

Dynamics of NGOs: A Pakistani Perspective

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Abstract

In Pakistan, NGOs are growing in number and size and getting place for themselves as the third sector of society. The reasons of NGOs becoming a third sector side by side the state and business sectors are attributed to the ineffectiveness of state apparatus and failure of business in providing the effective development mechanism at grass root level. In Pakistan where socio-economic indicators are little appreciable, the state is looking towards other institutions to share its responsibility of social welfare and development. Realizing the importance of NGOs as a helping hand in socio-economic development by the present government, Citizen Community Boards (CCBs), which are also a new form of citizen's initiatives, have become a part of the local development mechanism in the Local Government Ordinance 2000.

NGOs which have proved their importance in Bangladesh and other under developed countries of the world can play crucial role in grass roots development, along with, the state and business organizations. In this background, this is right time for state and business as to understand the dynamics of NGOs with special reference to Pakistan so that the potentials of citizen's initiatives can be utilized for public good. This paper presents a picture of NGOs by taking account of the genesis, types and kinds, regulatory authorities, its roles, and strengths and weaknesses of Pakistani NGOs.

1. INTRODUCTION

The desire to help those in need is as old as civilization itself. Volunteerism is not new in Pakistan. It has a long history of dedicated and selfless workers who have devoted their lives to respond to the needs of people. Volunteerism in our country has come to be identified by the organizations to which they belong. Not too long ago, mostly, the non-formal organizations were simply known as 'Voluntary Social Organizations/ Agencies'. Presently, the voluntary organizations in more organized forms are widely known as NGOs. NGOs are growing in number and size and getting stronger. The reasons of NGOs becoming a third sector of society, side by side, the state and business sectors are attributed to the ineffectiveness of state apparatus and failure of business sector in providing the effective development lead at grass root level. Recently, realizing the importance of NGOs as a helping hand to state in socio-economic development by the present government, Citizen Community Board (CCBs) has become a part of the local development agenda.

This paper has been written with an objective to provide an insight of Pakistani NGOs to, public and private planner, researcher, NGO practitioners, local and

international donors, social entrepreneurs, and social marketers. An extensive literature search, field visits and interviews of the NGO activist/professionals have been undertaken in writing this paper.

2. GENESIS OF NGOs IN PAKISTAN

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are covered under the term Voluntary Organizations (VOs) which is an umbrella term comprising all sorts of organizations working for the welfare and development of the general people: a particular segment of society; members of the cooperatives and professionals etc. The term 'voluntary' refers to action taken by the free will of the actor [1]. Voluntary Organizations represent a different class of organizations that depend on energy and resources freely by their members and supporters without expecting any material gain but in support of organizations' mission and goals [2]. One of the terms, out of numerous terminologies, used for NGOs, besides VOs, is Non-profit Organizations (NPOs). According to The John Hopkins Non-profit Sector Research Project for Pakistan, NGOs/ NPOs have an institutional presence and structure, are institutionally separate from the state, do not return profits to their managers or directors or members, are fundamentally in control of their own affairs, attract some level of voluntary contributions of time or money, and also membership in them is not legally required [3]. The voluntary organizations as a whole are, termed as citizen/ NGO sector; a subset of civil society.

The last few years have seen a rapid increase in the number of NGOs in Pakistan. There are various types of NGOs distinguishable by the factors that have led to genesis, and importantly their impact on the process of democratization and socio-economic transformation [4]. The more important reason for the growing interest in the NGO movement is the track record of NGOs not only in Pakistan but also in the South Asian region as an agent of socio-economic change. The reason of the existence of these organizations is the inability of state and private institutions to provide support services and support to the deprived and poorest sections of society [5].

Non-Governmental Organizations, in current term – a major segment of citizen sector – existed from the time immemorial in different forms and known by various names in Pakistan, such as Welfare Organizations, Voluntary Organizations, Missionary Organizations, *Falahi Idare*, *Jirga*, *Panchayat*, Not-For-Profit Organizations etc [6]. NGOs are also classified on the basis of level and functions. The other segments of NGO sector are Grass Roots Organizations (GROs) and Support Organizations. However, the segments are overlapping up

to some extent; hence the clear-cut boundary lines for each segment cannot be sketched. The segments identification and classifications are also developed on their functions and levels.

Ever since Pakistan gained independence, foreign donors have played an instrumental role in the formulation of development policies. However, the aid received by Pakistan has not been judiciously utilized. Billions of dollars of foreign aid have gone into supporting large planned projects, the benefits of which have not reached the common man [7]. Having noticed this impediment, the donors have started asking the government to involve communities through NGOs in the development process. Seeing that donors are keen to support, the government, in some cases, has taken it upon itself to create rural support organizations. These organizations have either serving or retired civil servants on their boards rather than professional development managers and do not have participatory organizational culture [8]. This is not to say that they do not follow a participatory approach while working with communities. But there is a room to increase the level of participation of stakeholders in planning and execution of programs in these government organized NGOs (GONGOs).

In Pakistan NGOs were also established on ideological ground. Activist Peoples' Organizations can be distinguished by their organizational cultures and the backgrounds of their founding members. Most of the founding members were actively involved in the movement for the restoration of democracy during the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, though their work with women's organizations, trade unions, popular theater groups, human rights groups, political prisoners, urban slum populations, and socio-economic and political system [9]. This is an alternative sector in Pakistan. What has been the impact of the emergence of the alternative sector on the process of socio-economic transformation in Pakistan? The answer is, the NGO sector is still very small to have a significant impact on the process of social, economic and political change in the country. However, the last few years have seen the growth of more and more citizen organizations. There has also been a tendency towards networking of like minded groups with a view to working towards strengthening civil society and bringing about political and socio-economic change. The relationship of NGOs and politics has also been questioned in various discussions within the NGO movement in Pakistan. It appears that in the years to come, some of the activities would converge to form effective pressure groups. By coming together and extending their linkages with professional and workers' associations, NGO activists could become the catalyst in the formation of civil society.

Along with, the volunteerism and dedication of NGOs to the social development cause, Pakistani NGOs are also witnessing 'limousine culture' like other developing countries that started with the huge fund flow directly to

NGOs from foreign donor agencies [10]. This trend is influencing the culture of volunteerism to services on high cost approach. The concept of volunteerism is increasingly changing with luxurious life style. People with political connections have created their own NGOs in the name of social services such as health, non-formal, education, women development, micro credits and the poverty alleviation program. The high officials of NGOs are not much sensitized to the deprivation of the community for whom; the whole NGO systems have been established. The increasing activities of NGOs in mid nineties drew sharp attention of deposed Nawaz Sharif government. This government feared the increasing flow of funds directly to the NGO sector and increasing activities of religious group through *Madarsas*. Screening process of NGOs was started in early December 1998. As a result, more than 2000 NGOs were banned and their registrations were canceled. Out of this figure, 1941 NGOs belonged to Punjab and the rest to Sindh. This act of screening and, latter on, canceling the registrations of NGOs was widely condemned by the bosses of NGOs and politicians alike [11].

3. TYPES AND KINDS OF NGOs IN PAKISTAN

The types of NGOs have been explained in the literature of NGOs as the levels of organization, such as size and institutional space etc, while the kinds over the fields of interest, the function and scope of the NGOs. Below is the detailed explanation of these terms separately

3.1 Types of NGOs

There are three types of NGOs, also classified as levels of NGOs:

- i) Community Based NGOs (CBNGOs)
- ii) Midlevel or Intermediary NGOs
- iii) Support Organizations [12].

These three levels of NGOs form a pyramid, Fig. 1, when quantified in terms of their numbers.

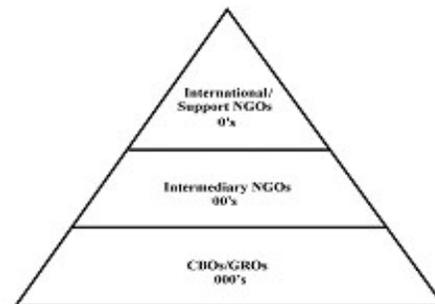


Fig-1: Types and levels of NGOs

i) Community Based NGOs (CBNGOs)

CBNGOs include, indigenous community groups, village level clubs, induced community groups, mass organizations, local and national religious organizations,

local and national trade organizations. CBNGOs work at the grass roots level, concentrate on welfare activities and remain active for the welfare of the local communities [13]. They are said to be first generation of NGOs. David Korten is quoted by Ian Smillie for an IUCN-Pakistan working paper 1992 as; “The front line of NGOs active in local development often spontaneously-fronted community groups with the energy and motivation both for real change in the conditions under which the poor live in both urban and rural areas for giving the poor a voice and access to public resources in setting where they have traditionally been isolated from power” [14]. Of course, these organizations are small and fragile which seems vulnerable to external influences and temptations. CBOs are a set of building blocks for civil society. It is thus inferred that ‘CBNGOs are the groups of beneficiaries who organize themselves on a self-help basis’ [15].

ii) Intermediary NGOs

Intermediary NGOs are also known as a midlevel NGOs or simply NGOs. These organizations remain ‘service delivery organizations’ focusing on healthcare, family planning, education, environment, water and sanitation. Mostly intermediary NGOs are local philanthropic organizations, national private philanthropic organizations, national public philanthropic organizations, hometown organizations and humanitarian organizations. These are support organizations to grass roots organizations, and not necessarily support with funds but provide technical support in their programme extensions. Intermediary NGOs are linked with the donors and CBOs/GROs simultaneously. Most of them are dependent on external donor funding and on self-generated funds. They undertake programs in capacity building, training and financial management of CBOs/GROs. The group of volunteers generally runs them by forming Executive Committee/ Managing Committee/ Board of Directors or General Body as apex body through the paid staffs. The Intermediary NGOs have well-defined organizational structure, use management tools up to some extent, have paid staffs in significant numbers depending on size and functions and avail the services for the support of project on community level [16].

iii) Support Organizations:

Support Organizations are the capacity building organizations, which provide financial or technical or both types of assistance to Intermediary NGOs and CBNGOs. They are not implementing agencies or services delivery organizations but help their partner organizations in making them more effective and efficient [17]. From function’s point of view, the term, ‘Support’ is used for donor, covers national and International philanthropic organizations that legally exist with the objectives to support financially openly and comprehensively to other types of NGOs. For the sake of easy comprehension, the donor organizations can be classified into three types as follows:

a) UN Agencies

UN Agencies include the donor agencies having UN mandate [18].

b) International and Foreign Donor Organizations

These organizations include all non-UN international organizations and representative organizations of foreign governments. These can be projects, funding concerns, or implementation agencies. They may be donating expertise, equipment, materials, money, advice or implementing themselves in special cases [19]. This definition includes all the organizations with offices in regional countries as well as those which fund regional/local NGOs directly from foreign land.

c) Local Donors and Philanthropic Organizations:

These should include all structures through which funds are supplied for philanthropic and development purposes. In this category the local foundations and trusts set aside funds within their businesses or collect from other sources for the use of philanthropic purposes. Mostly, these are registered with the competent registering authorities in the countries where they operate, such as Foundation or Trust Act.

3.2 Kinds of NGOs

General Welfare NGOs, Development NGOs, Rehabilitation and Emergency Relief NGOs, Policy Dialogue NGOs, and Advocacy & Lobbying NGOs are some main kinds of NGOs. However, the kinds of NGOs can be divided into two broad categories, such as:

- i) NGOs by Functions
- ii) NGOs by Scope

i) NGOs by Functions

By functions, NGO exist to support, exchange, promote the religion, education, research, sports, the art, peace and justice, human rights, social work, relief and development, professional development, health, environment etc [20].

ii) NGOs by Scope

These NGOs by scope exist on community, regional, provincial, national and international level.

4. NGO REGULATING AUTHORITY

There are six major NGOs Registering Acts and 14 subsections which encompass the registration and regulating laws for NGOs in Pakistan as follows [21]:

- Societies Registration Act 1860
- Trust Act 1882
- Cooperative Society Act 1925
- Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies Registration and Control Ordinance 1961
- Company’s Ordinance 1984

- Local Government Ordinance 2000 (This is an additional law promulgated under devolution plan 2000 for CCBs' registration)

5. ROLE OF NGOs AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETY

NGOs/VOs exist to satisfy those human needs, which are unfulfilled by other social, economic and political institutions [22]. Business sector avoids operations in those areas where it suffers loss while public sector does not have access due to its financial limitations or other priorities like defense building, regional and international politics. However, NGOs in Pakistan are growing quickly in numbers and outreach, but to a large extent, their potential is still under-utilized because of funding limitations, their own institutional weaknesses and governments' skepticism towards the role of NGOs. NGOs are becoming more important players in rural development, poverty alleviation through their micro financing programmes and they are playing important roles in policy advocacy and lobbying in the field of environment and development policy making [23]. CBOs/GROs, Intermediary NGOs and Support Organizations/International NGOs are different levels of citizen sector. They have the same agenda of helping the people to come up with self-sustainable socio-economic programmes with different levels of work. Hence, NGOs are making contributions to the sustainable development in Pakistan. They are mobilizing local people to improve their quality of life, and increasing their own effectiveness so as to potentially influence national policy making, either through growth or building alliances. As a result, people may link all the elements of sustainable development including ecology, economics, politics and culture, and enable individuals, to cope with change. They are playing a role in upliftment of society in general and poorest of the poor in particular. Especially, the Intermediary NGOs have the agenda of providing help in resolving the economic and cultural differences among local people, by using their money and experience through GROs. They bridge the gap between local and technical knowledge in efforts to find long-term solutions, which are widely accepted by target groups. In this way new approaches are being applied in solving problems and disseminating knowledge to other organizations through connecting them with local organizations by way of joining networks or building links with international organizations.

International organizations offer new ideas to national and local NGOs and alert them toward ongoing international policy making. Hence, NGOs serve as international lobbyist to tackle the policies of governments, corporations and multilateral institutions. Indeed, NGOs in Pakistan like other developing countries are increasingly insistent that lobbying should be the primarily role of Northern

NGOs¹. International NGOs also link up disconnected global communities, share similar problems and increase awareness of global issues, such as: deforestation; loss of biodiversity; and global warning.

In Pakistan, it has been found that the majority of NGOs are urban based. It is interesting to note that more than 70% of the population lives in rural areas while more than 71% of NGOs have their bases in urban areas. 46.4% NGOs focus on education and research, 17.5% on civil rights and advocacy, 8.3% on social services, 7.3% on development and housing, 5.5% on culture and recreation, 6.1% on health, while professional associations are 3.8% and NGOs working on environment are 0.2% [24].

6. INFORMATION ABOUT NGOs

The NGOs literature in Pakistan is very limited. However, some libraries, being established and developed by NGOs themselves, provide a collection of books of local and foreign writers studies and reports conducted by bilateral and multilateral donor agencies and Newsletters frequently published by local NGOs are available in these specialized libraries. Non-Governmental Organization Resource Center (NGORC), a project of Aga Khan Foundation, has well-organized library where, up to great extent, the information regarding NGOs of South Asian countries is available. As per John Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Project Research, the number of registered NGOs have been found to be 56,219, out of which 33,168 are in Punjab, 16,819 in Sindh, 3,033 in NWFP and 3,127 in Balochistan [25]. However, only 45% of the registered NGOs have been found active and functional.

7. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF NGOs

Like other sectors, the NGOs are not exceptional in having strengths and weaknesses. Some strengths and weaknesses are discussed here.

i) Strengths

NGOs have special ability to reach the poor and other segments of society overlooked by public and commercial sectors. NGOs facilitate local resource mobilization and have programs of local participation in development. Service delivery at low cost and innovative solutions to novel problems are their strengths. The biggest strength of these organizations is the openness in thought. They are said to be learning organizations, their capacity grows from small size with administrative flexibility and have relatively more freedom from political constraints [26].

ii) Weaknesses

Due to the small size and budget, NGOs lack in technical capacity, because the highly trained technical and professional people do not find much attraction for career jobs in this sector. The NGOs have limited ability to scale

¹ NGOs/NPOs are termed as Northern NGOs in the West or developed countries.

up successful projects to achieving regional or national impact. This is due to their small size and resources that there are unscientific administrative system, intensive focus on a few committees, the difficulties in maintaining their essential value consensus soon as the staff expands, interaction to developing real efficiency and expertise in a well defined technological environment, and even living with their own commitments to their initial beneficiary populations [27]. NGOs ignore the larger contest in which they operate rather they focus on the micro level, and fail to recognize the extent to which the committees they serve are part of systems, thus strongly being influenced by other external factors.

8. CONCLUSION

In Pakistan, NGOs have grown in size and numbers and moving from infancy towards adulthood. In a country like Pakistan where socio-economic indicators are less appreciable, the state is looking towards other institutions to share its responsibility of social welfare and development. Hence there is a need to provide enabling environment for NGOs to get more organized and stronger. NGOs which have proved their importance in Bangladesh and other under developed countries of the world can play crucial role in grass roots development, along with the state and business organizations in Pakistan. The history of NGOs in Pakistan offers a mixed response to the calls of the need in the past. However, the responsibilities of low performance of NGOs cannot be solely attributed to these organizations. This is an admitted fact that the NGOs have displayed excellent results in managing projects and have contributions at micro levels. Why the NGOs have not impressed at the macro level? The answer should be explored in the corridor of states and it can be a new area of research in Pakistan. One of the answers of these questions can be that the political history of Pakistan has been uneven, and as a result the attitude of different governments varied towards NGOs. The present government seems to provide more space to NGOs than its predecessor as it reflects from devolution plan now in operation. In order to be beneficial, the potentials of NGOs in socio-economic development in Pakistan, especially for rural development, it is right time to study and understand the dynamics of Pakistani NGOs.

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