

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY
OF
GILGIT-BALTISTAN
A CASE STUDY OF THE NORTHERN AREAS OF
PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study analyses explore to the paths of constructing and strengthening of civil society organizations and their activities in Gilgit-Baltistan, the Northern Areas of Pakistan. The focus is on the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) since the 1980s. A conceptual framework of civil society and NGO activities and nexus is developed. The empirical analysis is based on NGO documents and interviews with communities and NGOs personnel. Initially, civil society activities focused on availability of physical infrastructure, community development through public- private policy ventures and educational programmes etc. Later the working of NGOs has focused more on issues like gender sensitization, and community empowerment through participatory approaches, etc. These projects are further supported at grassroots level by the establishment a series of community organizations, which work on voluntary basis under the umbrella of project funded NGOs or joint venture programs of GoP and NGOs.

Key Words: Development Studies, Gender Development, Pakistan, Northern Areas, Gilgit-Baltistan, Civil Society, NGOs, Community Empowerment, South and North.

Preface

This is an important and fascinating analysis of civil society developments in a part of the world where few academic studies on civil society have been conducted. Muhammad Shams Mir has with his profound knowledge of Gilgit-Baltistan and an impressive determination successfully completed this Master thesis at Lund University, Sweden. As his supervisor, I have learnt a lot about a part of Pakistan, which I knew very little of before. Muhammad Shams Mir is to be congratulated for this achievement and I hope that this study will find many readers, in Gilgit-Baltistan as well as other parts of the world.

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“NGOs act as pillars of civil society and as forces of democratization”

-----Clark 1995,
de Janvry & Sadoulet
1993, Reilly 1995.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AKRSP	Aga Khan Rural Support Programme
AKES	Aga Khan Education Services
AKHS	Aga Khan Health Services
AKCS	Aga Khan Culture Services
AKHB	Aga Khan Housing Board
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
D.J	Diamond Jubilee (Schools)
FANA	Federally Administered Northern Areas
FMFB	First Micro-Finance Bank
GAD	Gender and Development
GoP	Government of Pakistan
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
IUCN	World Conservation Union (formerly International Union for the Conservation of nature)
KADO	Karimabad Area Development Organization
KKH	Karakoram highway
LB&RD	Local Bodies and Rural Development
LDOs	Local Development Organizations
LHVs	Lady Health Visitors
LGRD	Local Government and Rural Development
LSOs	Local Support Organizations
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NAs	Northern Areas (Pakistan)
NADP	Northern Areas development Project
NAED	Northern Areas Education Department
NAHD	Northern Areas Health Department
NGOs	Non - Governmental Organizations
P&D	Planning and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

VOs Village organizations
WID Women in Development
WOs Women's Organizations
WWF World Wide Fund for Nature

1 Introduction

Today human society is facing a number of challenges regarding the rapidly changing modes of life. For the last more than two decades, the entire world is witnessing the dramatic changes in world's social systems which have caused to replace the traditional practices, understandings and perceptions. More specifically the concept of development and phenomenon pertinent to it has swiftly permeated across the globe. Development practitioners have realized to strengthen or to establish a viable civil society, which may support to promote their development activities through different channels, more specifically via NGOs. In this regard, the participatory development (Mohan, 2002:49), community empowerment (Bridge, 2003:2) and people centered-growth or development (Jennings, 2002:1) became important to support civil society activities in various parts of the world.

Civil society is championed across the globe as the notion of the late twentieth century, but its origin dates back to the ancient period of history. The tricky concept of 'civil society' has become a major 'buzz word' within the development literature and practice. Various community groups and NGOs seem quite familiar with this expression. However, the term such as civil society can be traced in seventeenth and eighteenth-century social and political philosophy. No longer is civil society only a topic for philosophical discussion, now the term is widely used by the policy makers, and national as well as international organizations.

Civil Society has entered development thinking, policy and practice as paradigmatic concept of the twenty-first century, and NGOs are the prime organizational vehicle for strengthening of civil society (Howell, 2001: 229,235). In development studies, conceptulisation of planning and development is main distinguishing feature of new form of civil society equipped with trend of participation and involvement of communities. NGOs form a vital part of civil society, along with other types of civil associations. NGOs come to play a remarkable role to structuring, constructing and strengthening in local , community-based and grassroot level initiatives in developing societies (Potter, 2008: 119,120).

In Pakistan, the term civil society has got popularity for the last two or three decades although the citizen participation in public sphere has been visible since the creation of the country (Herald, 2007: 17). Now, the contemporary development

discourse tends to employ the term as an umbrella term for a range of non-state and non-market citizen organizations and initiatives, networks and alliances operating in a broad spectrum of social, economic and cultural fields (Sattar & Baig, 2001:1). Key civil society actors in Pakistan include, among others, NGOs, faith based organizations, trade unions, workers or professional associations, women's rights groups, media and student organizations. However, Pakistan's civil society is characterized by hybrid forms, multiple inheritances and the unresolved struggle between the practices and values of pre-capitalist society and new modes of social life, between authoritarian legacies and democratic aspirations. (ibid).

A cursory look at the civil society in Pakistan, especially the voluntary sector¹ reveals that most of the NGOs are focused on service delivery in the areas like literacy, health, social awareness and infrastructure development. This case study focuses on civil society developments in Gilgit-Baltistan, the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Many development practitioners have noticed that tremendous change has occurred in this region ((Malik et al, 2006:196) which has sped up the social transformation.

1.1 Aim of Study

The aim of this study is to explore as to what extent the NGOs have been successful in strengthening civil society by empowering the communities, especially women, in Gilgit-Baltistan, the NAs of Pakistan. For this purpose, we have chosen NGOs including their sub-organizations such as VOs, WOs, LSOs, and CBOs, to gauge the civil society activities in this region. Being a native of the region, since outset it was in my mind to see in depth the core objectives of these institutions. My study at Lund University helped me to go through theoretical aspects of the development discourse. It further encouraged me to do my research work and employ the academic experience in the chosen region. Then the sample area helped me to see as to what extent these NGOs have been successful in constructing civil society in Gilgit-Baltistan, NAs of Pakistan. Some of the NGO activities, which will be discussed here, focus on participatory

¹ "Volunteers are the key elements in the functioning of the [civil society] sector both in a formal sense, as well as in terms of the ideas and experiences they bring to the particular organization," said Kevin Gilroy when addressing Tuesday's Plenary Session. Statement available online at <http://www.unv.org/en/what-we-do/thematic-areas/civil-society/doc/civil-society-urged-to.html>

approach, empowering communities and gender sensitization. In order to conduct research, this work has carefully studied the development initiatives taken by the NGOs in the region. Initially, these activities focused on the development of physical infrastructure, but subsequently these efforts centered around new phase of development with reliance on participatory approach in society (Wood 2006:8).

1.2 Research Question (s)

- To what extent have NGOs in Gilgit Baltistan been successful in strengthening civil society in this region?
- Have the NGOs been helpful in empowering women in the region?

1.3 Research Methodology

To discuss the issue, the study relied on some techniques. Mainly the literature review, observation, interviews and discussions were the main tools to collect the data. For secondary data, books, articles and internet resources were basically used. The basic literature about NGOs activities in Gilgit-Baltistan was taken from the documents of these NGOs.

Moreover, I have also resorted to opinion research, and the objective of this type of methodology was to gather data on attitudes, opinions, impressions and beliefs of women on empowerment questions. This was accomplished by asking them via questionnaire, which was tailored with a view to eliciting their point of view on the progress of NGOs towards construction and/or strengthening of civil society in the region. Moreover, the general research approach was survey study. To provide more details, I have used the following methodological approaches to measuring and analyzing the contribution of NGOs towards the construction of civil society of Gilgit Baltistan.

1.3.1 Population and Sampling

Though the population of this study was all the NGOs working in the Gilgit Baltistan, but my picked sample was Agha Khan Rural Support Programme, and its allied sub organizations. The data primarily relied on books, periodicals, activity booklets and information gathered from the libraries of AKRSP, AKESP, IUCN, KIU, WWF and Municipal library. The next source was some interviews with NGO officials, members from NGOs' sub-organizations, as well as non-members from different villages of Gilgit region, where NGOs are operating their activities).

Initially, I chose 100 respondents, but for convenience sake, the selection of individuals was done in two stages. First, I selected 50 respondents to circulate the questionnaires which were directly affiliated with VOs or WOs. Secondly, I further selected another 50 respondents from the same villages where these VOs / WOs were working, but the individuals had no direct affiliation or membership. The data of 100 individuals was further presented in tabular form. The reason for survey was to know about NGOs performance from ordinary people; whereas, the interviews were focused for those individuals, who were directly affiliated with NGOs. Therefore, for interviews, the target group was the volunteers and professionals working with NGOs in Gilgit-Baltistan.

1.3.2 Data Analysis

The qualitative and quantitative modes of data analysis provided me ways of discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful patterns. And I conducted data analyses, by depending on the responses of the questionnaires which were handed down /communicated to 100 respondents in AKRSP, and its allied sub-organizations.

While analyzing the collected data, I worked through three stages. The first step based on data reduction, which was done through the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data. This winnowing of data was done with a view to having better manageability of data.

Secondly, I displayed data so as to have organized information that would eventually permit conclusion drawing. In this stage of data analysis, some tables were used to display data for analyzing patterns of response concerning perceptions and assessments of the respondents working in the NGOs of Gilgit Baltistan. So, the data

gathered from the respondents of this research i.e. the picked sample was displayed here.

The final stage of data analysis was based on conclusion drawing and verification. Here, conclusion drawing involved stepping back to consider what the analyzed data meant and to assess their implications for the research question at hand.

Overall, I analyzed the research question qualitatively and incorporated them with findings of questionnaire, checking further whether the findings related to literature and material on the issue. In this way, results were discussed and evaluated in the second last chapter of the thesis.

1.3.3 Linguistic and Ethical Considerations

Language was not a hurdle during my research work in Gilgit-Baltistan. Since, I am a native of the NAs of Pakistan, it was not a trouble to address with the issues of interpretation of local dialects. However, I conducted face to face interviews of diverse respondents. This tool also helped me to discuss the changing behaviour towards social transformation in the (civil) society of Gilgit-Baltistan.

The qualitative interview was carried out and it was assured, during the interview, to keep their names secret. Those who showed consent to quote their names were mentioned; otherwise, the names remained anonymous. However, most of the respondents allowed using their names and reference in the work. Keeping the ethical aspect of the work, it was also pledged to use the gathered data only for this work.

1.4 Outline of the Study

This research project is divided into five chapters. The first chapter embarks with a brief introduction, aim of work, methodology, research question etc. The second chapter deals purely with the theoretical aspects of civil society. This part introduces conceptual and theoretical aspects of civil society, relying on different approaches with a special focus on Gramsci. The third chapter gives history of civil society in Gilgit-Baltistan, and focuses especially on NGOs and its working. This section of the work helps in understanding the basic approach about civil society in a historical perspective. The chapter four holistically addresses civil society activities in Gilgit-Baltistan and the

activities carried out by NGOs in the region since the 1980s. Furthermore, the attention is also paid to the aspects focused by NGOs in the areas like community empowerment and gender related issues. This chapter, towards the end, also gives results/findings and then tries to establish correlation, if any, between research questions, theoretical framework in the light of empirical evidence. The final part of the thesis gives an overall conclusion. So, in all the thesis comprises of 5 chapters.

2 Theoretical Approaches to Civil Society

Civil society is not a new, post Hegelian concept. It is much older term, which entered into English usage via the Latin translation, *societas civilis*, of Aristotle's *koinonia politike*. In its original sense, it allowed no distinction between 'state' and 'society' or between political and civil society: it simply meant a community; a collection of human beings united within a legitimate political order, and was variously rendered as 'society' or 'community'. (Bobbio, 1989). However, it was Hegel who first bifurcated the concept, whereby state and civil society functioned in his account as re-descriptions of one another. (Reidel, 1984: 133).

Before we dilate on civil society, it seems in fitness of things to give some detail on this notion. Generally, the two key components of civil society are: non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. (Tariq Z. Khan et al., 2003). Today, researchers are crediting NGOs as pillars of civil society and as forces of democratization (Clark 1995, de Janvry and Sadoulet 1993, Reilly 1995). Different scholars, social and political scientists have defined the term differently, so there is apparently no general consensus over the definition of civil society. The concept of civil society refers to the social domain of diverse social groups that function outside the government to organize economic and other aspects of social life (Miller, 1999, p. 257). Furthermore, a scholastic view is that 'civil society plays an important role in giving voice to the concerns of the citizens and delivering services that meet people's needs (European Commission: 2003).

The expression "civil society" has taken on a meaning different from that of the "bourgeois society" of the liberal tradition, which Hegel conceptualized as a "system of needs," that is, as a market system involving social labour and commodity exchange (Jurgen Habermas, 1994: 362-3). Habermas describes further that 'civil society is composed of more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations, and movements ,attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres' (ibid). For Habermas, the civil society is the source of self-reflexivity in society, without which democracy itself dries up. He argues that civil society, given the complexity of modern decision-making and the need to protect certain levels of efficiency, cannot govern, but can only 'influence' or sensitize the state through democratic-will formation (ibid: pp. 9-10).

Civil society has a long and conceptually rich history, and has ‘hovered in numerous variants on the edge of discussions of society ever since antiquity’ (Shils, 1991:5). However, the idea of civil society has re-emerged within political thought in less than three decades in relation to the collapse of communism in the former USSR and Eastern Europe (McIlwaine, 1998: 416). Currently, within the development policies, the notion of ‘strengthening civil society’ is a centre-stage pursued by multilateral and bilateral organizations; it involves a focus on the role of NGOs and grassroots organizations in addressing poverty alleviation and social welfare objectives (Edwards and Hulme, 1996).

During the discourse on the notion of civil society, the problem arises when it comes to defining the very concept. As Bebbington and Riddell (1997: 108) point out, civil society is ‘a notoriously slippery concept’. With a view to having a simplified concept of civil society, a broadly working definition of civil society in the development context is that it ‘denotes (a) a certain area of society which is (b) dominated by interactions of a certain kind. The area in question is the public space between the state and the individual citizen (or household)’ (McIlwaine: 416). This ‘area’ or ‘space’ is further defined as an arena of ‘associational culture’ or ‘associational groupings’ (Blair, 1997) comprising various types of organized activity. These activities generally refer to voluntary organizations, community groups, trade unions, church groups, co-operatives, business, professional and philanthropic organizations, and a range of other NGOs (UNDP, 1993). Although civil society is usually defined as made-up of these various groups, there has also been a tendency to view NGOs as primary ‘vehicles’ or ‘agents’ of civil society (Clark, 1997: 44-45). NGOs and social groups are therefore constitutive elements of civil society.

Although central to classical western political theory, the concept of civil society was largely moribund during the days when models of state-led modernization dominated both liberal and Marxist conceptions of social change and development. It was recovered during the late 1970s and 1980s, as these models disintegrated. Civil society seemed to promise something better and available: it was democracy and prosperity, autonomy and the means to exercise it. (Kaviraj and Khilnani, 2001: 12). A scholastic view is that ‘Hegel perhaps is the pivotal figure in shaping contemporary understandings of the idea of civil society. Actually, Hegel was concerned with possibility of creating and sustaining a community under modern conditions’. It was in response to such an ideal that he introduced the distinction between the ‘state’ and ‘civil society’. (*ibid*).

Retrospectively, the term civil society fell into disuse in the mid-19th century as political philosophers paid their attention to social and political repercussions of the industrial revolution. However, the ideal of civil society came into limelight after World War II. It was through the writings of the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, who revived the term to portray civil society as a distinctive premise of independent political activity, a crucial sphere of struggle against tyranny. In the early post-Second World War decades, the concept of civil society received no significant attention in the West. During the same period, critics of the Left likewise found the term of little interest. Marxist, both orthodox and dissident, used it negatively: it was identified with ‘bourgeois society’, a realm of contradiction and mystification sustained by relations of power. Civil society, as bourgeois society, was seen as the sphere of needs, inextricably linked to the productive base of capitalist society, and in need of constant policy and regulation by the state. (ibid: 15)

The real revival of the term civil society began in the late 1960s when it gained popularity among the radicals who were ideologically discontented with Marxism. Eventually, the existing structures of Left politics were challenged in favour of ‘social movements’. Besides this, the recovery of Gramsci’s work was a vital spur: his modification of the arrangements of Marx’s schema of base and superstructure gave the concept of civil society -applied to Western Europe- a wholly novel centrality. (Bobbio, 1987). The term finally became very popular during the late 1970s and 1980s when different groups and intellectuals, who were against the authoritarian states and regimes, brought it to their discourses.

As explained by Martin Shaw, civil society is not merely “a sphere of association in society in distinction to the state, involving a network of institutions through which society and groups within it represent themselves in cultural, ideological, and political senses” (Shaw, 1999: 269-78), But, in the terms developed by Gramsci, “the institutions of civil society [also form] ... the ‘outer earthworks’ of the state, through which the ruling classes maintain their ‘hegemony’ or dominance in society”. In terms of power and the exercise of power, civil society and the state are therefore interlinked. (ibid).

Over the roles and functions of civil society, there are two broad perspectives: liberal approach and post-Marxist approach. The liberal approach views civil society as a largely autonomous sphere of freedom and liberty, often associated with the writings of de Tocqueville. And it stresses on the beneficial effects of vibrant civic associations. On

the other end of spectrum, the neo-or post-Marxist approach views civil society as a site of oppression and power inequalities. Such approach draws primarily on the writings of Marx, Hegel and Gramsci (Foley and Edwards, 1996). Generally, the liberal view in the development literature tends to inform those who consider civil society as a panacea; whereas the post-Marxist perspective recognizes internal divisions and the ways in state power may be maintained through the indirect domination of civil society. (McIlwaine: 417).

By force of 1980s neoliberal agenda, there is a tendency to view civil society and the state as separate (Robinson, 1997). Now, civil actors, and particularly NGOs are increasingly accepted as service deliverers for a state. At the same time, strong civil society organizations are seen as responsible for acting as a counterweight to authoritarian or tyrannical regimes, and for ensuring some form of popular participation (Foley and Edwards, 1996). Thereby, a vibrant civil society based on Tocquevillian assumptions is seen as a potential solution for many contemporary development concerns as long as these embrace western notions of democratic capitalist development (McIlwaine: 418)

Many of the specific criticisms of the liberal approach to civil society come from a broadly post-Marxist perspective. One of the most contentious elements in this is the separation of the state and civil society. For instance, in an area characterized by authoritarian rule, there is strong probability that civil society groups might ally themselves with the state rather than oppose it (Oloka-Onyango and Barya, 1997).

The Hegelian conceptualization defines civil society as ‘a sphere of interests existing outside the state [where]...individuals pursue their self-interests often without regard for obligations and duties that are considered essential for protecting the rights that all members are to be accorded’ (Adekson, 2004). Thus, Hegel views civil society, not as a natural condition requisite for freedom, but as a ‘historically produced sphere of life’ that emanated from a multifaceted process (ibid).

In contrast to the Liberal model, Hegel does not imagine a marked distinction between the state and society. On the contrary, he avows that civil society overlaps with the state, and that the former is in fact an extension of the actualization of the latter (ibid). Therefore, the relationship between state and civil society is ‘an organic or dialectical relationship, where they are overlapping, interdependent or complementary, and where civil society serves as a site of policy input’. The Hegelian School does not treat civil society as a perfect realm, but as an intermediary stage. Quoting Hegel, Adekson asserts

that Civil Society may be uncivil if 'it is [not] ordered politically and subjected to the higher surveillance of the state. Furthermore, Hegel discusses the concept as a space of 'universal egoism'. He further conceives that this space for economic exchange and individuals' growth of their self-consciousness leads them towards their satisfaction and self autonomy. It shows difference between 'man as citizen' and 'man as a private individual' even though Marx did not accept that cleavage (ibid).

Marx differentiates civil society and political society in terms of 'base' and superstructure. The former, according to him, is civil society, whereas the latter is political society. Agreeing on the link between capitalism and civil society, Marx held that the latter represents the interests of the bourgeoisie (Edwards, 2004:10). Therefore, the state as superstructure also represents the interests of the dominant class; under capitalism, it maintains the domination of the bourgeoisie. Hence, Marx seems to have rejected the 'positive role of state' as advanced by Hegel. Marx holds that the state only protects the interests of the bourgeoisie, and cannot show neutrality when it comes to solving the problem of the people. He considered the state and civil society as the executive arms of the bourgeoisie; therefore, both should wither away (Brown, 2001:74). To put it in another way round, Marxist ideas do favour the centralization process with controlled and accountable system to tackle the Bourgeois who always exploits the lower strata of society (Lavalette & Ferguson, 2007:449).

The Marxist view of civil society has been challenged and revised by scholars sympathetic to Marxism. For instance, Gramsci contends that 'the struggle to transcend the inequalities of class, society can only proceed following careful analyses of culture and ideology among masses of civil society'. (Adekson, 2004). Generally, Gramsci regards civil society as incorporating more than a social manifestation of bourgeois domination of economic relations. For him, class and national identities are constituted within civil society, where 'a conflict ensues over which social class or group will succeed in imposing its norms and economic interest on society in general' (ibid).

Gramsci isolated civil society as a category of importance in its own right. Gramsci described civil society as the realm of culture and ideology, or as the associational realm (made up of the church, trade unions, etc.) through which the state, under normal circumstances, perpetuates its hegemony or achieves consent. However, precisely because this associational realm represents a non-state and a non-economic sphere, Gramsci, contra Marx, saw it as having the potential for dual autonomy from both the state and market relations. (Gideon, 2002:6). He was therefore the first to articulate

the idea that civil society, in a moment of counter-hegemony, could actually be resistant to state power as, in his well-known phrase, so many ‘earthworks and buttresses’.(*ibid*).

Disagreeing somehow with Marx, Gramsci did not consider civil society as corollary to the socio-economic base of the state. Rather, he located civil society in the political superstructure. He placed emphasis on the crucial role of civil society as the contributor of the cultural and ideological capital required for the survival of the hegemony of capitalism (Ehrenberg, 1999:208). Unlike the earlier Marxist conceptions, Gramsci’s more political or agency-centered emphasis is reflected in most contemporary accounts; civil society is therefore used to identify a sphere of willed action, rather than an unwilled arena of human interaction. (Gideon, 2002:6). In addition, Gramsci adds that every societal institution is non-governmental, and non-familial, ranging from recreational groups to trade unions, churches, and political parties. Finally, he shows that these societal platforms support and encourage voluntary activities and political horizon for community growth and development (Alagappa, 2004:29).

In brevity, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony relies on the fact that the ‘state’ should not be taken in the narrow sense of the government. Therefore, he enunciates state in terms of ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’. Political society, according to him, is the arena of political institutions and legal constitutional control, whereas ‘civil society’ is the ‘private’ or ‘non-state’ sphere. (Martin, 2002: 92). The former is the realm of force and the latter is that of consent, but such division is merely conceptual as the two often overlap and complement each other.

To put it in a nutshell, Marx expanded Hegel’s argument, and delineated the domain of civil society as one of ‘exploitation, alienation and social injustice’. Neo-Marxist Gramsci saw civil society as the ‘place where the state operates to enforce invisible, intangible and subtle forms of power, through educational, cultural, and religious systems and other institutions’. The value of Gramsci’s theory is perhaps the attention to developing forms of autonomous organization outside of the dominant bloc. Hence, a Gramscian position seems to unfold that civil-society organization can play *both* co-optive and counter-hegemonic roles. As, the study focuses on strengthening of civil society in Gilgit-Baltistan, the NAs of Pakistan through NGOs’ involvement, the Gramscian approach seems more applicable to the work. The chosen theory seems to emphasize involvement of communities, individuals or institutions under state control. So, in the subsequent part of my thesis, I will apply a Gramscian approach in the analytical framework and discussion on the results.

3 Civil Society in Gilgit-Baltistan

3.1 History of Gilgit-Baltistan: A Brief Glimpse

The Northern Areas of Pakistan is generally called as Gilgit-Baltistan by the native inhabitants of the area, whereas, officially it is also called as FANA. In Geographical terms, the region is stretched to nearly 72,496 Sq.km (27, 991 meters square) of north-eastern region of Pakistan. The realm is distinguished by its 'frail and fragile, high mountain, peaks, glaciated corridors and asperity of climatic conditions'; even though it is supported by over 970,347 people with great ecological and cultural diversity' of the region (IUCN, 2003: viii). History of the region itself is quite unknown; however the contemporary historians have referred to the indigenous people of the region as a 'Dardic People' (Leitner, 1985:1). In this connectivity, it is quite difficult to trace the real origin of these heterogeneous communities and their ancestral background. Furthermore, the region is religiously, ethno-linguistically (Streefland et al, 1995:10) and culturally diversified, and different communities have stationed here for hundreds of years now. In spite of the hardships and severity of climatic conditions, the communities have established their indigenous and natural system to run social and political spheres of life.

Considerably there were numeral small Princely States and kingdoms under the sway of local rulers (Khan & Hunzai, 1992:2). Gradually the GoP started to introduce democratic form of system by replacing monarchy and tribal system. This *Rajgiri* (monarchy) system was finally abolished in 1970's by the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, (IUCN, 2003:250; Streefland, 1995:71; Wood 2006:40) in a bargain of a monthly stipend from GoP to the rulers and their heirs. This financial agreement and support continues to date. Today many of the NGO sector personnel carried an impact study of this reform by GoP and concluded that it resulted in an institutional vacuum in two important areas. First, it necessitated to recognize and inflict private property rights in land at the village level. Second, and perhaps even more important that there was a requirement to control the use

and management of centralized property such as pastures, forests and irrigation channels (Hussain, 1999:19).

3.2 Civil Society: NGOs Perspective

NGOs have become increasingly important agents of the development process in South Asian countries, in all of their main areas of work: humanitarian relief, long-term development, policy formation and political advocacy (Iain Atack, 1999). As their name indicates, NGOs including development NGOs, are an important part of civil society (MwMakumbe, 1998, P. 305). Generally, NGOs, as civil society organizations, seem particularly appropriate as vehicles of empowerment in the context of processes of development. They are seen as “an instrument of empowerment that will enable ordinary folk to take control of development decisions”. (Bratton, 1989, p. 569).

In modern context, the performance of NGOs has raised in strengthening and supporting the civil society activities across the world. In the same way, the civil society activities are actively progressing in Pakistan, particularly in rural areas. Civil society activities in Gilgit-Baltistan, the northern areas of Pakistan, have been in progress within different time spans and epochs. The developments within this region, somehow, look compatible with the theoretical framework of this paper, but to some extent it does challenge or contradict the basic concepts, and theorization. To reiterate what I already mentioned in the introductory part of the paper, the *‘Pakistan’s civil society is characterized by hybrid forms, multiple inheritances and the unresolved struggle between authoritarian legacies and democratic aspirations’* (Sattar & Baig, 2001:1).

Ideally, the NGOs seek for active participation by the people in the development process as an essential pre-requisite to their empowerment. Over the years, NGOs have developed highly effective participatory processes to enhance the involvement of the target groups in their own development processes. Many of these participatory tools and methodologies have won recognition and acceptance by official development agencies, and respective governments.

In Pakistan, many policies have been adopted and initiatives taken because of the working of different NGOs in the country. Especially, in Gilgit-Baltistan, the Northern Areas of Pakistan, the role of NGOs has been recognized in the construction of civil society.

Before I proceed further, it seems quite important to briefly define the term ‘NGO’ and mention its main categories. ‘An NGO is generally defined as an essentially non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized at a local, national, or international level, and is locally, national, or internationally active’ (Vedder, 2007). Again, the World Bank (1989; also see Bieler 2000) defines NGOs as ‘private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor...’ Nonetheless, the term NGO is very broad and encompasses many different types of organizations. In the field of development they include research institutes, churches, professional associations and lobby groups The World Bank classified two main categories of NGOs:

- a. *operational* NGOs - whose primary purpose is the design and implementation of development-related projects;
- b. *advocacy* NGOs - whose primary purpose is to defend or promote a specific cause and who seek to influence the policies and practices.

Local or community-based NGOs that have a local scope and action domain are also referred to as grassroots organizations. The importance of NGOs and other grassroots organizations is well established within the ambit of development issues. Partly due to donor pressures to strengthen the civil society, and partly due to imperatives for finding organizations to ‘fill the gap’ left by the states, NGOs have now become major players and implementers of donor policies (Gordenker and Weiss, 1997). Hulme and Edwards (1997: 276-77) highlight the dangers of these trends for the formation of civil society. In discussing the current development myths of 1990s, they emphasize the problems of trying to create and strengthen civil society via donor policies. Not only may certain interests be co-opted, for example, by the middle classes establishing NGOs in order to access funds, and the original objectives of poverty alleviation and participation compromised, but civil society may also not be permitted to emerge from below according to its own rules and negotiations (Pasha, 1996). However, for practical reasons, it may be useful to consider civil society organization as occupying a particular space which may encourage participation in development goals.

In an effort to accelerate and increase the efficiency of development tasks, they now seek ways to by-pass the central state and to assist directly what they identify as the constituents of civil society. The private enterprises and organizations, church and denominational associations, self-employed workers co-operatives and unions, and the vast field of NGOs, all have attracted external interest. They have come to be seen as

essential to the construction... more accountable, public, and representative forms of political power. (World Bank, 1989)

It is generally recognized that NGOs have a significant role to play in assisting the poor to wriggle out of their condition of poverty, and empowering them socially and culturally. Nevertheless, the notion of empowerment can be as basic as enabling groups to better their conditions through socio-economic development programmes or projects. But many NGOs view empowerment as a much more encompassing process. These organizations aim at enabling the underprivileged and needy people to deal with the systems and structures which undermine them socially, economically or politically. The NGOs achieve such objectives with the implementation of certain projects and programmes.

Practically, NGOs are often able to reach segments of populations that many governments neglect or do not target as a priority. Hence, the job of NGOs becomes of great importance in terms of having access to the neglected segments of communities, involving the formally excluded people or groups from development process, and ameliorating their lot. In short, the rapid spawning of NGOs has remarkably changed the old and traditional understanding and practices of societal systems. The participatory development, volunteerism, empowering community via facilitating awareness and providing social rights to society are the main slogans for NGOs in contemporary time period. (Malik 2005; 112). In addition, it is obvious that NGOs have become the vital service provider (Lavalette & Ferguson 2007:453) to communities particularly in developing societies.

3.3 A Chronological Study of NGOs in Gilgit-Baltistan

Currently there are hundreds of NGOs operating their programmes in Gilgit-Baltistan but some important international NGOs also work remarkably in the region. Studying a chronological study of the NGOs in Gilgit-Baltistan, it traces back to its activities in 1946, when the *Aga Khan III*, started D.J schools programme in the region. In later stages the AKDN spread its network in the Gilgit-Baltistan, establishing the AKES in 1946 and registered them under Service Company in 1985; further in 1964 the AKHS was established, like wise in 1970s the AKHB came into being; in 1982 the AKRSP started

functioning and it followed by AKCS, FMFB, etc Furthermore, apart from AKDN there are numerous international and local NGOs which have been functioning since 1980s (AKDN, 1996).

At the outset, the NGOs focused their programmes and activities to the selected areas, with a view to working for such communities as could be receptive to change. In Gilgit district particularly the Hunza, NGOs freely initiated the activities. In contrast, the other parts of the Gilgit-Baltistan showed their reluctance and faltered to concede to or allow NGOs programmes in their areas (Streefland, 1995:69). But, in recent years some of the areas of Baltistan and Ghizer region have become more conducive to the NGOs and international donor agencies to initiate their developmental and civil society activities.

In post 1980s, the NGOs have spread tremendously in the region and their numbers have increased many folds. As per estimate, as many as 512 NGOs (P&D, 2002: 27) are functioning and registered under the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance of 1961 (IUCN, 2003:24). By and large, these organs are working as voluntary units trying to improve and enhance the social living standards and economic conditions in the region.

3.4 NGOs and their Activities

In the beginning of this work, it was mentioned that initially the NGOs had focused on the development of physical infrastructure of the region. In spite of the lack of proper means of communication and infrastructure, they carried out their routine life activities (Malik et al, 2006:197). Furthermore, growth, environment, biodiversity were also considerably focused by the NGOs in the region. The voluntary activities of NGOs became more in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan. It is because the programmes of these NGOs were evolutionary, participatory, and highly flexible and they encouraged volunteerism (Dani, 2004: 225). The AKRSP, which is taken as a role model NGO in the region had the same strategy model focusing on three core areas: First, 'cooperative social organization; second, increased access to capital; and third, skills creation' (Khan and Khan, 1992:35). Quite recently, the NGOs achieved significant achievements by establishing VOs, WOs, LSOs, and LDOs etc. to strengthen and sustain the projects that were started in different pockets of the Gilgit-Baltistan society (Khan & Khan, 1992: 77). It further helped these NGOs to achieve their

mission and projects smoothly through participatory approach and involved communities. Therefore, with the due course of time, the concept of CBOs is also established (Khan, Hussain Wali, 1998: 95). Even though apparently both organizations VOs/WOs and CBOs were community representing organizations and seemed to work on a same nature, but in real terms the nature of activity was slightly changed (Gloekler, 1998:22). However, it was a great move to empower the local people through community participation, and by providing gender and educational reforms.

In the wake of the progress of NGOs and their sub-organizations, a series of new institutions were developed in the region: women's organizations for agricultural diversification, economic participation and mutual aid; schooling for girls; a rural sanitation service; and a system of primary health care. The impact of the changes was breathtaking in Gilgit – Baltistan (Clyde Hertzman, 2001).

4 Community Empowerment: the Case of Gilgit-Baltistan

Community empowerment through developmental activities has been identified as a way to support a community, just to strengthen and thrive into a viable civil society (Farah, 1999: 33). In current time, the NGOs and their donor agents are completely concentrating on community development with their proper involvement and participation. They blend old and new mechanism and forge the concept of village democracy (Gloekler, 1998:16).

4.1 New Sub-Organizations for Community Participation

Despite the positive move of community participation, usually the native influential representatives become disadvantaged to the general masses via monopolising programmes and projects. They use these projects for their personal interests and benefits (Malik et al, 2005: 27). By and large, the community people were encouraged to pay their attention to, and it led to transparency along with the sustainability of projects through communities by themselves. (ibid: 208). Embarking on democratic form of system and creating VOs, WOs, LSOs, CBOs, etc. strengthens the human capital. These human resources get further professional trainings, workshops, seminars and excursion tours in order to enrich their abilities and to contribute their skills to strengthen civic system on modern lines (ibid: 221). For example, the AKRSP has organized numerous workshops, seminars and nearly 1400 trainings to the active members of VOs and WOs (IUCN, 2003:25). It is unanimously agreed by most of the communities that these entities are working in region just to 'facilitate the group of the rural poor into highly participatory native cooperatives' and decentralizing these indigenous units (Nelson, 2000:47).

It is noticed that the NGOs established VOs/ WOs which have performed a vital role to bring a viable societal change in its social structure (Dad, 2000: 47). The nexus between VOs and NGOs is that the VOs are community-based organizations which are set up within society at grassroots level, and these organizations are controlled by the NGOs.

The motive behind establishing these VOs/ WOs is not only to enhance economic conditions but also to create an enabling environment for democratic move in the society. However, steadily these organs initiated to lose its effectiveness. Though a modicum of effort has been made to empower communities and an equal support provided to women by these NGOs, still communities believe it is more like lip service. I got a chance to interact frequently with few community members and, by and large, the respondents reported that the communities were not taken into confidence by management committees. It depicts that the clumsy kind of planning at the beginning of projects caused a severe setback to the sustainability of their ongoing programmes. One positive move in current time is public-private partnership which is under consideration; this will further strengthen the concept of community participation (AKRSP, 2003: 107). It will automatically lead toward the community empowerment. The public-private linkage has made local communities 'self-conscious'. It is without any doubt that NGOs have taken efforts to make communities aware regarding their social rights and values (ibid, 118). Furthermore, the 'self-consciousness' not only empowers communities but it also emancipates them from traditional and obsolete practices. (Smith, 2003:46).

The advent of NGOs, in the Gilgit-Baltistan paved a way for common community members to get involved actively in decision making (AKRSP, 2003: 149) which was totally ignored in previous time period. In retrospect, most of the decisions at policy level or at implementation phase were taken by influential members of the society. However, the inception of these VOs / WOs has altered the behaviours and attitude. In this way, by and large, decisions are made at general body meetings of these VOs / WOs. But, it has been observed that sometimes management committee of these VOs / WOs made decisions without taking communities in confidence.

The community participation program required minimum 70% of the village to be represented in the VO and the members then choose their office bearers to speed up greater participation at grassroots level(ibid, 92). The recent data tells us that almost 126,000 members interact nearly in over 3,000 VOs / WOs representing coverage of

more than two-thirds of rural households (Dad, 2000: 61) as mentioned in table 1. The World Bank stresses that there was “growing realization of the value of the village Organization concept,” and that the VOs were “the basic building block of AKRSP’s participatory rural development model” (World Bank, 1996: 3 & 45).

The core idea behind these VOs is to build, through social organizers as well as local participants (the VO), Productive Physical Infrastructure (PPI), and then to maintain the physical infrastructure (PPI) project. These grant-assisted projects are the catalyst and incentive for the initial organization of VOs and for the accumulation of savings (Project Areas Rural Saving, 2004: 97). It has three basic benefits; the projects foster participation and help strengthen the local capacity for development through organization; they inject productive capital into the village economy from which villagers can earn new income to build their own capital reserves; and finally, PPIs create new resources and expand the existing resource base in the area (Khan and Khan, 1992).

The VOs across the Gilgit-Baltistan have several features in common. Firstly, membership is open to all households, with the general practice of one male representing each member household. Secondly, participatory and democratic principles are emphasized through the involvement of the members in the decision-making process of the VO. Thirdly, regular meetings are held for resolving disputes, making decisions on the management of common property, planning future activities and interacting with the support organization (Malik et al, 2005).

Table 1**Program Area Social Data****January 1982- December 31, 1997**

	Gilgit	Chitral	Baltistan	Program Area
Area (Sq. Km)	33,500	14,850	25,850	74,200
Population	441,115	334,678	358,922	1,134,715
Rural Households	37,900	40,554	32,396	110,850
VOs	768	678	771	2,217
WOs	570	287	284	1,141
Total # Organizations	1,338	965	1,055	3,358
VO Members	33,718	25,677	29,022	88,417
WO Members	21,550	8,218	7,871	37,639
Total # of Members	55,268	33,895	36,893	126,056
VO Savings	164.93	67.01	49.46	281.40
WO Savings	60.48	11.27	3.47	75.22
Total savings (Rs. Mil.)	225.41	78.28	52.93	356.62

Source: AKRSP fifteenth Annual Review.

During the frequent visits to distinct villages in Gilgit-Baltistan, interaction with communities and interviews, it is noticed that it is quite difficult task to contrast the performance of VOs between/among villages in the Gilgit-Baltistan. A cursory review of data reveals that Gilgit has the largest percentage of total percentage of total households in VOs.

In addition to the new form of institutions, it is realized that NGOs have resurrected the concept of village councils called as *jirga* system. These institutions are replaced with new institutions (VOs, WOs, LSOs, CBOs, etc.) with a concept of participatory development (ibid). NGOs initially did not start their activities in more conservative and traditional societies like *Chilas*, *Darel* and *Tangir* because these districts were not ready to give their consent on the new modes of change introduced by NGOs. But, now the inhabitants of these districts have realized that the NGOs activities could be useful for changes into their traditional mechanism (AKRSP, 2003: 188). In addition, the NADP is striving to support and strengthen the NGOs and CBOs through their capacity building particularly in traditional areas like Chilas, Darel and Tangir (IUCN, 2003:25). In parallel to NGOs, the State is also trying to espouse and endorse the public private partnership through its local bodies programme. There are nearly 558 village councils in local terms called as *Dehi Councils*, whose mandate is to unravel socio-economic as well as political issues of their concerned villages. These state-monitored activities are done through LB & RD set up, which is supporting the villages in the Gilgit-Baltistan.

In recent times, the trend is focused on community empowerment by establishing local bodies. Therefore, the patterns of change here have accompanied Gilgit-Baltistan transformation from a secluded rural system into a semi-urban agglomeration (NRSP, 2005: 112). Through demonstrating the effectiveness of the participatory rural development model in the Gilgit-Baltistan, the NGOs have influenced the thinking of government, donors and local communities, and thus enabled them to replicate its participatory model in other rural parts of Pakistan (ibid, 115). As a result of community empowerment and successful work by the NGOs, the concept of 'community-driven development' once unknown, now appears in all significant national and provincial development

polices and projects. These community empowerment initiations have significantly led to mainstream development strategies (Jabeen, 2007: 190).

4.2 Gender Development

Discourse on civil society should also recognize internal divisions along lines of gender, race and ethnicity. Although broadly incorporated within the post-Marxist perspective, these issues are usually ignored in specific discussion of civil society (see Sen, 1996, on gender). Nonetheless, many civil society groups and particularly NGOs have embraced the discourses surrounding the term and organized themselves in a range of alliances. However, their primary rationale is to strengthen their participation in decision-making processes, especially vis-à-vis the state (Mello, 1996, on the Brazil network on Multilateral Financial Institutions).

The South Asia is known for gender discrimination, and Pakistan is no exception to it. But in recent years the NGOs have focused on gender studies, and resultantly it has become more focused area of civil society activities. By 1970s and early 1980s, the dialogue of WID motivated the donor funding to force the NGOs for provision of an equal right for women in the developmental process (Jabeen, 2007: 201). It is further supported in 1990s by GAD, which strove to guarantee the gender relations, their roles and responsibilities being taken into explanation in development (Gloekler et al, 2006:123). Going by the gender related development index, the position of Pakistani women is not better off. The reasons for the deplorable position of women in Pakistan is not far to seek (Samjhota, 2008). The gender based preference, bias in the sex ratio, low literacy rates and low visibility of women in public sphere caused the low ranking among the nationals (ibid).

In case of Gilgit-Baltistan / NAs of Pakistan, the gender based discrimination has been present for centuries. It is highly institutionalized, male chauvinistic and patriarchal structured society. This has side lined the women and they have remained underprivileged in all the spheres of life particularly social, cultural, political and economic (Saleh, 2008: 175).

The status of women in Gilgit-Baltistan is quite similar to other parts of Pakistan (Ahmad, 2005: 207). It further added hardships to the women of this region due to geographical remoteness and isolation from mainstream activities. These hardships develop a sense of inferiority, and men keep dominating socially and culturally and are tail-enders for security and quality of food' (Wood, 2006: 46). Women in Gilgit-Baltistan got fewer opportunities to work in government institutions, whereas they get more opportunities and exposure in private sector (see table 2).

In an interview with an NGO, an official recognized the lower status of women in NA. He told that, in the specific context, "The NGOs in Gilgit-Baltistan particularly the AKRSP staff and members observed that women were largely excluded from the village decision-making process despite their significant contributions to both farm and non-farm economies. As a result, the AKRSP deemed it necessary to assist... rural women in forming separate platforms for the purpose of initiating rural development projects. These platforms are called Women's Organizations (WOs) and function similarly to VOs." Therefore, the initiatives taken by NGOs specifically AKDN have done tremendously to alter the traditional understanding towards women. The AKRSP's plan for the development of civil society implemented via community organizations and it facilitated participation of target group for community growth (Gloekler, 2006: 120-188).

In addition, the WOs were specifically designed to encourage women to articulate their interests, needs and priorities. Bearing in mind that membership to VOs is limited to males. WOs were created so as to be more gender-sensitive to participation at the village-level (Sattar, 2001: 68). The NGOs undertook a series of surveys to establish labor responsibilities and needs of women, which in turn enabled them to incorporate gender-specific sensitivity into their program of household participation (ibid, 146). This was an essential undertaking and a monumental step toward recognizing the importance of integrating gender into a model for development (ibid, 172).

The formation of the above mentioned separate institutions for women (the WOs) was probably the most significant step towards encouraging women to play a role in the public sphere (AKRSP, 2003: 87). On the surface, this initiative may appear to support segregation of women instead of mainstreaming them. In

reality, however, it proved to be a strategic step towards allowing women to discuss their problems and take on village level challenges in the socio-culturally sensitive context of the Gilgit-Baltistan (Jabeen, 2007: 158). These institutions provided a unique platform for rural women of the Gilgit-Baltistan to access various development services. The significant among them was the opportunity to save their money with formal systems. In a context where women have had very little control over resources, for example land and household properties, the WO savings proved to be a unique tool for empowerment (Farukh, 2007: 35).

The promotion of equality, gender rights and interests in culturally sensitive regions like Gilgit-Baltistan; therefore, require efforts to clarify gender concepts among all stakeholders, invest in programs that directly improve the conditions and position of women (e.g. employment generation), and have frequent dialogue with the religious leaders on gender sensitization (Awais, 2006: 47).

In addition to above discussion, accepting the very close nature of the society, the AKRSP did realize since outset that the real achievement of development is strengthening of the local capacities. It can be done while establishing local and indigenous platforms like VOs and WOs which rose promptly to 2,217 and 1,141 respectively (see above table 1). Currently, these platforms have developed umbrella organization known as LDOs. These LDOs are further cooperating and coordinating with these VOs and WOs. The AKDN tried to create an enabling environment for entire communities and strengthen the practices through gender-sensitization activities (AKRSP, 2003: 158). These initiations will directly have effect at grass root levels. Therefore, the marginalized women in the society will get an opportunity to restore their real status.

My field visits and conclusions from interviews and observations establish rather tentatively that the participation of women in both income generating activities and village-wide development efforts has effectively raised the economic and social status of women in public and within the household. Many women are spending their increased incomes on educating their children. Specifically the demand for girls' education has risen dramatically. Indeed, it is observed that after inception of these NGOs, it remarkably provided opportunities to the women of the region to get emancipated, freedom to pursue their education

and a chance for self-development (Ummar & Khan, 2002: 4). This initiation resulted into forging a viable civil society.

In contrast, some of the NGOs have purely focused on educational reforms and development. By and large, the educational focus remained towards female education. The role of AKESP is quite tremendous, which in true sense worked for the real growth of female education in remote and invincible parts of Gilgit-Baltistan. By 2005, the total number of schools under AKESP system was 251(AKESP Annual Review, 2005: 114). There are 25903 students who are facilitated under these schools and most of them are female students (ibid). Nevertheless, one cannot ignore gender inequalities in the field of education as well. Most of state owned educational institutions are focusing on male education as compared to females. Even communities demand for male educational institution. They believe that male is the only source of earning and support for the household.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, almost 1,764 schools are functioning. The number of colleges is 19, and there is one university which has been established in 2002 in Gilgit-Baltistan, the NAs of Pakistan (NED, 2005: 135). In addition, we cannot avoid the religious educational centres called *madrassas*, which have a large number of enrolments of male and female students. So, education is accepted as a real source of social development (ibid). The increased use of education as an instrument of social mobility, and growing urbanization led to a dramatic increase in public expectations and aspirations. It resulted in both the consolidation of the power of the existing elite and the emergence of new economic and social forces that articulate their social and political interests through non-profit CSOs (Shah, 2004:369).

Apparently, in recent years, women of Gilgit-Baltistan seem to have crossed the threshold towards real empowerment in all the spheres of life. It starts from enrolment in academic institutions to employment in various private and public departments for example they are working as teachers, doctors, LHVs, NGO workers, etc. (NHD, 2005: 12) They are required to do more, because the social boundaries are addressed by the strong cultural and religious norms and traditions (Streefland, 1995:23). It can be only achieved, if every woman starts their move from their own household. Further, the woman entrepreneurship is also been espoused in WID approach, which tends to enhance women's educational

profile, employment conditions, their representation at political platforms, and their socio-economic activities. (Hussain, 1999:12). The following table reveals the number of women employed by government institutions in the NAs of Pakistan.

Table 2
Number of Women Employed by Government Institutions
in Gilgit-Baltistan

Name of Institutions	No. Of Women
Accountant General Pakistan Revenue	0
Banks	0
Chief Court	0
Department of Education	450
Department of Labour and Employment	0
Directorate of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries	0
Directorate of Animal Husbandry	0
Directorate of Civil supplies and Transport	0
Directorate of Education	3
Directorate of Health/Health Department	149
Directorate of Local Bodies and Rural Development	0
Directorate of Minerals and Industries	0
Forest Department	0
Northern Areas Secretariat	0
Northern Areas Transport Corporation	0
Office of the election Commission	0
Planning and Development Department	5
Police Department	70
Population Census Organization	0
Public Works Department	0
Registration office	0
Services and General Administration Department	0
Total	667

Source: IUCN 2003 p.193

4.3 Implications of NGOs activities on Civil Society

Implications of NGOs activities in Gilgit-Baltistan are both bright, and gloomy, which depends on their performance and people's perception about it. Hence, the study prompted me to carry out further field work to collect feed back from both community and NGOs about the implications of civil society activities in the region. As such, a number of questions were included in the survey, for example, queries on awareness level and people's contact with the NGOs, views about the quality of these services and the allegations/myths commonly discussed about the NGOs. Also a direct question was included asking their opinion on government control and check on NGOs.

However, with the positive public image that emerges about NGOs, physical presence, activities, interaction and the quality of the services, a good number of people (41%) regard them as useful and another (44%) as somewhat useful. Whereas, the ongoing debate about the NGOs (allegations and counter allegations) has an obvious impact on people's minds. Though not in majority but a good number of people see NGOs with suspicion. They see foreign hands behind mushroom growth of NGOs. It is perhaps in this background that a large number of respondents (84%) endorse the view that there should be government control and check on the NGOs. Only 12% say there shouldn't be any check and evaluation by the government. This, however, may be because the NGOs too do not resist the role of government. When the same question was asked to those who are running NGOs, the ratio was even higher (91%). This means that any step improving the monitoring and check of the government over NGOs in Gilgit-Baltistan shouldn't face much resistance. However, the overall mixed image is reflected into responses received with regard to the following statements.

Table 3²: Opinion about NGOs implication in Gilgit-Baltistan

Statement	Correct	Somewhat Correct	Wrong	Don't Know
Majority NGOs are working for giving upper hand to a specific religious group	21	18	39	22
Majority NGOs don't believe in religious stratification rather working for the welfare of all	49	27	16	08
On pretext of education, majority NGOs lead new generation on a path against Islamic values	21	12	53	14
Majority NGOs work for eradication of ignorance and backwardness and to educate masses	63	21	09	07
Majority NGOs run with foreign countries funding and work to protect their interests in the region	25	15	25	35
Majority NGOs spend foreign funds for public welfare where no foreign interest lies	34	16	25	25
A number of public welfare projects have been completed in Gilgit-Baltistan as a result NGOs working	64	24	07	05
Majority NGOs officials have made money while they have not done much welfare work	39	28	13	20
NGO-activity has raised women awareness	42	34	16	08
NGO-activity has increased obscenity and waywardness among the women	33	23	34	10
NGOs have imparted to people skills that have increased the income of the household	58	25	09	08
Due to activities of majority of NGOs, the local culture and values have faced negative changes	24	20	40	16

² The data in table 3 is collected from communities and members of VOs / WOs in Gilgit region in NAs. The total number of persons selected was 100 (including both members of VOs and WOs etc., as well as non-members from general community in the selected areas.

Table 4: NGO officials Opinion about NGOs' implications in Gilgit-Baltistan

Statement	Correct	Somewhat Correct	Wrong	Don't Know
Majority NGOs are working for giving upper hand to a specific religious group	19	24	52	05
Majority NGOs don't believe in religious stratification rather working for the welfare of all	64	17	17	02
On pretext of education, majority NGOs lead new generation on a path against Islamic values	14	17	59	10
Majority NGOs work for eradication of ignorance and backwardness and to educate masses	84	12	02	02
Majority NGOs run with foreign countries funding and work to protect their interests in the region	17	21	33	29
Majority NGOs spend foreign funds for public welfare where no foreign interest lies	36	19	26	19
A number of public welfare projects have been completed in Gilgit-Baltistan as a result NGOs working	79	17	04	00
Majority NGOs officials have made money while they have not done much welfare work	34	19	28	19
NGO-activity has raised women awareness	66	19	12	03
NGO-activity has increased obscenity and waywardness among the women	22	16	40	22
NGOs have imparted to people skills that have increased the income of the household	85	12	03	00
Due to activities of majority of NGOs, the local culture and values have faced negative changes	24	17	47	12

When the same questions were put to the NGOs officials (another 100 respondents), with a slight difference, the response pattern is interestingly the same against almost all the statements (as is evident from the following table 4). The mixed image that emerges from the above two tables (table 3 & 4) may perhaps be regarded as a reflection of a number of factors. These include the prevailing polarization, apprehensions about NGOs and the existence of certain NGOs with ill designs or a poor performance, but the broader spectrum of view- point favours NGOs efforts in the region.

4.4 Discussion and Analysis

In this part, I am going to give findings of the research survey, conducted through questionnaires/interviews. The findings have been given in tabular form (in the preceding chapter) following discussion on the results. Structurally, this section of thesis will specifically include:

- (a) Summary of the results /research findings
- (b) Discussion on the research findings (providing direct answers to the research questions as given in chapter 1, along with the chosen theory).

4.4.1 Summary of the Results

While summarizing the results, the findings can be divided into two categories:

- a) General findings; and
- b) Specific findings.

In the category of general findings, it is shown that majority of the respondents in the picked sample are unanimous that many public projects have been completed in Gilgit-Baltistan owing to the working of the NGOs. For instance, table 3 clearly shows that a great number of the respondents (selected members of VOs, WOs, CBOs etc., and non-members from general community) hold that many public welfare projects have been completed as a result of NGOs working.

Likewise, more than 50% of the total respondents in table 3 hold that NGOs have been successful in imparting to the people skills that have increased the income of the household.

On the question, whether or not the NGO-activity has raised awareness among the women, a sufficient number of respondents hold that the activities of the NGOs have raised women awareness, but less than 50% either testifies to this fact partially, or simply gives no answer to the question.

However, particular results in table 3 show that respondents on the questions regarding religious, cultural aspects stand divided, and no finding can be drawn from their responses.

The results from the 100 respondents (table 4) who are NGOs officials sound quite encouraging. For instance, more than 80% of the respondents in this category opine that NGOs are successfully working for eradication of ignorance and backwardness and to educate masses. Almost equal number of respondents responds that a number of public welfare projects have been completed in the chosen area as a result of NGOs working. Likewise, less than 70% of the picked sample in this category holds that NGO-activity has raised women awareness.

About the query as to whether or not NGOs have imparted to people skills that have increased the income of the household, as many as 85% NGOs officials respond affirmatively.

The responses of the respondents in this category were, however, quite mixed when they were posed questions on the effect of NGOs on local culture, religious values etc. However, majority of the respondents do not endorse to the fact that the activities conducted by the NGOS have impacted the local culture, religious values in a negative way.

Beyond the general findings noted above, the research results specifically indicate that the major obstacles to NGOs working in Gilgit-Baltistan are social norms, cultural and religious constrains and indigenous value-system. Another specific finding is that majority of the respondents in all the categories believe that contribution of the NGOs towards the amelioration of the masses and the women is worthwhile and thereby is the most significant aspect of the working of the NGOs.

The survey specifically indicates that a vast majority of the respondents believe in the worthwhile working of the NGOs. The same pattern is endorsed by many respondents (table 3), and a vast majority of respondents (table 4) (NGOs officials). Moreover, it is also specifically indicated that a large number of respondents (84%) endorse the view that governmental control and check on the working of the NGOs is inevitable.

The survey's responses accordingly suggest that a vast majority of respondents in all the categories are of opinion that NGOs can very effectively empower the general masses, and the women under the control of the government as the respondents in the communities are divided and suspicious on the question of NGOs funding.

4.4.2 Discussion on Results (Research Findings)

The purpose of this study was to explore the developmental projects implemented or undertaken by the NGOs in Gilgit-Baltistan, and to ascertain the extent of success attained by the NGOs towards strengthening civil society in the region. The research findings contributed a wealth of information on and insight into the working of the NGOs and the barriers and check-and-balance issues. In this part of thesis, the research question(s) (as developed in chapter 1), and survey results are discussed simultaneously so as to develop nexus or correlation (if any) among them. In the last part of this section, a correlation among the results, research question and chosen theory is deemed to be established.

Reflecting on the research question as to what extent and how have NGOs been successful in the construction of civil society by empowering marginalized communities, and particularly women in the Gilgit-Baltistan region, we refer to the findings drawn from the results of the above given tables. The table 4 clearly indicates that a vast majority of the respondents think that the NGOs have been successful in eradicating ignorance and backwardness, and to educate masses; they have been successful in imparting skills to people and raising income for the household; they have been equally successful in creating awareness among women. Likewise, the research findings in table 3 also testify to the fact that the NGOs have been quite instrumental in empowering the marginalized communities, as well creating awareness among women.

Analytically, the apparent amelioration of women can only be seen from the fact that about 22 % women are parliamentarians in Pakistan. But, when we specifically focus on the situation of women empowerment in Gilgit-Baltistan, their presence at the political horizon is a recent phenomenon. Especially, the very recent appointment of a woman governor, an ex-worker for an NGO, in this region speaks a lot about the struggle of the NGOs in this area. Earlier on, there was no representation of women in politics of Gilgit-Baltistan. The recent development, however, seems to have been catalyzed solely due to the work of NGOs towards women empowerment. The

administrative step, such as the Proclamation on the Provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan, taken by the incumbent government has been a blessing for allocation of women seats at the political horizon. Actually, the fixation of women quotas is a recent affirmative action taken by the government. It might, indeed, be true to state that this could not have been possible if there had been no developmental work by NGOs. The process of empowerment, I reckon, does not take place in the vacuum, and the betterment does not happen automatically. So, the work of NGOs cannot be overlooked just because the political empowerment of women has happened as a result of government's administrative as well as constitutional steps.

Although the findings (table 2) indicate that women in Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan face discrimination almost in all walks of life, the positive response of the majority of the respondents in communities as well as NGOs reveal that NGOs' activity has improved the social status of women. On the other end of spectrum, the figures given in table 2 amply shows the poor and/or no contribution of women in jobs at various levels, which further suggests that government can effectively empower women by affirmative action through the agency of NGOs. The findings are consistent with the literature reviewed in chapter 2 that NGOs can work under the umbrella of government, where government can effectively empower women through some affirmative actions.

It is empirically evidenced (see table 2) that the women still are facing a worse-off scenario in terms of their economic development, and well-being. The non-participation and/or marginal contribution of women in jobs at various levels might have some reasons behind which are far to seek. For instance, the local traditions and cultural taboos, social restrictions, lack of women quotas at governmental level are some of the cogent reasons for almost non-participation of women in public offices. Here, NGOs seem to be less successful in creating social change in public attitude towards women which could be conducive to women in jobs. However, on positive side, the projects undertaken by the NGOs in Gilgit-Baltistan were specifically designed to encourage women to articulate their needs and priorities.

Before the working of the NGOs, the membership to VOs was limited to males only; hence, WOs were created so as to be more gender-sensitive to participation at the village level. The reports and scholarly writings empirically evidence that the number of local and indigenous platforms like VOs, WOs, and CBOs etc has increased significantly as a result of the working of NGOs.

The significance of the Gramscian theory is perhaps centers around the developing forms of autonomous organization outside of the dominant bloc or state. Hence, Gramscian position seems to unfold those civil-society organizations can play *both* co-optive and counter-hegemonic roles. So, in development discourse, the NGOs and its sub-organizations have the potentiality to develop counter-hegemony and therefore are capable to strengthen the civil society.

The Gramscian approach might testify to the result that a large number of respondents (84%) hold the view that there should be government control and check on the NGOs. When the same question was asked to those who are running NGOs, the ratio was even higher (91%) supporting role of government in check and control of NGOs.

Theoretically, the above findings apparently seem to relate with Gramsci, although the theory might not be consistent with the research findings. Since, the object of this part of analysis, of course, is to dig out a correlation between theory and research findings, it sounds quite appropriate to reiterate Gramscian theorization that “*the institutions of civil society [also form] ... the ‘outer earthworks’ of the state, through which the ruling classes maintain their ‘hegemony’ or dominance in society*”.

Based on the data collected, and empirical evidence on the contribution of women in jobs, it can be inferred that women in Gilgit-Baltistan are not economically empowered. The working of NGOs towards the amelioration of women seems quite worthwhile, but the claims are not testified by the figures given in table 2.

The findings were particularly consistent with the literature related to the cultural norms and conservative nature of the area which might be one of the reasons as to why NGOs have not been successful enough in empowering women in, Gilgit-Baltistan, the NAs of Pakistan.

5 Conclusion

Since the primary concern of civil society in many regimes has been the empowerment and emancipation of the marginalized, underprivileged, and underserved factions of the population, the yearning of civil society has always existed. The civil society as a societal institution towards the empowerment of the communities, especially the women is deemed as inevitable. And NGOs are the major players affecting the civil societal movement around the globe; the same phenomenon is ubiquitous in the Gilgit-Baltistan. It is undoubtedly due to the contribution of the NGOs in Gilgit-Baltistan that the notion of civil society has developed in recent years.

As back as 1980s, there has occurred an enormous change in the pace of development in the evolution of civil society in Gilgit-Baltistan. The major contributing factor in providing impetus to this change has undoubtedly been the NGOs. Since the challenges before the NGOs, among others, were lack of awareness on rights and responsibilities, the NGOs have sought to address this problem in collaboration with the conventionally conservative institutions for a more balanced and universal development to ensure progress.

With a view to strengthening of civil society in Gilgit-Baltistan, the NGOs have resorted to such programmes which aimed at creating a sense of ownership, self reliance and self help within the indigenous population. The success of the NGOs is corroborated by the research findings as discussed and analysed in the preceding chapter(s). Owing to the working of NGOs in the area, the communities now feel empowered enough to make their own decisions, although the women are not empowered up to the desired level of development.

5.1 Conclusions on Findings

The case study and community responses suggest that flexible, independent, and credible non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are most capable of effectively implementing NGOs type models. There is however still a long way to go before a

truly vibrant civil society emerges that ensures equal participation of even the most marginalized segments of the society.

Moreover, the research findings clearly reinforce the idea that to improve the status of women in Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan, it is imperative for their socio-economic betterment that the initiatives are taken by the Pakistani government together with NGOs. Government should make sure that their contribution in jobs at all levels is up to the desired mark, that they are practically engaged in decision-making bodies at district and provincial levels.

A broader conclusion to be drawn from the working of the NGOs is that much work needs to be done to address the problems of the marginalized communities, especially women in Gilgit-Baltistan, the NAs of Pakistan.

5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

It is hoped that this study will serve as a catalyst for the subsequent researchers to explore the other aspects related to NGOs, and suggest the modalities which could be adopted for the effective betterment of marginalized communities, particularly women.

As to the implications for future research, the future study would be conducted by a broader sampling. Future research should also include examination of specific factors Gilgit-Baltistan that inhibit or promote marginalized communities, especially women. An in-depth study of developmental factors that contribute efficient working of the NGOs to promote or detract from empowerment is needed. Thereby, I intentionally leave these grey areas of research to be harped on in future.

("Trust in people, its extraordinary phenomenon of development. The most powerful force is people changing their own environment. They will to change very often the capacity to change well because they living their context").
(**His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan**)

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