

Panel: Redefining the Role of Civil Society Organisations in South Asia

In her book *Women, Work, and Economic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*, Valentine Moghadam divides the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) into seven basic types: (1) welfare (charitable) organisations; (2) professional associations; (3) research institutes which often engage in advocacy work; (4) human rights and women's rights organisations; (5) development NGOs that provide 'technical assistance and expertise on such issues as sustainable development, literacy and education, health, family planning and community development'; (6) organisations affiliated with a political party; and (7) worker-based and grassroots organisations (Moghadam 1998:37). Kim and McNeal (2005, p.96) emphasise that NGOs are 'nongovernmental, nonprofit, politically neutral, voluntary, and independent organizations set up by those who agree to work together for shared goals or common goods and to empower citizens vis-à-vis a domineering state.' However NGOs, while closely linked to the state, 'operate outside the parameters of the formal state apparatus' (Ibid.).

Researchers, social workers and activists are invited to explore the concept of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in South Asia and the work they undertake within their given limitations. The states, often subjected to a globalisation synonymous with liberalism, rely on them, while attempting if not to control their activities, then at least to guide their actions. In effect CSOs constitute 'an alternative quasi-public institution' (Ibid.). They, thus, tend to play 'the role of policy entrepreneurs', assisting governments in defining and implementing policy, while trying to protect public interest by monitoring government and business activities' (Kim 2003, p. 58)

References

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