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## Voluntary Action for Sustainable Development

### Abstract

*The action programmes of the Voluntary Organizations (VOs) relate to community organization, community health, education, natural resource management, skill development and income generation. The Problems of VOs relate to funding, one-manship in decision making, unattractive service conditions of paid staff and apathy of bureaucracy. There is an urgent need to promote and strengthen voluntary action. Some of the suggestions for improvement of VOs may be demonstration of genuine commitment of leadership to treat VOs as partners, extension oriented promotive style of functioning of the bureaucracy, simplification of grants-in-aid procedure, setting up a networking mechanism among the VOs, training of personnel and improving the organizational structure and administrative competence of the voluntary organizations. The role of voluntary organizations in sustainable development of the nation is*

### ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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### Key Words

*Voluntary Organization, Sustainable Development, Organizations.*

### Introduction

Voluntary action has always been an integral part of socio cultural tradition in India. Voluntary organizations (VOs) are rooted in the people, and therefore, can respond to people's needs and aspirations very effectively.

Voluntary action is an effort from one's own volition. It leads to people's participation and involvement in endeavours of social and economic well-being, Voluntary action aims at helping people to help themselves through mobilization of their own resources, exploring their potential, seeking and implementing solutions to their problems for achieving their goals., Voluntary action may not always be in conformity with the current policies and programmes of the State. Quite a number of such efforts are of the nature of social activism in which marginalized individuals and groups or even others organise themselves in protest and seek change in the existing social and economic structures.

## **Silent Features of Voluntary Organisations (VOs)**

Voluntary Organisations (VOs) are constituted by the initiative of persons with keen interest in social welfare and development, particularly of the poorer sections of the society. These persons, who have sense of commitment and dedication, are driven by their concern for social cause. Membership of VOs is purely voluntary. While some VOs have specific areas of interest, others have more universal objectives and goals. VOs are neither own set of rules and regulations and do not function under administrative control of the Government. Some do, however, look for grants-in-aid from Government for which they have to fulfill certain conditions as per rule. Most of the VOs are registered under the societies Registration Act of 1860 or similar Acts of the state Governments. Such registration makes them eligible to receive grants-in-aid from the Government.

The role of voluntary organizations in sustainable development of the nation is considered vital because VOs have first hand knowledge and experience of people's needs and available resources at the grass-roots level. VOs have closer contact with the people. VOs are flexible in nature in contrast to rigid bureaucratic system. Voluntary action is far more cost effective than an elaborate bureaucratic set-up.

The terms Voluntary Organisation (VO) and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) are invariably used interchangeably by the scholars and development planners, because both types of organizations are involved in activities outside of the Government sector. However, all NGOs are not voluntary in nature. VOs and NGOs differ in the matter of their origin and sponsorship, funding, autonomy, style of functioning and so on.

## **Growth of Non – Profit Sector in India**

Indian scenario is unique in an e collaboration between the state and VO. Centralizing tendencies in development signifies weak and anaemic local self-governing institutions. However, public policy has focused on peoples' involvement and participation in development. Development has resulted in geographical and social disparities but it has brought strong resentment and violent agrarian protests at times, Caste formation has not weakened in rural areas but clans homogeneity has appeared on specific economic issues, a received political legitimacy. Land reforms, Bhoodan and Gramdan, restoration alienated tribal land, adverse consequences of gigantic dams to tap water resources and reasonable wage rates for rural workers are just a few examples. NGOs have made positive contribution in the struggles of the marginalized economic groups and been catalysts in the struggles for development empowerment, making common cause with civil society associations. India's democracy sustains three mutually supporting bases of incremental and smooth development transition. Firstly, the constitutional mandate favours autonomous groups to operate and brings people in the mainstream of development. Secondly, the strategy of planned development allocates spaces for voluntary effort in furtherance of rural development. Finally, political parties support voluntary organisations undertaking development projects. This evolution is helped by three distinct but congruent streams of VOs/ NGOs in differing measures. The first stream is ideological or intellectual engaging in democratic discourse, the purpose being progressive incorporation of the weakest in the socio-economic development chain. The second stream is utilitarian or physical investment facilitating community solidarity in scaling up development effort. The third stream is philanthropic or spiritual necessary for arousing social conscience for sharing available resources and caring for the weak in society. Indian evolution mirrors all this. The spirit of the constitutional mandate lives in the Preamble of the Constitution and the duty of the state for incremental empowerment shows up in the Directive Principles of State Policy. The Supreme Court has fortified them in a number of public interest litigations (PIL) brought by VOs. It has expanded the scope of the right to life (Art21) and affirmed that it includes the right to live with dignity and all that goes with it. The Supreme Court (1984) has clarified that "it may not be possible to compel the state through e judicial process to make provision by statutory enactment or executive fiat for ensuring... basic essentials which go to make up a life of human dignity but where legislation is already enacted the state can surely be obliged to ensure observance of such legislation". The Directive

Principles (Article & 38) specifically enjoin economic associations to be promoted by the state “to minimize the inequalities in income, and endeavor to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only among individuals but also among groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations” (Article 43). State is expected to welcome “economic organisation” for promoting employment with a “living wage”, NGOs are mandated to seek legal status in laws made according to powers distributed between the Union and the State in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. Following from this premise, the First Five Year Plan stated that “the field of public cooperation becomes coterminous with that of national development.” It indicated that “voluntary organisations” should attempt to develop fields for constructive work and as they develop and can assume greater responsibilities, it should be possible to entrust to them “an increasing number of functions which have at present to be undertaken by Government agencies” since “the responsibilities of the administration tends to increase to an extent with which it may be difficult to cope.” Bharat Sewak Samaj (BSS) was formed as a platform and a networking organisation for this purpose. The Second Five Year Plan moved a step further to stress that, “cooperative form of organisation has advantages which neither the system of private enterprise nor that of state ownership can match” and “by harnessing voluntary effort and local manpower resources, physical targets in the Plan can be supplemented in many fields and even greatly exceeded.” It welcomed old Gandhian organisations such as the Sarva Sewa Sangh and Gandhi Smarak Nidhi as also new Gram Vikas Mandals and gramdan villages to boost voluntary work culture. The Third Plan proceeded to list more all India voluntary organisations “with links in different parts of the Country (that) can help to create a sense of oneness and common Outlook.” Forms of VOs were not material; the purpose and the direction were very clear during a period when the present generation of NGOs was yet to appear.

## **Voluntary Action For Sustainable Development**

**Pre-Independence Era:** Before 19th century, the traditional social institutions like family, kinship, caste and village community used to take care of the needs of the destitutes and the poor in the Voluntary Action for -Sustainable Development society. Charity and relief were organized for large numbers at the time of disasters like flood, famine, fire, earthquake and war. Such efforts were mostly by way of individual philanthropy arising from piety and religious act.

Voluntary action became more organized in the later part of 19th century and early 20th century and several religions founded societies to undertake social welfare activities. Christian missionaries, too, played an important role in organizing social services for the poor, though they often had also the latent objective of proselytisation.

Voluntary action of secular nature started getting momentum during the freedom movement due to the efforts of a number of national leaders and social reformers. Gandhi’s philosophy of social reconstruction ushered a new era of mass mobilization for socio economic upliftment of the masses. Social reform movements and role of national leaders generated renewed interest in the acute social and economic problems of India. As a result, large number of voluntary organizations were set-up in the country. These VOs were, often small in size, but fired with great zeal and zest of the voluntary workers. They worked in the areas of health and education for the masses in different parts of the country and compensated for the inadequate services provided by the Government. A large number of schools, colleges, charitable dispensaries and welfare institutions, which came up in the early decades of 20th century, were the result of voluntary action.

**Post-Independence Era:** Immediately after independence, India started planned efforts for socio-economic development of its people. The launching of the national programme of community development in rural India threw up new challenges. The approach in community development was aided self-help, as it was intended to be planned and executed mainly by the village community itself, with Government providing technical support through extension Service and giving some financial assistance to undertake the programme. Thus, the aim of community development was to mobilize the community resources through its own efforts. This approach was supposed to lead to the realization that if self-help and community participation could

become the mainstay of rural development, development would be self-sustaining and at a faster pace. Steps were, therefore, taken as a part of community development to promote voluntary action in rural areas, Punctional groups of women nd youth were organized in the form of Mahila Mandals and Yuvak Mandals respectively. During the First and Second Five Year Plans, people's involvement and contribution to development was also sought through projects. Voluntary Organisations were also involved and given Shram Dan (or voluntary contribution of labour) in development development projects. During the third and subsequent Five Year Plans, the significance of voluntary action, co-operative self-help and I community effort was greatly emphasized and promotion and support of voluntary organizations became the policy of the State. However, the detailing of the role of voluntary sector in the 1960s and 1970s was left, to be defined by the Ministeries/Departments. Since most of the Ministries were implementing their programmes in rural areas, they brouch out their own guidelines and patterns of assistance to the Vo, without considering holistic nature of development work. The resources of different ministries were not at all pooled for development work in a particular area even in allied or closely interlinked developmental activities. Recognising the importance of voluntary organizations in accelerating the process of social and economic development, the Seventh Plan placed a great deal of emphasis on peoples participation and voluntary action in rural development. The role of voluntary organizations has been defined as providing a basis for innovation with new approaches towards integrated development, ensuring feedback regarding impact of various programmes and securing the involvement of local communities, particularly those below the poverty line. The need for a cadre of trained animators and social organizers was recognized and a massive programme for imparting training to the identified persons was prepared with the help of established voluntary organisations. CAPART, an NGO was set up by Government of India in 1986 to promote voluntary action and people's participation, and facilitate the development and transfer of technology relevant to rural India. In the Eighth Plan, a greater emphasis was put on the role ofVOs in rural development. A nation wide network of NGOs was created. In order to facilitate this network, three schemes related to the creation/replication/multiplication development and consultancy were worked out by the Planning Commision. Efforts were made to evolve a system to provide single window services to VOs/NGOs working in the area of integrated development.

Similarly in the 9th Plan and onwards voluntary organisation were envisaged to play an enhanced role especially as facilitators and social animators to bring about greater awareness through advocacy. They were also supposed to help the poor to form Self Help Groups (SHGs) with the objective to improve their economics status through concerted action. In this way the PRIs, the voluntary organizations and the community would work in tandem to bring about greater development at the local level and consequent reduction in poverty levels.

On the basis of the development programmes listed for participation ofand I functions to be performed by the VOs envisaged in the various Five Year Plans:

- a) **Advocacy:** Advocating socially relevant causes such as improving the conditions of rural poor, abolition and rehabilitation of bonded labour/child labour, adoption of Small family norm, preventing environmental degradation, improving status of women, promoting literacy, etc.
- b) **Social Activism:** Advocating changes in structures and organizations through awareness, organization building and whenever necessary, challenging existing systems and institutions, and advocating radical action.
- c) **Relief:** Providing relief to victims of natural and man made calamities and disasters.
- d) **Development:** Implementation of wide range of development programmes.
- e) **Research, Evaluation and Documentation:** Identifying and analyzing developmental issues and evaluating development programmes thereby expanding the knowledge base on development strategies, delivery system and impact of the programmes essential for improving programme planning.

- f) **Training:** Providing professional skill to the functionaries at different levels and upgrading competence in different areas of responsibilities.

## Conclusion

With the ever increasing partnership of VOs in country's planned development, appropriate measures have been taken, from time to time, to promote and strengthen voluntary action. Still, there is lot to be done to improve the quality of functioning of VOs for their effective participation in the endeavour for sustainable development in the country.

Some of the suggestions and corrective measures to be taken up in this regard are as follow:

- The political leaders should promote voluntary action. Industrialists, professionals and the academic community should demonstrate their commitment in this regard. This will give them much greater insight into the development problems of the poor.
- There should be a radical change in the manner in which the bureaucracy deals with voluntary organizations. An extension oriented promotive style of functioning is very important to accomplish the objectives.

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