

## **Government Must Work with the CSOs**

*By: Abdoulaye Bathily*

*As a scholar and from your experience of Africa, how would you assess the chance of success for the CSSDCA initiative?*

For me the chances are good given my own understanding of the system as it is at work now. Firstly, there is no other time in history that we have had so many positive developments on the government's side and on the side of the civil society. There is a new climax today in Africa in favour of (a more purposeful) partnership between the civil society on one hand and governments on the other. Secondly, the Governments of Africa have changed tremendously over the years. The democratization process has affected, positively, the way governments work, the way they tackle issues and so on. And of course there is an equal development over what is general between countries, but overall I think there is a lot of positive signs in this direction.

*How do you think the CSSDCA process should be effectively pursued?*

First of all, they have to avoid duplication. This CSSDCA structure should not be another OAU. It should be a structure outside the OAU. It should be a forum which should be convened every two years, maximum three years. Those who should attend the conventions should include government representatives, not only ministers of Foreign Affairs but also ministers in charge of the economy ministers in charge of rural development, ministers of environment and the different issues of culture. Topics should be designed for each session of the forum. NGOs and other civil society organizations should also attend on the basis that they have a pan African outlook, that is, they are widely based, not only in their own countries but reasonably represented across the African continent. The forum should, quite significantly, also work in such a way that, it would not take the same governmental decisions as the OAU. In fact, it will have a kind of moral influence both on the OAU and on the partners of Africa. And I think it is important to have this forum as an independent entity from the OAU but which will be working in partnership with it. There shouldn't be any conflict between that forum and the OAU. And I would like to see a very light structure in the conduct of the affairs of the forum between two sections. It could be a secretariat or a directorate, one secretary and an executive secretary or one director and his deputy and with a local technical stop point, because there is no need today to have another apparatus. This will not be necessary. Drawing on the lessons from the weaknesses of OAU, it is appropriate to say that this organization should also be free to have a kind of independent mind, and a critical approach to African problems without being handicapped by governmental pressures or by state positions of any kind.

***If we have to create a forum that will operate a little bit outside the government structure as it is today how do you think whatever decision taken in this forum would be binding on African Governments?***

It will be like a general assembly of the United Nations. For instance, the General Assembly can take decisions but such decisions have more of a moral weight on the governments and on the people and whatever stakeholders there are. So I think it is important, it would not be for instance, building decisions as such. This will be difficult to get, but I think if that forum is large enough, a collection of different bodies, governments, civil society organizations, it would have a higher moral stature than existing ministerial councils of the OAU. Even the heads of state will take that into account because they must have this plural approach to the problems of Africa today. Because decisions taken by the governments are the results of hard negotiations compromise etc. and in the end, the crux of the matter is that a number of decisions cannot be implemented. But if governments know that there is this pressure from the forum they would know the state of African public opinion and it would also help some governments who want to move forward to take that opportunity to be able to move in this or that direction. I think it is important to know that while in the OAU every decision has to be a compromise and usually compromises take the lowest standard not the highest. But when we have this forum, it will move us forward and it will take decisions which will be in the direction of moving forward rather than just lagging behind.

***People often compare the CSSDCA with the Helsinki process. In fact the people who mooted the CSSDCA idea have acknowledged that they drew their inspiration from the Helsinki process and many people believe that if the Helsinki process could work why not the CSSDCA? Is the scenario or the socio-political environment that propelled the Helsinki process in Eastern Europe comparable with what exists in Africa today?***

I think so, I think in Africa today, there is a growing want for progress, for something new in terms of body of decisions. In terms of how best to face this globalisation and we all know that individually, no African country can face the challenges of globalisation. There is a need to come together, there is a need to strategies, to have a common strategy towards globalisation so as to face the challenges in terms of economic integration, in terms of political unity. Where as, in the other parts of the world, there is unity, if you look at Europe, look at North America, United States and Canada, South America, all these are economic blocs and at the same time political blocs. Politics at the service of trade, at the service of economic interest! It is only Africa which does not have this common force on the issues and therefore I think, the climate is ripe today for this kind of initiative and it is not only the intellectual community of Africa which is in favour of this, trade union movements, the Civil Society are also in favour of it and a good number of the governments of the new generation of people too, Therefore I think it is possible to achieve it in this climactic and conducive atmosphere.

***You have at various times canvassed for the harmonization of the protocols of ECOMOG and ANAD. In concrete terms, do you see us moving in this direction or do you see this happening in the near future?***

I have hope very much that we will move in this direction, I think the African governments or at least governments of West Africa should realize that there is no need for the continued separate existence of these two security protocols ANAD and ECOMOG, I am of the opinion that the two should be merged to give way to one single security protocol in West Africa which will also work hand in hand with the other security arrangements in other regions of Africa; to draw lessons from each others' experience. This is important because ANAD, as I have indicated in my earlier contributions, has come up as a security protocol of the Francophone countries basically under circumstances that are no longer in existence, the cold war has ended! Today African people should not be divided in terms of Anglophone or Francophone because the majority of the population do not speak French, Portuguese, or even English. Our interest is really to see what is beneficial to us and what is beneficial to us even in terms of finances is to have one single structure. I have also suggested that the new security protocol should involve the civil society in order to assist the government look into conflicts, to study the conflicts, the ways they have developed, and how to solve and manage them. And I think at this level also, we have to give thought to it. From what I see in West Africa today, again a new generation is coming into the management of public affairs in both Anglophone & Francophone countries. This makes it possible for a new kind of dynamics in terms of unity, in terms of integration. It is unavoidable. We have to do it.

***You discussed earlier the civil society involvement in governmental cooperations particularly the CSSDCA. How do you think that the civil society organizations can actually be mobilized to play a more active role in the business of government in Africa?***

I think they have already been mobilized at the national level first. Of course, the civil society has a lot of weaknesses. It is dispersed. It is young. Sometimes, it lacks transparency. There is a lot of rivalry among them, there is little or no coordination, they are donor driven etc. but these weaknesses should not lead us to say that civil society has not been playing important roles in the present process. When you look at the historical process as it unfolds in African countries today, for instance, the role of the press in the democratization process. We know that in Senegal, the independent press played a very important role, as did the human rights organizations defending the rights of the people against authoritarian rule. We also know about the role of academic organizations in developing independent research for the benefits of the people of Africa. Organisations like CODESRIA, Association of African Political Scientists, African Academy of Science and other civil society organizations, these are all important. Each in its own domain may have played an important role in this awakening, and I also mentioned that it is not the actual collapse of the Berlin wall that made civil societies to emerge. Long back, during the colonial days. When you look at how the Pan African Movement was launched it was launched by civil society organizations at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. For instance, the Aborigines Rights protection Society in the Gold Coast and their leader, Johnson, who was based in London was instrumental to the launching of the pan African Movement in 1900 and one of the basic demands of the movement was the demand for

the rights of the African civil society. In other words the African leadership which had been dispossessed by the colonial masters; dispossessed of their lands and other rights and this is an example, in the twenties. The National Council of British West Africa, which was also a civil society organization was made up of free traders and whoever was threatened by the world economic crises and the British House of traders. In the 1940s also the cooperate movement of African farmers led by Houphouet Boigny which subsequently led to the creation of the Rassemblement Democratique Africain in Cote d'Ivoire; the party which later became the most important political party in Francophone Africa. I don't need to mention voluntary organizations, people from the same villages, coming together forming associations. All these are trade union association all these are parts of civil society organisations, intellectuals, professionals during the colonial days, they were there throughout Africa. Infact, it is the one party system that has crushed them, stiffened them for almost three decades but they have continued to survive under the conditions of lawlessness, under the condition of the one party state, etc. And it was the culmination of this struggle, under the condition of clandestine underground movements that led to the movements in the 1990s, which was of course accelerated by external factors such as the fall of the Berlin wall. And the result of which was that the super powers were not anymore interested in holding to the African dictatorship, so the removal of the competition between East and West, was an accelerating factor but it was not a determinant factor for those so called discourse or appeal by Francois Mitterrand. Some people think that it was the determinant factor in democratization process in Francophone Africa, but this is not true! We have been fighting hand in hand for decades, the political parties, underground groups and civil society organizations! Conditions are better now because of the combinations of these external and internal factors. Even though civil society organizations are booming today, I do think they are still playing an important role and they will continue to play an important role. This is why in the CSSDCA process I think the states or the governments should not say: civil society organizations have weaknesses therefore they will not call them. They themselves have so many weak nesses! They are quarrelling among themselves! There are rivalries among the African governments! The OAU is a symbol of that! Does it then follow that we should destroy African states?! No! We have to correct the mistakes. We have to go beyond these shortcomings and improve on them, so that we will have a new arrangement for tomorrow, a new system of government which is being evolved even within the OAU itself. There is a certain level of self criticism today, that we did not have before. This is important. Some heads of state no longer mince words, they call a spade a spade and I think this is something good. It is healthy for us. At the same time, the civil society organizations have been criticizing themselves, they are taking into account the old errors (mistakes) and coming together into a partnership. Africa will rise again, Africa will become an active player in the world scene. And this forum I am taking about can be a place where the civil society will come together with government in a very informal, very independent manner. It will enable Africa to have a common strategy when it comes for instance to approaching the issues of WTO, cultural with the IMF and World Bank e.t.c. In future, I can see this forum being a kind of bridge between governments and the people of Africa.

***How do you think the donor driven tendencies of the Civil Society Organisations can be managed?***

It can be managed if, first of all, those civil society organizations make efforts to get funding by government and by African business Organisations. This is possible. They should not be shy of this. I don't see why government should not fund civil society organizations because for me, I see no conflict between government and civil society! Their roles are complementary! Civil society organizations should not feel that if they take government's money, they will lose their independence. In Europe, the civil society organizations will take money from their government. Why not take money from your own government? So long as you remain independent, I think in the long run it is possible to do that.

***What would you say has been the deficiencies of the OAU? Why has it not performed as you or those who conceived it in the first place would have expected?***

It is difficult for me to draw a balance sheet of OAU activities. But what I can say is that the OAU is handicapped in so many ways. For a long time it has not only been an inter-governmental organization but an intergovernmental organization but an intergovernmental organization rocked by so many contradictions; contradictions which stemmed not only from the interests of each government, but also from outside influences. I think this is important because Africa is unfortunately the only continent where external influences have for a long time been so important in terms of economy and in terms of politics. Thank God, these tendencies are now being shed because precisely, it's not only that a new generation is coming up, but that the direction of our countries and the world has also changed. So, a number of efforts are being made now to think autonomously and independently; to act autonomously and independently. These we can clearly see presently.

***What do you think is the implication of the recent democratic developments in Senegal for Africa?***

Well, we hope that of course we are honest, and we are humble enough to say that what we have done under the history of Senegal was the best we could do, under the condition. However, I think that some lessons can be drawn from our experience. One of the lessons that can be drawn from our experience is that, we have worked hard, having agreed that we needed a change. We have put up a strategy of unity instead of bickering among ourselves. The Socialist party of Abdul Diouf has been in power for forty years. Things have not improved. In fact, over the years, things had deteriorated. So the most important thing for us was not that Abdoulaye Bathily would become president, or this or that leader would become president at all cost, what was important was to achieve the change, and to make the political arena free for whoever would like to compete; to make institutional reforms, democratic reforms and to break away from the tradition of the de facto one party system which has been in place for over forty years. So, these things are important. But the second thing is that we have also deliberately decided that we want change by peaceful means through the ballot box and not by any other means. This was

also our option and all the political actors agreed on that. So, we all had to be creative on our own side to win, that is, to work in such a way that all strategies of rigging by any party will be of no effect. This is the Unity of the opposition that has made the change possible, otherwise it would not have been possible if each of us had tried to do it alone. The Socialist party would have used the division of the opposition to confuse the electorates to win as it has done for the last forty years.

***Now that we have achieved relative peace in the sub-region, what, in your view should be the future role of ECOMOG and what should the structure look like?***

For me, ECOMOG and ANAD should be merged together. We should have a structure which will deal with the management of conflicts at state and government levels and at the level of the civil society. For instance, academic institutions should play a role in researching on conflicts. Also, the military should be organized, and the civil society too in such ways as will forestall conflicts. But of course I think ECOMOG should be a truly regional organization. So far, unfortunately, for historical reasons, ECOMOG has been an organization financed by Nigeria, staffed by Nigeria, and run basically by Nigeria. Of course, this is too burdensome for Nigeria. No country can do that for long; and Nigeria also has pressing issues and challenges at home. So we should not allow one country to have the whole burden of such a structure. Secondly, for democratic reasons, for reasons of principle, we should not allow that to happen. Each country should contribute, so that we will have a level ground of play. Each should contribute according to its means so that everybody will be at ease. Every decision making process must also be looked at. We should not leave the matters to the military alone. The matter of ECOMOG should be discussed among political leaders and, responsible leaders, and personalities. I'm not saying that the military are not responsible but they have the tendency to look at the technical dimension of the issues alone, and conflicts are not just military issues, conflicts combine social, political, economic and cultural issues all in one. So you should not leave that to the military alone to solve. It is beyond their capacity! Therefore, I think it is what governments should take very seriously as they have done so far.

***In spite of tribal and linguistic differences, Africa still need to cooperate with one another. These differences are a problem and how they can be managed.***

It is real, and at the same time it is imaginary. It is real in the sense that it is true that we have inherited for instance different traditions of state craft or bureaucracy, of military technicality etc. from the days of colonial rule and this has had a bearing on our outlook. It is realistic; we should not say that this does not exist. Secondly, for a long time during the colonial days, the colonial powers tended to instill in the people, the ideas that one colonial system is better than the other or one more democratic than the other, whereas no colonial system is better than another. Their modalities and form may differ but they pursue the same goal. Fundamentally, they are the same. But ideologically, this has been put into our heads and of course, this created prejudices among us, Africans. On the other hand I say it is imaginary because when you look at it closely, when you work seriously with people from Francophone, and Anglophone countries you will see that we have more in common. The African heritage is more important in our behaviour, in our outlook than

the European. Fundamentally, our cultures are the same across borders and I feel we should make an effort to understand ourselves not through the spectacle of the European traditions, culture and heritage but through the spectacle of our own historical African heritage, and when we do that we understand each other better and we push away the prejudices. I have always said that the majority of African people are not Francophone or Anglophone. In Senegal for instance, over 60 per cent of the population do not speak French, so when we are speaking of Francophone, Francophones will be the elite which is just a tiny minority in the country and in Ghana, Nigeria, the situation is more or less the same. Therefore, we really don't have to cultivate our differences, we should rather cultivate what really unites us.