

Governance by Civil Society

Civil society-led initiatives empower South Asian households and individuals by helping them to act collectively on fundamental issues

As demonstrated in the 1997 and 1998 Reports on *Human Development in South Asia*, self-organization within civil society, including the private sector, helps fill the void left by the limited role South Asian governments (with the notable exception of Sri Lanka) have played in providing social services to the poor and investing in their nations' abundant human capital. Civil society-led initiatives also empower South Asian households and individuals by helping them to participate and act collectively on fundamental issues. This chapter reviews the many ways in which people—through their organizations, households, private businesses, and independent media— fend for themselves and assume greater responsibility for their livelihoods, especially when formal governance institutions fail to deliver. These forces promote good civic governance by complementing and encouraging the evolution towards good political and economic governance. Each dimension is indispensable to the other and all three are essential for achieving humane governance.

The growing financial clout, political influence, and effectiveness in delivering goods and services by nongovernmental media, and private sector organizations place civil society-led activities, increasingly in competition with insecure governments. Indeed, informal community initiatives are now being organized all over South Asia, with or without government help, and they have often succeeded in serving those most vulnerable sections of society that governments find difficult to reach. By opening spaces for civic engagement, civil society organizations, households, businesses, and the media can contribute to governance processes for human development in general and an improvement in the lives of local

communities in particular. These independent and flexible institutions also help to create a democratic culture in South Asia, while promoting respect for the rule of law and for individual rights.

Civil society for good civic governance

Individuals and households spend most of their time operating in informal face-to-face interactions in small social groups—first in the family, then on the street, next in the neighbourhood and, perhaps, in the village or the town. As people move beyond these local frontiers, however, they find the wider world—led by either the state or the market—organized on very different principles of governance. As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, the formal structures and processes of governance in South Asia tend to start from a centralized, 'top-down' development philosophy. This can often engender social and political exclusion. Conversely, civic governance initiatives provide citizens at the grassroots with the tools to do more for themselves—activating voices from below.

While changing slowly, South Asian governments often perceive development as something to be done for, rather than by, people—stifling many grassroots initiatives. The rediscovery, however, that people are the chief means for expanding capabilities and choices is fueling a radical re-orientation across the region concerning the mutually supportive roles of the state, the market, and the emerging third sector—better known as civil society. The emergence of the self-instituted civil society as an independent social partner, alongside formal political and economic structures, will thoroughly modify governance systems.

Broadly defined in chapter 2, civil society includes all independent voluntary

and private sector activities, which comprise: i) individuals and households, ii) the media, iii) businesses, and iv) civil society organizations (CSOs), which include all remaining groups. This section examines the general characteristics attributed to civic actors, along with their connections to good civic governance and the formal institutions of governance.

Are civic actors respected and encouraged, or mistrusted and shunned? Do they serve as effective intermediaries between the citizen and the state? Do they help promote non-violence in regions such as Northern India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan that share a long tradition of sectarian and ethnic intolerance? Increasingly, people are realizing that governments cannot, and should not, do everything. Agents of civil society clearly have a role to play in governance (see figure 7.1).

Civic governance through self-organization

The principle of self-organization is at the heart of civil society efforts to promote good civic governance. The freedom to self-organize is a fundamental part of the framework of human rights outlined in the next section. Since time immemorial, human beings have collectively self-organized for mutual caring and protection. Compassion, a distinctly human attribute, fosters the solidarity and cooperation necessary for self-help and self-development to flourish within families, communities, and friendship networks. Self-organization, which leads to sustainable self-governance, is vital to human development at the household and community levels and must be well conducted for it to be enduring and beneficial to people.

In referring to the self-organization of *citizens* in contrast to the state or government, the concept of civil society is received with growing interest by many South Asians. The notion of civil society and the related term *citizenship* in South Asia have been shaped by the region's

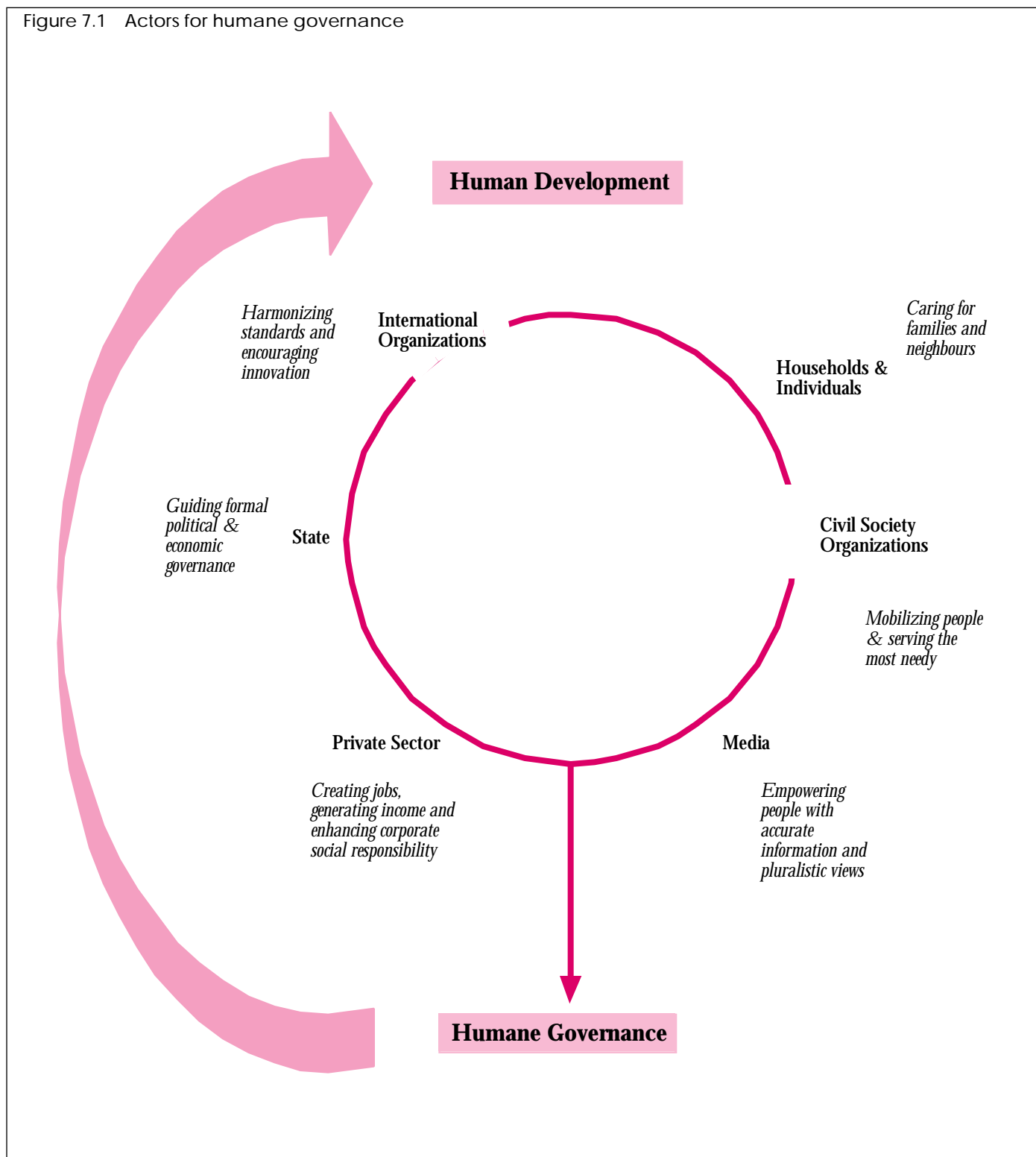
waves of settlers stretching back to the earliest Indus valley civilization. Civil society and citizenship indicate who is included and who is excluded in public affairs. Voluntary action is also deeply embedded in South Asian communities. It is directed toward common concerns that cannot be adequately addressed by individual families and extended kinship support systems: production and exchange of goods and services, lifecycle rituals, and collective security, all of which maintain community consensus and cohesion (Serrano 1994).

In South Asia, where heavily centralized state institutions wield inordinate influence, progress in developing the relations between government and the media, civil society organizations, and business is markedly slow. The old colonial mindset maintained by many elite dictators that the role of the state is to 'organize' and 'control' society (to serve the narrow, vested interests of the elite). Without strong civic governance, however, democracy in South Asia may not be sustainable—as occasionally witnessed in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Further, without direct participatory institutions, development that depends on collective action becomes impossible. People need to mobilize and push governments to open new channels for dialogue and collaboration. The proper balance would allow the state to support, but not directly control, the work of civil society groups. Only then will people be empowered and benefit from the formal structures of governance.

The informal self-organization of free citizens, whether voluntarily or for profit, is a key pillar of support for sustainable human development. Rather than simply filling a void left by the formal institutions and processes of good political and good economic governance, civil society's efforts at constructing good civic governance should be considered an integral component of humane governance in a fast globalizing world.

The principle of self-organization is at the heart of civil society efforts to promote good civic governance

Figure 7.1 Actors for humane governance



The primacy of human rights

For good civic governance to flourish, a solid framework of human rights must be established. These rights include an individual's and community's inherent civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights enshrined in the constitutions of South Asian countries, the international human rights covenants, and the *UN Charter* which states, '... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women ...' Seeking to defend freedom from fear and want, human rights are based on universal respect for the dignity and worth of all human beings. Human rights are inextricably linked and complementary to human development, and they afford protection against social exclusion and marginalization (UNDP 1998b).

The origins of South Asian's modern human rights frameworks are found in the nationalist struggle against British rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Madsen 1996). Led by sections of the rising middle classes, the battle focused on the desire for equal access to government service and for equality before the law. Apart from the nationalist struggle against the injustice of colonial rule, a different human rights struggle relating to cultural rights ran through the colonial period (Madsen 1996). This parallel movement questioned the power of government and the courts to reform traditional law and custom if found contradictory to natural justice. It was during this period that several human rights reforms were implemented, including the suppression by the state of female infanticide, *thugi*, *sati*, and bonded labour.

The foundations of good civic governance today can be said to be articulated in particular articles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (box 7.1). Good civic governance requires reverence for these inalienable human and civic rights. Progress toward securing human development over the long-run

becomes impossible without the protection of these rights and the participation of the entire population, both men and women, in development activities (Banuri 1997). This observation is supported by a recent detailed cross-country study by Dasgupta (1993) that compared achievements in human development with political and civil liberty indices across the world. The results showed that improvements in political and civil rights are positively and significantly correlated with the growth of per capita income, with improvements in infant survival rates, and with increases in life expectancy at birth.

At the heart of a system espousing humane governance must then be the preservation of justice, particularly equal access to and treatment before the law. Establishing a human rights framework that promotes the effective delivery of justice requires strong judicial and quasi-judicial institutions—not only judges and lawyers, but also teachers, doctors, military officers, bureaucrats, police, politicians, election commissioners, and service commissioners (Banuri 1997). Here regional forums like SAARC, NGOs, international agencies, and the media have a role to play in shaping behavioural patterns in support of human rights accountability.

On human rights issues ranging from trafficking in women and children to migrant workers, refugees, and indigenous people that require transborder cooperation, there is an incentive for regional cooperation among the SAARC nations (Dias 1996).

To a large extent, centralized governance structures in South Asia undermine basic human and civic rights (Banuri 1997). To promote justice, impartial and effective law enforcement and adjudication are necessary, in accordance with constitutional principles and international human rights agreements. Currently, the perception among a cross-section of South Asian citizens is that their fundamental civil and political rights are not adequately protected (see box 7.2).

At the heart of a system espousing humane governance must be the preservation of justice

Box 7.1
Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Article 21

(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

Arbitrary actions that violate societal norms of justice, hinder the operation of civil society groups. This in turn can rip apart the social fabric that is crucial to the notion of citizenship and the proper functioning of humane governance (see box 7.3). Besides efforts to strengthen legal and enforcement machinery in South Asia, creative approaches to changing societal attitudes about human rights—approaches that stress the role of civil society groups—are also essential for long-term progress. Often it is only courageous citizen's organizations or the independent media that confront subjects as difficult as minority discrimination and domestic violence.

Upholding human and civic rights through accountable, responsive and transparent government is an achievable objective in South Asia. But, as argued in chapter 3, citizen participation and democracy must extend far beyond casting votes at election time. People are aware that simply having their views 'represented' in government is not enough. In contrast to centralized political and economic structures, the diverse actors comprising civil society often create avenues for creative citizen participation in governance processes that shape citizen well-being and understanding for each other.

Box 7.2 People's perceptions—civic governance and human rights

Good civic governance, the third dimension of humane governance, highlights the role of civil society actors in governance. Questions on the political status of women and minorities, access to justice, and how people perceive the non-profit and private sectors were an integral part of a recent survey in five countries of South Asia.

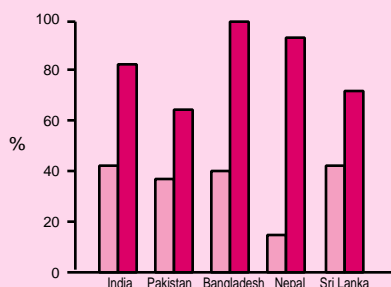
Although conducted on a limited scale in each country, the survey results confirm the prevailing socio-economic realities. While most people agreed that women and minorities are not included in governing structures as equal partners, a remarkable 81 per cent of the respondents in South Asia favoured their inclusion (figure below). In Bangladesh, 98 per cent of the respondents believed that women and minorities should be made equal partners in

governing structures. While only 13 per cent of Nepalese respondents thought that women and minorities were equal partners in the governing structures, 92 per cent were of the view they should be afforded equal status. In Pakistan, 63 per cent agreed that women and minorities should participate equally in governance. In India, 81 per cent of the respondents favoured granting women and minorities equal status in governing structures.

On people's perception about provision of justice and protection of human rights, the response was largely negative. In India and Nepal, the survey results showed a nearly fifty-fifty divide. 64 per cent of the respondents in Pakistan did not consider the legal system to be just and protective of people's rights; 70 per cent of Sri Lankan respondents were also dissatisfied with the current system, as were 65 per cent of the respondents from Bangladesh. Their dissatisfaction is not difficult to understand. In Pakistan alone, more than 1,000 people died in sectarian and politically motivated violence in 1998. In 1997, there were 188 reported deaths of prisoners while in police custody in India. South Asian prisons are filled with people awaiting trials, as the courts are overburdened with cases. The total number of pending cases in South Asia is approximately 29 million. In Bangladesh alone, there are about 6.5 million cases still pending in court, and the average number of cases per judge is about 5,142—the highest in the region.

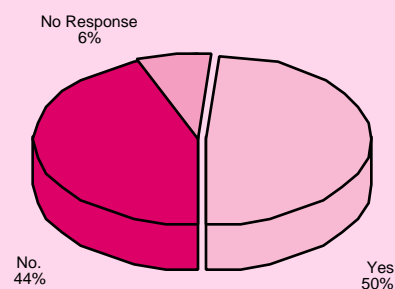
On the importance of the private and non-profit sectors in the delivery of public services, 45 per cent of the respondents in Pakistan believed that the private sector is most effective in providing public services. Concerning the contribution of the non-profit sector towards empowering people, 49 per cent of all survey respondents felt that they have made an impact (figure below). The non-profit sector provides a forum to people, especially minorities, women, and children, to present their views and to advocate for the rights which their governments have failed to safeguard. In Sri Lanka, 67 per cent of the respondents felt that the non-profit sector played a very important part in the provision of social services. 37 per cent of the respondents in Nepal favoured the non-profit sector in the delivery of public services.

Citizen's Perceptions—
Women & Minorities



- Are women and minorities equal partners in governing structures?
- Should women and minorities be equal partners in governances?

People's Perceptions: do non-profit organizations make an important contribution to empowering people?



Source: HDC 1999b; HDSA Tables; and US State Department 1998.

Opening spaces for civic engagement

The range and scope of civic actors today is immense. As renewed democracy and loosening economic controls slowly extend through South Asia in the 1990s, the varied array of groups emanating from civil society has expanded in number, size, and reach. From the explosion of civil society organizations and steps toward privatization to the resurgence of the print media and advent of new communications technologies, citizens have unparalleled potential to influence public policy and affect social change. Wielding impressive economic and political resources, non-state actors are a relatively new subject of study whose general characteristics—positive and negative—are seldom understood.

Growth of civil society organizations

People-driven civil society organizations have been responsible for advancing political freedom, safeguarding basic rights, and furthering social development at a much lower unit cost than governments. This is reflected in the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, community-based people's organizations, religious groups, peasants' associations, consumer groups, and trade unions. For those who are excluded from the formal structures of governance, such as women, the poor, and minorities (whether ethnic, religious, or racial), CSOs are often welcome alternatives to formal structures. Their participatory methods are vital to human development.

By many estimates, South Asia boasts one of the world's most buoyant NGO sectors with, for instance, a mushrooming of over one hundred thousand non-governmental organizations in the region today. Of these, twenty-five thousand are in India, nineteen thousand in Bangladesh, ten thousand in Pakistan, about eighteen thousand in Nepal, and some thirty thousand in Sri Lanka (see figure 7.2). Some of these NGOs are quite small and exist only on paper. But

Box 7.3 Violent elections in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the NGO Gono Shahajjo Shangstha (GSS) aims to raise the consciousness of the poor and assist them in setting up their own organization, with the eventual aim of contending for political power. Working among the most deprived in Nilphamari, GSS organized a grassroots organization that, by 1992, became strong enough to enter elections in five unions of the district. When the GSS group won the first of a staggered series of elections, the local elite responded by unleashing a reign of terror, during which GSS schools were burned; male and female members of the local organization were beaten up; and armed thugs conducted house-to-house searches and ensured

that GSS members could not reach the remaining four voting sites.

The district government and police arrested some GSS staff members accused of 'organizing the poor'. Clearly, the government functionaries had depended on the status quo for containing rural unrest and for maintaining day-to-day governance.

They saw the GSS as a threat to the social and political order that provides them with the authority to govern. Consequently, GSS has been forced to adopt a new non-confrontational strategy based on a model of 'class harmony'. GSS's economic activities now substitute for its previous political activities.

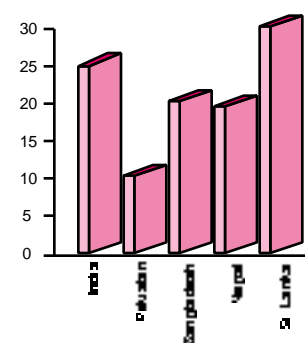
Source: Hashemi 1996.

many NGOs have a national impact, and some—including Sri Lanka's Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (see box 7.4) and the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh—are international role models.

COMMUNITY-BASED PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATIONS. Are also important contributors to good civic governance. The Indian state of Tamil Nadu alone has 25,000 such registered grassroots organizations. Bangladesh has some 20,000 and Sri Lanka around 25,000 local people's groups that receive local and central government financial support (and many more that do not). These organizations can be defined as democratic organizations that represent the interests of their members and are accountable to them. Many take the form of self-help economic activities or cooperatives that operate on the basis of one person-one vote principle. Given the long rural tradition to organize collectively on community-level issues, the history of people's organizations is much older than the NGO sector.

The idea to form a community based people's organization often comes from the people themselves—as with those traditional self-help groups in South Asia in which people come together to pool their labour, to obtain credit, to buy

Figure 7.2
Estimated number of NGOs
in South Asia (in 000's)



Source: Haq 1997.

goods in bulk or to promote and develop more sustainable forms of agriculture (see box 7.5). Sometimes the impetus can come from outside the group, perhaps from a dynamic individual like Akhtar Hameed Khan, who recognized the needs of *katchi abadi* or slum dwellers in a suburb of Karachi and strengthened the capacity of the local people to help

themselves. The success of Khan's Orangi Pilot Project in supplying sanitation facilities to some 28,000 families has led to programmes for low-cost housing, basic health and family planning, women's work centres, school upgrading, and micro-credit for small family units. Variations of Khan's pioneering participatory development strategies are being adapted by communities throughout South Asia today.

Box 7.4 SSM: caring for low-caste Sri Lankan families

During the 1950s, a dedicated Sri Lankan community leader, A.T. Ariyaratne, took up the challenge of integrating low-caste families into the mainstream of national life. Now, the Sarvodaya Sharamadana Movement (SSM) that was started as a result of this concern has more than 7,700 staff and covers 8,000 villages (more than a third of the total in Sri Lanka) in both Sinhalese and Tamil parts of the country.

The Sarvodaya Sharamadana Movement deals with both income-generation and welfare activities. On the one hand, it organizes many income-generating programmes for the poor, such as workshops for mechanical

repairs and carpentry, sewing shops, off-farm activities for small farmers and the landless. On the other, it arranges relief and rehabilitation programmes for the victims of ethnic conflicts and for the deaf and disabled. It also organizes nutrition programmes for pre-school children.

The movement is based on the participation of people. It has created new leadership that by-passes the traditional elitist culture of the state. It has enabled the weakest and the most ignored groups in society to participate in the economic, social, and political life of the country.

Source: Haq 1997; and UNDP 1993.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS. Are commanding greater attention within civil society as vehicles for social service delivery, advocacy, and empowerment. NGOs cover a wide spectrum, from small loose-knit local organizations to nationwide federations and international networks. They can be defined as independent voluntary organizations that work with, and very often on behalf of, others. Many NGOs forge close links with community-based people's organizations, channelling technical advice or financial support as intermediate service organizations.

The range of NGO activities varies from one country to the next. Bangladesh has a strong tradition of NGO movements: it is estimated that NGOs currently cover over 78 per cent of the villages in Bangladesh and about twenty-four million people (approximately one-fifth of the population) benefit from their activities. In Sri Lanka, two-thirds of the NGOs are engaged in religious or social welfare activities, only one-sixth in development activities, and the remaining one-sixth in human rights or advocacy activities. In India and Pakistan, NGOs focus on community development and provision of social services; nearly one-half of the NGOs in Pakistan, for example, are committed to programmes for women's development.

Donors increasingly find NGOs a sound and cost-effective mechanism for implementing community development projects. For instance, the unit cost per student of running a non-formal school is generally one-third to one-half that of

Box 7.5 Village-level institutions in India

The village of Sukhomajri near Chandigarh is widely hailed for its pioneering efforts in micro-watershed development. The inhabitants protect the heavily degraded forest land that lies within the catchment of their minor irrigation tank. The tank has helped to increase crop production nearly three fold and the protection of the forest area greatly increases grass and fodder availability. This in turn increases milk production.

In little over five years, annual household incomes increased by an estimated Rs 2,000 to 3,000—an impressive achievement. This accomplishment stems from an improvement in the village's natural resource base and self-reliance.

At the heart of Sukhomajri's success is a village-level institution created to promote environmental sustainability. Known as the Hill

Resources Management Society, this local body consists of one member from each household in the village. Its job is to provide a forum for the villagers to discuss their problems, mobilize them to take control of their environment, and ensure discipline among the members. The Society ensures that no animals graze in the watershed, and in return, it has created an innovative framework for the fair distribution of the resources generated—water, wood and grass—among the households in the village.

Today, the entire catchment of the tank is green and the village is prosperous, capable of withstanding drought. Whereas government programmes tend to create a feeling of total dependence among people, community organized groups can encourage innovative solutions through direct initiative by those most affected.

Source: Agarwal and Narain 1994.

a formal government school (Haq 1998a). Due in part to their efficiency, in Bangladesh alone about \$500 million worth of projects are approved annually by donors for implementation by NGOs. This has sometimes led to a certain degree of tension between NGOs and national governments. Foreign grants are often scarce and governments become direct competitors for these concessional resources. In such circumstances, closer NGO-government collaboration, rather than competition, should be encouraged. Otherwise, the government may respond by placing obstacles in the way of NGOs, including restrictive and politicized processes of registration and approval.

Indeed, by learning to work closely with NGOs, governments have benefited from the relative strengths of NGOs in several areas. Experience shows that government-NGO cooperation has had positive results in Bangladesh, as in the case of the General Education Project and the Fourth Population and Health Project. In Sri Lanka, such collaboration has been carried a step further, where NGOs have often become contractors for a number of government programmes, such as the Integrated Rural Development Programme. The Sri Lankan government has also supported NGO activities through vocational, managerial, and leadership training, as well as marketing and distributing NGO products. In India, the Lok Jumbish project in the state of Rajasthan provides a good example of NGO-state collaboration in education and women's empowerment. Similarly, government assistance to Rural Support programmes (RSPs) in Pakistan has enabled innovative poverty alleviation approaches to be applied nation-wide. However, sometimes government-NGO collaboration may lead to detrimental results, as in the case of Sri Lanka's Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement earlier this decade.

Successful civil society initiatives have demonstrated that the poorest sections of society need to be organized into viable groups, at the grassroots, which can then assume responsibility for their own

Box 7.6 AKRSP: a successful experiment in local governance

The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), a non-profit project initiated by the Aga Khan Foundation, started operating in 1982 to improve the extremely poor socio-economic conditions of about one million inhabitants of Pakistan's five northern mountain districts. A model for participatory development in rural areas, AKRSP derives its success from a two-pronged focus on institution-building and community participation. The organization's programme has a flexible 'package approach': it provides credit, imparts technical skills, supports small enterprise development, encourages local resource management, and embarks on major infrastructure projects. A key feature of AKRSP is how it organizes itself in the communities:

- At the lower level, AKRSP helps organize broad-based, multi-purpose Village Organizations (2,217 in 1997, covering 80 per cent of rural households) to address multiple or single activities in a broad geographical region.
- At a higher level, AKRSP fosters Cluster Organizations to enable Village Organizations to work together on common issues. Both the Village and Cluster Organizations hold institutionalized meetings, take minutes, and elect office bearers. Facilitated by AKRSP, these new organizations formalize informal groups that already exist. Their success depends primarily on local leadership and harnessing people's initiative.

- At the village level, AKRSP helps to organize interest groups such as vegetable growers and women's organizations. As of December 1997, AKRSP estimates 1,141 women's organizations with a total membership of 37,639 in its areas of operation.
- On special issues, AKRSP helps start Organizations for Collective Action. While similar to the Village Organization model, they are not institutionalized and work around a particular individual.
- Finally, AKRSP encourages the creation of Intermediary Institutions that are small NGOs created by trained individuals in the community. They are accountable to their own boards and are involved in training, advocacy, resource mobilization, and community project management.

A major impact of the AKRSP initiative—besides the formation of participatory social institutions—has been the two fold increase in village cultivable area as well as in incomes. The total savings of the Village and Women's Organizations has reached Rs 356 million, and the small-credit programme has benefited nearly half a million people, with outstanding loans worth Rs 272 million. The Village Organizations have also helped to build a strong civic ethic as well as produce knowledge that the community can use. 'Needs-based' rural support programme initiatives, based on variations of the AKRSP partnership model, are now being replicated throughout South Asia.

Source: AKRSP 1997, and 1998.

development (see box 7.6). While exceptional leadership is necessary to start a movement that benefits disadvantaged groups, sustainable self-reliance and self-help programmes require a basic approach—that is participatory rather than paternalistic. The relationship between the community and an NGO must be treated as a partnership with obligations to fulfil. Instead of charity or state subsidies, capacity-building—especially organizational skills—can help the poor harness their own potential to help themselves. Non-governmental organizations can also help improve

NGOs can supplement and complement governments but never replace them

access to opportunities so that the poor can better compete in the market-place.

Long-term and resilient grassroots development activities may be ensured when resources are mobilized from the actual beneficiaries, operating on the principle of self organization. Similar to knowledge, financial capital is power, and the poor are prepared to improve their standard of living through a line of credit for which a dedicated support organization can be of initial assistance. Moreover, many community initiatives have benefited from government support that establishes an enabling environment for sound NGO operations, while regulating malpractices without compromising the freedom of action cherished by civil society (Haq 1997).

While many NGOs in South Asia have been extremely successful in achieving their objectives of empowering people, it would be well to note the following in order to develop a balanced perspective on the role of NGOs.

First, NGO projects are not easily replicable and often depend, even in the long-run, on exceptional visionary leaders (Streeten 1997), with resources and training not easily accessible among the disadvantaged classes. Some such examples include Mohammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh; Ela Bhatt and the Self-Employed Women's Association in India; Asma Jahangir and the AGHS Legal Aid Cell in Pakistan; and P.K. Kiriwandeniya and the Sanasa movement in Sri Lanka. At times victims of their own success, these favourites of donor agencies are often overburdened with funds beyond their absorption capacity.

Second, compared to the reach of governments and the private sector, South Asian NGOs are still quite small in scale, and consequently, they may disadvantage the poor if their role is overstated. Large NGOs like the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and the Grameen Bank reach less than 20 percent of all landless families in Bangladesh (Farrington et al. 1993). Even

with fast paced growth, it will be years before NGOs make a substantial impact on a majority of South Asia's poor. NGOs can supplement and complement governments but never replace them. The small size and decentralized energy of most NGOs regularly result in overlaps, duplication, and gaps. Moreover, the evidence concerning the composition, level, and effective use of resources by the NGO sector is still limited. Their presence in the field should never serve as an alibi for inaction by governments and the business community.

Third, NGOs can be counter-productive to the development of civil society if they are co-opted by the establishment, adopt solely donor-driven agendas, or neglect their empowerment or advocacy roles. Often the formal purpose of an NGO programme might be improvements in health or literacy or agriculture, but NGOs have also traditionally concerned themselves with how much each project enhances people's power, particularly among women and 'the poorest of the poor'. For example, the Working Women's Forum (WWF), in India's three southern states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, provides health and family welfare services to poor women; simultaneously, it seeks to empower the organization's 200,000 members to challenge the existing exploitative and oppressive power structures in society (Ramesh 1996).

As donors channel ever larger sums to NGOs willing to act as alternative social service providers, these same NGOs are tempted to move away from their familiar civic mobilizing activities. Wary of agitating government and hence donor relations, NGOs can become reluctant to monitor the performance of—and demand greater access from—formal governing bodies (see box 7.7). Admittedly, NGOs vary greatly in size and purpose, but their underlying common strength must remain rooted in a determination to empower the poor and marginalized, and thereby bolster participatory democracy.

Finally, it is important to recognize that not all civil society organizations are 'good' or 'civil'. Outlawed religious extremists and terrorist organizations that fuel violence and intolerance are part of civil society too. In Bangladesh, for example, several well-financed NGO delivery systems are notoriously corrupt—exploiting donor funds without providing the services promised. Further, several NGOs in South Asia have set themselves up as consultancies working for a fee in the voluntary sector. NGOs generally have no one particular body to which they are accountable, and unlike governments (that must submit to periodic re-election) or businesses (that must make profits to survive), NGOs have no readily acknowledged 'bottom line' against which performance can be measured (Desai and Howes 1996).

Besides the need for voluntary codes of conduct concerning the behaviour of non-state actors within a community, NGOs and people's organizations need to be provided positive incentives, alternative financing, and better government access to improve their mobilization of, and level of service for, the poor. When power is shared between the government and the informal institutions of civic governance, democracy and the rule of law can be strengthened.

Households and individuals seizing initiative

Households and individuals are the principal organizing units within civil society. Since people function predominantly at the person-to-person and family levels, the self-help and self-development philosophies pervading good civic governance find their foundations in healthy, educated, and proactive households and individuals. This requires massive public and private investments in basic human priority areas, such as primary education, health care, nutrition, micro-credit, and family planning. The unsatisfactory performance of formal institutions and processes of governance has lent to South Asia's

regrettable distinction as the most deprived region in the world. In such a quagmire of misgovernance and despair, reliance on informal social networks and kinship is often the only option available for the survival of the poor.

When basic human needs are met in the household, individuals and their families can begin to develop civic values and an ethic for improving the conditions in their communities. Without a sense of civic responsibility, the frictions and tensions associated with living in densely populated South Asian communities will multiply. Civic participation can take many forms, such as organizing a 'neighbourhood watch' to prevent crime, supporting a candidate's campaign for the local body election, writing op-ed (opposite editorial) pieces for the local newspaper, or volunteering for community service. The mobilization of individual citizens, as manifested in the teachings of Gandhi and others, has also helped to fuel the modern Panchayat Raj movement in India. Collective group identities at the grassroots level is critical for fostering a sense of belonging and civic pride, especially when the powerful

NGOs must remain rooted in a determination to empower the poor and marginalized

Box 7.7 Client surveys to motivate public service improvements in India

In several countries, client surveys have helped motivate better public sector performance. By tapping the experience of citizens and having them monitor and evaluate services, surveys have helped identify problems, and design and implement innovative solutions. While circumstances and situations will vary across countries, enabling citizens to be heard through client surveys initiates a process towards changing the rules of accountability among different actors within or between the public and private sectors.

In Bangalore, India, 'report cards' ask citizens and businesses to rate the public agencies they use to solve problems or get services. The report cards, administered by the Public Affairs Centre Bangalore, an NGO, assess the quality and cost of citizens' interactions with public agencies. In the first round

of report cards the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), which is responsible for housing and other services, scored the lowest in several categories, including staff behaviour, quality of service, and information provided. Only 1 per cent of respondents rated the Authority's services as satisfactory. The survey results, not surprisingly, generated widespread interest in the press. Rather than viewing the results as a threat, however, the Authority's director took them as an opportunity to initiate reform and launched a citizen-government initiative to improve BDA's management, staff training, and delivery systems. Other agencies in Bangalore have also taken action inspired by the report cards, and groups in five other Indian cities, including Mumbai, have started using the report card approach.

Source: Paul and Steedman 1997; World Bank 1997g.

Citizenship involves human rights and freedoms but it also places an equal emphasis on individual responsibilities and obligations

electronic media can breed a feeling of exclusion and marginalization among people with limited resources.

Citizenship involves human rights and freedoms but it also places an equal emphasis on individual responsibilities and obligations. Civic action stems far beyond the citizens' act of casting a vote at election time. Indeed, by participating in an election, citizens obligate themselves to monitor the performance of public representatives. Furthermore, citizens maintaining disposable income and time outside of daily duties can give back to their communities through countless activities as diverse as donating financial and technical support to charities, tutoring students, and cleaning up dilapidated public parks.

By taking action in areas that complement the state, especially when governments fail to deliver, individual citizens assume new responsibilities to better their families and surrounding communities. South Asians, for instance, supplement their children's education with parental guidance and discipline, as well as building basic community infrastructure and care for the elderly. Through creative citizen-led initiatives, governance renewal that places people at the heart of efforts to manage change can occur in South Asia. Valuing individual participation—in formal structures of governance and in their daily struggle for existence and fulfilment—is undeniably the most important ingredient of humane governance.

Innovations in corporate social responsibility

Throughout South Asia's modern history, governments spent their limited resources and energies on running production enterprises in agriculture and industry, or controlling vital services such as banks and insurance, which are best left to the private sector. Lately, governments are starting to encourage the creative, entrepreneurial dynamism of the business community to efficiently handle a range of development challenges previously falling under the domain of the state,

including heavy industries, education, and certain utilities. This is linked to the emerging consensus that the private sector, and its investment (both domestic and foreign), is and will continue to be the chief source of job creation and wealth generation for people. In Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, for example, private, small-scale cottage industries account for most manufacturing jobs. Moreover, the business community today provides the chief share of capital, technology, and expertise needed for economic growth and higher standards of living.

The private sector is a diverse category with its modern enterprises, a broad variety of unregistered small firms, family farms, and an array of independent producers and service providers (Sachs 1998). When private firms adopt an ethic of civic responsibility and support community development, they often boost their significance as players in promoting humane governance. Business-led initiatives include financing non-formal basic education programmes, offering *pro bono* legal services, building community recreation and child care centres, and providing health care to those unable to pay. Associations of private sector leaders, such as Rotary and Lion's Clubs and the local chambers of commerce, have lent some assistance to community activities in South Asia. Some corporations, such as Mafatlal Industries, even set up non-profit foundations for serving communities. Mafatlal's Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation provides technical expertise in forestry, agronomy, horticulture, and water management to tribal villages in Northern India.

Through public/private partnerships, businesses are also given helpful incentives to cooperate with government on issues of local concern, such as resource management, pollution control, and crime prevention (see box 7.8). Investment risk underwriting, and other innovative steps that combine the profit motive with good citizenship, are helping governments catalyze and harness the business community's energies for

enhancing humane governance. In Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, for example, Mangalore Chemicals & Fertilizers works closely with India's regional governments to improve agricultural production and help farmers diversify into related activities like bee-keeping and dairy farming. Similarly, Shell Pakistan Limited collaborates with the government of Pakistan on social work activities, including education, health, safety, environment, and general welfare issues.

Over time, the concepts of civic and social responsibility have spread from households and villages to the welfare state and NGOs. Due in part to the consumers movement in the West, growing numbers of businesses have begun to engage in acts of corporate social responsibility for the betterment of both consumers and broader civil society. Motivations thus range from pure altruism to self-interest, as companies aspire to gain recognition, reduce their tax burden, protect the safety of their employees, or promote the firm's image. For instance, Lever Brothers and Proctor & Gamble have sponsored community walks in South Asia to raise awareness and financing for human rights and health issues, but these activities also bring positive exposure to the sponsors. By purchasing cardboard boxes made by the blind at the Maharishi Institute for the Blind, Brooke Bond in India combines social consciousness and business interest in a single corporate culture.

As the private sector expands, governments must balance the need to enforce labour safety, environmental, and other regulations without impeding a company's normal business operations. An unrestrained and corrupt private sector, however, can be as harmful to the broader civil society as an authoritarian and wasteful state. Corporate social responsibility begins with the fair treatment of workers, management of the environment where industry is located, and respect for the rights of consumers and the general society. The accelerated pace of market penetration, and

accompanying processes of labour migration and economic dislocation in many parts of South Asia today, heighten the need for a socially aware business community. It is necessary for governments, in collaboration with the private sector, to adopt social safety nets, re-training programmes, and other measures to limit economic volatility and compensate the victims of market failures.

Realizing that their own prosperity is at stake, businesses can also take certain steps to limit social exclusion and other costs linked to economic liberalization. Voluntary guidelines for corporate social responsibility are one method of self-regulation that can contribute to good employer behaviour and increased community involvement. Innovative collective arrangements linking

Corporate social responsibility begins with the fair treatment of workers

Box 7.8 Public/private initiatives for crime reduction

Karachi is a city ridden with violence. With an infrastructure too weak to support its ever increasing population of over 9 million, the past two decades have seen a sharp rise in crime, drug abuse, strikes, killings, bomb attacks, and terrorism, resulting in the disillusionment of people with the system. There is a deep mistrust of the police force and many crimes go unreported. In these conditions a new private-sector-led initiative, the Citizen's Police Liaison Committee (CPLC), is a step in the right direction.

Established in 1990, the CPLC aims to bridge the gap between the ordinary citizen and the law. Along with direct support from the Sindh Governor's Office, CPLC's membership consists of many businessmen who have volunteered their time and money for a more peaceful and prosperous Karachi.

Part of the reason the CPLC stands out from the rest is its endeavour to involve the common citizen in the fight against crime. With their slogan 'Let's beat crime together', the CPLC encourages victims of crime to come forth with their grievances. Their areas of activity range from tracing stolen vehicles to liaising with the police and the judiciary in connection with CPLC's

witness protection programme.

The CPLC has also been working for police welfare. Recently, the CPLC provided gas connections to sixty-nine flats accommodating police families, provided additional water lines, furniture, and proper lighting to police houses and developed a children's park in their residential area. The CPLC also provides medical care to police officers injured in joint operations. Such actions have not only helped to create an atmosphere of understanding between the police and the CPLC, but have also raised the morale of the policemen—a key to achieving a corruption free police force.

The CPLC is mostly self-financed by the business community. Over the past eight years only 21 per cent of the funding has been provided by the government. This has enabled the CPLC to maintain its autonomy and separate itself from the negative image associated with law enforcing agencies. Highlighting the role of CPLC, the UNDP led Colombian Mission on Sustainable Peace in Karachi recently suggested a four point agenda to attain the goal of sustainable peace. The UNDP also endorsed CPLC's call for a metropolitan police force, and recommended its replication throughout Pakistan.

Source: CPLC 1998; and UNDP 1999.

Today, governments are losing their monopoly over information

government and business, known as 'deliberation councils', have also proven helpful in East Asia for stabilizing the policy environment and promoting social and economic development (Campos and Gonzales 1997).

The most visible initiatives concerning corporate social responsibility in South Asia today spring from large-scale enterprises, whether home grown or a local subsidiary of a foreign firm. Companies such as Lever Brothers, Mahindra & Mahindra, Shell Oil, and Habib Bank channel sizeable resources to development programmes and charities. The size of their operations and capital base make it easier for such companies to support human development while pursuing the maximization of their shareholders' wealth. By recognizing both this reality and the limited resources directly available for indigenous community-oriented activities, realistic strategies in South Asia for strengthening corporate social responsibility should be developed.

Media in the information age

The media can play a pivotal role in the projection, critique, and reform of the governance crisis in South Asia. An informed population, a responsive government, and a vibrant conduit between the government and citizens, are essential components of governance that

aspires to be humane. The media, consisting of the electronic media (radio, television, satellites, the Internet), print media (newspapers, magazines, books), and the visual media (film, theatre) can best provide such a conducive environment. In South Asia, the media has not always played this role adequately or impartially. It has, on many occasions, worked to protect the interests of the ruling elite.

A variety of formal and informal controls over the free functioning of the media have traditionally been in place. In many cases, the government controls the electronic media and a substantial part of the print media. Elsewhere, censorship is less blatant but equally potent. Commercial considerations and fear of stricter regulations from orthodox power brokers, for instance, are typical restraints. There is very little tradition of social inquiry, journalists are often poorly paid, training is of low quality, and thus debates and reporting are usually full of clichés and misconceptions. This situation, however, is changing now.

THE SOUTH ASIAN MEDIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS. Today, governments are losing their monopoly over information. Satellite television, the spread of the international media, and the advent of the Internet have ushered in the information age (see table 7.1).

Table 7.1 The state of the media

	(per 1,000 people)					Adult literacy (%)	Population millions 1995 (% urban)	Real GDP per capita (PPP US\$) 1995
	News-papers 1996	Radios 1995	Televi-sions 1995	Personal Computers 1995	Internet Hosts 1998			
Sri Lanka	29	206	66	1.1	0.031	90	18(23)	3408
Maldives	10	118	40	12.3	n/a	93	0.25	3504
Pakistan	21	92	22	1.2	0.015	38	140(35)	2209
India	30	81	61	1.2	0.011	52	936(27)	1422
Bangladesh	9	47	7	n/a	0.017	38	120(19)	1382
Nepal	11	36	3	n/a	0.005	28	22(11)	1145
Bhutan	n/a	17	n/a	n/a	n/a	42	1.6	1289
South Asia	27	80	50	1.2	0.012	49	1238(25)	1531
Low income	n/a	113	47	n/a	0.010	49	2048(28)	1008
High income	287	1005	611	224	37.5	99	926(78)	16337

Source: HDC 1998b; UNDP 1998a; and World Bank 1996b, 1998p and 1998q.

International networks and satellite television are drawing people away from government controlled local television. Increasingly, citizens can access alternative sources of information about government actions that are necessary for accountability and participation.

However, in countries where every second person cannot read or write and earns less than \$1 a day, obvious limitations exist to the media's coverage. The number of radios and televisions, as well as newspaper circulation, is well below that of middle-income countries around the world, and even lower than low-income countries in certain areas. The growth of the media has been unable to keep pace with the rapid increase in population.

On the other hand, several important indicators have accelerated faster in South Asia over the last quarter of this century than in much of the developing world, including the rate of urbanization, income level, and access to television and radio (see figure 7.3). Accompanying technological breakthroughs and the increasing awareness of human freedoms, these developments, most visible in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, are instruments of change, democratization, and hope.

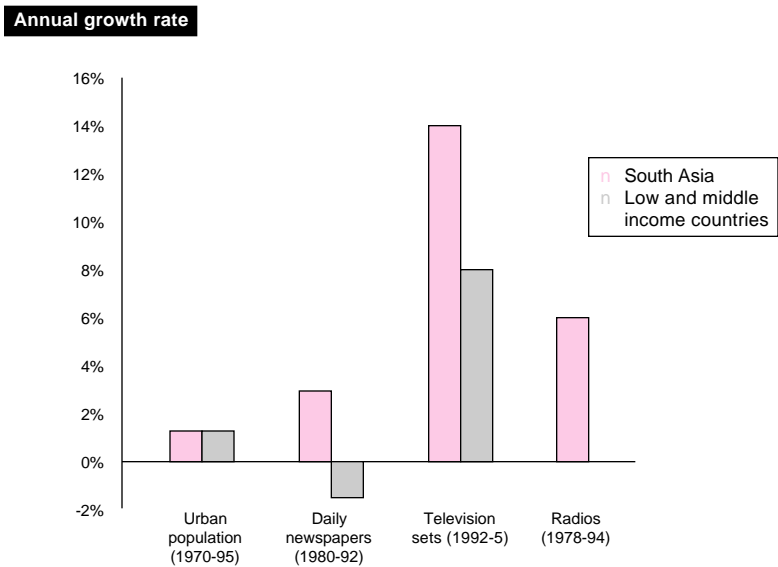
A common problem with the media in South Asia remains the dominance of the English language and continued neglect of regional languages. Even though English-language papers and broadcasts typically have smaller audiences than those in the national or regional languages, they are generally considered more influential in policy formulation. This is because the ruling elite in these societies is mostly western educated and English speaking. Those in the media industry continue to look upon English-language papers as the key to gaining audience with the elite. This further marginalizes the bottom 95 per cent who do not understand what is being disseminated. They are the ones the media must address in order to affect reforms in governance. Increasingly greater emphasis is being placed on national and regional language media.

SHOOTING THE MESSENGER. States with weak and heavily politicized institutions are never likely to create a free, independent, and pluralist media; advocates of censorship frequently invoke the need for stability and national integration. However, in South Asia, these concerns have rarely been the articulated reason for censorship. More often, censorship policies and laws have been used to conceal government misdeeds, to mask human rights violations, to propound official propaganda, and to quell divergent opinions. While most constitutions in South Asia recognize freedom of information as a fundamental right of citizens, there continues to be a general failure in the implementation of this right. In most countries, a right of information act has yet to be endorsed and enacted.

This often leads to manipulation and curtailment of media freedom. The relationship between the media and government in South Asia has historically been a complex one. A variety of political, social, and economic controls are in place. For example, newspapers can be charged exorbitant licensing fees; import duties can be increased or foreign exchange

Censorship policies and laws have often been used to conceal government misdeeds

Figure 7.3
South Asia and the information revolution



Source: Haq 1998a; UNDP 1998a; and World Bank 1998p.

A free and effective media is essential for sustaining humane governance

denied, making the import of essential equipment impossible.

There are five major ways of restricting the media: (i) direct control through state monopoly; (ii) control by licensing and self-censorship (Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka); (iii) emergency regulations and national security provisions; (iv) pressurizing the media through informal means, such as advertizing or regulating newsprint; and (v) physical intimidation of media employees. State influenced press agencies also continue to control, collect, and distribute news. These forms of control are visible in South Asia today to different extents. However, in India, some hopeful trends are emerging. For instance, the Indian Supreme Court decided, in 1985, that taxes on newspapers could be considered unconstitutional if deemed excessive.

South Asia's ruling elites are aware that information and knowledge are passports to empowerment. Their attitude toward the media and the spread of information is thus adversarial. Governments realize how dangerous facts about their regime's misdeeds can be. The media serves as a watchdog over the many different agents in society, holding actions before public scrutiny and ensuring more transparent processes. Regrettably, this core institution of inquiry, debate, and transparency has

never been allowed to seriously evolve under South Asia's centralized modes of governance. The lesson for the region's future is clear: wherever traditions of democratic participation are better rooted in the institutions of the state and civil society, the media is more free. A free and effective media is essential to nurturing and sustaining humane governance.

Such civic actors are gaining greater recognition in South Asia. It is widely admitted today that governance is not just about governments. It is also about the way a society serves its own needs through self-help.

South Asian countries will find the ever growing number of civic actors particularly useful if they formulate concrete programmes to overcome the worst aspects of poor governance and human deprivation in the shortest period of time. The agents of civil society can embolden democratic practices and a civic ethos by informing and mobilizing citizens. They can also help improve future investments in the poor through less hierarchical, flexible, and efficient social service delivery. Stemming from the analysis of the major issues in this Report, the next chapter presents an innovative agenda for tackling the major governance challenges of the coming decades. In this effort, civil society initiatives can play a critical role in South Asian countries.