

## **The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative: African Lessons for Australia**

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The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is the most prominent of the “transparency measures” that national governments, multilateral organisations and non-government organisations of civil society have forged over the last decade to cope, it is said, with the excesses of private development in the resource sectors of the South. “Transparency” has to date been rather narrowly defined as the balance between the taxes paid by the extractive industries to national governments and the taxes received by those governments, an equation that ideally sums to zero, though broadened definitions are currently being pursued within and without the organisation.

The states of the North for long did not regard themselves as candidates for scrutiny through the EITI, but now the Australian government is supporting a domestic trial with Australian companies, and recently hosted the sixth “global conference” of the organisation in Sydney (May 2013). Critical observers argue that a “vibrant” civil society is a pre-requisite for addressing the central concern of the EITI protocols – corruption in business and government. A review of African experience of the EITI has lessons for Australia of a similar vein: the agency of individuals and groups is indeed essential. Whether or not the Australian pilot leads to full membership of the EITI for Australia (a prospect more doubtful though not impossible since the change of government in September 2013), debates around the meaning and significance of “transparency” will certainly be better informed if the successes and failures of the EITI are considered.

This paper first considers the evolution of the EITI over the last decade, drawing out the salient features of the organisation as it balances the interests of the North and the South, then reviews the course of the pilot study to date (shrouded in confidentiality though it is) and finally considers some possible implications for Australia of the acceptance or non-acceptance of the pilot now under way. It concludes that Australia’s membership of the organisation would be significant both for Australian extractive industries and Australian society generally, but would also have implications for the future operations of the EITI itself.

### **A Northern Conspiracy?**

The EITI is often cited as an example of global-policy-making in tri-partite mode, an emerging organisational form identified by Ruggie (1994), though not precisely named by him. Neologisms suggested by others to encompass the emerging phenomenon include “tri-partite co-regulation” (Mukherjee-Reed & Reed 2011, p. 372; Steurer 2013, p. 13). It seems unlikely that any particular term will win wide acceptance because the organisations thus loosely identified have similarities insofar as membership is shared between government, business and civil society but they also differ markedly in the detail of their

organisational arrangements and ‘policy power’. Thus the ISO standards, the Kimberley Process for the identification of diamonds and “Partnerships UK” in the environmental sphere all share aspects of tri-partism but differ in their membership, powers and objectives. It could well be argued that these bodies reflect, in a subdued way, earlier forms of corporatist organisation in international society, most notably the International Labour Organisation of states, labour and capital. “Labour” is not clearly represented in the new formulation of tri-partism, and civil society (possibly including labour representatives) seems to have taken its place.

Organisational typologies are of limited use in analysing the EITI or other somewhat similar bodies, though a demonstration of the effectiveness of one or another might indeed suggest that “globalisation” has a concrete and evolving meaning, supporting commonplace (though contested) arguments that the power of the nation state is declining relative to an emerging “global” sphere. The effectiveness of the EITI has yet to be demonstrated in any thorough-going way: its membership includes some resource-rich countries but not others, its ability to police its standards has been questioned, and some observers have even claimed that it provides a convenient rhetoric that covers and sustains corruption in certain cases. Above all, the origins of the EITI are seen to lie in the global North, raising questions about the motivation of its original and continuing supporters in the developed world.

The idea that transparency in tracking the revenues from mining could support better distributive policies in the resource rich countries of the South came from Blair’s UK government at the time of the at World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg 2002); and the British interest has been maintained since, evidenced in the chairing of the organisation to the present day by Blair’s prominent former minister Clare Short. Even though the sincerity of the original proponents was not doubted, and indeed could be traced to the experience of particular individuals in Africa, especially activists in civil society organisations (CSOs), arguably the EITI continues to serve the interests of governments, businesses and civil society in the North. The major financial contributor to the organisation is the World Bank and its associated agencies, and some African critics have questioned whether the protocols give comfort to Northern companies and investors but do little to improve the character of politics in the host societies (Keblusek 2010).

### **Membership and Policies**

The following table summarises the country membership, showing current members and those whose membership has lapsed, not proceeded or been suspended. Continental Africa provides the majority of the membership and only one nation, Norway, is decidedly from the North. Notably absent are some of Africa’s resource rich states, including Zimbabwe and South Africa.

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**Table 1 Current, Candidate, Former and Suspended Member States by Region**

	Member/candidate	Ex- / Suspended
Africa	Burkina Faso Cameroon Chad Côte d'Ivoire Ghana Guinea Liberia Mali Mauritania Mozambique Niger Nigeria Republic of the Congo Sao Tome & Principe Tanzania Zambia Senegal Togo	Angola ex- Central African Republic (susp) Democratic Republic of Congo (susp) Gabon ex- Madagascar (susp) Sierra Leone (susp)
West Asia	Afghanistan Albania Azerbaijan Iraq Kazakhstan Kyrgyz Republic Mongolia Tajikistan Ukraine	Yemen (susp)
Asia Pacific	Indonesia Solomon Islands The Philippines Timor-Leste	
Americas	Guatemala Honduras Peru Trinidad and Tobago	
Europe	Norway	

Source: EITI. Progress Report 2013 Beyond Transparency.

As the suspensions and exits may suggest, the EITI has some teeth. Conversely, the continuing and candidate memberships suggest that governments, extractive companies and CSOs at the national level are able to find mutual accommodations that make membership worthwhile for all. Despite the differing interests of the three sides, common ground is found if transparent revenues from mining are demonstrated. Governments benefit if investors are attracted by EITI certification, and empirical research suggest that this is indeed a potent factor for governments, and for companies wishing to avoid the bleeding of corrupt payments (David-Barrett & Okamura 2013). Potentially greater revenues for governments are attractive for CSOs as a way to open debate around reformed budget allocations in a society. The interests of the actors cannot be predicted in advance, as was shown in the early days of the EITI when British Petroleum unilaterally decided to release its payment to the Angolan government, claiming that it had nothing to hide and every motive to open its books. The government reacted angrily, suggesting that it had something to hide, and withdrew from EITI candidacy never, to the present date, to return (Haufler, p. 57).

For all participants, the key point of agreement is that corruption should be at least lessened, if not abolished. However appealing this assumption, critics have increasingly pointed to the fact that corruption takes many forms and has costs that are not captured simply by measuring and validating revenue flows. Corruption does not occur just at the level of government-company transactions, but, as Collier (2010) pointed out in the case of Nigerian oil, may occur well down the line and late in time following substitutions of terms in contracts through legal means. Others have argued that transparency only reveals how revenue is collected and the quantity of that revenue, not how it is spent (Kolstaf & Wigg 2009). The largest assumption underlying the EITI is that the abolition of corruption in all forms – if ever that could be accomplished – would allow a continuing accommodation between the extractive industries and those critics in the environmental movement who wish to restrict mining, in some cases outlaw it, for reasons that do not revolve around corruption control. Establishing fair “means” for mining (the rules for its operations) trumps consideration of the “ends” of mining (in what circumstances it should be permitted). The EITI straddles that space; and the Australian situation, it must be imagined, would likely provide enough grist for a continuing focus on the centrality of corruption to the exclusion of arguably deeper questions.

### **Structure of the EITI**

The EITI is nation-state based, despite its “global” and “tri-partite” character. Nations of the North support its budget, albeit indirectly through trans-national organs like the World Bank, and have direct membership on its governing council. Governments of the South must assent to, indeed lead, the participation of their state in the EITI, even though both extractive companies and civil society organisations (CSOs) are also required for the tri-partite structure to function. The two non-government partners also have strong links to a certain number of nation states, though less obviously so than an entity that is “the government of” a specific state. The participating CSOs are somewhat ambiguous in their

national identification, for virtually all see themselves as global organisations that seek to elude classification in national terms; but in fact funding, and thus support for staffing and training, comes largely from supporters in the North. The participating companies to an even greater extent can be located only with increasing difficulty in a national framework when many have a trans-national character and eschew identification with the national interests of a given state; but ownership, on inspection, tends to be strongly in the hands of investors with an unambiguous location, as in the broad ownership of say Exxon Mobil (the United States, certainly not Portugal or anywhere else).

Both clarity and ambiguity are important to the EITI as it seeks to win resource-rich nations to its membership whilst at the same time seeking to extend its capacity as a global organisation with standards that transcend the nation state. The balancing of nation and global interests is apparent in the carefully constructed categories of membership on its executive council, summarised in the following table. It follows the format of official EITI reports, and thus shows the participating nation states of the South 'above' the "supporting" nation states, as they are termed, of the North. This serves rather to elide the weight of the "supporting" states as manifested in their continuing membership of the council; the Southern states exhibit a more rapid turn-over, not fully explicated in the table which aggregates membership across two terms (2009-12 and 2013 – 2015/16). The CSOs of the North also maintain membership across terms to a greater extent than the CSOs of the South. There are of course no companies drawn from or representing the South.

The separate bands of membership shown below for each category reflect faithfully the practice of the EITI, but are un-named in official documentation. As an editorial device in this paper, a descriptive tag of the bands or sub-groups has been added ("Africa 1" and so on) to emphasise the categorisation and balancing of interests involved. Companies are identified with similar tags, but an attempt at precise national identity has been avoided.

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**Table 2: EITI Executive Council Membership 2009 – current**

EITI composition - Executive Board 2009 - 13

State Members		The South		CSO Members	
"Africa 1"	Niger Mauritania Togo	"Africa 1"	Niger DR Congo		
"Africa 2"	DR Congo Rep Congo	"Africa 2"	Ghana Nigeria		
"Africa 3"	Nigeria Ghana Liberia				
"Non Africa 1"	Mongolia Timor-Leste Peru			"Non Africa"	Mongolia Timor-Leste Azerbaijan Kazakhstan Peru Indonesia
"Non Africa 2"	Indonesia Azerbaijan Kazakhstan				
Supporting State Members		The North		Company Members	
"North America"	USA Canada	"Atlantic +"	Netherlands UK USA	"Euro Oil 1"	Statoil Pemex Total
"Europe 1"	Spain, UK Norway Finland	"Homeland"	USA	"US Oil"	Chevron Exxon Mobil
"Europe 2"	Netherlands Switzerland Italy EC			"US Minerals"	ICMM Copper&Gold
				"Other Minerals"	Areva Rio Tinto De Beers BHP Billiton Arcelor Mittal
				"Euro Oil 2"	R Dutch Shell BP
				"Insurance"	Standard Life Allianz SNS Assets

Source: EITI. Beyond Transparency. Oslo 2013; EITI Board Members 2013-2015/2016. Oslo 2013.

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The South					
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"Africa 2"	DR Congo Rep Congo	"Africa 2"	Ghana Nigeria		
"Africa 3"	Nigeria Ghana Liberia	"Non Africa" Mongolia Timor-Leste Azerbaijan Kazakhstan Peru Indonesia			
"Non Africa 1"	Mongolia Timor-Leste Peru				
"Non Africa 2"	Indonesia Azerbaijan Kazakhstan				
The North					
Supporting State Members		CSO Members		Company Members	
"North America"	USA Canada	"Atlantic +"	Netherlands UK USA	"Euro Oil 1"	Statoil Pemex Total
"Europe 1"	Spain, UK Norway Finland	"Homeland"	USA	"US Oil"	Chevron Exxon Mobil
"Europe 2"	Netherlands Switzerland Italy EC			"US Minerals"	ICMM Copper&Gold
				"Other Minerals"	Areva Rio Tinto De Beers BHP Billiton Arcelor Mittal
				"Euro Oil 2"	R Dutch Shell BP
				"Insurance"	Standard Life Allianz SNS Assets

Source: EITI. Beyond Transparency. Oslo 2013; EITI Board Members 2013-2015/2016. Oslo 2013.

The table re-states the opening proposition that it is Northern (trans-national) companies that constitute company membership entirely, but may also suggest by exception the equally entire absence of the state-owned enterprises of China and the mixed extractive enterprises of Russia and Brazil. The pervasive influence of the USA, UK, the Netherlands and Norway is also suggested both in nation state and CSO representation. Although Norway has not supplied CSO representatives, it hardly needs to do so when the secretariat is located in Oslo, and has been staffed from the outset by those involved in civil society campaigns around transparency. The resource rich countries themselves are allocated membership in sub-groups that reflect the pattern of overall membership, so that African nations predominate. The coincidence of nation state and CSO representation in the cases of Niger, DR Congo and Ghana, as with Peru and Azerbaijan, does not necessarily suggest a particularly strong commitment to the EITI protocols, as Azerbaijan at least has been seen by commentators as taking advantage of the legitimacy afforded by the EITI to observe the letter rather than the spirit of transparency (Wallwork 2013, p. 1).

Though Australia has been, according to official sources, the largest financial donor to the EITI, exceeding the USA and the UK for example, it is not a “supporting member” of the EITI and neither have Australian CSOs figured on the council (Australian Government 2013). Norway, though a fully compliant member of the EITI and as noted the only such Northern state, is a “supporting member”. Other Northern states are said to be considering membership in one way or another – Germany (though not resource-rich by conventional definition) is considering a pilot akin to Australia’s; the USA, UK and France have announced their intention to seek candidacy “in 2014”; Italy has promised to “implement” the EITI in a time period as yet undefined; and Canada has promised its own version of the EITI (G8 June 2013 EITI Plenum). The inclusion of Northern states in the ordinary membership may indeed pose issues by diluting what is presented as Southern dominance of the council. If Australia ever were to move to full membership, its location within the sub-groups of membership would become possible by introducing for the first time a relatively large Northern economy to the organisation. The perception that the EITI protects the interest of the companies and investors of the North would be challenged, but also challenged would be Australia’s view of its autonomy.

### **Critics and Auto-critics**

Critical evaluations of the EITI’s performance from scholars and CSO activists over the last decade have increasingly converged on a number of key points, above all the relatively narrow definition of transparency initially adopted and the widespread inability of CSOs, and more broadly communities, in member and candidate companies to make effective use of whatever information does enter the public domain (Aaronson 2012). The origins of the EITI in CSO activism is well documented and on the whole celebrated, but the ability of CSOs in the South to take advantage of their opportunities is to an extent reflected in the membership of the executive council considered above: the CSOs of the North (Global Witness, Publish What You Pay [PWYP], the Revenue Watch Institute, Cordaid) are relatively well funded and active but those of the South are few, their resources limited, and their independence from government in some cases uncertain.

The EITI is one of its own chief critics, surely appropriate for such an organisation. It is not immune from a tendency to trumpet its achievements, but at the same time its publications and debates are mostly open for inspection. At an open session of its 2013 convention, for example, one of its chief activists, Pascal Fabie of Transparency International, did not hesitate to stress the danger of establishing mere “Potemkin villages” through formal rules, identifying, under questioning, Azerbaijan’s enthusiastic membership (author’s observation). Likely more enduring, the EITI commissioned an evaluation from the Norwegian consultancy Scanteam in 2011, and the ensuing report gave detail and substance to the critics. Weaknesses in civil society, under pressure from repressive governments, were documented in detail in Gabon, Mongolia and Nigeria especially. The chief criticism of the report was probably its finding that the EITI had “neither empirical evidence nor any rigorous theory of change that links EITI as an international standard to societal change” (Scanteam 2011, p. 22) – that is, that the linkage between information and social change through budgetary allocation and policy implementation was ill-defined or not defined at all. The mere provision of information cannot alone lead to democratisation and material



welfare for repressed populations. At the time of writing, the EITI leadership has indicated its willingness (though not necessarily its capacity) to address these concerns, promising that a “tick box exercise” will be replaced by procedures ensuring “disclosure of licensing information, more transparency in the activities of state-owned enterprises, more information on the transfers to local government, the disclosure of social expenditures by companies where contractually or legally required, and information on where the revenues end up inside the government’s budget” (Short 2013, p.1).

For CSOs currently, an issue that brings these points together is the lack of information around specific mining sites; the provision of nationally aggregated data does not disclose local differences in taxation or misappropriation within a state, possibly by the same company, and likewise precludes comparisons across national boundaries, again possibly involving a particular company. Local knowledge is thus precluded and mobilisation at local levels inhibited accordingly. The weight of activism falls to the national level, where the repressive levers of cooption and intimidation can be efficiently practised by corrupt political leaders. Such issues will arise in Australia if it moves to membership, and it is notable and not promising that the pilot appears to have eschewed an attempt to investigate site information.

### **The Australian Pilot**

The Australian pilot was established under the Gillard government in November 2011 and is due to report in March 2014. Following the parent model, the tripartite stakeholder group includes governments (the Commonwealth, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland with Western Australia observing), extractive companies (Rio, ExxonMobil, BHP Billiton, Shell, BP, Unity Mining, Oz Minerals, MMG) and

CSOs (Jubilee Australia, CAER, CFMEU, Oxfam, NNTC, NCA First Peoples, Transparency International Australia). It was announced as a joint initiative of the then foreign minister, Kevin Rudd, and minister for natural resources, Martin Ferguson, and can be seen as a continuation of the African policies of the Rudd government that had given emphasis to the federal government’s role in promoting good corporate practice by Australian mining companies in Africa (Hawker 2013). Nevertheless, the pilot came some two to three years after those policies (including for example the establishment of the Centre for Sustainable Mining at the universities of Western Australia and Queensland) had been put in place. From its outset the pilot was set within cautious language that emphasised that it carried no necessary promise of full implementation leading to Australian membership of the EITI, and at the global conference of the organisation in Sydney in early 2013 (above) the then assistant Treasurer, David Bradbury, was at pains to stress the point again. The change of government in September 2013 did not lead to the aborting of the pilot but agnosticism about its outcomes remains evident. Under the Abbot government the web-site of the pilot continues to maintain the message that “The Australian Government’s decision to undertake a domestic Pilot of the EITI does not constitute an agreement to full EITI domestic implementation”, and no specific statements about the pilot appear to have emanated from the minister responsible (now Ian Macfarlane).

Since a pilot program is in no sense required for candidacy or membership of the EITI - no other national government seems to have run one, though the current German government as noted has promised to consider one - it may reasonably be asked why successive Australian governments have supported the pilot. After all, it is not long since government ministers in the time of the Rudd government were implicitly denying that membership of the EITI was necessary for Australia because high standards of financial transparency were already in operation in the country, seen especially it was said in reporting requirements to the stock exchange for listed mining companies.

The obstacles to Australia moving to candidacy of the EITI, let alone to full membership, are very considerable. Most are obvious difficulties and have been pre-figured in the progress reports of the pilot study, perhaps it could be said 'rehearsed' as preliminaries to a cautious final report. One obstacle is not that Australia already has a transparent system of reporting though that has often been claimed, as just noted. At different times the mining companies operating domestically have sought to make the argument that their full level of taxation is not recognised because of downstream imposts that are ignored in headline figures. Such claims were frequently made in the heated exchanges that accompanied the Rudd government's attempts to implement the early version of the Minerals Resource Rent Tax (MRRT). Whether an EITI compliant system would settle those claims must be doubted, not least because the pilot has adopted a simplified model that "constitutes a scoping exercise that limits the number of companies, payments and reporting requirements involved, and to some extent has more of a focus on the story or issues around the payments rather than the reconciliation of figures" (Australia's Pilot Progress Report, February 2013). A full coverage of the taxation situation of the extractive industries broadly considered is thus likely to remain obscure at least for a time – and prolonging the debate can only favour those interests opposed to the EITI protocols for whatever reasons.

But a real and major obstacle to candidacy or membership is Australia's federal constitution and, a related point, the size and structure of its national economy. Unlike any existing EITI member or candidate nation, Australia is a "real" federation in that the constitution expresses the retention by the founding states of substantive powers, and not the least of these is the capacity of state governments legally to regulate and tax the extractive industries. Whilst it is true that federal power has grown greatly since the act of federation in 1901, and that the commonwealth's share of gross taxation revenues in particular has expanded steadily and now dwarfs the states in combination, certain revenues remain with the states and may be even more closely defended in the future if federal power overall continues to rise. The recent stalemate between the commonwealth government and the West Australian state government around the acquittal of the MRRT (profits based) against state royalty payments (production based) showed that the Commonwealth had some financial levers to use against a state government, not that the state government in question loosened its constitutional powers or was encouraged to surrender information to a national plan.

Of all EITI member states, Nigeria might seem closest to Australia in that it is also a federation; but its federal structure is of a very different character and the lessons of its experience for Australia are at best ambiguous. The Nigerian national government has the formal capacity to manage its constituent states in ways that an Australian national

government does not, shown most obviously in the growth in the number of state governments from four at independence to some thirty-six as part of a federal attempt to weaken the states in a divide and rule strategy of doubtful success. A prominent member of the EITI governing council in 2011-13 was Ibrahim Dankwambo, first minister of Gombe state, one of the northern states not enjoying the oil revenues of its southern counterparts. Dankwambo's domestic campaign for a fair sharing of oil revenues doubtless supported his interest in the EITI, and the ability of EITI participants to use the organisation in such ways is one of the seldom stated benefits of membership that is not to be underestimated. But an Australian premier – say a premier of Western Australia – does not need to engage with the EITI as part of their domestic campaign to 'save their state'. They can abstain altogether and defend their position with virtually no obeisance to international or global compacts.

Australia's constitutional framework clothes a deeper economic and social reality – that the economies of the states are not identical, giving rise to economic interests that believe they are best served by a form of constitutional pluralism. In the sphere of the extractive industries, it is likely that the resource rich states, most obviously for the foreseeable future Western Australia and Queensland, will continue to resist any form of integrated national planning and reporting. The value of minerals production in Western Australia alone, it should be noted, is greater than the value of production in any existing EITI member state, and constitutes a resource that gives meaning to political contests. Political regimes change, to be sure, and policy attitudes may change accordingly, but any such changes are, again, likely to come slowly. Without the participation of all elements of the federation – all six state governments – Australia cannot proceed to membership of the EITI as membership is currently framed, around nation states.

Yet, by the same token, political values and perceptions of sectional interest are open to change as knowledge and consciousness are shaped in the public sphere. The dominant interests in the extractive industries are the large companies, all with operations in Western Australia and in Africa, and their famous (to many observers, infamous) success in defeating the MRRT in its first manifestation through a sustained campaign of (mis)information could be taken to show that their interests require constant propagation. Success is not "natural" or inevitable. In Australia as in Africa political activists beyond the centres of established power can challenge and in some circumstances reformulate dominant opinion. It seems no accident that resource rich Western Australia should have given rise to the most articulate proponent of the EITI protocols in the federal sphere – Senator Scott Ludlum of the Greens party. His near defeat in the Senate elections of September 2013 threatened to allow a senator aligned with the party of the 'mining magnate' Clive Palmer to enter parliament instead, and any revisiting of that flawed election may possibly give a different outcome again. In any event, another vocal EITI proponent is his party colleague, Senator Lee Rhiannon, as shown recently in her pursuit of information about the pilot from cautious officials in Senate committee hearings (Senate Estimates – Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, 21 November 2013). The espousal of transparency in mining revenues generally and of the EITI methodology in particular is undoubtedly associated with players on the edges or beyond the centres of established power. That is not to exclude the Labor party, the proponent after all of the pilot under consideration here; but its motives in initiating the pilot are not entirely clear and its future position not yet elaborated.

### **Australia Learning?**

As in Africa, it is around the organisations of civil society that agitation for the EITI protocols will be shaped. The CSOs' membership of the pilot to some degree has inhibited their capacity for public intervention for a time, though PWYP, Transparency International and others have not ceased from general campaigning around transparency in their websites and other publications and activities. The extension of reporting to cover site reporting and broad policy outcomes continues and can be expected to increase whatever the report and fate of the pilot.

That fate is in the hands of the Abbott government and a number of considerations summarised above, not least the attitudes of state governments and consideration of the interests of the smaller miners who have not been involved in the pilot, will likely be reflected in the outcome. That is to say, no very definite outcome is to be expected: at best a welcoming of the report as informing debate and then a period of reflection, probably a very long period at least as long as the government's life, will follow. The birth of the EITI was attended by governments, and governments remain largely in control of the organisation, but its conception took place in the public sphere and Australia likely will follow that route again.

Answers lie within Australian domestic politics, then, as in the domestic politics of the African states. Are the Australian CSOs better situated than their African counterparts? Civil society has been given causative status in the emergence of the new global norms. Governments have acquiesced or been persuaded; and businesses have responded in a mixed way, though in some cases initiating action, as in the case of Angola. At the same time, a common theme emerging from the EITI reports and commentary to date is that civil society struggles to cope with the EITI reports, however imperfect those still are in many cases: voters are illiterate, unable to relate documentary reports or even media presentations to their immediate concerns, pre-occupied as they are with economic survival and so on. As we saw above, it is true that the CSOs of the North have played a constant role in the EITI's governing body and their Southern equivalents have had a transitory appearance in that forum. To some hostile observers, a resolution of the tension is immediate if CSOs are seen to be dominated by an educated leadership distant from the communities they claim to represent, perhaps indeed misrepresenting their interests; but that is to see the CSOs as part of the problem, as contributors to building "Potemkin villages". A more considered view, that seeks to strengthen the tripartite relationship rather than weaken one of its constituents, starts from the premise that CSO success comes despite weaknesses in resources not experienced by the other partners. It is usually believed that for-profit companies as in mining will advance their interests as forcibly as they can; and that governments will do what they can to hold onto office. Both are in competitive markets, it is true, with competing firm and swayable voters always in view, but CSOs even more so must struggle to remain alive, to re-create themselves constantly. It can then be argued that CSOs need opportunities to strengthen their inherently weak position and resources to test themselves in wider public domains. That was the policy underlying the Australian government's funding of media training workshops in Timor Leste,

for example (Aaronson 201, p.54). There is a risk that supported CSOs lose their autonomy and critical bite, that cooption by one or other of the partners takes place. The very weaknesses exhibited by CSOs in Africa illuminate the Australian challenge.

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