

Co-regulation of a co-dependent coalition

 By [Thabani Khumalo](#)

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Civic society movement is a growing force within our global societies. The strength of civil society movement has ensured that most governments move away from repressive to democratic governments, from wars to peace, from secret to open societies, from arrogant to responsive administrations, and from elite-driven development to community-based sustainable development.

Global communities witness their outstanding activisms and achievements almost on a daily basis, from campaigns for fair economic practices, climate-change challenges, environmental and wildlife conservation, media freedom, human rights, sustainable development programmes, moral regeneration and many human-threatening issues.

Civic society, a cultural force

Civil society movement has become the most important interface between government and people as it offers governments an idea of where public opinion stands and how citizens evaluate governments' policies, programmes and performance.

In its modern form, civil society means driving development initiatives through cultural power. Business has economic power. Ruling party has political power. Government wields administrative power. But civil society possesses cultural power.

When cultural power is active, it unveils issues connected to values, principles, meaning, truth, ethics, morality, authenticity, legitimacy, commitment, honesty, willingness, responsibility, and ubuntu.

Political analyst Zamikhaya Maseti says, "Civil society should be given enough space to join in the fight against corruption and the decomposition of our social fabric, and a type of warfare should be unleashed against the immoral values that are displayed and promoted by the bourgeoisie and their newly found allies: the flying political dragons. There is now a large vacuum in our communities - hence the emergence of political dragons and vampires".

Civil society and media are co-dependent

The ability of civil society movement to influence government laws, policies, and programmes is crucial to the consolidation of our democracy and sustainability of our development. Hence South Africa should heave a huge sigh of relief that the recently released [Press Freedom Commission Report](#) recommends that "a system of independent co-regulation", as opposed to the current self-regulation and proposed statutory regulation, be adopted.

Such a co-regulatory institution of civil society movement and the press will ensure that the press balances its constitutional

mandate and commercial interests, and operates within a free, fair and favorable environment. It will also ensure that the press regains credibility and trust of the masses, and thus reverses the perception that it is "mass media without masses".

In fact, civil society mobilisation and positive media reporting proved co-dependent when they together contributed to the struggles against apartheid, oppression, exploitation and underdevelopment. I have no doubt that this coalition of like-minded and co-dependent partners will make press co-regulation a huge success.

Media needs public scrutiny and criticism

While celebrating [World Press Freedom Day](#) today, Thursday, 3 May 2012, South Africans should welcome recommendations by the Press Freedom Commission on how the country's press should be regulated in the best interest of all citizens.

The current debates, accusations and protest actions concerning the [Protection of State Information Bill](#) and proposed [media appeals tribunal](#) are an indication that citizens embrace media as being strategically important in sustaining democracy and accelerating development, enlightenment and civilisation.

Such a strong endorsement of the fundamental role of the media within a democratic society demands that we deliberately, regularly and consistently seek answers to a variety of questions to determine whether our media is succeeding in achieving the objectives contained in our Constitution and expected by the citizens.

In a country where respect for human rights, accountability, transparency and good governance are entrenched in the Constitution, such an expected role of the media deserves collection support, independent monitoring, and continuous public scrutiny and constructive criticisms.

Media freedom should be protected at all costs

To gather news, disseminate information, propagate truth, promote peace, provide enlightenment, influence community development, protect democracy and human rights, and shape and inform the consciences and thinking of citizens are never easy, neutral tasks nor a single institution's tasks. It requires political will, media determination, community support and independent monitoring to ensure that media operates without fear or favour in its quest of building of enlightenment, communion and prosperity within our society.

South Africans are encouraged to join the ongoing national debates on the POIB (aka the [Secrecy Bill](#)) and media appeals tribunal vigilantly, vigorously and responsibly.

As [Prof Tawana Kupe](#) puts it, "The freedom of the media should never be undermined by political power, economic imperative or journalistic excesses because when it is lost, everyone will be a loser."

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