CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN GOOD GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

Governance is an imperative tool for sustainable development. It is understood that without an appropriate governance structure, developing countries will not be able to sustain either economic growth or a momentum towards rapid poverty reduction. It is trying to figure out why despite resource allocation and good policies, improvements in human welfare have not occurred and any improvement in services, freedom from hunger, illness and illiteracy remain elusive. The Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) could contribute to achieve the common goal of development.

SIGNIFICANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS: The concept of civil society goes back to 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. The 90s brought about renewed interests 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 is composed of autonomous associations which develop a dense, diverse and pluralist network. As it develops, civil society consists of a range of local groups, specialised organisations and linkages between them; it amplifies the corrective voices of civil society as a partner in governance and the Market.

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The key features of successful civil societies from various definitions include the following: separation from the state and the market; formed by people who have common needs, interests and values like tolerance, inclusion, cooperation and equality; and development through a fundamentally endogenous and autonomous process which cannot easily be controlled from outside.

The experience of developing countries highlights a wide range of such organizations, from large registered formal bodies to informal local organizations, the latter being far more numerous and less visible to outsiders. Civil society should not be equated to non-government organizations (NGOs).

NGOs are a part of civil society though they play an important and sometimes leading role in activating citizen participation in socio-economic development and politics and in shaping or influencing policy. Civil society is a broader concept, encompassing all organizations and associations that exist outside the state and the market.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN GOVERNANCE PROCESS: 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. Engaging civil society organizations in the governance process would enhance the legitimacy of a democratic process. Therefore, civil society organizations are increasingly recognized as the most appropriate actors when dealing with public policy and development programs.

It is because it addresses certain issues or problems that may be beyond the easy reach of state bureaucracy and on the other hand, relatively of little interest evinced by the private sector. Civil society organizations, increasingly better organized and informed, are also aware of their potential role in the policy process. They understand the importance of building more effective relationships with government in order to create and implement development policies and programs that are more responsive, sustainable and cost effective.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE: Based on the above definitions, good governance is said to have the following eight essential elements. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law.

Figure 1Principles of good governance

Participation - Participation by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society would be taken into consideration in decision-making. Participation needs to be informed and organized. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand.

Rule of law - Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force.

Transparency - Transparency means that decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also means that enough information is provided and that it is provided in easily understandable forms and media.

Responsiveness - Good governance requires that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.

Consensus oriented - There are several actors and as many view points in a given society. Good governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development. This can only result from an understanding of the historical, cultural and social contexts of a given society or community.

Equity and inclusiveness - A society's well-being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.

Effectiveness and efficiency - Good governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

Accountability - Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Who is accountable to whom varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution. In general, an organization or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law. Conclusion From the above discussion it should be clear that good governance is an ideal, which is difficult to achieve in its totality.

Very few countries and societies have come close to achieving good governance in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards this ideal with the aim of making it a reality.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM: civil society plays a significant role in global governance. In the last three decades especially after the end of the Cold War, the presence of civil society organisations (CSOs) in international affairs has become increasingly relevant.

The CSOs have played a role in agenda setting, international law-making and governance, transnational diplomacy and the implementation and monitoring of a number of crucial global issues ranging from trade to development and poverty reduction, from democratic governance to human rights, from peace to the environment, and from security to the information society. CSOs have thus been significant international actors as advocates for policy solutions, service providers, knowledge brokers, or simply watchdogs and monitors of state and intergovernmental actions. This global activism has taken place within a particular political constellation produced by the combination of institutional backing, socio-economic processes, technological innovation, and the dominance of a specific political ideology among other elements.

A number of international organisations have supported the inclusion of civil society actors within international decision-making. The UN has actively promoted cooperation with civil society in global governance, especially in relation to the World Summits, which have provided a forum for global civil encounters to occur. The European Union has followed a similar approach by integrating different types of civil society organisations within its governance mechanisms.

The globalisation process has generated a sense of common purpose among civil society actors, and has thus been a trigger for both internal unification, increasing the sense of solidarity among civil society organisations, and for contestation of the socio-economic consequences of globalisation. The rapid intensification of neo-liberal socio-economic policies has provoked a strong political response from different sectors of civil society. For the first time, a number of adhoc coalitions and campaigns have been organised on a trans-ideological basis, going beyond the traditional political barriers of previous forms of mobilisation, and targeting a number of controversial (mainly economic) aspects of globalisation.

Innovations in the field of Information Technology (IT) have revolutionised the organisational patterns within civil society. Through the internet, groups from different parts of the world have been able to familiarise themselves with other political realities, like-minded organisations, and alternative forms of action. In this way, they have been able to increase their political expertise and their ability to coalesce trans-nationally on common goals.

The wider international system, based as it is primarily on liberal western principles, has offered a conducive environment for these kinds of activities to develop. The widespread recognition of the transnational value of human rights, civic participation, accountability, social empowerment, and gender equality have enhanced the possibilities for civil society organisations to gain space and legitimacy in the international system beyond the traditional framework of state based representation.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND NATIONAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM: The history of the development of civil society in India can be traced to the famine and drought of the mid - 1960s and to the early 1970s during the shift from the Nehruvian era to Mrs. Indira Gandhi's rule. The famine and drought resulted in the sprouting of NGOs that were funded by international donor agencies that aimed to meet the basic needs of the poor. With regard to NGOs that rose to protect peoples' civil liberties, it is relevant to note that Mrs. Gandhi's coming to power is concomitant with the "emergence of an authoritarian state on the one hand, and the continued expectations from a welfares state responsive to the popular demands of the polity and it's marginalized on the other". Post-colonial India witnessed the emergence of a wide range of NGOs, including those that emerged to remove the chronic levels of poverty that had resulted in the famine and drought of the mid- 1960s in India. Moreover, a number of NGOs mushroomed in the post- emergency period to protect the civil liberties of people and to advocate for human rights.

The drought and famine experienced by India in the mid - 1960s resulted in development planners shifting their focus away from strategies for industrial growth to those that would meet the basic needs of poor individuals. Several NGOs emerged during this period that focused on removing poverty amongst the rural poor in India. Though many of them were funded by international agencies, those whose programmes fit in with the central and state government's programmes and schemes such as the Integrated Rural Development Programme, were also provided government support for their work.

While many NGOs, the government and policy makers in the 1960s and 1970s worked to achieve the "basic needs" of the poor, the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of the mantra of "participatory development" amongst development planners. The reasons behind this were the large-scale dissatisfaction with centrally planned development strategies that failed to reach the intended beneficiaries. Firstly due to the excessive emphasis on creating large industries that was characteristic of the initial First and Second Five -Year Plans and the failure of the trickle - down theory, which led to the realization that development below had greater chances of being connected with people's needs and realities. This period also saw an increase in the interaction of NGOs with international funding agencies. The post-liberalization phase has seen a synergizing of market - based economic reforms with the notion of good governance associated with this idea is the increasing role being given to civil society organizations such as development and rights - based NGOs that are perceived by international funding agencies as more efficient, capable, committed and likely to be accountable for their actions by their promoters than the autonomous, opaque and all - powerful state.

THE EMERGENCE OF CSOS ROLE IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: The efforts made by the Indian Government to ensure good governance at the rural level, one has to peep into the historical developments in this regard. Panchayat Raj Institutions existed in rural India since long in one form or the other with a limited role. However, after independence, these institutions were visualized as one of the potential agencies for bringing about socioeconomic transformation by empowering rural masses for self-governance. One of the Directive Principles of State Policy provides that the state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. Prior to the establishment of Panchayat Raj Institutions, the Government of India launched Community Development Program and National Extension Service to bring about socio-economic development of rural India. However, these could not achieve the desired objectives for want of people's participation. Consequently, a Study Team under the Chairmanship of Balwant Ray Mehta was appointed to examine and report upon the mechanism to be evolved through which the active participation of the rural masses could be ensured. The Study Team recommended a three-tier system of Panchayat Raj, i.e. Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level and Zila Parishad at the district level and genuine transfer of power with adequate resources to these bodies.

It was also recommended that all the developmental schemes for rural areas should be routed through the PRIs. Accepting these recommendations, the Panchayat Raj system was introduced in several states of India. Unfortunately, the system could not make much headway even after a long trial for want of its masters, bureaucrats and rural masses. Therefore, next attempt to revamp the Panchayat Raj system was made by the Janata Government in 1977 by appointing a committee headed by Asoka Mehta.Its main recommendations were two-tier system of Panchayat Raj, i.e. Mandal panchayat is consisting of a number of villages having a population 15 to 20 thousand and Zila Parishad at the district level. In addition to this the committee

recommended for the establishment of Nayay Panchayat, party-based elections to PRIs, transferring of developmental functions to Zila Parishads, non-supersession of PRIs on partisan grounds and appointment of a Minister for Panchayats in the State Council of Ministers.

Not all these recommendations could be implemented because of the decline of the Janata Government in 1980. In spite of the various steps and initiatives made by the government to bring about improvement in the health of PRIs, most remained unchanged until the passage of 73rd Constitutional Amendment, 1993. 73rd Amendment, in fact, aimed at enhancing the capabilities of the rural people to involve themselves in the planning process with respect to their priorities. It also envisaged decentralization of the execution of all types of developmental activities with the active participation of the rural masses. Briefly, the purpose of the amendment was to bring good governance at the rural local level. Though the Amendment was regarded as a welcome step, yet its in-depth analysis reveals some inherent ambiguities.

The most important one is the lack of clear-cut demarcation of functions amongst the three tiers of Panchayat Raj system. Further, it is pointed out that the powers and functions of Gram Sabha have not been specified. The implementation of the 73rd Amendment during the last decade has yet to exhibit a qualitative improvement in the governance of PRIs India. It is mainly because of the fact that certain essential pre-requisites such as revamping the Gram Sabha, financial viability, political for decentralization, attitudinal and behavioural changes on the part of both politician and bureaucrats, enlightened rural masses, active participation of Civil Society Organizations, committed and dedicated representatives and office-bearers have not been given due attention. Therefore, it requires corrective measures to be taken immediately to facilitate the PRIs to function in such way as to send signals of good governance to the rural masses.

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