

Changing Role of Civil Society Organizations in India

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ABSTRACT

NGOs are increasingly becoming an important force because they are efficient, effective, innovative, flexible, independent and socially committed. Increasing concerns for inclusive growth, social justice and empowerment of poor and marginalized in the wake of globalization and economic liberalization, the role of public private partnership in social development sector has got momentum. In India too, there has been phenomenon growth in the number of civil societies and NGOs. No doubt, the role of NGOs in social reconstruction, poverty alleviation, people's empowerment and social development has increased in the recent past however; a large number of NGOs and civil societies are small in size and annual budget. They are confined to limited geographical area and developmental activities due to certain limitations. There has been paradigm shift in government and NGO relationship and the credentials of NGOs are being recognized. The relationship between state and voluntary sector is gaining momentum in the context of new policy regime and economic environment.

Introduction

Non-governmental organization (NGO) is a term that has become widely accepted for referring to a legally constituted, non-business organization created by natural or legal persons with no participation or representation of any government. In the cases in which NGOs are funded totally or partially by governments, the NGO maintains its non-governmental status insofar as it excludes government representatives from membership in the organization. Unlike the term intergovernmental organization, "non-governmental organization" is a term in generalized use but not a legal definition, in many jurisdictions these types of organizations are defined as "civil society organizations" or alternative terms. NGOs can be classified under four broad categories viz. operational or gross root level NGOs, support NGOs, network NGOs and funding NGOs. Operational or Gross root NGOs directly work with the oppressed sections of the society. Development NGOs may be

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involved in providing development services. Support NGOs provide services that would strengthen the capacities of gross root NGOs. The Funding NGOs primarily work for extending financial and technical support to the Gross root NGOs.

Historically, individuals and associations help the poor and destitute during the crisis of different kinds. During the pre-independence era, social reformers initiated and sustained movements against certain types of social practices. Christian missionaries did considerable work relating to charity, welfare and provisions of services and also establish educational institutions, hospitals and other charitable institutions for the poor. After independence, a change in the perception on development and also the role of NGOs in rural development took place. In 1950s and 1960s, it was assumed that the economic growth through state investment was the answer to poverty. NGOs were supported by the national and state governments for implementing community development and welfare programmes. By the mid of 1970s, the felt for people's participation in various development programmes was well realized in the policy circle. By late 1980s, Support and Network NGOs emerged to lend capacity enhancement support to Grossroot NGOs and create a platform for NGOs to meet, share, experiences and carry out coordinated action. By 1990s, NGOs have become more popular with government and aid agencies in response to certain developments in economic and political thinking.

India has possibly the largest number of active non-government, not-for-profit organizations in the world. A recent study commissioned by the government put the number of such entities, accounted for till 2009, at 3.3 million. That is one NGO for less than 400 Indians, and many times the number of primary schools and primary health centres in India. Even this staggering number may be less than the actual number of NGOs active in the country. This is because the study, commissioned in 2008, took into consideration only those entities which were registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 or the Mumbai Public Trust Act and its variants in other states. Such organizations can be registered under a plethora of Acts such as the Societies' Act, 1860, Indian Trust Act, 1882, Public Trust Act, 1950, Indian Companies Act, 1956 (Section 25), Religious Endowment Act, 1863, The Charitable and Religious Trust Act, 1920, the Mussalman Wakf Act, 1923, the Wakf Act, 1954, and Public Wakfs (Extension of Limitation Act) Act, 1959, etc.

According to the government study, the largest number of NGOs are registered in Maharashtra (4.8 lakh), followed by Andhra Pradesh (4.6 lakh), UP (4.3 lakh), Kerala (3.3 lakh), Karnataka (1.9 lakh), Gujarat (1.7 lakh), West Bengal (1.7 lakh), Tamil Nadu (1.4 lakh), Orissa (1.3 lakh) and Rajasthan (1 lakh). More than 80 per cent of registrations come from these 10 states. While

the government will begin studying the finances of the sector in the second phase of the survey, estimates from within the sector suggest that NGOs, or NPIs, raise anywhere between Rs 40,000 crore and Rs 80,000 crore in funding annually. The government has been the biggest donor – Rs18,000 crore was set aside for the social sector in the XI Plan – followed by foreign contributors (according to the latest figures available, around Rs 9,700 crore was raised in 2007-08). Around Rs 1,600-2,000 crore was donated to established religious bodies such as the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams.

Changing Civil Society

The changing socio-economic and political tableau in India has impacted the Indian CSOs and their focuses across states within the country. Before tracing the significant changes that the CSOs in India are experiencing, some brief highlights on the composition and role of CSOs in the Indian context is discussed in the following paragraphs. According to Tandon (2002), the phrase 'civil society' in India has gained general currency since the beginning of the 1990s. He defines civil society as individual and organizational initiatives for public good. In fact, as described by Tandon, the wide range of formations that may possibly constitute the mosaic of civil society in India are as follows: (i) Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), (ii) Mass Organizations, (iii) Religious Organizations, (iv) Voluntary Development Organizations (VDOs), (v) Social Movements, (vi) Corporate Philanthropy, (vii) Consumer Groups, (viii) Cultural Associations, (ix) Professional Associations, (x) Economic Associations and (xi) Others, which includes, media and academia (Ibid). It is important to note here that, there is hardly any consensus on mainstream media coming under the umbrella of civil society. Although both media and civil society need to and in many instances do work together, considering its corporate character and for-profit initiatives, it is still a debate whether media can count as non-profit civil society. However, media and civil society each is presumed to be a necessary condition for the other (La May, 2004). Thus in the Indian context it is seen that civil society will gain roots only if it is perceived as a continuation of the tradition of voluntary action. PRIA in 2002 (Tandon & Srivastava, 2002) had conducted a study on the non-profit sector in India in collaboration with the John Hopkins University, USA. The findings of the study indicated the existence of nearly 1.2 million non-profit organizations in India, but nearly half of them are unregistered. Thus, even in spite of the wide spread of the sector, these organizations remain largely invisible.

A significant trend noticed since the decade of 1990s is the 'mushrooming of voluntary organisations' (Tandon, 2002) in India. A whole lot of organisations have started emerging abruptly without being necessarily aware

of the local context and the specific needs of that context. More so, many such organisations instead of pursuing their social commitments are flagging business or commercial motivations. Another practice that has gained currency is that of the political leadership forming CSOs. Besides, the number of CSOs set up by ex-bureaucrats, ex-corporate employees, industrialists is also increasing. Many of them are entirely devoid of the vision for development/welfare and look at the sector from a business perspective; besides, a section of the unemployed youth in India is viewing the CSOs/ NSOs as self-employment ventures and money-making machines. For example, in the post-Tsunami period enormous amount of funds gushed in the state of Tamil Nadu for service and relief delivery purpose. Hence, many people from other sectors and even the youth became enthusiastic to open CSOs with the purpose of grabbing such funds. This, in turn, increased the number of CSOs in Tamil Nadu to a considerable extent.⁵ Indeed, the mushrooming growth of CSOs/ NGOs in India with the increasing entry of opportunist people into the sector is becoming an appalling phenomenon.

Formation of organisations like National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), established in 1992, is also a notable trend. NACO is a division of India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare leading the HIV/ AIDS control programmes in India; it is considered to be the nodal organisation for formulation of policy and implementation of programmes for prevention and control of HIV/ AIDS in India. It works not only in close association with several union ministries and government departments, but also encourages partnerships and alliances with corporate/ public/ private sector in eradicating the threat of HIV/ AIDS in India. Also, NACO partners with a number of CSOs especially working on HIV/ AIDS and utilises the latter's expertise so far as community mobilisation and empowerment are considered, in turn enhancing the scope of HIV/ AIDS prevention, care and support.

The CBOs are also a significant part of the civil society, both in urban as well as rural settlements. They mostly operate within local communities and are essentially a subset of the larger group of non-profits. CBOs are predominantly voluntary and self-funded 'bottom-up' organisations which are extremely effective in addressing the local needs than the larger charitable organisations. In the last decade, the emergence of significant number of urban community based organisations is one important inclusion in civil society in India. Examples of urban CBOs are Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), Neighbourhood Associations, Apartments Associations representing the interests of the citizens of a specific urban or suburban locality in the Indian cities.

The CSOs in the decades prior to economic liberalization in India worked for the overall development of the society and tried to contribute for the

upliftment of the downtrodden. Broadly speaking, the contribution of CSOs (known more as voluntary organizations during this phase) had been of three types (Tandon, 1986). First, they brought certain critical developmental issues and concerns like environmental degradation, deforestation, land alienation, displacements, etc. to the attention of the policy makers while also making it open for wider public debate. Second, they experimented with various developmental models and solutions to address the socio-economic problems of the society. The models of adult education, primary health care, toilets, irrigation system, bio-gas, ecologically balanced wasteland development, etc. were developed on the basis of micro-experiments carried on by them throughout the country. Third, they contributed towards highlighting the plight of the most deprived sections of the society. Most of them worked with the women, tribal, landless labourers, informal sector workers, etc., for their political empowerment, social emancipation, and economic development. Beyond the government and business, they acted as the third sector of society. In post-liberalization times since the beginning of the 1990s, when the State started withdrawing from many of its responsibilities, addressing the concerns of society could not be left at the mercy of the political system. As Sarah Joseph (2002) writes, civil society and social actors are being encouraged now to take up responsibility for the development and welfare functions which the State wants to shed. It is argued that the compulsions of survival in globalised financial and capital markets necessitate such a division of responsibilities. States, it is argued, can no longer guarantee employment and redistribution of assets and remain competitive. Besides, there is a large scale prevalence of poverty, conflict, exclusion, marginalization across the world. Handful of people belonging to corporate and government are also hijacking money through corrupt means. Therefore, the CSOs need to focus upon governance and development. Various international organizations and also the UN agencies are working actively with the CSOs in India by providing aid, monitoring and overseeing developmental programmes in regions hit hard by socio-economic problems. There can be three important contributions of CSOs in national development Tandon (2002):

- (i) **Innovation:** They have been experimenting with new ways of promoting more sustainable, people-centered development and have been able to develop methods, models and equipment that have been widely adopted by the state and national governments as well as internationally;
- (ii) **Empowerment:** Involving in empowering socio-economically marginalised and exploited sections of society;
- (iii) **Research and Advocacy:** They have undertaken significant public education and policy advocacy through their sustainable research on

the issues of women, tribes, dalits, environment, education, human rights, etc.

The Indian Voluntary Sector is known for its impartial analysis, quality and outreach of service and support, capacity building and research based advocacy. The sector has made significant impact in the lives of common citizens, especially in improving the quality of their lives. The Voluntary Sector works in close collaboration and partnership with government and other players to achieve its objective. Interestingly, in the last few decades the sector has grown in numbers on the one hand and ventured into new areas and tested new strategies, on the other. Such a growth has led to a decrease in understanding about the nature, scope, and functioning of this sector. Some people compare it with the 'blind men and elephant phenomenon'. Various perceptions and theories are being floated around on this subject. Terms like 'Non-government Organizations, Voluntary Sector, Not-for Profit, Third Sector, Non-State Actors, Civil Society Organizations, Non-Profit Organizations, etc are being used to define this sector. There is no definite estimate of how much employment is generated by this sector, as working in this sector is equated with passion. Here again terms like volunteers, activists, professionals, social workers, etc, is being used to define people working in the sector. Some people see this sector as the trouble maker or cause of disruption of growth, and for some it is a saviour, and supporter of human rights. Even the composition of the sector has changed in the last few years. A number of new types of entities are now being defined under the same category Such as private foundations, hospitals, schools, sports club, and resident welfare associations. Even there are many government run organizations registered as non-government organizations. Such a loose composition has resulted in increase in the total number of the organizations as well as entry of fly by night organizations in the same category. The study conducted by Central Statistical Organization (CSO) estimated the figure to be around 1.5 million, with a turnover of Rs. 25,000 crores. These figures, although highly disputable, give birth to number of questions in the minds of common people and give excuse to the government to rein in the sector.

1. Policy Formation

The VO engagement in the policy formation is significant because not only does it echo the voice of the marginalized, it also presents a clear picture of what the issue is. Its engagement is strongly based on research and cases built from interactions at the grassroot levels. Throughout the history of the Indian VO sector, there has been a noticeable stimulation in the culture of rights based advocacy and lobbying with a view to influencing the

amendments of policies and legislations. Conducting research would involve mobilization within the sector and actively engaging them in policy decision making processes. The exercise also encourages a culture of open articulation as stakeholders get a platform to creatively interface and offer inputs regarding national legislation, policy proposals and programs. Typically, the result of research and analysis in the chosen policy area or sectorial issue is the advocacy for policy change or effective policy implementation. Generally, advocacy challenges the root causes of poverty while achieving equity and social justice through the empowerment of the disadvantaged – this way they are able to have a direct participation in decision making processes, which are expected to affect both their rights and lives.

2. *Service Delivery*

The delivery of services by the VOs in India encompassed challenges of geographical remoteness, civil instability, and over-centralization of the government, lack of infrastructure and transportation system and lack of resources from the government, among others. The VOs serve as substitutes in terms of recognizing the potential roles of VOs to supply public services in India.³³ The provision of various services by the VOs is primarily based on the VOs qualities such as: generally small, flexible and decentralized. Their structure permits them to make decisions at the grass root level enhancing their ability to provide better public services. In addition, the local VOs employ local staff and create culturally compatible, locally driven projects and have the potential to satisfy the needs of previously under serve groups that create partnerships among local organizations.

3. *Rights Based Entitlement*

In India, the fundamental right as to life and personal liberty, privacy, equality, non-discrimination, freedom of movement, religion, expression, thought and conscience, and even of property has been a major concern not only because of caste-system, but mostly due to the inadequate will to enforce the rules and laws pertaining to equality and access to these rights. The intervention of the VOs in this regard has been considerable as they were able to gain legal recognition for basic rights and services such as the right to education, food, water and sanitation, health and nutrition and land rights, among others. Over the years, there has been a revolution in terms of shift in power relations among the various development key players involved in the promotion of rights-based approach. In this regard, the VOs would not only help the poor, but it would lobby for new approaches to ensure that 'poor people are actors in their own right, and not victims of beneficiaries'.

Foreign Funding of NGOs

Foreign contribution to NGOs in India is shown in Table 1. There has been fluctuating trend in amount of foreign contribution to NGOs in India during the period of 2010-11 to 2013-14. However, there has been significant growth in foreign contribution during the period of 2010-11 to 2012-13. During 2010-

Table 1
Foreign Contribution to NGOs in India

(Amount in Rs. Crore)

State	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
New Delhi	2018.36	2285.75	2248.43	7.53
Tamil Nadu	1558.70	1704.76	1626.23	51.17
Andhra Pradesh	1179.07	1258.52	1148.45	53.53
Karnataka	1002.01	1104.28	1128.07	36.32
Maharashtra	915.40	1107.39	1039.26	29.49
Kerala	881.44	1029.52	849.62	49.80
West Bengal	652.05	726.66	705.14	134.45
Gujarat	363.82	384.32	399.28	6.32
Uttar Pradesh	257.41	265.01	219.46	8.39
Odisha	212.37	240.23	211.54	17.89
Madhya Pradesh	145.65	154.75	166.09	29.97
Bihar	144.59	181.37	139.61	4.52
Rajasthan	142.11	145.14	137.76	3.10
Jharkhand	134.63	143.81	135.87	2.39
Himachal Pradesh	128.75	125.81	172.93	0.63
Uttarakhand	116.72	119.56	104.89	2.36
Punjab	87.24	102.57	105.55	0.47
Assam	86.27	120.37	108.78	15.68
Chhattisgarh	57.24	62.69	53.33	2.49
Manipur	46.83	46.24	43.50	2.26
Meghalaya	40.71	52.78	53.33	0.63
Jammu and Kashmir	38.57	34.15	30.41	3.08
Pondicherry	30.53	35.77	25.14	0.00
Nagaland	23.82	28.26	42.01	13.89
Haryana	22.30	24.95	13.31	0.02
Goa	18.75	19.04	17.98	0.48
Chandigarh	12.79	12.81	14.34	0.10
Arunachal Pradesh	9.96	9.11	7.40	2.74
Tripura	7.49	7.96	8.37	0.70
Sikkim	6.42	9.57	3.48	0.49
Andaman and Nicobar Island	6.28	4.98	4.03	0.12
Mizoram	5.00	5.86	4.28	0.00
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	1.65	1.33	0.69	0.00
Daman and Diu	0.02	0.11	0.00	0.00
Total	10354.94	11554.75	10963.82	476.05

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India.

11, 23068 NGOs/ Associations reported that they received an amount of Rs. 10354.94 crores. However, during the period of 2012-13, number of NGOs/ Associations filing returns was reported to be 17574. A large number of NGOs/ Associations do not file their returns. This may be due to non-receiving of foreign funds for development purposes. New Dehi, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal and Gujarat accounted for a lion share in foreign contribution in India.

Number of reporting NGOs/ Associations receiving foreign contribution in India is shown in Table 2. There has been decline of 92.13 per cent in the number of NGOs/ Associations reporting receiving of foreign contribution during the period of 2010-11 to 2013-14. The amount of foreign contribution has also drastically reduced in 2013-14 as compared to 2010-11. This is because of fact that foreign contribution was recorded as per report of July, 2014.

Table 3
Number of Reporting NGOs/Associations Receiving Foreign Contribution in India

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of NGOs / Associations</i>	<i>Foreign Contribution (Rs. Crore)</i>
2010-11	23068	10354.94
2011-12	22719	11554.75
2012-13	17574	10963.82
2013-14	1815	476.05

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India.

Trend in foreign contribution in India is shown in Table 3.9. There has been more than 6 fold increase in the amount of foreign contribution to NGOs

Table 3.9
Trends in Foreign Contribution in India

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Registered NGOs / Associations</i>	<i>Percentage of Associations / NGOs Providing Details of Remittance Received</i>	<i>Amount Received in Crores</i>
1993-94	15039	-	1865
2000-01	22924	64	4535
2003-04	28351	61	5105
2004-05	30321	61	6257
2005-06	32144	58	7878
2006-07	33937	56	11007
2007-08	34803	54	9663
2008-09	36414	55	10803
2009-10	38436	56	10338
2010-11	40575	56	10334
2011-12	41844	59	11548

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India.

in India. As on March, 2012, there were 41844 registered associations / NGOs under FCRA. As compared to 2004-05, the amount received in 2011-12 has gone up by 85 per cent and their number 38 per cent. However, about 60 per cent associations provide details of remittance received from foreign countries.

Country-wise largest donors to India are shown in Table 4. During 1993-94 to 2011-12, Rs. 116073 crores were received by registered NGOs/Associations under FCRA in India. Only about 55 per cent NGOs gave audited accounts. The largest donors were reported to be USA, Germany, UK, Italy, Spain and Netherlands. There has been significant increase in the amount of foreign contributions from USA (94.11 per cent), Netherlands (79.01 per cent), UK (55.47 per cent) and Italy (55.16 per cent) during 2002-03 to 2010-11.

Table 4
Country-wise Largest Donors to India

Year	(Rs. Crore)					
	USA	Germany	UK	Italy	Spain	Netherlands
2002-03	1680	715	685	316	250	262
2003-04	1584	757	676	350	261	304
2004-05	1927	931	764	433	338	354
2005-06	2425	1181	1062	500	402	446
2006-07	2949	1033	1428	488	465	448
2007-08	2928	971	1269	515	401	414
2008-09	3433	1103	1131	547	437	513
2009-10	3106	1046	1039	584	437	509
2010-11	3261	1007	1065	490	351	469

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India.

Receipt of foreign contribution towards major purposes during 2010-11 is shown in Table 5. During 2010-11, about 13 per cent foreign grants was received for establishment purposes. Rural development, welfare of children, construction and maintenance of school/colleges, grant of stipend, scholarships and assistance to poor and deserving children accounted for larger share. About 20 per cent foreign contribution was received for the purposes of welfare and empowerment of children including students while about 6 per cent foreign contribution was received for religious purposes including construction of religious places, schools and other religious functionaries.

Conclusion

NGOs are tremendously working, and helping government, institutions, and the poor in the fight against poverty. They have played an increasingly prominent role in the development sector as innovative and Grassroots

Table 5
Receipt of Foreign Contribution Towards Major Purposes During 2010-11
 (Amount in Rs. Crore)

<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Foreign Contribution</i>
Establishment Expenses	1337.15
Rural Development	863.12
Welfare of Children	745.24
Construction and Maintenance of Schools / Colleges	631.24
Grant of Stipend / Scholarship / Assistance in Cash and Kind to Poor / Deserving Children	458.13
Research	392.43
Awareness about HIV/AIDS/ Treatment and Rehabilitation of Persons Affected by AIDS	392.33
Welfare of Orphans	259.70
Construction/Running of Hospitals/Dispensary / Clinics	253.31
Awareness Camps / Seminars / Workshops / Meetings / Conferences	226.55
Non-Formal Education / Coaching Classes	224.63
Maintenance of Priests / Preachers and Other Religious Functionaries	211.30
Religious Schools / Education of Priests and Preachers	209.39
Welfare / Empowerment of Women	203.06
Construction / Repair / Maintenance of Places of Worships	199.74

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India.

Organizations with the desire and capacity to pursue participatory and people centred forms of development and to fill gaps left by the failure of the government in meeting the needs of their poorest citizens. NGOs because of their situation and interaction with local people can be very effective in bringing change since they are able to address issues that governments are often not able to comprehend. As these organizations work at the grass roots level they are able to sense the urgency of issues and prioritize into the problem solving mode at a quicker pace. The empowerment of the poor and community mobilization are the keys to sustainability, and these processes can take extensive periods of time to be assimilated. NGOs are recognized for their role in developing new initiatives, new programmes or components of programmes, new approaches, new mechanisms, etc., to address development problems and issues. Many NGOs, with their generally flexible organizational structure and characteristics, which include organizational independence and participatory structures, are able to experiment on new institutional mechanisms and on different approaches that add value to projects. Accountability and governance is another area where civil society has played a major role. Civil society organizations have brought these issues to the forefront. A conducive international context helped them doing so: the emphasis on governance by donor agencies such as the World Bank made it beneficial for the government to adopt this language, if not to practice it.

Organizations have developed a range of fairly technical tools to monitor the government's record. They have organized audits of government projects or services by affected communities.

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