



Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Empowering the Disadvantaged Women

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Abstract:

NGOs are playing key role in providing community service voluntarily in the field of education, health, nutrition in social welfare and also in human development. To take up issues relating to human development, the Government has to support NGO's financially and consider their recommendations with regard to families and solutions of the particular burning issues in present society. This paper discusses the role of NGOs in human development activities.

Key Words: Empowerment, Disadvantaged, Non-governmental organizations, Profit Organizations.

Introduction:

The term NGOs is broad ambiguous. It covers a range of organizations with in civil society, from political action groups to sports clubs. NGOs can be regarded as civil society – the concept of NGO came into force from 1945 following the establishment of the United Nations Organizations. It is private sector, voluntary(usually non-profit and non-sectarian) organization that contributes poor participants in co-operation projects, education, training of other humanitarian, progressive or watch dog activities some of these accredited by the UN, and some collect donations or distribution among disadvantaged or distressed people.

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in India are primarily engaged in providing to the community voluntary services in the fields of education, health, nutrition, social, welfare and so on. NGOs are forms of social organizations found in

varying degrees, present in most areas of the world both in the past and present. Their main objective is to change the life pattern of masses, enable them to live in national mainstream and provide minimum needs with in their reach. NGOs have played a pioneering role in the field of Human Development and action research. Notwithstanding their limitations to undertake developmental programs nationwide, they may contribute their mite by undertaking special projects in selected pockets by implementing them with an element of information and flexibility which is the distinctive feature.

Objectives & Methodology

The study aims to study the NGOs' role in the development of empowering women and to debate some of the studies on role of NGO's in Women Empowerment. This research is mainly based on secondary data.



Earlier studies

Empowering women has been the central agenda for both government and NGO driven sectoral interventions. Empowerment of women as a goal of development projects and programs has gained wider acceptance since 1990s (Karl 1995). According to the Random House Dictionary, empowerment comes from the term empower which means "to give power or authority" and "to enable or permit". The key elements in empowerment are "enabling" and "providing power", and they reinforce each other. In practical terms however, empowerment would mean the process of challenging existing inequality, power relations, and of gaining greater control over sources of power by the under-privileged.

Most of the studies published on women's empowerment relate to micro-finance/micro-credit as an intervention. Micro-finance programmes for women have been promoted over the years not only as a strategy for poverty alleviation but also for women's empowerment (Mayoux 1996). There has been a paradigm shift from micro-finance and income generation to a more integrated approach to empower women. Representation of women in political decision making through the 73rd constitutional amendment Act of India (Government of India 1994) is one such approach that has a great potential to empower women. However, the question remains how far such a provision is really going to empower women in rural areas.

According to Schuler (1986) empowerment refers to the capacity to mobilize resources to produce beneficial social change. She identified three critical dimensions of the empowerment process such as, individual consciousness raising, collective consciousness development, and mobilization. The third dimension builds on the first two and it is where collective skills and resources are translated into political and legal action.

Korten (1986) defined empowerment as "control, specifically the control over and the ability to manage productive resources". He emphasized that the "control over an action should rest with the people who will bear its consequences".

Conger and Kanungo (1988) defined empowerment as a "process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information". They view empowerment as a "motivational construct", i.e., enabling and not simply providing.

Bhatt (1989) emphasizes on the strategies of "struggle and development" as the key to the empowerment process. According to her "struggle" involves fighting for one's rights and interests through trade union. "Development" is defined as building alternative economic structures such as co-operatives. Principal elements of strategy are organizing (bringing people together,



thinking through common problems, to agree on common issues, to decide on common action and to forge common ideologies) and waging wars against injustice (taking direct action, filing complaints, influencing policies).

Peggy (1989) looks at empowerment from the power angle, i.e., "personal power" (the strength within each person to act). She believes empowerment is "a spectrum of political activity ranging from acts of individual resistance to mass political mobilizations that challenge the basic power relations in our society". She distinguished "personal power" (or power for) from "role power" (or power over).

UNDP (1994) defined empowerment as a process which enables individuals or groups to change balances of power in social, economic and political relations in society.

According to Holcombe (1995) "participation is an essential ingredient of empowerment represents sharing control, the entitlement and the ability to participate, to influence decisions, as on the allocation of resources".

According to Beteille (1999), much of the literature on empowerment is context driven and is about radical social transformation, oppressed-oppressor relationship, re-distribution of power and social change. The critical question according to him is linked with the nature of social transformation and its measurability. Empowerment could be invoked in the context of human rights, basic needs, economic security, capacity building, skill formation, conditions of

dignified social existence. Implicit in the idea of empowerment is a certain theory of social change from hierarchical to an egalitarian and democratic type of society.

Overholt et al. (1985) defined empowerment as access to and control over resources and benefits in the context of women. The issue of empowerment of women has been increasingly a part of the gender and development discourse over the past decade. Moser (1989) proposes the "empowerment approach" available to gender planners. The focus on empowerment has been strengthened with the understanding of the distinction between practical and strategic gender interests (Molyneux 1985; Moser 1989). In order to address strategic issues there is a need to address power dynamics of gender, i.e., how power interacts with other power, both in relations between women and men, and between different women.

Edna and Bose (1990) studied empowerment from the angle of "gender decolonization", that calls for "profound reformulations and restructuring of the power relations between women and men at the domestic and societal levels, free of all hierarchies".

Keller and Mbwewe (1991) defined empowerment with a development focus. According to them empowerment is "a process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging



and eliminating their own subordination”.

The Indian women’s movement aims at economic development of women in such a way that there is a self-conscious attempt to create organizational forms in which women become empowered both psychologically and socially (Leslie 1992). In other words, attributes such as participation in decision making and in implementation of decisions; raising consciousness about the situation of women in the family and community; creating mutual interdependence and group solidarity; developing skills, self confidence, and assertiveness are all integral to the process of empowerment.

UNICEF (1993) provides a women’s empowerment framework, which argues that women’s development can be viewed in terms of five levels of equality, of which empowerment is an essential element at each level. The levels are welfare, access, conscientisation, participation and control. According to UNICEF, such a framework would be useful to determine the stage at which the project or programme is operating.

Helen (1993) cites the example of a two pronged strategy for empowering women. They are “alternative employment (carpentry, pottery, etc.) and alternative power structures at the local level achieved through building and strengthening women’s groups.”. In her study of female tree plantation workers of Sri Lanka, Samar Singhe (1993) reveals that the “development strategies which simply increase women’s access to

resources do not necessarily ensure their empowerment”. Women’s control of resources is necessary for their empowerment.

From their research in Bangladesh, Schuler and Hashemi (1993) hypothesized that “the process of empowerment should weaken the systemic basis of women’s subordination”.

They identified six hierarchy of domains in which women have traditionally been subordinated such as sense of self and vision of a future, mobility and visibility, economic security, status of decision-making power within the household, ability to interact effectively in the public sphere, and participation in non-family groups.

Batliwala (1994) defined empowerment as “the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control, over the sources of power”. According to her women’s empowerment is seen as ‘the process and the result of the process’ of (a) challenging the ideology of male domination and women’s subordination; (b) enabling women to gain equal access to and control over resources (material, human, intellectual); and (c) transforming the institutions (family, education, religion, media and so on) and structures (legal, political, economic and social) through which the ideology and practice of subordination is reinforced and reproduced.

Mahmud and Johnsten (1994) argue that empowerment leads to “increased



autonomy and decision making power" and provides women with "an alternative power base that is independent of the domination of men".

Karl (1995) views that political participation is central to the empowerment process. According to her, empowerment involves the interplay of four interrelated and mutually reinforcing components: collective awareness building, capacity building and skills development, participation and greater control and decision-making power, and action to bring about greater gender equality.

Carr et al. (1996) in their research on women's economic empowerment in South Asia came up with a definition of empowerment in which the focus was on "economic change/material gain plus increased bargaining power and/or structural change which enables women to secure economic gains on an on-going and sustained basis".

Rao (1996) in her study of women in the informal sector has described the "process of empowerment involving not just an improvement in physical and social conditions, but also equal participation in decision making processes, control over resources and mechanisms for sustaining these gains". In other words both the practical and strategic needs of women need to be addressed in the process of empowerment.

A summary of relevant studies on empowerment is presented in a review of all these definitions suggest that

empowerment has certain key elements. They are: power, autonomy and self-reliance, entitlement, participation and process of building awareness and capacity. All these elements are applicable at the individual and group level to understand the process of empowerment.

The study indicates that the NGOs are functioning effectively in providing benefits to Women with in their reach.

Importance of NGOs in the present Era

Over six and half decades of planned approach and massive financial outflow could not provide needful atmosphere to eradicate poverty. There has also been quite a concern for people's participation, natural resource management, gender equity and encourage wage employment. In fact, right to employment has also been made in the recent past in India. However, effective results of programmes are not mere combination of sound strategy and sound implementation process. It has many a connotation of deal and responsible roles played by various institutions like community development functionaries, community representatives, NGOs personnel, the target population itself and capacity building of both stakeholders and so on. The sustainable development can be achieved only when the development taken place in the areas by improving the socio-economic conditions of the poor. To achieve this goal, implementation of developmental programmes and schemes in the areas is very much essential.

**NGOs Role:**

Many NGOs are implementing the programmes for the development of the poor people. In recent years, development agencies, decision makers, and officials increasingly laud the role of NGOs in community participation for any development programmes particularly in the context of empowerment. Indeed, community participation has to be termed as an effective intervention with a positive impact on Socio-Economic improvement of people.

Empowerment of Women development:

Empowering women contributes to social development, economic progress in any country whether developed or underdeveloped. Women development in National development is crucial. Empowering women is not for meeting their needs but also meeting holistic social development. Empowerment is synonymous with the achievement of equality and equal mindedness in society. Gender bias is in social, educational, economic and political fields still manifest in many civilized societies of the World. Empowering women can serve as an essential input in development. Though Government of India initiated number of welfare programs for the enhancement of quality of life of women such as National Policy for Women, 2001, National Mission for Empowering of Women, 2011 etc but in practice results are not expected. According to one estimate the number of N.G.O's in the country touches 30.000. .G.O's are nearer to society with regard to the effective

welfare activity. The programs initiated by voluntary bodies with specific planning and changing them according to the people's interest and desires.

NGOs and its role in the development of disadvantaged Women:

Sustainable social development is the most important factor and vital aspect of any governmental developmental interventions. Success of NGO's in this direction is mainly because of their flexibility, autonomy and task oriented approach in reaching individuals at the grass root level of development of life skills enabling to sustain on their own irrespective of the educational levels and social strata both economic and social. NGOs are concentrating in implementing the programmes for the development of the poor. Off late, decision makers, and officials of development agencies, increasingly appreciate the role of NGOs in community participation for development programs towards empowerment. The N.G.O's can act as a catalyst between Government welfare departments and women. This paper aims to present the role of NGOs for the development of disadvantaged women.

In responding to the contemporary importance in the context of development schemes, there is an emerging need to understand various methods used and adopted by the NGOs in the process of community participation for the promotion of developmental programs. Also, it needs to be studied in detail to understand the real impact on socio economic development of the Women. This kind of study will be helpful



to the planners and implementing agencies for the formation of the plans and programs for the development of the disadvantaged Women. The results and the views obtained from the study will also helpful to the planners, government agencies, voluntary organizations and social activities to frame and follow the strategies in their future endeavour.

NGOs can provide grass root services and dynamism in women groups in micro-level where the Government and other agencies find problem in accessing to reach neglected women groups.

Conclusion:

The NGOs act as a catalyst between government and developmental activities to the beneficiaries. N.G.O's as a cohesive alternative force in addressing the needs of population in promoting a more responsive and sustained approach to development strategies, in micro-level is being realized by the successive Governments. Development experience in the Third World countries has observed the limitations of the Governments. Efforts to promote effective Rural Development at local level same in the case women empowerment. The trend is common in worldwide fiscal crisis, the need for increased human resource development within the Government bodies and also urgency to improve the economic livelihood, education, health, political participation, availing welfare programs and nutritional status and overall being of Women.

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