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ROLE OF NGO’S IN PROTECTING ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

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Introduction

The past five decades have witnessed the difficult problems encountered in providing health care services to our poor people, the majority of who live in more than half-a-million villages and in the proliferating slums of our cities. Charitable and voluntary organizations since time immemorial have been contributing significantly towards the health care of the community. With the passage of time, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have equipped themselves adequately and come up enthusiastically in providing services like relief to the blind, the disabled and disadvantaged and helping the government in mother and child health care, including family planning programmes. As a result, all concerned have realized the potential of NGOs and their considerable merit compared to the public/private health sectors because of their staff’s motivation, dedication and sympathy for the deprived sections of our society and their personalized approach towards the solution of problems.

The National Population Policy (NPP) 2000 and National Health Policy (NHP) 2002, states that there should be greater involvement of NGOs in the implementation of different health and family welfare programmes in the country. In recognition of the crucial role played by them, Government of India started granting financial aids to NGOs for various schemes. The important role played by the various national and regional level NGOs is briefly documented in the ‘Encyclopaedia of Social Work in India – 1968’, where special mention has been made of such organizations like All India Blind Relief Society, Family Planning Association of India (FPAI), Indian Medical Association, Indian Red Cross Society, National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, Sent Parmanand Blind Relief Mission, T.B. Association of India, Bombay Mothers and Children Welfare Society; to name a few. Greater roles for the NGOs was seen to ensure Health for All through the primary health care approach. Their role was also considered as most crucial to translate the concept of ‘People’s Health in People’s Hands’ into action.

Objectives of NGO’s

General Objectives

- To describe and discuss the common characteristics of health system functioning in the given socio-economic, socio-cultural, political and ecological settings

- To highlight and delineate crucial factors responsible for the health sector reforms and to undertake, as the most challenging endeavour, effective and efficient health management and quality health care service provisions in the community
- The fundamental objective is to act as a catalyst in bringing about local initiative and community participation in overall improvement in quality of life.

Civic and Environmental Objective

This aims at developing civic and environmental consciousness among the public. Organisation of civic amenities and sanitary facilities on a self-help basis, enactment of suitable legislation for the betterment of civic standards, environmental protection is some means by which a cleaner and healthier environment can be achieved.

Service Objective

This was formulated to provide service to all segments of the society like the poor, women, children and youth through various schemes like drug and alcohol addiction programmers, organisation of rallies against child labour, medical camps, blood donation camps, etc. This also includes the protection and preservation of nature, wildlife, historical and heritage monuments.

Activities Undertaken by NGO's

Solid waste management

This includes both municipal solid waste and bio-medical wastes. Civic Exnoras play a major role in assisting the Municipal Corporation in the collection of garbage from individual households and the deposition of the same in secondary collection points by appointing street beautifiers in the concerned areas. With its experience over the years, Exnoras has realised that this was merely a relocation of waste rather than management of solid wastes.

Zero waste management

NGO's have now started focusing its efforts on the concept of [Zero Waste Management](#), by which practically all wastes can be converted into wealth through recycling. Exnora is also addressing the problem of handling and disposal of bio-medical wastes, and is trying to find a solution beneficial to all concerned.

Citizens' Waterways Monitoring Programme (WAMP)

This programme was started with the sole purpose of developing clean and pollution free waterways in cities and for creating a healthy living environment for all city dwellers. WAMP was formed in 1991, as a joint programme with several NGOs and individuals dedicated to the cause of developing clean waterways in the city. The WAMP objectives are:

1. To stop pollution of waterways
2. To maintain the waterways of the city cleanly

A series of meetings were conducted with various governmental agencies, which has resulted in the drafting of a detailed action plan. If the Government and the public implement the plan properly this will result in achievement of clean waterways.

Community Sanitation Improvement Projects

Inadequate sanitation facilities are a major problem to human health, especially so in the neglected low-income areas and slum settlements. NGO's concept of self-help is best displayed by the community sanitation improvement projects in these areas. Two of the most successful projects have been at the at Narikkurava (Gypsy) Colony in Indira Nagar, Chennai and at Giriappa Road in T. Nagar, Chennai.

STudent Environment Programme (STEP)

This program has a dual role - of creating environmental awareness amongst the student community and to develop each child's mind resources through various personality development programs. A teachers' manual and an activity book that have been brought out as a part of this program are designed in the 'do-and learn' format and provide an easy understanding of the problems faced by us and at the same time kindles the mind to find remedial measures.

Tree Planting

The Civic Exnoras in the city have been instrumental in planting trees for the purpose of beautification of roads, parks, playgrounds, burial grounds, etc., with the larger perspective of environmental protection.

Vegetable Roof Gardening

With agricultural land shrinking rapidly and deforestation rates rocketing, urban agriculture is the need of the hour. Exnora has been propagating and training youth in setting up and maintaining vegetable roof gardens in households of Tamil Nadu. The organisation is closely working with the Tamil Nadu Horticulture and Agriculture Departments on this project.

Rain Harvesting

NGO's have propagated the system of rain harvesting in several residential areas in the city with the aim of exploiting one or another important water source, viz., and rainwater. Many cities suffer from perennial water problems every summer and therefore it is important that all avenues of water source be tapped. By using simple and inexpensive techniques the NGO (Exnora) has arrived at a method to conserve a large part of the 110 cms of rain that we receive annually. A Water Conservation Committee constituted in Chennai by Metro Water Supply and Sewerage Board Exnora is a core member.

AIDS Awareness

NGOs are working diligently to educate the public about the prevention of AIDS and provide support and counseling for HIV-infected persons. The additional dangers of placing value judgments on how individuals became HIV-positive is one of the toughest issues facing NGOs that work with people who are HIV positive. One key in the prevention of AIDS is to eliminate negative images of HIV-infected persons as projected by the media. NGOs should

work toward educating the public to respect the dignity of all persons living with HIV, regardless of how they became infected.

Pollution Control

The task of pollution control in India is complex due to the large number of heavy, large and small-scale industries involved. Further, the rise in the number of vehicles coupled with poverty and the large population puts tremendous pollution pressure on air, water and land. A comprehensive approach to pollution control is being undertaken based on the following principles:

1. Prevent pollution at source.
2. Encourage, develop and apply the best available practicable technical solution
3. Ensure that polluter pays for pollution and control arrangements.
4. Focus on protection of heavily polluted areas and river stretches.
5. Involve the NGO's in educating the public about pollution control measures to be taken.

Noise Pollution

Noise pollution has become a major problem in the metropolitan cities and in other urban areas. With a view to regulate and control noise producing and generating sources, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has notified the *Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000* under the Environment (Protection) Act 1986, for prevention and control of noise pollution in the country.

Air Pollution

The sources of Air Pollution are industries like thermal power plants, sugar mills, distilleries, paper mills etc. Vehicular emissions are another source of air pollution. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 has classified the industries as red, orange and green depending on the degree of pollution caused by them. It further specifies the various pollution control measures to be adopted by these industries.

Water Pollution

The rivers of India are part of its cultural heritage. Over the years, the quality of the water has deteriorated due to the uncontrolled release of effluents by industries into the rivers. A **National River Conservation Plan** (NRCP), which includes second phase of GAP also, has been formulated which aims to control the pollution of grossly polluted rivers of the country. A National River Conservation Authority has been setup to review the implementation of the programmes related to cleaning of rivers. The NRCP covers 141 towns located along 22 interstate rivers in 14 states. The total cost of the scheme is Rs.2013 crores. A **National Lake Conservation Plan** envisaging the conservation of lakes by prevention of pollution by

catchments area treatment, desalting, weed control, based on the integrated water shed development approach, is under implementation.

NGO's Role in Pollution Control

The success of India's environmental programmes depends greatly on the awareness and consciousness of the people. A National Environmental Awareness Campaign has been launched to sensitise people to the environmental problems through audio-visual programmes, seminars, symposia, training programmes etc. **Paryavaran Vahinis** have been constituted in 184 districts involving the local people to play an active role in preventing poaching, deforestation and environmental pollution. **4000 NGOs** have been given financial assistance for creating environmental awareness. An **Environmental Information System (ENVIS) network** has been setup to disseminate information on environmental issues. India has a large network of NGO's, which are involved in spreading the message of sustainable development to the public.

Institutions Involved in Environmental Activities

Environmental Training Institute

An integrated effort is required in environmental planning management and action. Interdisciplinary understanding, cooperation and coordination and increased public participation and support are important components in the process towards sustainable development. To move towards Sustainable Development, DANIDA has prepared a project document for establishing "Environmental Training Institute" in Tamil Nadu. A side letter was signed between Government of India, Ministry of Finance and the Kingdom of Denmark with a Danish grant of DKR 9.961 million. Government of Tamil Nadu has also given concurrence for setting up the Environmental Training Institute in Tamil Nadu with DANIDA assistance. Accordingly, the Environmental Training Institute was established in the year 1994. ETI is a common platform that offers training to pollution control board staff, industries, the urban sector as well as NGOs.

Over the years the institute has conducted 124 Technical programmes, involving over 1965 participants and 36 special Environmental awareness programmes have been conducted for NGOs, Govt. Officials, Professionals, Universities and Educational Institutions. There are many similar Environmental Training Institutes that have been established by the government in various states.

TATA RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) has launched a major project, the first phase of which is nearing completion. This project called "**Growth with Resource Enhancement of Environment and Nature (GREEN India 2047)**" has rigorously estimated the reduction in India's key natural resources during the period 1947-97, and has computed economic values of consequent losses, which in some cases are alarmingly high. On the basis of past experience and a careful analysis of the cost behind the degradation that has taken place in the past, strategies for the future have been developed, whereby a fresh and creative approach can be taken in the next 50 years.

In the case of indoor air pollution, the major reason lies in the fact that the poorest sections of society are still dependent on low-grade biomass energy resources. As a result, women and children in particular are exposed to long hours of harmful emissions, which lead to

a number of health problems including heart disease, pregnancy related problems and various upper respiratory diseases. The solution to such a problem will be larger production of biomass for increasing the availability of good quality fuel wood, and the development and use of superior technologies in its conversion and end-use.

The use of modern biotechnology techniques, for instance, provides the only means to enhance production of biomass under soil and climatic conditions that have traditionally not been conducive to high growth. Concurrently, efforts to produce methane or other gases from organic matter, such that they can lead to clean combustion for cooking purposes poses not only a major scientific opportunity, but also a challenge in a managerial and organizational sense. The highest level of scientific expertise should be directed to the solution of this problem. Of course, the benefits of innovative solutions in this area would be confined not to India only, but would be of direct relevance to several other developing countries where inferior biomass fuels are used on a significant scale.

Corporate Social Responsibility

In addition to complying with regulatory standards and norms, industries have to adopt clean technologies and bring about implementation in management practices. This measure has been agreed upon on the understanding that a bank guarantee would be furnished by the concerned units indicating the commitment to the action plan. However, this is without any prejudice to the stipulations made in the existing standards and action already taken/initiated for non-compliance and area-specific requirements warranting stringent actions. The industrial units which are not complying with the **national standards notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**, will submit an action plan to meet the standards and bank guarantee to the respective State Pollution Control Board within 3 months (by Dec 2003).

The National Institute of Health and Family

The National Institute of Health and Family Welfare is a premier institution in the country. It has kept pace with new thinking and contributed to the knowledge in the area of health and family welfare.

The main objective of the Institute is to serve as an apex technical institution to promote national health and family welfare programmes in the country through education and training, research, evaluation and monitoring, consultancy and advocacy, and providing certain specialized services.

NIHFW is an autonomous Institute funded by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. It is situated in South Delhi.

CAF: An organisation providing financial help to NGO's

CAF India's vision is to create a sustainable voluntary sector with resources contributed by relationships built on trust between NGOs and donors. CAF India has pioneered corporate community initiatives with several companies in India. CAF India has a registered public charitable trust, exempt under Indian tax laws, and it has offices in Delhi and Bangalore. CAF India is opening up new resources within companies by working with chambers of commerce,

such as the Confederation of Indian Industry, on the development of primary education facilities and by providing fund raising support.

Limitations in the Performance of NGO's

Governmental Organisations (NGOs) who came forward to shoulder several social responsibilities, are facing a credibility crisis with a number of cases of embezzlement and scandals involving some of them coming to the fore.

Recently, the Dutch government, funding a multi-crore water supply and sanitation project in Uttar Pradesh, terminated its contract with an NGO because of financial mismanagement. This particular NGO allegedly spent huge amounts of money on setting up a new office and on foreign trips for purposes other than those relating to the project. Bikaner, Rajasthan, another NGO involved in women's welfare reportedly pocketed around Rs two lakh by putting fictitious names on its rolls.

In another case, the CBI found that out of seven NGOs receiving funds to help women in self-employment, four had not done a thing and the rest existed only on paper. About 400 such NGOs have been black listed by the Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) while the Central Social and Welfare Board (CSWB) has black listed 3,000 NGOs for their poor performance in different fields in our country.

The NGOs which are really working at the rural areas don't even know how to write a project report necessary to get the money and those who don't work but know the skill of writing project report, manage to get the money sanctioned.'

The CSWB, through which the government funds NGO's issues about Rs 40 crore every year in addition to thousands of dollars given by institutions like CAPART. After getting funds from the government, the NGOs default in fulfilling requirements like submission of audited accounts and details of programme implementation within a stipulated period of time. NGOs have become a money making machine and, being smart in public relations, they are more encouraged by the press who gives them coverage and don't cover the positive work done by the genuine NGOs, as good work is not an important news to the press.

Conclusion

The total number of NGOs in the country is about 70,000; (Nagraj) while the actual number might be in lakh, the number of the registered NGOs may not be more than 10,000. Commercialisation of NGOs has no doubt led to their rapid growth but it does not mean that every one joining the field is coming because of money only.

A high official with CAPART says that there are more number of good NGO's than the bad NGOs but "unfortunately it is only the bad ones who get projected."

A code of conduct should be evolved to evaluate and rate the NGOs and the initiative should come from within the NGO sector.

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) is working on evolving a regulatory frame work to allow NGOs to sell micro insurance products particularly to tap

insurance potential in the rural areas. Since NGOs are performing well the insurance sector also will be soon open to NGOs. These NGOs can capture the rural market easily.

What we can do for the protection of Environment

1. Educate the students about the pollution problem and the harmful effects of pollution.
2. We should minimize the use plastic cover for different purposes.
3. Buy only environment friendly products i.e. the products which are not reducing the natural resources.
4. Not to waste water for various purposes.
5. To plant and grow trees in the house garden.
6. To Support the NGO's financially which are rendering service to the Health and Environment sector.
7. To motivate research on different measures to be taken to solve environmental problems.
8. To support the initiatives taken by the central and state government in protecting our environment.