



Status Of Non-Governmental Organizations in Iran

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Abstract

Whenever social actors find a gap between what there is and what should be, a plethora of problems happen to exist. In this regard, researchers in the field detect the problem and carry out a large number of studies to find the causes and facts related to such a social phenomenon. The form and structure of the problem determines the method of solution-finding and decision-making; hence, addressing such a problem is regarded as the main task of the policy-makers. Although permanent development is considered as one of the main objectives of every country, there remain a multitude of arguments in achieving such a precious purpose.

To this end, the citizens' social participation to carry out specific activities related to repairing or ameliorating social damage is regarded to be one of the most efficient ways in NGOs. Nevertheless, NGOs or "Saazman-e-Mardom Nahad", as recently recognized in Iran, have encountered a plethora of problems in working efficiently in the developing countries; therefore, there is an urgent need to find solutions to fix or ameliorate the NGOs problems through a descriptive research design. In this regard, the current study finds that political, legal, and economic structural barriers as well as the limitations of financial sources, managerial weakness, lack of NGOs freedom as endogenous barriers, all and all, add to the malignant disease of NGOs.

Keywords: NGOs, Iran, Centralization, Civil Society, Civil Structural Barriers

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1. Introduction

NGOs are regarded as the manifestations of civil society in relation to the authority of community values. They pave the way for people's attendance in a variety of social affairs and play a vital role in managing public affairs through helping with issues such as policy making, implementation, and pursuing related activities. These organizations facilitate an organized elite participation in the community management. To this point, different roles such as critics, partners, executive authorities, partners, and inspectors can serve to effectively implement a

plethora of different development programs. In addition, NGOs gain the trust and support of the people at national and international levels to identify social problems and to find solutions for them. Therefore, a heavy burden is removed from the government shoulders. Nonetheless, there is no clear-cut definition of an NGO activity in Iran. Of course, unorganized and transitory governmental activities such as religious and national celebrations are well-established in Iran. While, the formation

of a set of regular people who spend a part of their time and budget on a social sector or the whole society, has not been implemented over the years. This issue is the origin of many NGOs' problems. Since our community is wholly managed by the government, Iranian people have not yet accepted the fact that they must

be prepared to encounter the problems and to remove the barriers by themselves. They also believe that it is the duty of the government to remove the obstacles ahead of them. Besides, there is another facet to this issue which is the government's pessimistic viewpoint with regard to institutionalization outside its framework of total power supervision. Rather than considering it as an opportunity, Iranian government considers this issue as a potential threat. These two viewpoints have significantly caused the disestablishment of NGOs in Iran. It seems very clear that ameliorating the current situation, first of all, needs an evolution in the culture of the ruling elite as the influential people in the development of our community.

2. Theoretical Foundations of NGOs

NGOs are an elusive term to define since they include a wide variety of organizations. Carrying out a structural- functional research, John Hopkins University¹ (1990) found that an NGO enjoys five characteristics which are

as follows: organizability (establishment and stabilization), non-governmentality, convergence, independence, on-profitability, and being voluntary. The most important of these components, the following can be noted. Besides, this university reported that the following criteria should be mentioned as assets for NGOs:

2.1. Social Groups

The most important concept of NGOs is their social identity. Such organizations do inherently enjoy the structure of a social group. Although, at first, it may be created by an individual, its foundation possesses a collective nature (Niebur, 1932).

In other words, a social group consists of the individuals interacting with one another in a regular way. Groups may include very small institutions or large organizations or communities. In this regard, aside from the group size, one should consider the determining characteristic of its members' awareness of common identity. Human beings are involved with different group in such a way that most of them belong to different types of groups. Since the ties, mutual interaction, and awareness of a collective identity are regarded as the main components

of social groups, these groups are considered beyond any kind of collective and social groupings relating to statistical groupings (Scott, 2005).



2.2. Organization

In this study, the purpose of an organization is related to the common concept in management which enjoys a legal entity with ideals, goals, charter, structure, tasks, as well as human resources. Hence, an NGO works in terms of an organizational framework.

2.3. NGO

Is an organization with an independent legal entity possesses a written charter and laws according to its conditions, circumstances, and needs. Also, it functions within the framework of the country's provisions and administrative regulations.

Every organization brings about two analyses of its environment: the internal and the external environments. The former includes the human resources related to managers, stakeholders, and founders. While, the latter underscores every element which is involved with the organization in any way. These elements may consist of consumers, suppliers, competitors, government, media, and so forth. Taking these values into account within the framework of these two environments is very important (Maleki, 2009).

2.4. NGO Identity

The main characteristic of these organizations are their non-governmental essence. An NGO concept may have a number of meanings. Generally speaking, this concept implies that NGOs cannot be subcategorized under any governmental entity. In this regard, they should be away from the direct control or interference of the government.

Although an NGO can establish active and bilateral interactions with different governmental structures in the national and international arenas, its relationship with the government is regarded to be different. NGOs, in some cases, may complement and enhance the policies of the government. To this end, they are called GONGOs which means that an NGO can act under the supervision of the government and for the advancement of the government's policies although they are not subcategorized under the government's structure². Hence, for implementing their policies and programs, they do not possess total independence. These types of organizations cannot be literally regarded as NGOs since they are established and supported by the government.

2.5. Cooperation Dignity

The dignity of an NGO brings about the principle of cooperation, learning, and participation. The internal relationships of an NGO pursue a unified goal. Therefore, the cause of such unity is consistency and participation, especially civil participation, which helps for the creation and survival of an NGO. Of course, the dignity of an NGO does not mean that this organization belongs to cooperative sector as one of the triple sections of Iran's economic system (based on Article 44 of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution). The difference between the dignity of an NGO in terms of cooperation with other participatory institutions and agencies can be more underscored in the next section (Patnam, 2006).

2.6. Non-Profit Orientation

The NGO concept may bring about the illusion that such organizations belong to the private sector. The fourth issue of NGOs emphasizes on their separation from the private sector. Private organizations often

² What is a non Governmental organization? Peter willets, city university, London: Article ON NGO for UNESCO encyclopedia



have the tendency to do business. Also, some of these private organizations go beyond business and making profits to assist people by being involved in people's lives professionally (e.g., health care organizations in the private sector).

Nevertheless, NGOs often do not pursue business-oriented or professional goals. Nowadays, the word "nonprofit" has lost its real and profound meaning in that most NGOs follow a business-oriented approach instead of pursuing a non-profitable approach in the process of social development.

3. NGOs in Iran

The NGOs in Iran can be studied in three periods: the period before the institutional Revolution, the period from Constitutional Revolution to the Islamic Revolution, as well as the period after the Islamic Revolution.

3.1. The Period before the Constitutional Revolution

In Iran, before the formation of the modern state, the local NGOs were not created due to the East oppression although some traditional institutions such as trade unions at the heart of Iranian society, the clergy, the market, and other groups exercised a mediating role between the government and people. In this respect, none of these organizations played a key role in forming a new organization with a direct public's mediation to organize a unified participation. Based on the new meaning of NGOs, Iranian people in this period were acquainted with this concept and modernism which was the product of their relationship with the West in the 19th century (Abrahamian, 1998).

The increasing encounters between Iranians and Westerners led to the emergence of a new group of people in the nineteenth century. As (Masoudnia, 1978) aptly put it, this new group, which was later called the intellectuals, were deeply influenced by the French Revolution and called for political reform through the establishment of a parliamentary system. Therefore, under the influence of European developments, they tended to establish NGOs whose mission was to achieve both parliamentary and institutionalized goals. In line with this goal and before Iran's Constitutional Revolution, these intellectuals aimed to establish organizations such as "Faramooshkhaneh" (i.e., a place for forgetful people), secret society, humanity convention, and the Revolutionary Committee and Center (Abrahamian, 1998) However, the activities of these organizations were largely hidden from the government due to the monarchy of the time with an exception to Mozafareddin Shah's ruling period. Therefore, the civil society in Iran emerged, at least, in the second half of the Safavid ruling based on two groups of Shia scholars and marketers. Moreover, in his analysis of Iran's Islamic society in the Middle Ages, Lambton (as cited in Khaniki, 2004) wrote: "that the governments were so dependent on the economic strength of the market that, in some cases, the marketers were using their influence to become the governmental ministers of the time". Hence, the market and the clergy were the two inseparable pillars of civil society before the Constitutional Revolution.

3.2. The Period from Constitutional Revolution to the Islamic Revolution

The establishment of Constitutional Revolution in 1906 culminated in codifying of constitution and recognizing individual rights and freedom. Also, it resulted in the formation of different conventions for the intellectuals and workers of this period to establish NGOs (Bahar, 1942). In this regard, the intellectuals aimed to establish political wings and workers founded the first Workers' Union in 1906 (Lajvardi, 1990). Hence, NGOs are evolved from the Constitutional Revolution. From the Constitutional Revolution until Iran's revolution in 1979, except for short periods of time, NGOs had no chance of creation and activity. Also, During Reza Shah's period the activities of these institutions were strongly opposed. His government exercised a lot of pressure on the civil-traditional groups such as the clergy and the market to both limit and



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weakened the establishment of new organizations (Abrahamian, 1999). However, with the fall of Reza Shah, the social atmosphere of Iran was ready to accept the establishment of new NGOs; nonetheless, internal chaos and strife among the endogenous groups caused the reappearance of the absolutist state. During the period of Mossadegh as Iran's Prime Minister, the internal chaos reached its peak but the coup of August 28 put an end to this golden opportunity. In the years following the coup, perhaps one of the most important institutions was the Islamic Association of Tehran University founded by Bazargan and his colleagues (Abrahamian, 1999).

3.3. The Period after the Islamic Revolution

Iran's evolution in 1979 represents the beginning of a new revolution in the contemporary Iranian political arena as the basis for the development of NGOs in the country's social and political structure. Since the Islamic Revolution in the creation, development, and activity of NGOs can be subcategorized into four periods. The first period began right after the victory of Islamic Revolution until the demise of Imam Khomeini in June 1990. The second period of eight years (1990-1998) continued with the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani. Moreover, the third period began from June 1998 until 2006 during which Khatami ran the presidency. Furthermore, the fourth eight years (2006-2014) continued with Ahmadinejad running the presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The first eleven years commenced with the Revolution victory during which the Islamic Constitution was codified and the individuals' rights and freedom were recognized. Thereby, liberal public gatherings and parties were announced to act freely. In such an environment, people's participation in society was mostly recognized but not in an organized and systematic way. In fact, a mass of religious ideas were developed under the influence of charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. These conditions led to the creation of a plethora of NGOs which forgot their real goal (i.e., organizing public participation), or lacked the ability to pursue it. Hence, they followed a charitable approach to achieve their particular goals.

Iran's acceptance of "Resolution 598" to end the Iran-Iraq War, and Rafsanjani's presidency all and all represent the beginning of a new era in the history of the revolution. The priority of economic over political modernization in his eight years of presidency brought about some changes in the social and economic structure.

The most important characteristic of this period was the shrinking of civil society, the groups' activities, and the parties in power (Razaghi, 2002). Despite the superiority of economic development on policy development, some prominent consequences such as replacing the scientific management instead of value management came along with economic development. In this respect, it paved the way for the formation of some NGOs such as student-related associations and organizations in different universities which were in parallel with the establishment of Islamic Student Association and the Executives for Construction Party. However, these organizations

aimed to stabilize and to strengthen the structure Clintalistry System. Khatami's victory in the presidential elections in June 1997 pushed Iran to its third phase of political stage.

The main feature of this stage was to adopt an approach to replace democratic dialog and civil society with mass society. On the one hand, the consequences of such a development led to demographic changes in the second decade of the revolution. On the other hand, it guided the ruling elite review of two issues concerning the development and stabilization of the revolution. The most important role of structural transformation concerned the economic modernization after the Holy Iran-Iraq War. During the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani, a top

priority of economic programs with a great deal of investment were devoted to huge foreign loans; hence, these assets were injected to the war-stricken society of Iran to reduce the gap between villages and cities, to alter the consumption patterns, as well as to change cultural space which eventually led to the formation



of the new middle class which demanded an active participation in political affairs through democratic institutions and NGOs (Rabi'ee, 2002).

In addition to structural changes, other developments such as Iran's population increase, its young population, urbanization growth, as well as the increase of literacy rate in urban areas, most notably Iran, especially in high schools and universities paved the ground for political participation through a large number of NGOs (see the table below).

According to the 1976 census, Iranian community was regarded as a semi-urban society (i.e., Iran's total population was 33,708,744 among whom 15,574,730 settled in urban areas and 17,854,064 inhabited rural areas). In other words, in 1976, only 47% of its population lived in cities and 53 percent inhabited rural areas³. According to the 1996 census, the urban population was 61.3 percent and the rural population was 34.38 percent of the total population. **Table 1** shows the growth of urban population⁴. This proportion changed to 63 percent of urban and 37 percent of rural inhabitants in 1999 (Zanjani, 1991; Rabi'ee, 2002).

Persian date October of 1977 census, whereas only 47/5 percent of the population was literate population and housing census in 1996 showed that nearly 80 percent of the population aged years and above are considered literate country. The literacy proportion in urban areas and 86 percent in rural areas is 70 percent. In these two decades, proportion literate women from 36 percent to over 74 percent (**Table 2**).

The development of education in the society meant strengthening, deepening, and expansion of modern discourse among people. In this regard, a new generation emerged who in many respects was different from the generation of the fifties meaning that their ideals, attitudes, and demands were not necessarily in the interests of the generation of the fifties (Rabi'ee, 2002).

Thus, during the eight-year presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani, the structural changes in population changes came along with a growing middle class who wanted the transition into the development of a civil society. Nevertheless,

this hybrid quantitative-qualitative growth was not institutionalized because of the barriers facing the NGOs.

Table 1. The Comparison of Urban and Rural Population in 1976 and 1996.

		Population1996	1976 Populati
1	Urban	36/ 817/789	17/ 854/064
2	Urban	61	Percent 47
3	Rural	23/ 026/293	15/ 574/730
4	Rural	38/ 34	Percent 53
5	Total	60/ 055/488	33/ 708/744
6	Total	99/ 64	Percent 100

³ . The results of Population and Housing Census in 1976 within the Statistical Center of Tehran: Iran in 1980.

⁴ The results of Population and Housing Census (1996 detailed results) within the Statistical Center of Tehran: Iran in 1997.



Source: Iran's Census Center (Rabi'ee, 2002: p. 134).

Table 2. The percentage of literacy level in the population of 6 year-old and above disaggregated by gender, urban, and rural areas (the comparison of 1976 and 1996).

Literate percentage

Female (s)	Male (s)	Male (s) and Female (s)	Year
Country's Total			
30	58/6	47/1	1976
74/21	84/67	79/51	1996
Urban			
55/1	74/4	65/2	1976
81/70	89/56	85/71	1996
Rural			
16/5	42/9	29/7	1976
62/41	76/74	69/61	1996

Source: Iran's Census Center (Rabi'ee, 2002: p. 137).

4. Barriers to NGOs

4.1. Structural Barriers

The current study found that political, legal, Internal and economic barriers as structural as well as the limitations of financial sources.

4.1.1. Political Barrier

In their nature, NGOs are somehow opposed to the absolute power of the government. With reference to a country such as Iran, where the government has exercised its absolute power, this challenge is not an easy task (Koolai, 2005). Therefore, Iran's government has been independently engaged in adopting political decisions and informing social infrastructure; nonetheless, NGOs were not directly allowed to be involved such mechanisms.

These conditions have caused the political dialog in Iran have Patrimonialistic nature and possess a patriarchal interpretation of power. The concentration of power in the history of Iran has led the government to exploit an NGO Participation which is governmental in essence and is run through governmental channels. Therefore, it is evident that the most important challenge for the government, which exercises its traditional power, is the formation and structure of the NGOs. On the other hand, the most important challenge for these organizations is the government as the real owner of power (Katouzian, 2014), which has tried to undermine the role of NGOs through giving its own solutions. These are as follows (Amir-Ahmadi, 2001).

- Interfering directly and indirectly in the activities of NGOs;
- Exploiting the economic needs of the NGOs and making them dependent on the government economically.
- Utilizing the NGOs instrumentally for justifying the government's political and ideological activities;



- Converting the NGOs to governmental contractors.

4.1.2. Legal Barriers

In his book titled as *The Morality of Law*, “Lon L. Fuller” considers some characteristics which are counted as internal politeness. He believes: that every law enjoys two kinds of politeness, namely internal and external politeness.

The former implies the procedures which should be kept independent of the content even though the specific law is discriminatory. While the latter mentions the content of the law which can be either fair or not. In this respect, he scrutinizes that if the specific law possesses internal politeness, we have to consider it as law despite what others would call it unfair and illegal. He, also, discusses eight characteristics for the law which includes internal politeness. It should be mentioned that removing one of these features may abolish the law. These laws are as follows: (Fuller, 1964)

- 1) The specific law should be applied both inclusively and publicly;
- 2) Firstly, the law is not retroactive, and secondly, the implementation of some laws is subjected to the passing of time;
- 3) The law should be obvious and public;
- 4) The law should be clear and understandable;
- 5) All the laws should enjoy internal consistency;
- 6) The law should not be prolonged;
- 7) The law should not be changed frequently;
- 8) The declared laws should not be different from their actual implementation.

Nevertheless, the internal (and to some extent external) politeness does not apply in Iranian laws (Hajjarian, 2009). Hence, some irregularities have been formed due to its malfunctioning, including (Sadeghi & Vaezi, 2010):

The precarious position of these organizations in the legal system of Iran

One of the most important legal shortcomings of our country with reference to NGOs is due to the inappropriate status of such organizations under Iranian laws which results in a lack of sufficient legal security. Since previous institutions lacked some of the features of the current NGOs⁵ such as enjoying an assembly, well-established organizations, and a sufficient number of members, the legislator were not urged to pass specific laws governing the relationships of these organizations.

With regard to the objections and distribution of the above-mentioned issues, the Ministry of Interior provided and submitted the draft regulations to the Council of Ministers in 2001. This draft was entitled “operational regulations for establishment and activities of NGOs” and was passed as the operational regulations of Article 182 within the third Iranian economic, social, and cultural Development Plans which is considered as the most important legal text in the field. With the approval of these regulations, the legal status of NGOs in Iran is largely known; however, there are two fundamental flaws to this issue. Firstly, the text of the Regulations has several drawbacks although the Council of Ministers reformed some of the inconsistent provisions and principles related to international laws on 30 July 2005. In this respect, there are

⁵.Operational regulations for establishment of NGOs in 2002, the ministry of Iran.



still objections on it. Secondly, only a code to protect and ensure the rights of these organizations is not sufficient because the Majlis (i.e., parliament of Iran) may change or abolish the provisions of the regulations through passing some laws at any moment. Perhaps, one of the reasons people hesitate to form NGOs is the improper position of such ORganizations in our legal system which does not provide sufficient legal security.

Legal hardships for the establishment of NGOs

One of the legal obstacles for the formation of NGOs is regarded to be the legal difficulties which are prescribed in the operational regulations. Three important issues related to these cases are explained below. First, severity in determining the number of the founders within the organization: According to Clause 5 of Article 18 of the regulations, the minimum number of founders in NGOs must be five members. This condition is a serious

obstacle for the establishment of these organizations and makes their formation difficult. Second, severity in the nationality of the organization's founders: in accordance with paragraph B of Article 18 of the regulations enacted in 2005, the founders of the NGOs must have Iranian nationality. Although foreigners can be employed as a member of the organization after the establishment of NGOs, this enactment will severely exert negative effects for the formation of NGOs. Third, there remain some hardships in obtaining the necessary legal licenses for the establishment of such organizations (Sadeghi & Vaezi, 2010).

Government intervention regarding the activities of NGOs

The laws of many countries emphasize greatly on describing non-profit non-governmental organizations. Also, Iranian lawmakers underscore the non-governmental nature of such organizations emphasizing; hence, the title of executive regulations enacted in 2002 and 2005, is termed non-governmental organizations or NGOs. In addition, Clause 2 of Article 1 stipulates that the purpose of NGOs is that governmental entities are not involved in the establishment and administration of them, while, the issue is significantly different.⁶

Lack of effective status in policy-making and justice-related procedures

One of the main roles of NGOs is to monitor the performance of power and government. In this respect, these organizations should be empowered to assist the government in making appropriate decisions related to organizational issues through sufficient and well-established legal tools. One of such tools is the obligation of the Government to exploit the effective views of these organizations and is the need to invite them in its decision- making assemblies.

Nonetheless, there is no law for the legislative process to obligate the government to attend to such invitations. Furthermore, Iranian NGOs are not linked to Mallis representatives and are not able to express the weak and strengthening points in the field. All and all, these issues have culminated in the lack of significant impact on the legislative process on behalf of the Majlis representatives (Sadeghi & Vaezi, 2010).

⁶ .The operational regulations for the establishment and activities of NGOs enacted by the government assembly in 30 July 2005 (with the number of 27,862 T 31,281) is regarded to be a clear manifestation of Article 5 which obligates the NGOs to provide fiscal-operational functions to the related authorities.



Lack of effective and clear rules on freedom of access to governmental information

There is an urgent need for NGOs to play an important role in monitoring and criticizing the government function which is in turn necessary to support their members in providing correct and clear information. However, the legal system lacks such laws to divulge sufficient information for NGOs. Although the operational regulations enacted a law in 2005 and in accordance with Article 12, public institutions are obliged to provide unclassified information to NGOs, yet it seems that this reform is not helpful for several reasons. Firstly, it may be argued that many government legislatures may deduce the requirement for amendment in

Article 12 concerns public institutions, not governmental agencies; secondly, there may be some governmental bodies who refrain from divulging sufficient information for NGOs since the requested information may be considered as classified in some legislatures' terms; therefore, they may not cooperate with the NGOs. Thirdly, the article entails that whether the NGOs enjoy access to the governmental information or not, public institutions may be obliged to consider the present information as classified and might not be able to divulge it.

4.1.3. Economic Barriers

Iran's young population, high unemployment, and economic problems have led a major part of social endeavors focus on profitable economic activities. Yet, these activities are not well-grounded and not long term but are false and superficial activities. In addition, the dependence of Iranian community on the government has made the people and the private sector not to play vital roles in economic activities. For these reasons, NGOs do not possess a well-established stance among Iranian people; hence, the necessity for forming a civil society and NGOs is not yet welcomed among these people (Mohammadi, 2000).

4.1.4. Internal Barriers

Basically, NGOs have not evolved out of a natural process as other manifestations of modern civilization such as art, politics, philosophy, and science have went through somehow naturally in Iran. That is, since the idea of NGOs is imported, their formation is not yet adapted with the specific culture, knowledge, ethics, and structure.

Hence, some local NGOs have been originated from the Iranian culture which is not capable of giving definite answers to the current needs of this society.

However, some of the conditions governing the social organizations have infiltrated into the local NGOs which in turn has caused serious problems for such organizations and have reduced their efficiency and effectiveness. The following problems are some of the most common (Pazhooh, 2008).

4.2. Endogenous Barriers

Limited Financial Resources, NGOs Closure, management weakness, Lack of Credibility and Social Base, lack of NGOs freedom,... as endogenous barriers, all and all, add to the malignant disease of NGOs.

4.2.1. Limited Financial Resources

Perhaps through the first glance, one might say that the most important problem encountered by NGOs is financial resource constraints. As (Mirbod, 2003) aptly put it, the limited financial resources may culminate in the emergence of some barriers ahead of NGOs' development. Nevertheless, experience has demonstrated that the organizations enjoying an appropriate status in society work efficiently irrespective of limited financial resources.



In this regard, financial resource constraints in some NGOs may divert them from their primary goal and might obsess them with excessive business-related activities.

4.2.2. NGOs Closure

NGOs closure or openness can also be a strengthening or a weakening factor in forming democracy in such a way that closed associations with specific isolated group identities, even in spite of having a high level of trust within a group may activate social polarization and might threaten the social cohesion. Open associations, however, may encourage a greater percentage of their members tending to have membership in other groups.

Those organizations which exaggerate on religion, race, and ethnic identity help to promote a civil society nurturing discord, animosity, and malice. For instance, the activities of Islamists in Sudan in the 1980s culminated in destroying civil rather than nurturing it. In contrast, the organizations which are involved in the fields such as human rights, peace treaties, environment, animal rights, women's health, arts and culture, social welfare,

as well as politics enjoy the most members and are more likely to buy in other to strengthen civil society and democracy; therefore, the type of organizations is also crucial in determining the strengthening or weakening of NGOs.

In Iran, closed organizations have attracted the most number of members who participate in social-related matters through exercising traditional values and religious beliefs to promote democratic mechanisms in terms of its package and also the cultural capital is low. In fact, the current status NGOs in Iran can be regarded as a consequence of the weak society against the strong government which has lost its democratic mobility.

4.2.3. Weak Management

This problem arises in different organizations through many forms. A plethora of institutional managers consider an economic outlook toward NGOs; thereby, they do not believe in teamwork.

Such an approach may result in weakening of an NGO performance in the short. Also, in the long run, it culminates in the NGO deviation from the goals of the organization which has set for itself. In many organizations, the managers and the founders are not available to provide definite answers to the problems encountered by the organizations. Hence, it can be said that many organizations are afflicted with elitism and their activities guided by specific individuals who may hurt their organizations in case they decide to withdraw from their positions and invest in other social areas. To sum up, if an NGO is not able to manage its own system efficiently, it cannot be expected from the government to run the organization effectively (Mohammadi, 2000).

4.2.4. Lack of Credibility and Social Base

Some NGOs do not enjoy a sufficient amount of credit for performing the activities which they have primarily set for themselves; therefore, their mottos are not in line with their performance. In addition, the lack of an appropriate social base among the people may result in a loss of efficiency of NGOs. Perhaps, these NGOs are

unaware of their influence in shaping social structure and bringing about dramatic changes in the existing values, norms, and culture within the society. Also, it is likely that these organizations ignore their primary goal which is to mediate between the people and the government. On the one hand, the level confidence in these organizations is set at its lowest level; as a result, they are not capable of asking for their rightful demands from the government.

On the other, the government may ignore the NGOs' effective roles. In addition, their presence might not be formally recognized in public policies, programs, and activities by the government.



4.2.5. Lack of Professional Expertise

Many NGOs do not possess sufficient expertise to work in the field of their interest, expertise, teamwork, or organization. Exploiting modern sciences is not properly utilized. Moreover, there are some limitations in internet use and many websites. Furthermore, many NGOs interact with one another through traditional methods. Besides, there is no collective knowledge to communicate experiences in many fields. Therefore, many activities

are done through trial and error. To sum up:

- The reporting procedures among these organizations are weak which make it difficult to attract the international investors for related projects;
- The organizational public relations rely on traditional techniques. Hence, it weakens the organization in establishing itself to the related society. This, in turn, reduces the effectiveness of these organizations in the target communities and culminates in their deviation from the organizational defined goals;
- The financing procedures are insufficient and, in some cases, unconventional. This damages the reputation of the NGOs in the community and makes the people alienated with them.

4.2.6. Lack of Active Participation in the International Arena

The scope of the NGOs' international communication is limited in Iran. Many of them are not aware of the existing resources in the international arena. Also, there is no proper propaganda within these fields distributed by the government and state channels. Also, due to the lack of information regarding the activities of these organizations and their actions, they are not generally considered as international organizations. Therefore, they lose the opportunity to do international projects. In other words, there is not any continuous interaction between the government and the NGOs inside and outside the Iranian borders.

The main factor concerning the inefficiency of NGOs is greatly due to the elite political culture which acts as an inhibitor. As a panacea to the current situation, it is necessary to understand the totality of political culture in Iran.

5. The Conditions of Implementing Efficient NGOs

5.1. Civil Society

The concept of civil society in Western politics has faced many changes. These conceptually different viewpoints regarding civil society can be presented in terms of pre-modernity and post-modernity periods (Afroogh, 2002):

- 1) The notion of civil society in pre-modernity period: The main feature of this period is the full reorganization of the government by the NGOs; hence, the civil society and the government are counted as inseparable parts. This concept is evident in the works of John Locke, Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant.
- 2) The concept of civil society in post-modernity period: The most important theories related to this notion underscore the independency of civil society from the government which in turn can be divided into three concepts (Babbio, 1989; Bashiriyeh, 2004):

- a) Civil society consists of a set of groups which are intertwined and coexist; however, they are act separately. The strength of civil society is social participation and partnership even though it is a village. This interpretation considers the government as outside the civil society. Hence, civil society is not synonymous with civilization, but civilization is the outcome of the civil society;
- b) Civil society means the interface between the family and the government. The idea evolves out of Hegel's philosophy which considers civil society as the intermediary between the public territory (i.e., the government) and the private realm (i.e., the family) and terms it as a stage of a liberal state whose duty and



responsibility is to support individual rights. Hegel believes that civil society encounters the family and the government. In this regard, the individual is evolved from a family, enters the civil society, reaches the government, and self-represents

him/herself (Chandhoke, 1999; Mclean, 2002);

c) Civil society is the territory of the material and economic realms or the well-established relations among the individuals and classes in a related society of infrastructure and set of relationships outside the scope of the government's manipulation. This interpretation of civil society manifests itself in the philosophy of Marx. This philosophy emphasizes on the notion that civil society is the natural base of the government whose major characteristic is individuality, competition, and debate (Babbio, 1989);

d) Civil society is the interface between people and the government which includes a set of individuals who are independent of the government, groups, or associations. In this respect, the government does not have the right to exercise its power over it. According to this view, civil society organizations are, in fact, non-governmental which can evolve in the form of associations, clubs, unions, classes, parties, cultural institutions, and NGOs.

In this study, civil society limits the government's power through a variety of public organizations. It acts as a buffer zone between the four main sections of the society in which voluntary associations play a vital role in the formation of political, social, economic, and cultural views. To this end, civil society in Iran is associated with the following features:

5.1.1. Centralized Political Power

The first assumption is that increased government control over power resources, including both the obligatory and the non-obligatory sources of power reduces the establishment and the development of civil society. The concentration of power in the hands of the government may increase its efficiency; nonetheless, it may damage the development of civil society. In general, history has shown that the process of government modernization with emphasis on political unity and national identity weakens the foundations of civil society (Bashiriyeh, 2003). Many politicians and theorizers consider the accumulation of wealth as a necessary pre-condition for economic development, and regard the accumulation of power as an important pre-condition for political development.

Nevertheless, these theorizers ignore the fatal consequences caused by the government's accumulation of power for the process of political development and civil society engagement in decision-making. According to the experience of many countries, (Lipset, 2005), nowadays, Iran's political environment is moving towards greater centralization of power which is a major barrier in the development of civil society.

5.1.2. Non-Civil Political Culture

In his book, "Civic culture" Almond mentions the discussion over the civil political culture which is an indispensable part of democratic societies and paves the ground for the formation of a well-established civil society (Almond, 1965). However, civil political culture has not yet emerged in Iranian culture. As (Azghandi, 1997)

adroitly put it, Iranian culture has always welcomed lack of cooperation, lack of trust, and being manipulated. He, also, holds that this issue has manifested itself in Iranians' political culture.

5.1.3. Rentier Government

It is defined as those governments that consistently borrow large amounts of foreign rents from foreign institutions or governments (Backhaus, 2004). These governments can be identified with four features (Mahdavy, 1970; Beblawi, 1987; Ross, 2004):

1) Although all states have some features of rentier economies, the rentier governments are devoted to a bulky amount of rentier revenue;



- 2) The rent must be of foreign origin. In other words, it should not be attached to any production processes in the domestic economy;
- 3) The rentier government devotes a very small percentage of its workforce to engage in rent production; hence, the majority of the society distributes or receives the rent;
- 4) The rentier government receives the rent and plans to spend it alone.

To this end, it has become evident that the Iranian ruling class is considered as rentier government. Also, many scholars consider this type of government as a significant factor in the lack of well-established civil society. Whereas, other political theorists hold that the government's financial crises will pave the ground for the development of civil society.

5.2. The Growth of Citizenship Concept

Whenever political and social analysts discuss over citizenship culture, they frequently emphasize on the type of relationship with other socio-cultural phenomena. In other words, they underscore the citizens' duty with reference to the social organizations or other citizens (Lawson, 2001). It is worth mentioning that citizenship culture does not deal with predefined legal norms such as citizenship rights; nevertheless, it encounters a set of norms and values that which are considered to be dramatically flexible. In this respect, Turner believes that a civilized citizen has in mind the cultural partnership in the related society. He or she is, also, responsible for participating in social and cultural affairs within a specific society (Kousha, 2008). Furthermore, the field of citizenship culture refers to a set of parameters and variables as keywords. These key concepts are understood as civil responsibility, lawful citizens, and norm-acceptability from urbanization patterns.

In an urban community, these notions should be built in the citizens' social rights emanating from a well-grounded system of urbanization. Besides, citizens should be vigilant about their civil rights and duties (Nabavi, 2009).

Thereby, citizenship is a series of values and behaviors which deals with specific civil demands. The most important factor among these demands includes a sense of belonging and commitment to society. In such circumstances, an individual is promoted from being an ordinary citizen to being a prominent social capital. To this end, a plethora of scholars have emphasized on seven vital elements regarding a social capital. They are:

- 1) Participation in the local community;
- 2) Activism in a social position;
- 3) Confidence and Security;
- 4) Neighborhood bonds;
- 5) Difference acceptability of bonds;
- 6) Placing value on lifestyle;
- and 7) Behavioral stability (Jajrami, 2001).

But how is a social capital formed? If people participate in an urban context and share with other individuals their common ground without regarding their institutional, ethnic, and cultural bonds, one can claim that the basis of social capital is formed. Of course, such inter-group relations can be potentially productive for the accumulation of social capital.

However, the government's role in the formation of social capital should not be ignored. That is, the formation of any social phenomenon requires special conditions and circumstances. In other words, human beings are

not capable of creating their ideal community voluntarily under different circumstances; rather, for establishing a desired society, the objective and subjective grounds for the formation of a certain type of society or social phenomenon should be met (Newton & Norris, 2000).

6. Conclusion

In all developed and even developing economies, the social activities of citizens have increased substantially within the framework of NGOs in the late twentieth century. Of course, there have been a large number of debates over the success or failure of such organizations. Nonetheless, in Iran, these



entities do not work efficiently since they are looking for the financial issues more than other aspects.

Also, most of these organizations are heavily dependent on the government. Not only being non-governmental not necessarily mean that NGOs are against the government, but they can also be useful for governments in many fields in that NGOs are capable of facilitating the difficult and complex procedures which the government cannot overcome because of financial or workforce problems. These organizations have the potentiality to provide efficient solutions or ameliorate different problems by accepting to be responsible for seeing the problems with a critical eye; hence, they are able to help the government in different social, cultural, economical, and even political projects.

Through their boundless capacity for voluntary and non-profit activities and their potentiality for strengthening public masses to follow a common goal, NGOs can be effectively significant in DE monopolizing the governmental seizure on the public's fate. Through both critical thinking and practice, NGOs are empowered to

achieve effective publicly desired goals which can be in line with the governments' policies in different fields.

At present, many developed countries empower their desired NGOs to actively participate in their specialized fields. In this respect, the potential power of civil society comes into play with the governments' discretion in both domestic and foreign policies. Therefore, ignoring such great potential definitely endangers the country and the government.

However, in Iran, the conditions are not yet ready for NGOs to actively participate in different social, cultural, economic, and political arenas since the government does not underscore a change in the vital role of elites as an intermediary between the people and the government. In addition, a significant structural reform should be applied to find efficient managers who possess sufficient knowledge of the current philosophies and ideologies to strengthen the bonds among the elites, the people, and the government. In this regard, there are three types of communication between the government and NGOs. Firstly, NGOs are in the "client" position facing the government.

In this position, they perform the programs financed by the government. During 1980s, some countries such as China and Tanzania followed this pattern. The second kind of communication is the adversarial relationship between the two sides emphasizing that there are no common grounds or interests to achieve consensus

between the two sides. The Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya have experienced such communication. The third interaction, which is the most well-grounded one, focuses on the real partnership in reaching a con-sensus between the two sides. This consensual model emphasizes on a strong relationship with a well-established bilateral discourse regarding the differences between the two sides. Utilizing every one of the abovementioned models has required a great amount of caution and investigation on behalf of both the government and the NGOs.

Using a strategic approach, it can be claimed that in case the barriers are removed and non-governmental managers are employed in the related fields, at some point we will see the following developments:

- 1) Strengthening and expansion of social bonding;
- 2) Strengthening and promoting the active and voluntary participation of the majority in different social arenas;
- 3) Strengthening of persuasion practices at the macro level;
- 4) Distributing power and reducing power density in society;
- 5) Helping to increase the number of organizational hierarchies and groups (social actors) in the social network that can reduce the concentration of power in society and may adjust the related disorder;
- 6) Assisting in mobilizing the people in establishing a dynamic society;
- 7) Facilitating the transfer of information through updating and implementing the related data effectively



through strengthening the relationships within the community discourse.

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