



The Achievements, Difficulties and the Challenges ahead of the NGOs in Kanyakumari District

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ABSTRACT

The NGOs in Kanyakumari District work for the welfare of the poor, downtrodden, women, children and aged people. Their achievements are tremendous, noteworthy and significant yet they face many difficulties to execute their programmes in this district. This study exposes the achievements, difficulties and the challenges they face.

Introduction

The NGO's activities are people centered and their vision looks towards justice and sustainability. "NGOs facilitate the people to carry out the programmes with their decisive involvement. They enable the people to gain a sense of ownership and belongingness in the programmes. They motivate the people not to be dependent on the government for little things that could be managed by them. They infuse a sense of moral responsibility to take care of assets and protect the infrastructure¹. NGOs now have gained more influence on every sphere of civil society. Many NGOs have taken up the challenge to play the role of advocacy and to influence policies in favor of the poor. NGOs enable the ordinary people to do extra-ordinary things. NGOs working in the developing countries assert that the projects and programmes they fund and promote play usually a positive and important role in helping to alleviate the poverty of the millions of people who live in misery.

Achievements

One among the important achievements of the NGOs in Kanyakumari district is their proximity with the people. The programmes and the programmers are located in the area being served². They are well known in the communities where they work and are capable of cultivating an intimacy with the people they serve. Respect for the people, sustained presence, intimacy, communication and trust feed on one another. This creates a kind of confidence and willingness among the marginalized people to undertake new activities and to try new ways of doing things.

Another important achievement of the NGOs is gaining the popular support of the people. The people voluntarily participate in all the programmes introduced by the NGOs. The society meaningfully involves itself throughout the programmes. Moreover people are not acted upon rather they themselves are the actors. NGOs are the local effective organizations that "convert plans into projects, people into a work force, money into credit and food into an instrument of community mobilization and self-help"³.

One among the important achievements of the NGOs in Kanyakumari district is making the people to be aware to their own backwardness "Social awareness programme is the prime moto of many of the NGOs because many of the people in this district were under the clutches of the high caste Hindus. NGOs played a vital role to make the people to be aware of superstition, casteism economic backwardness, human rights, women empowerment, environment protection, women education and health. These awareness programmes in this district made the people to fight for their own right."⁴

Another achievement of the NGOs in this district is making

the people self sufficient and self – generating. Though in the beginning, people of this district depended on the NGOs for financial assistance, later on they themselves generated funds for their existence. This self – generation led to self – sufficiency. Now many of the members of the NGOs help each other with their own funds rather than expecting from the NGOs. This made the people to be independent because dependency would always make the people submissive and inferior.

The NGOs in this district have brought the people together who were divided and scattered based on caste, religion, language and economy. This coming together brought a kind of oneness among the people. This helped the people to achieve anything, which was not possible as an individual. "NGOs made the people to be courageous brought out the people from the backward social set up and made them to fight for their own right. The people now go to the government offices and ask for their privileges"⁵

Self Help Groups (SHGs) are an effective system to ensure individual involvement in decision- making and fund management. Though in the beginning the NGOs gave monetary support later on the SHGs themselves self generated funds and managed themselves. The members of the SHGs are mainly women and they themselves voluntarily came forward to be the members of the SHGs because women are more cautious about their families and the future of their children. These SHGs are not only engaging themselves in fund raising and giving credit rather they try to solve the internal problem of each and every family⁶. These SHGs are working with the aim of empowering the poor and oppressed women and creating a kind of democratic activities among the women.

A radical achievement of the NGOs in this district is recognition by the government. Now the government is moving towards the greater recognition of the role of the NGOs and is willing to work with them to promote development⁷. Many a times, the government machineries are not able to tackle the grass root level of the problems. Here the NGOs may be able to provide an alternative means to tackle the problem.

Many of the NGOs in this district have dedicated themselves in one way or other to bring a little bit of happiness in the lives of the AIDS patients. Earlier many inhuman measures have been taken against the patients but the NGOs came forward and created awareness among the people by saying that this is a disease as any other disease known to them.

Difficulties

Practically all the NGOs suffer from funding problem. The funding problem is the biggest issue faced by the NGOs since

they do not have enough funds sometimes they are not even able to maintain their staff. Because of this, they move from organization to organization. Sometimes they have to bribe the government machinery to get the funds from abroad and even from India. Moreover, the financial assistance they received shall not be used or diverted for any other purposes. Because of this, they are not able to involve themselves fully during emergency⁹.

Earlier the government allowed the NGOs to work freely, no hard and fast rules were imposed on them. But on course of time, the government became suspicious towards the activities of the NGOs. Therefore, it imposed unnecessary control over the NGOs, which is a biggest hurdle for them to reach out the people because they have to get permission for each and everything in writing from the government.

Another critical problem the NGOs face in this district is The NGOs with the help of the people protest against the government. As the result the govt threatens the heads of the NGOs and the members.

The biggest threat most of the NGOs face here is the problem of conversion. However, the activities of the NGOs are being people-centered and people – oriented ,reaching the remotest of the remote and the poorest of the poor, downtrodden, outcaste and oppressed they are looked upon with suspicious eye of conversion. In some areas, the volunteers who work in the NGOs are man handled and beaten because the dominant communities and the oppressors do not allow the poor people to come up in their life. Because of this, people are afraid of doing service to the needy⁹.

Another important difficulty they come across in this district is the people of this district are always expecting money and materials from the NGOs, even though it would be affordable by them. Moreover once they go to help the targeted group in an area, the developed, rich and the educated are always expecting the same assistance for them. Many NGOs do not have proper infrastructure to execute their work in the remote villages. They are not willing to attend any training programme. Many a times, the activities of the NGOs in the targeted area fail miserably because there is no discipline among the beneficiaries¹⁰.

Especially Kanyakumari district during Tsunami witnessed a "Mushroom Growth" of NGOs. Their intention is getting donation from abroad and enjoy their life. Many a times people of this district equate these NGOs with the NGOs those who have committed themselves for the welfare of the people for the past years. The expectations of the people are too high which in no way can be meted out by the NGOs working in this district.

Challenges

The NGOs in this district continue to face rather formidable

constraints against their activities and further growth and these challenges could be overcome if there were sufficient funds in future.

Large sections of the people in the society have lost faith in government policies and agencies. It is the biggest challenge for the NGOs to make the people of this district to have faith in the government.

Over expectations of the people from the NGOs is another challenge the NGOs face after Tsunami because not every thing can be affordable to the NGOs.

Another challenge they face here is unhealthy competition among the NGOs to establish their superiority among the NGOs, which is a hurdle for further development.

Generally, the NGOs are set up by value driven, self – motivated people to serve the people who are not touched by the state. However, on course of time the commitment with the NGOs is lacking behind, which is a challenge to go further into action.

In Kanyakumari District thousands of NGOs are doing their activities in different fields. However, they never come together to fight for a just cause. As it is said, they are powerful when they act individually but powerless once they come together. Lack of co-ordination among the NGOs is another challenge because of this, there is a possibility of duplication of works.

It is a general criticism that the NGOs are doing dependency-creating activities and it is a challenge on the part of NGOs to make the people independent.

Most of the activities of the NGOs in this District are stereotype and repetitive in nature. Lack of creativity among the NGOs is the biggest challenge to implement any programme in this district. NGOs are lagging very behind by not having a scientific approach to solve many of the problems which still exist in this district.

It is the challenge to cross the religious barrier and reaching to the people.

Conclusion

For almost fifty years, the NGOs have been concentrating in the rural areas and their animators and the organizers are having very close affinity with the rural, illiterate and downtrodden people. NGOs in the district have a long history of active involvement in the promotion of human welfare and development by eradicating poverty and hunger. Their achievements are so great, yet they have to travel a long way to attain justice and equality for everyone in this district.

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