



CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION (CSO) BILL, 2015

BENEFITS OF THE BILL

- Regulates an important sector
- Provides registered CSOs with rights and privileges
- The Secretariat will strengthen registered CSOs
- Civil society is recognised for the role it plays
- Creates a functioning tripartite partnership
- Provides public accountability and public participation
- Contributes to and quantifies the value-added to National Development

CIVIL SOCIETY BAHAMAS KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE BILL

- That independence of the civil society sector is preserved
- That power is shared and not concentrated in one institution
- That the Bill is practical and workable
- That the formal consultation protocol is institutionalized
- That inclusivity and the voice of civil society is enhanced, not restricted
- That civil society is invigorated as a result of enactment

ISSUES IN THE BILL THAT NEED TO BE RESOLVED:

- Concretisation of the definition of civil society, to afford recognition and credibility; to encourage compliance with the Bill once enacted; and, to avoid a 'worse case' scenario, such the duplication of NPO and CSO legislation
- CSO standards are not defined, in terms of general operating procedures, and, efficiency measures such as: purpose and function of Registrar; procedure for approval and rejection; a less onerous appeals process; timelines on the registration process; No role for BCSU implementing standards
- Distribution of surpluses allowed
- Rights of non-registered CSOs
- Role of Minister: too wide and restrictive; Regulations should not be solely determined by the Minister; the Consultative Mechanism, enshrined in the *Charter of Civil Society*, and approved by the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, is insufficiently safeguarded and institutionalised
- Role of Secretariat is insufficiently defined
- Autonomy best served through an independent body
- Financing to address critical support areas such as: self-help or capacity building for the membership, Research and Development, Public Education and Awareness, Administration, and, physical headquarters.