



Research Paper

The Role of NGO's in Rural Development in India

Nagendrakumar .P

Associate Professor of Sociology,
Government First Grade College, Kuvempunagar, Mysore

Abstract

Rural development is a multifaceted process since it requires ongoing adjustments and adaptations of conventional values, practices, and institutions to integrate the growing body of scientific knowledge and technologies aimed at improving the quality of life and well-being of the community. It fundamentally represents an issue of transformation in modernization that can only be managed successfully through the active involvement of individuals at every phase of decision-making. It is now generally accepted that rural development as a community-focused initiative should be seen as a transformation driven and maintained by the people or the intended group themselves. For this to occur, individuals must be organized and capable of being active participants in the development process. This position is well matched to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that have arisen as effective agents for expressing people's needs and concerns. Acknowledging that this government policy aims to promote the involvement of NGOs in rural development efforts wherever and however possible.

Keywords: NGOs, Rural Development, Liberalization, Globalization, human Rights, policy implication and (MGNREG).

I. Introduction

India is a nation of villages, and the Government of India has been executing various rural development initiatives for the enhancement of rural communities. Non-governmental organizations, due to their flexible, locally focused, need-driven, beneficiary-centered, and dedicated service approach, have created numerous roles that can influence rural development. Several NGOs have been essential in the development of rural communities, in addition to government efforts. Recognizing that the government could not tackle the vast challenges of rural development on its own, it became essential to involve non-profit, voluntary, and non-governmental organizations in various stages and activities at global, regional, and local levels. Consequently, in subsequent stages, both GOs and NGOs have played a significant role in improving the lives of the impoverished rural population. Undoubtedly, NGOs have been tirelessly operating every day to address numerous issues related to children, women, the elderly, the environment, and more.

NGOs have existed in India for a long time. Voluntary work has consistently been a significant aspect of Indian culture and social tradition, and the importance of organizing individuals into registered associations for their engagement and participation in rural development is now widely acknowledged. In recent years, there has been a notable rise in their numbers, gaining more significance and importance while conducting numerous new experiments in rural development, as government organizations have struggled to effectively reach the rural poor for development at the necessary level. Despite the large sums of money that have been allocated and utilized for various rural development programs over the years. However, the advantages have not reached the impoverished rural population. Despite substantial shifts in methods and strategies for rural development, the government has failed to meet even the basic desired targets in areas such as education, nutrition, health, drinking water, and employment.

Aims of NGOs

These goals encompass a broad range of topics including socio-economic progress, women's empowerment, rural development, tribal advancement, environmental conservation, literacy initiatives, rehabilitation for the underprivileged, awareness campaigns, poverty reduction, leadership development, consumer advocacy, education, and more. The primary goals of NGOs are outlined below:

- ❖ Advancement of women and rural communities socially, economically, and politically via income-generating initiatives, educational programs, awareness workshops, etc.

- ❖ Overall socio-economic progress of individuals residing in rural regions, particularly in disadvantaged areas.
- ❖ Motivating the rural community to engage actively in cultural events, artistic pursuits, sports, and scientific activities.
- ❖ Advancement of marginalized groups in society, including fishermen, tribal communities, and rural women, etc.
- ❖ Launching entrepreneurial projects (for both genders) and arranging leadership and personal development workshops.
- ❖ Promoting Gandhian principles and writings, raising awareness, and organizing de-addiction initiatives.

Goals of NGOs

- In essence, the goals of NGOs in Rural Development are:
- To bring about social justice for the poor and create awareness about their rights and duties;
- To promote growth in social, political and economic aspects of life in rural areas and
- To devise policies through networking with national and international agencies for sustainable development and facilitate the practice of the same.
- To help the people help themselves in their endeavours to progress;
- To promote the growth of inherent potentials among people;
- To initiate a process of participatory development.

NGOs in India:

- **This was the first phase of NGOs in India.** Soon after Independence, a number of NGOs had emerged in India. Mahatma Gandhi even pleaded to dissolve the Indian National Congress and transform it to a Lok Seva Sangh (Public Service Organization). Though his plea was rejected, but the followers of Mahatma Gandhi started many voluntary agencies to work on various social as well as economic issues of the country.
- **The second phase of NGO** development started in 1960 when it was felt that just the government programs were not sufficient to complete the task of development in rural areas. Many groups were formed whose role was to work at grass root levels.

Over the years, the role of NGOs in rural development of India increased. 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 envisaged an active role of NGOs in developing self-reliant communities. These groups were supposed to show how the village resources along with 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 not a tough task for them.
- ❖ **The eighth five-year plan**, more importance to NGOs for rural development in India had been given. Under this scheme, a nationwide NGO network had been created. The role of these agencies was the rural development at a low cost.
- ❖ **In the ninth five-year plan**, it has been proposed that NGOs would play a significant role in the development on the public-private partnership model. More scope has been provided to NGOs by the government for rural development through the agricultural development policies as well as their implementation mechanisms.
- ❖ **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.

Functional Areas

The Functional Areas of NGOs can be grouped under the following broad categories:

1. **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.
2. **Development:** Implementation of a wide range of development programmes.
3. **Research, Evaluation and Documentation:** Studying problems of the rural areas and evaluating development programmes thereby expanding the knowledge based on development strategies, delivery systems

and cost effectiveness of programmes. The documentation of information on voluntary effort provides information which is invaluable for programme planning.

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

5. Social Activism: Advocating changes in organisations and structures through awareness, organization building and, when necessary, challenging existing and institutions and advocating radical action.

Goals of Government in NGO

NGO approaches to government now range from strongly oppositional to closely collaborative, with the majority of NGOs keeping an uneasy, sometimes reluctant, but pragmatic and often sophisticated partnership with the state in its various forms.

NGOs have responded to the government's socioeconomic development agenda over the years. Thus, when the government changed emphasis from capital-oriented growth to anti-poverty programs, NGOs made a distinct shift from welfare and service delivery interventions to a direct attack on poverty. Subsequently, in the 1990s, when the state moved on to macro-economic and structural reforms, NGOs began to focus on scaling up their activities. This led to their working with the state to develop innovative methods and ensure commensurate changes in policy.

Goals of the state and NGOs have converged, particularly in the areas of empowering communities, encouraging participation, strengthening democratic institutions, and improving access to basic services like health and education. They differ in the uniform, bureaucratic processes adopted by the state, contrasted with the NGOs' more flexible response to local needs.

The government has set up several institutions to promote funding of NGOs (e.g., Khadi and Village Industries, Cooperatives, Central Social Welfare Board, National Wasteland Development Board, and CAPART. This has led to the beneficiaries' dependence on the state. NGO reliance on such funding has also introduced the risk that they will lose their autonomy and become mere implementers of public sector projects.

Role of NGOs in Rural India

NGOs are playing a promising interlocutors role in all development activities in existing academic as well as development studies. In recent times, responding to Grass-roots level initiative and voluntary action became necessary to develop the rural areas. The increasing demands for the NGOs are itself a response to recent trends relating to socio-economic issues and their corresponding development interventions in academic and policy-oriented research.

Moreover, development administrators and change agents have to keep this fact in mind while working on any development project/programme that require deep thinking, sincere attempts and extensive involvement. Either organizations or individuals those who know this fact hardly try to make an attempt through short-cut methods for the development of their communities or the communities they work for. It is only this distinguished quality of them attracts one to focus their attention to such organizations and individuals involved in social uplift of deprived and underprivileged sections of the society.

There is an urgent need for accepting the changing role of NGOs in the implementation of child care, women development, anti-poverty and minimum needs programmes. While the role of NGOs has been accepted in supplementing governmental effort, still there is general confusion and lack of understanding on how best they involve themselves directly in the mainstream of development process. Now, this is a turn to recognize the changes that have taken place in the society that there are many other economically and social vulnerable groups like small and marginal farmers, agricultural labours, scheduled castes and tribes, bonded labours, rural artisans, rural women, etc., who also need to be brought in the mainstream of development process.

Rural Development Schemes and NGO:

The important schemes available from Government of India for Rural Development are:

- ❖ Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREG)
- ❖ Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY)
- ❖ Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY)
- ❖ Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY)
- ❖ National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)
- ❖ Department of Land Resources-DoLR
- ❖ National Land Records Modernization Programme (NLRMP)
- ❖ Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP)

The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP):

The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) is a rural development program of the Government of India launched in Financial Year 1978 and extended throughout India by 1980. It is a self-employment program intended to raise the income-generation capacity of target groups among the poor. The target group consists largely of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and rural artisans living below the poverty line.

The Government runs its large-scale rural development schemes mainly through the Ministry of Rural Development, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). Besides, some autonomous bodies like District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), National Rural Roads Development Agency (NRRDA) and Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) are also working in tandem with the Government.

Opportunities:

Local Resource Mobilization provides potential for NGOs to raise funds from local businesses, individuals, government and locally generated income. To do this NGOs must have strong governance and accountability mechanisms, clear strategies and local credibility.

Local Networking provides opportunities for mutual learning, identifying appropriate development initiatives, generating learning resources, improving coordination and cooperation with local government, harmonizing approaches to development, and pursuing effective local advocacy. Form consortia to source funding from the donor community.

Regional NGO Networks: Regional and thematic networks present opportunities to NGOs to share research, approaches, resources, capacity and work with both GoK and the corporate sector. Strong regional networks also provide the basis for supporting district level networks and ensuring the NGO Council remains strong by keeping its membership strong.

NGO Income Generation: NGOs with excess assets can use them to generate income which may be used as the NGO determines. Consider renting buildings, providing consultancy, offering training, trading on your name or with locally made products.

Information, Communication and Technology (ICT): The world has moved into the technological age. Get connected! Internet and email are fundamental to serious organizations. Set up a simple website and start building your networks and your profile. Share with others your work, approaches and impact.

New NGO Act: The proposed new NGO Bill and Act, provides both opportunities and threats to the NGO community. If the NGO Council effectively lobbies for the NGOs in an informed and professional manner, a more enabling environment for this sector may result. Alternatively it is possible for the Sector to lose its self regulating mechanism and be controlled by a single government-appointed body.

Government devolved funds and new funding mechanisms: The CDF, Constituency Aids Funds, Youth, Women, Water, LATF and other locally available development funding is available to local NGOs and CBOs, which should also be more involved in the management of these funds. New basket funding from central government, through the NGO Board, is also a possibility.

Major role seen for NGO's in rural development:

As economic reform and liberalization saw the Government vacating several areas to let private sector entrepreneurship flourish and contribute to the high growth rate of the economy in recent years, a similar paradigm shift is needed to transform NGOs from their dependence on aid and grants from within and outside for transforming the rural scenario in the country.

Better credibility: As NGOs get finance generated through their own activities. Their credibility vastly improves and their service to rural people gets reinforced. CNRI is an apex body with over 2,000 member NGOs engaged in multifarious activities ranging from self-help group formation, income generation, marketing, and agency work for insurance companies for life and non-life products and for banks and financial institutions to environment protection, watershed management, handicrafts, textiles, traditional medicinal plants and HR development. It is completing one year of its existence. To mark the celebration of one year of its service to NGOs, CNRI is hosting a three-day national meet - 'Advantage Rural India' - from April 17.

Special Sessions:

The NGOs have taking active participation in rural development. The rural poor and socially depressed classes are mainly depending upon the operations 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 benefit of the poor. At the same time we should not forget the mushrooming of the NGOs for their welfare. The following are the important activities should take up for the development of the poor.

1. Agricultural related programs:

Numerous activities can be undertaken under agriculture sector. The jobs/projects like distributing planting materials, cattle, poultry, minor irrigation, free medical care for cattle's, safe drinking water for animals etc.

2. 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.

3. Human Rights:

NGOs have played a role akin to that of an eye specialist in human right issues. It takes some one (NGO) from the outside to tell the government (democratic or dictatorial) that you are not representing the interest of the citizenry but a few elite. When the vision of government and politicians are blurred as regards respect for human rights, the NGOs who are acting as eye specialist can fit them a pair of appropriate glasses to see properly. The issues of development and democracy is being linked to human right issues because there can be no true economic and political advancement without respect for human beings.

4. Community development programs:

The community development programs like adoption of villages for development, moral support during flood and famine period, supply of food and drinking water during flood, common well, training programs for the rural youths, housing projects, repair and renovation of houses etc will satisfy the basic necessities. The important program like training programs for the rural poor will hold the youths from rural exodus. Even this type of training programs may also be extended for the rural women, so that we can expect self sustenance among this community.

5. Human Resource Development programs:

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

6. HIV/AIDS and other Topical issues: There is no doubt that NGOs have been at the fore-front (although in collaboration with government) in fighting the endemic problem of HIV/AIDS. Through various work-shops, seminars, symposiums, media campaign etc, NGOs like Community Partners For Development and Action in Development Centre etc have been able to create awareness of HIV/AIDS and its implications on poverty and development. They have also been involved in other topical issues such as child abuse, early marriage, human trafficking and prostitution, child labor etc. with a view to creating awareness of policy makers to the plight and consequences of these social maladies.

7. 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.

Policy implications:

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

- i. The overdependence of NGOs on funding agencies and the syndrome of dependency should be reduced by involving the government directly in funding activities.
- ii. Donor agencies should also take active initiation in selecting the funding projects and even selecting of NGOs too.
- iii. The donor agencies should go for surveying the viable projects for NGOs and the needs of the people.
- iv. NGO should also accept the truth that, the funding agencies are no longer available for the projects which are not viable.
- v. 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.

II. Conclusion

The role played by government at various levels national, state and local have in some or many ways failed at addressing the key issues in rural economic development. In other words, the rural development programmes embarked upon by government to transform the rural economy have minimal impact on the rural economy of the nation. It is therefore, the responsibility of the NGOs who can penetrate the rural communities to engage them in participatory development process for the rapid development of the rural areas. In addition, NGOs are flexible and effective at obtaining true meaningful participation of the intended beneficiaries, as well as achieving the correct relationship between the development process and outcomes.

Rural development has the rural dwellers as the focus of attention. It is the rural dwellers alone who can effectively identify their own problems and adequately identify their perceived needs. It therefore, becomes imperative that they be involved in the design and implementation of development programmes meant to improve their welfare. Therefore, rural development planning should start from the people themselves in a bottom- up strategy.

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