

Definitions of Civil Society

Civil society is not just about the development of community activity. It is also about solidarity and social inclusion. Through strengthening families, neighborhoods, voluntary associations and self help groups, participation in such effort is building the idea of democracy and human rights from the foundations. Such a process can be genuinely empowering. The new groups may co-operate or clash, both with each other and with the state. Individuals and groups previously not acknowledged or recognized may now form themselves into associations to lobby for their cause, and also to educate or re-educate the general public about their needs.

National Institute for Social Work (United Kingdom), NISW Briefings, Electronic Version, No. 18. Social Exclusion, Civil Society and Social Work. September, 1996.

The concept of civil society is essentially a framework for combating social exclusion and promoting social inclusion. Towards this end, it is aimed at reducing dependency by strengthening the individual's relationship with public programs through increased involvement in community-based groups (non-government organizations - NGOs, not-for-profit organizations, private care agencies, religious organizations, etc.). The civil society is thus directly related to the emerging emphasis on an appropriate welfare mix of government and non-government programs, for-profit and not-for-profit agencies, professional and voluntary benefits and services. As such, the strengthening of the "civil society" it is not only about restructuring welfare, it is also about reviving the sense of social values, participation and communication (information, discourse, dialogue) that are prerequisites for a viable process of social protection and democracy.

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