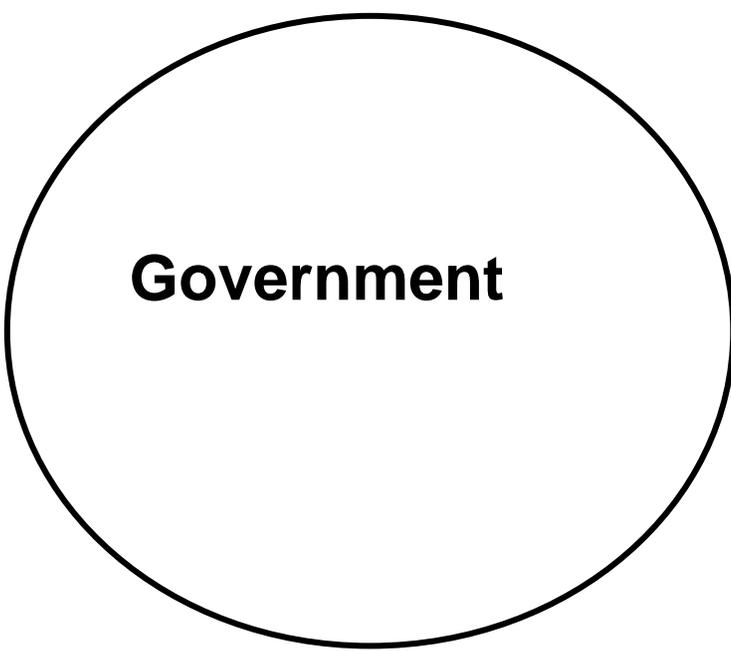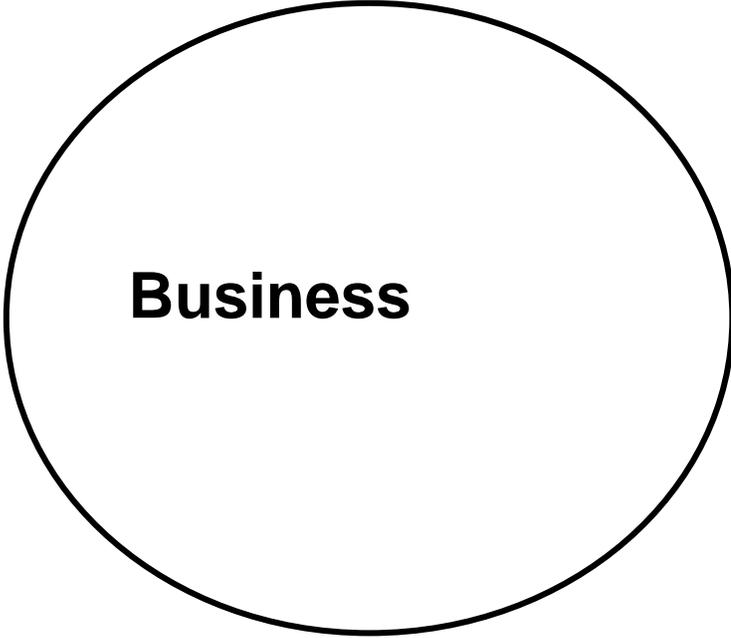# Clarifying "Civil Society"

The political economy of the modern nation state can be divided usefully into three:
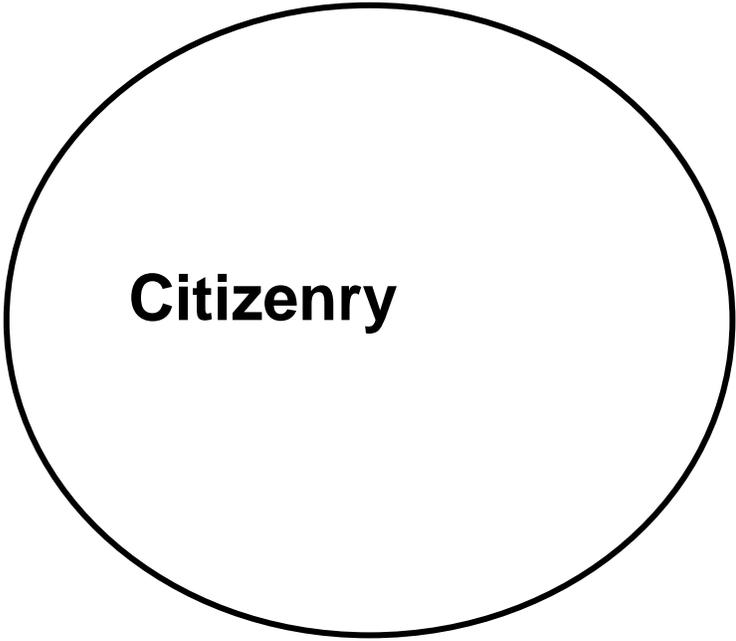
1. The Public Sector
    (The Government - regime, administration, and armed forces)

2. The Private Sector - Business

3. The Citizenry – non-profit and non-government

Government

Business

Citizenry

Distinctive Competencies

1. The Government: to rule and to govern through the legitimate use of coercion

2. Business: to make profits through market exchange

3. Citizenry: to mobilize around shared values and shared commitment to action

Motivation and Resources of the Three Parts of the Nation/State

| Sector	Motivation	Resources	Resource Mobilisation
Government	To rule and to govern	State property, laws, power, control of armed forces	By law enforcement, command, and coercion
Business	To make profits	Private property	By trade and exchange
Citizenry	To hold the other two sectors accountable to the citizens To enable citizens to associate To improve the lives of the citizens	Citizens' own time, energy, and personal resources Gifted time, energy and other resources	Through shared values with other citizens Through shared commitment to action with other citizens

Definition of Civil Society

Civil Society is the dynamic equilibrium relationship between the three actors of government, business and citizenry:

"A true "civil society" is not one where one or the other of these three sectors is in the ascendance, but one in which there are three more of less distinct sectors – government, business, and non-profit – that nevertheless find ways to work together in responding to public needs.
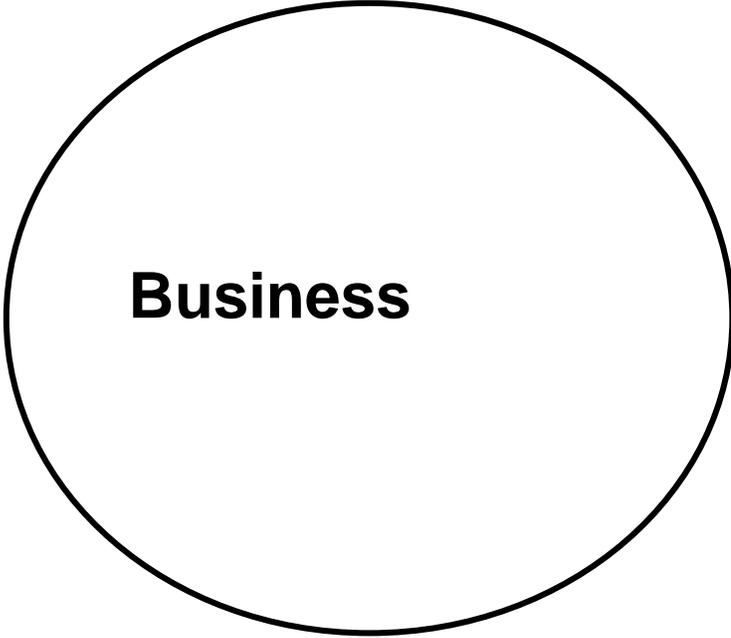
So conceived, the term "civil society" would not apply to a particular sector, but to a relationship among the sectors, one in which a high level of cooperation and mutual support prevailed"

Salamon and Anheier, John Hopkins University Civil Society Institute.
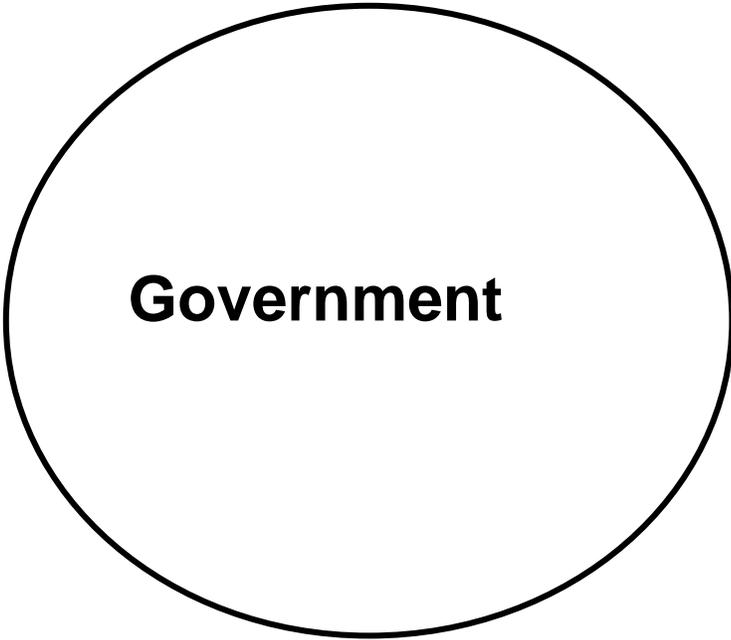
Government

Business
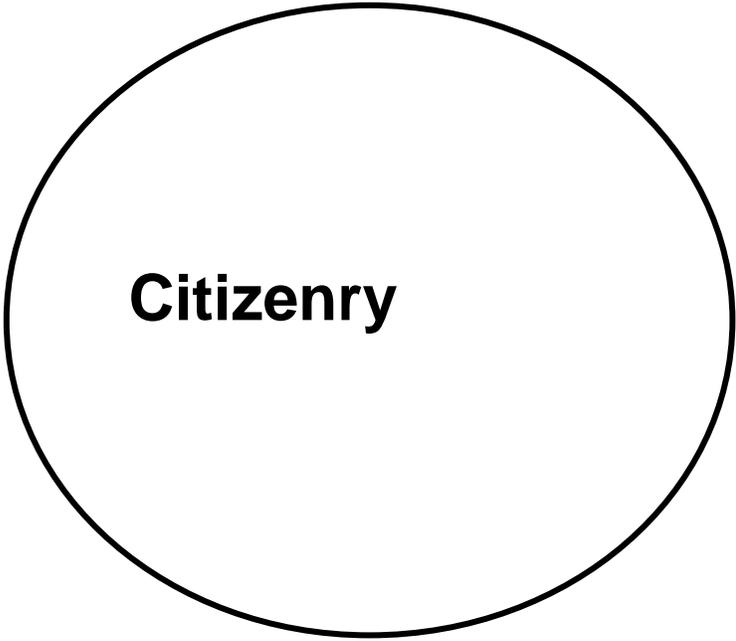
Citizenry

Civil Society

- **provides space for the mobilization, articulation, and pursuit of interests by individuals and groups**

- **provides the institutional means for mediating between conflicting interests and social values**

- **gives expression and direction to social, religious, and cultural needs**

- **limits the inherent tendency of governments to expand their control**

- **nurtures the values of citizenship required for democracy in a modern nation-state[1]**

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1 "Striking a Balance – a Guide to enhancing the effectiveness of non-governmental organisations in international development" Alan Fowler. Earthscan.London 1997.

Institutions of Civil Society

Where the sectors overlap is the arena where important institutions connected to the sectors of State, Business and Citizenry function. These institutions are:

- **The Judiciary**

- **The Legislature**

- **The Media**

- **Local government councils**

- **Independent accountability organisations**
  - Election Commission
  - Human Rights Commission
  - Anti-Corruption Commission
  - Auditor General's office
  - Attorney General's office
  - Ombudsman

- **Citizens Organisations** (also called Civil Society Organisations)
  - Representative Organisations
  - Pressure Groups
  - Service Organisations

- **Business Associations**
  - Chambers of Commerce
  - Associations of Manufacturers

- **The Stock Exchange**

- **The Universities**

This arena requires a high level of cooperation and mutual support and it is governed by civic rules agreed by citizens. These define the "civility" of the nation state, a normative description of how the citizens would like things to be – democratic, legal, and with good governance.

What is a healthy Civil Society?

In order to assess whether Malaysia (or indeed any country) has a healthy civil society, it is necessary to ask of each of the institutions the extent to which:

a.   they exist, are accessible to all, and do not exclude anyone

b.   they are bound by and abide by the law

c.   they are active - and encourage a democratic, equitable, and compassionate society

d.   they are amenable to judicial and legislative review

e.   they are accountable to institutions in which the citizens have a say

The Components of Civil Society

"While impossible to define satisfactorily, the aid system understands civil society to be the array of people's organisations, voluntary associations, clubs, self-help or interest groups, religious bodies, representative organs, development NGOs, foundations and social movements which may be formal or informal in nature, and which are not part of political parties, and are not established to make profits for their owners.

In other words, civil society is often visualised as the arena of association and information between the family and the state. How this arena exists in practice varies enormously between countries".

"Striking a Balance – a Guide to enhancing the effectiveness of non-governmental organisations in international development" by Alan Fowler. Earthscan.London 1997.

Civil Society Organisations are one of the Institutions of Civil Society

They have the following functions:

1. to hold the government and the business sectors accountable to the citizens

2. to enable citizens to associate together

3. to improve the lives of the people

Functions in more detail

1. **to hold the government and the business sectors accountable to the citizens**

- *research to find out how government and business is operating*

- *publicizing the research and its findings*

- *using citizens complaints procedures*

- *advocacy campaigns to change laws or, more likely, to make sure that laws and policies are implemented*

2. **to enable citizens to associate together**

- *organising citizens to form associations to test the right of association*

- *advocacy for policies or laws that create an enabling environment for civil society organisations*

3.   to improve the lives of the people

- *implementing projects to deliver services*

- *empowering people*

- *encouraging self-help*

- *providing public information and education*

    - *advocating for changes in laws, policies, practices, and behaviour which are blocking improvement in the lives of the people*

There are two kinds of Civil Society Organisations

1. **Mutual Benefit Organisations**
    They are organisations formed by members whose purpose is to help their members (e.g. unions, professional associations, community organisations)

2. **Public Benefit Organisations**
    They are organisations formed by self-selected individuals whose purpose is to help others selected by them, or to help everyone

There are also "pretender" organizations which are actually fronts for government, political parties, businesses and individuals which pretend to be non-government and non-profit

The Range of Civil Society Organisations

Mutual Benefit Organisations		Public Benefit Organisations		"Pretenders"
Religious Organisations		Private philanthropies		GONGOs
Ethnic Organisations		Public philanthropies		PONGOs
Indigenous community organisations		Development and Welfare NGOs - service delivery, advocacy, and representation		BONGOs
Induced community organisations		Non-profit companies		
Employment related organisations		Religious Organisations		
Mass Organisations		Civic Organisations		

Kinds of NGOs

- **Implementing**

- **Research**

- **Advocacy**

- **Networking**

- **Representational**

- **Federations**

Characteristics of NGOs

1. **Voluntary**
   NGOs are formed voluntarily, and there is an element of voluntary participation in the organisation (usually Board members of beneficiaries)

2. **Independent**
   NGOs are formally constituted and autonomous, and governed by people to whom responsibility is delegated by a Board

3. **Not-for-Profit**
   NGOs do not make profits by defintion, but if they have surplus income, it is ploughed back into the work of the NGO. Board members receive no fees for being Board members.

4. **Not Self-Serving**
   NGOs are constituted to improve the circumstances of identified disadvantaged people or to act on concerns of society as a whole, not to advantage themselves

5. **Value Driven**
   NGOs are based on shared values and commitment

6. **Non-Political**
   NGOs are not primarily involved in promoting candidates for elected office

7. **Non-Religious**
   NGOs are not primarily involved in the promotion of religious worship or religious education

Ideal Mutual Benefit Organisations

The capabilities to:

- **Mobilise and regulate local resources on an ongoing basis**
- **Manage and account for resources to the members**
- **Ensure that leadership can be censured and held accountable**
- **Ensure and enable the ongoing participation of relevant stakeholders**
- **Cost-effectively translate external support into sustained impacts**
- **Critically assess public policies and translate them into locally appropriate ways**
- **Mediate, resolve and manage internal conflicts**
- **Effectively control an equitable distribution of benefits**
- **Resist appropriation of benefits by those who should be excluded**
- **Make legitimate claims on resources and defend local interests towards the government**
- **Understand civic rights and exert them towards politicians and government officials**
- **Monitor, evaluate and learn from experience**

Ideal Public Benefit Organisations

Understands socio-economic and political realities and is able to maintain the **position** it wants with respect to its values, vision, identity, and mission amongst the other institutions and organisations in society

Is an **aware** organisation, constantly able to **learn**, review and adapt its position and methods to maintain performance

Shows distinctive competence through cost-effective use of resources in achieving its mission

Is accou8ntable to its stakeholders and proves its legitimacy through demonstrated impact on the problems of poverty and injustice facing those it is established to serve

Can form strategic alliances with others in pursuit of its goals without compromising its position

Enjoys competent leadership that is visionary, has integrity, is respected internally and externally, can constructively manage inherent organisational tensions, is adept at recognising and resolving conflicts and is action-oriented

Has a financial base that assures autonomy and continuity, requiring long-term financial strategies and competent management of diverse funding sources

Has organisational structures and systems that:

- Ensure interventions are appropriate to diverse environments and social groups
- Can selct and maintain correct priorities and plan for them accordingly
- Can link multiple levels of development action
- Engage with both institutional and organisational change
- Achieve sustainable impacts
- Do not create dependency
- Empower those served
- Motivate and develop staff as individuals and teams
- Continually learn
- Are responsive, with high local problem solving capabilities
- Build the capacity of others, particularly CBOs