

The IMF and Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have proliferated during the past quarter century, as have the issues they address. Whether national or transnational, the way CSOs do business has been profoundly affected by globalization. CSOs increasingly employ extensive networks to pursue their activities and to try to influence policies on a broad range of issues. Many CSOs focus on economic matters at the core of the work of the IMF and other international organizations. The IMF thus seeks to engage with CSOs through information sharing, dialogue, and consultation at both global and national levels.

What is civil society?

The IMF uses the term "civil society organization" to refer to the wide range of citizens' associations that exists in virtually all member countries to provide benefits, services or political influence to specific groups within society. CSOs include: business forums, faith-based associations, labour unions, local community groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), philanthropic foundations, and think tanks. Usually excluded are not only the branches of government (government agencies and legislators) but also individual businesses, political parties, and the media.

What is the basis for CSO-IMF engagement?

Over the years, the IMF has become more transparent and has sought to become more accountable, not only to the governments that own it, but also to the broader public. This has led to a more active involvement with CSOs, as well as legislatures. When the IMF began to engage with CSOs in the 1980s, it was usually at a global level, in response to advocacy by groups concerned with economic and social justice. Such engagement remains central in IMF-CSO relations.

As the IMF's policies have evolved—for instance its increased focus on promoting poverty reduction in low-income countries through a participatory approach, and its emphasis on transparency and good governance—outreach and communication have become an integral part of IMF country work as well. The Fund has become committed to:

Being transparent about its work. Dialogue with CSOs is an important channel for communication.

Fostering a culture of listening and learning. CSOs can highlight important issues, offer information to supplement official data, and provide insights that may differ from perspectives in official circles.

Strengthening country ownership of policies, which is essential to successful stabilization and reform. Constructive dialogue with CSOs can help to build mutual understanding and to increase support for reform.

As a reflection of the importance of dialogue with CSOs to the IMF's work, a Guide for Staff Relations with Civil Society Organizations was distributed to IMF staff



• Prof. Pat Utomi (Guest Speaker) with Mrs. Priye Joseph, member, Restoration Group at the National Village Square Meeting "Let's Talk Nigeria," organised by the Restoration Group (RG) and held at Muson Centre, Lagos.
Photo: SUNNY NWABUIKE

by the Managing Director in 2003, and published on the IMF website. The note encourages IMF staff to continue to increase outreach, and gives practical advice on issues arising from interaction with CSOs.

How does the IMF engage with CSOs? The issues that feature in CSO-IMF engagement evolve, but some are always at the forefront: IMF policy advice, especially to low-income countries; the social and environmental implications of IMF advice; debt relief; program conditionality; trade policy; governance and transparency; and the voice and representation of developing countries in the IMF and World Bank. At the global level, the IMF's engagement with CSOs takes a variety of forms, including: Contacts between IMF management and CSO representatives, in both small meetings and larger forums; Meetings, seminars and consultations with IMF staff and Executive Directors-at Fund headquarters and worldwide on specific policy or country issues; Invitations extended by the IMF to contribute to reviews of its policies, by attending seminars or by providing comments to papers posted on its external website; A series of Civil Society Dialogues organized jointly with the World Bank, run in parallel with the Annual and Spring Meetings of the IMF and World Bank, covering a wide range of topics, including some organized by CSOs themselves.

The Independent Evaluation Office also

maintains regular contacts with CSOs, who have been among the most active providers of feedback, comments and suggestions to its evaluations.

In individual countries, engagement with CSOs takes several forms. The IMF Managing Director regularly meets with CSOs when he visits a country. Staff surveillance missions make a point of meeting with CSOs—for example, labour organizations and think tanks. In the context of program design and negotiations in low-income countries, missions often meet CSOs that are engaged in the consultative process of preparing poverty reduction strategies.

Community leaders thumb down Lagos water privatization process

The National Civil Society Network on Water and Sanitation in Nigeria (NEWSAN) with the support of WaterAid recently, organized a one day Roundtable to review civil society engagement in the Lagos State Water Privatization process. At the end of the one day deliberations organized with the support of WaterAid Nigeria, the over 30 community leaders drawn from all the Local Governments in Lagos state expressed total ignorance about the going process by the Lagos State Government to privatize the water supply system through the introduction of Public-Private Partnerships.

We have not been informed of this development, chorused almost all the community leaders at the Consultative roundtable, organized by NEWSAN to brief them on development in the water sector. This assertion is in sharp contrast with official positions of both

The Community Leaders in a communiqué at the end of the meeting made five key pronouncements:

1. The Lagos Water privatization programme being financed with a \$200m World Bank loan, should be reviewed to make it inclusive, people centred, transparent, participatory, and achieve the goal of delivering water to Nigerians at an affordable price

2. Water must remain a public trust rather than a commodity to be traded by the private sector, to guarantee its access and affordability to the poor who used it most.

3. The implementation of the Lagos Water Privatization process as presently designed should be suspended until adequate public consultation is carried out on this project.

4. Specifically, there is a need to review the Lagos state water Law to accommodate the concerns of the civil society and general public.

Atamu Social Club launches N100m fund, honours prominent Urhobos



• Obaro M. Osah, President, Atamu Social Club

How can a people meet the challenges of modern development in a fast growing, dynamic but repressive world where the majority always have the way while the minority grudging have their say. For the Urhobo people who make the sixth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, their lot have been that of playing the second fiddle as the cancer of individualism grows bigger displaying the hitherto communal life long cherished and endeared by the people.

It is against this background that the president of Atamu Social Club, a forum for young Urhobo professionals resident in Lagos, Mr Obaro Osah, started his "let Begin Again" welcome address at the launching of the club's N100 million Educational Endowment Fund by saying that the history of the Urhobo nation as one replete with understandable bias for communalism as against individualism is very clear and indisputable.

BRIEF

British Council Launch Management Express in Lagos

A new British Council product Management Express (MEX) designed for young professionals is scheduled to be launched in Lagos on Tuesday 5 September 2006 at 11 a.m. at the Agip Hall of MUSON Centre, Onikan, Lagos.

The launch will feature a management seminar on the topic "Achieving Career Satisfaction: Moving Up, Moving Over or Moving Out", which will be presented by Mr Akinsola Akinfemiwa, MD/CEO of Skye Bank PLC.

Management Express consists of a set of products developed by the British Council for young professionals to assist them in the development of their careers. They are:

1. A core collection of management materials selected by key UK management sector professionals, which is updated annually and available for use through British Council centres.

2. Management Forum is a network of young professionals who meet regularly to discuss current management topics and to network with peers and experts. 3. Management Newsletter made available to British Council centre members and provides in-depth articles about current topics in the management field.

4. Fast Track series is a self-access continuous professional development series aimed at early career managers or recent graduates intending to pursue a career in management, resulting in a British Council professional development certificate.

MEX reinforces British Council's existing activities in the area of continuous professional development for individuals and was developed for young professionals to assist them in the development of their career.

Benefits of Management Express:
Promotes career advancement through learning from resources related to professional courses (such as MBA, ACCA) to learning about on-the-job aspects.

The Management Forum involves high profile speakers from country and abroad speaking on the issues and concerns that motivate them, opportunities to meet hundreds of other professionals from different industries and organisations, and from next year the chance to join an online community linking professionals wherever they may be over the internet.

achievement of the educational aspirations of her people.

Said Osah: "In this regard, the indelible legendary imprints of the late Chiefs Mukoro Mowo, Jeretin Mariere and others are living testimonies of the passion of the Urhobo nation when education is the topic. I am personally persuaded that these Urhobo leaders of distinction saw far ahead and well on time, the challenges that stood before the Urhobo nation if she neglected the path of educating her children."

"In Atamu, we are guided and goaded by the philosophy that is not enough to lament the fear darkness imposes; it is rather pertinent to light a lamp. Nothing is created unless it is created, nothing happens unless it is made to happen. Our congregating here today, I am convinced, is words spoken in action that we are willingly ready to make things happen, to create things yet uncreated and above all to light a lamp to expel our darkness."

The chairman of the event, Chief Mike Omeru had earlier said that the place of the sixth largest ethnic group, their motive seemed to convey, could at least be much better, if certain planning pegs are gotten right and actually placed where they could mobilize growth like never experienced in the Urhobo nation.

Challenging all present to make pledges to the Urhobo nation, Chief Omeru said the paradox that we have seen, greatness yet greatness is far away, has its root in the disconnect between our good past of communalism and the present-day individualism that appears to have veiled the torch that shows the way to light.

According to Omeru, "if the truth must be said, and it should be said, the Urhobo nation possesses all it takes to be an outstandingly glorious entity. Be that as it may, Urhobo is still far, absolutely miles away from giving meaning to our potentials."

As part of its 15th anniversary celebration,