

### **Role of NGOs in Protecting Human Rights**

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### **Abstract**

*There are many organizations around the world that are putting their efforts to protect human rights and ending human rights abuses. NGOs are one of the most visible sets of actors in the related fields of human development that can play a significant role in making aware the masses about their human rights. An NGO plays important role to become a concrete expression of international, national, regional and local level voice to assist and stand up for those who can't speak for themselves. Every human being is entitled to certain basic human rights which are available to them without discrimination of any sort. In India human rights are protected by the judiciary, human rights commissions, apart from these organizations the Non Governmental organizations also have an important role in protection of human rights. The Non Governmental organizations work from grassroots level to the national and international level in the protection of human rights. NGOs may be facing some problems and obstacles in reorienting their activities explicitly towards human rights, yet they contribute a lot to the society. The United Nations and its specialized agencies are striving to protect human rights across the globe.*

### **Keywords**

NGO (Non Governmental Organization), Human Rights

## Introduction

“Peace, development and human rights are essentially inter-related, inter-dependent and indivisible,” (Theo van Boven). Human rights are the ‘Rights relating to life, liberty, equality, and dignity of individuals guaranteed by the constitution or embodied in international covenants and enforceable by the courts in India’. The term non-governmental or, more accurately non-profit is normally used to cover the range of organizations which go to make up civil society. Such organizations are characterized, in general, by having as the purpose of their existence something other than financial profit. However, this leaves a huge multitude of reasons for existence and a wide variety of enterprises and activities.

In every part of the globe, there are Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working every hour of the day to document the injustices heaped upon women, children and the under-class, standing beneath the bottom rung of the society. By their active campaigning, they remind Governments to keep their promise in order to give practical shape to goals set by various national and international conventions on human rights. No accurate estimate is available on the number of NGOs in India but it is estimated to have more than 1 million NGOs. The NGO are a necessary corollary to the democratic machinery of the government, they are means of democratic empowerment of those who are less powerful and less advantaged as the government machinery and its authorized institution are not always sufficient to guarantee the protection of human rights. NGOs have a vital role to play in the promotion and protection of human right especially in the developing countries. Human rights NGOs are in a good position to provide a broad picture of the context in which violations take place and present a pattern of the events.

## Role of NGOs

“The 21st Century will be an era of NGOs.” - Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary General. The world conference on human right was held in Vienna in Austria in 1993, with objective “to review and assess the progress made in the field of human right”. The resolution 38 of the declaration stated –the world conference on human right recognizes the important role of Non Government Organizations in the promotion of all human rights and in humanitarianism.

NGOs have functioned as the conscience of the nation in the field of human rights by taking prompt action in investigating the instances of human rights by undertaking the spot studies and publishing the observations. In addition to a role in the development of human rights, NGOs are playing a pivotal role in many fields, such as in awareness and prevention of HIV/AIDS, child exploitation, child labor, sex tourism, early childcare and education and providing counseling in number of matters including domestic disputes, subject relating to rights of women and children and so on. Among the wide variety of roles that NGOs can play important role to promote human rights; some of them are as follows:

1. NGOs in their role of relief and charity can be seen as initiating internal programs and projects of social welfare in a country like India.

2. The NGOs playing mediatory role in the development of human rights - where communication as a skill is important for development and social action. NGOs in this role can be seen as participating or taking up external programs and projects.
3. In consultative role NGOs have to support documentation and dissemination of information and expertise should be critical. NGOs in this role can be seen as working in collaborative programs. Local experts/professionals/resource persons play major secondary roles.
4. Community- based organizations and cooperatives can acquire, subdivide and develop land, construct housing, provide infrastructure and operate and maintain infrastructure such as wells or public toilets and solid waste collection services to develop and operate infrastructure.
5. NGO have the advantage of selecting particular places for innovative projects and specify in advance the length of time which they will be supporting the project - overcoming some of the shortcomings that governments face in this respect.
6. The significance of this role to the government is that NGOs can communicate to the policy-making levels of government, information about the lives, capabilities, attitudes and cultural characteristics of people at the local level. NGOs can facilitate communication upward from people to the government and downward from the government to the people.
7. Training institutions and NGOs can develop a technical assistance and training capacity and use this to assist both CBOs and governments.
8. Innovative activities need to be carefully documented and shared - effective participatory monitoring would permit the sharing of results with the people themselves as well as with the project staff.
9. In some cases, NGOs become spokespersons or ombudsmen for the poor and attempt to influence government policies and programs on their behalf. This may be done through a variety of means ranging from demonstration and pilot projects to participation in public forums and the formulation of government policy and plans, to publicizing research results and case studies of the poor. Thus NGOs can play roles from advocates for the poor to implementers of government programs; from agitators and critics to partners and advisors; from sponsors of pilot projects to mediators.

## **Role played by NGOs in India to protect human rights**

In India, many NGOs have moved ahead or taken gap filling initiatives to protect human rights. In Africa, Asia and Latin America, citizen participation through a range of civil society organizations has become a growing and vital force. These organizations are injecting critical financial as well as technical resources into local civil society and mobilizing resources from a wide variety of sources both domestic and international for this purpose. They pressurize the government on certain issues, such as protection of

prisoners rights, torture etc. They approach the judiciary on behalf of poor people who otherwise have no access to justice. In this regard, more is expected to be put in place by the growing number of NGOs in our country, for the overall well being of the society. These they can do through an effective collaborative programs and strategies with an effective and efficient leadership structure. Some of them are as follows:

## **Sulabh Movement**

In India, caste system crept in amongst members of other religions, as well, even if it did not get associated with ethicon-religious ideas; in practice, though, in other non-Hindu religious groups' caste hierarchy, as amongst the Hindus, regulates inter-caste relations. The concept of polluting influence of a member of a lower caste may not prevail among the converts or their descendants, but lack of social interaction continues to prevail more or less to the same degree as it did. Dr Bindeshwari pathak, founder of the Sulabh Movement said "It was in 1968 i.e. the year of Gandhi Centenary celebration commencement that I was assigned the task of finding out an alternative to scavenging and in 1970 I launched Sulabh Sanitation Movement by setting up, social voluntary non-profit organization, Sulabh Shauchalaya Sansthan to carry forward the movement which combined in itself sanitation technology and humane ideology." It is a major social movement in the country for the betterment and welfare of Dalits, in a generic sense, and in particular for the liberation and social mainstreaming of scavengers.

## **Child Rights and You (CRY)**

Rights and You (formerly Child Relief and You, till 2005), commonly abbreviated as CRY is a non-profit organization in India that aims to restore children's rights in India. It is a voluntary organization committed to the upliftment of millions of children who have been deprived of their childhood due to various reasons. Child Relief and You (CRY), founded in 1979, is a dedicated to restoring to deprived Indian children their basic rights to food, shelter, health and education. Its role is to fill the gap left after government and foreign aid do what they can to help children in need. CRY originated through the efforts of one man, the late Rippan Kapur, combined with the ideas of a small group of friends and family. CRY was partly modeled after UNICEF in that it combines development with enlisting public support through greeting card purchases and donations. CRY now also sells calendars, address books and stationery. CRY's main strategy for improving the situation of Indian children has been through generating resources, primarily from the public, and channeling them through project "partners" whose priorities include children, women, and comprehensive community development. CRY currently supports 143 child development project partnerships.

The organization partners with grass-roots Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to uplift thousands of Indian children denied basic children's rights. In 2007, its media campaign showing "smiling kids" and asking citizens to partner instead of simple donate, was seen as departure from stereotypical NGO sector advertising in India.

## **Campaign against Child Labor (CACL)**

The campaign against child labor is a joint initiative of Youth for Voluntary Action (YUVA), Pune and Tere des Hommes (Germany) India Program. The Campaign is currently supported by ILO and is actively working for progressive eradication of child labor through provision of education, organization of awareness programs, promotion of legislative changes and rescuing children in bondage or victims of abuse.

## **Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service**

It is an Indian non-governmental organization established in Varanasi, established in 1900 and became a branch of Ramakrishna Mission in 1902. It manages an education program on essential health problems in schools, slums and villages of Uttar Pradesh (India) thanks to auto produced multimedia educational films.

## **People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL)**

It is a prominent civil rights organization in India. It was formed in 1976 by veteran socialist and campaign leader Jaya Prakash Narayan, who launched it as the People's Union for Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights (PUCLDR), it was originally intended to be an organization free from political ideologies, bringing those concerned about defending civil liberties and human rights from different backgrounds onto a common platform.

## **People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR)**

It came into existence in 1976-77 as the Delhi unit of a larger national forum, and became PUDR on 1 February, 1981. In the last two and a half decades of its existence the organization has taken up hundreds of instances of violations of democratic rights, covering most parts of the country and involving the rights of many sections of society. PUDR conducts investigations, issues statements, distributes leaflets, organizes public meetings, demonstrations and dharnas, and fights legal cases to highlight the violation of people's rights, and to help towards their redressal. PUDR also takes up issues of general importance that affect the rights of people through general campaigns, publications and legal interventions. These include: gender equality; rights of forest-dwellers and forest policy; working class rights; agrarian conflict; caste oppression; deaths, rapes and torture in police custody; and undemocratic legislation, in particular the various incarnations of the 'terrorist act' (TADA and POTA) etc.

## Bandhua Mukti Morcha

Bandhua Mukti Morcha (BMM) or Bonded Labor Liberation Front (BLLF) is an NGO in India working to end bonded labor. Based in New Delhi, it was founded in 1981 by Swami Agnivesh who continues as its chairman. Bonded labor was legally abolished in India in 1976 but it remains prevalent, with weak enforcement of the law by state governments. Estimates of the problem vary. Official figures include a 1993 estimate of only 251,000 bonded laborers while BMM says there are 65 million bonded child laborers, and a larger number of adults. A 2003 project by Human Rights Watch has reported a major problem with bonded child labor in the silk industry, BMM's efforts are credited with the passing of legislation to abolish child labor in India ( Child Labor Prohibition and Regulation Act 1986).

## Saheli, Chetna and Butterflies

**Saheli and Chetna** are actively involved in the protection of Women's Rights. They provide free legal aid to women to fight for their rights against gender bias and discrimination.

**Butterflies** is an NGO with a program for street and working children. It was started in 1988 and its activities include non-formal education, saving schemes for children, vocational training, holding Bal Sabhas, and creating awareness for children's rights, Bal Mazdoor Union, networking with other NGOs and research and documentation.

The above brief information about some of the NGOs are indicative of different kinds of role played by them in safeguarding human rights. There are a number of other organizations working for the cause of human rights.

## Suggestions for NGOs to Strengthen their Role

While NGOs have assumed greater role and responsibilities under the democratic dispensation starting from 1999, but there is need to strengthen their role:

- NGOs need to expand their programs, campaigns, skits from yearly or bi-yearly to monthly. Frequent programs increase the awareness of human rights even more than yearly.
- NGOs also need to get more aid both from foreign and within India which will be useful to carry out their cause.
- NGOs must have clear goals and priorities, they should define what they are trying to achieve as clearly as possible. They should think strategically and assess how short term goals fit in with long term ones.
- NGOs must have a clear written work plan for both individual and staff activities. Plan reminds people of what the goals are, it helps keep things on track and with major projects or campaigns it helps people see where they fit into big picture.
- NGOs should conduct seminars and workshops etc. to teach people · building self-esteem, ability to set priorities in life, principles of value classification, ability to impact positively on others, developed negotiating skills and so on.

- NGOs need to promote awareness programs and upgrading knowledge of their rights.
- ‘Celebrations of Week’ that may find coverage in the Indian media each year need to be hosted by joining hands with grassroots community.

## Conclusion

The observed role of Non Governmental Organizations towards the development of the society in general is enormous and inexhaustible, and its activities can cut across all spheres of human endeavors. No doubt they are contributing a lot to the society and helping to meet up with the millennium development goals (MDGs) and strategizing to ensure sustainable development in Indian local communities, through empowerment of the people with knowledge required to participate actively in the process of development. In addition to protect human rights, the challenge before the NGOs in India, currently is to fashion out ways to get rid of the increasing challenges posed by poverty, HIV and AIDs, oppression, political and socio-economic powerlessness of the people.

NGOs are especially well suited to action for human rights because of their size and reach, closeness to local populations and willingness to confront the *status quo*, and ability to address.

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