The Civil Society of Bangladesh:  
Depoliticized in Working Agenda but Politicized in Power Relation

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Abstract
The concepts of depoliticization and politicization are opposite in nature but they coexist in the context of the Bangladeshi development paradigm. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are depoliticized in their working agenda and this is convenient for the state, the market and even for the CSOs themselves because they do not challenge anyone. Nevertheless, this position renders the CSOs more prone to politicization in accordance with party politics. Ultimately Bangladesh is suffering from the democratization process despite the huge number of CSOs. This study is based on an extensive survey of 1,005 CSOs in Dhaka, Bangladesh, conducted by means of structured questionnaires through direct interviews in 2006 and 2007.

Keywords: Bangladesh, civil society, NGO, depoliticization, politicization

要旨
非政治化と政治化の概念はまったく相反するものだが、バングラデシュの開発パラダイムの文脈では共存している。市民社会団体 (CSO) の活動方針は非政治的であり、そのことは国家、市場、さらに CSO そのものにとっても好都合である。なぜなら、誰かに反抗することはないからである。しかし、その立場はかえって、CSO が政党政治に迎合して、政治的になってしまう傾向をより強める。結局バングラデシュは、膨大な数の CSO があるにもかかわらず、民主化のプロセスに苦しんでいる。本研究は、2006 年と 2007 年に行った直接面談による構造化アンケートによって、ダッカ (バングラデシュ) の 1,005 の CSO を広範に調査した結果に基づく。

キーワード： バングラデシュ、市民社会、NGO、非政治化、政治化
Introduction

Development discussions for Bangladesh mostly focus on the economic and social spheres but are less reluctant to address the political milieu. The state and market forces incorporate civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), in the development process. But how can sustainable economic and social issues be achieved without addressing the democratization process which is by nature political in a developing country like Bangladesh? The depoliticized nature of CSOs makes the puzzle more complicated as at the same time they are politicized in line with party politics. Depoliticization and politicization are divergent and conflicting concepts but they coexist in the context of CSOs in Bangladesh.

In Anglophone literature many analysts have sought an answer to the causal relationship between the surge of associations and political change and how this can be replicated in third world countries (Fowler 1991, Carroll 1992, Clarke 1993 and Farrington and Lewis 1993). The success of Eastern European CSOs in ending the Soviet empire has inspired such academics to construct a paradigm that suggests a ‘global associational revolution’ (Salamon 1994: 109-122) took place. All this enthusiasm concerning CSOs is broadly connected to the third wave democratization process which is taking hold around the world (Huntington 1991: 12-34). Drawing a correlation between neo-liberal ideas, democracy and CSOs was pervasive in mainstream discussions and Western academics claimed, after the dissolution of the Soviet system, that it was the “end of socio-cultural evolution” (Fukuyama 1992). All these major sources appeared immediately after Western success over communism at the beginning of the 1990s.

Over the last decades, it is evident that constitutional democracies have increased in postcolonial and developing countries, and Bangladesh is part of this democratization process (Freedom House 2010). However, the CSOs of Bangladesh are more interested in service delivery than in playing a part in advocacy (Wood 1997, Fisher 1997, White 1999, Rahman 2006, World Bank 2006 and BRAC 2008), which does, in fact, undermine their efforts to democratize the state. The neo-liberal model has found it an opportunity to overcome development challenges, such as the alleviation of poverty, and many scholars (e.g. Wood 1997, White 1999 and Rahman 2006) see this phenomenon as a depoliticization of CSOs. To survive, people have to negotiate their rights in a depoliticized manner. Geof Wood (1997) termed this a Faustian Bargain. Fahimul Quadir (2003) stated that the politicization of CSOs in accordance with the political party in Bangladesh demonstrates diametrical opposition to authoritarian rule
and politicized CSOs. All these sources are polarized in statist and neoliberal views and few have focused on the contextual framework of CSOs in Bangladesh which revolves around state, market and community.

This paper will seek to demonstrate a theoretical relation with the concept of two spaces filled by NGOs unattended by state and market (Shigetomi 2002). The ramification of NGOs, the prime actor of CSOs, largely depends on the state, the market and the community which evolve around resources. The hypothesis put forward is that the NGO phenomenon in a specific country is determined as a function of extent and form of these two spaces. Like many other developing countries the growth of NGOs in Bangladesh is fueled by a lack of better politics of the state and a dysfunctional market system. This paper will critically examine this theory; on the one hand it is supportive of the premise that state, market and community do leave some areas open for contribution, whereas on the other, the broader concept of CSOs, rather than NGOs, fill the gap (Tsujinaka et al. 2007: 16-32). Another point of disagreement is that this theory limits the NGOs relationship exclusively within the framework of the nation-state but in the case of Bangladesh I would argue that the Wilsonian view of aid policy crosses the nation state boundary and sees CSOs as a vehicle of foreign policy. This is an alternative channel for the distribution of resources that works parallel to, or sometimes within, the existing structure of state and market.

The rational of this paper is to contextualize the state-market-community model and explain the dynamics of party politics of the ruling elite which is at the center of the discourse of democracy and constantly suffers from a legitimacy crisis in Bangladesh. This paper will examine the dominant factors that shape CSOs along with the market and state, and how CSOs negotiate their autonomy.

The failure of the conventional market has created a void which has been filled by the Bangladesh CSOs in a development milieu. This, in fact, has redefined the non-profit organizations (NPOs) which traditionally rely on charity. Now, some NPOs, particularly the big ones, more resemble corporations involved in commercial activities. The Bangladesh government has also offloaded their burden of development activities onto NGOs which are regarded as skilled and empowered with comparative advantage. This paper would argue that this offloading of the burden is a marriage of convenience because sluggish bureaucracies are happy to see their job being done by other parties, while NGOs receive the resources needed to survive. The divergent NGOs create more market space but at the same time they lose the advantage of citizen participation.
dependent on internal resources (World Bank 2006). This in fact has turned the citizen into a consumer, or more precisely a client, and in depoliticizing the development paradigm has created a trading off between service and advocacy. International donors support this balanced model and it aligns well with neo-liberal policy. This paper will also argue that the Bangladesh ruling elites, with their lack of consensus in power sharing and quest for legitimacy, politicize CSOs in general in a partisan way. So CSOs are depoliticized in their working agenda and politicized in their relation to power. This binary position of depoliticization and politicization has created a new interface which puts more emphasis on development than on civil engagement, the core to a consolidation of democracy (Putnam 2003).

This paper will point out that agricultural, labor and co-operative CSOs of Bangladesh rose significantly over the last fifty years and that this burgeoning nature started earlier than the worldwide phenomenal growth of CSOs in the 1980s and 1990s. The reasons for individuals becoming involved in CSOs were mostly economic in nature; social and political issues were less important. CSOs also chose depoliticized issues such as social welfare, economy and so on.

Both primary and secondary data are used in this study. The primary data was taken from a survey of 1,005 CSOs in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, administered by the author of this paper with the assistance of Tsukuba University in 2006 and 2007. Nine categories of CSO, i.e. co-operative, youth and culture, mosque, NGO, chambers of commerce and trade, labor unions, social welfare, education and research and, finally, professional bodies were surveyed. Other published materials were also examined.

Defining the concept of depoliticization and politicization in dichotomous ways in discussing CSOs has many pitfalls. This is because well defined concepts with opposite meanings can create more confusion than clarification. Moreover, these concepts are used here to describe double entities, i.e. depoliticization and politicization in an organization or in CSOs in general. To have a clear understanding, it is better to define the phrasal expressions of these two leading concepts which will help in an understanding of the contextual reality. Firstly, the CSOs of Bangladesh primarily work for health, education, microcredit, etc. which are mostly economic and social issues revolving around a service delivery approach. Even though these issues could become political, their proponents try to depoliticize them, a phenomenon defined in this paper as a depoliticized working agenda. Secondly, depoliticization does not necessarily mean nonpolitical, because the CSOs of Bangladesh are not free from politics, as either they
are affiliated with a political party or the political elite come to them for support. Their relation with politics serves the purpose of staying close to power. Many groups of CSOs thus become politicized in their relations with power, mostly in line with party politics. This political affiliation has little relation to the democratization process. However, these two mutually exclusive ideas coexist in the realm of CSOs.

This paper does not intend to provide an overview of the relationship between civil society and social capital per se, rather it postulates that Bangladesh CSOs are depoliticized and politicized with little concern for civil engagement. The development notion of CSOs has brought together the market and the state which in fact work with each other to depoliticize the development agenda.

This paper is divided into four sections. Firstly, it will propound that the burgeoning nature of CSOs in Bangladesh cannot be defined as an Associational Revolution given the contextual view. Rather it will suggest that CSOs are going through an evolutionary process which sometimes results in their being integrated into the state and the market system. Secondly, it will give an outline of patterns of CSOs to portray their general characteristics and how they are related to the contemporary socio-political landscape of Bangladesh. The third part will deal with the underpinning dynamics of society, politics and market that do in fact shape and construct CSOs. Finally, the paper will seek to demonstrate that CSO survival tactics have turned into an economic growth strategy based on depolarization and that it is broadly related to the contentious nature of elite and market exclusion. In conclusion, it will suggest that the co-option of CSOs into the state and market systems could compromise their independence and prevent them from democratizing.

1. Contextualization of the global perspective

Civil society intelligentsia frequently use the term ‘association revolution’ to describe the movement after the end of the cold war era. However, the problem in social science is to negotiate the difference between conceptualization and contextualization. Conceptualization helps build a model but the context can sometimes challenge the pervasive view. In the case of Bangladesh, the rise in non-profit organizations is dissimilar to this existent concept.

Lester Salamon in 1994 identified eight causes to explain the extraordinary growth of civil society, as follows: first, the crisis of the modern welfare state; second, delivering service through NGOs; third, environmental concern; fourth, the failure of socialism; fifth,
development of communication; sixth, education and literacy; and seventh, global economic growth. Of these seven causes the concepts of welfare state in Scandinavian countries and the socialist regime are absent from the reality of Bangladesh. It is true that Bangladesh has achievements in the service sectors through NGOs such as environmental awareness, development of communication, education and literacy and economic growth. Every sector of NGO has its role, but the NGO-ization of each issue has its own drawback which could undermine civil society discourse (Nazneen et al. 2009: 193-199).

Fig. 1: Establishment year of civil society organizations in Bangladesh, 1900-2006.

The BD-JIGS data in Figure 1 shows that the mid 1940s was the takeoff phase for Bangladesh CSOs. In a first phase, the 1940s was an important decade politically for three reasons: first, it was the time of the Second World War; second, it was the end of British colonialism in the Indian sub-continent; third and most importantly, it was the beginning of Pakistani rule which ultimately led to Bengali nationalism. A second phase appeared in the 1970s which was marked by the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan and the opportunity to develop sociopolitical institutions. Then the 80s and 90s were a period of phenomenal growth of CSOs. Particularly the 90s were marked by democratically elected governments and the reinstatement of parliamentary democracy. These trends are bound by a politically important timeframe but they do not fully explain the causative factors.
Lester Salamon in 1994 wrote that Bangladesh boasts approximately 10,000 registered nongovernmental organizations but recent news shows that Bangladesh has 250,000 registered NGOs (Prothom Alo 15 January 2010). Does this match his claim that an association revolution has taken place in developing countries like Bangladesh? The fundamental question can be asked whether the rise of civil society can be defined as a ‘global associational revolution’ because in social science the term ‘revolution’ has its own meaning which is different from the way Salamon uses it (Tsujinaka et al. 2007). Quantity does not necessarily translate into quality. In the case of Bangladesh, despite the huge number of CSOs, they have their own weaknesses in democratizing state and society. If the discussion here is restricted to the Bangladesh context of ‘global association revolution’ in terms of numbers, then it would become apparent that it is not only in the 1980s and the 1990s that Bangladesh experienced a surge of CSOs, but also in the 1960s and the 1970s which were marked by a nationalist movement. This contextual voracity of civil society in Bangladesh differs from the ‘global associational revolution.’

2. Instrumentalization of CSOs

The importance and expectations of CSOs rose as their numbers grew in significance. NGOs were viewed as a catalyst in social development. Islamic CSOs, particularly mosques, were redesigned to carry out government development projects. At the same time these development initiatives also brought CSOs into relation with political power. The politicization of CSOs is closely related to political party lines and this has nothing to do with any form of mass mobilization. This is in fact the problem of instrumentalization of any organization because in the end they serve the political elite rather than the group and their members per se.

2.1. NGOs are pervasive in nature

NGOs started to grow during the liberation war of 1971 and afterwards, in response to the rehabilitation program in war-torn Bangladesh, diversified their efforts in the development field. Gonoshasthaya Kendra, Proshika and BRAC are the sherpas of NGO development which changed the paradigm of development in Bangladesh. Later the Grameen Bank and others joined in this social development trajectory. During the 1960s and the 1970s political elites were divided over broad issues like nationalism, capitalism, and communism. But political actors simply ignored that the grassroots needed to fight poverty, which was sometimes intensified by natural calamities such as floods and cyclones. This desocialization of policies by political actors was gradually filled by NGOs.
with the support of foreign donors. Now BRAC is the largest NGO in the world working with 110 million people and employing 120,000 people (BRAC 2009). These NGOs do not merely work based on voluntarism, rather they have connected themselves to social business which tends to deviate from the capitalist model (Yunus 2008). Large-size NGOs have close links to the market. They have a footing in various businesses ranging from banking to mobile phone operations. Bangladesh not only privatized its economy but also deregulated its education, health and banking systems, some of which are run by NGOs. Geof Wood termed this a Franchise State (Wood 1997: 79-92), which in fact is the failure of public institutions leading to their being replaced by market institutions. Traditional market forces are less interested in the weak purchasing power of the poor, and the vacuum is filled by the NGOs.

How, in comparison to CSOs, did NGOs become successful in decision making processes other than market forces? Such a comparative discussion would not give us an understanding of the complete picture of the strength of CSOs in absolute terms but rather it would give us an idea of the strength of an individual group.

![Fig. 2: Policy influence of civil society.](source: Built by author based on BD-JIGS Survey)
The survey reveals (see Figure 2) that non-profit has the highest influence over policy-related influence. These subjective assessments can be cross-checked by the objectivity in Figure 3, which is scaled down, but still the success rate of non-profit organizations in altering or blocking is the highest among other categories.

Despite the strong position of NGOs among CSOs, they still have little effect on political decisions. This phenomenon is broadly related to the nature of membership and resource accumulation, most importantly the depoliticized nature of NGOs in their working relations. This, in fact, weakens their position in influencing the government in decision making processes.

2.2. Islamic civil society

Bengali nationalism grew through a secular ethos, and the constitution of Bangladesh (Hakim 1998, Bangladesh Government 2000) embraced the idea of secularism in its maiden version in 1972. After 1975, successive governments used religion to create a support base to build up their political muscle, and shed the secular nature of the constitution. When Jamaat-e-Islami became part of the government as a coalition member with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in 2001, its senior leader Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed became the Minister of Social Welfare which was primarily responsible for the regulation of social organizations. This government
accorded registration to 473 local and 25 foreign NGOs and Islamic NGOs ‘popped up’ with support from Middle Eastern countries (NGOs under scanner 2009). This transnational Islamic civil society can be explained as an effort to counter Western-founded NGOs which were predominant at the time. When the Islamic party became part of the government it tried to strengthen Islamic NGOs and many such NGOs were accused of terrorism.

The niche of Islamic civil society is not with the NGOs but with the mosques. Religious organizations have a long history in sociopolitical affairs and Bangladeshi elites either use these institutions as their support base or they avoid confrontation. Traditionally, mosques take on a number of social responsibilities other than religious activities. Therefore, the Bangladesh government takes advantage of this social network. Involvement of government and other foreign donors with mosques is two-fold, first in training the Imam and second, in undertaking different projects using mosque facilities. Government and foreign donors use mosque facilities and social influence to contain militancy and promote their development projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of organization</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Religious institution</td>
<td>230838</td>
<td>88.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary organization</td>
<td>16586</td>
<td>6.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational and sport club</td>
<td>5784</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>3433</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Union</td>
<td>2604</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional association</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees association</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural institution and others</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>261962</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2007

Table 1 shows that religious institutions are the highest in number among the different types of organizations. Even though it does not show the different types of religious organizations such as mosque, church, mandir, etc. or their number, we can assume that mosques are the majority as we know that Bangladesh has 89.7% of Muslim population (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2007) and the total number of mosques is 191,620.$$^5$$
Table 2: Percentage of households giving to institutions

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ahmad 2002

Tables 1 and 2 are based on household surveys and both show that religious institutions are dominant in number as well as in receiving generous donations. An interesting phenomenon of this numerical expression is that religious institutions rank so highly that the other categories are far below their position.

The Islamic CSOs, i.e. mosques, are much higher in number than Islamic NGOs (NGO Affair Bureau 2010). The existence of Islamic CSOs becomes controversial when they are contrasted against the Western-founded NGOs and they have to compete to establish their ideology from a geopolitical perspective. The broader picture of Islamic CSOs is presented by mosques with their strength in individual membership fees and contributions. Nevertheless, they are not immune to politicization. Military rulers have used this platform as a media for political communication.

2.3. Partnership of CSOs with Civil-Military Bureaucracy

The challenge for democracy in Bangladesh has always been to put civil-military bureaucracy under political leadership. However, the over-powered civil-military bureaucracies have taken political power several times in the history of Bangladesh, which they inherited from Pakistan. Initially, without a political front, they managed to stay in power with the help of civil society. They came to power criticizing existent political parties in order to depoliticize them and finally they established a new political party to stay in power over time (Zain 2010: 89-97). They helped build different associations, particularly the religious CSOs. This was the case in Bangladesh between 1975 and 1990, an era of military involvement in politics. The donor-funded NGOs had their own competent bureaucracy which welcomed retired civil-military to join their
workforce. Thus CSO partnership with civil-military grew in the context of Bangladesh. Moreover, the weakness of political parties always strengthens non-political forces in becoming political (Siddiqa 2007, Military Business 2010).

The contentious nature of political parties was never resolved with regards the election issue and since 1991 a shuttle debate has been going on between the two major political parties: Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Political parties amended Article 58 of the Bangladesh constitution, which opened the door to CSOs to influence policy, not merely as service providers or in an advocacy role, but also as an actor in the government. If the governance process is depoliticized, even if only to run an election, the civil-military bureaucracy will be in power. However, cases of involvement of civil society in the governance process are rare in recent world history.

2.4. Politicized nature of CSOs

Political regime change was so frequent in Bangladesh that it hampered policy continuation, and Bangladesh suffered from military intervention in politics. In fact politicians failed to build the necessary confidence between government and citizens. The Bangladeshi political elites failed to create an effective local government so the relation between central and local governments was channeled through the bureaucracy. This failure to create political institutions had an alternative effect on social institutions. The political class needed to create a support base in the absence of political institutions in local areas, so alternatively they politicized social institutions. This led to politicized CSOs in Bangladesh (Quadir 2003: 425-438). Such politicized nature should be defined in accordance with party politics of Bangladesh.

Labor unions, NGOs, chamber federations and religious civil society are highly affected by politicization. Their autonomy is compromised by this politicized nature while on the other hand many leaders of CSOs participate in party politics. The relationship between political parties and CSOs is not well demarcated so both habitually cross the line.

3. An affinity to market and politics

Max Weber used the term ‘elective affinity’ to describe the relationship between protestantism and capitalism, in which he arguably differed with Karl Marx (Herbert 1978: 366-385). The idea of elective affinity was incorporated in the discussion of the depoliticized nature of Bangladesh NGOs by Sabeel Rahman in 2006, where he argues
that the “elective affinity or continent response is the result of local and international pressure”. The normative aspect can be theorized by the depoliticized nature of NGOs while growth in CSOs can be explained by involvement of state, society and international phenomenon. There are three ways to get involved with CSOs: outside, below and above (Salamon 1994), and the growth in CSOs is closely related to the broad social, political and economic structures which are deterministic in nature and their combination has a ripple effect on the numerical surge.

3.1. Social exclusion and bridging the gap

Bangladesh has the most homogenous population compared to other countries in South Asia. 98% of the population is Bengali and the other 2% includes other ethnic groups and non-Bengali Muslims. Despite this homogeneity a social exclusion process can be seen in social relations. Bill Reimer in 2004 proposed four systems through which social exclusion and inclusion operates: 1. market relations (private system); 2. bureaucratic relations (state administration system); 3. associational relations (shared interest); and 4. communal relations (shared identity). If we include the gender issue in the discussion, we would find that women are significantly excluded at all levels of life. However, the CSOs of Bangladesh, particularly the NGOs, are keen to take affirmative action to reduce the gap and they are doing this through associational relations, e.g. 97% of borrowers of Grameen Bank are women (Grameen Bank 2010). This inclination towards women created opposition from traditional social authority and religious groups. On the other hand, women, representing half of the population, acquired a sphere where they could contribute to social development.
Figure 4 shows that 26.9% of CSOs are involved in social welfare activities and there is a social demand which propels them to organize these institutions. The exclusive nature of state, market and community creates an opportunity to grow as against the fourth system, the social associations, which try to be inclusive in nature (Reimer 2004: 76-94). When CSOs try to create autonomous areas, state and market forces embrace them, which is how exclusion and inclusion operate.

3.2. The problem of legitimacy of political society

Government needs to legitimize its actions, and legitimacy is conferred on government by internal and external sources. Religion is the much used internal instrument and foreign aid is another effective method of legitimation. Historically, the power elite of Bangladesh legitimized its political authority mostly through religion, which grew in extent when the military seized state power. The depoliticized nature of Bangladesh CSOs never posed a threat to undemocratic forces such as the military and the political class, and the government let the CSOs flourish. Furthermore, political parties established a patron-client relationship with CSOs and used them as a support base to obtain state power. Once political parties become successful in ruling a country they distribute the benefits to their clients. This in fact creates corruption and nepotism which again delegitimize the state.
The state of Bangladesh sought external legitimacy though Western countries. It maintained a dual relationship with NGOs and foreign donors who were mostly friendly to each other. Foreign aid came to Bangladesh in two forms: as loans and as grants. In the 1980s the foreign aid dependence of Bangladesh was over 10% of GDP. However, this was gradually reduced and in 2007 represented only 1% (Ministry of Finance 2010). This foreign loan was based on a neo-liberal economic philosophy which favored a strong civil society in the post-cold war era. Hence the military dictatorships needed cash inflow from donors as they were incapable of even collecting taxes and had no problem accepting the depoliticized NGOs which were not a threat to their existence. Furthermore, the government gave its legal and administrative support to enhance these instruments and the outcome was a rapid growth of religious CSOs and NGOs.

3.3. Failure of market and complementary role of CSOs

Bangladesh failed to combine the difficult choice between neo-liberal policies and regulation of government. More importantly, the sporadic implementation of these approaches could not ensure the social imperative of market access for the common people which resulted in widespread poverty (UNDP 2010). Market institutions for the common people were engineered by CSOs of which micro-credit is a successful example. Micro-credit works to ensure a basic survival level in local areas whereas sustainable market access is connected to the broader area of national governmental policies and globalization. However, the CSOs of Bangladesh concentrated their efforts on the service sector instead and limited their role to one of advocacy (Wood 1997, Rahman 2006). This makeshift effort at a service sector is necessary for markets tied to growth. In Bangladesh many CSOs saw an impetus towards business orientations, transforming into social businesses but different from the traditional individual money making process (Yunus 2008).
This household survey reveals that people join clubs or societies for economic reasons. The top four activities are somehow related to economic benefit. 66% of people are directly related to finance and their main purpose is to borrow money from CSOs. The traditional financial systems could not reach the common people and CSOs, mostly NGOs, opened their doors to people desiring access to small business. These efforts were not immune to criticism as CSOs charged high rates of interest while maintaining access to the credit market (PKSF boss slams 2010). However, this failure of traditional market systems contributed to the creation of huge growth opportunities for Bangladesh CSOs.

4. Depoliticization as a safe game

Since the very inception of NGOs in Bangladesh in 1971, their focus was on humanitarian concerns. As they grew bigger, they understood that their depoliticized nature would shield them somewhat in resource accumulation as well as against government hostility both at national and international levels. The survival techniques of the various CSOs are different but their methods are influenced by social and political institutions, and their strength largely depends on the market. Along with internal resource mobilization, some groups, especially NGOs, depend heavily on the state and international actors. This assistance does in fact compromise their autonomy, which is reflected in their ability to change the establishment’s decisions.
Figure 5 reveals that NGOs are more open to financial assistance over and above their membership fee, which accounts for 83.6%, and agricultural groups also receive similar support, accounting for 60%. Many NGOs are funded by foreign donations, whereas the Bangladesh government subsidizes agricultural sectors, which is reflected in the resource management of these two groups.

The dramatic growth of CSOs was largely dependent on resource management and strategic use of funds by these groups (Fowler 2010: 231-220). The players involved in this discourse are the Bangladesh government, international donor agencies and, obviously, the CSOs. This tripartite relationship shapes both the larger picture of the landscape of CSOs right down to the detailed survival strategies of these groups.

4.1. Sharing the burden of governance by the state

Bangladesh bureaucracy throughout the nation’s history repeatedly failed to implement the complete Annual Development Project (ADP) which is vital for infrastructure development and poverty alleviation. Finance minister Abul Maal Muhith informed parliament that the government machinery could only implement 47.6% of the ADP (Ministry of Finance 2010). It seems spending the budget is more difficult than arranging resources. However, to achieve 8% GDP growth by 2013, the government requires USD 28 billion, and the puzzle of how the government can implement this future ambitious budget when it has failed to implement existing development projects.
remains unsolved (Muhith 2009). The Bangladesh government came up with the magic bullet of Public Private Partnership (PPP), a contractual agreement between public agencies and private sector entities that allows for greater private sector participation in terms of infrastructure development and management to deliver services. The Bangladesh government includes NGOs, along with national and international corporations, as private sectors in order to invigorate the development process (Muhith 2009). PPP is not new in the social development paradigm which functions in the education, health and environmental sectors. Under administrative guidance, the Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (IDCOL) in 1997 and the Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Center (IIFC) in 1999 were established to invigorate investment opportunities. National Domestic Biogas and the Manure Program were implemented by NGOs and private sectors within this framework.

Supporting CSOs through government could undermine their role as advocates of political change as happened in the Japanese case of Neighbourhood Associations (Pekkanen 2006). Mainly bureaucracy tries to share the development burden with other agencies like CSOs. Bangladesh bureaucracy is often criticized for its ‘snail pace’ and ‘red tape-ism’. Compromising their dominance in implementation, they invite NGOs to join in the development process. The political authority also lost confidence in state corporatism which had high stakes in bureaucracy but which resulted in waste of public resources. If a democratic government wants to be re-elected it needs to be committed to the promises made to the electorate. Since the 1990s this is evolving in Bangladesh under the elective officials. These new faces of governance help direct resources to the CSOs so that they may implement development projects and this policy of support shapes the nature of survival of many CSOs.

4.2. Donor Policy: Dunantist and Wilsonian views

Bangladesh has always been a place for foreign aid but recently the amount of foreign aid has been reduced significantly. Nevertheless, the dynamics of power relations have not been changed among the Bangladesh state, foreign donors and the CSOs, particularly the NGOs. To understand this complexity, Abby Stoddard in 2003 made a typology of foreign donations divided into three broad sections based on their historical strand. First, religious faith-based donations which sometimes go beyond the belief system; second, Dunantist which is purely humanitarian and named after Henry Dunant the founder of the Red Cross; and third, Wilsonian, named after Woodrow Wilson, the 28th president of the US who saw basic compatibility between humanitarian aims and
US foreign policy (Rieff 2002). Many states, particularly developed countries, practice a Wilsonian aid policy. Religious foreign aid also has some political ambition so it can be included in the Wilsonian category. Basically, therefore, Bangladesh has two types of foreign aid: Dunantist and Wilsonian. Defining foreign donations as bilateral and multilateral, state and agency is often misleading because this excludes individual foreign donors who give more aid than the Wilsonian ‘strategic allocation of foreign donations’ (Stoddard 2003).

In Bangladesh the foreign donation recipient-NGOs must be registered under the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Ordinance, 1978 act. Foreign donors and NGOs prefer a more direct connection and the government is reluctant to lose its regulatory control over the NGO-donor relation. However, donation is different from aid, which combines grant and loan together. Some aid, in the form of projects, is also spent by NGOs under government supervision. So foreign aid and donations are the key source of survival for some NGOs, especially the development NGOs. In addition, some foreign donation recipient-NGOs have networks or partner organizations which receive money through outreach programs. The number of NGOs directly receiving foreign donations are 2,588 (NGO Affairs Bureau 2010) but the total number of registered NGOs stands at 250,000. Hence a huge number of NGOs fall outside the donation privileges and must manage by their own funding.

Source: NGO Affairs Bureau 2010

Note: Data up to May 2010 was included.

Fig. 6: Flow of foreign funds and recipient NGOs
Bangladesh has experienced more foreign donation since the democratic government era which began in 1991. In the last ten years foreign donations to development NGOs has increased almost five times; the number of foreign donation recipient-NGOs also grew in comparison with the money but it does not match the total registered NGOs which are approximately 250,000. If we compare the total landscape of CSOs then the coverage of foreign donations is very limited. Through foreign donations and strategic use (e.g. Save the Children 2009) the most powerful elements in the modern Bangladeshi state, i.e. the Wilsonian view of donations and the NGOs, are connected.

4.3. Market orientation of CSOs

The Bangladesh state and international actors, i.e. donor agencies, play a big part in shaping the NGOs but they are limited in shaping the bigger landscape of the CSOs which is influenced by social cultural dynamics. State is a new concept to Bangladesh and it has only been seventy years since its inception. The penetration of society by the state is still in its infancy and the dissemination of donor-driven ideas to change the development paradigm has always fallen short of expectation. Migdal (1988) defined a strong state as a power to ‘penetrate society’, measured against this the Bangladesh state has failed to penetrate society by reorganizing those institutions which lacked continuation of regime (Blair 1985). However, little attention has been paid to the role of society in taking up the challenge in curbing this trend. Natural disaster-prone Bangladesh returns regularly to normal life without the aid of exogenous actors such as the government and foreign donors. The poor infrastructure means that any response from the state and foreign donations to an emergency is slow to arrive. The weak state-society relation has led to indigenous solutions which creates reliance on the CSOs. Figure 5 shows that NGOs and agricultural groups are financially more dependent on outside assistance but the rest of the CSOs manage their funding through membership fees. From the perspective of households, the pattern of donating to NGOs is almost absent; however, as shown in Table 2, religious and educational institutes, on the other hand, receive generous donations. Another important factor developed in large-size NGOs which, nowadays, rely less on foreign donations and are oriented more to market activities. This trend is more linked to a global phenomenon where the GDP of developed countries has shrunk in comparison to that of developing countries. Developing countries are set to account for nearly 60% of world GDP by 2030 (OECD 2010). This in fact nudges the market which contributes to the survival of the CSOs.
Conclusion

The dominant groups of Bangladesh CSOs have developed a pattern where it is not necessary to have civil engagement; they perceive their members as clients rather than citizens. Citizenship is a political concept which is critically engaged with government, society and market. Weeding the political aspect from the membership makes the job easy for the government and the market.

The niche of Bangladesh CSOs is development, more precisely poverty eradication through economic development which is broad in objective, often crossing the boundary of membership to become that of client. This is how CSOs gained prominence in development discourse which is efficient in resource accumulation and management. Some Bangladesh CSOs are efficiently transforming themselves from charities to businesses. Some of them are now corporate conglomerates. The military plays a strong part in political decision making; NGOs join it to change the equation of the political game along party lines. Depoliticized CSOs are not necessarily apolitical, some of them are not immune to politicization.

The inability of the government, market failure and social exclusion created a vacuum which was filled by the CSOs, predominantly through the service sector. As the military backed political parties came to power, they needed legitimacy and these parties penetrated through the CSOs. The fledgling political society sought support through a patron-client relationship and distributed benefits to their supporters through this channel.

CSOs started their journey with altruism and as they diversified their activities they went beyond the membership contribution. This is how civil engagement was given less attention than social development. Foreign donations and government policy to involve CSOs in the Annual Development Program (ADP) put them in a comfortable situation in terms of resource accumulation. Many NGOs promoted business as a means of eradicating poverty and turned themselves into social businesses.

The activities of CSOs are organically rooted in social and economic development but strategically they do not want to annoy different regimes with their political activism. They trade off political activities for socio-economic development which they claim works to improve the governance system, especially the performance of governance. CSOs clearly distinguish between politics and governance, the former being the process and the latter the outcome. The outcome might try to satisfy demand for service but
does not necessarily create a political space which is crucial to a democratization of the state and society. As NGOs lean more towards development activities they come closer to national and foreign governments. The government could in fact implement their own agenda and CSOs would be ready to be a ‘supplementary force’ to the government. CSOs could gain extra advantage as the geopolitical power shift happens from the West to Asia. Now China, Brazil and India are giving more aid than before (Brazil foreign-aid 2010) and they are replacing the traditional donors of Western powers. The competition to establish ‘soft power’ among ambitious countries is helping to gain more bargaining power for the Bangladesh state and the CSOs, but the ‘NGO-ization’ of the whole development paradigm could jeopardize the democratization process.

1 Political development in terms of democratic consolidation can be explained by the growth of CSOs (Huntington 1991) but this largely depends on the political catalyst nature of CSOs. Bangladesh has some remarkable political achievements in terms of constitutional democracy like many other third world countries but it is impeded in deliberating democracy (Bessette 1980: 102-116). Some of the leading theorists of deliberate democracy are Cohen and Arato who outlined this and put ‘free association’ in first place, but it is dependent on the quality of the CSOs. This quality demand is more a question of number than ‘free.’

2 BD-JIGS was one of 13 country surveys known as Japan Interest Group Survey (JIGS), a Special Research Project on Civil Society, the State and Culture in Comparative Perspective directed by Professor Yutaka Tsujinaka of the University of Tsukuba. The survey was carried out in two stages: first in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, where 1,005 CSOs were surveyed by the author, and second in Rajshahi, a divisional city of Bangladesh with 504 CSOs, which was selected for another survey, and conducted by Dr. Fahat Tasnim.

3 It is an unsolved question of how many NGOs there are in Bangladesh. This problem of number has two main causes. First, NGOs are registered under seven offices of government: Department of Social Welfare, NGO Affair Bureau, Department of Cooperative, Office of the Registered of Joint Stock Companies and Firms, Micro-credit Regulatory Authority, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and lastly Department of Youth Development. These offices have an overlapping registration procedure and lack coordination. Under existent law even a local club or library can be registered as an NGO. Many civil society organizations do so to obtain donations. Secondly, the multiple track of registering NGOs does not ensure less government control but rather increases bureaucracy. This originated from an ambiguous definition of NGO in the Bangladesh context. The survival nature of NGOs inspires other organizations to define them as NGOs. On the other hand, the leaders of NGOs are only interested in acknowledging an organization an NGO if it works for developmental issues like poverty alleviation, health, education, environmental conservation, etc. (See M. Tazul Islam, the director of Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh Prothom Alo <www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2010-01-15/news/35054> (2010.01.15).
4 The ‘Fundamental Principal of State Policy’ of Bangladesh was changed radically by General, and then President, Ziaur Rahman. This change had two points: first, it enacted the Islamic image to gain political support from the political elite based on religion which had been abandoned during the Bengali nationalism of the Pakistan era. This line was again taken by the General, and then President, H. M. Earshad. The second concerned divorcement from socialism, which was associated with the Bengali nationalistic movement.

5 The Deputy Director of The Imam Training Academy Muhammad Abdul Halim under Ministry of Religious Affairs of Bangladesh government informed the author of the number during a telephone interview on 13 September 2007.

6 During the British Raj the state concept was developed in Westphalian fashion in the Indian subcontinent. In Bengal the concept gained momentum after the Lahore Resolution in 1940 during the Muslim League session, which proposed the ‘Two Nation Theory’ in independent India.

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