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CONTRIBUTIONS OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT IN MEGHALAYA: AN EMPIRICAL EXPLORATION

Abstract

The voluntary organisations (VOs) have emerged as an important entity in the domain of development owing to their increasing involvement in developmental and welfare activities. By collaborating and establishing networks with the government as well various non-governmental agencies, devising innovative strategies to execute their programmes, these organisations have indeed displayed their unique capabilities. They have emerged as a crucial link between people and development agencies, particularly at the grassroots level owing to their people centric approaches and strategies. Relying on both empirical and secondary data, the paper discusses the development interventions of VOs in Meghalaya and outlines the developmental and welfare activities carried out by them in diverse areas such as health, environment and livelihood. While the empirical data have been obtained from 10 VOs, secondary data were gleaned from the available literature and in-house publications. In their pursuit, though these VOs have faced various challenges and difficulties, sheer determination and commitment to work for the people's welfare have motivated them to continue with the available resources at their disposal to make their programmes and activities sustainable and effective.

Keywords: *capacity framework, organisation, structure, voluntary organisation.*

Introduction

Etzioni (2007: 3) while asserting the significance of organisations argued that our society can be perceived as an organisational society as organisations remain integral to social system. As important social units, these tend to pursue their goals by devising well designed approaches and strategies. Owing to their unique sense of purpose, organisational setup, work culture, voluntaristic and altruistic values, VOs have emerged as distinct organisational entities. Their

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nonprofit making principle and service orientation provide added advantage to them as they remain crucial social force in the development domain. Volunteering can be perceived as actions of individuals that contribute for a greater social good through their preferred means. Through volunteering, the individuals are not only motivated to carry out philanthropic activities but also committed to provide services that are devoid of pecuniary benefits (Marshall 1996: 56-57). In the growing literature on voluntary sector, various synonymous terms such as voluntary development organisation (VDO), action groups (AG), civil society organisation (CSO) public service contractor (PSC) and people's organisation (PO) service provider, empowerment, network NGOs, have been used to denote the notion of VO (Korten 1990: 2, Tandon 1990: 3). Of late, the popular term non-governmental organisation (NGO) is in vogue.

Oommen (1975: 160-183), emphasises on two important factors that were instrumental for the emergence of VOs. These are: the elasticity of permissiveness and the need structure of a given society. Elasticity of permissiveness implies the degree of freedom that a political system permits. Hence, contrary to authoritarian political system, in a democratic political system, VOs are likely to proliferate and mediate between the state and the citizens. With regard to the need structure, Oommen argues that nature of VOs varies from traditional society to modern society. Instrumental type of VOs in a traditional society will be replaced by expressive type in a modern society which are essentially seen as the agents of modernisation. According to PRIA (1991: 67) the emergence of VOs can primarily be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, it provides a collective mechanism and commitment to work. Secondly, it carries out specific projects as projects funds were made available to the organised activities rather than individual initiatives. Pointing out the growing significance of NGOs, Baviskar (2005: 3), asserts that we are living in an era which is characterised by some as the decline or retreat of the state and this decline of the state is accompanied by an increasing attention towards the civil society institutions.

Though VOs deploy diverse strategies to achieve their development goals and objectives, Fowler's (2005: 43 - 68) formulation of 'capacity framework' asserts that for non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) to remain effective, it is pertinent for them to sincerely address five critical areas such as vision, mission, strategy (programmes, projects, people), structure (systems, management) and relationships among various stakeholders (resources, results and learning) where each should be consistent with the other. While vision is important to make them relevant, strategic analysis, planning and execution of development activities are also extremely important. Price (cited in Torres, McIntosh, & Zey 1991: 159) contends that assessment of the organisation should be based on "intentions" (i.e., its official goals that the organisation tries to do) vis-a-vis "activities" (i.e., operative goals that the organisation actually carries out) thereby making a distinction between official

goals and the operative goals. For most organisations, it is relatively easy to identify the abstract official goals found in official charters and by-laws though their real success depends on their achievements on operative goal.

In India, VOs are engaged in a wide spectrum of activities cutting across economic, social, cultural domains. Their activities encompass issues relating to larger national concerns, governance, advocacy, generating awareness on various laws and regulations and addressing the basic needs of marginalised sections of society (Srivastava & Tandon 2005: 1948). There are VOs of different size, scope and magnitude which are found in different forms such as socio – economic organisation, socio – cultural organisation, rural development societies, cultural organisations and service oriented organisations contributing towards the welfare and development in India (Mehta 1994: 48 - 49). In Meghalaya, a North-Eastern state of India, the VOs too have emerged as important intermediary and support agencies to execute development projects. By collaborating with the government as well as non-governmental agencies, seeking people's support in their developmental activities and devising people friendly innovative strategies, they have created a much needed platform for effective implementation of the development projects at the grassroots. Based on the primary and secondary data, the paper analyses the intervention of VOs in the development domain and outlines the contributions they have made towards the welfare and development of people.

Methodology

Using purposive sampling technique, 10 VOs were selected from East-Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. These are: Grassroot, Bethany Society (BS), Bosco Integrated Development Society (BIDS), Social Service Centre (SSC), North East Educational and Development Society (NEEDS), Ri-Lum Foundation for Sustainable Development (RLFSD), Voluntary Health Association of Meghalaya (VHAM), Women for Integrated Sustainable Empowerment (WISE), Ka Synjuk Ki Arliang Wah Umiam Mawphlang Welfare Society (KSKHAWU-MWS) and Reach Shillong Ministries (RSM). These VOs are registered under the Meghalaya Societies Registration Act, XII of 1983. They are also registered under the FCRA in order to avail international funding. Formal registration not only gives the legitimacy and credibility to VOs but also leverage to seek financial support from various donor Furthermore it helps the government agencies. It also helps the Government agencies to identify these VOs to collaborate for the effective implementation of various governmental programmes.

The organisation is the unit of the study and data have been obtained both from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from the functionaries as well as members of the VOs that include executive committee members, ordinary members and staff members. The data were also collected from beneficiaries to develop a comprehensive understanding

on the contributions of VOs to the development domain. The fieldwork to obtain the primary data was carried out in 2016-17. The secondary sources of data include annual reports of the VOs, relevant theoretical and empirical literature on VOs.

Vision and Mission

The vision of an organisation conveys the ideal future of an organisation wherein its aspirations and hopes are explicitly stated which in turn inspires and helps to formulate its mission. The vision forms the very basis of the VO as it is primarily the vision that leads to its formation besides motivating and strengthening its constituents to further its goals. In some cases, the organisation's vision is implicit in its mission statement (Anheier & List 2005: 276). The mission of the VO stems from its vision which remains a guiding thread for pursuit of its goal. The mission is usually laid out in form of a mission statement, i.e. a succinct description of the basic sense of purpose of an organisation. The mission statement brings out the value base of the organisation; offers guidance for its operations; helps to prioritise the objectives and tasks; acts to motivate staff, volunteers and members besides providing guidance for evaluation and orientation. A good mission statement articulates the organisation's purpose, long-term goals, the organisation's core values, operating principles and the organisation's aspirations for the future (*Ibid.*: 164 - 165). If the vision of the VO is to fight against the degradation of the environment, the mission outlines the awareness programmes and executes various programmes to fulfill the vision.

Box: 1 Vision of the VOs

Grassroot: *Responsibility and Power of the Individuals and the Community*

BS: *We dream of an earth fully alive, where everyone enjoys fullness of being*

SSC: *We visualize a holistically developed tribal society, which is directing its own destiny and living in harmony with all people and the natural environment*

NEEDS: *Empowerment through Education*

RLFSD: *Maintains a special focus on the youth, children, women and physically challenged sections of the society and we accordingly organise, initiate & implement projects for the empowerment of these groups*

VHAM: *Making health a reality*

WISE: *We visualise a society where people, particularly women are integrally empowered to usher in sustainable development, for improvement of*

their life in totality

BIDS: *It has a vision in which everyone particularly the youth actively participates in building a just, equal and harmonious society*

KSKHAWU–MWS: *It visualizes to protect and preserve the environment and to restore the bio - diversity*

RSM: *Lives transformed to the best through Jesus Christ*

Source: Annual Reports and Constitution of the VOs

As presented above, the VOs have well thought out vision and they pursue it vigorously by mustering support from various stakeholders, i.e., office bearers, members, donor agencies and beneficiaries. In order to fulfill their stated objectives and mission, VOs devise appropriate approaches and strategies which they deem fit for their respective organisation. Hence, the approach and strategy of the VO always assumes significance. As Cunliffe (2008: 75) articulates, to achieve organisational goals, the approach and strategy which include plans, decisions and actions need to be identified, nurtured and pursued.

Resource Generation

According to Viravaidya and Hayssen (2001: 1) financial security is an important part of planning for all NGOs. NGOs increasingly face financial constraints as they had to sustain with meager financial support mostly accrued in form of grants and donations to meet the growing expenses. Therefore, resource generation strategies are extremely significant for them which are imperative on them to become financially sustainable. The study observed that VOs have sought financial support from various sources such as government, civil society, international agencies and individual donors to implement their projects. However, VOs had to comply with the guidelines and fulfill various requirements before they seek funds from the funding agencies. To avail resources from foreign sources, they need to register under FCRA and are required to have a single bank account. At times, they face enormous difficulties, especially those who are working in different locations and remote areas. It was observed that almost all the VOs are registered under FCRA and those VOs who are not registered are in the process of registration which shows their keen desire to explore the possibility of receiving funds from various sources including the foreign donors. Most of the VOs have obtained financial support both from the central and state governments. Apart from seeking financial support from the government sources, they have sought support from individual donors to ensure that their activities are not adversely affected. When inquired about the importance of funding and their efforts to generate adequate resources, all the members of the VOs were of the view that the ability of VOs to generate adequate resources is important because financial sustainability will also to a great extent ensure organisational sustainability. Some of the arguments offered by them are: (i) foreign funding

provides much needed financial support to carry out their projects. Moreover, if the foreign donors intend to fulfill their orientation and desire towards working for the welfare activities, VOs remain the effective channels for them to reach out the needy. Therefore, it mutually benefits each other. Since the funding is usually project based, VOs need to ensure that the resources are utilised properly in order to win the support and trust of the donors. (ii) The VOs need to collaborate with the government in implementing the programmes and schemes of the government to meet the common objective i.e., to work for the people's welfare. The coordinated approach and combined effort to a great extent ensure the effective and smooth implementation of the schemes and programmes. Therefore, constant support from the government could make the VOs financially sound and sustainable. (iii) The local donors can play a significant role towards financial sustenance of the VOs through their voluntary support. Therefore, efforts should be maximised to obtain support from them. (iv) The VOs must not be complacent even though they keep receiving generous funding, instead they need to be innovative and make all-out effort to generate their own resources in the forms of promoting in-house publication, motivating like-minded people for voluntary donations and carry out collaborative programmes and activities with other organisations by creating an effective network. It was observed that most of the VOs are able to carry out their activities on continuous basis though they lack a corpus fund to meet the exigencies. However, there have been conscious and constant efforts by them to generate resources for their organisations and some of them have initiated startup livelihood programmes for the people at the grassroots level.

VOs in the Domain of Development

The VOs have carried out various welfare activities and community driven development programmes by devising innovative strategies and establishing collaboration with other organisations including the agencies of the state. These outreach programmes have helped them to address various welfare issues ranging from health issues to livelihood of the people. Pertinent in this context is to highlight their interventions and the contributions that they have made towards welfare of the society in general and the people in need in particular.

BS: Welfare of the elderly and differently abled persons (DAP) is the prime concern of this VO. In West Garo Hills District, as per the data, it has reached out to 600 senior citizens and constantly guiding them to avail the benefits. To fulfill its commitment towards the welfare of the DAPs, it has set up 4 hostels to cater to the need of 155 PWDs in Shillong and Tura respectively. Through its vocational, livelihood and open school programmes, 200 DAPs and 1000 households have been benefitted in East Khasi Hills District. That apart, as part of its capacity building programme to empower the DAPs, it has facilitated and imparted trainings to 450 DAPs who have successfully completed

training programmes in various livelihood programmes. It has reached out to over 1500 DAPs from 300 villages in 5 blocks of West Garo Hills District, 320 DAPs in 33 villages in Mawkyrwat block of West Khasi Hills District and 325 DAPs in 30 villages in Laskein block of Jaiñtia Hills District respectively. To strengthen their voice and concern, it has encouraged and helped the DAPs to form their own collective body; as a result, disabled persons organisations (DPOs) have been formed in 39 blocks of Meghalaya impacting 3000 DAPs. Realising the need for trained teachers in rural areas, it has also made sincere efforts towards the formation of social capital in form of creating a pool of trained teachers. It has facilitated and imparted training to 100 teachers who are well trained in B. Ed special education with foundation course on inclusive education to engage DAPs in teaching learning process.

Grassroot: Primary health being its focal issue, it has been able to mobilise people and sensitise them about the importance of health and the necessary care need to be taken by them. As a part of its efforts towards this direction, it has formed 9 primary health center (PHC) committees and 46 village health, sanitation and nutrition (VHSN) committees in East Khasi Hills District. About 50 advocacy programmes were conducted on HIV/AIDs to create awareness among the vulnerable groups both in rural and urban areas of Meghalaya. It has also sensitised 2400 migrant workers by making them aware of the risks involved with HIV/AIDS, its spread and the preventive measures. It has conducted household visits on tuberculosis awareness programmes in various blocks of East Khasi Hills District. While it has organised 691 visits covering 15 villages in Shella Bholaganj block, in Mawryngkneng block 74 visits were made covering 15 villages. In Laitkroh - Khatarshnong block, 250 visits were made covering 15 villages. It has also made a couple of visits to the Shillong District Jail. Besides, it has carried out awareness programmes in collaboration with the government on issues relating to AIDs.

VHAM: Maternal health has been its primary concern wherein it is actively engaged in creating awareness on immunisation amongst women and children. According to the members of the VO as well as the members from the community, there is increasing awareness among the people on the issues relating to health and hygiene. There are about 7646 out-patient department (OPD) and 296 in-patient department (IPD) cases in Jatah PHC and 13203 OPD and 222 IPD cases in Dangar PHC. There has been an increase not only in the intake of Ayush medicines but also delivery cases in the PHCs. To facilitate the increasing number of delivery cases, additional labour rooms have been created. All these developments can be attributed to the initiatives taken by the VO. With regard to substance abuse, it has taken various preventive measures in Shillong city as well as in Jowai town, the two important urban centres in Meghalaya. In two localities of Shillong such as Nongmensong and Nongshilliang, it has made its present felt through its programmes relating to substance abuse. In Nongmensong, it has registered

508 drug users under opoid substitution therapy (OST) and another 304 under the needle syringe exchange programme (NSEP). In Nongshilliang, it has registered 31 drug users under OST and another 90 under the NSEP. In Jowai town of Jaiñtia Hills District, 274 drug users under the OST and 434 under the NSEP have been registered. A total of 110 female drug users and 78 PMI drug users have been registered for services like nutrition, counseling and health care.

BIDS: It is actively involved in providing shelter homes to the destitute children. Due to its efforts, 119 children were admitted during the period 2012-15. Out of these, 48 children were repatriated and 71 continue to remain in the Rilang Shelter Home set up by BIDS in Nongshilliang, Shillong. They have been engaged in running community schools where 16 schools were set up spreading over 8 villages in two districts such as East Khasi and East Jaiñtia Hills. The number of students attending the school varies from 40-120 with an average of 70 students attending regularly with a trained teacher from the village appointed in each school. It has been able to reach out 830 children to provide health services. Due to its initiatives, 105 children from East Jaiñtia Hills district who were suffering from rickets had undergone treatment and over 210 mothers were made aware of preventive healthcare.

WISE: It has contributed towards the improvement of the livelihood of the women by imparting trainings on various income generation activities (IGAs). About 112 women and self-help groups (SHG) members availed skill training on flower making, fast food preparation and handicrafts. Further, about 50 women trainees participated in training on tailoring and embroidery and over 25 women were imparted skill up-gradation in tailoring. As a result of its outreach programme, over 85 SHGs have been formed and received a seed capital for starting up IGAs. It was observed that many IGAs such as livestock rearing, beekeeping, fishery, bay leave marketing, candle making and rural tourism have been initiated. The social audit of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) was carried out in 39 village employment councils (VECs) of Khatarshnong-Laitkroh block through district rural development agency (DRDA).

SSC: Focusing on the importance of ethno medicines and herbal garden, it has carried out 1453 awareness programmes on activities relating to the promotion of organic kitchen garden out of which 643 awareness programmes have been carried out on herbal remedies. About 140 mobile clinics were arranged and people were taught the importance of preventive measures against malaria and the matters relating to basic health care. There were about 8000 people who have benefitted from the mobile clinics. About 145 awareness programmes have been held on government health schemes such as National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP) and insurance schemes such as Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RBSY) and Meghalaya Health Insurance Scheme (MHIS). Apart from

the issues relating to maternal health care about 1960 people have been sensitised on the adverse effects of malaria and the aspects relating to it. In order to enhance the health services on tuberculosis (TB), malaria and maternal health care, 70 village health workers and community-based organisations (CBO) members have been trained. It has identified, trained and supervised 23 volunteers on RNTCP and has opened 9 directly observed treatment, short-course (DOTs) centres to provide treatment for the patients. About 70 home visits and interactive sessions were organised to educate the patients and urged them to adhere to the treatment plans provided to them. The organisation has formed task force groups (TFGs) in 10 villages (Ladmawphlang, Jathang, Mawrah, Diengkynthong, Nongtraw, Rngimawsaw, Laitlyndop, Pyrda and Mawkma) and oriented these TFGs about the various health services. Capacity building programmes for TFGs were conducted in all the 10 villages relating to first aid rescue, sustainable agriculture and poultry farming. Mock drills on earthquake, flood and cyclone preparedness were carried out and the people were made aware of about the immediate course of action to be taken when natural disasters occur. People are sensitised on the use of first aid, protecting valuable items and documents. Due to its concerted efforts, it has reached out to 708 families in their areas of operation.

RLFSD: It is actively engaged in mobilising the people for IGAs and encouraged them to take up farming. It has conducted 8 awareness programmes on the adoption and planting of tree saplings in schools located in its project area. It has formed 40 SHGs and has provided all possible support towards imparting training to 426 SHG members. It has been monitoring 14 SHGs and 4 Farmer's Club and facilitated training programmes on IGAs and farming activities in the project villages. Besides, it has formed 14 honey producer groups and created 77 home based nurseries (HBNs) in the project villages.

NEEDS: It has taken certain decisive steps on solid waste management. It has reached out to some of the localities and schools in Shillong where they have initiated the construction of their own compost pits. Kitchen scrap, leaves and grass are collected for filling in the compost pits and the manure is used in the garden and agricultural land. About 9 schools and 14 localities of Shillong have been convinced and benefitted from this initiative. Integrated low-cost sanitation (ILCS) scheme is undertaken by NEEDS to promote issues relating to sanitation and made efforts to construct low-cost sanitation units to economically weaker section (EWS) households who have no toilets in the urban areas. From this scheme 17 localities of Shillong have been benefitted.

KSKHAWUMWS: It has carried out various awareness programmes to sensitise people on environmental issues such as deforestation, charcoal burning and forest fire. To address the problem of forest fire, it has been able to train and monitor the people to carry out the practice of *Saiñding* (create forest lines to avoid the spread of fire) and carry out patrolling so as to keep a

check on the forest fire. To facilitate high regeneration of forests, it has closed an area of 1100 hectares from animal grazing and firewood collection. That apart, it has installed 20 fuel efficient stoves which are made by a youth who was trained by KSKHAWUMWS and distributed 96 electric rice cookers at Laitkroh village of Khatarshnong-Laitkroh block in East Khasi Hills District in order to minimise the use of firewood. Besides, efforts have been made to identify the sites for the conservation of medicinal plants and set up 5 units of nurseries with the support of 5 herbal practitioners. It has completed the monitoring of 21 HBNs. The success of this initiative can be comprehended from the fact that 6 nurseries have achieved almost 99 per cent survival of saplings while 4 are catching up with more than 60 per cent saplings survival. This was possible due to good seed quality, timely watering and various other measures taken to protect these from animal grazing. However, the efforts need to be maximised as remaining 11 nurseries could achieve only 30 per cent or less survival of saplings. It also started 77 community tree nurseries (an area earmarked in the community to plant tree saplings) in the project villages which are managed by the SHGs. It has organised training programmes where about 580 people have received trainings on the various farming activities in order to generate livelihood. By providing 20 charcoal briquettes making machines, it has not only created opportunities to generate incomes but also contributed towards doing away with charcoal burning practices.

RSM: Imparting education to those who find it extremely difficult, RSM has extended support and offered sponsorships through its educational sponsorship programme. About 250 children were able to attend school through flagship programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in which the VO is actively involved. That apart, it has provided accommodation to 40 children in the shelter home *Lawei Baphyrnai* in Umpling, Shillong, out of which 12 children have been repatriated to their families.

Besides the above mentioned initiatives and the benefits accrued, the VOs have been instrumental towards the formation of SHGs in different villages. These SHGs are able to generate funds for their group activities from the government and avail loans from banks to carry out their entrepreneurial activities. The members of SHGs have picked up various skills and leadership qualities and learned how to maintain the records, organise meetings and arrive at decisions through consensus. The VOs have facilitated capacity building programmes such as trainings and workshops with local leaders and SHGs which have helped the SHG members to acquire skills for social leadership and financial management. Women members have found SHG as an effective platform to deliberate on issues such as health, nutrition and domestic violence which has helped them to chalk out collective strategies to fight against these issues. In rural areas, SHGs have created much needed confidence among the members to actively participate and contribute towards effective implementation of most of the programmes run by the VOs. Some of the SHG

members were given the responsibility to help the community in assisting child birth and providing information on health facilities in the villages.

Another area on which VOs have made significant contribution is the issue of substance abuse. The VOs have facilitated the rehabilitation process of both the male and female substance abusers. The substance abusers have been accommodated in the drop-in centres run by the VOs wherein counseling is provided and they get opportunity to interact with other inmates. Various therapies and counseling programmes have helped the victims to overcome the problems. The children, who were deprived of education, the victims of broken family and victims of other domestic problems have been provided opportunities to enroll in schools. Through sponsorship programmes on education by the VOs, they have been able to get free education. Furthermore, the homeless and abandoned children have found homely care with food, clothing and education through the establishment of children homes and shelter homes. They are provided with health and nutrition facilities, counselling and are sensitised about child rights.

Conclusion

Of late, there has been proliferation of VOs in Meghalaya and they have been quite active in carrying out various developmental and welfare activities either through collaborative ventures or through individual initiatives. They have sought financial resources from government (state and central), non-government (international organisations, other like-minded organisations) sources and individual donors which enable them to carry out their activities on continuous basis. They have made their presence felt in the domain of development with their innovative strategies, collaborative approach and timely intervention. Their community oriented and participatory approaches have not only helped them to establish enduring and trustworthy relations with the people but also provided immense support to augment their income generating opportunities in place of activities and livelihoods. They have been able to involve people in the critical areas such as health, environment, skill development and more importantly, work towards sustainable livelihood opportunities. By doing so, the VOs consider people as partners rather than mere beneficiaries which is evident from the support and cooperation they have obtained from the public at large. This in turn has generated hope, a sense of ownership and collectivism among them. However, the VOs should look beyond welfare oriented approach to institutional development approach and take initiatives to build up of grassroots support groups and institutions so that the benefits of development are sustained and the deprived ones are empowered.

Notes

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