
TRANSFORMATION OF CIVIL SOCIETIES: CHANCES, MYTHS AND NEW STRATEGIES FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Dr. Özlem Becerik Yoldaş

Corresponding Author

Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University

Biga Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences

Department of Public Administration, Çanakkale/Turkey

E mail: oez_bec@hotmail.com

Tel: +90 286 3358738-1150

ABSTRACT

There have been changes in civil societies as a result of globalization. The expectations of civil society organizations in young democracies are diverse. Nowadays, citizens are more engaged in civil society organizations and the growth of them has been remarkable. Since the 1980s, nonprofit organizations have flourished rapidly to protect and support the material and immaterial interests of individuals. NPOs play a vital role in the public sphere, but their concern is changing the society in a major way. Furthermore, nonprofit organizations are faced with big challenges which prevent them from reaching the heights to which they aspire. In order to fulfill their objectives, they have gradually adopted new market values and approaches which have led to a growing 'marketization' and 'commercialization' of nonprofits, a move which may have negative consequences on democracy and on creating a strong civil society in the future. This paper aims to scrutinize the challenges which nonprofits are facing and to provide new strategies for them to realize their goals and improve their capacity to be able to meet society's needs.

Keywords: *Civil societies, commercialization, globalization, new strategies, marketization, nonprofit organizations, transformation*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'civil society' from the 1980s is one of the most interesting subjects in political and social science, but it also remains at the heart of criticism. In the context of recreating democracy, it has achieved significant importance in the public sphere. Given the profound changes in modern societies, the tendency of citizens, particularly young people to be active in organizations such as political parties or unions is decreasing, while nowadays a high number of citizens are interested in social, societal and political involvements where they can speak freely, observe the conditions and accept the results of their actions. For this reason, they leap at the opportunity to take part in certain initiatives of civil society. To some extent the activities of civil society are becoming more and more important for a modern democracy. To cope with problems, modern society has three different social regulation mechanisms: state, market and civil society (Meyer 2009, pp. 137–138). The state has the duty to make essential and effective decisions in society and to assure its position through power. The market regulates the supply of goods and services through money. Civil society solves social, cultural, ecological and political problems and acts like a forum in which citizens can influence the state and the market (Ibid., p. 142). But due to the globalization process, new questions are arising when it comes to the justification of political decisions and the importance of democracy. The network of political actors has become significantly wider so that besides governments and parliaments financial enterprises known as 'global players', nonprofit organizations (NPOs), associations, churches and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also participating in shaping the infrastructure of civil society. Moreover, by way of specific functions, interests and forms of action, they are attempting to impact global policy. But this situation leads to an expansion of the political area, an increased complexity of problems and certainly to conflicts (Frevel 2009, pp. 152–153).

Nevertheless, the concepts of 'market' and 'state' are still common and sufficient for a description of institutional segments of modern societies. But there are some organizations which are neither commercial enterprises nor public authorities. They do not fit clearly into the sectors of the market or the state and they are not really open to public and scientific attention. So, in recent years, a new definition of such organizations has been established, namely the concept of a 'third sector' (civil society) which is not to be confused with the tertiary sector in the service industry. Basically, all industrialized democratic countries are familiar with the third sector, but organizational layouts and fields of work vary in international comparison. Non-governmental organizations are part of the third sector, but from the perspective of political science, they deserve more interest. NGOs fulfil important tasks at national and international levels and are included in the decision-making process even though they do not belong to traditional governmental functions (Seibel 2003, pp. 489–490).

Although nonprofit organizations play a vital role in the public sphere, they are faced with big challenges which prevent them from reaching the heights to which they aspire. In order to overcome the difficulties, they have adopted new market values and approaches over time which are leading to a growing 'marketization' and 'commercialization' of NPOs and which may also have negative consequences on the democratic process and on creating a strong civil society in the future. This paper is going to discuss the challenges facing the nonprofit sector and aims to provide potential strategies to allow nonprofit organizations to realize their objectives and boost their capacity to meet society's needs.

BACKGROUND

During the 1990s political and academic discussions were more noticeable as the importance of the third sector and of social organizations grew and also given the fact that the third sector depends on their environment which varies from country to country. The assumption is that third sector organizations are less subject to political and market pressures than for-profit organizations (Seibel and Anheier 1990, p. 15). The fact is that in past decades, both in Europe and in the US, a remarkable growth in the number of civil society organizations in terms of size, importance and popularity was registered, a fact that is closely linked to economic and social improvement.

As a result, much research has been done in recent years on nonprofit organizations, social organizations, voluntary organizations and other types of civil society in an effort to analyze their significance, tasks and the permission of participation of organized interests in the political decision-making process (Anheier and Seibel 1990, p. 1). By approaching a subject, anyone is forced to make limitations and classifications. A look at the large amount of literature on organizations in the third sector reveals that many scholars from the social sciences have applied various nonprofit theories. As the term indicates, nonprofit organizations are tax-exempt, self-governing organizations and are "the sphere of institutions, organizations and individuals located between the family, the state and the market in which people associate voluntarily to advance common interests" (Anheier 2005, p. 56). Dahrendorf (1992) cited by Adloff (2005) points out that citizenship is a prerequisite of a civil society that contains civil, political and social rights, but these rights are inevitable for a liberal social system and not sufficient for a civil society. Nevertheless, Dahrendorf goes on to describe the importance of a liberal protection of society from the state which is the only way to be independent of a center of power. If civil societies, in all their variety are able to realize vital interests of members of societies with autonomy and tolerance, they will be protected from any totalitarian or authoritarian rule (Adloff 2005, pp. 78–79).

Although civil society and transformation have been counted as key subjects in social sciences in the 1990s, some writers, however, were skeptical about the definition that civil society "is a remedy against faults of government action" (Ibid., p. 13). Moreover, when concentrating on civil society, most writers allege that civil society as a social sphere belongs to the public and should clearly distinguish itself from the private sphere and family (See Adloff, 2005; Cohen & Arato, 1995). In particular, experts from transformation research raised the question of the extent to which a living civil society is needed in democracies or the extent to which it contributes to the democratic transformation of authoritarian regimes in different regions. At first, because of authoritarian regressions in Latin America, civil society served as a leading role in developing a new vision of future democracies where social justice was suppressed (Lauth 2003, p. 223). At the end of the 1980s, the idea of a civil society was revived with the political and social transition in Eastern Europe (e.g., Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary). So, many civil societies were able to emerge in opposition to the state and create a free public sphere for protection against any unjustified state (Croissant, Laut & Merkel 2000, p. 11). But in many countries, civil society is not strong enough to survive and express its concerns against powerful state structures or a politically organized society. In the framework of a stabilization of democracies, an interplay with stable democratic and constitutional institutions is therefore not out of the question, on the other hand, civil society has the potential to jeopardize political stability and democracy, in particular, when it is geared towards ethnic or national separation (see former Yugoslavia, some countries in Africa). At the same time, it can distort the scope of the mission of civil societies. This situation shows us precisely how civil society can provide an arena for discourse and intolerant groups such as xenophobic ones in European countries (Thiery, 2007, p. 656).

THE CHARACTER OF THE "THIRD SECTOR" (CIVIL SOCIETY)

The third sector or civil society has the potential to increase the efficiency of market and state in the field of goods and services. But, it also broadens its political integration capability of a modern constitutional state. Additionally, civil society creates opportunities for participation in public affairs otherwise it generates zones with weakened transparency and control. NGOs and civil society provide services to the community. To do so they just need assertiveness or power. The control of power is less formal and therefore by far weakly defined as the control of power between barriers of a formal constitutionalism. The development of the third sector in Europe is associated with the development of civil society (Seibel 2003, p. 491). Early in the 1990s, both in political and social science the phenomenon of civil society became an important subject, and it seems that the notion of civil society is gaining in popularity today based on the struggles against communist and military dictatorships in Eastern Europe or Latin America which contributed to a successful transition to democracy (Cohen & Arato 1994, p. vii).

There are so many understandings of the notion of civil society yet problems exist about the definition in political, social or ethical thoughts. Civil society may provide a possible understanding about the relationship between state, economy and society. According to Cohen and Arato (1994) civil society "...is a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication. Modern civil society is created through forms of self-constitution and self-mobilization. It is institutionalized and generalized through laws, and especially subjective rights, that stabilize social differentiation. (...) It is necessary and meaningful to distinguish civil society from both a political society of parties, political organizations, and political publics (in particular, parliaments) and an economic society composed of organizations of production and distribution. Political and economic society generally arise from civil society, share some of its forms of organization and communication, and are institutionalized through rights (political and property rights) continuous with the fabric of rights that secure modern civil society. But the actors of political and economic society are directly involved with state power and economic production, which they seek to control and manage" (Ibid., p. ix).

Given the diversity and theoretical and empirical questions raised about the reasons for the existence of organizations beside or between market and state, Edwards and Foley (2001) emphasize the socialization function of civil society. According to these authors, civil society plays a major role in building citizenship skills and motivating citizens to apply such skills. The associations of civil society perform *public and quasi-public functions* by educating people, encouraging culture and providing a service to society without any governmental support (pp. 5–6). Nevertheless, in times of globalization, the concept of the third sector or civil society remains a fabulous idea among academicians, politicians, writers, thinkers and journalists that plays an important role in finding solutions for a better world. In this context, the theorist Benjamin Barber recommends a strong democracy where citizens have the opportunity to deliberately discuss (e.g., talk with neighbors, plan benefits actions, organize events, etc.) and therefore, people can act as public individuals. The structure of civil society has, according to Barber, a public-political character without any force and at the same time it has a free and voluntary-based nature without being privatized (Kost 2013, p. 29). As mentioned before, a small number of citizens are members in political parties whilst the organizational level in associations or social organizations is relatively high. Modern societies without voluntary associations, clubs, social organizations and interest groups are not feasible. Between a wider range of interest organizations, many of them cannot be classified as political associations because they describe themselves explicitly as being non-political. But it seems that they could be slightly politically

oriented when offering a forum for exchange of interests and political discussion. Additionally, many social and professional organizations are an important factor for creating a living democracy (Frevel 2009, p. 110). A look at association lists show us the variety of organized interests.

But what are *organized interests*? Organized interests are voluntarily organized social unities with specific aims and a division of work that try to realize the individual, material and immaterial interests of members when it comes to the needs, necessities and justification within social unities (e.g., a small sports club) or against other groups, organizations and institutions (big sports clubs) (Alemann 1989, p. 30). Indeed, the interests of members can be categorized into three dimensions which generally appear collectively:

1. *Individual dimension*: refers to satisfying human needs (food, life, social contact, need for solidarity, recognition).
2. *Material dimension*: refers economic benefits. This is in particular a topic of economics.
3. *Immaterial dimension*: Many people cannot reduce their interests to specific needs and benefits, they only express their own subjective and ideological images of interests (Ibid.,).

If these interests become relevant as needs for each individual, a membership in an association or club which organizes the interests cannot be excluded. Against this background, Ulrich von Alemann (1989, p. 71) outlines a clear typology of organized interests by action and political fields.

3.1 Typology of organized interests by action and political fields:

1. Organized interests in the field of business and employment:
 - a. Trade and freelance associations
 - b. Trade unions
 - c. Consumer organizations
2. Organized interests in social fields:
 - a. Social demand federations (e.g., society for the blind)
 - b. Social benefit federations (e.g., welfare organizations)
 - c. Support groups (e.g., alcoholics anonymous)
3. Organized interests in the field of leisure and recreation:
 - a. Sports clubs and federations
 - b. Leisure and hobby clubs
 - c. Consumer organizations
4. Organized interests in the field of religion, culture and science:
 - a. Churches, cults
 - b. Scientific associations
 - c. Education associations, art associations
5. Organized interests in sociopolitical cross-sectional fields:
 - a. Immaterial associations (e.g. humanist union, amnesty international)
 - b. Sociopolitical associations (e.g. for environment, peace, emancipation of woman)

Alemann stresses that such a classification has its drawbacks. ADAC, for instance, is a German consumer association. It also operates as a commercial travel agency and is known as a famous automobile club (p. 71). All associations, federations and trade unions strive for political influence to improve the life and activities of their members, something which amounts to lobbying. Trade associations insist on influencing all laws, from tax regulations to labor law in favor of their members. In this sense, business and social associations and federations have a political dimension of action which is perceived as legal and appropriate to democracy. They are expected to be organized democratically to be able to express their real interests of members and not to be an instrument of power in the hands of small leadership cliques (Meyer 2009, p. 145). With its multi-functions, civil society is a special field of activity between state and market. The third sector has its own rules which vary according to state and economic activities. In this way, the civil activity of citizens is voluntary like in the economy, but it is geared to the common good. Civil activity can be described as a state activity without any direct use of instruments of power. Additionally, the third sector is a place of civic engagement, reflected to a large extent in voluntary work like citizens' initiatives, discussion forums, support groups, etc. (Ibid., p. 139).

Generally speaking, it is clear that organized interests appear with different roles, duties and importance which differ from state, system, scope, structure and policies. Although organized interests face suspicion, it is widely accepted that organized interests represent a political voice of citizens in government decision-making and provide them with alternative sources of information (Edwards 2009, p. 15). With the decline of party memberships or voting turnout in recent years, social organizations in the third sector have stepped out as new social actors which have attracted more attention from young people who are socially engaged and perceive politics as power to bring about change in society (Barran 2001, p. 103). Volunteering is a sign of political involvement and Putnam (1993, 2000) remarks the increasing trend in volunteering for a stability of democratic institutions.

Despite the common perception that nonprofit organizations are supported by private philanthropy, Salamon (2012) keenly examined that in reality the third sector in the United States is not like this. In 2007, 52 percent of the major sources came from private fees and charges, followed by government support (38%) and lastly by philanthropy at 10 percent (Salamon 2012, p. 10). The distribution of revenue sources explains the greater involvement of NPOs with the private market economy because the growth reliance on fees and memberships leads to a high competition for clients in the market and also for government support (Young, Salamon & Grinsfelder 2012, p. 529). Besides their economic importance, Salamon draws attention to major functions which nonprofit organizations perform in community life. NPOs act as service providers in meeting public needs. Moreover, to contribute to civil society, they operate as advocates by protecting human rights for community interests and by mentioning unaddressed problems which basically deserve public attention. Nonprofit organizations also play a crucial role in expression and in the building of 'social capital' that helps to strengthen civil society for the benefit of individuals and groups. Another key function which nonprofit organizations perform is indeed the valuable guardian function, which emphasizes individual initiatives for the public good (Salamon 2012, p. 11–13). In spite of the explosive expansion of the nonprofit sector in the US, which refers to the prosperity of the American people and social programs of Great Society in the 1960s, at present, a trend of growing marketization and commercialization in this sector in a number of countries and in the US is evident which will be discussed in more detail below.

"CIVIL SOCIETY" - LOSING ITS MISSION?

According to Burton Weisbrod (2004), the third sector has experienced an increasing trend towards commercialization among nonprofit organizations in recent years. He goes on to state that this trend will continue into the present as a response to increased fiscal pressures and a lack of traditional resources in funding nonprofit organizations. To survive, nonprofits have begun to charge user fees or benefit from other commercial incomes instead of relying on donations or grants (Weisbrod 2004, p. 43). Furthermore, in the 1980s and 1990s, these activities were also used in other sectors such as in the education and health subsectors (Eikenberry & Drapal Kluver 2004, p. 134). It is clear that nonprofit organizations have taken crucial steps toward creating an environment of commercial nonprofits. But such endeavors to contribute social capital have negative effects when it comes to achieving the mission (Meyer & Simsa 2014, p. 204). More and more nonprofits are generating revenues from unrelated business thereby putting their social mission at risk. Here, Weisbrod refers to universities and colleges in the US, who are booking educational tours and cruises. A massive change can also be noted in the research and development of nonprofit universities as some universities join partnerships with private firms to conduct scientific research. Other examples Weisbrod gives to show nonprofits competing for profits include hospitals opening retail pharmacies or nonprofit museums such as the Art Institute of Chicago that have opened retail shops in shopping centers for commercial activities (Weisbrod 2004, p. 43). Indeed, commercialization is a new phenomenon, and due to changes in the environment, nonprofits are forced to adopt new market values and enter joint ventures or other cooperative dealings with for-profit but this still remains open for discussion as to whether nonprofits can benefit in the long run from becoming commercialized. Because of cut backs in public funding for social programs, different organizations are subject to strong competition when distributing scarce public funds. With partial funding it is not easy to distinguish the sector from state and market. Through financial influence of the state, the third sector will be subject to market rules. Adloff (2005) emphasizes that on the one hand the state issues power of attorney to private organizations through the delegation of duties and, on the other hand, that the public funding of organizations may lead to stronger government intervention in their internal structures. Moreover, a transition from for-profit to nonprofit activities can be also smooth (Adloff 2005, p. 110). When discussing the possible impacts of commercialization on nonprofits, many nonprofit scholars have different viewpoints. Some support commercial activities that may generate healthier organizations as long as the charitable purpose of nonprofits remains the driving force. Those who do not support this see the public's trust in danger and argue that commercialism also means a loss of the real mission and that social goals serving as conduits for free expression and social change are challenged in a marketized environment (Boscher 2009, p. 5; Eikenberry & Drapal Kluver 2004, p. 136).

Beside commercialism in the nonprofit sector, the marketization trend is also greater, which is a potential minefield for nonprofit organizations. Salamon (1993) describes the shift to marketization as "the penetration of essentially market-type relationships into the social welfare arena" (p. 17). Le Roux and Feeney (2015) argue that as a result of changes in organizations, nonprofits are behaving in more a business-like manner. Many nonprofit leaders adopted new managerial reforms and market-based strategies in the late 1980s and 1990s to increase earned income. They point out that the variety of nonprofit organizations also depends on the educational backgrounds and experiences of NPO leaders. So, well trained business leaders are entering the market to fill the leadership position in the third sector (Le Roux & Feeney 2015, p. 337). In summary, examining the balance between nonprofit and forprofit collaboration leads us to conclude that, in particular in health care and education, nonprofits are seeking to invest in advertising and marketing to

compete for clients and government support (Young, Salamon & Grinsfelder 2012, p. 527). Of course, nonprofits are exposed to profound pressures to move toward to the market. As mentioned earlier, market pressures, growth of fee income and incorporation of the dominant market culture may appear to be an advantage when it comes to increasing efficient fundraising activities and the performance of nonprofits. However, Young et al. (2012) assumed that the market influence undermines the public's trust and at the same time supports a reduction in donations and political good will (Anheier 2005, p. 211). In light of this assumption, it should be noted that nonprofit organizations are an important part of social networks that may contribute to social capital in spite of adopting commercial forms of operation and business-like methods and structures (Backman and Smith 2000, p. 355). Because the nonprofit sector has grown in scale, shape and importance in the last decades, the competition among organizations has risen, meaning that they expect to satisfy customer demands and wants to an even greater extent. In this respect, philanthropists are calling for an increased market-like behavior among voluntary organizations. Generally speaking, commercialization and marketization are complex notions that have come under severe scrutiny. But how can nonprofits keep their charitable mission without losing their tax-exempt status in future? Is the social mission completely lost? Will they still able to carry out nonprofit activities? These are questions that are driving new strategies and solutions for nonprofits in future in an effort to improve their capacity to meet societal demands.

NEW STRATEGIES - A RESPONSE TO COMPETITION

Starting and managing a nonprofit organization is certainly a big challenge, and there are different reasons for founding one. According to Simsa and Patak (2008) nonprofits carry out nonprofit activities which are important in societal, political and cultural fields of modern societies. As international studies show, the economic importance of this sector has become more significant than assumed thus far (Simsa & Patak 2008, p. 17). Although nonprofits have a tax-exempt status, they face difficulties when establishing formal structures, power and authority. It is common that these formal structures are neither clearly defined nor applied despite definite rules (Ibid., p. 19). Like other scholars, Greiling (2014) argues, that in practice, a profound change from a 'trust me' toward a 'prove me' culture has affected the nonprofit sector. This change has led to an extension of requirements of better quality and more transparency of large-scale programs and projects of stakeholders. In this way, nonprofits feel pressured to demonstrate their quality (Greiling 2014, p. 231–232). Organizational success depends on quality leadership, well-developed strategies, goals and a rewards system. The survival of nonprofits depends on improving performance and applying political strategies. From this perspective, Simsa (2001) refers to confrontational strategies which are commonly geared to organizations perceived to be a creator of a specific problematic situation. The general understanding is that NPOs pursuing confrontational strategies have the power to act as democratic, social-state and environmental abutments. Simsa also stresses that accountability politics is related to confrontational strategies. Increased transparency tied with confrontation may influence the expectations of a cost-benefit structure. As nonprofits do not possess formal and financial power, they are obliged to refer to subtle forms of 'negotiation of meaning'. For example, the conducted landmine campaign of nonprofits was able to achieve tremendous success when the disarmament question was redesigned as a humanitarian question (Simsa 2001, pp. 360–361). Salamon stresses the importance of such influence that makes a nonprofit stronger, and its function serves as a reaction to government and market influences and, last but not least, as a source of policy reforms (Ibid., p. 361). Another efficient strategy that helps to react to unsolvable issues is called the cooperative strategy. The goal of this strategy is to cooperate with different

organizations to optimize strategies to provide particular goods and services. The most frequent cooperation form of NPOs and other organizations is cooperation with governmental organizations. The state may benefit from the flexibility of NPOs, in particular, when the state faces complex problems of overcharging (Ibid., p. 362). There are several examples showing how the state, market and third sector overlap in formulating policies. "Public and nonprofit sectors also overlap in the area of policy formulation. Whether at local, regional, national, or international levels, governments seem to find it increasingly difficult to formulate policies on their own. Third sector organizations, foundations, and 'think tanks' in particular, serve as policy-formulating and consulting institutions for political bodies" (Anheiber & Seibel 1990, p. 16).

Bishwapriya Sanyal (1998) dealt with the question of why nonprofits and governments should work together. She demonstrated that only a development strategy can be profitable between 'the top' and 'the bottom' (Sanyal 1998, p. 78). Nonprofits have a comparative advantage to generate profit in regions and projects where public institutions have no access. For example, the percentage of public fundings of developmental NPOs in the United States was 1.5% in 1997, but in 1988 the proportion increased to 35% (Simsa 2001, p. 363). They have the power to "ensure citizen's participation in the development process by engaging them in learning environments..." (Sanyal 1998, p. 78). In the framework of cooperative strategies, Sanyal draws attention to the maximum effect of partnership in response to global changes in politics, economy and environment. This is why economic organizations are encouraged to cooperate to ensure legitimacy and public acceptance. Beside core resources such as transparency, legitimacy, quality and transnationality, NPOs contribute to the greater credibility of economic and governmental organizations (Simsa 2001, p. 363–364). To reach effectiveness, and to alleviate negative effects in organizations, another impact factor can be applied, the so-called mitigation strategy. This strategy makes it possible to stop a system transformation and fosters social work which is implemented by aid organizations or development organizations. A big challenge of such a strategy is the confrontation with problems and suffering. Most nonprofits operate with financial support or are in need of some public funding from economic organizations. In the event of floods, earthquake or fire, people in developing countries largely rely on assistance because the resources for governmental information or compensation policies are insufficient (Ibid., p. 364 ff.). Finally, with high civic engagement and the motivation of nonprofits in humanitarian activities, prosperity increases between rich and poor countries in the long run.

CONCLUSION

Nonprofit organizations take part in the system of the critical public and focus on social change. When analyzing the concept of civil society, much has been written by various European intellectuals. The concept of civil society is very complex at first sight, and there is no common definition. But there is a general consensus that nonprofits are not dependent on the state. Associations or interest groups can be counted as a part of civil society as long as they fulfill the prerequisites (Croissant et al. 2000, p. 18). Michael Walzer's work 'Toward Global Civil Society' sees civil society "as the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks – formed for the sake of family, faith, interest and ideology – that fill this space" (1995, p. 7). At first, it was assumed that the nonprofit sector was an American phenomenon, but from the 1980s onwards, the sector was also found in modern societies. It is true that the third sector gained significant importance in the US welfare state because the state engaged nonprofits to offer public funding services (Adloff 2005, p. 109). But in Western European countries as well, nonprofits began to play an important role in mobilizing the public. Nowadays, social movements face new challenges which are correlated with internationalization of politics and society. The claim is that if more decisions are taken above the nation-state level, the more movements and organizations will be forced to orient themselves at such decision-making level. This means a cooperation of national organizations to form supranational organizations. Or, on the other hand, national organizations have the chance to operate at an international level (Seibel 2003, p. 483) Civil societal processes should be further strengthened because they can have a valuable input to secure democracy, peace and social justice.

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