



Emerging Trends and Significant Role of NGO's Activities-An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The diversity of NGOs strains any simple way. They include many groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of government and that have primarily humanitarian or cooperative rather than commercial objectives. They are private agencies in industrial countries that support international development; indigenous groups organized regionally or nationally; and member-groups in villages. NGOs include charitable and religious associations that mobilize private funds for development, distribute food and family planning services and promote community organization. They also include independent cooperatives, community associations, water-user societies, women's groups and pastoral associations. Citizen Groups that raise awareness and influence policy are also NGOs.

KEYWORDS : NGOs, Organization, Commercial Objectives, Cooperative.

Introduction

A Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) is any association having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social cause or any non-profit voluntary citizens group which is organized around specific issues, such as education, environmental conservation, social welfare, rural development sanitation, healthcare or human rights, on a local, national or international level. The World Bank defines NGOs as "private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provides basic social services, or undertake community development. NGOs include an array of groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of government and characterized primarily by humanitarian or cooperative, rather than commercial objectives". According to a World Bank key document, the term NGO can be applied to any non-profit organization, which is entirely or largely independent from government and exists to serve humanitarian social or cultural interests either of their memberships or of social as a whole. NGOs are typically value-based organizations, which depend, wholly or in part, on charitable donations and voluntary service. Although, the NGO sector has become increasingly professionalized over the last two decades, principles of altruism and voluntarism remain key defining characteristics. Volunteerism, as a voluntary spirit of individuals and communities to make interventions for community good, has played significant role in shaping the human civilization at each stage of its growth. Voluntary organizations have been generally defined as voluntary, autonomous, Non-Profit Organizations or groups of citizens established to address various issues/problems and disadvantages in the society. The term 'Volunteer' is normally used to denote someone who others unpaid service to a good cases. Voluntary organization ensures collective action with division of responsibilities and relieving the members from the unlimited financial responsibilities. Voluntary organizations, thus, can be said as an organization which is initiated spontaneously at least at the level of persons who form it and governed by members without any external control and compulsion.

A sustainable organization is one, which is able to remain in existence for long, delivering the same or better level and quality of service, enduring and withstanding hardships, moving along its declared mission and striving towards the vision set. Privatization has not worked to rural India's benefit. Telecom, for instance, has been a big success in urban areas where phones are easily available and calls cost very little. But in rural areas teledensity is just about 2 per cent. In health, housing, education, and transport, privatization has not led to similar benefits.

Reforms have not brought about necessary measures of justice or equality. The infant mortality rate is 67 per 1000 births and marked by regional disparities. HIV, Malaria and Tuberculosis are rampant and require big doses of investment in public health. The courts are clogged. 500 million Indians do not have bank accounts. The unor-

ganized sector in villages and cities does not get the recognition and institutional support it deserves. Agriculture, the mainstay of two-thirds of India's rural population, is declining. Farmers face a host of problems including soil degradation, lack of irrigation, poor seed quality, and the inconsistencies of world markets.

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is generally considered to be any non-state, nonprofit, voluntary organization. As a *non-state entity*, an NGO is generally independent from government influence it is not a part of or controlled by government or an intergovernmental agency. As such, an NGO is either not established by a government, or intergovernmental agreement, or, if established in such a manner, is now independent of such influence. As a *nonprofit organization*, an NGO is not operated for the primary purpose of carrying on a trade or business, although profits may be generated for the mission of the organization. A more accurate term may be *non-profit distributing*, in that any surplus that is generated is to be used solely to help the organization fulfill its mission and objectives, with no part of the net earnings of the NGO to be distributed to the benefit of the directors, officers, members, or employees of the NGO, or any private persons, other than reasonable compensation for services rendered. As a *voluntary organization*, an NGO is not required to exist by law, but is formed by private initiative, resulting from voluntary actions of individuals. In effect, NGOs are organizations that are neither part of the government sector nor part of the business sector. For such reasons, they are sometimes referred to being part of the "third sector" in society.

Roles of NGOs

Among the wide variety of roles that NGOs play, the following six can be identified as important, at the risk of generalization:

Development and Operation of Infrastructure:

Community-based organizations and cooperatives can acquire, subdivide and develop land, construct housing, provide infrastructure and operate and maintain infrastructure such as wells or public toilets and solid waste collection services. They can also develop building material supply centers and other community-based economic enterprises. In many cases, they will need technical assistance or advice from governmental agencies or higher-level NGOs.

Supporting Innovation, Demonstration and Pilot Projects:

NGO have the advantage of selecting particular places for innovative projects and specify in advance the length of time which they will be supporting the project - overcoming some of the shortcomings that governments face in this respect. NGOs can also be pilots for larger government projects by virtue of their ability to act more quickly than the government bureaucracy.

Facilitating Communication

NGOs use interpersonal methods of communication, and study the right entry points whereby they gain the trust of the community they seek to benefit. They would also have a good idea of the feasibility of the projects they take up. The significance of this role to the government is that NGOs can communicate to the policy-making levels of government, information about the lives, capabilities, attitudes and cultural characteristics of people at the local level. NGOs can facilitate communication upward from people to the government and downward from the government to the people. Communication upward involves informing government about what local people are thinking, doing and feeling while communication downward involves informing local people about what the government is planning and doing. NGOs are also in a unique position to share information horizontally, networking between other organizations doing similar work.

Technical Assistance and Training

Training institutions and NGOs can develop a technical assistance and training capacity and use this to assist both CBOs and governments.

Research, Monitoring and Evaluation

Innovative activities need to be carefully documented and shared - effective participatory monitoring would permit the sharing of results with the people themselves as well as with the project staff.

Advocacy for and with the Poor

In some cases, NGOs become spokespersons or ombudsmen for the poor and attempt to influence government policies and programmes on their behalf. This may be done through a variety of means ranging from demonstration and pilot projects to participation in public forums and the formulation of government policy and plans, to publicizing research results and case studies of the poor. Thus NGOs play roles from advocates for the poor to implementers of government programmes; from agitators and critics to partners and advisors; from sponsors of pilot projects to mediators.

Works and Effects of NGOs

- NGOs were engaged in a broad range of activities beyond the narrow definition of health. NGOs have multiple areas of activity, for example, health services, economic, educational, religious, and development support. Health services ranked highest for health sector NGOs in both districts.

- The format of registering NGO areas of work by district, county or even sub-county can be misleading and suggest greater coverage than actually exists in the field.

- NGOs' target groups were mainly vulnerable groups - those prone to poverty and ill health. Gender, age, and socio-economic status were the criteria used to determine vulnerability. In Coimbatore where there are more NGOs, and with a longer history of NGO activity, a broader range of vulnerable groups has been included. While NGOs were able to mention the type of groups they target, they were less clear about the size of the target group. Lack of specific information on size of target groups is a limitation on the extent to which this variable can be used to assess NGO contributions.

- By targeting marginalized groups especially women, NGOs give them a greater opportunity and role to participate in development activities. There are also increased opportunities for capacity building and skills development.

- Enthusiasm and other positive effects generated by association with one NGO, e.g., strengthening local leadership, mobilizing local development committees, and capacity building have the potential to spread and in the long term be cultivated within the community.

- To some extent, communities have been involved in planning, implementation and monitoring of NGO activities although levels of involvement vary between NGOs. There are also varied perceptions on involvement between communities and NGOs. Participation in implementation is the commonest form of community involvement. NGOs that are orientated towards capacity building and not just provision of materials and relief have realized better community participation and ownership.

Monitoring NGO Works and Assessing their Effects

The criteria for assessing NGOs' contribution to development that were identified during the study include human resource capacity of NGOs, duration of operation, geographical areas of operation, and type and size of NGO target groups. Current strategies for monitoring of NGO activities were through various channels:

- Report writing and information sharing meetings – monthly, quarterly, annually;
- Meeting with target communities; and
- External monitoring and evaluation.

Benefits from these strategies have affected poor documentation and limited information sharing by NGOs. In the absence of a clear and consistent policy on reporting and accountability, many NGOs acted as if they had relatively little reporting or information sharing obligations to the various stakeholders.

Indicators for Measuring Change of NGO Works

Indicators mentioned cut across sectors and are mostly quantitative (output and effect level). The sectors were:

- Health (occurrence of disease, quality of services, water and sanitation);
- Economic (access to income generation activities);
- Education (availability of facilities, enrolled school age children in school, female education); and
- Infrastructure (quality of housing and roads).

The indicators commonly mentioned by communities, NGO and district respondents were those that were easily observable and tangible and, therefore, more quantitative than qualitative.

Emerging Trends in NGO Activity

David Korten (1990) quoted by Misra, Rajeeb (2008) identifies four distinct generations of voluntary action. The first generation functions refer to relief work, or helping war victims, as well as welfare services for the poor and the disadvantaged. The earliest NGOs fall into this category. The second generation functions refer to community development, through which NGOs help people become self reliant and meet their own needs. Third generation functions refer to the efforts of NGOs to bring about reforms in policies and institutions. Fourth generation functions include organizing independent and decentralized initiatives to support a social vision. According to Clark, John (1993), the focus of NGO activities has gradually shifted from a "supply side" approach (delivery of services) to a "demand side" approach. "Supply side" refers to delivery of services to the community and "demand side" refers to helping the community to articulate its concerns and demands.

Funding of NGOs

NGOs receive funding either from domestic or international sources. The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) governs the flow of funds from international sources. Both the number of NGOs registered under FCRA and the amount of foreign contributions have increased over the years from 1993-94 to 2002-03 – the number of NGOs registered under FCRA from 15039 to 25404 and the amount of contribution received from Rs 1865 crores to Rs 5047 crores. (Source: Data from the records of the Ministry of Home Affairs). According to the report of the Home Ministry, the states receiving the largest amount of foreign contributions are Delhi (Rs 881 crores), followed by Tamil Nadu (Rs 775 crores) and Andhra Pradesh (Rs 630 crores). Among the foreign donor countries, the US leads the list (Rs 1,680 crores) followed by Germany (Rs 715 crores) and the UK (Rs 685 crores). Among the leading donor agencies are Ford Foundation (US) (Rs 121 crores), World Vision International (Rs 90 crores) and Foundation Vincent E Ferrer (Spain) (Rs 79 crores). In terms of the uses to which foreign contributions are put, establishment expenses top the list (Rs. 674 crores) followed by rural development (Rs 487 crores). Fixed costs of NGOs seem to be high in proportion to funds directly employed for programs.

Significant Role of NGOs

Clark, John (1993) suggests that the voluntary sector, apart from projecting itself as an alternative to the government agency as a provider of social services, should also strengthen the government's efforts at social development in the following ways.

- Persuading government ministries and official aid agencies to use successful approaches developed by the voluntary sector.
- Making the public aware of their rights under government programs
- Helping to tailor official programs to public needs
- Collaborating with official bodies on operational aspects
- Shaping the local development policies framed by national and international institutions
- Offering training and improved management capacity to the government and funding agencies, thereby enabling them to come up with a more effective development strategy.

NGOs and Social Capital

NGOs are an important part of the social capital of any community. NGOs are primarily engaged in community driven development, which involves working closely with the poor and empowering them with a view to facilitate poverty reduction. According to Poteet, Amy (2003), community driven development brings about empowerment by building effective social institutions, which form the social capital of the community. Poteet, Amy (2003) uses the term social capital to refer to dimensions of social organization that generate multiple horizontal linkages and foster the development of social trust, collective reciprocity and tolerance. High levels of social capital are expected to facilitate provision of public goods and services and contribute to community well being.

NGOs in Water Issues

Water related issues plague many communities at the local level in most parts of the developing world and even in developing countries like India. There is enough experience to show that NGOs have the potential to play an important part in promoting water harvesting techniques, water conservation habits and building local institutions for self management of the community's water resources.

NGOs in Micro Finance

Micro finance operations of Indian NGOs began in a small way and later grew into a large-scale operation. Initially, only the savings of members of the Self Help Groups were used to meet the credit requirements of the other members. Since this was sufficient only to meet consumption credit needs, the NGOs gradually began to raise funds from outside donors through agencies such as NABARD. The amount of credit fund available varied from NGO to NGO. Loan applications are submitted by members to the leader of the SHG. The decision to sanction the loan was made by the entire group, based on factors such as ability to repay the loan, attendance at group meetings and contribution to savings. All loans had to be guaranteed by two other members. In most cases, members could apply for a second loan only after the first loan was repaid. However, in emergency situations, such as health reasons, a second loan could be granted. The loan amounts generally varied from as low as Rs. 50 to a maximum of Rs. 10,000. The average loan amount for most of the NGOs was Rs. 1500. The annual interest rates were fixed by the NGOs, based on market rates and varied from 12% to 24%.

Some banks do not value the idea of NGOs playing the role of financial intermediaries. During a workshop organized by the Small Industries Development Bank of India (2002), the argument was that NGOs could not match the formal financial institutions like banks in terms of financial know-how and scale of operations. It was felt that NGOs would do best to focus on the formation, nurturing and capacity building of the SHGs and leave the financing activities to the banks and other micro finance institutions.

NGO Poverty Alleviation Strategies

Indian NGOs have been playing a prominent role in the empowerment of poor women, livelihood security and capacity building. However, the efforts of Indian NGOs to reduce poverty have had limited success, since they have been unable to tackle the root causes of poverty, namely lack of assets and unemployment. The same is true of local organizations, such as schools, banks, co-operatives and gram panchayats. The constraints within which NGOs have had to work - lack of technical and political capacity, managerial expertise, trained staff and infrastructure. It was also found that the main obstacle faced by NGOs in their efforts to alleviate poverty was the fact that they have had to work in isolation, due to weak support from local organizations.

Marketing Issues of NGOs

NGOs have been successful in persuading members of the SHGs to take up creative activities, supported by micro credit. However, they have not been able to derive the benefits because of poor marketing effort. For example, one NGO in Kerala encouraged its members to take up basket making, with the objective of getting them to market the finished products. This affected their incomes from the activity and their ability to repay their loans.

Strengths of NGOs

To list out the advantages and disadvantages of NGOs they are Empowerment and development NGOs undertake activities based on studies to determine who the poorer sections are, the reasons for poverty and the strategies to be adopted to reduce poverty. Based on these studies, they help the poor to articulate their concerns and address their problems. They are also more flexible in terms of their functioning, methods and practices, since they are small in size and have local coverage. A few surveys among Karnataka based NGOs revealed that a majority of them covered only one or two taluks in a district (Rajasekhar, D, 2000). This makes it easier for them to implement and monitor their programs, respond quickly to local needs and change their working styles according to the needs of the local community. The small staff strength also enables better coordination. Empowerment and development NGOs use innovative and participatory approaches, whereby they involve the local communities with which they work. A good example is that of the Graeme Bank in Bangladesh, whose innovative credit program is implemented by both developed and developing countries. Another example worthy of mention is the Credit Management Program of MYRADA, whose innovative approach inspired other NGOs, as well as the NABARD to introduce similar programs. Similarly, MYRADA and the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT), based in Tamil Nadu also adopted innovative approaches to watershed and dry land development. Regarding the use of participatory approaches, several NGOs have successfully adapted participatory methods such as Participatory Rural Appraisal and Participatory Learning and Action and used them for their own benefit. As a result of people's participation, they have been able to make their programs more cost effective. Development and empowerment NGOs enjoy greater autonomy than other NGOs, since they have independent governing boards. People's participation in their programs also makes the development and implementation of their programs independent of the local power structures.

Conclusion

NGOs were engaged in a broad range of activities beyond the narrow definition of health. NGOs have multiple areas of activity, for example, health services, economic, educational, religious, and development support. Health services ranked highest for health sector NGOs in both districts. The format of registering NGO areas of work by district, county or even sub-county can be misleading and suggest greater coverage than actually exists in the fielding's' target groups were mainly vulnerable groups - those prone to poverty and ill health. Gender, age, and socio-economic status were the criteria used to determine vulnerability. In Coimbatore where there are more NGOs, and with a longer history of NGO activity, a broader range of vulnerable groups has been included. While NGOs were able to mention the type of groups they target, they were less clear about the size of the target group. Lack of specific information on size of target groups is a limitation on the extent to which this variable can be used to assess NGO contributions. By targeting marginalized groups especially women, NGOs give them a greater opportunity and role to participate in development activities. There are also increased opportunities for capacity building and skills development. Enthusiasm and other positive effects generated by association with one NGO, example, strengthening local leadership, mobilizing local development committees, and capacity building have the potential to spread and in the long term be cultivated within the community. To some extent, communities have been involved in planning, implementation and monitoring of NGO activities although levels of involvement vary between NGOs. There are also varied perceptions on involvement between communities and NGOs. Therefore, participation in implementation is the commonest form of community involvement for NGOs that are orientated towards capacity building and not just provision of materials and relief have realized better community participation and ownership.

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