

EVOLUTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONFLICT PRONE COUNTRIES OF 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Civil society organizations are very important for uplift of humanity and work round the clock to bring changes and reforms. However, at times the conflict prone countries of Asia and Africa not allow the civil society organizations to work freely for the uplift of society due to old mindset. The determination, struggle and persistent efforts of societies to work independently helped them to achieve some success. Still civil society needs more efforts to resolve issues of those persons who are victims of terrorism, ethnicity, domestic violence, slavery, unequal treatment or discriminations. There are places where people are deprived from their basic rights and they cannot be educated due to violence. Civil Society can help people to raise their voices nationally and internationally. Hence, civil society is pivot for a state to achieve stability and tranquillity particularly in conflict prone country. The article is an attempt to discuss the evaluation of civil societies in conflict prone countries of 21st century. In this regard, the case studies of Pakistan, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Afghanistan will be discussed.

Keywords: Civil Society, Conflict, Ibn Khaldun, Peace Building, Narratives.

Introduction

Civil society actors have become strategic players, both in conflicts as well as peace. It is widely recognized by the political scientists as well as historiographers that civil society plays a key role in developing democratic governance in peaceful societies. However, the political significance of civil society may be far more prominent in contexts marked by conflict. Being characterized by a higher degree of politicization and a less organized institutional setting, conflict situations may generate more penetrating mobilization of civil society¹. While in stable political systems, civil society may become passive but in conflict-ridden areas, mobilization may suddenly grow. Here politicization is of different nature, as it occurs in view of the life or death nature of politics. Contrary to peaceful contexts, in conflict situations, the existential nature of politics and the securitization that follows, generate different societal incentives. The cross-sectional nature of existential or securitized politics thus yields a quantitatively higher degree of public action spanning different sectors in

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society. The different understandings of the grounds of conflict and the adequate responses to them may in turn lead to the formation of civil society actors and ensuing actions that can either fuel conflict, sustain the status quo or promote peace².

The remarkable work of Ibn Khaldun is a classic example on the rise and fall of a civilization and the origin and evolution of human society³. Beyond a conventional understanding of the study of past political entities, Ibn Khaldun sought to construct a sound synthesis for a philosophy of humanities. He advanced a five cycles/stages evolution of a civil society i.e. success or consolidation, tyranny, prosperity, satisfaction and enjoy⁴. The pre-condition of such an evolution is only possible in a society, which is free of conflicts and divergences. These conflicts/divergences may be internal as well as external. Growth of institutions as well as civil society becomes vulnerable due to conflicts and divergences. In such a perennial paradox situation, a particular stage of evolution may get either prolonged, retarded or even reversed. Despite the difficulties imposed by the historical-contextual imperatives of time and place, Ibn Khaldun's work remains an authority to modern historiography. His ideas bring new logic to the study of political philosophy, which is still valid in the current epoch.

The incident of 'Black Tuesday' and subsequent war on terrorism have raised the importance of civil society at global level. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Inter-governmental Organizations (INGOs) are putting emphasis on civil society for promoting democratic system and transparency. Arab awakening started in 2010 from Tunisia and subsequently in Egypt and Libya. Basically this was the wave of democratization, instigated due to role of civil society, which provided sense among people to realize their rights.⁵ But there were elements of adulteration in civil society like disjointed segments from states (ethnic groups, minorities). This phenomenon has totally changed the pure concept of civil society. The concept of civil society has been put in confusion as there are certain stake holders who are pursuing on their interests in the name of social welfare.⁶

Though Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in different conflict zones are not purely serving the ideal purpose but still they are playing their role against authoritarian regimes such as overthrow of dictators in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and in Syria it is still in process. There is a huge difference between civil societies in the past and that in current conflict prone countries. This article will focus on unique nature of civil society in Syria, Libya, Egypt Afghanistan and Pakistan, its role in promotion of democratization to gain political advantage and associated challenges. This article also elaborates the role of civil societies with the help of certain case studies in the light of Khaldun's concept of Assabiyah⁷.

Evolution of Civil Society

In Ancient ages, Greek philosopher, Aristotle was the one who highlighted the importance of the public participation in state but only for people with enough possessions and time so that they can take part in public affairs. Roman philosopher, Cicero talked about 'Society as civilis'. He negated the work of Aristotle and introduced new concept about civil society irrespective of common grounds, wealth and possessions rather on equal rights for all individuals.

In 13th century, Ibn Khaldun gave Islamic concept of civil society. He was the one who talked about this concept, there were monarchies and people did not dare to talk about their rights. Mohsin Mahdi says,

*"The biographical, stylistic and doctrinal evidence introduced in this study establish this point beyond any reasonable doubt. It has been shown that he articulately though cautiously, defended the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle against Neo-Platonism, atomism and logical nominalism; and that his study of prophecy, the religious law and the character of the Islamic community prove that he was a true disciple of the Islamic Platonic tradition of political philosophy."*⁸

His main work, named "Muqaddamah", (in Arabic) is also known as "Kitab ul Ibrari" (Book of lessons). He wrote this book in the light of rise and fall of European powers. The most important factor he discussed is "Assabiyah" (community tribalism). He was the one who applied new concepts to sociology. He divided societies into two groups; Urban (Hadra) and rural (Badawa). Rural society has been categorized in primary level while Hadra lies in secondary level. In Rural areas people are used to twig with agrarian life style and this is not possible in urban areas as urban life style is based on business and scientific techniques. According to Khaldun these both groups jointly form Assabiyah. In societies or civilizations Assabiyah plays role in both ways; productive and unproductive.⁹ Khaldun emphasized that 'empires also have a certain life period like a human being'. He also said that 'dynasty cannot stay more than three generations and in this time, dynasty can achieve its development but in the end it has to decline'.

Initially, Western scholars didn't recognize the importance of Khaldun's works and that he was a forefather of sociology and history; however, in 19th century, they started recognizing his work. Many scholars like Machiaveili, Adam Smith and Montesquieu, did acknowledge him. Later on, Ibn Khaldun was also given title of "Father of Political Economy"¹⁰. In 20th and 21st century, civil society got huge importance. Rise of such groups during 1990's was due to increase in "social wealth". This term got prominence during that time period as the purpose was promotion of NGO's and INGO's. Social wealth leads to development of civil society and in turn

collaboration among individuals on certain agendas and motives. Such ethics of collaboration and support are reflected in Aristotle's work on "civic virtues"¹¹.

Civil society is considered as a role model and a guiding source for those countries who seek justice in their societies. It works freely and independently without any pressure or external force. It primarily works for the betterment of people and makes a stable system where people can enjoy their lives.

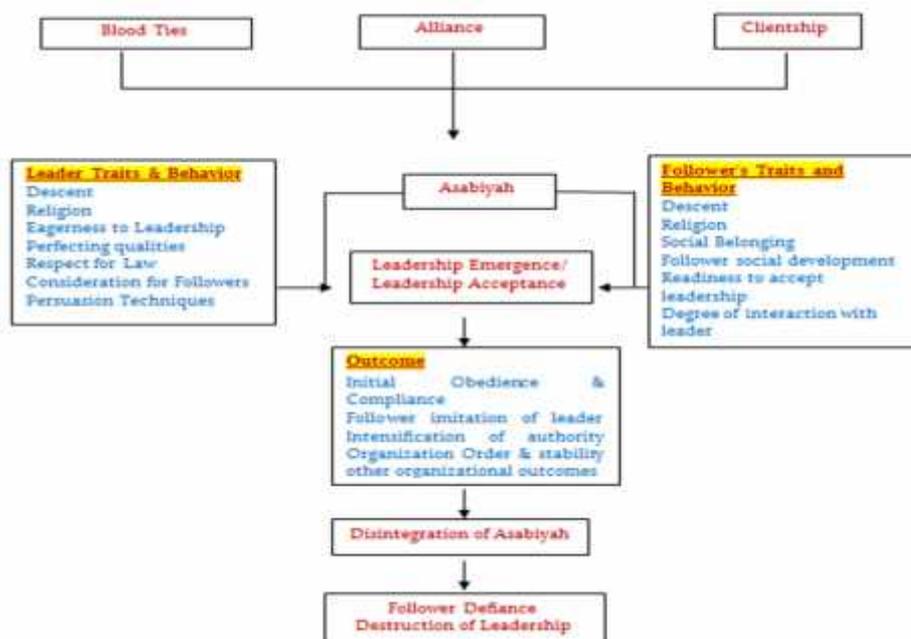
Definition of Conflict

The word "conflict" means hostility between two or more parties or persons.¹² Once the conflict is initiated, it could lead to disastrous results. By definition, conflict means that between the conflicting parties when there is a clash of perception, each party wants to compel the other for their objectives¹³. In a nutshell, conflict may be of words or physical force whose prime purpose is to destroy.

The theoretical framework is based on the Khaldun's theory of Assabiyah or social cohesion i.e. group solidarity. At that time the savage pride of tribes were so high that it was vital to overcome the pride of the Bedouins to create cooperation in established dynasties and cultivate urban civilization. Once the principle of group solidarity was established, Ibn Khaldun saw dynasties going through predictable cycles of five phases: (1) successful overthrow of a royal predecessor;(2) gaining of complete control; (3) leisure and optimal expression of rule; (4) contentment succumbs to lassitude and luxury; (5) squandering breeds hatred in the people and disloyalty among the soldiers, and dynastic senility becomes an incurable disease. Khaldun's cycle helps to describe the authoritarian continuities found in recent Arab history: three rulers across sixty years in Egypt; two across fifty years in Tunisia; one for more than forty in Libya; one for more than thirty in Yemen; father and son for more than forty years in Syria. The most continuous line of authority in the region of course is in Saudi Arabia, where the clan of Al-Saud has been preminent for over a hundred years, testing the elasticity of Ibn Khaldun's theory and buying the patience of the people with social subsidies.¹⁴ In contention with royal modes of ruling are democratic recognitions that all leaders are flawed and that term limits both minimize the chances of peculiar flaws becoming endemic, while they also maximize the chances of systemic flaws becoming identified and treated.

The unique development of civil society in confliction is explained by Khaldun's concept of Assabiyah. The gradual process of disintegration of society as explained by Khaldun is given as under:

Ibn Khaldun's Process of Disintegration of Society



Role of Civil Society in Peace Building

Civil society is the best peace-building tool for conflict-torn countries.¹⁵ In the book "Critical Clash", the authors explain the broad and wide phenomenon of conflict management based on the authors' theories and concrete statements¹⁶. The book narrates a critical confrontation about the respect, enforcement of enemy peace lines and the achievement of all means and goals in resolving the conflict. Most of the civil society follows this model when they are working in a conflict prone environment. The purpose of civil society is not to use any tool, which directly or indirectly is linked with violence¹⁷.

Concept of Civil Society in 21st Century

According to World Bank, concept of civil society is defined as:

*"The wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. CSOs therefore refer to a wide array of organizations: community groups, NGOs, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations"*¹⁸.

In a nutshell, civil society is a composition of groups, where voluntary actions are taken for political and economic progress; it brings together people for a specific cause, which can be their agenda or motive to achieve. A definition of healthy civil society can be abstracted through association of voluntary people in a certain group. Hence it allows people to have a public debate with agreements and negotiations.

Conventionally, role of civil society was highlighted as counterweight to state but in 21st century, these civil societies got a separate identity as some scholars recognized new dimension that they are playing their role in overthrowing the authoritarian administrations. Initially such non-state actors played their role in “Latin America and European states” and now later on in Arab countries in 2010. The civil societies played their role in rallying people of particular state, for democratic regimes. These societies have totally changed the original meaning of social work. As they are doing all for achieving their own interests and motives, like Islamic movements.¹⁹

In 2000 in Egypt “Civil Society Index (CSI)”, found it difficult to implement proper concept of civil society. The definition of CSI is as under:

“The arena, outside of the family, the state and the market, where people associate to advance common interests”, because the delineation between government and NGO is somewhat blurred in instances when an NGO is partly run by civil servants, relies primarily on government funding for its survival and closely follows a government agenda in terms of setting its priorities²⁰.

There is no fine line between civil society and politics of groups such as “Muslim Brotherhood” in Egypt. Such groups are playing and working on different agenda.²¹ Civil societal groups were used to be neutral in nature but in terms of Southwest Asia, these NGO’s and parties are in opposition to each other²². In Arab world, revolution was not due to efforts of formal or organized institutions, but it was from the side of informal or non-systematic organizations like student groups and other protestors who were not part of any well-organized association.²³

Institutional and Political Factors Shaping Civil Society in Conflict Prone Countries

Institutions and politics have direct relationship with civil society for the betterment of a nation. Undoubtedly, political parties are linked with civil society in order to promote their agendas and slogans. Such parties coordinate with civil society for formulation of a policy or amendment in law.

The other factor was progression in technology. So many laws were passed to restrict the role of NGO’s by Arab countries and in result, global funding to these

NGOs was stopped. NGOs were under observation of security institutions as they were closely used to keep check on their funding. For example in Egypt, there was a proper fine a particular NGO takes donation from any international actor without having approval from the state. Similarly, in Jordan, there were also laws to restrict the activities of NGOs. There were “counter terrorism financing” and “money laundering laws”, which were applied on NGOs. Same goes with Bahrain, where Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice, both were responsible to keep a check on the funding of NGOs.

On other hand, the stakeholders such as media, judiciary and bureaucracy also coordinate with civil society for strengthening their roles. Whenever any mishap occurs in a society, the civil society makes its plea to these stakeholders and they create a solid solution to counter it. Interestingly, international institutions also participate in these practices. For example, United Nations is an active institution, which monitors different civil societies of the world. They also grant them financial assistance and help them to promote justice, equality, good governance and transparency. All these activities shape international peace and stability.

For example, when civil war erupted in the Sri Lanka, many civil society organizations were banned in the country. Their rights were curtailed by the government. The international organizations helped these civil societies to restore their status. Hence, political factors and institutions have strong role to play for motivating civil societies.²⁴

Political Revival and Role of Civil Societies in Conflict Prone Countries – Case Studies

Pakistan

Before partition of sub-continent, there were various movements, which mobilized people against British Empire to fight for their freedom. Civil society activities in Pakistan can be divided into three phases.

First Phase (1947 – 1968)

After independence, there was a dire need to rebuild country due to disintegration and relocation of people from other areas. Making of Constitution and formation of a government were another problem to be settled. There was huge competition among parties and tribes for having control over state. Leaders of provinces were also demanding equal distribution of resources among them. Civil societies were playing a divergent role. In urban areas, these societies were comprised of student associations, lawyers, and journalists while civil society in rural areas was controlled by influential people like landlords.²⁵

Second Phase (1968 – 1988)

During this time period, there were three opposing rulers; General Yahya, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and General Zia respectively. Though all of these had different ideologies, but the common agenda was to tackle and contain civil societies. Civil society during this era was unable to promote democracy due to disintegration among different ruling parties.

Third Phase (1988 – 1997)

In 1988, the demonstrations started to re-establish democracy in the country after the death of General Zia. This phase is also known as “Revival of Democracy” in Pakistan. Two political parties emerged prominently, namely Pakistan People Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim Leagues Nawaz (PLM-N), and the main leading actors were Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Due to bad governance and financial mismanagement, country started declining and lost its credibility. Mass protests and demonstrations of civil societies were legitimized in this phase.²⁶

Egypt

In Arab and African countries, there is a lack of cohesion among people in terms of ideology. People don't accept the legitimacy of governing elites²⁷. It is also claimed that it all depends on the factor that how a particular leader rules the state and to what extent he is strong to exercise influence²⁸. In Arab countries, formal institutions were not responsible for revolts but there were organizations such as students and street protests. Though mass protests were informal and not organized but all have same ideology to topple the regime so it can be related to Khaldun's Assabiyah. In Tahrir square protests, formal institutions were being replaced with informal organizations. Individuals from every walk of life participated in toppling Hosni Mubarak regime,²⁹ including human rights associations. At the end, last entity was Egyptian military, which promised the people that they are standing with them. Army had played a great role in maintaining ideological primacy as military acted in both way; consent and coercion. In other words, they have used both hard and soft power to overcome the situation. It is also said that army acted to complement the civil society.³⁰

Libya

The wave of democratization, which started from Tunisia, also touched Libya. In 2011, protests started against Muammar Gadhafi, resultantly he was killed on 20th October. During the Gadhafi regime no civil society organizations (CSOs) were present in Libya. Even in constitution of country, there was no discussion and laws about CSOs.³¹ Charles Dunne has highlighted the importance of CSOs in Libya and

observed that the main obstacles in formation of CSOs were lack of education and cooperation. Libyan military and police were not capable enough to control the situations.³² Due to such deficiencies, Libya observed highest bloodshed as compared to other states³³.

Syria

In Syria, protests started in 2011 to overthrow the regime of Bashar al Assad. Assad's regime is being supported politically and economically by Iran, Russia, Lebanon and China. Rebellious actors are Qatar, Saudi Arabia, USA, and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). Initially Syrian civil war was not on the basis of sectarianism but in fact this was due to democratization wave which started in 2010 from Tunisia.³⁴ There were also external actors who got involved in war just to achieve their own interests. Civil society organized many protests in support of democracy, rights and justice across the country. Activists also provided humanitarian assistance to people in terms of food, education and medical. In spite of hurdles, they are still active in containing rebellions. Civil societies are different in their agendas like equality, rights and education etc. Syria is now a fragmented country with different actors and groups, who are taking part in social welfare. There are also groups who are getting funds from foreign countries and supporting anti-state activities. Extremist groups are more influential than social activists and civil society as the former are taking funding from anti-state elements. Syrian nation is always in conflict within. There are many civil society groups, who are working on same agenda or ideology but they don't want work together. But still the role of civil society cannot be neglected as they are doing their level best to promote democracy.³⁵

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is another conflict prone country. Here, civil society comprises of religious groups, NGOs, political factions and interest groups. The advent of civil society came into being after Soviet invasion in 1970s. Shura is a traditional term and this is a sort of civil society in rural areas, where elders and ones having the knowledge of religion, usually are involved in discussion to solve issues. Everyone can sit in Shura's meeting and its membership is open to all.³⁶ They immediately solve the issues and also contact with the responsible authorities. Shura is present among all Afghani populations and it has legitimate authority. It also has contact with "development associations" which are usually in urban areas of Afghanistan and these associations are responsible for implementation process. This is true reflection of Khaldun's concept of Assabiyah, in which he divided society into factions; rural and urban. Rural faction is of primary importance and urban having secondary importance. Both are dependent on one another. The same phenomenon is present in Afghanistan.

Secondly, there are also religious groups, who are involved in social activities. During the Taliban era, such groups were critical as they were supporting Taliban.³⁷ Religious groups supported Taliban to topple the government of Rabbani. After prevalent support, Taliban got control over different cities of Afghanistan and then they tried to exercise their control on long term basis. According to Khaldun, when one leader fails to establish its rule then other groups emerge and replace the particular leader. Rabbani was the leader who was unable to stabilize the country and then Taliban emerged and their ideology was supported by religious groups

Thirdly, there are NGOs who are working in Afghanistan for rehabilitation of state. Total numbers of NGOs are 1020, which are registered in Afghanistan. NGOs are providing benevolent aid to the people and these organizations have international standards. The most crucial aspect of such organizations is that they are working for rights of people and are involved in the process of peace building. NGOs are usually private in nature and they work according to particular agenda.³⁸

Fourthly, there are political parties who are actively taking part in revival of politics. Primarily, these are nationalists who are considered as moderates. There are also individuals who are “social democrats” and are involved in peace-building activities across the country.³⁹

Challenges of Civil Societies

Asia and Africa are diverse regions that comprises of different areas and geographies⁴⁰. It has different cultures and traditions, which are quite unique in the world. There are many problems, which are faced by the civil societies in these regions. Firstly, there is a degree of denial i.e. people in different regions of Asia do not accept civil society workers in their area. They do not want to have reforms or change in their society, and they do not allow such civil workers to visit.

There are many ethnic groups, which are found in big and small places of South Asia. These groups are conservatives and reject new ideas and innovations.⁴¹ They do not allow civil society members to take part in their domestic politics and confronts them in open public. In elections, such parties create problems for civil society members. If civil society supports a newly formed political party in their region, than such old political parties try their best to sabotage such arrangement.

If civil society wants to conduct development works in a region like building bridges, roads, hospitals, schools, universities and dams, then small pressure groups would make hurdles for the civil society workers. There is a terrorist and insurgent threat to civil society as well.

Recommendations

Role of Religion in Relation to Counter Extremism & Conflict

The conflict societies of Muslims world as discussed are strategically important to the world and consist of various religious groups⁴². This is the reason, that this region was the focus of extremism and violence where different religious groups clashed with one other. The recent episode of Rohingya crisis has caused death of thousands of innocent lives due to extremism. The clash started between the Buddhist community and Muslims, where the government officials burned many Muslim houses and Muslims were left with only option to flee to neighboring countries to seek refuge. When the news was appeared, the international civil society experts approached the place. This was the positive step by the civil community to counter the violence. The civil society can use inter faith harmony to prevent violence and extremism in the South Asian region⁴³. Such organizations try their best to mix people from different faiths in order to reduce hate and disparity among them. International Red Crescent Society is the best organization, which works to inter-link people from different communities. In this perspective, it is mandatory that civil society can use cooperative measures to create unity and integrity to fight extremism and violence. Unity among various factions can help to bring peace and closeness.

Developing a New Narrative

Throughout the course of history, political and ethnic groups established their own narrative to justify the norms of their society. This was the biggest dilemma which was faced by the backward regions of Asia and Africa. Such narrative was not only a barrier for a change, it also kept the people under darkness, and they could not modernize their societies.⁴⁴ There is a need to build a narrative in order to prevent positive change and such steps can be taken by propagating campaigns through civil society.⁴⁵

Encouraging a New Global Movement

Global movements are considered as a gem for the democracy that allows people to raise voice and participate in social activities. Whenever there is political turmoil or any uncertainty, the civil society members march with movement in the streets to oppose government policies. There is need to develop a new global movement, which should aim to strengthen the rights and freedom of people. This will make the democratic trends stronger and more peaceful.

New Forms of Democratic Governance

Good governance is the basic essence to establish a stable country. In the conflict regions there is deficiency of good governance due to lack of transparency and that of check and balance.⁴⁶ People are not allowed to participate in the governance matters due to non-recognition. The civil society can take a stand to make new amendments in the law to include public opinion in state matters⁴⁷. This will make possible for a smooth mechanism of governance. The civil society can work as bridge to fulfill the gaps between the public and government bodies.

Family Support Services

Family support services are community-based services that help and encourage parents while playing their role as guardians. Such organizations provide many different forms of services depending on the criteria and needs of the families. The primary goals of the family support program are to enhance parent's skills and to help resolve children issues. Family support programs cooperate with the family elders and parents to address all the key issues. These programs benefit the parents as well as children. Generally, family support programs focus the basic population or target groups such as ethnic groups, minority groups, and cultural groups. This also further investigates in special cases like orphan children, adolescent parents, kinship care givers, and families facing mental and health issues.

Policy and programs approaches in the family support services provide training and meetings with the parents. This gives the parent an overview how to support their families in longer run. Such programs are based on counseling efforts. For example, if a child is facing domestic violence by his parents then he has the right to inform the police about the situation in his home. So, police authorities and family support services will provide the child protection and special support. Giving services to young parents is also another important role of the family support services. Young parents face a lot of problems while grooming their children because they have no experience. So these services guide them with proper rules and regulations. If they have financial issues then again these services give them money to take care of their children.

Dimension of Health and Civil Society

Civil society is one of the multidimensional areas that serve the health units. This process works on certain principles and ethics to maintain the reputation of healthcare and gives confidence to people. The method of marketing in health services primarily focuses on patients. The concerns include the relationship of home health marketer to the hospital mission. This will allow the hospital to have more control over the services their patients are receiving after discharge and will benefit

from the lower readmission rates to the hospital. Adding home health care services is a strategic initiative to improve patient satisfaction and increase the hospital's prestige in the community. The civil society function is to ensure that a strategy initiative conforms to the vision and mission of the institution. The mission of the civil society is to meet the health care needs of individuals within the community it serves.

Connecting Media with Civil Society

Media is the most vital source that helps to bring justice to local people in different part of the world⁴⁸. Media can be used to expose any misconduct that is carried by any organization. Members of civil society and media can work shoulder to shoulder to eliminate evils of society.

Conclusion

In the light of above discussion, it can be asserted that civil society organizations are the saviors for human rights. Primarily such organizations have contributed a lot for the betterment of a society. They work day and night to bring change and reforms. Although there were some stages that these civil society organizations weren't allowed working in small towns due to old mindset. However, after countless struggles they have managed to make their place in these societies to work independently. Still civil society needs more efforts to resolve issues of those people who are victims of terrorism, ethnicity, domestic violence, slavery and discriminations. There are places where people are deprived from their basic rights and they cannot be educated due to violence. Civil Society can help people to raise their voices locally and internationally. Hence civil society is pivotal for a state in order to achieve stability and tranquility particularly in conflict prone countries.

NOTES

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