CHALLENGES AND ISSUES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION IN INDIA

Rajkumar G Rathod[*]

Abstract:

In recent decades NGOs have increased their numbers and range of activities to a level where they have become increasingly dependent on a limited number of donors. Consequently competition has increased for funding, as have the expectations of the donors themselves. This runs the risk of donors adding conditions which can threaten the independence of NGOs; for example, an over-dependence on official aid has the potential to dilute "the willingness of NGOs to speak out on issues which are unpopular with governments". In these situations NGOs are being held accountable by their donors, which can erode rather than enhance their legitimacy, a difficult challenge to overcome. Some commentators have also argued that the changes in NGO funding sources has ultimately altered their functions.

The scale and variety of of activities in which NGOs participate has grown rapidly since the 1980s, witnessing particular expansion in the 1990s.This has presented NGOs with a need to balance the pressures of centralisation and decentralisation. Conversely it may also be advantageous to decentralise as this can increase the chances of an NGO responding more flexibly and effectively to localised issues by implementing projects which are modest in scale, easily monitored, produce immediate benefits and where all involved know that corruption will be punished. This paper emphasis on the present challenges and issues of Non Governmental organization in society.

Key words: Challenges. Issues, Non-governmental organizations, legitimacy

[*] Guest Lecturer, Vinutana College of MSW, Gulbarga

A Quarterly Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International e-Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories
Indexed & Listed at: Ulrich's Periodicals Directory ©, U.S.A., Open J-Gage, India as well as in Cabell's Directories of Publishing Opportunities, U.S.A.

International Journal of Research in Social Sciences
http://www.ijmra.us

482

Introduction:

The issue of the legitimacy of NGOs raises a series of important questions. This is one of the most important assets possessed by an NGO, it is gained through a perception that they are an "independent voice". Their representation also emerges as an important question. Who bestows responsibilities to NGOs or INGOs and how do they gain the representation of citizens and civil society is still not scrutinized thoroughly. For instance, in the article, it is stated, "To put the point starkly: are the citizens of countries of the South and their needs represented in global civil society, or are citizens as well as their needs constructed by practices of representation? And when we realize that INGOs hardly ever come face to face with the people whose interests and problems they represent, or that they are not accountable to the people they represent, matters become even more troublesome."

Moreover, the legitimacy and the accountability of NGOs on the point of their true nature are also emerging as important issues.Various perceptions and images on NGOs are provided, and usually implemented in an image as 'non-state actors' or 'influential representatives of civil society that advocate the citizen.' Accountability may be able to provide this and also be able to assist activities by providing focus and direction. As non-state actors with considerable influence over the governance in many areas, concerns have been expressed over the extent to which they represent the views of the public and the extent to which they allow the public to hold them to account.

Meaning and definition of NGO:

NGOs are difficult to define and classify, and the term 'NGO' is not used consistently. As a result, there are many different classifications in use. The most common use a framework that includes orientation and level of operation. An NGO's orientation refers to the type of activities it takes on. These activities might include human rights, environmental, or development work. An NGO's level of operation indicates the scale at which an organization works, such as local, international or national. "Confronting the Classification Problem: Toward Taxonomy of NGOs"One of the earliest mentions of the acronym "NGO" was in 1945, when the UN was created. The UN, which is an inter-governmental organization, made it possible for certain approved specialized international non-state agencies - or non-governmental

organisations - to be awarded observer status at its assemblies and some of its meetings. Later the term became used more widely. Today, according to the UN, any kind of private organization that is independent from government control can be termed an "NGO", provided it is not-profit, non-criminal and not simply an opposition political party.

Professor Peter Willetts, from the University of London, argues the definition of NGOs can be interpreted differently by various organizations and depending on a situation's context. He defines an NGO as ""an independent voluntary association of people acting together on a continuous basis for some common purpose other than achieving government office, making money or illegal activities." In this view, two main types of NGOs are recognized according to the activities they pursue: operational NGOs that deliver services and campaigning NGOs. Although Willetts proposes the operational and campaigning NGOs as a tool to differentiate the main activities of these organizations, he also explains that a single NGO may often be engaged in both activities. Many NGOs also see them as mutually reinforcing. Professor Akira Iriye defines NGO as "a voluntary non state, nonprofit, nonreligious, and nonmilitary association."

A **non-governmental organization** (**NGO**) is a legally constituted organization created by natural or legal persons that operates independently from any form of government. The term originated from the United Nations (UN), and is normally used to refer to organizations that are not a part of the government and are not conventional for-profit business. In the cases in which NGOs are funded totally or partially by governments, the NGO maintains its non-governmental status by excluding government representatives from membership in the organization.

Challenges and issues of NGO's:

Lack of Funds: NGOs are expressing difficulty in finding sufficient, appropriate and continuous funding for their work. They find accessing donors as challenging as dealing with their funding conditions. They perceive there to be certain cartels of individuals and NGOs that control access to donor funds. They have limited resource mobilization skills and are often not looking for funds that are available locally, preferring to wait for international donors to approach them. There is a high dependency of donors and a tendency to shift interventions to match donor priorities. There is a lack of financial, project and organizational sustainability.

Poor Communications: NGOs also recognize that there is very poor communication within the sector. The majority of NGOs have little or no access to reliable email and internet connections, they receive almost no literature on development issues and are generally out of touch with issues of global, regional and national importance. There lack of understanding of the difference between the Board and Council is just one example of the knowledge gaps that exist.

Limited Capacity: NGOs recognize that many of them have limited technical and organizational capacity. Few NGOs are able or willing to pay for such capacity building. Weak capacity was identified in fundraising, governance, technical areas of development, and leadership and management. Some NGOs felt that the existence of quality standards would assist them to develop the required capacities. The speed of technology changes is also a challenge particularly in areas of IT capacity.

Development Approaches: Many NGOs are still focusing upon what some refer to the 'hardware' approach to development, i.e. the building of infrastructure and the provision of services; rather than what some refer to as the 'software' approach of empowering people and local institutions to manage their own affairs. Other NGOs seem unaware of changes in the role of government, the changing Aid paradigm, and the effectiveness of a "right's based" rather than "welfare" approach. While it is becoming harder to fund and sustain service delivery interventions, most local NGOs persist with them. Community poverty and illiteracy rates remain significant. NGOs are acutely aware of the increasing and enormous needs of poor people and feel at a loss as to how they can respond to all these needs. There is a lack of sustainability and ownership of development interventions by communities. Some communities have been spoilt by dependency creating interventions and are not inclined to do things for themselves. It is difficult to keep our programmes relevant to changing situations and the culture of handouts is hard to counter. There is no accepted code of ethics and conflicting approaches.

Political Interference: In some regions, in particular South Rift and North Eastern, NGO leaders identified the interference of local politicians and civic leaders as a major hindrance to their work. Where NGOs are involved in sensitive issues, such as land disputes, local leaders can

threaten NGOs with de-registration. NGOs are not aware that the Board - and potentially the Council - are there to protect them from such intimidation.

NGO Board and NGO Council: Many participants were poorly informed of the difference between these two institutions, NGO Coordination Board and the National Council of NGOs; and unaware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to them. Most participants expressed the opinion that the NGO Code of Conduct is outdated and needed updating soon. This group of participants also complained that the NGO Council is poorly governed and doesn't provide any services to the NGOs. They were aware that the NGO Board does not respect the Council and that there is mistrust between the Government and NGOs. Participants are well aware that the NGO sector has a very poor public profile which they see as mainly due to the leadership wrangles, politics and infighting at the Council and among NGOs. While most participants appreciated the positive role of the NGO Board in creating an enabling environment for NGOs, a few participants felt there was a lack of political good will towards NGOs in some parts of government. Some branches of government are thought to deliberately frustrate NGOs. A few participants felt that government bureaucracy holds back the NGO sector and its members.

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.

Effective support from the NGO Board and NGO Council: Maintaining NGO records with the NGO Coordination Board will enable NGOs to received regular information and gain access to basket funding. The NGO Coordination Board is also working hard to improve the public image of NGOs through the promotion and support of annual NGO Week. A more effective NGO Council supported by its members and responding to NGO expressed needs, will provide appropriate and affordable capacity building support and an enabling environment for the sector. Good Governance of the NGO Council would provide a positive example for all NGOs to emulate. Good Governance can be achieved if the serious, active and engaged NGOs exercise their rights and responsibilities in a professional manner. An effective NGO Council will become a voice of the sector when interacting with GoK and Regional Governments.

Enabling Environment: The new governmental dispensation has provided Kenyans with more political space to undertake their own development initiatives. People at all levels of society are more prepared to pursue their own development activities rather than wait for government and external actors to provide services, relief and welfare support. Improved infrastructure (roads, electricity, IT, communications, water, market access) provides more development opportunities to poor people and their communities. Tax incentives are now encouraging donations to registered charities.

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 loose 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.

Development Approaches: Communities have assets, wisdom, labour, time, and skills to be applied to their own development programmes. Communities are now willing to work for their own development. Invest in community institution building, train local people; enable them to plan, implement and evaluate their own development programmes, and to access available local resources. Innovative local solutions to local problems always attract support.

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.

A Quarterly Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International e-Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories
Indexed & Listed at: Ulrich's Periodicals Directory ©, U.S.A., Open J-Gage, India as well as in Cabell's Directories of Publishing Opportunities, U.S.A.

International Journal of Research in Social Sciences
http://www.ijmra.us

487

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.

Selected INGOs provide potential partnerships: Progressive INGOs are looking to partner with local institutions and have the ability to provide financial, technical and institution building support. Some also support thematic and issue-based advocacy initiatives that enhance local networking and address the structural causes of poverty, inequity and injustice.

Conclusion:

Unless the NGOs are developed, prepared to face the new challenges like shortage of funds, it would be difficult for them to sustain. Rural India continues to suffer from lack of employment and self-employment opportunities owing to its narrow economic base. In the recent past, considerable success has been achieved in developing rural poor through entrepreneurship development approach which focuses on selectively utilizing local talent, appropriately developing them through training intervention and linking them with relevant business opportunities. EDI implemented Rural Entrepreneurship Development (RED) Approach, in collaboration with NGOs by training their development workers. One of the major hurdles faced in the process is non-availability of required and timely financial support to trained.

References:

1. Indu Bhaskar and Geethakutty, (2001)"Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in rural development: A case study", Journal of Tropical Agriculture, 39, pp.52-54.

2. Jain (2006) "Rural development schemes:An overview," The Chartered Accountant"

3. Moyo,E. (1996). Rethinking Community Level Planning And Development Conceptual Consideration For The Future, A Discussion paper, Masvingo.

4. Mudimu, G. & Bernisten, R. (1987). Household And National Food Security In Southern Africa, Department of Agriculture Economics and Extension UZ, Harare

5. Neefjes, K. (2000). Environments And Livelihoods: Strategies For Sustainability. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

6. Riddwell, R. & Robinson, M. (1995). Non – Governmental Organisations and Rural Poverty Alleviation. Oxford: Oxford University Press,

7. Sahley, C. (1997). Strengthening The Capacity Of NGOs Cases Of Small Enterprise Development Agencies On Africa, Intrac, U.K. Development Agencies On Africa, Intrac, U.K. 8. Scoones, I. (1998). Sustainable Rural Livelihood A Framework For Analysis, IDs working Vivian, K. (1994). in Edwards.

9. M. and Hulme E. Eds (1998). Non–Governmental Organisation Performance and Accountability: Beyond the Magic Bullet Earthscan Development Agencies On Africa, Intrac, U.K.