

Abstract

Civil society organizations are defined as means by which the citizens advance and defend their interests in public life through collective action. The role of civil society in a multi-party democracy especially in the developing countries is very important. A strong civil society is a precondition for sustainable democracy. Empowering civil society contributes to consolidating and strengthening democracy.

Civil society organizations are working in Bangladesh since the inception of the country. They are implementing many programs focusing on violence against the poor and women, prevention of dowry and early marriage, establishment of land right of the poor, ensuring rule of law and good governance, election monitoring, reducing corruption from society and conservation of environment and fostering sustainable development.

The dramatic expansion of NGOs in Bangladesh is in line with the international experience in 1990s when donor encourages CSOs in the whole collapse of soviet commune. Much of CSO activities are donor-funded.

This paper focused on the advocacy CSOs in Bangladesh. It examines the following issues. First, it examines the validity of the hypothesis that advocacy civil societies in Bangladesh are donor driven. An analysis of advocacy of civil societies in Bangladesh supports this hypothesis. This study suggests that most of CSOs in Bangladesh are “Civil Society by design ” and not spontaneous.

Second, the stakeholders in advocacy civil society projects are interviewed to determine whether stakeholders were really involved and interact by these projects. An analysis of the available data indicates that more of the projects are altogether unknown to the beneficiaries.

Thirdly, this is a widespread belief that there is no transparency in the CSOs and they are not accountable to anybody except the donors. A survey undertaken of this study shows that most of the advocacy CSOs, who are vocal champions of transparency and

accountability, do not at all share information about the income and expenditure with anybody except donors. They are completely free to initiate any project and expend any amount of money without following financial norms. There is no proper mechanism to hold them accountable and answerable for their activities. The only government regulatory organ NGOAB does not have sufficient trained manpower and technologically advanced methods to monitor and supervise the large volume activities of the CSOs. The founders of these organizations act as a perpetual head of the organization, and there is nobody to challenge any of their decisions. Though the donors finance them, they are accountable to nobody.

Finally, this study examines the hypothesis that CSOs, by propagation democratic values, promote social harmony and cooperation. The experience of Bangladesh contradicts this hypothesis.

In recent time, many civil society organizations have been accused of being involved political activities. The whole NGO communities Bangladesh has been divided into two groups based on political affiliation. The fragmentation of ADAB and creation of FNB intensified unhealthy conflicts in NGOs.

This study highlights the need for formulation and implementation a comprehensive code of conduct containing the issues of transparency, accountability and corporate governance for the CSOs. Because of the unwillingness of advocacy CSOs to share essential information with researchers, it is very difficult to appraise them. Further research should be undertaken on this area with the assistance of NGOAB.