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Planning Moment #2: Understanding the Big Picture

Mapping the Political Landscape

One of the important first steps in planning is mapping the political landscape. Each context has its own characteristics that create changing political opportunities and challenges. Mapping involves identifying how a political system is organized and how different forces, people, organizations, and ideas shape the political space. When we refer to the political landscape, we usually mean the national level,

but the global and local levels are also important.

There are many ways to do a contextual analysis. Some of the underlying questions in this analysis are:

- Who has what kind of power?
- Who has more power?
- Who has less power?
- How is this imbalance maintained?



Analyzing the Larger Context:
Many forces, ideas, institutions, and people interact to shape the political context.

- How can the imbalance be changed?

To look at these questions, we offer three exercises:

- *Structural Analysis* describes how the economic and social structure is organized. It defines who are the haves, who are the have-nots and the common beliefs about why things are this way. This analysis helps us to understand power dynamics.
- *Naming the Powerful* identifies the decisionmakers and influential people in the economic, political, cultural, and ideological spheres.
- *Historical Analysis of the Political Landscape* looks at the relative power, autonomy and strength of the state, market, and civil society and how these have changed over time.

This analysis will provide a better understanding of the larger context in which you are operating. You will be able to deepen this analysis once you have chosen your advocacy issue and set goals and objectives (see Chapter 9). Chapter 12 will help you refine your analysis at that stage of planning.

Many activists use an implicit structural analysis in their work and planning. Discussing the analysis in an explicit way clarifies differences as well as commonalities. For people who have less experience with politics and analysis, examining the political landscape in this way can be enlightening.

Facilitator's Note

Contextual analysis can be hard work and is best conducted in small groups. The analysis focuses mainly on a particular country, and only people who are familiar with that country's context can do it. In a regional workshop, people can be divided by country, even if some people work alone.

Sometimes people may not know the answers to the questions posed in the exercises. You may want to invite a resource person who is knowledgeable about politics, social movements, and history to provide additional input. You can also give participants copies of interesting articles, papers to read, and/or a list of references where they can get additional information.

Purpose

To analyze how the social, political and economic structures in a country are organized in order to better understand the distribution of resources and the dynamics of power.

Process

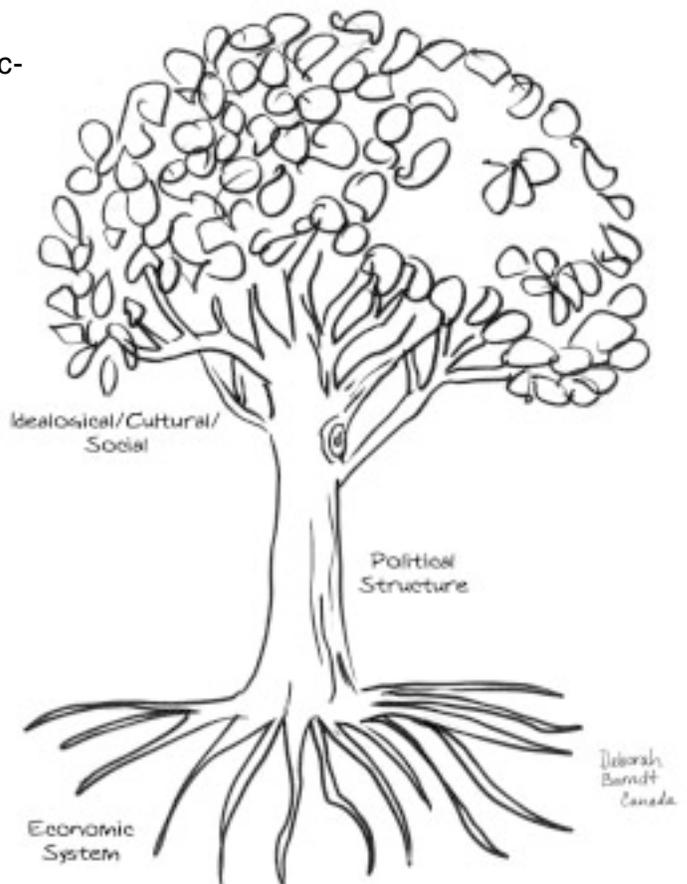
(Time: 1½ hours)

- Using the “social tree” in the illustration below, describe the meaning of each of the elements.
 - The *roots* are the base of the social structure—its **economic** system. Economics has to do with who owns what, the primary sources of income, economic productivity, and growth, how people survive, their conditions of life, and how economic resources are distributed.
 - The *trunk* is the **social and political** structure that makes the system run smoothly. It regulates the system through laws, policies and institutions.
 - The *leaves* are the **ideological, cultural, and social** elements of society. This includes beliefs and institutions such as churches, schools, and the media that shape values, ideas, and norms.
- Divide participants into three groups. Ask each group to analyze a different element of the social system. Give them 20–25 minutes to complete the task and then ask them to share their work in plenary.
- Discuss each group’s analysis. Then do a collective analysis of how the different aspects inter-relate.

Questions for Group Discussion

Economic System

- What are the main industries (e.g., agricultural, mining, service, manufacture, trade)?
- What are the main goods produced and exported (e.g., timber, shoes)?
- What are the main imports?
- What services are produced (e.g., tourism, banking)?
- What are the dominant corporations? Who owns them?
- Identify between five and eight main sources of formal employment (e.g., tourism, mining, agriculture, electronics, service).



- What percentage of workers are employed in the informal economy?
- Where are women employed? Where are men employed? Where are young people employed? Do employment and income levels differ on the basis of ethnicity and gender?
- What role do foreign corporations play in the economy? What role do multilateral organizations like the IMF and the World Bank play?

Political Structure

- Who/which institutions make the laws? How are laws enforced?
- Who/which institutions make the key budget decisions?
- What kinds of people are elected and appointed to government? Do they represent diverse economic, gender, racial, and ethnic interests?
- Do certain kinds of people benefit more from political processes than others? Who?

Ideological, Cultural and Social Elements

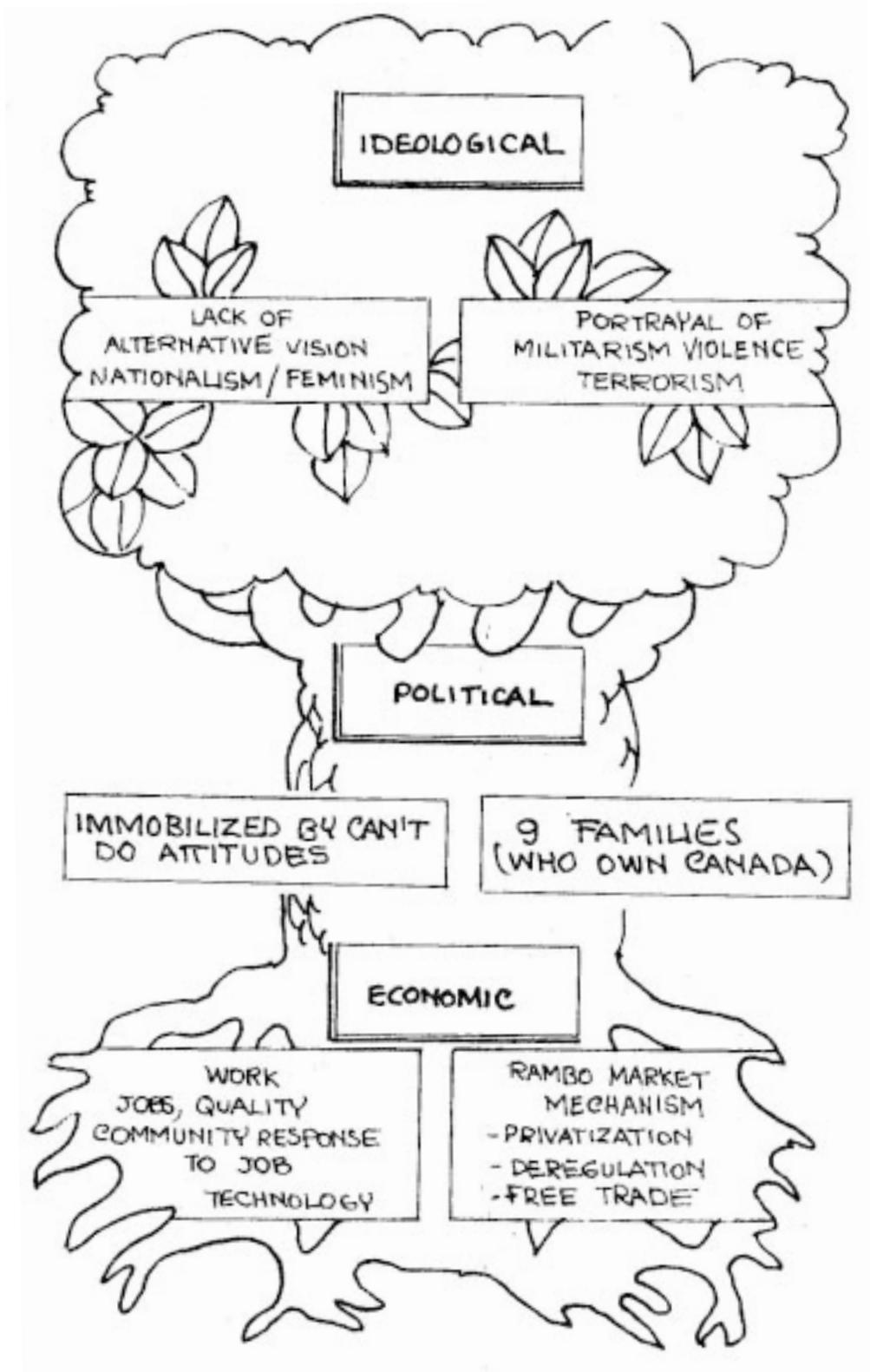
- What are the main expressed values of government (e.g., freedom, unity)? Are these different from the values reflected in how government actually operates?
- How does society treat women? How does it treat ethnic groups?
- What are the main family-related values? How is “the family” defined? What roles are given to men, women, boys, girls?
- What values and lifestyle does the media promote?
- Which institutions shape the values and ideas besides government structures?
- Does society tolerate difference from the “norm” in terms of social identity and political perspectives? Does society tolerate nonconformist behavior and thinking?
- What are some of the ideas and values where there is significant conflict or dissent? agreement?

Overall Analysis

- How does the economic system influence the legal and political system?
- How does the legal and political system influence the economic system?
- How does the value system shape the legal and political system and vice versa?
- How does ideology reinforce social and economic hierarchies?

Example

The following is a structural analysis from a group in Canada. The group analyzed their social structure in relation to the issue of free trade. Because their analysis focused on one issue, they were able to probe more deeply.



Adapted from *Naming the Moment: Political Analysis for Action* by Deborah Barndt, The Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, Toronto, 1989.

Purpose

To identify the key economic and political decisionmakers in your community or context and define their key interests. The analysis produced through this exercise can inform your selection of issues and advocacy solutions. It can also help to identify common interests and potential conflict.

Process

To ensure participation and to divide up this large task, small group work is best. If your group does not know the answers to some of the questions, you can suggest research to find out more. Gathering this kind of information can be very empowering for citizens and is an important part of *doing* advocacy. Alternatively, analysts sympathetic to your interests can help provide the information. But if a trained researcher assists, make sure that the researcher does not *do the analysis for* the participants. Inquiry and discovery are vital parts of citizen education. (Time: 1½–2 hours)

- Using the results from the *Structural Analysis*, make a chart that lists the main *economic* groups (or players). Identify who the decisionmakers are in each group. Put names in the “Who?” column. Then define what appear to be their main interests and note these in the last column. The following questions may help focus the analysis.

- What issues have they been involved in recently? How do they affect the community or constituency with whom you work?
- What interests do these players promote?
- Are the dominant interests nationally-based or international?

	Who? (Leaders)	Interests
Banks		
Major Industry		
Chamber of Commerce		
Trade Associations		
Major Property Owners		
International Agencies/ Donors		
Other Opinion Leaders		

- Identify the *political* groups, decisionmakers (elected, appointed, or otherwise) in formal government, and define their critical interests. The following questions may facilitate the analysis:
 - Who are the national legislators in the area (MPs, Congressional Representatives, Senators, etc.)? List names.
 - Who are the regional, state, or district officials in your area?
 - What form of government exists at the local level? Does it operate under a single official? Who has the most authority and budgetary control?
 - Who are the chief officials at the level at which you are operating (national, local, regional)?
 - In what major issues and policies have they been involved?

- How do these issues and policies affect your constituencies?
 - What local communities and groups (including civil society) are politically important?
 - In what issues have they been involved recently? How do these affect your constituencies?
3. Identify the *media* groups, decisionmakers (owners, editors, and journalists) and how they make decisions. The following questions may facilitate your analysis:
- Who owns the main newspapers and television and radio networks?
 - How much control do they exert over the content of the media?
 - Whose interests do they promote? Whose interests are invisible?
 - How does this affect your constituencies and issues?
4. Finally, repeat this process for religious and civil/social service leaders and use these questions if desirable.
- Who are the main religious leaders? On what political and social issues do they speak out?
 - Whose interests do they represent? How does this affect the constituencies with whom you work?
 - Who are the main civic leaders?
 - Do the dominant NGOs and civic groups promote a specific agenda?
 - How do these groups affect your constituencies?

Synthesis

Once you have completed this exercise, synthesize with an overall analysis that answers the more general questions about the political context and moment of your advocacy, such as:

- Where are the most serious changes needed?
- Where are the most sensitive spots?
- Where are there big opportunities?

Adapted from *Naming the Moment: Political Analysis for Action* by Deborah Barndt, The Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, Toronto, 1989.

The State, the Market, Civil Society and the Family

The next form of contextual analysis involves historical reflection about how the government, the market, civil society and the family have changed over a period of years. Analysis of the impact of war, economic upheaval, natural disasters and other important events tells us more about the opportunities and challenges for citizen organizing and advocacy today. This analysis can also be used more simply to examine forces that make up the current advocacy context.

As with most political terminology, there is some disagreement about what the following concepts mean. But most people agree that each refers to an arena that has written and unwritten rules that define the relationships and processes within that arena.

The **State** consists of the people, procedures and institutions of government. The state's authority and duties, and people's access to public decisionmaking, resources and opportunities are defined and regulated through laws and policies. Policies and laws are enforced and implemented through government ministries, the police, courts, schools, local government and ministries, and other institutions. Different states exert various levels of control on civil society and on the market, and regulate relationships in the family through family law. An authoritarian or centralized state can handicap a healthy civil society with too many restrictions. In contrast, a small state may not be able to ensure the basic welfare of the population. Different parts of the state do not always work together. Internal conflicts between institutions and individuals can create advocacy opportunities or constraints.

Debates on the Ideal Role of the State

Some people believe that the state should be smaller. They believe that the market and civil society should handle more economic and social matters without government interference. Others believe that the state plays an important role in regulating the excesses of the market and protecting basic rights. They feel that civil society is not able on its own to meet the social and welfare needs of all members of the population. We discuss a related debate on the extent of the state's responsibility for people's welfare under citizenship in Part One.

Civil Society refers to the arena of social interaction between the family, market, and the state¹ where the level of community cooperation, voluntary association, and networks of public communication determine its potential. In a vibrant civil society people work together to solve problems and have a high degree of trust in one another and in public institutions. In a strong civil society there are many different types of groups, communication is open, and there is a high level of public involvement. A repressive state controls social relationships and organizations and often breaks down the values that enable people to work together. In many countries emerging from years of authoritarian rule, there are few community groups. In this situation, it can be difficult to motivate people to work together for long-term collective solutions. Civil society is not homogenous, nor harmonious. As in the other arenas, there are patterns of privilege, exclusion, conflict, and ideological difference.

The **Market** refers to the arena where the exchange of goods and services occurs and where business, industry, trade, and consumption happen. Most political scientists believe that the state should set the basic rules of the

market so as to protect the rights and responsibilities of the buyer, the seller, the worker, the investor, and others. They also assert that the state must not hinder competition. The market can have both a positive and negative effect on civil society. On the one hand, liberalization can encourage entrepreneurship and growth that may benefit many people. On the other hand, competition for scarce goods and services can undermine the cooperative spirit that is key to a strong civil society.² A completely unregulated market can contribute to extreme inequality which destroys civic values, such as fairness and reciprocity, and may generate social violence. The distribution of economic resources is a key factor in determining the opportunities and conflicts in the market and society at large.

The **Family** is defined by a set of relationships created by birth, lineage, marriage, common law partnership, or other social commitments. These relationships usually extend beyond a single household to other households and groups. The family can be an important source of individual well-being and stability. It can also be the source of abuse of basic rights and freedoms. The family promotes social attitudes and values that influence the nature of the state, civil society, and the market. It is a

central force in shaping relationships between men and women. Although the family is considered a private realm, there are usually laws to regulate some aspects of family relationships.

The degree of overlap between the sectors tells us something about political opportunities. For example, when civil society is tightly controlled by the state, independent citizen action is difficult, or even impossible. When civil society and the state are very far apart, government may be completely unresponsive to civil society. This can happen, for example, when a state is so corrupt that it is incapable of ensuring basic justice and welfare.

Relative Power of Different Sectors

The relative power of the state, the market, civil society, and the family vary from country to country. "Advocacy is located at the intersection of the sectors where civil society (NGOs, community-based organizations, and others) acts from the private domain for the public good. Advocacy efforts challenge the precept that the state and the market represent the dominant public domain. Citizens also legitimately claim the 'public space' when they give voice to values and goals important to a society. Demands for land tenure rights expressed by village women's associations, for example, are an expression of this reality. . . . Advocacy is also important when unrestrained freedoms of private market interests jeopardize the common good. Consumer unions are often the vanguard of protecting individuals against unscrupulous business practices. . . ."

Valerie Miller and Jane Covey. *The Advocacy Sourcebook: Frameworks for Planning, Action and Reflection*, Institute for Development Research, Boston, 1997, p. 10

7 Exercise: Historical Analysis of the Political Landscape²

Purpose

To apply the concepts of the state, the market, civil society, and the family to an historical analysis that examines the relative power and autonomy of each of these sectors over a 5–20 year period. The analysis reveals how the government, market, and civil society have changed over time and how these changes affect opportunities for advocacy.

Process

(Time: 2½ hours)

1. Review the concepts of the state, the market, civil society, and the family. One way to do this is to give four small groups one concept each to define. After 10 minutes, they can share their definitions in plenary. The concepts can then be refined with input from everyone. If the concept is completely unfamiliar, you can use the definitions on page #. You can give each participant a copy of these definitions or your own definitions. It is important that all participants have the same understanding of the concepts.
2. Trace the past 5–30 years in your country. Identify two or three milestones when an internal or international incident brought noticeable change in the political, economic, and social lives of people. Such moments include wars, natural disasters, changes in government, or severe economic crisis.
3. At each milestone along the timeline, assess the relative power of the state, the market, civil society, and the family. Did the state control the market? Or did the market have greater influence over political and social life? Was civil society well organized and relatively harmonious? And what was its relative power compared to government and to the market? Make a circle for each of the four sectors with the size of the circle showing its relative power and influence. Show the relative autonomy or connectedness of each of the sectors through the degree of overlap among the circles.
4. Once you have completed drawing the circles at different points on the timeline, analyze all of the diagrams. Discuss how historical changes create opportunities and constraints for advocacy today. Adapt the following discussion questions to suit your situation. If your country has recently undergone a major change, you may have specific issues to probe.

Other Concepts and Categories

Some political scientists define an additional category called *political society* to cover political parties. Some groups want a category of *culture* to be included in the exercise to represent the overall values and social practices of the society. Other groups have drawn a larger circle around all the other categories to represent the power and influence of the *international realm*.

The original framework in *The Advocacy Sourcebook: Frameworks for Planning, Action and Reflection (ibid.)* had three circles representing the state, civil society, and the market. We have added a fourth circle to represent the family. Women's rights advocates in Africa said this circle was important because of the family's role in shaping women's status and choices in many countries of the world.

Discussion

- Does one of the sectors predominate in shaping people’s lives, choices, and opportunities? For example, the family may be the predominant influence on the lives of girls and women, while the market may be the most important for peasant farmers.
- If the market is the largest circle, what kinds of challenges and opportunities does that pose for the state, civil society, and the family?
- If the state is the largest circle, what kinds of challenges and opportunities does that pose for the market, civil society, and the family?
- How does the family resist the influence of the other sectors? How does it reinforce the power and influence of the other sectors? How has this changed over time?
- How have historical changes restricted or expanded opportunities to promote people’s participation in public life?
- What contradictions among the state, the market, civil society, and the family can open up or reduce opportunities for organizing?

Examples

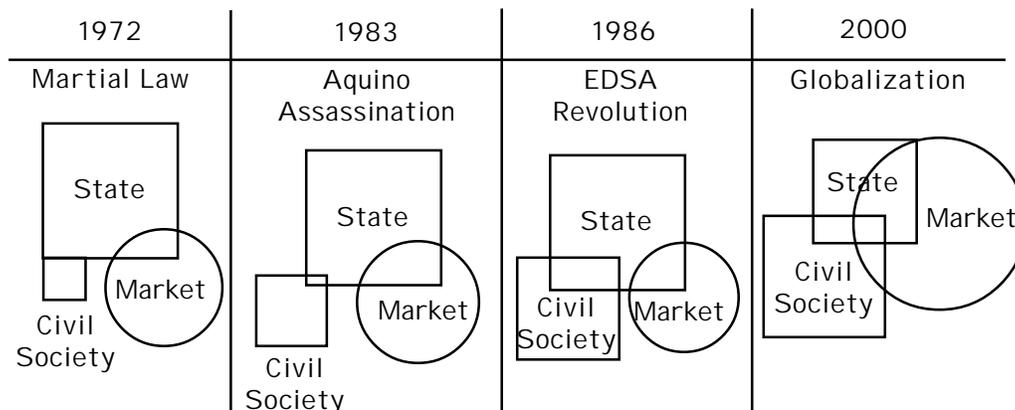
The following timeline examples are from activists in the Asia Pacific.³

The Philippines: Raissa Jajurie, SALIGAN Alternative Legal Assistance Center

“In 1972, martial law was declared by the government. We had a very strong state and market. We even had crony capitalism within the state. Civil society was relatively small because of the repressive policies of the government. In 1983, an opposition leader was assassinated and this provided the stimulus for civil society to become bigger and to engage in more active mobilization and struggle.”

“By 1986, we had a broad-based revolution which ousted the President from the Philippines. Now we have a more active (bigger) civil society that has gained enough influence to reach the formal power in the state.

“At present [1997], we have new liberal economic policies that have allowed the market to grow more influential than the state. Civil society also increased its influence with the emergence of more and more, and stronger organizations. In the face of the economic dislocation caused by neoliberalism, civil society will have to rise up to the challenge of how to influence economic policy and actors. The family remains a constant influence on the beliefs and values of people, as well as the church. The family and the church are very interconnected as a source of conservative social influence.”

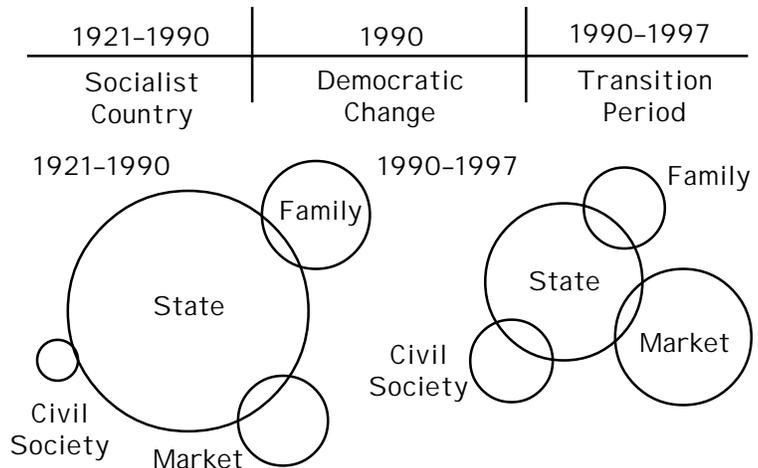


Mongolia: Itgel Lonjid from the Liberal Women's Brainpool

"From 1921–1990, Mongolia was a socialist country with a centrally planned economy. In 1990, there was a democratic change that influenced everyone. From 1990 up to now, we still see the transition period to a market-oriented society. This transition generated many political changes. We have formed a multiparty parliament and have had a presidential election. Also, civil society is gaining strength. I can say that civil society was very weak in the past because, although there were some so-called NGOs, they were all initiated by the state. We can't say that there were really NGOs."

"NGOs and other associations began to emerge after the democratic change in 1990, and at the same time, freedom of speech began to stimulate people's minds. The democratic change demanded new skills and knowledge from people, and so they are having difficulty adjusting to the new environment."

"Before, the state dominated and there was no market economy nor civil society. But the family had the second most important role next to the state, because everyone respects and obeys the elder members of the family. Prior to democratic change in 1990, family rules were so strict that even young people obeyed them. Since 1990, the role of the family is changing. Young people stopped respecting their elders and crimes within the family increased. On the other hand, I can say that civil society is growing. Now there are around 770 NGOs in Mongolia. Lastly, the role of the state decreased and the market increased."



Analysis of the Circles

If the state is a much larger circle, the opportunities for political change and political space are usually limited. A dominant state often means a controlling, repressive state. In such cases, advocacy may be risky, or focus exclusively on local, community issues.

If the circle representing civil society is relatively small, why is this so? Does this mean that people seldom work together on community problems? Does it mean that people have little faith in the state and in each other? A small civil society circle can mean that advocacy will require intensive political consciousness raising and organization-building activities. Bringing people together around basic needs is often the first step toward building political skills and interest in collective action.

In many countries, the sizes of the circles are changing as the market grows and the state shrinks. If the market grows to be larger than the state, will it be difficult to protect people's interests and environmental, labor, and social rights? Will more availability of goods produce negative kinds of consumerism? On one hand, there may be increased and beneficial opportunities for economic productivity with a growing market. At the same time, in some countries, economic growth has been accompanied by growing poverty and an increased concentration of wealth. Poverty consumes people's time and energy as they struggle for survival. This can make it difficult to motivate people to take collective action. Further, a shrinking state has less capacity to enforce laws that protect people and the environment.

A relatively large family circle can have negative implications. It can imply that traditional and cultural beliefs restrict women's ability to become involved in public life. In contrast, the family may be a stabilizing force in some countries where conflict and change have disrupted social harmony.

Ways to Understand Transitions in the Political Landscape

Which issues and strategies you choose depend on the possibilities for different types of political action in your country, and the risks attached to each. The chart below describes some characteristics of states before and during a transition. Academics describe these three phases as different “regime” types. The characteristics help highlight possibilities and risks. For example, in countries without effective legislative bodies, lobbying lawmakers is not very helpful. Where the government is repressive, some groups may choose confrontational strategies and enlist international support for some protection. Other groups may choose quiet, behind-the-scenes negotiation using personal contacts.



Pre-transition: Protest and Repression

Looking for Advocacy Opportunities at Different Transition Moments

While every country is different, they often share similar problems and possibilities during different stages. Of course, transitions do not all move from a negative situation to a positive one, and even if they do, there are many conflicts and digressions along the way. The characteristics below assume negative to positive change. Some groups have found this analysis useful as a way to assess their context, but most tailor the characteristics to fit their circumstances.

In the **pre-transition** or closed regime type:

- political organizing and education opportunities are often found at the community level on local issues, such as water, housing, and healthcare;
- often the strongest associations are user groups, church groups, and clubs. These offer good opportunities for education and organizing;
- direct challenges to government are risky;
- law reform initiatives are possible unless they deal with basic rights or resource distribution;
- organizing around the provision of basic services can be a useful way to engage communities, laying the groundwork for more significant change in the future;
- there may be less risk for policy initiatives in the international arena.

“Important decisions affecting citizens’ daily lives are becoming more and more globalized. These decisions range from trade and labor to food policies. To tackle globalization, civil society actors are linking across borders to work together on common concerns and demands. Often where governments have failed to work together, civil society associations have put aside differences to work for common agendas. The emerging global civil society is both promising and challenging.”

Commonwealth Foundation and Civicus.
The Way Forward: Citizens, Civil Society and Governance in the New Millennium, 1999.



Transition: Peaceful Demonstrations of Citizens' Demands



Consolidating Democratic Process: Using and Participating in Law Reform

In the **transition** regime type:

- reform creates opportunities to build organization;
- broad public education programs can raise awareness about the political system and need for change;
- civic education can help people understand and work with government;
- some governments engage in reform because of donor pressure;
- issues and tactics must be chosen carefully so as to maintain the political space necessary for future organizing;
- activist groups may feel reluctant to shift from a confrontational posture to engage with government;
- organizing around basic needs can promote people-government interaction.

As **democratic process** are institutionalized:

- legal reform and lobbying initiatives provide opportunities to build public involvement;
- there is increased space for political groups, such as human rights committees and lawyers associations who often focus on political change in cities;
- expanding and securing rights and democratic practices for excluded populations requires promotion of their organizations, leadership, and critical consciousness, and may provoke backlash;
- including women, workers, poor people, and other marginalized groups remains a constant challenge. Even in the oldest democracies, equity and equality can be controversial when they challenge established power dynamics.

In-depth Mapping of Civil Society

Civil society is both the engine and focus for advocacy. Understanding the civil society is important for planning. The regime type gives an idea of the potential for civil society, but advocacy opportunities also depend on the number and types of associations in civil society as well as their values. Often when a closed political system opens, initially there is conflict and deep divisions within civil society.

CIVICUS, a worldwide network promoting the effectiveness of civil society, has developed a Civil Society Index called the *CIVICUS Diamond Tool*. The index looks at four different dimensions of civil society: structure, values, space, and impact⁴.

Structure

- How large is civil society in terms of institutions and organizations?

- What are its component parts and what resources does it have?

Values

- What are the values, norms, and attitudes of civil society?
- How inclusive are they?
- What are the areas of consensus and dissent?

Space

- What is the legal, political, and sociocultural space in which civil society operates?
- What laws, policies, and social norms affect its development?

Impact

- What is the contribution of civil society to solving specific social, economic, and political problems?
- What impact does civil society have on the public policy making process?

Characteristics of Regime Types		
PRE-TRANSITION (less open)	TRANSITION (opening up)	MORE OPEN SYSTEM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - centralized power and sometimes personalistic rule - one party system - low tolerance for opposition - very little public dissent - very little respect for human rights - minimal freedom of association - control of the media - public appears to be apolitical 	<p>Stage 1: Political Liberalization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consideration of legal reform - relaxation of restrictions on individual and group rights and freedoms - controlled permission to citizens and opposition to engage in the public arena <p>State 2: Democratic Transition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased opportunities for political competition - increased public dissent and engagement with the state - more active opposition - negotiation between government and citizens and opposition - elections - re-writing the constitution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - relatively fair, free elections - increased public debate - increased tolerance for dissent - increased conflict among different social groups - creation of institutions for public participation - strengthening of the rule of law, the role of legislatures and independence of the judiciary - growing public expectation of government - growing citizen awareness of their rights and the political process

Mapping and analyzing civil society with this tool can help groups better identify potential allies and understand the context in which they are operating.

Sometimes the kind of overall analysis described in this chapter can paralyze people because so many political factors seem to work against change. What appears insignificant at one moment may lead to unexpected allies and sources of power at another, which can then create broader opportunities. Taking risks to expand political space is one of advocacy's important functions. Careful analysis helps your organizations to avoid pitfalls and choose the best options.

NOTES

- ¹ Bratton, Michael, *Civil Society and Political Transition in Africa*, Remarks presented at a Faculty NGO Seminar at Boston University, April 1994.
- ² See Birdsall, Nancy, *Why Inequality Matters: Some Economic Issues*; Carnegie Endowment for Peace, Discussion Paper #5, August 2001.
- ³ From the Advocacy Training of Trainers cosponsored by TAF's Global Women in Politics program and by the Center for Legislative Development (CLD) in Manila, 1997.