

ROLE OF NGO'S – AN OVERVIEW IN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. N. Srividya

Professor,

Techno India School of Management Studies,

Techno Main Salt Lake,

Kolkata, West Bengal, India

1.0 INTRODUCTION

India is vast country and is also known as a subcontinent with huge diversity in all aspects and large area also. To implement various welfare activities across the whole country is a magnanimous task, that too being a large democratic country. The welfare activities include the developmental activities too in social front, women empowerment, quality of life, child development, educations and awareness etc. In such scenario, to supplement the government's effort, few organisations called Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) are established at various levels. The NGOs play a vital role in implementing and managing various development initiatives at rural level (Sourav Kalra, 2019). They work in solving various problems in social front concerning with children, women, senior citizens, environment etc. (Sourav Kalra, 2019). Usually NGOs operate in autonomous mode in non-profit basis by a few groups of people. They work closely with Government agencies for execution of their projects, though they are Non-Government Organisations on Non-Profit basis.

Particularly, in democracy formulating and implementing development programmes is no easy task. There are several numbers of poor people and there are huge inequalities. And bridging these gaps in inequalities is not an easy task. Moreover, development means not only the economic development, it also includes the improvement of life style, awareness etc. And all these are not possible only by the Government. Hence, there should be some connecting body to bridge these inequalities and NGOs play a major role in this part. Approximately, there are around 25,000 NGOs in different parts of India.

2.0 EVOLUTION OF NGOS IN INDIA

The NGOs had been started in 1871 as Bhil Seva Mandal in Gujrat. It was started as a developmental movement for tribes. After independence, Mahatma Gandhi wanted to dissolve Indian National Congress in to voluntary Public Service Organisation, which was

eventually turned down. Later, many service organisations had been evolved by staunch followers of Mahatma Gandhi, basing on Gandhian Principles. Actually, in the beginning there were plenty in Gujarat and other parts of India too. Some of them are Seva, Ekalvya, Disha etc. But in 1970s only, the actual registration of NGOs had been taken place and this surge in the NGOs is readily accepted and encouraged by the Government. The upsurge in their number speaks a lot.

Many committees have already reiterated their importance in many ways. In 1957, Balwantry Mehta Committee had also highlighted the need for NGOs in the field of tribal development. Even in five year plans also the need and importance of the NGOs had been stressed. Again, 1966 Rural-Urban Relationship committee also reiterated the role of NGOs for local development by mobilising the community. Later, Dhebar Commission also expressed the same view that non-official organisations have to work at all levels involving actively all the local people. Another committee called Sivaram Committee was set up by government of India for the development of tribal community. Like this, till now the NGOs play a major role in developmental activities.

Government of India in its sixth Five-year plan had come with a famous slogan "GARIBI HATAO". This actually had an underlying stress for the development of NGOs again in seventh five-year plan they gave a stress upon "Self-Reliance Communities" under rural development. In eighth Five-year plan, the government promoted a nation-wide network of NGOs. When it comes to ninth Five-year plan, the Government encouraged PPP (Public Private Partnership) and in by the time tenth Five-year plan had come, the Government promoted creating awareness among farmers about modern farm techniques and more initiatives towards this end. Not only encouraging and promoting, the Government provides the financial aid also to these NGOs.

With this magnanimous support of Government, NGOs have accelerated their work by taking up several issues like Poverty Alleviation, Child Rights, Caste Stigma Discriminations, Women Rights, Child Labour, Rural Development, Water and Sanitation, Environmental Issues etc. In last few years, they become more active and played a crucial role in resending the school dropout to school especially in rural areas, thus paved a way for the Right to Education Act.

When it comes to health sector, NGOs handled various programmes like Leprosy Eradication Programme, Eliminating TB, Malaria and Improving Water and Sanitation Facilities in India. All of these were huge successes.

Apart from all of these, NGOs played a major role in influencing Government towards much awaited laws and policies. Right of Information Act, Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), MNREGA, Juvenile Justice, Nirmal Gram Initiative, Rashtriya Swasthya Bhima Yojana (RSBY) are few among them to name. There are also various policies that came into existence because of NGOs are Women Development, Antitrafficking, Forest and Environment Development, People with Disability etc.

Basically, NGOs are voluntary organisation that work for the development of the society. But they are called NGO Non-Governmental Organisation as they do not come under control of Government. Anybody can join an NGO and work for society. NGOs do not seek a financial assistance from the Government and they can frame their own principles and programmes. In this way, they start building self confidence in masses.

3.0 ROLE OF NGOS IN INDIA

First NGOs consists of experts with several years of experience in working for social welfare activities. These experts make a detailed analysis of the situation and contemplate possible solutions. While implementing those solutions they work with civic agencies and other government agencies at all levels.

Not only like this, NGOs get funds even from foreign companies as well. A separate act namely Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, (FCRA) 2010 is framed to check and regulate these funds. This act first framed the rules and regulations for the receipt and usage of foreign contribution by NGOs in India. The funds should not be used for any antinational activities. This act includes a normal person, corporate body and any type of entities formed or registered in India.

As suspected, many NGOS had come under the radar of Indian Government for alleged contravention of the Act. According to this Act, the NGOs should collect the funds only getting a certificate of registration or a prior permission under the Act. This is implemented by the

Ministry of Home Affairs. NGOs need to understand the intricacies of this law or their survival, expansion and for working too.

NGOs consider projects for the welfare of the community they work with. They address several concerns that exist in the society. As they are Non-Profit Organisations, they run by donations made by individuals, corporate and institutions. They try to raise funds through various activities for carrying their works.

India has a large number of NGOs, exactly for every 400 persons we can find an NGO. In total there are 3.4 million NGOs are there in India. All these work on various aspects from disaster relief to upliftment of the underprivileged communities. Some of their activities include are as follows.

During Covid many of these have helped people particularly for the migratory workers to provide various aids and food etc. They also work on various issues like human labour rights, gender issues, healthcare, environment, education, human and labour rights, legal aid and research etc. Some of the causes for NGOs work in India are Child Rights, Poverty, Social Justice, Environment Conservation, Human Rights, Care for Elderly People, Women Empowerment, Wildlife Conservation, Animal Rights, Sanitation and Hygiene, Humanitarian Relief, Health and Nutrition, Literacy and Education, Refugee Crisis, Disease Control and Others.

They also help in working with Self Help Groups (SHG) to work with all these aspects. Some NGOs work politically too. They collect the public opinions against Government's policies and actions and they would try to pressurise Government to work upon them. This makes them appear as Pressure Groups. The NGOs are responsible for many acts like Environment Protection Act 1986, Right to Education Act 2009, Forests Rights Act 2006 and Right to Information Act 2005. Without the work of NGOs, these laws could not have been appeared. NGO create social awareness against the superstitions prevailed, faiths and beliefs of customs etc.

Broadly we put the roles played by the NGOs into four categories such as

1. Protection

2. Prevention

3. Promotion

4. Transformation

1. Protection means the disaster management. NGOs try to provide relief to the people who are the victims of any natural disaster. They also help poor people in upgrading their life styles.

2. Prevention means again protecting people from being vulnerable to many fraudulent practices or companies.

3. Promotion means enhancing the chances and opportunities of the people for better life conditions. They do so by providing better education to poor and under privileged children.

4. Transformation means protecting the underprivileged from political and economic oppression. They may act as pressure groups for government creating or amending the laws necessary.

For conducting all these activities, they would have experts in the respective fields and they would conduct a detailed analysis of the situation and the possible solutions. If needed, they collaborate with civic agencies and other government agencies to carry out these activities. NGOs do the field work as well as conduct massive campaigns to create awareness about these activities. Now-a-days like this, NGOs play a major role in reaching masses.

4.0 CONTROVERSY ABOUT NGOS

Undoubtedly, NGOs play a major constructive role in building a nation. But they are not away from controversies for various reasons and they came under red scanner of Government. The Government started looking at them suspiciously. All these things are because of lack of transparency or accountability, which cost them the credibility. It may not be true with all NGOs, but true in case of at least a few.

A report of Intelligence Bureau stated that NGOs are sole responsible for the loss of 2 – 3% of Country's GDP. This report made to raise eyebrows of all the people. They have to raise their

voice and protest for the sake of communities and people, but that should not be at the cost of development and GDP. They played a very crucial part in protesting against setting up coal and thermal project plants and Konndankulam nuclear project, which ultimately led to power shortages in respective states.

As a result, many people argued that their foreign sourcing of funds should be stopped as there is no transparency. But in a country like India, where there is a scarcity of funds. Instead Government introduced an Act to control and regulate the availability and utilisation of the funds. As a result, Foreign Contribution Regulation (FCRA) Act, 2010 came into existence. This makes the NGOs to become transparent in governance and broad functioning.

5.0 AMENDED FCRA ACT

The Act was amended in September 29, 2020 by getting President's assent. These amendments put more responsibility on NGOs in choosing partnerships and getting and utilising the funds particularly from foreign entities. But, the Government has to keep an eye on NGOs to prevent the misuse of the funds towards illegal activities.

With this, sub granting was made illegal. Sub granting means a bigger NGO passes funds received from foreign donors to smaller NGOs. The smaller NGOs cannot get the funds from foreign donors. For example, Life Education and Development Support (LEADS) in Jharkhand receives Rs. 8 lakhs annually from a Germany based "Bread for The World" to strengthen the school system. LEADS runs this program through four small NGOs. In the same way, in Assam an NGO called GVM takes support from ActionAid and National Foundation for India to work for Bodo's that are in the border area of Bhutan. The cap on the administrative expenses had also been reduced to 20% from 50% of their foreign donations. The amendment also makes it compulsory to get funds from SBI branch of New India. The NGOs had to submit the statement of expenses four times a year. This amendment also disallows Amnesty and other civil society organisations from receiving foreign contributions for supporting other NGOs. The Ministry of Home has full powers to cancel the certificate from FCRA of an NGO.

6.0 CRITICISMS OF THESE AMENDMENTS

These amendments are largely questioned by many civil societies particularly during the time of Covid. With banning the sub granting, the country's developmental sector may get affected badly. The flow of foreign funds may get hindered. Moreover, the Environmentalism, human rights and civil liberties would get affected largely. The ideals of these important pillars of India's soft power would not synchronise with the amendments. So, International Commission of Jurists said that this new was in contradiction to the international obligations and to even its own constitutional rights.

7.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF NGOS FOR INDIA

Before independence even, NGOs are playing a very crucial role in helping distressed people in lifting their socio-economic status of millions in the country. As the India is very vast both in demography and in area with severe cultural diversity, NGOs help in filling up the gaps by government in improving their lives of marginalised communities, by taking various activities. Some NGOs provide direct benefit by providing nutritious feed to malnourished children. Some NGOs help in sending children to school. The NGOs has a very lasting impact in underprivileged and deprived people. For getting registered under FCRA, the NGO should work for three years in conducting field activities spending Rs. 10,00,000. They need to renew the registration for every five years in the prescribed manner. Even if the NGOs are not eligible for the registration, they can seek for prior approval for receiving foreign funding.

But, India made huge progress in socio-economic sphere since independence. Millions and billions of people came out of poverty, got good health care services, their life expectancy grew, literacy rate increased, and many more had happened. But still, due to the vastness of India, still millions of people are left behind and also the progress is also not uniform with all the people. Now, the main job of the NGOs is now to bridge the gap. They sometimes provide direct distribution of the materials like nutritious food to underprivileged people and sometimes they educate people about the importance of sending children to schools.

8.0 PROBLEMS WITH NGOS

There were several NGOs in India currently working. They have grown like mushrooms in recent few years to help poor. Under the name of NGO, many grab money from donors and

also involve in money laundering activities which are illegal. In fact, for every 400 people in India, we can find one NGO. Moreover, many lack transparency and accountability in their dealings and transactions. With this, we can easily understand that many are not serious in their work and also fraudulent. Adding to this, in recent years, few NGOs are black listed for indulging in misappropriation of funds. Few NGOs are even identified by India's Intelligence Bureau for being responsible for reducing India's GDP by 2-3% per year.

9.0 WAY FORWARD

Though are plenty of NGOs are there in India, they need to work effectively and efficiently with the resources they have. Also, they need to transparent in their work and the utilisation of funds.

Particularly in India, NGOs work for the benefit of whole nation. Moreover, the Corporate Social Responsibility Act (CSR) makes its mandatory to spend at least 2% for social issues and nation building. They need to play a still major role in coming days to reduce poverty and distress.

But it is very important for both NGOs to main transparency in financial matters and in the work they do as well. Both income and expenditure details should be available in a public domain. Just the source of funds or native or foreign could not justify their credibility. Also, Government also should not always look at them through suspicious eyes, unless and until they are involved in illegal activities.

As years pass by, NGOs have streamlined their operations and scaled up too. They also need to work just like companies with well-defined KPIs and targets. With more transparency and accountability, they can form a good trend in best utilisation of funds. With all these NGOs can become a powerful change agent.

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