

# **General Framework**

**Authors Conference on Civil Society  
in Bangladesh, 20-21 Feb, 2012**

**Proposed Title of the Book**

**Civil Society in Bangladesh: Quest for  
Development and Democracy**

# Need for the Book

- Civil society has emerged as an important sector to achieve and maintain democracy and pluralism.
- For, developing countries international development organizations and donor countries have found this civil society to be the best mechanism to ensure liberal economy and democracy besides ensuring social development (Hulme and Edwards 1997, Howell and Pearce 2001, Lewis 2004, Stiles 2002).
- However, in practice, the process may not be so simple and easy as it may sound in the theories and policies (Tarrow 1996, Arnomy 2004, Alagappa 2004, Quadir 2003).
- So it has become necessary to understand and analyze the reality.

# Why Bangladesh

- Bangladesh has a vibrant civil society, reaching its triumph in 2006 when Professor Yunus and his Grameen Bank won the Nobel Peace Prize.
- Besides, civil society in its present meaning were active in Bangladesh through its history so far known.

However, Bangladesh has a -

- A poor economy
- A confrontational democracy with political rivalry, distrust and division.

Such contradiction makes the civil society in Bangladesh to become a potential case to analyze and understand the reality.

# Structure of the General Framework

- Highlights on the idea of civil society according to the project
- Focus on the relationship between civil society and democracy
- A brief review on the existing literatures on Bangladesh
- Point out the most important issues concerning civil society in contemporary Bangladesh
- Clarify few more concepts and
- Point out why the book shall be unique.

# Overall Contribution of the Book

- Empirical condition assessment of civil society in Bangladesh with a broad perspective.
- Understand the relation between civil society and state, politics, society and market in Bangladesh.
- Asses the role of civil society in politics and democracy in Bangladesh.

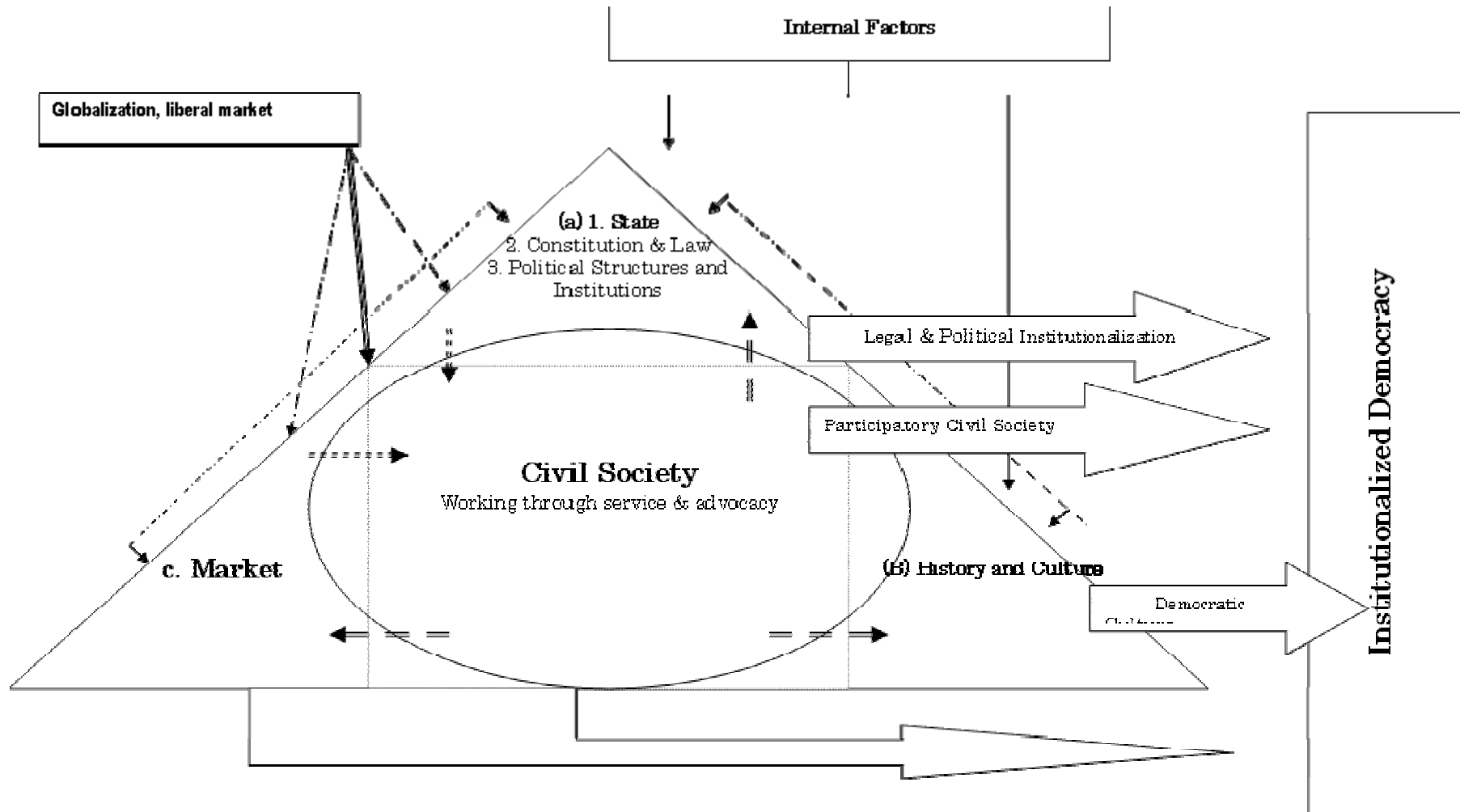
# Civil Society

**Civil Society:** In broad meaning it includes all organized form of autonomous group activities that are placed outside the state, family and market.

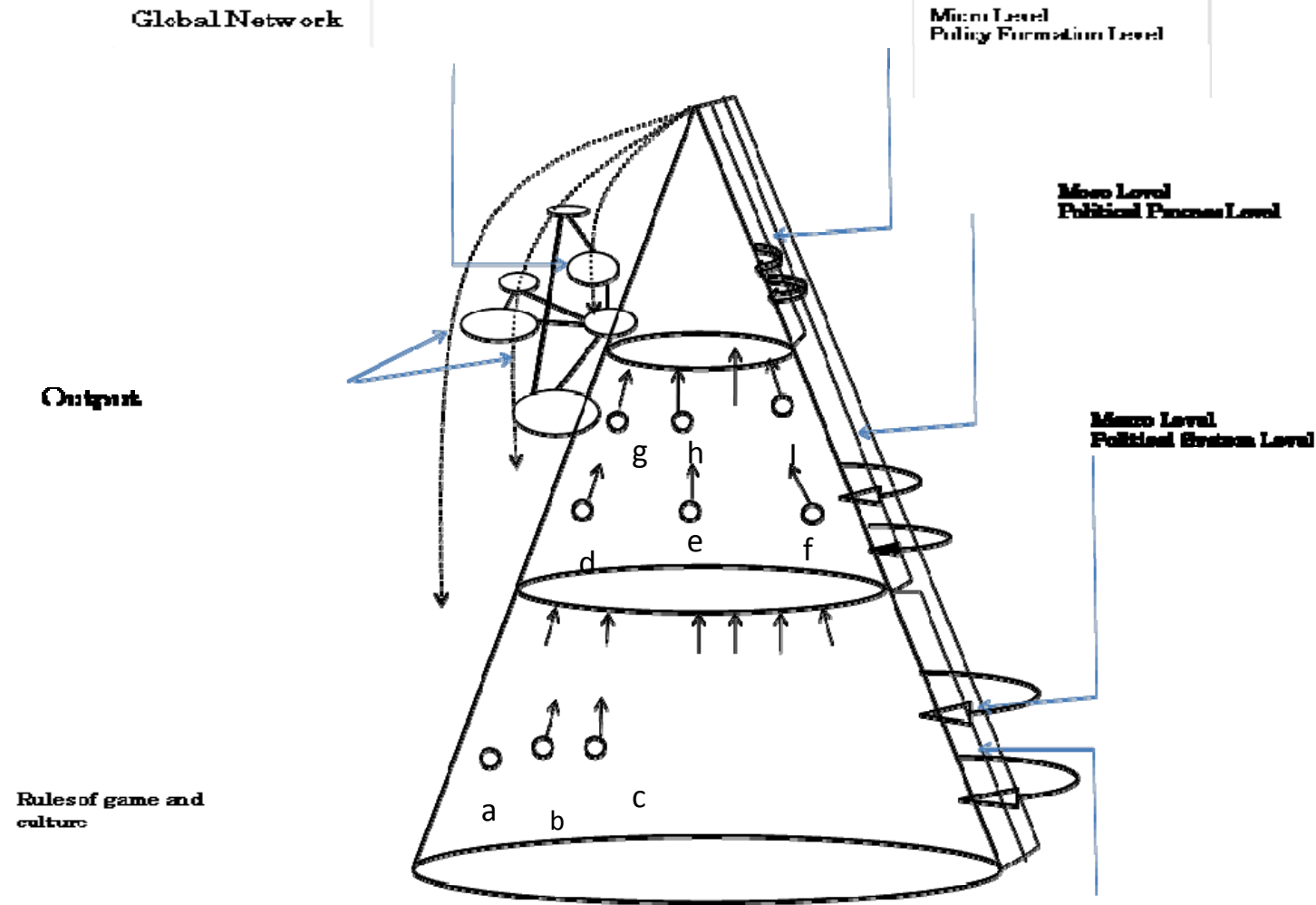
**Civil Society Organizations (CSO):** All organization that may be found in this particular sphere may be considered as CSO. However, in all cases they must be non-profit. They may pursue both for the interest of their members as well as for broad public interests. For example, clubs, trade union, welfare group, professional groups, citizens' groups etc. It is to be mentioned that non-profit hospital and schools have been listed out as CSO.

**Social Capital:** Social capital is the features of social organizations such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of the society by facilitating coordinated action (Putnam, 1993:167).

# Integrated model to understand civil society in relation to other sectors in the political system



# Three Levels of Power Model to Understand the Movement of Civil Society Organizations





# Democracy

- Dahl's (1971, 1991) *Polyarchy* is often considered the model for democracy. It is the target for the transitional or fledgling democracies to achieve through institutionalizing their democratic institutions and practices.
- The three main dimensions of such political democracy—competition, participation and civil and political liberties (Sørensen, 1993:13).
- In such a democracy institutional power holders are elected by the people and are responsible to the people (Vanhanen, 1997: 31). It ensures power sharing by all major groups where common people have some kind of control over decision making (Quadir, 2004: 88).
- Dahl (1971) emphasizes the responsiveness of government to the preferences of citizens considered as political equals.

# Electoral Democracy vs Liberal Democracy

- After the third wave a good number of countries around the world earned democracy, however, in most cases it was initially electoral democracy. Where the political structures and constitutions were rebuilt to become conducive to democracy however, the democratic practices was still pending. This often lead to tyranny of Democracy, or rule of the 51% and increased possibility of further rivalry and dissatisfaction.
- On the other hand, a liberal democracy not only ensures peaceful transfer of power by election but also preserves and maintains the freedom of speech, association, religion, property, rule of law, minority rights etc. These rights are also upheld by the constitution in a electoral democracy, but they are practiced and ensured in liberal democracy. Civil society plays an important role in implementing such rights and monitoring the state functions which ultimately deepens the civil society
- Bangladesh is going through the stage of electoral democracy but however, after 20 years of achieving democracy, it is yet to enter the stage of liberal democracy and role of the civil society in this connection has come under scrutiny.

# Democracy and Civil Society

- During the Third Wave of Democracy, Civil Society has been recognized as a political force (Alagappa 2004)
- According Larry Diamond (1999), Civil Society contributes to democracy in two stages,
  - 1. *Generate transition from authoritarian rule to electoral democracy.***
  - 2. *Deepening and consolidating democracy under new democratic state through different means like checking and limiting the power of the government, stimulate political participation, better citizenry, political education, training political leaders, providing multiple channels for aggregating and representing interests. Ensure pluralism and so on.***

***Again, it may Strengthen social foundation of democracy by generating social capital***

Bangladesh is enjoying electoral democracy since 1991. However, it is still going through the hasty journey to institutionalize it. Role of civil society in democratization is often considered marginal.

# Literature Review on Civil Society in Bangladesh

## Neo-Liberal Model

- Mostly American scholars for example, Robert Putnam, Francis Fukuyama, Larry Diamond, Lester Salamon belong to Neo-Tocquivellean or Neo-Liberal School. They advocate that coexistence of liberal market and civil society ensures and enhances democracy.
- Literatures on Bangladesh following the Neo-Liberal School may be divided into three groups.
  1. Literatures concerning NGOs and supporting micro-credit system (Dowla and Barua 2006, Goon 2002, Lovell:2000, Nobusue:2002)
  2. Researches by the development agencies on their projects uphold the idea (World Bank, SIDA, Danida, DFID reports and working papers).
  3. Lack of suitable theory corresponding to reality (Stiles: 2002, Amin: 1997, Sobhan:1996, Ullah and Routary: 2003).

# Critiques of Neo-liberal Model

- Criticisms to introduce such Western notion of civil society in non-western settings have gained considerable attention in recent scholarly writings due to the ramifications observed in different countries.
- Projects based on preconceived notions of civil society and neglecting indigenous settings, local circumstances, and histories, provoke controversy. The theory is too naïve.
- It is often said that though Bangladesh has a notable history what can be readily described as civil society, it can hardly fit in to the Neo-Toquevillean model. This fact has also been observed by good number of researchers who are rather critical of the Neo Liberal Model (Lewis :2004, Davice and McGregor :2000,Wood 2003, 2005, White 1999, Sobhan 2002, Quadir 2003, Tasnim 2007, Shakil 2010).
- They have pointed out the, existence of strong clientelism and over politicization within the political system and over donor dependency of the NGOs and moreover, lack of autonomy and internal democracy within the civil society organizations which impedes democratic development of the civil society.

# Critiques of Neo-liberal Model

## Structuralist

Among the scholars, a group has found the statist or structural model to be more appropriate to describe the situation. They argue that political structures consisting of powerful elites ultimately exert the highest influence in determining the nature of civil society and the level of democracy (Quadir 2003, Shakil 2010, Tasnim 2007).

## Culturalist

Again, other prominent researchers have been comfortable in explaining the situation from the cultural aspect of the society and state in Bangladesh (Lewis: 2004, Huda, Rahman and Catherine Guirguis, 2008).

☆ A combination of the structural and cultural model often help in depicting and analyzing the real situation, changes and outcome of the different Neo-liberal Policies initiated at the structural level and executed in the cultural reality.

# Theological Perspective

Religion is an important factor in culture. For the construction of state, politics, society and of course civil society in Bangladesh, religion has always played a decisive role. However, it is a recent trend to conduct research on Islamic segments of civil society in Bangladesh.

Such researches again may be divided into two groups (Shakil 2011)

1. First group consider Islam with suspicion as it may be triggering fundamentalist ideology and actions (Riaz, 2009).
2. The other branch tries to support the Islamic values from the theological as well as socio-economic stand point (Huq 2008 and Tasmia 2010, Shakil, 2005)

# Focus on the Issues related to civil society in Bangladesh

**Foreign donors:** Foreign donors during the late 1980s initiated the idea of civil society in its modern form. A substantial form of aid money was engaged for NGO development programs in Bangladesh. In the recent years dependency on the foreign donation is decreasing in Bangladesh. However, NGO system, for empowerment, social development established through the foreign donors is taking an institutional form in the country.

**Micro-credit:** Micro-credit is an indigenous idea of Bangladesh by Professor Yunus. However, it matched well with the idea of liberal economy, social capital and civil society as initiated by the neo-liberal school and adopted by the donor agency. Micro-credit, NGO and development, these are that have attracted attention mostly.

Beyond these issues Bangladesh has a vast number and variety of traditional civil society organizations and the civil society's ultimate role is not only development but also ensuring democracy.



# Continued

## Islam

**Religion, particularly Islam had always been an important part of the politics and society in Bangladesh. Political rulers have used religious sentiment for their political gain. In the last decade it had been imaged and thought that Islamic organizations are being exploited by fundamentalist and extremists. However, at the community level, Masques plays an important role for generating social capital just as church is doing in USA and offers potential for development and social service. This social and civil society aspect of the Mosque has hardly been explored since recently. BD-JIGS survey also could not ignore the fact.**

# Continued

## **Civil Society relation with Political Society and contribution to Democracy**

- It has been observed that civil society is acting and contributing differently at various levels of the state, society and market.
- From the peripheral aspect of civil society, it is rich in social service functions but less concerned about advocacy, participation and governance.
- Such non-vigilant attribute of the civil society is linked to co-optation and politicization by political forces. CSOs are more prone to clientism in accordance with party politics. CSOs are away from the policy change and they express their innocence in the partisan political connection to establish their legitimacy.
- On the other hand civil society at the center is more powerful and effective during non-political regimes and is over politicized under regime of elected governments.
- Both attribute to a weak civil society in Bangladesh from the perspective of democracy.

# Empowerment

Naila Kabeer (2001, P19) refers empowerment, the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Every effort to empowerment requires four elements; access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability, local organizational capacity.

# Development

- Development and economic growth in the developing world are the main concern of development agencies. Nobel Lauriat Gunner Myrdal (1974:729) terms development as the movement upward of entire social system.
- UNDP defines the term as leading long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community.
- Economic development in its basic sense relates to the qualitative change and restructuring in a country's economy in connection with technological and social progress. The main indicator to increasing Gross National Product or Gross Domestic Product, reflecting an increase in economic productivity, and average martial well-being of a countries population.

# Good Governance

- Good governance marries the new public management to the advocacy of liberal democracy (Rhodes, 1997: 50).
- Through their good governance agenda, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other development agencies seek to encourage competition and markets; privatize public enterprise, reform the civil service, introduce budgetary discipline; decentralize administration, and greater use of non-government organizations in the third world.
- Good-governance agenda suggested that a virtuous circle could be built between state, economy and civil society which would balance growth, equity and stability.

# Uniqueness of the Book

- The only volume in its kind, the proposed book, tries to give an overall picture of the civil society and its relations to other sectors and actors in the socio-political environment of Bangladesh.
- Half of the chapters will provide quantitative analysis extracting from the rich data base of the JIGS-BD survey on more than 1500 Civil Society Organizations in Bangladesh.
- It quantitatively shows how Civil Society both at the center and local level are more interested in providing social services but refrain in participating in issues that are related to politics.

# Continued

- CSOs are giving disproportionate attention to the social and economic development than democracy and politics. Yet they are not free from politics, many of them pivot around the party politics which is theoretically opposite and sometimes conflicting in nature.
- The edited book will also gather the insights of national and foreign experts to investigate the civil society in Bangladesh. These chapters written by different scholars, experts in their own fields, focus on civil society's relation to state, governance, market, democracy, environment and socio cultural tradition of Bangladesh.
- JIGS data base chapters and guest writers' chapters together contribute to a complete book on civil society in Bangladesh from consideration of development and Democracy.

# List of Presenters at the Book Conference

## Guest Participants

1. **Geof Wood**, Emeritus Professor University of Bath, UK,

Joint presentation with Professor Joe Devine of University of Bath

Topic: **Can Civil Society be Free of the Natural State? Applying North to Bangladesh**

2. Harry Blair, Senior Research Scholar & Lecturer, Yale University, USA

Topic: **Comparative Study on Civil Society in Bangladesh with that of Philippines**. Concentration will be on advocacy performance . Analysis will be based on JIGS data.

3. Fahim Quadir, Associate Professor, York University, Toronto, Canada

Topic: **Questioning the Role of Civil Society in Democracy and Development: partisan politics, regulated space, and the rise of ‘illiberal democracy’ in Bangladesh**



# Continuation

## Participants from Bangladesh

4. Dr. **Sk. Tawfique M. Haque**, Associate Professor, North South University, Bangladesh

Topic: **Local Civil Society and Informal Governance System of Bangladesh**

5. **M. Abul Kashem Mozumder**, Professor, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh

Topic: **Civil Society in Bangladesh: Challenges and Opportunities in Consolidating Democratic Governance**

6. **Md. Ansar Uddin**, Professor, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh  
Topic : **Role of Civil Society to Democratic Development in Bangladesh**

# Presenters among the organizers

Welcoming Speech and introduction to JIGS Survey: Professor Yutaka Tsujinaka

1. Anar Koli

Topic: **Environmental Civil Society in Bangladesh: Some Unintended Contradictions**

2. Farhat Tasnim

Topic: **How Vigilant is the Vibrant Civil Society in Bangladesh? A survey based Analysis**

3. Shakil Ahmed

Topic: **Clientist Civil Society Organizations: Politics without Democracy**

Besides, there shall be a special presentation on BD-JIGS and if possible Indian JIGS together.

For overall supervision and conducting the sessions: Professor Yutaka Tsujinaka and Professor Robert Pekkanen, Professor Yoshiaki Kubo.

# Participant and Discussants from Tsukuba University

- Professors From Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences.....(yet decided finally)
- Professors, Researchers and students from CAJS..... (yet to be decided)
- A tentative schedule for the conference has been sketched, however, it is open for comments and suggestions

# Nature of presentation and discussion

- All participants is expected to read the nine papers before attending the conference.
- Each participant will be involved in the process in three ways in three different paper sessions (45 minutes).
  1. He/she will present with comments a paper written by another participant. ( 10 minutes)
  2. Again, for another paper he/she will be a discussant (10 minutes), and
  3. In his/her session, he will reply to the presentation and comments made on his/her own paper (10 minutes)