Role of Government in Social Norms and Dilemmas

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Introduction

The contemporary society is being faced with various problems, some of which are the result of natural catastrophes, and others are provoked by humans and cause international conflicts. However, many would agree that both of the aforementioned issues involve a conflict between the personal interest of particular individuals and the society, which reflect the broader interests.

The situations with the involvement of a lot of money usually concern the majority of people. It is most vivid to observe this situation at the country level where the government plays the role of one of the actors. People are often unwilling to donate money for maintaining centers or supporting the volunteers' activities. The reason is that despite the amount of individual contribution, everyone can benefit. Social psychologists call this type of problem as "social dilemma." Another term that is used to denote this meaning is "public goods dilemma" (Dawes, 1980).

This paper attempts to analyze the role of the government in social dilemmas and norms. Various factors influence the behavior of the government as a leader of the society and the citizens as its group members; however, its final role depends on itself. In order to answer the topic question, the theoretical background of social dilemma, leadership, and interrelations are discussed. All of that is supported by the discussion of the issue and provision of the practical examples on the role of the government in social norms and dilemmas.

Theoretical Background

Many scholars seek to indicate the role of the government in social norms and dilemmas (Dawes, 1980; Van Vugt & De Cremer, 2002; Yamagishi, 1986). Social norms are a belief of

group members concerning their own behavior in a certain context. It is also an informal understanding, which governs the behavior of the society. There are two dimensions of social norms within the frames of "government-citizens" relations. The first is the amount of the behavior that is exhibited, and the second is the extent, to which the group members approve that behavior. Social dilemmas are considered complex issues as in such cases, the collective interests are in conflict with the private ones. At the same time, these situations can arise when there is a prioritization of the interests by any side of the society. In this case, various short-term and long-term interests of an organization or society are meant.

There are ideas that public goods are created because of individuals' voluntary contributions. However, in order to make these goods existing for a longer time, such voluntary opportunity can be forced to change in the way they were initially organized. The basic and the most obvious solution is the setting up of a leader who would manage the goods (Van Vugt & De Cremer, 1999). When the leader is installed, the behavior of the groups he or she is managing should be explored. Thus, it is essential to analyze whether the leader manages public goods successfully or not, how much power he or she possesses, and what type of leadership he or she adopts.

The analysis of the aforementioned questions is quite essential; however, a lot also depends upon the general cooperation strategy between the leader and his or her attributes and upon the expectations of the group representative. Thus, it is essential to analyze the motives of the leaders in social dilemmas in order to acknowledge their effectiveness in the ability to fulfill their role and the group needs. Let us consider the government of a country as a leader and ordinary citizens as group members.

When analyzing the solutions of the leader regarding social dilemmas, it is essential to focus on the conditions under which society is willing to give its freedom to a government that makes all of the decisions on behalf of it. In their research, Van Vugt & De Cremer (2002) demonstrate the ability of a group to tolerate an autocratic leader when either was the group not successful for a number of times on its own or there were inequalities in its outcomes. Only a few studies explore the behavior of the group after the leader's installation (Van Vugt & De Cremer, 1999). An interesting theoretical and practical question remains whether the group members or citizens start cooperating with their government in providing goods.

Despite the hierarchical organization of most of the public goods, governments or authorities are unable to control the contributions of each group member completely. Thus, they are unable to rely on constraint solving the conflicts regarding public goods. For that reason, in order to maintain and continue cooperation with the citizens, they should act persuasively and tactfully.

Frequently, the indicators for cooperation with leaders may be unstructured, which can result in social dilemmas. This type of cooperation is usually shaped by individual factors such as the efficiency, interpersonal trust, personal rewards, etc. Thus, the cooperation of the government and its citizens is usually shaped through the impressions of the citizens about the leader and his or her particular style of leadership.

Van Vugt & De Cremer (2002) believe that in order to be effective, the leaders (in this case, the government) should be able not only to solve general country problems with the provision of their own positive outcomes but also to fulfill the needs of the citizens. Moreover, many functions of the leader also depend upon the extent to which citizens identify the existing government with their group's interests.

Motives for 'Citizens-Government' Cooperation

According to Van Vugt and De Cremer (1999), there are two perspectives concerning the reasons of the cooperation between the leader and the group members. The scholars name these perspectives as relational and instrumental (Van Vugt & De Cremer, 2002). An instrumental perspective is the cooperation of the group members and the leader only because of their self-interest. Thus, if a member of a group expects to be excluded from their group or punished because he or she does not contribute to it, it will be more of stimulus for them to contribute. The cooperation will be more noticeable if they expect their leader to be successful by motivating other members of the group to contribute. That will speed up the solution of the free-rider problem (Yamagishi, 1986). The same principle but on the higher level can be somehow transferred to the relations between the government and its citizens.

The aforementioned instrumental perspective should also consider the moment of the human factor. There are chances that people can also cooperate with their leaders because they develop positive ties between the group members. Such approach makes the group stronger and tighter. Such relational perspective means that the leader can be effective by shaping the needs of the group members. As a result, if the leader is able to strengthen his or her ties with the group as well as within it, the group members will be more willing to be open for much closer cooperation.

Consistent with a social identity model of leadership, we suspect that these relational concerns are not equally important to each group member. Only when the members identify strongly with their group, they will be sensitive to relational information from the leaders. When members perceive themselves more as unique individuals, they will be more concerned about the

leader's potential success in solving the free-rider problem, which guarantees positive material rewards.

Discussion Framework

Van Vugt & De Cremer (2002) in their research attempted to examine the role of identity processes in the cooperation of group members with their leaders with the aim of securing the common goods. Their findings demonstrated that group members were willing to contribute more upon the reason of existing fair and committed group leaders. At the same time, the attributes of those leaders were more influential for those who were strongly identified with their groups.

There is a tendency regarding the effectiveness of the leader who is able to manage social dilemmas, being contingent concerning their group commitment. Group members are willing to improve their efficiency mainly because of the intrinsic skills of their leader. Thus, leaders are expected to cope effectively with the free-rider problem within the frames of social dilemmas. By doing that, they should ensure positive outcomes for individuals that represent the group and for the group as a whole. The leader's influence also depends on his/ her personal motivation, which reflects the strength of general commitment of the group. Thus, there should be a tight cooperation with leaders, which should be influenced by intra-group leadership aspects characterized by the procedures fairness.

Based on the research of Van Vugt & De Cremer (2002), it can also be concluded that the cooperation with leaders can be considered as high when social components predominate the personal identities. However, according to Bouas & Komorita (1995), it is essential to note that the conducted research on social dilemmas cannot be considered conclusive completely regarding the influence of group identity on cooperation. Thus, it is better to view social identity

as a moderating factor can possibly affect rules, incentives, and leadership within the frames of

contributions. Another moment that is needed to be taken into consideration is the selection

procedure for leaders, which is proved to matter for the group members. For example, people

tend to contribute more when they have an opportunity to elect the leader. However, the situation

is completely opposite when the leader is being appointed.

As we see, the effect of leadership in the context of public goods has quite significant

implications. The group members usually perceive the elected leaders as more legitimate ones.

That makes them also be more influential in developing the cooperation with their group. These

precise mechanisms can be easily transferred to the country level when, for example, the

president or government is being elected or, otherwise, appointed.

Practical Examples

The previous part of the paper dealt with the theoretical framework regarding the

cooperation between group members and the leader. The aforementioned relations can be applied

to the national level and observed from the point of view of how governments are able to solve

social dilemmas and behave towards the social norms. The analysis below is the practical

example of the behavior of the governments of Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, Senegal, and Kenya, the

countries where the research subject regards the children's rights. The analysis is based on the

report that was initiated and conducted by the UNICEF representatives (UNICEF, 2010).

The research was done in close cooperation with officials and representatives of the

governments, local research institutions, non-governmental organizations, experts, and United

Nations agencies. All of them were involved at different stages of the development of the report

about their countries and provided a corresponding input into the analysis. The technical support

was provided from the Florence Innocenti Research Centre of UNICEF. The research was

conducted by using a consultative process with the participation of aforementioned representatives. According to report, there is a growing consensus between local governments, development community, and international actors (UNICEF, 2010). Such a cooperation is aimed at the change of these areas for better using corresponding programmatic approaches and the most effective strategies, which would help to change the existing situation.

It is stated that the government representatives are there to promote the abandonment of harmful practices in the national policies regarding women's issues, health, and population in general. Considering women's policy in particular, the Women National Policy was developed in 1993. Its main aim was to set up the structures in corresponding institutions and governmental offices at all possible levels in order to introduce and further implement policies that are gender-sensitive to public.

The report informs that in October 2005, it was strengthened when the Women's Affairs Office became a line ministry. After three years, a corresponding ministerial body was set in order to respond to violence, which is considered a gender-based, and to prevent it in the future. The violent acts also include various harmful practices. Despite the fact that the laws criminalized various harmful practices, there was a lack of a national action plan or comprehensive strategy, which would promote their abandonment. There is an urgent need to implement and support those practices in different areas. The activities that were related to harmful practices were further integrated into the government's prevention program on HIV/ AIDS. The corresponding Control and Prevention Office conducted those activities. In order to proceed with those activities, there were about a hundred of people selected from various villages in every sub-district so that the office representatives and facilitators could participate with them leading various community dialogue sessions.

The main goal of such a task was to engage the group representatives from the villages in the discussion so that they would return to their local communities and continue working with citizens of their villages regarding the abandonment of the practice. The range of the participants varied from the students to respected elders. The audience was also represented by local government employees, traditional birth attendants, housewives, members of youth and women groups, HIV and AIDS positive, sex workers, and religious leaders.

It was noted that the villagers paid more attention to the decisions that were imposed by their government compared to the information that came from the group representatives. However, there were many significant changes as various sensitive issues started to be disclosed and discussed. Furthermore, there was also an option in the discussion of not cutting girls. In spite of such intervention, it was still quite challenging to shift the social norms that provoke the community to conduct female genital mutilation/ cutting.

The reporters noted active participation of representatives of administrative structures in sessions. Moreover, their support in the facilitators' work was also noticeable. At the regional level, the member of female genital mutilation/ cutting committee was established. High-level government authorities and supreme council workers represented it. They declared publicly that female genital mutilation/ cutting does not have any basis in Islam.

Government structures were also engaged in community conversations and various awareness-raising activities. The main aim was to ensure their support at the community level. It was also noted that the representative of non-governmental organizations was able to engage a couple of government departments, the Women's Affairs Office, the sub-district and district administration, justice bodies, and health offices both at the local and at the regional levels to be more active in the participation in the organized activities.

Consequently, the Kenyan Government took a quite clear position regarding the abandonment of female genital mutilation/ cutting and other practices that may be considered harmful. The result of the Government's position can be demonstrated through various specific policy legislations and guidelines. The first is the passing of the Children Act by the Parliament of Kenya, which criminalizes the female genital mutilation/ cutting practice on children under 18 years old. The penalty for subjecting a child on female genital mutilation/ cutting is a year of imprisonment, a fine of 50,000 Kenyan shillings, which is approximately a thousand of U.S. dollars, or both of the penalties depending on a case. The establishment of a new institution such as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development was selected to coordinate all the activities connected with female genital mutilation/ cutting. NGOs, donors, ministries, and international organizations implemented it. It also launched the National Plan of Action for Accelerating the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting.

Another positive step was the support of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development in the development of policy regarding the abandonment of female genital mutilation/ cutting. The UNICEF reporters also state on the change in the situation regarding the traditional dictates and mores that was noticeable by some traditional leaders who have an influential and powerful role within the local community's ethnic groups. Thus, the Supreme Council condemned female genital mutilation/ cutting and adopted the resolution to impose fines on those community members who would either conduct or participate in the aforementioned practices.

Conclusion

The report demonstrated strong interrelations between the representatives of the local and national levels. The examples of some countries demonstrate that the responses at the national

level are the most effective when they reinforce and complement the efforts at the local level that is represented by simple people. That allows those grassroots people to create movements and act with greater coordination.

The report presented the evidence of the government commitment in addressing the female genital mutilation/ cutting. Moreover, government seems to understand the necessity of translation of activities against the cutting into action. It would enable people to access the corresponding services to receive appropriate information. Moreover, it would promote policies and laws, which would support change, and solve the existing social dilemmas and norms.

It is an undeniable fact that this investigation could not be objective, as cooperation with the government in research cannot bring true research results. Many can believe that the governments just act to be supportive in order to demonstrate their devotion to the cause that would attract the necessary financial resources to their countries. Such kind of behavior of the government is a common practice, especially among the third world countries. The administrative officials know that the report is written and will be read by those who possess financial resources and have a strong cooperation with the prospective donors. Thus, they are stimulated by this fact and demonstrate a little different behavior compared to the one upon ordinary circumstances.

The case of receiving financial support was also described by in the UNICEF report. However, the exact motives of government behavior are not noted apart from their close cooperation. That is the reason we can conclude that such a behavior of the government, in case it has a positive aim and implements all of the procedures assigned by the donors, can bring the group members or the community members together and make them cooperate faster in solving the existing social dilemmas and norms.

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