

**AN OVERVIEW OF POLICY INFLUENCING  
INSTRUMENTS DEPLOYED BY CSOs:  
A CASE OF BANGLADESH**

Mohammad Jasim Uddin\*

***Abstract***

Influencing public policy has been an important function of some civil society organisations (CSOs). Therefore, involvement of the CSOs to public policy process has been relevant. Then a basic question is: what are the instruments CSOs in general exercise to influence public policy? This paper finds that CSOs by and large exercise both formal and informal instruments to persuade government decision. The case of some selected CSOs of Bangladesh has not been exception to using the instruments to a certain extent. There are some limitations of the CSOs to better exercise the instruments, and thereby influencing public policy of Bangladesh. This paper puts two specific recommendations forward for the CSOs to better address the limitations and exercise the instruments to influence public policy of the country.

**I. Introduction**

Public policy is a course of actions adopted by government on methods of governance and systems of regulative methods including laws, regulations, administrative guidelines and procedures.<sup>1</sup> In a democratic arrangement, elected politicians usually set up legislative and regulatory framework. While bureaucrats develop administrative guidelines and procedures, other stakeholders' views and advices based on frontline experiences are also taken into consideration.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, role of CSOs in policy process may be put in the following contexts. First, policy process has been much more complex, multifaceted and multidisciplinary. Public institutions alone may not

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\* **Mr. Mohammad Jasim Uddin** is Research Fellow at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS). His e-mail address is: Jasim\_biiss@yahoo.com. He is grateful to Dr. Nadia Molenaers, Institute of Development Policy and Management (IOB), University of Antwerp, for her valuable comments on this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Floyd, "Steps in the Public Policy-Making Process", 2008. See [www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/documents/Rex\\_steps\\_in-policy\\_making.pdf](http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/documents/Rex_steps_in-policy_making.pdf) [accessed on May 7, 2009].

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

have adequate expertise in dealing with multifarious policy issues. Second, broadening and deepening of development agenda dictates that all major social forces including CSOs can be a part of policy process. Third, public policy process in a democratic set up requires participation of major stakeholders including CSOs. Therefore, CSOs' involvement to public policy process has been relevant, while instruments of the involvement have been both formal and informal.

A basic question then is: what are the formal and informal policy influencing instruments CSOs in general exercise to influence public policy? Other essential research questions of this paper are: do CSOs of Bangladesh exercise the instruments? Have CSOs of Bangladesh any limitations to exercise the instruments, and influence public policy of the country? What are the limitations? What ways out could be taken into consideration to deal with the limitations?

Now a pertinent question is: why is Bangladesh undertaken as a case? Since 1980s, the country has been witnessing expansion of third sectors led by many non-government organisations (NGOs), of which some are considered as CSOs. A few of the some CSOs work for influencing public policy, and their involvement to public policy discourse is rather acknowledged. It is therefore mooted that observation on the few CSOs may provide important ideas for those concerned with the issue – CSO and its role in public policy discourse. Since, literature on initiatives and service-oriented activities of CSOs in Bangladesh is available, but research on their participation to and influence in policy paradigm is infrequent, and mainly focused on just observation and comments. In fact, thorough investigation and in-depth study on policy influencing instruments deployed by the few CSOs of Bangladesh in public policy discourse has not yet been done satisfactorily. Therefore, Bangladesh is taken as a case to be studied.

This paper is based on secondary literature. It applies method of *analytical narratives*, a tool of case study method. While *analytic* indicates 'use of a theoretical framework or set of theoretical concepts'<sup>3</sup>, *narratives* demonstrates 'use of qualitative evidence'<sup>4</sup>. A major handicap in this paper is dearth of information. First of all, public policy

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<sup>3</sup> Lee J. Alston, "The Case for Cases Studies in Political Economy", *The Political Economist*, Vol. 12, Issue 4, 2005, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

includes a variety of activities, many of which are ubiquitous and difficult to be determined without first hand information. Secondly, at times, organisations, mandated to work on policy issues through advocacy and disseminating information on enterprise development and corporate governance, do undertake research on hardcore traditional security.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, consultation of published information materials was not enough to draw a concrete conclusion.

Barring introduction that constitutes Section I, this paper consists of five successive Sections: Section II: Policy Influencing Instruments Deployed by CSOs: A Holistic Conceptual Discourse, Section III: CSOs and Policy Influencing Instruments: Bangladesh Perspectives, Section IV: Limitations of Selected CSOs in Influencing Public Policy of Bangladesh, Section V: Conclusion and Recommendations.

## **II. Policy Influencing Instruments Deployed by CSOs: A Holistic Conceptual Discourse**

In recent times, CSOs are observed “as a type of watchdog over the State and so function as a force for accountability, pressuring officials to inform the public about what they are doing and explain their decisions, and holding them responsible for what they have done”<sup>6</sup>. While CSOs are in opposition to the State on some particular issues, they mobilise public views or lobby policy-makers to influence public policy. They make efforts to influence in policy reforms through academic research, deliberation and publication, policy paper and policy briefing, dialogue, advocacy and pressure group function.<sup>7</sup> Taking political contexts into consideration, CSOs engage themselves in influencing policies through a variety of formal and informal approaches such as campaigns and public protests, multi-stakeholder dialogues, formal interaction with government institutions, etc. Notwithstanding these instruments found in

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<sup>5</sup> Abdur Rob Khan, M. Jashim Uddin and Mohammad Jasim Uddin, “Role of Civil Society Organisations in Security of Bangladesh”, in Mufleh R. Osmany (ed.), *Whether National Security Bangladesh 2007*, Dhaka: University Press Limited and BISS, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Marina Caparini, “Civil Society and Democratic Oversight of the Security Sector: A Preliminary Investigation”, 2002, p. 8. See [http://www.dcaf.ch/civsoc/proj\\_governance.pdf](http://www.dcaf.ch/civsoc/proj_governance.pdf) [accessed on May 12, 2009].

<sup>7</sup> R. Mukamunana and P. A. Brynard, “The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Policy Making Process in Rwanda”, *Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 40, No. 4.1, 2005.