effective.' In the view of some key informants, negative perceptions of female candidates have deep cultural roots. As one political party interviewee said, 'In some societies, women who are outspoken are seen as being arrogant.'⁷³

To overcome this negative perception, focus group participants suggested that more education needs to be undertaken on gender equality, among other interventions.

On the whole, the study identified that though female candidates in both countries have come to be recognized as equally competent as their male counterparts, there remain some key bottlenecks to further progress, sometimes entrenched in tradition and exacerbated by the limited economic power of females.

3.10 CHALLENGES FACED BY CSOS IN INFLUENCING POLITICAL PARTIES

In Ghana and Sierra Leone, CSO interviewees and focus group participants admitted to experiencing challenges in trying to influence political parties. The CSO respondents complained that the political parties are unreceptive to criticism and often label CSOs that criticize them as belonging to an opposing political camp. This intimidates many CSO respondents and partly accounts for why some CSOs avoid engaging with politics and elections. Respondents said that the suspicion with which politicians and political parties treat CSOs greatly limits the fruitfulness of their engagement. They added that political parties always prefer to be praised rather than criticized and resort to slander and defamation of CSOs that criticize them. According to one Sierra Leonean CSO key Informant, 'most of the issues raised in our programme were perceived to be criticizing the incumbent government.'⁷⁴

In response, political party respondents claimed that some CSOs are indeed not politically neutral. They questioned the neutrality of CSOs whose reports or comments constantly praised particular political parties and condemned others. The political parties argued that it is always difficult working with such suspicious CSOs.

CSO informants and focus group participants also stated that it was more difficult to engage ruling political parties than those in opposition. In the case of Sierra Leone, for example, one key informant confessed that 'it was really challenging to meet with ruling APC [All People's Congress] officials as opposed to other political parties.' This remark was supported by some focus group participants, though they revealed that similar challenges were encountered with officials of the Sierra Leone People's Party when they were in government.

The evidence from Ghana suggests that influencing political parties in general is an arduous and risky task. CSOs suffer high levels of suspicion from political parties due to perceived lack of political neutrality. This is often exacerbated when the CSOs in the course of their activities criticize certain political actions or decisions. As hinted by respondents from both countries, this suspicion has resulted in the bracketing of some CSOs with certain political parties. This challenge notwithstanding, the study identifies that political parties show some level of appreciation of divergent views that are based on empirical data.

CSOs' ability to influence political parties is also limited by the need to re-engage political party leaders at every election because of poor record-keeping by the political parties, which fail to ensure that notes on previous engagement are passed on to new leaders.

CSO key informants also observed that it was challenging for CSOs outside the national capitals to engage political parties effectively on certain issues because of party bureaucracy and the concentration of power in national committees. They said that often, when rural CSOs try to engage political party representatives in their communities, they are referred to national offices. This, in the opinion of the respondents, limits the degree to which CSOs in rural communities can engage political parties.

Apart from the above difficulties, the study identified other factors, external to political parties but internal to CSOs, that affect their ability to influence political parties. These include:

- fragmentation among CSOs such that they have an inconsistent voice on issues;
- poor engagement skills, which limit their persuasiveness;
- lack of innovation;
- insufficient human and financial resources to maintain engagement after elections.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the dramatic changes in the political landscape of West Africa in the early 1990s, democracy has flourished, albeit with challenges. The generally liberated environment has engendered peaceful political exchanges between governments and the governed. Relatively free and fair elections have taken place and regime changes have occurred largely through non-violent elections, even though sporadic conflict has arisen during a number of such elections.⁷⁵ The liberal environment has also facilitated the activities of CSOs in promoting the well-being of their constituents. For some CSOs, the election period offers good opportunities for political leaders to be engaged to bring about change in communities or societies. This study assessed the conditions that facilitate CSO success in engaging and influencing political parties in West Africa by drawing on recent experiences in Ghana and Sierra Leone.

The study examined the factors that influence CSOs' engagement with political parties, whether negatively or positively. It reviewed the methodologies used by CSOs in engaging with political parties; analyzed the strategies used in influencing political parties; and interrogated the challenges faced by CSOs in their engagement with political parties. This concluding chapter summarizes the resultant findings based on the evidence from Ghana and Sierra Leone. In presenting the main findings, it also provides recommendations as to how CSOs could go about future engagement activity or attempts to influence political parties.

4.2 MAIN FINDINGS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

4.2.1 Essential attributes of CSO structures needed for effectiveness

The study noted that there is a dense population of CSOs in West Africa with varied interests and different approaches to their goals, making it difficult for a single internal structure to be prescribed for all. However, political party representatives who participated in the study outlined key characteristics required of CSOs if they want to command a greater audience or see their demands incorporated into political parties' programmes:

- *Political neutrality:* Political parties usually try to ascertain the political leanings of CSOs before they engage deeply with them. In an environment rife with suspicion and political polarization, the slightest exhibition of political bias can be catastrophic for CSOs whose goal is to engage all political sides. The political parties revealed that once a CSO is found to be politically biased it is blacklisted, a situation that is very difficult to reverse.
- *Objectivity:* To be taken seriously, CSOs need to have strong evidence-based arguments that political parties can understand. Basing demands on research and other evidence reduces the suspicion with which political parties sometime view CSOs.

- *Consistency*: Political parties appreciate CSOs that are consistent in the values and principles that they advocate. CSOs should not shift values and principles depending on which political party is in office.
- *Credibility*: Avoiding situations that cast doubt on a CSO's credibility should be of concern to CSOs that want to be effective. Political parties have trust and confidence in CSOs that have invested in developing long-term working relationships with them.

Beyond the qualities mentioned above, donors and CSOs themselves identified additional qualities for CSO effectiveness including good organization, accountability, and monitoring and evaluation.

Accordingly, CSOs interested in long-term success with political parties should avoid unprofessional conduct and commit more time, attention and resources to improving their internal structures and external relationships. Moreover, CSOs can minimize the risks involved in engaging political parties by eschewing partisanship in all their activities. They also need to be objective in their demands and maintain a high level of consistency in their judgements. Furthermore, CSOs facing capacity challenges can enhance their effectiveness through working in coalitions. Working in coalitions allows less institutionalized CSOs who may have a passion for change to improve their image in the eyes of political parties or donors through the goodwill of others in the coalition.

4.2.2 Methodologies for formulating CSO election demands

CSOs exhibit different approaches to formulating their election demands. Given the variety of issues on which CSOs campaign, it is impossible to claim the superiority of one approach to another. There are those who arrive at their demands based on broad consultation with their constituents. This can be an effective approach given that, in a situation where stakeholders share divergent views on their needs, consultation can assist in building consensus. Other CSOs determine their demands on the basis of evidence from research conducted on the subject of interest. This approach allows them to assess the various dimensions of issues and draw conclusions as to what is workable in the short, medium and long term. This approach, however, is usually expensive.

In addition, there are CSOs who arrive at their demands on the basis of their familiarity with the issue (often based on experience) and how topical they think their demands are. Here again, it is difficult to condemn this approach, as it can work best for CSOs that have single focused concerns generally appreciated by the public. Moreover, this approach is the least expensive of the three.

4.2.3 Strategies that facilitate CSO influence on political parties

If the experience of the 2012 elections in Ghana and Sierra Leone is a reflection of trends in other African countries, then African CSOs appear to be making progress in adopting innovative strategies to engage political parties. CSOs are combining newer strategies with older ones to demand better accountability from political parties. The conventional engagement strategies of roundtable meetings, seminars and conferences are being combined with (in African terms) unconventional ones. For example, CSOs have intensified their lobbying strategies by engaging candidates directly or through their close associates. The strategy of engaging parties through debates is also working – especially in Ghana where this has become a regular occurrence. Debates present CSOs with a single platform where all candidates can be engaged on the issues. The candidates also benefit, because the debates provide a ready audience for them to

engage with. CSOs in Sierra Leone and elsewhere would benefit from adopting this strategy to enhance their engagement options with political parties or candidates.

Using media channels has also proved successful. CSOs have taken advantage of the power of the media to engage political parties as well as to keep their issues topical. As long as the media remain influential, CSOs can continue to use them to drive change.

The innovative engagement strategies used by CSOs in Ghana and Sierra Leone in the 2012 elections were very successful. The use of pledge cards, for example, was a very good way to get candidates to commit to CSOs' demands as well as providing CSOs with reference documents to track candidates' commitments after the election. The use of social media platforms, street rallies and protest marches also created a degree of sensation around the issues and kept them topical.

The study recommends that CSOs can benefit from being innovative in their strategies towards political parties, as designing new strategies appears to inject fresh momentum into political parties' engagement with them.

4.2.4 The best time to engage with political parties

The study observed that CSOs needed to engage with political party structures on an ongoing basis to ensure that their concerns remained relevant to politicians. The study also identified that for CSO concerns to be well captured by political parties, they needed to engage with the parties before their manifestos or party programmes were drawn up, or not less than six months before the election. It is recommended that as far as possible CSOs should maintain their relationships with political parties beyond elections as a way to keep their issues relevant to the parties. After elections, CSOs should endeavour to engage with the elected government and other state apparatus to pursue their demands.

4.2.5 Who should be the focus of CSO engagement: candidates or political parties?

As power relations differ between political parties, CSOs that want to influence political parties need to understand the power relations within each party with which they try to engage, and to identify the most suitable or workable channel for engagement. Where power is held by individuals, those individuals need to be engaged with as a necessary condition of success. Where power is distributed among a number of bodies and individuals, CSOs must engage with them appropriately. More importantly, CSOs need to understand policy formulation processes within individual political parties in order to influence the key people at the right time.

4.2.6 Does gender play a role?

The study confirmed that African societies continue to suffer from negative perceptions of women engaged in politics. Female candidates are marginalized and limited by tradition and culture, and find reassurance in CSOs, particularly those that focused on gender issues. The study revealed that female candidates are more receptive to CSOs than their male counterparts. Accordingly, it is recommended that CSOs intensify their consultations with women in formulating development-related demands, and where possible, enhance their involvement in the process of influencing parties.

4.2.7 Challenges faced by CSOs in influencing political parties

The challenges faced by CSOs in influencing political parties can be grouped into two categories: internal and external.

There are external challenges related to political party suspicion of CSOs, such that the engagement process between the two entities is strained. There are also external challenges related to the bureaucratic processes that CSOs have to go through in engaging political parties. This problem is mostly experienced by community-based organizations,⁷⁶ which are often obliged to go to the national offices of political parties in order to engage with them. Internal challenges include fragmentation among CSOs, poor engagement skills and insufficient human and financial resources.

Dealing with the external challenges requires effort from both political parties and CSOs. Each entity will need to be more open and appreciative of the importance of the other to national development. As for their internal challenges, CSOs will need to address their divisions as well as concentrating on improving their capacity.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CSO OFFICIALS

This guide is designed to elicit responses from representatives of civil society organizations on how organized non-state actors engage with political parties during election campaigns to seek improvements in the lives of citizens. This instrument serves as a guide in identifying the strengths and gaps associated with CSO–political party engagement during elections. The responses will add to a database of knowledge and experiences on how African CSOs can work with political parties to make change happen. On average, this interview is expected to take about 55 minutes.

Note: Please complete spaces where applicable (use additional sheets if necessary). Where a respondent decides to change an answer, cross out the first answer and enter the new one.

SECTION A: BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWER

A1. Interviewer's Name: _____

A2. Type of Interview (e.g. face-to-face, phone, etc.): _____

A3. Date of Interview: _____

A4. Language of Interview: _____

SECTION B: BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWEE

B1. Interviewee's Name: _____

B2. Name of Interviewee's CSO: _____

B3. Interviewee's Position: _____

B4. Sex of Interviewee: _____

B5. Focus of Interviewee's CSO (e.g. health, agriculture, water and sanitation, etc.):

SECTION D: INTERVIEW RESPONSES

1. Do you know how many media firms there are in your region? What is the number of print media firms? What is the number of electronic media firms?
2. When was your CSO formed? What are the specific objective(s) of your CSO? Is your CSO multi-purpose, dual-purpose or single-purpose? Who are your constituents, including target beneficiaries?
3. What is the nature of the management structure of your organization? Do you have a board? How is it composed – who holds what positions? How many men, how many women? Any reasons for this (some organizations may have a quota)?
4. How are employees recruited? Are they permanent or temporary?
5. Do you maintain any form of accountability with a regulatory authority? Do you maintain any form of accountability with your beneficiaries/constituents? (Interviewer to find out if there are any annual/biannual reports.)

6. What is/are the source(s) of funding for your CSOs? (Interviewer to probe further for magnitude/percentage contribution from the source(s) of funding.)
7. How many attempts has your CSO made to engage political parties **during elections** for purposes of championing the interest of your constituents? How many political parties are there in your country? Did you engage all political parties during your campaigns and why?
8. Does your CSO have any political leaning? If yes, how do you manage this in relation to your work?
9. Is any top management member of your CSO a known supporter of any political party? If yes, how do you manage this?
10. What issue(s) did your CSO try to champion for its constituents during the 2012 elections?
11. How was/were the(se) issue(s) formulated or arrived at? What factors influenced the choice of issue(s) identified by your CSO? How were constituents engaged in the formulation of the issue(s)? Was evidence-based research employed in the formulation of the issue(s)? (Interviewer to request report if available.)
12. Would you say your issue(s) appealed more to some of your constituents than others? For example, would you say more women were interested in the issue(s) than men, or vice versa?
13. In your opinion, is/are the objective(s) raised in your 2012 campaign activities achievable before the next elections?
14. Were the issue(s) of your campaign considered to favour some parties/candidates over others? If so what accounted for this? Did some political parties appear more interested in your issue(s) than others? If so, what accounted for this? Do political parties prefer engaging with 'politically biased' CSOs?
15. What resources (other agencies, internet, research papers, etc.) were used to support campaign planning and delivery? How were they identified?
16. Was/were your issue(s) targeted at political parties or politicians at the local or national level? If targeted at the local level, to what extent was the work done at the district and local level useful to influence political parties or raise awareness among voters?
17. How did you engage political parties/candidates with your issue(s) in the lead-up to the 2012 election? How did you first make contact with the political parties in relation to your issue(s) for the election? How did you manage the relationship subsequently?
18. Which strategies and tactics used during your campaign appeared to be particularly effective, and why? (Interviewer should probe further about the effectiveness of engaging candidates/political parties through close contacts and how the contacts are identified.)
19. What strategies and tactics used during the campaigns did you find **not effective**, and why? Were some strategies considered to be ill-judged or counterproductive? What are the contextual factors which can explain why some strategies worked better than others?
20. Do divergences of views between political parties and civil society affect the ability of political parties to listen to CSO demands?
21. How would you describe the reception you had from political parties or their candidates in the course of your engagement with them? How different was your engagement with male candidates or party representatives from that with female candidates or party representatives?
22. In your experience, what are the public perceptions of: a. female candidates; b. male candidates (in terms of their public appeal and effectiveness)?

23. Did you provide any support (technical or financial) to female candidates in the last elections?
24. Do you consider the election campaign period as the most suitable time to make your demands to politicians or political parties?
25. Which do you consider the more effective way of championing the course of your constituents during elections: addressing the issues to the candidate directly, or through his/her political party?
26. Did your CSO engage the assistance of other bodies (including the media) or individuals (such as opinion leaders or elder statesmen/women) in getting your voice heard? How important were the roles of these bodies or individuals?
27. Did your CSO join other CSOs in a coalition to champion your demands during the election campaign? Do you think a critical mass of actors or CSOs is needed to provide an effective front during election campaign?
28. In your opinion, what credentials do CSOs need for them to be taken seriously by political parties? Are there bargaining mechanisms?
29. From your 2012 experience, what would you say are the risks involved in engaging political parties/candidates in such CSO campaigns? How should these risks be managed?
30. Now that the election is over, what strategies do you intend to employ to make sure your desired changes happen?

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

This guide is designed to elicit responses from high-level political party officials on how organized non-state actors engage with political parties during election campaigns to seek improvements in the lives of citizens. This instrument serves as a guide in identifying the strengths and gaps associated with CSO–political party engagement during elections. The responses will add to a database of knowledge and experiences on how African CSOs can work with political parties to make change happen. On average, this interview is expected to take about 30 minutes.

Note: Please fill in the spaces where applicable (use additional sheets if necessary). Where a respondent decides to change an answer, cross out the first answer and enter the new one.

SECTION A: BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWER & INTERVIEW

A1. Interviewer's Name: _____

A2. Type of Interview (e.g. face-to-face, Skype, phone, etc.):

A3. Date of Interview: _____

A4. Language of Interview: _____

SECTION B: BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWEE

B1. Interviewee's Name: _____

B2. Interviewee's Political Affiliation: _____

B3. Interviewee's Position: _____

B4. Sex of Interviewee: _____

SECTION C: INTERVIEW RESPONSES

1. How and when was your party formed? How are decisions made in your party?
2. How many presidential elections have you participated in? How many parliamentary elections have you participated in? How many local elections have you participated in?
3. In your opinion, how important are manifestos/campaign programmes/commitments or pledges to your party?
4. As far as you are aware, does your party prepare a manifesto or programme for its participation in elections? If no, how does your party communicate its plans or vision to constituents?
5. Who determines your political party's programme or issues for elections? How is it developed? When is it developed? How long does the process take?
6. What information sources do those who develop your party's programme consider?
7. What role did the women's wing of your party play in developing your party programme for the election? What role did they play in publicizing your campaign messages? Did your party provide any financial support to female candidates during the last election?
8. In your experience, what are the public perceptions of: a. female candidates; b. male candidates (in terms of their public appeal and effectiveness)?

9. To what extent do you consult CSOs when formulating your party's programme? What factors/conditions influence the choice of CSOs you interact with? In the last election, how many CSOs did you interact with?
10. If a person or institution (including a CSO) wants your party to consider an issue as part of your election campaign, who is/are the best person(s) to contact? (Should concerns or issues be specially channelled through high-ranking officials of the party or close contacts of the candidate, or to the candidate himself/herself?)
11. What causes your political party or those in charge of your election programme to listen to demands from external individuals or CSOs? What credentials do CSOs need for them to be taken seriously by political parties?
12. Do political parties care about how CSO demands are formulated (whether evidence-based, etc.)? Must the objective of the CSO be popular among the electorate for it to be worth considering? If so, how do you determine this?
13. What factors influence the level of political party engagement with CSOs?
14. Is a critical mass of CSOs needed in order to provide effective pressure on political parties during election campaigns?
15. Are there CSOs that your party has consistently interacted with over the years? If yes, what is unique about these CSOs? How have you maintained your relationship with these CSOs?
16. Does your party prefer engaging with politically biased CSOs (or CSOs known to favour your agenda) to politically neutral ones? How do you handle CSOs you regard as more inclined towards your competitors?
17. Is the period during an election campaign a better time for CSOs to be heard by your political party and candidates? If not, when is a more appropriate time?
18. In your opinion, what key steps should CSOs that want to be heard by your political party follow to ensure that their interests are captured in your campaign programmes?
19. Does your party have any experience with CSOs worth mentioning? (Please provide examples of both negative and positive experiences.)
20. After elections, how should CSOs engage with political parties to make sure that their desired change happens? Kindly give examples of your experience in this regard (if any).

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ACADEMICS

This guide is designed to elicit responses from academics on how organized non-state actors engage with political parties during election campaigns to seek improvements in the lives of citizens. This instrument serves as a guide in identifying the strengths and gaps associated with CSO–political party engagement during elections. The responses will add to a database of knowledge and experiences on how African CSOs can work with political parties to make change happen. On average, this interview is expected to take about 30 minutes.

Note: Please fill in the spaces where applicable (use additional sheets if necessary). Where a respondent decides to change an answer, cross out the first answer and enter the new one.

SECTION A: BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWER & INTERVIEW

A1. Interviewer's Name: _____

A2. Type of Interview (e.g. face-to-face, Skype, phone, etc.):

A3. Date of Interview: _____

A4. Language of Interview: _____

SECTION B: BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWEE

B1. Interviewee's Name: _____

B2. Interviewee's Organization/Institution: _____

B3. Interviewee's Position: _____

B4. Sex of Interviewee: _____

SECTION C: INTERVIEW RESPONSES

1. In your opinion, have CSOs been successful in influencing the development programmes of political parties through their demands (petitions, pledges, etc.) during elections?
2. When should CSOs who want to influence political parties or their candidates begin their engagement with the parties? Is an election campaign a better time for CSOs to be heard by political parties and their candidates? If not, when is a more appropriate time?
3. How should CSOs go about their demands? Should they submit their demands to the party candidate directly? Or his/her close ally? Or the manifesto drafting committee? Or whom?
4. In your opinion, how important are manifestos/campaign programmes/commitments or pledges to politics in your country?
5. What causes political parties or candidates to listen to demands from external individuals or CSOs? What credentials do CSOs need in order to be taken seriously by political parties?
6. In your opinion, does the gender of a candidate influence the kind of requests external individuals or CSOs present to him/her for consideration during elections? Are female

candidates more receptive or accommodating to requests from external individuals or CSOs than male candidates?

7. In your experience, what are the public perceptions of: a. female candidates; b. male candidates (in terms of their public appeal and effectiveness)?
8. In your opinion, do political parties care about how CSO demands are formulated (whether evidence-based, etc.)? Must the objective of the CSO be popular among the electorate for it to be worth considering? If so, how is this determined?
9. In your opinion, do donors care about how CSO demands are formulated (whether evidence-based, etc.)? Must the objective of the CSO be popular among the electorate for it to be worth considering? If so, how is this determined?
10. Is a critical mass of CSOs needed in order to provide effective pressure on political parties during election campaigns?
11. In your view, how important are the media to influencing political parties during election campaigns? How can CSOs use them effectively in election years, in particular during election campaigns?
12. In your opinion, what key steps should CSOs that want to be heard by political parties follow in order to ensure that their interests are captured in their campaign programmes?
13. After elections, how should CSOs engage with political parties to make sure that their desired change happens?

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR DONORS

This guide is designed to elicit responses from representatives of donor agencies on how organized non-state actors engage with political parties during election campaigns to seek improvements in the lives of citizens. This instrument serves as a guide in identifying the strengths and gaps associated with CSO–political party engagement during elections. The responses will add to a database of knowledge and experiences on how African CSOs can work with political parties to make change happen. On average, this interview is expected to take about 30 minutes.

Note: Please fill in the spaces where applicable (use additional sheets if necessary). Where a respondent decides to change an answer, cross out the first answer and enter the new one.

SECTION A: BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWER & INTERVIEW

A1. Interviewer's Name: _____

A2. Type of Interview (e.g. face-to-face, Skype, phone, etc.):

A3. Date of Interview: _____

A4. Language of Interview: _____

SECTION B: BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWEE

B1. Interviewee's Name: _____

B2. Interviewee's Organization: _____

B3. Interviewee's Position: _____

B4. Sex of Interviewee: _____

SECTION C: INTERVIEW RESPONSES

1. Did your organization fund any CSO campaign(s) in the last election? If yes, please specify. If no, why? (then go on to question 3)
2. What factors led you to agree to provide funding to the CSO(s)?
3. In your opinion, have CSOs been successful in influencing the development programmes of political parties through their demands (petitions, pledges, etc.) during elections?
4. When should CSOs who want to influence political parties or their candidates begin their engagement with the parties? Is an election campaign a better time for CSOs to be heard by political parties and their candidates? If not, when is a more appropriate time?
5. How should CSOs go about their demands? Should they submit their demands to the party candidate directly? Or his/her close ally? Or the manifesto drafting committee? Or whom?
6. What causes political parties or candidates to listen to demands from external individuals or CSOs? What credentials do CSOs need in order for them to be taken seriously by political parties?

7. In your opinion, does the gender of a candidate influence the kind of requests external individuals or CSOs present to him/her for consideration during elections? Are female candidates more receptive or accommodating to requests from external individuals or CSOs than male candidates?
8. In your experience, what are the public perceptions of: a. female candidates; b. male candidates (in terms of their public appeal and effectiveness)?
9. In your opinion, do political parties/donors care about how CSO demands are formulated (whether evidence-based, etc.)? Must the objective of the CSO be popular among the electorate for it to be worth considering? If so, how is this determined?
10. Is a critical mass of CSOs needed in order to provide effective pressure on political parties during election campaigns?
11. In your view, how important are the media to influencing political parties during elections? How can CSOs use them effectively in election years, in particular during election campaigns?
12. In your opinion, what key steps should CSOs that want to be heard by political parties follow to ensure that their interests are captured in their campaign programmes?
13. After elections, how should CSOs engage with political parties to make sure that their desired change happens?
14. In your experience, how important are manifestos/campaign programmes/commitments or pledges to politics in the country in which you operate?

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MEDIA

This guide is designed to elicit responses from high-level media officials on how organized non-state actors engage with political parties during election campaigns to seek improvements in the lives of citizens. It also seeks responses to how political parties engage with CSOs in the development of election campaign programmes. This instrument serves as a guide in identifying the strengths and gaps associated with political party–CSO engagement during elections, particularly in terms of the development of party manifestos/campaign programmes. The responses will add to a database of knowledge and experiences on how political parties and CSOs in West Africa can work together to make meaningful change happen. On average, this interview is expected to take about 30 minutes.

Note: Please fill in the spaces where applicable (use additional sheets if necessary). Where a respondent decides to change an answer, cross out the first answer and enter the new one.

SECTION A: BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWER & INTERVIEW

A1. Interviewer's Name: _____

A2. Type of Interview (e.g. face-to-face, Skype, phone, etc.):

A3. Date of Interview: _____

A4. Language of Interview: _____

SECTION B: BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWEE

B1. Interviewee's Name: _____

B2. Interviewee's Media Company: _____

B3. Interviewee's Position: _____

B4. Sex of Interviewee: _____

SECTION C: INTERVIEW RESPONSES

1. In the last election, did your media company cover or support any CSO campaign(s) of engagement with political parties aiming to improve the lives of citizens? If yes, what factors influenced your decision to cover the campaign(s) or support the CSO(s)?
2. In your opinion, have CSOs been successful in influencing the development programmes of political parties through their demands (petitions, pledges, etc) during elections?
3. In your opinion, what causes political parties or candidates to listen to demands from external individuals or CSOs? What credentials do CSOs need in order to be taken seriously by political parties?
4. In your opinion, does the gender of a candidate influence the kind of requests external individuals or CSOs present for to him/her consideration during elections? Are female candidates more receptive or accommodating to requests from external individuals or CSOs than male candidates?
5. In your experience, what are the public perceptions of: a. female candidates; b. male candidates (in terms of their public appeal and effectiveness)?

6. In your opinion, do political parties care about how CSO demands are formulated (whether evidence-based, etc.)? Must the objective of the CSO be popular among the electorate for it to be worth considering? If so, how is this determined?
7. Is a critical mass of CSOs needed in order to provide effective pressure on political parties during election campaigns?
8. In your view, how important are the media to influencing political parties during elections? How can CSOs use them effectively in election years, in particular during election campaigns?
9. After elections, how should CSOs engage with political parties to make sure that their desired change happens?
10. From your experience, how important are manifestos/campaign programmes/commitments or pledges to politics in the country in which you operate?
11. In your opinion, what new ways of collaboration between CSOs and the media can be developed to improve the life of citizens?

APPENDIX 6: LESSONS FROM GHANA: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide is designed for discussions on lessons learned from CSOs engagement with political parties during the 2012 election campaign. The discussion forms part of a study being conducted by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) on behalf of Oxfam GB to identify best practices on how organized non-state actors can effectively engage political parties during election campaign in an effort to improve the lives of citizens.

QUESTIONS

Part 1

1. What were the topical issues or major concerns in the 2012 election? Were these the same issues as in the previous elections? If not, what accounted for the issues being topical in the election?
2. What major issue(s) did CSOs try to champion during the 2012 election?
3. Would you say your CSO's issue(s) appealed to some segments of the public more than others? For example, would you say more women were interested in the issue(s) than men, or vice versa?
4. In your opinion, are the objectives raised by CSOs in their 2012 campaign activities achievable before the next election?
5. How do CSOs engage political parties/candidates with their issues in the lead-up to an election? How do they first make contact with the political parties in relation to their issues for the election? After the first contact, how are relationships managed?
6. What strategies and tactics used by CSOs during election campaigns are effective and why?
7. What strategies and tactics used during election campaigns are **not** effective and why? Were some strategies considered to be ill-judged or counter-productive? What are the contextual factors which can explain why some strategies worked better than others?
8. Do divergences of views between political parties and civil society affect the ability of political parties to listen to CSO demands?
9. How different are engagements with male candidates or party representatives from those with female candidates or party representatives? In your experience, what are the public perceptions of: a. female candidates; b. male candidates (in terms of their public appeal and effectiveness)?
10. Did political parties provide any **special** support (technical or financial) to female candidates in the last election? Why?
11. When should CSOs who want to influence political parties or their candidates begin their engagement with the parties? Is an election campaign a better time for CSOs to be heard by political parties and their candidates? If not, when is a more appropriate time?
12. Do you think a critical mass of actors or a coalition of CSOs is needed to provide an effective front during an election campaign?
13. What credentials do CSOs need in order to be taken seriously by political parties? Are there bargaining mechanisms?

14. What would you say are the risks involved in engaging with political parties/candidates in CSO campaigns? How should these risks be managed?
15. Do political parties care about the management structures of CSOs they engage with? If yes, what structures are acceptable and which ones are not?
16. Do donors care about the management structures of CSOs they fund to champion citizens' concerns during elections? If yes, what structures are acceptable and which ones are not?

Part 2

17. How important are manifestos/campaign programmes/commitments or pledges to your party?
18. Do all parties prepare a manifesto or programme for their participation in elections? If no, how do parties without manifestos communicate their plans or vision to constituents?
19. Who determines your political party's programme/issues/manifesto for an election? How is it developed? When is it developed? How long does the process take?
20. What information sources do those who develop your party's programme consider?
21. What role do women in general or the women's wings of political parties play in developing party programmes for elections? What role do they play in publicizing campaign messages? Do political parties provide any financial support to female candidates during elections?
22. To what extent do political parties consult civil society organizations when designing their programmes? What factors/conditions influence the choice of CSOs your party interacts with? In the last election, how many CSOs did your party interact with?
23. If a person or institution (including a CSO) wants political parties to consider an issue as part of an election campaign, who is/are the best person(s) to contact? (Should concerns or issues be specially channelled through high ranking officials of the party or close contacts of the candidate, or to the candidate himself/herself?)
24. What causes political parties or those in charge of election programmes to listen to demands from external individuals or CSOs?
25. Do political parties care about how CSO demands are formulated (whether evidence-based, etc.)? Must the objective of the CSO be popular among the electorate for it to be worth considering? If so, how do parties determine this?
26. Does your political party prefer engaging with politically biased CSOs (or CSOs known to favour their agenda) to politically neutral ones?
27. How does your political party handle CSOs they regard as more inclined towards their competitors?
28. What key steps should CSOs that want to be heard by political parties follow to ensure that their interests are captured in campaign programmes?
29. After elections, how should CSOs engage with political parties to make sure that their desired change happens?
30. In your opinion, have CSOs been successful in influencing the development programmes of political parties through their demands (petitions, pledges, etc.) during elections?
31. Does the gender of a candidate influence the kind of requests external individuals or CSOs present to him/her for consideration during elections? Are female candidates more receptive or accommodating to requests from external individuals or CSOs than male candidates?

32. Do donors care about how CSO demands are formulated (whether evidence-based, etc.)? Must the objective of the CSO be popular among the electorate for it to be worth considering? If so, how is this determined?
33. How important are the media to influencing political parties during elections? How can CSOs use them effectively in election years, in particular during election campaigns? What new kinds of collaboration between CSOs and the media can be developed to improve the life of citizens?

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NOTES

- ¹ The restricted focus on Ghana and Sierra Leone is an obvious limitation to the results of the study, which must therefore be treated with caution. Nonetheless, in spite of its Anglophone bias, the study provides useful findings and lessons which could serve as a basis for future extended research.
- ² Separate interview guides were designed for each category of respondent
- ³ See Appendices 1 – 5 for interview guides
- ⁴ See Appendix 6 for FGD question guide
- ⁵ See Amoako, K.Y. (2008); Bratton, M. (1989)
- ⁶ See Whitfield, L. (2002)
- ⁷ Opoku-Mensah, P. (2009)
- ⁸ Jumah, B. (2011)
- ⁹ Meja, V. (2011)
- ¹⁰ Jumah, B. (2011)
- ¹¹ CDD-Ghana (2012)
- ¹² Opoku-Mensah (2009)
- ¹³ Amoako (2008), p.10
- ¹⁴ Opoku-Mensah, P. (2009)
- ¹⁵ Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2004)
- ¹⁶ Makumbe, J.M. (1998)
- ¹⁷ CDD-Ghana (2012), p.3
- ¹⁸ CDD-Ghana (2012)
- ¹⁹ Ozler, S.I and Sarkissian, A. (2011), p.365
- ²⁰ Gershman, C. (2004), pp. 27-35.
- ²¹ Gershman, C. (2004), pp. 29-30
- ²² Robinson, M. and Friedman, S. (2005), p.383
- ²³ See Mainwaring, S. (1995)
- ²⁴ CDD-Ghana (2012), p.27
- ²⁵ CDD-Ghana (2012)
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ For general reading, see Chazan, N. and Rothchild, D. (1988)
- ²⁸ Robinson, M. and Friedman, S. (2005), p.363
- ²⁹ Robinson, M. and Friedman, S. (2005),p.367
- ³⁰ See Abdulai, A.-G. and Quantson, R. (2008/2009); Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2009), pp. 138-152
- ³¹ Gyimah-Boadi, E. and Prempeh, H. (2012), pp. 94-108.
- ³² CDD-Ghana (2013)
- ³³ Ibid
- ³⁴ Ibid
- ³⁵ See CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report for Sierra Leone (2007)
- ³⁶ Ibid
- ³⁷ Sierra Leone FGD (2013)
- ³⁸ CIVICUS (2007), A Critical Time for Civil Society in Sierra Leone[online] Available at: http://www.civicus.org/new/media/CSI_SierraLeone_Country_Report.pdf
- ³⁹ See Sessay, M.G., et al. (2007)
- ⁴⁰ CDD-Ghana (2012)
- ⁴¹ Ghana FGD (2013)
- ⁴² Sierra Leone FGD (2013)
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ghana FGD (2013)
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.

- ⁴⁶ Interview with a Political Party Representative (Ghana), 2013
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Interview with Political Party Representative (Ghana, 2013)
- ⁴⁹ Interview with CSO Representative (Ghana, 2013)
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Interview with CSO Representative (Sierra Leone, 2013)
- ⁵² The consultative forums served as a form of validation for the findings of the surveys. They were also used to make clear to the political party candidates how important the issues of water and sanitation were to the public.
- ⁵³ Interview with CSO Representative (Ghana, 2013)
- ⁵⁴ Ghana FGD (2013)
- ⁵⁵ The IEA Presidential Debates are open only to political parties with seats in parliament
- ⁵⁶ Interview with Representative of UHCC (Ghana, 2013)
- ⁵⁷ Interview with Representative of Academia (2013)
- ⁵⁸ Interview with Political Party Representative (Ghana, 2013)
- ⁵⁹ Ghana FGD (2013)
- ⁶⁰ See CDD-Ghana (2012)
- ⁶¹ Sierra Leone FGD (2013)
- ⁶² A political party respondent cited Save the Children as one such organization.
- ⁶³ Ghana FGD (2013)
- ⁶⁴ Interview with Political Party Representative, 2013
- ⁶⁵ Ghana FGD (2013)
- ⁶⁶ Interview with Representative of Academia (Ghana, 2013)
- ⁶⁷ Interview with CSO Representative (Ghana, 2013)
- ⁶⁸ Interview with CSO Representative (Sierra Leone, 2013)
- ⁶⁹ Interview with Representative of Academia (Sierra Leone, 2013)
- ⁷⁰ Sierra Leone FGD (2013)
- ⁷¹ Interview with CSO Representative (Sierra Leone), 2013
- ⁷² Out of 133 women who contested for 102 out of 275 parliamentary seats in Ghana, only 29 were elected. And of the 124 seats in the Sierra Leonean parliament women occupy only 15.
- ⁷³ Interview with Political Party Representative (Ghana, 2013)
- ⁷⁴ Interview with CSO Representative (Sierra Leone, 2013)
- ⁷⁵ Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2004)
- ⁷⁶ Community-based organizations constitute one strand of the CSO subset.

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