

SPECIAL SECTION



**BLINDED by PESSIMISM
or SEEING POSSIBILITIES**

Despite challenges, civic groups can help strengthen democracy

I have often been uplifted by individuals and organizations that take it upon themselves to ensure that disadvantaged people and communities lead a dignified life, because in reality, if they chose not to assist anyone, nobody would scream at them. But you know what? They do the most amazing things and work tirelessly and touch those lives. They become the proverbial salt that seasons food to make it tasty and fulfilling.

The Mott Foundation plays an important role in making a difference in disadvantaged people's lives. Our world is pockmarked with the disease of gross inequality and inequity. Some have a great deal more than they need and others have a great deal less than they desperately need. And that, as all of you dear friends know, is a certain recipe for instability, for resentment by the many alienated in all kinds of ways toward those who are so conspicuously well off. Such a situation is dire and ultimately unsustainable. That is not how God intended it to be.

It saddens me that in South Africa the culture of philanthropy remains underdeveloped, not because individuals and organizations do not have the resources to assist, but maybe because they choose to focus their attention elsewhere. Philanthropy is the opposite of selfishness; it has a high purpose — it is a love of others to make their circumstances better.

Much of the philanthropy stemmed from the European Christian missionary enterprise, and it had the same ambivalence that the Christian missionary undertaking had. In many instances, the Christian missionary effort was part and parcel of the imperial expansionism of the West. Many of us would



**Archbishop Emeritus
Desmond Tutu**

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu is co-founder (with his wife, Leah Tutu) of the trust that bears his name. The winner of the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize was appointed by Nelson Mandela to head South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

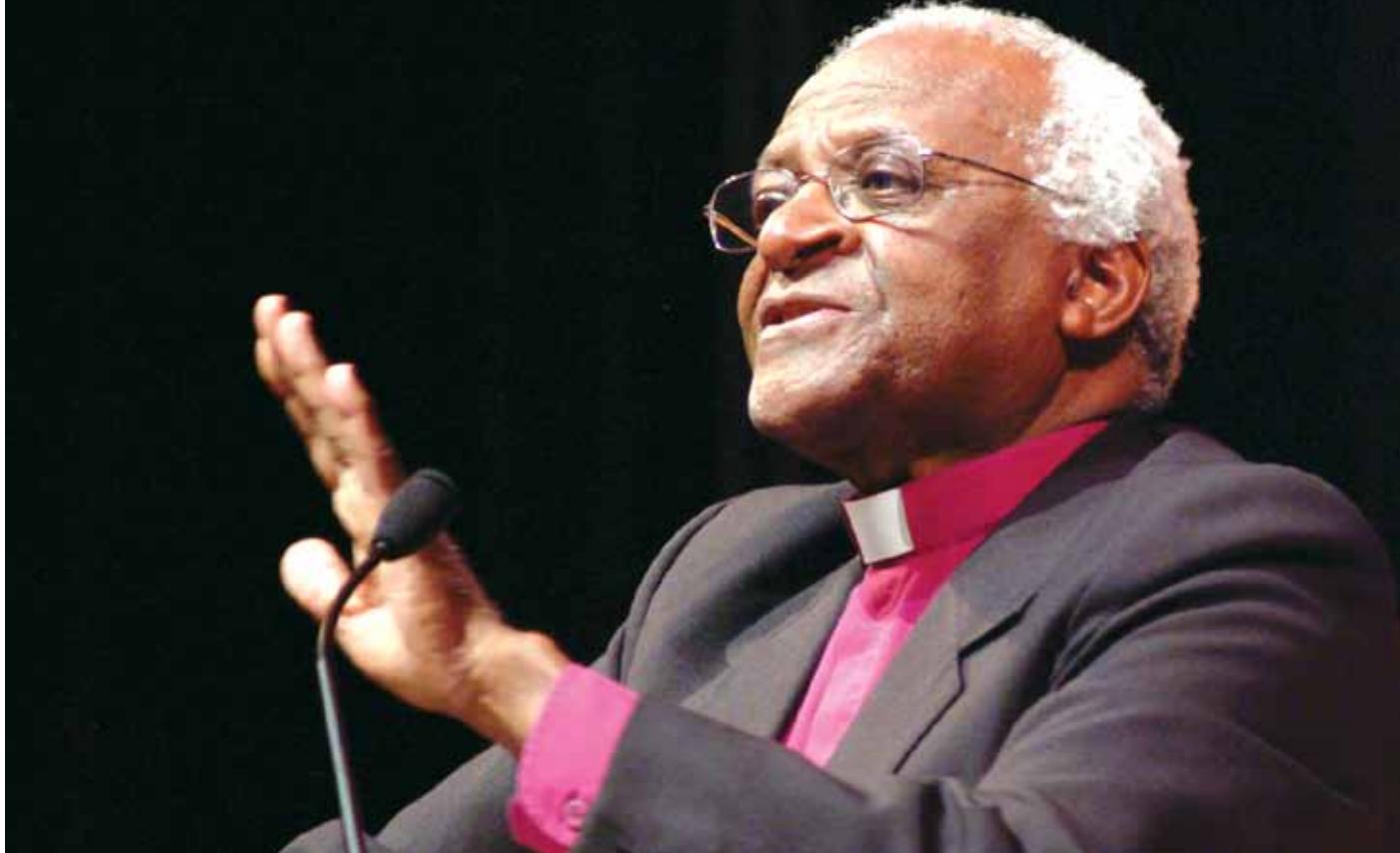
Organization: Desmond Tutu Peace Trust

Location: Cape Town

About the organization: The trust, founded in 1998, administers and oversees the development of the Desmond Tutu Peace Centre, which works to build and leverage the legacy of Archbishop Tutu to enable peace in the world.

Mott grants through 2009: Four grants totaling \$232,100 since 2000.

Web site: www.tutu.org



Philanthropy is the opposite of selfishness; it has a high purpose — it is a love of others to make their circumstances better.

not have been educated at all had it not been for the outstanding schools and colleges that the missionaries established. Many of us would not have been alive today had it not been for the hospitals and clinics that they provided.

Responsible philanthropy is to help change situations of injustice, deprivation, squalor into their glorious counterparts. It is heartening to know that despite the challenges that civic organizations face, they continue to strengthen democracy in South Africa as political parties are preoccupied with their own agendas. Civil society engagement with the state provides opportunities for greater and ongoing influence by the public in decisionmaking between elections. Non-governmental organizations and opposition parties in parliament have the ability and power to keep government controlled and publicly accountable. They remain a force for unity, civility and positive change in society.

Healing old wounds requires facing the past

During the fight for freedom in South Africa, the nonprofit sector was a key component of the liberation struggle. It provided a vehicle for civil society to play its part and for the international community to express its support. Along with arts and culture, a strong, vibrant, independent and well-

resourced civil society is fundamental to creating a just society based on human rights for all.

When we became a democracy in 1994, there were two giant questions facing the nation. One was, "How do we meet the basic needs of the nation, such as the need for water, electricity, jobs, shelter, health care and education?" The second question was, "How do we deal with what we have done to each other?"

Our new democracy has had notable achievements in areas such as electrification and provision of clean water, but there is still a great deal to be done, and there is an increasing impatience among the poorest of the poor. We face big challenges in relation to unemployment, criminality and HIV-AIDS.

At the Institute for Healing of Memories, our contribution has been, and continues to be, in the area of providing safe and sacred spaces where people can tell their stories and find willing listeners — those who have acknowledged the past and are beginning to let go of that which is poisonous while going forward with that which is life-giving.

In our institute we like to say that "all people have a story to tell" and "every story needs a listener." We say this to those who come to our workshops: "We promise you one step toward healing." For some, it might be a very tiny step. But at almost every workshop I have ever

Father Michael Lapsley



Father Michael Lapsley is director of the Institute for Healing of Memories. Previously, he was the chaplain at the Trauma Center for Victims of Violence and Torture in Cape Town. He is a survivor of an apartheid-era letter bomb that cost him both his hands and one eye.

Organization: Institute for Healing of Memories

Location: Cape Town

About the organization: The institute was created in 1998 to contribute to the healing of individuals and communities affected by the political conflict and violence during apartheid and to share South Africa's experience of dealing with its past with the broader international community.

Mott grants through 2009: Three grants totaling \$210,000 since 2004.

Web site: www.healingofmemories.co.za



attended, there are usually one or two people for whom that step is a life-changing one.

I remember one particular woman who came to our workshop. I noticed her on the first night of the workshop because of the ugliness on her face. She told a story of how her son had been killed 15 years previously. As she spoke, it was as if the terrible event had happened only a few moments previously. Her life had stood still for 15 years. She believed she owed it to her son to keep hatred alive.

I asked her what kind of life she thought her son would have wished for her. Well, in the process of the workshop, this mother began to let her son go. She let him rest without forgetting him.

On the last day of the workshop, I could have walked straight past her, because the lines in her face had literally changed. She looked radiant.

She was no longer simply the relative of a victim. She had begun a journey toward being a victor. Or — as my Rwandese friend Ester, herself a widow of the genocide, told me — she had traveled the journey from being “dead-alive” to becoming “alive-alive.”

Through my work at the institute, I have learned that these types of transformations are possible. But it often takes non-governmental organizations to provide the independent space for it to happen. It is a myth that time alone will heal old wounds. To heal old wounds requires facing the past, not burying and forgetting it.

Universally, human rights groups know that if we simply tell the facts but we don’t speak about the pain and the poison connected to the memories, we cannot begin to lay a foundation of truth on which real reconciliation will happen.

NGOs must be eyes, ears and voices of the people

The World Cup took South Africa by storm! We had all our stadiums absolutely full with supporters of the various teams. We had all of our fan fests* full, and our *vuvuzelas* took our breath away, as millions of them were sold and blown. Except for a very few incidents of violent intolerance and unsavory behavior, South Africans once again rose with the spirit of *ubuntu* (local philosophy that says “a person is a person through other persons”), providing warm hospitality to all.

Over time, I have heard many success stories of people who previously were working as temporary employees in the hotel and catering industry and are now in permanent employment. I have heard of people who have been able to come out of their financial difficulties simply because of the boom resulting from the influx of people and spending during the World Cup. I have heard of people who have been able to save up to buy tools and implements they would have had to save for months to buy. And there are the thousands who have learned to live with each other as South Africans, appreciating our differences and commonality.

* The fan fests were enclosed areas outdoors, where those who couldn't get into the stadiums watched the matches on large screens.

The World Cup has helped to dispel past prejudices and fears, with crowds now willing to travel to Soweto to watch rugby matches and patronize local shops.

Within weeks of the World Cup, the Durban July Handicap thoroughbred horse



Ela Gandhi

Ela Gandhi is chairperson/editor of the community newspaper, *Satyagraha*. She serves on the South Africa Legal Aid Board and was a member of Parliament from 1994 to 2003. She is also the granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi.

Organization: Satyagraha — In Pursuit of Truth

Location: Durban

About the organization: Satyagraha, founded in 1999, responds to South Africa's many divisions — in housing, employment and education — and works to counteract the powerful influences of the past that still extend into the present.

Mott grants through 2009: Four grants totaling \$251,216 since 2002.

Web site: www.satyagraha.org.za

races took place. And while there was plenty of designer clothing on display at the glitzy event, it jolted me into the reality that at the end of the day there would be those who would be overjoyed with the winnings, and there would be those who would be weeping at the losses. There would be those who would see a boost in their bank balances, while there would be those with no money for the rest of the month. No doubt the former are few and the latter are many.

Is this, then, also the story of the World Cup? While the infrastructure has been

created for public convenience, and while the cash flow within the country has increased, has there been a fair distribution of the wealth and development?

As with the July Handicap, the community and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have to pick up the pieces and struggle with the task of building on the gains that were made during the Cup and of helping those who remain on the edge. NGOs must continue to be the eyes, ears and voices of the people, while empowering



citizens to articulate their needs and tap the many community resources in order to deal with the poverty and unemployment they face.

Now the challenge for civil society and the NGO community is to come to the aid of the vulnerable with renewed vigor.

There is no time to look back or to be prophets of doom. We need to use the World Cup event as a springboard to build a strong, vibrant and warm South African nation.



Can civil society sustain gains from the games?

South Africa has discovered that soccer involves more than kicking a ball around to relieve the tedium of existence. It is played by children in every rural village, township street and squatter camp, often with soccer balls made from old rags and omnipresent pieces of plastic, tied tighter with string. It also was played for three memorable weeks, featuring the world's top soccer teams, in 10 state-of-the-art stadiums in the country.

Because the 2010 World Cup cost billions of Rand, critics say it was a waste of money that could have been better spent on housing and education. But at the same time, the event infused a "we feeling" into the nation — getting the nation to its feet, with flags waving, *vuvuzelas* blowing, and the national anthem being sung with pride and enthusiasm.

And when Bafana Bafana, the national team, bowed out of the competition at the end of the opening round, we adopted BaGhana BaGhana, the only African team to make it into the quarterfinals, before they were beaten. Whoever was playing in a given game, my two hitherto-uninitiated toddler grandsons, each in a Bafana Bafana shirt, ran about the house shouting, "Go, Bafana Bafana, go." Soccer Friday, in turn, saw young and old, black and white, rich and poor, business people and workers, women and men, wearing Bafana Bafana shirts.

Sociologists tell us that the feel-good social-tissue that builds a nation is as important as the more tangible, material aspects of nation-building. In a complex, almost contradictory sense, the emotional and psychological enthusiasm associated with the soccer extravaganza already has had a tangible or

material spinoff, resulting in the development of the national infrastructure. This ranges from the development of state-of-the-art airports, roads and ports to new bus and rail transport systems — all vitally important to the long-term development of the economy. There also were no bombs or terrorist attacks as had been predicted in some overseas tabloids. Our cities were clean and the cops were polite. We proved that we can control crime without putting on the jackboots.

With the final whistle having blown on the World Cup and the lights switched off at Soccer City in Soweto, it's back to reality. The majority of South Africans still don't have houses, decent schools, clinics, hospitals, electricity or running water. Xenophobia, crime, corruption, HIV-AIDS and joblessness continue to ravage the poor. It's time to apply the lesson learned from the World Cup to service delivery and poverty relief.

Social and economic change comes when those who hold the power, and the purse strings to facilitate change, are persuaded that it is in their interest to do so.

Civil society has a particular responsibility in this regard. It needs to expose the inequalities of society and to share in the protests of the poor. But more is needed. Civil society needs to empower the poor to correct what is within their power to correct and to be at the cutting edge of development, in association with the poor, government, business, faith communities and worker organizations.

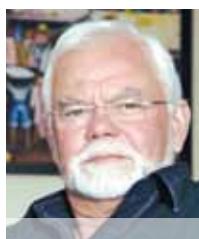
The World Cup ultimately needs to be assessed on what it has left behind. Civil society, in turn, needs to be measured by what it is doing to ensure that the momentum of the cup is sustained — reminding us that "we can do it" if we put our minds to it.

And here's the wake-up call for civil society: As we insist that the nation not be allowed to drift back into its old ways, civil society needs to find new, creative and effective ways of going about its work.

It's time for change. Good non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations need to become great. They need to become formative, cutting-edge agents of change.

We nostalgically remember the optimism that prevailed in the country at the time of the first democratic elections in 1994 that united the country behind the leadership of Nelson Mandela. The symbolism of Mandela wearing a Springbok shirt (despised by many black South Africans) at a stadium packed with largely white spectators, when South Africa won the 1995 Rugby World Cup, with a team that had only one black player, is a distant memory.

The question is whether we will, this time around, seize the moment offered to us by the beautiful game to reach for gold in rising above the fissures of racism and classism.



Charles Villa-Vicencio

Charles Villa-Vicencio, a current board member of the institute he created, previously served as the national research director for South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Organization: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation

Location: Cape Town

About the organization: The institute was founded in 2000, during the country's transition from apartheid to democracy. Today, it helps build fair, democratic and inclusive societies on the continent of Africa through carefully selected engagements and interventions.

Mott grants through 2009: Four grants totaling \$486,365 since 2002.

Web site: www.ijr.org.za

Will South Africa's leaders rise to the nation's challenges?

When talking about South Africa after 1994, the difficulty is not only how to keep a neat story line, but also how to keep the balance between an optimistic narrative and a pessimistic one.

At the level of politics, South Africa is doing well. But at the social and economic levels, South Africa is not doing well. It is deeply divided and, as a result, the character of civil society is itself splintered. It is split by the benefits of toeing the line and the potential anguish of being on the wrong side of the system.

Society is divided by race, urban-rural disparities, knowledge levels, political party identities, as well as ethnic identities. The extent to which the administration of President Jacob Zuma will improve the situation is not very clear. The often-celebrated “unity in diversity” is superficial because the divisions are deep, damaging the social solidarity required for social cohesion.

The democratization of the political space after 1994 — as demonstrated in peaceful elections, peaceful protests and even the peaceful “political coup” that saw the

transition from former President Mbeki to Mr. Zuma — has not extended to social relations and to the economic spaces. Hence the levels of violent crimes and other ills associated with an impoverished social fabric continue with minimal reductions since 1994.



Kwandiwe Kondlo

Kwandiwe Kondlo is professor and chair of African Studies at the University of the Free State. Previously, he was executive director of the governance program at the Human Sciences Research Council.

Organization: Human Sciences Research Council

Location: Pretoria

About the organization: The council, founded in 1968, is South Africa's statutory research agency. Its staff conducts independent research about all aspects of human and social development.

Mott grants through 2009: Five grants totaling \$402,864 since 2002.

Web site: www.hsrc.ac.za

South Africa requires leadership that can rise to the challenge of moral example in politics, economics and society. This is the challenge and opportunity of civil society in South Africa today.

Economic growth during the Mbeki era occurred without effecting a turnaround on the plight of the majority. The material conditions of black people, especially those in the former homelands, continue to deteriorate. An ordinary black person is still broken to the very depth of his substance. Therefore, if one applies the notion of civil society to "ordinary citizens" within and outside organized public spaces, then South Africa has a crisis of civil society.

A healthy civil society is one where ordinary communities are able to do things on their own, rather than depend on handouts from the state; where citizens can hold public officials to account because they are informed not only of their rights but also of the obligations of the state and how these should be discharged. This is the kind of civil society South Africa needs — but does not have. The ruling party's conduct and divisive capacity for patronage have a major impact on civil society.

South Africa requires leadership that can rise to the challenge of moral example in politics, economics and society. This is the challenge



and opportunity of civil society in South Africa today.

Of course there are promising initiatives by civil society to address the moral fiber of South African society. A number of community-building organizations have emerged to give support to the country's moral regeneration movement. Government itself has started serious initiatives to deal with issues of social cohesions and nation-building.

It remains to be seen how these initiatives will lead to an improved social fabric and socioeconomic inclusivity.



It's possible to be a realist *and* an optimist

It's been 16 years since our Rainbow Nation first burst forth joyously into democracy. That first rosy flush of peace, love, understanding and wide-eyed optimism has faded slowly into a morass of cynicism and finger-pointing.

Sadly, we're no longer the loving parents of a young democracy, ever so proud of everything our baby does. We're now the cranky old folks who yell at neighborhood kids to get off the lawn. Not without reason, you understand. With the media parading a constant stream of

stories about corruption, hate speech, crime, infighting, backbiting, bribery, striking, protests and embarrassing sports defeats, it's hard not to slump into discontented pessimism.

This is why non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and public service organizations are ever more important. It's why we need to play the role of mentor and cajoler, and be a mirror to reflect the need for change. We need to promote growth, spread positivity, celebrate diversity, educate, inform and strengthen our society.

The pessimists are wrong. Look all around and the evidence is there. I've seen hundreds of "born frees"—kids born into democracy—come to the Cape Town Holocaust Centre, positive and enthusiastic about learning and ardent social activists with a developing culture of volunteerism. I've seen educators who truly care about developing young minds and fighting intolerance and injustice in their communities. I've seen religious leaders who preach hope and tolerance and who emphasize commonalities—people of all hues and cultures coming together to learn about the past, with their eyes fixed firmly on a better future—no, a better today!

NGOs need to be the ultimate optimists—the ones bridging cultural and societal chasms, celebrating rich diversity and the value of every life. They need to remind us all that democracy takes work, dedication and—ultimately—perseverance. But it is worth it.

NGOs remind us all that it's possible to be a realist and an optimist. It's not an easy fight, trying to make yourself heard over the clamor of the bitter, the cynical and the afraid. But I think as long as there are those who are willing to take on the challenge, this one day will be the Rainbow Nation of our dreams.

We need to promote growth, spread positivity, celebrate diversity, educate, inform and strengthen our society.



Amanda Cooper

Amanda Cooper is the exhibition coordinator at the Cape Town Holocaust Centre. She has a graduate degree in social policy and management and previously worked as a health sciences educator at the University of Cape Town.

Organization: South African Holocaust Foundation

Location: Cape Town

About the organization: Founded in August 1999, this was the first Holocaust center in Africa. It houses a permanent exhibit on the Nazi Holocaust and hosts educational programs for schools, teachers and adult groups.

Mott grants through 2009: One grant for \$50,000 since 2008.

Web site: www.ctholocaust.co.za

NGOs must safeguard their sovereignty, independence

In South Africa, few people would disagree that, historically, the roles and strategic interventions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been informed, defined and shaped by the various social problems the country has faced.

During the apartheid era, with service provision not reaching the majority of the population, many NGOs played a critical role in filling the gap.

In present-day, democratic South Africa, there remains an inability on the part of government and business to address the variety of social problems facing the country. So we continue to see NGOs playing a vital role in addressing poverty, HIV-AIDS, loss or absence of income, drug abuse, violence against women and children, and a myriad of other problems.

Through my work at the Community Development Resource Association, I have witnessed the contributions NGOs have made to address various social problems. For example, NGOs have had tremendous impact in two areas: early childhood development and HIV-AIDS.

At a time when young children were not given priority, NGOs were actively involved in developing learning materials, creating income-generating projects to support and sustain informal child development centers, and training people for child development careers.

With the growing threat of the HIV-AIDS pandemic, I saw NGOs lead the charge in training volunteers and creating home-based care programs for people living with, and affected by, HIV-AIDS.

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is an example of a civil society organization that has campaigned relentlessly for government policy to reflect socioeconomic and health rights.



Nomvula Dlamini

Nomvula Dlamini has worked as an organization development practitioner at the Community Development Resource Association since 1995. She also spent 10 years as a high school teacher.

Organization: Community Development Resource Association

Location: Cape Town

About the organization: The association, founded in 1987, provides and supports development practices among people, organizations and institutions that work for social transformation benefiting the poor and marginalized.

Mott grants through 2009: 11 grants totaling \$1.076 million since 1991

Web site: www.cdra.org.za



TAC is an example of how social movements give hope to marginalized, desperate people and motivate them to keep striving for a better life.

Such organizations enable changes that lead to an increase in human security, freedom and self-determination. But the real power

of organizations like TAC is they help bring to the surface people's voices, enabling them to appreciate their power to decide their own present and future. They alert society to issues such as social justice, human rights and environmental sustainability.

Notwithstanding the vast contributions they make, we continue to question the roles and identity of NGOs in a changed context. When looking at the processes through which NGOs engage communities, as well as their ability to build creative new practices, there is no doubt there is a need to breathe new life into this important resource.

The sector needs to safeguard its sovereignty and independence. This calls for renewed activism — energy, boldness, courage and imagination to seek change in the broader society. We need to build leadership that is able to work in a context that has become more complex and uncertain — leadership that is open to learning, and capable of working with communities, government and business without compromising its values and ideals.

This requires that NGOs find a creative balance between being confrontational and cooperative in their relationship with government and business while ensuring they do not become detached from the communities in whose name they pursue certain goals.

It is only by connecting our efforts — through critical engagement and dialogue with those in government and business — that we will genuinely become a force for positive change and ensure that the deeper intentions of the NGO sector are reflected in South African society.



Civil society can be a powerful force for change

Driven by a commitment to justice and dignity, the Black Sash Trust, like many civil society organizations in South Africa, has sought possibilities when confronted with challenges. That flexibility is what sustains the civil society sector.

I think it's important for organizations to retain their relevance by being willing to reshape and reinvent themselves so they can advance their values. At the heart of relevance is knowing what your value is in the world and then making sure that it gets packaged in a way that speaks to the issues of the day.

But if an organization no longer has a purpose in this world, then maybe it should shut its doors — and do that gracefully — rather than go on forever.

Experience shows me that an active civil society can be a powerful force for change. So in recognizing the limited participation of citizens in holding government accountable through institutions of democracy — and in an attempt to give a stronger voice to civil society — Black Sash has helped incubate civil society organizations over the years.

But if we don't experiment and research new possibilities, then we close down options for civil society.

Many of these went on to develop their own voice so they could engage effectively with government. This is one way to help ensure innovation in the civil society sector.

While I'm totally in agreement that the sector needs to have good governance structures in place, sometimes we err on the side of rules and less on the side of innovation — less on the side of new thinking or experimentation. But if we don't experiment and research new possibilities, then we close down options for civil society. And we need all the fresh ideas that are out there because we are working to ensure that the human rights promise of our constitution remains paramount in our laws, policies and state service delivery.

At Black Sash, we make it a priority to listen to individuals who deal with poverty every day. The voices of our clients inform every engagement that we have with institutions of democracy. People in power need to hear what the ongoing struggles are for those living in poverty so they can be addressed adequately. "Making human rights real" has become our call to action.

In 2009, Max Sisulu (speaker of Parliament) said at the induction for members of Parliament in the National Assembly: "We must ... ensure that the program of Parliament is designed to effectively do the oversight, monitoring and evaluation of government departments. ... And we must rededicate

ourselves to the true meaning of keeping the doors of Parliament open."

Fifty-five years ago, South African women stood in mournful silence, wearing their distinctive black sashes to protest the unjust laws being passed in Parliament.

Today, the people of Black Sash help to keep the doors of Parliament open. We are committed to ensuring that civil society has its voice heard and its human rights respected.



Marcella Naidoo

Marcella Naidoo is Black Sash's national director. Her experience in grassroots organizing started more than 25 years ago when she helped establish an advice office (a community-based center providing legal and related services for the country's poor) and went on to manage a network of advice offices in South Africa.

Organization: Black Sash Trust

Location: Cape Town

About the organization: Black Sash, founded in 1955, is a human rights organization that operates a national office and seven regional offices throughout South Africa. Its staff and volunteers work to promote and protect civil, political and socioeconomic rights.

Mott grants through 2009: 14 grants totaling \$2.19 million since 1991.

Web site: www.blacksash.org.za

Now is a good time for stocktaking

The year 2010 is an opportune time to assess the relationship between the civil society sector or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the South African government. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the release from prison of Nelson Mandela, the nation's first post-apartheid president.

Four general elections later, South Africa is now celebrating its 16th year as a democracy. This also happens to be the year that South Africa hosted the soccer World Cup — a first for the continent of Africa after 80 years of the tournament's existence.

South Africa remains a young democracy, but it soon will bid farewell to its teen years. Therefore, the time is ripe for a pause and some stocktaking. What better way to do this than to look briefly at the relationship between civil society and government?

The end of apartheid spelled a new era for NGOs and government (local, provincial and national). At one level, what essentially happened was that NGOs became government, because the new government drew heavily from the NGO pool of expertise and experience.

This is not to say that all NGOs collapsed into government and vice versa. While some NGOs did indeed close shop after 1994, many have continued to exist. But all of them had to deal with a new situation that included the installation of a democratic and legitimate government. Relations with government have had to be restructured in light of this reality.

Furthermore, funding relations between NGOs and government have changed: Both government and NGOs appeared to compete for the same overseas donor pool — a competition that was soon and easily won by government. They also competed for ideological legitimacy and authority. Put differently, who — the civil society sector or government — truly represented the needs and wishes of the people was becoming increasingly biased in favor of government. NGOs and government also competed for the



Tinyiko Sam Maluleke

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke is executive director of research at the University of South Africa. He is also president of the South African Council of Churches.

Organization: University of South Africa

Location: Pretoria

About the organization: The university, founded in 1916, is a leader on the continent for distance learning. By forming partnerships throughout Africa and the world, the university strives to help the people of Africa achieve their dreams.

Mott grants through 2009: Two grants totaling \$100,000 since 2004.

Web site: www.unisa.ac.za

small pool of human resources — once a competition that was easily won by government.

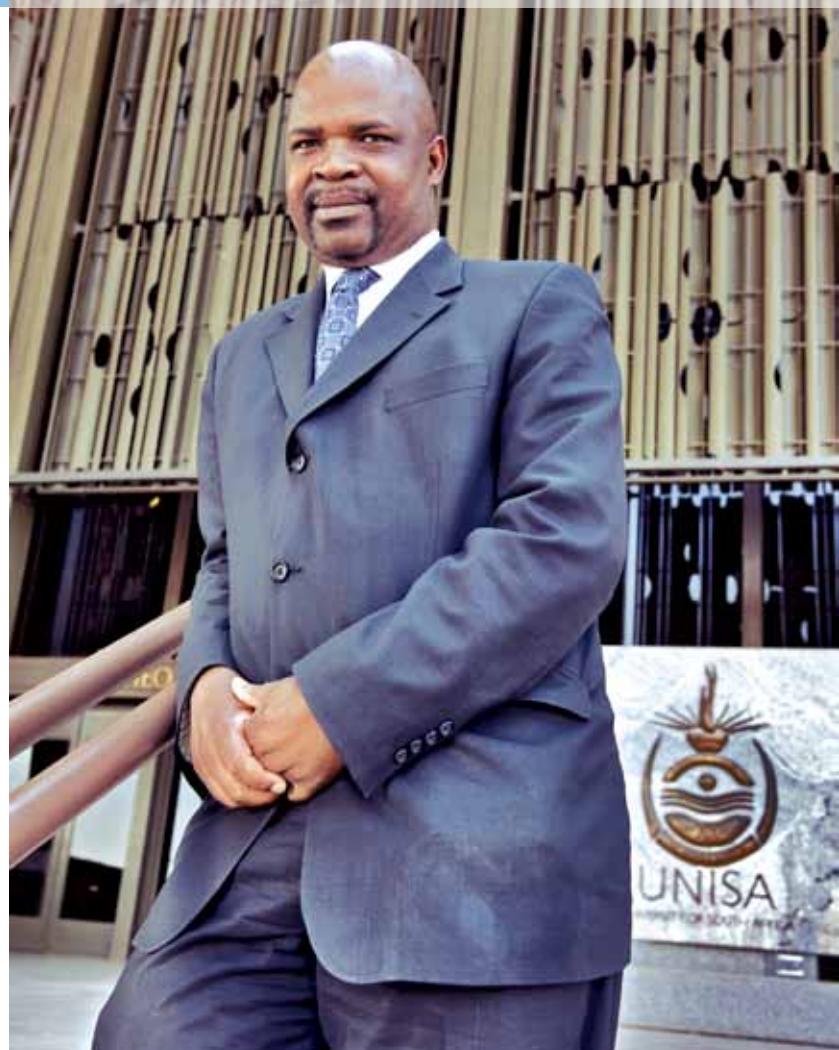
For these and other reasons, we now have a much weakened civil society sector when compared with its strength during the apartheid period. The fact that government stands as a potential sponsor and funder of the civil society sector further weakens the hand of the latter in relation to the former.

Yet, even if all things were equal and the country was operating in a best-case scenario, the government simply would not have the capacity to single-handedly deliver services and produce the desired outcomes in all areas needing attention.

Think of the challenges South Africa faces in education, skills shortages, HIV-AIDS, job creation, crime, violence and the development of a culture of human rights — to mention just a few. Through the years, successive apartheid governments tackled these problems racially and selectively. The democratic government has no such “luxury” — and is unable to tackle these effectively on its own. Perhaps no government can tackle them all alone. The civil society sector is needed more now than ever.

The question for South African NGOs for the past few years has been, “What kind of relationship is desirable between government and civil society if we are to reach the developmental goals promised by our democracy and constitution?”

There are many options — formal alliances between government and the civil society sector, government-initiated NGOs, and



linkages between NGOs and ruling party officials that are so strong they are essentially government partnerships.

For me, the most desirable option for government/civil society sector relations is one based on mutual respect. In this scenario, neither the government nor the NGO is encumbered by the other in any way. This relationship is not a parent/teen relationship but one more like an adult/adult relationship. It leaves space both for collaboration and non-collaboration, criticism and commendation — and all in a context where service to the poor and needy is the primary guiding principle.

SPECIAL SECTION PHOTO CREDITS

[page 13](#), Rick Smith, Rochester, Michigan

[page 15](#), Jane Hale, Fenton, Michigan

[pages 17, 18, 21, 22, 25, 26, 29](#), Oscar Gutierrez, Johannesburg, South Africa