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## UNDERSTANDING THE STATUS OF NGOS IN INDIAN CONTEXT THROUGH COMMITTEES AND REPORTS

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### ABSTRACT:

**Preamble:** In the process of development, NGOs are working in the various fields such as poverty eradication, women and child development environment conservation etc. In the present age, the scope of work of NGOs has increased tremendously. Subsequent research seeks to understand what the various reports, committees have observed on the groundwork, quality and status of NGOs.

**Objectives of the study:** To study Various Official committees and status of organizations:  
To understand the Five-year plan and status of non-governmental organization.

**Methodology:** The paper is based on the secondary data. The review of literature from books, journals policy documents and reports.

This paper is divided in three parts. First part explains the concept of NGO and focuses historical status of NGOs in the Indian context.

Second part deals with Various Official committees and status of organizations.

Third part focuses on the Five-year plan and status of non-governmental organizations.

**Findings:** Studies have shown that voluntary organization is a broad concept and it is working in various fields and all committees have considered the role and status of participation of NGOs in social development work as important. Study of the Five-Year Plan shows that government believes our country requires commitment of NGOs, and their ability.

**Conclusion:** I conclude that the role and status of NGOs is as important for the development of society as that of government organizations.

**KEYWORDS:** NGO.

### I. CONCEPT OF NGO AND HISTORICAL STATUS OF NGOS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT.

The term NGO was initially coined during the first developmental decade of the 1960s and popularized by a UN document during the second half of the 1970s. (ECOSOC Resolution 288 (X) of 27 February 1950 as amplified by Resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 25 June 1968, quoted in Philip 1995, 18). The distinction between the words 'NGOs' and 'voluntary organization' has led to some problems. The word 'NGOs' was coined by the UN mainly to indicate the difference between the sovereign nation- states which are its direct members, and the organizations that collaborate with or receive grants from its agencies to implement development programmes. However, the title is too well spread now that all



institutions other than the direct government departments are loosely referred to as NGOs. Even the government agencies, which are registered as societies, the universities etc, are also often referred to as NGOs even though they are government- maintained agencies. Of course, all other registered societies are brought under the broad umbrella called NGOs. (Rameshwari Devi 2006, PP 9).

The term non-Governmental organization (NGO) is very broad. Any organization, which functions in a manner distinct from government, may be termed as a non-governmental organization, ranging from a global charity to a local self –help group. It may be a research institute, a Co-ordinating agency or a lobby group. NGOs in India are known as voluntary agencies, pressure groups, social action groups, self-help organizations', non-party processes, alternative development agencies (Mathew, 1999 PP 529-534).

A voluntary agency may be defined as, “an organization that is administered by an autonomous board which holds meetings, collects funds for its support, chiefly from private sources, and expands money; whether with or without salaried workers, in conducting a programme directed primarily to improve conditions by providing services or education or by advancing research or legislation, or by combination of these activities”. Similarly, a voluntary agency is an organization entity set up by a group of persons on their initiative or partly by an outside motivation to help the people of a locality to undertake activities in a self –reliant manner (partly or wholly) to satisfy needs and also bring them and the public sector extension services closer to one another for more equitable and effective development of the various section of the rural poor (Paul Chowdhury (Kapoor and Singh: 1997 p 14)

Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) can be defined as “voluntary organizations that work with and very often on behalf of others. Their work and their activities are focused on issues and people beyond their own staff and membership. NGOs often have close links with people’s organizations, channelling technical advice or financial support as intermediate quite different from people’s organizations, often having bureaucratic hierarchies without the democratic characteristics or accountability of most people’s groups”.

A study of the above interpretations reveals that, NGOs are known under a wide variety of labels. In common parlance, they are designated as voluntary agencies, grassroots organizations development organizations, private development organization, private voluntary organizations, people’s organizations, quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organizations and non-profit organizations. There are some more terms that appear in the literature on NGOs namely, non-profit organization, intermediary organization, umbrella organization, community organization, voluntary development organization, people’s organization, grassroots organization, self- help organization, indigenous NGO, domestic NGO, business- organized NGO, political NGO, and funder –organized NGO .All these, slight variations in form and structure apart, represent the same genera of organizations and are frequently used synonymously. Apparently, they are distinct from government and statutory bodies in several respects, though the latter also perform similar functions. Under the broad definition, NGO includes any organization that is not part of the government but operates in a civil society. They may be organizations such as political groups, labour and trade unions, religious organizations, sports, arts and cultural clubs, professional associations, and consumer organizations. In short, voluntary organization is a broad concept and it is working in various fields.

### **NGOS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT.**

This section provides a historical overview of the work of NGOs in India.

Voluntary action has a long tradition in India (Deo, 1987). Since the ancient days, there has been a tradition of voluntary service in India. During ancient and medieval times, voluntarism operated freely and exclusively in the fields of education, medicine, cultural promotion and even help on crises like droughts, floods, epidemics and foreign invasions. Philanthropy was widespread. This role of voluntarism continued during the early Mughal and British Periods.

During British period, there were numerous agencies providing voluntary services to the underprivileged and weaker sections of society, their areas of operation were largely in the fields of religious and social reforms. There were several organizations which worked with dedication towards

removal of caste restrictions, improving the condition of widows, orphans and destitute and for the education of women. In the eastern part of the country, Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded the Atmiya society (1822), and Brahma Samaj (1826). In the western part, Dr Dadabhai Naoroji played a pioneering role from 1849 to 1865 in the furtherance of education of girls, religious reforms and women's education. During the latter part of the century, different leaders of public opinion launched several voluntary movements. In Maharashtra Mahatma Phule founded the Satya shodhak Samaj. During the colonial period, there was a long tradition of self-help and social organization in Maharashtra. The tradition of voluntary action is very old in India.

Thus, the concept of working for the society, either spontaneously or through organization, is not new to India. In India helping others in times of need is considered part of a higher standard of living and ethics.

The post-independence era witnessed a phenomenal increase in the number of voluntary agencies. After independence, the social workers who had worked under the leadership of Gandhi provided leadership in voluntary action in India. As a matter of fact, they were the ones who started the movement of voluntary action, both in urban and rural areas, in the fields of health, education, social welfare adult education, rural development, etc. The NGOs in India have grown enormously, particularly since the middle of the 1980s. Many of them are foreign funded; some get funds from the government under specific schemes; some carry on their work on donations and desist from receiving funds from foreign sources or the Indian Government. NGOs also vary in their objectives.

Voluntary organizations, otherwise called Non- Governmental Organizations, today particularly in India have been mushrooming in the field of socioeconomic development. Some of these NGOs are contributing remarkable and commendable service to the humanity and are varied in nature, vision, style of functioning depending upon the need of the people and where and whom they serve.

In this way, they work for social development and to work for social problems has the good history in the Indian society. The status of voluntary work was very high in tradition of Indian history.

## II. VARIOUS OFFICIAL COMMITTEES AND STATUS OF ORGANIZATIONS:

A number of official committees dealing with development have acknowledged the need for involvement of voluntary organizations. For instance, the famous Balvantray Mehta committee (1957) had this to say about voluntary agencies: Today, in the implementation of the various schemes of community development, more and more emphasis is laid on non-governmental agencies and workers and on the principle that ultimately people's own local organizations should take over the entire work. The Mehta committee felt that non-official agencies engaged in development work would no doubt like to keep their identities intact; but at the same time these agencies would in future be "drawn into closer cooperation and even collaboration with statutory organizations". (Report of the team for the study of community projects and National Extension service, vol.1 New Delhi, 1957, p107)

Another important committee, dealing with rural –urban relationship (1966) laid emphasis on the role of voluntary organizations in mobilizing community support for local development activities. Quote from the committee Report: Local voluntary organizations can be very helpful in mobilizing popular support and assistance of the people in the activities of local support and assistance of the people in the activities of local body. It is possible to maintain constant and close contact with the people through these organizations. The formation of a network of local organizations, like neighbourhood and Mohalla committees and citizens forums, would be useful in mobilizing public participation. (Report of the Rural-Urban relationship committee, Government of Indian, Ministry of Health, 1966, p113)

Another all –India committee –the committee on panchayat Raj Institutions (commonly known as Ashoka Mehta committee)—wrote in appreciation of the role of voluntary organizations in rural development. Quote from the committee Report: Of the several voluntary organizations engaged in rural welfare, a few have helped the Panchayat Raj Institutions in micro- planning exercises. They prepare comprehensive area development plans, conduct feasibility studies and cost-benefit analysis. They explore ways and means to induce local participation in planning and implementation. AVARD

(Association of voluntary agencies for Rural Development) also provides consultancy services in project formulation and assists its member agencies with technical support. Voluntary agencies, if they have requisite expertise, proven standing and well-equipped organizations, can assist Panchayat Raj Institutions in the planning process. They can be particularly involved in formulation of projects and schemes. They can also help to create strong public opinion in support of measures aimed at social change. (Report of the committee on panchayati Raj institutions, Government of India, 1978, p144.)

Thus, Mehta Committee (1957), Rural Urban relationship Committee (1966) and Panchayati Raj institutions (1978) underline the requirements of NGOs for the local development. All these committees have considered the role and status of participation of NGOs in social development work as important.

### III. FIVE-YEAR PLAN AND STATUS OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS:

The planners recognized the importance of the role of voluntary organizations in the first five-year plan itself. During the mid -1980s, the Government not only accepted the NGOs' role in social change, but also provided them a substantial funding. The sixth five-year plan (1980) admitted that success stories in the field of voluntary action are many and stated that considering the vast pool of motivated individuals available in the country, what has fructified so far by way of organizational effort is not even a fraction of the potential. An important objective of the plan is to meaningfully tap this potential. In 1983, a new organization, Council for the Advancement of Rural Technology (CART) was set up to improve conditions in rural areas through diffusion and innovation of technology with the help of voluntary organizations. In 1986, CART was merged with PAD (People's Action for Development) to form the council for Advancement of Peoples Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) to coordinate and catalyse the development work of voluntary agencies countrywide. The main thrust of CAPART is in the areas of employment, income generation, creation of community assets and fulfilment of basic needs like housing and drinking water. For the first time in the history of Indian Planning, the seventh Five-year plan (1985) document contained a chapter on voluntary agencies. The plan attempted to involve the voluntary organizations in planning and implementing the programmes of rural development of the government in a big way, stressing the need to professionalize volunteerism by introducing professional competence, management expertise and accountability in the working of these organizations, the plan emphasized the need to give greater attention to the mobilization of locally available human and financial resources, identify people in the poorer and vulnerable occupations, upgrade their skills and give them the tools to make them economically self-sufficient as well as productive.

The Eighth plan document (1992) placed a still greater emphasis on voluntary organizations. It stated that people's initiative and participation must become the key element in the whole process of development. Therefore, the focus of attention came on developing multiple institutional options for improving the delivery systems by using the vast potential of the voluntary sector. It further envisaged creation of a nationwide network of voluntary organizations and to provide one window service to the voluntary organizations working in the area of integrated development. In order to give effect to the above policy, an action plan to bring about a collaborative relationship between voluntary organizations and government was drawn up. It stressed that the collaborative relationship should be at all levels, namely, district, state, regional and national levels, and should rest on the premise that one supplements and strengthens the other. According to the action plan to bring about a collaborative relationship between voluntary organizations and government, people have to be organized and be active participants of the development process. While the government can create a climate conducive to such organization, the government by itself cannot organize people. This role has to be appropriately left to the voluntary organizations. It further provides that (i) every social sector ministry, department should earmark a fixed percentage of its annual budget exclusively for such organizations, and (ii) every such ministry, department must lay down clearly and precisely the order of priority areas which should be left exclusively or substantially for these organizations.

In this way, financial assistance was provided to the NGOs through the Five-Year Plan and the status of cooperation of the government organization in development was given. In this way, a great

effort was made to incorporate the concept of helping or assisting the common man in social development work through voluntary organizations through various reports and provisions in the Five-Year Plan. In this way, government believes our country requires commitment of NGOs, and their ability. The historical review of social work and the study of committees and five-year annual plan underscores that the role and status of NGOs is as important for the development of society as that of government organizations.

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