Civil Society in India Complimenting the Government Initiatives – An Overview

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Abstract

The Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) is poorly understood, since the term employed to describe it lacks clarity. In the present article the author has examined the role of Civil Society in India complimenting the government initiatives. Lester and Anheier (1992) reviewed different ways of defining the Non-Governmental Organisation. They defined the NGO as a group of organisations which were formally established. The basic structure of the Non-Profit organisations was non-governmental, self-governed, voluntary and non-Profit activities. The three basic categories of the NGOs' roles were partners, catalysts, and implementers. NGOs typically support government efforts, though occasionally they have attempted to introduce reforms. The government relies on or supported NGOs to carry out specific tasks in various contexts, such as the nation and the State. Nearly all nations have NGOs, but their structures and standards varied depending on where they operate. The emergence of NGOs varies in each nation. The way NGOs had been operating lately has also drawn criticism. Politicians criticized NGOs' expanding influence and substantial financial resources (Lewis, 2010). NGOs are adaptable, creative, and effective at providing essential services and reducing poverty. At a lower cost than governments, they could reach isolated and poor populations. They are able to determine the genuine local needs, promote participation, and disseminate the necessary development technology. There were several opportunities for NGOs to revive their humanitarian efforts (Khandpekar, 2016). NGOs are vital to the success of development efforts in reaching the population. NGOs mostly concentrated on health care and education between the years1950 and 1960. Later, they have begun concentrating on initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and developing activities for the underprivileged. The growth of NGOs and the services they provide are directly impacted by state policy in India.

Keywords: Non- Governmental Organisation, Self- Governed, Humanitarian Efforts

Introduction

Civil society is referred to as the "third sector" or "non-profit" sector, which includes all organisations that operate outside of the public and private sectors Pharr (2003). The civil society assists people or groups in achieving their most important objectives (Brown, 2001). Coalition of NGOs, known as the civil society, strives towards common goals. Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) are citizen-based groups that operate independently of the government and complement its range of services. NGOs are a broad category of organisations that are not owned by governments and do not operate for financial gain. In a democratic society, they play crucial role in social development, health care, empowering those who are marginalised, promoting policy reforms, etc. In all their areas of work, they provide services and also take initiatives to advocate. The NGOs strive for societal acceptance, political participation, and policy support. NGOs now consider taking part in the formulation of health policies to be a crucial activity. As a result, NGOs are now more actively involved in delivering social services and working with the government to formulate health policy (Piotrowicz, & Cianciara, 2013). Different terms, such as Civil Society Organisations, Charitable Organisations, Voluntary Organisations, etc., are used to refer to non-governmental organisations. The World Bank divides non-governmental organisations into two groups: NGOs that focus on development programmes and NGOs that can participate in lobbying on behalf of a cause.

There are various phases to the beginnings of NGOs in India. Social reform movements began to take shape in the 19th century, which motivated people to assist society's most vulnerable members. The rights of marginalised to education, employment, and religion were highlighted, along with the rights of women to education and other facets of society. These actions led to the development of the idea of a voluntary organisation. A socio-political awakening that occurred in the second half of the 19th century gave rise to reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission etc. The government had to pass an act in the year1860 for the registration of societies. Following this, during the period from 1900 to 1947, the voluntary organisation made a successful effort at nation-building. All the voluntary organisations have been functioning as non-profit organisations.

It is challenging for a nation with a large population like India to manage or address all the problems of the vulnerable population. The government cannot effectively manage every aspect of the oppressed people's growth. NGOs are vital to

the success of development efforts in reaching the population. The growth of NGOs and the services they provide are directly impacted by state policy in India. The government has additionally supported and provided financial support for the NGOs' social development activities. The important initiatives supported by the government and implemented by NGOs are the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, the Rural-Urban Relationship Committee, the Ashok Mehta Committee and many more. These NGOs are active in community development, people's involvement in local government programmes, rural welfare, area development plans, feasibility studies, and ensuring local people's participation in government developmental initiatives. In order to verify the legal standing of the expanding number of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), the Societies Registration Act (SRA) was enacted in the year 1860. While most state governments have made changes to the original SRA, it is still applicable regulation for NGOs operating in India.

Government Collaboration with Civil Society

The government provided new areas for NGOs to contribute to the development of the nation from the years 1980 and 1985, under the sixth five-year plan. The government provided new areas for NGOs to contribute to the development of the nation from the years 1980 and 1985, under the sixth five-year plan. The Seventh Five Year Plan, which extended from the years 1985 and 1990, provided NGOs an opportunity to engage in empowerment and development discourses. The Eighth Five-Year Plan, which sought to create a nationwide network of NGOs, continued the government's support and encouragement of NGOs. The Ninth Five-Year Plan proposed that NGOs could contribute to the development of the nation on the basis of the public-private partnership model. The government gave NGOs space to operate when developing and implementing agricultural development initiatives. The watershed development initiative has been one of the most appreciated programmes. It is evident that the government began working with nonprofit organisations. In the years 2004, the "Civil Society Window" was created with the goal of enabling citizens to communicate with the Planning Commission and provide comments. Through regional engagements with civil society for their strategy paper, the Eleventh Five-Year Plan was organised. The three categories of NGOs in India are Societies, Trusts, and Charitable Companies (Bavishkar, 2001).

Role Played by NGOs in India

In India, a Non-Governmental Organisation refers to any legal entity which works for philanthropic and charitable goals. They can operate either as a society under Indian law, a trust, or a company registered under Company Act-25. Therefore, NGOs are government-registered organisations which aim to improve society (Athulya, 2020). The NGOs have contributed to the following areas, such as education, health, women's empowerment, eliminating caste-based stigma and discrimination, discouraging child labor, promoting gender equality, disaster management, micro credit programmes, disease prevention programmes (HIV/Tuberculosis/cancer/Leprosy/Pandemic), promotion of rights of farmers, etc. NGOs have played a key role in spreading education to grass-root level people in India. In India, there are still many obstacles to ensuring the education of the underprivileged and female children. NGOs significantly assist in encouraging education among children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

NGOs mostly concentrated on health care and education between the years 1950 and 1960. Later, they began concentrating on initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and developing activities for the underprivileged. NGOs began new subjects to address in the years 1980 included gender, the environment, social forestry, and social conservation (Chandra, 2007). Character development, which exhibited the physical, mental, and spiritual culture of the human personality, was mostly based on education. NGOs concentrated on educating those who had not been reached and those who were unwilling to pursue an education. (Khandpekar, 2016). To bring out-of-school children into the educational system and help them understand their entitlement to an education, numerous NGOs have been collaborating closely with the government.

It is commendable that the NGO has contributed to health care initiatives in India. India's health index has improved as a result of NGOs' contributions to the prevention and management of both communicable and non-communicable diseases like leprosy, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and cancer. The popular programmes which were spearheaded by NGOs in India are the Jeevan Dhara programme (Safe Drinking Water, Community Toilets, Sanitation, and Immunisation), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the Nirmal Gram Puraskar (Rural Sanitation), and the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (Promoting Health Insurance in Rural Areas) (Gautam, 2013). The Milliennium Development Goals of the country believe in a combined approach to poverty and health. The NGOs concentrate on raising the living standards of the underprivileged and ensuring their access to safe drinking water, efficient trash disposal, etc. NGOs actively advocated with the government on behalf of the poor's health (Locke, 2003). The empowerment of women is formally addressed by government organisations. However, to empower women, a multifaceted strategy must be used to connect with people on a grassroots level and collaborate with many

stakeholders. Many strategies were used by NGOs to create programmes for women's empowerment that catered to different populations of urban, rural, and tribal women (Aritra & Rimi, 2015).

NGOs promote the rights of children and the abolition of child labour. They support child abuse, child trafficking, and child rights remedies. The NGOs have been saving kids from the harm that society has done to them—exploitation, neglect, and physical and psychological abuses. The NGOs have made significant efforts to protect kids from child labours. The Juvenile Justice Act, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO), the Criminal Law Amendment Act, and other laws in Indian law all assist the well-being of children. NGOs are crucial in both implementing the benefits of the Acts for children and educating the public about the advantages of such benefits. Numerous well-known NGOs actively support children in Tamil Nadu and India (Snehlata, 2007).

In India, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is responsible for upholding and defending human rights. They also emphasise socially significant rights problems. The commission concentrated on issues of rights involving child employment, trafficking of women and children, and educational rights. NGOs that focus on human rights activities supplement the work of the NHRC. The NHRC commission assists NGOs in completing the human rights projects. NGOs carry out helpful efforts to assist the victims or the community that is impacted. Additionally, they collaborate with numerous parties and promote the rights of the victims.

Role Played by NGOs in India during the Pandemic

The nation requested NGOs' assistance to supplement official efforts during the outbreak. The nation's prime minister urged the civil society to assist the government in resolving difficulties while the area was under lockdown (India Blooms, 2021). The NGOs accepted the burden on their shoulders and were essential on the front lines. They concentrated on the needs of the underprivileged, made sure that protective items were available, assisted victims in getting to medical facilities, and raised knowledge of disease prevention and the value of early treatment. They labored diligently on campaigns to encourage behaviour modification in people through social exclusion and the deployment of protective commodities.

The pandemic particularly affected those who were marginalised, migrant labourers, daily wage employees, and those who did not perceive their own risk. Migrants were forced to walk miles to their houses as a result of the lockdown that had been imposed and the loss of their jobs. NGOs took on the responsibility of handling the pandemic difficulties encountered by people despite facing funding challenges for their existing programmes. The NGOs put a lot of efforts into distributing aid, providing shelter, and guiding COVID victims to medical facilities. During the lockdown, they specifically dealt with many of the problems the frightened community was experiencing. In order to pinpoint the areas that turned out to be illness hot zones, the health authorities employed the expertise of NGOs. The NGOs were given responsibility for certain regions where they could handle pandemic prevention and protection. For treatment services, they collaborated closely with government health authorities. They backed the corporations that cremated the victims. Numerous other tasks were also filled by NGOs, including managing the needs of those who were isolated and counselling the community that was in a state of panic. They filled the gap between community needs and government services.

The second wave of the pandemic presented more urgent concerns for the NGOs to address because the virus had claimed a significant number of deaths. People's requirements are diverse and intricate in every region of the nation. There is a lack of understanding over whether to seek treatment in hospitals versus staying at home, in addition to a lack of oxygen and healthcare infrastructure including beds, Intensive Care Units (ICUs), and ventilators on the ground. While there is no doubt that healthcare is the most pressing need, NGOs working at the local level found that there would also be a large need for other forms of emergency assistance, such as dry goods, meals, and financial support for essential needs and medicines. Numerous NGOs helped the communities in which they operate solve key difficulties like employment and income loss, mental health issues, and other pressing concerns.

An interest in comprehending the leadership dynamics of the organisation is sparked by a detailed examination of NGOs' operations and the demanding nature of their work. The NGOs conduct their everyday operations with professionalism and expertise. The accomplishment of an NGO's vision and goals depends increasingly on its leadership. The success of the organisation also depends on the leadership qualities exhibited by the entire staff of the NGO. The behaviour of employees in their places of employment is largely influenced by the effectiveness of the organization's leader, who also sets up the entire management team for success. The leader of the NGO should explain to the staff the organization's vision in great detail. Employees feel more confident in their workplace as a result, and they also admire the leadership (Muft et al., 2019). In order to fulfill their objective, non-governmental groups must overcome both internal and external obstacles. In resolving the issues, leadership is crucial (Apostu, 2013).

NGO leaders have to navigate their challenges to effectively implement their services. Their leadership potential helps them to manage the pressures while working with the donors, the government, and the people. Strong leadership therefore becomes very important in individual Non-Governmental Organisations and in the overall sector of Non-Governmental Organisations

Civil Society in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu has a sizable network of civil society organisations that are active in several fields. They support the government's efforts at social development and welfare programmes aimed at helping the weaker section of people. In Tamil Nadu, the NGOs operate in both urban and rural regions. They receive grant support from the government and international donors. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), Avahan-Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Tata Trust, Alliance, and many others are just a few of the donors who successfully implemented programmes in Tamil Nadu with the aid of NGOs. Many philanthropists and charity donations support the work of NGOs. Through donations from corporations, the NGOs also carry out the community programmes. NGOs in Tamil Nadu have played a crucial role in improving the standards of life and social-economic conditions of marginalised and downtrodden communities. Some of the main areas that NGOs in Tamil Nadu concentrate on are health services and disease prevention, development of women and children, upliftment of women and children, education, awareness, and empowerment, care for the elderly, old age homes, mental health, health care services, water and sanitation projects, development of urban backward settlement areas, microcredit and microfinance programmes, etc. The other areas in which the NGOs focus on: agricultural development, female infanticide awareness and prevention, rain water harvesting, rural and urban development, tribal community health and development, etc. Many NGOs in Tamil Nadu get grant support for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, cancer, etc. from government grants. During the pandemic, Non-Governmental Organisations were funded for the prevention and relief programmes by the government. Larger NGOs, referred to as mother NGOs, act as donors in Tamil Nadu and sub-grant projects to smaller NGOs. International donors provide money to the parent NGOs. The mother NGOs prioritise training and performance monitoring of the smaller NGOs in addition to giving money to them. The Tamilnadu AIDS Initiative (TAI), the M.S. Swaminathan Foundation, the Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health (REACH), and Voluntary Health Services (VHS), in Chennai are some of the well-known mothers' NGOs.

The society that reports to the Ministry of Rural Development is called the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART). It operates in rural areas of Tamil Nadu and is active throughout the world, supporting various programmes. The most popular schemes are listed: Natural Resource Development and Management (NRDM), Rural Industrialization, Income Generation, and Market Access (RIIMA), Technologies for Rural Development and Promotion of Information Technology (TRO & PIT), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Schemes for the Empowerment of Rural Women, Schedule Caste/Schedule Tribes and Disadvantaged groups, and schemes for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in rural areas, and Human Resource Development Scheme (HRDS) (NGOs India web portal 2018).

Power of advocacy by the Civil Society

Nonprofit organisations are essential in bringing the public's attention to issues and needs in society. They serve as the main means via which communities can communicate their concerns. Among NGOs' most important responsibilities is advocacy. NGOs' goals and objectives usually place a strong emphasis on improving the lives of its clients and the communities they work with. NGOs were thought to represent marginalised, disenfranchised, or otherwise disempowered groups of people (Bluemel, 2005). International NGOs stated that they spoke for impacted communities, thereby introducing viewpoints from individuals impacted by international policies and initiatives into international organisations, who were typically left out of national or international policy formation (Sikkink et al, 2002).

Networking, facilitating movements and advocate for people is the greatest power of NGOs. Some of the famous movements are Dalit movement, women rights movement, anti- racism movement, social consciousness, environmental movements, educational right, health rights, etc.

NGOs with a local presence are crucial to Community Capacity Development (CCB). These NGOs have the local knowledge to recognise issues and help the impacted communities find solutions because they are typically situated near to the affected communities. However, little is known about the strategies these regional NGOs employ to strengthen community capacity and the rationale behind their selection of particular CCB initiatives. Sten Langmann et al. (2023) in his research observed that the process of providing communities with (i) a sense of caring and hopefulness, (ii) spaces to communicate their feelings and concerns, and (iii) support to translate their voices into community action has been found to be the means by which local NGOs build capacity in communities through emotional empowerment. Local NGOs used this tack after discovering that long-standing disadvantageous groups had strong affective hurdles that hindered them from

taking charge of their circumstances. These barriers included discouraging personal outlooks and acceptance of the status quo societal structures.

Under the general heading of community development, Community Capacity Building concentrates on creating group activities in the community to address local issues and enhance the quality of life and well-being of the local population (Moreno et al., 2017). Local NGOs have a special opportunity to use bottom-up Community Capacity Building techniques to empower communities. These local NGOs can concentrate on reducing poverty within relatively small geographic areas because they are on the front lines of the issue and they are not challenged by formal structures (Cawsey, 2016).

It is important to note that the local NGOs perceived that people in the impacted communities typically had depressing personal outlooks that could inhibit their confidence, which was typically caused by low self-esteem and past humiliations. Initially, the individuals experiencing this internalized low self-esteem felt helpless and inconsequential, this prevented them from overcoming their obstacles and improving their circumstances. Another significant element sustaining the vulnerabilities within the group was the members' acceptance of the social structures that were already in place. Family expectations and social conventions that were reinforced from the outside led to this acceptance. First, in the larger community, abusive acts directed towards low-status groups are frequently accepted as societal standards (Sten Langmann, Pieter-Jan Bezemer, David Pick, 2023). The study of the authors highlighted that local NGOs in Tamil Nadu primarily concentrated on providing more hope to the communities they served, thereby enabling them to feel more empowered emotionally. This, along with giving them a platform to express their emotions and challenges, enabled the communities to take the initiative on individual and group development projects.

In various health initiatives by the NGOs working in Tamil Nadu, they have focussed on empowering the local communities and understanding the barriers towards empowerment. When the community is empowered to advocate for their health rights and other issues revolving around their lives they own the initiatives taken by the NGOs. Their faith and trust on the NGOs have increased.

Conclusion

The author summarizes that civil society has great ability to reach unreached people. The skill sets of the NGOs can supplement the government's activities. Effective NGOs enable the local community to comprehend its issues and obstacles, which in turn promote and strengthen the sustainability of the service operations. The NGO staff members have specialised skill sets that enable them to persuade difficult-to-reach individuals to take part in programme activities. There are numerous Tamil Nadu models that have employed community power to guarantee the program's success. A few examples of successful initiatives are the Rainfed Farm Development Programme, the Water Shed Programme, the Sanitation Programme, the Poverty Alleviation Programme, the Microcredit Programmes, the establishment and networking of Self Help Groups, and the Disease Prevention Programmes that address HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Anemia, etc. NGOs are essential in the following areas: health care; pandemic and outbreak response; hunger alleviation; provision of clean water and sanitation; assistance during natural disasters; advancement of equality and justice in the legal system; conservation of biodiversity and wildlife; combating climate change; assistance with economic development; protection of reproductive rights; advancement of gender equality; safeguarding children; safeguarding refugees; and safeguarding democracy.

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