

Titel:

Civil society, political institutions, and the sustainable development goals

Abstract:

Civil society and political institutions matter if we are to achieve the development goals. Civil society can play a decisive role in achieving the goals, if the mobilization and training done in civil society is supplemented with building strong political institutions. Strong political institutions are the foundation of achieving them, civil society is the propeller of change. I will argue that the youths peaceful actions are the most effective weapon to make a real major impact, particularly, if they have learned to reach compromise, design and executive actions in a binding community, such as the scouts. However, to unleash the potential of scouting, scouts must critically rethink how they engage in society.

Personal titel:

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Today I will talk about civil society, political institutions, and the sustainable development goals. I will reflect on why civil society and political institutions matters if we are to achieve the development goals. I will argue that civil society can play a decisive role in achieving the goals, if the mobilization and training done in civil society is supplemented with building strong political institutions. Civil society is the propeller of change – strong institutions are the foundation of achieving them.

That is why I think number sixteen of the development goal is the most important: the one emphasizing peace, justice and strong institutions. It forms the basis of any other of the goals. Without a platform for conflict solution, compromise reach, or decision execution and sanctioning, there will be no better world. I have done field work in Mongolia and Indonesia and interviewed some 100 leaders from civil society organizations. Those interviews form the basis of my talk today. I will wrap up my talk by pointing directions of what the Scout movement can do to contribute to achieve the development goals.

Mongolia and Indonesia present a paradox: By the lights of conventional theories, they should not be democracies at all. Scholars have found that geographical proximity to other democracies confers advantages, but Mongolia's closest neighbors, China, Russia, and Kazakhstan, are all autocracies. Likewise, with the Indonesian archipelagos, which is surrounded by Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines – all highly non-democratic countries by western standards. Mongolia and Indonesia are not just overachievers in their respective neighborhoods; they do well globally compared to other countries at their level of development. Greater wealth has long been associated

with more open politics, and neither Mongolia nor Indonesia are rich countries. Their per capita income of about \$12,000 is less than half of Russia's and roughly equivalent to the figures for Jordan and Egypt. Among Third World democratizers with incomes per capita of \$15,000 or less, only Mongolia, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Benin have been rated as free political systems by the well-respected Freedom House in every annual survey for the past twenty-five years, and Indonesia for the past fifteen years.

We even know that getting to democracy is, relatively speaking, the easy part. Sustaining it is more difficult. From Russia to Thailand and from Mali to Turkey, initial breakthroughs to open politics have been aborted as security services or high-handed executives have scrapped civil liberties and returned to rigged elections. Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Turkey under Prime Minister and now President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan are two prominent examples of that. But in Mongolia and Indonesia, civil society has been a secret organizational weapon of an open political system that has punched above weight.

Let me first flesh out why civil society matters to make progress on achieving the sustainable development goals – that is making progress in political, economic and not least social everyday life. Civil society is “the realm of organizational life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules” (Larry Diamond). A rich civil society has long been seen as a boon to democracy. Alexis de Tocqueville observed in “Democracy in America” one hundred and sixty years ago a remarkable civic engagement: He attributed the robustness of the democracy he found in America in part to Americans' inclination to band together into self-constituted organizations for every conceivable cause. Contemporary Tocquevillians, such as Harvard-professor Robert Putnam, also see spirited non-state associations as democracy's ally.

Civil society was a training ground for the next generation of political leadership, it bound people together in what they believed in, it checked state power and pushed back against economic elites' abuse of power, it voiced concerns of powerless social groups, aided the state in delivering social services, and kept voters on the know and officialdom on notice in a zone of uncomfortably high levels of transparency of their otherwise hidden operations, thus sustaining an open political regime.

Not all scholars laud a strong civil society. Some scholars argue that extremist, fanatical, or destructive civil society organizations are as likely to emerge as benign ones. The skeptics often adduce Weimar Germany, which was rich in nonstate associations at the time of Hitler's rise. They see restive, well-organized masses as at least as great a threat to democracy as are high-handed elites. Civil society organizations became a platform for mobilization of the masses, for propaganda of non-democratic content and a training ground for contentions actions used to ultimately overthrow incumbent regimes. This development was spurred by a narrow outlet of strong and big civil society organizations and by few, strong political parties. There was no vigorousness of civil society, no real competition for higher office. Instead, the one-to-one relationship between available civil society organizations and political parties became a boon to non-democratic mobilization.

There are two take away points from this: First, we need a vigorous and vibrant civil society to see positive development for democracy, human rights and human development. Second, we need multiple strong institutions to channel this engagement into the political arena. A political party is one such institution. With weak institutions, the combination of economic development and mobilization of frustrated masses that do not benefit from progress can trigger a breakdown of democratic institutions and stall any political, economic or social progress, because their anger is not accommodated in the political system. To avoid this scenario, we need sturdy institutions, that set and sanction predictable rules of the game – rules for decisions making, for leadership selection,

for organizational crisis management – that can form the basis of compromise between social actors. There is no doubt that civil society can include bad apples, but empirical support for the case against a strong civil society is paltry. In the postwar world, democratization has been derailed far more frequently by governing elites—typically chief executives—than by unruly grassroots movements. There is a reason why Russia’s Vladimir Putin, Belarus’s Aleksandr Lukashenko, Kazakhstan’s Nursultan Nazarbaev, and other autocrats work so assiduously to thwart the emergence of potent civil society organizations: They know that societal lethargy and demobilization suit their interests. The last thing they want to face is an assertive, well-organized civil society.

Mongolia’s post-communist and Indonesians post-Suharto experience illustrates the trouble vigorous civil society organizations can cause for rulers who would prefer electorates that remain ignorant and manipulable, underprivileged groups that are resigned to their fate, and government operations that are safely shielded from pesky public prying. In fact, from the outset of transition Indonesia and Mongolia’s muscular civil society has differed starkly from Russia’s and Thailand’s anemic one, which helps explain why Indonesia and Mongolian democratization has been so much more successful. Indonesia and Mongolian civil society engages in all the democracy-enhancing functions that Tocqueville identified in early 19th-century America.

Indonesian civil society helps make the foundation of democratic rule sturdy by shoring up political institutions. Organizations first voice their queries in the streets, and push for reforms that enable an independent judicial system, electoral commission, anti-corruption commission and human rights commission. But one thing is to have the rules of the game written on paper, another thing is to give institutions a life of their own, where they become the only game-conveners in town. Civil society has contributed to do exactly that.

The electoral commission is the institutions that safeguard that elections are held free and fairly. During the 2014 presidential elections there were allegations of vote fraud, when results were reported from the 500.000 polling stations across the 19.000 islands to the national commission via commissioners at the district and the regional level. The national commission – with members recruited from civil society and academia – decided surprisingly to many elites to publish the electoral result at each of the polling stations, with a note on the door. An alliance of civil society organizations mobilized citizens to take pictures of the result and snap it to them. With a crowd-sourcing initiative, 700 volunteers typed in the result in a google kind of sheet. The result re-affirmed the official result announced by the national electoral commission. It also helped the commission identify irregularities that was then investigated with the help of yet other civil society organizations.

Another example is the Indonesian Institute for an Independent Judiciary that works with the supreme court. After Suhartos military dictatorship fell in 1998 during students' mass demonstrations, they helped to facilitate the process of selection new judges. They lobbied heavily to select judges from outside the military ranks. For the first time in the country's history, an academic was recruited as chief judge, and half of the remaining judges were drawn from outside the military ranks. These judges are much more like-minded with civil society actors, and has since invited civil society organizations to conduct major reforms in the judicial system, such as a chamber system, a supervision system and a quality system to ensure more coherence and precedence in rulings.

Mongolia is an example of civil society that push for the needs of voiceless people, of creating real social change. A strong case of a non-state organization that assists the state in policy making is the Mongolian National Federation of the Blind, assuming burdens that otherwise would fall to the state

but that state agencies have failed to shoulder effectively. It has been a real help to the state in advancing their welfare. The National Federation of the Blind started flexing its muscles during the middle of the 2000s, when it staged hunger strikes to call attention to the plight of the disabled. In Mongolia, as in many developing countries, the disabled have often been hidden away and had their access to employment and public services severely restricted. The hunger strikes raised public awareness, leading in 2012 to the creation of a Department for Development of Persons with Disabilities Protection within the Ministry of Population Development and Social Protection. The hunger strikes also prompted the government to invite representatives of the National Federation of the Blind to assist parliamentary committees with drawing up legislation. The organization used its access to develop a relationship with official bodies that enabled it both to press its cause in the corridors of power and to assist official bodies with making and implementing laws.

In 2013, the National Federation of the Blind took over drafting a new law and identified a champion of its cause among MPs, Oyun Sanjaasuren. Oyun headed the parliamentary working group that drew up the final draft, and she then carried the bill – drafted by the organization – into the legislature for consideration. In February 2016, parliament passed the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which aims to eliminate discrimination and to integrate people with disabilities into mainstream society.

The new law promotes understanding of disability among officials and the general public. It stipulates measures to improve the living and working conditions of the disabled, requiring enforcement of standards in buildings, infrastructure, and public transportation. It also defines the rights of people with disabilities to education, work, health, and social protection.

The National Federation of the Blind interacts with the state in a manner that has reshaped the way officialdom deals with the disabled. It furnishes a noteworthy case of how a civil society

organization can enhance the quality of legislation and public service provision and thereby help the state overcome information and resource constraints. Left to their own resources, government officials lacked the expertise and motivation needed to push for legislation that would really help the disabled. The organization stepped in to draw up the draft legislation that lawmakers subsequently used as the basis for what would become the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. By assuming such tasks itself, the National Federation of the Blind engages in burden-sharing with the state, relieving pressure on state agencies and bolstering the regime's legitimacy. Without the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind, the disabled and their families might feel excluded from the corridors of power as well as from workplaces. As it is, however, they have developed a stake in the stability of a political order under which they have made real gains.

Civil society organizations in Mongolia and Indonesia really punched above weight. They are champions of change.

But how then, can we, as scouts of Scandinavia propel a movement of creating a better world, that plays a key role in achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030? Well, we have learned from the examples of civil society in Mongolia and Indonesia that what works is a combination of shouting from the outside – checking state power, pushing back against backlash of development – and working from the inside constructively with civil servants and political elites.

If we scale up this finding, scholarship on civic actions at the global level has two key messages: First, we know from studies of all mass demonstrations around the world since 1900, that nonviolent campaigns are most successful in achieving radical changes. When at least 1000 people take it to the streets several times to demand notable changes, they are most likely to succeed, if they use peaceful means. Second, the most successful campaigns are initiated, led and championed by the youth. The youth plays a particularly important role in propelling change. The chances of

creating real changes are even larger, if they lead the way and engage by peaceful means. That does not mean, that you should spent the rest of the weekend planning strategies of mass demonstrations.

You should consider deeply, how you can use the unique mobilization potential hidden in the scout organization and turn it into a movement for change. A movement of youth that has the right set of skills, the right mindset and the ability to lead a change to achieve the sustainable development goals. The Scout movement is such an important ally of empowerment of the youth, of making children better prepared, of achieving the sustainable development goals.

You should be mostly concerned with how you can unleash the potential of the remiss and lazy youth that would rather sit behind the screen than go out. Moreover, if we are to achieve the development goals, we will never get there by mobilizing the already redeemed. We must do more than just having night games playing to be illegal immigrants. We must do more to reach out and embrace those that do not look like ourselves.

I have this strong memory of Lucie Myslíková, the sixteen years old Czech girl guide who took it to the streets in 2017 to tell neo-Nazis that they are wrong in their attitudes and acts. Lucie and well over 30 million other youth involved in world scouting learn two very important things in scouting: First, Lucie learns on a micro level how to create and sustain political institutions. She learns to deliberate, find her own opinion, make compromise and find a common solution. Second, Lucie learns on a micro level how to mobilize for action. She learns to design, plan, and executive the authoritative decision they arrived at. And she learns that she and her scout patrol only succeed if everyone contributes with the best they can. I believe that this value basis and this set of tools is what bestow Lucie with her political citizenship that is at the heart of a democratic political system.

Our movement is the best platform for propelling real change. We have a youth with the right skills and the right attitude to mobilize and enact. They can lead the way for a much broader change,

where youth on a much broader scale starts to act like scouts. They have what it takes. They know they might fail, and they are ready to stand up again.

Therefore, it is fully appropriate that the Danish Youth Council has proposed to the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs to include an eighteenth development goal that focuses on empowering and engaging youth to take action. But if we are to achieve the sustainable development goals, the scouts cannot do it alone. We must be able to mobilize youth on soccer fields, at the chess board, in the reading room, and deep in the forest – make them act like scouts – on the methods and values of the scout movement.

Let me point four directions of possible actions:

First, we can use our strong method to show directions of action that can contribute to create a better world one small step at a time in our local communities. We must make sure that our scouts actually take specific action to achieve the development goals in their everyday life. When scouts in Denmark have (point one) made at least three specific actions to create a better world, (point two) got to know the content of the development goals and their interrelationship, and (point three) have reflected on and realized what they themselves can do to activate others to take actions, they get the SDG badge.

Second, we must make sure everyone has the opportunity to become a scout: (point one) scouting must be affordable to all, (point two) scouting must be present in local communities, and (point three) that our presence with badge-covered uniforms, knives and rare handshake invites people unlike ourselves to become part of our strong community.

Third, we must turn our method, values and habitats into an open source. That means open the doors of our clubhouses, and put our method at the disposal of development in local communities,

such as kindergartens, schools, sport clubs and the church. Only then do we embrace and act on the eighth element of the Scout Method: “community involvement”

Fourth, we must mobilize those who live on the promise: once--a--scout--always--a--scout. The Scout alumnis. There are 500 million people around the world, who have promised to do something to help other people everyday. If they make just one significant act every year until 2030 to empower another person to take action, we have engaged the entire human population in acting on achieving the sustainable development goals in due time to fulfill them.

Let me wrap up by giving an example of how the scouts in Tunisia show the way for us: Since the revolution in 2011, the Tunisian Scouts – Les Scouts Tunisiens – have played a significant role as a civil society adding the state in delivering on the promises of democracy.

During the first national elections to the parliament, the Scouts mobilized observers for 400 poll stations, contributing critically to improve the credibility of the elections. The scout movement has also been a catalyst for social and economic development in Tunisia during a critical time of public frustrations with high youth unemployment during the economic crisis.

In collaboration with the YMCA-scouts in Denmark the Gilwell course was given a new thematic focus an entrepreneurship. Today, more than 800 people have been trained in taking leadership in their own life’s and to create their own living. At least 25 new companies are now well-established with several employees: Hassan started a business in his parent’s garage having friends driving him around for jobs. Today he has a consolidated firm that installs alarm systems, electronic locker systems and light regulation. Hend Yahya started a kindergarten that now has 16 children, and three staffs to take care of them. Wissem Tayahi started a communications bureau that now have 5 staff members, and 120 freelances all in newly renovated office buildings. And Dhoubia Ben Hassine wrote down words of wisdom from the entrepreneur course in a notebook that she refers to as “my

first step to win”. She now has a shop selling orthotists appliances. They all have in common, that they had been unemployed for years, and started their business during the training at the Gilwell-ish course.

This sounds like a modest outcome. But the impact of the Gilwell-inspired entrepreneurship program has in fact been so significant, that the Tunisian Minister of Employment applauded the Scouts for being much more efficient in getting people on the right track than his own staff – he simply asked them to enhance their efforts. Mehdi Ben Khelil, who has been deeply involved in the Danish Tunisian partnership is now a member of the World Scout committee, together with Pia Melin Mortensen, from the Danish partner. That makes me confident that scouts can propel a change at a global level.