Civil society organizations: nature and their role in rural development (A case study of Hazara region of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province)

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Abstract: Efforts by the state to reduce poverty and improve rural livelihoods in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan in general and mountainous regions of the province in particular have gain modest success. The vacuum created by the state and non-government organizations (NGOs) regarding rural development is (sometimes) filled by so called 'organization' including village level and religious non-profit organizations. Such organizations claim that they are deeply rooted in the traditional and religious culture of the province, and that they are in a better position to address the issues related to prevailing rural poverty and inequality in the marginalized areas. These organizations and social movements even challenge the state departments in providing basic services to the rural communities. This paper, examined the social organizations in a broader perspective of civil society movement. The data were collected from Abbottabad and Mansehra district of (former) Hazara division of KP. The results showed that the organizations working in the study region can be broadly classified into three categories; the organizations working for rural development/human rights, cultural identity and religious identity. Majority of the organizations was working in both rural and urban areas. It was found that these organizations mostly relied on voluntary staff. In most of the cases, at district and provincial level, these organizations had linkages and networking with other organizations on different issues e.g. for child rights, women rights, rights of forest users and owners, rights of growers and landless labourers.

1.   Introduction and context

Development of rural communities on sustainable basis is one of the core objectives of the developing countries including Pakistan. More than half of Pakistan's population resides in rural areas whose livelihoods are dependent on agriculture and this sector contributes 21% to the national GDP (Govt. of Pakistan, 2012). Rural people have a significant contribution in the overall economic development of the country, but they are more vulnerable to poverty (Ahmad *et al.,* 2004). They have least access to basic necessities of life like education, health, clean drinking water, proper sanitation etc. (Hussain *et al.,* 2003). It has been argued by the researchers that in rural areas only agricultural growth is not sufficient for rural development rather it is the holistic improvement of economic as well as social conditions of rural communities by raising their farm income and providing them basic amenities of life (Israr *et al.,* 2009). Nevertheless, the Government of Pakistan had launched a series of rural development initiatives and interventions in Pakistan since independence (in 1947) to date (see for example, Khan and Khan, 2001; Lodhi *et al.,* 2006; Rehman, 2005; Shahbaz *et al.,* 2012).

However efforts by the state regarding rural development remained generally unsuccessful (with some exceptions) and the researchers has attributed many reasons of this failure (see for example Luqman *et al.,* 2005; Davidson and Ahmad 2003). Political instability in the country, corruption at different levels, use of top down methodological approach are some of the reasons behind failure of most of the rural development initiatives (Lodhi *et al.,* 2006).The overall impact of different rural development programmes and projects on poverty alleviation and in addressing the real needs and problems of the poor remained minimal as can be seen from low Human Development Index of the country (UNDP, 2011) and increasing rural urban divide (Chaudhry, *et al.,* 2012; IFPRI, 2008). In rural areas the emphasis of most of the interventions remained mostly on the large and medium farmers while small farmers, landless labourers and tenants had not given due importance in these programmes (Shahbaz *et al.,* 2010; World Bank, 2007), regardless of the fact that majority of the farmers in Pakistan are small farmers (Ghafoor *et al.,* 2010). By and large, the rural development in Pakistan is characterized by inconsistent, politically motivated short term projects without any proper feedback (Rehman, 2005).

General failure of state interventions and policies in reducing rural poverty and improving livelihoods as well as in delivering basic services (such as health, education, water and sanitation etc.) to the rural community resulted in the emergence of civil

society organizations (CSOs) in the form of NGOs, professional associations, religious groups and other organizations to induce competition and to make the state agencies more accountable (Rehman, 2006; Shaukat, 2007; Zaidi, 2005; ESCAP, 2001). Likewise many rural support programmme (RSPs) network started work around the concept of participatory rural development (RSPN, 2010). These RSPs have taken many initiatives to provide job and income generation activities through community organizations (COs) to upgrade the economic conditions of rural community (Riaz *et al.,* 2012). The important rationale behind the success of these programmes is the identification and prioritization of specific local household or community needs or demands, which was not addressed in the previous rural development initiative (RSPN, 2010).

Nevertheless, despite intensive efforts of State, NGOs and RSPs in the rural areas of Pakistan, little success has been gained in the reduction of poverty and hunger (Shaukat, 2007) and majority of the poor and food insecure still resides in rural areas (IFPRI, 2008). There exists distinct resistance in the working of NGOs in Pakistan by the religious groups/organizations who argue that they (NGOs) are extending the western agenda in the country and they are working against the socio-cultural norms of Pakistani rural society (Iqbal, 2006; Rehman, 2006). Similarly formal and informal social groups/organizations and so-called social movements claim that they are deeply rooted in the traditional and religious culture of the province, and that they are in a better position to address the issues related to prevailing rural poverty and inequality in the marginalized areas (Bano and Nair, 2007). These organizations and movements sometimes even challenge the state departments in providing basic services to the rural communities (Kirmani and Zaidi, 2010; Iqbal and Siddiqui, 2008). Other than organizations, culturally rooted civil society groups also claim that they are in a better position to provide the real needs of the poor (Iqbal *et al.,* 2004). In KP province there exist conflicts between state and non-state actors with regard to access over natural resources and non-state institutions like to play an important role in resolving these conflicts (Watto *et al.,* 2010).

In this milieu the main objectives of the paper are to identify different organizations and groups interacting with each other at different levels for specific purposes (such as rural development) and to see whether such organizations have potential to form a social movement through networks and coordination with each other. The paper also intends to analyze the role of these non-state institutes in delivery of services to the community.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

There are different stages of social movements as pointed out by De La Porta and Diani, (2006) and at every stage its popularity and success depend on the involvement of organizations and groups in the form of networks (Christiansen, 2009). These organizations have the capacity to undertake collective action in the common interest of community and to empower them on sustained basis (Veltmeyer, 2004). Such organizations contribute considerably in creating public voice through their campaigns and social mobilization programmes through efficient social networks (Pandha and Pattnaik, 2003). The self-help groups also address the issues of poverty and inequality (Patterden, 2010). This paper takes this concept and intends to analyze the organizations vis-à-vis rural development and social movements. In Pakistan many civil society organizations especially the grassroots level organizations have made significant contributions in recent years to poverty reduction, social welfare and the development of civil society as a whole (Pakistan Center for Philanthropy, 2007). These organizations are usually based at union council (UC) level established from the clusters of informal community based groups or organizations. These support organizations serve as the mediators and link between two parties i.e. formal and informal institutions and community groups (RSPN, 2007).

2.   Methodology

The study was conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan (formerly known as North West Frontier Province). Though, the province is endowed with the natural resources but poverty and food insecurity in the region, particularly in the mountainous areas, is relatively high (SDPI, 2009). Hazara division which consists of 5 districts was purposefully selected as case study area for the present research keeping in view the diversity of socio-economic conditions of community and presence and engagement of many NGOs as well as local groups and organizations including religious organizations in community welfare work. From Hazara division, districts Abbotabad and Mansehra were randomly selected. As first stage of the research an inventory of organizations working in the study area was prepared by using a checklist. Those organizations were selected which are involved in the provision of basic services, advocacy, capacity building etc. At the 2nd stage the working of these organizations were studied through qualitative and quantitative interviews.

Quantitative data were collected by face to face interviews from heads or the representatives of organizations; while qualitative data were collected through key informant interviews (e.g. local residents, head of social welfare department and agriculture department, representatives of local social and religious groups, heads of farmer organizations etc). For this purpose twenty (20) key informant interviews were

conducted for the collection of data during year 2012 and 2013.

3.   Results and discussion

3.1   Typology of organizations/groups

The organizations working in the study region can broadly be classified into three main categories.

Rural development/human rights: Rural development is a complex phenomenon and the recent approaches to livelihoods have changed its nature (Scoones, 2009). In this changing context the locally originated community organizations play an important role in determining and prioritizing the local community needs and determining goals towards sustainable rural development (Pandha and Pattnaik, 2003). These non-state institutions have effective capacity in developing a concrete strategy to reduce poverty (Rashidpour and Hosseini, 2010).

In the study area many organizations are engaged in rural development and human rights related activities. Majority of these organizations like *Hashar Association, Siaban Development Organization, Skyn Welfare Organization, Dost Welfare foundation, IDEALS, Yarana Welfare Organization* etc. involve in delivering community related services such as advocacy campaigns, training, education (support to schools), health, supply of drinking water, disaster management etc. These organizations were found to be locally originated and worked only in the Hazara region. Similarly at village level community based organizations (CBOs) were also found to be involved in local community development initiatives like pavement of roads and streets, provision of clean drinking water to the community. Some larger organizations like *Aurat (woman) Association* and Childs Rights and Advocacy Network were involved in raising voice and rights of most vulnerable and neglected masses of rural society of KP. In this network, representatives from most of the civil society organizations, groups and state departments participate. Other than the formal and registered organizations, some informal groups and associations were also found in the study area like *Anjuman-e-Kashtkariane Hazara* (Association of Farmers in Hazara), *Pakistan Kissan Ittehad* (Farmers Union), Sustainable Agriculture Action Group, *Dahi Ijtami Triqiati Council* (Rural Participatory Development Council), Tobacco Growers Association, Tea Growers Association etc. These informal groups and associations were involved in raising the voice of local farmers, peasant groups, landless labourers and fighting against the existing structure of asset and resource distribution as well as rights of producers means farming community.

Cultural Identity: Traditional cultures are often perceived as positively associated with sustainable development in the perspective of civil society organizations. Realizing the importance of cultural values and pattern, Ahmed (2008) stated that these cultural patterns and practices of a specified target group is one of the important variables for development planners during the process of designing development programmes. It provides a sense of identity for rural communities. This identity assists mutual understandings about, traditions, values and interests to improve well-being of community (Brenan, 2009). Local culture can also use to mobilize people for their common interests (Brennan, 2005).

In the study region (Hazara), there are informal networks with the claims that they raise the voice of the people of Hazara. The qualitative interviews revealed that the main rational behind the emergence of these social networks was injustice regarding unequal distribution and allocation of resources to the rural people of the province. Among these networks *Hazara Quomi Mohaz* (Hazara National Front) and *Tahrek-e-Haqooke Hazara* (Hazara Rights Movement), *Tahrek-e-Soba Hazara* (Hazara Province Movement) were found as the leading ones. The representatives of *Tahrek-e-Soba Hazara* demand that there should a separate province comprising of all the districts come under Hazara region. During discussion, an activist of that movement said:

"Our region is full of natural resources (forests) and important dams upon which whole of country's agriculture depends but no share or royalty is given to our region. Our region is most neglected one. All the people have to go to Peshawar for their official work as whole of the provincial administration and heads of public offices are in Peshawar. We faced a lot of difficulty in this regard so we demand a separate province for the betterment of our citizens"

Recently, in 2010 the movement rose to prominence again under the leadership of local leaders for a separate identity in the form of separate province as in April, 2010 the name of the province had changed from NWFP to KP which created problems in the region as majority of the people in that used to speak languages other than Pushto (Khan, 2012). While interviewing, a resident of Mansehra said:

The government has changed the name of the province due to the reason that majority of the people are Pushto speakers. But by assigning this name the identity of Hazarwals (the people living in Hazara region) has finished. For our separate identity the government should also announce a new province with the name Hazra province as the provincial as well as central government is using all the resources of our region.

Religious identity: Among various principles of social life religious identity occupies the main central position (Mahajan and Jodhka, 2009). In Pakistan majority of the voluntary welfare organizations were found to be religiously inspired (Iqbal and Siddiqui, 2008). Similarly Bano (2005) conducted a survey of about 20

social non-profit organizations and concluded that 80 % of the initiators of these organizations were religiously motivated to serve the needy and poor community.

In the study area our results showed that besides secular organizations some religiously rooted organizations and groups were also working for the rural communities. Qualitative interviews revealed that these groups and organizations were against the working of NGOs in the area as one of the imam misjad (head of mosque) in a remote village of tehsil Oghi (district Mansehra), commented;

NGOs especially foreign funded organizations also have hidden agenda besides developmental tasks in the area. They are working against our cultural and social norms.

The main religious organizations working in the area include *Al-Khidmat Foundation, Flahe Insaniat Foundation, Edara Tudreesul Quran.* Other than the organized and registered organizations some village level or area level local religious committees are also working with different names like *Khidmat committee, matma committee.* The main source of motivation behind the working of these religious groups and organizations was found to be the religion. These religious groups and organizations in collaboration with different political parties collaborate with each other for some specific purposes. The best of this interaction was the establishment of *Difa-e-Pakistan Council* which is a coalition of more than 40 religious and political parties (Firdous, 2012). With reference to KP province various religious organizations worked for the welfare of people but with little success (Rauf, 2006). But it was found during qualitative discussion with local religious leaders of and representatives of religious organizations argued that:

Our working strategy is compatible with the local cultural norms, values and traditions. We are representing the actual needs and demands of mostly marginalized and deprived section of society for example we support to needy and poor people in the field of education and health sector. In our medical campus doctors provide services on voluntary basis and we provide services to the poor community without any fee or charges.

3.2   Operational area of organizations

Data were also collected regarding operational and working areas of these organizations and the data in this regard is tabulated as in (Table 1).

The data presented in Table 1 showed that operational and working area of majority (42.1%) of the organizations was both urban and rural localities. However, organizations working under the theme of agriculture (agricultural development) were purely rural based. The working areas of religious

organizations like *Al-Khitmat foundation, Filah-e-Insniat Foundation, Al-Huda Islamic movement, Idara Tudrees-ul-Quran* were working both in rural as well as urban localities.

Table 1: Distribution of the organizations according to their operational area

Operational area	Percentage (%)
Rural	31.6
Urban	26.3
Both	42.1
Total	**100.00**

3.3 Status of staff of organization

The civil society organization, who engaged in variety of social welfare and development oriented activities mostly rely on both voluntary and paid staff work. The data regarding the status of staff of organizations was collected and given in figure 1: The data presented in figure 1 showed that
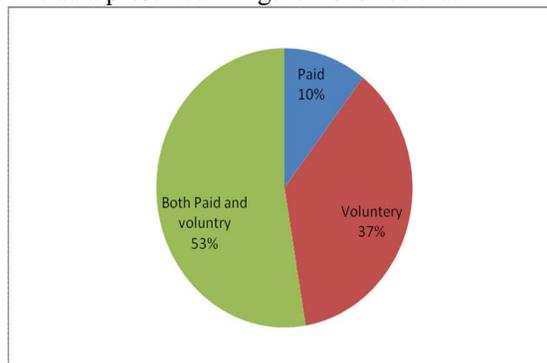
**Figure 1: Status of staff of organizations**

53.00% of the organizations had both paid and voluntary staff for executing different projects and activities related to rural development or welfare of the local community. And 37.00% of the organizations had exclusively relied on voluntary staff for their work only 10.00% organizations had paid staff. These findings showed that in social organizations voluntary staff plays a key and important role. In connection with the results of present study Jantzi *et al.,* (2008) concluded that social organizations often rely volunteers for their short as well as long term institutional objectives.

3.4 Rural development activities rendered by civil social organizations (CSOs)

The local level organizations were also found involved in a variety of tasks related to rural development, which are given in the figure given in figure 2.

The figure 2 showed that majority of the organizations surveyed were involved in charity related activities followed by educational activities, advocacy, emergency relief services, health services etc. The

organizations who were working in the rural areas were found intensively involved in agriculture related activities like training to farmers, supply of agri. inputs, advocacy, farm forestry and kitchen gardening. Similar observations were also found by Israr *et al.*, (2009), who concluded that village level organizations were mainly involved in agriculture related activities.
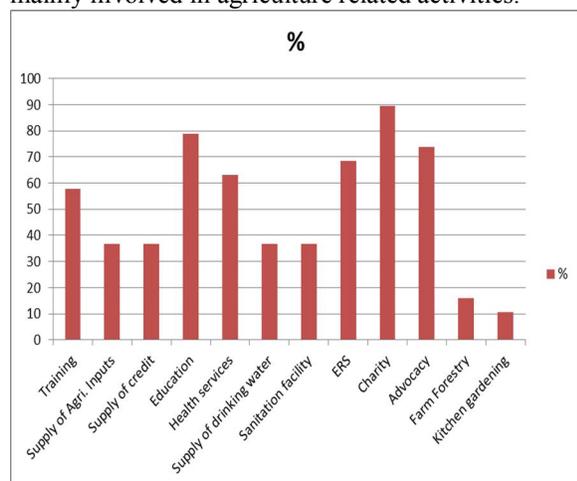
Figure 2: Percentage of involvement of organizations in rural development activities

On the other hand the organizations working in urban centers were involved in education and health related activities. In the provision of health services to the poor and marginalized people of the area religiously rooted organization were at the forefront. In a previous study Rakodi (2007) synthesized that religious organizations are regarded as the important service providers especially in the field of education and health. In case of Pakistan, Bano (2009) reported that among other religiously rooted organizations *Al-Khidmat foundation* and *Al-Khidmat Welfare Society* are engaged in providing services to the humanity without discrimination on any basis. Among these services emphasis was given on educational, health and emergency services. It was also found that in providing religious education especially to female community of urban areas *Al-Huda* religious Islamic movement played a leading role.

Regarding provision of services most of the respondents from these organizations claimed that they are the real and actual representatives of local needs and demands of people. It was pointed out by the respondents during qualitative discussions that not only material or economic wellbeing of rural people but also non-material wellbeing (e.g. voice/power, dignity, social justice etc.) was also the main indicators of reducing poverty and inequality. In this regard these local organizations also claimed that they address the non- material wellbeing to the community other than

the material wellbeing. They claimed that they work and provide material as well as non-material wellbeing services to only poor and marginalized within socio-economic culture of the society. The staff of majority of the local organizations and groups said that our main emphasis is not the service delivery as it is the responsibility of the state to provide basic services to the people, we only launch advocacy campaigns for the rights and obligations of the marginalized and deprived sections of society.

3.3 Networking and interaction

Majority of the organizations concentrating on social mobilization on important issues like human rights, women empowerment, education and implementation of state rural development programmes through their intensive campaigns, community mobilization and networking. These organizations play an important role in building rapport with the community and mobilize them (Villi, 2006). However, in some cases local level groups in an organized manner commonly known as social movement organizations (SMOs) started working on some community related issues just like a social movement as in case of Philippines where local groups opposes the scheme of dam on the river (Earle, 2004). In this context, in the study area *Saibaan* which is now working as an NGO at local level but the point of start of their journey was the local campaign for the establishment of local library under the administration of district government as one of the senior official stated during discussion.

Organizations as well as local groups play an important role in building linkages between individuals that increase effective socializations among communities. The local level organizations serve as a link between local residents and existing political system (Roman and Moore, 2004). The local level groups joined together or coalesced with other groups into an organization with a much broader support to achieve specific goals to from a movement which (Hilhorst, 2003). In the present study it was analyzed that in most of the cases these organizations had strong bonding and networking with other organizations (at district and provincial level) on different issues e.g. for child rights, women rights, rights of forest users and owners, rights of growers and landless labourers. The best example of this interaction was found in Child Rights and Advocacy Networking (CRANK), in which people from different civil society organizations, as well as state departments, journalists participate. Regarding rights of farmers and landless peasants and labourers Anjumun-e-kashtkarane Hazara, Pakistan Kissan Ittehad and Sustainable Agriculture Action Group, Tobacco and Tea growers associations integrate and collaborate with each other. Regarding this

interaction and collaboration one of the farmer activists said that:

For the rights of farmers the platform of Anjumun-e-kashtkarane is working, the main focus of our struggle is on the issues of marketing and rights of landless labourers. Our demand to the government is that the economic wing must regulate policies regarding prices of vegetables and fruits, on which majority of our farmer's livelihoods depend just like in the case of Tobacco. Regarding tobacco growers association we have members from all over the country. But the problem is the funding. The members didn't contribute membership as well as annual fee to run the matters of association.

But it was found that due to the limited resources and funds the interactions of these groups were found weak which inhibit their efficiency. Keeping in view the present results Opare, (2007) also reported that informal small groups and organizations commonly known as community based organizations provide a variety of social welfare services for the development of rural communities but due to the lack of interaction and linkages between other local organizations and large institutions, their service delivery efficiency becomes ineffective. These groups show a reaction against a particular situation which is unacceptable for them (Earle, 2004).

Conclusions and implications

It was concluded that local non state institutions/social organization which are locally rooted related to rural development are the key players in addressing the issues of poverty and inequality. These organizations working in the study region can be broadly classified into three categories. Both rural and urban areas were the operational areas of majority of these organizations and mostly these organizations relied on volunteers. In most of the cases, at district and provincial level, these organizations had linkages and networking with other organizations on different issues e.g. for child rights, women rights, rights of forest users and owners, rights of growers, landless labourers and also the issues of poverty and inequality in the region. These linkages and interactions are also helpful raising voice of community on the platform of a social movement leading of rural development practices. These culturally rooted organizations should be streamlined in the rural development process.

Acknowledgement

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