Balochistan based civil society organizations
Some grey areas restricting it from empowerment

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Abstract

Efficiency and effectiveness is subject to best performance, however, it is impossible if there is ambiguity in conceptual framework, the target is not clearly fixed and the capacity is not sufficiently built. This is a general principle, which applies to both individuals and organizations irrespective of their belongingness, mandate and areas of operations. Civil society in general and its various formal and informal actors in particular must go through a detailed appraisal to gauge their capacities in comparison with their competitors such as public and private sector organizations including their current and future targets and challenges plus proclamation. This paper is a preliminary effort to examine civil society organizations while highlighting their internal weaknesses/ shortcomings along with the space that is available to it for smooth functioning. All possible efforts have been made to incorporate opinions of different stakeholders to ensure diversity and validity of data and information. Based on findings of various tools being implied such as survey, key informant interviews and focus group discussions weaknesses were identified which can be improved as they come under the control of civil society organization itself. Issues and challenges associated with socio-economic condition, geo-political situation and constitutional/ legal framework do require help and support from national and international forces toward its empowerment.

Key Words: Civil society, grey areas, geo-political environment, socio-economic conditions

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Introduction

Interestingly, Balochistan despite being least developed part of the country is tremendously rich in terms of civil society organizations. A large number of its formal and informal organizations do exists among both urban and rural settlements. Many of those are functional on regular basis, while others become occasionally active. (Baig, 2001) Civil society organizations are widely bifurcated into two major categories of formal and informal based on their nomenclature and functioning. The formal ones are those organizations which have a permanent set up such as Board of Director, paid staff, and hierarchal structure and are registered under any law of the country, while the informal ones are basically loose bodies of a particular group of people that is socially sanctioned such as Jirga, Anjuman e Mazaraeen, fisher-folk communities etc. There are a variety of other groups and organizations which qualify for the term civil society. The online dictionary Wikipedia defines civil society as the aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens. Civil society includes the family and the private sphere and is referred to as the 'third sector' of society, distinct from government and business" (wikipedia, 2018)

Among the active ones NGOs as its formal actor has since long been rendering various types of services ranging from providing basic social services such as health and education to combating poverty towards better living standards, whereas its informal actor such as Jirga becomes active when and wherever an upsetting issue of local conflict arises either between various tribes, clans or competing interest groups. Nevertheless, since civil society is not confine to NGOs and Jirga only, the effectiveness of civil society in its totality is questionable as far as its performance and contribution is concern. The gap between its presence in large number with variety of actors and its effectiveness has always been a major field of scientific investigation and research in order to find satisfying answers to pertinent questions regarding the very existence of civil society organizations.

This research paper is a preliminary effort towards this end. It examines both actors and factors aspects associated to deliberations about civil society organizations. The actor aspects refers to the current capacity and capability of existing civil society organizations, whereas the ' factor' aspects is referred to the prevailing environment that includes socio-economic conditions, geo-political situation and the constitutional and legal framework available to it. While doing so, various tools have been implied such as literature review – to focus groups discussions and to survey. Keeping in view the need and significance of validity, reliability and diversity both homogenous and

heterogeneous groups and individuals belonging to both academicians and practitioners were explored for their views.

Current Scenario

Presently, the pace of competitive feature of world has increased many folds due to ever increasing pressure being built by globalization. This unforeseen scenario has now affected almost all spheres of life (Sharma, 2004). Now the context of this competitiveness is no more confine to out-fashioned notion of world scenario as first and third world countries, where second world countries have always been missing. The new contextual framework widely divides and stresses upon distinguishing it into three main sectors such as public, private and civic sectors, which can be logically held responsible whenever a policy and decision making process is devised or a mechanisms of basic social service delivery is developed. All three sectors are separately characterized by their practicing values systems. Public sector as representative of state, for instance, is mandated to be catering for masses needs by providing adequate social services as per its prime responsibility (James, 2017). The role and mandate of private sector, on the other hand, is to bridge the gaps that may lie between recipient masses and the available basic social services, either due to lack of resources or capacities of government, at some affordable cost. However, the profit maximization feature of private sector and Multi National Companies MNCs is criticized as the "ugly face" of this sector, whereas civil society's concern is more humane since it promotes and protects the rights and interests of masses as representative of masses at large. Civil society is also mandated to be playing the role of "watch dog" to critically monitor the deeds of both public and private sectors with the aim to make them human centered (Biship, 2016).

Among multifaceted actors of civil society NGOs occupies prominent position as it plays a very important role in socio-economic development of a country while empowering citizens towards protection and promotion of their rights and interests. Zenia Shoukat rightfully points out that in Pakistan, NGOs are mainly considered to be synonymous for the 'civil society' though civil society is far broader term (Shoukat, 2007). Indeed, this is a major shift in the conventional political thought that state/government alone is mainly responsible for this ever increasing challenging task. The contributions being made by NGOs is of more significance due to its participatory approach where involvement of masses are treated as backbone of sustained effort for any development activity.

NGOs as an actor of civil society seem more prominent in countries where government functionaries proved to be ineffective in meeting the needs of

masses with regard to basic social services. Fragile states, is a new jargon introduced by civil society experts to express the gloomy situation of countries where civil society activism is more rapid to overcome sufferings of masses." Fragile states refer to countries that are incapable of basic security, maintaining rule of law and justice, and providing basic services and economic opportunities for their citizens (Hayman, 2012). Unfortunately Pakistan does qualify for the term "fragile state" as far as basic security and service provision is concerned. In fact, a fragile state does lack the ability to develop mutually constructive and reinforcing relations with society.

Keeping in view the above definition of fragile state, where state institutions are characterized with ineffectiveness, NGOs contrarily proved efficient and effective during the course of their project interventions. All such interventions during the past more than three decades can broadly be divided into certain phases. Initially, most NGOs work was focused on development of physical infrastructure to either generate or increase income of poor households. "The second phase is characterized for the most part, in short, sensitization and mobilization of relevant stakeholders for participation, on multifarious socio-economic issues and administrative loopholes of government, whereas the third and ongoing phase is more focused around creating space for civil society activism as an influential third or civic sector to monitor policies and actions of both public and private sector" (Barech, 2010). In this regard lots of efforts to build capacity are underway both at national and international level. Internationally, various forums were formed to boost voices through larger networks to influence global economic policies and institutions. Apart from capacity building, these forum have been striving to develop internal mechanism for assessing effectiveness and identifying shortcomings of civil society in order to best monitor the conducts of public and private sectors "In 1993 CIVICUS 'a worldwide forum of civil society' was established, that means World Alliance for Citizen Participation to nurture the foundation, growth and protection of citizen action and civil society throughout the world, especially in areas where participatory democracy, and freedom of association are threatened (Anheier, 2001). CIVICUS besides providing focal point for knowledge sharing and institutional development among desperate sector also measures status and impact of civil society organizations worldwide. Another international forum that assesses effectiveness of development organizations is "the Open Forum for CSO for development effectiveness". According to their thematic group report of January 2011 the forum is a unique space for CSOs to share learning, mutual trust and principles of development effectiveness (Lingan, 2011). The framework serves the same purpose to analyze COSs vision, approaches, relationships and impact of their actions

while identifying strengths and weaknesses to be addressed for its strengthening. David L Brown & Archana Kalegaonkar identified the following major shortcomings in present day's civil society organizations while naming these as external and internal challenges that CSOs are confronted with. According to them, "the challenges that emerge for civil societies vary across countries due to prevailing differences in political and economic context, institutional history, international contact and value and visions that mobilize popular support. At the same time, however, some aspects of the civil society failure are likely to emerge: restricted focus, amateurism, material scarcity, fragmentation and parochialism. These problems are often the shadowed side of civil society strengths, but they frequently have negative consequences for the sector's ability to accomplish its goals (Kalegaonker, 1999). The researched challenges seem to be common for majority of the civil society organizations operating in many developing countries including Pakistan and most particularly Balochistan province. These can be further bifurcated into two major categories without compromising the roles, contributions, effectiveness and impact over the current issues and challenges across provinces. Let us see them one by one as grey areas of civil society organizations.

Internal Weaknesses

The internal weaknesses identify the current strengths and capacities of civil society organizations in respect to their mandate, proclamation and problems and issues that are addressed by it. One of the major issue and challenge tagged with civil society is its biased treatment while focusing issues within a limited subject matter and geographical area. On the other hand while presenting them as civil society; almost every actor proclaims the wider vision of serving communities irrespective of any difference of cast and creed. Unfortunately, many actors of civil society seem to have failed to do so. Faith based organizations, for instance, create an ideological difference between them and other stakeholders; consequently, most of the issued being addressed by them do not get proper time, resources and attention thus remain partially resolved.

Parochialism, at any levels either individuals or organizations do limit approach and focus to achieve overall goals and objectives. Restricted focus apart from parochialism of ideological difference sometime help CSOs to remain focused on a particular issue, for instance, Aurat Foundation, seems confine to taking up issues that are only gender based. They at the same time do not cover many other alarming issues such as environmental degradation and sustainable development agenda and similar other issues, which may be the root cause or contributing factor towards gender disparity in the country.

Also important is to highlight the issue of amateurism and material scarcity. Many voluntary organizations came into being on the basis of sentiment than logical felt needs. The leaders and staff of such organizations seem to be immature as they do not know about necessary basics of management, leaderships, accountancy and other required professional skills. Consequently, they remain inefficient to perform because laymen approach and skills do not work. Dependency on foreign aid is another major issue that CSOs are faced with. Commitment to bring about changes in the current world scenario does not work without required financial resources. Of course, a barefoot Doctor in an event of public health program organized by civil society organization wouldn't work without the support of paramedic staff of nurses as paid staff of public or private sectors.

Equally important is to deliberate upon fragmentation of civil society organizations. Lack of resources combined with parochialism and restricted focus have already led CSOs to be fragmented. This state of affair had never been useful for any collective effort. Let it be government agencies where CSOs have a lot to say or business i.e. private sector, which proved to be relatively more crucial in responding towards meeting basic social needs of masses. This conflicting situation itself raised the need of collaboration and coordination among actors of civil society organizations across countries, particularly the third world.

The lack of an effective internal mechanism to discourage mushroom growth of vested interest groups / organizations under the title of civil society is another major weakness. This happens mostly during emergencies and natural calamities when dozens of groups and organizations come forward as civil society without qualifying for it.

External Challenges

Apart from weaknesses that CSOs are confronted with internally, there are some other factors that have multifaceted impact over capacities and performances. External factors are beyond the control of civil society as compare to internal weakness, which can be improved through establishment of some useful mechanism within structure of a civil society organization.

Legitimacy and accountability, for instances, are two major factor that have great influence over CSOs activities and success. Social sanctioning of CSOs does help to pave the way to improve performance to an adequate level. In Balochistan civil society in general has a limited space and NGOs as its actor do face a great deal of dislikes among various segments of population, particularly religious stratum and illiterate tribal masses, who question the very existence of civil society including development organizations and look into it

suspiciously. Lack of public acceptance combined with less clear accountability mechanism to public besides creating hurdles also make CSOs vulnerable to be attacked by other two relatively powerful sectors. One can partially conclude that one major reason for less empowered CSOs across provinces is its legitimacy and accountability.

A supportive legal framework, no doubt, is a protective shield that contributes towards growth, effectiveness, strengthening and empowerment of civil society as a legitimate and powerful third sector. And since strengthened civil society to intervene into matters of policy dialogue with public and private sectors is lacking, therefore, sometime clash of interests between the three sectors motivates government to opt for changes in current laws or to go for new legislation to restrain activism of CSOs in the country. "NGOs in Bangladesh, for instance have been subject to arbitrary rulings and even decertification by the Bureau of NGOs when they were seen threatening to the interests of state bureaucracies (Kaleaonker 1999). Similarly, in Pakistan NGOs these days are faced with more or less the same situation, which was strongly opposed by a large majority of civil society organizations under the umbrella of Pakistan Civil Society Forum PSCF." The Forum strongly condemned the broad-brush maligning of NGOs through a spate of recent statements made by senior politicians and government officials. In particular, the Forum took serious exception to a statement made by the former Interior Minister, Chaudhry Nisar Ali, alleging national NGO involvement in anti-state activities and links with Israel, India and the United States. Such sweeping statements are highly irresponsible and totally unfounded. 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"(Memon 2015).

 Lack of supportive environment that consists of both legal system and public acceptance is another major reason for less empowerment of civil society in many developing countries including ours. In Pakistan, the existing registration institutions that operates under various acts and ordinances seems to be relatively supportive to voluntary associations, however they still requires to be reviewed to increase their coverage and support for growth of other actors of civil society in general.

Another major external factor being faced by civil society is the hidden agenda and biased working relationships between public and private sectors organizations. This relationship, in most cases, provides a backdoor support to private sector to remain unchecked and none monitored. Consequently, the interests of masses remain un-protected against the vested interests of marketplace being influenced by business sector and multinational

corporations. The hues and cries of masses, particularly consumer societies, over violation of their consumer rights remain un-heard and un-addressed. Consumers are provided with low quality, unsafe, inefficient and hazardous goods and services with no mechanism of grievances and redressal available to them. These problems are rooted in the crisis of governance in the country and the monopolistic and unregulated market practices (CRCP, 2000). Unregulated market practices are carried out by private sector, where civil society have a lot to say for getting it change and make them pro-people. Any partnership or cooperation between civil society organizations and business / private sector carried out in few countries of the developed countries of world, would definitely add into confusion of masses, which in turn adjoin into issue of its legitimacy and lack of public acceptance.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

At present civil society organizations both formal and informal are at its infancy, therefore, it might have dozens of weaknesses and grey areas, but at the same time, there is a great deal of time, space and resources to get it empowered for its efficiency and effectiveness in the province.

The internal issues and challenges, which make it weak and ineffective, can be resolved by formation of a collective body of all actors of civil society at province level. This step must be taken by NGOs who is somewhat trained to provide heterogeneous groups a common plate-form for joint efforts. After having established the body and ensured participation of all concerned members, the body must first go through a detail exercise, which can be ended with identified and prioritized problems along with proposed agenda to get them addressed with timeframe. While doing so, research and development efforts must be adopted, which should be 100% align with global development agenda and local prevailing situation.

While focusing on external challenges, it is imperative to first built capacities, which is subject to formation of a joint body of civil society. Once civil society is empowered, it can change the existing legal framework by sensitizing political environment which is subject to creating awareness among masses and their representing groups and organizations i.e. media, political parties, religious organizations, clergies and all other influential's

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