

The Hum Awaaz Manifesto

A case for Civil Society coming together in Karachi

Pakistan is frequently ranked as one of the world's top charitable countries. This means that that the citizens of Karachi are likely to contribute more to charity (as a percentage of their annual income) than the citizens of any of the world's other mega urban centers. It would follow that that the amount of Civil Society organizations working in Karachi is greater than that of most of the world's other mega urban centers.

And still we are racked with problems. What is happening? Is Civil Society failing at some level? Or are we victims of larger-scale failures, left to pick up the pieces?

It is not the purpose of this paper to fix the blame. The picture of "what went wrong in Karachi" is far too complex and nuanced to point out one or two (or a dozen) culprits.

What we can do, however, is put forth a solution. That is what this paper aims to suggest.

The suggestion is this: Civil Society may be one of Karachi's *greatest* and most *under-used* assets in the struggle to find security, prosperity and quality of life for its citizens. Greatest, because organizations are already established, supported and widespread across the city. Under-used, because the sum of each organization's resources does not match the final result in terms of general impact upon the city.

The suggestion follows like this: one of the main reasons Civil Society is not achieving more is because we are functioning like disparate and vulnerable entities.

Hence: if the individual Civil Society organizations could somehow "come together" we could begin to behave like a coherent and powerful organism, and achieve results that are more proportionate to the effort and resources we are investing toward social good.

WHERE DO WE STAND RIGHT NOW?

As we all know, there is a lot of ground to cover before we reach a state of "coherent, organismic behavior". (In the words of Faiz: *yeh, voh sehar tou nahin!*) Since the first key step we are proposing is for Civil Society to "come together" we will now explore how we are "not together".

Fragmentation

Civil society is operating, yes, but from separate and disconnected cubicles. There is very little *awareness* about what others in our field are doing. There is even less *collaboration* and partnerships among organizations. We cannot achieve anything larger-scale than our own resources permit because we do not embark on joint ventures with others who work in our same field. This "silo" effect leaves each of us more vulnerable, limits our vision and encourages duplication of effort and financial investment.

No ownership

Due to this fragmentation and a self-centered focus we do not feel that the city as a whole is our responsibility. We don't feel like someone else's problems are ours as well, and we don't look out for others or the "greater good". This leads to good organizations or causes suffering needlessly, while others who could help them at very little cost happily go about business-as-

usual. We fail to realize that a defeat to any one of the players means a defeat to all of the players.

No common vision

Perhaps we fail to realize this because we have disjointed and often conflicting visions of what the “game” really is all about. Because of this we find ourselves pulling in opposite directions or stepping on each other’s feet in our response to problems. This is not to suggest all of Civil Society must turn into a Stalinist dystopia and robotically agree on everything. Disagreement and conflict are necessary! But we do feel that a large enough percentage of organizations must agree on *at least* a few points, which can become a common and uniting vision which can provide us with valuable guidance.

No platform

But how will there be a common vision if there is no place to discuss and debate it? We lack common platforms, places where we can come together, whether virtually or in the flesh. We lack mechanisms that bring Civil Society together, we lack opportunities to see each other, network and create synergy.

No collective voice

As a byproduct of not having a collective vision, we end up without a collective voice. We may be shouting at the top of our lungs, but no one can make out what we are shouting for (compare the voices in market place to the voices in a football stadium). This weakens us a whole. We are unable to put *pressure* on the needed people or bodies when pressure is needed. This leads to us becoming *under-valued* and *under-represented* when key decisions are being made in our country and city.

Lack of resources

As a result of not being together in vision and voice the resources seem scarce. While a coordinated effort might secure a plentiful amount of resources which can be distributed and shared among all, this is not usually what happens. We each fight our separate battles, struggle for smaller amounts of resources, and these, in the end don’t add up to much. (This point is intimately connected to the point on fragmentation and the lack of joint ventures.)

Lack of capacity

That is not to speak of how our limited resources *are* used. Many organizations face structural problems which drain resources (or stop them from tapping new sources) because their people lack training or their systems are inefficient. These problems could more easily be solved with mutual support or pooling of resources. Some areas in which Civil Society lacks capacity are: financial management, legal support, reporting and program M&E, marketing and communications, donor management and outreach, use of technology and data, volunteer resourcing, creating an organizational structure and/or culture, strategic planning, human resource management, etc.

Dependent on big donors

Currently there is much global focus on Pakistan, and this brings with it investment from international donor agencies. But this may be a mixed blessing. Will these funds actually contribute to lasting change? Or will they create dependence and further feed corrupt systems? Some have suggested that we have become a “buyer’s market” where big donors can dictate the focus of Civil Society. We do not see this as a healthy situation. We believe Civil Society must be resilient enough to succeed without intervention of international

donors who may or may not have a clear idea of what is needed locally. This resilience will be increased as organizations build their capacity, work together to secure resources, and use their collective voice.

Poor knowledge sharing

When was the last time we “compared notes” with peers of ours in the same field? When was the last time we shared best practices with similar organizations? Many of us independently conduct research, develop intellectual resources, or discover tips and tricks to do our jobs better. But we usually keep these to ourselves. Again, we are not aiming for a Stalinist utopia where everyone shares everything. (I’m really stuck on comrade Stalin today.) There is *definitely* a place for competition and withholding intellectual property for your organization’s own profit. But what if there was *some* knowledge that we *could* share with our peers at no detriment to us? And what if in return we could receive knowledge from our peers at no detriment to them? Would that not actually *increase* the opportunities for both?

Limited grassroots engagement

Perhaps due to problems listed earlier, reliance on big donors, lack of organizational capacity, and others, many organizations find themselves removed from the ground realities. Many find themselves without the support, whether financial or moral, from the communities they serve. There have been observations of our inability to mobilize community members, or to gain popular support for the causes we are advocating. What is wrong here? Where and how are we disconnected from our beneficiaries?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In light of the above situation, we propose the formation of Ham Awaaz: a network of Civil Society organizations who have come together in order to strengthen Civil Society in our city and raise a collective voice regarding the problems we are currently facing. (Read more about what Hum Awaaz is, how it is structured and how it works in our [Constitution](#). Read more about the specific interventions and projects which Hum Awaaz is implementing in our [Strategy](#).)

Our mission

The mission of Ham Awaaz is two-fold:

Strengthen civil society to increase its social impact in Karachi

Create a collective voice among the members of civil society to bring needed attention relevant issues

“Strengthen” for now means “bring it together”, and this will be further described in the below section. However, this word provides us with a broad mandate and creates a fertile ground for many other interesting interventions, such as capacity building, support groups, think tanks, fundraising drives or resource centers, which may be implemented as the future unfolds.

“Social impact” is not qualified. It simply means that existing Civil Society organizations do whatever they already do, but they are able to do more and better.

“Collective voice” means that civil society becomes organized and coordinated enough that it can create a stir, apply pressure, and get a clear message out to the public when needed. It means that civil society begins to compete with other entities (local/western media,

conservative radicals, foreign “experts”, local or global authorities, etc.) for the rights to the “narrative” of Karachi.

“Relevant issues” are not explicitly outlined. These will be issues which member organizations decide are most pressing at the time. As we cannot predict this it is important that this category remains open and in constant discussion among member organizations. The only definition which we might offer is that they will be issues which threaten the peace, prosperity and wellbeing of the citizens of Karachi in the present, the near and the distant future.

“Civil society” expresses our target audience. All of the work of Hum Awaaz will be geared toward Civil Society whether directly (through interventions to strengthen member organizations) or indirectly (by using member’s collective voice to highlight social issues).

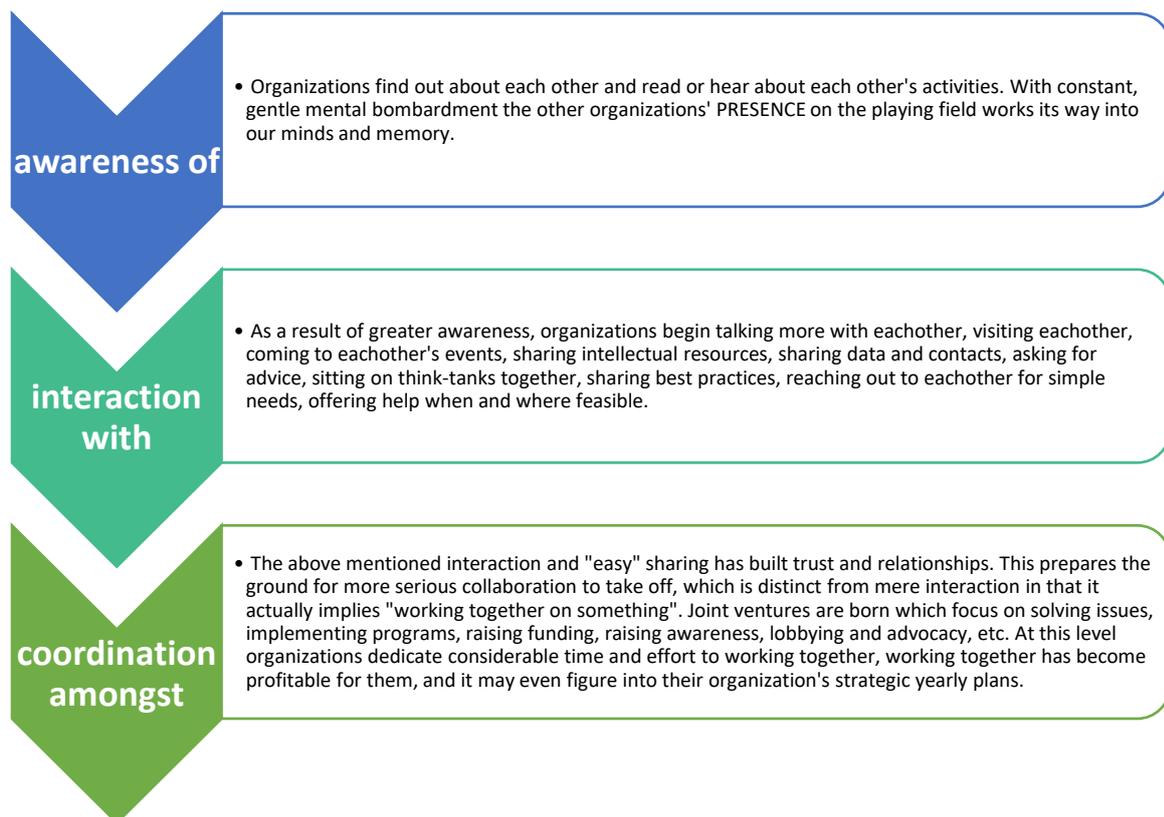
“Karachi” suggests that we are limiting our focus to this city. But it is conceivable the as Hum Awaaz matures, and opportunities and partners arise, the focus may grow beyond Karachi.

How does Civil Society become “strengthened”?

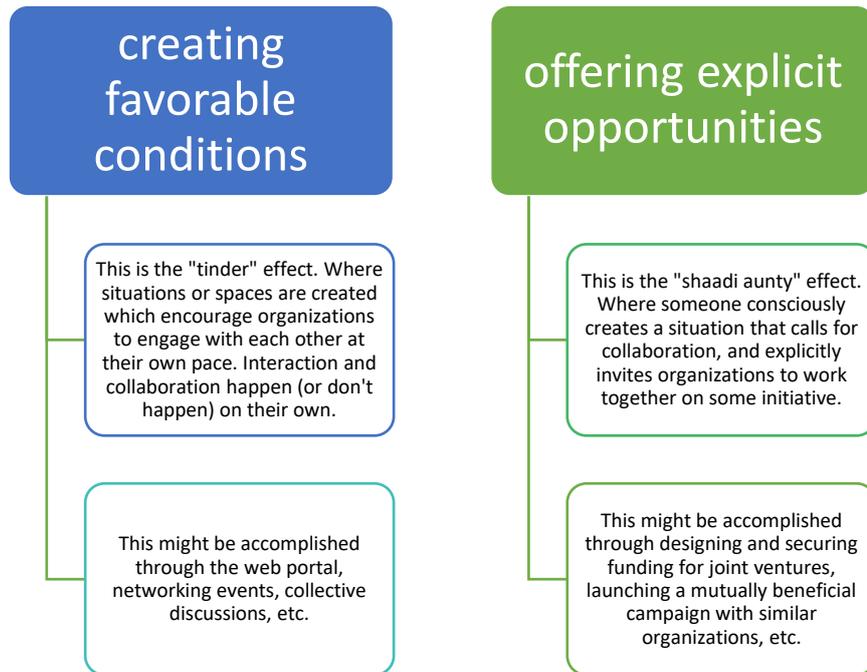
As already mentioned, the main way we envision organizations being strengthened is if they can come together. This is an evocative idea, but it is vague, so some specifics are needed to help us form a picture of what that “coming together” actually means, and how might it happen.

This can be pictured as a process of deepening levels of engagement between organizations; the gradual forming of relationships among them. This process moves from the initial goal of organizations simply having more *awareness of* each other, to gradually having more *interaction with* each other, to finally having more *coordination amongst* each other. At this point the above mentioned “coherent and organismic behavior” begins to be seen.

The below chart gives some specifics of what might be seen in each stage:

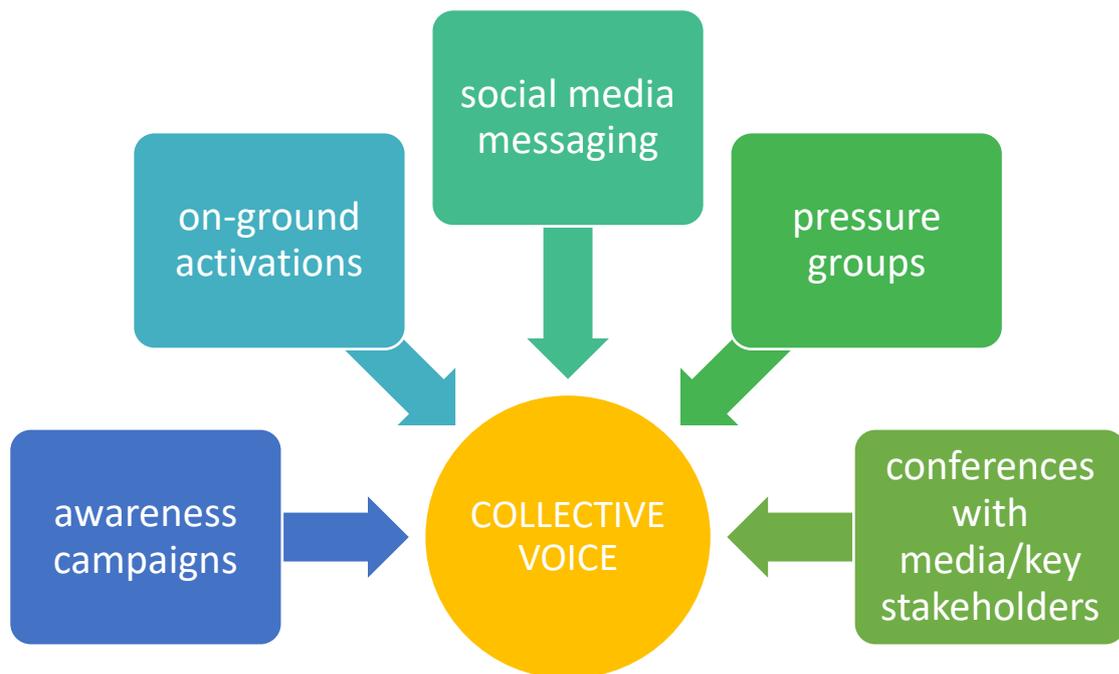


Civil Society may naturally work its way through each of the stages without conscious help. But this is not likely. We believe that to move through each stage organizations will need one of two kinds of stimulus:



How do we “Create a collective voice”?

Much of the work done to strengthen and bring together Civil Society will also help to bring out this collective voice. However this voice also needs to be exercised and stimulated in order to grow and gain influence. Several possible initiatives that will contribute to bringing out the collective voice are:

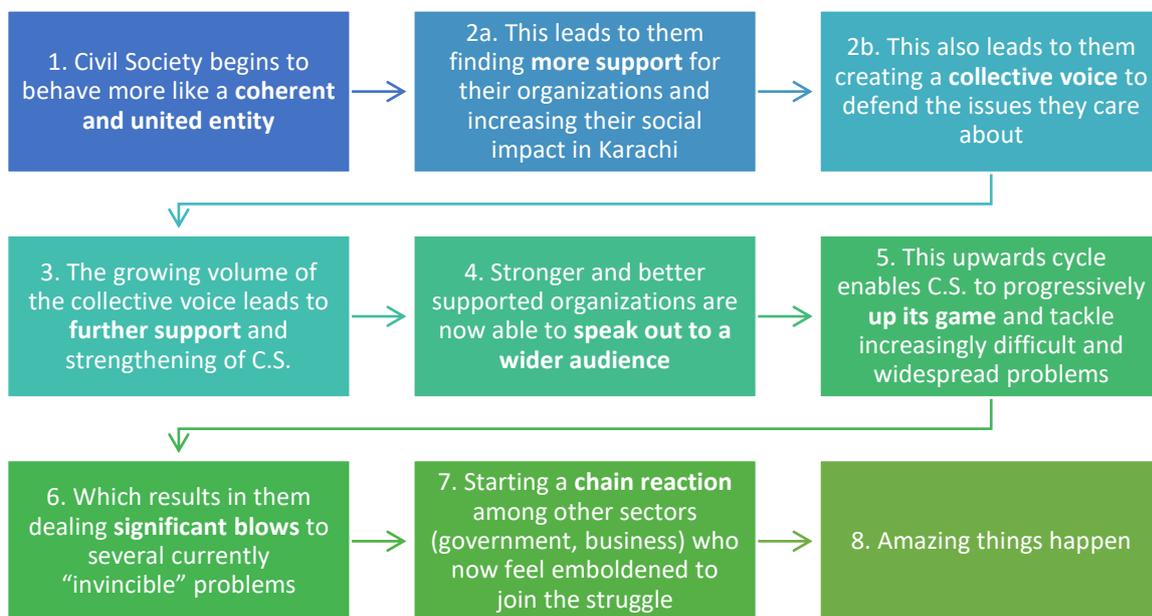


These initiatives will not be randomly selected and rolled out. Member organizations of Hum Awaaz will deliberate and decide on an issue which they feel is important. The messaging, call to action, case-specific activities and point people will then be developed and agreed upon by the member organizations, and the initiative will then be rolled out. We foresee however, that emergency situations may arise, which do not allow for such an organized response. In such cases predetermined members of the network will follow an emergency procedure in order to get the word out in a timely manner. (Read more about this in our [Communication Strategy and Procedures](#).)

WHAT FOR?

Our vision—what we would like to see in the future—is civil society becoming organized and behaving in a united, coordinated and mutually supportive fashion. We would then like to see civil society taking this unity a step further and finding and using its collective voice. We would like to see Civil Society creating an outcry against prevailing wrongs, or promoting and pushing for needed large-scale solutions.

Our envisioned “happy ending” plays out like this:



To summarize: it looks a bit like a progressive cycle which is sparked by Civil Society coming together. The cycle then repeatedly goes through steps—we get more support, we speak out unitedly about issues, this leads to more support, and we speak out more, etc. This continues and Civil Society grows in influence and impact until our response matches the size of the problems we are tackling.