CSOs Charter for Civic Rights and Spaces in Pakistan
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Civil society sector plays significant role in socio-economic development and political empowerment of society at large in Pakistan. CSOs/ NGOs /NPOs also work as forefront institutions in times of need to rescue, relief, recovery, rehabilitation and even reconstruction in case of any manmade or natural catastrophes. In spite of their vital role the CSOs in Pakistan face severe challenges and gradual loss of their development gains including challenges to their own existence, due to **restrictive legal environment, financial viability and public image** etc. According to The Civicus Monitor, Pakistan comes under **repressed** category as far as civic spaces and rights are concerned. Pakistan Development Alliance conducted countrywide surveys and consultations with informed CSOs. The online survey was responded by **431 CSOs** from all across the country. According to the responses 46.3% CSOs representatives were agreed and 29% partially agreed that government restricts freedom assembly, association and speech. The detailed findings of the survey were also shared with related stakeholders including government authorities. **151 government officials and 231 CSOs leaders** attended the stakeholders' consultation. 87% of the responded agreed that civic spaces are squeezed and around 60% agreed that threats to journalists, trade unions and human rights defenders have increased. Around 66.1% respondents agreed that violence against women and children was increased during COVID-19 outbreak. 58.7% respondents agreed that access to justice has become difficult in Pakistan. Around 61.7% respondent agreed that corruption has increased whereas 47% agreed that illicit flow of funds has increased in Pakistan in recent years. 64% respondent agreed that government is failed to provide sufficient protection to human rights defenders. HRDs / WHRDs and civic rights activists will have face negative consequences if they express their opinion in public. 55% averagely agreed that work for the rights of minorities, transgender community, women and other socially excluded groups. Around 81% respondents agreed that NGOs face challenges in opening of bank accounts whereas around 55% respondents agree that NGOs /CSOs face unnecessary restrictions from security agencies and govt departments whereas 62% agreed that CSOs are unable to receive foreign funding for their developmental interventions.

The CSOs Charter for Civic Rights & Spaces is based upon the recommendations collected through the survey as well as consultation with informed Civil Society & related government institutions/departments. The Charter is already adopted and endorsed by AwazCDS-Pakistan, Ujala Network, Umang Champions and Pakistan Development Alliance, Child Rights Movement (CRM), National Action & Coordination Group (NACG) and large number of other Civil Society organizations.

We the CSOs / HRDs/ WHRDs / NPOs and others demand that

1) Representation of minorities required to be increased in local governments(currently minorities are allowed to have their seats in the constituencies where there is at least 5% minority population)
2) Forced conversion -restriction laws need to be introduced
3) Government should public the Commission of Inquiry Report on enforced disappearances and initiate legislation for the criminalization of enforced disappearance and put an end to the practice of enforced disappearance and secret detention.
4) Government should review the coercive policies and regulatory frameworks towards NGOs and create rightful spaces for them to ensure freedom of expression and association
5) Multi-stakeholders engagement processes need to be initiated under the umbrella of UN for regional peace, trade & development, enhanced civic spaces and freedom of expression and association
6) MOU with Economic Affairs Division should be for the eligibility of NGOs to receive foreign contributions instead acquiring MOU for every project funded by foreign donors
7) Renewal of registration / MOUs should be for at least three years instead on annual basis.

8) Registration authority should release letter for the opening of registered NGO Bank Accounts in the scheduled Banks. The matter should also be notified by the State Bank of Pakistan

9) State Bank of Pakistan should write to all Banks to avoid asking EAD MOU from those NGOs which are not getting any direct funding from foreign donors.

10) One window operation required to be introduced to ensure ease of doing business in social sector

11) Charity work should not be regularized as cognizable offence (KP Charity Act imposes a fine of PKRs 100000 and 6 months imprisonment).

12) Govt should initiate open sensitization drive as well as engage meaningfully with CSOs prior to introduce any policy or regulation pertaining to CSOs/NGOs etc.

13) Multiple registration laws and outdated laws regarding NGOs need to be abolished.

14) CSOs/ NGOs should have a recognized forum for collective bargaining with govt on various challenges

15) CSOs /NGOs should submit their annual /audit reports to the concerned authorities on regular basis

16) Local CSOs/NGOs should be allowed to work freely anywhere in Pakistan on any of the human rights / civic rights challenge or issue.

17) There should be a coordination committee among various registration and regulation departments and they should meet on periodic basis to discuss how to facilitate NGOs better.

18) There should be a legal & national coordination council comprised of Govt and reps of CSOs for better coordination and support

19) Local civil society need to be strengthened and localization of global commitment be promoted & implemented through local CSOs

20) Local authorities need to put in place measures, in consultation with others including civil society, that could mitigate the gaps to ensure that the enforcement of regulatory policy framework does not lead to violations of the right to freedom of association