

ROLE OF NGOS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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Balwantrai Mehta study team had observed that development process is futile without participation of people. The voluntary organizations world-over have served as catalyst who link the people in development process. They create development awareness, mobilisation and organised people in development process. This reality has been recognised by the Government of India by seeking partnership with the voluntary sector in the development process.

The term 'Third Sector' is one of the hotly debated as to what is within the preview of and what is not within the preview of the Third Sector. The researchers like Dr. Rajesh Tandan of PRIA would go to the extent of including active citizenship; which is not formally organized, whereas some others would include trade unions and cooperatives and most others would equate non-profit sector with the "Third Sector" and regard it as an entity distinct from the Public Sector (state and government) and the Private Sector (economy). However, there is a broad agreement among the researchers in the field of the 'Third Sector' research that their endeavour is to establish "civil society" a just and exploitation free society.

II

The NGOs in India can be described as : (i) Organizations that are generally formed by professionals or quasi-professionals from the middle or lower middle class, (ii) These organizations have been formed either to serve or work with the poor or to canalize financial support for them. (iii) These organizations are generally non-membership organizations and have salaried employees, (iv) To meet the requirement of the rules and regulations that govern the non-profit sector in India. Some employees are (or are regarded as) members of the organization, (v) India has a very few international NGOs and those NGOs like CARE, OXFAM and CAF

which operate in India are relief and development fund disbursing agencies, (vi) In India NGOs are most commonly known as Voluntary Agencies.

III

Voluntary organizations and initiatives in India aiming at development broadly conceived as economic upliftment as well as social transformation and welfare, have a long history in India dating back to the pioneering experiments of Tagore and Gandhi in 1920s. The voluntary sector has considerably expanded since then, and a large number of organizations engaged in activities, ranging from charity to economic relief, rural development, political mobilization and struggle for social justice have come up. According to Harsh Sethi, 'The organizations that emerged in and after 1970s are distinctly different from most of the earlier organization as well as ideological leaning. The politically active youth in India that was disillusioned with the country's economic and political performance has charted a new path for itself through these formations.

They have no electoral ambitions, they claim to avoid the opportunism of political parties and status-quoism of traditional voluntary organizations. They have adopted participatory methods of functioning and launched a frontal attack on the root causes of poverty and injustice. They seek to articulate and give form to the struggles and aspirations of the marginalized sections such as tribals, traditional artisans, small fanners, landless workers, etc. These groups operate in a specific locality, not more than a district and share a common ideological orientation, are it Marxism / Gandhism, Sarvodaya or a mix of these.

The growing disillusionment and the resultant discontent among the masses gave birth to a number of NGOs in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. The response of the national ruling class was the slogan of 'Garibi Hatao' (Eradicate Poverty) and launching of a number of rural development oriented programmes such as SFDA (Small Farmers Development Agency), MFLDA (Marginal Farmers' and Landless labor Development Agency), Food for Work and finally IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme). In Maharashtra, the Employment Guarantee Scheme was launched in 1972. The benefits of these programmes did not percolate to the target groups for which these programmes were designed. Thus, according Rajani Kothari, the national government, as well as those of the states, was following the strategy of 'passive revolution of capital' as it was not in position to launch a direct attack on the semi-feudal rural elite. During the times of late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, it was realized that the NGOs could play an important role in fashioning a capitalist civil society. Thus, the Seventh Five-Year-Plan

made the voluntary agencies a partner in the government's rural development programme. The Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), a national body to co-ordinate voluntary action and channelize funds for the activities of the voluntary organization was set up in 1985, with a budgetary allocation of 10 million rupees per annum. Taking the cue from this, the Maharashtra state government sought the co-operation of the NGOs to implement state-run schemes. Yet, the wheels of bureaucracy moved slowly and the People's Action for Development (PAD) was activated in 1990. The PAD maintains contact with more than 1,000 voluntary organizations in Maharashtra.

Budgetary allocations are made annually for the disbursement of the funds to the registered voluntary organizations. The Government of Maharashtra launched an ambitious Rs. 800 crore programme for water and soil conservation in 1993 to fight the recurring drought and sought involvement of the NGOs in its implementation.

IV

The Yusuf Meherally Centre was started in 1961 in memory of Yusuf Meherally a leading freedom fighter. It is located in a rural area about 65 kms. From the metropolitan city of Mumbai. Dr. Zakir Hussain, the then Vice-President of India, inaugurated it formally in 1965.

The objectives initially were : promoting national integration and studying the problems of urbanization. After 1967 the transformation of a rural area through mobilization of urban resources in man, money and material and with the participation of local people got added as an objective.

During 1962-67, cultural and intellectual activities dominated its programme. The Centre was the first to organize an exhibition for K. Laxman's cartoons. It helped Bangladesh refugees and organized famine relief whenever necessary.

Later, rural development becomes its main activity and a large number of activities were taken up in diverse fields at Tara in Karnala Panchayat and around. On the basis of the experience gained over two decades a new dimension was added to its activities. Since early nineties. It is actively engaged in evolving a model of rural development.

This model is based on its definition of rural development as micro-watershed development plus organic farming, including vermi-culture or and vermi-compost, plus non-conventional energy plus village industries and marketing their products in urban and semi-urban areas, in addition to the surrounding villages.

V

OBJECTIVES OF YMC

- To undertake Constructive and Nation Building Work among all sections of society.
- To undertake Rural Development activities.
- To promote and undertake Khadi & Village Industries.
- To create awareness of the importance of maintaining ecological balance and to promote sustainable Development.
- To provide the medical and other relief to the needy.
- To undertake educational activities.
- To provide other relief when required.

VI

Yusuf Meherally Centre, in its history of 57 years, has experimented a lot. It started with the objectives of promoting national integration and finding solutions to the problems of urbanization, and has evolved into a premier voluntary organization working for rural development & rebuilding local economy in Konkan region in Maharashtra.

The activities undertaken by YMC are as follows:

(1) AGRICULTURE:

The Centre has a nursery for raising saplings for its afforestation programme and also for supply to others. During the year, the agricultural department of the centre continued its paddy fanning and vegetable cultivation operations. A modest beginning was made by the department to make compost.

(2) MICRO-WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT:

The Centre continued to promote Micro-Watershed Development programme in the Konkan Region in Maharashtra consisting of 4 Districts.

The Centre was able to motivate two other NGOs in Thane District. They have selected 2 villages for the programme. The project work started in 1999-2000. The Centre has also identified a hamlet Balwandi to implement the project by itself.

(3) VERMI-CULTURE:

The Centre has a small dairy farm. The milk produced was continued to be sold locally. The Cow dung and the urine are used in the production of vermi-compost.

The Centre has a vermi-culture department and a demonstration farm with a unit for growing earthworms and bacteria useful for composting. The Centre makes vermi-compost and Eureka, a product of earthworms that is growth promoting and antifungal.

A new technique for converting the Cattle dung into vermi-compost was tried. A bed of Cow dung was prepared before the monsoon and without charging with external vermi compost, the earthworms were allowed to convert it into vermi-compost. If the Forest Department is persuaded to accept the technique, then Vermicompost can be produced on a large scale.

An experiment was conducted by the vermi-culture unit of the Centre, at CBCK.D, Mahad, to convert maisalium cake into manure. This experiment has also shown that the foul smell emanating from the cake can be eliminated.

The Forest Department availed themselves of the facilities of the Centre to train 25 men and women in vermi-culture.

One person trained by Centre from Karjat kept cows on his farm and from the cow-urine and the vermi-compost, he raised exotic vegetables and Basmati rice.

(4) MEDICAL:

The main activity of the Centre continued to be medical and health related programme in a cluster of villages in and around Tara in the Raigad District of Maharashtra State. A Sunday Clinic-cum-Diagnostic Centre at village Tara manned by Mumbai doctors, a regular dispensary and a mobile clinic run by the Centre's RMOs are the main features of our medical camps periodically. It has a 35-bed hospital with a modestly equipped operation theatre and a pathology laboratory. In the hospital, in addition to medical patients, routine surgical operations are performed and cases of road accidents are treated. During the 32 years that it had been functioning, It has treated over 5,03,000 patients carried out over 10,000 cataract operations. Gave specs to thousands of people at subsidized rates and many free, saved hundreds of lives and reduced considerably morbidity by timely correcting malnutrition, imparting health education etc.

The section of the highway on which the Centre a hospital is situated is highly accident-prone and the Centre's medical staff as well as non-medical staff provides all possible services promptly, efficiently and sympathetically.

(5) VILLAGE INDUSTRIES AND MARKETING

To generate employment in the region, oil ghanis, a soap making unit, a pottery workshop, a bakery unit and a carpentry workshop are operating. From small beginnings, the units are now selling their products from outlets in Mumbai, Besides, these also provide training facilities.

(6) EDUCATION

The Centre runs two high schools, one in Marathi and one in Urdu medium for the local children. A fully equipped computer laboratory provides them with the necessary exposure to the latest advancements. The performance of the students at the Board Examinations has been good. Education in both the schools is imparted without any fees being charged.

(7) WOMEN AND TRIBAL WELFARE:

The welfare activity of the centre continued to be focused on organizing women and creating awareness about various women's issues; re-activating previous women's association : relief to widows and abandoned women: formation of Self-Help Groups; strengthening existing Self-Help Groups and to arrange loans from the Centre and Bank; etc.

In twenty villages, meeting of the newly formed Mahila Mandals were held, which were attended by about 750 women. Another 175 meetings were organized in 60 villages where already the Centre had organized Mahila Mandals and about 7220 women attended those meetings. The subject matters discussed in those meetings were water shortage, cleanliness, roads, lack of punctuality among school teachers, bus service for villagers, public distribution system, kerosene supply.

Income Generating Activities. 170 adivasi and other low-income families were given the necessary inputs for starting kitchen gardens.

VII

The success of this experiment in rural development can be attributed to the following factors :

- (i) YMC has leadership, which combines the qualities of dedication and vision. The leadership has a sincere desire to improve the lot of the disadvantaged sections in the

- disadvantaged region. In order to ensure that YMC does not suffer due to political rivalries. Dr. G. G. Parikh has totally withdrawn himself from active party politics.
- (ii) Voluntary work is not a pastime or weekend activity for the well-meaning and enlightened urbanites. Dr. Parikh devoted his entire time, energy and resources to YMC for four long decades. Dr. Parikh does not believe in empire building as in evident from the decentralization process; wherein two sub-centers have functional autonomy.
 - (iii) People's participation is the essence of the success of any rural development activity. Participatory planning is the guiding operational principle of YMC; wherein the decisions are taken in consultation with the beneficiaries.
 - (iv) YMC has a well-knit field organization of full-time, paid social workers at various levels to implement and monitor the implementation of the programs. The problems arising out of implementation are immediately resolved.
 - (v) There is constant interface between the management, the field organization and the beneficiaries. Since no project or scheme is undertaken without the consent and participation of the beneficiaries, there is little scope for any serious differences to arise between the beneficiaries and the benefactor.
 - (vi) YMC had displayed enterprise in tapping funds from various sources and utilizing the local natural and human resources.
 - (vii) YMC maintains separate account books for each of the funding agencies. Cashbooks and ledgers are maintained on day-to-day basis. The accounts are regularly audited. There is free accessibility of accounts for public viewing. The transparent financial management demonstrates its accountability and sense of responsibility to the general public. This builds the confidence of the donors and the trust of the public.
 - (viii) More than the procedural matters, its achievement is remarkable in the areas of activities. Most voluntary organizations confine their sphere of activities to either education or health or sanitation. YMC has a comprehensive sphere of activities ranging from soil and water conservation, agricultural research, tribal development, skills training and employment-generation, health and medical services.

YMC has been among the few successful experiments of voluntary action for rural development. YMC provides a model for voluntary organizations engaged in rural development in India.

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