"Best Practices" in Voluntary Organisations

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ABSTRACT

Under the Eight-five-year plan, India has adopted a policy of economic liberalization, which opens up the doors for "Business Organisations" to contribute in social and welfare activities. Such participation has been channeled by the concept of "Corporate Social Responsibility". Now, many corporate houses are providing funds to voluntary Organisations working in the areas of health, education, empowerment, governance, disability etc. The large inflow of funds from the business Organisations has brought significant changes in the role and nature of voluntary Organisations. The present paper is an attempt to qualitative analysis of 'Best Practices' adopted by the voluntary organizations at all levels of their functioning. These changes have created voluntary sector more efficient for the advancement of various services towards nation building.

In the last 65 years - of planned development processes - the voluntary sector has made major contributions in implementation of various developmental programmes and welfare schemes. In national development planning processes, these contributions have grown over time; i.e. the first five-year-plan stressed the importance of community participation in national development; the Seventh five-year-plan declared that serious efforts would be made to involve voluntary Organisations in development programmes and in the Tenth-plan, the Planning Commission identified sixteen monitorable activities in which the intervention of the voluntary Organisations would be encouraged. This list includes women welfare and their empowerment, poverty alleviation, employment generation and education in remote areas through innovative measures. Through these plans, in recent years, a number of steps have been taken by the Central and State Governments to create an enabling environment for the voluntary sector and to collaborate with them for implementation of various developmental programmes and welfare scheme; e.g. SSA (Sarva Siksha Abiyan), NPEGL (National Programme for the Education of the Girls at Elementary Education, National Programme of mid-day meals in schools etc.

The changing role of Voluntary Organisations
Under the Eight-five-year plan, India adopted a policy of economic liberalization, which opens up the doors for "Business Organisations" to contribute in social and welfare activities. Such participation has been channeled by the concept of "Corporate Social Responsibility". Now, many corporate houses are providing funds to voluntary Organisations working in the areas of health, education, empowerment, governance, disability etc. The large inflow of funds from the business Organisation has brought significant changes in the role and nature of the voluntary Organisations. Recently, the Govt. of India has adopted a "National Policy on the Voluntary Sector", which aims to provide an enabling environment for the voluntary sector and also make it accountable, so that "Voluntary Organisations" can play their constructive role in development activities effectively. These changes have created voluntary sector more efficient for the advancement of various services towards nation building.

These changes have also encouraged voluntary Organisations, to adopt new strategies for escalating their outreach in the society. The strategies adopted by the voluntary Organisations mainly cover:-

➢ Documentation of programmes and activities;
➢ Adopting innovative approaches for creating role-model projects;
➢ Giving importance to sustainability of the project;
➢ Giving importance to monitoring and evaluation of project activities;
➢ Involving people from diverse background in project planning and implementation processes;
➢ Adopting transparency at all levels of functioning.

The adoption of various new strategies has brought many changes in the functioning and management of the voluntary sector. The Organisation like BPF (Best Practices Foundation), Bangalore is working to identify the best practices adopted by the development sector Organisations and also to encourage them to identify the adopted strategies, evaluation of project sustainability & performance and bringing transparency in the over-all functioning.

Definition of Best Practices
In general term, the word "Best Practices" is defined as the process, practices and system identified in public and private Organisations that performed exceptionally well and are best suitable to improve the Organisation's performance and efficiency. The original call for Best Practices was launched during preparations for the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) as a means of identifying what works in improving living conditions on a sustainable basis. As a result, the first International conference on Best Practices was held in Dubai in 1995. The International community identified three criteria's to analyze the Best Practices:

• **Impact:** Examines the positive and tangible impact of the practice on the people and stakeholders
• **Partnership:** Looks at the strategic partnership of other govt. agencies, bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies, NGOs, private sector, media, research and academic institutions etc.
• **Sustainability:** Determines whether the practice is within the legal, regulatory and social policy framework and judges if this practice can be used by other agencies. Is also looks to see if the practice is contributing to the NGO being more efficient, transparent and accountable.

The United Nations defines Best Practices as outstanding contributions for improving the living environment. UNAIDS defines Best Practices as 'Continuous process of learning, feedback, reflection and analysis of what works and why'. In the contemporary global environment, the term "Best Practices" is applicable in tasks performed by the Voluntary Organisations for initiating the developmental processes.

The Organisations working for the socio-economic development and welfare of the people, performs a wide range of activities like planning, organizing, structuring, reporting, budgeting etc. In performing all such activities, it is

very essential for the Organisations to select tools and methods, which are tried and tested at the field level and give significant level of performance and sustainability to the projects to serve its target group.

"Best Practices" Adopted By Voluntary Organisations

In an attempt to recognize the "Best Practices" adopted by the voluntary Organisations a short survey study was carried out by some organizations in execution of their projects. These voluntary organizations include NAB (National Association for the Blind), Navjyoti India Foundation, EFRAH (Empowerment For Rehabilitation, Academic And Health), ABHAS (Action beyond Health and Support), SAKSHI, ANKUR (Society for Alternatives in Education) etc.c This study was based on five monitorable parameters:

- **Participative:** Looks at strategic partnership/involvement of all stakeholders from both internal and external environment such as community members, pressure groups, government or private agencies, media etc in implementation of the project.
- **Planned:** Looks at the various steps undertaken by the agency, through considering the socio, economic, political and educational background of the community in preparing the framework for the implementation of the project.
- **Sustainable:** Determine whether the practice can continue itself for the long time without much internal help. Is also looks to see if the practice involve the participation of all the stakeholders in various planned stages of the project.
- **Cost effective:** Sees if the practice can generate its own resources for its continuation in the community. It also sees if the practice contributes to the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the implementing agency.
- **Target oriented:** Looks at the impact generated by the practice among the beneficiary group, whom it been designed to cater.

On the basis of above mentioned monitorable parameters, following practices were adopted by these Organisations.

Table-1 Best Practices adopted by Organisations

No.	Organisations	Activities
1.	NAB & ABHAS	• Employing the former students in the current projects.
2.	NAB, SAKSHI & ANKUR	• Using network of existing Organisations, providing same services.
3.	EFRAH	• Involving the parents in planning and monitoring of educational programs. • Allowing women to bring their small children to vocational classes.
4.	SAKSHI	• Formal system of tracking students, those who have been mainstreamed and offering support to those who appear to be struggling. • Incorporating information on women's social and political empowerment in their vocational training courses. • Utilizing relationship with Govt. schools to streamline the admission process for students.
5.	ABHAS, DRAG & ANKUR	• Using campaign survey to spread awareness and information of their programme and activities. • Using extra-curricular activities eg. Dance, drawing, celebration of festival etc. • Utilizing creative methods to educate children.
6.	DRAG	• Creating special educational techniques to teach students; who have never written before.
7	ANKUR	• Changing the time-schedule of educational programmes as per demand.
8.	NAVJYOTI	• Organizing meets of old students for motivating the community people to send their children for attending the educational programmes.
9	SOF & NLM	• Involving the participation of retired personnel's in Organisation functioning.

Description of Activities:
A) National Association for the Blind (NAB) & Action Beyond Help and Support (ABHAS): Employing the former students in the current projects

1. National Association for the Blind (NAB), a pioneering Organisation in the field of "Visual-Disability" runs various programmes for blind people; e.g. Helpline service for the visually handicapped, residential training programmes propagation of "Daisy" standards, information dissemination about various training courses etc. The Organisation has adopted a very unique strategy of employing their trained students in their on-going projects. This practice helps the Organisation in utilizing specialize skills of trained students in their projects; as-well-as students in getting employment opportunities.

2. Action Beyond Help & Support (ABHAS) is a N.G.O working for educational upliftment of downtrodden and vulnerable section of the society. The Organisation runs various educational and vocational training programmes in the community for empowering specially the girl child. The Organisation has also employed their old trained students in their on-going projects as teachers in learning centers, retention centers etc.

The above mentioned practices adopted by the Organisations has helped them in extending their outreach & trust in the community and also becoming a channel for economic empowerment for their trained students.

B) NAB, SAKSHI & ANKUR: Using network of existing Organisations providing same services.
1. National Association for the Blind (NAB) utilizes its existing association and network with other Organisations, N.G.Os etc in spreading awareness of their programmes and activities for the blind people.

2. SAKSHI works for propagating child rights and educational empowerment. The Organisation utilizes its existing association and network with other Organisation and N.G.Os in extending their outreach and spreading information about their services in near-by communities.

3. ANKUR (Society for Alternatives in Education) works for developing new teaching pedagogy and rehabilitation for resettled communities. The Organisation utilizes its existing network with other Organisation and N.G.Os in making new teaching-learning curriculum for various age groups of children.

The above mentioned practices adopted by the Organisations have helped them in getting immediate technical support from other Organisations in their programmes and activities and also utilizing the network as a medium for interchanging innovations, ideas, learnings and practices. . This practice also helps the community people in getting immediate help through referral services.

C) EFRAH:
1. Involving the parents in planning and monitoring of educational programs.
2. Allowing women to bring their small children to vocational classes.

1. Empowerment for Rehabilitation, Academic & Health (EFRAH), works for holistic development of the people, living in deprived and dehumanized conditions in the society. The Organisation has involved the participation of parents in the planning and monitoring of educational projects run by the Organisation in the community. EFRAH has formed a committee of parents, who looks after the functioning of learning centers and also for providing important inputs to the Organisation for improving the performance and management of educational programmes from time-to-time.

2. EFRAH has also brought changes in the timings of their vocational education programmes and it has also allowed the women to bring their small children along with them. This practice has resulted greater enrollment of local women in vocational training classes.

The above mentioned practice adopted by the Organisation has resulted greater participation of local community people in the programme and activities run by the Organisation in the community. The involvement of parents in planning and monitoring of educational programmes has also encouraged the parents to send their children to the learning center and also it has improved the performance of the teachers in the learning centers. The change in the time-schedule of the vocational training centers has also given results as participation of increased number of old women in vocational training courses.

D) SAKSHI & NAVJYOTI:

1. Formal system of tracking students, those who have been mainstreamed and offering support to those who appear to be struggling.

SAKSHI

1. Incorporating information on women's social and political empowerment through their vocational training courses.
2. Utilizing relationship with schools to streamline the admission process of the students.

1. SAKSHI and NAVJOTI India Foundation has a programmed system of tracking the performance of their old pass-out students or those who have been mainstreamed by the Organisation in formal schools. This practice has helped the Organisation in keeping an eye on the drop-out ratio and also towards extending their support and resources to the needy students.
2. SAKSHI has incorporated the information of women's social and political rights in the curriculum of vocational training courses. This has helped the local women to know their rights and boost up the confidence level of the women.
3. The main objective of SAKSHI educational programme is to mainstream the children in formal education system. For achieving the objective, SAKSHI has created linkages with the local government schools through showing them their work in the community. This working along with the government schools has streamlined the admission process and it has acted as a medium of communication between the school and community as well.

The above mentioned practices adopted by the Organisations have helped them to extend their support to the needy students and it has also supported the Organisations for judging their current educational methods very efficiently towards teaching children for the effective learning.

E) ABHAS, DRAG & ANKUR

1. Using campaign survey run by teachers and students to spread awareness and information of their programme and activities.
2. Using extra-curricular activities; eg. Dance, drawing, celebration of festival etc.
3. Utilizing creative methods to educate children.

1. ABHAS, DRAG and ANKUR have adopted campaign surveys to spread awareness of their educational programmes.

The staff-teachers undertake visit of the local community in a group of 3-4 teachers and motivate the parents for sending their children to schools. The Organisation also conducts regular Parents-Teachers Meetings and distributes the printed publicity materials about their educational programme in the community. This practice has also helped these Organisations in the initial screening of children for admission.

2. ABHAS, DRAG and ANKUR encourage the participation of students in extra-curricular activities. These activities help the children in creating a sense of communal identity within the children.

3. ABHAS DRAG and ANKUR also encourage creative teaching methods in educating the children. These methods improved the learning process by not only teaching the students just the subject – but also by teaching them how to learn, a skill they will need to pursue successfully their higher studies. Many creative teaching methods cater specifically to students who have never studied before and aim at creating relevant teaching methods that students can easily be used.

The above mentioned practices adopted by the Organisations have helped them in involving the greater participation of the community in their educational programmes and also have encouraged the process of creative teaching and learning.

F) DRAG: Special educational techniques to teach students; who have never written before.

2. DRAG has adopted special educational techniques to encourage the students who have never written before, such as teaching shapes of alphabets, instead of making them to copy the alphabet over and over etc.

The practice adopted by the Organisation has helped them to teach never before educated children and also encouraged their participation and retention rate.

G) DRAG & ANKUR: Changing the schedule of educational programmes as per demand
1. DRAG & ANKUR have made changes in the daily time-schedule of their educational programmes. This has helped the local community children (mostly girl children) to perform their house-chores and to take care of their daily responsibilities at home. It has encouraged the parental support towards sending their children for attending educational programmes.

This practice has brought changes in the attitude of parents towards educating their children, due to realization of the importance of education and facts behind it; that their children can perform household chores and attend the educational programme run by the Organisations freely without taking any additional burden.

H) NAVJYOTI: Organizing meets of pass-out students for motivating the community people to send their children for attending the educational programmes.
1. NAVJYOTI regularly organizes meets of their pass-out students from their educational programmes. This practice has helped the Organisation in keeping a track on the performance of their pass-out students and also encourages the local community people to send their children for attending the educational programmes run by the Organisation.

The above mentioned practice adopted by the Organisation has encouraged the parents to send their children for attending the educational programmes.

I) SOF & NLM: Involving the participation of retired personnel's in Organisation functioning.
1. Social Outreach Foundation and Noida Lok Manch have involved the participation of retired personnel's in the day-to-day functioning of their Organisation. Most of the retired

personnel's are teachers, engineer etc. The Organisation utilizes the vast experience of the personnel at various levels of management and programme implementation. Some are involved in teaching; some are involved in managing accounts; some are involved in managing the administration etc. The Organisation also gives small honorarium to these personnel.

The practice adopted by the Organisations has given them opportunity to utilize the vast experience of these personnel's in preparing the plans and strategies for project preparation and implementation. The practice also gave the opportunity to the retired personnel' to share their expertise's for social cause.

Conclusion

The experience of collecting information on "Best Practices" from the identified Organisations was very interesting and gave us exposure of various levels of programme implementation & management. The prime objective of conducting this study was to identify, what changes and practices, the "Voluntary Organisations" have adopted to maximize their services and outreach in the society. The data collection part under the survey was primarily done through observations and discussions with personnel of these Organisations. They extended their full support and gave recognition to the survey study. The survey study also assisted the Organisations in recognizing their best practices.

As identified by the International community that the Best Practices should meet the criteria such as Impact, Partnership and Sustainability. It is found under the study that the parameters set by the participating organizations identify the Best Practices based on standards to meet the Universal criteria of Best Practices.

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