

NGOs and Development: A Study of Three NGOs in Meghalaya

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Abstract: *In the modern times, it can be seen that NGOs play an important role in development. They function in many areas and work for the people who are in vulnerable situations. NGOs in India have been instrumental in creating awareness and mobilising the people in the villages. As a result they tend to build a good rapport with the people of the villages and this in turn helps the NGOs to successfully implement their various developmental activities and programmes. They took issues relating to health, environment, women and youth, empowerment and so on. In the light of these, this paper attempts to look at the importance of NGOs and the various issues taken by them. This will be looked at from the various developmental activities and programmes implemented by the NGOs and what impact these had on the people.*

Keywords: *Awareness, Civil Society, Development, Developmental Activities and programmes, NGOs, VOs.*

I. Introduction

All over the world, the fastest growing segment of the society is the nonprofit sector, as millions of ordinary people social entrepreneurs are increasingly stepping in to solve problems where governments and bureaucracies have failed. As Bornstein (2003) says, the past twenty years has produced more social entrepreneurs in the society. Today, NGOs are serving millions of citizens in a large number of countries. Their reach and scope often eclipse both the private and public sector, touching and affecting the lives of every citizen, often more profoundly than the forces of the market place or the agencies and bureaucracies of government (Fisher 1998). The Civil Society is playing an increasingly important social and economic role around the world. According to Jeremy Rifkin, the society is a three - legged stool made up of the market sector, government sector, and civil sector. The first leg creates market capital, the second leg creates public capital and the third leg creates the social capital. The civil sector consists of the millions of citizens who give of their time each week serving in many NGOs that make up the sprawling civil society (ibid. 1998).

For some scholars, NGOs exist as an alternative mode for development. They say that in being 'not governmental' NGOs constitute a platform for people to participate in development and social change in ways that would not be possible through government programmes. In being 'not governmental' they constitute a 'space' in which it is possible to think about development and social change in ways that would not be likely through government programmes. They constitute instruments for turning these alternative ideas and alternative forms of participation, into alternative practices and hard outcomes (Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin 2007). The relationship of NGOs to development therefore takes many forms and their diversity cannot be overemphasised. For some, NGOs are useful actors because they can provide cost-effective services in flexible ways, while for others they are campaigners fighting for change or generating new ideas and approaches to development problems (Lewis and Kanji 2009: 22).

NGOs now have greater diversity, credibility and creativity than ever before. It is said that organisations get created because that seems like the most natural way of functioning. Two main reasons for creating NGOs are rooted in two different priorities. The first one relates to providing a collective mechanism to pursue the commitment to work. This mechanism becomes the organisation. The other route for creating an organisation is based on the requirements of projects. Increasingly project funds are available only to organised initiatives, and not to individuals. Many non-government voluntary development organisations have come about because of this requirement (Society for Participatory Research in Asia 1991: 67). Much of today's international development effort is directed at variety of organisations and institutions - social change is seldom achieved by an individual acting alone (Fowler 1997: 20). However, their output is hard to measure because of the nature of their services.

In the case of Khasi-Jaintia society of Meghalaya, volunteering is a part of traditional values, spirit and norms. It is intricately linked to all the spheres of community life. The impact of the entry and institutionalisation of new forms of institutions and organisations on the traditional society resulted in both positive and negative changes in values, perceptions, attitudes and behavior of the people. It has also have resulted in the emergence and formation of several types of action groups who took up issues those concerning the welfare and development of the society (Nongkynrih 2006).

Non- Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are those types of organisations which are non-governmental in nature and are non - profit making. NGOs are also referred to as non – profit organisations

because of their non-profit seeking behavior. NGOs seek to further collective goals and work mainly for the welfare of the weaker sections of the society. It can also be argued that, NGOs act as a mediator between the state i.e. the government and the people i.e. the society. Therefore an NGO occupies an important place in society. As Baviskar says that, we are living in an era characterised by some as marked by the decline or retreat of the state and this decline of the state is accompanied by an increasing attention towards the civil society institutions such as NGOs (Baviskar 2005). NGOs are not homogeneous. They include Socio-Economic Organisation, Socio-Cultural Organisation, Rural Development Societies, Cultural Organisations and Service Oriented Organisations and Societies. A unique feature of NGOs is that it stimulates voluntary action among the served community and progressively involves enlightened individuals belonging to the served community in the higher echelons of its decision making machinery. NGOs in India have been specializing in various areas of rural development (Mehta 1994: 48-49). Under the broad umbrella term 'voluntary action', we find synonymous terms such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Voluntary Organisations (VOs), Grassroots Organisations, Action groups, etc (Misra 2008).

1.1 Objectives

This article aims to look at and discuss the importance of NGOs and their roles in society. It will also look at what are the role of NGOs in Meghalaya and will discuss the different developmental activities and programmes of the three NGOs and finally look at how their activities and programmes have helped the people.

II. Methodology

The present study is concentrated on three NGOs functioning in the state of Meghalaya. The empirical data have been collected from the office bearers, members and beneficiaries of the NGOs. An interview schedule was used to collect the empirical data. In – depth interview was carried out with the NGO personnel and a group interview carried out with the beneficiaries. The secondary sources include data from books, articles and the NGOs annual reports. The organisation is the unit of the study.

Importance of NGOs

NGOs play a vital role in shaping and implementation of participatory democracy. They have been contributing immensely towards various development programmes. They work at the grassroots level even in remote areas and their reach is much wider. They are closer to ground realities and know the needs of the communities. Their approach with target groups is direct, emphatic and they are able to draw more contextual plans of action. They also manage to develop intimate contacts with people and develop confidence among them (Report of the Steering committee on Voluntary Sector for the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07), Planning Commission, Government of India). NGOs are created to provide specific services to their beneficiaries, otherwise not available from the market. Their motivation for work is different from that of the profit seeking ones. They provide a set of services, which are not governed by market forces, and offer their services only to people who cannot pay for them (Misra 2008: 11). NGOs are an important link between people at the grassroots, civil society and the state. They have been instrumental in creating awareness and implementing development programmes in agriculture, watershed development, women's empowerment and health and family welfare. They are thus representative of alternative modes of development in India. NGOs approach to development is based on the important principle of people's participation. The approach adopted by NGOs treats people not as objects but as subjects who possess cultural knowledge as well as abilities to take their own independent decisions, which can be collectively implemented in bringing about change in the desired direction (Pawar, Ambedkar and Shrikant 2004: 13).

NGOs vary in size and their nature of services is also different. Some NGOs are large, others are small: some work directly with people at the grassroots level, others perform support functions of research, documentation and training. Some implement concrete development programmes, others mobilise people to demand their rights and justice. Some like to replicate and expand, others prefer to experiment and demonstrate. Some prefer to collaborate with government and industry, others scrupulously avoid doing so. The variety is so wide and overlapping that it defies any neat classification in terms of activities, functions, approaches and roles (Pandey 1984 cited in Bhatt 1995: 870). Despite the differences in the nature of services and size, their main aim is working for the welfare of the people.

Different scholars have categorised NGOs according to the role they play. Bhatt (1995: 870) opines that there are several ways of looking at the role of VOs depending upon one's framework of analysis. But looking in terms of the VOs impact in society, it can be considered as performing basically three roles. They can be broadly labeled as developmental, mobilisational, and political roles. These roles make impact on three different sectors. The developmental role aims to affect the design and delivery systems of governments or those organisations, like national and international funding agencies, which concern themselves with programmes aimed at raising the physical quality of life. This may be done by influencing the existing development

programmes and their delivery systems or by directly demonstrating alternative designs for development. The mobilisation role attempts to mobilise the intended beneficiaries of development so that they can influence the government's delivery system or look after their own development. In the political role, the approach is to influence the political system: either its policies, laws and legislations or its processes and performance. Neither these roles nor their impact are mutually exclusive. In one sense all roles can be considered political or developmental, insofar as its intended impact is to bring about social transformation. For instance in the mobilisational role, the expectation is that if people are well mobilised then they in turn, will make political and developmental impact. On the other hand Fowler (1992) says that the NGO sector differentiates itself from the government and corporate enterprises in terms of its purpose, which is said to be driven by values like altruism, philanthropy and voluntarism whereas the primary objectives of the government and private sectors to govern and make profit respectively. Above all the NGOs aims at delivering services at the grassroots level and are looked upon as an alternative mode for development. Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin (2007) are of the opinion that the intervention of NGOs in the developmental process may be classified into two types of development, i.e. big 'D' development and small 'd' development respectively. They say that in big 'D' Development NGOs have been regarded as sources of alternative ways of arranging microfinance, project planning, service delivery, and so on. However, in little 'd' development is seen as arising from the underlying processes of capitalist growth and development, or alternative ways of organising the economy, politics, and social relationships in a society. A key area of development to which NGOs have contributed is that of 'people – centred' development which relates to issues such as empowerment, participation, gender and social capital. However, the activities of development NGOs are not restricted to providing services only to people living in poverty, but can also be wider forms of public service (Lewis and Kanji 2009).

Role of NGOs in Meghalaya

The last decade has witnessed a tremendous proliferation and growth of NGOs in Meghalaya to address the issues of contemporary relevance such as charity, development, women, etc. It covers various youth organisations, civic organisations, farmers' organisations, religious organisations, professional organisations, etc whether they are formal or informal (Syiem 1998). The NGOs in Meghalaya are engaged in social and developmental programmes such as environmental awareness, youth leadership, health education, dissemination of information on government schemes, formation of SHGs, skill-based training and rural entrepreneurship programmes (Nongkynrih 2010: 70). However, when looking at the growth of NGOs in Meghalaya they are still at the nascent phase as compared to the country as a whole.

In the state of Meghalaya 'organisations' are said to be the new social units and they play a major part in the societal system. Though organisations of different types are found in the state, of late the VOs in Meghalaya have emerged as one of the key agents of development and could be seen one such social units which are actively engaged in developmental activities. They have a close relationship with the rural communities and operate at the grassroots level. The programmes and activities they carry out includes conducting of seminars, workshops, training and awareness programmes, supporting people with disabilities, mobilizing communities to form Self Help Groups (SHGs), rendering help to people below poverty line, counseling, organising health camps, cleaning drives and so on. Each VO is confined to a varied number of programmes and activities and is not based on a particular classification i.e. they are not clubbed under a particular theme such as, environmental organisation or health organisation or capacity building organisation and so on. These organisations also partners with different Government agencies and International agencies regarding projects which are to be implemented in a village or a block or a district. The major objectives of these organisations are to alleviate the rural communities, have a sustainable livelihood, become aware of the various developmental issues, mobilising the people, empowerment and so on. However, the main aim of most of the VOs in the state is to bring about social empowerment among the people (both at the individual and group level). When looking at social empowerment at the individual level it means to increase self - esteem, building confidence, boost one's capacity, understanding and personal skills. On the other hand social empowerment at the group level means to build trust and tolerance, co-operation, exchanging of views and opinions within the group and to share their experiences together. This in turn widens the scope for group activities and enables the people to work as a team.

Developmental activities and programmes

NGOs are an important link between the people at the grassroots level and the state. They have been instrumental in creating awareness and implementing developmental activities and programmes. There are many developmental activities and programmes of the different NGOs functioning in the state of Meghalaya. However this paper will look at only some activities and programmes of three NGOs functioning in East – Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. The NGOs included in this paper are: Bethany Society, Women for Integrated Sustainable Empowerment (WISE) and Social Service Centre (SSC). All these organisations are engaged in a

varied number of activities and programmes. The types of activities and programmes they focused on are social service, capacity building, business – entrepreneurship, health and environment among others. They are all located in and around the capital city of Meghalaya i.e. Shillong but most of them carry out their operation in the rural areas. Their main aim is to work for the people at the grassroots level in order to stimulate civic consciousness, mobilise the people and ensure their effective participation in the activities and programmes of the NGOs.

Some of the developmental activities and programmes of the three NGOs functioning in Meghalaya is discussed as follows:

Bethany Society

Bethany Society is a non – profit, registered and charitable society functioning in the state of Meghalaya. It works with people in vulnerable situations such as persons with disabilities, children, youth and women living in extreme poverty, particularly those residing in remote rural areas. There major activities include:

- (i) Institutional and Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programmes.
- (ii) Rural development and rural livelihood programmes.
- (iii) Training and capacity building in the sectors of disability, rural development, rural technology and environment education.

Bethany Society started the CBR programmes in the different districts of Meghalaya which includes West Garo Hills, West – Khasi Hills and Jaiñtia Hills since 2002, 2007 and 2010 respectively. The main focus of these programmes is reaching out to Persons with Disability (PWD) and the poor people residing in the remote villages of Meghalaya (Bethany Society Annual Report 2012). The programmes included issues on health, education, livelihood, social inclusion and empowerment.

Bethany Society collaborated with different agencies and institutions to improve the mental health and eye care services of the people in vulnerable situations. It also increase awareness programmes in the schools and colleges relating to these programmes. In the field of education, it has been active in embracing the needs of PWDs to avail for formal and non – formal education as well as the sustainable livelihood programmes by setting up schools, hostels and a livelihood academy. Four hostels were set up where two are in Shillong and two are in Tura for 155 PWDs with different types of disabilities. Bethany Society started Jyoti Sroat School in Shillong, which is a school with special focus on visual impaired students. Bethany Society is also involved in promoting Braille literacy (Braille is a form of written language for blind people represented by raised dots) by preparing Braille books and supplying Braille books to students from pre – school to post graduation in Meghalaya and other North – Eastern States (Bethany Society Annual Report 13). It has also been engaged in giving training to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) teachers and promoting inclusive education through certified courses of Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) on Foundation Course (FC) and B. Ed (special education). It also started a livelihood academy in Shillong called Roilang Livelihood Academy, which provides training to the PWDs. Trainings are offered in cane and bamboo handicrafts, leather and rexine products, handmade paper products, screen printing, bakery, etc. It has also helped the PWDs in promotion of legal awareness where it facilitated the formation of Disabled People’s Organisation (DPO) in Meghalaya, in order to help and protect the rights of the PWDs.

Bethany Society has been active in promoting awareness on sustainable livelihood amongst the rural communities and also involved in the formation and development of Self – Help Groups (SHGs). A number of trainings are carried out for the farmers, SHG members and the local communities on micro – enterprise for sustainable agriculture and livestock rearing.

These activities and programmes were carried out in collaboration with the different government agencies, departments and institutions (both national and international), like – minded VO and with the help of foreign sponsors and funding, local donors, local fund raising, etc.

Women for Integrated Sustainable Empowerment (WISE)

WISE is an NGO in Meghalaya which was established in June 2000. This organisation is mainly devoted to the welfare and empowerment of people, especially women, school dropout girls, domestic workers, SHG members and women in difficult circumstances. The major activities of the organisation carried out from the year 2000 to 2010 are as follows:

- (i) Skills training conducted at the centre of the organisation.
- (ii) Intervention at the District Jail.
- (iii) Initiatives at the Children’s Home Shillong.
- (iv) Development initiatives in the Villages.

WISE has been active in all the mentioned activities and has played an important role in functioning at the grassroots level. It always conduct regular skills training programmes for school drop – out girls, domestic

workers, single mothers and women in difficult circumstances. These training are conducted at their centre and include a varied number of trades like tailoring, embroidery, handicraft, candle making, knitting, weaving, flower making, basket making and card making. It has also been providing regular awareness programmes, value education and conducts interactive sessions with the women inmates in Shillong District Jail (WISE Annual Report 2009). From 2003 onwards the women inmates are given skills training on the different trades which would help them to have alternative means of livelihood after their term in the prison ends. From 2006 onwards they have started similar programmes for the men inmates. They also conducted similar programmes and activities for the young boys at Children's Home Shillong (a centre where young boys who are caught misbehaving in some way or the other are admitted for a period of transformation) (ibid.).

In the villages, WISE has carried out many developmental initiatives such as community empowerment in the rural areas which is mainly the formation and development of Self – Help Groups (SHGs). It was also partnered with Meghalaya Rural Development Society (MRDS) in the implementation of livelihood improvement projects in the villages. This project was funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in collaboration with the Government of Meghalaya. The project has also linked up with WISE in imparting short term skills training on candle and broom making to the SHG members. The SHGs are also involved in income generating activities and micro enterprise such as livestock rearing, kitchen garden, vermicompost units, grocery shops, agriculture, fishery, etc (WISE Annual Report 2011).

Social Service Centre (SSC)

SSC is a registered non – governmental, non – profit and non – political organisation functioning in the state of Meghalaya. It works for the integral development of all sections of the society irrespective of caste, ethnic groups and religion, with special focus on the poor and marginalised groups. Their main goal is to bring about a qualitative change among the vulnerable groups especially of the tribal society (at family, village and society level) through formation of people's organisation and advocacy. Some of the major activities and programmes of the organisation are as follows:

- (i) Disaster relief programmes.
- (ii) Health awareness and medical relief programmes.
- (iii) Construction of check dam in Pyrda village (a village located in East – Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya) for water harvesting.

SSC has implemented many programmes and activities for the poor and marginalised group. Prior to the year 2007, it has been very active in facilitating the process for accessing aid and relief to people greatly affected by natural calamities. From 2007, onwards it realised that facilitating aid and relief would not be sustainable. Henceforth, they coordinated the implementation of programmes in 10 villages in East – Khasi Hills such as Community Based Disaster Preparedness, Community and Family Disaster Preparedness and Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (SSC Annual Report 2012). All these programmes aimed at providing awareness and mobilise the people towards preparedness activities that could reduce the effects of natural disaster.

SSC is also active in implementing health awareness programmes in a number of villages in East – Khasi Hills and Ri – Bhoi District on mother and child, malaria, tuberculosis and HIV – AIDS. Training on herbal remedies for common illness was imparted to the Village Health Workers (VHC) and people have been made aware of the use of traditional herbs. They also provided awareness National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program and on Government health insurance schemes such as Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna (RSBY) and Meghalaya Health Insurance Scheme (MHIS). Awareness programmes was also conducted on immunisation, anti – drugs abuse, nutrition, sanitation, environment among others. These activities were carried out with the collaborative effort of the District Health Officer (DHO), Meghalaya AIDS Control Society (MACS) and NRHM personnel (ibid. 2013).

SSC also facilitated the process for implementation of the construction of a Water Harvesting structure in Pyrda village which would enable the village community to utilise for agricultural purposes. This was under the Horticulture Mission for North – East and Himalayan States (HMNEH) scheme from the directorate of Horticulture (ibid.).

The other developmental initiative carried out by SSC is the development and formation of SHGs. Training was imparted on strengthening the SHGs about their management (role and functions) and on income generating activities for the SHG members. The SHGs are involved in many incomes generating activities such as cultivation of agricultural crops, processing of turmeric and ginger, candle and pickle making, poultry and pigery farming, handicraft works, etc.

To summarise the above discussion we can say that the activities and programmes of all the three NGOs are diverse and each NGO had a varied number of activities and programmes. And their main target groups are the poor and marginalised groups of people.

Outcome of the Activities and Programmes

The three NGOs as a developmental entity have been engaging in activities and programmes relating to the welfare of the people. The services they provide in the villages have helped them to establish a close relationship with the people. The people in turn cooperate with them by rendering help in running the activities and programmes smoothly. The intervention of these NGOs in the developmental activities has made the people to realise the sense of belonging, responsibility and are more conscious about their rights, duties and entitlements. The SHGs created by them have also developed gradually and have been very active in conducting different awareness programmes for the people.

The skill trainings conducted by the NGOs have also helped the people to try to earn a livelihood. Some of them, who have successfully completed their skills training programmes have started their own unit in their respective villages and also have started conducting trainings for the marginalised group of people in the village (WISE Annual Report 2011). The people have developed a sense of ownership over the activities and programmes of the NGOs and still continue to practice them till then. The NGOs have been able to support the people micro – enterprise development and credit linkage. With regards to the programmes on natural disaster, the villagers (especially the youth and children) were sensitised on the importance of Disaster preparedness and they started accessing the government schemes for Disaster Risk Reduction measures (SSC Annual Report 2012).

The people in the different villages are now aware of the herbal remedies that can be used for treating several illnesses and have started to preserve the traditional herbs. The health centre in a number of villages in East – Khasi Hills and Ri – Bhoi District falling under the target area of the NGOs have been strengthened with more equipments in order to be able to help the villagers in times of need. A number of village committees were also formed such as the Village Health Sanitation Committee (VHSC), Village Health Task Force (VHTF), Health Coordination Committees (HCC), etc. Village mobilisation was carried out through these various committees; the villages understand the importance of preserving and maintaining a clean environment. The villagers started to repair the roads to the villages for efficient transportation of goods and services to different markets and for health related problems which cannot be treated in the village Public Health Centre (PHCs) or Community Health Centre (CHC). The people have also learned and understood about the symptoms and treatment of different sickness.

The CBR programmes have helped PWDs in over 400 villages in Meghalaya (Bethany Society Annual Report 2013). The PWDs have realised their sense of belonging in the society with the help of the NGOs. They can now avail to formal and non – formal education with the support of the NGOs. The students who are undergoing formal education are supported by the organisation to pursue for higher studies. The DPOs formed in the villages have made the PWDs aware about their rights and duties and motivated them in pursuing for what they need.

Therefore, it is seen that the developmental activities and programmes implemented and facilitated by the NGOs have had a positive impact on the people of Meghalaya. However, the outcome is hard to measure because of the diversity of the nature of their services.

III. Conclusion

NGOs have emerged as a potential developmental agency which can contribute to the welfare of the people. The empirical data obtained from the three NGOs suggest that they have carried out diverse activities and programmes relating to agriculture, watershed development, women's empowerment, health and family welfare. They have also been instrumental in creating awareness among the people on issues relating to environment and health. As a result they have gained the villager's trust and support in their activities and programmes. These NGOs have demonstrated their ability to operate in remote and inaccessible areas, being in the fore-front during natural calamities and delivering goods at the grassroots level.

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