

ACCEPTANCE OF NGOS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN DISTRICT BAHAWALPUR

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Abstract

Non-government organizations are initiated by groups of people having a passion and understanding for solution of their community problems at the grassroots level. The performance and image of NGOs depend on the nature of services, service delivery and acceptance from the community people in Pakistan and rest of the world. This research explores views of NGOs' representatives regarding acceptance of their organizations in local communities. A sample of 129 NGOs registered under the Department of Social Welfare and Bait ul Mal was selected through systematic random sampling technique in District Bahawalpur and 116 respondents responded to the self-administered questionnaire. The results indicate direct interaction of NGOs with local people in the majority of cases. Local community people are aware about NGOs working and consider their activities beneficial for society. Some results also show that people criticize NGOs' working as being inactive, harmful and foreign agenda. A convincing trend is found regarding cooperation and participation from local people towards NGOs' welfare/development projects. They also provide funding, material resources and technical assistance to NGOs at the local level. Local people accept NGOs because these organizations provide awareness, are local, provide material resources and are consistent with local culture.

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Introduction:

Non-government organization (NGO) does not have a particular definition (Bhose, 2003). According to Willetts (2010), term NGO is a disputed and complex concept which is discussed in both positive and negative perspectives. Community people may find NGOs' practices in such manners which could have or have not resemblance with the aims expressed by those organizations (Keengwe, 1998). Vedder (2007) referencing the World Bank has given a definition of NGOs as '*private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development.*' In the present era, significance of NGOs cannot be ignored in development and welfare especially in social development. This significance gets increased because of the working style of NGOs which is more autonomous, flexible and related to community issues. There is no or limited interference of the government in the formation of NGOs and their project designing and implementation. NGOs, in individual and collective capacity, practice in all fields and aspects linked with human beings (Nelson, 2007). The organizations working at small and large level include both operational and advocacy organizations (Asian Development Bank, 2009; Vedder, 2007). Khan and Khan (2004) discuss three major categories of NGOs which include welfare and charity, community development and sustainable development and advocacy organizations. Ranjha (2013) mentions service areas of NGOs registered with the Department of Social Welfare and Bait ul Mal which include education, women's welfare, health, child welfare, youth welfare, patient welfare, disable welfare, sanitation, old person's welfare, environment, coordination with NGOs, awareness raising, recreation, family planning, vocational training etc. Bhose (2003) discusses various categories of NGOs i.e., charity NGOs, relief and rehabilitation NGOs, service providing NGOs, economic development NGOs, social development NGOs, empowerment NGOs, network NGOs and support NGOs. Mostly, NGOs are initiated with the idea of non-profit by well educated and well off people having passion to serve local communities. Vedder (2007) has pointed out three major characteristics of NGOs, which include non-profit nature, having groups of voluntary people and relying on donations or voluntary activities. Bhose (2003) adds voluntary nature, legal status, independent working, flexibility,

quick decision making, non-profit, not self-serving, high motivation, freedom in work, value driven and people-centred as main characteristics and specializations for NGOs. Bano (2008) considers NGOs more innovative, committed and localized as compared to state institutions.

According to Bhose (2003), founders of NGOs are close and accessible to target communities and they work for the uplift of marginalized people with a vision and commitment. Hilton (2012) argues that NGOs are started by groups of people having common interests in their local communities. Omofonmwan and Odia (2009) add that this initiation is wilful and volunteer nature. Small scale organizations are considered to have closer interaction with target communities (Keengwe, 1998). The relationship of NGOs with the communities is deeper as they work for meeting community needs (Khan & Khan, 2004). It is assumed that local people accept, cooperate and participate in NGOs' activities because these are locally based organizations. Ismail and Baig (2004) explain it that mostly organizations in Pakistan get support from community contribution also. The acceptance, cooperation and participation of local communities could be key to success of NGOs and overall social development in society.

Being localized, NGOs empower people through mobilization and participation, which enable them to speak about their rights. Kim and Kim (2013) also mention the role of NGOs to involve local communities in local, national and international level decision making. NGOs may work parallel to government, may act as opposition, may become the voice of weaker people and may empower them for decision making (Clark, 1995). No doubt, this role gets more important when NGOs get more real acceptance in local communities. Globalization has provided an easy environment for different organizations to interact with each other and this makes local people more aware (Kim & Kim, 2013). Bano (2008), in a research on school education, mentions that NGOs get more acceptances in local communities as compared to government institutions. On the other side, Vedder (2007) criticizes that NGOs' self-imposed role is not as real as they show their first impression and they lack democratic values in practices. Further, organizations interfere in community matters without involvement of local people in real decision making. Accountability of NGOs also affects their acceptance in local communities. According to de Souza (2007), NGOs are criticized for being not accountable before beneficiary communities and due to their

bureaucratic styles and wasteful practices. Banks and Hulme (2012) argue that bottom-up practices make NGOs accountable before local people. Although in many cases, NGOs find them more accountable before donors and remain at distance from community people. They rely on donors' funds, but weak interaction with local communities decreases their acceptance at grassroots level. van der Borgh and Terwindt (2014) talk about different kinds of problems and pressures faced by NGOs at grassroots level. They point out that some sensitive areas taken up by the NGOs are in contrast with social and cultural values. In such cases NGOs having urban background, have to face resistance from local communities. They also discuss religious aspect regarding acceptance of NGOs.

Ismail and Baig (2004) discuss mistrust situation between the government and the NGO sector during the late 1990s, when the Social Welfare Minister, Punjab announced to look into illegal matters of NGOs in the province. In 1999, the government also announced to register NGOs after clearance from federal intelligence agencies. When governments make such serious announcements, community people get conscious and hesitate to interact with NGOs.

Here, Pasha, Pasha, and Iqbal (2002) talk about another version that government feels threats from the NGOs as competitors on different social issues and try to restrict or pressurize the organizations. The activities of many organizations become suspicious and lost their acceptance in communities when they take up some sensitive issues like women's rights, political freedom and nuclear disarmament (Pasha et al., 2002). Religious matters are also taken as sensitive in many cases. Some religious organizations, especially religious political parties were strongly against NGOs and blamed that these organizations were working on Western agendas to make Pakistan a secular state. This kind of cold war still exists between the religious organization and secular advocacy and operational NGOs getting foreign funding (Iqbal, 2006; Iqbal, Khan, & Javed, 2004). NGOs working in favour of family planning and co-education face criticism and opposition (Iqbal et al., 2004). Pasha et al. (2002) also discusses various types of conflicts among NGOs damaging acceptability of these organizations at the local level.

Khan and Khan (2004) argue that welfare and charity organizations hold more credibility in local communities and have less interaction with state. Nzimakwe (2008) views weakness of some NGOs when they do

not reach in target communities in effective manners. The legal status of NGOs is also considered very important to get accepted at official level and in local communities. According to Ghaus-Pasha, Jamal, and Iqbal (2002), mainly four laws deal with registration of NGOs in Pakistan. These laws include The Societies Registration Act, 1860, The Trust Act, 1882, The Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control Ordinance), 1961 and The Companies Ordinance, 1984 (NGO Resource Centre, 2003).

Indeed, NGOs exist as prominent stakeholder parallel to government institutions with special reference to service provisions. Organizations render their services not only in Pakistan but also in other developed and developing states. They get appreciation in response of their hard work and fast and effective services at local level. This is also a fact that NGOs' number got rapid growth. In his research, Ranjha (2013) discusses the increase of NGOs' numbers in Pakistan with the passage of time depending on various factors. Speedy growth of NGOs could be possibly due to their better performance, acceptance from community and appreciation from the government and communities. At the same time, NGOs face criticism by different groups in Pakistan. A clear division exists among community people due to a continuous tension between secular and religious organizations. Secular minded people view religious organizations as conservative, anti-social and anti-development. Even these organizations are blamed as terrorists or are connected with terrorism. In opposition, religious minded people take secular organizations as anti-Islamic agents and security threat to Pakistan. Secular organizations are blamed as western agents. Recently, in 2015, international NGOs have been criticized and they were discussed for having suspicious agendas in Pakistan. Offices and projects of a well known international organization were closed for some period in Pakistan (Dawn, 2015). Further, funding sources and financial corruption are also hot topics regarding NGOs practice.

Services of NGOs could not be ignored when we talk about the practices of organizations at the local level. These organizations have to face both appreciation and criticism in local communities. Appreciation and criticism could be linked with acceptance of these organizations in communities. Thousands NGOs, including registered and unregistered render services at local level in Pakistan. As discussed earlier, different laws deal with registration of NGOs. A lot of research and scholarly

work is available on the history of NGOs, NGOs' projects, roles, achievements and problems in Pakistan.

That scholarly work is no doubt helpful to explore the importance of and improvements in the NGO sector in the country. This research has been conducted to explore acceptance of NGOs registered with the Department of Social Welfare and Bait ul Mal in District Bahawalpur. The main objective of the research was to know views of NGOs' representatives about acceptability of their organizations in communities. This also focuses on reasons for NGOs' acceptability. Major queries in this research include methods of NGOs' interaction with local people, awareness of communities about NGOs' working and their opinion, response, cooperation and participation of people in NGOs' activities.

Methodology:

Representatives of NGOs were selected as respondents to express their views regarding acceptance of NGOs in grassroots level communities. NGOs registered with the Department of Social Welfare and Bait ul Mal, Punjab under the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961 were included as target population for this survey research. District Bahawalpur was taken as geographical universe. According to lists provided by six (6) Community Development Projects (CDPs), total 371 NGOs are registered with the Department of Social Welfare and Bait ul Mal in District Bahawalpur. Respondent NGOs were selected through systematic random sampling from all six CDPs. Total 129 NGOs (35%) were selected from 371 in the District. A questionnaire was used as a data collection tool which was responded by 116 representatives of NGOs. Gathered data were processed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis.

Results:

Data gathered through self-administered questionnaire from 116 respondents were analysed with the help of SPSS. The results have been presented in tables with the number of responses and percentages. The results of every close-ended question in the questionnaire have been presented in separate tables for easy understanding.

Table 1. NGOs' Interaction with People in Community

	Number of responses	Percent
Direct interaction	74	64
Indirect through media	25	21
Indirect through local leaders	45	39
Do not know	3	3
Missing	2	2

Table No. 1 presents multiple responses about the nature of interaction made by the NGOs with local people in communities. The results clearly show a trend of direct interaction between NGOs and grassroots communities. Nearly one third of respondents (64%) describe that their organization has direct interaction with people. On the other hand, more than one third NGOs' representatives mention their interaction with people through local community leaders (39%). Local leaders hold respect and dignity and could be better gateways to enter in communities. Some respondents (21%) also talk about their NGOs' contacts with local people through media. Nature or method of interaction depends on nature of NGOs' projects or activities.

Table 2. Awareness of Community People about Working of NGOs in Area

	Number of responses	Percent
Well aware	18	15
Aware	70	60
Less awareness	12	10

No awareness	9	8
Do not know	5	4
Missing	2	2

NGOs' representatives were also asked about the level of awareness regarding NGOs working in communities. Table No. 2 shows that respondents find local people aware about their NGOs' working at grassroots level (60%). In addition, 15% claim that people are well aware about NGO working in their area. This could be a good sign regarding NGOs working and acceptance also. On the other hand, some NGOs' representatives admit the fact that less awareness exists regarding working of their NGOs (10%). Even, 8% discloses the fact that local people do not know about their NGOs' activities. These findings about low and no awareness could not be neglected because NGOs welfare and development activities start from awareness. This low or no awareness could be due to the weak performance of NGOs or lack of interest on the side of local people about NGOs working.

Table 3. Perception/Views of Community People about NGOs

	Number of responses	Percent
NGOs are beneficial for society	82	71
NGOs cause damages in society	10	9
NGOs work on foreign agendas	8	7
NGOs do nothing	22	19
Do not know	3	3

Table No. 3 shows multiple responses given by NGOs' representatives about image of NGOs in local communities. The majority of respondents view that local people find their NGOs beneficial for society (71%). This finding shows that NGOs registered with the Department of Social Welfare and Bait ul Mal hold positive reputes at local level. While, a considerable number of NGOs' representatives disclose that local people perceive their NGOs doing nothing in the community (19%). Further, 9% respondents say that people take NGOs harmful in society and 7% participants find people with perception that NGOs are foreign agents.

Although, the majority of respondents seem satisfactory about positive fame of their organizations, but doubts in minds of limited number of local people could also be a big question regarding acceptance of NGOs among local people.

Table 4. Attitude of Community People during Working of NGOs in Community

	Number of responses	Percent
Very cooperative	17	13
Cooperative	61	52
Less cooperative	24	21
No cooperation	9	8
Oppose	2	2
Missing	3	3

The results in the Table No. 4 show the cooperation level of the local people towards NGOs' working in their communities. More than half representatives of NGOs find local people cooperative towards their organizations' welfare/development projects or activities (52%). Moreover, 13% respondents see community people very cooperative during NGOs' activities. In other words, almost two third respondents claim to get cooperation from community people. While, the rest of the respondents find less and no cooperation which is also an attention demanding finding. Nearly one fifth of respondents (21%) see less cooperation of people for their NGOs' activities and 8% find no cooperation. Two (2) percent respondents also point out opposition of local people towards NGOs' programmes in communities.

Table 5. Participation of Community People in NGOs' Projects

	Number of responses	Percent
High participation	16	13
Participation	65	56
Less Participation	21	18

No Participation	9	8
Do not know	2	2
Missing	3	3

Participation of local people in NGOs' programmes is also an indication of measurement of community acceptance towards NGOs. The results in the Table No. 5 show that more than half NGOs' representatives see local people participating during their organizations' activities (56%). Thirteen (13) percent respondents claim high participation of people in their NGOs' projects/programmes. On the other hand, 18% participants witness less participation of local people in activities initiated by NGOs. Further, 8% do not see any participation from community side. It makes sense that nearly one fourth of respondents report less/no participation of the people during welfare/development working of NGOs. Again, reason behind less or no participation of community participation could be from both NGOs and community side.

Table 6. Nature of Assistance Provided by Community People for NGOs' Projects

	Number of responses	Percent
Financial assistance	40	34
Provision of any material resources	36	31
Technical support/assistance	12	10
Participation	81	70
No assistance	13	11
Do not know	4	3

Table No. 6 presents multiple responses of NGOs' representatives about different kinds of assistance and cooperation provided by local people during NGOs' interventions in communities. As seen in the previous results, community participation is found as major assistance and cooperation of local people towards NGOs' activities (70%). More than one third of respondents (34%) claim that their organizations get financial assistance from local people which is a sign of full involvement of community in NGOs' activities. Nearly one third respondents report that their NGOs get material resources from local community people in the form of assistance (31%). Multiple responses show that one respondent could give more than one response to a single query. Twelve

respondents (10%) talk about technical support from community people for their projects. Some respondents (11%) also find no assistance or cooperation for their NGOs from local community people.

Table 7. Reasons for Acceptance of NGOs by Community People

	Number of responses	Percent
NGO gives awareness in community	89	77
NGO provides material resources for problem solution	24	21
NGO's values have consistency with cultural values	27	23
NGO is local	38	33
NGO also work on religious services	7	6
Do not know	3	3

Table No. 7 also presents multiple responses about the reasons for acceptance of NGOs or NGOs' projects in local level communities. The majority of respondents view that local people accept NGOs' working due to NGOs' role to aware local people (77%). Nearly one third (33%) respondents consider that their NGOs are local organizations and community people have acceptance for local initiatives. In addition, local community people find consistencies among cultural values and NGOs working style in their areas (23%). Nearly one fifth NGOs' representatives (21%) see that NGOs are accepted in local communities because they provide material resources for problem solving or welfare/development. Few respondents (6%) think that their organizations get accepted because of providing religious nature services in local communities.

Discussions

Although, this research focuses NGOs' acceptance in local communities in District Bahawalpur, the results could be generalized in rest of areas, especially in case of NGOs registered with the Department of Social Welfare and Bait ul Mal, Punjab. The results show a clear agreement with many scholars as discussed in the introduction that NGOs play vital

role in communities. No doubt, this research results include views of NGOs' representatives only, but these findings are very important. The results show a positive and satisfactory trend that NGOs' make direct interaction with local community people. This direct interaction leads these NGOs towards real problem solution and higher level of acceptance from local people. The other two indirect methods of interaction with local people also seem proper in many cases depending on the nature of activities. Sometimes, NGOs need to take help from local leaders and media to make intervention in local communities. This is also very encouraging that local people are aware and well aware about working of NGOs in their communities. Getting awareness means local people know what is happening around them in the social welfare sector especially in NGO sector. Almost three fourth respondents claim awareness about their NGOs in local communities and less than one fifth view low or no awareness. This lack of awareness could be due to lack of interest of local people in NGOs' working and weakness or inefficiency of some NGOs in their local area. This is quite possible that some NGOs do not interact or perform at local level.

NGOs' representatives claim that local people perceive their NGOs favourable for society. In other words, it is acceptance of these NGOs from local communities which is encouraging for the organizations. On the other hand, some NGOs' representatives also disclose the fact that local people have different perception about their NGOs working. They perceive NGOs' working against society and having foreign interests. These results seem an agreement with discussions made by Nzimakwe (2008), Iqbal et al. (2004), Iqbal (2006) and Pasha et al. (2002) about inefficiency, credibility, accountability, harmful to society and working on the western agenda. This finding gets more importance that local people think that some NGOs do nothing, damage society and work for other's interests. These kinds of perceptions are linked with acceptance of NGOs not only at local level but also at broader perspective. Cooperation and very cooperation from local people towards NGOs' welfare/development activities are actually positive gestures and acceptance from them. Although, one third of NGOs' representatives claim this trend from community side, but low and no cooperation of community mentioned by more than one fourth of respondents could not be ignored. Even, two respondents disclose that local people oppose or reject their NGOs' practices. This finding about low and no cooperation towards NGOs could also be linked with perception of some local people about NGOs' image. If some people view NGOs' working

negative, they will not cooperate properly and ultimately will not accept those organizations. Although, such numbers in results are low but exist. Another measurement for NGOs' acceptance could be level of cooperation from community people. About one third respondents are confident that their organizations get cooperation and high cooperation from local people. This is satisfactory, but the findings about less and no cooperation are question marks on working of organizations. The research finds that mostly NGOs are registered as local level organizations and possibly are initiated by group of people from local communities. In such cases, organizations hold strong relations with their local communities and have more chances to get cooperation from local people. As far as less or non-cooperation from local people are concerned, there is possibility that some people having different ideologies may not cooperate or accept some NGOs' working. Those might have cooperation for some other organizations working in their area. Also, this non-cooperation could be linked to perceptions of people for NGOs as discussed earlier. Trend of participation during NGOs' activities and projects is encouraging. The results about community participation show consistency with earlier discussed results i.e., perception of local people about NGOs and cooperation towards NGOs' working. Some respondents find less and no participation from the community which could be due to other factors also including lack of interest, lack of leisure time and indirect intervention by the NGOs in the community. Community participation is a key principle for community development process which is directly or indirectly community acceptance.

In addition to participation, community people also assist local level organization in financial matters. The representatives of NGOs admit financial support from local people and this financial support seems a higher level of acceptance of and trust on NGOs. They also provide material resources for activities and projects of NGOs as reported by nearly one third of respondents. Technical support and from community side further strengthens the bond between NGOs and local communities. Although, some respondents disclose no assistance from community people, which is quite natural in NGO sector where controversies exist on working of NGOs. The results about non-cooperation and no assistance from community people could be tolerated in broader scenario, but some NGOs could have serious hurdles in their working at the individual level. As separate cases, some NGOs do not have community cooperation, participation and assistance.

NGOs representatives point out that the majority of local people accepts their organizations for providing awareness in communities. It is fact that NGOs play a vital role to raise voices for various kinds of human rights, which directly or indirectly aware local people. Local NGOs are formed by local people and they have greater chances of acceptance in their local communities. They consider the cultural values very important and make their NGOs more consistent with accepted practices in their communities. Provision of material resources in the form of any activity or project also enhances the acceptability of NGOs. Some organizations get acceptance among local people due to their religious services. Almost all results indicate that organizations get acceptance and cooperation at grassroots level when they adopt the bottom-up approach from initiation till the implementation of welfare/development projects. Community participation in any project of NGO becomes community acceptance and success for both NGO and the project.

Conclusion

Almost all organizations have to make interventions to get acceptance and deliver in local communities. Majority of participant organizations in District Bahawalpur does have direct interaction with local people which is encouraging sign. The awareness level of community people regarding the working of NGOs in their areas is satisfactory and little number of respondents talks about unawareness. A big majority of respondents view that their organizations are considered as helpful in local communities. Some of the respondents also point out that local people criticize NGOs and their activities. Besides that, the majority of people are cooperative towards NGOs activities and participate in welfare/development activities initiated by the organizations. The local organizations receive financial support, material resources and technical assistance from the local communities which is indication of acceptance. These organizations get acceptance at local level because of providing awareness in communities, local initiative, having consistent with the cultural values, providing material resources and rendering religious nature services. It could be argued that NGOs get acceptance and success with direct intervention and local peoples' participation.

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