

Strategy for Achieving Legitimacy in Local Contexts: A Case Study of the Kahrizak Charity Care Center for the Elderly and Disabled in Iran

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In this presentation, local NGOs' legitimacy will be discussed with Iranian contexts, from the strategies to gain social approval and authorization initiated by Kahrizak Charity Care Center in Iran.

The Kahrizak Charity Care Center, run by the Kahrizak Charity Foundation, is a facility that provides care for the poor disabled and elderly in Iran. The Center is the biggest welfare complex in the Middle East, located in the southern outskirts of Tehran. Since its establishment in 1972, the center gradually extended its facilities and activities, and now there are 1,700 residents and 1,000 paid staff in the Center with branch offices in Los Angeles, London, Toronto, and Paris. The annual cost to run the center is estimated to be about 10 million dollars, of which 85% are provided by donations from people inside and outside of Iran.

Donations are not only monetary, but also include food, clothes, vehicles, precious metals, buildings, and land. A part of the donations is provided in accordance with Islamic terms of charity, such as *zakāt*, *waqf*, and *sadaqa*, *khoms* (a religious tax unique to Shi'a Islam), *sols-e māl* (donation of a part of inheritance for the peace of late parents' souls) and *nazr* (the granting of a wish, or petition, to *Emāms*.) These donations should be used in accordance with detailed definitions in Sharia, and the religious intentions of the donors should be respected. Donations are made simply as "gifts" or "presents", especially when they are from Iranian immigrants overseas.

In addition, volunteer workers in various fields play very important roles within Kahrizak. Volunteer work is seen as a good deed, donating their time, energy, abilities and love to the vulnerable. If they give services for the residents, it is believed that their problems will be solved due to the rewards from God.

Donations given to the Center are mainly based on religious intention, and volunteers at the Center attempt to perform good deeds there; however, at this time, Kahrizak is not regarded as an "Islamic" NGO in Iran. As a result of the Islamic revolution, any organization or activity described as "Islamic" has a political connotation in Iran, so Kahrizak carefully avoids expressing their activities as "Islamic." Kahrizak emphasizes that their purpose is to provide the residents with the highest level of care as a non-governmental and non-profit organization.

To gain the approval from Iranians who have different kinds of social / political backgrounds, Kahrizak, as a local NGO, tries to show legitimacy from multiple directions / dimensions. The practices of Kahrizak will be introduced using the following 6 points. (1) Legal compliance: (both Sharia and secular law) (2)

Administration: (the role of the Board of Directors, organizational construction, quality control of the wards and paid / volunteer workers, publishing annual reports etc.) (3) Approval from international organizations (UNESCO and UNICEF) (4) Introducing the new concepts and facilities for care and rehabilitation (5) Demonstrating legitimacy through historical and cultural heritage (connection with royal families, celebrities, or deceased famous Ulama) (6) Fulfillment of religious intention (addressing personal / religious needs of donors.)