

**ROLE OF NGOS IN TRIBAL LIVELIHOOD PROMOTION: A CASE OF
MITTRA IN TRIBAL AREAS**

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Abstract:

NGOs play a fundamental role in enhancing development in tribal areas; NGOs have tried to fill in the void by trying to focus on development of local people. Through an empirical study in Nandurbar district in Maharashtra, an effort has been made in the present article to examine NGO's contribution to livelihoods development. It is argued that though NGO intervention has helped people in development process, sustainability of such development practices still remains a concern.

Keywords: *NGOs, Tribal, MITTRA, Livelihoods, Development*

Introduction

Non Government Organizations (NGOs) are organizations by people and operate independently from the government. The term stemmed from the United Nations to refer to organizations that do not form part of the government. The two main attributes of NGOs is that they do not make profit and they are not part of government. They have a wider mandate thus calling for their specialization. Most NGOs today specialize in specific areas like rural, urban and tribal development, climate change, human rights protection, governance and disease control among others. This article discusses how NGOs participate in tribal development at various levels.

It is worth noting that NGOs play a fundamental role in enhancing development in tribal areas. They initiate programs aimed at transforming the lives of people from miserable to better status. Because of the positive characteristics of most NGOs, it is easy to feel their impact since they are result-oriented. They put a lot emphasis on self-reliance through empowering people so that they do not remain

poor forever. Thus, NGOs have room for public participation in their activities, to make them effective towards achieving the desired results.

Kamat observes that the NGOs or as she refers to them as community based organizations (CBOs) “emerged in the post-World War II period between the 1960s and 1980s in response to the failure of developmental states to ensure the basic needs of the poor”. When the welfare states began favoring neo-liberalism, they started gradual withdrawing from various welfare responsibilities towards the marginalized sections of the society. At the same time the market was also expanding. In this context, Kamat says that “Given expanding market economies and shrinking states, NGOs fill a growing void by responding to the needs and demands of the poor and marginalized sections of society.” This has happened globally. The Sixth Five-year Plan (1980-05) in India, in a sense, paved the way for recognition of NGOs as service providers and enabler of people’s participation in different development programmes. Now NGOs are considered to be playing a critical role in ensuring good governance and development in developing countries like India through their diversified activities.

Role of Non-Government Organisations

It is difficult for the Government organisations to be flexible in their programmes, while NGOs have necessary skills and capable human resources to assess the problems of the poor and identify suitable interventions to solve their problems. The dedicated members of these NGOs can interact closely with the poor and mentor them to gain confidence and take active part in the development programme. They can identify the priorities of the poor and coordinate among various stakeholders regularly for efficient planning and implementation of various development activities. Such intensive involvement, commitment and flexibility can be exercised only by NGOs dedicated to the upliftment of the poor. Therefore under the present scenario, NGOs having proven track record are even better than the Farmers’ Cooperatives for effective inclusion of the poor in various development programmes. Good models developed by NGOs can be widely replicated through various development schemes of the Government using the agricultural extension network.

MITTRA's Approach to Sustainable Livelihood for the tribal Poor :

Maharashtra Institute of Technology Transfer for Tribal Areas (MITTRA), established in 1993, is a nonprofit making development organization promoted by BAIF. The word 'Mitra' meaning 'friend' in Marathi also means 'rising sun' in Sanskrit. The rising sun symbolizes rays of light that bring new life to the world. MITTRA, with headquarters at Nasik, is a non-political, secular and professionally managed organization dedicated to the welfare of tribal communities in Maharashtra. Since inception, it is engaged in implementing multipronged comprehensive tribal development programmes in different regions of Maharashtra.

Considering the challenges in tribal areas, Mittra has set its mission to create opportunities of gainful self-employment for the tribal families, especially disadvantaged sections, ensuring sustainable livelihood, enriched environment, improved quality of life and good human values. This is being achieved through development research, effective use of local resources, extension of appropriate technologies and upgradation of skills and capabilities with community participation. Mittra is presently operating in 4939 villages covering 2,26,709 families in Maharashtra.

Tree Based Farming System (Wadi) and Improved Agriculture;

The Wadi programme is a holistic development approach to create sustainable livelihood with the 'tree-based farming system' at its core. The wadi plot is an agri-horti-forestry plantation of beneficial plant species. Wadi has proved to be a boon to small holders in dry areas who cannot take the risk of investing in high-input intensive agriculture because of poor land quality and limited water availability. The long gestation period of fruit trees such as mango and cashew is reduced to about four years through adoption of techniques like grafting or vegetative propagation methods. Promotion of cultivation of intercrops with best cultivation practices has helped in further reduction of the gestation period. Water resources are developed in the Wadi plot to ensure proper growth of plants and improved productivity of crops. All these activities result into substantial increase in the family income and obviate the need for survival migration. The cessation of migration results in remarkable improvement in the quality of life of the family. The Wadi programme is implemented since 1993 and is one of the most popular activities in the tribal areas.

Progress of the Wadi programme is given below.

Table No :1 Region wise performance is as follows :

| Regions | Districts | No of Wadi |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Konkan | 2 | 16,319 |
| Western Maharashtra | 2 | 3,006 |
| Vidarbha | 10 | 35,252 |
| Marathwada | 1 | 2,969 |
| North Maharashtra | 4 | 39,453 |
| Total | 19 | 96,999 |

Contextualizing the Problem

2.1 Profile of the study area: The tribal areas has occupied a distinct place in the global map due to high incidence of poverty, malnutrition, hunger and starvation deaths, low level of literacy, unemployment, low income level of people etc. In absence of productive land owing to geographical condition, poor irrigation infrastructure and lack of other livelihoods avenues, the work participation rate has been very low. On the contrary, all these provide ample scope and opportunities for focused livelihoods intervention, thus making a substantial change in lives and living condition of the people.

2.2 Significance of the study: MITTRA has been playing a critical role promoting development in 19 district through its livelihoods intervention programmes under the domain of ‘Tree Based Farming System (Wadi) and Improved Agriculture’. MITTRA’s intervention in the area has now been close to two decades. And, this can be considered a long enough time to examine the impact of its intervention and to see whether the focused intervention has brought out any discernible change or not in the lives and living condition of the people of the area. It has been recognized now that development does not include economic development alone in terms of growth in gross national product and per capita income, and variables like quality of health services, nutritional status, education, housing, clean water, electricity etc. are needed to be considered to understand development in a holistic perspective. In this context, it would be worthwhile to employ the sustainable livelihoods framework

which takes into account all such variables and examine the contribution of the NGO towards development.

Methodology of The Study

Sampling of families: MITTRA through its project Tree Based Farming System (Wadi) and Improved Agriculture is working in 95 gram panchayats of the four blocks, Dhadgoan, Akkalkuwa, Shahada and Nandurbar covering a total of 155 villages. The target beneficiaries in these 155 villages include 21466 families. With a view to get a representative picture of livelihoods intervention in all 155 villages and its impact on the target household beneficiaries within a stipulated time period, a representative sampling following stratified random sampling method was drawn from the villages covered by the project. A total of 200 families were covered under the study from 21466 families. While drawing the sample careful attempts have been made to choose representative sample from both the blocks representing various tribal groups.

Data collection and analysis : Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used for data collection. While questionnaire survey was carried out among sample families following the quantitative method, interviews and focus group discussions were carried out as part of qualitative method. Finally, both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to reach at study findings.

Impact Of MITTRA's Livelihoods Intervention In Nandurbar District: In this section an attempt has been made to examine the impact of MITTRA's intervention in livelihoods programmes in four blocks of Nandurbar district through its project. It may be noted here that as sustainable livelihoods refers to creation and sustenance of economical sustainability.

MITTRA's TRIBAL livelihoods intervention Programme in Nandurbar district:

MITTRA's focus areas are livelihoods promotion among marginalized communities, primarily belonging to Scheduled Tribes (STs). It has been systematically promoting a process of change emphasizing empowerment of the poor with a view to ensure sustainable development.

MITTRA focuses on promoting round the year food and livelihoods security of the tribal poor through its rural livelihood programmes. Emphasis is laid on

promotion of activities in farm sectors to achieve this objective. The strategies followed by MITTRA include:

- **Wadi (Tree Based Farming System)**
 1. Horticulture Development
 2. Land Development
 3. Supply and application of Fertilizer and Pesticides
 4. Technical Support and Training
- **Improved Agriculture**
 1. Identification of Technology Needs of Farming
 2. Improved Agricultural Practices
 3. Vegetables and Other Cash Crops
 4. Vermicomposting
- **Water Resource Development**
 1. Mobile Lift Irrigation Schemes
 2. Lift Irrigation Scheme

MITTRA's intervention on Improved Agriculture through Wadi development project (Tree Based Farming System) : As the tribal farms are located in hilly areas, Wadi program seems best strategic plan for region. The scientific analysis for the causes of low agriculture production was carried out by the NGO official. The water resource development activities like Mobile Lift Irrigation Schemes and Lift Irrigation Scheme were promoted through supply of solar pump units' installation. The following activities were carried out to help tribal farmers for improving livelihoods.

Table No :2 Impact of MITTRA's intervention on livelihoods of tribal farmers

| Wadi (Tree Based Farming System) | Identification of Technology Needs of Farming | Use Of Bio fertilizers (Vermi composting) | Cultivation of Vegetables and Other Cash Crops | Improved Agriculture |
|---|---|---|--|----------------------|
| Acceptance by No of families | 200 | 150 | 180 | 180 |

Table No: 3 Economic benefit Achieved

| No. | Economic benefit Achieved | No of Respondents (*) | Percentage (%) |
|-----|--|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Growth in Income | 180 | 90 |
| 2 | Availability of vegetables from own farm | 100 | 50 |
| 3 | Loan dependency minimized | 85 | 43 |
| 4 | Saving of money | 128 | 64 |
| 5 | Profitable farming | 180 | 90 |

(*)Multiple Responses

All the sample respondents practice agriculture as their primary occupation. Similarly, more than 75% of the respondents depend on agriculture labour activities as their secondary source of occupation. Percent 41 of the respondents have accessed both formal and informal credit facilities to start up some kind of economic activity. They access this loan amount either from relatives or from Money Landers. Majority 90% of the respondents achieved Growth in Income and turns their farming activity Profitable. Nearly 64% of respondents could save money due to MITTRA's livelihoods program. When half of respondents could grow vegetables from own farm for self consumption and earn additional income through sells, 43% of respondents have successfully control their economic dependency on loan.

The above economic pattern shows that MITTRA's livelihoods promotion of tribal farmers brought significant Impact on economic growth of tribal people.

Conclusion

The sample study has revealed that MITTRA's contributed to livelihoods development of people significantly. The economic activities have helped the family members to be economically empowered. People have been able to make their own economic choices which suggest of economic empowerment brought about by the NGO. Similarly NGO intervention has helped people to have access to reliable credit sources; their dependency on local moneylenders has decreased significantly.

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