

Islamic NGOs in Bangladesh

—Focus on Their Management—

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INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

A non-governmental organization, or NGO (NGOs plural), is a buzz-word in the lexicon of development studies in Bangladesh, and refers to a huge number of developmental agencies and organizations – from tiny developmental gossip bodies consisting of a few people, to practically large-scale bodies – which have mushroomed in this country during the past two to three decades of its phenomenal movement of economic and social development. NGOs and non-profit organizations (NPOs) in Bangladesh are societies or associations for the promotion and diffusion of literature, science, fine arts, useable knowledge, political education, and other activities for charitable purposes and are established under the *Societies Registration Act of 1860 (Act XXI or Act for the Registration of Literary, Scientific, and Charitable Societies)* (Khondaker, 2006). These also include civil societies (CSs), voluntary organizations (VOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and other similar organizations and associations that function on non-profit basis for the welfare of their members in general, and the development of society and the country in particular. Khondaker (2006a and 2006b) has given an elaborate definition of NGOs and NPOs in Bangladesh and has disillusioned the mystery surrounding their definitions, terminologies, nomenclatures, acronyms, and catch-phrases (Khondaker, Molla, and Taslima (2009).

NGOs can be, and are, formed under the *Section 28* of the country's joint-stock companies' law, which is called the *Companies Act of 1994 or Act 18 of 1994*. By subscribing the names of the organizers to a Memorandum of Association (MOA) and filing the same to the Registrar of Joint-stock Companies, a NGO can be registered to undertake actions to achieve the objectives for which it was formed. The companies or organizations formed under the above article of this Act are called "companies not for profit." These companies are set up for charitable purposes and are entitled to exclude the word "limited liability" from their names, provided they can satisfactorily prove to the government that they are societies eligible to be organized as limited liability companies to carry out commerce, arts, science, religion, and charitable activities, as well as similar entities established to promote similar objectives. In such cases, if such societies use or want to use their entire profit or other income for the promotion of such objectives, while also prohibiting the offer of any dividend or profit to members, the government, with the approval of a Secretary (the highest position in the civil service of Bangladesh), and by virtue of issuing a license, can promulgate a directive that the above

societies, without using the term “limited liability” at the end of their names, can be registered as limited liability companies and be established as such. The government, however, in such cases, reserves the right to attach any condition or impose restrictions on the licensed activities, with which a company must oblige. And, under government directions, such conditions or restrictions must sometimes need to be mentioned in the Memorandum or Article of Association. Thus, a society and/or company established and registered under this article of the *Company Act* can enjoy all benefits and advantages of a limited liability company for which it does not need to send the list of members to the Registrar of Joint-stock Company, nor does it need to mention the word “limited liability” with its name (GOB, MOL, 1994).

In Bangladesh, NGOs can also be established and organized for all lawful activities, without registration with the government authorities. This might be one of the reasons for the existence of so many non-registered NGOs, and similar organizations, in this country. In light of foul practices by some rogue NGOs, and with the changes in global concern of financing unlawful terrorist activities in the guise of developmental charitable purposes, the government has imposed legal obligations to the NGOs to seek clearance from the National Security Intelligence (NSI) authority, which operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA).

Although it is difficult to get an exact number of NGOs in Bangladesh, according to an aggregated account of different government ministries, it could be as high as 110,000. According to the Registration Wing of the Social Services Department under the Ministry of Social Welfare, there are 80,003 registered voluntary organization as for 2018, 4,448 of which are orphanages and 75,555 of which are general social service organizations. This branch of the government found 9,888 VOs that have been inactive for the last two years, but have not yet cancelled their registration¹. The NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) of the government has registered 2,565 functional NGOs, 2,209 of which are domestic and 256 of which are foreign. It has abolished the licenses of 484 NGOs over the years, which include Muslim NGOs, namely the Women Development Organization (WDO), Shomaz Kallayan Sangstha, Dhaka Ahsania Mohila Misson, Al Amin Etimkhana, Bangladesh Shomaz Unnoyan Samity, and New Life Centre, at the latest reporting (Jugantor, 2017). Islam (date not found/ DNF) reports that the government has cancelled licenses of 6,000 NGOs and charities (all categories) due to their poor management, unnecessary function, and/ or inactivity. In view of the above situation in the NGO sector, this paper aims to explore the general situation of Muslim NGOs in Bangladesh, especially seeking to examine aspects of the management styles and practices of those NGOs, with examples from three case studies.

DEFINITION AND CONDITION OF ISLAMIC NGOS IN BANGLADESH

There is not any theoretical or practical definition of the term “Islamic” or “Muslim” NGOs in general, or in the context of Bangladesh. For fear or other reasons, some NGOs and activists do not

¹ The authors have received this information directly from the ministry.

endorse or agree with the concept of Islamic NGOs. The authors encountered many arguments, which are presented as follows: Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim country, with a more than 90 percent Muslim population, and NGOs' target beneficiaries are Muslims and non-Muslims alike; NGO activities aim to promote development and wellbeing for people who are Muslims, Hindus, and others; NGOs promote activities for people regardless of religion, caste, and color, as Islam makes it obligatory to promote social welfare irrespective of religion; NGOs are registered with the same governmental authority and they follow the same principles, therefore no NGOs can be called a Muslim NGO in particular; we do not classify developmental organizations as Islamic and non-Islamic in this country, etc. The authors argued that, although Bangladesh itself propagates the state policy of secularism, as a dichotomy, it also upholds the Islamic principle in the state activities *vide* its national *Constitution*, which starts with the name and praise of Allah, and thus gives leeway to all people to practice their respective religions without hindrance. Yet, political parties that were formed in line with Islamic religious beliefs do exist, and they organize political activities to establish an Islamic government/ nation; such parties, however, do not undermine the political and religious rights of non-Muslim minority religious groups.

The relationships between philanthropy and religion are broadly expressed in both Western and non-Western societies, as well as in Buddhist and Hindu societies in Asia, and these relationships are well-documented. Salamon and Anheier (1997), in their research for developing the International Classification for Nonprofit Organizations (ICNPO) at the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Research Project, have earmarked a category for such religion-based philanthropic organizations. Although the customs of *zakat*, *waqf*, *fitrah*, and *sadaqa* make up a robust tradition of philanthropy in the Islamic world, and have long served as a basis for a welfare safety net, these customs are not well documented and researched in the philanthropic field, though they indeed provide a premise of robust Islamic philanthropic tradition (Potter and Khondaker, 2015).

In the context of Bangladesh, Khondaker, Molla, and Taslima (2009) provided a framework of NGO nomenclature, whereby they suggested the acronym *RNGO* for the religious NGOs in this country. They did not, however, provide any definition for Muslim NGOs; rather, *RNGO* was suggested to denote a NGO category for organizations that promote objectives in line with religious principles, or its targeted activities are aimed to believers of a certain religion. More recently, literature has shown the existence of religious NGOs, especially Islamic ones (Salehin, 2016), in Bangladesh. In its original form, the antecedents of the Muslim religious NGOs were the Islamic, faith-based charitable and religious education-cum-training institutions, the forerunner of which were *khanka sharif* or *mazar sharif* (the assembly of a Muslim saint or his disciples surrounding his preaching place or graveyard), *peer darbar* (the stable of a *sufi* scholar), *madrassa* (religious educational institutions), *hefzokhana* (religious schools that train in memorizing the Quran), and *etimkhana* (Muslim orphanage), which were established to propagate Islam, as well as to conduct charitable activities.

Muslim community-based religious, charitable, and other philanthropic organizations first came into being when Muslim preachers came to the Indian sub-continent in the early 8th century AD, when Muhammad Bin Qasim advanced to Sind with his troops. These institutions and activities further expanded during Muslim rule in Bengal from the 12th century to the 18th century (Eaton, 2000).

Maktab and *madrasa* of different categories were established to provide religious education, while many more Muslim academic institutions provided religious and other education in mathematics and foreign languages like Arabic, Persian, and Urdu (ACU, 1991). These schools were mostly dependent on donations and charities from the general public, as well as from disciples of religious peers and dervishes. Muslim religious preachers and leaders stables' at Atrashi, Charmonai, Maizbhandar, Sharshina, Sylhet, Chittagong, etc., Tablig Zamaat based at Kakrail in Dhaka, and *mazar*-based organizations in Sylhet, Chittagong, Dhaka, Bagherhat, and many other places in the country attract large numbers of people even today and provide spiritual education and/or services on a give-away, non-profit, non-cost basis (Khondaker, 2006a). Devotees assemble in such places on a voluntary basis and sometimes give donations with the intention of receiving virtues and divine blessings.

The conditions of Muslim religious organizations in Bangladesh are strikingly similar between the past and modern times. Although this country is secular in many respects, about 90 percent of its population is Muslim, and there is no dearth of philanthropic, charitable, nonprofit organizations, and givology customs based on the Islamic ethos. Salehin (2016) investigates *zakat* management in a host of Islamic NGOs, which differ from secular NGOs in many respects, not only because they serve and flourish in the community, but also because they are circumscribed by similar legal, intuitional, and cultural milieus.

The precise number of Islamic NGOs and charities (registered and non-registered) in Bangladesh is not entirely known or accounted for. As one Muslim NGO activist reported to the authors, most NGOs in the country are Islamic, since the promoters/owners/activists are Muslims, and because Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country. Some NGOs, however, are actively engaged in religious proselyting and conversion from one faith to another. The two such faith systems who most engage in missionary activity are Christianity and Salafism (a Muslim religious sect) (Islam, DNF); however, converting to Islam is not popular, as the country is predominantly Muslim and almost no propagation of Islam is directed toward Hindus (the second biggest religion in Bangladesh) and other non-Islamic religious groups to convert them into Islam. Muslim religious and political groups do still promote many activities, collect supporters, and take part in political maneuverings. The more profound of Islamic developmental activities undertaken are those by the biggest Islamic political party in the country, the Jamaate Islami Bangladesh (JIB), which is virtually to establish and show its presence in the NGO sector, one of the most active and vibrant developmental fields in this country. The mood is, generally, "if you secularists have supporting development activity partners, we also have partners in this field." The number of such NGOs could be several thousand, some of which are affiliated with a moribund Muslim NGO federation, the Association of Muslim Welfare Agencies in Bangladesh (AMWAB). This organization itself claims to promote the cause of Islamic NGOs in the country (more details later).

THE POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES OF ISLAMIC NGOs IN BANGLADESH

Unlike Pakistan, which existed as a province from August 1947– December 1971, Bangladesh has

never officially established Islam as its state religion, although different governments have highlighted or used it according to their political preferences. The government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972–August 1975) and the Awami League, which led the independence movement for the country, earmarked four state policies of capitalism, socialism, secularism, and democracy, and urged the necessity of de-popularizing religion-based politics, which vehemently acted in favor of Pakistan and took a paranoid attitude to the causes and war of independence. The rulers that followed, especially Ziaur Rahman, rehabilitated the pro-Pakistani Islamic political parties and extended them in terms of privileges in ruling politics. Ziaur's widow, the following Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, more openly sided with the anti-independence block Jamaati Islami Bangladesh (JIB), and even shared power with it. While in power with BNP, the JIB tried to promote Muslim social spirit in the country, together with a massive support of social, educational, and cultural institutions and organizations. The massive influx of Islamic NGOs at that time, and thereafter, is an offshoot of that particular political climate in Bangladesh.

At present, Bangladesh has one of the most active and prominent NGO sectors than anywhere else in the world. NGOs have been active in this country since its independence. The sector is dominated by four players, namely Grameen Bank, ASA, Proshika, and BRAC, and together these make up three-quarters of the micro-finance sector (Fernando, 2011). In fact, the NGO sector in this country has been characterized by the *Economist* as 'the other government' (1998). Several governments led by the BNP and the military regime of H.M. Ershad adopted Islam as the country's official religion, while the Awami League governments pursued a course of secular modernization, more or less. Still, the NGOs that have become household names are mostly secular. Islamic NGOs have grown and proliferated, depending on the political proclivities of successive pro-military and pro-BNP political administrations.

The NGO sector in Bangladesh is, in general, sometimes found to be in contention with state agencies, namely ministries, the NGOAB, district-level administrations, and others. Islamic NGOs and other similar organizations are also sometimes seen to be in contention with secular NGOs. As Fernando (2011) observed, the ruling parties, the mainstream NGOs, and the Islamic NGOs (including charitable and philanthropic organizations), are as if three parallel states are operating in this country. Concerning the growing political role of Islamic organizations, Ahmed and Potter (2006) observed that the politicization of NGOs has partly been fueled by the sustained, malicious criticism of Islamic fundamentalists, who do not approve of the widespread secular influence of NGOs at the grassroots, nor with their networking, and, especially, their pro-women stance. Islamic fundamentalists have instead created their own NGOs, with funding from Muslim donor countries to curb the secularizing effects of other NGOs. As such, the secular developmental NGOs took a course to protect themselves from Islamic NGOs by forming strategic alliances with many anti-Islamic forces in the country. Stiles (2002) and Fernando (2011) observed in their studies of the civil societies in Bangladesh that secular NGOs are sometimes in opposition with Islamic NGOs, which at times can be very violent.

Still, many international and domestic Islamic NGOs operate along with secular NGOs in a competitive environment, in occasions they found to be collaborative. In 2017, and since thereafter,

some Islamic NGOs worked side by side with secular NGOs to help Rohingya refugees coming from Myanmar. From the late 1970s, international Islamic developmental organizations, namely Rabeta Al Alam Al Islam, started funding activities in collaboration with Islamic political organizations, namely Jamaat-e-Islam Bangladesh. Islamic Aid (Bangladesh) started working in the country from 1990 and Muslim Aid (Bangladesh) from 1991. The Al Haramain Islamic Foundation of Saudi Arabia established its Bangladesh branch in July 2004, and now works as a private charitable, educational NGO. Other noted international Islamic funding organizations, namely the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIROSA), Islamic Aid (UK), the Islamic Relief Agency (Sudan), Qatar Charity, the Al Basher International Foundation (Saudi Arabia), Kuwait Joint Relief Committee (Kuwait), World Assembly of Muslim Youths, etc. have provided funds for various developmental and religious activities.

Some Islamic NGOs distribute meat from Muslim countries in the Middle-East during the feast time of the Hajj month, and during the compulsory giving time (*fitra*) of Ramadan. Some local Islamic NGOs work as their collaborators. Such local Islamic NGOs have mushroomed in the last decade, and prominent members include the Al Ihsan Social Development Center, Al Amanah Samaj Kallayan Sangstha, Al Jamateul Islimah, Al Watan Charitable Society, Al Falah, Darul Ihsan Trust, Haqqani Mission, Islami Bank Foundation, Islamic Relief Committee, Islamic Blind Mission, Masjid Samaj, Muslim Hands International, and Zam Zam Bangladesh, to name a few. Most of these are engaged in activities like disaster emergency response, hunger and malnutrition relief, poverty alleviation, madrasa education, orphan support, construction of mosques, healthcare, human rights, humanitarian efforts, religious activities, women's rights, and similar other activities. Some of these NGOs are alleged to collaborate with Muslim fundamentalists, even terrorist organizations, and fund anti-government activities in the country (Saikia and Stepanova, 2009). Some secular and pro-independence NGOs look very suspiciously at these NGOs and keep an invisible distance from them. The existing odd and/or competitive relationship between these two categories of NGOs seems that it will continue into the future and may even turn to a hostile track if the current regime changes in favor of the pro-BNP-Jamaat alliance.

WHAT IS SO DIFFERENT ABOUT THE ISLAMIC NGOS?

Traditionally, developmental NGOs in Bangladesh undertake activities and projects in a wide variety of fields, in both rural and urban areas throughout the country. All large developmental NGOs are composite entities, in that they offer almost all types of activities, ranging from income generation, employment creation, basic education, human rights promotion, and political awareness building. Khondaker, Molla, and Taslima (2009) found 55 categories of programs and activities that were offered by the 567 NGOs affiliated with the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) in 1998. The major categories of activities included in those were adult education, advocacy and lobbying, child education and protection, micro-credit, disaster management, human and civil right protection, rural development, environment and social forestry, health and nutrition, non-formal

primary education, social mobilization, sustainable agriculture, training and education for skill development, water and sanitation, and women's development (Khondaker, Molla, Taslima, 2009). Both secular and Islamic NGOs are engaged in activities that target the most stringent national issues of poverty alleviation and/or eradication, micro-credit operations, job creation, female empowerment, alleviation of social vulnerability, and so on. In the case of micro-financing NGOs, both categories target women in the name of empowerment and, more importantly, as the most reliable partners to meet their micro-financing debt obligations, including sharia-based micro-financing. As Salehin observed (2016), women in rural communities find Islamic NGOs to be less coercive and more sensitive to their religious environment than secular NGOs (Salehin, 2016).

As Salehin, (2012) observes, however, Islamic NGOs endeavor to achieve economic, social, and other developmental goals for their target beneficiaries (individual, group, and locality) in a way that the Islamic value of earthly wellbeing is achieved together with the fulfillment of the worldly obligations and duties that increase ones possibility of success. In Islam, this means the satisfaction of almighty Allah in order to be blessed with eternal heaven in the life hereafter. Islamic teachings of empathy, generosity, and selflessness are emphasized by these NGOs in their activities, which are targeted at emancipating the destitute classes. In rural areas, Islamic NGOs have changed the ideological structure that shapes beneficiaries' lives through the issues of empowerment and piety. Those NGOs have been successful in mobilizing women to create a sense of guilt or sin regarding interest charges by the microcrediting programs of non-Islamic NGOs, and have advocated an Islamic version of female empowerment by enhancing their religious awareness. In contrast to liberal, secular NGOs, a different model of gender relations is emerging, one which envisages Muslim women's sense of piety as central to constructing 'good women.' This concept informs the way they should appear and behave in public life and engage in activities to enhance their social mobility (Salehin, 2012).

The policies undertaken by two military dictators, namely the late Ziaur Rahman and H. M. Ershad, introduced competing notions concerning the roles of women, education, and NGOs in the rural economy of Bangladesh (Karim, 2011). The Zia regime in particular introduced the concept of religion in politics and developmental activities by rehabilitating groups and interests that opposed the independence of Bangladesh because of their hostility to the Awami League (the party that mobilized, organized, and led the independence movement of the country in 1971). Those groups had the organizational ability to bring general people into politics by promoting religious zeal, as many illiterate Bangladesh Muslims are highly influenced by religious and/or Islamic spiritual propaganda and activities for eternal wellbeing. Limitations of the secular NGO-led development movement in the country to address spiritual needs, in conjunction with social transformation due to religious movements in favor of Islam, has led to a new Islamic religion-based NGO development practices (Salehin, 2016), which are now distinctly visible. Islamic NGOs have intertwined the mundane realities of life with piety, which has opened up a niche for their existence, increasing popularity, and sustainability.

THREE CASES OF ISLAMIC NGOs MANAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH

In this section, we will briefly examine the cases of two NGOs, namely PROCHESTA and SAWAB, and the case of one Islamic NGO federation, the AMWAB. Our main focus here is to explore how these NGOs organize and operate their activities and how far their practices differ from or resemble traditional, secular NGOs in the country.

CASE A – PROCHESTA

Established in 2012, PROCHESTA is a faith-based, Islamic NGO operating in grassroots-level development in the Jessore district of Bangladesh. From its inception, it has adopted a faith-based approach to integrated sustainable development by establishing a mosque at a village in the sub-district of Chowgachha in the Jessore district, but its activities have yet to be spread to other districts. It is also not registered in the country as a not-for-profit organization. As mentioned in its preamble, the country of the founder's birth Bangladesh possesses enormous potential to develop, but many people in this generally impoverished country deserve adequate opportunities and resources to avoid suffering and enjoy better lives. Therefore, PROCHESTA was established to help liberate the most unfortunate Bangladeshis from their deprivation and suffering. The name PROCHESTA is derived from a Bangla word *prochestha* which means "effort" or "endeavor." The English transliteration of the catchphrase PROCHESTA is derived from and/or stands for **P**rogram for **R**ural **O**ccupational, **C**ultural, **H**ealthcare, **E**ducational, **S**ocial and **T**echnical **A**dvancements, which is the underlying motto of this organization. As the terms illustrate, this organization has emerged with certain robust objectives and commitments. To that end, it has undertaken some measures aiming at comprehensive changes and advancements, which will enhance the standard of living of abject communities.

PROCHESTA's primer elucidates its mission as follows: "PROCHESTA takes cognizance that Bangladesh is a faith-based society where people of all walks live in harmony with full allegiance to their respective religions." It then goes on to say that, "all religions, and particularly Islam, which is the religion of the vast majority of Bangladesh's population, deeply inculcate in their adherents the sense of upholding justice, peace, prosperity and betterment, and strongly command them to stand against injustice and human suffering." Therefore, PROCHESTA believes that merely working for good causes from a purely secular perspective and approach overlooks, neglects, or even opposes the religions that may well underpin such charitable activities. Instead, they believe that it is more prudent, efficient, and effective to take advantage of a religious perspective and approach. This is particularly important due to the fact that religious perspectives and approaches are inherent and deeply rooted in the hearts of those who are fully allegiant to their religions. Furthermore, religions generate strong emotional and spiritual feelings amongst their adherents in daily life.

Using the above reasoning, PROCHESTA adds that, "since Muslims constitute about 90% of the total population of Bangladesh, we can take an example of how Islam can play a leading role in the integrated development of Bangladeshi society." In many verses of the Qur'an, Allah has commanded to do and promote what is customarily known as good (*m'aruf*) and abstain from and prohibit what is

abhorred as bad (*munkar*). In fact, many verses of the Qur'an, and sayings of the Prophet (pbuh), confirm that rituals (*ibaadaah*), such as five-times-daily prayers as well as fasting in Ramadan, are themselves a form of training to motivate Muslims to promote *m'aruf* and avoid *munkar*. Muslims are closely attached to masjid on daily basis for five-time prayers.

PROCHESTA's primer again justifies that, as "Bangladesh has nearly seventy thousand villages each having at least one masjid, in addition to the cities that are full of masjids at every corner." Every masjid has an *imam* who leads the prayer and is usually well respected and followed. At least once a week, the *imam* (literally meaning leader) has an opportunity to address his congregation during the *jum'ah* (Friday) prayer. For Muslims, not only the *jum'ah* prayer is obligatory, but also attentively listening to the Jum'ah sermon. The sermon is essentially aimed at reminding Muslims what is good and forbidding what is bad, all while keeping them self-motivated and activated on weekly basis. Therefore, if taken in the right spirit, masjids can serve as centers for development activities, *imams* can be well trained in leading development activities, and Muslims can be motivated by their attachment with masjids and their loyalty to the *imams*. They could also be particularly inspired by motivational Jum'ah sermons whereby all people can participate, partner, and take the ownership of development activities for society. Elaborating to include non-Muslim citizens, PROCHESTA goes on to say, "similarly, the other religions and their centers of worshipping can be well utilized to integrate people of all faiths with development activities." This organization believes that a "faith-based (*particularly Islamic in the context of Bangladesh*) perspective and approach can be more efficient, effective and rewarding, and has been overlooked or neglected thus far by development players" (PROCHESTA, 2012).

PROCHESTA believes that the Prophet (pbuh) of Islam had used mosque not only for worshipping and ritual performance, but also as the center for worldly activities, including administration of the institutions of education, justice, consultative assembly, governance of internal affairs, international and diplomatic relations, and affairs of peace, reconciliation and war. Even today it is perceived to play a vital role as the center for all activities in Muslims' lives, be they earthly or spiritual, mundane or religious, for the welfare of this world or the life hereafter (PROCHESTA, 2012). As such, PROCHESTA has established a mosque and operates all its grassroots level activities from this institution. Currently, all activities target the people in that village.

As the first step toward achieving integrated development, PROCHESTA has located certain priority social challenges of its target group and region, and organizes activities under certain core categories of fields. These are summarized as follows (PROCHESTA, 2012).

(a) Advancement of Education: With the understanding that education is the backbone of a nation, and a lack of education is one of the root causes of poverty in the rural society of Bangladesh, especially in remote villages, causing suffering not limited to illiteracy and lack of education. In this regard, PROCHESTA established and operates a social school centered around its mosque, with a daytime school for uneducated housewives and a nighttime school for the men who mostly work as agricultural farm laborers during the day. The organization wants to gradually expand its operations to cover as many villages as possible in the region, particularly under the social school program, which costs only an estimated amount of \$100 per month for an entire village. Since every village has

at least one mosque, having such social schools at affordable low costs is actually feasible. In addition to this, a Qur'anic school has been established at the mosque to teach reading and reciting the holy Qur'an. This school has a full-time teacher trained in the "scientific" method of teaching the Qur'an in the most authentic way, as opposed to the traditional, unscientific way. It also operates a Tahfizul Qur'an school (school for memorizing the Qur'an), which offers full facilities with accommodations for both students and teachers. Moreover, this organization envisions establishing an institution for the training and education of teachers and *imams*, with a focus on the relevance of classical sources of Islam, including the Qur'an and the hadith (the prophetic traditions). It also offers scholarships, stipends, and other financial support programs for the poor, but promising, children who would otherwise be deprived of an education, and likely end up becoming forced laborers due to poverty. Lastly, as a part of its master plan, PROCHESTA is establishing model schools and colleges at strategic locations at Chowgachha and other sub-districts in Jessore, as well as in the whole country. As planned, these schools and colleges would provide high quality education using the state-of-the art technologies and facilities. PROCHESTA also envisions that graduates of such institutions will be exemplary agents of positive changes in society (PROCHESTA, 2012).

(b) Healthcare: Identifying poor health conditions as the main cause of poverty and suffering in rural society, and identifying sound health as the barometer of happiness, activity, vitality, motivation, and prosperity, PROCHESTA recognizes the significance of healthcare as an important area of focus for integrated development. It has taken on several robust programs for providing medication and treatment to sick and terminally ill people in the target area. The organization also has plans to establish primary healthcare centers to provide basic health education, treatment, and medicine to poor village people at no or little cost. Initially, PROCHESTA devoted activities to improving services in existing healthcare facilities in the area, especially to the Chowgachha Upzilla Health Complex, to enhance the quality of its services. To this end, it has been sponsoring the salaries of some nursing caretakers who work as volunteers/trainees alongside government employed healthcare workers. Since germ-free, arsenic-free, clean underground drinking water is in low supply and is essential, especially in rural areas, it has installed two deep tube wells with reservoirs to supply drinking water at no cost. Furthermore, as unawareness is a problem that critically affects sanitation, particularly in rural areas, it is trying to create funds that support toilets with sanitary facilities, and to build awareness among people to use such sanitary toilet facilities (PROCHESTA, 2012).

(c) Poverty Alleviation: Bangladesh is a poor nation where both crude and absolute poverty rates are very high. In rural areas, and in urban slums especially, a vast majority of people live below the poverty line, and are deprived of the basic human necessities of food, clothing, shelter, drinking water, sanitation, healthcare, education, and so forth. Their living conditions have remained unchanged for generations. Poverty brings other vices with it, namely joblessness, illiteracy, insecurity, powerlessness, exclusion, subjugation, insufficient capacity, exploitation, and the like. As part of its holistic approach to comprehensive development, this NGO has introduced plans to combat poverty and prevent human suffering, singling out advancement of education and healthcare, with special attention to poverty alleviation and/or eradication, vis-a-vis its limited capacity and resources. Schemes to provide all required supports to poor people, including micro-finance, education, training,

planning, supervision, management, job training, etc., to enable them to change their life conditions towards continued betterment. Since Bangladesh is an agro-based country and poor people in rural areas are engaged in agro-based farming activities (food-crop farming, poultry, dairy, fisheries, etc.), schemes targeted at capacity building and productivity improvement in these fields have already been undertaken. As expected, such programs will increase income, improve livelihood and quality of life, and create better opportunities for poverty emancipation (PROCHESTA, 2012).

(d) Humanitarian Programs: Humanitarian issues such as destitution, orphaned children, widows, disabled people, elderly people, etc. are heart-throbbing in the country, and PROCHESTA has undertaken various humanitarian programs to alleviate their suffering. Humanitarian causes are PROCHESTA's priority, and it emphasizes the religious importance of such. In this vein, it has undertaken some action plans in the target region to support orphans and widows, as well as disabled and elderly people. It also has plans to build an orphanage in the near future. Furthermore, PROCHESTA has undertaken a plan to build homes for the homeless and, in the meantime, it has built and renovated accommodations for some impoverished families. It has also provided costs for medical treatment for poor people suffering from chronic illnesses and offered financial assistance for education and livelihood for parentless children (PROCHESTA, 2012).

All these programs and projects are undertaken within the planned and perceived action framework of the founder of this organization, who himself was born in a very needy family, experienced poverty in life, and pursued higher education in Malaysia and the USA. His robust and monocratic leadership ability, humanistic aptitude, management expertise, and charismatic devotion to the cause of religion and development are some of the prime assets that has helped bring the organization success so far. Question such as, how long his leadership will continue, how he will nurture and develop his successor, how he will incorporate outsiders in the organization's management, and how much growth this organization envisions, will greatly influence its success in the coming future.

CASE B – SOCIAL AGENCY FOR WELFARE AND ADVANCEMENT IN BANGLADESH (SAWAB)

Established in 1995, the Social Agency for Welfare and Advancement in Bangladesh, abbreviated as SAWAB, is an Islamic NGO that has its head office in Dhaka, the capital city of the country, and conducts charity activities with its credo "serving humanity is at the heart of SAWAB's existence." It is registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB), the apex NGO authority under the Prime Minister's Office of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. SAWAB has been working since 1995 with varied programs committed to such areas as education, poverty reduction, health, emergency situations, awareness building, and so on. It promotes an integrated approach to development, "where both material and ethical aspirations are accommodated." So far, it has provided services to more than half a million people and has developed partnerships with 200 community-based organizations (CBOs), which help it implement its programs effectively. It has also enhanced its partnering CBOs through numerous capacity building activities and programs. Through these partnering organizations, it can reach target groups and communities across the country. Apart from development interventions and charities, SAWAB "strives to promote tolerance and caring attitudes in

society,” as it strongly believes that “tolerance is essential to build a harmonious society” where all people, irrespective of religious faith, economic class, and subnational region, will have fair opportunities and choices (SAWAB: HP).

SAWAB is highly modernized and forward focused in its approaches to management, in that it has developed its logo, established its vision, articulated its mission, and charted its institutional values, which work as the underlying policies and principles for all its activities as a development partner and leader in the country. Its vision is to establish a just society free from hunger, ignorance, social injustice, violence, oppression, and other forms of exploitation, and where peace, progress, tranquility, and development would prevail. It has earmarked its institutional mission to develop and empower all people and communities facing situations of poverty, social injustice, ignorance, violence, terrorism, exploitation, and other forms of suffering through promoting education, mutual understanding and collaboration, poverty alleviation, health, skill development, and awareness building (SAWAB: HP).

In essence, SAWAB is a value-driven developmental organization and has earmarked its six institutional and operational values as: a) empathy and care – SAWAB is committed to being empathetic and caring to distressed people; b) partnership and collaboration – in order to create synergy in development efforts and charity, SAWAB builds partnerships with different organizations, individuals, and communities; c) integrity and transparency – SAWAB strictly practices integrity and transparency in all its activities and interventions; d) change and adaptability – as changes take place constantly, SAWAB endeavors to adapt to all positive changes to stay relevant; e) inclusiveness – SAWAB reaches out to all in need regardless of cast, creed, culture, and religion; and f) ownership – all stakeholders are consulted while developing and implementing projects and programs. Its target beneficiaries always remain at the forefront of its activities and steer all programs aimed at their wellbeing (SAWAB, HP).

At the apex of its staffing and administration, SAWAB has a general body of twenty-one members and an executive committee, consisting of seven members, which is the highest management body and directs it towards achieving its goals and objectives in the best possible manner. The chairman of this committee acts as the chief executive officer (CEO), convening meetings when required. At the management level, heads of different programs play important roles in implementing organizational plans and activities. One of the most important parts of its management is that it gives utmost importance to its transparency of policies and operations. All activities with financial involvement are audited by a certified auditing firm, which is selected from the list, published by the government, of such firms. SAWAB submits all its audited reports to the NGOAB of the Prime Minister’s Office. It also submits such reports to its funding agencies. Moreover, it has an internal audit team that checks all of its financial transactions and ensures its operational transparency (SAWAB, 2013 and 2015). Below the chairman/executive director, there is one personnel officer, one coordinator, one administrative and human resources officer, one communications officer, one program manager, one program coordinator, one program officer, one accounts officer, one audit and monitoring officer, two assistant program officers, one communication officer, and one office assistant. In addition, there are several supervisors and two drivers. The chairman holds a post-graduate degree from one of the most prominent universities in the country and is man of profound expertise. All staff and officers are also

highly educated and experienced in their respective fields and function as a team in organizing activities from the head office to the grassroots level. The organigram of this NGO looks as follows (Figure 1).

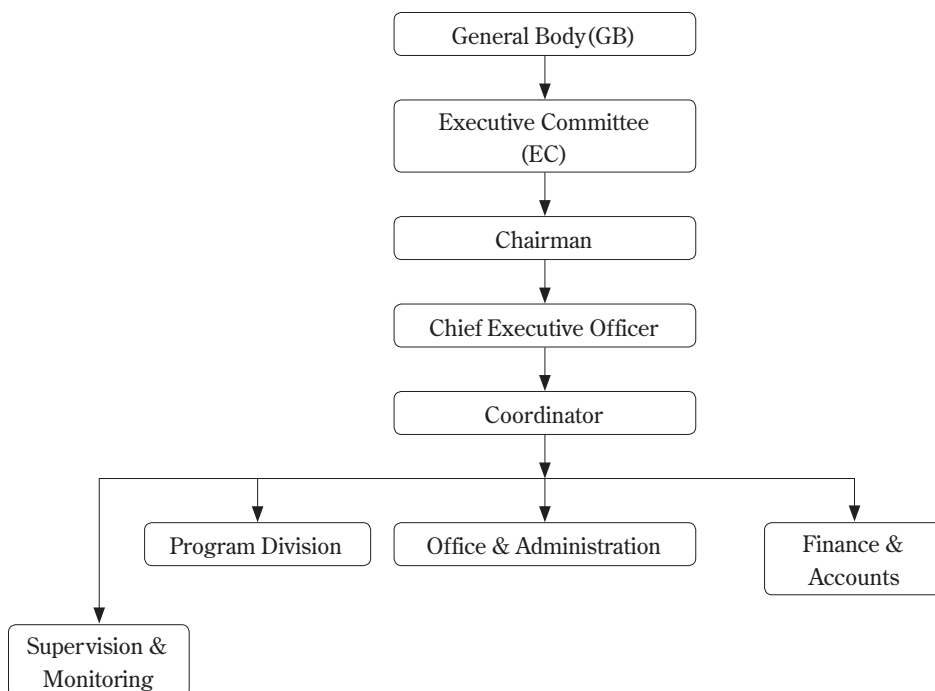


Figure 1: SAWAB's Organogram

Source: SWAB (website). <http://sawabbd.org/organogram/> (accessed on March 8, 2018).

Underlying SAWAB's principles, policies, projects, and activities are a strong Islamic moral and religious fervor. It upholds a strong moral and political conviction that material gains alone cannot relieve an individual or a family from the vicious cycle of abject poverty. As such, its development programs are specially designed with moral and religious values in mind, as a way of promoting mutual cooperation and empathy in society. Moral and religious values equip an individual with essential qualities to fight poverty and its underlying causes, mitigating them by utilizing available resources. As such, SAWAB is committed to promoting mutual dedication and understanding among its target group of poor people, with a high ethic of morality and socio-economic advancement. As mentioned in the message of its chairman, SAWAB is devoted to "always seek divine help from Allah" in all its efforts to serve humanity (SAWAB, website).

SAWAB extends its programs and activities to different parts of the country to help poor people cope with the various forms of hardship they encounter. With this aim, it sponsors and implements different programs, projects, and activities by developing partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) that show a record of working effectively in both rural and urban areas of the

country. As mentioned before, it has developed workable partnerships with more than 200 CBOs as of 2014–15, and considers such partnerships as the most viable strategy to help achieve various national developmental goals. Since its inception in 1995, it has worked in a wide range of activities, namely education (formal education, non-formal education for the underprivileged, technical education, brother family project, and orphan care programs), basic health care, water and sanitation (WATSAN, as the catchphrase), poverty alleviation, entrepreneurship and empowerment, integrated slum improvement, female empowerment and development, emergency ambulance services, disaster management and climate change adaption, emergency relief and rehabilitation, occasional programming (such as food for the poor, orphan care, clothing support, Ramadan programs, Eid gifts, and Qurbani meat distribution among the poor), networking and partnership, advocacy and campaigning for development, interest-free microcredit, and so on, through overcoming resource scarcity, social and political malaise, and natural and man-made disasters, some of which chronically prevail in the nation². SAWAB also undertakes some need-based emergency programs, which are taken when unexpected crises occur, such as super cyclone SIDR in 2007, which washed away the coastal districts of Pauakhali, Barguna, Jhalokati, Bagerhat, and Khulna (mainly mangrove forest regions). It also responded to the Rana Plaza Collapse at Savar in 2013, and to current Rohingya refugee crisis. In all of these cases, it has mobilized its available resources to serve thousands of affected people and rehabilitate them as needed.

SAWAB's most important approach to development activities is perhaps its partnership building with other developmental organizations, government agencies, and philanthropic establishments in the country and abroad. As mentioned above, it has developed strong relationships and offered different programs in collaboration with many active CBOs in different fields in both rural and urban areas. Collaboration and partnership with local, regional, national, and international organizations is deeply rooted in its core values. It has especially strengthened partnerships in fundraising and in implementing its humanitarian activities. It offered its Brother Family project from 2013 to 2017, with the assistance of Yardim-Eli-Dernegi Turkey, and provided food support and rehabilitation services in 2013. In partnership with the Zakat Foundation, USA, it also offered emergency ambulance service in 2007 with support from the Islamic Medical Association (PIMA) and the Al-Khadim Foundation of Pakistan. SAWAB even distributed relief goods among flood victims at Lalmonirhat in 2016, with funds from NAHAR (North American Humanitarian Aid & Relief) under its disaster management program. It also implemented many seasonal programs such as food, clothing, and Qurbani meat distribution for poor Muslims during the fasting month of Ramadan, as well as for the Hajj season, with special financial support from the Hayrat Foundation of Turkey, Muslim Aid UK, ACT Indonesia, and Yardim Eli, VERENEL, and IHH (all from Turkey)³. It is one of the signatories to the Union of NGOs of the Islamic World (UNIW) in Turkey.

So far, SAWAB has arranged many seminars, symposiums, and workshops involving

² For more details about the activities of SAWAB, see its website and annual reports.

³ Here we mentioned some important examples of SAWAB's humanitarian activities. Some of these activities are occasional and/ or seasonal, and but there are many activities which it organizes as part of its regular activities.

representatives of partner NGOs at the regional and national levels, which open up scopes for the effective understanding, sharing knowledge, collaboration, and implementation of development programs and activities. Such programs increase opportunities to understand the diverse needs of the country and develop policies and strategies to address those effectively. Furthermore, it has taken part in emergency relief activities for the victims of the earthquake devastation in Nepal in 2015. It has dispatched its members and activists to different training and/or study programs/tours in Cyprus, Dubai (UAE), Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Yemen. All these have improved its managerial and organizational capabilities to undertake projects and programs to achieve its developmental and humanitarian goals and objectives effectively and efficiently.

CASE C – ASSOCIATION OF MUSLIM WELFARE AGENCIES IN BANGLADESH (AMWAB)

Established in 1993, the Association of Muslim Welfare Agencies in Bangladesh (AMWAB) is a NGO by itself, as well as a federation of Islamic NGOs in Bangladesh. As the Islamic NGO sector expanded and flourished in the country, its members formed this forum and initiated activities for its member organizations, which are involved in different types of development activities. This is very similar to that of the secular, pro-Awami League NGO organizations, known as the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) (Karim, 2011), the pro-Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) organization, and the Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB).

In 2008, AMWAB had around 320 registered Islamic NGOs that worked with rural clients within an Islamic framework (Karim, 2011). There is now an apex body of grassroots Muslim NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) working in this country. Currently, 320-plus NGOs with AMWAB membership are working in Bangladesh. Among other functions, AMWAB provides capacity building support to its member organizations if and when necessary. Such capacity building programs and projects include human resources development, strategic management training, networking, funding, *dawah* (advocacy) activities, seminars, symposiums, workshops, research and publication, logistics support, and so forth (AMWAB, DNF). Many Islamic NGOs, however, are not registered with the AMWAB, even though the number of such organizations was 4,000 in 2007, as per the report of Transparency International (Karim, 2011). An activist has complained to one of the authors that this organization is neither in a position to offer adequate leadership, nor can it provide action programs necessary to meet the divergent needs of the Islamic NGO movement in the country, urging that it needs to rejuvenate and revamp its operations, management, and leadership without much delay.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to understand to what extent can it be claimed that there is an Islamic NGO or NPO sector in Bangladesh. A few questions, however, still remain: when researchers and practitioners talk about Islamic philanthropy and/or charity in this country, do they mean an “Islamic NGOs sector,” an “Islamic nonprofit sector,” a “separate nonprofit sector with Islamic

elements,” or “nonprofit sectors with participation by Islamic developmental organizations?” The authors examined this issue by considering NGOs in this country through three case studies on PROCHESTA, SAWAB, and AMWAB. The findings of this study can be summarized as follows. First, Islamic developmental organizations or NGOs prevail in the pretext of having a competitive voice, presence, and role in the development activities of Bangladesh, which is an effective way of drawing as close to the general public as possible. As a vast majority of people are Muslims, and the talk of religious spirit appeals to them, Islamic NGOs use the language of religion, which connects earthly needs of living with an eternity in heaven. Secondly, Islamic NGOs, in their operation and management, promote a scientific approach, in that they develop operational and managerial principles and philosophies of mission, strategy formulation, goal development, and day-to-day objectives in a calculated and evidence-based way. *Prima facie*, all of these NGOs possess a spiritual/religious component that transcends their activities, operations, volunteering, and management. Third, the leaders, who promote Islamic NGOs and constitute the nuclei of those organizations, are highly educated, highly experienced in the culture of the development of Bangladesh, and future-focused in their action, outlook, and approach. They carefully and objectively study the loopholes in the approaches and attitudes of secular NGOs and position and align their resources, most importantly their staff and activists, in competitive and similar fields to accomplish more successful projects and programs. Fourth, Islamic faith-based NGOs are particularly active in such fields as poverty alleviation, income generation, emergency relief operations, education, gender emancipation, social welfare, healthcare, human rights promotion, disaster relief, and so on (see also Nejima, 2010). Fifth, Islamic NGOs promote networks between local and international Islamic NGOs and development assistance providers, as well as collaborating with secular NGOs that are on at least equal and/or competitive footing. They put more emphasis on the human aspect of development activities and strategically attach importance to human values, social equality, and distributional justice, which make them more trustworthy to their target beneficiaries. Sixth – on one hand, Islamic NGOs make the utmost efforts to establish friendly and collaborative relationships with international donors and supportive organizations, and on the other, they collaborate with government organizations (developmental activity line ministries, NGOAB, district-level administrations, etc.). Their efforts to remain law abiding, trustworthy, and efficient are meticulous. Seventh, Islamic NGOs are scared of sabotage and of a step-motherly attitude and treatment adopted by the competing secular NGOs, pro-political party NGOs, and government authorities. Eighth, some Islamic NGOs allegedly engage in anti-liberation and anti-secular government propaganda, pro-terrorist activities, underground hostile activities, and funding Muslim fundamentalist criminal organizations. As such, prominent secular NGOs look at them suspiciously. Ninth, the authors have evidence that there are many good Muslim NGOs that are highly patriotic and efficient while are liked by government authorities for their sincerity, effectiveness, and trustworthiness. Tenth, and finally, in terms of management, mobilization, and lobbying, Islamic NGOs are no farther behind secular and political NGOs in the country. They have their own lobbyists, organizations, and federations, and even mobilize international lobbying efforts in favor of their movement and mission.

As of present, Islamic NGOs are a distinctly visible reality in the development movement of

Bangladesh, and their roles and efficiency are attested to in many sectors. The Muslim people of Bangladesh are historically sincere, in many ways, to their religious instincts, values, and culture. Islamic NGOs can and do appeal to them, if the people find them truly religious and honest in their activities and operations. Although secular politics is viewed as a hostile and/ or negative element for Islamic NGO activities, these NGOs can discernably hold strong positions alongside secular and non-Islamic NGOs in this country in the future.

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Islamic NGOs in Bangladesh

—Focus on Their Management—

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Abstract

Based on archival sources and first-hand interviews, this paper examines some aspects of the operation and management of Islamic NGOs in Bangladesh. Findings suggest that Islamic NGOs prevail under the pretext of having competitive presence and roles in the developmental activities of the country, which is an effective way of getting closer to the general public in the nation. In their operation and management, these NGOs implement some progressive approaches, in that they develop operational and management principles and philosophies consisting of mission statements, strategy formulations, goal development, and day-to-day operational management objectives. All such actions possess a sort of spiritual fervor which transcends their organizations, activities, operations, volunteering, and management. The leaders-cum-activists of Islamic NGOs are meticulously educated, they are forward-facing in terms of action, outlook, and approach, and they are highly conversant with the culture and movement of development in the country. They carefully and objectively study the loopholes in the approach and attitude of secular NGOs and position and align their resources, staff, activists, and managers in competitive fields to achieve successful missions and programs. These NGOs are particularly active in such fields as poverty alleviation, income generation, emergency relief operation, education, gender emancipation, social welfare, healthcare, human rights promotion, disaster relief, and so on. They promote networks with both local and international Islamic NGOs and development assistance providers and collaborate with secular NGOs on an equal and/or competitive footing. They emphasize the human aspect of development activities and strategically attach importance to human values, life-after-death, social equality, and distributional justice, which make them more trustworthy to their beneficiaries. Furthermore, these NGOs make utmost efforts to establish friendly and collaborative relationships with international donors, supportive organizations, and government organizations. They meticulously work to remain law abiding, trustworthy, and efficient. They are afraid of sabotage and of receiving step-motherly attitudes and treatment from the competing secular NGOs, politically neutral NGOs, and government authorities. Some Islamic NGOs allegedly interfere in anti-liberation, anti-secular government propaganda, pro-terrorist activities, underground hostile activities, and funding Muslim fundamentalist criminal organizations. There are, however, many good Muslim NGOs, which are highly patriotic and efficient and are liked by government authorities for their sincerity, effectiveness, and trustworthiness. They have their own lobbyists and organizations, and even mobilize international lobbyists to further their movement and mission.

Keywords: AMWAB, Bangladesh, NGO sector, Islam, Islamic NGOs, PROCHESTA, SAWAB.