

Unit 2: Types, Characteristics and Strengths and Weaknesses of NGOs

The term, "non-governmental organization" or NGO, came into use in 1945 because of the need for the UN to differentiate in its Charter between participation rights for intergovernmental specialized agencies and those for international private organizations. At the UN, virtually all types of private bodies can be recognized as NGOs. They only have to be independent from government control, not seeking to challenge governments either as a political party or by a narrow focus on human rights, non-profit-making and non-criminal. As of 2003, there were reportedly over 20,000 NGOs active in Iran. The majority of these organizations are charity organizations, and thus would not fall under the category of development-oriented NGOs. In this document the term NGO is primarily used for organizations other than charitable organizations.

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is a non-profit, citizen based group that functions independently of government. NGOs, sometimes called civil societies, are organized on community, national and international levels to serve specific social or political purposes, and are cooperative, rather than commercial, in nature. While the term "NGO" has various interpretations, it is generally accepted to include private organizations that operate without government control and that are non-profit and non-criminal. Other definitions further clarify NGOs as associations that are non-religious and non-military.

The World Bank defines NGOs as "Private organisations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development." In wider usage, the term, „NGO“ can be applied to any non-profit organisation which is independent from government. NGOs are typically value based organisations which depend, in whole or in part, on donations and voluntary service. The United Nations describes an NGO as: Any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to governments, monitor policies and encourage political participation at the community level. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements. In simple terms, NGOs can be defined as "self-governing, private, not-for-profit organizations that are geared to improving the quality of life for disadvantaged people" (Vakil, 1997).

NGO is an organisation that is flexible and democratic in its organisation and attempts to serve the people without profit for itself. The terminology of an NGO varies from country to country. It refers mainly to private organisation that pursues activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of vulnerable groups, protects the environment, provides basic social services or concentrates on community development.

In South Asian countries, the realisation of development goals, such as alleviation of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, inequality, ignorance, environmental degradation and strengthening of national integration, depend upon the active participation of people. Here lies the importance of NGO as an organisation of the "members of the community" that is feasible and democratic in its functioning. It is an organisation committed to the root causes of problems trying to better the quality of life, especially for the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised in urban and rural areas, without profit for itself. NGOs take to undertake developmental tasks on their own and thereby make contribution to government programmes and development planning. In other words, it can be stated that the NGO has emerged as an important instrument of decentralisation and de-bureaucratisation. The World Bank's definition of an NGO gives the broadest view on the IIIrd voluntary sector (non-governmental organisation) (visà-vis the Ist that is, the Public

Sector and the Private Sector). “They include many groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of government and that have primarily humanitarian or cooperative rather than commercial objectives. They are private agencies in industrial countries that support international development; indigenous groups organised regionally or nationally and member-groups in villages. NGOs include charitable and religious associations that mobilise private funds for development, distribute food and family planning services and promote community organisation. They also include independent cooperatives, community associations, water-user societies, women’s groups and pastoral associations. Citizen Groups that raise awareness and influence policy are also NGOs”.

NGOs can serve as watch dogs of government programmes, and also serve as policy advocates, applying their grass root knowledge of development to government priorities and programmes. Such a perspective assumes that indigenous NGOs can influence government behaviour and priorities.

Characteristics of NGOs:

- ☐ An NGO is a non-profit making, voluntary, service-oriented, development oriented organization, either for the benefit of members (a grassroots organization) or of other members of the population (an agency).
- ☐ It is an organization of private individuals who believe in certain basic social principles and who structure their activities to bring about development to communities they are servicing.
- ☐ It is a social development organization assisting in empowerment of people.
- ☐ An organization or group of people working independent of any external control with specific objectives and aims to fulfil tasks that are oriented to bring about desirable change in a given community or areas or situation.
- ☐ An independent, democratic, non-sectarian people’s organization working for the empowerment of economic and/or socially marginalized groups.
- ☐ An organization not affiliated to political parties, generally engaged in working for aid, development and welfare of the community.
- ☐ An organization committed to the root causes of the problems trying to better the quality of life especially for the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized in urban and rural areas.
- ☐ Organizations established by and for the community with or without little intervention from the government; they are not only a charity organization, but work on socio- economic and cultural activities.

Typology of NGOs

Two broad groups of NGOs are identified by the World Bank:

- _ Operational NGOs, which focus on development projects.
- _ Operational NGOs, which are organized to promote particular causes.

NGOs are identified and classified on the basis of their work, according to the level at which they operate, and according to the approach, which they undertake.

(I) On the basis of their work

(a) Service Oriented NGOs provide services in the areas of health, education, family planning etc. The programme is designed by the NGOs and people are expected to participate in its implementation.

(b) Charity Oriented NGOs are directed towards meeting the needs of the poor or vulnerable society such as distribution of clothes, food or medicine; provision of temporary shelter, housing, school, etc. This type of NGOs also undertakes relief activities during disasters.

(c) Empowerment oriented NGOs aim to develop a clear understanding among the underprivileged sections of society about the socio-economic or political factors affecting their development, and to strengthen their awareness of their own potential power. Here, NGOs act as facilitators and encourage maximum involvement of the local people.

(d) Participation oriented NGOs often have a participatory orientation such as cooperatives. In the community development project, participation begins with the need definition and continues to be the part of planning and implementation stages.

(II) NGOs: On the basis of level of operation

(a) Community based organisations include women's organisations, religious or educational organisations.

(b) City level organisations such as Chambers of Commerce and Industry, ethnic or educational groups remain involved in specific purpose and help the poor.

(c) National level NGOs, for example the Red Cross, assist local branches.

(d) International level NGOs, like OXFAM and CARE, are involved in funding local NGOs to implementing the projects themselves.

NGOs play an important role in development. Their crucial role in supporting and encouraging, and if required, in criticising and pressurising the government for human rights and justice, is noteworthy in development planning.

15.3 ROLE OF NGOS

NGOs are expected to play an important role in all conceivable aspects of development as a planner and implementer of development programmes; mobiliser of local resources and initiatives; catalyst, enabler and innovator; builder of self-reliant sustainable society; mediator of people and government; facilitator, supporter and partner of government programmes; agent of demystify technology and disseminate information; factor of transformation, conscientisation and improvement of the poor; and facilitator of development education, training and technical assistance.

The strength of NGOs are mentioned below:

Supporting Government plans/projects

NGOs help in selecting the most suitable place for innovative projects and specify the weaknesses and strengths. In addition, suggest the ways to overcome the shortcomings that government may face at the time of implementation. NGOs act more quickly than the bureaucracy in planning and implementation of government programmes. They support and demonstrate the pilot projects very effectively and facilitate clear communication between citizens and the government.

Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in Development Planning Facilitating Communication

At the field level, NGOs have the first hand feel of the community response to the existing programmes and basic needs of the people. They use interpersonal methods of communication and win the confidence of the people (community). The importance of this role is that the NGOs communicate with the government at the policy making level and provide information about the lives, attitudes, culture and capabilities of people in their area. They facilitate communication at both levels, upward (from citizens to the government) and downwards (from government to citizens). In this context, upward communication includes informing the government about the requirements, thinking, and ability of local people. They provide much needed feedback for modifying or changing the existing programmes and formulating new policies and programmes, as per the needs of local people. However, communication downward reflects informing people (local) about the government plans, functions and resources. NGOs organise themselves to work in more global strategic ways and also share

information and develop networking between other organisations involved in the similar work for development.

Mobilising Local Resources and Initiatives

NGOs play a crucial role in development especially in uplifting the backward society. They develop land, building material supply centres and community based economic enterprises, construct houses and provide infrastructure to the community. They also operate and maintain infrastructure, such as drinking water supply, public toilets and solid waste collection services. In certain cases, NGOs become spokespersons for the poor or underprivileged sections of the society.

Advocacy for and with the underprivileged

They prepare and empower the poor to overcome psychological inhibitions and to raise the voice against atrocities, which is basically an advocacy role. NGOs become ombudsman for the affected people and attempt to influence the government policy and programmes on behalf of the underprivileged sections (women, children or any other). They act through various means ranging from demonstration on formulation of government plans and policy to publicising research results or case of the affected citizens for changes in development policy and practice. They also help the government in monitoring and evaluation of government programmes.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The NGOs conduct innovative research and activities in the field of planning and implementation of development programmes, which is documented and shared with the government and citizens. Their efforts in monitoring and sharing of results contribute in the effective functioning of bureaucracy and political leadership, and encourage active people's participation in development process. In such manner, they keep a check on administrative functions. For monitoring and evaluation, some NGOs provide technical assistance and training also.

Facilitating Development Education, Training and Technical Assistance

They develop programmes to provide technical assistance and enhancing training capacity with the help of experts. These organisations provide a training ground for volunteers and other NGOs. Then, the trained NGOs provide their services to assist the government and other community-based organisations. It was greatly needed due to sudden spurt in the welfare and development initiatives by the Government with the help of NGOs.

NGOs: Advantages and Disadvantages/Strengths & Weaknesses

Advantages

- They have the ability to experiment freely with innovative approaches and, if necessary, to take risks.
- They are flexible in adapting to local situations and responding to local needs and therefore able to develop integrated projects, as well as sectoral projects.
- They enjoy good rapport with people and can render micro-assistance to very poor people as they can identify those who are most in need and tailor assistance to their needs.
- They have the ability to communicate at all levels, from the neighbourhood to the top levels of government.
- They are able to recruit both experts and highly motivated staff with fewer restrictions than the government.

Disadvantages

- Paternalistic attitudes restrict the degree of participation in programme/project design.
- Restricted/constrained ways of approach to a problem or area.

- Reduced replicability of an idea, due to non-representativeness of the project or selected area, relatively small project coverage, dependence on outside financial resources, etc.
- "Territorial possessiveness" of an area or project reduces cooperation between agencies, seen as threatening or competitive.

Unit 2 **Types & Characteristics of NGOs**

MDC:01T
NGO & ITS OPERATIONS

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Introduction

NGOs can be defined as “self-governing, private, not-for-profit organizations that are geared to improving the quality of life for disadvantaged people” (Vakil, 1997).



TYPES

NGOS

Orientation

- Charitable Orientation
- Service Orientation
- Participatory Orientation
- Empowering Orientation

Co-operation

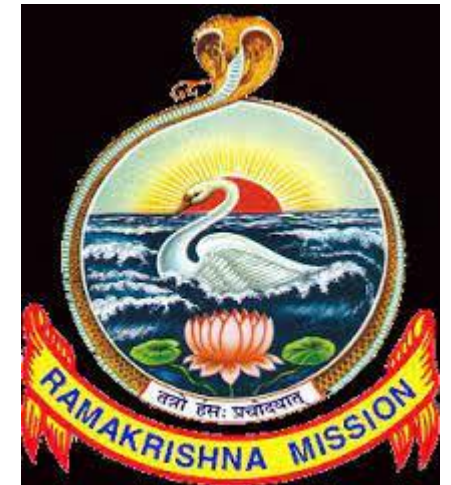
- Community-based organization
- City-wide organization
- National NGO
- International NGO

Activities

- Operational NGOs
- Campaigning NGO
- Advocacy NGOs

CHARITABLE NGOs

- ❖ involves a top-down paternalistic effort with little participation by the "beneficiaries".
- ❖ includes NGOs with activities directed toward meeting the needs of the poor: distribution of food, clothing or medicine etc.
- ❖ may also undertake relief activities during a natural or man-made disaster.



Service NGOs

- ✓ includes NGOs with activities such as the provision of health, family planning or education services
- ✓ the programme is designed by the NGO
- ✓ people are expected to participate in its implementation and in receiving the service.

Fighting isolation,
poverty, neglect

HelpAge India

unicef 



CHILD RIGHTS AND YOU

www.cry.org

Community Based Organizations

- arise out of people's own initiatives
- to resolve specific problems or provide local representation in regional government.
- programme objectives range from the improvement of local socio-economic conditions to citizen education and involvement in policy-related advocacy efforts
- serve as bridges between national- and local-level efforts.



International NGOs

International NGOs range from secular agencies such as SOS Children's Villages, OXFAM, CARE, Ford Foundation, and Rockefeller Foundation to religiously motivated groups.

They can be responsible for funding local NGOs, institutions and projects and implementing projects.



Operational NGOs

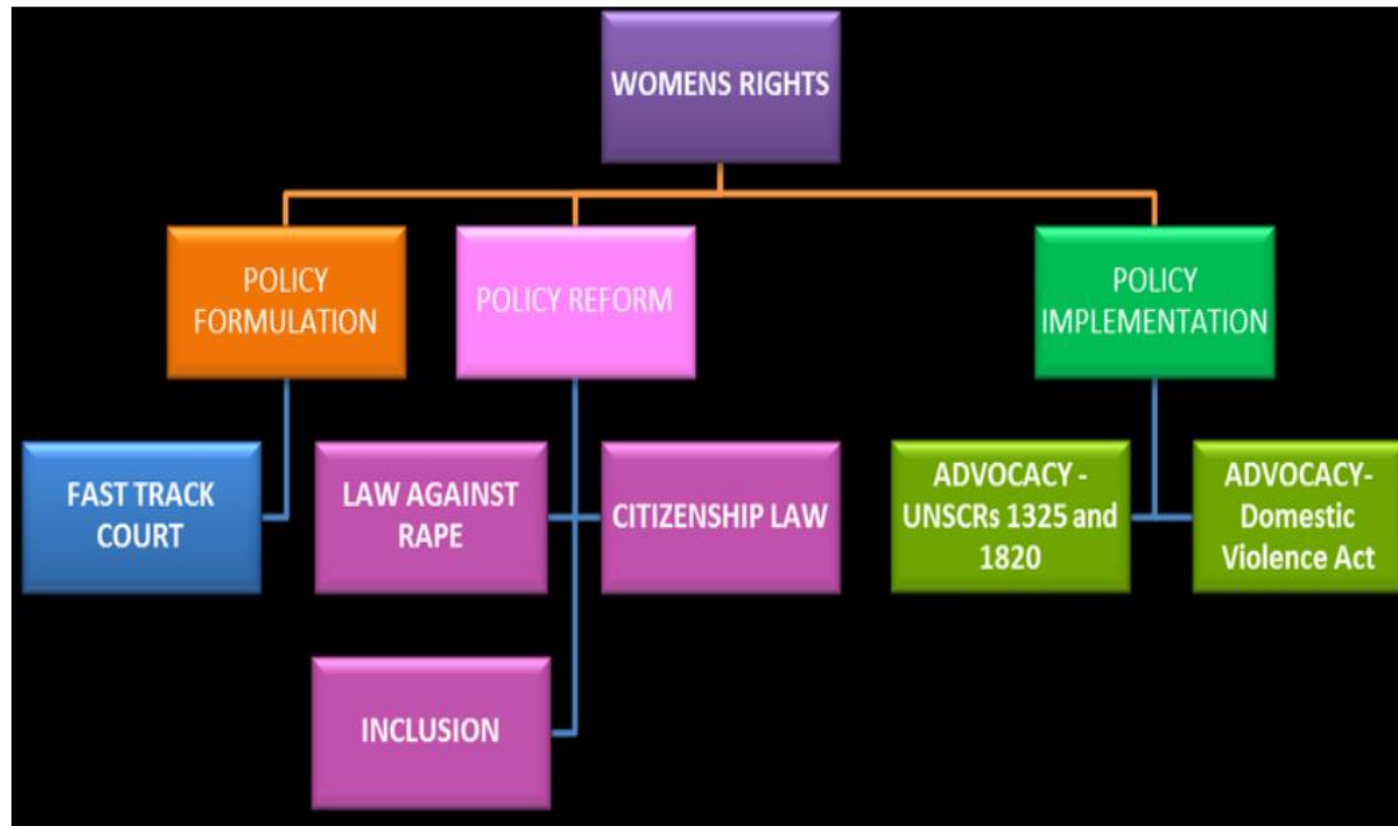
- Main purpose is to design and implement the development-related projects.
- Has to mobilize resources, in the form of financial donations, materials or volunteer labor, in order to sustain their projects and programs.
- Finance obtained from grants or contracts, require time and expertise spent on planning, budgeting, accounting, and reporting.
- Fund-raising events require skills in advertising, media relations, and motivating supporters.
- Thus, operational need to possess an efficient headquarters bureaucracy, in addition to the operational staff in the field.

Advocacy NGOs

- ❖ provide support to groups that are unable to speak for themselves.
- ❖ Do not necessarily directly provide aid, but work with governments, civil society organizations with specific focus on ensuring government accountability
- ❖ E.g., Wikileaks, makes government documents public to inform about privacy infringements by governments



Advocacy NGOs

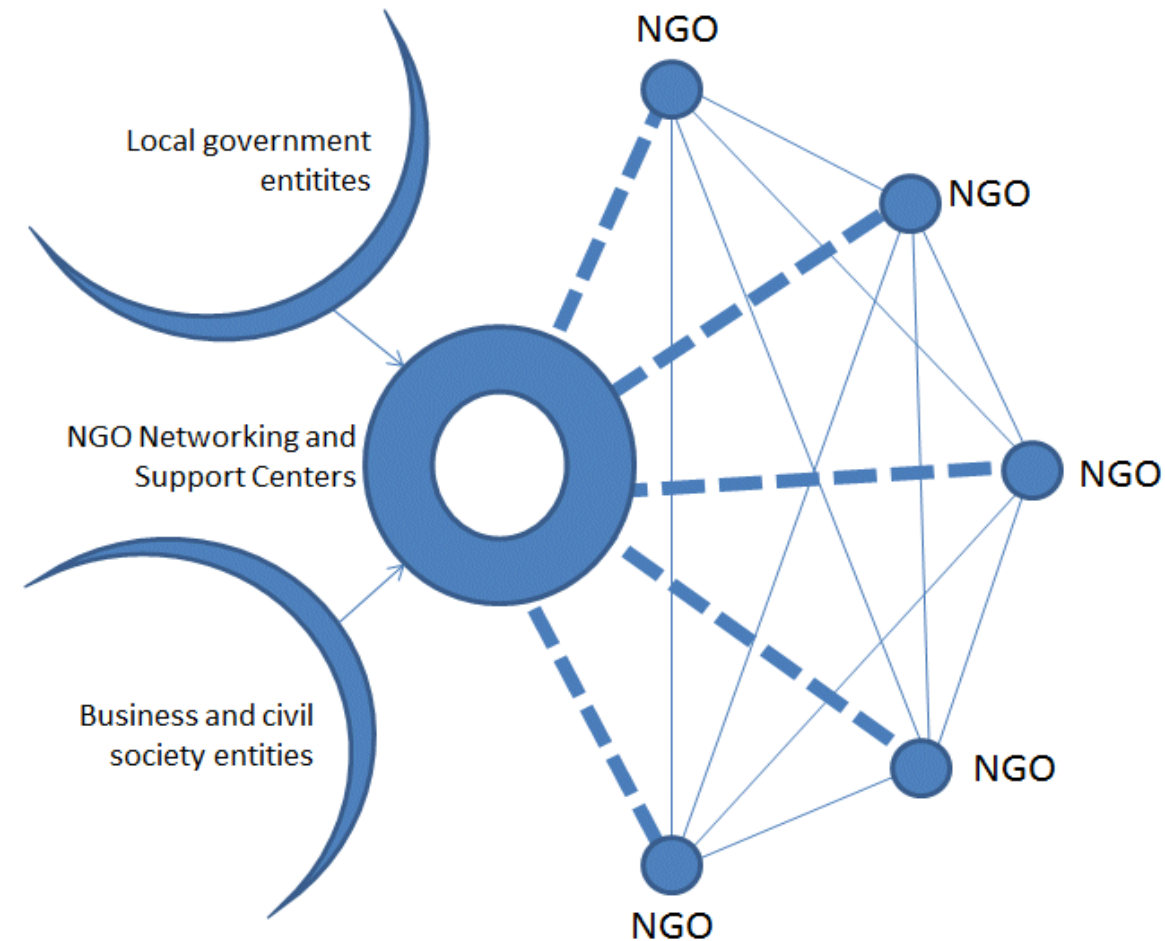


Policy Advocacy of the NGOs working on women's rights

Networking NGOs

Networking activities support the NGO's own activities, and facilitates linkages with other organizations in other sectors, including government agencies.

Networking also assists NGOs in administrative, financial and legal problems they may have.



Characteristics of NGOs

- **Non-profit Nature:** not a commercial organization but a social organization, set up to achieve some social cause.
- **Voluntary Participation:** participation is based on willingness and not compulsion
- **Private Initiative:** an organization of private individuals who believe in certain basic social principles who want to bring about development to communities they are servicing.
- **Independence & Autonomy:** An independent, democratic, non-sectarian people's organization working for the empowerment of economic and/or socially marginalized groups.
- **Social Objectives:** It is a social development organization assisting in empowerment of people.

Strength & Weaknesses of NGOs

- § They have the ability to experiment freely with innovative approaches and, if necessary, to take risks.
- § They are flexible in adapting to local situations and responding to local needs and therefore able to develop integrated projects, as well as sectoral projects.
- § They enjoy good rapport with people and can render micro-assistance to very poor people as they can identify those who are most in need and tailor assistance to their needs.
- § They have the ability to communicate at all levels, from the neighbourhood to the top levels of government.
- § They are able to recruit both experts and highly motivated staff with fewer restrictions than the government.

Challenges & Limitations

- Lack of Funds
- Lack of Strategic planning
- Absence of Networking
- Lack of maintenance
- Paternalistic attitudes
- Restricted/constrained ways of approach to a problem or area.
- Reduced replicability of an idea
- "Territorial possessiveness" of an area or project reduces cooperation between agencies, seen as threatening or competitive.