

Brief Overview

50 Years of
Bangladesh's
Independence

LEGACIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE



50 Years of Bangladesh's Independence:
Legacies of Civil Society Organizations on
Socio-Economic Change

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This book is dedicated to the brave martyrs of Bangladesh's Liberation War. Their heroic sacrifices in 1971 paved the way for our nation's cherished freedom and independence. Their courage and selflessness remain a guiding light in our national history and collective memory.

This publication also honors the civil society leaders and workers who have been pivotal in Bangladesh's development over the last fifty years. These dedicated individuals, many of whom sacrificed their lives, have tirelessly worked towards social justice, human rights, and community upliftment.

Their legacy continues to inspire and guide us. This dedication stands as a tribute to their contributions in shaping a more equitable and prosperous Bangladesh for future generations.

Preface

From its valiant struggle for independence to its ongoing quest for sustainable development, Bangladesh's journey has been marked by triumphs and trials alike. Throughout this journey, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have been pivotal, acting as catalysts for change and championing advancement of the grassroots people including hard to reach communities, supplementing and complementing government's efforts to achieve the national goals and fulfill international commitments.

Within the intricate tapestry of the nation's development, the role of CSOs remains crucial, intertwining a society's hopes, endeavors, and achievements. As a nation rich in history and cultural diversity, Bangladesh has forged an extraordinary path since gaining sovereignty. Post-independence, CSOs in Bangladesh have evolved into major drivers of development and have become an essential component of national efforts to achieve various socio-economic goals and international commitments.

With significant changes and advancements, the nation is on course to transition from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2026, symbolizing the profound shifts underpinning its remarkable growth. Yet, the activities and contributions of CSOs are often unrecognized. This publication delves into the complex and dynamic landscape of Bangladesh's developmental journey, highlighting the crucial role of CSOs in shaping its socio-economic trajectory.

To illustrate how CSOs have influenced Bangladesh's metamorphosis, this compilation provides an overview of the developmental roles CSOs have played over the past five decades to accelerate economic and social progress. It aims to paint a broad picture of the developmental interventions by CSOs that have supported or facilitated changes in the country's social and economic realms. The chapters explore the evolution and transformation of

CSOs in Bangladesh, examining their various forms, functions, and approaches. From advocating for marginalized communities to influencing policy reforms, from improving access to health and education to promoting gender equity, the scope and impact of CSOs are extensive and significant. The evolving partnerships in development form a critical aspect of this endeavor.

The volume adopts a sectoral perspective, addressing right based provision and policy advocacy. Data were collected from organizations' annual reports, websites, and published impact assessments or research studies on their activities. To gain a deeper understanding of CSOs' engagements, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted across selected sectors, consulting at least one expert/ leading practitioner from each. Additionally, two focus group discussions were held, involving representatives from CSOs at both national and local levels. Efforts were also made to recognize the contributions of government, policy makers, development partners, and other stakeholders. Utmost care was taken to ensure a participatory preparation process, reflecting CSO activities in the document and securing sectoral ownership of the compilation.

Acknowledging the limitations of such an exploration is crucial. Any comprehensive study on the role of CSOs faces challenges due to the vast complexity and diversity of their programs and the issues they tackle. The CSO landscape is wide-ranging, including everything from local grassroots groups to movements, campaign groups international organizations. Their domains are diverse, encompassing human rights, environmental stewardship, health, and education, among others. CSOs have been at the forefront of advocacy on human rights issues, raising awareness of violations and lobbying for legal and policy reforms ranging from gender based violence to right to information. Critical issues in Bangladesh such as climate change, gender equality, rights of the extended and marginalized have been significantly addressed by CSOs.

Moreover, their influence at the policy level, advocating for rights-based state policies and promoting good governance, is noteworthy. Covering every type of CSO and their role comprehensively within a single book is a daunting endeavor that may lead to oversimplification

or omission. Should there be consensus and available information, a subsequent edition of this book may include areas presumed to be insufficiently covered in this volume.

The dynamic nature of issues and diversity of CSOs contributes to the limitations of this book's scope. CSOs operate in a constantly changing landscape influenced by political, social, economic, and technological shifts. The intersectionality of issues adds complexity to achieving comprehensive coverage in such a study. CSOs often operate at the nexus of multiple issues, recognizing that challenges are interconnected. Capturing all these facets in one volume may result in a lack of depth or clarity on specific topics. The inherent subjectivity in analyzing CSO activities presents challenges, as varying perspectives on their effectiveness, ethics, and motivations can lead to diverse assessments of their impact.

As we undertake this exploratory study, we must honor the CSO leaders and the myriad of individuals who have devoted their lives to the nation's development. Their relentless dedication, often amidst challenges, underscores that the pursuit of development is a collective responsibility, necessitating active civil society engagement. May this book stand as a tribute to their commitment and inspire future generations to further the development of a better Bangladesh.

Dhaka, 19 December 2023

Rasheda K. Choudhury
Convenor, CSO Alliance

Executive Summary

Even in times of heightened global uncertainty, Bangladesh has demonstrated a history of growth and development, the nation's current economic performance is often called the "Bangladesh Surprise." The upgrade from "least-developed country" to "developing country" status has given the milestone celebration a timely dimension. Bangladesh is now considered an epitome of economic transformation. In Bangladesh's development journey, civil society organisations (CSOs) have been key companions, providing innumerable supportive roles.

Over the last 50 years, the state, the private sector, and Bangladesh's uniquely vibrant civil society organisations have contributed to the country's impressive socio-economic development. While the roles of the private sector and the state are well-established in the literature, the roles and perspectives of civil society organisations are not adequately documented and recognized. It must be acknowledged that the development interventions by CSOs have played a significant role in effecting social change across multiple measurable indices, such as women's empowerment, promotion of disability rights, poverty alleviation, environmental conservation, and more. Whatever the frontier, CSOs have been at the forefront of the development agenda, proving influential at the policy level and effective in establishing grassroots reach. CSOs have innovated participatory approaches that have empowered the marginalized and oppressed, restoring dignity to those relegated to the fringes of society.

While it is widely acknowledged that CSOs have made significant contributions to the social, economic, and environmental development of Bangladesh, the cumulative impact and legacy of their work have yet to be the subject of detailed study in the existing literature. The nature of CSOs' developmental interventions can

be categorized as follows: (a) CSOs complement the actions of the state by filling gaps in the provision of services and addressing social issues that the state is unable or unwilling to address; (b) CSOs hold the state accountable by monitoring and reporting on the implementation of policies and programmes and advocating for the protection of human rights and the provision of essential services; (c) CSOs address market failures by providing services and products that are not available or affordable to vulnerable communities; (d) CSOs influence market dynamics by advocating for the protection of workers' rights, the promotion of fair-trade practices, and the protection of the environment; and (e) CSOs contribute to building civil society by empowering communities, promoting participatory decision-making, and supporting the development of community-based organisations.

The scope of CSOs' work is as expansive as it is seldom documented. This volume aims to provide a brief overview of CSOs' role in the dynamic transformations that have shaped Bangladesh, starting from the country's hard-won independence in 1971. This book delves into the complex and dynamic landscape of Bangladesh's developmental journey, highlighting the critical role of CSOs in shaping its socio-economic trajectory. To illustrate how CSOs have influenced Bangladesh's metamorphosis, this compilation provides an overview of the developmental roles CSOs have played over the past five decades to accelerate economic and social progress. It documents the nature and scope of CSO activities, differentiating between legacy developmental projects and time/location-specific success stories. It aims to paint a broad picture of the developmental interventions by CSOs that have supported or facilitated changes in the country's social and economic realms. The chapters explore the evolution and transformations of CSOs in Bangladesh, examining their various forms, functions, and approaches. From advocating for marginalized communities to driving policy reforms, from improving educational access to promoting gender equity, the scope and impact of CSOs are extensive and significant. The evolving partnerships in development form a critical aspect of this collection. The volume adopts a sectoral perspective, addressing both service provision and policy advocacy.

Regarding the methodology of the study, data were collected from organisations' annual reports, websites, and published impact assessments or research studies on CSO activities. To gain a deeper understanding of CSOs' engagements, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted across selected sectors, consulting at least one expert from each. Additionally, two focus group discussions were held, involving representatives from CSOs at both the national and local levels. Efforts were made to recognize the contributions of the government, development partners, and other stakeholders. Utmost care was taken to ensure a participatory preparation process, reflecting CSOs' activities in the document and securing sectoral ownership of the compilation. Based on the data and information, CSOs' contributions have been presented in a decade-wise fashion in each sector, highlighting the nature and scope of their engagements in each decade.

As the study relies heavily on secondary sources and information collected from the organisations themselves, the study is subject to several limitations. Primarily, the study may suffer from bias, as the reports are generated by the organisations being studied and may only reflect certain aspects of their work. While primary data were collected via KIIs and FGDs (Focus Group Discussions), the ability to validate the findings was limited. This is primarily due to a lack of documentation and data on many of the activities undertaken by CSOs before the 2000s. Moreover, it is not easy to portray CSOs' comprehensive engagement and wide-ranging contribution to Bangladesh in its economic development and social change in a single compendium. It is well-known that the landscape of CSOs is remarkably broad and heterogeneous, encompassing a wide spectrum of organisations, ranging from local community-based groups to regional, national, and international agencies. Attempting to cover every single type of CSO and their role across these wide development areas within the confines of a book is a monumental task, likely to result in oversimplification or omission.

From the broad spectrum of functional and operational areas of CSOs, the main thematic issues covered as part of the volume are as follows: (a) agriculture development and food security; (b) micro-financing and entrepreneurship development ; (c) quality education

and skills development; (d) health, nutrition and population management; (e) gender and development; (f) environment, climate change and disaster risk reduction; (g) water, sanitation, and hygiene; and (h) inclusive development: mainstreaming the excluded and social mobilisation.

Agriculture Development and Food Security

In the areas of agriculture and food security, CSOs roles are associated with improving agricultural practices, knowledge and skill enhancements, access to resources and technology, empowerment of smallholder farmers, and climate change adaptation. CSOs often worked directly with the farmers and contributed to increased agricultural productivity, improved crop yields, and enhanced food production. Equipping farmers with knowledge and skills, these entities enhanced the country's agricultural practices and enabled them to make informed decisions. CSOs contributed to bridging the gap between farmers and necessary resources, enabling farmers to increase their productivity, reduce post-harvest losses, and improve their overall agricultural efficiency. The establishment of farmers' groups, cooperatives, and self-help organisations by CSOs provided farmers with a platform to voice their concerns, share knowledge, and collectively address agricultural challenges, which fosters social cohesion, resilience, and community-led initiatives for sustainable agriculture and food security. The intervention of CSOs helped farmers adopt climate-resilient farming practices, diversify their crops, and their efforts enhanced farmers' resilience to climate risks and contributed to long-term food security. On the policy and advocacy front, CSOs played a significant role in advocating for pro-poor agricultural policies, influencing government strategies, and fostering collaboration between various stakeholders. The importance of the agriculture sector and food security received impetus in their evidence-based research, policy analysis, and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness among the stakeholders. CSOs have also worked closely with government agencies, research organisations, and development partners on the way to formulate effective policies and programmes for improved agricultural

practices, increased food production, enhanced resilience to climate change, and empowerment of smallholder farmers that are associated with sustainable development and poverty reduction in the country.

In the early years after the Independence, CSOs engagements were largely involved in relief and rehabilitation and land rights, which extended to development programmes on rehabilitation and aquaculture development and strengthening the land rights movement in the 1980s. An agriculture plus development programme were initiated in 1990s along with aquaculture development, flood and relief responses and Adarsha Gram programme and vested property law related issues. During 2000s, crop diversification, climate resilient and adaptive agriculture, rehabilitation of cyclone victims and continuation of land rights issues got priority in CSO activities. Regarding the success stories and legacy cases, Hellen Keller International's Homestead Food Production Programme (HFP) for Improving Food Security; Brac's Poultry industry initiatives for Income Generating for Poor and Women; and funded by ADB, the Northwest Crop Diversification Project (NCDP)'s HVC production technologies and modern technologies for HVCs to farmers.

Micro-Financing and Entrepreneurship Development

Microfinance for Financial inclusion and women empowerment is the most significant visible contribution of the MFIs in the country. The period 1976-1985 was the era of experimentation of microfinance that expanded in the following decade and reached the level of maturity mainly following the mid-1990s. MFIs came under the formal regulatory framework in 2006 and were consolidated. The interventions of MFIs have had notable impacts on ensuring social welfare and creating social capital. Access to credit and other support services has allowed individuals, especially those in rural areas, to start their own businesses and engage in income generating activities. MFIs have placed strong emphasis on women's empowerment through microfinance programs, offering women the means to start small businesses, acquire new skills, and gain economic independence. The activities of MFIs have improved gender equality and produced a positive impact on women's overall social status in Bangladesh.

It is crucial to note that MFIs have made significant contributions to entrepreneurship development by ensuring microfinance; addressing gender disparities; and promoting the scalability and viability of microenterprises. Microfinance and entrepreneurship activities have facilitated job creation at the grassroots level, with the facilitation of access to capital and capacity development by the CSOs that have contributed to poverty reduction. Through training and capacity-building initiatives, a notable portion of entrepreneurs are equipped with essential techniques to improve their productivity and skill set, enhancing competitiveness. By concentrating on crucial sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, education, and renewable energy, CSOs have addressed the specific needs of communities and provided essential services that have improved the overall well-being of individuals and reduced vulnerability. MFIs have also facilitated the development of social capital and networks among microfinance clients and entrepreneurs, thus creating a conducive environment for entrepreneurship and fostering community cohesion.

CSOs engagement on micro-financing and entrepreneurship development started with experimentation on micro-credit in 1970s which entered the stage of growth and expansion during mid-1980s to mid-1990s and reach its maturity in the following decade (1996-2005) with introduction of green microfinance, microfinance plus and micro health insurance etc. The microfinance activities had been consolidated in the following decade (2006 onwards). Of the success stories and legacy cases, the Grameen Classic Model (GCS) was quickly adopted and implemented by other MFIs entering the sector in the early years. BRAC's Holistic Model has been useful in creating access to financial services has been fundamental to BRAC's comprehensive development strategy. And ASA's microfinance model has been recognised as a cost-effective approach.

Quality Education and Skills Development

Following independence, CSOs focused on adult literacy that shifted to child education programmes mainly in the 1990s. CSOs' engagement in the education sector expanded following mid 2000s with the partnership of the Government when CSOs contributed

to quality education and greater inclusivity. The impact of CSOs in Bangladesh has been instrumental in improving access to quality education and skill development opportunities for marginalized communities. Their interventions have contributed to positive social changes by empowering individuals, promoting gender equality, and fostering economic strength among the vulnerable through a skilled workforce. Schools, learning centres, and informal education programs have been established in remote areas, slums, and disadvantaged regions, thereby bridging the education gap. Promoting girls' education has been a key focus area for many CSOs to overcome cultural and social barriers that hinder girls' education and advocate for gender equality in educational access. These efforts have contributed to increased enrollment and retention of girls in schools. Several CSOs have a special focus on improving the quality of education by training teachers, developing curriculums, and implementing innovative teaching methods. CSOs have been advocating for educational reforms and policy changes to enhance the overall quality of education in the country. CSOs' vocational training programs, entrepreneurship support, and technical skills development interventions have empowered individuals with the necessary skills to secure employment opportunities and income generation. CSOs engaged parents, community leaders, and local stakeholders to create awareness about the importance of education and involve them in decision-making processes that helped build support systems and strengthen the sustainability of educational programs. In the area of policy advocacy, several CSOs have been advocating for policies and reforms in the education sector through conducting research and generating evidence-based recommendations.

During first decade after the Independence, CSOs were largely engaged in sponsorship programmes and adult literacy development activities, which shifted to child education programmes in 1980s, a partnership-based activity with the government had expanded in the following decades (1989-2005). Ensuring greater inclusivity through quality education has been a major area of focus of CSO activities in 2005 onwards. CSOs' initiatives have contributed to positive social

changes by empowering individuals, reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and fostering economic growth through a skilled workforce. Of the success stories and legacy cases, BRAC's Non-formal Primary Education (NFPE); Dhaka Ahsania Mission's GonoKendra; CAMPE's Education Watch Reports and the Database on Education; BACE's Female Stipend Programme; JAAGO's Technology Schooling; SSS's Floating School; D Net's Computer Literacy Programme (CLP) are particularly prominent.

Health, Nutrition, and Population Management

CSOs have played a crucial role in driving social changes related to health, nutrition, and population management in Bangladesh since its independence, covering awareness, advocacy, service delivery, and policy influence. In the 1970s, to supply relief and volunteer, two important initiatives took institutional shape, named Gonoshasthaya Kendra at Savar and BRAC at Baniachong, Sylhet. In the 1980s, CSOs concentrated on providing their services to the urban areas of the country, and in the rural areas, they got the chance to work as a complement to the government from 1985. In 1990s, CSOs were successful in delivering family planning services to the one-fifth population of the country, and addressed malnutrition programmes and women's health issues. During the 2000s, CSOs were actively collaborating with the government of Bangladesh to provide health care services in the rural areas.

Many CSOs directly delivered health and nutrition services to communities, particularly in remote areas, providing essential healthcare services, vaccinations, and nutritional support. This bottom-up approach ensures that interventions are culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs of the common people. Several CSOs conducted public campaigns, workshops, and community-level interventions to educate people on topics such as maternal and child health, family planning, nutrition, hygiene, and disease prevention, resulting in improved health outcomes and reduced mortality rates. Through evidence-based research and public campaigns, CSOs have contributed to shaping policies, regulations, and resource allocation in favor of improved health services, access

to nutritious food, and effective population management. The efforts of CSOs in Bangladesh have yielded meaningful results by ensuring improved access to healthcare services, reduced infant and maternal mortality rates, increased immunisation coverage, enhanced nutritional status, improved family planning, and empowered communities to make informed choices regarding their health and well-being. Of the success stories and legacy cases, the role of the Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK) is well recognised. GK started as a field hospital with 480 beds for the wounded freedom fighters and Bangladeshi refugees during the liberation war in 1971. “Oral Therapy Programme” of BRAC worked as a game changer for the children of Bangladesh. In the 1980s, CSOs concentrated on providing their services to the urban areas of the country, and in the rural areas, they got the chance to work as a complement to the government from 1985. In 1990, CSOs were successful in delivering family planning services to the one-fifth population of the country. During the 2000s, CSOs were actively collaborating with the government of Bangladesh in community health care facilities and other health related issues. There is a significant impact of the project campaign named “Stop Unnecessary Cesarean Action” by Save the Children. And, USAID’s INCA (Improving Nutrition through Community Approaches) Project was effective in the riverine areas of the southern part of Bangladesh.

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

CSOs’ contribution in Bangladesh in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment is well recognized. Along with the government, CSOs played a role in providing services to support victims of gender-based violence following 1972. CSOs became particularly active in the women empowerment front in 1980s. Women rights issues and concerns received special attention during 1990s. In the 2000s, CSOs continued their efforts to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment through various initiatives. CSOs have been instrumental in promoting education and raising awareness about gender equality issues by offering educational opportunities and promoting awareness campaigns that have helped

empower women and challenge traditional gender roles. Access to credit, business training, and market opportunities by several CSOs has empowered women to become financially independent and contribute to their households' economic stability.

CSO initiatives led to a gradual increase in women's decision-making power within their families. By addressing barriers to healthcare, promoting reproductive rights, and spreading awareness about maternal and child health, CSOs have helped reduce maternal mortality rates and empowered women to make informed decisions about their health and family planning. Several CSOs have been at the forefront of advocating for gender-responsive laws and policies in Bangladesh and have actively engaged in lobbying for legal reforms, including measures to combat gender-based violence, ensure inheritance rights, and promote gender equality in the workplace. CSOs' efforts have contributed to changing attitudes, reducing gender-based violence, and creating an enabling environment for women's empowerment. These have resulted in increased legal protection and access to justice for the women in the country. CSOs have not only addressed immediate needs but also worked toward long-term sustainable change by challenging discriminatory norms, providing support systems, and empowering women to become agents of change in their communities.

The decade of 1970s could be termed as decade of rehabilitation with regard to CSOs engagement on gender development point of view. This is followed by the decade of women empowerment through CSOs involvement during 1980s. CSOs were engaged more on rising concerns of women's rights at national and international level in 1990s. Their activities focused more on inclusion and policy changes during 2000s. Of the success stories and legacy cases, 'Passing of the Anti-Dowry Bill' is a notable achievement where Bangladesh Mahila Parishad played notable role. As part of their advocacy efforts, Naripokkho and ASF also provided support to survivors of acid violence, including medical treatment, legal aid, and vocational training. BLAST played a crucial role in eliminating the two-finger rape test in Bangladesh. CPD has been extensively involved in pursuing evidence-based policy research on women empowerment, female employment, and gender-related issues. As

part of this, several milestone research projects have been conducted on different issues related to estimating the unpaid work of women in the national economy, the economic and social cost of domestic violence, and gender budgeting. Further, MJF's efforts in combating gender based violence and stopping child marriage have notable implications.

Environment, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

CSOs have had a significant impact on the environment, climate change, disaster management, and humanitarian assistance in Bangladesh, leading to positive social changes, including improved environmental sustainability, increased resilience to climate change, enhanced disaster preparedness, and the provision of critical support to vulnerable populations. In this disaster-prone country, CSOs have played a crucial role in disaster management and response. In the 1970s, CSOs were particularly active in rehabilitation and relief operations in response to a few catastrophic cyclones and natural disasters. Forest management received the impetus of CSOs in the 1980s; and rehabilitation and environmental advocacy by the CSOs received the attention of CSOs during the 1980s and 1990s. Disaster risk preparedness, and fight for the environment and climate change have been key concerns to a good number CSOs following 2000s.

Working alongside government agencies, CSOs provided emergency relief, including food, shelter, and healthcare, to affected populations and contributed to enhanced preparedness and response mechanisms. CSOs have implemented projects focused on afforestation, wetland protection, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable agriculture practices that have helped in preserving ecosystems, mitigating deforestation, and promoting sustainable resource management. In response to Bangladesh's high vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, including increased frequency of cyclones, and erratic rainfall patterns, CSOs have been instrumental in raising awareness about climate change, advocating for climate change policies, and implementing adaptation measures. These entities have worked with local communities to build climate-resilient

infrastructure, promote climate-smart agriculture, and enhance community-based disaster preparedness. CSOs have advocated for policy reforms, strengthened community participation, and raised awareness about the importance of sustainable development and social equity in Bangladesh. Of the success stories and legacy cases, BDRCS's Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) played a crucial role in responding to the devastating Cyclone Bhola in 1970. Resilience in the face of cyclone by the landless group of Nijera Kori is a remarkable intervention in response to Cyclone Amphan. NAARI Consortium's Rescue Operation played a critical role in the rescue and recovery efforts following the Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013. In another notable movement, BELA (Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association) played a significant role in the legal battle that led to the ban on two-stroke vehicles in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

CSOs have been instrumental in driving positive changes by ensuring access to clean water, proper sanitation facilities, and promoting good hygiene practices, particularly in rural areas. In the early years of Bangladesh, the country's WASH infrastructure was severely lacking when some INGOs like OXFAM and CARE incorporated a WASH component into most of their relief and rehabilitation projects. The UN declared the period between 1980 and 1990 the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD), and CSOs helped combat the mortality and morbidity caused by water-borne illnesses at a grassroots level. This period (1990-2000) saw a marked increase in GO-CSO partnerships in the implementation of WASH projects. WASH projects received attention of the government backed by foreign agencies (UNICEF, WHO) and CSOs/NGOs during 2000s.

CSOs in Bangladesh have been actively involved in raising awareness about the importance of WASH practices among communities that helped improve knowledge and change behaviors related to WASH practices. This capacity-building approach by CSOs empowered communities and strengthened their ability to manage and maintain WASH facilities. They collaborated with local

authorities and communities to construct safe drinking water sources, such as tube wells, rainwater harvesting systems, and community-level water treatment plants. And supported the construction of hygienic latrines and promote the concept of improved sanitation facilities, including waste management systems. CSOs contributed to the policy reforms and collaborated with government agencies to improve WASH-related policies and regulations by conducting research, gather evidence, and use their influence to promote policies that prioritize WASH investments, ensure accountability, and enhance coordination among various stakeholders. Through their concerted efforts in awareness-raising, infrastructure development, capacity building, advocacy, and monitoring, CSOs contributed to improved access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and the adoption of proper hygiene practices, enhancing public health and well-being in the country. Regarding legacy cases, the SOCMOB project was a success and served as a template for future development initiatives in the sector. Further, VERC/WaterAids Community Led Sanitation (CLTS), and Social Advancement Centre (SAC) approach by UNICEF are notable CSO interventions.

Inclusive Development- Mainstreaming the Excluded and Social Mobilisation

CSOs' contribution to inclusive development and social mobilisation may be associated with various aspects of the country's development, including poverty reduction, education, health, gender equality, environmental sustainability, human rights, transparency, and accountability, etc., where CSOs have played significant roles. Through effective interventions, CSOs played remarkable roles in Bangladesh in promoting the inclusion of marginalized communities, including tribal people, transgender individuals, disabled populations, and backward communities, through addressing the social, economic, and political challenges faced by these groups and striving to create an inclusive society. Challenges and health issues among Adivasi communities received attention of CSOs since the 1970s. CSOs worked to preserve the cultures and traditions of Adivasis which are under threat due to modernisation and assimilation mainly in

1980s. In the late 1990s, CSOs began working on the Hijras, and the Government of Bangladesh made the policy decision to officially recognize the Hijra as a third gender in 2013.

CSOs' engagement in community development projects that specifically target these vulnerable groups focused on improving access to healthcare, education, clean water, sanitation facilities, and other essential services. CSOs also facilitated economic empowerment through income-generating activities and entrepreneurship support. CSOs complemented government efforts, filled gaps in service delivery, and brought attention to marginalized communities. Through their work, these entities contributed to building a more equitable and sustainable society in Bangladesh. CSOs contributed as watchdogs, exposing corruption and advocating for the rule of law. Of the notable outcomes, CSOs in Bangladesh have played a crucial role in advocating for the enactment of legislation and policies that safeguard and advance the rights of persons with disabilities. Through their dedicated efforts, several key legislative measures have been established to protect and promote disability rights. As a notable initiative, the Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCC) serve as a key pillar in TIB's work in civic engagement and play a crucial role in fighting corruption and promoting accountability, transparency, and good governance at the local level. ActionAid's work in the Char/Hoar regions; and Bandhu's advocacy towards the legalisation of Hijra identity have notable implications. In the research front, the Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD) is CPD's flagship programme that produces analyses of the macroeconomic performance of the Bangladesh economy as well as analyses and recommendations for the national budget.

Way Forward

Today, the new forms of solidarity or social contracts between citizens and authorities at various levels; new relationships in the form of partnerships, alliances, and other forms of cooperation; and the development of international military, political, and economic collaborations have implications for the changing functional scopes

and approaches of the CSOs. The changing situation requires newer responses on the part of CSOs in several instances. Thus it is important to re-evaluate the functional scopes and operational approaches to draw a future direction for the CSOs of the country in line with the changing social, economic, and cultural scenario, and policy priorities of Bangladesh.

Over the years, the operations and financing of the INGOs changed and took different shapes, and the financing volumes declined. Today, INGOs cannot play a key role being their foreign affiliation, and national and local CSOs will have to produce bigger roles in social and cultural movements. Considering the changing developmental needs, CSOs roles has to be different in the coming days. Bangladesh is set to leave the least developed countries group to join the developing country club by 2026. With graduation, Bangladesh will no longer be eligible for LDC-specific special and differential treatment, aimed to facilitate LDCs to increase participation in international trade, under the WTO agreement. In such a situation, CSOs' cooperation by offering capacity development and policy inputs to support the government's efforts to handle the challenges and sustain might prove to be a crucial force. Bangladesh will have to become more innovative and productive to complete the remaining stages for achieving the SDGs- a journey in which CSOs will have to play a more supportive role.

A radical re-assessment of CSOs' roles in the humanitarian arena is needed. CSOs can help to create a countervailing force to the processes that exploit and exclude people by re-distributing assets and opportunities, injecting social values into market processes, and holding economic institutions to account for their actions. As foreign aid declines, new forms of international cooperation are emerging to meet the realities of this changing situation. In this context, a key issue is whether the domestic regimes of the future will benefit the low-income and vulnerable segments of developing countries. CSOs have a key role to play in ensuring that by building strong domestic constituencies that represent vulnerable peoples' interests in more pluralistic structures of governance and enhancing the capacity of civic groups to participate at every level. It is well-recognized that CSOs have played remarkable contributions in pulling crops and

other agricultural productions and ensuring food security, however, CSOs of the country have roles to play in the form of service delivery, policy advocacy, awareness, and capacity development of the sector. Further, CSOs should come up with dedicated support on the way to attaining the goals identified in the NFIS-B. In the area of climate change, CSOs' support would be crucial to attaining the objectives of reducing environmental risks and climate change challenges.

In the areas of sanitation, there are achievements in behavioral improvements; however, infrastructural expansion is lagging. Despite remarkable improvement, economic and social inclusion for certain sections remained among the top agenda to concentrate on. In the changing economic and social setup, working with various marginalized (disabled, adivasi, etc.) will be more relevant in the upcoming years. Disability inclusion has to be systematic. Economic and social inclusion of the indigenous population especially Adivashi girls is amongst the key concerns to address. CSOs' voices against violence would remain critical and would require further impetus. CSOs have roles to play in advocating for technology-driven innovative last-mile connectivity solutions.

It is evident that the relationship, trust, and cooperation between the government and CSOs improved over time which requires further enhancement. For more effective collaboration and sustainable outcomes, CSOs need a greater impetus to bring together stakeholders across government and businesses and develop a new role in linking local and corporate business alliances with local communities and the wider market system.

ANNEX

List of CSO Alliance Committees

A. Convening Committee

Rasheda K. Choudhury

Executive Director, CAMPE
& Convenor, CSO Alliance

Asif Saleh

Executive Director
BRAC

Dr. Maleka Banu

Secretary General
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

Farah Kabir

Country Director
ActionAid Bangladesh

Shafiqul Islam

Asia Regional Director
ADD International

Dr. Ehsanur Rahman

Advisor
National Alliance of Humanitarian
Actors in Bangladesh (NAHAB)

Zakir Hossain

Executive Director, Buro
Bangladesh
& Chairperson, Federation of
NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB)

Shaheen Anam

Executive Director
Manusher Jonno Foundation

A.H.M. Noman Khan

Executive Director
Center for Disability in
Development

Dr. Fahmida Khatun

Executive Director
Center for Policy Dialogue

Dr. Dibalok Singha

Executive Director
Dushtha Shasthya Kendra

Sanjeeb Drong

Executive Director
Adivasi Forum

Korvi Raksand

Founder
Jaago Foundation

Mostafa Nuruzzaman

Executive Director
Shushilan, Khulna

Rasel Ahmed Liton

Executive Director
SKS Foundation
Gaibandha

Hasin Jahan

Country Director
WaterAid Bangladesh

B. Advisory Group of CSO Alliance

Aroma Dutta, MP

Founder
PRIP Trust

Selina Hossain

Executive Director
Fariah Lara Foundation, Barguna
& Literatiore

Advocate Sultana Kamal

Human Rights Campaigner

Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman

Executive Director

Power and Participation Research
Centre**Monsur Ahmed Choudhuri**

Disability Rights

Campaigner

Khushi Kabir

Coordinator

Nijera Kori

Khairul Islam

Regional Director

South Asia WaterAid

S N Kairy

Senior Advisor

Sajida Foundation

Syda Rizwana Hassan

Executive Director

Bangladesh Environmental

Lawyers Association

Shamsul Huda

Executive Director

Association for Land Reform and
Development**Tahsinah Ahmed**

Executive Director

Bangladesh Youth Leadership
Center**Morshed Sarkar**

Executive Director, POPI

& Chairperson, Credit and
Development Forum**Rokeya Begum**

Executive Director

Shablombi, Netrokona

C. Working Group.**KAM Morshed**

Alliance Focal Point

&

Senior Director

Advocacy, Innovation & Migration
BRAC**Bazle Mustafa Razee**

Executive Director

Friends in Village Development

Bangladesh, Sylhet

Nimai Mandal

Program Coordinator

Federation of NGOs
(FNB)**Shahe Alam**

Executive Director

PRIP Trust

Rebeka Saniat

Executive Director

Coalition for the Urban
Poor**M Abdul Awal**

Executive Director

Credit and Development
Forum**Chanchana Chakma**

Executive Director

Bangladesh Indigenous Women's
Network, Chittagong Hill
Tracts**Dr. Ahsan Ali**

Executive Director

Ashroy, Rajshahi

Syed AhamedCoordinator, CSO Alliance Secretariat
&

Founder & CEO, IID