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Human Security Discourse: A Case of Civil Society Activism in Sindh, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study strives to build a nexus between human security and civil society in Sindh which is a highly marginalized and socio-economically challenged province of Pakistan. Keeping the qualitative nature of the study in mind, field visits were conducted in District Ghotki and Umerkot, Sindh province in October 2022. The visits enabled the gathering of data through in-depth interviews, focused group discussions (FGDs), and community engagement. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents for interviews and FGDs. The findings shed contextual light on the human security landscape and the state of civil society groups of the districts. The study concludes that that local civil society groups are playing a significant role in the accomplishment of human security goals while enduring numerous challenges across intellectual/ideological, organizational, bureaucratic, political and financial fronts. In order to effectively address the human security issues in the districts, the research suggests the autonomous functioning of of civil society groups, adequate understanding of human security issues among those groups and their proper collaboration with government agencies.

Introduction

Area-wise, Sindh is the third-largest province of Pakistan and the second-largest in terms of population. It is marred by neglect, poor governance, and declining living standards. Around 66% of households in rural Sindh are reeling from acute deficiencies in terms of education, healthcare, material resources, personal safety, living standards, and socio-political participation (Hameed & Qaiser, 2019). Hence, this region is of utmost relevance to the academic commentary on non-traditional security (NTS), in general, and human security, in particular, vis-á-vis Pakistan. Human security is an emerging conceptual and policy outlook within the security matrix and architecture. Being the central tenet of non-traditional security, it fundamentally alters the state-centric and border defense paradigm - the traditional way of reading security threats. Human security places people at the heart of security discourse and calls for a human-centric approach to understand security issues and formulate policies in that regard. The Commission on Human Security (2003, p. 4) defines the concept as 'protecting the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment.' The development community has long been involved in various areas of human development. It is by virtue of human security that the intersection of development and security communities has occurred (King & Murray, 2001).

Civil society is elemental to the evolution and development of human society and over the years reflects the ethos of democratic norms and socio-political awareness in any

society. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are not elected or representative groups, rather they encompass a vibrant social interaction by committed individuals. Needless to say, CSOs have become highly proactive and prominent across the world in the last few decades. As per an international alliance of civil society actors called CIVICUS (2011, p. 8), civil society is 'the arena, outside of the family, the state and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests.' Sindh province of Pakistan has its share of civil society involved in various social activities of public concern. Being a backward region of the country, Sindh deserves academic attention with regard to its civil society groups and their role vis-á-vis human security.

To place the discussion in perspective, the article is structured as follows. Scholarship on human security and civil society is explored, followed by an overview of studies on Sindh in that respect. The methodology section covers the methods employed during the study, the sampling technique and the criteria of respondents. It is followed by the results and discussion section. In this section, the state of human security and civil society is covered followed by an analytical glance over the role of civil society in contributing to human security goals in the region. Lastly, the section goes on to elucidate the various challenges faced by CSOs during their efforts in addressing human security challenges in Sindh.

Literature Review

The existing literature offers adequate insight into the conceptual, theoretical and empirical dimensions of human security and civil society. Human security has found substantial and dynamic attention in the post-Cold War era. Additionally, civil society has historically been a dynamic segment of society which has been theorized by various scholars through multiple analytical lenses.

Human Security

The post-Cold War epoch is marked by a renewed and highly multifaceted understanding of security; the era witnessed a nuanced reading of security beyond its traditional state-centric paradigm. In addition to the latter, issues constituting threat but which do not strictly fall within the bracket of state-centric paradigm acquired the label of non-traditional security (NTS). Human security lies at the heart of non-traditional security discourse that has been in vogue in both academic and policy arenas. Taking humans as the referent object, non-traditional security challenges the state-centric and military-oriented notions of security.

In its 1994 Human Development Report, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) came up with the first major definition of human security. The report laments that the concept of security 'has for too long been interpreted narrowly…forgotten were the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives' (UNDP, 1994, p. 22). It goes on to highlight that human security means 'safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression…and protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life' (UNDP, 1994, p. 23). The report enlightens the world regarding seven elements of human security i.e., food security, health security, economic security, personal security, environmental security, community security and political security. Although this definition is widely quoted and discussed, scholars do not hesitate to point out that it is vague and expansive (Paris, 2001). Consequently, definitional elasticity and lack of precision cause

impediments to both research and policy in human security. UNDP's seven elements of human security present interwoven and overlapping dimensions but they are devoid of a coherent framework that could integrate them into a unified concept. On the contrary, Nef (1999) premises his analysis on the elements of the world system to propose an alternative five-fold classification system of human security: ecology/environment, economy, society, polity and culture. As for Nef, a set of bridges hold these subsystems together: economy and environment are tied by resources; economy and society by society forces; society and polity by alliances and brokers; and polity and culture by ideology.

For the fruition of human security objectives, some states have become more proactive, hence the initiative 'human security network' by the Canadian and Norwegian governments. The network consists of states, international agencies, academia, and NGOs committed to the attainment of human security goals (Paris, 2001). Since its inception in 1999, the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) boasts of spearheading over 200 projects across the world. In addition, it was in 2004 that the Human Security Unit (HSU) was formed under the banner of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The unit has since been responsible for managing the UNTFHS. Extending the scope of human security, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) came up with a common understanding of human security in September 2012 through the passage of resolution 66/290. Apart from the socio-economic empowerment of the people, the resolution acknowledges that human security entails the interlinkages between development, peace and human rights (UNGA, 2012). It also highlights the distinctiveness of human security from the responsibility to protect, stressing the governments as being primarily responsible for ensuring the gains in human security. Moreover, scholars affiliated with the World Health Organization (WHO) view human security as a threshold level above generalized poverty, proposing five domains of human security i.e., income, health, education, political freedom and democracy. The indicators formulated by them have been extensively employed by the UN agency and the World Bank (King & Murray, 2001). Nonetheless, countries have employed different conceptual approaches towards human security as indicated by the governments of Canada and Japan respectively. The Canadian government says:

Human security means freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, safety or lives. Canada's agenda focuses on increasing people's safety from the threat of violence. This approach complements both existing efforts focussed on ensuring national security, as well as international efforts to protect human rights and promote human development (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2002).

Japan has embraced an all-encompassing definitional stretch of human security which closely resonates with that of UNDP:

Japan emphasizes 'Human Security' from the perspective of strengthening efforts to cope with threats to human lives, livelihoods and dignity as poverty, environmental degradation, illicit drugs, transnational organized crime, infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, the outflow of refugees and anti-personnel land mines, and has taken various initiatives in this context (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2000).

Civil Society

Having a long history, civil society is one of the integral facets of intellectual development in social sciences. Kastrati (2016) traces the idea of civil society to Roman 'societas civilis' found in Cicero's works. Long before Cicero, Aristotle used the term

'koinonia politikè,' implying different social spheres in which people with various social statuses reside (Anjum, 2010). The renaissance of the concept occurred in the backdrop of the enlightenment period in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries characterized by theories of individual rights and the notion of social contract. Civil society was a social avenue where individuals interacted to forge a social contract, leading to the rule of law and the establishment of a state. Long before the intellectual clarification, there was no distinction between civil society and the state, with civil society being deemed more or less the same thing as political society (Kaldor, 2003). John Locke termed it as an arena cleansed from the 'state of nature – state of inconvenience' and as a source of legitimate political authority based on trust (Dunn, 2000). Tocqueville locates it as a network of non-political entities that check the power of the state and strengthen democracy (Kastrati, 2016). In the larger scheme of civil society, Adam Smith endorsed the idea of 'commercial society' – 'characterized by human needs, market and non-instrumental human relations' (Kaviraj & Khilnani, 2001, p. 20). It is only by virtue of commercial society, he believed, that a greater mode of morality and sympathy could arise amongst people.

The lack of a clear distinction between state and civil society lingers but Hegel rested the in-distinction. He deemed civil society as a horizontally organized sphere which offers avenues for social recognition and individual subjectivity (Kaviraj & Khilnani, 2001). The Hegelian horizontality of civil society hinged on 'bourgeois society' (Bürgerliche Gesellschaft) and was based on 'free play for every idiosyncrasy' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999). Although for other thinkers like Marx and Engels 'the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy' (Marx & Engels, 1959, p. 43). Arguably, Hegelian horizontality resonates with a much-clarified understanding of civil society many decades later. For instance, Habermas locates civil society as a 'network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres' (Habermas, 1998, p. 367). In fact, the Hegelian utility of 'bourgeois society' interestingly became an epistemic tradition, much that it influenced Gramsci's treatment of civil society as instrumentalism. For him, it is an instrument for the Bourgeois class to consolidate its hegemonic grip and an avenue for the working class to instigate counter-hegemony (Dudouet, 2007). Social agitations and the attendant social change across political and socio-economic spectrums, leading to the transition and transformation of different societies (Eastern, Central Europe, South America, Africa) from authoritarian to democratic dispensation have been attributed to civil society (Chandhoke, 2007).

Premised on its non-governmental characterization and liberal configuration, the idea of civil society has morphed to mean the 'arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values' (Centre for Civil Society, 2005) and a platform for 'individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests' (CIVICUS, 2011, p. 8). Over the last several years, there have been evolving conflation, redefinition, and reductionist approaches toward the idea of civil society. For some, it is reduced to the functioning of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), but for others, its functionality transcends the NGO community and increasingly becoming an amalgam of many (organized and unorganized) entities with new organizational structures across physical and digital domains (WEF, 2013) The growing complexion and nuance of the civil society bring up verticality and functionality geared at acting as check on political absolutism, ensure accountability and collaborate in policy-making (Dudouet, 2007). Beyond the Hegelian horizontality, other horizontal functions of civil society are that it allows participatory socialization and service delivery.

Human Security and Civil Society in Sindh

Sindh is the second largest of all four provinces of Pakistan in terms of population. The rural setting of Sindh province is known for large swathes of agricultural terrain, natural resources and dry climate. Nevertheless, it is one of the most marginalized regions when it comes to socio-economic and human development. According to the Pakistan National Human Development Report, Sindh has the second-lowest rural HDI value of 0.485, with the gap between the rural and urban HDI of the province being the highest in the country (Muzaffar, et. al., 2017; Pasha, 2021). The report goes on to highlight that 'Balochistan and Sindh are more widely represented among the poorest 20 per cent compared to their share in the overall national population distribution' (Pasha, 2021, p. 7). This report exposed the vulnerability of rural Sindh, especially in the area of human security – and raised its exigency to be addressed by state and civil society.

CSO groups in Sindh offer avenues for humanitarian action, social service delivery, disaster response and social activism. Hussain et al. (2014) classify civil society in the province into local, virtual, upper Sindh, lower Sindh, rural and urban, provincial, national and international categories. The virtual category is indicative of Sindhi CSOs across digital and social media platforms whereas the international category encompasses international platforms of Sindhi CSO groups such as World Sindhi Congress. There are numerous CSO groups operating across the geographic stretch of the province, with Ghotki and Umerkot being home to 25 and 27 groups respectively.

Ghotki and Umerkot at a Glance

Ghotki district lies in the Northeastern part of Sindh and borders Punjab province. It was a part of the Sukkur district before being declared a separate district in 1993. It consists of five tehsils which refer to administrative subdivisions of a district. The five tehsils are Mirpur Mathelo, Daharki, Ghotki, Ubaro and Khangarh. According to the Census 2017, the district stretches to an area of 6,083 sq km, having a population density of 271.04 sq km (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017a). It has a population of 1,648,708 which is around 3.4% of Sindh's total population of about 47.9 million. The population consists of 850,272 males and 798,271 females, making it 51.6% males and 48.4% females respectively. In addition, 78.1% population resides in rural areas and the remaining 21.9% lives in urban areas (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017a). Apart from that, Umerkot district lies in the Southeastern part of Sindh province. It is the only district in Pakistan with a non-Muslim majority population. It consists of four tehsils namely Kunri, Pithoro, Samaro and Umerkot. The district has an area of 5,608 sq km, having a population density of 191.42 sq km (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017b). It has a population of 1,073,469 which is 2.2% of Sindh's total population. The population consists of 556,470 males and 516,841 females, making it 51.8% males and 48.2 females respectively. 77.3% population resides in rural areas whereas 22.7% lives in urban areas (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017b).

Material and Methods

The study design was ethnographic research. Field visits were conducted in the month of October 2022 in District Ghotki and District Umerkot in Sindh province respectively. A total of 14 days - 7 days in each district. The period of 14 days was adequate because the purpose was not to explore the entirety of Sindh, but to qualitatively explore these two districts only. Furthermore, the relative ease of mobility and community engagement in these areas along with prior cooperation extended to the

researchers from the local community made it possible to complete the data collection in 14 days. Given the ethnographic nature of the study, data collection largely hinges on observations, communicative interactions, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs), which were used to draw inductive generalization on the functioning of civil societies in the province, particularly in the two districts. In addition, the research also employs informal data gathering, based largely on insights derived from community engagement.

District Ghotki has five subdivisions (tehsils) i.e., Ghotki, Mirpur Mathelo, Khangarh, Daharki and Ubaro. District Umerkot has four subdivisions i.e., Umerkot, Pithoro, Samaro and Kunri. A cross-sectional FGD in each subdivision was arranged, making it 9 FGDs in both districts. The respondents of the FGDs were purposively sampled as per the criteria mentioned below, with each FGD consisting of 6 individuals representing diverse strata of society. The time span of each FGD was approximately one hour. In sum, there are 25 functional NGOs in Ghotki and 27 of those in Umerkot. Prominent individuals associated with 15% of functional NGOs – 4 in each district – were approached for the interviews, with each interview lasting for approximately 40 minutes. Informal discussions were also held with a few civil society activists who do not necessarily belong to an NGO but still qualify as civil society activists.

The participants of FGDs were literate individuals of the area who had adequate knowledge about the political and socioeconomic conditions of their locality, in particular, as well as the province and the country in general. They represented diverse strata of society such as peasants, journalists, lawyers, professionals, civil society activists, students and scholars. Specific criteria for FGD participants were: (i) a minimum of 12 years of education (ii) the ability to use the internet and social media (iii) a minimum of 25 years of age. A minimum of 12 years of education has been set as a criterion while keeping in mind that most inhabitants (individuals) of these areas do not possess degrees or higher education but are relatively informed and vibrant in their locality. Hence, their participation in FGDs was not ruled out. With regard to 2nd criterion, social media is home to emerging trends of social activism these days. Therefore, those participants of FGDs were selected who had the ability to use the internet and social media. Lastly, a minimum of 25 years of age was set to ensure that the participants must be mature while having basic exposure in their field/sector. Apart from that, the respondents of the interviews were prominent civil society leaders who have made significant contributions to their area in terms of human security and community service.

Results and Discussion

The findings point to the contextual dynamics as well as the empirical insights of human security and civil society in Sindh province. Although the human security conditions are not encouraging, the services rendered by CSO groups are a respite for the populace. The services offered by these groups are elemental to the humanitarian outlook and public order in District Ghotki and Umerkot. However, the challenges endured by civil society are numerous and multifaceted across intellectual/ideological, organizational, bureaucratic, political and financial fronts. Not only do these challenges undermine the efficiency of CSO groups but also imperil their role in the accomplishment of human security goals.

The State of Human Security in Sindh

The first-hand observation of Sindh during field visits offered a grim picture of dilapidated infrastructure, decimated agricultural terrains, poor lifestyle and abject poverty. The field visit to Sindh took place in a post-natural disaster scenario. Throughout the travel across Sindh, the devastating impact of floods and torrential rains could be seen in the form of submerged villages, destroyed crops and widespread homelessness. As per Sindh's Provincial Disaster Management Authority (2023), the floods affected 12 million population in Sindh, leaving 843 people dead, 8,422 injured and 82,000 displaced. A total of 737,000 houses were fully destroyed, 437,000 livestock were lost and the crop area of 3.78 million hectares was left damaged. With regards to analyzing human security, the study looks at three conceptual approaches of the Commission on Human Security (2003), especially the third approach that broadly pitched human security as issues including but not limited to the settlement of conflicts, observance of human rights, access to clean water, food, education, etc. (Ogata, 2005). The insights collected from the field visit further enrich the approach to this conceptual paradigm. One of the scholars in Ghotki argued, 'the analytical grasp of human security in the context of Sindh cannot be attained without accounting for the long history of bad governance and the deeply entrenched feudal culture.'

Although both districts are reeling from dismal human security conditions, Ghotki is slightly better than Umerkot in that regard. Table 1 below depicts the human security profile of both districts. The reason behind Ghotki's slightly better profile is the fact that it is relatively developed and industrialized with the presence of oil and gas industries, power plants and agro-based industries. However, the respondents nearly concurred with the notion that the socioeconomic benefits they receive are quite minuscule while most of the resources and profits belong to the corporations. Umerkot was among the districts worst affected by floods which could be seen in the form of submerged villages, inundated crops and homelessness. Nevertheless, it has traditionally been known for religious harmony and peaceful coexistence amongst people from different identities. Umerkot is also the only district in Pakistan with non-Muslim majority.

Table 1
Human Security Indicators

Indicators	Ghotki	Umerkot
People Having Access to Basic Sanitation	38.1%	30.7%
Number of Basic Health Units	34	32
Number of Rural Health Centres	3	6
Patients per Doctor	4,514	6,457
Infant Mortality Rate (Out of 1000)	67	21
Number of Schools	2,231	2,745
Number of Non-functional Schools	23%	45.4%
Male Literacy Rate	58.9%	42.1%
Female Literacy Rate	20.3%	10.8%
Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index	0.3	0.4

Human Security Indicators – Data retrieved from Research and Training Wing – Planning & Development Department of Sindh

Understanding Civil Society in Sindh

Sindh province of Pakistan is home to various groups, associations and platforms that fairly qualify as civil society. Though the dedicated individuals associated with CSO groups could be seen in large numbers, most of the people deemed their relationship with CSO groups as voluntary and temporary. Nevertheless, respondents demonstrated a fairly good understanding of civil society and its functions. According to a prominent civil society activist in Umerkot:

It is wrong to deem NGOs as the sole constituent element of CSOs in Sindh. In essence, civil society reflects the collective voice and acts of society emanating from NGOs, professional bodies, unions, informal associations and the intellectual community for the purpose of social service delivery and state accountability.

It could also be stressed that civil society is a pivotal social actor which ensures the fulfillment of the social contract. Drawing on the ideas of enlightenment thinkers, some of the CSO groups in Sindh could be seen working in that direction. For example, an organization in Umerkot sensitizes the youth regarding the exchange of rights and duties between the public and the state, and arranges sessions to reflect on emerging political and socioeconomic developments. The contextual reality of civil society in Ghotki and Umerkot is characterized by loosely organized groups generally undertaking voluntary and informal nature of activities.

The composition of CSO groups across different parts of Sindh is not entirely identical. It is safe to infer through various interactions and observations that civil society in the Northern part of Sindh is driven mainly by journalists and professionals. In the Southern part, it is led primarily by NGOs and nationalist groups. For both conceptual and contextual analysis - composition and underlying dynamics of civil society in Sindh, we turn to Mary Kaldor's conceptual underpinning. Kaldor (2003) offers interesting three classifications/versions of civil society, namely: the activism version, the neoliberal version and the post-modern version. For her, the activism version 'referred to the idea of a realm outside political parties where individuals and groups aimed to democratise the state, to re-distribute power, rather than to capture power in a traditional sense' (Kaldor, 2003, p. 9). Whereas the neoliberal version encompasses those CSOs that are neither controlled by the state nor the market, filling up the gaps left by the government and market while offering social services. Lastly, the post-modern version of CSOs denounces activism and the neoliberal version as a Western construct and emphasises indigenous and alternative forms of civil society that are often neglected by the Western conceptualisation of civil society. Based on the field visit observation and interaction with the local community, in the case of Sindh, the activism version takes the lead and makes itself visible in both the physical and digital arena. It is followed by the neoliberal version which became highly visible during the COVID-19-induced lockdown and recent floods. However, the post-modern version is virtually non-existent in both theory and practice with regard to Sindh.

Role of Civil Society in Advancing Human Security

Since the field visit was conducted a few months after the floods, environmental security was high on the agenda amongst different segments of society. Upon careful observation, there could not be found any government agency engaged in relief or rehabilitation endeavors. This exposed the seriousness of the government's claim regarding protecting the people from humanitarian catastrophe. However, civil society was at the forefront when it came to the relief and rehabilitation of the affected populace.

Throughout Sindh, there was the visible manifestation of social activism in the form of fundraising used in the provision of rations and tents to the affected victims. Nevertheless, there were concerns with regard to the *modus operandi* of the activities. Locals in Umerkot and Ghotki deplored that although CSOs had been rendering humanitarian services, the focus was on their marketing and publicity, the dedication of the CSOs fell short of sustainability and transparency of their efforts. When the same point was raised before some CSO managers in Umerkot and Ghotki, they highlighted how CSOs do not operate in a vacuum; they have financial and geographical limitations which inhibit their functions with regard to sustainability. Moreover, the CSOs were not well connected with each other and they could not even collectively produce any data as to how much they contributed to post-disaster humanitarian activities. The data could have been instrumental in comparing and contrasting the civil society's humanitarian services with those of the government.

Umerkot and Ghotki districts host a variety of CSO groups which are rendering a spectrum of services which include personal security, political security, community security and economic security. This depicts the 'people-centered approach' of human security geared at empowering individuals to better cope with multifaceted threats. The aforesaid security approach of the CSOs in the two districts resonates with the three conceptual approaches of the Commission on Human Security (2003), especially the third approach that characterizes human security in terms of, but not limited to, the settlement of conflicts, observance of human rights, access to clean water, food, education, etc. (Ogata, 2005). Within this framework, this study situates the operations of CSOs in the two districts as elemental to human security.

CSOs in the districts offer services that align with human security goals as enunciated in the report of the Commission on Human Security (2003). The Commission's second approach to human security calls for empowering individuals and communities. Similarly, their efforts reinforce human security as that aspect of security that emphasizes the pertinence of basic rights of people and enabling environment for growth (Axworthy, 2004). The fieldwork helped in unveiling CSOs in Ghotki and Umerkot rendering vocational training and skill development to the local population. One of the managers of an NGO highlighted, 'We offer vocational training and skill development sessions to locals but our scope is quite limited. The lack of economic opportunities has a nullifying effect as the locals cannot commercialize those skills for their economic benefit.' Thus, civil society cannot be viewed in isolation from the economic affairs of society.

Empowerment comes in different shapes and forms. Reiterating Kaldor's activist version of civil society, it was interesting to understand how the endeavors of CSOs in the Umerkot district brought about the intellectual and cognitive empowerment of the locals and by extension fulfilment of human security. During an FGD in Umerkot, social activists narrated the case of a public library which has been operational since the 1980s in the Somaro town of Umerkot. It was usurped by the District Superintendent of Police (DSP) and turned into personal property. To revert the usurpation, social activists in the town organized peaceful protests that resultantly compelled the DSP to vacate the library and knowledge space was again open to the public. However, the library still lies empty with no books and facilities provided by the government. The activists said 'This is as far as the civil society can go. It cannot take up the role of government. No matter how hard we try, the human security problems cannot be addressed without the effective and sincere intervention of the government.' This assertion demonstrates the lacuna in civil society-government relations that ought to be addressed diligently.

The civil society in the province has been quite proactive in terms of advocacy and pushing for legislative initiatives. The findings corroborate the study by Rohwerder (2015) that the passage of the Domestic Violence Law 2013 in Sindh is largely attributed to the advocacy by civil society in the province which eventually created a domino effect across the country leading to The Balochistan Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill 2014 (Bill No.07 of 2014), The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016, and The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence Against Women (Prevention And Protection) Act 2021 respectively. In this regard, the CSO groups of Umerkot were found to be more effective than those in Ghotki as far as their political outreach and legislative activism were concerned. By extension, the findings do not fully affirm the studies of Hussain et al. (2014) and Ali et al. (2021) which revealed that the humanitarian agenda is a secondary focus for Sindhi activists. Although many CSO groups could be constrained by financial, organizational and bureaucratic hurdles, their focus and primacy for humanitarian concerns were found to be intact. This realization may further help to understand the enduring numerous challenges that impede civil society in Sindh with regard to efficiency.

Challenges Faced by Civil Society in Sindh

Certain imperatives in the districts expose the strengths and limitations of the CSOs, hence the challenges in the fruition of human security. The challenges are widespread across ideological/intellectual, organizational, bureaucratic, political and financial fronts that thwart CSOs' strides in terms of human security in the region. A Ghotki-based scholar and activist highlighted, 'the ideological/intellectual failure of CSOs in Sindh deprives them of sense of purpose and clarity with regards to their role and vision. There is no system of internal training and sessions in that regard.' These might be the reasons why CSOs end up being inconsequential groups merely raising voices but lacking any ideological basis and intellectual understanding of the issues. Furthermore, the lack of organizational basis and hierarchical structure is a colossal challenge. A member of a CSO in Ghotki pointed out:

A meaningful civil society activism can only originate from a solid organizational strength in which there is a proper chain of command, well-defined hierarchy and proper management of funding. Unfortunately, that is seldom the case throughout CSOs in Sindh. Consequently, CSOs are always exposed to both internal and external threats.

Owing to the lack of ideological/intellectual and organizational strength, the CSOs are sometimes prone to manipulation and instrumentalized for purposes outside their realm. A small number of groups serve at the will and pleasure of local elites. Locals in both Ghotki and Umerkot stated that, at the outset of election season, some activists act as political agents of electoral candidates to mobilize voters. Sometimes they resort to manipulation and coercion to mobilize voters and intimidate opponents. This resonates with Gramscian theorization of civil society as an instrument for hegemonic rule by the elite. Moreover, Mary Kaldor stresses the need for procedural accountability as internal management of civil society which 'depends on the social composition of the group, forms of funding and the type of organisation' (Kaldor, 2003, p. 9). The lack of organisational capacity and strength of CSOs in Sindh deprives them of procedural accountability, hence rendering them ineffective and vulnerable to powerful elements in the society.

As an entity with the state system, either state-civil society interaction or civil society- bureaucracy is not unlikely (Pérez-Díaz, 1978). The constitutional and legal provisions require a fair degree of checks and balances upon civil society exercised by

the bureaucratic brass. However, bureaucratic oversight has a tendency to turn into bureaucratic hurdles that have increased significantly over the years. It was since the Abbottabad operation in 2011 that regulatory noose began to tighten around the NGOs across the country. The relative ease and autonomy with which they rendered their duties began to diminish. Then came Pakistan's grey-listing by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) bringing an additional regulatory burden on NGOs. One of the CSO managers in Umerkot asserted, 'By no means do we wish to challenge the prerogative of the state to exercise checks and balances on us. But the state cannot freely strangle and obstruct our functions concerning human security.'

As for political hurdles, CSO members pointed out the intimidation and coercion by local politicians as well as politicians' indifference to policy input given by civil society. The COVID-19 pandemic was one of such glaring instances wherein the gap between civil society and politico-bureaucratic authorities became much more evident. According to an activist in Ghotki, 'Neither politicians nor bureaucracy kept us in the loop regarding COVID-19 and the nature of imminent lockdown that followed.' If politicians and bureaucrats had deliberated with civil society before the lockdown and informed them about all policy measures, CSO actors would have been better equipped to support government agencies and offer services to the affected people.

Combined with the salient socio-economic deprivation in terms of education, healthcare and livelihood, the situation in the districts is further complicated by the undemocratic relationship between the local politicians and the people. During one of the interviews in Ghotki, a police officer exposed the undemocratic and wrongful utility of the security forces – according to him 'Almost the entire police force works at the whims and wishes of feudal lords and politicians. They instrumentalize the police to consolidate power and coerce people into subjugation.' It is safe to infer that civil society cannot offer meaningful services in an environment punctuated by coercion, intimidation, and undemocratic proclivity. Besides, such an intimidating environment contradicts other elements of human security that stress the enjoyment of civil and political rights, unpopulated environment, political freedom (Paris, 2001; McDonald, 2010) and freedom from violence or circumstance that may jeopardize the right to life, liberty, and property – all three cardinal rights upon which other sets of rights are erected.

Another facet that emerged to the fore was what the activists termed an industrial-politico-bureaucratic nexus. This notion came up in the context of an environmental security concern raised by activists as well as locals in Ghotki. They believe that big corporations operating in Daharki city have been dumping chemical waste into groundwater, a violation of environmental rules and safeguards. Consequently, the groundwater of Daharki has turned into poison, being a source of many water-borne diseases. They disclosed that a leading corporation in Ghotki gave away Rs. 3 billion rupees to local politicians and bureaucracy in 2022. This is the reason why politicians and institutions turn a blind eye to corporate excesses and leave the masses at the mercy of corporate irresponsibility. Civil society actors raised alarm over this issue but found themselves powerless before what they labelled as the industrial-politico-bureaucratic nexus at play in Ghotki.

Civil society groups are reeling from financial constraints that undermine their operations and the sustainability of services. The ongoing economic crunch has had far-reaching repercussions on the CSOs as well. Almost all CSO actors in Ghotki and Umerkot concurred with the notion that the country's economic challenges have reduced the number of donors as well as the amount of donations they receive. People associated

with civil society groups are either completely leaving the CSO groups or reducing the amount of their voluntary services in order to pursue professions that offer them tangible financial outcomes. One of the activists in Ghotki was of the view:

Civil society cannot function effectively in capitalist societies like ours because people's ideas and activities are driven mainly by capital. CSO groups are viewed as unproductive and people start detaching themselves from them to pursue wealth-oriented social roles.

All these hurdles combined have a negative impact on the efficiency and role of civil society in the region. Resultantly, CSO groups are deprived of all the strength and capability to take action for human security when it is needed the most.

Conclusion

The intangibility of NTS does not diminish the pertinence of the challenges especially those falling within the realm of human security. Even when it is broadly termed, the challenges posed by the multifaceted human insecurity transcend the capability of the state, and instead require the joint effort of civil society organizations and the state, most especially in developing economies like Pakistan. The need for an organic and in-depth understanding of the cross-pollinating relations between civil society and human security in specific sociocultural contexts is imperative. This qualitative – ethnographic study in District Ghotki and Umerkot in Sindh province of Pakistan has made important revelations with regard to human security and civil society, coupled with an understanding of the nexus between the two concepts.

The study sheds light on the human security and civil society landscape of Sindh province, with a special focus on the two districts. The CSO groups are rendering significant services with regard to different elements of human security, in some instances even surpassing the state. Nevertheless, the compounding effect of multiple intellectual/ideological, bureaucratic, political and financial lines. These challenges cannot be viewed in isolation from the governance crisis and socioeconomic degradation that has been plaguing the province for decades. Nevertheless, there is a need for further academic scholarship in the marginalized regions to better acquire localized perspectives for an enriched understanding of the nexus between human security and civil society.

Recommendations

- The CSO groups may be allowed to attain as well as exercise autonomy in their organizational and operational tasks. The undue influence of influential groups or government agencies would constrain CSO groups' ability to deliver. In this regard, the government and CSOs could learn from the case studies of other countries such as Norway and Japan.
- The actors involved in the operations of CSOs should have adequate analytical understanding of human security and its various dimensions. This would allow them to translate their analytical rigor into real work on the ground.
- There should be an effective and fair collaboration between CSO groups and government agencies. The government agencies would be ill-advised to exercise excessive scrutiny over CSO groups. A proper relationship between would channelize both the government's and CSO's efforts towards the accomplishment of human security goals.

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