

## **Civil Society, Good Governance, and Anti-Corruption Initiatives: The Case of Bangladesh**

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**Abstract:** This paper discussed about the civil society organization, dominant liberal views regarding the role of civil society organizations in promoting good governance and reducing corruption, the analyses of the alternative views regarding civil society organizations' role in ensuring good governance, curbing corruption, and the challenges civil society organizations face in reducing corruption in the context of Bangladesh. The civil society organizations, although they have played critical roles in various political transitions in Bangladesh, are now weak, politicized, and co-opted by the state. The civil society's capacity to act against corruption depends on the nature of the state, a balance of power between the state and civil society organizations, and accountability, legitimacy, representation, and trust in civil society organizations in the broader society they are working, which are absent at this moment in Bangladesh.

### **1. Introduction**

Since the beginning of the 1990s, due to the growing occurrence of corruption and high-profile corruption scandals both in developed and developing societies, corruption has become a high priority topic in the discussion of international development, development economics, comparative politics, and other social science disciplines (Harriss-White & White, 1996). Bilateral donors, multinational financial institutions, and transnational civil society organizations (TCSOs) provided much of the impetus for the debate of the corruption and anti-corruption initiatives since the beginning of the 1990s as part of ensuring good governance in newly democratic countries and new international regimes of anti-corruption emerged to address the serious problem. International institutions such as OECD and the United Nations (UN) have adopted conventions that their member states pass laws prohibiting bribery and extortion. International financial institutions, particularly the World Bank, have announced programs aimed at ensuring transparency in their projects (Heineman and Heimann, 2006). Civil society organizations, including domestic and international NGOs (INGO), have been considered influential actors in counteracting corruption and balancing the power of the unaccountable state and corrupt markets. Bilateral donors, multilateral financial institutions, and various philanthropic organizations provided generous financial supports to civil society organizations for different purposes of governance reforms, including fighting against corruption. However, despite generous support from donor agencies, civil society organizations failed to curb corruption in many developing countries, including Bangladesh. The research investigates the reasons for civil society's failure to curb corruption in the context of Bangladesh.

The chapter is divided into various sections: section one defines civil society organization; section two discusses dominant liberal views regarding the role of civil

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society organizations in promoting good governance and reducing corruption; section three analyses the alternative views regarding civil society organizations' role in ensuring good governance and curbing corruption; section four discusses the challenges civil society organizations face in reducing corruption in the context of Bangladesh; and section five summarizes the previous sections and draws a conclusion.

## **2. Defining Civil Society**

The civil society concept has re-emerged in discussion over democracy, good governance, and development in the 1990s, but it has a long history of political, social, and economic thoughts (Lewis, 2004; Davis & McGregor, 2000; Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004). The modern concept of civil society evolved in the West with the rise of capitalism that not only changed the production processes but also altered the state-society relations (Davis & McGregor, 2000; Lewis, 2004). Early modern political thinkers like Hobbes, Locke, and many other scholars, in their writing on the origin of the state, didn't classify civil and political society and used these two terms interchangeably (Davis & McGregor, 2000).

Sixteen-century Enlightenment thinkers considered civil society as "a type of political association which places its members under the influence of its laws and thereby ensures peaceful order and good government" (Davis & McGregor, 2000). The meaning and definition of civil society have changed over a long history of practice (Davis & McGregor, 2000; Lewis, 2004). After 1750, scholars including Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, Thomas Paine, and Alexis de Tocqueville were concerned about authoritarian and despotic tendencies of the state, and they defined civil society as a distinct entity playing a controlling and counterbalancing tyrannical power of the state (Davis & McGregor, 2000).

Contemporary scholars divided institutions into three broad categories: state, market, and civil society; they regard civil society as a 'space' independent of the state and market, and other scholars associate it with the 'voluntary sector' (Carothers, 1999). Civil society is commonly defined as "the population of groups formed for collective purposes primarily outside of the state and marketplace" (Van Rooy 1998: 30, in Lewis, 2004: 301). According to L. David Brown & Archana Kalegaonkar (1999:2), "the state is the concern with public goods and mobilizing resources through state authority; and the market is concerned with private goods and services and mobilizing resources through market exchange. Civil society, by contrast, is concerned with common goods defined by social groups and it mobilizes resources through social visions and values".

Peter R. Davis and J. Allister McGregor, (2000:48) defined civil society as "as an associational arena between the family and the state, usually, not including the organizations and institutions of the state, or the market." According to Larry Diamond (1994: 5), civil society is: "the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, and autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules." Civil society fulfills two functions in a democratic society: pluralist and educational and integrative (Hadenius & Uggle, 1996). Two conditions are necessary to discharge pluralist function: "the organizations should be autonomous from the state, and they should seek to influence state policy as well" (Hadenius & Uggle, 1996: 1624).

Civil society organizations include all the institutions and groups outside the state and market, including neighborhood groups, non-governmental developmental organizations, cooperatives, local clubs for community welfare, and many other organizations. It also includes various agencies that political scientists traditionally called interest groups – not just advocacy NGOs but also Trade Unions, professional associations, labor unions, chamber of comers, and other voluntary organizations (Davis & McGregor, 2000).

The civil society performs various activities, and they differ enormously in their focus, objectives, activities, programs, membership, and organizational structure. Some civil society organizations are non-political and local, and their primary purposes are to provide some essential services to local people based on their organizational aims and objectives. However, some other civil society organizations are political, and their goals are broad, and they work for their corporate and professional interests. Sometimes, they also act for public benefits, including to keep state and market institutions accountable to their citizens and also to work as government or business watchdogs. There are broadly two views regarding the role of civil society in promoting democracy and fighting against corruption in various countries: dominant liberal views and alternative views.

### **3. Civil Society, Good Governance, and Anti-Corruption Initiatives**

#### **- The Dominant Liberal Views:**

In general, corruption is less in mature and consolidated democracies due to the rule of law, accountability, and transparency. The role of political elites is vital for democratic transition and consolidation, and democratic consolidation is only possible if the political elites are committed to democracy (Diamond, 1999). However, several scholars (Diamond, 1994, 1999; Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004; Hadenius & Uggle, 1996; McLaverty, 2002) argue that other institutions, both state and non-state organizations, include civil society organizations, also have critical roles in the democratic consolidation process. They claim that autonomous and robust civil society organizations, including NGOs, can contribute significantly to the democracy-building process by mobilizing ordinary citizens, creating awareness regarding social and political problems, consolidating democratic values and norms in the society, and monitoring activities of state officials. The first and most essential democratic function of civil society is "containing the power of democratic governments, checking their potential abuses and violations of the law, and subjecting them to public scrutiny" (Diamond, 1994: 7).

In some newly democratic countries, political parties were weak and fragmented, political apathy was high due to long communist and authoritarian rules, including military rules, and political corruption, including vote-buying, was widespread. In these post-communist and authoritarian countries, civil society organizations played a critical role in promoting and sustaining democracy by providing leadership training, preventing electoral fraud by disclosing electoral irregularities, and affirming the legitimacy of the election results by monitoring elections (Diamond, 1994; McLaverty, 2002). The role of civil society organizations is also important where traditional interest groups are weak, major political parties are unable to represent the interests of ordinary citizens, and governments are unaccountable to people (Diamond, 1994). Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) articulate the political demands of ordinary citizens and force governments to reform political systems, including ensuring political rights, enacting new laws, and

signing international treaties in providing global governance. In some other countries, civil society organizations also play a critical role in enhancing accountability and transparency of state institutions and strengthening the rule of law, which are a prerequisite for democracy and good governance.

Some other scholars (Diamond, 1994; Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004; Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004) argue that civil society not only strengthens liberal democracy but also promotes economic success by protecting the economic rights of individuals and business organizations. An active, viable, and strong civil society provides inputs on economic policy issues, protects private entrepreneurs from state oppression, creates awareness among ordinary citizens regarding the benefits of a free-market economy, and facilitates the growth of private enterprises by protecting property rights. Nonprofit organizations also play a critical role in creating and sustaining social capital (bonds of trust among individuals and groups), which is necessary for a democratic society and a free-market economy (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004; Diamond, 1994). High social trust reduces the cost of economic transactions and ensures the sustainability of the free market economy. Both state and non-state actors contribute to social capital formation, but the role of non-governmental organizations is much more important because they "may be more capable than government institutions of generating social norms and trust, cooperation, and mutual support due to their non-coercive character and appeals to charitable and social motives" (Backman and Smith, 2000: 362).

Another group of scholars (Diamond, 1994, 1999; Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004) discusses the role of civil society organizations in promoting good governance. Scholars point out four broad reasons for the growth of civil society organizations and their growing involvement in governance reform initiatives. First, many countries embrace democracy as their form of government after the fall of the communist and authoritarian regimes in various parts of the world. However, the democratic deficit was high in newly democratic states, and governments were overly centralized. Such a condition created the opportunity for NGOs to contribute to governance reform initiatives at the national and global levels (Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004). Second, NGOs played important advocacy roles in many countries due to a lack of organized interest groups. They influence government policies in both formal and informal ways by meeting with state officials and by providing alternative solutions to critical social and economic problems. CSOs also affect corporate agenda setting and attempt to make them accountable to ordinary citizens. NGOs' relations with governments and businesses differ widely, and their relations are both cooperative and antagonistic in many issue areas depending on the nature of the state and the formation of CSOs in any particular country (Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004; Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004). Sometimes CSOs cooperate with the states by providing policy inputs for sound and general policymaking. They also collaborate with businesses implementing some social policies funded by business organizations (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004). Third, due to neoliberal economic reforms in the 1980s and 1990s and downsizing of the government's social welfare activities created a space for civil society organizations and, more specifically for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in providing necessary public services such as education, health care, and micro-credit (Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004; Davis & McGregor, 2000; Leftwich, 1993). Corruption in the state sector encouraged donors to assist NGOs instead of state institutions to offer necessary services to poor people with efficiency and relatively low costs (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004).

Fourth, the emergence of global media also helped to create a positive attitude towards civil society organizations. At the basic level, CSOs gather facts, educate people by disclosing the facts, and mobilize public opinion to put pressure on government actors or corporations (Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004; Grabosky, 1995). CSOs organize various seminars and conferences both at the national and global levels and maintain communication with national and international civil society organizations to influence government policies and make corporations socially responsible both locally and globally. Another important aspect of information gathering is to monitor and evaluate government policies for policy effectiveness (Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004).

#### **4 Civil Society, Good Governance, and Anti-Corruption Initiatives: Alternative Views**

Some other scholars (Mercer, 2002, 2003; Fukuyama, 2001; Bickford, 1995; Carothers, 1999; Najam, 1996; Jalali, 2001; Leftwich, 1993) are critical about positive normative perception about civil society organizations including NGOs. They argue that civil society is inherently good for development and democracy is not supported by empirical evidence. Claire Mercer (2003:747) claims that "If civil society is to be found in NGOs, a view strongly supported by many development donors, then recent research revealing the undemocratic practices of NGOs in Africa must surely dispel the myth of civil society's 'innate goodness'." In most instances, NGOs are donor-dependent and subject to the personal rule; they represent elite interests and rarely challenge, or they cannot challenge undemocratic actions of the state (Mercer, 2003). NGOs are also corrupt in a highly corrupt country, like the state institutions and business organizations (Mercer, 2002). Creating civil society by providing financial and technical resources is also highly challenging and counterproductive and may hinder the development of indigenous civil Society. Francis Fukuyama (2001:18) argues:

It's hard for outsiders to foster civil society in countries where it has no local roots. Foundations and government aid agencies seeking to promote voluntary associations have often managed to create a stratum of local elites who become skilled at writing grant proposals; the organizations they found tend to have little durability once the outside source of funds dries up. Fukuyama (2001) further argues that it is impossible to create civil society organizations by using public policies or providing aids to non-governmental organizations.

Civil Society is the byproduct of historical experiences, tradition, religion, and other cultural and social norms. Some other scholars (Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004; Mercer, 2003; Fukuyama, 2001; Bickford, 1995; Jalali, 2001) argue some severe drawbacks of NGOs' activities in developing countries. Geographical distribution and concern about who regulates CSOs is a significant issue. The majority of powerful INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organizations) are based in North and West, particularly in European countries. These INGOs rely on institutional donors, including multilateral financial institutions and big corporations, for their survival and growth, severely reducing their organizational autonomy. According to Bridget M. Hutter & Joan O'Mahony (2004: 9), "CSOs perform less effectively than their popular image suggests when they are dependent upon either official funding or a single source of funding." When these INGOs support southern NGOs, they impose their values, moral judgments, and self-interests, including the interests of institutional donors, including big Multinational Corporations

(MNCs). Non-governmental organizations from Developing countries are dependent on foreign funding due to a lack of domestic income sources that reduce their independence, create asymmetric relations between the donors and NGOs in the developing countries, and decrease their legitimacy to ordinary citizens. Their ability to represent public interests is also compromised due to their financial dependence on institutional donors, compliance rules and regulations of INGOs, and asymmetric relations with the donors (Bratton, 1989).

The boundaries between the state and civil society are challenging to distinguish in many countries. Civil society organizations act like another wing of the state. The differences between the NGOs and market actors are also becoming narrower due to the commercialization of activities of major southern NGOs. However, commercialization is also against the aims and objectives of civil society organizations. L. David Brown and Archana Kalegoankar (1999: 6-7) argue:

"Relations with the market sector pose a serious problem as foreign sources available to NGOs increase because those resources will attract agencies which are nominally NGOs but which have been organized for market reasons. In some regions, already high percentages of non-governmental organizations competing for funds reflect the capture of civil society organizations and their conversion to a profit-seeking role."

Angela M. Eikenberry and Jodie Drapal Kluver (2004: 136) argue that: "It is extremely important for nonprofit organizations to focus on their organizational missions. Yet, the organizational mission is threatened when for-profit partnerships, the generation of commercial revenue, and social entrepreneurship activities emphasize profit at the expense of a nonprofit organization's mission." CSO's activities are justified because they promote more representative and democratic regulations (Hutter & O'Mahony, 2004). However, some scholars (Edwards and Hulme, 1995; Grabosky, 1995; Ayres and Braithwaite, 1992; Meidinger, 1987; Amal, 2014) argue that CSOs' involvements in regulation undermine democratic norms and representation. Peter N. Grabosky argues that CSOs are "one step removed from the democratic process." According to Bridget M. Hutter & Joan O'Mahony (2004: 8): "They [CSOs] are, however generally less open to public scrutiny than government bodies, and the multiple accountabilities they do have create difficulties of prioritizing and reconciling the many demands placed upon them. Indeed, to the extent that they represent particular interest groups, they do not necessarily act in the interests of the wider public." Instead of a cohesive force, civil society organizations create division among various ethnic groups and political factions in some countries, detrimental to democracy promotion (Amal, 2014). In the context of Indonesia, M. Khusna Amal (2014: 55) argues:

Civil Society was often used as a political vehicle, not to produce civilization and social capital but rather as an attraction in the socio-political conflict involving the masses to the grassroots. Therefore, it was not surprising that civil Society brought more harm (mudharat) than benefits (maslahat). Instead of encouraging political changes towards a more democratic way, civil Society contributed to weakening the pillars of democracy (the decline of democracy).

Some scholars (Carothers, 1999; Fukuyama, 2001; Davis & McGregor, 2000; Dasgupta, 2000) argue that the idea that civil society members only work for public goods is controversial. Thomas Carothers (1999:21) claims that "Although many civic activists

may feel they speak for the public good, the public interest is a highly contested domain." Some scholars (Dasgupta, 2000; Carothers, 1999) consider civil society associations as a private good. People have their self-interests when they involve in organizational activities. For example, lawyers or journalists, or laborers create their organizations for their self-interests or community interests. They try to influence the government's policies for their community interests or the interests of the leaders of these associations. Francis Fukuyama (1999:12) argues, "One person's civic engagement is another's rent-seeking; much of what constitutes civil society can be described as interest groups trying to divert public resources to their favored causes, whether sugar-beet farming, women's health care or the protection of biodiversity." Fukuyama (2001:12) further argues, "There is no guarantee that self-styled public interest NGOs represent real public interests. It is possible that too active an NGO sector may represent an excessive politicization of public life, which can either distort public policy or lead to deadlock."

### **5. Civil Society, Political Opportunity Structure, Anti-corruption Initiatives, and their Limitations in the Context of Bangladesh**

Since its inception, successive governments in Bangladesh have introduced new rules and regulations, enacted anti-corruption legislation, initiated institutional reforms, and adopted an administrative decentralization strategy to curb corruption. The country also created new institutions including the Bureau of Anti-Corruption in 1974 and the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2004 aimed at combating systemic corruption. The government also introduced the "Right to Information Act (RTIA) in 2009 to make administration accountable and transparent. However, despite these initiatives, corruption is still rampant and a way of life in Bangladesh. Scholars often use two broad approaches or models in their efforts to explain corruption and anti-corruption: first, the top-down or the principal-agent model; and second, 'collective action model' engaging all stakeholders such as state institutions, civil society organizations, and private business associations to address serious corruption problem.

**i) The Top-Down or Principal-Agent Model** is applied in various disciplines in social science, including studies related to the decisions and behavior of bureaucrats and elected politicians or public officials. This model argues that institutional factors influence the decisions of individuals. The model has two basic assumptions: first, principals and agents have conflicting interests; and second, agents have more information than principles, which creates information asymmetry between them (Waterman & Meier, 1998). In this model, strategies to reduce corruption are commonly conceptualized as a principal-agent problem (Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Klitgaard, 1988). Scholars argue that corruption happens because principles (citizens) are unable to control the behavior of agents - mainly influential politicians and bureaucrats, who are mostly self-interested and opportunists. When bureaucrats and politicians have the opportunity to make illegal money, generally, they use it. Agents assess costs and benefits before engaging in unlawful activities. If risks are high, agents avoid unlawful activities. On the other hand, if risks are low or they can manage risks, they engage in fraudulent activities such as bribery, commission, and accounting irregularities (Rose-Ackerman, 1999).

The purpose of anti-corruption strategies is to create institutional constraints on the behavior of agents through policy and institutional reforms such as decreasing discretionary powers of the ministers, bureaucrats, and other influential political and

administrative actors, who misuse and abuse state power for personal and institutional gains. Anti-corruption aims to make corrupt behavior costly by increasing the likelihood of detection and punishment if corrupt people are convicted (Persson, Rothstein & Teorell, 2010; Klitgaard, 1988; Quah, 2003). The purpose of institutional reforms is to provide rewards to honest agents that encourage others to follow the laws and social norms (Persson, Rothstein & Teorell, 2010). Reducing corruption through institutional reforms is also known as a top-down anti-corruption strategy.

In a mature and well-functioned democracy, there are various ways to make politicians and bureaucrats accountable to principles or ordinary citizens, such as regular free and fair elections (vertical accountability), and checks and balance of power, the rule of law, free press, and separation of authority (horizontal accountability). However, these preconditions are absent in many illiberal democracies and authoritarian neo-patrimonial states, including Bangladesh. Implementation of downward anti-corruption initiatives is tough in highly corrupt countries because due to the lack of political will.

Major regulatory institutions in Bangladesh that are responsible for detecting and punishing evil acts such as the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), parliamentary committees, police, courts, and audit agencies are very corrupt and inefficient. In most instances, selection, promotion, rewards in key positions are based on political consideration rather than merit-based criteria. Due to the politicization of bureaucracy and judiciary, these organizations lack institutional autonomy, and they also have limited power and authority to investigate high-profile corruption cases involving top-level politicians and high-level bureaucrats who are politically connected with the ruling party.

In most instances, the ruling party uses police and other para-military organizations to oppress leaders and supporters of opposition political parties and other civil society organizations or individuals who are against the government or protest illegitimate activities of ruling elites. Due to a lack of neutrality and professionalism, most of the anti-corruption institutions lost their legitimacy to ordinary citizens. However, neutrality, efficiency, and professionalism are necessary to maintain institutional integrity and validity. As a result, anti-corruption initiatives by state actors almost always fail to produce any positive outcome in Bangladesh (Kochanek, 2000; Zafrullah and Siddique, 2001; Khan, 2002; Sobhan, 2004). Principles are unable to control agents in Bangladesh due to various reasons such as lack of horizontal accountability (absence of free and fair elections), the patron-client framework of Bangladesh politics, criminalization of politics, including the nexus among criminal politicians and illegal gangs, corrupt officials, and big businesses who rely on state patronage for their rapid capital accumulation (Sobhan, 2004). Principals are unorganized, weak, and unable to act against the powerful state or state-supported actors due to lack of political opportunities such as lack of freedom of press and expression, fear of oppression, political apathy due to hopelessness, and absence of appropriate institutional arrangement in mobilizing public demands.

## **ii) Corruption as a Collective Action Problem:**

According to the collective action problem model, most citizens condemn corrupt acts, but they can't prevent corruption due to what is called 'the collective action problem' (Jenkins & Goetz, 1999; Persson, Rothstein & Teorell, 2010; Rothstein, 2011). According to this model, corruption is a serious problem for all stakeholders, such as the government, ordinary citizens, and business organizations. Although corruption is a



common enemy to all stakeholders, still collective action against corruption is not an easy task. It requires time, expertise, continuous negotiation, and close collaboration among various actors (OECD, 2020). It also requires trust among various actors with diverse interests, which is absent in Bangladesh at this moment.

Considering the intensity of the corruption in many countries, many scholars and donor organizations (World Bank, 2008; OECD, 2020) started to focus on the 'collective approach' or 'stakeholder approach' since the beginning of the 1990s in formulating an appropriate anti-corruption strategy. Based on experiences of various countries, scholars realized that state institutions or any non-state actor alone are not able to prevent corruption massively, and effective cooperation, collaboration, and coordination are required between the public and private sectors to develop successful anti-corruption strategies (OECD, 2020). According to the World Bank Institute (2008:10), collective action is:

A collaborative and sustained process of cooperation between stakeholders. It increases the impact and credibility of individual action, brings vulnerable individual players into an alliance of like-minded organizations, and levels the playing field between competitors. According to this model, the government should engage civil society and business organizations, and civil society and business organizations should support the government in the fight against corruption (World Bank 2012).

In many countries, private business associations play a critical role to fight against corruption due to their self-interests that also serve collective interests. Corruption increases business costs, decreases the overall efficiency of the economy, creates unfair competition, and inefficient allocation of resources that seriously decrease the economic competitiveness of a country. Weak state institutions, unpredictable legislation, corruption, and lack of political will also create obstacles to running a free market economy (OECD, 2020). Due to relatively high economic growth in the last two decades, the number of business organizations has increased hugely in Bangladesh. However, despite their growth and growing financial capabilities, they are still unable to play an important role in addressing serious governance problems in general and fight against corruption due to a lack of coordination among various private sector organizations, opportunistic behavior of many business leaders, and politicization of trade union and other business associations.

Considering the current business environment in Bangladesh, it is extremely difficult to maintain a big business without the presence of a close relationship with top politicians government officials. Many scholars describe this relationship as crony capitalism (Sobhan, 2004; Mujeri, 2018). A significant portion of big business organizations maintains good relations with the ruling party and powerful politicians to get various favors such as licenses, permits, tax breaks, and other undue facilities that are not allowed in a free-market and democratic state. Similarly, political parties and mainly ruling political parties get a huge amount of donations from the big business firms, and powerful politicians also get rents from business firms. This reciprocal relationship enriches corrupt politicians and rent-seeking businessmen. The primary beneficiaries of crony capitalism are few firms that are connected to the ruling elites at the cost of many other firms that are competitive in a free market. This type of economic system of crony capitalism creates income inequality, distorts the incentive structure of the society and

economy, and decreases the legitimacy of the state. Private sector organizations also failed to involve with other stakeholders such as local and national authorities, and civil society organizations, and international institutions in addressing serious business-related problems such as rent-seeking, bribery, delay in decision-making regarding business-related decisions due to their organizational weaknesses and lack of legitimacy in the broader society.

Cooperation at the global level is also necessary to combat corruption at the nation-state level. Due to globalization and the financial integration of the global economy, the nature of corruption is now extraterritorial. Most of the corrupt people send their money to other countries, mostly western banks and financial institutions, to hide their illegal money and to avoid tax. So, the use of an international legislative arsenal is necessary to detect illegal money and punish corrupt politicians, businessmen, and bureaucrats (OECD, 2020). International institutions such as the World Bank, The United Nations, and OECD, Transparency International (TI) also have the expertise and institutional capacity, so they can provide necessary advice and training to many countries, who lack technical knowledge and expertise to develop appropriate strategies to fight against corruption. However, international institutions and global civil society organizations only play a critical role if domestic stakeholders, including state institutions, are serious about anti-corruption initiatives. They also can play an effective role when domestic stakeholders are united and able to organize ordinary people in achieving their collective goals. As a result, the role of civil society organizations is also very important in initiating anti-corruption programs in collaboration with other state and non-state actors.

In some countries, the legitimacy of civil society organizations is high due to the presence of civil society organizations for a long time. In general, legitimacy, social trust, and political opportunities are high for civil society organizations in democratic and decentralized countries compared to authoritarian and highly centralized countries (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 1999). The validity of civil society activities is also associated with the existence of a legal system that supports the rule of law, freedom of speech and association, and pluralism. However, these preconditions are absent in many developing countries, including Bangladesh. Civil society organizations face various challenges, and they are defenseless in the absence of an established set of supportive regulations (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 1999).

According to L. David Brown & Archana Kalegaonkar (1999:5), "NGOs in Bangladesh have been subject to arbitrary rulings and even decertification by the NGO Bureau when they have been seen as threatening to the interests of state bureaucracies." Bangladesh government introduced a new law known as "the Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulations Bill 2016 (FDRB) in 2016.

According to Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch, "The Foreign Donations Law is a shocking new initiative by a repressive government to make civil society toe the government line, or risk being arbitrarily shut down" (Human Rights Watch, October 19, 2016, retrieved on May 6, 2020)

In many countries, including Bangladesh, government actors are deeply suspicious about the activities and intentions of civil society organizations. They consider foreign funded-NGOs as the agent of imperialism (Bratton, 1989b, Bebbington, 1997). As a result, initiating any anti-corruption campaign against state institutions is a serious challenge for

many civil society organizations and particularly foreign-funded NGOs that work for governance reforms. Suspicions are deep in countries with highly centralized regimes, governments with weak or no legitimacy, and the nature of politics are confrontational. States consider civil society activities as threats of incumbent governments. Oppositional political parties support CSOs' activities when they are out of power, but they oppose the same activities when they go to power. Civil society organizations, including NGOs, adopt various soft compromise strategies to overcome their Challenges. According to L. David Brown and Archana Kalegaonkar (1999:6):

Civil Society organizations adopt a range of strategies for dealing with government action and political space, from low profile work that draws little attention to implementing government programs, cooperatively developing joint programs, contesting government actions with mass movements, and building transnational alliances to influence global patterns of recalcitrant governments. But the success of such strategies turns on the good understanding of the political possibilities of the specific situation, and CSOs that misjudge those potentials many encounter serious shrinkage of the political space in which they must work.

In Bangladesh, Civil society organizations were unable to play a critical role in solving collective action problems in recent years due to the organizational weaknesses, partisan approach, and opportunistic behavior of some of their key members.

The role of various civil society organizations such as students, lawyers, journalists, trade unions, and cultural organizations was substantial during the struggle for Bengali nationalism, secular society, democratic rights, and most importantly, the war of independence (Hashemi & Hasan, 1999; Lewis, 2004; Quadir, 2007). These organizations also played a crucial role in organizing and creating awareness against the military rules of Ayub Khan in the 1960s and HM Ershad in the 1980s that helped democratic transition from military authoritarianism in 1990 (Quadir, 2007). However, since 1991, civil society organizations have entirely lost their autonomy and separate identity as civil society organizations. Prominent civil society institutions such as university teachers' associations, cultural associations, trade unions, chambers of comers, lawyers' and journalists' associations are now highly politicized and serve the interests of political parties for getting political patronage, which is the opposite of pluralist views of civil society (Stiles, 2002; Woods, 2014). The degree of penetration of civil society by political forces is widespread, and in most instances, civil society acts as the political wings of the political parties (Stiles, 2002; Quadir, 2003). Fahimul Quadir (2003: 432) points out:

*"A large number of so-called civil society groups are either the creations of different political parties or the product of the extreme ideological polarization of the country's chaotic political culture. With very few exceptions, all professional, associational, religious, and ethnic groups belong to one of the three major ideological camps that have evolved over the past two decades: secularist, nationalist, and Islamists."*

Kendall Stiles (2002: 840) argues that

*"Almost no one is thought to be "above politics" and no opinions are viewed separately from the political affiliation of the speaker." Due to politicization and fragmentation, civil society organizations didn't play key roles in promoting good governance and curbing corruption in Bangladesh after the fall of the authoritarian regime in 1990."*

Due to a lack of autonomous and capable civil society organizations and organized and active private business associations that can work for their collective interests, corruption has increased in Bangladesh. Now, corrupt people dominate political, social, economic, and even religious institutions. Due to their good connections with high political authorities and top bureaucrats, and other powerful actors in the system, they can easily ignore rules and social norms and can avoid punishment (Sobhan, 2004). Ordinary citizens feel helpless, but they can't resist organized crime and other fraudulent activities due to the lack of appropriate political and social institutions, lack of political opportunities, and social and political apathy.

## **6. Conclusion**

According to OECD (OECD, 2020: 13) corruption, in all its forms, has extremely negative political, social, and economic effects. It is a breeding ground for poverty and a real threat to democracy, leading to a loss of citizens' trust in institutions, and is an important factor in undermining peace and endangering stability in the world. It is an obstacle to economic development and impedes private-sector-led growth, hindering investment and competitiveness.

Despite many negative consequences of corruption, it is widespread and systemic and has become embedded in the daily life of Bangladesh society. Corruption is the root cause of institutional decay, and sustainable socio-cultural, political, and economic development is impossible without efficient and effective state and non-state institutions. Most of the anti-corruption programs initiated by both political and military governments, including implementing neo-liberal economic policies, enacting new laws, and initiating administrative reforms, did not work to prevent corruption due to the patrimonial nature of the state, criminalization of politics, patron-client social network, and lack of appropriate and capable state institutions (Sobhan, 2004). The capacity of the state was and still is very weak, and the breakdown of a vicious cycle of corruption is not an easy task without a capable state and a combined effort of the state, civil society organizations, and market forces. Corruption is now extraterritorial and international cooperation is also necessary to curb corruption in many developing countries.

According to the principal-agent model, corruption increases if principles are unable to control agents through both horizontal accountability (regular free and fair elections) and vertical accountability (checks and balance of power, the rule of law, and separation of authority). Both types of accountabilities are absent in Bangladesh at this moment. National elections were relatively free and fair under neutral non-partisan caretaker governments in Bangladesh from 1991 to 2009. However, in 2011, the current ruling party abolished the caretaker government system and allowed national elections under a partisan political government. According to various news media, since 2014, various local and national elections, including parliamentary elections, were severely controversial and rigged by ruling party thugs. Elections are one of the most important ways to make ruling elites accountable to the masses, and the possibility of regular free and fair elections is minimal under a political government. Horizontal accountability is also an important part of a democratic and accountable political system and effective means to control unaccountable and corrupt agents. However, horizontal accountability is also absent, and the power of the executive branch in general, and the Prime Minister in

particular, is overwhelming. Judiciary and parliament have limited power, and there are no checks and balances of authority.

The commitment of political leaders combating corruption seems absent in Bangladesh due to some factors, including dysfunctional and confrontational politics, lack of democratic norms within all mainstream political parties, the hopeless role of the parliament in policymaking, and the existence of patron-client political culture. Bureaucracy has become politicized and has lost professional integrity and morality that increased corruption in the public sector. A significant portion of market actors relies on the corrupt state for their rapid capital accumulation. The connections between corrupt politicians and cronies (politically connected corrupt businessmen) are high, and they support each other. So, they don't have any intentions to change the corrupt practices that seriously hamper the overall efficiency of the economy. Corrupt politicians and bureaucrats are monopolists, and they are unwilling to sacrifice their rents. It is not possible to change the vicious cycle of corruption without the change of political culture and administrative system. The root causes of corruption in Bangladesh are inherently political, and it is tough to curb corruption without addressing the underlying causes of corruption.

In such a pessimistic macro-environment, many scholars and international institutions focus on empowering citizens as the best tool to fight against corruption. They focus on alliance building and a collaborative approach among various state and non-state institutions. The success of any social movement depends on the power balance between the state and civil society organizations. It is difficult for civil society groups to force a state to initiate serious governance reforms without the authority to impose sanctions against the government both at the local and national levels. Collaboration and cooperation among civil society organizations and private business organizations are necessary to make them a viable political force. However, civil society organizations failed to create a broad-based alliance with various interest groups that may help to mobilize ordinary citizens against corruption. Due to the institutional weakness of the civil society organizations, policy advocacy and dialogues between the state and civil society is one-sided, and the state can easily avoid the demands of civil society groups without any political costs (Bratton, 1989; Wampler, 2008). Civil society organizations, although they have played critical roles in various political transitions in Bangladesh, are now weak, politicized, and co-opted by the state. Civil society's capacity to act against corruption depends on the nature of the state, a balance of power between the state and civil society organizations, and accountability, legitimacy, representation, and trust in civil society organizations in the broader society they are working, which are absent at this moment in Bangladesh.

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