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.