Measurement of Civil Society – Methodology

Name

Institution
Introduction

The world has renewed its interest in the matter of civil society in the three most recent decades especially in the circles of governance and development. Civil society is understood broadly as the avenue where citizens take collective action. Despite the increased attention in civil society, it has become increasingly difficult to define its basic concept and its operationalization. The question of whether there is any way through which researchers can measure civil society has become a major point of discussion among interested parties (Malena & Heinrich, 2007). The methodology section shall offer proposals for methodology and a framework for the measurement and comparison of the status of different civil societies in different places around the world, in comparison to the one in Saudi Arabia.

Both public and private non-profit and profit-oriented organizations are guided by some procedures and policies. These procedures and policies require periodical reviewing to ensure that there is optimum utilization and efficiency. The review process does not simply help in the assessment of the failure or success of the procedure or policy, but also in encapsulating the process of implementing these policies.

In Saudi, the civil society was over a long time a neglected field with few studies conducted among other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council and other Middle East. Intellectuals and activists advocating for reforms and development concerning human rights have gradually and increasingly been effectively active as social actors since the early 2000s. The main point of concern was the lack of consideration for Saudi residents by the regime. The heightened push for recognition of human rights have meanwhile increased the democratic space, allowing people to pile pressure on their governments thereby presenting a greater challenge to the policies of the state (Alhargan, 2012). Successive governments, however, are stricter on independent activists, with some of them facing arrests. This PhD
thesis investigates the Saudi Arabia civil society, its nature, as well as examining the suitability of both existing and proposed civil society theories and the degree to which these theories can be applied in the Saudi context. Further, this research works towards determining whether these theories can be modified and developed to serve as a guide to people with an interest in this field.

The aim of this fieldwork is to collect both primary and secondary qualitative data concerning the civil society in Saudi Arabia. The collection of such data will take various structures and forms. The primary data will be collected from specific selected CEOs of some NGOs operating in Saudi Arabia, both local and international. To avoid ethical issues, the interviewees will receive a guarantee from the interviewer that their information will not be revealed to other parties. The questions included in the questionnaire will be semi-structured to allow the respondents to give their honest views on the matter under study.

In addition to that, the collected data will depict the functions they perform, how they affect the society as a whole, the ruling powers along with the level of effectiveness by which these functions are discharged. It also seeks to collect in-depth information concerning the role played by the religious leadership, especially in civil society development and the way they influence political authority. The research shall look into sectarian, regional and tribal identities and the way they affect the civil society.

Saudi Arabia has an authoritarian regime, with limited space for civil society. There are few NGOs in Saudi Arabia with the ability to single-handedly influence the government. However, the pressure that they apply to the Saudi government is only on social reforms, leaving the political reforms under the authoritarian control of the government. The social contexts in which the works of the civil society in Saudi Arabia have applied in the past include human rights issues, women’s driving rights or divorce issues. This indicates that the
society in Saudi Arabia offers a more complex study, considering how it operates under stringent conditions.

The civil society, and the many stakeholders who support it, play an essential role in the dynamics of development in many countries, especially the developing states. The role of the society cuts across several dimension, such as building a democratic legitimacy with its basis as the citizens. This is an important role since the citizens hold the power to choose their leaders in democratic states through elections that are held every few years, as stipulated in their constitutions. With the type of political system in Saudi Arabia, the civil society faces a tougher task of performing this function. The second role is to implement projects and programs in places and sectors where the government does not have a presence. People are involved in many social events with which most governments do not consider involving themselves. For instance, in Saudi, the society has made efforts towards creating different forums where the Saudi people can air their contributions and grievances pertaining to a specific issue affecting them (Falisse&Sanz-Corella, 2008).

The third role is the application and maintaining of constant pressure on the different arms of government to ensure that good governance is permanent within the countries. Political leaders are in most cases irresponsible and do not deliver on the promises that they make before they are elected into office. The civil society comes in to ensure that people get the kind of leadership that the respective countries’ constitutions envision by being vocal against various vices in the society such as corruption, nepotism, dictatorship, insecurity as well as oppression of the people by those in power. In Saudi, the civil society tries to play a major role in detecting and speaking out against different vices like embezzlement of funds (Malena& Heinrich, 2007).
Many publications by global bodies indicate the importance of civil society to any country. For instance, the efforts of the civil society receive support from the United Nations and other global bodies that protect human rights and consumers among others. The dynamism of the civil society causes it to have a wide variety of stakeholders and as a result, it has become increasingly difficult to identify reliable and strategic institutions that can help in the design of a strategy and the implementation of programs undertaken by the civil society. That forms the basis for the design of a guide providing the methodology for measuring civil societies (Nash, Hudson & Lutrell, 2006).

Numerous studies concentrate on the link between religion and civil society for a long time especially from the time the Roman Catholic Church focused on politically unstable regions and marginalized areas. Numerous studies have been undertaken on Islam as it relates to the civic society in Islamic States. Alhargan posits that local actors pushing for civil rights arose from unaffiliated government clerics, the religious establishment, activists and writers, independent rights activists and local NGOs, Islamo-liberal orientation. Saudi was established with religious alliance, Ulama’s (religious figures) role was of significant in the regulation of the relationship between the government and the citizens. The majority of citizens of Saudi respect the clerics’ advice, especially concerning controversial religious and social issues where they expect the government to heed to calls against citizen abuse and lift oppression. Notably, the role played by Ulama in looking into the civil society concept will be investigated by information from interviews available and literature. This will be essential in the answering of research questions proposed in this study, bearing in mind possible limitations of the data.

Islamists, liberals, elites, and university lecturers are important groups for this particular study. The Islamists’ teaching shapes the vital understanding of the religion within the region. A similar understanding shapes the relationship between other organizations like
the government and the society. Elites and university lecturers offer an academic view into different organizations, cultures and the government. Mostly, the elites and university lecturers are taken as role models in the society. Therefore, the influence and understanding they offer are usually important in the understanding of different relationships in the society. Additionally, the two groups form a vital societal pillar as they recognize the degree to which the rights of humans are applicable in the society, especially regarding the government laws and policies. The same groups usually pass their shared understanding to the society whenever they develop the feeling that those rights are threatened.

This research shall maintain its focus on the first commerce chamber in the Saudi Kingdom, the Jeddah Industry & Commerce Chamber. The organization formed in 1946 through the late King Abdul Aziz decree, offers industrial and commercial assistance to owners of businesses in Saudi Arabia at no profit. It also operates on the vision to become the main avenue for the development and growth of the Jeddah business community for the evolution of Jeddah into a cultural and commercial getaway.

The issue of measuring civil society has elicited divergent remarks from different observers, with some arguing against such measurement. A dissenting opinion is that civil society qualifies as a normative, theoretical and abstract idea that does not have any distinct, clear or measurable empirical features in the social life of a person. Others regard the measurement of civil society as an impossible process, despite their recognition of the importance of such an exercise. Holders of this thought posit that there is no consensus on the nature of civil society aside from the many ways in which people understand it in the divergent contexts in the world. Regardless of the doubts, the reasons for undertaking the measurement and comparison of this outweigh the reasons not to undertake the exercise (Nash, Hudson & Lutrell, 2006).
One of the reasons why it is necessary to compare and measure civil society is to examine whether civil society is an abstract idea that does not have a solid basis or whether civil society is a phenomenon that exists. The second reason is to investigate the link between crucial political and social goals like democracy, good governance, social justice and development to civil society. The third reason is to assess the reason why the strengthening of the civil society has always been important to the development community. Finally, the measurement of the civil society is essential in the promotion of comparative learning among actors in civil society.

The third goal is the development of a vision of social actors in different sectors in relation to cooperating with the government or continental unions, the connections that they have and the relative weight. This determines the rate at which the proposed reform is passed and implemented. In addition to that, the acceptability of the actions of the civil society is pegged on its cooperation with the government of the day several governments under. The fourth and final goal of mapping is to assist makers of decisions in the identification, formulation and implementation of strategies and policies. This is imperative in the determination of the creation and amendments of laws (Malena & Heinrich, 2007).

There are several tools specifically designed for mapping the different political context dimensions. The selection of these tools is based on their coverage of a wide array of political dimensions. Their wide coverage of political dimensions give these tools the ability to offer a list of different approaches that CSOs can use for the mapping of political context. The first tool is the Civil Society Index, also known as CIVICUS (Nash, Hudson & Lutrell, 2006). The Civil Society Index provides information about the structure of civil society, the environment in which the civil society operates, the impact of actions undertaken by the civil society as well as the values that the civil society advocates for. The second tool is Institutional and country policy assessment. This tool considers the dimension of the policies
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put in place by respective governments, different governance institutions as well as economic management. The World Bank uses this tool in its assessment of the status of affairs in the countries with which it has affiliations.

Another tool is Governance and Democracy Assessment, which places emphasis on the dimensions of the players in governance, the different interests that the government needs to protect, resources employed in the various activities undertaken by civil society as well as the different rules. This tool is in most cases used by USAID. The Drivers of Change is a useful tool which focuses on the dimensions of the structure of civil societies, the various agents that affect its different activities different institutions that facilitate its activities. Other tools are the Governance Questionnaire, Governance matters, Stakeholders analysis, power analysis and World Governance Assessment (Nash, Hudson &Lutrell, 2006).

In designing the methodology for measuring civil society, it is imperative to demystify the importance of political context. Context is the aspects of the globe that have some relevance to action. To begin with, context gives shape to the likelihood that change will occur. The happenings in the society make people to see the weaknesses in the system and initiate strategies for the required reforms. An example of change is reforms in policy. The second reason why context matters is that it determines the perspectives and positions of organizations that have an interest in reforms on policy. What the public goes through makes different interested organizations to form a position on different respective matters. The third reason for considering context is that it determines the appropriateness or effectiveness of different actions. When the people see a weakness in the system, they find a basis for pushing for reforms. The changes that the people and the civil society push for may be appropriate for the society to make progress in the economic, social and political development (Malena& Heinrich, 2007).
The mapping of political context so that the society can be more engaged in processes of policy involves the identity and identification of the elements of political environments—rules, organizations and power—that determines the manner in which work is processed by policy. Mapping political context presents a major challenge. Context is multi-dimensional and highly complex. In any single location—whether the specific place is a household, a neighbourhood, a region or a country—economic, social and political dimensions exist among other dimensions. The variety of dimensions that qualify as relevant depends heavily on the purpose that one seeks to achieve and the position that one is in (Nash, Hudson & Lutrell, 2006).

The multi-dimensional nature of context along with the fact that relevant context dimensions depend considerably on the purpose that the action hopes to achieve and the actor’s position appear to present a major problem in the mapping of contexts. This is a major challenge that in some circumstances may make the employment of flexible and simple tools in the mapping of political contexts a sensible thing to do (Falisse & Sanz-Corella, 2008).

A flexible approach has the production of a clear statement of the reform in policy that the civil society pursues. This is followed by the production of a map of political interests. The map of political interests addresses issues such as the priority of the area of policy for the actor, the actors in an area of policy and the reasons why the actors exert influence in an area of policy. Others are the resources of the actors that they use to influence the policy outcomes in an area of policy, the extent of influence in an area of policy and the potential and actual alliances among the actors.

The third component is the production of a graphic showing the circle of influence. The circle of influence shows the position (undecided, support or opposition) of different players with reference to the reforms that have been proposed and the capacity that they have
to influence the reforms. The fourth component involves the conducting of a systematic analysis. The institutional contexts for the reforms in policy are analysed systematically, with the relevant organization and the inter-organizational arena in consideration. This component operates through the answering of several questions, such as what resources of influence are relevant in a specific arena and the importance of an arena to the result of the policy reform under pursuance. Others are what actors can access the specific arena with the aim of instigating discussion sessions and the rules that apply in the arena, particularly relevant to the reform in the policy (Falisse & Sanz-Corella, 2008).

The fifth and final component of political context mapping is the completion of a matrix of the policy process so that every stage of the process of policy can be assessed and a decision made on the right action to be undertaken so that the proposal for a reform in the policy may survive. It is imperative to note that the fourth and the fifth steps place more emphasis on the development of a strategy of influence. The strategy of influence builds on political context mapping as opposed to being part of the process of mapping (Nash, Hudson & Lutrell, 2006).

To support the five components of context mapping, it is important that the development of a communication strategy occur. This is because it enables active individuals in the civil society to think critically about the goal that the strategy seeks to achieve, the audience that will be affected by the reforms that are proposed and the message that the civil society desires to share with the public (Malena & Heinrich, 2007).

**Research Design**

This research work will be undertaken through qualitative research design. This research design is a process based on methodological and distinct inquiry traditions that explore a human or a social problem. It will allow me to undertake an analysis and to give a
detailed report concerning the opinions of respondents as well as create a holistic and complex picture. Further, I will have an unconditioned setting throughout the research so that I understand and discuss accurately in my report the ‘why and how’ of the phenomenon under study. Qualitative research offers the required exploratory and in-depth tools to help in the achievement of a clear image of the process. Qualitative research methods are valuable tools in social sciences. This has spread into applied research on social policy.

Qualitative data used in framework analysis are gathered through participant observation, focus groups, or interviews in most cases. Participant observation involves the researcher observing a participant or more in the event under study (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009). For this research work, I will participate in the activities of two non-profit organizations. This will be essential in giving the research due credibility as well as provide new data only collectable through close engagement and taking notes in the examination of organizations’ dynamics. In doing so, I will get past the restrictions while gaining the trust of respondents in these organizations to feel at ease while providing answers.

Interviews involve face-to-face conversations between a researcher and the participant. The three Interview types include semi-structured, unstructured and structured interviews. I will start off the conversation by asking a holistic question such as one on the life of the respondent. Semi-structured interviews have features of both the structured and unstructured interviews. Questions are open-ended in semi-structured interviews; thus, the choice of answers are not limited (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009). This research employ all the interview methods mentioned above. Solidly structured interviews will be valuable in the collection of socio-demographic data. More of the data for the research work will be collected by employing the less structured and open-ended interviews. The last two methods will be used widely because they are effective in ensuring that more information can be
collected, due to the friendly environment that they help create (Hutter, Hennink & Bailey, 2011).

It is imperative to note that comparing Saudi to GCC civil societies will help in giving in-depth information and provide an insight into the extraction of novel opinions from the field; thus, employing means that will assist me extract as much information as possible will be prudent throughout the study.

Participants will be sourced selectively, depending on their ability to respond to the questions posed to them. They include:

1. CEOs of NGOs and other management staff, regarding the difference between their activities and those of the state, aside from whether the influence that they have on the state is direct or indirect. Further, this group will explain whether their work tallies with the common definition of the term civil society.

2. Elites involved in the creation and development of CSOs and have "intellectual salons" or "circles" every week.

3. Religious figures involved in civil society activities creation of and NGO or being a patron in a relevant organization's opening and events.

The main intention is to acquire a peek into the role in play in the spreading of the civil society concept as well as in the stimulation of the involved community. Further, the methods and media that they adopt in their quest to influence the Saudi civil society such as social events, the media, social networks among others will be investigated.

In administering the questionnaires, the individuals participating in the interview as respondents will be identified first. I shall secure permission from the head of the organization or any other designated individual with such power to grant permission for the interviews. The respondents will receive notifications on the interview. In time, I shall secure
appointments in coordination with the respondents. The schedules of the respondents will be put under consideration in the arrangement of the appointments.

The interview process will take place subject to required assurances for transparency, confidentiality and the general observance of ethical practices in research. In necessary cases, there shall be a rescheduling of subsequent interviews involving a respondent or other contact individuals interviewed from the same CSO.

**Subjects of the interview/ case studies**

The civil society groups that will make up the population under study for this will possess five features, as Sokolowsi, Salamon and List (2003) specify:

i. Permanence of the Organization

ii. Separated from the state and its activities

iii. Self-governing

iv. Continuity and regularity in terms of activities, membership and procedures for legitimacy in the making of decisions among others

v. Voluntary, i.e., people have the freedom to join, support or quit the group or the organization.

vi. Non-profit distributing;

From this population, I settled on a few organizations that meet the requirements these organizations will make up the sample that the research work will focus on.

**Duration of the Research Work**

The fieldwork should begin in July 2014 through to July 2015. The fieldwork will be undertaken through Possible Research Limitation.
The data set for this research work is mainly data concerning the civil society. This form of data is relatively new and has not undergone empirical research tests. This may present challenges in the determination of their applicability and accuracy. However, it provides me with an opportunity to retrieve answers for the research questions guiding this study.

**Geographic research locus**

The intended area for the research will be the Saudi Arabian Kingdom. The organizations covered herein will include civil society organizations formed both locally and internationally for the benefit of Saudi citizens and overseas individuals. In inaccessible areas, research work undertaken by other researchers on related topics will be used to gather essential secondary information for this research work. Other strategies such as performing telephone interviews and sending questionnaires to respondents via e-mail will be exploited when the need arises.

**Conclusion**

The civil society in Saudi Arabia plays an important role in the push for the recognition of human rights within the country. Despite successive governments trying to reduce the influence of civil society groups within the borders, the Saudi Arabian civil society has made considerable strides over the period of its active existence, one example being the first municipal elections in the history of the country in 2005. The measurement of the civil society in Saudi Arabia would be important in ensuring that its activities spread beyond the current fields of religion, professions, culture and social issues to political and other essential issues. However, the civil society will need to push for the removal of administrative and legal hurdles that prevent them from being effective organizations as they undertake their activities.
References

