
CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Madhalli Iravva Thippanna

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, S.Y.B.Womens
First Grade College, Chitradurga.

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ABSTRACT:

Civil society serves as the vital ‘third sector’ bridging the gap between the state and its citizens. Encompassing NGOs, trade unions, and voluntary groups, it plays a crucial role in fostering democratic values, advocating for the public good, and ensuring government accountability. By facilitating political socialization, welfare activities, and conflict resolution, these organizations actively strengthen governance. However, modern civil society faces significant contemporary challenges, including the complex impacts of globalization, internal conflicting interests, and increasing politicization. Navigating these hurdles requires shifting towards a globalized approach to promote equity, justice, and nonviolent participation for marginalized communities worldwide.

KEYWORDS:

Civil Society, Democracy, Governance, Non-Governmental Organizations (Ngos), Political Socialization.

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Introduction:

Civil society is the “third sector” of society, comprising non-governmental, voluntary, and community-based organizations that operate independently of government and for-profit businesses. It includes NGOs, unions, faith-based groups, and activists working for public good, representing diverse interests, and holding governments accountable. It is essential for a healthy democracy.

Civil society is one of the key concepts in all of the social sciences that touch on political life. Because so many countries have established more democratic regimes in recent years, there has been renewed interest in popular engagement in political life and everything else that relates to the way that political cultures or basic values and beliefs affect the way a state is governed. More recently, there has also been growing interest in how strengthening civil society can contribute to conflict resolution. Civil

society is also called the ‘third sector’ (after government and commerce) or ‘social sector’. The term ‘Civil Society’ has a fairly long history. The term first originated in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century and enjoyed a remarkable career. The concept of civil society (Bürgerliche Gesellschaft) was first used by Hegel (1770–1831) in his ‘Philosophy of Right’ published in 1821 in which he discusses civil society, law, the bureaucracy, the king, war etc. He defines civil society as “organised bodies that are intermediate between the state and the family.”

Fukuyama: “Civil society is the realm of spontaneously created social structures separate from the state that underlie democratic political institutions”

Key Components and Features

Definition: It is the arena of collective action around shared interests, purposes,

Jordan was heavily impacted by political and economic turmoil in 2021. As the country continued to deal with the impact of COVID–19, both public and state officials raised concerns about the government’s management of the health crisis. Following the earliest cases of COVID–19 in the country, Jordan announced a state of emergency in March 2020, which continued to be in effect through 2021. The state of emergency activated Defense Law 13 which provided the government with sweeping powers to pass further measures (known as Defense Orders, such as prohibitions on movement and travel, travel bans on social gatherings, and punishment for spreading information about the pandemic that would “cause panic”). Though many of these restrictions were slowly eased by late August 2020 the state of emergency remained in place throughout 2021 and upticks in cases in March 2021 spurred the reimposition of nightly and weekend curfews and penalties for social gatherings. At the end of April, the weekend curfew lifted but the nightly curfew remained in place. By the end of the year, Jordan had recorded a total of roughly 1,190,000 cases of COVID–19, and just over 40 percent of the population was vaccinated. The government also worked to ensure mass vaccination of the large refugee population living in Jordan, and over half of adult refugees in the country were vaccinated by early 2022.

In March, protests erupted across the country after a state hospital ran out of oxygen, leading to the deaths of at least seven COVID–19

patients. The Minister of Health submitted his resignation while demonstrators decried the government's response to the crisis, worsening economic conditions, and the restrictions and emergency powers that had been re-instituted through the Defense Law.

Components of Civil Society

The organisations and groups included under the umbrella concept of civil society are:

1. Non-government organisations
2. Community-based organisations
3. Indigenous people's organisations
4. Trade Unions
5. Farmer's organisations
6. Cooperatives
7. Religious associations
8. Youth groups
9. Women's groups, and
10. Other similarly organised groups

Traditionally, the terms 'State' and 'Civil Society' were used interchangeably and treated synonymously. The World Economic Forum is committed to accelerating the impact of civil society organizations. With a view to this, it created 'Preparing Civil Society for the Fourth Industrial Revolution', a multi-sectoral platform to support the transformation of the social sector and its inclusion in the governance of emerging technologies.

Features of Civil Society

Features of the civil society are:

1. It refers to non-state institutions.
2. It covers a large space in society.
3. It refers to the organised society.
4. It covers groups which are intermediate between the state (political society) and the family (natural society).
5. It, though autonomous, is subject to the authority of state.
6. It implies the existence of freedom of association, freedom of thought

and other civil and economic rights.

7. It is in pursuit of common public good.
8. It opposes authoritarianism and totalitarianism.
9. It promotes citizenship by educating the individual.
10. It facilitates citizens participation in the politico-administrative affairs.
11. It formulates public opinion and sets the demands which are general in nature.
12. Its important attribute is voluntarism, not coercion.
13. It advocates pluralism to reduce the domination of the state.
14. It serves as a moral reference in the community value system.

Nature of Civil Society

Civil society is an arena in which the individual legitimately gratifies his self interest, develops his individuality, learns the value of group action, social solidarity and dependence of his welfare on others. All these educate him for citizenship and prepare him for participation in the political arena of the state.

- Independent
- Common share
- Associations
- Freedom of choice
- Involvement
- Accountability
- Reciprocity

Role of Civil Society

Civil society is the most important part of the political process. But the term civil society may not exist in this name everywhere. However, it performs certain important functions which help the administrative authority in various ways and it is a vital part of public administration.

1. Political socialisation

An important function of civil society is political socialization. Political socialisation is a process by which individuals in a given society become acquainted with the political system and determine their perceptions

of politics and their reactions to political phenomena.

2. Bridge between the state and the people

The civil society holds the middle position, acting as a bridge, between citizens and the state. The citizens do not have the scope to ventilate their grievances and convey to the competent authority through proper channel.

3. The stabilizer

The civil society acts as a stabilizer in many political systems, particularly the capitalist systems. Antonio Gramsci, draw attention to the fact that in spite of crises on economic front, capitalism or the capitalist system has not collapsed.

4. Helps governance

The term governance primarily includes accountability, transparency, predictability and participation. In liberal democracies civil society performs its duties on behalf of the general public. Ventilation of grievances is essential because, without it the grievances cannot be redressed.

5. Welfare activities

Civil society performs many welfare activities such as serving the downtrodden masses, to take care of health problems of unprivileged and under privileged people of society. Many civil societies have been found to be active at the time of natural calamities such as devastating flood, storm, or cyclone, drought etc.

Importance of civil society

Democracy is a government based on consent. Many times, the consent to govern for a specified term, is faced with many problems and the key issues on which people vote a government remain unattended. It is here that the civil society comes into picture to take the issues to the government as a mediator on behalf of the society that is largely unorganized, apathetic and powerless as individuals.

1. Restraining force

Civil society includes a wide range of organized groups and institutions that are independent of the state, voluntary. This essentially includes non-governmental organizations, independent mass media, think tanks, universities, and social and religious groups. As civil society groups

are diverse and cater to the needs and requirements of divergent needs and aspirations of the society.

2. Organized and purposeful

In a democracy, civil society groups have respect for the law, for the rights of individuals, and for the rights of other groups to express their interests and opinions. Part of what the word “civil” implies is tolerance and the accommodation of pluralism and diversity. Representing the democratic spirit, civil society draws attention of the government to the problems facing the society and interestingly, offers best possible solutions.

3. Apolitical

Civil society groups, are apolitical in nature i.e., they do not identify with any political party though they support or endorse certain stands taken by political parties. Civil society groups may establish ties to political parties and the state but do not seek political power for themselves.

4. Participation

Civil society groups actively promote political participation. NGOs educate people about their rights and obligations as democratic citizens and encourage them to understand problems confronting them and raise their voice at the appropriate platforms. Given the limited reach and understanding of problems among the people, civil society groups raise, debate public issues, and express their views. During elections.

5. Raise issues

Civil society develops the habit of questioning and seeking information from the government among the people, a cardinal requirement for a working democracy. Most of the public, who live on a daily basis, may not have the time and space to raise voice against any injustice from the government or from the private persons.

6. Nurture democratic values

Civil society organizations can help to develop the values of democratic life such as tolerance, moderation, compromise, and respect for opposing points of view. Without this deeper culture of accommodation, democracy cannot be stable. These values cannot simply be taught; they must also be experienced through practice. Practice, participation and debate is an integral part of a healthy democratic values.

7. Public platform

Civil society is an arena for the expression of diverse interests. Civil society organizations lobby for the needs and concerns of their members, as women, students, farmers, environmentalists, trade unionists, lawyers, doctors and so on. Civil society groups present their views to parliament and provincial councils.

8. Progressive

A civil society can provide solidarity and support cutting across tribal, linguistic, religious, caste and other identity ties. When people of different religions and ethnic identities come together on the basis of their common interests as women, artists, doctors, students, workers, farmers, lawyers, human rights activists.

9. Training ground

Civil society can provide a training ground for future political leaders. Non-Governmental Organizations and other civil groups can help identify and train new leaders who have dealt with important public issues and can be recruited to run for political office at all levels.

10. Problem solving

Civil society organizations are known to play an important role in mediating and helping to resolve conflicts. In many countries, civil society groups have developed formal programs and trained hands to resolve political and ethnic conflict by influencing conflicting groups to solve their disputes through bargaining and accommodation.

11. Poll monitoring

Civil society organizations play a vital role in monitoring the conduct of elections. They deploy neutral monitors at polling stations to ensure that the voting and vote counting is entirely free, fair and transparent.

12. Mediator

Civil society is not essentially in fight with the state or government. Though civil society is independent of the state, it doesn't mean that it must always criticize and oppose the state. In fact, civil society makes the state more accountable, responsive, inclusive, and effective and therefore more legitimate.

Challenges before Civil Society

For the last several hundred years, the civil society is performing

various duties and functions with efficiency and sincerity. But during the last few decades it has been found to be in trouble.

13. Globalisation

Globalisation has, to large extent, lessened the geographical boundaries among the nation–states. The powerful MNCs and NGOs have globalised or internationalised their activities. The MNCs or NGOs have been able to establish their effective control over the administration.

14. Conflicting interests

In a state, there could be any number of civil society organizations. The purposes and functions of all such societies are not identical and not supposed to be identical. The conflicts and tensions among the different civil society organisations is obvious.

15. Politicization

Many civil societies are guided by group or sectional interests and sacrifice the interests of the society. Many civil societies are politicized or they have definite political purposes or patronage. This type of civil society does not serve the real purpose of the people. Some civil societies become active or inactive during a particular regime.

16. Anti-national

Some civil societies directly or indirectly support terrorism or terrorist activities creating problems for the state administration. The terror groups challenge the normal activities of the state, administration and question the constitution and constitutional means.

Conclusion

As we continue through the 21st century, the principles and systems of civil society must move beyond the nation–state to include a global political economy of relations and groups. Everyone is to be viewed as one another’s neighbour; mutually responsible for everyone’s opportunity to experience a satisfying and satisfying life. Developing appropriate political and social systems through which participation, authority, and responsibility can be just, equitable, and nonviolent responding with concern for the disenfranchised, marginalized, and impoverished.

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