IN SEARCH OF REALITY:
PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC GOOD
GOVERNANCE THROUGH CIVIL SOCIETY

MD. AL-AMIN

Abstract
Good governance as a concept has drawn a sweeping public attention since 1990s. Civil society, as a non-state actor, has been gaining prominence day by day for accelerating the movement of democratization in many developing countries, while Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) as components of civil society are also making their considerable efforts to advance this process. The main objective of this paper is to explore the linkages between civil society and democratic good governance, and also to appraise the role of NGOs in promoting the democratic good governance through their initiatives.

Introduction
The idea of civil society as a debatable issue among academics and scholars has become more prominent in political and developmental parlance in the early 1990s. This is mostly due to successive waves of democratization across the developing countries. Political scientists and some other development practitioners have come to the realization that it is not just the state institutions that essentially ensure a high standard of democratic governance but also the civil society has the role to play. The concept of civil society can be applied in order to change and enhance the relationship between citizens and state as well as the policy formulation and its implementation in the state sphere. In the present era of globalization state is essentially important, and at the same time market economy, while civil society and other transnational forces are increasingly and equally influential as well because all these factors have led the state to play a role to promote the national interests in relation with the international funding institutions. Now for the developing countries, the concern is to strengthen the role of the states and enhance the efficiency of the state apparatus through good governance in order to cope with the force of globalization and to achieve development goals.

Good governance, a much talked about issue, generally, encompasses a broad range of practices that maximize the common good. Some of the attributes of good governance are democratic practices, participation, rule of law and respect for human rights, transparency and accountability. Civil society here is an important force of democratization process because it provides a vital link between citizens and the state. It also creates an environment that can be used to enhance community bond and decision-making, which is vital to civic participation, and also promotes its development. Therefore, the role of civil society cannot be ignored in any case considering its contributions to the governance system. The paper focuses on various conceptual arguments of civil society and tries to explore as to how civil society and democratic good governance are linked to each other, and thus, civil society plays a role in ensuring its practices. Moreover, the role of NGOs as components of civil society is under assessment so as to discover their contributions to expedite the ongoing movement of democratization in developing countries. Here in this paper an attempt also has been made to address the major challenges for civil society in this era of globalization.

Clarifying Key Concepts
The role of civil society is gradually increasing in the current world of globalization, and hence the horizon of civil society is also expanding. The discourse of good governance has an inherent cooperation between civil society and political society, between the state and citizens. From realistic point of view, “civil society and its building blocks cannot replace a state; they may have a complementary role by engaging government/bureaucracy to be more productive and efficient” (Parnini, 2006: 189). Thus, civil society has been instrumental to enhance good governance in developing countries. NGOs also have been development partners of the governments and advocating for democratic good governance in many developing countries. In this regard it is important to clarify and understand the meaning of the terms civil society and good governance and their relationship in this context.

Civil Society: Conceptual Clarification
The term civil society owes its origins to the word ‘civics’, which derives from the Latin word ‘civis’ meaning citizen. Both the Romans and Greeks had the same terms meaning political society where citizens being active in the political life of the state helped shape its institutions and policies (World Health Organization, 2002). Historical evidence shows that as a term civil society has a rich, evocative and long history of political philosophy. As a result, there is no consensus and universally accepted definition about civil society or organizations formed to represent civil society, but one way to think of it is in terms of activities undertaken for
the public good by groups or individuals in the space between the family, the state and the market (Salamon and Anheier, 1998). Civil society also can be defined as “the domain of social organization within which voluntary associative relations are dominant” (Warren, 1999: 14). But in a modern society definitions based on simple state-society relations are not sufficient to conceptualize civil society. Because in this case they fail to identify power relative autonomy of the market as well as fail to identify the distinctive means of civil society organization. Thus, civil society can be thought of as the domain of associations that are based on associative relations, and which shade into associations that interact with states, market and intimate relations (ibid). Some theorists consider civil society as a space which is independent of the state and the market, while other compares it with the voluntary sector of organization (Keane, 1998, in Parnini, 2006). After a long historical journey, civil society has been an important agent though which people can express their voices and defend against their rights and can resist the tyranny of the governments. According to the London School of Economics:

“Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations, community groups, women’s organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups” (LSE, 2004, in Wood, 2007: 2).

Civil society which is also considered as the third sector or the non-profit sector is used to describe all aspects of society, and that the boundary extends beyond the realm of public and private sector (Pharr, 2003, in Teegen et al., 2004). Brown et al. (2000, in Teegen, 2004: 664), defines “civil society as an arena of association and action independent of the state and the market in which citizens can organize to pursue purposes that are important to them, individually and collectively”. The common understanding regarding the civil society is that it represents general public interests providing the social power of its networks of people where their ideas, information, services and expertise are used to press forward the interests of people by seeking to influence the state and the market.

Uphoff (1995) argues NGOs not being representative enough to the reality of civil society suggesting that it should be seen as an operational space between the public and the private. (Uphoff, 1995, in Parnini, 2006). But with the change and demand of time NGOs have taken the position of civil society by its own rights, making less clear divisions between what and what NGOs are not. However, civil society is a group of people in a country having regular concern for the social and political affairs of that country not being involved in the political parties. NGOs as being synonymous with civil society by the western donors are engaged in the functions that the way civil society performs, though some scholars considers NGOs as one of the small parts of civil society. In addition, an array of civic elements is active in the public sphere. They are trade unions, foundations, faith-based and religious groups, community-based organizations, social movements and networks and ordinary citizens. De Tocqueville (1990), and very recently Robert Putnam (1999), have seen the civil society as a network of association which safeguards the democratic space between the state and the family (ibid). Civil society as a non-state, non-profit, voluntary organization constituted by people within the social sphere of civil society has been gaining increasingly accepted understanding of the term, and this organization draws from community, neighborhood, work, social and other connections, which have become a common channel for people seeking to exercise citizenship and contribute to social and economic change (World Health Organization, 2002).

However, it is mentionable here that the boundaries between local, national and international civil societies are gradually becoming nebulous and loose due to the effect of globalization, which has essentially brought the world much closer to the people. In other words, this global civil society has been a platform where people argue about, campaign, negotiate about or lobby for the arrangements that presupposes to shape global developments. (Kaldor, 2003). There are many civil societies at global levels with a range of issues offering the possibilities to participate in debate about the much talked about global issues such as democracy and good governance. The concept civil society here in this paper stands for a wide range of civil society actors including NGOs.

State, Market and Civil society: Fuzzy Boundaries

The state, in theory, can be separated from non-state actors and that non-state actors refer to both the market and civil society, while the market refers to the private for-profit sector, civil society actors known by their not-for profit operations. In practice, the classification between state and non-state, profit and not-for profit is blurring. The boundary between the market, civil society and the state are nebulous, and even the interests of those civil society are not divorced from the state or market.
civil society, by and large, is not self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or a set of shared rules. It is distinct from society in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state and hold the state officials accountable" (Diamond, 1994, in Rooy, 1998: 20). The civil society, by and large, is not the different entity from the state and market that works for the collective interests through interaction with two other forces-state and the market from its own position and role.

This definition means civil society as space for action where three actors-state, market and civil society create an interactive space and through these process collective benefits of the society is pursued where civil society is the passive beneficiaries, but active participants. American writer Larry Diamond views civil society as the sphere that keeps the state in check, and civil society is therefore:

“The realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating (largely), self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or a set of shared rules. It is distinct from society in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state and hold the state officials accountable” (Diamond, 1994, in Rooy, 1998: 20). The civil society, by and large, is not the different entity from the state and market that works for the collective interests through interaction with two other forces-state and the market from its own position and role.
party democracies have yet to translate the basic principles of good governance, civil society has an important role in which it can work to ensure democratic values as well as to bring and establish a socially integrated indigenous notion of good governance. Civil society as the “third leg” of governance structure is perceived to be a potent force having the capability of creating the necessary additional pressure on government to give it incentive to take the steps—such as to fight corruption, a common bad, effectively, and to ensure good governance (Parnini, 2006). A strong civil society can bring about a substantial change in the sustaining of democracy and it can also advocate a diverse set of interests in society. While the state represents the broad interests of society at large, individual society groups have a responsibility to advocate the interest that they represent. This is the way that a strong civil society can provide a balance in society and ensure that power exercised by the government is not abused, and thus the very notion can be driven by checks and balances. All these dynamic functions of civil society can bring about positive change to promote a system of good governance on the basis of mutual accountability. Therefore, the role of civil society within a country can truly become a part of the current waves of democratization process worldwide, more specifically in Africa and Asia to cope with the challenges of having good governance in order to have a sustainable society and achieve development goals. Howell and Pearce (2001) point to the positive contributions of civil society toward development, and an important democratic check on the state, while Robert Putnam (1993a, in Howell and Pearce, 2001: 47) argues that “democratic government is strengthened, not weakened, when it faces a vigorous civil society”.

Civil society can act as an important source of knowledge and expertise for governance, and most successfully espouse the democratic governance, the essential issue that needs to be taken into account. One of the glaring successes of civil society may be of pressuring the government of a given country to pass legislation protecting the citizens against the tyranny of the government. In general, developing democratic governance is both very much political and dependent to some extent on the state of democratic governance. Civil society as a vehicle for change and a common ground for the voice of the people plays a pivotal role in developing and sustaining democracy, particularly in countries undergoing democratic transition—such as those moving from military rule to democratic governance (Foelsong and Phillips, 2003, in Ball et al., 2006).

In Asian studies it is also observed that civil society has an important role to play in helping to develop the agenda for reform, and prodding governments to take efficacious measures in this regards. The country where the civil society is vibrant tends to have more wide-ranging governance related reform and a viable way to make the democratization process, though some considerable variations remain between countries. Civil society is becoming more engaged in those Latin American and Caribbean countries, with much focus on justice and public security, which arguably creates a space for people to have an opportunity to enjoy democratic freedom. Transparency as a component of good governance is designed to increase citizen control and prevent corruption through available information to citizens regarding the activities of the governments by way of civil society. Civil society as a pressure group in a state puts much emphasis on the need to bring the popular voice into decision-making by opening up channels to civil society and decentralizations of governments. In this process state is kept under pressure to become more active and effective for the sake of people's rights. With regard to many developing countries, it is understandable that increasing number of citizens have considered civil society as a way to enhance public participation, consultation, transparency and accountability in global governance. Civil society might enhance democracy in global governance through public education activities and, also, by giving voice to stakeholders, and at the same time mobilize the people to increase the public transparency of governance. Moreover, the enhancement of democracy by civil society is perceived to foster a more general basis of democratic rule. Civil society activities are regarded as the cornerstone for more democratic global world. Most of the current civil society initiatives impressively reveal these positive contributions (Scholte, 2007). In this fashion civil society is active in supporting participation, advocating for transparency and accountability and defending human rights, working together with government and international community so as to reach the goal of a more democratic world.

**NGO as Component of Civil Society**

As the last century was approaching to a close, the size, profile, extents and diversity of NGOs operating in developing countries was proliferated. Those NGOs are serving a wide variety of purposes for the people and society operating in different spheres of life. The relevance of NGOs is focused much in their recognition by some international bodies like United Nations, European Union, and African Union, bilateral and multilateral organizations. The popularity of NGOs are gaining momentum as governments of some developing countries have allegedly failure to reach out their proper services to the grassroots due to massive corruption, mismanagement, and the lack of transparency and accountability. As a
result, NGOs occupy a good space as substitute to governments in many of the developing countries. It is, sometimes, said about the NGOs, especially foreign NGOs that “they are no evil, they are not corrupt, they are for the poor and above all are the third eye” (Ezeoha, 2006: 128). NGOs by their missions, visions and structures, have been turned into key agents of development. In some countries NGOs assume various forms, and operate programs almost parallel with government departments and agencies (Baneke, 2000, in Ezeoha, 2006). They are treated as the not-for-profit non-governmental organizations, and essentially a part of civil society. According to the working definition of World Bank:

“NGOs are private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services or undertake community development” (World Bank, 1996, in Ezeoha, 2006: 128). This way NGOs have been indispensable as partners in development for the governments of many developing countries to serve the voices of the weak and the poor, and fruitfully protect their rights. Moreover, it also has been reasoned out that “countries around the world are seeking to encourage the growth of an independent voluntary not-for-profit sectors—sometimes known as civil society—to serve as partners—with the government and for profit sectors—for social and economic development” (Karla, 1999, in Ezeoha, 2006: 132).

NGOs are helpful in different ways to pursue the common good for people: work as providers of legal implementation to the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of association, create strong support for the institutional procedures of democracy, enforce appropriate principles of transparency and accountability. Moreover, NGOs arguably remain the preferred vehicle of development assistance, democratization and participatory development by most donor agencies (Robinson, 1997, Clark, 1991, in Ncube, 2005). Furthermore, the role of NGOs in participatory governance is to provide innovative instruments that enhance the voice of the poor and access to decision-making process and resources (Clark, 1991, in Ncube, 2005). NGOs are, therefore, seen as important for the institutionalization of democratic accountability similar to those which emerged in the liberal democracies of the west about one century ago (Baccaro, 2001).

The dimension and diversity of actions that NGOs perform lead us to argue that “democracy flourishes if it is sustained from below by vibrant civil society” (Putnam, 1993, in Baccaro, 2001: 10). In this process, NGOs as service providers are closest to the local people and they can understand their felt needs, and, therefore, mobilize them to be organized for their collective interests. Furthermore, they are the contributors to keep the elected officials ‘on their toes’ and are, therefore, key ingredients of democratic development in developing countries (Baccaro, 2001). Streeten (1997, in Baccaro, 2001: 10) defines NGOs, arguing that the definition of NGO is not very different from that of civil society, as follows:

“NGOs or private voluntary organizations [...] are non-profit seeking organizations; some religious, others secular; some indigenous, others foreign, some professional, other lay. Their principal aim is to contribute to the reduction of human sufferings and to development in poor countries, [...] They are part of the national and global civil society”.

Civil society plays important role in strengthening the democratic process and implementing democratic initiatives. Thus, NGOs have turned into important factors to restore the political democracy. They also instill political and right-based insights into citizens with offering them an opportunity to contribute intellectual resources or services for their community or country. As part of civil society, NGOs can foster political change and that change can be considered to promote democratization (Fowler, 1993). World Bank argues to have a vital function of intermediary, or service oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community based organizations (CBOs) in improving accountable government, inter alia, helping to build more plural institutional structure (World Bank, 1989, in Fowler, 1993). The most leading African funding agencies proclaims that NGOs “can exert pressure on public officials for better performance and greater accountability” (World Bank, 1989, in Fowler, 1993: 326).

Thus, NGOs as components of civil society have entrenched their position to play significant role in order to bring about a change in the political democratic governance and contribute to the democratization process in many developing countries, especially where political situation is in transition from authoritarian regime to democracy or in countries where democracy is still in nascent stage.

Challenges for Civil Society

In the current world of globalization, the challenges for civil society have to be taken into account. As civil society is becoming increasingly prominent at local, national and international levels, they are facing questions by the governments and the critics of civil society about their legitimacy, transparency and accountability such as it does not take the
high level of public trust that it enjoys for granted. Thus the debate for civil society is now-a-days gaining momentum, and a lot of civil society actors are engaged with accountability challenges. Since the early 1990s, the world experienced a rise in the transnational movement as part of the comprehensive effect to democratize political space and to overcome the democratic deficits around the developing world. These movements are difficult to grasp because it is not quite evident that how they are organized. One of the major challenges coming from within civil society is the challenges of power and power imbalances. Civil society as vibrant and diverse group embraces highly structural groups such as trade unions, while this diversity poses questions about whose voices are heard, how resources are accessed and distributed and who is the exact representative (Naidoo, 2008). Besides, if the civil society forges alliance with the groups of different areas of interests, then it may also prevent from achieving the common goals.

Critics have identified and focused on the vulnerable aspects of civil society that “they called upon civil society groups to ‘practise what they preach’ by instituting high standards of legitimacy, transparency and accountability. It is often said that civil society groups don’t represent the views of anyone but themselves, and if they are accountable at all, it is usually upwards to their funders rather than downward to those they purportedly serve” (Naidoo, 2008: 4). Civil society is confronting another challenges in the current world that is very much related to the so called ‘war on terror’. Some countries are enforcing laws as part of international agenda on the war against terrorism, where civil society is the prime target of attack on the implementation of this laws (Brown and Jagadananda, 2007), creating a daunting and stifling situation for civil society to be vocal, vibrant and vigilant. Moreover, civil society participation in actions concerning politics and democracy has a partisan tendency in some developing countries like Bangladesh. As a result, their prospect in contributing to democracy is not encouraging and emerging as a strong vigilant force is challenging (Tasnim, 2007). It is also evident that in most of the developing countries, civil society organizations are somehow aligned with political parties that creates confusion among people about their neutrality and, hence, lose their confidence in civil society. This way civil society faces challenges for being supposedly engaged mainly in the practice and promotion of ideas and the interests of a particular kind of politics instead of representing collective interests of the people (Quadir, 2003, in Tasnim, 2007). Another crucial challenge concerning the autonomy of the civil society is that too much dependency on the funders or the governments may ruin its natural growth as a fully autonomous organization. Likewise, some community-based civil society organizations in developing countries remain active so long as they receive funds from the governments or from other agencies. In addition, corruption as an all-pervasive phenomenon may be another challenge for civil society to exist with high standard of morality.

Conclusions

Civil society as an agent for the purpose of people’s wellbeing and interests, provides them with the capacity to organize collective actions, and also provides the resisting capacity of people against what are not in their favor, through the vote or gathering and disseminating information, sometimes through demonstrations, strike, civic movements in order to increase the transparency of the state. Civil society, as representing citizens, is importantly playing the role to secure democratic good governance at the local, national and international levels. Democracy essentially requires governmental openness so that the public and interest groups can witness the decision making process, and thus, individuals can successfully criticize the actions of the ruling party and bound it accountable. Likewise, civil society as a pressure group can also hold governments to their ultimate responsibility of protecting citizens and safeguarding their rights. In the agenda of democratic good governance, the civil society concept is viewed on the assumption that power and tyranny is associated with the state, freedom and liberty falls in the realm of civil society which lead to a kind of romantic view of civil society where the existence of institutions outside the state become a basis to assume that “state power is cured and greater democratization is taken place” (Mathur, 2001: 3). Now, there is an accepted view that civil society initiatives and engagements pave the way for greater opportunities for people to raise their voices with regard to their felt needs, rights and demands and freedom of choice other than some exceptions in many developing countries, especially in neo-patrimonial state in Africa where civil society is notoriously weak. In addition, civil society, as an association, generates social capital to strengthen and widen democracy, and it is also assumed that civil society fosters freedom and liberty of the citizens through mobilizing and awakening them about their democratic rights. Considering all these factors and evidences on the issue in question, a logical conclusion can be drawn that a positive correlation exists between civil society and democratic good governance. More precisely, the actions of vigilant and vociferous civil society have potentially significant impact on the democratic good governance.

The paper also makes some policy recommendations to increase the downward accountability of civil society other than those are their funders.
or the governments as well as ensure transparency by transporting the available information to the public through seminars, symposium, opinion exchange by building partnership with mass media. Legitimacy question regarding civil society may be diminished by the governments’ initiatives to recognize the civil society as a watchdog of the state, which would be supported by the governments, but the autonomy to play its role should be upheld to the full. Considering the growing concern of the rise of global terrorism, governments of the respective countries should adopt some cautionary and effective measures to protect civil society so that it can play its role without fear or any intimidation. Moreover, civil society should stay in safe side from corruption or any other practices, and the like that may denigrate its image, losing the credibility and acceptability among people. Furthermore, the strength of civil society would be enhanced, if it really furthers its efforts to feel the pulse rate of the people, listen to their worlds and understand their voices as being closest to them.

References


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