

Civil society: a revived mantra in the development discourse

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Abstract

There is an assumption that the inclusion of civil society in governance processes promotes democratic performance and contributes to ‘good governance’, in the sense of pluralism, accountability and transparency. This paper refers to the governance process of the water utility in Accra involving the private sector, and examines the validity of the assumed roles regarding the inclusion of civil society in the governance process. For the purposes of this study, civil society is defined as ‘non-state and non-market organisations that can, or have the potential to, champion democratic governance reforms and act as agents for political and socio-economic change’. Contrary to assumptions made about the inclusion of civil society, the analysis herein shows that the inclusion of civil groups in the governance process of the water utility led to hostile and undemocratic processes and to weak indicators of ‘good governance’. The main concern of the key actors was centred on how to build consensus around the privatisation programme of the water utility. ‘Managing consensus’, however, is an inappropriate planning measure. It is argued here that the focus should rather be on how to design governance structures and arrangements, mobilised by legitimate and committed political leadership, to build and enhance the capacity of governance processes.

Keywords: Accra; Civil society; Governance; Public; Private; Water utility

Introduction

Following the disintegration of the communist bloc, the resurgence of neo-liberalism and the rise of pro-democracy movements in the developing world, three ideological threads began to knit and converge around a new policy agenda of ‘liberal democratic reform processes’ to promote development and foster democratisation in Africa (Leftwich, 1993). The three lines of thought are articulated around the emergence of the notions of ‘governance’ and ‘social capital’ and their connotations regarding the revival of ‘civil society’ (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Hearn, 2001; Lewis, 2002); these ideas are briefly explored in this paper. The essence of current reform policies is that, through participatory decision-making processes, actors from different governmental bodies as well as the market and civil society, can construct reform policies of ‘good governance’ (Lewis, 2002). In contrast to the understanding of

doi: 10.2166/wp.2010.087

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the notion of “good governance” in the Western context, the developmental agenda of the World Bank appears to have reduced the political substance of the term, and instead associates it with the liberal values of efficiency, transparency, accountability and the rule of law (Leftwich, 1993; Marcussen, 1996).

The new developmental paradigm promoted by international development agencies has emerged in response to two rationalities. The drastic cuts in public expenditure followed by the market-based but state-led adjustment programmes that prevailed in the 1980s failed to achieve policies to effectively reduce poverty and trigger social development (Leftwich, 1993; Reed, 2001). The uneasy fit of the World Bank’s market-driven reform policies tended to exclude the perspective of the civil population and received much criticism, calling on the Bank to incorporate the perspective of civil society in discussions about economic restructuring and state reform policies (Edwards *et al.*, 2001).

In the next section, the notions of ‘governance’ and ‘social capital’ and their linkages to civil society are discussed, followed by an exploration of the relevant theoretical perspectives on civil society.

Governance and its link to civil society

The notion of ‘governance’ has its origin in the West. Gonzalez & Healey (2005) define governance in a Western context as ‘the shift from government arrangements associated in Europe with the post-war welfare settlements which gave a strong role to the state in supporting the economy and civil society towards a form of governance with a stronger role for the economy and civil society in self-managing what had previously been provided by the state’. Civil society is seen as a necessary complement to the welfare state, a permanent precondition but never a substitute for it (Gerometta *et al.*, 2005). In simple scientific language, governance is the process of policymaking, while civil society is an actor in this process.

The concept has emerged in modern times to describe processes that are referred to in the lexicon of development and democracy as participatory democracy and deliberate policy-making. The governance process that is mobilised by the state integrates different actors from a range of social spheres: governmental institutions, the private sector and civil society, in a specific local setting. It is a dynamic process of interaction dealing with a broad range of problems and conflicts, with the goal of reaching mutually satisfactory decisions and cooperation in the implementation and monitoring of these decisions, through a collective learning process. It is assumed that through rational communication and discourse, equal, competent and autonomous actors are able to arrive at a mutual and common understanding, and act collectively to overcome policy-making challenges and maintain and enhance social development (Dryzek, 2000). Ostensibly, this interaction promotes legitimate and innovative solutions through flexibility, mutuality and responsiveness (Brinkerhoff, 2003). It is also claimed that this notion of governance defends the public interest and counteracts private interests as a result of the shift to the more privileged business sector (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999; Dryzek, 2000).

Social capital and the link to civil society

Development and democracy literature recognises the role of civil society in the enhancement of political performance and social development (Putnam, 1993; Dryzek, 2000; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003). This recognition has also come about as a practical manifestation of the notion of ‘social capital’ discussed in Putnam’s thesis (Putnam, 1993), which concludes that economic and political development

seems to be fostered by associations of horizontal networks made up of civil society groups. According to Putnam, social capital is defined as ‘features of social organisation, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate attributes of coordination, reciprocity, and cooperation for mutual benefits’. This conclusion has led to operational political measures. Voluntary civil organisations promise a solution to the enduring problem of development and democracy in developing countries (Van Rooy, 1998). The significance of civil associations in fostering democratisation and development swiftly and conveniently fits into the development discourse (Harriss & Renzio, 1997). The implication has manifested in the strengthening and proliferation of civil society organisations embarking on reform policies in developing countries.

Definitions of civil society

The burgeoning literature on the subject of civil society recognises that the concept is diffuse, hard to define, empirically imprecise, ideologically laden and not particularly useful as an analytical tool (Allen, 1997; Van Rooy, 1998; Hearn, 2001). Recent claims distinguish civil society from those groups belonging to the market and the state, and see civil society as a residual category of non-state and non-market actors. However, there are commentators who point out that civil society encompasses all of the associations that exist outside the state (Carrothers, 1999/2000), including market actors (Van Rooy, 1998: 39), whereas others avow that political society is an imperative component of civil associations (Foley & Edwards, 1996; Boussard, 2002). As Foley & Edwards (1996) indicate, ‘the concept seems to take on the property of a gas, expanding or contracting to fit the analytic space afforded it by each historical or socio-political setting’. In practice, civil society is circumscribed by groups of non-governmental organisations, advocacy groups, human rights groups and social movements. In the context of developing countries, the concept is reduced to apply mainly to non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

For the purposes of this study on reform policy with regard to water governance in Accra, it has been useful to develop and adapt here the definition made by USAID (Van Rooy, 1998: 35). Civil society is defined as ‘non-state and non-market organisations that can, or have the potential to, champion democratic governance reforms and increase the capacity for effective governance’. Governance capacity refers to the ability of stakeholders participating in an inclusive decision-making process to behave in a democratic manner and act collectively; ‘stakeholders’ is used to refer to different interests groups that can affect and be affected by the policy-making process. The assumption is made that the participatory approach ensures civility, cooperation and collective endeavour among participants (Cleaver, 1999). In this sense, civil society is viewed as an agent for political and social change.

The new development policy paradigm assumes that governance processes that include civil society, represented in practice by mainly non-governmental organisations, are deemed prime engines of socio-economic and political reform. The paradigm has manifested in the strengthening of civil society organisations in Africa and elsewhere.

The aim of this paper is to examine whether the inclusion of civil society groups, through governance reforms, will promote development and foster democratisation performance. The paper refers to the reform policy of the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) in Accra that included civil organisations in the decision-making process involving the private sector. It looks at the validity of some of the assumed roles of civil society in the public sector reform policies of water supply in Accra, based on

relevant literature (Foley & Edwards, 1996; Allen, 1997; Van Rooy, 1998; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Lewis, 2002).

The assumed position taken by the mainstream literature is that civil society: (1) contributes to ‘good governance’ as a source of liberal democratic values such as pluralism, accountability and transparency; (2) promotes democratic performance; and (3) constrains the scope and action of the state, thus increasing individual and, more notably, market freedom.

Accordingly, assumptions made about the role of civil society groups that will be examined in this case study are:

- that they promote democratic performance and thus increase the governance capacity of stakeholders to act collectively. Foley & Edwards (1996) assume that civil associations have the potential to affect governance positively in the sense of deliberate policy-making, albeit developed in response to the Western experience;
- that they contribute to ‘good governance’ as the source of the liberal democratic values of pluralism, legitimacy, accountability and transparency (Allen, 1997);
- that they represent the perceptions and values of the general public in participatory development processes, according to the claims of effective development and the sentiments espoused in the governance approach. In its annual meetings, the World Bank has stressed the importance of participation in improving the effectiveness of development policies and the incorporation of the perceptions, values and priorities of the beneficiary population (Cooke & Kothari, 2001: 72).

Background

In the early 1990s, the reform programme of the water sector in Accra was initiated. The reform process integrated radical institutional restructuring that included the separation of urban water systems from rural ones, the separation of water from sanitation services, and the emergence of new water sub-institutions. The World Bank was instrumental in driving the whole process. In the programme’s third phase, popularly known as the ‘urban water project’, a water reform policy to improve urban water supply services in Accra was put in place. Based on the expertise of foreign consultants, a concluding report was issued that recommended that the government of Ghana (GoG) lease the water systems to private operators. Accordingly, binding documents were prepared that endowed the private operators with considerable investment capital. These documents were redrafted many times to surmount the challenges of putting in place the right terms of contract for the pre-qualification of the bidders, and to attract private operators. Due to a combination of factors, the process was stalled. The increasing local resistance to the privatisation scenario and the reluctance of private capital to invest, due to the profound failure of similar cases worldwide, resulted in political and social risks for both the Ghanaian government and the private operator. The GoG began to demonstrate uncertainty regarding its own position on the issue, particularly as elections drew near.

The process was revived again in 2003, and a new round of promotion for private sector participation began. To build popular consent, a reversal of the government’s position, in the form of a management contract (MC) of 3–5 years was publicised, instead of the lease contract that was initially designed. The MC was finally awarded at the end of 2005 to a joint venture company originating in the Netherlands and South Africa.

A broad coalition of individuals and civil organisations, religious bodies, community organisations, academics, farmers, the Trade Unions Congress (TUC)—with the exception of the Public Utility Workers Union (PUWU), the union of GWCL workers—and NGOs emerged to form and promote the Ghana National Coalition Against the Privatisation of Water (NCAP-Water). The coalition was recognised by the international community and received considerable support in its fight against privatisation. NCAP-Water used tactics of mass mobilisation and public education to combat the Government's efforts to privatise the water utility. The Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), a non-profit social development organisation, was at the forefront of NCAP-Water, and pushed for the Accra declaration on the right to water, issued on 19 May 2001. ISODEC is made up of three national affiliate bodies and two international joint venture operations in the West African sub-region. Since 2000, they have led a programme that confronts the neo-liberal policy promoted largely by international donors, linking grassroots action to national and global efforts to effectively implement the programme. [Agyeman \(2007\)](#) described in detail how ISODEC tried to influence and manage public opinion and engage it to fight against privatisation. They organised campaigns in the form of T-shirts, car stickers, banners and educational materials with basic information regarding their views on privatisation. They also mobilised communities to demand their rights to water, and linked to organised labour and faith-based organisations. They organised media campaigns and promoted international solidarity to defend their cause.

In this paper, the analysis examines the role of civil society groups, including international non-governmental organisations such as WaterAid, TUC, the Ghana Consumer Association (GCA), and academia, but the analysis is mainly focused on the role of NCAP-Water that was led by ISODEC and which was influential in the water utility governance process. WaterAid in Accra attempted to influence water policies through advocacy activities such as a 'new national water policy' that looked at how to serve urban communities and poor areas.

The analysis in the paper rests on three main issues:

- (1) how did stakeholders comprehend the consultation process around the privatisation programme of urban water supply systems, and did the inclusion of civil society in the consultation process promote democratic behaviour? A democratic participatory decision-making process should bring together different interest groups (stakeholders) in an authentic discussion, to cooperate and arrive at a mutually beneficial solution and build consensus ([Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003](#));
- (2) has the inclusion of groups from civil society contributed to the process of 'good governance' in the sense of improvements regarding the values of pluralism, transparency, and accountability?
- (3) to what extent did the inclusion of civil society groups in the consultation process regarding the shift to private sector management represent the perceptions of urban citizens (households) on the management of their water supply systems, and to what extent did it deviate from their perceptions?

The research methods used to answer these questions integrated (i) interviews with key informants to capture the multitude of actors' views on the decision-making process and (ii) a survey used to capture the perceptions of urban dwellers in Accra on some of the themes that were defined as being important to the study.

The interviews with actors representing public water institutions, donors, the private water operator, regulator and civil society groups including international non-governmental organisations, entailed semi-structured, open-ended questions that allowed conversations with the interviewees (See [Figure 1](#)).

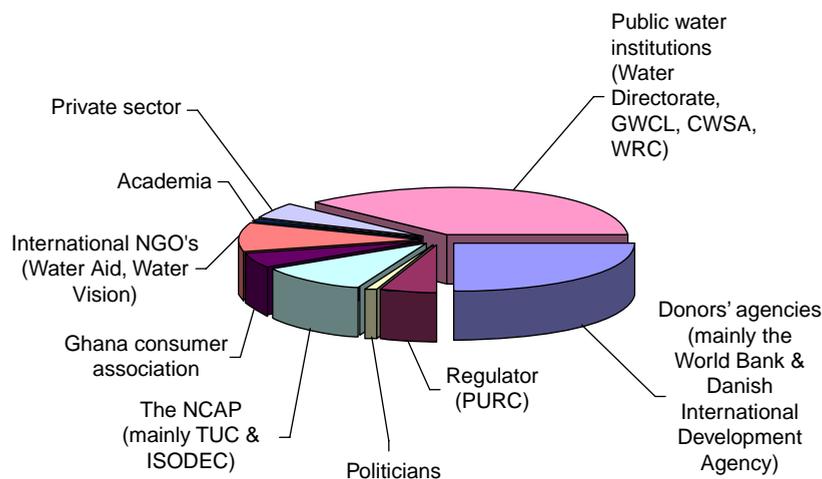


Fig. 1. Identified actors interviewed in the study.

More than 25 interviews were carried out in the study. The interviewees are shown as personal communications in the reference list. Whenever needed, more than one interview was carried out with the same person. For those interest groups deemed to have a significant role in the water governance process, such as public water institutions, NCAP-Water and donors, at least two persons were interviewed. In most of the interviews, the key person representing an interest group was interviewed. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed for qualitative analysis.

A survey was addressed to a sample of urban areas reflecting a range of socio-economic statuses and assorted difficulties regarding access to water supply services, integrating 131 households, in order to capture the perceptions of urban dwellers on the privatisation process. The questionnaire was self-administered and structured to entail guiding questions on issues of public awareness and representation, public perceptions on the private sector and on the decision-making process, and expectations regarding the performance of the contracted private operator.

A deliberative approach to decision-making

When the decision-making process began, there was intensive participation from governmental bodies, bilateral agencies, private water operators and maintenance contractors. The civil society groups at the forums were represented by only two organisations, both of them internationally based, whose activity agendas did not relate to water supply in urban areas. It was only after the formation of NCAP-Water that the forums and workshops started to integrate civic groups and local NGOs.

Does the inclusion of civil society groups promote democratic performance?

Contrary to their presumed role, the inclusion of groups from civil society led to a hostile and chaotic governance process. In the beginning, the consultation process had a narrow focus, with some confusion regarding the concept of private sector participation (Ahligah, 2006; Yeboah, 2006). Once the concept was properly understood, the process became characterised by hostility. The civil groups

in NCAP-Water who opposed privatisation believed that Ghanaians were adequately competent to manage their own water utility (Ahaligah, 2006). They questioned the continuing dependency on outsiders and foreigners (Addo, 2006), mobilising rallies and public protests calling for the ‘right to water’ and organising public forums that challenged the WB officials to confront and debate with their critics.

The consultation process was controversial, overwhelmed by problems, and characterised by opposition and the exchange of accusations among stakeholders. There was, for instance, a claim from NCAP-Water that the UK government had used aid as a bribe to ensure that the GoG remain committed to the privatisation scenario. The GoG was also accused of corruption related to its handling of the bidding process (Agyeman, 2007). The coalition, on the other hand, was accused of being backed by international movements and receiving financial compensation in return for fighting against privatisation. One of the accusations is cited below to indicate the atmosphere that enveloped the process:

‘They (i.e. ISODEC) are opportunists and big noise seeking only money, we don’t pay attention to them because they don’t discuss objectively. They are poor and the only thing they want is money.’ (Nkrumah, 2005)

According to Daniel Bompoe, Director of the Project Management Unit (PMU), though the consultation process was designed to be carried out in a civil manner, most of the time it resulted in arguments, debates, disagreements and insults (Bompoe, 2006). The GoG was confronted by opposing ideas coming from different civil groups, which caused confusion and distraction, and resulted in a deadlock between government agencies and citizens’ groups.

One of the interviewees described the process in one sentence when he said, ‘when (the) democracy experience is not mature, it is dangerous’ (Addo, 2006). Stakeholders lack the capacity to participate in a democratic way because they are not accustomed to participatory governance modes and are not integrated in their political culture. The institutional setting is not appropriate to accommodate the implementation of sophisticated modes of governance that are beyond their own capacity.

Does the inclusion of civil society contribute to ‘good governance’?

The perceptions of stakeholders regarding the transparency and openness of the process varied significantly. Whereas governmental and donor actors claimed that the consultation process could not be more open and transparent (Aboagye, 2006; Bompoe, 2006; Van-Ess, 2006), and that everybody had the right to contribute to the discussion and reach a final decision, NCAP-Water claimed it was neither transparent nor open, and not sufficiently participatory (Abloso, 2006; Manteaw, 2006). Manteaw (2006), from ISODEC, claimed that before NCAP-Water came into being, consultations were held with donors and development agencies, without involving the general public, with the goal of selling the idea to the people. The leader of NCAP-Water claimed that the population at large was ignorant of what was happening. Neither the GoG nor the World Bank provided information to the people in Ghana. According to the TUC, the consultation forums were ‘cosmetic’ and regarded as a ‘gimmick’ that was created to give the impression that stakeholders had been involved in decision making (Abloso, 2006).

Abdul-Nashiru (2006) from WaterAid believed that there was an appreciable level of openness. He added that there was concern that the consultations, particularly with civil society, were inadequate.

However, he also questioned how a measurement of adequacy could be made if the standards themselves were inadequate.

Most of the stakeholders except NCAP-Water were not opposed, at least in principle, to private sector involvement, but had concerns in three key areas: (1) that the private sector should be made accountable; (2) that they should be socially responsible for the urban poor; and (3) that they should integrate local Ghanaian capacity. This required consensus, which they were not able to achieve. The actors recognised that mechanisms of accountability to citizens and frameworks monitoring the performance of private operators were weakly addressed and remained inadequate.

The contested issues of transparency and openness, weak accountability mechanisms and lack of consensus were aspects characterising the governance process. Thus the analysis shows little evidence of good governance as defined by liberal democratic sentiments.

Was the inclusion of civil groups effective regarding the representation of public perceptions?

The ideology of NCAP-Water

NCAP-Water was strongly opposed to private sector schemes and involvement in the management of a water utility. For them, water was seen as being primarily a public resource and a human right, and not simply a commodity to be subjected to market forces. They stressed and defended the idea that ‘water is a strategic asset and we can’t let the private foreign operator run it’ (Manteaw, 2006). NCAP-Water, via tactics of mass mobilisation against privatisation, waged a campaign against multinational water operators. They used the media to stimulate public awareness and education to combat privatisation, and launched fact-finding missions in favour of alternative water management models. They raised reliable concerns regarding the accountability and social responsibility of the private sector to the urban poor, and emphasised the social risks of lack of affordability and service exclusion. To credit NCAP-Water’s efforts, it must be acknowledged that this campaign achieved some benefits on the ground. They pushed the government to rethink its ambitious privatisation schemes that were driven by donors and to become more alert and cautious regarding the involvement of the private sector, and to carefully integrate the socio-political risk.

The perceptions of urban dwellers

The survey that was used to capture the perceptions of urban dwellers showed that the consultations were neither open enough for the public to become aware about what was happening nor inclusive enough to represent urban dwellers in Accra. The survey results showed that the public’s perceptions regarding the involvement of the private sector deviated significantly from the interests of NCAP-Water, as shown below.

Awareness and representation

The survey showed that only half of the households in the survey sample, 50.4% (66/131), were aware that the management contract (MC) of water supply services was awarded to the private sector. More than 90% of urban dwellers (118/131) were unaware of any prior consultation process regarding the decision by water management officials to privatise water utilities (See Figure 2).

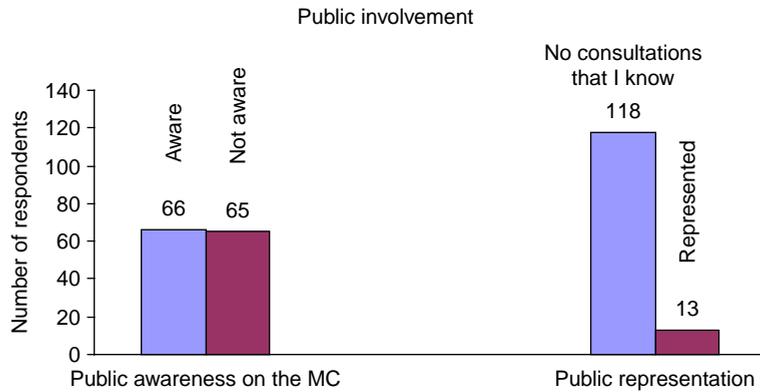


Fig. 2. Public awareness of, and inclusion in, the governance process.

Perceptions of urban dwellers regarding the private sector

The perceptions of urban dwellers regarding the private sector were positive and deviated from the coalition’s views. About 73% of households (96/131) believed that the GWCL contracted the private operator in order to bring about an improvement in efficiency and services. The issues related to the potential for investment and the reliability of the private sector were equally weighed, and accounted for 22.9% (30/131). Other measures were viewed as being less significant (See Figure 3).

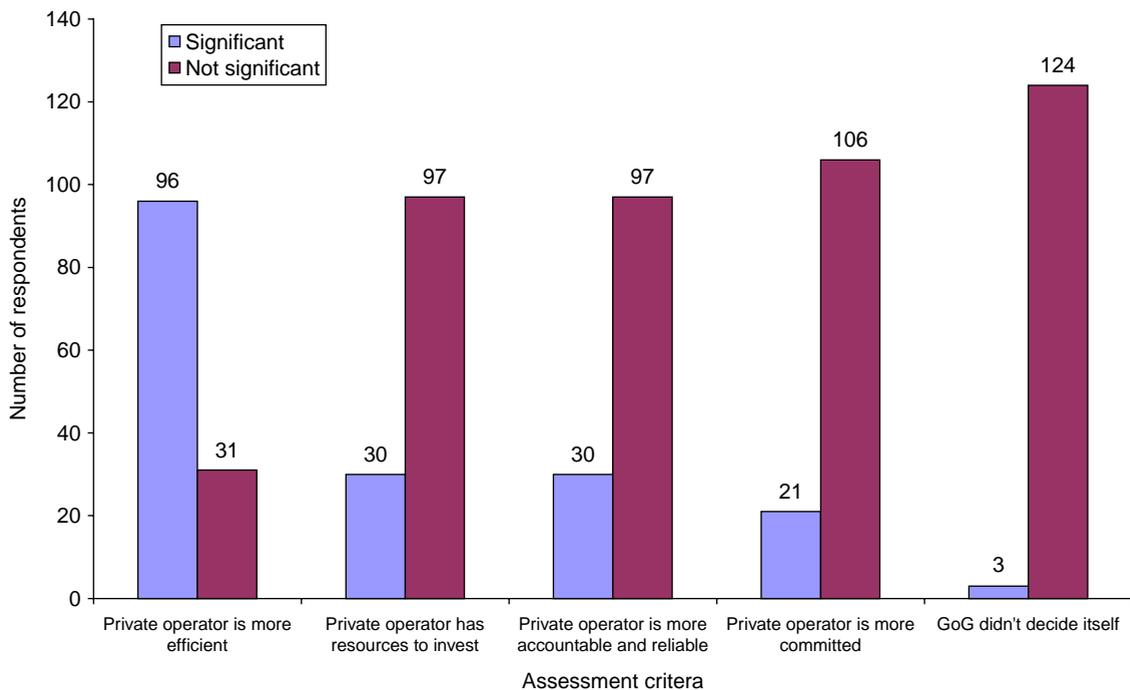


Fig. 3. Public perceptions regarding the private sector.

Perceptions of urban dwellers regarding the decision-making process

The perceptions of urban householders were polarised and equally divided regarding the wisdom of the decision to transfer the management and operational responsibility of the water utility to the private operator. Half of the survey sample, 49.6% (65/131), believed that it was a prudent decision, while an equal number believed that it was not.

About 84% (54/65) of urban dwellers not in favour of the decision were either pro-public utility (15) or, more significantly, had fears about the possibility of unaffordable tariffs and exclusion from water supply services (39). About 87.3% (55/65) of urban dwellers in favour of the decision took this position because they believed that the private operator would be more efficient, that it would provide greater investment potential, and that it would improve water services (See Figure 4).

Despite having positive perceptions about the private operator, urban dwellers were confused about the issue, and unsure which decision would be most advantageous. This raises a question. Did these responses reflect the actual perceptions of citizens, or was their hesitation the result of exposure to the media and the campaign that ISODEC led against privatisation, which stimulated public fears about lack of affordability and service exclusion?

This issue was raised for discussion with Abdul-Nashiru (2008), and he was asked to explain, from his point of view, the polarisation of the urban dwellers' perceptions. According to him, it could be attributed to the public's level of understanding regarding the concept of privatisation and its implications. He added that it might also be a consequence of the influence on the public of mass information from NCAP-Water. The coalition organised many seminars, public awareness campaigns and social events led by charismatic leaders.

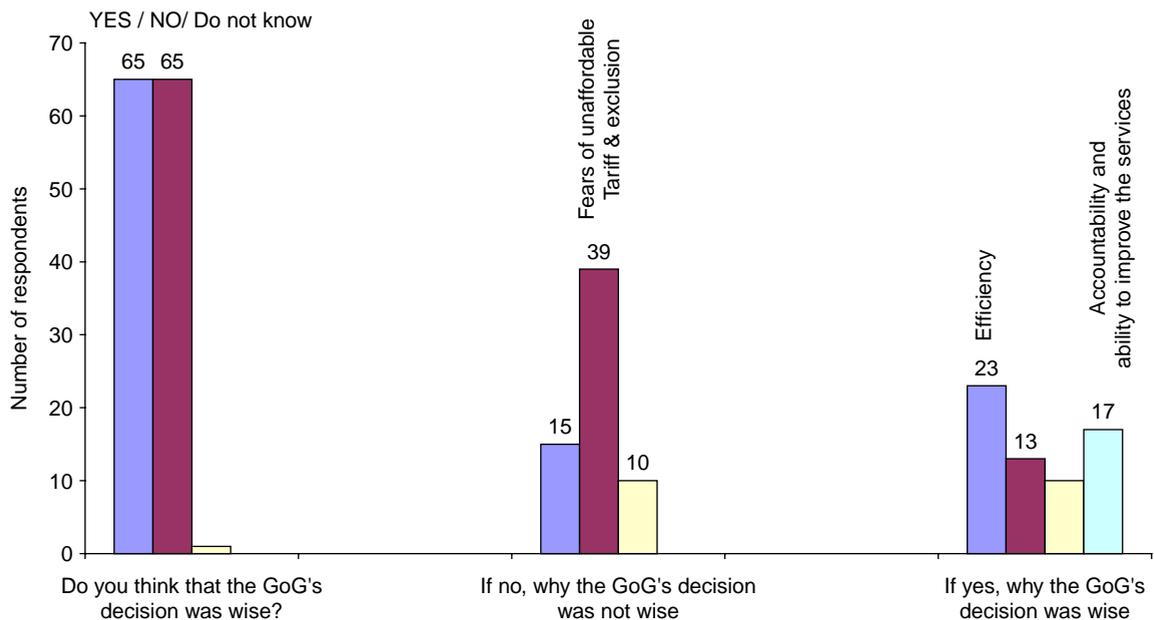


Fig. 4. Public perceptions regarding giving the management contract to the private operator.

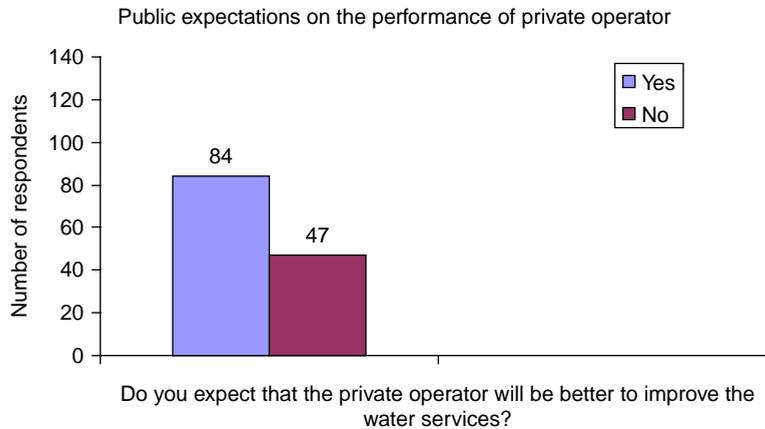


Fig. 5. The urban dwellers expectations regarding the performance of the contracted private operator.

Expectations of urban dwellers

The analysis of responses from urban dwellers shows that they had relatively high expectations regarding the performance of the contracted private operator: 64.1% (84/131) felt that the private operator would be better equipped to improve water supply services, while 35.9% (47/131) disagreed (see Figure 5). Those who expected an improvement in services emphasised the issues of efficiency, investment and more effective operation, less interference in management, and the facilitation of an institutional environment to achieve improvements. On the other hand, those who were more sceptical regarding the performance of the private sector emphasised factors such as the unfamiliarity of the private foreign operator with local priorities, fears of unaffordable tariffs and service exclusion, and fears that the private operator would be driven by self-interest. According to them, the reluctance of the private operator to invest, the inability of the government to protect the public interest and the weakening local capacity due to foreign dependency were also important, but less significant than the previous three factors.

The analysis shows that there was a rift between the ideology of NCAP-Water and the perceptions of the public. The civil pressure groups were more concerned about promoting their own ideologies and mobilising and managing public opinion against privatisation than representing public perceptions and values in the discussion forums around policy alternatives.

To conclude this section, neither the government and donors nor the civil groups were in any real sense concerned about representing the perceptions of the public on water reform policies. Donors wanted to pass on their neo-liberal policies and NCAP-Water was primarily concerned about defending its ideological interests, which received a lot of recognition and support from the international community for its fight against privatisation.

Are the assumptions regarding the positions of civil society organisations valid?

The case study regarding the reform process of the governance of the water supply in Accra leading to the privatisation of water utilities raises reliable concerns regarding the validity of assumptions espoused

by the new policy paradigm. The assumptions made by the international development policymakers on the role of civil society groups to foster democratic culture and good governance are seemingly inconsistent with practice.

In addition, governmental actors failed to design institutional arrangements to control and manage conflicts of interest and to include public perceptions and values regarding solutions to the problems besetting water services. The various actors espoused different ideologies and defended different interests, even within the civil society organisations themselves. There was a conflict of interest within the TUC, for example, where all the unions took the same position in the fight against privatisation except for the union of GWCL workers (PUWU), which was more concerned about negotiating the compensation package for workers, having control over the ‘administration of the retrenchment programme’ and making sure that everyone was paid. Every interest group wanted to prove that it had taken the right position and was primarily concerned about defending its own ideology and interests (Nkrumah, 2006).

Though the evidence in this study is inconclusive, the analysis leads us to express substantial concern regarding revisionist thought about the design of governance structures and arrangements to improve governance capacity. What remains is the question of how to integrate civil society groups, and control and manage conflicts of interest to enhance legitimacy, and to embark on publicly acceptable reform policies which are characterised by clear accountability and monitoring mechanisms.

Commentators also argue that civil society can be seen as being in opposition to the state (Foley & Edwards, 1996), not necessarily in the sense of resisting and confronting authoritarian regimes, but in the sense of containing and constraining the scope and action of the state (Allen, 1997). The assumed role of civil society under minimal state control, according to Allen, is to increase market freedom for individuals, a sentiment that connotes the liberal-democratic spirit. This argument is however not supported by this study. The civic groups that constituted NCAP-water were not founded in order to increase market freedom for individuals, as assumed by Allen (1997), but rather to oppose the market approach in the management of water supply services. Furthermore, this opposition was seemingly connected to, and supported by, anti-privatisation international movements. The position of groups within civil society is clarified in Van Rooy’s (1998) text book. In all but a few cases, Van Rooy depicts the position of civil society as being anti-hegemonic and not conducive to modern liberalism (in politics and economy), but serving instead as its antithesis.

The case study can perhaps also be coupled with the comments of Hearn (2001) regarding the engineering of consensus in African countries, including Ghana. As Hearn noted, opposition to hegemonic market interests was to be expected in Ghana. Thus the development paradigm has promulgated the importance of intensive processes of consultation and the management of consensus around policy-making in Africa, in order to create a sense of ownership. These insights in development policies have been echoed in the publications of the World Bank, USAID, and the Economist Intelligence Unit. Referring to Ghana, the latter concluded that ‘in the face of domestic opposition to these measures (the introduction of Value Added Tax and public sector reforms), a popular consensus in their favour will have to be forged in parliament and the country at large’ (cited in Hearn (2001: 46)).

Hearn (2001) explains the apparent paradox of managing consensus in the reform policies in Ghana that was also underlined by interviewees from NCAP-Water (Abloso, 2006; Manteaw, 2006). Consensus on reform policies is not intended as an end to develop the governance capacity of stakeholders but as a means to legitimise economic policies through liberal democracy (Amin, 2006). Civil society in Africa, Hearn (2001) argues, is influenced by donors not to challenge the status quo but to build social

consensus and to maintain it. Thus he concludes that autonomous social leaderships are needed more urgently than ever before in Africa. Leftwich (1993) argues along the same line. What Africa needs, Leftwich wrote, is a strong but legitimate political leadership committed to developmental policies which are not necessarily consensual.

Leftwich (1993) criticised the new development proposition that assumed that democracy is necessarily a prior or parallel condition of development. The Western experience sustains the view that democracy is an outcome of socio-economic development, and not a condition of it. Supported by this analysis, the new development paradigm, Leftwich argues, is likely to hinder development and can in fact lead to political turbulence and democratic reversal.

Conclusion

In the last two decades, civil society in governance processes has been strengthened as a new development paradigm. The general philosophy is that the inclusion of civil society groups seems to promote socio-economic development and foster democratic performance. It is assumed that the inclusion of civic groups promotes democratic patterns, contributes to 'good governance' and enhances aspects of pluralism, transparency and mechanisms of accountability through participatory governance processes that include state, civil and market actors. In this study, civil society is defined as 'non-state and non-market organisations that can, or have the potential to, champion democratic governance reforms and improve governance capacity'.

The case study of the reform process regarding the governance of water supply on the privatisation of water utilities in Accra raises reliable concerns regarding the validity of these assumptions. The reform process failed to promote democratic behaviour, and in fact advanced exactly the opposite. State actors failed to control and manage conflicts among different interest groups and civic groups in the governance process, to which Foley & Edwards (1996) raise considerable concerns about splitting civil associations into warring factions or having the process degenerating into one characterised by a variety of self-serving interests; the development of conflict management interventions are an important means of building governance capacity (Priscoli, 1998: 626). The reform process also did not lead to marked signs of better governance, nor was it inclusive enough to integrate the perceptions of all the stakeholders. Furthermore, the process excluded, in any real sense, representatives of the urban dwellers of Accra.

It is worthwhile underlining two important points. First, generally speaking, to reach the conclusion that the governance process in the study could be described as un-civic in practice is not to argue that the process was useless or to underestimate its worthiness. Throughout history, the participatory and collaborative approach to water management has engendered a high potential to build democratic spirit and governance capacity through dialogues that create a sense of community and stewardship (Priscoli, 1998: 630). Apparently, some, if not all, actors in the case study had the opportunity to experiment and learn lessons about the importance of objective discussion and constructive criticism regarding water policy alternatives, with the goal of being able to set up a legitimate monitoring framework, check performance and improve policy implementation (Nkrumah, 2006). The challenge, however, is to apply what has been learned.

Second, while the outcomes of the governance process are far from reaching desirable standards, what is more important is what can be learned from this process, in order to improve the democratic civil

culture and enhance governance capacity. Governance is a learning process and governance capacity is the ability of the actors to operate collectively. To extract lessons that can be utilised in the planning of future water governance processes and the designing of institutional arrangements to enhance service delivery is the main responsibility of actors from the public institutions. This issue, however, requires utter commitment and the openness to learn from experimentation, in order to improve water services delivery. Such commitment is unlikely to be achieved if water governance processes are externally driven and subjected to conditionality that may change according to international development agenda and ideologies.

Finally, it is worth noting that the civil pressure groups in this study were self-ideologically driven, and that their roles cannot be understood within ideal theoretical types of normative criteria. One has to recognise that their advocacy activities and political participation in the governance process of managing water supply services, albeit backed by external factors, was a desirable goal in itself, which was achieved.

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Received 28 June 2009; accepted in revised form 14 September 2009. Available online 29 May 2010