



Climate Change effects on Sustainable livelihoods: Role of Civil society, Media and Advocacy Groups

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Abstract:

A major function of civil society organizations is to serve as a force for social justice and social harmony. Social justice lies at the heart of civil society endeavor even though it takes a variety of forms in different settings and at different times. At a minimum, the pursuit of social justice means promoting respect for the worth of each individual and protecting basic human rights—the right to security of one's person and property, freedom of belief, and freedom of association and expression. Beyond this, however, it has come to mean overcoming inequalities of opportunity and condition, and guaranteeing at least some minimum standard of living and a healthy and secure environment both for those living and those still unborn. How civil society organizations pursue their social justice mission can differ substantially from place to place depending on political traditions, levels of development, and cultures of participation. Nevertheless, there are enough similarities in the social justice role that civil society organizations perform in different settings to make a general statement of the sort offered here both possible and useful. More specifically, civil society organizations can pursue their social justice mission through at least two different, though inter-related, routes. The first is through the provision of services such as health care, education, and sustenance to those in need. This is a long-standing function of civil society organizations and retains its importance today.

Key words: *Social justice, Standard of living, Health care, Fundamentalist, Competition*

1. Introduction

The concept of civil society goes back many centuries in Western thinking with its roots in

Ancient Greece. The modern idea of civil society emerged in the 18th Century, influenced by political theorists from Thomas Paine to



George Hegel, who developed the notion of civil society as a domain parallel to but separate from the states (Cerothers, 1999). The 90s brought about renewed interest in civil society, as the trend towards democracy opened up space for civil society and the need to cover increasing gaps in social services created by structural adjustment and other reforms in developing countries.

Civil society has been widely recognized as an essential 'third' sector. Its strength can have a positive influence on the state and the market. Civil society is therefore seen as an increasingly important agent for promoting good governance like transparency, effectiveness, openness, responsiveness and accountability.

2. Civil Society in Developing Countries:

The issue of the small scale of the civil society sector in developing countries, where their potential contribution to the achievement of MDGs is high, deserves further attention. If these organizations are to be strengthened, it is important to

understand what factors have historically hindered their growth.

Variation in the scale and nature of civil society sector in different countries is largely affected by the historical, cultural, social and political environment; a number of impediments to growth of CSOs can be identified as follows: (Salamon and Anheier, 1997)

2. Authoritarian political control:

Perhaps the most basic factor accounting for the generally retarded pattern of the third sector development in many developing countries is the long history of authoritarian rule. In Latin America, for example, the nonprofit sector in Brazil has taken shape in the historical context characterized by a strong state and a weak civil society. As Landim (1998) puts it, "In Brazil, the state has always taken on itself the task of creating society, whether by arranging groups and individuals... or by intervening to destroy autonomy." Strong state control also figured prominently in the histories of



Egypt and Ghana, in Africa. First under the Ottoman Empire and later under British colonial rule, Egypt was ruled by a succession of authoritarian leaders with only limited opportunity for effective democratic involvement. Similarly, in Ghana the pre-colonial societies were organized in traditional tribal form with local chieftains exercising dominant control. In India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan (in South Asia) history is dominated by successive empires that rose, flourished and declined, with a hierarchical social form, with limited social organization outside the control of the state.

Given this pattern of authoritarianism, little room was left for a truly independent third sector in these societies. What charitable institutions emerged therefore had to fit within the prevailing structures of political and social power and avoid posing serious challenge to the dominant political authorities. Passivity and dependence rather than empowerment and autonomy thus became the early watchword of nonprofit sector activity.

Authoritarian political control did not end in these countries with independence. Rather, it persisted. The upshot has been a persistent atmosphere of distrust between the nonprofit sector and the State in many of these countries. The State remains highly watchful of its power and too easily interprets the emergence of CSOs as a challenge to its very legitimacy. In Egypt, for example, this distrust is currently fuelled by the antagonism between a strong secular State and Islamic fundamentalist groups that are using civil society institutions as a way to strengthen their links with the urban poor. In Brazil, State distrust is a residue of a recent authoritarian past and a social and economic policy that seeks to build up the private business sector and still views the "citizen sector" as an antagonist. In Thailand and India has stronger tradition of partnership in emerging, though not without deep-seated reservations about the bonds that has formed between indigenous non-profit institutions and their foreign supporters. In Pakistan, the



new NGO Bill is a reflection of the continued effort by government to “keep a close eye” on the CSOs.

3. Religion:

Religion has a multiple impact on the development of the nonprofit sector. In addition to the basic creed and the support it gives to acts of charity, crucial other facets of religion’s impact need to be taken into account – its posture toward individualism, its commitment to institution building, and its relationship with State authorities. Indications are that while religions can share a positive orientation toward philanthropy, they may not generally be supportive of the emergence of CSOs.

For example, the church in Brazil functioned historically to reinforce secular authority and a monolithic system of social and cultural control, thereby sharply reducing the opportunities for developing an independent nonprofit sector. In Pakistan, human right CSOs, particularly working on issues like women’s rights, are constantly challenged

and sometimes threatened by the dominant religious fundamentalist segments of society which continue to have influence over the state.

4. Colonialism:

Another factor that helps to explain the generally retarded pattern of third sector development in the third world is the recent history of colonial control. Like religion, however, colonialism’s impact on third sector development has been multi-dimensional. What is more, it has varied somewhat depending on the national traditions and values of the colonial power. Colonialism has tended to undermine the independence of local social classes that might have provided the rallying point for civil society institutions. This was particularly true of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial traditions, which created especially authoritarian political and social structures in their respective colonies. In much of Latin America, colonialism created a highly inhospitable environment for the emergence of truly autonomous civil society institutions that might have challenged the monopolistic



power of the colonial regime and its local allies.

5. Low income and constrained social development:

Perhaps the most important impact of colonialism on some of the countries was the constraint it exercised on social development. One of the principal consequences of the colonial experience, in fact, was to limit the space that indigenous middle class elements could occupy in the developing world. This was so because the colonial administration handled many governmental and commercial functions that might otherwise have been performed by the indigenous people, thereby restricting middle class professional opportunities. What middle class cadre emerged in these countries thus tended to be tightly bound to the colonial administrations and therefore lacked the independence characteristic of the urban commercial and professional middle class elements that emerged in Western Europe during the dawn of the industrial era.

This situation persisted because of the general poverty and lack of development in these countries. As growth had gathered momentum in at least some regions, however, this situation is changing. Indeed, the significant upsurge of nonprofit activity in countries like Brazil, Thailand and Egypt over the past two decades can be attributed in part to the emergence of a sizable new urban middle class as a result of recent economic growth.

Limited Resources: An important factor hindering the growth of the civil society sector is the scarcity of financial resources. Funding constraints limit the scale and functioning of CSOs, significantly impairing their ability to deliver and maintain services. In case of large NGOs, in particular, heavy reliance is frequently placed on funding from foreign donors. This is making CSOs more reflective of donor interests than those of their communities or designated target groups. Many CSOs have to review their missions or undertake work outside their mandate just to survive. The



difficult economic conditions make local fundraising very difficult. Competition for scarce resources is also limiting opportunities for coalition-building, long-term institutional development and other aspects of local capacity building. Their performance in terms of poverty reach and popular participation is also compromised but in some instances, they have neglected the landless and other marginalized people, thereby failing to reach the poorest of the poor" (UN-NADAF, 1990-2001). Sometimes only certain regions are serviced by well-equipped CSOs, neglecting other areas more desperately in need.

6. Techniques for Effective Advocacy:

Policy monitoring and public accountability

Almost all effective policy-related advocacy efforts commence with observation and monitoring of the implementation and effectiveness of policies already in place. These might include, for example, commitments to ICT infrastructure roll-out, universal

access policies, support for community-based ICT access centres, public interest broadcasting policies, or regulatory mechanisms to ensure fair pricing of services.

High profile ICT policy monitoring by civil society advocacy groups can, on its own, contribute to improved policy implementation and effectiveness by highlighting public policy targets and drawing public attention to under performance or to policy failure. Governments and public bodies, especially in democratic societies, are sensitive to critical reports, and more so when these are based on robust evidence and analysis, come from a credible source, and are widely published and disseminated. Policy monitoring by civil society groups may be in the form of one-off investigation into a particular area of interest; it may consist of a baseline study, perhaps at the commencement of a new policy, and a follow-up study later to establish what results were achieved; or it may be a periodic monitoring report, such as an annual review. Policy monitoring and public



accountability are made easier where government departments and other public bodies, including regulatory organisations, maintain and publish data and reports in a timely fashion and undertake research and consultation to facilitate decision making in the public interest. Where this is not the case, where the information is poor or unreliable, or where independent data is needed, civil society organisations and coalitions may organise their own research and data gathering, or they may rely on third party sources such as commercial and academic research.

Right to information laws can help and, in countries where such laws are weak or absent, their adoption or improvement has itself been a key demand of civil society organisations, not only those working in the communication policy field. In some cases investigative journalism may be needed to root out and expose policy failings. Impact may often be enhanced by involving citizens and civil society organisations in the process of policy monitoring and review and

by gathering demand-side data using techniques such as citizen surveys, social audits and participatory policy review. Such social accountability mechanisms have gained increasing recognition as effective means of strengthening civic engagement in policy making and policy monitoring.

Legal Treatment:

A further factor impeding the development of the nonprofit sector in some developing countries has been the legal environment within which nonprofits must operate. Certainly in civil law countries such as Brazil, Thailand, and Egypt, where no “basic” right to organize is automatically recognized in law, formal law can shape the environment for action rather fundamentally. Reflecting the generally authoritarian politics that have characterized these countries during much of their recent history, the legal structure for civil society activity has been quite restrictive. For example, the Religious Bodies Registration Act of 1981 in Ghana revoked the legal status of all religious CSOs and required them to reapply through a



highly restrictive registration procedure. In Brazil, Law 91 of 1935, regulating the public utility statues of CSOs, was used as a means of political control and favoritism. In Egypt, Law 32 of 1964 establishes de facto government control of large segments of the civil society sector and in Thailand, the Cremation Welfare Act of 1974 was passed by the military government to preempt feared infiltration by communists. The Act required all existing local cremation and related communal welfare societies to register with the central authorities in Bangkok and to submit to State supervision.

In other cases, the basic legal provision affecting CSOs in India, Pakistan and Ghana were borrowed from those in force in late 19th and early 20th century England through a system of legal ordinances. The environment for CSOs in these countries therefore appears quite open. To get around these general legal provisions, however, governments have added various restrictions to limit their general thrust and make them

more cumbersome. Thus, for example, tax laws and related legislation often establish significant obstacles to the operation of CSOs. What this makes clear is that establishing an enabling legal environment for civil society action is only a first step towards opening a way for a viable civil society sector. A variety of other obstacles can easily frustrate the intent of even the most supportive legal provisions.

Media:

By collecting and relaying vital information to the public, the media and other communication processes can provide the knowledge needed to improve the livelihoods of the population and to ensure participatory policymaking. Strategic/development communication is especially critical in reaching the communities most affected by poverty and those most vulnerable to threats to their environment, health and economic productivity. Hence, professional and democratic media delivering well-researched information are essential to the fight against poverty, the building of strong



public institutions, and constructive civic engagement. Coupled with an efficient communication infrastructure, informed debate, transparency, and the active participation of citizens, the media can contribute significantly to the shaping of policies, attitudes, and behaviours that are needed to support sustainable livelihoods.

7. The Development Paradigm:

One other factor helping to explain the historically constrained pattern of civil society sector development in the third world is the changing fashion in development policy and development ideology. During the 1950s and 1960s, development thinking emphasized the importance of a State as the principal agent of modernizing reforms. As a consequence, considerable effort went into differentiating a sphere of State action outside the pre-modern structures of tribe or community, and into creating modern, secular administrative structures that

could effectively operate in this sphere. This development framework included a sphere of business in addition to that of government, but it downplayed, if not excluded, CSOs which were viewed as only marginal in the frame of affairs.

The shift to “structural adjustment” in the 1980s did not change this fundamentally. To the contrary, the “structural adjustment” paradigm of development merely replaced government with the private business community as the mode of development. In the process, however, it reinforced an essentially two-sector model of society that left little room for a vibrant civil society sector. The lack of civil society growth is thus understandable given that it been historically neglected in the central policy debate.

In short, the development of the third sector seems to have been inhibited by a long history of authoritarianism; by colonial heritage and a history of limited economic growth that restricted the growth of an independent urban



middle class; by religious traditions that placed less emphasis on “modularity” and the fostering of independent institutional structures; by legal structures that often placed impediments in the way of civil society formation; and by development policies that stressed the creation of a modernizing State and later the development of private enterprise rather the promotion of independent institutions outside the confines of the market and the State.

8. Increased Awareness and Coordination on Climate Change Issues:

Based on observations and public announcements, there is increased awareness of climate change issues within government ministries and departments at policy level. There is evidence that government, development partners, civil society have started mainstreaming climate change into their sectoral plans but it is in the early stages. Increased awareness of climate change issues is yet to filter down to district, communities

and grassroots. More effort in raising awareness is required.

There is need for a central office to coordinate, provide sector guidelines, monitor and Marshall Resources for climate change activities. Worth noting is that there is now a Government of Malawi/Donor Working Group on Climate Change. This group comprises representatives from the donor community and principal secretaries from government meant to have a cohesive approach in implementation of climate change activities. EP & D, UNDP and EAD are championing this effort.

9. Conclusion:

This needs assessment study aims to evaluate what is needed by poor rural populations in enable them to develop sustainable livelihoods that can cope with the impacts of climate change. Improvement of sustainable livelihoods in this area is a key to alleviating poverty, but remains challenging. Thus, an understanding of how livelihoods are conducted and sustained, how resources can be better accessed to



meet basic needs and generate income, is a crucial step in attaining genuinely sustainable development in these areas. The challenge of developing and maintaining sustainable livelihoods, and lifting the local population out of poverty, is increasingly being compounded by the impacts of climate change. This study recognises that any efforts to support sustainable livelihoods will only be effective if they take into account the impacts of climate change, and build local communities' resilience to these emerging threats.

The purpose of this study is to: identify the risks that climate change poses to understand the role of access to natural resources and access to markets in supporting their livelihoods and reducing their vulnerability; and to recommend adaptation actions that can help increase the resilience and sustainability of poor people's livelihoods in the face of climate change. The research was divided into five themes which are closely interlinked: water supply, irrigation and sanitation; land

access and management; value chains and access to markets; climate change.

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