

In my view, NGOs play the same role in the social sector, which market forces play in the economy. The NGOs are a product of privatization and its mirror reflection in the social sector. Privatization, one of the hallmarks of IMF packages, is built universally on erosion of state from the productive sectors. While human development, which followed alternative development, still remains an elusive goal, state has been effectively rolled back from the economy.

Pakistan is certainly no exception and is hurriedly undertaking all such steps, which other developing countries have taken after considerable planning. Therefore, that the state itself was welcoming its competitor, not its partner, was a natural and logical consequence of pro-market agenda.

It is an irony that in Pakistan the NGOs became a safe haven for liberals and leftists. Whereas the NGOs were a worldwide phenomenon led by market forces, their frontmen in Pakistan were those who once cherished in their leftists ideals. Perhaps they were dictated by the temptation to oppose General Ziaul Haq, who obviously assumed power with the promise to destroy any remaining idols of socialism in the country.

Therefore, the NGOs in Pakistan set out on a journey somewhat different from their counterparts in the West. That is why Dr Mubarak Ali is rightly surprised at the contradiction between the behaviour of international NGOs (INGOs) and Pakistani NGOs over US invasion of Iraq. The INGOs operating in the West are not funded by CIDA, JICA, USAID etc. whereas they are the principal donors for NGOs in Pakistan!

It is my contention that NGOs do not favour strengthening of parliamentary democracy so badly needed in Pakistan. It is obvious from their birth in a military dictator's era and perhaps their boom in the era of another military dictator, who included many NGO activists in his cabinet. NGOs' leadership sets its eyes at access to power through backdoor, en route Western sponsored campaigns and tactics. They also cherish in their methods to encourage participative decision making, which historically has been promoted by parliamentary democracy. That is why, political parties with a mass appeal, whether led by conservatives like Qazi Hussain Ahmed, or a modernist like Nawaz Sharif, are envied by the NGOs and some times, vice versa. Therefore

ALL the three articles appearing on the role of NGOs in Pakistan last week were less objective in their assessment of these organisations. They showed only little part of the whole complex picture.

It is a proven fact that in a developing country like Pakistan, government cannot fulfil all its obligations to their citizens. The funds under Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) that it has at its disposal are too meagre and cannot meet the ever-increasing financial and administrative needs of society. The resultant shortfall will naturally be filled by some non-governmental organizations.

Although NGOs date back to the early period of the country's independence, their mushroom growth in the decade of nineties can only be attributed to the failure on the part of successive governments to gear up economic development and provide social security to the citizens.

Broadly speaking the NGOs in Pakistan can be divided into two categories: homegrown organizations and those which are either a subsidiary of or funded by foreign organizations. The latter ones, such as Christian missionaries, are mostly involved in education and health programmes. They came and stayed here during the British Raj. They played a vital role in the spread of quality education in the country. Most of these institutions were nationalised during Z.A. Bhutto's government and now they are urging the government to restore their institutions to them as has been done in the case of P.C. College of Lahore.

Education has not been a priority with all the past governments in Pakistan and one must be thankful to these NGOs for offering a vital standardized service that goes a long way to fill the vacuum. By sidelining or marginalizing these organizations, as is being advocated by conservative religious sections of our society, we will not gain anything but rather lose a necessary facility available in this crucial sector.

Another category of organiza-

tions is governed by an agenda set by the westerners and are largely concerned with human rights, gender issues, peace etc. Since most of them are funded from abroad by international donor agencies, both governments and concerned nationalists often see them with suspicion and accuse them of spreading foreign values and undermining the age-old, native traditions and values. Their logic and arguments may be more objective and nearer the truth, yet they are not seen representing the views held by the public. In 1998 when India tested its nuclear devices, most of these organizations were urging the government to show restraint. But Gallop polls said more than ninety per cent of the people were in favour of nuclear tests.

The religious sections hold the view that these NGOs are not rendering any valuable service but are rather bringing alien culture to this land and hence should be dealt with firmly. They want their sources of funding and auditing of their expenditures should be strictly regulated.

Then, there are homegrown organizations, mostly involved in providing health care and other essential social services. They have a real contact with the people at grass-root level. The Pakistanis, who according to an estimate donate 70 billion rupees annually to such organizations, do so because they have faith in their sincerity and genuineness. The most prominent among them is Edhi Trust, which has the largest fleet of ambulances in the world and is recognized abroad by several countries for its valuable contribution to human welfare. It is amongst the most respected NGO of Pakistan.

The successful launching of Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust Hospital by Imran Khan has set a new trend. Now a large number of prominent Pakistani artists are floating NGOs on a similar pattern. They include Abrar ul Huq, Shahzad Roy, Jawad Ahmed to name a few. They are doing the work at different levels. ■

A less objective analysis

By Adnan Lodhi