

Domains of Conflict, Governance, and the NGO Sector in Pakistan: A Critical Appraisal

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Introduction

Pakistan inherited a multitude of conflicts at the time of her birth. The poor functioning of the governance system in the first six decades of her existence got worse as the successive governments, operating in the hands of vested economic interests as well as conservative political elite, were not able to let the modern, liberal and progressive outlook to grow in an uninhibited manner. Democracy remained a dream yet to be cherished in its true spirit. A strong democracy could have supported the civil society and vice versa, but the two could not evolve in a manner that could enhance the confidence of the masses, who were also subjected to fissiparous forces. Emerging divisions enhanced the intensity and diversity of the prevalent conflicts, thus posing new challenges for the society with every passing year.

This paper explores three major questions in the context of Pakistan. These are: a) the nature of significant areas of conflict addressed or affected by the actions of civil society; b) whether better approaches for development were possible both by the state and non-state actors, and c) prospects for the public-private collaboration in the context of new liberal policies in resolving the present-day conflicts.

The paper provides, at the outset, a brief introduction of the NGO sector in Pakistan. It is followed by a discussion on the domain of conflicts and the role of the NGO sector in this respect and the sector itself as a controversial domain. The information used is from the secondary sources on the subject, a survey of NGO functionaries and

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expert opinion on NGOs. The conclusion highlights the position of the NGO sector as an agent of change and uplift, as well as that of conflict. In view of the expanding pace of the sector, and growing emphasis upon the policies of public-private partnership, this analysis is relevant to understand the contemporary processes of governance, change and development in Pakistan.

Major areas of conflict in Pakistan focused in this paper include: ideology, governance, leadership, security, ethnicity, resource distribution, income distribution, urban-rural divide, environmental preservation, socialization and education, gender, human rights, sustainable development, and government versus non-governmental sectors. Due to rapid influx of influences from the external environment under modernization, globalization, geo-strategic compulsions and internal dynamics of the sociopolitical system, the above areas have been identified as crucial for survival and well being of the society.

Historical background

Historically Pakistan has gone through difficult times due to many commissions and omissions of its leadership among other factors. Birth of Pakistan itself was considered as a solution to the communal problem of united India; to provide a home to Muslims where they could establish their autonomous institutions free from the fear of Hindu domination. This political approach of the leaders, who struggled for it, generated a process which had itself sown the seeds of conflict, which started germinating after the new state was finally established in 1947. The non-governmental sector, commonly taken as voluntary sector in Pakistan, has evolved during the past sixty years. During this period various issues affecting the Pakistan society and the well-being of its people have molded the approach of the NGO sector as well. NGOs themselves are immersed in a conflicting position due to their not-so-smooth relationship with the government. The Government of Pakistan has been generating, patronizing, funding, guiding, controlling, as well as confining the NGO activity in various phases, hence the paradoxical interaction between the two is obvious, and can be identified as a domain of conflict. Phenomenal growth of NGOs in the nineteen eighties is also attributed to the failure of a top-down, centralized approach to the planning and implementation of programs. A number of NGOs initiated bottom-up development activities. They experimented with participatory development at the grass roots level. Moreover these groups were formed to protect the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups like minorities, child workers, industrial workers, women, etc. in view of large-scale violation of human rights and rise of intolerance during the

military regime of General Zia.¹ The NGO sector has been striving to mitigate the problems like poverty, illiteracy, human rights abuses, gender discrimination, and effecting some changes in legislation as well.

For a developing country like Pakistan, having a poor profile regarding human development, issues of development, especially sustainable development are intricately connected with resource distribution, income distribution and the system of governance. High incidence of poverty, poor quality of education, inherent biases in the domain of culture against some sections of society namely women, aged, disable, minorities, rural and menial worker, are compounded by tribal, caste and kinship cleavages. The pressing challenges of adjustment in a globalizing world are throwing virtually every human being into fierce competition; the conflict has seeped deep down into the personality of each individual, thus creating maladjusted of individuals and contributing to the malfunctioning of the system as a whole.

The NGO sector in Pakistan

There were 5543 NGOs registered in four provinces of Pakistan in 1990,² while in 2005, the number registered with the social welfare department in only one province of Sindh has been reported to be 6151.³ For a cursory glance on the evolution of the sector see Table 1.

TABLE - 1
Evolution of the Voluntary Organizations in Pakistan since 1947

(percentage)					
Broad Category	1947-58	1959-71	1972-77	1978-87	1988-2001
Madrasah and other religious education	27	26	23	21	20
Social Welfare	16	13	17	20	21
Primary and secondary education	9	5	13	14	10

¹ Omar Asghar Khan, 'Ghair Sarkari Tanzeemon Ka Taraqiyyati Aur Awami Pairvi Ka Kirdar', Karamat Ali (ed.), *Riyasat, Samaji Tabdeeli Aur Awam Omar Asghar Khan Ki Muntakhib Tehreerain* (Karachi: Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, 2003), p.215.

² Muhammad Shareef Ashraf, *Survey of NGOs in the Field of Social Services*, Vol. II, Directory of NGOs, Part 2 (Lahore: HRH Associates, 1990).

³ News Report, *Dawn* (daily), 25 November 2005.

Vocational / technical education	0	7	19	5	4
Campaigning or lobbying for civic amenities	7	11	15	12	14
Health	16	9	4	6	8
Community and neighbourhood improvement	2	1	5	4	4
Religious activities, preaching	7	3	1	2	3
Civil rights movement	0	1	0	1	2
Others	18	24	3	15	14
Total	100	100	100	100	100
NPOs by year of establishment	1.3	3.0	9.0	27.4	54.4

Note: These estimates are based on the survey of nonprofit organizations conducted as part of CNP Project, Pakistan, quoted in SPDC Working Paper No. 4, p.31.

The survey, quoted in the following pages, was conducted with 110 persons working as team member of 94 NGOs (one regional, 35 national, 58 provincial /local level), through a questionnaire, conducted by mail as well as in person. Major issues discussed with them included: general impact of the NGOs work, any negative impact felt, potential of NGOs to effect basic changes, and the need and prospects for public-private collaboration in future.

In the following section major domains of conflict would be discussed with reference to their relevance for the issues of governance and development, and the role of NGO sector as well.

Major domains of conflict in Pakistan

a. Ideology

From its inception, Pakistan claimed to be an ideological state. This was in direct contrast with what the founder of the nation had envisaged i.e. a secular state. The early managers of the state could not sense the significance of this position and the nation was left in a continued tussle between the secular-modernists and the fundamentalist-conservatives. The NGO sector has been mostly dominated by the modernist group, at least the trend-setters in the sector do not endorse religious ideology of the clergy, and the conflict between NGOs and the clergy has become a

perpetual one. It has created aversion, suspicion, and caution about the NGOs, and this has hampered their work. Very interestingly, the voluntary organizations set up in large number by religious organizations for various religious and temporal purposes are also NGOs in their essence, but the word 'NGOs' triggers extreme hatred among the clergy. They refuse to accept that whatever they are doing is also non-governmental in principle. Since the religious groups have been actively working to mold public opinion in favour of their own ideology, they have effectively used media and communication technology while the NGOs have not bothered to respond to them. Anyhow, the conflict goes on. The people, however, show diverse attitudes towards NGOs under the influence of oppositional propaganda, and hence their participation in NGOs work is checked. The government has been treating both the religious forces and the NGOs in keeping with its own compulsions and convenience. Pro-religious governments in Pakistan have created difficulties for the NGOs, both directly and indirectly. An obvious example is the so called Islamist regime of Zia, which was bent upon its Islamization program, and created an extremely unbearable situation in the country regarding minorities, human rights, women, and civil liberties. This was the time when the independent NGO sector resisted openly and strongly. It made clear to the regime that dictatorial policies, though under the garb of Islamization, could not be tolerated by a large section of society. Later, in 1994, the NGO Bill was presented in the parliament to curtail NGOs' activities or to regulate them more strictly. The party in power at the time, the Muslim League, followed the political legacy of Zia regime, and thereafter, the bill paved the way for amended legislation about NGOs.

Since the eighties, sectarian schism in Pakistan has been widened by multiple factors including: the spread of arms during the Afghan war, trained militants, involvement of religious groups in armed conflicts inside and outside the country, and financial support from external sources for the opposition parties.

Theological differences have given rise to many sects within mainstream Islam, and these sects fight violently with each other. There are many sectarian organizations (NGOs in spirit)⁴ serving their own communities, as well as shielding them in an environment of competition

⁴ By naming such organizations as faith-based organizations (FBOs), they can be treated separately from the mainstream NGOs engaged in development and advocacy work. Anyhow their co-existence with the NGOs also invites attention of the analysts as to their implications for the society, which has become complicated due to rising number of the FBOs.

and risk. They provide basic services (health, education, housing, ceremonial arrangements, etc.) as well as support religious activities; preaching, pilgrimages, and management of holy places. They manage guards for the holy places; holy processions and also for militancy and terrorist attacks on the other sects and the state as such. Their voluntary activity varies widely, i.e. provision of food to the hungry, providing support for funerals, relief in general and in disaster situations, apart from militant and terrorist activities etc. This makes it difficult for the analysts to classify their work. *Madrassah* (religious seminary) students get free education, food and boarding from *Zakat*. Then these students are indoctrinated to be a fanatic *mullah*, a militant, or a preacher. All such activities are knitted so well together, that separating welfare and development from religious fanaticism is difficult, at least in practical sense. This phenomenon of *madrassah* was very much boosted by the Zia regime. The good and bad outcomes of such voluntary activity, justified in the name of ideology, are important determinants of genuine development of the people.

b) Governance

Good governance as the desirable form of governance means ‘a process that is more inclusive, participatory, transparent, accountable, and responsive’.⁵ The UN agencies have listed the following as components of good governance: (a) political process ensuring democratic elections and public accountability at all levels in society; (b) a vigorous civil society; (c) a public information system providing free access to accurate data; (d) an independent judiciary; (e) an enterprising private sector; (f) government institutions with the capacity to formulate and implement policies; and, (g) a civil service managed according to a standardized and transparent set of rules.⁶

According to an analysis, major issues of governance in Pakistan are: (a) persistence of colonial structure, (b) need to have greater confidence in people regarding decision-making, (c) erosion of state institutions due to low credibility, competence and integrity, and (d) perceived external threats.⁷ All these allude to a crisis of governance. As

⁵ Ezra Mbogori and Hope Chigudu, ‘Civil Society and Government: A Continuum of Possibilities’, CIVICUS, *Civil Society at the Millennium* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 2005), p.111.

⁶ C.f. UNO in Zia-ul-Islam, *Good Governance for Pakistan* (Place unknown: Argus Advertising, 2001), p.16.

⁷ Mushahid Hussain and Akmal Hussain, *Pakistan Problems of Governance* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1993), p.160.

in other parts of the world, in Pakistan, the civil society, and NGOs as its main constituent, has been struggling to ensure good governance, rather than being merely observers of the governance system. Three dimensions of governance – economic, political and social⁸ – can be addressed by the NGOs as follows:

Economic governance: It deals with sound fiscal management; public spending focused on human development; service closer to the beneficiaries; and low corruption. Through advocacy, raising voices against mismanagement and corruption, and helping the government to devise and implement policies, NGOs can ensure better economic governance.

Political governance: Political stability and rule of law are two aspects of political governance, which are critical for the very existence of society, particularly when the government fails to sustain them. It can be said that there is little the NGOs can do or have been doing in this regard in Pakistan. They can raise public awareness about the factors causing instability, and also make the law-enforcement agencies accountable to people.⁹

Social governance: It is about public participation in decision-making and gender equity. By building confidence between development workers and the beneficiaries and ensuring to make the development process participatory, NGOs can play a significant role.

After clarifying the concept of governance, there is a need to discuss role of the NGOs in Pakistan. The non-governmental organizations have been less active on ensuring good economic governance in Pakistan. They have paid little attention to causes of poverty, or corruption, or exploitative system. Their attention has been focused on skill training, entrepreneur training, and micro-credits on an extensive scale, and on marketing to a small scale, in order to help alleviate poverty. They have supported the informal sector and service provision as a people's solution to problems caused by inability of the state agencies entrusted with such duties.

Concerning social governance, NGOs have taken some steps to promote political education and women's participation in various levels of political representation. Regarding gender equity, the role of the

⁸ Sadiq Ahmed, 'Poverty Reduction and Governance in South Asia', *Mahbub ul Haq Development Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2001, p.44.

⁹ Citizens-Police Liaison Committee is an example in this regard.

NGOs has been commendable. There are a large number of women NGOs or NGOs working on women issues. More details on the above three aspects of governance would be given in the later sections of this paper.

Regarding political governance, political education programs have been run by many NGOs, e.g. Aurat Foundation, Awaz CDS, Citizen's Commission for Democratic Development, and Church World Service. These programs have used various methodologies, bringing political parties and the NGOs together thus creating linkages between two important components of civil society and ensuring people's voices to reach the incumbent and potential parliamentarians.

Advocacy has been added to NGOs strategies in the 1980s. In the 1990s, NGOs became more confident and vocal; they organized protests and demonstrations against the nuclear tests, the Fifteenth Amendment concerning powers of the president, Kalabagh dam conflict and also about promoting peace in the region by organizing peace assembly, and other such activities.¹⁰ Such moves brought NGOs into direct conflict with the government, and as a result they had to face serious challenges.¹¹ 'NGOs have joined the disadvantaged sections of society in their programs; and have adopted advocacy method to address their problems and obtain concessions for them. NGOs' efforts are focused at a democratic socio-economic and political system, and they want a change in the existing laws, introduce better legislation, and a type of development that weakens the stranglehold of privileged class and realize basic rights for the masses.¹² To this end, the challenges to the NGOs include: centralization of power, inequality, social devaluation, economic disruption, and political instability. When people at large are kept out of the decision-making process, they cannot enjoy the fruits of development.¹³ Through advocacy, the NGOs have successfully struggled for women's rights, environmental protection, reducing, if not abolishing, child labour, and social welfare.

Less than satisfactory performance of the NGO sector can be explained as a result of a weak civil society. Ahmed has identified major

¹⁰ Naheed Hasan and Zafar Junejo, *State of the Citizen Sector in Pakistan* (Karachi: NGO Resource Centre, 1999), p.38.

¹¹ Omar Asghar Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-41, Khan has provided details on experience of the advocacy NGOs regarding crucial political issues of the 1990s.

¹² Sheen Farrukh, *Maholiyat, Qanoon Aur Hum* (Lahore: Mashal, 1996), p.131.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.132.

reasons for this. First, it's the gradual de-politicization of society which is a multidimensional process. When people are ignorant of their rights, they cannot demand them. Moreover, migration to Middle East, huge inflow of remittances, political oppression during the martial law regimes, and halting the political process during the Zia era have largely depoliticized the masses. Second, the fall of the socialist regime in the former USSR demoralized the socialist groups. Third, trade union movement has declined. Fourth, the media with no real sense of development imperatives, has not mobilized the people while intelligentsia has failed to face up to the challenge. Pointing out the shortcomings of NGO sector, Ahmed states that it has not been able to play its role as an active organ of civil society.¹⁴

In response to their demand for good governance, the NGOs themselves have been called upon by various quarters – the government, NGOs federations, and the media – to ensure transparency, accountability, more inclusion and participation in their organizations. The NGOs have been criticizing the government for something that they themselves have been accused of. In fact, development has suffered at the hands of both the state and non-state actors. NGOs realized the need for good management of their own affairs when they were strongly criticized by the government and were threatened with new legislation to regulate them. NGOs have also called for more access to information so that citizens can make informed judgments and evaluate performance of public officials and institutions. NGOs' periodic literature, protest activities, and awareness campaigns, all are means to ensure good governance.

Globally, the efficacy of the state has been questioned due to its many perceived failures, particularly in the areas of service delivery and development. The alternative sought, is decentralization of state authority, functions and services. The devolution of power plan of General Pervaiz Musharraf regime (2000) in Pakistan was a similar measure, though it had other motives as well, such as providing legitimacy to the military government, and to engage people and development workers at the grass roots level, thus relieving the burden of authorities at the centers of power. The devolution plan consisted of setting up district governments in the country, with the exception of two metropolitan centers of Karachi and Lahore, where city governments were formed. Since the plan entailed good elements of participatory decision-making and development, and grooming leadership at the local

¹⁴ Syed Jaffar Ahmed, *Civil Society Ki Yeh Khamoshi Kiyon?* (Karachi: Pakistan Peace Coalition, Education for Peace, Articles Series No.8, 2003).

level, NGOs have responded to it enthusiastically. NGOs launched awareness and training activities for the candidates, voters and the public at large to familiarize them with the details of the plan.¹⁵ In this process of power shift, NGOs acted as facilitators. The plan, however, owing to its inherent shortcomings and hasty introduction, faced some troubles. NGOs again came forward to point out such problems and help address them. When the revised plan was introduced for the second round of elections for the district councils, NGOs were still there for continuous improvement of the new system, as it entails hope for empowerment of the powerless.

c) *Leadership*

The ruling elite of Pakistan has been trained in the feudal and colonial environment and has continued the same culture of patronage. It expected blind obedience from the masses – a fact which is a testimony to the ruling elite's insensitivity to the problems of the people. The elite failed to repeal the dictatorial laws of *hudood*, *qisas*, *diyat* and blasphemy, nor have they acted on any single recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry for Women (1997).¹⁶

Observers have found that the ruling classes have been exploiting major contradictions to further their own interests and depriving the masses of their due participation in development and political processes. They have been opposing democracy in the name of under-development of the masses. They have promoted reliance on ascription, opportunism, depending on their connection with the establishment for ascending to power rather than solving the problems of people and changing the structure of society. The political parties have failed to resolve the challenges and conflict linked to the political process, mainly because their leadership is still commanded by the feudals.¹⁷

The elite-mass distance in society is maintained by some NGOs as well. Among the NGOs there has developed a kind of hierarchy. Elite NGOs, that serve as umbrella NGOs for the smaller ones – intermediary NGOs, and the community-based NGOs – these three categories have

¹⁵ Salman Abid, *Pakistan Ka Niya Siyasi Nizam Aur Maqami Hakoomaton Ka Kirdar* (Lahore: Jamhoori Publications, 2002, II ed), p. 52.

¹⁶ Eqbal Ahmad, 'Roots of Violence in Pakistan', *Pakistan Perspectives*, 4: 1 (January-June 1999), p. 9.

¹⁷ Mubarak Ali, 'Minority Majority Conflict', S. Haroon Ahmad (ed.), *Contemporary Conflicts* (Karachi: Pakistan Psychiatric Society, Sindh, 1991), p. 15.

their own types of leadership coming from the corresponding classes of society. Their leadership has, therefore, promoted their class culture in NGOs. One can see in some NGOs, elitism, prosperity due to foreign funding, lucrative infrastructure, large overhead spending as compared to the benefits accruing to the people, and a distance from the beneficiaries in terms of denying them participation in all stages of projects designed for them. The rhetoric of participatory development is, though, very popular, but genuine participation is not allowed. Some of the elite NGOs have their offices in posh areas of the federal or provincial capitals with security guards, and their leadership is not friendly to the common people, whereas some other elite NGOs are quite different. It shows that the NGOs' leadership reflects traits prevalent in society and cannot be generalized. Authoritarian rule of one person in the NGO, who is mostly the founder, shows that still some NGOs have a long way to go, to evolve a democratic culture within themselves.

Since the ruling elite in the country come from a privileged class, they have resorted to a system that preserves their privileges and exclusive rights to hereditary rule in the country. It happened only in the eighties that the urban middle class and the enterprising sections got representation in the power echelon. In a small number the underprivileged class has also got some voice and its members are sitting in the local bodies formed under the devolution plan. NGOs have supported the process of devolution. Many of the new local leaders entering the local bodies have emerged from the NGO ranks, and this has caused some friction with the traditional leadership.

d) Security

Pakistan has been facing many external challenges due to its geo-strategic location, the perpetuation of the Kashmir conflict, its attitude toward the super powers in different phases of history, and the policies followed by its leaders in the world affairs and foreign relations. The internal threats faced by Pakistan originated mainly due to its political system, poor economic governance, bad management of law and order, role of militant groups, corruption in the law enforcement agencies, and poor judicial system which could not build people's trust in its efficacy to dispense justice. The transnational linkage of the so-called *jihad* initiated by the Afghanistan war has created enormous opportunities for the suppliers of arms, and a drug culture was promoted under the protection of these arms. Many institutions emerged with it for recruitment, indoctrination, training, and widespread acceptance and sustenance of the essentials of *jihad* phenomena such as *mujahids*, *madaris*, and the militant training camps.

Militarization of society and politics became deeply entrenched later on due to increasing influence of the military and pro-military forces in the country. Steep rise in armed violence, armed conflict and criminality in the country was directly supported by these trends of the eighties and nineties.

Today, crime, domestic and sectarian violence,¹⁸ terrorist attacks, civil disorder, and assaults on women point to a horrible picture. State has failed to protect its citizens many a time, especially in the late nineties, when it was observed that ‘the convergence and accentuation of multiple forms of violence, such as now exists in Pakistan, has historically signaled the decline of the state, its legitimacy, and its institutional will and capacity to govern.’¹⁹ Roots of violence traced by Ahmad testify the hegemony of the feudal culture, which has permeated the whole society, though feudalism has been declining as relations of production. He sees ‘mastery of violence’ as the prominent feature of feudalism, so through this tradition violence has assumed a central place in the culture of Pakistan. Violence has a large spectrum, and prevails in almost every sphere of life – family, relations of production, politics, media, religion, education – so at all inter-personal and inter-group levels there is coercion, repression and threat of some kind.²⁰

NGOs working for human rights, like being Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and other women’s groups have documented, protested, and even taken actions to stop most heinous forms of violence. Their action has brought positive results in terms of raising awareness, sensitization, legal literacy, training of police personnel about human rights, and keeping a watch on the performance of law-enforcement agencies and courts.²¹

¹⁸ The incidents of violence against religious minorities and sectarian violence have been reported by the HRCP reports. It observes increase in such incidents in the year 2009 as well. Its detail is available in *State of Human Rights in Pakistan 2009*, pp. 122-40.

¹⁹ Eqbal Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁰ NGOs have busted private jails of feudal lords who kept bonded labour families, made the public aware about the issue of child abuse, have protested unendingly on gang rape cases, sought to redress and legal action for them, and have dared to challenge the practice of forced marriages involving violence. NGOs action has gradually made the people and the courts alert to such incidences and now the court itself has started taking action on such incidents. Along HRCP report, see also, Maisoon Hussein, *For Life, Peace and Justice* (Karachi: Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research/ Pakistan Study Centre, 2005), pp. 193-8.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Violence against women has been very actively addressed by the NGOs, and they have finally succeeded in breaking the silence on the taboos surrounding sexual violence, honour killing, and the state has been forced to legislate on the issues. Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act 2006 was passed after much haggling, for which major driving force has been the NGO sector. But one should note that total number of cases of violence against women have been rising during 2005-2008. According to the HRCP's annual report of 2009, there were reported 1,404 murders, including 647 women murdered in the name of honour. Moreover 928 cases of rape were reported and 563 women committed suicide, and another 253 attempted suicide. The number of women burnt was 135. The number of domestic violence cases went up from 205 to 205.²² This situation gives an impetus to the work of NGOs because despite their ameliorating efforts, the factors promoting violence also grow strong due to certain other reasons.

Tribal and feudal customs are openly condemned and people are now more aware about their implications. It is difficult to assess what has been the impact of such developments on actual magnitude of violent incidents, yet the efforts to condemn and check violence are gaining strength and confidence, so the noose is tightening around the violators.

NGOs' linkage with foreign donors, and working on the projects which are preferred by the donors invite criticism, since both are blamed to ignore the ground realities and people's priorities. They are also blamed for providing information to the foreign donors, possibly inviting a threat to security of the country. NGOs' work for Afghan refugees and closeness with the Afghan *jihad*, made them suspect and victim of government's wrath as well. In post-*jihad* situation, however, there seem fewer reasons to doubt, but as the new situations emerge they invoke the interest of the international community. Their interest revolves round their own hidden agenda. The international connections and flow of aid money from various quarters should therefore be accepted with caution.

e) *Ethnicity*

It has been a persistent phenomenon in Pakistan that development has not been evenly distributed in different regions. Consequently, the neglected regions develop resentment and a sense of alienation, which, if coincided with common ethnicity, fuel ethnic politics. Ethnic political parties have taken up such issues thus adding a dimension of ethnic conflict in politics. On similar lines, conflict has been going on between the federal center and the provinces, among the provinces, within the

²² *State of Human Rights in 2009*, p. 189.

provinces between developed and underdeveloped regions, and between urban centers and their rural hinterlands. Cities, which are polarized by ethnic politics, are focal points of ethnic violence. The rural-urban migration has also created resentment against the migrants among the urbanites.

Ethnic differences have been affecting national and provincial politics since the fifties. There has been an attitude of denying such ethnic tension. Deprivations in terms of economic needs, power, esteem, and security needs when combined together, give rise to frustration and aggression, which, if shared among an ethnic group, is directed against the other ethnic groups deemed responsible for it, and the conflict may get worse if the deprivation continues. Cultural differences heighten it. Political demands are thus labeled as ethnic and anti-state. Centralization of powers leaves little option for addressing the local problems. Dominance of one ethnic group – Punjabis – in the parliament, the military and the bureaucracy has triggered ethnic hatred among other ethnic groups of Pakistan to varying degrees. Fruits of development have been distributed disproportionately according to the whims and wishes of the dominant power groups. According to Ahmed, factors responsible for ethnic tensions in Pakistan have included: unclear position of Islam regarding ethnicity; uneven geographical distribution of ethnic groups in provinces; settlement programs and migration within the country inviting people from other provinces; refugee influx; intellectuals projecting ethnic points of views; government banning discussion on ethnic issues in public media; under-reporting the incidents of ethnic conflicts; jobs given on ascription and ethnic affinity rather than on merit.²³ Ali has characterized the ethnic tensions as a minority-majority conflict.²⁴

Poor governance has also reinforced ethnic differences. In 1971, Pakistan saw the extreme form of ethnic conflict when a part of it was separated by an ethnic group (Bengalis), who had suffered economic and political discrimination at the hands of another ethnic group (Punjabis). Ethnic polarization was intensified in the post-1971 Pakistan, because the reasons augmenting it persisted. Political parties like Pakistan Siraiki Party, Awami National Party and various Sindhi and Balochi nationalist groups have been expressing such grievances. They have rightfully voiced people's concerns and represented them in the parliaments.

Ethnic divisions, when interposed on class divisions, have complicated the situation even more. The Mohajir ethnicity was asserted

²³ Akbar S. Ahmed, 'Pakistani Mu'ashray Mein Nasli Siyasat', *Irtiqa*, No. 5, September 1990.

²⁴ Mubarak Ali, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-15.

politically by lower middle class activists, while other ethnic groups could hardly see their lower middle or even middle class members sitting in the parliament. The class formation process is also in flux. The remittances from millions of Pakistanis²⁵ working abroad had empowered the lower classes mostly in the rural areas. In a competitive economy the expanding sectors of industry, commerce and services have been giving more chances to the achievement-oriented persons. The traditional land-based income is also now shifted to modern sectors of economy, thus relying more on urban economy. Rural-urban migration is bringing urban money, urban values, a confidence to challenge the old oppressive structures, and freedom to move, too, to the rural areas. The feudal lord is now mostly an absentee landlord enjoying urban consumerism. Thus the rural leadership structure is also in flux.

Ethnic conflict as a hallmark of Pakistani politics, has been complicating the process of development as a whole. However it does not seem to pose a major threat at the sub-national level, i.e. at the provincial levels of Punjab and NWFP. Globalization is melting some of the differences, and dragging people out of familial and parochial differences. Large scale blunders, favoritism, and political corruption have been reported in the allocation of development funds to the regions through the elected representatives, a system which itself is based on winning favor of the electorate only for the party in power. NGOs, on the other hand have their own mechanisms of getting funds. When governments decided to seek NGOs partnership for executing the development projects, similar pattern of preference has been extended to the NGOs domain. Most of the intermediate NGOs and community based organizations have forged links with the political and bureaucratic elites of the area, as they can get funds only through such channels. For small scale NGOs it is difficult to satisfy the criteria imposed by the international donor agencies.

f) Resource distribution

As a federation, Pakistan must devise a formula for the distribution of national resources according to the demands and development needs of the provinces and other units of federation. National Finance Commission Award (NFC) has been such a formula, which has been revised and adjusted to the changing demands and needs of units. Yet

²⁵ The amount of remittances was above 6.5 billion US dollars in the year 2009-10, according to the *Pakistan Economic Survey 2009-10* (Islamabad: Economic Advisor's Wing, Finance Division, Government of Pakistan, 2010), p. 76, Statistical Appendix.

there remain many conflicts, especially on the criteria to be followed for the distribution of revenues from federal divisible pool and the provinces' claims on their natural resources. The distribution of water among provinces has also served as a cause of tension and claims of riparian rights have not yet been reconciled amicably. Due to acute water shortages anticipated in coming years new dams are needed to conserve water, but the dams issue has been highly politicized among the provinces. It is estimated that about 6.2 MAF water is being wasted and can be conserved.²⁶ The government has declared that to meet shortage of water in Pakistan, new dams are necessary, while the tail-end areas like Sindh province fear that the dams in up-stream areas will hinder the flow of water to them.

g) *Income distribution*

What globalization of the economy implies for the poor in the developing countries has been an issue of debate, while Pakistan is also striving to integrate its economy with the global economy. The latest figure of poverty and claim of the government²⁷ about reduction in poverty in Pakistan in the recent budget is strongly contested by the informed circles. The official figures claim improvement in the areas of housing, health, literacy, school enrolment and immunization.²⁸

The issue of poverty reduction has a direct link with governance, and the government has allocated more money for better governance. It has been assumed that 'access to justice facilities in effective enforcement of property rights and overall improvement in law and order encourages inflow of foreign and domestic investment, ultimately increasing job opportunities in the country.'²⁹ The current poverty alleviation strategies have been discussed at length by many researchers, especially economists. It has been pointed out that growth itself is not

²⁶ *Fact Sheet about the Water Issue*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of Pakistan, n.d.

²⁷ President Musharraf also declared that poverty went down by 10 per cent, from 34% to 24% in years 2005 and 2006. News Report, *Jang*, 30 October 2006. Official reports kept repeating the claim. In the months following the departure of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and general elections in February 2008, the bogus claims of prosperity and elimination of poverty were fully exposed and there came forceful demands to impeach Shaukat Aziz for deceiving the nation and juggling with figures to show economic boom during his term in the office. (Till December 2009 no such impeachment had happened.)

²⁸ Quoted from PSLM Survey, in *Pakistan Economic Survey, 2004-5*, pp.41-2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.46.

enough, unless it is pro-poor. The conditions necessary for reduce poverty include: an environment for the poor to participate in the growth process; an assurance that public programs support the poor; and a good quality of economic, social and political governance. An accountable government ensures the following: a) well-being of its people; b) equitable access to economic and social opportunities; c) safety of people's life and property; and d) availability of a fair dispute-resolution mechanism to safeguard the rule of law.³⁰

It has been observed that due to governance problems in Pakistan in the 1990s, growth has suffered badly. For comprehensive resolution of poverty problem will require addressing the problems of governance. Better governance, in conjunction with other growth enhancing policies, is likely to accelerate further economic growth; it would reduce poverty and ensure sustainability of the efforts for growth and poverty reduction.³¹ The poor are caught in a vicious cycle. The poverty ratchet increases their vulnerability thus producing powerlessness, isolation, and physical weakness, which in turn enhance poverty.³² They are unable to articulate their need due to weak governance, hence they need external help, which can be provided by the NGOs.

h) Environmental preservation

Since the eighties, environment has become an important theme for the NGOs, when funds became available for activities in this area. It has been identified as a distinct area of NGO activity according to the international classification of non-profit organizations.³³ NGOs have moved into the fields that were earlier exclusive domains of the government, i.e. social forestry.

Concern about environmental degradation has been a phenomenon articulated by non-governmental organization, at least in a practical sense. Some laws were there but they were not implemented properly. The NGOs started mass awareness campaigns and advocacy for introduction of suitable laws and their enforcement sensing the urgency of the issue. They introduced many innovative schemes, methods, and approaches to tackle the issues. Such NGOs are of diverse nature and capacity, ranging from national level NGOs, that act as

³⁰ World Bank, *World Development Report 2000/01*, Washington D.C.

³¹ Sadiq Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p.34.

³² C.f. Robert Chamber, in Andrew Webster, *Introduction to the Sociology of Development* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.22.

³³ Quoted in Naheed Hasan and Zafar Junejo, *op. cit.*, p.43.

umbrella organizations for the smaller ones, to the community-based organizations. Some of them had professionally qualified staff while others had only volunteers in need of basic training. It was observed that the environmental NGOs have not worked in a coordinated manner. Even national level groups did not exhibit good advocacy skills.³⁴ Even then, some cases have been won by them under public interest litigation, and they could stop construction of buildings that had violated the building code. In urban areas, environmental concerns are mostly related to the provision of civic facilities, traffic management, treatment of industrial waste, urban planning, and inadequate housing. Many NGOs, though not recognized as environmental NGOs, have been working on such issues. There are some groups working for the preservation of cultural heritage (old buildings, archaeological remains), raising awareness among school children and engaging them in practical work, social forestry, as well as research and publications on the above issues. Some NGOs are busy working on recycling, desertification, deforestation, and awareness creation in rural areas.

Environmental issues emerge mainly due to poverty; over-population; lack of awareness, resources, skills and planning, and above all neglect of the public sector agencies. Poor management, corruption, and the subsistence nature of agriculture, have contributed to the deterioration of the situation. NGO activities have assumed immense variety and have included areas like preservation of wildlife and water bodies, and controlling water-logging and salinity, for which they have formed networks and are working in a large geographical area.³⁵ Some national level women NGOs³⁶ have focused on women especially for awareness and action about environmental issues.

Given the geographical diversity of the region, various NGOs have been working in the forest areas, Potohar plateau, agricultural communities for extension, near dams sites for rehabilitation of displaced populations, and in rain-fed areas for construction of small dams to store water. Some have adopted advocacy as their top-most activity on dams and conservation issues.

The activities of environmental NGOs are perceived by various interest groups as a threat, so they oppose NGOs work. There is a series of mafias – timber mafia, land mafia, builders and developers' mafia.

³⁴ Sheen Farrukh, *op. cit.*, p.43.

³⁵ This is true for the NGO named SCOPE, which has been working in the resource poor Thar Desert for improving the resource base of the community, in coordination with other NGOs working in Thar.

³⁶ These include Shirkat Gah and Aurat Foundation.

Industrialists, the municipal administration, and above all the government often plan with little insight into environmental concerns regarding dams, parks, motorways, and roads. So many powerful agents begin to confront the NGOs when the latter uphold the need for preserving environmental resources for the posterity. Many incidents of harassment, blackmailing, and attacks have been reported against environment activists. Some organizations have received international awards for their work, but this should not give the impression that environmental lobby has gained enough strength to affect policies and legislation. Rather small-scale successes have been achieved: a public concern about environment has taken root; few laws have been passed; some new institutions have been established, and the subject has been included in the textbooks now. Yet, one has to consider the challenge posed by the offenders and the poor structure of the response mechanism. For instance, recently city government of Karachi has legislated to ban vehicles with old engines and unfit conditions. Then came transport strikes, and the conflict is still on. The enforcement agencies have taken a back seat. Attempts have been made to tame rickshaws with noisy engines, but they are still at large. Though media and NGOs are spreading environmental consciousness, the inability of the people to develop new environment friendly habits is a continuing concern.

1) Urban- rural duality

In Pakistan, urbanization has been a post-independence phenomenon. Karachi, the largest metropolis, which developed into about one-tenth of Pakistan in later decades, was merely a city holding 500,000 persons before partition. Other cities were not developed urban centers. Predominantly agricultural economy and lower level of political, economic and cultural activities had made those cities under-developed as compared with some cities of India. Later, rapid urbanization in all small cities and hyper-urbanization in Karachi, ensued and the proportion of urban population in Pakistan has been going up. It was 30 per cent in the 1998 and 25 per cent in the 1972 (both census years). Karachi received the bulk of refugees from India, which touched the figure of 600,000. The ethnic composition of Karachi, and the urban centres receiving the refugees changed drastically, and it had later impacted on the development process of both urban and rural areas. The political development, including major policies regarding settlement, industrial development, change of federal capital from Karachi, and allocation of resources for urban development, has by and large contributed to the aggravation of problems in urban areas. While rural

areas have also not received much attention, more and more people have moved into the urban centres.

The urban-rural conflict, as mentioned by Eqbal Ahmed, has its origin in colonial past. He has explained how feudalism was strengthened by the British, who benefited from the internal rift between the trading community and landed classes and between Hindus and Muslims. The feudal class sought help from religious groups and promoted fatalistic and conservative attitudes among rural masses, consisting at least 90 per cent of the population in 1947. Rural elite has been deciding the country's fate for over five decades. Political moves to neutralize the majority of Bengal in the united Pakistan showed the keen desire of the feudal class to preserve itself. They failed the land reform efforts and sought military's help to consolidate its interests. Such economic policies favored the feudal class. The ruling elite, dominated by feudal element, tried hard not to let other classes and interest groups get a chance in a democratic order.³⁷ As a result, the tussle between the modernists and the traditionalists continued. The civilian, bureaucratic and military elite finally led the country to a state in the eighties that it was ranked among the poorest and most under-developed nations of the world. As a result dissatisfaction among the masses, various ethnic groups, and regions increased, and the rural-urban divide sharpened.

Major urban problems in Pakistan have been related to congestion, housing, basic services, traffic management, environmental degradation, crimes, terrorism, and ethnic violence. Social, cultural, demographic, and economic conditions in the cities have been changing at such a pace that some areas have become unbearable, even to pass through. Hasan has provided details about the conditions in the city of Karachi in particular.³⁸

NGOs appeared mostly in the urban centers and there were 70 per cent urban and 30 per cent rural NGOs in 1989.³⁹ They worked and expanded in the urban peripheries and later set up branches in rural districts. Yet, NGOs are predominantly an urban phenomenon, with a huge concentration in the city of Karachi, followed by the capital and then the provincial headquarters. NGOs import foreign ideas and

³⁷ Eqbal Ahmad, 'Nasliyat Siyasi Mu'ashī wa Samajī Awamāl', *Irtiqa*, No. 5, September 1990, pp. 77-9.

³⁸ See, Arif Hasan, *Understanding Karachi* (Karachi: City Press), and 'Karachi Shehar Taghayuraat Ki Zad Mein', *Aaj*, No. 20, Autumn, 1995, pp. 379-415.

³⁹ According to, Shahla Zia, *Pakistan NGOs A Policy and Legal Framework*, UNSP-1. UNDP, Pakistan, 1996.

practices, graft them into the urban milieu, and then try to adapt them with some improvisation. Development professionals are mostly from urban middle class and philosophy of development reflects the middle class mindset. With gradual erosion of feudalism and tribal culture in rural communities, the replacement is coming up slowly by the local young men (as rural women rarely come up as NGO functionaries) who set up small CBOs or branches of big NGOs. They are either affected by some urban NGO or have been trained and patronized by such NGOs. Their activities are replicas of the urban NGOs with some flexibility and since the persons are local, they have some advantages regarding rapport, confidence, transparency or credibility. Their work, anyhow, brings modern notions and values and traditional culture of the rural areas is bound to collide with it. This cultural collusion is in fact what causes conflict, mistrust and disrespect for the NGOs in rural minds. Another factor is disruption of old power structure based on landed interests, and emergence of new leadership from lower strata of society.

j) Socialization and education

The education system in Pakistan is fragmented and segmented. Official adult literacy rate was 52 per cent in 2004-5. The education sector reforms are taken up by the government to support economic growth, to alleviate poverty, and to adjust it to the market demands.

The domain of education is replete with many contradictions, biases, distortions, obsolete practices, incompetence, and anomalies. The formal education of the public schools and *madaris* education with mainly theological content, has been poles apart, thus creating divisions. Their connection with promoting fundamentalism (with militancy added on it), sectarianism, fatalism, and conservative extremism in the society has been creating tension among the concerned sections. The Musharraf regime has tried to regulate these *madaris*, through registration, bringing their curricula in line with the demands of a progressive society⁴⁰, and to integrate them in the mainstream of education instead of living in their own 'paradise'. This effort has been vehemently opposed by the *madaris* and the religious sections, yet the drive is on and it has assumed the form of a conflict between the government and a section of opposition in the parliament. The conflict is basically between the secular and religious, or the modern and traditional forces.

⁴⁰ To this end formal subjects like English, mathematics, social/Pakistan studies, general science, economics and computer science were planned to be introduced at various levels as compulsory subjects.

Another issue in the field of education is that of privatization, leaving the poor with low-quality public schools, and creating many more vertical divisions in society according to affordability of the student. The government has been devising and introducing many new schemes for ensuring universal enrolment, gender parity, better quality, adult literacy and giving incentives in many forms. With more privatization at all levels, NGOs are taking up the field at greater pace than ever before. The number of schools and teaching centres operated by NGOs are increasing, and this activity is non-profit in nature, along side ever expanding commercial (profit) sector.

k) Gender

Traditionally the cultural norms dictate subordination of women and any effort to break this inequality is resented by conservative elements. The subordination is so much deep rooted that even the system of education, media, state institutions, health services, all ignores women in either unconscious or deliberate manner, with the sense of being totally justified. Growing strength of an overall culture of violence (militancy, drugs and arms, fundamentalism, and frustration) has resulted in various forms of violence and discrimination against women. Customary laws and honor killing are widely accepted norms; even the law becomes lenient towards such offenders. In such a biased system, gender has become the most crucial domain of the NGO activity. Women languish in jails under false charges, they are harassed in all public places, they are threatened, battered, molested, trafficked, mutilated, raped, burnt, murdered and sold in marriage, and the state cannot provide sufficient deterrence to the offenders.⁴¹ Therefore the NGOs have taken up the issues of women's rights in their advocacy campaigns.

Women NGOs emerged in the initial years of the independence of Pakistan, but their number shot up only after 1970s' world focus on women issues. Yet, one can count some good milestones of successes of women groups, such as Family Law Ordinance 1960, and resistance to authoritarian laws of Zia regime, increase (30%) in women seats in the assemblies, and legislation being done on honour killing during the

⁴¹ In addition to the Protection of Women Act 2006, in October 2009, the government introduced the 'Protection Against Harassment at the Workplace Bill 2009' in the National Assembly aimed at eliminating violence and harassment at workplaces. This was in addition to the proposed amendments in the PPC and Cr.PC pertaining to harassment and aimed at setting up a mechanism to address harassment cases at the workplace. This bill was also an outcome of advocacy by the NGOs.

Musharraf regime. NGOs have supported the processes of increased integration of women in the economy and politics, visibility at public places and awareness of rights.

1) *Human rights*

Due to an unstable political system, largely undemocratic political culture, prolonged periods of direct or indirect military rule, and a weak civil society, Pakistan's human rights performance has been very poor. There are many more reasons aggravating this situation, which are cultural (tribal, feudal, patriarchal), economic (widespread poverty, sharp class difference, exploitation, unemployment), and legal (overloaded, archaic and corrupt judicial system, highhandedness of powerful section going unchecked). Vested interests have hijacked the economy and the society, and mafias have come to rule. Law enforcement is poor, and resource-poor, too. As a result, the annual human rights report of an NGO (HRCP) presents a pathetic situation every year.

Human rights are one of the major areas of NGO activity. As a leading organization in the field, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is an agency to monitor human rights violations and seeks redress through public campaigns, lobbying and intervention in courts. Its other activities include workshops, seminars, fact-finding missions, and publications on the issues, which are a commendable contribution to the cause. Along with other thousands of NGOs committed to the cause of human rights, the human rights movement in Pakistan has gained such a momentum that its impact is felt among the people and the government. Any major violation of human rights cannot go un-noticed and there is widespread awareness among the educated sections about the issues of human rights.

Labour rights have been an area of NGO activity, since the labour movement in Pakistan has been weakened since the 1970s.⁴² There were at least 1.7 million *haris* (tenants) in bondage in Sindh and their number was increasing.⁴³ To end forced labour in brick kiln industry, an NGO, Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) has conducted many studies and suggested changes in legislations. It is undoubtedly due to gross neglect of the government departments that worst forms of exploitation, discrimination, and suffering have been going on for decades. The industry has employed

⁴² An elaborate analysis of downfall of this labour union movement in Pakistan is provided by Kamran Asdar Ali, *Karachi Mein 1972 Ki Mazdoor Jidd- o-Jehad* (Karachi: PILER/Pakistan Study Centre, 2006).

⁴³ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, *op. cit.*, p.11.

missions of men, women and children, who are mostly enchained by forced labour due to loans recorded falsely by the managers. PILER, through its large scale studies and analysis has recommended practicable measures, regarding legislative measures as well as resumption of union activity. All this is aimed at ensuring minimum wages fixed by the government, provision of social security, and improving working conditions, as well as to safeguard children and women from sheer oppression and hazards.⁴⁴ Such technical reports can be of great help for the government, if committed to act upon it. ⁴⁵ PILER has prepared a large number of such reports on various aspects of labour rights, women and child labour.

NGOs' work has reduced, according to some responses, the tradition of volunteerism among the labour class. Their small organizations have started looking towards large labour rights organizations for help, research and publications. They have now taken to the hotels instead of streets.

m) Sustainable development

Historically, Pakistan has been an area of colonial exploitation, details of which have been documented to show that roots of underdevelopment have been colonial in their origin. Later the neo-colonial economic relations forced the country to opt for export of human resources while ignoring priority of its own development. Ahmed has declared such policies conforming to the client status and dependent/crippled role of the economy. The economy of the country has been operating to serve imperial designs, and its features have evolved in such a way that local exploitative classes and the international capitalism have joined hands for promoting their common interests. The continued underdevelopment of a large section of the populace is, therefore, instrumental for the privileges and luxuries of the power elite. With such assertion, Ahmed concludes that basic conflict of global capitalism is with the oppressed masses of the Third World, and only these masses can ensure their own development, if they can change the structures of foreign dominance, economic underdevelopment, and social injustices.⁴⁶ But the productive

⁴⁴ There are estimated 10 million child labourers in Pakistan according to *ibid.*, p.9.

⁴⁵ Aslam Khawaja (trans.), *Pakistan Mein Jabri Mushaqqat, Eent Bhatton Mein Mushaqqat, Qarz, aur Ghulami* (Karachi: Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, 2003).

⁴⁶ Feroz Ahmed, *Pakistan Ghulami Kay Pachas Saal* (Lahore: Takhleeqat, 1997), p.116.

forces in Pakistan could not free themselves from the continued imperial domination of the national economy and polity, and instead sought refuge in economic collaboration with countries in the Middle East.

n) Government versus non-governmental organizations

In Pakistan, since the 1960s, the NGOs have started gaining strength as against the government agencies responsible for rural and urban planning and development. Success of NGOs like Aga Khan Rural Support Program has shown that people can participate in their own development, and major and minor problems can be solved through strategies which are innovative, flexible, and professional, too. On the other hand the government agencies lacked the dedication to work, despite having steady flow of funds and technical competence (in which NGOs are deficient). Some may blame the colonial bureaucratic legacy for it. There seems a general consensus upon the policy of 'public-private partnership' for the cause of people who need development, but the experience of NGOs regarding government's cooperation has not been free of tension and conflict. Anyhow, 'in view of the past three decades performance of the NGOs, they should not work in isolation, as they have been trying to do, but should cooperate with the government'.⁴⁷ The success of collaborative work of the two partners in development has been fairly impressive. Interestingly, the collaborative rhetoric and the conflict go on side by side.

The government has been creating and sustaining NGOs, such as the rural support programs. It has been financing NGOs projects. In June 2002, National Commission for Human Development was formed to seek public-private partnership in the fields of health, education and micro-finance. It is working for capacity-building of government departments, community organizations, and elected officials. Government is shedding off its responsibilities towards people due to various factors, thus leaving ground for the business and non-profit sector. Under the new liberal policies, privatization is rapidly transferring public sector units to the private sector, as the number of privatized units had reached 146 by April 2005.⁴⁸

Regarding any change needed in the role of the government towards the NGOs to facilitate them in development work, overwhelming majority of the survey respondents was of the view that it would definitely create problems for NGOs, making their targets impossible (14%) or difficult (14%), and slow down the pace of

⁴⁷ Sheen Farrukh. *op. cit.*, p.133.

⁴⁸ *Pakistan Economic Survey 2004-05*, p.x.

achievement. Anyhow there was an emphasis upon continuing working without government help (17%), turning to the masses for their greater participation, mobilization, and winning confidence (19%), and to cooperate with other NGOs through networking for shared objectives and joint action (14%). There were suggestions to have dialogue with (5%) or pressurize the government for favorable attitude (4%), and seeking help of international donor agencies and governments (6%), too. Only 2% responses were in favor of not having any conflict with the government. Responses proposed many strategies for action to ameliorate the situation of non-cooperation of the government, which dealt mainly with self-reliance, coordinating with other stake holders, efficient use of media, having long-term planning, advocacy and lobbying, promoting literacy and human rights among the community to ensure their help.

The NGO sector as a domain of conflict

The non-governmental sector, the citizens sector, the civil society organizations, the non-profit sector, the third sector, and the independent sector, are some names used alternatively to describe the field commonly known as 'NGOs'. The concept of NGOs itself is bit confusing, more so is its legal dimension, which allows registration of NGOs under five different laws in Pakistan. Some anomaly in their working arises out of it.⁴⁹ Other problems arise out of relations of the NGO sector with the public sector (as outlined in the previous sections), the media, the funding sources, the expected beneficiaries, and the cultural forces. NGOs have some problems within themselves. As an essential part of the modern society, NGOs have assumed a status of 'aide to government', and they work independently, too. In a transitional society, where old structures are breaking and new patterns are emerging, NGOs have acquired enough room to manouver, and to assert their position, and to establish their utility. With all their merits and demerits, NGOs are contributing a lot to the development of people, and this is something which makes them inevitable, as the state is withdrawing, leaving room for the private and voluntary sector.

⁴⁹ This aspect has been analyzed thoroughly in Shahla Zia, *op. cit.*, and Zafar H. Ismail, *Law and the Nonprofit Sector in Pakistan* (Karachi: Social Policy and Development Centre, 2002), SPDC Working Paper No. 3, The John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project.

Why NGOs make a domain of conflict?

- It has been felt by the NGO functionaries that their own NGOs, and the NGO sector as a whole has, at times, impacted the society negatively. The perceived reasons for such impact as mentioned by them are outlined as follows:
- *People's participation:* Little participation of people in the NGOs work due to NGOs bureaucratic structures, elite-mindedness, or limited approach, thinking people to be incapable of developing themselves.
- *Enhancing dependence:* NGOs have in a way enhanced the tradition of external intervention and providing services free or at low cost. This has strengthened the attitude of looking towards some agency for help instead of self-help in the people. People do not contribute to fund-raising as they are now used to receiving it. They are now less volunteering, because the social work is now paid for at large scale and handsomely in many NGOs.
- *People's needs and expectations:* Expectations of people from the NGOs have been much higher than NGOs' capacity, hence these are not usually met properly, so some disappointment and resentment prevail. In fact people in dire needs think the NGOs should provide their most urgent needs, while NGOs work on their own agenda, according to their own priorities, so quite often they do not address some of the most important concerns of the people. If NGOs free persons from bonded labour, and do not rehabilitate them fully, then they go back to the old masters.
- *People's perception:* People have been affected by the propaganda made by the media, and the anti-NGO lobby, and since people take them at the face value, and rarely bother to verify, their perceptions, both right or wrong, continue. Some actual mismanagement of the NGO people have supported such notions, too.
- *West-oriented NGOs:* NGOs are generally thought to be established by people from the West, or influenced by the West, so they are thought to be promoting western values and cultures, which is perceived to be corrupting the indigenous culture and traditions, undermining the very ethos of local culture. Such notions indicate the perpetual ongoing tussle between the traditional and the modernist sections in Pakistan.
- *NGOs' leadership:* If respectable persons of the community do not patronize, people do not trust NGOs, showing that people trust the old structures of roles and expectations. Old relations are revised, like at the village well, women used to share their life concerns with

fellow women, but water supply schemes had deprived them of it, showing that even positive outcomes might have some negative implications.

- *NGOs functioning as institutions:* Major reasons behind negative impression of NGOs include lack of accountability, transparency, and democratic management. NGOs are dominated by only one person or few family members. They are not free of corruption. Their impact is found limited and temporary, despite spending huge money. 'Their work is often in the form of individual efforts which lack impact.... an apparent lack of measurable results often leads to misunderstandings among the government, business and media and impedes constructive dialogue'.⁵⁰
- *NGOs' empowerment programs:* NGOs have given people awareness about their rights, have enhanced their capacity to realize these rights and the courage to fight the odds in the way to a better dignified life. Now women are more assertive, labourers know more, and the disadvantaged people can compare blessings of Edhi Foundation with what the state has given them. There has been definitely an improvement in economic viability, political visibility and articulation of a section of the down-trodden people as a result of NGOs action.⁵¹ Such changes have alarmed the traditional distribution of power within the family, the community, and the society at large. Under the fear of disruption the old power structure, is, therefore, resisting NGOs' moves.
- *NGOs' dominance in the sphere of civil society:* What political parties should have done, is being done by the NGOs. NGOs have delved in so many issues which other components of the civil society should take up. This impression is true because as a whole the civil society is weak in Pakistan. They are therefore, blamed for depoliticising the society, diverting masses' attention and turning them away from the political process.
- *NGOs' semblance with governmental organizations:* Since the government agencies have not come up to the people's desires, they pin hopes on the NGOs, and when the NGOs fail to deliver, they blame them for the ills prevalent in the public sector development agencies, such as corruption, inefficiency, bureaucratic hurdles, top-

⁵⁰ Naheed Hasan & Zafar Junejo, *op. cit.*, p.9.

⁵¹ This is confirmed by the survey respondents of this study.

down approach, and insensitivity to the needs of the beneficiaries. The same happens in the NGOs when they expand in size.⁵²

- *Sensitive issues:* When NGOs are felt delving into the sensitive issues in the domains of religion, ideology, and culture, and forcing their point of view, the resistance erupts. It has been seen in the cases of honour killing, blasphemy laws, and consent in marriage. It is noteworthy that such areas have very little to do with the material conditions of any group or class, or distribution of power among the classes. It is the psychological aspect of culture which is threatened, hence the conflict arises. It is true to say the people do not change and adjust in total, but do so only partially. Gender relation is such an area where patriarchal forces do not like any intrusion, while a bulk of NGOs work is focused upon it, hence the opposition.
- *Technology transfer:* Like transfer of western ideas, import of modern technology (e.g. videos, internet) is also felt by some as threatening the integrity of the social and moral structures of the society. When NGOs are perceived to be introducing or promoting such technologies they are not welcomed.
- *Conflicts absorption:* Since NGOs operate in a political culture and a power structure incompatible with the demands of a modern progressive dynamic society, they have become dominated by civil-military aristocratic elements at places, and have ultimately absorbed the influences creating conflicts in the society at large.
- *Closeness with the government:* Some NGOs cooperated with the government, while others opposed it. This has created another fissure in the NGO sector, creating two opposing factions.
- *The Left politics and NGOs:* NGOs in their approaches have undermined the cause and ideology that the left-wing forces have been upholding in the country, so the Leftist lobby is also not feeling comfortable with the NGOs.
- *Apolitical approach:* NGOs have failed in many of their pursuits relating to gender and have invited 'backlash from the urban educated middle class and rightist political elements of the society'. This is mainly due to the apolitical and non-challenging stand on

⁵² United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, *States of Disarray the Social Effects of Globalization* (London: UNRISD, 1995), p.140.

Pakistan's patriarchal ideology and policies as well as their non-confrontation approach to conservative elements.⁵³

It can be concluded from the above that the NGOs have added those elements in the society which have been annoying some sections (e.g. religious, conservatives, feudal, authoritarian rulers, vested interests, mafias, etc.). NGOs' obvious and forceful assertion about their role as progressive change agents from the West was thought as threatening the very integrity of the family, patriarchy, moral and gender role structures, etc. Such domains were already in a flux of new values; NGOs have only accelerated the process and sharpened the impact. Being non-governmental in nature, NGOs had to face the criticism from the government and other quarters. While most development policies, modern education, electronic media, ICTs, transfer of modern technologies in various fields (including medical and transportation), were modernizing, and people were left with even less options to accept them as compared to what NGOs offered them, yet the modus operandi of the NGOs caused displeasure of people. It is doubtlessly accepted that people change the non-material culture only under real pressures to adjust. In the case of development programs both from the government and the NGOs what ever collided head-on with their values, were forcefully rejected by the people, such as the family planning drives and women's emancipation. However, economic pressures and rising awareness gradually made people to accept them. So the role of NGOs and other development agencies in minimizing the resistance through enhanced awareness must be appreciated.

Conclusion

When NGOs are grafted on a traditional society of a recently decolonized country, they are bound to face many challenges. While development has been the most urgent need and the government had assumed the role of an authoritarian agency responsible for it, or at least controlling all factors leading to it, the quality of governance became the key-stone of this gigantic challenge. When it weakened, the whole edifice collapsed. When the NGOs entered the field in a noticeable number they had to face a complicated situation, as many factors causing conflicts were grafted upon each other. Unfortunately NGOs were also grafted on the top of this collage, and they could not ease out the situation for the masses. NGOs relieved the masses in many ways;

⁵³ Tahira S. Khan, *Beyond Honour* (Karachi: Oxford, 2006), p. 303. She has analysed the NGOs working regarding gender issues in Pakistan and exposed their paradoxes.

empowered people to challenge the oppressor, and gave them awareness about their rights – a precondition for the struggle against a hierarchical social structure steeped in exploitation and dehumanizing traditions. NGOs cleared out mist around the gender roles, and human rights.

Since governance is associated with state, taken as ‘politics of dominance’, and the civil society is gradually gaining strength to ensure ‘politics of consent’, it is inevitable to see a conflict, which is imperative to lead to a state of more equilibrium, more advantages and more progressive open environment for the oppressed section, since they have suffered at the hands of poor governance. NGOs may not be panacea to all of their ills, but they can keep the hope alive, and the confidence intact in self-help for the struggle to break silence, domination and powerlessness.