



Handout

Module 3

Citizen Participation



Module 2: Social Accountability

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1. Understanding Civil Society

‘CIVIL SOCIETY’ has existed since early times in modernity in the western world during the 17th century. Since then the concept ‘civil society’ has been bestowed with many meanings and has undergone many revisions.

The contemporary interest in civil society has arisen out of the collapse of communist regimes in East and Central Europe. This concept and its use in the past decade has become necessary during the significant shifts in the roles of the state and the market economy.

The first approach came from the Anglo- American tradition and builds on the work of Mr. Tocqueville (sociologist). In this approach, civil society is seen as an intermediary layer between individuals and families, on the one hand, and state institutions. Even where state institutions evolve within a democratic institution, they begin to dominate different aspects of human endeavour - health, education, social services and a wide variety of arenas where citizens interact with the state.

The second meaning of civil society has arisen from the challenge posed by citizens to communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Citizens began to protest against authoritarian states in Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union, on the one hand, and military dictatorship in Latin America, Philippines and South Africa. These movements democratize the state and create fundamental freedoms and liberties for their citizens. In such a formulation, civil society began to be equated with the process of democratization in political structures and systems.

A third approach to concept of civil society has its roots in the growing universal acceptance of free market and private enterprise as engines of economic development. Public Sector (the state and its institutions) and Private Sector (the for-profit business enterprises) have

been undergoing realignments and shifts in their roles and contributions to societal development.

Civil society can be defined as the sum of individual and collective initiatives directed towards the pursuit of common public good. This definition of civil society acknowledges the presence of individual initiatives in different cultures. Individual action, howsoever limited and small, contributes to the well-being of society as a whole. This has been reinforced through various religious and spiritual traditions in different societies in different periods of history.

This definition also points to the varying degrees of collectivization, which may exist in a society. While some collective initiatives are more formally organized, many others remain transient, temporary and informally managed.

The above definition bring us the meaning and interpretations of public good. Historically, public good has been the domain of public institutions, so-called state institutions and political formations. With a decline of state institutions, and the growing differences in the needs and interests of diverse population, it is no longer possible to response for all public good in the hands of public/state institutions. Different section of population may interpret public good differently. This may also vary from a local reality to a global issue.

A clear cut distinction is thus made between the boundaries and functioning of the state and civil society. It is important to note that while civil society retains its autonomy from the state that autonomy is rarely absolute.

Our definition of civil society includes not only formal organizations but informal organizations as well. There are a large number of associations, networks, and alliances with varying degrees of formalization. Some of them even lack any organizational form.

There are also a number of organisations that enable others to play their role effectively by providing them support like the charitable trusts, membership and networking organizations, etc. These enabling intermediary organizations also fall within the broad meaning of civil society.

Conclusion

Using the associational framework, the map of civil society can be seen to present a wide array of 'public good'. From serving the particular interests of a community or a group to those of marginalized and excluded, to those of middle class and elites, such associations vary in their composition, structure, degree of formalization, extent of resources and quality of outcomes. This map is at best an initial guide of associational types today.

However, the above classification leaves out individual initiatives; it also does not capture transient types like a flood relief committee; certain hybrid types may also not be adequately covered in this map. The map also does not determine the degree of autonomy,

effectiveness or voluntarism in such associations. Despite these limitations, such a map of civil society emphasizes the nature and range of voluntary citizen associations in pursuit of common public good.

2. Strengthening Citizen Participation

Depending on the context of the project activities, the initial interventions to get participation from citizens can start with encouragement and targeting women leadership. As the second step the intervention should start working with men particularly youth while maintaining a consistent focus on developing women leadership. As a result, a large number of community organizations were participating in the intervention.

A multi-track approach to capacity building for the citizen leaders and citizen collectives was undertaken to achieve the objectives. The following is a brief description of capacity building approaches.

(a) *Preparing Profiles of Citizen Collectives:* Before engaging with citizens leadership, we must map the existing community based organisations to identify potential citizen leaders. After having the information, we can find out that several active citizens in the community are taking part in a variety of collective actions or become helpful to other fellow neighbour in a variety of way. The community members recognise their contributions. Efforts were made to contact those citizens to weave the programme around their existing capacities.

(b) *Training for Citizen Collectives and Citizen Focal Points:* Series of short training (one day to three days) training programmes for a variety of citizen collectives and citizen leadership were organised in most of the locations. The purpose of these training programmes ranged from building perspective on local governance and citizenship to enhancing skills on group management, local level planning, mobilisation, and gender justice etc.

(c) *Regular Meetings and Ongoing Support:* The intervention required regular meetings and ongoing support to the collectives and their leadership. In many places counselling, guidance and support to individual leaders proved to be useful. The members of the citizen collectives were provided support generally related to their daily needs.

(d) *Exposure Visits:* The purpose of organising the exposure visit was to facilitate learning for the citizen leaders on various development initiatives, which could be replicated by them. Since only select individuals could participate in those exposure visits, efforts were made that the learning acquired by the citizen leaders could be shared with other member of the collectives and community at large.

(e) Citizen Centred Interface Workshop/Meeting: One of the expected outcomes of strengthening citizen collectives and citizen leadership intervention was to enable effective interface between citizens and governance institutions. In many locations the interface meetings and workshops served as the initial dialogues.

(f) Organising Campaigns: Series of campaigns should be organised on specific issue and voting information. Local songs, dances and street plays were extensively used in these campaigns. Efforts were made to build ownership through involving the citizen and group leadership from the planning to implementation of these campaigns.

(g) Facilitating Networks of Citizen Collectives: *Facilitating and catalysing networks of citizen collectives with specific focus on women, minority and other vulnerable groups were an explicit objective of civil society building interventions at the sub-national level.*

Implications of Capacity Building

The pursuit of multi-track capacity building approaches and numerous interventions give good results for the citizen to work together to participate in a range of collective and individual actions at the community level. They undertook these tasks voluntarily. These engagements intensify the development of common thread in the community:

- Initiating self-help actions
- Engaging in bottom-up local level planning
- Mobilising sub-national community (villages, communes, and districts ...)
- Engaging with line departments for accessing services,
- Engaging with governance institutions to address the issues of social injustice or social discrimination,
- Participating in local and national elections.

3. Citizenship

The term ‘**citizenship**’ has been discussed, defined and understood at different point of time in the political history. In the Western context citizenship emphasizes individual choices. It is considered that individuals act ‘rationally’ to advance their interests in the society. This emphasis on individual choice is based on the faith that the state will provide necessary protection and welfare provisions in exercising the individual choices. However, it does not recognise the fact that individual choices are restricted by the inherent structural inequalities in the society.

Rights and obligations are at the core of citizenship. Citizenship as ‘**rights**’ is understood as formal status granted by the state. Individuals are entitled to specific universalised rights

enshrined in law. Citizenship as ‘**obligations**’ is understood as political participation of all citizens as duty.

Rights are conceived as political (e.g. right to vote, right to form association), civil (freedom of speech, liberty of the person), social (not to be discriminated against on the basis of caste, class, religion or gender and equal access to basic services like health, education etc.), economic (protection of private property, equal access to employment and sources of livelihood) and cultural (protection and preservation of traditional culture). It is a matter of choice for the individual to claim and exercise rights. Some of them are formalised in law while others are not. The role of state is to protect citizens in exercising their rights. Many argue that it is not enough. Exercising choice or claiming rights requires the resources, power and knowledge.

While citizenship is bestowed to a person by the state, in a democratic set up state derives its legitimacy from the citizens who voluntarily allow themselves to be governed by their elected representatives and if citizens collectively refuses to offer the legitimacy the state loses its identity. So there is a relationship between a citizen and state.

A citizen may be regarded as a person who enjoys social, political, civil, economic and cultural rights, who is part of a nation-state and society and who has certain rights and obligations. An active citizen should be aware about the reality, be willing to work to change the reality, be striving for common public good and be promoting collective efforts in their own community

4. Gender Perspective on Good Governance

What is Gender?

The term gender refers to a set of roles, attributes behaviours expected from women and men by their societies. Ministry of Women Affaire of Cambodia defines Gender referred to as consideration of differences and relation between men and women which influences on economic, politics, social, law, and culture attributions and process, and impact of men and women and those process (Gender Glossary of WoWA 2006).

Gender equality is built-in governance. Both women and men have equality of rights under the law, equality of opportunity, including equality in access to capabilities and other productive resources that enable opportunity, and equality of voice to influence and contribute to development process (World Bank: 2001). Equal participation by both men and women in governance is essential for a number of reasons, viz.,

- Influence the allocation of scarce resources;
- Improve living conditions and promote the interests of women;
- Shift the political focus towards issues affecting the quality of life of both men & women by ensuring equitable distribution of productive resources and opportunities for growth, giving visibility to reproductive roles of women in policy making and increasing women’s participation in the political process. (Commonwealth Foundation: 2004)

Gender and Governance

Gender is a salient factor in participation and representation in public decision-making. Both women and men need to participate and be active in decision-making and policy formulation. The nation-states, world over, guarantee all its citizens the right to political equality. The criteria of equality between sexes afford women the right to participate and represent in formal political decision-making without any discrimination. But do women really participate equally with men in policy and decision-making bodies?

Factors Constraining Participation of Women in Governance

A noteworthy factor responsible for non-participation of women in the decision-making and governance is unequal gender relations. Gender relations and power distribution between the sexes in both the private (personal) and public spheres create gender inequalities.

Private-public divide associated with women and men have always hindered women to negotiate in the public domain. The private domain associated with household, reproductive work and femininity, whereas, the public domain is associated with political authority, public decision-making, productive work and masculinity. Women are either being criticized for their inadequacies or patronized by men.

Autonomy of women in family/household also influences their status and ability to participate in governance. Women's bargaining power at the household is restricted typically due to lack of access and control over resources, no autonomy in decision making, low self esteem, low skills and education, restricted physical mobility and eventually less power as compared to men.

Other intersecting hierarchies such as class, caste, ethnicity, religion, and rural/urban locations further complicate gender inequality in governance.

The existence of persistent discrimination against women and inequality between women and men requires that engendering governance strategies be by and large complemented with targeted interventions on women's empowerment.

Missing women in development processes clearly indicates that public decision-making processes have not actually addressed the strategic needs of women in the context of gender relations.

If the desired outcome of good governance is distributional equity then gender equality should stand high on the agenda of any government. (Commonwealth Foundation: 2004)