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Civil Society Organizations in Bangladesh and Their Impact on Good Governance

Bangladeş'teki Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları ve İyi Yönetişim Üzerindeki Etkileri

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Abstract

Aim: This study aims to analyse the roles and contributions of civil society organizations on good governance in Bangladesh. This study examines the roles and contributions of civil society organizations in fostering good governance in Bangladesh, while also analysing the relationship between civil society organizations and good governance through various topics and initiatives.

Method: Qualitative research method was used in this study. The paper analysed the growth, roles, and difficulties faced by civil society in Bangladesh when trying to encourage good governance through a literature review approach. The literature study includes several sources, such as academic journals, books, reports, and policy documents.

Findings: In line with the findings, it is difficult for Bangladeshi civil society organizations to remain politically impartial and autonomous on a national and regional level, often aligning with political parties to promote political interests. The role of religion, democratization, colonialism, and political culture in the interplay with CSOs on governance in Bangladesh will help CSOs and policymakers develop strategies that may not involve the same level of interest groups in order to enhance governance.

Result: The complexities faced by civil society organizations have further intensified due to governance practices, political turmoil, military-backed interventions, and democratic instability during different political regimes. Civil society organizations in Bangladesh have been grappling with these challenges while attempting to fulfil their roles. Maintaining an impartial environment for civil society, free from politicization and fundamentalism, to facilitate diverse participation and contribute to a home-grown governance system. By addressing the measures, civil society in Bangladesh can truly fulfil its potential as a catalyst for positive change and a driving force though difficulties.

Originality: The study's findings are anticipated to significantly benefit scholars about civil society organizations and good governance. Furthermore, the study will be advantageous for policymakers and civil society organizations. The research seeks to improve collaboration among various institutions by offering evidence-based insights, hence fostering more good governance processes. This collaboration is essential for cultivating a stronger civil society capable of effectively tackling modern challenges.

Key Words: Civil Society Organizations, Good Governance, Bangladesh.

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışma, Bangladeş'te iyi yönetim üzerindeki sivil toplum kuruluşlarının rollerini ve katkılarını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, Bangladeş'te iyi yönetimi teşvik eden sivil toplum kuruluşlarının rollerini ve katkılarını incelerken, aynı zamanda çeşitli konular ve girişimler aracılığıyla sivil toplum kuruluşları ile iyi yönetim arasındaki ilişkiyi de analiz etmektedir.

Yöntem: Bu çalışmada, nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Makale, Bangladeş'te sivil toplumun iyi yönetimi teşvik etmeye çalışırken karşılaştığı büyüme, roller ve zorlukları bir literatür taraması yaklaşımıyla analiz etti. Literatür çalışması, akademik dergiler, kitaplar, raporlar ve politika belgeleri gibi çeşitli kaynakları içermektedir.

Bulgular: Elde edilen bulgular doğrultusunda, Bangladeşli sivil toplum kuruluşlarının ulusal ve bölgesel düzeyde siyasi olarak tarafsız ve özerk kalmaları zor olup, genellikle siyasi çıkarları teşvik etmek için siyasi partilerle iş birliği yapmaktadırlar. Din, demokratikleşme, sömürgecilik ve siyasi kültürün Bangladeş'teki sivil toplum kuruluşlarıyla (STK'lar) yönetim üzerindeki etkileşimi, STK'lar ve politika yapıcılara yönetimi geliştirmek amacıyla aynı düzeydeki çıkar gruplarını içermeyen stratejiler geliştirmelerine yardımcı olacaktır.

Sonuç: Sivil toplum kuruluşlarının karşılaştığı zorluklar, farklı siyasi rejimler sırasında yönetim uygulamaları, siyasi kargaşa, askeri destekli müdahaleler ve demokratik istikrarsızlık nedeniyle daha da artmıştır. Bangladeş'teki sivil toplum kuruluşları, bu zorluklarla başa çıkmaya çalışırken rollerini yerine getirmeye çalışıyorlar. Sivil toplum için siyasallaşma ve radikalizmden uzak, çeşitli katılımları kolaylaştıran ve yerel bir yönetim sistemine katkıda bulunan tarafsız bir alanın korunması gereklidir. Bangladeş'teki sivil toplum kuruluşları bu zorluklara rağmen gerçekten de olumlu değişim için bir katalizör ve itici güç olma potansiyelini gerçekleştirebilir.

Özgünlük: Çalışmanın bulgularının, sivil toplum kuruluşları ve iyi yönetim hakkında akademisyenlere önemli ölçüde fayda sağlaması beklenmektedir. Ayrıca, çalışma politika yapıcılar ve sivil toplum kuruluşları için faydalı olacaktır. Araştırma, kanıta dayalı içgörüler sunarak çeşitli kurumlar arasındaki işbirliğini geliştirmeyi ve böylece daha iyi yönetim süreçlerini teşvik etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu işbirliği, modern zorluklarla etkili bir şekilde başa çıkabilen daha güçlü bir sivil toplumun geliştirilmesi için gereklidir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları, İyi Yönetişim, Bangladeş.

Introduction

The concepts of globalization and civil society are intricately linked and exert a substantial influence on the contemporary global landscape. Globalization refers to the phenomenon wherein there is a heightened level of connection and interdependence observed among nations and individuals around the globe. Globalization encompasses the worldwide interchange of commodities, services, knowledge, technology, cultural elements, and concepts. Civil society may be thought as the sphere encompassing voluntary organizations, associations, and individuals that operate independently from both the government and the business sector. The composition of this entity consists of a diverse array of civil society organizations (CSOs), community groups, advocacy groups, religious institutions, and other independent entities, all working collectively to advance social, political, and environmental objectives. In the framework of globalization, civil society has emerged as a crucial actor in modern states, playing a significant role in promoting good governance (Alam, 2012; Bratton, 2013; Edwards & Foley, 2015). GIZ's Academy (2020) identifies that good governance, in this context, indicates to the implementation of effective and efficient systems that offer the best possible assistance to individuals in living a secure and fruitful life in accordance with their aspirations and possibilities. Essentially, this entails the combination of a welfare state, democratic governance and rule of law. Good governance fosters a culture that motivates an organization and its officials to strive for optimal outcomes for its members, while also minimizing the likelihood of non-compliance, misbehaviour, and improper utilization of members' funds. This has sparked renewed interest among scholars and practitioners (Keane, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Societies worldwide, regardless of their geographical location or cultural background, grapple with fundamental political questions related to balancing the private and public spheres, individual and social interests, and public ethics and private concerns (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Habermas, 1996; Taylor, 2004). Civil society is commonly perceived as a prospective intermediary to mitigate tensions and conflicts between opposing forces that threaten social cohesion and stability while promoting good governance (Diamond, 1994; Walzer, 1995). Turan (2018) emphasizes that "civil society serves to spread values like tolerance, moderation, compromise, and respect for opposing views, which are elements of democratic culture, to all levels of society and the administrative mechanism. Different social identities contribute not only to limiting the arbitrariness of governors but also to the growth of more self-confident and virtuous citizens" (Turan, 2018: 1313). In this perspective, it is necessary to comprehend the significance of the terms "civil society" and "good governance" and their interconnection.

The notions of civil society organizations and good governance have been prevalent in Bangladesh since the early 1990s; they have been significantly shaped by international donor agencies when designing global "good governance" policies (Hossain, 2004; Sarker & Alam, 2010). However, civil society in Bangladesh has also developed a distinct local approach, influenced by the country's struggle for independence in the 1970s (Ahmed & Alam, 2012; Rashid, 2013). CSOs have emerged as a prominent form of civil society in Bangladesh, although their practices often deviate from the traditional roles of civil society (Ferdous, 2009; Karim, 2011). Furthermore, the accountability and potential political

biases of donor-funded CSOs have raised concerns (Chowdhury & Hossain, 2008; Islam, 2016). Therefore, the current emphasis lies in supporting civil society organizations to enhance the effectuality of the state machinery for the purpose of promoting good governance (Chowdhury & Alam, 2010). There has been a growing trend CSOs participating in development partnerships (Howell & Pearce, 2001). These groups, such as the Social Watch Network, also serve as watchdogs across several levels (Fowler & Biekart, 2015).

Civil society organizations have a crucial role in encouraging for good governance practices and engaging the poverty-stricken masses in the process of holding authorities accountable in a democratic setup. In Bangladesh as a developing country, the need is to improve CSOs more effective. Most development-oriented activities over the last decade or so in the context of Bangladesh have centred on strengthening CSOs and enabling them to carry out economic and social functions. The interventions aimed to develop their skills, capacities, horizons, understanding and networking people (Egholm et al.2020). Recognizing the social aspect of civil society, this article aims to understand civil society organizations and their impacts on good governance in Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Study

This paper tries to analyse the roles and contributions of civil society organizations on good governance in Bangladesh. Strengthening the capabilities and resources of civil society organizations is crucial for effectively addressing current decay and injustices (Hossain & Alam, 2014). This study is going to analyse the roles and contributions of civil society organizations in fostering good governance in Bangladesh, while also analysing the relationship between civil society organizations and good governance through various topics and initiatives. The study's results illuminate civil society organizations' role in promoting national-level governmental accountability (Islam & Hossain, 2013).

The following precise objectives have been selected to comprehend the role of civil society organizations in facilitating good governance in Bangladesh:

The first objective is to understand the importance of civil society in establishing a successful government in Bangladesh. To achieve this goal, the history of good governance activities in Bangladesh will be covered from their beginning to their current situation. This study will examine the evolution of the country's governance over time by looking at significant milestones, policy changes, and institutional innovations.

The second objective is to examine the contributions of organizations and CSOs in promoting and implementing good governance practices in Bangladesh. Especially, it will look at how the strategies, policies, and projects of these players affect governance outcomes.

The third objective is to find out what prevents Bangladesh from having good governance. This objective focuses on identifying the barriers and issues that hinder the establishment of good governance in Bangladesh. Institutional weaknesses, political dynamics, corruption, and socioeconomic issues are some of the things that will be examined in this analysis.

Methodology

This study analyses the growth, roles, and obstacles faced by civil society organizations in Bangladesh when trying to improve good governance through a literature review approach. The literature study includes several sources, such as academic journals, books, reports, and policy documents. The criteria for selecting literature encompassed its pertinence to the subject, recent publication dates, and academic quality. Academic databases and libraries were searched using keywords like "civil society," "good governance," and "Bangladesh" to acquire relevant literature. The literature part was deeply examined and synthesized to identify key themes, concepts, and arguments related to Bangladesh's civil society and good governance. The research question is that "What are the factors influencing the role of CSOs on good governance?". Therefore, which factors most likely to influence the role of CSOs on good governance in Bangladesh are to reveal. The factors influencing CSOs are colonialism, democratization, accountability, participation, political culture (authoritarianism), limited resources and religion. The analysis focused on understanding the historical improvement of good governance initiatives, the role of donor agencies and CSOs in implementing good governance, the barriers to establishing effective governance, and the significance of civil society organizations in encouraging good governance.

Understanding Civil Society and Good Governance

Good government, according to the United Nations Development Program (1997), is the application of political, financial, and administrative authority to oversee national affairs at all levels. It covers the means by which people express their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their responsibilities, and reconcile their differences—that is, the institutions, mechanisms, and procedures. States have a responsibility to empower their inhabitants by enhancing the skills and abilities of individuals and civil society groups, promoting fairness in opportunities, and guaranteeing inclusive participation in social, economic, and political spheres, as well as access to resources. This enhancement necessitates the presence of effectively operating legislative bodies, election procedures, and an appropriate legal and judicial framework. CSOs can help governments create more effective policies to deal with problems like gender equality and the protection of the rights of physically disabled individuals. CSOs do not only contribute to the national level good governance but also help in the formation of good governance principles at the societal level. So, the self-governance capacity of local communities is improved according to contemporary democratic principles. This result in the reduction of expenses and the improvement of administration by enabling government institutions to focus on critical areas, the fundamental components of social, financial, and political issues.

Civil society is crucial in promoting social development and enhancing the enforcement of rule of law. Government structures often fail to fulfil their designated functions due to a range of factors, such as corruption, inadequate funding, financial constraints, and an overly controlling approach to societal regulation. Hence, there are clear justifications for highlighting the significance of civil society in government. The collaboration between civil society organizations and state structures is both necessary and beneficial.

Civil Society and CSOs

Civil society is an expansive concept that includes groups and associations operating independently of the state and market. Its origins can be traced back to ancient Greece, but the modern comprehension of civil society emerged in the 18th century. Political theorists such as Thomas Paine and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel regarded civil society as a realm apart from the state. In recent times, civil society has gained renewed interest due to the democratic trend and the need to address social service gaps in developing countries caused by structural adjustments and reforms (Morgenthau, 1985). The definition of civil society lacks certain clarity among scholars. However, it can be conceptualized as the collective endeavours carried out by individuals or groups, situated between the realms of family, state, and market, with the aim of promoting the common welfare (Salamon and Anheier, 1998). Various perspectives define civil society differently. For example, Veneklasen (1994) characterizes it as a space of social engagement between individuals and the state, characterized by norms of cooperation, voluntary associations, and public communication. Connor (1999) emphasizes the importance of autonomous associations and networks that amplify the voices of civil society in governance and the market. Uphoff (1995) suggests that CSOs, while being a component of civil society, it is imperative to regard it as a functional domain that exists between the public and private sectors. Within the framework of this article, civil society can be delineated as a complex web of organizations and initiatives that serve to uphold the democratic realm situated between the state and the family. This term refers to the collective of both groups and individuals inside a nation who actively participate in social and political matters, while not operating as formal political parties (Tocqueville, 1900; Putnam, 1999). Civil society serves a crucial role in expressing citizens' concerns, resisting government abuses, and negotiating with the state to achieve its objectives. Key features of civil society include its separation from the state and market, common values and interests among participants, and its endogenous and autonomous development process (Lewis, 2004).

Devaney (2022) describes CSO generally as an autonomous organization that operates without government control or influence. The United Nations (UN) established the phrase in 1945 to differentiate between governmental entities and commercial organizations. It is a relatively recent concept. CSOs are commonly established by individuals with a specific purpose or objective, and they utilize their platform to advocate for causes within the non-profit industry. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are generally nonprofit organizations that are driven by a specific mission and focus on advocacy or providing services. There are several CSOs of varying sizes that operate globally and are structured to serve a wide range of purposes. Devaney (2022) emphasizes that CSOs should strictly adhere to a set of fundamental principles and ideals. Transparency and accountability are crucial for CSOs due to their significant role in all aspects of development. Enhancing the awareness of the CSO's funding, operations, and aims among its members, stakeholders, and beneficiaries is crucial for establishing credibility and promoting the success of the organization.

Kumar (1993), Calhoun (1993), and Chandoke (1995) characterize civil society as an intermediary domain situated between the individual/family and the state, although the specific components of this domain differ. Marx (1977) employs a political economy framework that situates civil society within the domain of property and class, contrasting this with the purported universalism of citizenship in the political realm. Civil society is a crucial factor in driving liberal and democratic political transformations, providing a basis for evaluating the enduring sustainability of political

systems. They can enhance the structural formula of society, support democratic processes by advocating for government transparency, and accountability of public leaders. A dynamic civil society can uphold standards of public humanity and responsibility, while also maintaining a disciplined relationship with the state. If civil society replaces public services, potential issues may develop if it is incorporated. Turan (2022) stated that CSOs have had different tasks in many phases of history. In our modern world, besides the significance of civil society associations in the country, it is obvious that they also carry out activities abroad. One of the reasons behind this is that there is change and development in the cultural and social fields along with the economy in the globalization process (Turan, 2022: 1101).

The existence of CSOs does not guarantee good governance. Therefore, institutional bodies must be sure civil society can successfully engage in decision-making by taking preventative measures and thus to ensure good governance. Powell and Steinberg (2006) states that CSOs fulfil a diverse range of service and humanitarian roles, conveying citizen concerns to Governments, advocating for and overseeing policies, and promoting political engagement by providing information. Burnell (2000) noticed that CSOs are crucial for good governance because they are directly linked to key elements such as transparency, involvement, and decentralized power sharing. The concept of "democracy" explicitly encompasses the notion of civil society's involvement in governance. The presence of a strong civil society is crucial for a government to effectively fulfil its primary responsibility of allocating and managing resources to address common issues. In this context, it is important to emphasize the institutional structures of local self-government, which enable the participation of CSOs in the decision-making processes of the governing structures. Therefore, it is imperative to have an informed and engaged public engagement through non-governmental organizations (CSOs) and civic groups to enhance openness and accountability within the government.

Understanding Good Governance

The concept of good governance is of paramount importance in ensuring effective and accountable decision-making processes in any society. Good governance encompasses the principles of accountability, transparency, participation, rule of law, and responsiveness (World Bank, 1994). Social stability, economic growth, and societal well-being are all dependent on good governance. This indicates that institutions and processes are equitable, inclusive, and responsible, resulting in the welfare and empowerment of citizens. A comprehensive understanding of the concept of good governance is essential in order to deal with the challenges faced by civil society organizations in Bangladesh regarding good governance. Donohue (2024:3), citing United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), characterizes good governance as "participatory, consensual, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, fair and inclusive, and consistent with the rule of law." Good governance therefore reduces the possibility of corruption, promotes inclusiveness and meets the current and future demands of society. According to the United Nations Development Program (2007), ensuring those in authorities accountable for their actions and choices is an important part of good governance. Transparent governance encourages transparency, accessibility and the flow of information, enabling citizens to make their leaders accountable. According to the United Nations Development Program (2007), participation is a key element of good governance, which emphasizes the importance of everyone being involved in decision-making processes. It recognizes the perspectives of diverse groups and encourages their active participation and representation. (World Bank, 1994).

The rule of law is a crucial part of good governance and emphasizes the fair and impartial application of laws (United Nations Development Programme, 2007). As a result, justice and equality are promoted and individuals and organizations are held accountable through legal frameworks and procedures (World Bank, 1994). Responsive governance demonstrates to the capacity of institutions and leaders to meet the expectations and demands of the public (United Nations Development Programme, 2007). In order to promote and strive for good governance, civil society organizations in Bangladesh must have a firm grasp of these ideas. Civil society can help improve society by adhering to these principles, which include openness, accountability, citizen engagement, and the rule of law.

Interaction and Challenges of Civil Society and Good Governance in Bangladesh

Democratic states should now employ a common approach to effectively communicate, cooperate, and shape favourable democratic governance policies. This will help expand democratic opportunities and establish themselves as exemplars and advocates of good governance and democracy in Asia. Supriadi (2018:1) emphasizes that "*civil society has a crucial role in defending democracy. But with limited resources, civil society struggles to develop an adequate and timely response to the current democratic regression. Thus far, most efforts have been at the national level in silos, or grouped around thematic advocacy issues, creating a movement in the region that is not in sync. Many times before in the Asia region there have been attempts to strengthen solidarity among these different parts and movements of civil society, and the most recent of these, focusing on democracy, has come in the formation of the Asia Democracy Network (ADN)*".

Civil society organizations play a crucial role and serves as the core of the movement to enact change and protect rights. Therefore, it should be give more emphasizes on the improvement of civil societies in order to facilitate good governance and democracy. Supraiadi (2018) underlines that civil society needs to be provided authority and be prepared to promptly intervene across all avenues of advocacy. It is necessary to establish connections with those who are socially isolated and implement effective outreach strategies across all segments of society in order to augment the population of proponents of democracy. In order to transform the perception of democracy and ensure its attainment, it is imperative that we proactively involve ourselves in media platforms and establish partnerships with both governmental and non-governmental entities. For the sake of our basic liberties and the openness of our government, it is critical that more people realize that democracy is the way to go.

Singh (2020) argues that the development and influence of civil society are shaped by multiple elements, including the level of political democracy, economic advancement, historical and cultural context, demographic and sociological context, mobility patterns, value systems, and modernity. Civil society organizations must be empowered and prepared to engage instantly in all domains of advocacy. Productive communication strategies must be used across all social groups to incorporate socially isolated individuals. To alter perceptions of democracy and facilitate its implementation, we must proactively participate in media platforms and develop alliances with governmental and civil society organizations. It is crucial to recognize that democracy provides the optimal opportunity to safeguard our fundamental liberties and guarantee governmental transparency. Recognizing that democracy offers the greatest chance of safeguarding our basic liberties and guaranteeing governmental openness is crucial.

Bangladesh Context

The history of civil society and good governance in Bangladesh is a complex topic that necessitates thorough comprehension. Bangladesh, a developing nation, acknowledges the significance of civil society organizations and good governance in attaining sustainable development and social improvement. Civil society covers a range of organizations, community groups, and grassroots movements. Civil society organizations play a crucial role in empowering citizens, fostering inclusivity, and facilitating active participation in decision-making processes. Civil society organizations aim to improve social conditions, and facilitate positive transformation (Chaney et al., 2020; Chaney & Sahoo, 2020).

The World Bank initiated the concept of "good governance" in the 1990s in the context of improving government performance, the concept can be defined as the utilization of accountability, involvement, transparency, and predictability to enhance administrative efficacy (ADB, 1995; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2000). However, the donor-driven approach rarely meets local demands for enhancing the governance system in Bangladesh. The Western notion of "good governance" and "good government" has often been used interchangeably (Crawford, 1996), but governance involves multiple actors beyond the government, including civil society, media, lobbyists, and multinational corporations (Barenstein, 1994). The Western paradigm of "good governance," characterized by the imposition of conditionality's by international donors within the context of Bangladesh, fails to adequately address the indigenous governance system. Cooperative people, used to associational behaviours, underpin voluntary initiatives. The first and apparently only attempt to critically evaluate the role of CSOs in Bangladesh was published in 1993. The report is long and generally very critical of international CSOs in their dealings with Bangladeshi ones, who are given more legitimacy than their international partners. The reports, however, exclude war-related charities as not being CSOs, although they now fall within the popular understanding of CSOs. (Chowdhoree et al, 2020).

Civil society organizations in Bangladesh serve a crucial role in advocating for social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability. These organizations have significantly contributed to addressing issues including poverty reduction, gender equality, education, healthcare services, and disaster management. Establishing a communication channel between communities and governments facilitates the recognition of the needs and rights of disadvantaged groups, ensuring their voices are heard. Moreover, CSOs in Bangladesh are actively involved in initiating legal reforms at the grassroots level to specifically address and empower the most marginalized segments of the community. The objective is to find effective resolutions for issues that were previously unresolved.

Bangladesh faces some challenges, including political instability, corruption, weak institutions, and resource limitations. A legal framework must be developed to safeguard the rights of civil society actors and establish an appropriate environment for their activities. Enhancing government institutions, fostering transparency and accountability, and facilitating effective engagement between civil society organizations and the government are crucial. Overcoming obstacles necessitates collaborative efforts, leading to comprehensive development and significant change.

Good governance establishes a crucial basis for enabling transparency, accountability, and effective service delivery. The creation of strong institutions, compliance with the rule of law, and the improvement of ethical norms in public administration are essential. The Bangladeshi government has implemented several initiatives aimed at enhancing governance quality. These procedures cover the implementation of productive e-governance systems, the formulation of anti-corruption programs, and the promotion of public engagement via diverse digital platforms. These initiatives try to solve the problems and supply social needs and responsible.

The condition of civil society and governance in Bangladesh is a complex and evolving matter that necessitates continuing collaboration and dedication from all stakeholders. This effort necessitates unwavering commitment and on-going enhancement. Bangladesh exemplifies a potential model for other nations regarding civil society and effective governance through collaborative initiatives. With dedication, patience, and a firm belief in societal potential, Bangladesh can achieve substantial progress and advance toward a more promising future (McDonough & Rodríguez, 2020; Hasan, 2024; Lewis, 2021; Van Rooy & Robinson, 2020).

Challenges to the Growth of Civil Society

Civil society organizations are crucial actors in the improvement of universal values around human rights, the environment, labour standards, good governance and anti-corruption. Yet, there are historical, cultural, social, and political factors that have hindered the growth of civil society in developing countries. Working in a challenging political environment is not the only impediment to the effectiveness of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bangladesh. The government has formulated and implemented several laws and policies that constrain the activities of the CSOs or, in some cases, impose restrictions on their functioning. The required approvals from line ministries and the bureaucracies concerned with the management of the CSOs are extremely time-consuming. Furthermore, the high level of political interference from lawmakers demands more paperwork and poses challenges for CSOs.

The CSO search for a shortcut or 'bypass' of government rules and regulations is seen as a direct violation of the sovereignty and policy of the government of Bangladesh (Bashar, 2021). In addition to this, there is a lack of commitment from within the CSOs themselves. The commitment of some CSOs is dedicated solely to the objective of raising funds from international donors to support their own personal careers. The beneficiaries of the field research have a strong opinion that the CSOs in Bangladesh are run by the 'middle class' and 'intellectuals' who lack an understanding of the reality of the lives of poor people. Moreover, there is a far lower level of credibility than trust. In such societies, although both concepts imply an expectation of getting what they want, trust matters; while credibility depends on reputation or status. On the other hand, there are other reasons for the lack of credibility, and hence trust, in the CSOs. Moreover, there are societal constraints that include religion, caste systems, and gender biases, discrimination and manipulation that act to curb the spread of social capital and civil society. In addition, trust is an integral part of the social and economic fabric within a society. It brings unity, cohesiveness, and a sense of security among people who perceive themselves as belonging to an exclusive section of the broader society. In contrast, the money-driven or 'corrupted' CSOs have a negative influence. Social advocacy is constrained by threats, denunciations, and persecutions by the opponents of civil society actors. Hate, malice, and political intolerance have created an environment of fear and suspicion, in which free collective social and civic calls for service are seen as threats to potentially developmental political powers. The overarching policies of the constitution of the country have been abused in recent years by the governing party to make it difficult for anyone to stand up to the government not conforming to its opinion and ideology; civil liberties are easily threatened with legal sanction and repression (Momen and Ferdous2023).

Many developing countries, like Bangladesh, have a history of authoritarian government, which leaves little room for civil society organizations. This is one of the reasons why Bangladesh is considered to be a developing country. Initially, new charitable organizations were required to conform to pre-existing power structures and refrain from criticizing political authority.

The improvement of the CSOs is also significantly influenced by religion, which plays an important part in the process. It is possible that religions do not endorse the establishment of non-governmental organizations (CSOs), despite the fact that they generally have a favourable attitude toward charitable giving. The effect of colonialism on the development of the civil society organizations is diverse. It also varies according to the national traditions and values of the various countries.

One of the most crucial obstacles of civil society organizations is the existence of restrictions on funds and resources. Civil society organizations which are largely dependent on foreign donors, can lead to a misalignment of priorities and an excessive emphasis on donor interests rather than the needs of the community. Moreover, strengthening democracy requires not only the creation of democratic structures but also social support and economic development. For a successful democratization, it is vital to develop state structures, a local civil society, and an economic foundation. These factors have historically prevented to the growth of civil society in developing countries, including Bangladesh. However, recognizing and addressing these impediments are essential to facilitate the growth of a strong civil society sector and advance the principles of good governance.

Findings and Discussions

Complexities of Civil Society in Bangladesh

The fundamental elements and principles of civil society in Bangladesh seem to have diminished in their relevance among the general population, no longer serving as a driving force for widespread engagement, voluntary action, and independent civil society (Harriss, 2001; Uddin & Islam, 2018). The observed phenomenon may be attributed to a multitude of variables, involving encompassing the expected response to shifts in the era of globalization, the heterogeneous character of political methodologies, and the swift proliferation of non-governmental organizations supported by Western sources (Harriss, 2001). During the period of military governance in the 1980s, the civil society of Bangladesh assumed a pivotal role in opposing authoritarian governments and military dictatorships, thereby facilitating the attainment of democratic liberties for the populace (Harriss, 2001; Hasan, 2017). These efforts were recognized as significant in the country's struggle for democracy. However, after the restoration of democracy in 1991, the challenges faced by civil society and the responsibilities associated with the good governance and civil society movements have become increasingly intricate (Harriss, 2001). On the one hand, it became imperative to reform state institutions; while on the other hand, there existed a necessity to establish a societal culture that aligns with the principles and norms of democracy (Uddin & Islam, 2018). In Bangladesh, the promotion of good governance and civil society principles by prominent donors like the World Bank, IMF, ADB, and UNDP has not translated effectively into broader societal impact. While governmental institutions have made some progress in areas such as transparency, accountability, self-management, and self-governance, these principles have not been adequately embraced by society at large (Harriss, 2001). The operations and role of civil society have become more complex due to governance practices, political turmoil, military-backed interventions, and instability during different political regimes (Harriss, 2001; Hasan, 2017). Civil societies in Bangladesh have been grappling with these challenges, and questions remain regarding their effectiveness and autonomous functioning for the interests of the people (Harriss, 2001).

Religion and politics are both important social institutions, and they are deeply interconnected in most social settings. The religious beliefs, practices, and principles of a society are bound to shape the social and political dynamics of that society. The influence of religion is particularly significant in society when the majority of the population adheres to a single faith, as is the case in Bangladesh, where over 90% of the population is Muslim. Not surprisingly, Islamic values have an impact on the social and political life of Bangladesh. The introduction of the concept of governance in Bangladesh occurred during the colonial period. However, independent Bangladesh returned to the art of good governance in the post-colonial era. Bangladesh has seen a rise in religious organizations. Apart from its influence on welfare policy-making, society in Bangladesh has seen frequent interactions between stakeholders and religious organizations. However, in Bangladesh, religion has two sides. Religion, in addition to being a force for cohesion, can also exacerbate divisions (Roy et al., 2020; Chaney & Sahoo, 2020).

In addition to religion's dual nature, religion directly impacts the role of CSOs in society. Non-governmental organizations, whether secular or faith-based, often find that they sometimes act in parallel with some religious institutions and, at other times, conflict with these same religious institutions. Religion has direct, organizational-level impacts on these relationships. While collaboration between religious institutions and non-governmental organizations occurs in some contexts, the religious sector also has a voice that often works against policy and legislative measures. The aim of this discussion is therefore to underline the importance of religion and to argue that a thorough analysis of the concept of good governance in Bangladesh must include religious concerns, practices, as well as beliefs (Chaney & Sahoo, 2020). Moreover, its unique relevance to political cultures and policy-making in predominantly Muslim countries such as Bangladesh, religion holds both the potential to engage marginalized populations and inform theoretical perspectives on governance (Alam et al. 2020). Religion-centred organizations can often reach more people than their secular counterparts. In societies like Bangladesh, religion must therefore be examined in discussions of good governance, rather than being ignored in favour of the secular approach. Schulz (2021: 90) states that religion and CSOs gain a significant place within society, and their interaction portrays the societal dynamics, including the influencing factors on the role of CSOs in Bangladesh.

Political culture is seen in inducing strategic behaviour of players that is anticipated to be beneficial collectively or for contending interest coalitions. Political culture as provinces of explicit behaviour acts upon governance either to undermine or negatively affect it or to strengthen or positively affect it. Political culture affects governance in major ways, either determining the degree and manner in which the members of a polity engage with governance processes or helping to instil within them norms and values found to be democratic. The challenge that interests us here also is to know how Bangladeshis engage in a specific sphere of political life, as normally they would in the light of their political culture.

In Bangladesh, the political culture is still fairly similar to earlier practices introduced during the colonial period. Nonetheless, the administration is not delivering the services, which rather resemble patterns, ending up with personal whims and following the previous practices of discretionary decision-making. Society was ruled by religious norms

before colonial power disintegrated such trends. Generally, public governance systems are influenced and shaped through each transition, but sometimes they follow the roots of colonial practices. While the older system is contesting with newer frameworks, societal transition occurs that gradually creates a distinct view in the root administration, which shows a perpetual continuation. Consider the colonial practices and those institutions introduced by the British in India. These policies and institutions are still part and parcel of the Bangladeshi administration system. That is why any environmental changes also affect the root practices of Bangladesh. The system stays as it is. The newly introduced practices can stay for a short period. It is proven that the colonial power introduced socially oriented institutions; however, local officials attempted to incorporate some of these new institutions into their work, but ultimately they failed, and the colonial power apparatus collapsed (Sakib, 2023; Islam et al., 2020)

Political culture of the country has historically been more family-based, in which emotions are more important than politics for the generations. Individual- and family-based decisions are the norm and are associated with benefits that extend beyond personal lives into the development sphere through the formation of political dynasties. Within such social structures, it is imperative to build institutions like CSOs to address the various symptoms of poverty that affect a majority of the population of the country. Service delivery has been fraught with difficulties due to the inability of colonial administrators to enforce laws and policies that were perceived to reduce poverty and injustice. Public perceptions of good governance, therefore, focused on the roles of service deliverer, which was largely based on the handouts of the zamindars or the morally superior British and which continues to this day to shape institutional trust and state-society relations in Bangladesh. Such context-specific analyses are crucial for identifying points of effective intervention, if any, for the identification of connections between democratization, political culture in Bangladesh, and the potential role of CSOs in promoting local governance. (Arefin et al.2020)

The process of democratization in Bangladesh was closely related to local, colonial, and international politics. It takes place within a socio-religious, politico-cultural, and historical context shaped by these processes. Colonialism represented a set of arbitrary power structures that, all rationale for existence aside, have perhaps brilliantly been the precursor of the modern state. The hermeneutic impulse behind the unveiling of the shape and scope of the state evolves with its successor, the postcolonial regime, liberal and authoritarian altogether. Various political parties played a key role in the democratic governance story. The Pakistan Muslim League, the ruling party of the colonial power, was the successor of the All-Indian Muslim League, a religious political party dating back to its inception in 1906 and sometimes dubbed a socio-religious reformist party. In the then Pakistani national politics, the BNP, formed with a cadre of former high-ranking military men of the Pakistani regime of the late sixties and seventies, was a populist center-right party; the Ershad regime, military coup-maker and the unseated President from 1982-1990, came from the BNP. Again, the Awami League has had the unique history of being one of the freedom fighters' political alliances. Civil society in general and CSOs in particular are two fundamental components of the abuses of the term "democratization." All put together, the political scientist concludes that "democracy will be consolidated in the case of Bangladesh as long as it focuses on 'traditions of pluralism, tolerance, and amity among the people' (Lewis & van Schendel, 2020; Hossain & Habib, 2021).

In the current situation, democracy in Bangladesh is hindered by authoritarian governance and development practices (Harriss, 2001; Uddin & Islam, 2018). Despite the existence of multi-party democracies, the translation of basic principles of good governance into reality has been limited (Harriss, 2001). The importance of civil society in encouraging democratic ideals and an integrated approach to local good governance that meets society needs is emphasized. (Uddin and Islam, 2018; Harriss, 2001).

Both national and regional scales, civil societies in Bangladesh frequently fail to remain impartial and autonomous, instead allying with political parties and furthering their own agendas (Harriss, 2001; Hasan, 2017). Powerful civil society actors like landowners, moneylenders, religious leaders, and village elites—who typically possess political connections and collaborate with the bureaucratic apparatus—are aligned in this alliance, threatening their autonomy (Harriss, 2001).

It is difficult for Bangladeshi civil society organizations to remain politically impartial and autonomous on a national and regional level, often aligning with political parties to promote political interests. When actors unite with powerful interests, it hinders civil society's ability to function autonomously. Members of the village elite, who control community-based services, make and keep political connections and frequently work together with bureaucratic institutions. Consequently, this collaboration serves to obscure the boundaries between civil society and political authority.

To address these complexities and challenges, certain measures are necessary. A robust and impartial civil society can serve as a crucial balance to ensure that government power is not abused, and it can contribute to the development of a governance system driven by checks and balances. Achieving this requires:

- The establishment of a resilient social and institutional framework is crucial for facilitating the expansion and advancement of civil society.
- Promoting transparency, accountability, and combating corruption in both public and private sectors.
- Actively involving civil society organizations in parliamentary committees and decision-making processes.
- Upholding autonomy from political factions and abstaining from advancing political agendas.

- Depoliticizing and strengthening educational institutions to enhance citizen involvement and emphasize both rights and obligations.
- The individual actively participates in advocacy efforts, offers policy recommendations, and provides technical help to government entities.
- Promoting dialogue and collaboration among various stakeholders, including state institutions, donors, civil society, and corporate groupings.
- Establishing an anti-corruption commission with strong links to civil society.
- Ensuring free access to information and developing a code of conduct for media and civil society organizations.
- Empowering local councils, CSOs, unions, consumer groups, and citizen associations through collaborative efforts with the state.

It can be concluded that understanding the role of religion, democratization, colonialism, and political culture in the interplay with CSOs on governance in Bangladesh will help CSOs and policymakers develop strategies that may not involve the same level of interest groups in order to enhance governance. For improving good governance, however, the role of religion, democratization, and colonialism also must be considered. While the role of CSOs in policymaking and service delivery is likely to be increasingly important in the future, it can be recommended that they also require a willingness to collaborate with the government (Tarusarira, 2020)

Conclusion

The complexities surrounding civil society in Bangladesh require a comprehensive and nuanced approach to ensure its effectiveness in promoting good governance and sustaining democracy. The essential elements and principles of civil society appear to have diminished in their relevance among the general populace, resulting in a lack of motivation for widespread engagement, voluntary actions, and independent operations. The above-mentioned phenomenon can be partially ascribed to the expected responses to the process of globalization, the heterogeneous character of political methodologies, and the swift proliferation of non-governmental organizations (CSOs) supported by Western entities. Throughout Bangladesh's history, civil society has played a crucial role in resisting authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships, contributing to the process of attaining democratic freedoms. Nevertheless, following the reestablishment of democratic rule in 1991, the challenges associated with effective governance and the advancement of civil society movements grew increasingly complex. Alternatively, it became imperative to reform state institutions, while on the other hand, the task of cultivating a culture that aligns with democratic principles and practices presented an equally formidable obstacle. Regrettably, the notions of good government and civil society, although prescribed by major international donors, have predominantly been limited to governmental institutions, neglecting their broader societal relevance. The complexities faced by civil society have further intensified due to governance practices, political turmoil, military-backed interventions, and democratic instability during different political regimes. Civil society organizations in Bangladesh have been grappling with these challenges while attempting to fulfil their roles. However, the question of the role of civil society and its capacity for autonomous functioning remains uncertain, hindering its ability to advance the interests of the people. Retaining an impartial environment for civil society, free from politicization and fundamentalism, to facilitate diverse participation and contribute to a homegrown governance system. By addressing these measures, civil society in Bangladesh can truly fulfil its potential as a catalyst for positive change and a driving force.

A common sense that strengthening CSOs does lead to the enhancement of the governance process and quality. CSOs contribute to the generation of good governance outcomes in the areas of policy reform, corruption, and transparency, and at the same time, there is no doubt that there will be challenges in this discourse—challenges in implementation and dialogue, challenges between national and international, regional approaches—as there are vested interests that feel threatened. In this context, it can be reiterated that CSO capacity building is essentially a long-term process. There is now broad agreement that a powerful and dynamic civil society is an essential ingredient in transforming Bangladesh. In conclusion, there is the proposition that a small investment in civil society in the short term can have a long-term pay-off in terms of good governance in Bangladesh.

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