Dichotomous Approaches for Social Development
An Analysis of Japan Interest Group Study on NGOs and Muslim Civil Society of Bangladesh

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Dichotomous Approaches for Social Development: 
An Analysis of Japan Interest Group Study on NGOs and 
Muslim Civil Society of Bangladesh

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Abstract
Why Muslim civil society in Bangladesh grows well at the community level without the support of foreign aid in comparison to NGOs? This research operationalized masque as a Muslim civil society and foreign funded civil society organization as NGOs. This paper argues that local membership and contribution matter to make a civil society grass-rooted. Firstly, the foreign aid dependency of NGOs limits the scope of membership basis which in fact impedes the community relation with NGOs. Nevertheless, NGOs can influence better at the national level than local areas as many of them are funded by foreign donors. Secondly, Muslim civil society is well grounded at the community level in Bangladesh. The lack of robust local government and functioning market has created a space for social actor such as Muslim civil society to step in the governance process which is supported by local membership and contribution. Methodologically speaking, this study adopts a quantitative approach to prove the central claims. The data come from a survey called Japan Interest Group Study (JIGS), an international comparative survey on civil society organizations.

Keywords: NGO, Muslim Civil society, Islam, Mosque, Religion, Bangladesh

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1. Introduction

Why Muslim civil society in Bangladesh grows well at the community level without the support of foreign aid in comparison to NGOs? In Bangladesh NGOs and mosques are biggest civil society organizations (CSOs) which can influence state and society. Increasingly the NGOs are playing bigger role Bangladesh’s social, economic and political process. International donors are using civil society rhetoric in a way so that it can be portrayed monolithically as civil society ignoring other social groups. So, this notion should be understood empirical way so that how NGOs are attaching them with the broad paradigm of Bangladeshi socio-political context. Islam is deeply rooted in Bangladesh. Apart from the politics as a civil society how religious organization such as a mosque in Bangladeshi context attend the barometer of ‘social network, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness (Putnam and Campbell 2010 and Putnam1993)

Bangladesh experienced flooding of foreign aid as a part of strengthening of the civil society since 1980s. Stiles concludes that the experience of donor sponsored support to the CSOs to strength the democratization process did not work well in Bangladesh (Stiles 2002). In some cases, it backfired and created a misconception on their social and political endeavors. Stiles like many other scholars put NGOs in a way that it seems that CSO is the substitute of the NGO, which is the partial view of the civil society landscape.

On the other hand, religious civil society is not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. Religion becomes a vehicle of civil society in the early history of Bangladesh. The Weberian framework of social changes focuses on religion and Banu interprets the social change in Bangladesh with the religious belief of the common people and their impact on the social political structure (Banu 1991). Murshid and Geertz argue that the religion has periodically played a dominant role in shaping the nature of politics in South Asia. It has been used as an identity in the process of political mobilization alongside with other identity such as language (Murshid 1997). Ahamed and Nazneen argued about the political Islam connecting social groups as a political force (Ahamed and Nazneen 1990). This focuses on the political identity involving the state and nation and says little about religion as a social network. Beside political relation religion has a social purpose to engage
people. Religion can divide people, nevertheless, it unites individuals at the social sphere (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

This paper will follow the succeeding sections. First, it will explain the methodology and justification of the field of study and categories of CSOs. Then will discuss the historical development of the mosque as Muslim CSO and NGOs of Bangladesh. Then this research paper shows survey data of Muslim civil society and NGOs of Bangladesh in a comparative manner to prove the central claims. Then it also provides other secondary data to prove how Muslim civil society and NGOs are interacting with Bangladeshi state and society.

2. Methodology

This research is based on both the primary and the secondary data of civil society organizations. The primary data was collected from a survey of 1005 civil society organizations of Dhaka, the research field of this study\(^2\). The survey was conducted through direct interview by a structured questionnaire.

Dhaka was selected field of study and there are three reasons. First, Dhaka is the biggest metropolitan area of Bangladesh and 11th largest urban agglomeration\(^3\) area of the world after Tokyo, Mexico City, New York, Sao Paulo, Mumbai, Delhi, Shanghai, Kolkata, Jakarta and Buenos Aires\(^4\). Second, Dhaka is the capital city of Bangladesh with main administrative units in the metropolitan area. It is considered as an opinion maker city of Bangladesh as major political movements on Bengalis nationalism and democratization took place in this city since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. Third, Dhaka has the highest density of population 3989 persons per square km\(^5\). Therefore, it is assumed that the number of civil society may be higher than any other areas of Bangladesh. Considering this fact sampling design\(^6\) has been made to conduct a survey of BD-JIGS\(^7\).

Nine categories of registered civil society have been selected for this survey from total 25760 survey population in the Dhaka metropolitan area 18.2% or 4688 CSOs from total population was randomly attempted to interview\(^8\). The response rate was 21.44% with 1005 samples.
This research will be working on NGO-based and Muslim-based civil society to have a better view of overall CSOs of Bangladesh. To get a comparative view of NGO and Muslim civil society it is also important to include other civil societies of Bangladesh such as the Chamber and Trade, Social Welfare, Labor Union, Youth & Cultural, Cooperatives, Education & Research and Professional Body. These organizations have multiple effects on Bangladeshi state and society. The selected CSOs are mixed groups. Some of these groups even existed since medieval age. The following are the figures of the founding year of CSOs in Dhaka.

**The Rise of CSO in one Hundred Years**

Civil society intelligentsias frequently use the term the ‘association revolution’ after the end of cold war era. In the social science it is difficult to negotiate the difference between conceptualization and contextualization. Conceptualization helps us to build modeling but the context sometimes challenges the pervasive view. Bangladeshi case concerning the rise of Non-profit organizations is dissimilar to this existent concept. Lester Salamon in 1994 identified eight causes to explain the extraordinary growth of civil society in the following ways. First, the crisis of the modern welfare state; second, delivering service through NGOs; third, environmental concern; forth the failure of socialism; fifth, development of communication; sixth, education and literacy; and seventh, global economic growth (Salamon 1994). Of these seven causes the concept of the welfare state of Scandinavian countries and socialist regimes, is absent from Bangladeshi reality. It is true that Bangladesh has achieved in service sectors through NGOs such as environmental awareness, development of communication, education and literacy and economic growth. NGOs have their role in a variety of issues but the NGO-ization of each issue has its own drawback which could undermine the civil society activism (Nazneen and Sultan 2009).
Figure 1. Founding Year of civil society

Source: Japan Interest Group Survey (JIGS)

The Figure 1 shows that the growth of the CSOs in Dhaka. This figure illustrates about the five CSOs i.e. cooperatives, mosques, NGOs, youth and cultural body and labor union. These CSOs have grown rapidly since last fifty years though only eight mosques reported about their existence before the year of 1900. Religion has periodically played an important role in sociopolitical mobilizing alongside other identity such as language. The formation of civil society in Bangladesh is not always secular like most of the democracies in the developed world. To unite a civil society it is needed an identity. In Bangladesh religion is an important factor in the formation of civil society alongside other identities.

**Mosque as an Indigenous Institution**

Bangladesh has the both ‘old and ‘new’ traditions of civil society which have been functioning in Bangladeshi cultural and politics (Lewis 2004). In the old tradition mosque played an important role in organizing community. ‘The geographic expansion of Muslim power in pre modern Bengal is easy enough to
reconstruct. In any given area of the delta, as in the premodern Muslim world generally, the erection of mosques, shrines, colleges, or other buildings, civil or military, usually presupposed control by a Muslim state’ (Eaton 1993). The establishment like mosque is the challenge to the existenting power. In the early history of Islam in Bengal Muslim wanted to consolidate power in the society and political authority came into their hands in later.

The Islam spread in the East Bengal, physically a flat Low-lying in the shape of a ‘great horseshoe’, which is open by Bay of Bengal in the south. Most tribal people live in a hilly area, eastern side of Bangladesh. After the invention of Bengal by Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1204 Muslim wanted to collect more tax and they needed more land to be cultivated. That led the expansion of inhabitants in the East Bengal. The Hindus and Buddhists were enjoying their share in Bengal but huge conversion to Muslim from these groups made the number of Muslim bigger. The caste system within the Hindu culture contributed to the conversion of Muslims. It is the indigenous people who converted to Muslim and caused Islamization in Bengal. Arab, Turk or Persian did not come here by huge number to settle down. Though Muslim ruler introduced forced taxes from the non-Muslim citizen of Bengal. The allegation is posed also to the Mughal Empire (Eaton 1993. P. 119-134).

Islam in Bengal is not an indigenous religion nevertheless the people of Bengal accepted Islam for a number of reasons. The caste system within Hindus and tax system of the Muslim ruler made it easy to convert them. However, it is very difficult to convert by force so many people or entire indigenous people. The people who argued about the forced conversion failed to define ‘force or conversion’ (Peter 1979. P. 78).

The mosque is the central unit of The Muslim community. ‘The mosque is the physical embodiment of the social reality of Islam, and hence the paramount institution by which community identity and solidarity are expressed’ (Eaton 1993. P. 230). In some place mosque is the only permanent structure for local communities. People made their mosque heavier than their home. Muslims think it is the house of God and to get blessing they spend money to build a mosque.

Once the land is brought under cultivation, the produce of the land must be used for the expenses of the mosque as well as the
needs of himself, his descendants, and his dependents. And he must assiduously pray for the survival of the powerful state.

(Eaton 1993. P. 228)

Building mosque was the Mughal emperor’s policy to create huge support base in the agrarian society in the subcontinent. In that society cultivation scheme and other local developmental issues were planned sitting in the mosque. Other service includes, salish (community justice), dispute and other social activities were administered from the mosque. The absence of local government in Bengal gave an advantage to flourish as social mobilizer. The Mosque has a representative nature as a committee of local people run the general affair of the mosque. This representation is not broad based women are excluded from daily activities of the mosque. Eaton gave a description of the mosque in this manner. ‘Mosques – unlike personal, or private, mosque – were generally intended for the male Muslim population of settled communities and were constructed as soon as any local society had achieved a sufficient number of Muslim to warrant one’ (Eaton 1993. P. 230). Bangladesh is rapidly changing the attitude to the women as Bangladesh is experiencing a new demographic patter. Women are becoming more educated in Bangladesh and they need religious space for their spiritual practice. In Dhaka some owners of multi-storied building are making arrangements for women who can come together and say their prayers. This is the phenomenon of the middle class and this change is spreading rapidly even in the low income group. Still these woman devotees are not yet independent as Muslim civil society as they are in the fledgling phase. Nevertheless, history shows that any small effort of mosque building may have an enormous effect in the future.
Table 1. Construction Mosque in Bengal. 1200 – 1800

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ordinary</th>
<th>Congregational</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>1200 - 1250</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1250 - 1300</td>
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<td>1300 - 1350</td>
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<td>1350 - 1400</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1400 - 1450</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1450 - 1500</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500 - 1550</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56</td>
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<tr>
<td>1550 - 1600</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>1600 - 1650</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>1650 - 1700</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700 - 1750</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750 - 1800</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Eaton 1993 p. 67)

A total of 188 mosques were built in the course of six hundred years. Most of the mosque was built in West Bengal. However, these mosques were made of durable material like brick and stone, which describes why they survived into the present. The number of mosques has risen nowadays. There are 191620 mosques in Bangladesh. The Mosque has been a local initiative since middle age and Mughal period of Bengal. Even in the modern time the JIGS survey reveals that mosque in Dhaka works in local areas in comparison to the other CSOs.
The mosque has the boldest presence 92% in the ward, the lowest unit of Dhaka city cooperation. But NGO has only 16% at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, at the national level NGOs have a 47% presence which is much higher than mosque 4%. On the other hand, other social groups have a strong presence at the national level.

The quality of social interaction and its huge number, especially in Dhaka city has made the mosque the biggest Muslim-based civil society. Mosque developed its own Bangladeshi nature of architecture and way of social interaction which is home grown.

**NGOs as Dominant Civil Society**

NGOs are the dominant actors among other civil society in the Bangladesh. Supported and financed by the ‘international society’ NGOs are key advocates of civil society in Bangladesh. They are so vocal to enhance the role of civil
society that NGOs and civil society became synonymous with each other in Bangladesh. Some foreign governments give loans or grants to Bangladesh they insist to build a tripartite relation among Bangladeshi government, donor and NGOs. This special focus to the NGOs has made them a dominant civil society in Bangladesh.

Based on the resource accumulation NGOs can be divided into two parts in Bangladesh, one is directly dependent on the foreign fund and other one is financially independent. It is very hard to distinguish between dependent and independent NGOs on foreign donations as some of them are working as a foreign fund manager. First, they receive funds as a foreign donation then they disburse them to the local NGOs. That has made the low rate of registration of NGOs in NGO Affairs Bureau, the legal government authority who is responsible to register the NGOs, who receive foreign funds. The number is low in comparison to the huge number of NGOs registered under other the different ministry of the government. There are total 45026 NGOs are working in Bangladesh. This huge number of NGOs are rare in the other developing countries.

Functionality of Muslim Civil Society - Communalism or Collectivism

Despite the normative character of religion, Muslim civil society has a social and cultural involvement in Bangladesh like many other countries. Mosque is such a huge institution that it has enough time to do social issues the five times prayer in a day. When cyclone SIDR hit in the southern part of Bangladesh in 2007 though the loudspeaker of mosques people was advised to flee away in a safe place, for example, cyclone center. Some of the mosques worked as a cyclone center and a fundraising spot for the cyclone victims. In Bangladesh mosque is dealing with people and local authority in meso level. As Muslim community is rising steadily in Bangladesh and their influence is visible at the societal level.
This research finds Islam is a dominant religion in Bangladesh since long. The answer to the main question is still unsolved whether mosques emerged as community center rather than a communal center. To get this view we further more we need the nature of Islam in the Bengal from a historical perspective. The spread of Islam was accelerated in Bengal after the victory of Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1203 AD. Many Sufis accompanied the conquerors and devoted themselves to spreading the message of Islam and Sufism.

Sufism is an Iranian tradition of Islam and this school of thought has immense influence in ancient Bengal, many orthodox Muslims argue that Sufism is a deviation of mainstream Islam. Nevertheless, this tradition has made Islam more liberal in Bengal and influenced the indigenous ideas, like vaisnavism as well as the mysticism of the bauls (Ahmed 2014). sufis built more shrines than mosques and their mysticism made them reluctant in worldly affairs. Though Sufism became more interested in mysticism and the way of their teaching of Islam remains popular in Bangladesh.

According to the Muslim tradition mosque is the center of all activities of the community. Building a mosque in a Muslim community is a global phenomenon. Britain is the home of 1.6 million Muslims, about 2.7 percent of its population and it has 1500 mosques and more mosques in the process to be built. However, sometimes these are creating tension within other community (Perlez 2007).
However, these huge facilities are bridging the Muslim community around the world.

**NGOs as Civil Society - Leaders without Followers**

NGOs started their work in 1971 in Bangladesh with a vision of social, political and economic development. When development practice came across Bangladeshi horizon, initially it covers only the social development issues. Nevertheless, NGOs have tried to reach the issues like economic and social issues to integrate their efforts to penetrate into Bangladeshi sociological structure. The NGOs became the partner of the foreign donors. This tailor made project proposal made by NGOs has little participation to the ‘beneficiaries’. The word they chose is not members but beneficiaries, which is in fact Bangladeshi NGO vocabulary. These beneficiaries are the recipients of foreign donation, nevertheless, they do not have control over the process of foreign aid.

**Figure 3 Financial assistance from outside sources**

![Financial assistance from outside sources](image)

Source: Japan Interest Group Survey (JIGS)
This data shows that the NGOs are the biggest recipients of outside assistance 84% percent. The mosque is one of the least recipients of financial assistance from outside sources with 32%. The mosque is reluctant to reveal about their financial sources or wanted to avoid the hassle about the financial details. However, NGOs were more open to say about their financial dependency on foreign donation.

Big NGOs are getting the lion-share of foreign fund, which is giving them a leading role in negotiation with Bangladeshi government and foreign donors. Big NGOs have little idea about their member that they are representing. Volunteering as viewed by Putnam is an act of ‘doing good for other people’ rather than ‘doing with’ them to achieve shared objectives. Doing ‘with’ is the true basis for creating social capital (Putnam 2000. P. 116-117). Skocpol descried the relation between leader and members before 60s in the U.S. in a critical way (Skocpol 1998).

Privileged men and women who climbed the ladders of vast membership associations had to interact in the process with citizens of humble or middling means and prospects.\(^{16}\)

\[
\text{(Skocpol 1998. P. 500)}
\]

Skocpol finds in the absence of direct surveillance of members professional persons advocate in the name of others which she termed it as ‘advocates without members.’\(^{17}\) On the other hand Pekkanen sees despite 300,000 Japanese Neighborhood Associations (NHAs) they lack advocacy role. In Bangladesh NGOs are the leaders without members in the realm of civil society. They have established a new type of patron-client relationship when they deal with the beneficiaries. The accountability is missing in dealing with the client of NGOs. The Transparency International Bangladesh, leading NGO that works for anti-corruption discloses a research report on the corruption of NGOs in Bangladesh.

NGOs are accountable to donors and government officially but they are not doing so to their clients. Demands of the clients are not met. NGOs implement various programs in the line of donors direction. These programs stop abruptly if the giving of donors are not available. NGOs never treat the clients as their collaborators. Nevertheless, in various field they are underestimated. No information is made public though reports
are given to government and donor. If some shows interested to know this information, it is kept out of reach terming it as secret.18

(Das 2007)

The relation among the leaders and their clients (members) is the ‘Achilles Tendon’ which is the weakest point of social capital of Bangladesh. This weakness is creating dependent elitist NGOs in Bangladesh and without the support of foreign aid it can merely survive. ‘Putnam contends that advocacy groups in which members do not participate, but simply write a check, do not constitute civil engagement as does active participation in civic or other groups. In other words, membership without participation in an advocacy group does not sustain democracy per se’ (Pekkanen 2006. P. 185). This is true in the context of the USA where social capital is declining as Putnam argued but case of Bangladesh is much worst where the dominant civil society, NGOs merely care about the membership. The definition of social capital of Putnam ‘social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness’ is missing from the NGOs led civil society in Bangladesh (Putnam 2000).

Relation between Elite and Civil Society

Neo-liberalistic ideally matches with the NGOs as it is sometimes uncomfortable with the state. To influence the state policy neo-liberals need to connect them to the power elite.19. In Bangladesh ‘donor’ is a term that basically refers to developed countries like the US and other European countries. These donors are keen to donate cash money to Bangladesh through NGOs.
There is a consensus among CSOs about the relation between NGOs and national elites of Bangladesh. On average 82.3% respondents agreed on the point that there is a relation between these two parties. Professional bodies, social welfare organizations and youth and cultural groups rate highest consecutively 94.7%, 89.6% and 86.0%. These groups are highly educated and deal regularly with the NGOs and elites.

The donors made a good relation with the national elite of Bangladesh. They channel 90% of their funds through only 8 major NGOs. The retired government officials head these NGOs, spouse of the editor of major daily newspapers, lawyers and so on. Poverty is not the highest priority to elite of Bangladesh (Hossain, 2005). Disruption of this economic growth occurs in the absence of proper policy and implementation procedure in agriculture sector. Bangladesh Bank admits this in the following manner.
Projection for the real GDP growth for FY07 has been revised down to 6.5 percent following set back in the agriculture sector that experienced a moderate growth due to inadequate rainfall, distribution problems relating to fertilizer and shortage of power for irrigation.

(Bangladesh Bank. 2007)

National elite has little interest in agricultural development and few foreign funded NGOs work for the seeds, fertilizer or. Neo-liberalist does not work for Bangladeshi poor farmers who needs a subsidy like any developing and developed country.

**Money Culture of NGOs**

Bangladesh got the ‘aid addiction’ both in government and NGO sector, which resulted in an adverse impact both on economic and social capital. ‘Aid dependency is destroying the immune system of society as AIDS destroys the immune system of a body.’

Bangladesh receives aid in two forms. One is loan and another is grant. ‘Since independence until June 30, 2006, Bangladesh has received a total amount of nearly $44.83 billion of foreign aid, of which 44.7 percent was grant and 55.3 percent was loan’ (Haque 2007). Most of foreign donation is not conditioned free. The multilateral lateral donors like World Bank, IMF, ADB etc. give so many conditions that they have some adverse impact on the local economy. However, the poor people have to pay in two ways, one in interest form and another one policy condition, which is directly affecting their livelihood.
CSOs received financial assistance from the different sources. The respondents, who received financial assistances besides membership fees were asked in the survey, are the financial assistances accompanied by the condition? 79.1% NGOs responded by saying yes. The contrasted answer came from mosques that said only 13.2%, the lowest among the respondents, are conditioned receiver. The more the condition prevails the less the autonomy is. NGOs are ready to sacrifice their liberty for financial assistance.

However, the reality is that the foreign aids in Bangladesh both grants and loans are contributing only 10403 cores Taka (Bangladeshi currency) in 2007-2008 financial year, which is 7.9% of the national budget. The foreign aid to Bangladesh is declining since 1971-1992 financial year. Nevertheless, the psychological dependency on the foreign aid is remaining the same (Sobhan 2007).
Local financing in NGOs is inadequate as they are not dependent on the membership fees or local donation. To fill the gap some NGOs are doing microcredit finance program for income generation. Microfinance organization of Bangladesh got a huge reputation worldwide and Nobel Peace Prize for peace of 2006 awarded jointly to Professor Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank. Microfinance institution is facing growing criticism for the repayment of loans from their members. The SIDR cyclone of 2007 vulcanized the debate again. When cyclone SIDR ripped through the southwestern coast killing over 3000 people and demolishing houses, crops, vegetables and trees alike along its trail of devastation over an area of thousands of square kilometers then NGOs became busy for repayment of loan as they disbursed as microcredit. The government requested the NGOs to suspend their collection for a time being. Professor Yunus did so in the line of the government. Nevertheless, at the field level NGOs ignored the appeal.

Ignoring the request of the government, country’s leading microfinance NGOs like BRAC, Grameen Bank and ASA have been forcing the distressed people in cyclone-affected districts to repay their loan installments.
Finding no other alternatives, many distressed people are now repaying their loan installments even by selling rice, lentil and cooking oil which they have received as relief either from government or from the international and local relief agencies.²³

The government lost its control over the microfinancing organizations. The executive director of the Microcredit Regulatory Authority, Khandaker Mazharul Haque admitted that there is no code in his hands to control these organizations. But the director of Bangladesh NGO Federation, M. Tajul Islam was against any kind of control but favored regulation. Dr. Abul Barakat suggested that the government could have taken any decision by its executive order against these NGOs (Jahid 2007).

Still the internal contribution in terms of money is low in NGO sector. Though NGOs are creating a huge job market in Bangladesh. After the banking NGOs are second largest job sector for educated people in Bangladesh (Ahmed 2007). This is helping to expand the circle of development professional which could have
created the opportunity of lobbying. Unfortunately lobbying and advocacy is low in Bangladesh.

Figure 6. Number of government registered NGOs

![Graph showing the number of government registered NGOs from 1990 to 2007.](image)

Source: NGO Affair Bureau 2007

The numbers of National/Local NGOs are rising when International NGOs got insignificant growth. In 1990 there were 89 International NGOs and in 2007 they were 206. But National/Local NGOs have risen tremendously. In 1990 they were only 293 and in 2008 the number rose to 2006. The rise of International NGOs is slower in comparison to the local NGO. A donor prefers national NGOs to distribute the funds. The donors usually link between the national NGOs and their ‘local partners.’ This is a hierarchical relation and the chain of command is being maintained through the International donor.

When a horrendous cyclone, CIDR hit Bangladesh on 15 November 2007, which shattered 12 districts, stuck 34 of the country’s 64 districts, and directly affected 2.2 million people then Bangladesh government appealed for international help. One is striking news is that NGOs were visibly absent from the immediate rescue and relief operations.24 Despite this huge allegation Anwar Choudhury, British
High Commissioner to Bangladesh said British government preferred to help Bangladesh with the help of NGOs rather than Bangladesh government. When the Bangladesh government sought help 0.5 million metric tons of rice as international help the donor suggested foreign assistance through cash despite huge allegation of corruption (Karim 2007).

Figure 7. Foreign Fund to NGO

![Chart showing foreign aid to Bangladesh from 1990-1991 to 2011-2012]

Source: NGO Affair Bureau 2007

The foreign Aid to Bangladesh government decreased but the donation though NGOs have increased since 1990. Which in fact is making dependant CSOs of Bangladesh on foreign countries. Most of the major NGOs are heavily dependent on foreign aid and the number of foreign fund recipient NGOs is 2212 registered under NGO affair Bureau.25

The statistic shows that the NGOs are receiving more money as a foreign donation. The money the donor committed to the NGOs is higher than the actual release of the money. The statistic only shows the actual release of the money. 2005-2006 financial year is the biggest year for the NGOs as they gained $347
million. If there is a natural calamity in Bangladesh donation increases in the following year. That happened after the cyclone of 1991, flood of 1998 and the flood of 2004. When the cyclone or flood hit Bangladesh there is no immediate fund in the hands NGOs when the affected people go to the normal life they come up with the help. This delayed nature of donation is making ineffective to the victims.

**Society Based Civil Society - Alien Actor in the Domain of the State**

When the concept of civil society came in Bangladesh in 1980s, members of mosque, commerce & trade, social welfare organization, labor unions, youth & cultural organization, cooperative and other professional organization became confused about their new identity. Who are they? Are they members of civil society? Then who are NGOs? Why they are talking too much about the civil society? Academically, their inclusion as CSOs is debated but the NGOs are so powerful members as civil society that they seldom acknowledge others a civil society. Whenever government wants to discuss or forced to discuss any policy matters NGOs appear as representatives of civil society. This monolithic identity made almost synonyms of NGO and civil society. NGOs successfully coined their name as civil society in Bangladesh.

Civil society is a wide concept and NGOs are very important component like other social organizations. Nevertheless, the disproportionate representation of civil society is making hard for the other CSOs penetrate in the policy orbit. It has become Lasswell’s “who gets what, when, where, and how.” In this competition CSOs other than NGOs are far away from the power base. Bangladeshi state embodies the most powerful elements like bureaucracy, political and business elite, foreign countries, multi donor agencies and NGOs leaders. Nevertheless, this elitist approach is widening the gap between the state and society.

State tries to penetrate into the society and extract the resources (Middal 1988). The state needs the social elite as long as they can maintain the social and political order. This relation as based on patron-client relation. When weak state and weak society appears, it creates the power vacuum, nevertheless, in the post colonial states this vacuum is filled by the new colonial structure. Migdal criticized modernization theory, Maxist theory, dependency theory and world
system theories as they are ‘too uncritical about the power at the top and too state-centered’ (Middal 1988. P. xiii). But Migdal is ambitious about social movement which is hardly seen in Bangladeshi case.

**Weak Bureaucracy and Local Government - Mosque Filling Vacuum**

In Bangladesh mosque is the mainstream religious organization that is being used as community service along with prayer. This is an institution that is more than a congregation space as it is also used as social space. Traditional leaders of the society usually sit here for various activities stretch from local irrigation to *salish* (village arbitration). Bangladeshi state and other NGOs are utilizing this huge institution which will be discussed in the later part of this article. However, the mosque is working as a social institution which works with the community issues.

Mosque got the position in the society in the absence of strong local government in Bangladesh. The bureaucracy of Bangladesh does not want to lose its power in the hand of elected representatives (Ahmed 1988). The lack of political will of the ruling political party and their dependency on the bureaucracy to stay in power is largely blamed for the unwilling reform.

The bureaucracy has been enjoying the power since the British colonial period. Colonial ruler needed a bureaucracy that was obedient to the master. The training the Indian Civil Servant (ICS) received was far away from the reality. That did not change a lot in the Pakistani era (1947-1971) and Bangladesh. At the field level like Thana administration bureaucrats are uncomfortable with the strong local government (Mozumder et al. 2009). Frustrated with the situation many have suggested that the active role of parliamentarians social and economic development in the local areas. However, the involvement of parliamentarians invites partisan politics in the local government and destroyed the bureaucracy.

**Muslim Civil Society is a Missing Actor in a Crucial Role**

The composition of salaried of a mosque has three knots. First, *Imam* (the leader of prayer), Second Moazzin (The crier who calls the faithful to prayer five times a day) and third Khadem (a man who serves at the mosque). This composition depends on the size of the mosque. Big mosque can afford multiple number of
Imams, Moazzins and Khadems. On the other hand, smaller mosque could have only Imam and Moazzzin with multiple workloads. The committee of the mosque assigns these employees. The members of the committee are from the respected persons of the local area who usually come to the mosque for prayer regularly. The general members give time and resources for the development and maintenance of the mosque.

Traditionally, the mosque has been performing a number of social responsibilities other than the religious activities. Therefore, Bangladeshi government is taking the opportunity of this social network to implement some development projects. The involvement of the government with the mosque has twofold, one training of the Imam and other, taking different projects using the mosque facilities.

Under the Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh the Imam Training Academy was established in 1979 ‘with a view to increasing knowledge and expertise and at the same time reducing the unwarranted orthodoxy and rigidity.’ The training curriculum includes the broad four subjects and these are Islamath (religious training), mass literacy, family welfare, primary health care and first aid, agriculture and afforestation and last one livestock - fishery rearing and husbandry. Along with the curriculum this training deals with AIDS, EPI, drug addiction and human rights.

The ministry of religious affair took big project (2006-2009) involving the mosque is being called ‘Mosque-based Child and Mass Literacy Program (4th Phase but originally taken 1992)’ intended to literate more than 1.6 children through 18768 mosques. It has been projected that less than 7 U.S. $ will be spent for a child per annum (Islamic Foundation Bangladesh 2007). This is the cheapest way to educate children of Bangladesh. The mosque has this relative advantage in comparison to other educational institution. The role of an Imam and his social status is an important factor in Bangladesh. The Imam of a mosque preaches at every Friday’s Jumma prayer. This gives him an audience to whom he can religious viewpoint. His advices are highly accepted within the community. Therefore, when an Imam advises parents to send his child to the mosque to be educated (mass education) the response is simply tremendous.28

The success and the innovative idea of engaging mosques with development activities make other international agencies to take similar projects. United
Nations Population Fund, Bangladesh (UNFPA) launched a project in 1999 to train Imams in various areas, like nursing, child health, safe motherhood, bad effect of dowry and child marriage, gender equity, awareness against social crimes and terrorism, prevention of spread of HIV/AIDS and control of diarrhea ((UNDP Bangladesh 2007 and The Daily New Nation 2007).

U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Bangladesh and The Asia Foundation, Bangladesh have launched “Leaders Outreach Initiative” with Imam Training Academy of Islamic Foundation Bangladesh intended to ‘expand the understanding of the Imams, persons of influence in Bangladeshi society, on development topics that will contribute to their ability to raise public awareness of development goals and facilitate greater citizen participation in development activities’ (The Asia Foundation, Bangladesh. 2007). The development activities includes family health service, HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, primary education, aquatic ecosystem management, bio-secure poultry raising, innovation in wheat, maize and vegetable production, sustainable aquaculture, environmental conservation and resource management, rural electrification, local governance, public advocacy, protection and promotion of human rights, and prevention of trafficking in persons.

Analyzing the volume of the programs this can be inferred that as Imams are influential in Bangladeshi society international agencies are also implementing some development project along with the state through the mosque. Nevertheless, these international agencies are promoting the global issues like HIV/AIDS which has a little effect in Bangladeshi society. The issues like poverty, mass education and disease like tuberculosis (620000 people were affected by this disease in 1997) are more acute than HIV/AIDS if we priorities in Bangladeshi point of view.

However, these huge development efforts have been carried through the mosque. The involvements of government and international agencies with mosque-based activities have been approached only to the limited number of Bangladeshi society. There are 191620 mosques around the country and the community is using these huge establishments for various purposes.
**Grass-rooted Mosque**

The social basis of the mosque is a sustained organization that integrates society and Bangladeshi norms that are passing though this institution to its members. Bangladeshi culture and thoughts are being constantly circulated with this shared identity. Putnam called church ‘to refer to all religious institutions of whatever faith, including mosques, temples and synagogues.’ However, Putnam advocated the contribution of churches in the U.S. society in the following way:

> Churches provide an important incubator for civil skill, civil norms, community interests, and civil recruitment. Religiously active men and women learn to give speech, run meetings, manage disagreements, and bear administrative responsibility. They also befriend others who are in turn likely to recruit them into other forms of community activity. In part for these reasons, churchgoers are substantially more likely to be involved in secular organizations, to vote and participate politically in other ways, and to have deeper informal social connection.

(Putnam 2000. P. 66)

The mosque is the single biggest civil society organization in Bangladesh. The skill that the people gain from this organization is being used for other social activities. This has become a training center for the social skill of the people. And the people of Bangladesh prefer to contribute in the religious organization than any other CSOs. This gives them the sense of ownership and attachment.

The giving to the religious organization is higher than any other organizations. The religious sentiment and the efficiency of the religious organizations are contributing to this factor.
Table 5. Percentage of Households Giving to Organizations in Bangladesh:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Environment &amp; Others</th>
<th>Sports, culture, arts, recreation, clubs, children &amp; youth</th>
<th>Education and Research</th>
<th>Social services, relief</th>
<th>Religious institution and charities, orphanages</th>
<th>Business, trade union, organization</th>
<th>Political Assn</th>
<th>Cooperatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ahmad, Muzaffer. 2007

This table shows that the giving to religious institution, charities (not to the NGOs) and orphanage is the height. This giving is almost similar in respect to the metro, urban and rural areas. There is a trend to be believed that the rural people are more religious than the metro people. But it does not reflect in this data because the people from the metro area give more (89.1%) than the rural people (70%).

The mosque is well fitted as a civil society organization to the people in Bangladesh. The historical background and people’s aspiration involved with organization is the contextual framework. The sustain activities around the mosques since last eight hundred years made it so content even the organizations who are proponents of secularism are also willing to work with this institution.

State and Society Divided - Unutilized Social Capital

Bangladesh is trying to distribute the benefits among the most disadvantaged population of the country. Despite some ‘positive discrimination’ policies of Bangladeshi, the tribal people and Hindu minorities are still left behind in getting the state sponsored benefits. This state centric approach of redistribution of wealth has just collaborated with the state ignoring the society. This is carrying forward the debate ‘Old Societies and New states’ especially in the postcolonial states like Bangladesh.

The role of the state is important to support the societal will and enhance its aspirations and work for the common good of the people. When a group squeezes the whole authority it becomes less democratic. On the other hand, the society has
been made the client of the state which is ruled by the Bangladeshi elite class. Transparency International, a Germany international CSO on corruption rated Bangladesh as most corrupt country in five consecutive years since 2001 (Transparency International Bangladesh. 2007). The bureaucracy, politician and businessman, the power elite has made an nexus which makes Bangladesh easy for corrupt practice. After the restoration of democracy from military rule in 1990 the political parties failed to make Bangladesh a corruption free country.

The failure of political parties, which has created a power vacuum in Bangladesh, invites the NGOs to step into power in a collaboration of the military. The collaboration between military and NGOs in 2007 helped to keep away political parties to run the state power in Bangladesh for two years. This is a weakness of the NGOs-led civil society who also failed to integrate the horizontal relationship though they have the vertical relation with the state.

On the other hand, muslim-lead civil society such as mosques has the density, autonomy and self-regulation and another consideration they have social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness, which is rich in horizontal relation but poor in vertical relation (Waismen 2006 and Putnam 200). In the case of Japan, there are around 300,000 Neighborhood Organizations (NHAs) but it has little impact on policy arenas which Pekkanen argued that it had been done deliberately though the legal mechanism and it was propelled by the bureaucracy (Pekkanen 2006). The involvement of development program with the government and donor agencies have also the risk to curtail the diversification and pluralistic approach of the mosque based civil society of Bangladesh. The aid dependency has been proven a hollow approach that can disable the societal strength. The cyclone SIDR in 2007 has attached the world’s attention and initially the aid to the victim as slow and sporadic. But the flow of aid to the people in some places made the people dependent. The intervention of the government and donor agencies to the mosque with the financial aid and the issues that they prefer is making this institution homogenous which would lead to lack of pluralism. Anyway, the fragmented effect of the social capital is harmful to the state and society of Bangladesh.
Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to understand why the muslim civil society in Bangladesh grows well at the community level without the support of foreign aid in comparison to NGOs? This research has introduced NGOs and mosques, the two dominant CSOs to establish the core argument that NGOs are good at the state level, contrary, the mosque has a stake with densed membership at the societal level. According to the JIGS survey data, each of these two groups does not have the command over the state and society simultaneously. It has been found since the last eight hundred years, the number of mosques rose steadily along with the growing muslim population. This facility has become a community center among these groups. Bangladesh has experienced the remarkable growth of NGOs after the independence in 1971. The membership of NGOs, the lifeline of any CSO got the less priority instead it became more dependent on the foreign aid. The aid dependency made them closer to the national and international elite that has been using aid as a tool of making alliances. The financial assistance accompanied by conditions is high among the NGOs which undermined their autonomy as CSO. However, a number of developed countries support the money culture of NGOs in Bangladesh. The data from NGO Bureau Affairs showed that the foreign donation in Bangladesh is upward trend since 1990. However, despite the huge presence in the grassroots levels mosques failed to penetrate in the policy orbit, largely dominated by the NGOs. Muslim CSOs remained as alien at the state level.

The bureaucracy is reluctant to grow the local government which afraid of losing power. Bangladesh has been experiencing a weak local government institution; therefore, there is a huge power vacuum at the local level. In addition, mosques are filling the gap by stepping in the local area. There were 191, 620 mosques in Bangladesh in 1998. The number has risen to 300,000 (approximately) in 2007. The government of Bangladesh and international NGOs (UNFPA, USAID and Asia Foundation) are using these facilities as development activities.

In Bangladesh, the social capital and their effectiveness are divided on the line of state and society. The Bangladeshi government and some other international NGOs are trying bridge the gap between the two paradigms, state and societal approaches. However, these efforts could make mosque homogenous in nature
and merely implementing agents like Neighborhood Associations (NHAs) of Japan. Having social capital is not enough for state and society it should be used in an effective way for the betterment of the people.

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These funds are almost exclusively grants and are channeled through the NGO Affairs Bureau of the government. According to the Bureau sources, the donor fund received by the NGOs up to 30 June 1999 amounted to $180 million. Source: Banglapedia <http://search.com.bd/banglapedia/HT/F_0149.htm> Accessed 24 December 2007.

This survey is part of a larger project called the Cross-national Survey on Civil Society, which conducted similar surveys in 15 countries: Japan, South Korea, The U.S.A., Germany, China, Turkey, Russia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Brazil, Poland, Estonia, Uzbekistan India and Thailand. The generic name of the survey is Japanese Interest Group Study (JIGS) and it is directed by Professor Yutaka Tsujinaka of the University of Tsukuba.

The term urban agglomeration refers to the population contained within the contours of a contiguous territory inhabited at urban density levels without regard to administrative boundaries or commuter flows.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division World Urbanization Prospect: The 2005 Revision. Table 12. p. 130


Sampling Pattern of the Survey of Dhaka BD-JIGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of CSO</th>
<th>Return</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent of Return</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-operative</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>24.90%</td>
<td>1280</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6398*</td>
<td>24.84%</td>
<td>19.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth &amp; Cultural</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>15.60%</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1783*</td>
<td>6.92%</td>
<td>73.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosque</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>15.40%</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>1985*</td>
<td>7.71%</td>
<td>26.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>13.30%</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4153*</td>
<td>16.12%</td>
<td>26.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cham. &amp; Trade</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>10.30%</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4200*</td>
<td>16.30%</td>
<td>12.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Union</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4488*</td>
<td>17.42%</td>
<td>9.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Welfare</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2263*</td>
<td>8.79%</td>
<td>28.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edu. &amp; Research</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>317*</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
<td>68.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Body</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>173*</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
<td>36.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,005</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4688</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>25760</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>21.44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Japgan Interest Group Survey (JIGS)

Japan Interest Group Study (JIGS) is the generic name of civil society survey. JIGS survey was conducted in fifteen countries such as Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Estonia, Germany, India, Japan, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Thailand, The Philippines, The U.S.A., Turkey and Uzbekistan.

Dhaka metropolitan area is consist of 33 Thanas during survey time in 2006-2007(area unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police) and these are as follows as per [The Dhaka] Metropolitan Police Ordinance, 1976 (As Amended) Adabar, Airport, Badha, Cantonment, Dakshinkhan, Demra, Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Hajaribag, Jatrabari, Kafrol, Kamrangirchar, Khilgaon, Khilkhett, Kotwali, Lalbag, Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Motojheel, New Market, Pallabi, Paltan, Ramna, Shabujbag, Shahali, Shahbagh, Shyampr, Sutrapur, Tejgaon, Tejgaon-Industrial, Turag, Uttara and Uttarkhan.

Imam Training Academy of Islamic Foundation Bangladesh carried out a survey in 1998. The Survey showed that there are 1985 mosques in Dhaka City. The total Number of the mosque in Bangladesh is 191620.

The mainstream Western media use this term to refer Western power and their allies, more specifically U.S. and Western Europe are clustered as “international society.”


Mills calls attention to the interlaced interests of the leaders of the military, corporate, and political elements of society. Please see Mills, C. Wright. 1956. The Power Elite. New York: Oxford University Press.

Coalition of Local NGOs (CLNB), apex bodies of over 850 non-government organizations, who do not accept foreign donation claim that and it was sited in the daily The New Nation. ‘NGOs visibly absent in relief operation: Journalists on the ground reported that the cyclone survivors were shocked at the absence of the NGOs”<http://www.bangladeshweb.com/view.php?hidType=&hidRecord=000000000000000178836> Accessed 30 November 2007.

A Swedish diplomat based in Dhaka who preferred anonymity expressed this view to one of the authors in 2001. Venue: Residence of Swedish ambassador to Bangladesh. Gulshan. Dhaka.


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28 The Deputy Director of The Imam Training Academy Muhammad Abdul Halim informed one of the authors about this issue over a telephone interview. 13 September 2007. Phone 88 02 8917880 office and 88 01715700322 mobile.


32 In Southkhali of Begerhat district of Bangladesh people were depending on the aid more than their livelihood even after the one month of the cyclone. A daily labour could get 150 Taka (BD currency) per day but when he/she found that waiting for the aid and once succeed, it would offer him/her an aid package with different items including foods. In some case it would value up to 1000 Taka. Therefore, this possibility was making them reluctant to work. Reported by Anawar, Shakeel. BBC Bengali Service. Probaho 7:30 pm − 8:00 pm Bangladesh time. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bengali/radio/aod/bengali_aod.shtml?bengali_probaho> Accessed 15 December 2007. Please see Also, Dowden, Richard. Director of the Royal African Society. Aid ‘is not solution’ for Africa. 24 June 2005 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/if/4105140.stm> Accessed 16 December 2007. Please see also Collier, Paul. “Aid ‘Dependency’: a Critique”. Journal of African Economics. Vol. 8. No. 4 December 1999. p. 528-545.