

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 506

RC 023 747

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TITLE The NGO Sector in Pakistan: Past, Present and Future.
PUB DATE 2002-03-00
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society (46th Orlando, FL, March 6-9, 2002).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Action; Community Organizations; Early Childhood Education; *Economically Disadvantaged; Educational Development; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Human Services; *Nongovernmental Organizations; Poverty; Private Schools; *Rural Development; *Rural Education; Teacher Education; Volunteers; Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS *Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Despite significant developments on the economic front, the Pakistani government's human development efforts have failed to serve the needs of the poor. Whereas the rural poor do not trust government schemes, they do trust nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), most of which are apolitical community-based grassroots organizations accountable to local people. The current government has revived the local council structure. The local councilors appreciate NGO contributions to the development of their areas and are willing to support them. There are several ways that public-private partnerships with NGOs can benefit Pakistan. The outreach capacity of the NGOs can help the government in its efforts to establish community centers for training teachers, managers, and communities. NGOs operate many low-cost private schools in poor and rural areas of Pakistan and have been quite successful in establishing schools for girls. NGOs have also helped with the expansion of government schools and the provision of inservice training to rural teachers. The government has made early childhood education a priority, but has little capacity for material development. NGOs have produced child-centered education materials for private schools and have the capacity to assist the government in this area. Because of their proximity to rural communities, NGOs are also well suited to provide health services to the poor. NGOs have grassroots perspectives, non-bureaucratic approaches, administrative efficiency, innovativeness, and flexibility, but their success depends on a conducive environment of policy, legislation, and funding. (TD)

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The NGO Sector In Pakistan Past, Present and Future

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March 2002

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The NGO Sector In Pakistan

One of the most encouraging developments during the past 50 years is the increased participation of civil society organization in nation building efforts in most countries of the world. Because most civil society organizations tend to be neither political nor abiding to an individualistic ideology, they have been able to improve voluntarism and thus effective community based development programs.

During the past two decades or so, civil society organizations have grown dramatically in diversity, scope and influence. Initially concentrated in the developed democracies of the west, voluntary citizen organizations began to blossom in developed countries in the 1970s and later in the former communist states. The increasing population in the developing countries, and the inability of government agencies to provide services to rural populations are usually cited as some of the reasons for increased involvement of civil society organizations in social service delivery. Nowadays, NGOs are a major contributor to international development efforts.

Emergence of Civil Society Partners in Pakistan

With the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in late 70's and the rush of refugees in Pakistan, several donor organizations began to provide support services to displaced Afghan citizens. This helped many highly educated young Pakistanis to acquire adequately paid jobs in foreign development organizations. By the late 80's and early 90's however, many development agencies, in addition to supporting the Afghan refugees, increased their focus on development efforts for the rural poor within Pakistan. Significant emphasis was paid to establishing a local development sector that would be able to continue the work even after the departure of foreign organizations.

A majority of young people who had joined international organizations and had gained experience in development work went on to establish their own NGOs. By the mid 90's thousands of registered and unregistered NGOs had been established in almost all districts of Pakistan. The increase in the number of NGOs also resulted in a negative trend. As funds were pouring in from all directions into the NGO sector in Pakistan, many interest groups (including several influential politicians) went on to establish spurious NGOs that existed on papers only and did little to uplift the condition of the poor. Consequently, due to covert malpractices of these bogus NGOs, other reputable NGOs also came under fire as the Government started tightening its control on the NGO sector. Notwithstanding

the pressure from the donor community, the Government and other good NGOs, many such fake NGOs were forced to either go out of business or adopt acceptable codes of conduct.

The focus of several NGOs by the mid 90's had shifted from being charity organizations to having a more awareness building and development-oriented modus operandi. However, as the state was considered to be the sole provider of relief services and was not able to do so, several voluntary citizen actions remained committed to charity and relief work. Private voluntary initiatives that sprang up across the country embodied hope for those stricken with abject poverty. Foremost among them was Edhi Foundation, which began as a small dispensary in Karachi and grew into a massive nation-wide network of social services, its branches spread throughout Pakistan. Other successful charity institutions include Marie Adelaide Leprosy Center, Ansar Burni Welfare Trust, Fatimid Foundation, Aurat Foundation and Behbud Foundation, to name a few.¹ Whereas, most organizations remained committed to providing health, education, and civil advocacy support to the poor, some others turned towards more radical ideas such as preparing young boys for *jihad* in local Madrassas.

Today, the citizen organizations form an expanding and diverse community in Pakistan and include grassroots or community-based initiatives, mid-level or intermediary organizations, advocacy and civil rights groups, and support centers. Small community-based or grassroots organizations (including madrassas) constitute the largest number of citizen sector organizations in the country followed by around two hundred intermediary organizations and a handful of capacity building or support institutions such as the NGO Resource Center in Sindh and the Institute for Development Studies and Practice (ISDP) in Balochistan.

Even though NGOs were mushrooming in all cities and population centers of the country, reliable statistics about the organizations in the social sector in terms of actual size and outreach was not available in Pakistan. In 1990, the Planning and Development Division of the Government of Pakistan surveyed registered voluntary organizations and found a total of 8,380 such organizations registered under five different laws². Even today, the registration framework severely limits the availability of reliable data. Documenting the scope, size, history and legal position of citizen sector organizations is a task long overdue. The Aga Khan Foundation has initiated the move by sponsoring

¹ NGORC annual report 2001.

² From NGO Resource Center Annual Report 2000.

the John Hopkins University's Comparative Non-profit Sector Project in Pakistan in collaboration with the Social Policy and Development Center (SPDC). In addition, in wake of September 11 incident, the Government of Pakistan has issued orders to collect data on grassroots charity groups such as the madrassas and other related organizations. It is expected that these efforts would result in availability of reliable data on the NGO sector in Pakistan.

Future of the NGOs and Their Partnership with Donor Agencies:

Pakistan, like many developing countries, has been trapped in a vicious cycle of social and economic strife for more than fifty years of its independent existence. Despite significant developments on the economic front, Pakistan's human development indicators are still among the poorest in the world: 33% of the country's population (45.5 million) lives below the poverty line; only 46% of the population above 15 years of age is literate, and girls' enrollment rates are among the lowest in the South Asia region. Hundreds of thousands of people, especially women, are subjected to day-to-day hardships that no statistics can adequately describe. These issues on one side combined with the very structure of Government operations at the district and sub-district levels that have historically failed to cater to the needs of the poor, have necessitated the involvement of private organizations in the social sector. Whereas, the rural poor tend not to trust the "development schemes" of the Government, they do trust the NGOs who have more permanent presence and therefore accountability towards the locals.

With the devolution plan of the current Government where local council structure was revived in hopes that more program implementation authority and responsibility would now be assigned to communities, it is expected that the role of the grassroots development organization would become more prominent in the coming years. Another positive aspect of the devolution plan is that many local councilors who were elected are young people, without strong attachments to any political establishment, and either had their own small development organizations or have been working for NGOs in their respective areas. These local councilors understand the value of NGOs' contribution to the development of their areas and thus would be willing to encourage donor and Government's support to the NGOs to reach the most rural populations to deliver social services.

Human Development Plan of the Government and the Role of the NGOs:

The Government of Pakistan has established a Human Development Commission whose role is to develop and implement a plan, which would provide education, health services and economic literacy to the poor. The implementation of this program would be a joint effort of the Nazims and their associates who are the elected district managers and District Coordination Officers who are appointed by the Government. According to the Human Development Commission report, social services would be provided to the poor with a special focus on building the capacity of service deliverers and communities to be able to sustain development schemes. In this regard, public-private partnerships would be created with a special emphasis on improving/creating a system that encourages behavioral change among people at all levels. Several donor organizations have committed seed monies to this idea and it would be launched during the coming months.

Given the willingness of the Government to encourage public-private partnerships and the fact that the Government or the NGOs alone cannot carry the whole load, it makes sense to build the capacity of the grassroots NGOs so that they are able to bring the Government and communities together for effective implementation of programs. The grassroots private organizations form the largest segment of the NGO sector in Pakistan, therefore, it is essential that they be supported in their efforts to reach the most rural populations.

Following are some of the areas where NGOs can be utilized to provide services to the poor in an efficient and effective manner.

Capacity Building - Creation of community based learning resource centers is one of the priorities of the current Government. These learning resource centers are envisioned to be established at the district and *thesil* level and would provide decentralized information and capacity building opportunities to teachers, managers and communities. Improved service delivery in social sectors is directly linked to the local level planning and governance mechanisms. The learning resource centers of the Government can use the outreach capacity of the NGOs at the district and *thesil* levels to inform the villages about the development schemes, build community capacity to participate in development efforts and to provide health and education training to teachers, education managers, and health workers. Partnering with NGOs to strengthen the role of learning resource centers is important and beneficial in that many of the NGO workers are young, educated, energetic and

dedicated people who are familiar with the local culture and language. They are also committed to improving the social situation in their respective areas. Supporting these 'sparks' to transfer that enthusiasm to others in their areas would assist in creating true learning communities within rural districts in Pakistan.

Education – As mentioned above, in many places where the Government of Pakistan has not been able to provide educational services, NGOs have filled that gap. Interestingly, parents see no problem in paying for their children's education if they go to a private school that is run by an NGO. In Orangi Town, which is a poor slum in Karachi, 80% of the education is provided by NGOs such as Faran Education Society, Bright Education Society and some subsidiaries of the famous Orangi Pilot Project³. In many rural districts in Balochistan, the most underdeveloped province of Pakistan, several small low-cost private schools have sprung up that are providing adequate education to the children. Interestingly, many girls are also enrolled in these schools. Several education development NGOs, such as the Society for Community Support for Primary Education in Balochistan (the Society) have experimented with support from donor funds that created scholarships for girls, with the establishment of community based rural private schools and have been very successful in their efforts. The Society for example, with assistance from World Bank funds, established more than 50 such community based rural private girls' schools that are still functioning and have subsequently become fully sustainable.

In addition to providing private education, NGOs can also be contracted-out to do the community mobilization work for the expansion of girls' education and management and maintenance of Government schools in rural areas. In this scenario, NGOs could work as a bridge between the Government and the communities and facilitate positive communication between the two. An example of this model is available in Balochistan, where the Society carried out the community mobilization efforts in more than 1500 rural villages where the Government established girls' schools. As the Government officials did not have any experience in community mobilization nor had the desire to reach rural areas on their own, the expertise of the Society in community mobilization and participation was useful in establishing girls' schools. In these community-Government partnerships schools the students' enrollment and teachers' morale was high as compared to those communities where schools were established without community participation.

³ Discussions with the Nazim of Orangi Town, Karachi, 2002

The work of the Society in Balochistan is an excellent example showing that solid partnership between the Government, communities and the NGO can lead to effective education expansion in rural areas.

Another area where NGOs could be utilized in the education sector is teacher training and development. Currently, there are several NGOs that are working in this field. The international donors support most of their efforts. The Teachers Resource Center in Karachi, the Aga Khan Institute of Education and Education Services in Sindh, and the Education Quality Improvement Program in Balochistan are some examples where NGOs' capacity is being utilized to provide regular in-service and cluster based training to rural Government teachers. These organizations are not only supporting rural private teachers but also Government teachers. During a recent evaluation of one of these programs in Balochistan it was reported that the Government district education officers are very happy with NGO's cluster-based training of teachers in Balochistan and want to expand it to other districts also. The participatory training methodologies applied by these NGOs and effective development and use of activity based learning materials by teachers is something of a novelty compared to Government training centers where learning tends to be passive and promotes rote memorization and an autocratic style of teaching. Thus, financing teacher development activities of the NGOs would also ensure quality improvement in rural classrooms and encourage students to continue to attend school regularly.

Early Childhood Education – Every primary school in Pakistan has a “*Kachi*” class, which is equivalent to the Kindergarten in modern education systems. Some studies conducted by the Government Education Departments in some provinces in 1998 showed that as many as 1/3 of children in primary schools were sitting in *Kachi* classes⁴. So detached was *Kachi* class from the regular primary grades that prior to 1998, in many schools, students in *Kachi* classes were not even counted as a part of the student body. As a result, in the absence of an organized early childhood curriculum and child-focused teacher training, many children in Pakistan dropped out of the school between grades *Kachi* through two. In the wake of these findings, one of the seven thrust areas of the new Education Sector Reforms (ESR) plan of Government of Pakistan is the focus on early childhood education. It is being considered the ‘first pillar of EFA’. The 1998-2010 National Education Policy has formally provided recognition to *Kachi* class as a proxy for early childhood education.

⁴ Pakistan Ministry of Education, “Education Sector Reforms Report” 2001

Even though the Government Education Departments have the budgets to pay for teachers' salaries and materials development for early childhood education, there is very little capacity to actually undertake materials development and child-focused teacher training. NGOs, on the other hand, have been experimenting with this issue for about a decade in Pakistan. Groups such as the Teachers' Resource Center, the Book Club, Alif Laila Book Society, Bunyad Education Society and the Aga Khan foundation have produced child centered education materials that are being utilized by private schools in urban slums and rural areas in different parts of Pakistan. These NGOs have the capacity to assist the Government and donors in conceptualizing and implementing early childhood programs in Government schools. It would, therefore, make the best sense to finance the efforts of these organizations to expand the early childhood education and teacher training in Government schools also. It would be significantly beneficial for these NGOs to work in close collaboration with Government teacher training facilities so that there is a process of active learning by Government master trainers and that early childhood education training becomes fully institutionalized in Government teacher training institutes.

Basic Community Level Health – Whereas the primary focus of a majority of the NGOs in Pakistan is education, several of them also have ad hoc health service delivery programs in the rural areas. There are only a handful of well-organized NGOs that are dedicated to health services for the poor. For example, APPNA SEHAT, which is an NGO run by the Association of Pakistani Physicians in North America, has provided excellent health training and services to the communities in several rural districts in NWFP and Punjab provinces. Similarly Edhi Foundation has medical and ambulance facilities in almost all districts in Pakistan.

Because of their proximity to rural communities NGOs are well suited to provide nutrition and health training and other health services to the poor. When supported with adequate equipment, supplies and transportation, these local NGOs can play an important part in providing health services through mobile health units and mid-wife training to rural women.

Conclusion:

Citizen organizations in Pakistan bring with them the additional assets of grassroots perspectives, non-bureaucratic approach, administrative efficiency, innovativeness and flexibility. However, as they work within the constraints of government systems, their success depends on a conducive environment of policy, legislation, human resource development and, most importantly, sustainable funding. A facilitating environment for citizen self-organization is absolutely essential for the long-term success and sustainability of development initiatives in Pakistan.

With the rise in the numbers of citizen organizations, there is an increasing demand to serve their institutional and human capacity development needs. Management of a development NGO is nothing like management of a profit-oriented organization. Even if the NGO sector shares the corporate sector's commitment to professionalism, its ends and means are so fundamentally different that attempts to import management styles from the corporate sector (often as a requirement of donors in the quest for 'efficiency') have failed miserably⁵. Some Pakistani NGOs are struggling to evolve management styles, structures and procedures based on rural development and feminist or human rights concepts, and some donors are supportive of this initiative. But at this point in time there appear to be no clear management models to emulate, and no obvious and quick solutions in this learning process.

It is important for the donor community to assist the NGO sector in Pakistan in developing management models that focus on reflective practices and change management and which balance the needs of the communities and demands of the donors.

⁵ "Understanding Pakistani NGOs" (1999) Cassandra Balchin, Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Center

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Publication Date: March 2002

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