

## Civil Society in Pakistan

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE CIVICUS  
INDEX ON CIVIL SOCIETY PROJECT IN PAKISTAN

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# Part I

## Introduction

### Overview of the State of Civil Society in Pakistan

In Pakistan, the contemporary development discourse, academic discussions and journalistic writings tend to employ Civil Society as an umbrella term for a range of non-state and non-market citizen organisations and initiatives, networks and alliances operating in a broad spectrum of social, economic and cultural fields. These include formal institutions such as political parties,<sup>1</sup> non-governmental organisations, trade unions, professional associations, philanthropies, academia, independent and quasi-independent pressure groups, think tanks, and traditional, informal formations such as faith-based organisations, shrines, seminaries, neighbourhood associations, burial societies, *jirgas*<sup>2</sup> (councils of elders) and savings groups. Notwithstanding a vibrant history of citizen action in the public sphere in this part of the world, the term civil society has been in vogue only for the past decade or so. It is yet to gain currency in popular parlance. The term has as yet no equivalent in any of the country's many vernacular languages.

Pakistan's civil society is characterised by hybrid forms, multiple inheritances and the unresolved struggle between the practices and values of pre-capitalist society and new modes of social life, between authoritarian legacies and democratic aspirations. Its cultural manifestations appear as a collection of incoherent voices, conflicting worldviews and opposing interests. While some social forms such as councils of elders, neighbourhood associations and shrines continue from previous phases of society, many new groups have been created 'organically,' to borrow a Gramscian<sup>3</sup> term, through the development of capitalism. Such are the dynamics of an evolving civil society, caught between the throes of a dying social order and the birth pangs of a new one.

### Overview of Civil Society Research in Pakistan

There remains a dearth of reliable and updated information on Pakistan's civil society. NGORC's mandate includes enhancing civil society — through research as well as other tools and channels. NGORC has had the experience of, and capacity for carrying out in-depth research studies on various aspects of civil society, particularly with a focus on NGOs. In the recent past, NGORC has conducted research on legal and fiscal frameworks for NGOs in Pakistan, NGO registration, corporate perception about the NGO sector etc.

As part of the broader NGO enhancement mandate of the Aga Khan Foundation, a three-year international study covering a large spectrum of civil society in Pakistan was initiated in May, 2000. The Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC) is undertaking a study on the non-profit sector

<sup>1</sup> Political parties are not on the CIVICUS definition of civil society presumably because their *raison d'être* is the acquisition of state power. The definition also excludes media due to their for-profit nature.

<sup>2</sup> In the North West Frontier Province, an assembly made up of elders, maliks and whoever happens to be around that decides through consensus tribal policy on war, peace, relations with the government and other tribes and tries cases according to Pakhtunwali, the main principles of which are honour, revenge and hospitality. Jirgas are also in place in Balochistan, albeit not as active as their counterparts in NWFP. Additionally, jirgas in Balochistan are less inclusive than the ones in NWFP and the tribal leader has the final say in all decisions.

<sup>3</sup> Gramsci Antonio, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintine Hoare and Nowell-Smith. New York, International Publishers, 1971.

in Pakistan in collaboration with the Aga Khan Foundation (Pakistan) and Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore USA. The study is part of the 43 nation Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project in order to gain a deeper understanding of the role and contribution of the non-profit sector. The objectives of the study are: to document the size, scope, internal structure, finances, and legal position of the non-profit sector; to improve public awareness of this sector and provide a more reliable basis for designing policies toward it; to evaluate the effectiveness and contribution of this sector and; to help promote the development of local capacity to chart the health of this sector in the future.

Yet another critical plug-in-the-hole is the CIVICUS *Index* on Civil Society Project. In March 2001, NGORC joined the list of the National Lead Organisations (NLOs), as CIVICUS refers to them, after detailed consultations between the CIVICUS Project Co-ordinator and the NGORC team during the visit of the former to Pakistan. It was also felt that the proposed research would fill a major gap in the existing literature on civil society that seems to be lacking an all-encompassing and cross-sectoral analysis.

Following the finalisation of methodology in March 2001, NGORC collated a range of secondary data including books, research papers, dissertations, newspaper articles and features, interviews and reports relevant to different aspects, dimensions and sub-sectors of civil society in Pakistan. Based on a thorough review of the existing literature, NGORC came up with an Overview Report on Civil Society in Pakistan.

Consultative focus group sessions with select groups of stakeholders were held in May 2001 in order to contextualise the definition of civil society, discuss the overview report and select indicators under the four dimensions that the CIVICUS Index uses to look at civil society (structure, space, values, impact)<sup>4</sup>. The focus group sessions held in Karachi and Lahore brought together senior representatives from media, citizen organisations, trade unions, government and the corporate sector. The discussions helped NGORC revise the overview report and adapt indicators suggested by CIVICUS to the Pakistani context. The participants particularly emphasised the need for mainstreaming informal and folk civil society sub-sectors to get a more comprehensive picture. They put forward various suggestions to enhance the contextual validity of the project.

A questionnaire was developed to gauge perceptions about civil society organisations. The stakeholder survey began in June 2001 and was conducted mostly through electronic mail. Almost 300 questionnaires were sent out to 'knowledge bearers' of civil society. By mid-July, NGORC had received a total of 106 questionnaires. Data collection is still ongoing in Pakistan and is expected to be enhanced and completed by the end of the year. It was subsequently decided that available data would be deemed a preliminary survey. Data from the survey was fed into an electronic database by the Index Co-ordination Office (ICO). All indicators were then transformed into a uniform scale from 0 (most negative) to 100 (most positive). The results were then used to plot a diamond that gives a graphical representation of the Pakistani Civil Society. Subsequently, the Diamond Tool analysis was embedded into the overview report.

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<sup>4</sup> The CIVICUS Index on Civil Society employs the Civil Society Diamond Tool in its analysis of civil society. This tool disaggregates civil society into four dimensions, structure, space, values and impact. The Diamond Tool approach, analytic framework and methodology were developed for CIVICUS by Dr. H. Anheier of the Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics. For more information on the Diamond Tool, see Helmut Anheier with Lisa Carlson. *Civil Society: Measurement and Policy Dialogue*. London: Earthscan, forthcoming

## Limitations

While every effort was made to make the project as broad-based, comprehensive and accurate as possible, we were constrained by a number of factors that must be mentioned at the outset.

- The paucity of literature and databases on traditional civil society actors did not allow us to cover the topic as comprehensively as we would have liked to;
- Government representation in the focus group sessions was limited;
- Despite considerable adaptation of indicators, it was felt that the questionnaire remained somewhat biased towards modern CSOs as compared to trade unions, professional associations and folk sub-sectors;
- Time and resource constraints precluded collection of data on traditional or folk sub-sectors;
- The relatively small number of respondents i.e. 106 might not be considered to be truly representative of the Pakistani civil society;
- The language of the questionnaire i.e. English also posed a limitation as knowledge bearers and representatives of certain sub-sectors such as faith-based organisations and CBOs are generally not conversant with that language.

## Objectives of the Index Project in Pakistan's Context

The implementation of the *Index* Project in Pakistan has a number of potentially far-reaching goals and objectives:

- To take stock of the existing literature on civil society, interpret it afresh and identify areas that merit separate research;
- To enhance conceptual understanding about civil society and build a consensus of opinion;
- To enhance understanding about the state of civil society and identify strengths and weaknesses;
- To bring to light areas of mutual concern and foster a sense of unity among CSOs;
- To increase collaboration at sectoral and inter-sectoral levels;
- To facilitate linkages between civil society, government and business;
- To identify impediments to the growth of civil society;
- To help create an enabling legal, fiscal and socio-cultural environment; and
- To set specific agendas and goals for civil society enhancement.

In a marked departure from the existing sector-specific literature, the implementation of the project will reveal consolidated information on various dimensions and sub-sectors of civil society. The research findings will allow researchers to compare and contrast the health of civil society in Pakistan with that of other countries. More importantly, it is likely to open up new vistas of research, particularly in areas that have hitherto received little attention.

The *CIVICUS Index* Project also breaks new ground by taking into account, albeit tangentially, the hitherto ignored informal or folk civil society actors. It thus provides an impetus for rediscovering marginalised histories and cultures. The global scope of the project offers exciting opportunities to Pakistani researchers, academicians, journalists and development stakeholders at large for learning from civil society experiences in different contexts.

Based on a stakeholder survey and a range of secondary data including existing research papers, articles and databases, the present report presents an overview of the contemporary civil society along four dimensions:

- Structure:** The first part sheds light on the number of civil society organisations, sectoral and regional distribution, resources, membership, networking etc.
- Space:** Analyses the legal, political and socio-cultural environment that civil society operates in. It focuses on laws and regulations, respect for volunteering and public spiritedness in the society.
- Values:** This part looks into the values, norms and attitudes that civil society represents and propagates. It takes into account issues such as promotion of human rights, gender equity, tolerance, sustainable development, transparency and accountability, internal democracy etc.
- Impact:** Discusses the contribution of civil society to various social, economic and political problems, its role in agenda-setting, policy-making, implementation and monitoring. It also analyses responsiveness of civil society organisations towards their constituents.

## Typology

NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisation): Private, non-profit citizen organisations, pressure groups and support centres. Also referred to as the citizen sector.

Community Based Organisations (CBOs): Membership-based, grassroots organisations - a subset of NGOs.

Trade Unions: Organised associations of the workers in an industry or profession working for the protection and furtherance of their rights and interests.

CSOs (Civil Society Organisations): CSO will be used as an umbrella term in the report to refer to NGOs, CBOs, think tanks, trade unions, cultural groups and informal citizen organisations

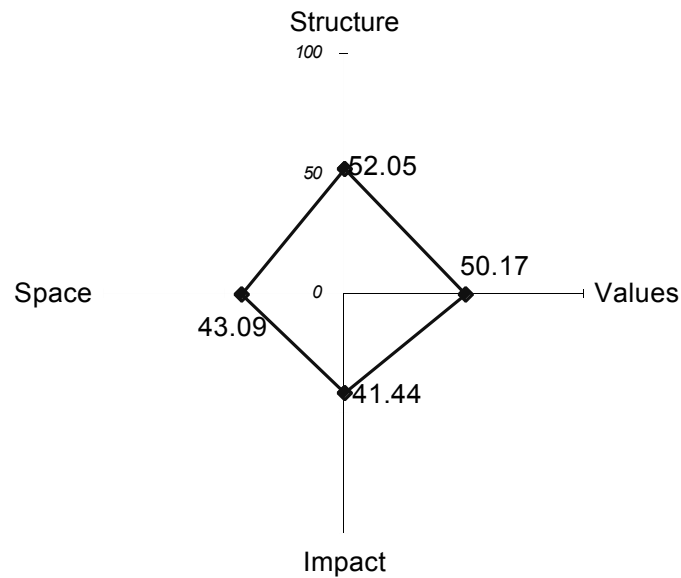
## Part II

### Civil Society in Pakistan

#### Diamond Analysis

The Civil Society Diamond for Pakistan shows a civil society with moderately 'good health,' especially with regard to its structure and values (see Chart 1). The dimensions that received a less positive rating are space and impact. It is interesting to note that both of these dimensions not only look at civil society, but also at some external factors and pre-conditions, especially the relationship to the state (a) as a factor of an enabling environment for civil society (space) and (b) as a reference point on which civil society is attempting to exert its influence, especially on the policy-making and implementation process (impact). Thus, a cursory analysis of the Diamond suggests that the internal characteristics of civil society are to be assessed as slightly more positive than its external environment (space) and its ability to influence this external environment (impact). However, in order to give any meaningful policy advice one has to examine the data more carefully, that is, analyse the sub-dimensions and individual indicators in greater detail.

Chart 1. Civil Society Diamond



Examining the sub-dimensions, some interesting differences among them become apparent. With regard to its structure, civil society seems to be commanding substantial and varied financial resources but is not well advanced in its networking and alliance-building processes and other issues related to its composition and vibrancy. Of particular concern is the limited membership

base. The low indicator score for business philanthropy contrasts with the AKF study on Indigenous Philanthropy.<sup>5</sup> Regional distribution scores dismally low and has a strong bearing on 'structure'.

In terms of space, not only business but also the general state environment and the laws affecting CSOs are seen as disabling. Other major limiting factors are political pressure on CSOs and the government interference with their activities.

With regard to the values dimension, no strong differences among the sub-dimension and indicators can be noted. The only indicators that score relatively less are financial transparency within CSOs and their role in promoting tolerance in society. The role of CSOs in practicing and promoting fundamental human rights scores a fairly positive rating.

The impact dimension shows a more positive rating for the service impact, than for civil society's public profile and especially with regard to its impact on public policy.

Highlights of the survey findings on the level of individual indicators also features in the following chapters.

## Structure

It is difficult to gauge the canvas of civil society in Pakistan as no comprehensive database has been maintained on a regular basis. Although several initiatives have been launched during the 1990s to collect data on various dimensions of the civil society, no comprehensive analysis has been undertaken so far.<sup>6</sup> The available data are sketchy and sector- or area-specific, most of them focusing on NGOs.

The *Structure* dimension scores the highest — 52 out of 100 on the CIVICUS Diamond indicating moderate health. On disaggregating the score, we find that it reflects shortcomings in areas such as membership base, regional distribution, building alliances and coalitions, co-operation with the private sector.

Other components of civil society, particularly the informal sub-sectors, are yet to get the critical attention they deserve. There are no consolidated data available on the number, funding sources and resources of such traditional civil society actors as *madrassas*, *jirgas* and *panchayats* (council of elders), savings groups, burial societies, neighbourhood associations and shrines.

## Mapping Civil Society

Having reviewed a number of databases and surveys, we would estimate that there are around 10 000 to 12 000 active and registered NGOs in Pakistan, the bulk of them (59 percent) in Punjab province followed by Sindh and NWFP. If non-registered organisations are added to those registered (active) under the six laws, the number, according to reliable government sources, could be anywhere around 60 000.

As for trade unions, the number is estimated to be around 8 000, with a total membership of around one million i.e. five percent of the country's employed labour force. According to sources from All Pakistan Trade Union Federation, this is mainly due to the restrictive nature of the Industrial Relations Ordinance (1969) and the Essential Services Act. These debar entire categories of employees from forming their unions. Temporary workers — or workers in the informal sector and agriculture — do not form part of trade unions. It is believed that the number of trade unions

<sup>5</sup> Philanthropy in Pakistan: A Report of the Initiative on Indigenous Philanthropy, Aga Khan Development Network, August 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Philanthropy in Pakistan: A Report of the Initiative on Indigenous Philanthropy, Aga Khan Development Network, August 2000.

and their members have actually been on the decline due to privatisation, retrenchment of the public sector employees and closure of some industrial units. Of the total registered unions, only 2 000 have the right to collective bargaining i.e. negotiating with employers on behalf of workers.<sup>7</sup>

Mapping the NGO sector in Pakistan makes for a complicated task partly due to the multiplicity of registration laws. There are six different laws under which organisations can be registered: the Societies Act (1860), Companies Ordinance (1984), the Trust Act (1882), the Charitable Endowments Act (1890), the Co-operative Act (1925) and the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance (1961). Moreover, there is no system whereby non-functional NGOs are struck off the registration records. Consequently, many NGOs that have become defunct continue to be listed and present a false picture of the sector.

### Regional Distribution

A vast majority of civil society knowledge bearers also hold that CSOs are not spread across the country in a balanced way. Observers suggest that class structure constitutes a major impediment to urban-based CSOs that might wish to operate in the countryside as well as to the local rural initiatives, as the traditional elites still hold sway over the rural society and economy.

**Fig 1 CSOs are spread in a balanced way across the regions of the country**

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree
9	70	21%

The paucity of modern NGOs in the NWFP and Balochistan is attributed to logistical difficulties, widespread illiteracy, limitations on women's mobility and the tribal/feudal system that frowns upon efforts for social change. Because Pakistani NGOs are predominantly urban, they do not reflect a population that is 65 percent rural.

A UNDP study conducted in 1991 identified 4 833 NGOs. Of these, 2 714 were located in the Punjab, 1 742 in Sindh, 213 in Balochistan and 163 in the NWFP.<sup>8</sup> The survey also revealed that 70 percent of organisations were urban-based. A more recent survey of intermediary NGOs reveal that 18 percent of intermediary organisations are exclusively urban-based, 21 percent exclusively rural-based and the remaining operate in both urban and rural areas.<sup>9</sup>

However, it must be pointed out that folk sub-sectors are present across rural Pakistan. That there is insufficient information available on their size, number and regional distribution needs to be looked into.

### Thematic Focus

In terms of thematic focus, with multiple areas of focus included, education (including basic, primary, adult and informal) represents 56 percent of the total, with health and women's development accounting for 39 percent each. Other areas of focus include early childhood development (15.2 percent), sports promotion and recreation (12.3 percent) and community development (12 percent). Intermediary NGOs and support organisations are also most actively engaged in education (69 percent); and women's issues (56 percent).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Pakistan Labour Gazette, Government of Pakistan (1996-97)

<sup>8</sup> NGOs Working for Others, A Contribution to Human Development, Vol 1. UNDP, Islamabad 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Directory of Intermediary NGOs in Pakistan, NGO Resource Centre, 2000.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

## Human and Financial Resources

It is difficult to estimate the total funds administered by the Pakistani CSOs; as only a few of them report regularly and when they do it is usually in terms of individual project funds. No attempt has been made as yet to define and regularly update the quantum of funds from the main sources—government, institutional donors and private donations. The sketchy information that is available suggests that most CSOs have multiple sources of finance.<sup>11</sup> Professional associations, trade unions and employers' unions rely mostly on membership fee to finance their activities.

The report of the Initiative on Indigenous Philanthropy<sup>12</sup> brought to light the high level of individual giving in Pakistan. "In 1998 alone," the report stated, "Pakistanis gave an estimated Rs.41 billion in cash and kind, and another estimated Rs.29 million in time. As much as 65 percent of all monetary giving went to individuals, two-thirds of which was 'zakat', it stated. Of the total giving going to organisations more than 90 percent went to individuals.

One of the five "pillars of Islam", zakat is the giving of alms to the poor, widows, recent converts to Islam, those in debt through circumstances beyond their control, travellers and those who do the "good works of Allah". Zakat is payable by those who are *sahib-e-nisab* (wealthy persons), those who hold income and assets above what one needs to provide for one's family for a year. Zakat is owed once a year during the hold month of Ramadan, although Muslims are encouraged to give zakat at any time. There are different rates of zakat for different types of assets. The general rate is 2.5 percent. The payment of zakat became compulsory for Pakistani Sunni Muslims in 1980, with the promulgation of the zakat and ushr system. Thenceforth, money would be collected from the bank accounts of those deemed *sahib-e-nisab*, sent to the central government, and distributed through a complex system of administration to a nationwide network of local zakat committees who are responsible for the disbursement of zakat to the selected needy. (Clark Grace, *Pakistan's Zakat & Ushr Systems from 1979 to 1999 in Pakistan 2000*, OUP, 2001).

The impression that CSOs in Pakistan are heavily dependent on foreign funds may hold true for large development-oriented and advocacy organisations. However, civil society at large relies on indigenous funding, both private and public. In 1991, the government of Pakistan provided a substantial financial endowment to initiate the National Rural Support Programme. It also set up in 1991-92, with USAID support, the Trust for Voluntary Organisations in order to provide financial support to CBOs/NGOs as a social investment fund.

<sup>11</sup>The State of the Citizen Sector in Pakistan, NGORC

<sup>12</sup>Philanthropy in Pakistan, A Report of the Initiative on Indigenous Philanthropy, AKDN August 2000

Survey results bore this out while reinforcing the premise that CSOs in Pakistan have multiple funding sources:

**Fig 2 Funding sources for CSOs**

	Agree	Disagree <sup>13</sup>
CSOs are dependent on indigenous public funding only	79.7%	20.4%
CSOs are dependent on indigenous private funding only	67.7%	12.9%
CSOs are dependent on foreign funding only	37.7%	41.9%

A focus group participant was of the view that “99 percent of community-based organisations in Pakistan sustain their activities by generating funds from the community.”

In terms of financial support, the role of the corporate sector merits attention. A National Survey on Corporate Giving revealed that the corporate sector is heavily involved in social development activities in Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> Ninety-three percent of the companies surveyed undertook some kind of philanthropic activity. By contrast, a majority of civil society knowledge bearers disagreed with the proposition that businesses were actively engaged in philanthropic programmes in Pakistan.

**Fig 3 Businesses are actively engaged in philanthropic programmes**

Agree	Disagree <sup>15</sup>
23.8%	71.4%

NGOs in Pakistan range from those that are completely voluntary and work with small budgets contributed by the volunteers themselves, to those that have well-paid full-time professional staff members. The majority, however, lie somewhere in the middle. A study conducted in 1991 estimated that 89.5 percent of the people engaged with the NGOs surveyed, were volunteers and 10.5 percent were paid employees.<sup>16</sup> It is estimated that the citizen sector employs around 250 000 people i.e. 0.5 to 1.6 percent of the country’s total labour force.

### Membership Base

A UNDP survey carried out in 1991 found that the majority of NGOs had a small membership base: one-third had fewer than 50 individual members, 17 percent had 50-99 members, another 20 percent had 100-149 members, while only five percent of the total had more than 450 members. However, there are no reliable figures available on the membership base of CBOs and faith-based organisations.

Only 22 percent of civil society knowledge bearers agreed that CSOs in Pakistan had an active membership base. Around 35 percent disagreed while as many as 65 percent of respondents seemed to hold a mixed opinion. This clearly indicates that there is a lack of information about the actual membership base of CSOs in Pakistan.

<sup>13</sup>The remaining responses fell in the category neither agree nor disagree

<sup>14</sup>The Dimensions of Corporate Giving, NGORC

<sup>15</sup>Remaining responses fell in the category neither agree or disagree

<sup>16</sup>NGOs Working for Others, A Contribution to Human Development, Vol 1. UNDP, Islamabad 1991

Fig 4 CSOs have an active membership base

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree
22%	35%	43%

### Networking/Umbrella Bodies

Mutual co-ordination among Pakistani NGOs has been weak in the past. However, this is beginning to change. Following government measures to control the scope and space available to NGOs, in 1995-96, a large number of organisations from across the country joined hands to form the Pakistan NGO Forum (PNF). The coalition of Rawalpindi/Islamabad NGOs played a major role as a catalyst in this process. Today, the PNF provides a national platform to over 2 500 organisations that are members of four provincial forums plus Rawalpindi-Islamabad NGO coalitions.

There are also a number of co-ordination bodies of NGOs that network sectorally. Examples include the Advocacy Development Network, Co-ordination Council for Child Welfare, Women in Development (WID) networks, Rural Support Network (RSPN), Pakistan Reproductive Health Network (PRHN), Pakistan Education Network (PEN), Pakistan Microfinance Network and the Environmental NGOs Network. NGOs are beginning to strengthen themselves through local, regional, national and international networks upon whom they draw for support and improvement of skills.

There are more than 100 trade union federations in the country, most of them industry-specific. The largest cross-sector umbrella body of trade unions, the Pakistan Workers' Confederation, is said to be the representative of around 70 percent of organised workers in the country. Other apex bodies include Pakistan Trade Unions Federation (PTUF), Muttahida Labour Federation (MLF), All Pakistan Federation of Labour (APFOL), All Pakistan Trade Unions Congress and Pakistan National Federation of Trade Unions, each one of them affiliated with a major political party.

However, the stakeholder survey results show that half the respondents did not agree that there was a CSO umbrella body in the country. This clearly points to the fact that there is a lack of information about the networking in civil society. It would seem that the existing umbrella bodies need to become more visible and pro-active in the society. The ability of 'the CSO umbrella body' to promote the common interests of the sector and encourage membership and participation was also called into question.

Fig 5 Opinion on umbrella body

	Agree	Disagree <sup>17</sup>
There is at least one networking or umbrella body of CSOs	39.1%	50%
That body is able to promote the common interests of the sector	27.9%	52.5
That body encourages membership and participation	23.7%	61%

A civil society knowledge bearer commented: "the co-ordination between CSOs is very weak and they largely operate in an isolated manner."

<sup>17</sup> Remaining responses fell in the category neither agree nor disagree

To summarise, the analysis of secondary data and the stakeholder survey concluded that whereas intermediary NGOs in Pakistan have multiple funding sources; community-based organisations rely mostly on local resources. Dependence on foreign donors is an issue for larger CSOs and it has a bearing on their sustainability and credibility. There appears to be a need for CSOs to increase their membership base and improve alliances and networking through the establishment of effective and representative umbrella bodies.

## *Space*

Civil society in Pakistan has borne the brunt of repeated military interventions in the country's polity. The state repression came in many of forms including bans on CSOs, arrest of civil society leaders and political pressure. While the situation steadily improved with the restoration of democracy in the late 1980s, a truly facilitative and enabling environment for civil society remained a distant dream. After a quasi-democratic interlude, the country is again under military rule even though this time round, the government has not imposed the kinds of restrictions that many feared it would. Certain socio-cultural norms and attitudes continue to impact on the strengthening of civil society.

The CIVICUS diamond shows that civil society in Pakistan is constrained by legal, political and socio-cultural pressures. The relatively low score of 43% on the *Space* dimension can largely be attributed to government interference and lack of linkages with the state and business. On the positive side, CSO registration and tax incentives indicate a relatively facilitative environment.

## **The Right of Association**

Freedom of association is guaranteed under Article 17 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. However, this fundamental right has often been usurped, curtailed and subjected to restrictions in the name of the national interest. This has taken the form of frequent bans on public demonstrations and assemblies, arrest of civil society leaders and public vilification. In the face of the hostile attitude adopted by certain religious groups, the state has often been wanting in its responsibility of ensuring the right of citizens to peaceful association.

The state's attitudes toward NGOs have been mixed and ambiguous. While it appreciates the services that the NGOs provide, it also perceives them as a competitor for donor funding, political allegiances and influences<sup>18</sup>. The government's concerns with the operation of NGOs essentially hinge around issues of sovereignty, funding, monitoring and supervision<sup>19</sup>. The chequered history of the relations between the state and civil society shows that while the former is relatively comfortable with the service delivery and charity role of NGOs; it is the advocacy work that it finds unsettling and provocative. Traditionally, the state has refrained from interfering with the activities of informal CSOs such as madrassas, shrines, seminaries and jirgas. The Zia regime that had come down heavily on human rights and women's organisations, also went to great effort to support and protect religious seminaries that often functioned as training grounds for militants.

<sup>18</sup> Zia Shehla, NGOs-A Policy and Legal Framework, UNDP, 1996

<sup>19</sup> Hussein Maleeha, Successful Partnerships between Government, Donors and NGOs, UNDP, 1996

<sup>12</sup> See severa

Trade unions have been subjected to state suppression for their perceived role in the disruption of industry. The labour laws in Pakistan apply only to workplaces employing more than 50 workers; the right to form a union, a constitutional provision, is denied to a large proportion of the workforce. Poor working conditions, poor health and safety hazards, long working hours, poor wages — all of these co-exist with very low remuneration in small-scale industries where workers are not allowed to practice collective bargaining.

### General Attitude of Government Agencies

It is generally believed that there is no clear-cut, comprehensive or cohesive government policy on CSOs. In other words, there are no operating guidelines to establish the parameters within which the government and CSOs could work. Additionally, the government agencies dealing with CSOs are said to be lax or ineffective. Most stakeholder survey respondents (70 percent) did not agree that the general attitude of the government towards CSOs was helpful.

### Fiscal Framework

In line with international practices, the fiscal framework in Pakistan allows for a range of tax incentives and exemptions to CSOs. However, a seminal study<sup>20</sup> on the subject pointed out that while the regulations might be in place they are open to the interpretation of the officials. The study noted that the discretionary powers of the officials often served as a means of extortion or the creation of obstacles. “The bureaucratic and cumbersome procedures are commonplace, and hence the necessary tax exemptions can be difficult to obtain”, adding, “the small community-based organisations often have difficulty working their way through the complex system that still prevails.”<sup>21</sup> Belying this complaint, most civil society informants were of the view that the existing tax legislation is not necessarily problematic but is complex to understand.

**Fig 6 Tax legislation in terms of receiving exemptions on moneys and membership dues**

Problematic	Not problematic <sup>22</sup>
14.3%	73%

It would be pertinent to point out here that in 1998-99, the government adopted in part, two amendments in the fiscal bill proposed by NGOs and forwarded by NGORC and the Social Policy Development Centre, thereby increasing the upper limit on corporate donations from 10 to 15 percent and removing entirely the cap on donations set at Rs 2.5million.<sup>23</sup>

### The Legal Framework:

A number of studies have concluded that the legal regime within which CSOs operate is confusing and outmoded.<sup>24</sup> The complex language used in the laws severely restricts public understanding of the legal regime. Consequently, most organisations opting for registration are at a loss as to what the law entails and what exactly is expected of them. It has also been pointed out that the government

<sup>20</sup> A Study of the Fiscal Framework for the NGO Sector in Pakistan, NGO Resource Centre and Sidat Hyder Morshad Associates, 1998 (unpublished)

<sup>21</sup> The State of Citizen Sector in Pakistan, NGO Resource Centre, 1999

<sup>22</sup> Remaining responses fall in category neither problematic nor not problematic

<sup>23</sup> Financial Sustainability of NGOs: Federal Budget Policy Paper, SPDC, May 1998

<sup>24</sup> Philanthropy in Pakistan: Initiative on Indigenous Philanthropy, Aga Khan Development Network, August 2000

oversight of the citizen sector within the prevalent framework remains minimal due to indifference and capacity constraints.

Going by the stakeholder survey however, one would assume that the process of registration at least, may not be as problematic as some studies suggest. It may be pointed out here that the CSO experiences with registration vary from sector to sector depending upon the nature of work and the corresponding registration act. For example, an organisation planning to venture out into advocacy may run into problems while a service delivery-oriented may get registered easily.

**Fig 7 Opinion about registering an NGO**

Problematic	Not problematic
16.4%	55.2%

The laws governing trade union activities are considered obsolete and restrictive by many. Existing labour laws do not cover either the agricultural sector or the informal sector, where the largest percentage of the work force is employed. The government has extensive powers to legally intervene in the internal affairs of the unions. This makes legal strikes impossible. Workers employed in hospitals, educational institutions, railways (open line), the radio corporation, the Security Printing Press, the Defence Housing Societies, agriculture, export processing zones, ordinance factories, Federal and Provincial Government Service as well as in the informal sectors have no real right to unionise and bargain collectively. However as a way around this, employees many such organisations have formed 'Welfare Associations' that appear to have assumed de facto bargaining powers.

The government has imposed the Essential Services Ordinance on public sector workers. This means that though they have the formal right to form a union and to collective bargaining, they have no right to hold strikes and the government has the authority to ban their trade union activities at any time. The previous government also made amendments to the Banking Ordinance of 1986, and section 27B now states that no worker is entitled to become a member or officer of a trade union, if he or she is retrenched from the service.<sup>25</sup> Trade unionism, it has been argued, has remained weak and factionalised due to the government policies of interference, co-option of leaders and setting up of rival unions to break the strength of the more autonomous unions.

### **Open Hostility**

The NGO-state relations turned overtly hostile in 1996 when the then government proposed a bill in the Senate called the Social Welfare Agencies (Registration & Regulation) Act. The Pakistan NGO Forum and its coalescing units rejected the bill as they found it to be a legitimising tool for extraordinary interventions in CSO affairs. The bill also proposed to eliminate civic education as a permissible CSO activity, thus precluding the advocacy role of CSOs. While the bill was never made law, it did engender a strong sense of vulnerability among CSOs

In 1998-99, the then government launched a campaign against CSOs, de-registering as many as 2 500 of them in the Punjab, Sindh and the NWFP. The action came in the wake of the protests staged by NGOs against a proposed religious legislation (Shariat Bill) and the nuclear tests conducted in May 1998. Many CSOs, particularly in the Punjab, complained of being intimidated by the personnel of intelligence agencies.

<sup>25</sup> Chaudary Ahmed Gulzar, General Secretary All Pakistan Labour Unions Federation, Open World Conference in Defense of Trade Union Independence & Democratic Rights, March 2000.

## Links to Government

The instances of active government-CSO collaboration are few and far between. The survey respondents were divided over the liaison between CSOs and government in terms of policy formulation.

**Fig 8 CSOs are requested by local and national governments to be involved in policy formulation**

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree
28.2%	47.9%	23.9%

Again, certain sub-sectors, especially service delivery NGOs and religious organisations, have been more fortunate than advocacy and human rights groups. The mixed results of the survey could well be attributed to this. Interestingly, certain religious groups have played an active role with their leaders sitting on committees such as the Islamic Ideology Council.

It would be instructive to note the opinion of a survey respondent:

*For religious/jehadi organisations as well as those developmental NGOs that are not politically supportive of the government, the state is helpful and 'recognises' their services in one way or another. Those who are neutral get some space as long as money coming to them is not from the government coffers. Those that are politically against state policies and do not have significant international clout do get discriminated against by the state.<sup>26</sup>*

The above argument also explains the fact that a substantial number i.e. 24 percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed on the question about the role of CSOs in policy formulation.

The foremost example of NGO-government linkage is Pakistan's National Conservation Strategy (NCS), developed in collaboration with IUCN: the World Conservation Union and approved by the federal cabinet on March 1, 1992. Pakistan is one of the few countries where sustainable development has become an official policy. NCS has also been dubbed one of the most participatory planning exercises ever done in Pakistan, where normally National Five Year Plans and public policies are formulated by the bureaucratic and professional elite without much involvement of non-officials.<sup>27</sup> Most of the rural support programmes being implemented in the country also owe their success, to citizens-government collaboration. NGOs were also given a role in the implementation of the Social Action Programme (SAP) launched in 1992 and more recently in the poverty alleviation programme.

## Government-CSO Partnerships: Current Scenario

Lately, the recognition within the government of the growing importance of CSOs as partners in development has been rising. This is borne out by the appointment of three seasoned CSO activists<sup>28</sup> on the federal cabinet, reliance on NGOs for the implementation of the official poverty alleviation and devolution plans and supportive statements frequently emanating from state. As an example, the government's 'Three Year Poverty Reduction Programme,' brought out in February 2001, states: "In Pakistan, NGOs and CBOs in general, and civil society at large, are playing a very significant role in promoting individual welfare and collective development through a variety of

<sup>26</sup> Kamal, Simi, Asian Development Bank Study of NGOs in Nine Asian Countries—Country Report: Pakistan, June 1997)

<sup>27</sup> Qadeer A. Muhammad, International Precepts Versus Local Knowledge as Bases for Planning for Sustainable Development, Habitat Intl. Vol 20, No. 3 pp. 477-492.

<sup>28</sup> Omar Asghar Khan, Federal Minister for Environment, Local Bodies and Overseas Pakistanis and Zubeida Jalal, Federal Minister for Education, and Attiya Inayatullah Federal Minister for Social Welfare & Women Development

interventions.<sup>29</sup> Recently, some NGOs have played an unprecedented role in imparting political education, and encouraging and helping people, particularly women, to participate in the local elections.”

### Socio-religious Pressure

However, the certain sub-sectors of civil society have had to face increasing hostility at societal level in the recent past. Throughout 2000, NGOs were subjected to repeated verbal assaults by religious leaders. The attacks came despite the support extended by the government ministers to NGOs calling for their inclusion in advisory panels and in undertaking work at the grassroots level. Religious extremists continue to accuse development and advocacy-oriented NGOs of working against ‘national ideology’ by spreading liberal and secular values.

In August 2000, Khewendo Kor, an NGO active in girls’ education in Dir (NWFP) reported that it had been combating continued threats from local religious leaders. A number of other NGOs such as Sungi, Pattan and Sangat also reported having received threats from religious organisations. Religious extremists have issued numerous death threats against the prominent human rights defender, Asma Jehangir.

However, one positive indicator that emerges out of the stakeholder survey is that CSOs in Pakistan are not pressured to join political groupings.

**Fig 9 CSOs are not pressured to join or endorse political groupings**

Agree	Disagree <sup>30</sup>
72.8%	21.8%

### Socio-Cultural Norms

Volunteering and public spiritedness have traditionally been the hallmark of Pakistani civil society. According to a survey, 58 percent of Pakistanis give their time to individuals and organisations in need. Of those volunteering time to organisations, a substantial majority (78%) reportedly gave their time to religious organisations.<sup>31</sup> Moreover it has been observed that Pakistanis value volunteering highly as a civic virtue. This climate of giving – time and money – lends itself to establishing space that is enabling for CSOs.<sup>32</sup>

In conclusion, it may be said that the space dimension points towards the need for improved linkages with the government and corporate sectors. Although the fiscal framework is ‘allowing,’ the legal framework needs revision. Hostile societal pressures prevail; although socio-cultural norms provide for an enabling environment.

<sup>29</sup>Three Year Poverty Reduction Programme, 2001-04, Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan 2001

<sup>30</sup>Remaining responses fall in the category neither agree nor disagree

<sup>31</sup>Philanthropy in Pakistan:A Report of the Initiative on Indigenous Philanthropy, Aga Khan Development Network, August 2000.

<sup>32</sup>ibid

## Values

While civil society is far from homogenous in terms of values, the majority of them do have a common vision and goals to pursue. There is, however, a dichotomy between the values held by modern CSOs and traditional or folk sub-sectors in terms of vision and values.

The *Values* dimension score of 50% reflects a civil society that is reasonably well-advanced in terms of norms and attitudes. Interestingly, one finds much difference among sub-dimension scores. The indicators that score slightly less are financial transparency among CSOs and their role in promoting values like tolerance, human rights, gender equity etc.

### Tradition of Charity

Volunteerism has traditionally been a deep-rooted impulse, encouraged primarily by the religious obligation of helping the poor and the needy. During the colonial period, prominent philanthropists established educational and healthcare charities that were open to all regardless of caste, creed or colour. They left behind a legacy that was to guide and inspire many a future philanthropist and volunteer. Charity organisations that were set up in Pakistan after partition drew on the historical tradition of providing relief to the needy. While such charity organisations have rendered invaluable services to the poorest of the poor, they have remained dominated by their founding fathers. They are characterised by informal structures and a lack of internal democracy and accountability.

### Promoting Human Rights and Tolerance

Human rights groups developed and functioned in Pakistan throughout the darkest years of political and social repression. These organisations have performed the role of defending and promoting human rights and social justice, often in the face of state-sponsored bigotry and fanaticism. They have consistently opposed state legislation that discriminated against women and minorities. CSOs have repeatedly exposed serious human rights violations such as extra-judicial killings, torture by state agencies, honour killings and bonded labour sanctified by centuries-old feudal and tribal systems.<sup>33</sup> Amid the rising crescendo of jingoism, citizen groups such as Pakistan Peace Coalition, Joint Action Committee, Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace & Democracy and the Liberal Forum have openly advocated non-proliferation and détente between India and Pakistan.

Fig 10 CSOs respect fundamental human rights

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree
61.4%	17.2%	21.4%

Barring faith-based and ethnic organisations, CSOs are generally secular in nature in that their membership is open to people belonging to every religion and their services are available to all regardless of caste, creed or sect. They have enjoyed the support of the English press in articulating their agenda and getting their points of view across to the government and the public. However, given the sheer weight and number of faith-based and ethnic organisations, they may overshadow the positive contributions of CSOs in this regard. This, and the fact that enough CSOs have not specifically focused on this key area, could possibly be the reason why the majority of respondents did not consider CSOs to be playing an important role in promoting harmonious relations amid the multiplicity of religions, castes, ethnicities and cultures. Equally noteworthy is the percentage of

<sup>33</sup>State of Human Rights, 1999, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

respondents who neither denied nor affirmed the role of CSOs in this regard, prompting one to think again about the great diversity of civil society actors in Pakistan.

**Fig 11 CSOs are active in initiatives promoting harmonious relationships between different political, cultural, religious and ethnic groups**

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree
21.7%	53.6%	24.7%

**Fig 12 CSOs are successful in promoting good relations between different groups in society**

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree
20%	57%	23%

### Promoting Sustainable Development

Development-oriented NGOs that sprang up in the country addressed the problems faced by the millions of citizens that had been bypassed by economic development. While the impact of citizens' initiatives for development and poverty reduction might be debated, they have consistently addressed the needs of marginalised communities in the cities as well as the rural areas. Many of them have opposed the diversion of scarce state resources towards conventional and nuclear defence regimes at the expense of human development. The fact that such CSOs are still few in number and their limited impact could be some possible reasons for the fact that civil society informants were divided in their opinion about the role of CSOs in promoting sustainable development.

**Fig 13 CSOs promote sustainable use of natural resources**

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree
24%	46.4%	29.6%

### Violence and Militancy: The Other Extreme

A sub-set of CSOs comprising religious seminaries, however, has invariably backed jingoistic and chauvinistic ideologies. Run mostly by religio-political parties, many of these seminaries have served as training centres for militants. The curriculum they teach tends to inculcate male chauvinism, intolerance and violence as desired values in young minds. Their worldview is clearly at cross-purposes with the goals of social development, gender equality and social justice espoused by other civil society organisations. Similarly, jirgas in the North West Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas often condone violence, honour killings and gender discrimination in the name of familial honour and traditions.

Violence is also prevalent among student wings of political and ethnic groups of all denominations.<sup>34</sup> While some observers blame political parties for infusing the culture of violence into universities, others are of the view that 'campus unrest is first and foremost attributable to raging student frustration with the deeply unsatisfactory nature of the educational experience and with the often dubious prospects of suitable employment thereafter'. The intrusion of partisan politics into academic life, the argument goes, is only an exacerbating factor.

<sup>34</sup>Rahman Tariq, *Language, Education and Culture*, Oxford University Press, 1999

### Other Folk Sub-sectors

Among the informal CSOs, sufi shrines and khankas have historically been the symbols of tolerance, non-violence and inter-faith harmony. Unlike the dogmatic belief, which lends itself to sectarianism and intolerance, mystic Islam holds that there are as many ways to God as human beings. In its heyday, mysticism in the subcontinent, as elsewhere in the world, gave birth to a whole range of poetry, allegory and music that was an amalgam of the unorthodox Islam and the indigenous culture. Sufi saints have been looked upon as models of piety and spiritual excellence. Some of these saints gained greater popularity after their death, with the result that their shrines emerged as centres of pilgrimage for people of all creeds and sects. Through the years, however, many sufi shrines in Pakistan have lost their essence to become hotbeds of drug addiction, quackery and prostitution. A few of them still continue to provide genuine alternative space for faith, devotion and cultural integration thus playing an important socio-religious role.

### Gender Equity

Studies have pointed out the need for trade unions to involve women workers and to address their concerns and problems. Hitherto, 'there have been very few instances where issues pertaining to women workers have been of major concern to unions'. Additionally, it has been pointed out that 'women have limited opportunity to exercise leadership in trade unions. This is partly due to the tradition of segregation and social restrictions on women's mobility...women workers will not have any incentive to join trade unions unless they have the confidence that doing so will improve their condition and strengthen their position in the workforce'. Much like trade unions, professional associations, employers' unions and student organisations also continue to be male-dominated. The under-representation of women in these organisations speaks volumes about their subjugated status in the Pakistani society.

One survey respondent commented:

***"Faith-based CSOs and community-based organisations are either negative or at best neutral about gender equity issues."***

The stakeholder survey confirmed the popular notion that gender equity remains a low priority for CSOs not only within their own ranks but also as a value to be promoted generally in society.

Fig 14 CSOs promote gender equity within their own ranks

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree
27%	40%	33%

Fig 15 CSOs promote gender equity in society

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree
19.7%	48.5%	31.8%

The results should again be qualified by the fact that the large number of CSOs often tends to eclipse the organisations that promote and practice gender equity, while the sizeable number of the apparently indecisive respondents points to the transitional nature of Pakistani civil society and perhaps also to the lack of information about gender equity issues.

### Accountability and Transparency

The increasing role of CSOs in the social sector has also given rise to greater responsibilities and public expectations. According to one study<sup>37</sup>, with a few exceptions, NGOs and trade unions (as well as informal CSOs) do not have well-defined governance, transparency and accountability structures — issues that are at the heart of public and government concerns about the Pakistani CSOs. NGOs are found wanting in terms of internal democracy and participatory decision-making. While professional associations, trade unions and employers' unions regularly hold elections to select office bearers, a small coterie of influential people usually monopolises the decision-making process within these organisations. Once in office, the representatives seldom, if ever, consult the stakeholders. Survey results again reveal a picture of a civil society caught up in conflicting trends. Only a quarter of the respondents agreed that CSOs make information about their general activities publicly available, while only 10% agreed that financial accounts were disclosed.

Fig 16 CSOs make information about their general activities publicly available

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree
25.7%	40%	34.3%

Fig 17 CSOs make their financial accounts publicly available

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree
10%	68.6%	21.4%

Community-based organisations are usually set up by individuals who are relatively better off and better educated, and wield a certain amount of influence. This position generally results in their having total control of the organisation with very limited democratic participation.<sup>38</sup> Larger NGOs in Pakistan have remained caught up increasingly in the world of foreign official aid, which pushed them towards certain forms of evaluation and accountability at the expense of others. When most funding is obtained exclusively from foreign funding agencies there is little incentive for organisations to establish their credibility either to government or to society-at-large.<sup>39</sup>

The findings from detailed monitoring of organisational finance and performance by foreign donor agencies are not publicly available, and therefore do little to enhance the local credibility of citizen organisations. However, with most donors emphasising the need for participatory approaches to development, many CSOs have made efforts to include communities in planning, implementation and monitoring processes. The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in the northern areas and the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in a Karachi-settlement have set successful examples of participatory development initiatives. Many emerging CSOs are following suit.

### Self-Regulation

The government actions against NGOs referred to earlier in the report were also legitimised by concerns about lack of transparency and accountability. While the government's arbitrary move disquieted civil society leaders, it also highlighted the need for citizen organisations to be pro-active about accountability issues. Consequently, the Pakistan NGO Forum (PNF), one of the representative bodies of Pakistan's NGOs, set up a committee to "evolve guidelines for the NGO

<sup>37</sup>Jillani Hina, *Human Rights and Democratic Development in Pakistan*, ICHRD, 1998

<sup>38</sup>Ibid

<sup>39</sup>Philanthropy in Pakistan: Initiative on Indigenous Philanthropy, Aga Khan Development Network, August 2000

community so that the highest standards of accountability, transparency and good practices can be observed”<sup>40</sup>. PNF maintains that this was also done “to demonstrate that NGOs/CBOs not only teach others about principles of sharing, partnership, transparency and accountability but also apply them to their organisational and programmatic domains.”

The PNF Executive Body and representatives from the Forum’s coalescing units developed a code of conduct in July 2000 after a painstaking consultative process. The code intends to establish self-regulatory practices and norms for the member NGOs of PNF in relation to the people for whom they work, their development partners as well as their own staff and members and could well be the first stepping-stone on the path to viable citizen sector self-regulatory framework<sup>41</sup>. Its enforcement would be a powerful statement to donors, beneficiaries, government and the society at large that citizens’ organisations in Pakistan have high standards and are willing to take meaningful steps to promote internal democracy and accountability. NGORC has played a key role in this regard, including holding a series of citizen sector self-regulation and regulation workshops throughout the country in which the concept, mechanisms and challenges for self-regulation were introduced and discussed in detail.

In conclusion, it may be said that public spiritedness and volunteerism are values that underpin civil society in Pakistan. Fundamental human rights are defended by CSOs as a rule. Concern for gender equity varies from organisation to organisation and sector to sector. The majority of CSOs appear to be lacking in well-defined/effective governance, transparency and accountability structures. However, with effective self-regulation mechanisms in place, the first steps towards internal democracy and accountability have finally be taken.

## *Impact*

The overall impact of the civil society initiatives can be gauged from the fact that CSOs in Pakistan are now accepted as partners in social and economic development. Once an indistinct voice at the edge, civil society today is a force to reckon with in the national arena. Functioning under resource constraints and in an unfavourable environment as they do, CSOs’ contributions to the country are indeed impressive.

The diamond score of 41.4 implies that civil society’s impact in terms of problem solving and public policy process has remained low. An analysis of specific impact indicators reveals that the low score can largely be attributed to CSOs’ inability to influence public policy making and monitoring.

## **Public Policy**

As mentioned earlier, civil society in Pakistan has evolved under the shadow of frequent military interventions and a debt-ridden and elitist state system. That the ideals of people-centred development, human rights, gender equality and social justice are slowly but steadily creeping into public policy frameworks has much to do with the efforts that civil society has made over the past five decades. The emergence of development-oriented and advocacy CSOs in the 1990s was essentially a response to the government’s misguided priorities and poor planning as well as resource constraints because of ever-burgeoning defence and debt-servicing expenditures.

By showing ability to succeed where the government has had difficulties, CSOs have, to an extent, helped to change national perceptions and policies towards development. The success stories have

<sup>40</sup>Sattar Adnan, Citizen Sector Self Regulation, Building Credibility: NGORC Journal, October 2000, Vol 1, Issue 1

<sup>41</sup>ibid

also contributed to a shift in donor policies towards CSOs as a more effective vehicle for supporting development initiatives.<sup>42</sup> However, the role of civil society organisations, particularly development NGOs and advocacy groups in policy making and monitoring of the government, has apparently remained minimal.

Here again, it must be pointed out that the faith-based organisations have had a significant influence on policy drafting and generation. These are sometimes co-opted by the state in order to capitalise on religious sentiments and to legitimise their rule in the name of religion; and sometimes the street power wielded by such groups forces the government to accommodate such demands.

The stakeholder survey indicated CSOs not to be very successful in representing the interests of their constituents and putting them on the public policy agenda (only 14% agreed that CSOs had been successful in this regard). Similarly, less than a quarter each agreed that CSOs could successfully influence the government policy, or could successfully co-operate with the government in implementing policies.

Fig 18

	Agree	Disagree
CSOs are successful in representing the interests of their constituents and putting them on the public policy agenda	13.9%	44.4% <sup>43</sup>
Representatives from CSOs are regularly invited to participate in the generation and discussion of legislation	27.1%	72.9%
CSOs successfully influence government policy in favour of their constituents	21.1%	78.9%
CSOs successfully co-operate with government on implementing policies	21.4%	30%

### Effectiveness of CSOs: Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development

In rural areas, initiatives such as the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) have made a tremendous impact through micro-credit, education and income generation.<sup>44</sup> In the midst of government's failure to deliver assistance to small farmers, growing disparities and deteriorating human conditions have been addressed by various CSOs. AKRSP, for example, has formed more than 2 300 village organisations and over 1 450 women's organisations; Rs 1450 million has been disbursed in loans to more than 600 000 villagers. The AKRSP model was replicated by each of the four provinces in addition to the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) at the national level.

According to one estimate, by 2000, these rural support programmes had in turn formed more than 20 000 village-based organisations across Pakistan and also a rural support network to share experiences and provide support to further their poverty reduction programme.

The success of the model can partly be gauged by the fact that the government is becoming increasingly open to accepting the flow of funds to CSOs, which have demonstrated effective strategies for rural development and have worked in complementary ways with government departments. Having said that, one must add that the centuries-old feudal and tribal systems still

<sup>42</sup>Shaheed Fareeda, Shirkat Gah quoted in Accountability and Legitimacy of NGOs in Pakistan

<sup>43</sup>Remaining responses fall in category neither agree nor disagree

<sup>44</sup>Human Development in South Asia 1999, the Crisis of Governance, 1999

reign supreme in many of the country's rural areas and offer the most serious obstacle for the emancipation and development of the rural population. Despite some lobbying, civil society is yet to catalyse a shift in the agrarian power formation away from a handful of landlords toward the farming communities. The feudal and tribal systems result in the total subjugation of the rural population in economic, political and social terms.

Some CSOs have come in for criticism for being insensitive to the needs and aspirations of local people. The following comment by a civil society informant reflects that view:

*Very few CSOs have agendas based on genuine needs and aspirations of their constituents. Most have donor-driven programmes, which often do not have genuine empowerment objectives. Their impact therefore is substantially questionable.*

The opinions of survey respondents about CSOs responsiveness to communities were mixed. Almost 45% agreed that CSOs 'produce' reflected needs and priorities of constituents and communities.

### **Comparative Advantage**

To the question as to whether CSOs are able to provide services in a manner that would not be possible for the state or for business, 42.6% respondents replied in the affirmative. Observers have pointed out that flexibility, informality and emphasis on small-scale projects give CSOs an edge over the state that has remained distant from the realities on the ground and obsessed with grandiose projects.

### **Creating Awareness**

Some NGOs in Pakistan have played an important role in creating awareness on issues such as human and legal rights, women's role in development, and over-population. For women and minorities that have borne the brunt of religious bigotry and social repression, civil society came as a silver lining in dark, gloomy clouds. Advocacy groups have consistently campaigned for repealing discriminatory laws and reforming the electoral process. Civil society lobbying successfully blocked an attempt by the Muslim League government to introduce religious coding of the national identity cards.

Civil Society's efforts gave an impetus to the government's slowly growing commitments towards greater gender equality, culminating in Pakistan ratifying the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Oppression Against Women in 1996. The efforts of human rights advocates have led judicial institutions to consider the plight of rape victims, for example, and take their claims seriously. They have thus become more responsive to citizens than in the past.

Today, the number of women organising at grassroots level and establishing linkages with other institutions is remarkable, even though their impact at wider societal level is not so visible. However, women across Pakistan still continue to fight against primitive social customs and discrimination. Civil society's efforts in this regard entail a slow process, as deep-rooted societal norms cannot be altered overnight.

### **Successful Lobbying**

Similarly, child rights' organisations have played a key role in reducing child labour in Pakistan's football stitching industry. As a result of years of active NGO lobbying, a partners' agreement to eliminate child labour in the football industry was signed in 1997 by the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), the International Labour Union and UNICEF. The resulting

project based on a multi-pronged approach of providing education to children displaced from the football stitching industry and giving credit to their families was an immense success and went on to win the government's support.<sup>45</sup>

Recently, civil society lobbying and networking catalysed active women's participation in the local elections. Aurat Foundation, a major advocacy and support network, mobilised women to exercise their right to franchise and canvass on the seats reserved for them. In collaboration with government agencies, the Foundation held meetings with local communities and disseminated information about the devolution plan.<sup>46</sup> That a substantial number of women turned out at the ballot and were elected to the union councils can partly be attributed to civil society's mobilisation and awareness-raising campaigns.

In another instance of effective lobbying, the Society for Conservation and Protection of Environment (SCOPE) filed a case against hunting of an endangered bird species in Sindh. SCOPE successfully lobbied the case resulting in the court deeming hunting of the Houbara Bustard illegal and a punishable offence.<sup>47</sup>

### International Recognition

These success stories have won acclaim at home and abroad. Seven Pakistani leaders – the late Akhtar Hameed Khan, Abdul Sattar Edhi, Bilquis Edhi, Dr. Adeeb Rizvi, Tasneem Siddiqui, Shoaib Sultan Khan and Asma Jehangir have been awarded the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay award. There are many other CSO activists who enjoy international recognition as a result of their contribution to human development.

### Portrayal in Media

The NGO Resource Centre conducted a content analysis of two major English newspapers and an Urdu newspaper last year to gauge the portrayal of citizen sector organisations.<sup>48</sup> The study found a sharp dichotomy between the English press and the Urdu press with the latter being generally negative towards CSOs. The most common allegations raised against CSOs were adherence to foreign agendas, corruption, and promotion of Western values and lack of accountability. Half of the respondents disagreed with the statement that CSOs are portrayed positively in the media. The fact that the coverage and analysis of CSO activities varies from one medium to another and also from one kind of CSO to another is reflected in the survey results, wherein more than half the respondents did not agree that CSOs enjoyed a positive image with the media. The fact that CSOs need to devise a strategy for effectively engaging media, has been reaffirmed during NGORC's recent dialogues with the Print Media.

Fig 19 CSOs are generally portrayed positively in the media

Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree
14.1%	56.3%	20.8%

The perception that CSOs do not have too positive a profile can partly be attributed to lack of mutual understanding between media and civil society. In a recent focus group session organised by NGORC, some participants argued that NGOs needed to become more pro-active and professional about sharing information with media.

<sup>45</sup>Stitching Footballs: Voices of Children in Sialkot, Pakistan, Save the Children, 1997

<sup>46</sup>Abid Salman, maqami hakoomatoon main auratoon ki numaindagi, NGORC Akhbar, Jan-March, 2001

<sup>47</sup>Perokari: Kia aur Kaissay, NGO Resource Centre, 2000

<sup>48</sup>Press Coverage of Citizen Sector in Pakistan, NGO Resource Centre, 2000, unpublished.

## Some Setbacks

Notwithstanding significant breakthroughs they have made, civil society's development initiatives have sometimes also met with failure. Those CSOs that have remained dependent on foreign donors to sustain their projects have often seen themselves having to abruptly close down operations due to the unexpected withdrawal of funding or at the culmination of the project period. This dependence often translates into programmes that are task-oriented, bureaucratised and unsuited to local conditions. Such CSOs are forced to concentrate more on immediate activities than on long-term planning, institutional strengthening, human resource development and building a sound resource base.

Community-based initiatives may fall short of targets because of a lack of focus and clear organisational structure. With bold dreams and unrealistic objectives, they may pull in different directions and thus not achieve all their goals.<sup>49</sup> They seem to be in need of clear vision, focused objectives, well-defined strategy, managerial and financial systems, planning and implementation skills, resource mobilisation skills and linkages with the surrounding systems.

Trade unions, too, are hemmed in by capacity constraints. They have thus far primarily participated in improving access to labour courts.<sup>50</sup> They have few organised and planned procedures for regular contact with the government. Technical advice and training in situation analysis and devising strategies are weak points that must be developed. This would be an important step towards building their capacity to put forward alternative policies in their areas of concern.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)-Pakistan Programme conducted a social sector review in 1996 which revealed that there were fewer than 100 effective development NGOs, but thousands of "generally weak" community-based organisations in the country. Another recent study<sup>51</sup> (2000) confirmed these earlier findings by identifying about 150 effective intermediary NGOs. The lack of co-ordination in the sector often leads to duplication and the concomitant wastage of resources. Cross-learning among organisations working in different sectors and based in different parts of the country is still weak. Studies have identified formation of strategic linkages with the government and business as one possible solution to the question of impact.

Finally, it must be added that many civil society initiatives are well-g geared toward long-term human development although their results may not be visible in the short-term, whereas CBOs still need some clarity in their long-term plans. Changes in attitudes, levels of awareness and social consciousness are hard to quantify — thus much of civil society's impact invariably escapes public notice.

The survey results bring into sharp focus the need for constructive linkages between civil society and the state especially in terms of policy formulation and the monitoring of government policies. The role of development and advocacy CSOs in this regard has remained minimal. For a lasting change on this front, the possibility of establishing institutional mechanisms should be explored. Additionally, greater collaboration among CSOs is a sine qua non for impact maximisation. CSOs also need to become better communicators of their work; and reach out to the public through both media and informal channels so that their role in development is accorded the proper recognition.

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<sup>49</sup>Making it Happen, Stories of Community-Based Organisations, NGORC

<sup>50</sup>Jillani Hina, Human Rights and Democratic Development in Pakistan, ICHRD, 1998

<sup>51</sup>Directory of Intermediary NGOs in Pakistan, NGO Resource Centre 2000

## Part III

### Conclusion

The research phase of the project yielded a wealth of information and ideas about the state of civil society in Pakistan. The participatory nature of the process helped to bring in a diversity of ideas and approaches to define and characterise Pakistan's vibrant and diversified civil society.

### Focus Group Sessions: Adaptation of Indicators

The focus group sessions held in Karachi and Lahore brought to the surface a range of perspectives regarding the assessment of civil society. In adapting the indicators proposed by CIVICUS the participants pointed out several dimensions that would otherwise have been missed out. The sessions ensured that the research process takes into account all the complexities that characterise civil society in Pakistan.

To place the concept of civil society in an appropriate context, the participants suggested the need for mainstreaming traditional or folk civil society sub-sectors. In this regard, they mentioned shrines, cultural troupes, mosques and religious seminaries that seldom, if ever, feature in studies undertaken from a Western perspective.

The adaptation of indicators also proved to be an insightful exercise. Indicators such as the role of civil society in promoting social justice and equality were added to refine the survey questionnaire in accordance with Pakistani realities.

### Survey Results

The survey findings based on the perceptions of civil society knowledge bearers shed light on the entire gamut of civil society. The results support some of the existing studies and call into question others. They could help identify civil society's strengths and weaknesses and prioritise goals and objectives. The Diamond plotted on the basis of the survey findings provides a bird eye's view of Pakistani civil society along four dimensions — structure, space, values and impact-and encourages a closer examination of specific indicators.

The analysis of survey findings and the Diamond scores highlight several areas of concern, many of which are inter-related. A case can be made for attributing the relatively low overall impact to certain dimensions within structure, values and space. Similarly, there may be a strong interplay between certain structural dimensions and values. To illustrate the proposition, the skewed distribution of CSOs across regions of the country could be considered a major limiting factor in terms of impact.

The survey results also point out the need for CSOs to strengthen networking and engage communities. Legislative access, general attitude of the state and lack of corporate philanthropy are other weak points as identified by survey respondents. Lack of gender equity and tolerance within CSOs and in their programming also needs to be looked into, as does their limited role in policy-making, implementation and monitoring of government activities. In this context, it would be enlightening to note the following comments by survey respondents:

*CSOs mostly lack professional expertise, which result in incompetent development and management of projects, budgeting and accounts. They mostly have heavy top-structures, lacking mid-level professionals and trained staff.*

*Most CSOs have weak structures, lack of vision for long term planning and are subject to political and government pressures. The objectives envisioned by most CSOs are vague and often limited to short-term redress of diverse issues.*

On the positive side, the research findings speak of a civil society that is healthy and advanced in terms of financial sustainability and commitment. The fact that civil society knowledge bearers consider it to be financially strong may encourage a focus on areas such as lack of human resources and weak management while trying to establish a link with low impact. Most CSOs have weak structures, lack of vision for long-term planning and are subject to political and government pressures. The objectives envisioned by smaller CSOs are often vague and limited to short-term redress of diverse issues.

The role of CSOs in promoting and practicing human rights emerges as a strong value especially given the non-democratic societal context. That the respondents did not see CSOs as playing a successful role in promoting harmonious relations in society needs to be qualified by the fact that the sheer number of militant and ethnic organisations overshadows the positive role played by other CSOs. The survey findings also highlight service delivery and mobilisation of the marginalised as success areas.

On a number of indicators a substantial percentage of replies fell in the mid-range category (those who neither agreed nor completely disagreed). This echoes the hypothesis drawn in the introduction to this report:

*Civil Society in Pakistan is characterised by hybrid forms, unresolved conflicts and divergent legacies — where a civil society is caught up amid the throes of a dying order and the birth pangs of a new one. The mid category responses also bring out the need for more information sharing and dialogue on civil society issues.*

The research findings offer an exciting opportunity for civil society and other development stakeholders to set priorities, build on the strengths and discover avenues for partnerships. There is also a need, “to assess the role of CSOs in the broader socio-political environment of the country,” to quote one focus group participant.

# Appendix 1

## *Project Implementation*

Presented below in chronological order is the sequence of events that lead to the development of the country report.

- March 2001: The NLO having missed the opportunity to participate in the NLO Workshop in Mainz, Volkhart Finn Heinrich was invited to Karachi to discuss the possibility of Pakistan joining CIVICUS in the Pilot Phase of the Project and to develop a tentative workplan. NGORC and Finn Heinrich met with AKF Pakistan in Islamabad to present the motivation for embarking upon the Study. Also met with potential Research Partner — SDPI (Sustainable Development Policy Institute).
- April 2001: Identification of relevant secondary reports, development of bibliography; collection and review of material
- May 2001: Collation of information, preparation of draft overview report
- May 2001: Focus Groups in Karachi and Lahore to contextualise the definition of Civil Society and select indicators; the development of list of respondents (sub-sector wise)
- June 2001: Finalisation of Overview Report; Administration of Stakeholder Survey
- July 2001: Analysis of 106 questionnaires by ICO; Generation of Status Diamond; incorporation of diamond analysis into overview report in order to develop Country Research Report

## **Future Steps**

- August 2001: Participation in World Assembly in Vancouver; presentation of preliminary findings and Status Diamond
- Last Quarter 2001: Partner with Research organisation; Expand stakeholder survey; elaborate upon overview report
- First Quarter 2002: Re-analyse Status Diamond, Revise Country Report
- First Quarter 2002: Conduct National workshop; disseminate findings; develop follow-up strategy.

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