State of Civil Society Organisations in Balochistan (2016-17)

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Abstract

Civil society, besides being an avenue of volunteer association for pragmatic efforts, is a public sphere for deliberation over issues and concerns of the citizens with the aim to safeguard against policies and decisions that are harmful to their rights and interests. Globally, civil society has now become a powerful force to influence mechanisms of decision making at various levels, ranging from UN General Assembly to a village council of elders. In Pakistan, civil society activism has been gaining momentum with every passing year; however the existing socio-economic situation, political environment and legal framework are not as friendly to their efforts as desirous.

In under developed semi-tribal Balochistan, civil society is in its infancy. Civil society exists with formal and informal features throughout the province but it is widely fragmented; faced with dearth of vision, scarcity of leadership, resources and capacities. Consequently, civil society is weak and ineffective in its efforts. This research paper is a preliminary effort to find out the root causes of its weakness with the involvement of active civil society organisations, intellectuals, politicians, media persons and sensitized educated individuals. Besides exploring the presently available relevant literature, this paper is based on a series of focus group discussions and key informant interviews. In the conclusion pragmatic efforts to be undertaken by relevant stakeholders are suggested for the effectiveness of civil society. This would hopefully help further research on this topic.

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Introduction

Civil society is altogether a separate entity not only in terms of its nomenclature but also mandate and methods of operations. It is differentiated from public and private sectors on a logical ground based on its vital role and contribution. 'Civil society is different from both state and society', it is however, 'neither opposed to state nor to society. On the contrary it works as a supplementary to each of the two in an

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organized and autonomous way'.[1] As a multifaceted actor it includes formal and informal organisations and groups such as NGOs and fisher-folk communities respectively. The term civil society refers to a wide array of non-for-profit organisations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, scientific, religious and philanthropic considerations. Civil society includes NGOs, labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisation, faith based organisations, professional association and foundations.[2]

Civil society envisions developing the concept of good society. The term 'good society' though generic, drafts a vague and ever changing conceptual framework of goodness for its activists and supporters alike. It encompasses social auditing and scanning of almost each and every action of influential forces. Let it be a public sector organisation, a legislative body, a decision making mechanism, a conceptual framework, a policy or a legislative process, a political notion or a practicing value system. This approach widens not only the areas of operations for civil society but also increases its challenges, mandate and responsibilities. It gets diverse shapes and forms while adopting different methodologies to address a particular issue. Consequently, the very basic concept of civil society differs among its practitioners and intellectuals both in the form of literature and practice. Variation also prevails in its pragmatic forms depending on the socio-economic and political features and status of a country.

Provision of basic social services, in principle, is purely the responsibility of state.[3] The obvious reason behind this somewhat political notion is the large number of taxation that a state government levies upon its citizens. However, in most of the developing countries it is vividly observant that majority of citizens, particularly the poor and socially isolated communities do not get proper amount of all social services and do not have protective shield to protect their rights and interests. Consequently, civil society organisations and groups emerge to bridge that gap between state and citizenry. In such a state of affairs which is vividly evident in most developing countries including Pakistan, civil society has dual role to play on two different and opposite

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[1]   Deejay Sam, 'Civil Society: Meaning, Features and Role', 2010. www.preservesarticles.com. Accessed in June 2016.

[2]   World Bank, 'Defining Civil Society', 2015. http://go.worldbank.org/4CE7W046K0.

[3]   Cecilia Ugaz, *The Role of State in the Provision of Social Services: Decentralization and Regulation* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001).

directions, that is, it has to mobilize and lead the masses, on the one hand, and, on the other, it has to strife to make governments responsive to the needs of the masses through review and reform of existing policies and decisions or going for the new and desired ones.

Like other provinces, Balochistan also has a large number of civil society organisations of all types, nature and strength. According to a survey report the number of registered civil society organisations in Balochistan is around 15000 to 18000.[4] Among these a large number is registered as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) with its main office in the provincial capital, Quetta. Indeed, currently NGO is the most prominent actor but civil society does not mean only NGOs, dozens of other actors too qualify for this title.

In Balochistan, civil society is in its infancy. Various programs have been launched from time to time by a variety of major NGOs to provide civil society with social sanctioning for its ligitimacy and functioning. Unfortunately, majority of these programs and projects were primaily focused around the broader theme of poverty eradication and efforts pertaining to improve means of livelihood. Keeping in view the size and pace of investment being made, very little has so far been invested to actually strengthen civil society and its mandate of promoting human values such as peace, democracy and human rights etc. However, one can not disregard the efforts of few NGOs in this regard. Center for Peace and Development (CPD), for example, is one major NGO that has been working to create adequate space for civil society to function and address issues and problems that actually need to be addressed. Formation of Balochistan Democratic Forum (BDF) is an extraordinary initiative being taken by CPD. BDF hold dialogues among concerned citizens, elected representatives of various legislative bodies, civil society organisations, media and intellectuals on certain prevailing issues and problems such as constitutional amendment, state of human rights, electoral process and engaging people for dialogue over conflicting issues such as sectarian voilence and promotion of peaceful coexistence.[5] Apart from holding sessions of delibrations, BDF has also been publishing reports of seminar and conferences for wider undersanding of masses. Stregthening Participatory Organisation (SPO) is another major NGO mandated to uplift masses. It has since long been working in more than 20 districts of the province with local organisations under the umbrella of Civil Society Networks (CSNs). These district based civil

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4   Farhad Zulfiqar, *NGOs in Pakistan* (Lahore: ShirkatGah, 2012), p.7.
5   N. Khan, *Balochistan Democratic Forum (BDF)*, Center for Peace and Development, CPD, 2010, p.12.

society networks take up local issues, advocate and lobby for building pressure to influence decisions of district administration to get them resolved. However, due to ongoing law and order situation and political instability, NGOs and all actors of civil society are confronted with issue of threats that hamper their efforts.

Nonetheless, civil society in its totality, which proclaims to be the third sector other than the public and private sectors, has not yet proved to be a powerful force to protect the rights and interests of masses and promote true and genuine essence of democracy and democratic values. Civil society is being criticized by both academia and practitioners alike for its poor performance and ineffectiveness.

This research paper strives to pinpoint underlying causes of weakness of civil society. A two pronged strategy is adopted to investigate into the matter. This includes studying the present capacities of both formal and informal actors of civil society while making an overall assessment of socio-economic and political environment available to it for strengthening and becoming resourcefully effective. The effectiveness of civil society, by and large, is subject to its legitimacy, accountability and social sanctioning, which is gauged generally through public participation in its efforts with regard to building pressure to influence a policy or a decision making mechanism, indeed for public interests, which is genuinely the art of civil society activism. Civil society organisations of all kinds in this province have been either indifferent or silent to issues that require their attention. For instance, violence against women, combating terrorism or highlighting unlawful acts of powerful forces has never received proper attention by civil society either due to delicacy of the issues or lack of capacity.

Literature review

Prior to tracing back the origin of civil society, it is imperative to add public and private sector into the realm of discourse and make a random comparison. While comparing with state institutions, civil society is too young not only in terms of its emergence, but also resourcefulness. State institutions have since long been privileged to have constitutional and legal support, administrative push-up and resources by the government, and the ever needed social sanctioning by citizenry. Whereas the private sector or businesses (national or multinational) not only provide financial resources, but also share the burden of state/government by providing jobs to citizens in a country. As a result private sector enjoys more support from the state than civil society. On the contrary, for being a young social entity with ever increasing challenges and complex issues to be addressed, civil society and its multifaceted actors lack financial

resources, political support and assistance of media. The situation is, however, changing rapidly. Various international conventions with regard to promotion and protection of human, women and child rights and environment etc are providing more space to civil society. According to John Keane,[6] with globalization the term civil society has become both a major category in human sciences and a key phrase often used by politicians, corporate executives, journalists, charitable foundations, human rights organisations and citizens. This phrase was not as frequent three decade ago. At the global level there has been a dramatic expansion in the size, scope and capacity of civil society mainly due to globalization, telecommunication and economic integration. An estimated US$ 15 billion was contributed by international civil society organisations towards efforts pertaining to development assistance.[7] Conversion of mutual cooperation from group and community levels for survival[8] has now widened to region and international levels due to wider understanding of issues and challenges which tantalizes life over the globe. Whereas civil society plays a role for the promotion of democracy and good governance,[9] Robert D Putnam summarizes civil society activism as social capital. He observes that social capital, which refers to social networks, is similarly important like physical and human capital to increase productivity of individuals and groups.[10] Another illustrative example of civil society is the theory of 'big idea' put forward by Michael Edwards. He believes that civil society is basically an arena of associational life to provide concerned citizen with a venue of public sphere to deliberate upon issues and administrative loopholes towards betterment of situation, which he named as good society.[11]

Apart from internationally known definitions, nationally various civil society experts define civil society organisation while considering the local contextual framework of our social set up. Zenia Shaukat has pointed out that NGOs are described as private, non-profit citizen's organisations working in the capacity of pressure groups and support

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[6]   Jhon Keane, *Civil Society, Definition and Approaches* (London: The University of Westminster, 2005), p.23.

[7]   World Bank, *op.cit*.

[8]   See Bruce Sievers, *What is Civil Society*, Grantmakers in the Arts, supporting a creative America, GIA Reader, vol.20, 2009.

[9]   Robert D Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2000), pp.35-40.

[10] *Ibid*., *Better Together* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2003), p.48.

[11] Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, second edition (New York: Polity Press, 2009), p.9.

centers. In Pakistan, NGOs are mainly considered to be synonymous for the 'civil society' though civil society is a far broader term.[12] Fayyaz Baqir points out that civil society is actually a very broad based set of institutions. Anything between the family and state will fall in civil society excluding the private sector that works for profit. He further explains that change always begins with one individual and small sustained efforts.[13]

        In Pakistan, civil society has now been an important part of every intellectual discourse. Since March 2008 there has been a democratic government in Pakistan which has helped civil society to become better organised in the country to play a more active and efficient role in the society, economy and polity. It can also help the government to fight the menace of terrorism in the country.[14] Empowerment of civil society is the best option to combat not only terrorism, but also poverty, violence, radicalization and to restore peace in the conflict ridden society of Pakistan.[15] The issue of sustainability of civil society, apart from its dependancy on foreign funding and donor driven project approach, is yet to be ensured.[16]

Methodology
Civil society study has a global, regional and local milieu. To arrive at some sagacious conclusion, apart from reviewing relevant literature, a series of focus group discussions with heterogeneous groups were held to enhance validity of findings. Key informants interviews were conducted to further help enrich the findings from local perspective. All possible efforts were made to ensure participation of relevant stakeholders to get better insight about issues and challenges that have an impact on performance of civil society in the province. A large number of concerned professionals representing various organisations were interviewed to explore their opinion and practicing values. Secondly a large number of books, research journals, reports and official documents of NGOs / donor agencies and official documents were studied while

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[12]   Zania Shaukat, 'Civil Society in Pakistan: Through Challenges and Opportunities', in *NGORC Journal*, Karachi, 2007, p.4.

[13]   Fayyas Baqir (Interview), 'We Need to Improve Governance in Civil Society Organizations', in *Ibid*., p.8.

[14]   Uzam Ahmed, 'Civil Society, Today and Tomorrow, 2015, theexpresstribune.com

[15]   Nikhat Sattar, 'Has Civil Society failed in Pakistan?' Working paper No.6 SPDC publication, 2001.

[16]   USAID, 'Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Pakistan', 2015. www.usaid.gov\pakistan/civilsociety-sustainability.

exploring for secondary data collection. Based on findings of both primary and secondary data some solid conclusions have been drawn and pragmatic recommendations have been suggested, to be undertaken by relevant stakeholders, to strengthen civil society organisations so that they could play an effective role in the province.

Result and discussion

Multiple sessions of focus group discussions with heterogamous groups unveil various shortcoming and weaknesses of the existing organisations of civil society in the province. Broadly, these can be categorized as internal weaknesses and external challenges. For instance, almost every actor of civil society, let it be a formal organisation such as NGO or an informal group, proclaim to be serving humanity without any discrimination, but biasness is vividly evident while they focus on issues or address a particular community. One of the most common actor of civil society is the faith based organisations whose ideology and approach widen the gap between masses on religious and sectarian grounds instead of getting them united. Consequently, the addressed issue never gets fully resolved. Parochialism, at any levels, tend to limit approach and focus to achieve overall goals and objectives.

Focus group discussion also highlighted the issue of immaturity and scarcity of resources as another major internal weakness that hampers civil society's contribution towards any addressed issue. Many groups and organisations such as Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and NGOs do lack professional capacities both at staff and organisational level. As a result they seldom focus any genuine issue according to its need. Since most of the actors of civil society are fully dependant on foreign aid, therefore, their programs and projects are by and large donor driven, which hinders their social acceptance. Of course, a barefoot doctor as an event of public health program organised by civil society organisation would not work without the support of paramedic staff of nurses as paid staff of public or private sectors.

Another major issue tagged with civil society is the mushroom growth of groups and organisations under the umbrella of civil society. This happens mostly during calamities such as displacement, drought, flood and other emergencies.

Apart from internal weaknesses, civil society is also confronted with some unavoidable challenges. These challenges are external factors such as constitutional and legal framework, socio-economic and political environment and pressure by media and international and regional political changes.

Friendly environment including constitutional and legal framework, no doubt, act as a protective shield to help improve the unpromising social status of civil society. They can, in turn, help improve civil society's performance and effectiveness. Since the existing legal framework is not congenial, a conflicting situation persist between government and civil society which restricts activism of civil society. Few years back the federal government initiated efforts to restrict NGO's over an issue. This was strongly opposed by a large majority of civil society organisations under the umbrella of Pakistan Civil Society Forum (PSCF). The forum strongly condemned the broad-brush maligning of NGOs through a spate of statements made by senior politicians and government officials. In particular, the forum took serious exception to a statement made by the Interior Minister, Chaudhry Nisar Ali, alleging national NGO's involvement in anti-state activities having links with Israel, India and the United States. The forum noted and added that 'such statements amount to hate speech as they may incite violence against NGOs and can put at risk the lives of hundreds of thousands of NGO workers active in the various parts of Pakistan'.[17]

The suspicious working relationship between government and private sector is another major challenge that civil society face externally. This distrustful situation hampers the watch dog role of civil society to monitor the actions and deeds of private sector. Consequently, public interest gets compromised.

The point highlighted during the study revolved around gaps between civil society's actual performance and the expectation of the masses. Another important point was that in order to activate public sector organisations and monitor private sector, civil society must play the much demanded role of a watch dog.

Conclusion

This research paper finds out a number of issues and challenges that obstruct civil society performance in the province. Despite the fact that a large segment of people do hope for effective civil society activism, another overwhelming majority still believes that reforms to present system of service delivery mechanism can serve to improve the already deteriorating socio-economic situation in the province.

Lack of social sanctioning is a major challenge that civil society organisations are facing throughout the length of breadth of the country, particularly in Balochistan. Apparently, reasons of non-acceptance is

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[17]   Nasir Memon, *Vilification of NGOs Condemned*, report of a meeting (Islamabad, Pakistan Civil Society Forum, 2015), p.7.

justifiable for some stake-holders, but indifferent attitudes of informed persons, politicians and media are not understandable, who incessantly claim to be the champions of rights and interests of the people.

The existing civil society organisations are largely divided into two set of groups — formal and informal. The formal group is, for the most part, being influenced by NGOs, drawing strong suspicions from the illiterate/backward classes of our society, in general, and the powerful establishment, in particular. While, the informal one is dominated by faith-based groups with primitive, outdated and radical methodology in the garb of religion.

Jirga, as a major informal civil society organization, is being used by the powerful establishment for the furtherance of its political interests. Professional associations, trade unions and labor federations are inclined more towards their business unionism instead of social unionism.

The dearth of vision combined with scarcity of leadership portrays efforts of civil society as fragmented and defocused that can hardly bring about any change in the current scenario. Consequently, it cannot play its needed and effective role of monitoring over the deeds of government and private sector during policy and decision making processes. Merit and quality are also compromised both during staff selection processes and while working in the field.

The role of civil society as a 'watch dog' to monitor proper functioning of various services delivery mechanism and decision making processes are completely missing. This role of strict monitoring seems to be compromised by influential organisations due to financial dependency and parochialism. Resultantly, the decadent performance of civil society has degraded to the lower level of public sector organisations, known for their inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

Along with their financial dependency, the weak presence of civil society activism in Balochistan is because they are terrorized both by non-state actors and law enforcement agencies. Another contributing factor is the ongoing political instability in the province. Interestingly, there is also a fear about the emerging role of civil society among political workers, parties, media persons and even civil beaurucracy.

Curricula and course contents of educational institution do not allow masses to be informed about significance of civil society and be friendly towards its activism. Another important aspect is that majority of civil society activists are also oblivious of their role and contribution towards their prime objective.

Research and Development (R&D) is an ever increasing human resource management activity but it is continuously being ignored by the

present actors of civil society. The civil society organisations are still heavily dependent on out-dated and conventional methodology in dealing with different issues.

Media and political parties must reassess their dubious role in choosing to represent the cause of civic sector or public/private sectors. Safeguarding their economic interests, the media becomes a virtual stooge of the private sector, particularly of the multinational companies (MNCs), and tout of the government. A close observation of the political culture of the country makes it evident that almost all political parties keep shifting their political stance about people's concerns and problems.

Recommendations

On the basis of findings of the analysis drawn from focus group discussions, key informant interviews and review of literature, following doable actions are suggested to be taken by relevant stakeholders. All possible efforts have been made to avoid preparing a 'wish list', instead need based pragmatism is taken into consideration.

- In fact, altruism is the true spirit of civil society activism; therefore, all other belongingness must be given up both at organisational and individual levels. Human values such as tolerance, coexistence, peace, democracy and human rights must be given weightage instead of political, tribal and personal interests.

- Civil society and democracy is interdependent, the more a society is democratic the better would be performance of civil society. And the more civil society become active the more democratic values will flourish. It is advisable that rigidity and tribalism is more intense in Balochistan, therefore, much of the efforts must be focused around promoting education, promoting democratic values and creating space for civil society. Extremism and narrow mindedness as a result of conventional thoughts must be replaced altogether with modern and open mindedness and liberty of freedom for induction of new ideas and concepts. Alignment of approaches with international community and actors of civil society around the globe is another major task to be considered.

- The prevailing vague image of civil society can be improved by establishing a combined body that should ensure induction of both formal and informal groups of civil society in it. This umbrella organisation must be given the mandate to frequently assess the strength and shortcoming of its members, in general, and the combined body, in particular, and should make continuous efforts to overcome those weaknesses identified.

- Initiation of making a vibrant movement of civic entities is an ever needed demand of all segments of the society; therefore, extra efforts must be made to bring religious groups, media and political parties into mainstream of civil society. NGOs for being the most prominent actor of civil society must come forward to take this initiative. Once the body is formed and operational, a long process of consultation must be made to develop a collective vision for the civil society at the provincial level. The vision must be widely shared among participating organisations for its acceptability and clarity. A crystal clear vision besides augmenting split efforts will also help minimize wastage of resources during the course of objective achievement. Since lack of vision is one of the major root causes of present fragmented and vague civil society image, therefore, this task must be treated on priority basis.
- After undertaking successful efforts with regard to identification, prioritization and getting to solve internal weakness, external challenges must be addressed to improve social sanctioning and achieving support from media and political parties. To become efficient and effective, apart from resolving external issues and challenges, capacities both in term of finance and human resource must be given priority, which in turn help better address the issues.
- In order to strengthen and empower civil society and its actors, it is imperative to treat Research and Development (R&D) as a regular feature of the efforts of combined body of the civil society. R&D besides identifying internal weaknesses also helps in making an organisation strong.