

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN PROMOTING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN AFGHANISTAN

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ABSTRACT: To assess the role of civil society in promoting good governance in Afghanistan by critically examining the various civil society players, their roles and challenges they face. The research work is carried out using qualitative approach so as to answer the questions of —what, how and —why Civil Societies are important players in the process of achieving ‘good governance’. Both primary and secondary data were used for this research work. Therefore, Primary data was collected through a survey that involved using questionnaires. The questionnaires are of two categories, one involved social activist and the other dealt with the local people of Afghanistan. Secondary data were collected from external resources such as books, journals, articles, reports. In addition, a desk review of all the relevant reliable existing data was undertaken to enhance work credibility. It was find out that civil society in Afghanistan is growing and expanding at an impressive rate. Afghan civil society has boundless enthusiasm and energy, but it can benefit gradually from capacity building and mentoring. Women also need encouragement and support to participate in the society beyond their homes. Civil society has been responsible for some positive changes in Afghanistan although, the lack of evaluation of program and time for reflection has often made it difficult for this to be recognized and appreciated. It can be concluded that despite progress, the development and consolidation of civil society in Afghanistan has been uneven. In Kabul province civil society has established strong roots and productive working relationships with governments, while in other provinces this has not been the case and CSOs remain excluded by suspicious and uncooperative governments.

Index Term: **Role, Civil Society, Good Governance, promoting, Qualitative, Government, data.**

Introduction

Establishing good governance has always been identified as a vital apparatus to usher the country’s national vision towards holistic growth. The onus of good governance is not vested in the government alone but is facilitated by the participation of all people in their best capacity.

From its very origin, the general perspective of good governance includes civil society. So we can say that the concept of civil society and notion of governance is interlinked and their -relevance to one another has remained undeniable.

Although, the western concept of good governance only entered Afghan political literature after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, but various contemporary actors like NGO leaders, youth and women’s leaders and human rights activists and traditional leaders, have played the role of civil society during the different phases of its history.¹(Atayee 2010)

Civil society plays intermediary role in extending across the concerns of the people in the political decision making and process of formulating policies. So, for having effective, accountable and inclusive governance relations in Afghanistan, an active civil society is a crucial pre-condition.

In post 2001 context, Afghanistan is characterised as a form of internationally funded democracy that is based on patronage system of rule. So, in this kind of settings, there is a requirement of an open space for an active vibrant and dedicated civil society which promote good governance and thus direct Afghanistan’s democracy toward a more professional and merit-based system in the longer terms.²(UN 2012)

Looking in an abstract way, good governance strengthens accountability, improves government performance and organisational capacity. Good governance is basically seen as a key factor in ensuring national prosperity. It makes the actions of government more clear and transparent. Good governance is efficient decision making that proves beneficial for a majority of the people while having minimum or zero detrimental consequences. In the form of organisations, groups or as an individual, civil society serves as an important contributor for the various element of good governance. This contribution can ensure improved services, accountability and transparency as a result.

As we know Afghanistan is a country characterised by prolonged years of conflict war. Afghanistan has experienced war, dictatorship, ethnic exclusiveness and religious tyranny. Lack of good governance is considered to be one of the major challenge

¹(Atayee 2010)

²(UN 2012)

Afghanistan confronts in the early 21st century. Afghanistan doesn't enjoy long historical and practical experience of good governance. So in such settings, the civic participation in decision-making process is even more complex. Thus civil society actors often play a dual role governing role as well as a civil society role.³(Shura 2016)

This project attempts to focus and analyse the role of civil society in promoting good governance in the conflict affected settings in Afghanistan. The primary focus though will be after 2001, post-Taliban fall. This project will explore the importance challenge and prospect of CSOs inside Afghanistan where there has been a label of corruption and many and government relatively lacks public trusts and legitimacy. The study also identifies different civil society actors and groups them into different categories. It also analyse the challenges faced by civil societies and their prospects under the current political atmosphere prevalent in Afghanistan.

Materials and Methods

With the project aim and objectives in mind, the project method deemed most appropriate for the purpose of this study was that of qualitative project. The qualitative approach chosen is also well suited to answer the questions of —what, how and —why Civil Societies are important players in the process of achieving 'good governance'.

In this project, I have used both types of data – primary data as well as secondary data. Primary data was collected through a survey done using questionnaires. For my project work, I have distributed two sets of questionnaires- one among the social activists from Afghanistan, who are involved in this area. The second set of questionnaire was distributed among the local people of Afghanistan to have their view on the concerned topic.

Secondary data collection was done from external resources such as books, journals, articles, reports etc Hours and hours of sitting in front of computer browsing Internet pages checking updated information from news and commentaries are another important part of my project process.

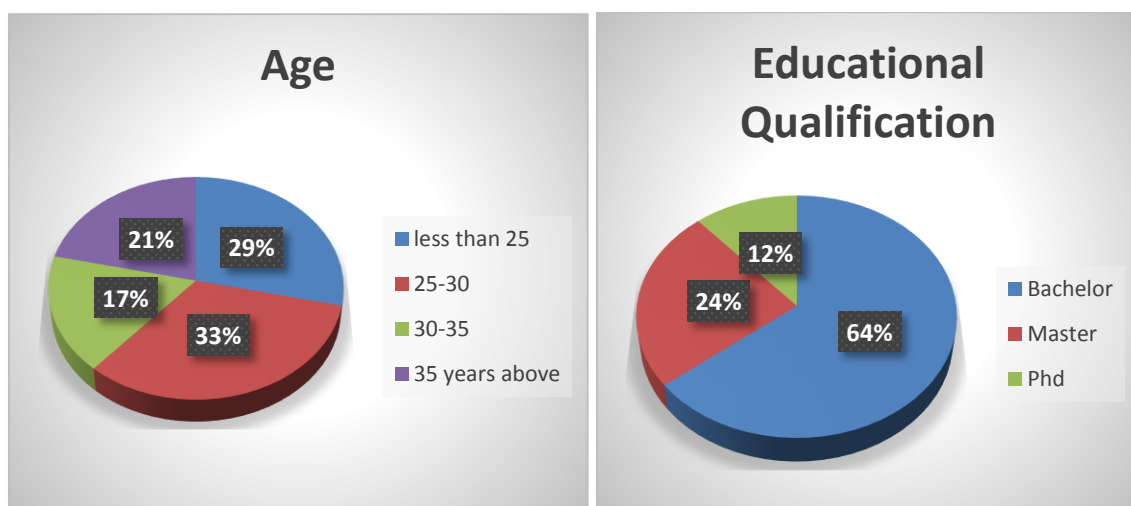
In addition, a desk review of all the relevant reliable existing data was undertaken to enhance my work credibility.

Presentation of Results

Civil Society plays a vital role in promoting good governance in Afghanistan. As far as I've learnt, they have worked on several projects to bring transparency and accountability in the governmental sector. To assess their roles in detail, I have distributed two types of questionnaire- One among the members of the different CSOs in Kabul province and the other to the local people. I've divided my survey analysis into following two sections

Information concerning local people

Analysis has been done on a sample of 70 out of the distributed 150 questionnaire. General Information related to the age, educational qualification and gender of the approached respondents has been shown in the following figures and tables



³(Shura 2016)

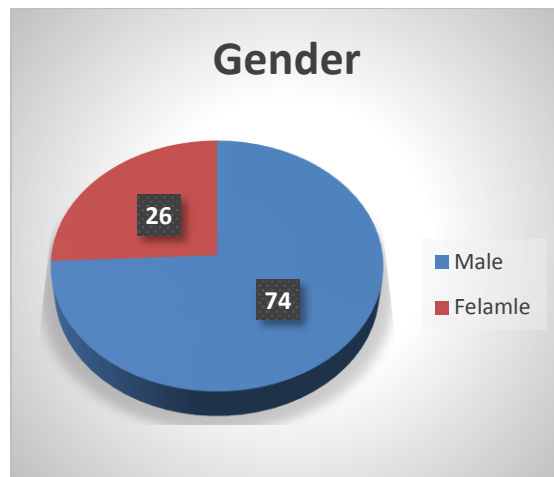


Figure 1.1: Represent information regarding civil society helps in the resolution of conflict

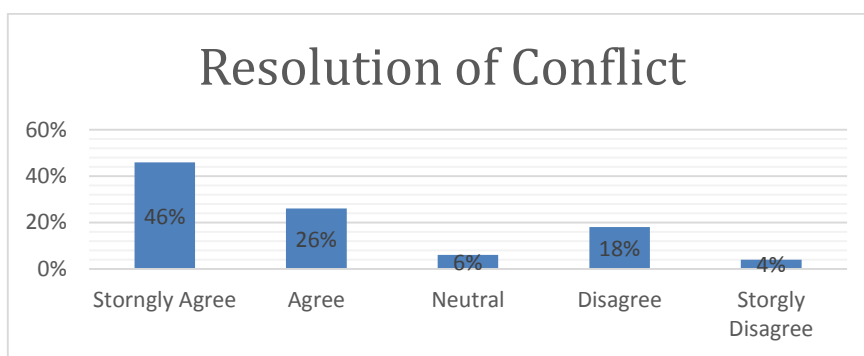


Figure 1.2: Represent information on Civil Society (actors and organisations) create public awareness

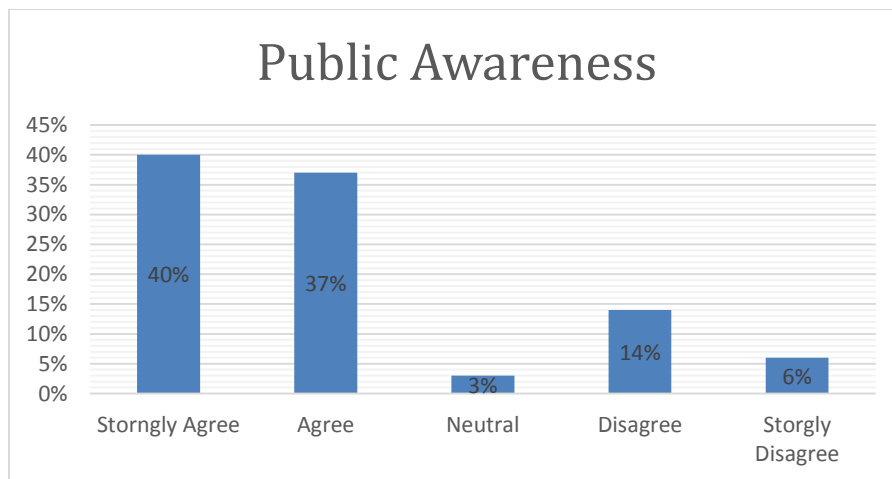


Figure 1.3: Represent information regarding Civil Society helps in implementing rule of law

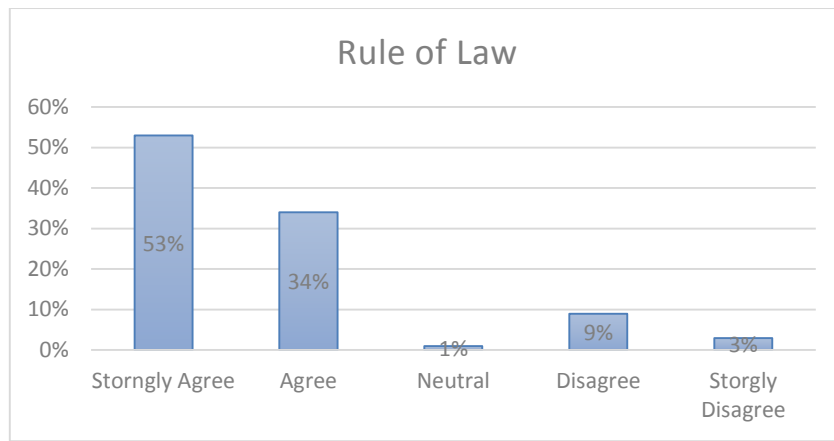
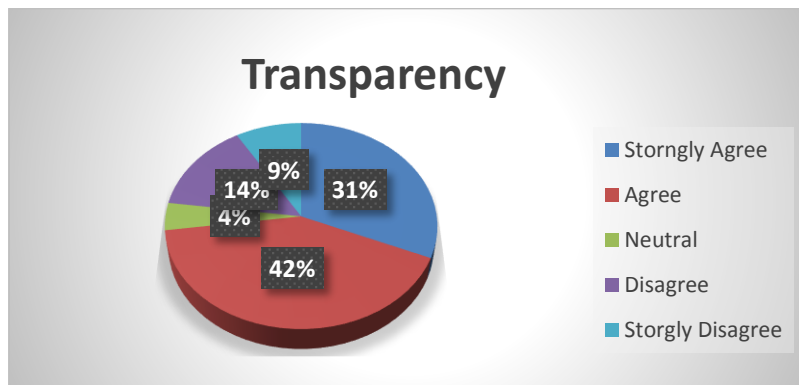
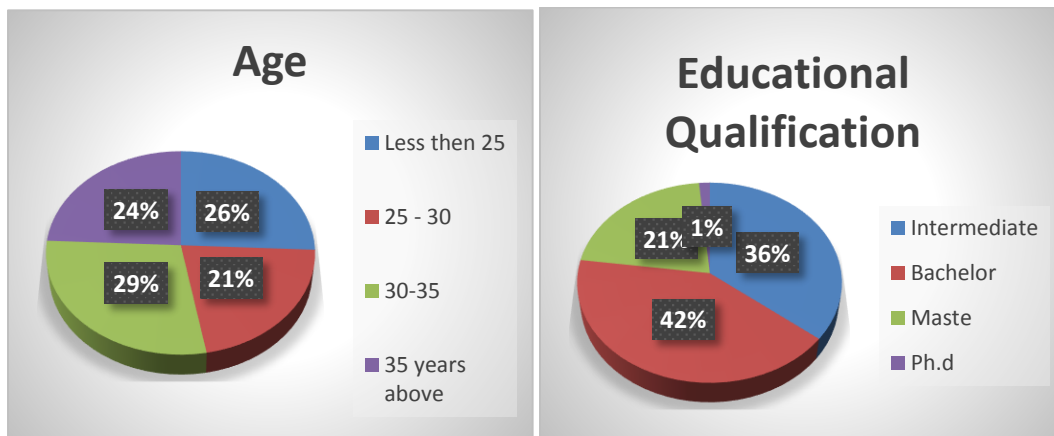


Figure 1.4: Represent information on Civil society promotes Transparency



Information concerning social activist Similar to analysis done with the local people’s sample, another part of analysis has been done for social activists on a sample of 70 out of the distributed 150 questionnaire. General Information related to the age, educational qualification and gender of the approached respondents has been shown in the following figures and tables



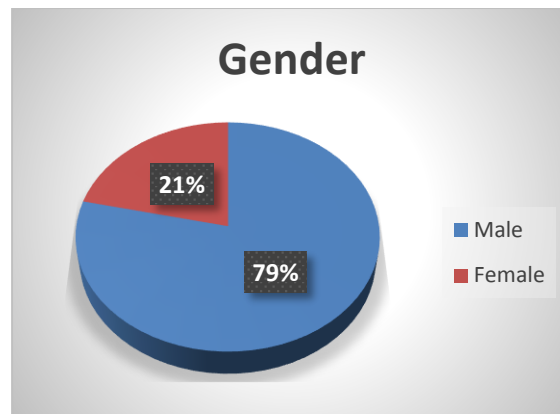


Figure 2.1 Represent information regarding Role in the Government Decision Making

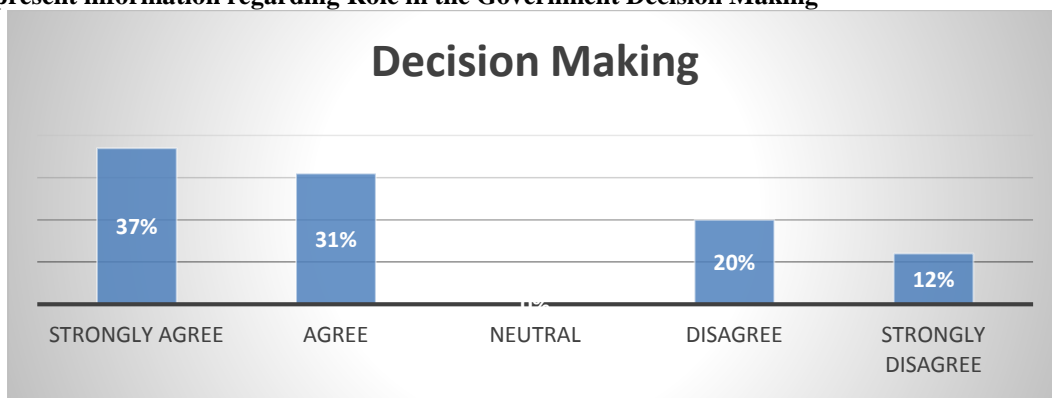


Figure 2.2: Represent information on Implementation of Governmental activities

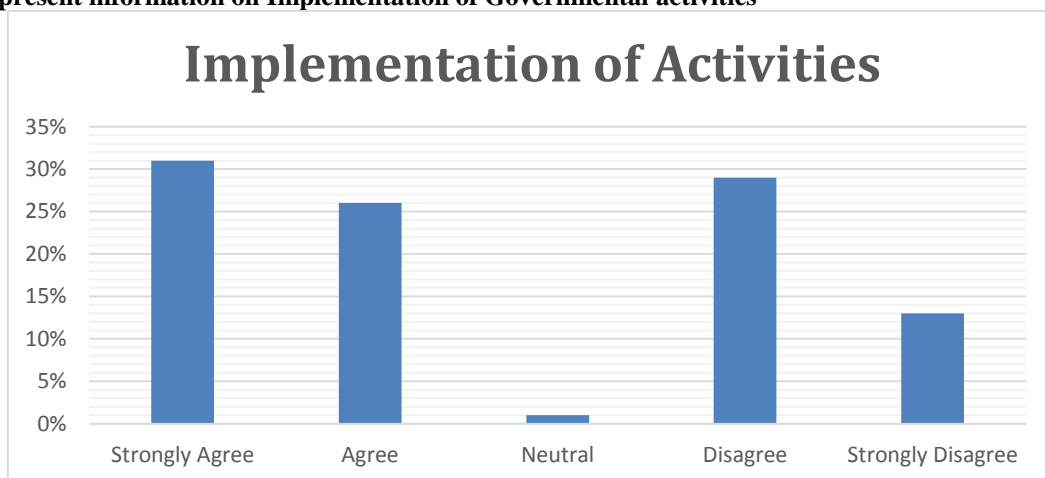


Figure 2.3: Represent information regarding Decision making at higher level

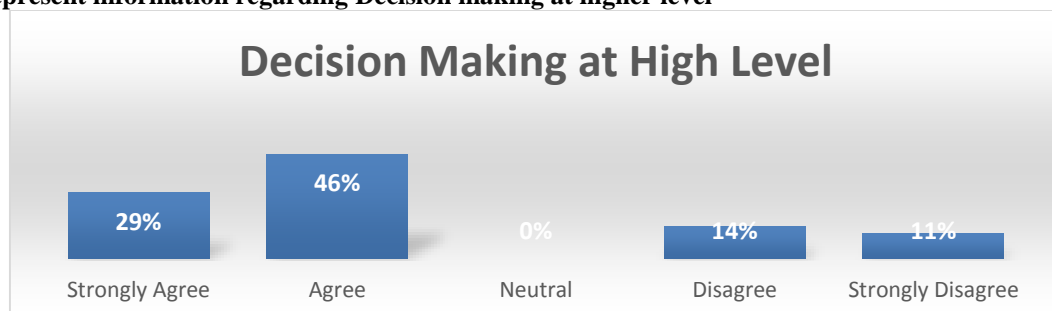
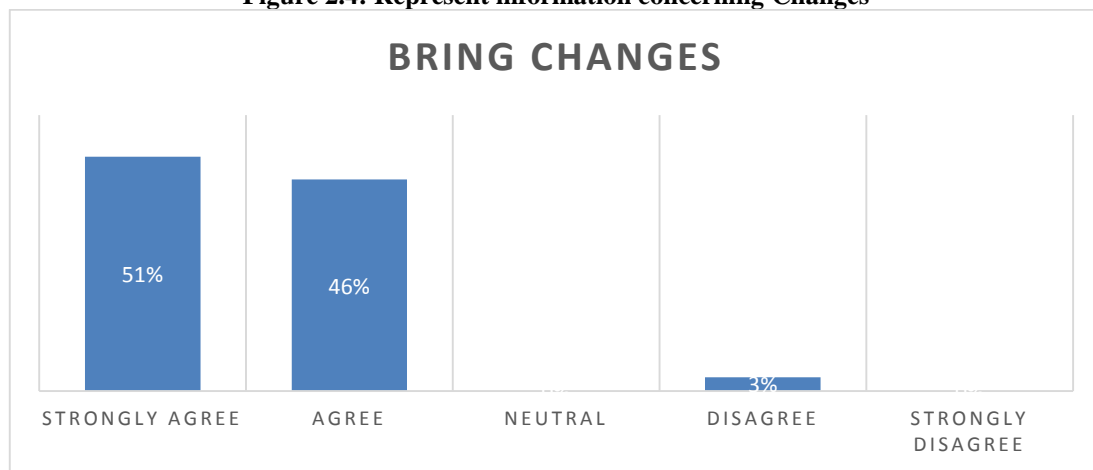


Figure 2.4: Represent information concerning Changes**Discussion:**

From figure 1.1 above, As Afghanistan is a conflict-prone land, disagreement among the people and the government is a usual phenomenon. I've learnt that civil society acts as a catalyst in removing this disagreement. They conciliate between individuals and the government to enhance the smooth communication among the two. In recent years, there has been increased recognition of the role CSOs can play with as partners with government in the conflict resolution and peace-building agenda.

While in figure 1.2 above, As we know, an effective democracy requires informed citizens to be aware about their governance system. I've found that civil society conscientize masses through various means like organizing seminars and workshops, spreading information through mass media, etc.

Then in figure 1.3, the underlying principle of good governance is the rule of law in society and it means that society should be subject to Law. As in Afghanistan the law can be brazenly broken without any fear of the consequences and even occasionally where culprits have been arrested it is the case that they are most likely able to escape the long arms of the law due to inefficiently, ineptitude and compromise on the part of law enforcement agencies. The study reveals that civil society has made significant.

Therefore, in figure 1.4 above, Civil Society are non-governmental organizations and working as a watchdog on the activities of the government. When asked about the extent of civil society interference in the governmental activities, it is found that the situation has now been better than as compared to the times of Taliban.

Furthermore, in figure 2.1 above it analyzes that Civil Society are playing vital role in suggesting policy alternatives to the governments. The civil society actors and organizations are closely in touch with the people and understand the problems of the general public very well. I've learnt through my project work that these people are contributing in the government decision making but not so satisfactorily.

Then in figure 2.2, Government are designing and implementing different programs for the welfare of society, most of the civil societies are contributing to support the successful implementation of these activities.

While in figure 2.3, most of the decisions are made by the top level governmental authorities and implemented in the bottom managerial levels in Afghanistan. 29% of the respondents highly agree and 46% are agreeing that they have got the chance to influence the top level decision making. 14% are disagreed and 11% are strongly disagreed in this hypothesis.

Therefore, in figure 2.4 the overall objective of the civil society is to bring changes into society and make everything developed; they are working for the betterment of the society. 51% of the civil activists responded that have made positive changes in the society and 46% are agree in the same case. 3% are disagree and argues that civil society may not have any positive influence on the society's betterment.

Conclusion

Post-2001 civil society organizations (CSOs) have worked throughout Afghanistan to support democracy and democratic governance. CSOs have been active in promoting participation, advocating for transparency and accountability and defending human rights, working together with governments and the international community. Governments and citizens have made progress. It is clear from the foregoing that civically oriented CSOs and others promote sustainable development through their prompting and insistence on good governance. CSOs thus act as either a check or complement to the exercise of government power. But in ensuring CSO effectiveness in Afghanistan, the social, policy and the political environment must be conducive. Besides, the various CSOs must have the right capacities and assertiveness.

As a part of my findings, I've concluded that despite progress, the development and consolidation of civil society in Afghanistan has been uneven. In Kabul province civil society has established strong roots and productive working relationships with governments, while in other provinces this has not been the case and CSOs remain excluded by suspicious and uncooperative governments.

The ideas and suggestions in this report are a guide for civil society organizations (CSOs) as they plan future engagement and actions.

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