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Management

AN OVERVIEW OF NON – GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are now recognized as key third sector actors on the landscapes of development, human rights, humanitarian action, environment, and many other areas of public action, from the post-2004 tsunami reconstruction efforts in Indonesia, India, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, to the 2005 Make Poverty History campaign for aid and trade reform and developing country debt cancellation. As these two examples illustrate, NGOs are best-known for two different, but often interrelated, types of activity – the delivery of services to people in need, and the organization of policy advocacy, and public campaigns in pursuit of social transformation. NGOs are also active in a wide range of other specialized roles such as democracy building, conflict resolution, human rights work, cultural preservation, environmental activism, policy analysis, research, and information provision. This chapter mainly confines itself to a discussion of NGOs in the international development context, but much of its argument also applies to NGOs more widely.

INTRODUCTION

The term NGO is broad and ambiguous. It covers a range of organizations within civil society, from-political action groups to sports clubs. Its clear definition still remains contested. However, it can be argued that all NGO's can be regarded as civil society organizations, though not all civil society organizations are NGO's. The concept of NGO came into use in 1945 following the establishment of the United Nations Organizations which recognized the need to give a consultative role to organizations which were not classified as government nor member states (Willett, 2002). NGOs take different forms and play different roles in different continents, with the NGO sector being most developed in Latin America and parts of Asia. The roots of NGOs are different according to the geographical and historical context. They have recently been regarded as part of the "third sector" or not-for-profit organizations. For organizations to be recognized as not-for-profit, they should satisfy the following criteria: First, an NGO should be privately set up and sufficiently autonomous in its activity, that is independent of direct governmental control. Secondly, an NGO should also be non-profit, which would clearly define its voluntary character. Thirdly, it cannot be considered a political party with an aim of attaining political power. Fourthly, an NGO should support development which demonstrates its public interest character (Schiavo Campo et al, 2001).

Firstly, the relationship of the NGO with intended beneficiaries is based upon principles of voluntarism rather than those of control which is typical of government. This means that intended beneficiaries are involved in program design and management and if this happens, the programs stand a better chance of success as they are more likely to be relevant and attractive. (Korten, 1980; Oakley and Marsden, 1984). Secondly, it is argued that NGOs have a task oriented approach that permits them to achieve appropriate organizational development, which encourages change and diversity rather than control and uniformity, which may hamper progress. The growth of this third sector is therefore influenced by its comparative advantage over governments. More specifically, the advantages that NGOs or not-for-profit organizations have over governments include some of the following:

- i. Achieving the correct relationship between development processes and outcomes;
- ii. Reaching the poor, targeting their assistance on chosen groups;
- iii. Obtaining true meaningful participation of the intended beneficiaries;

- iv. Working with the people and then choosing the correct form of assistance for them, i.e. not being dominated by resource as the basis for the relationship;
- v. Being flexible and responsive to their works;
- vi. Working with and strengthening local institutions;
- vii. Achieving outcomes at less cost (Tredt, 1998: 129)

What is an NGO?

NGOs include 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. A **non-governmental organization (NGO)** is a legally constituted organization created by private organizations or people with no participation or representation of any government. In the cases in which NGOs are funded totally or partially by governments, the NGO maintains its non-governmental status insofar as it excludes government representatives from membership in the organization. The number of internationally operating NGOs is estimated at 40,000. National numbers are even higher: Russia has 277,000 NGOs. India is estimated to have between 1 million and 2 million NGOs

Characteristics of an NGO

An NGO is a non-profit making, voluntary, service oriented/development oriented organization, either for the benefit of members (a grassroots organization) or of other members of the population (an agency).

- i. It is an organization of private individuals who believe in certain basic social principles and who structure their activities to bring about development to communities they are servicing.
- ii. It is a social development organization assisting in empowerment of people.
- iii. An organization or group of people working independent of any external control with specific objectives and aims to fulfil tasks that are oriented to bring about desirable change in a given community or area or situation.

- iv. An independent, democratic, non-sectarian peoples organization working for the empowerment of economic and/or socially marginalized groups.
- v. An organization not affiliated to political parties, generally engaged in working for aid, development and welfare of the community.
- vi. An organization committed to the root causes of the problems trying to better the quality of life especially for the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized in urban and rural areas.
- vii. Organizations established by and for the community with or without little intervention from the government; they are not only a charity organization, but work on socio-economic cultural activities.

NGOs are also traditionally known as:

- i. Voluntary Organizations (VOs)
- ii. Voluntary Agencies (VAs)
- iii. Voluntary Development Organizations (VDOs)
- iv. Non-Governmental Development Organizations (NGDOs).

Growth of the Voluntary Sector

1. The growth of this sector consisting of non-government organizations engaged in social welfare and development activities has been accelerated in recent years by several factors -increase in fund availability for social causes, positive public perception of the capacity of the voluntary sector to address social concerns and increasing awareness of the limitations of state and public agencies to reach out effectively to sections of society needing transformation.
2. Official agencies are not only constrained by resource availability, but face a number of -procedural and operational hurdles to the smooth execution of development programs. Enlightened governments in developing countries began to collaborate with NGOs with experience in areas such as poverty alleviation and environmental protection and which had closer understanding of the needs of local communities. Many governments began to appreciate the value of the voluntary sector as a partner, shedding their perception of them as competitors and intruders. However, it cannot be said that these misconceptions have been totally replaced by a constructive view.
3. The nature and focus of NGO activities has also changed over time. While NGOs that emerged after the World Wars I and II were more involved with relief work, attention gradually shifted to welfare activities in Third World countries and still later to providing finding and technical services to effective grassroots organizations. The 1970s saw the emergence of NGOs devoted to advocacy of the rights of disadvantaged classes of society and these began public campaigning and parliamentary lobbying in pursuit of socio political changes. During the 1990s, the trend among NGOs was to get involved in micro level reform, involving activities such as building rural institutions, redirecting agricultural extension services and bringing about changes in attitudes towards women. The primary objective of NGOs was to bring about change — in values, institutions and technologies.
4. The growth of voluntary organizations in India had roots in the pre-independence period and in the social reform movements of the late 19th century. During this period, a number of individuals and associations were involved in social service, such as helping the poor and the destitute, as well as social reform against practices such as bride burning and widow remarriages. Christian missionary groups also contributed to the growth by setting up a network of hospitals, schools and welfare services for the poor. The Gandhian approach clubbing 4 village development programs with social reform contributed largely to the growth of the voluntary sector.
5. Social historians (Misra, Rajeeb, 2008) have divided the history of voluntary organizations in India since the 19th

century into the following eight phases.

- a) First phase (1800 – 1850) — this was a period that witnessed social reform movements as a result of ideas that were introduced from the West, as well as the activities of Christian missionaries who combined social uplift with Christian missionary activity. These shaped the growth of voluntary organizations.
- b) Second phase (1850 – 1900) — This period was characterized by the spread of nationalism, popularity of English education and setting up of communication links, all of which influenced growth of the voluntary sector in these areas.
- c) Third phase (1900 – 1947) — the channeling of voluntary spirit for political action, mass mobilization and Gandhi's initiation of constructive work in rural areas and among "Harijans" led to the growth of the voluntary sector. Mahatma Gandhi's program of rural development, which employed volunteers in rural areas for the improvement of education, health and employment, set a new operating model for voluntary and charitable initiatives.
- d) After Independence to the mid-sixties — during the period following Independence, the perception was that economic growth could be achieved through a dominant role for state investment and effort. Accordingly, the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development started community development in rural areas. Welfare programs for the poor were initiated by social welfare Ministries of state governments. NGOs were approached by the government to implement these programs and to gather support of the local population. The emergence of a mixed economy or co-existence of both private and public sectors and the launch of the Community Development Program with the policy of people's participation were key developments during this period, which had an impact on the voluntary movement. The Fifth Five Year Plan document stated that social welfare services should be provided by voluntary agencies, with government co-operation.
- e) Fifth phase — mid sixties — early seventies — this phase witnessed the recognition of the limitations of the government's development model and the contrasting potential of voluntary organizations. A section of people with Marxist ideology rejected the development model followed by the government, since they felt that it did not address the root cause of poverty. This led to the increasing role of NGOs in the form of social action groups, which focused on specific issues such as price rise and corruption.
- f) Sixth phase — Early seventies — 1979 — during this period, the trend was to look for constructive ways to channelize energies and resources for building a better society. Disillusionment with the government and the idea of people's participation contributed to the growth of voluntary action. A number of social action groups supported by liberal foreign funding began to mushroom during this phase.
- g) Seventh phase — 1980s — during the mid-1980s, the fragmented development models gave way to a more integrated development model. Two different types of grassroots NGOs emerged – (i) development NGOs that were, involved in activities such as agriculture, environment, health and literacy and used participatory and innovative approaches and (ii) Empowerment NGOs which set up organizations for the poor in rural areas and helped them to articulate their concerns. These NGOs coexisted along with the welfare NGOs and social action groups. However, while the welfare and development NGOs collaborated with the as government, the empowerment NGOs and social action groups took a critical view of government policies and practices. This period witnessed the growth of support groups that specialized in services such as capacity building, research, advocacy, legal assistance, etc. More sophisticated issues such as women's development,

environment and water pollution were emerging on the agenda of voluntary organizations, as opposed to direct social service and support activities such as education, health services, care of the destitute etc.

- h) Eighth phase — 1990s — During this phase, voluntary organizations began to make their presence felt at the global level — for example, at UN sponsored meetings such as the UN Conference on Environment & Development. The value of development NGOs in certain areas was recognized and they were approached by international aid agencies and the government to supplement the latter's efforts in micro-level poverty reduction. The Planning Commission also emphasized the role of NGOs by including a separate sub-section on "Involvement of Voluntary Agencies" in the Seventh Five Year Plan document (1985-1990) under the chapter on Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Programs. A total Plan expenditure of Rs. 100-150 crores was set aside for collaboration between government and NGOs. The Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) was established in 1986, to provide support to NGOs involved in rural development. During the 1990s, the development policies of the World Bank gave a prominent role to NGOs in poverty reduction and development of civil society, in the New Policy Agenda. The aid agencies were of the view that NGOs should play an increasing role in service provision and / development, since they were cost effective and efficient service providers.

Role of an NGO

The Government has enunciated welfare state as one of the Directive Principles of State Policy and essentially the society and social organizations also have a role to play in providing basic needs and amenities to and addressing the problems of downtrodden, destitute, and the weak sections (women and children). The Government has identified, considering the social pattern of living and needs of citizens, schemes in which NGOs and voluntary organizations can participate. These are broadly: Age Care, Agriculture, Animal Welfare, Art & Craft, Children, Cities & Urban, Culture & Heritage, Disability, Education, Environment, Health, Human Resource, Rural Development, Science & Technology, Tribal People, Waste Management, Welfare, Women Development, Other Social and Cultural Activities. NGOs provide expert analysis in the field; serve as early warning agents and help monitor and implement international agreements. NGOs also help raise public awareness of issues, play a major role in advancing UN goals and objectives and contribute essential information at UN sponsored events. NGOs advocate many of the causes of concern to the United Nations, volunteer resources and execute and oversee development projects.

CONCLUSION

The relationship of NGOs to social transformation therefore takes many forms. For some, NGOs are useful actors because they can provide cost-effective services in flexible ways, while for others they are campaigners fighting for change or generating new ideas and approaches to development problems. The fact that NGOs have now become the focus of criticism from many different political perspectives is both a reflection of the wide diversity of NGO types and roles that exist, and of their increasing power and importance in the twenty-first century. The large volume of resources that they receive combined with the fact that NGOs receive a higher level of public exposure and scrutiny than ever before, speaks to their continuing importance. Perhaps there is now a more realistic view among policy makers about what NGOs can and cannot achieve.