

NGOs and rural development in India: A comprehensive analysis

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In India, the scope of development is very wide, it includes economic development and growth on social front, quality of life, empowerment, women and child development, education and awareness of its citizens. The task of development is so huge and complicated that just implementing government plans is not sufficient to fix the problem. To achieve this, a collaborative efforts involving various departments, agencies and NGOs is required. Owing to such a great need, rapidly the number of NGOs in India is increasing and, at present, there are about 25,000 to 30,000 active NGOs running in India.

Rural development is not an easy task. After independence by the help of five year plans many plans many rural development programmes were started in India. Main focus of these programmes were alleviating poverty, employment generation, more opportunities for generating income, and infrastructure facilities with the help of various policies and programmes started by Indian government. Along with this, the Panchayat Raj institutions have also been initiated by the government to strengthen the democracy at grass roots level. But in spite of all such efforts rural poverty, unemployment rate, low production still exists. The fight is still on for the basic facilities such as livelihood security, sanitation problem, education, medical facilities, roads, etc. There is a huge gap in terms of infrastructure that is available in urban and rural areas. The basic rural development should focus on development of all fields not just employment generation, proper water supply and other very basic needs.

NGOs or Non-Governmental Organizations belongs of a particular local place but it serves to public and community a wider level. With the help of government assistance, NGOs are playing very vital role in rural development.

NGOs in India : In India, NGOs basically came into existence after independence. Social service is given major importance in India. Mahatma Gandhi wanted that National congress should be transformed into a Lok Seva Sangh (Public Service Organization). This did not happened but the followers of Mahatma Gandhi started many

voluntary agencies to work on various social as well as economic issues of the country. This was the first phase of NGOs in India.

Till 1960, having just government programmes were not sufficient to complete the task of development in rural areas. There was need of several groups to work upon Grass roots level in rural areas. This was basically 2nd phase of rural development. At that time various policies came into function which had positive effect on formation of NGOs and their roles in development at that time. Moreover, favorable state policies had drastically affected the formation of NGOs and their roles at that time. The role of NGOs is increasing day by day in rural development of India. At present too, their role significantly changes with the change in the policies of the government through different plans.

In the sixth five-year plan (1980-1985), a new role for NGOs in the rural development had been identified by the government. In the seventh five-year plan (1985-1990), the Indian government guided NGOs to focus in developing self-reliant communities. These groups were supposed to show how the local human resource, skill, local knowledge that is greatly underutilized could be used for their own development. As NGOs were working in close connection with local people so bringing such a change was easy task for them.

In the eighth five-year plan, NGOs were given more importance for rural development in India. Under this a nation-wide NGO network had been created. These agencies worked for the rural development at a very minimum resources.

In the ninth five-year plan, it has been proposed that NGOs should start working upon public-private partnership model. Various agricultural development policies was started by the government for rural development.

As with every five-year plan, the role of NGOs in the rural development of India is growing, so NGOs are now attracting professionals from different fields. NGOs act as planners and implementers of developmental plans. They help in mobilizing the local resources to be used for

development. NGOs help in building a self-reliant and sustainable society. These agencies play the role of mediator between people and government. NGOs are the facilitator of development, education and professionalization.

Objectives of NGOs: The objectives displays the range of their goal, ideas, programmes and activities. Regarding the aims and objectives, the NGOs are broad-based which combines more than one objective. These objectives cover a wide spectrum of subjects like socio-economic development, empowerment of women, development of rural folks, tribals, environmental protection, literacy, rehabilitations of the needy, awareness programmes, poverty alleviation, and leadership training consumer protection, conscientisation and so on. The major objectives of NGOs are as follows:

- Development of women and rural folks socially, economically, politically with the help of income generating activities, education programmes, awareness camps, etc.
- Socio-economic development of the people living in rural areas with special assistance in down-trodden areas.
- Encouraging the rural folks to participate actively in cultural activities, arts, sports and science activities.
- Development of the under-privileged sections of the society such as fishermen, tribals, rural women etc.
- Running various educational programmes like formal education, non-formal education and adult education programmes to decrease illiteracy rate and to improve human resources to actively participate in development activities of a nation.
- Protecting the environment, rehabilitating the deprived sections like the handicapped, mentally retarded and orphans.
- Eradicating poverty through generation of employment opportunities, income generating activities, providing skill based training, imparting new technology in agriculture etc.
- Providing physical education, organizing competitions and giving training to the youth to actively participate in rural development activities.
- Initiating enterprises (for men and women) and organizing leadership/personality development programmes.
- Creating awareness and conducting de-addiction programmes.
- Formation of self-help groups and to provide financial assistance to the members of SHGs in order to empower them economically,

- Doing research and surveys, working for social justice and offering legal advice to the rural and urban people ,

- Organizing mother and child care programmes and value based education sessions to decrease- child deaths, malnutrition of women at the time of pregnancy and children and improving health, hygiene and sanitation in slum areas. Protecting the interests of consumers and working for prohibition and assisting in housing.

Goals of NGOs: In essence, the goals of NGOs in Rural Development are as following:

- To help the people to help themselves in their efforts towards their goals leading them to progress;
- To promote the growth of inherent potentials among people;
- To promote growth in all areas which include social, political and economic aspects of life in rural areas and
- To initiate a process of participatory development and group approach;
- To promote social justice for all and create awareness among people about their rights and duties
- With the help of national and international agencies planning policies for sustainable development and facilitating this plans.

Characteristics of NGOs : “Touch” is the main basic characteristic of any social service organization. Human touch is the basic quality of any human being which cannot be developed by any training, incentive or legislature. With the increasing professionalism in social work this basic quality is not seen now-a-days. The volunteers render a healing human touch either in their personal capacity or through a non-official agency. NGOs possess four basic characteristics which distinguish them from other sectors in our society.

They are indicated below:

- *NGOs are voluntarily formed:* NGOs are formed voluntarily to render service to the people who are in need with aims, objectives and self-achieving goals.
- *NGOs work towards development:* NGOs involve in the developmental activities and implement the rural development programmes launched by the government to develop the rural people to lead better life.
- *NGOs are relatively independent:* NGOs do not depend on any Government or other organizations and they are relatively independent.
- They co-operate with other NGOs and government to serve the poor for the development of the rural areas. Hence, NGOs are, by and large, local organizations.

Major functions of NGOs: NGOs in India perform various activities that would benefit the public basically because they are not working for self-interest or any profit motive. The important objective of NGOs is to serve the people who are suffering out of poverty or some natural calamity. Though NGOs are often criticized that they are wasting public money, they counter those criticisms by identifying the social problems systematically involving in finding a solution for them. As NGO in India runs mainly with the support of the funds, they plan everything carefully so that each programme that they execute is executed in a very cost effective way. The Seventh Plan has rightly recognized that government resources are very scarce and it could not handle huge task of rural development alone. Thereafter it comes propose a clear-cut policy for involvement of voluntary organizations in rural development in a big way. It gives emphasis on the need to identify and enlist the voluntary organization independently working for the social economic cultural transformation of the rural areas and rural people. Government comes out with a strategy to accelerate the rate of development underprivileged and marginalized people and economically and socially backward region through their participation in the planning and implementation of programmes of rural development. The Seventh Plan indicated a various functions that the voluntary organizations can perform. They are following:

- Mobilization of people and securing people's participation which is very critical for the success of any programme of rural development. Participation of people or concerned stakeholders increase the acceptance of programme and people willing come and co-operate.
- Voluntary organization ensure the fruits of rural development initiative should reach to last person that is rural people. NGO are working for the welfare of the people and at the same time they act as connecting link between government official and people. This helps to bring about changes specially in the attitude of the people through motivation and building up of awareness;
- Voluntary organization do not wish to replace the government organization but act in complementary way in rural areas by offering a wider variety of choices and alternatives;
- They act as watchdog of the people at the local level thereby improving the services by ensuring transparency and accountability of the concerned employees.
- NGO helps in information empowerment of rural people since they disseminate information to rural people

on diverse range of issues concerned with rural life.

- Act very efficiently and thus demonstrating how local initiative and local resources can be effectively used;
- Organize training programme for capacity building, skill development and motivation grassroots workers;
- Mobilizing community resources thereby adding to the total resources available for development; and
- Facilitating the process of change in social and economic structures so that the benefit can reach a larger number of people.

The Seventh Plan has listed out the programmes and areas where the participation of VOs was visualized as being particularly important. These were:

- Integrated Rural Development Programme.
- Implementation of land ceiling and distribution of surplus land. Enforcement of minimum wages to agricultural labourers.
- Identification and rehabilitation of bonded labour.
- Development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- Supply of safe drinking water.
- Afforestation, social forestry, development of alternative energy sources
- Promotion of small family norm. Primary health care, control of communicable diseases and preventive health programmes.
- Programmes for women and children in rural areas.
- Literacy programmes.
- Promotion of village and cottage industries.
- Promotion of science and technology in rural areas. Rural housing. Environmental concerns.

Functional areas: The functional areas of NGO can be grouped under the following broad categories:

Advocacy: Advocating causes which are socially relevant such as improving the condition of rural poor, abolition and rehabilitation of bonded labour, adoption of small family norm, preventing environmental degradation, improving women status, promoting literacy, etc.

Social activism: Advocating changes in social structure through awareness, organization building and advocating radical action. Voluntary organization helps in creating social awareness among people particularly illiterate people on number of issues which is affecting their lives. They also educates people about their constitutional, legal and human right thus helps in preventing these people from many kind of exploitation and injustice.

Relief: Providing relief to victims of natural and manmade

calamities. This is an area where voluntary organization has done very commendable job whenever such crisis has happened in the past. They help in rescuing, rehabilitation of the people affected by such calamities and work with shoulder to shoulder with government and other relief agencies.

Development: Implementation of a wide range of development programmes ranging from economic development to social development of the people. Many voluntary organization are involved in various developmental activities besides the government effort and working for the welfare of the people.

Research, evaluation and documentation: Studying problems of the rural areas and evaluating programmes based on development strategies, delivery system and cost effectiveness of the programme. The documentation of information on voluntary effort provides information which is valuable for programme planning.

Training: Providing professional skills to the functionaries at different levels and upgrading competence in different areas of responsibilities.

An assessment of the role of NGO's in rural development: The NGOs have been taking active participation in rural development. The rural poor and socially depressed classes are mainly depending upon the operation of NGOs. No particular job is particularly meant for the NGOs. Thus, there is a huge competition among the NGOs to extend the services for the welfare and benefit of the poor. The following are the important activities that should be taken up for the development of the poor.

Agricultural related programmes: Many voluntary organization are working in fields of agriculture and involved in different activities and offer range of services. Some of them are involved in the capacity building and training of farmers others offering advisory services to farmers regarding market price of produce, weather information and so on.

Health programmes for human and non-human beings: The works like pit drainage, housing, creation of smokeless environment, good drinking water for animals and human beings, regular health checkup camps etc. will improve the health conditions of the human and non-human beings.

Community development programmes: The community development programmes like adoption of villages for development, moral and emotional support during crisis period, supply of basic needs for survival like food, drinking water, shelter during flood, training programmes for the rural youths, housing projects, repair

and renovation of houses etc will satisfy the basic necessities. The important programme like training programmes, skill development programme, and capacity development programme keeps the rural youth on right path of life and helps them in becoming very productive and civilized citizen of the country. Sometimes this kind of training programmes also conducted for the rural women depending upon the resources available. So in way these agencies help in empowering rural women as well.

Human resource development programmes: The personality development programmes, skill development programmes, educational programmes, integrated development projects etc. will enable the rural poor to earn bread and butter.

Trade and industrial promotion: The important problem in the present context is availability of the market for the products of rural enterprises. Therefore, an NGO has a direct link with the government for marketing of the goods. Apart from this, NGO can also go for training the rural youths in fabrication works, wood works, beedi rolling, agarbathi manufacturing, printing press etc.

Government support: The government (central, state or local) support at all level is inevitable for rural development. NGOs alone can not do miracles overnight. Therefore, the government should watch and ward the working of NGOs at phase wise manner. Thus, the fund and other kinds of assistance should move directly to beneficiaries. The NGOs should accountable for the funds.

Problems of NGOs : One of the major problems that is faced by NGOs is lack of resources, both financial and human. Since most of the activities under taken by them are in the nature of extension work, they cannot become self-supporting. They are dependent for funds on the government, whose procedures are often slow and time consuming, on foreign donor agencies and industries whose grants may not be available on regular basis. Often, voluntary agencies do not have information about the government resources earmarked for the development of the area in which they operate, nor about the methods and procedures to be adopted to avail themselves of these resources. It is, therefore, not unusual to come across a situation where, on the one hand, the voluntary agency complains of lack of funds and, on the other, the government provisions lapse for lack of suitable projects to utilise them. NGOs have also weaknesses that include (a) financial constraints and management conflict, (b) limited institutional capacity, (c) low levels of self-sustainability, (d) limited inter-organizational and interdepartmental coordination, (e) small scale

interventions, and (f) lack of understanding of the broader socio-economic context. Professionals from rural development, management, medicine, and allied disciplines dominate some NGOs. These professionals have desired knowledge and skills, but their attitudes towards grassroots are not unquestionable. They have deadened the activist edge of NGOs and made the NGOs cold, calculating, and 'business-like' in approach. Some other NGOs gather funds to implement projects beyond their capacity. Being close to the corridors of power and pampering the officialdom for pushing files, making deals, and failing to achieve project objectives in the field, these NGOs are near moral bankruptcy. In 1998 CAPART blacklisted 65 such NGOs and put 262 NGOs in the 'further assistance stopped' list in the state of Bihar alone. Some of the others observations about functioning of non-governmental organization are following:

- A few NGOs have been operating without proper direction, organizational development, good management practices and specific mission.
- It is also observed from the existing literature that, some NGOs are very lack in the areas like decision-making for right kind of developmental intervention, managing socio-economic change and attaining sustainability,
- There is a direct correlation between the donor funding and the continuation of the projects undertaken by NGOs in rural areas.

Policy implications: The following suggestions and policy implications have been made for the further improvement in their working of NGOs.

- A short term training programme for strengthening the managerial capabilities of NGOs will go a long way in improving their performance and effectiveness significantly.
- The over dependence of NGOs on funding agencies and the syndrome of dependency should be reduced by involving the government directly in funding activities.
- Funding agencies should very careful in funding the project and actively be in touch with the NGOs to in order to ensure the effective utilization of fund.

- Before taking decision on funding of projects donar agencies should go for surveying and do the need assessment exercise which in turn helps in better planning of programme which is based on need and interest of the people. The viable projects for NGOs and the needs of the people.

- NGO should realize that funding without accountability, transparency and performance at ground level is no more available.

- Proper monitoring the activities of the NGOs and the enterprises run under the umbrella is the need of the hour. Therefore, the NGOs should also accountable for the funds on the one hand and the beneficiaries on the other.

Conclusion: In the fast moving world and shrinking budgetary support for welfare projects, role and responsibility and challenges of voluntary organization have increased. Unless the NGOs are developed, prepared to face the new challenges like shortage of funds, stoppage of funds, it would be very difficult for them to survive and sustain. Rural India continues to suffer from lack of employment and self-employment opportunities owing to its narrow economic base. In the recent past, considerable success has been achieved in developing and empowering rural youth and particularly rural women through entrepreneurship development approach which focuses on selectively utilizing local talent, appropriately developing them through training intervention and linking them with relevant business opportunities. There are number of organization working for entrepreneurship development, NGO's should developed better link with these organization. EDI implemented Rural Entrepreneurship Development (RED) Approach, in collaboration with NGOs by training their development workers. One of the major hurdles faced in the process is non-availability of required and timely financial support to trained entrepreneurs. It is therefore very much essential for voluntary agencies to prepare themselves for future challenges and continue playing their constructive role in development and growth of rural development and rural poor.

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