

NON-GEVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

UG HOME SCIENCE

UNIT 1 (SEC 402)

BY

Sister M. Tanisha A.C.

Department of Home Science

Patna Women's College

Patna University, Patna

Objectives:

To enable the students to:

- know the meaning of NGO
- understand the characteristics of good NGO
- learn about functions of NGO
- know the advantages of NGO

Introduction

The term, 'non-governmental organisations' came into existence in 1945. Non-Government Organisations, generally known as NGOs, are basically service and development oriented organisations created out of the government to address particular issues, tasks or functions of a non-commercial nature. Such organisations could be formed at local, national or international level.

Definition:

The United Nations Department of Public Information defines the Non-Governmental Organisation as organisations which are not part of the government and which have not been established as a result of an agreement between governments.

The World Bank defined the term NGO as groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of governments and characterised primarily by humanitarian or cooperative, rather than commercial objectives.

Other definitions

- An organisation of individuals who believe in certain basic social principles and who structure their activities to bring about development to the communities that they are serving
- An organisation or group of people working independently 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 area, or situation
- An independent, democratic, non-sectarian people's organisation working for the empowerment of economic and/ or socially marginalised groups.

The nomenclature used to identify this set of organisations varies considerably. They are referred to as 'voluntary organisations', 'non-profit sector', 'independent sector', etc.

Fundamental features of NGOs

There is no generally accepted definition of an NGO and the term carries different connotations in different circumstances. However, there are some fundamental features which are common to diverse types of bodies described as NGOs.

- An NGO is independent from the direct control of any government**
- It will not be constituted as a political party**
- It will be non-profit-making**
- It will not be a criminal group and will be non-violent**

Therefore, based on the above features an NGO is defined as an independent voluntary association of people acting together on a continuous basis, for some common purpose, other than achieving government office, making money or illegal activities.

NGOs are primarily aimed at serving the community at large, especially the disempowered, and working for their welfare. Usually, an NGO is registered under a specific law of a country.

Characteristics of NGOs

1. **Voluntary Nature:** They are formed voluntarily and are non-statutory. The members of the organisation contribute voluntary, unpaid work to some extent although not entirely.
2. **Independent:** NGOs are controlled by those who have formed them, or by a board of management/trustees/directors to whom the responsibility for control and management of the organisation has been delegated, within the laws that govern the functioning of the organisation.
3. **Legal Status:** Since NGOs are registered bodies they carry a legal status and have certain rules and regulations and a nature of accountability in the overall functioning
4. **Non-profit oriented:** NGOs are not formed for personal profit. They may have employees who are paid for their work. They may also engage in income generating activities but they do not distribute profits or surpluses to shareholders or members. They use the revenues generated solely for the purpose for which the organisation has been constituted.

Characteristics of NGOs (Contd.)

- 5) **Not Self-serving in aims and related values:** This characteristic defines particular types of organisations which do not serve the self-interest of members but are concerned in some way or other with the disadvantaged, or with concerns and issues which are detrimental to the well-being, circumstances or prospects of people or society as a whole.
- 6) **Flexibility in operation:** NGOs community based organizations, working at the grass-root level for a particular cause with focus on development of the community. Therefore, the programmes undertaken are mostly community need based. Hence there is flexibility in operations.
- 7) **Quicker in decision making:** The more locally based the NGO the faster the decision making because it functions to fulfil certain developmental needs of the particular community.

Other characteristics include high motivation on the part of the members, freedom in undertaking the tasks and people oriented approach.

Role and Importance of NGOs in India:

The NGOs are involved in various activities for the benefit of the society. They help the government to fulfil its objectives by undertaking various projects to meet the needs of the society and development of the nation. Considering the social pattern of living and needs of citizens, the government has allowed the participation of NGOs in Age Care, Agriculture, Animal Welfare, Art & Craft, Culture & Heritage, Education, Environment, Health, Rural Development, Tribal People, Waste Management, Welfare, Women Development, Child Care, Science and Technology and other social and cultural activities.

Functions of NGOs:

- ▶ Perform a very important role in helping the needy people
- ▶ Great help in case of natural disaster/calamity like earthquake, floods etc.
- ▶ Act as a link between people and the government, act as a communicator, facilitator in solving problems
- ▶ Play a significant role in improving the standard of living and reducing the poverty
- ▶ Contribute in the field of research and education for development of the country
- ▶ Supplements government efforts in education and health
- ▶ Help to bring about sustainable development of the country in economic and social growth and concern for the environment
- ▶ Play an active role in social mobilization on issues like empowerment of women, human rights, environmental concern
- ▶ Play an important role in Corporate Social Responsibility activities.

Classification of NGOs

NGOs have been variously classified on the basis of different criteria as given below:

1. According to the nature of the institution/strategies of development
2. According to the level of operations
3. According to their orientation
4. As per their geographical location
5. According to their strategy of intervention
6. As per their nature of functions
7. According to their size

Each of the above mentioned are categorized further.

1. NGO type based on the nature of the institution

- a) **Voluntary organisations:** They pursue a social initiative, members are committed to shared values
- b) **People's organisations:** They represent their members' interests, members are accountable to the organisation, and are highly self-reliant.
- c) **Public service contractors:** They function as market-oriented, non-profit organisations for the purpose of serving the public
- d) **Hybrid government/ non-government organisations:** They are created by the government and they serve as instruments of government policy.

2. According to the level of organisations

- a) **Community Based Organisations:** They are generally formed out of people's own initiatives. Some are devoted to raising the consciousness of the people, or helping them to understand their rights and so on. These include sports clubs, women's organisations, neighbourhood organisations, religious or educational organisations
- b) **Citywide Organisations:** These include organisations like commerce and industry, coalitions of business, ethnic or education groups and associations of community organisations. Some of them become involved in helping the poor as one of their many activities, while others are created for the specific purpose of helping the poor.
- c) **National NGOs:** these are nationally based organisations such as Red Cross, professional organisations, etc.
- d) **International NGOs:** include agencies which have international operations and carry on activities like funding local NGOs/institutions/projects besides they also implement projects themselves. Examples – CARE, Ford etc.

3. NGOs based on their orientation

- a) **Charitable orientation:** Mostly taken care of by the effort of the members themselves with little participation by the beneficiaries. The activities are directed toward meeting the needs of the poor, such as distribution of food, clothing or medicine or provision of housing, transport, schools and so on. They also undertake relief activities during times of disaster and calamities.
- b) **Service orientation:** It includes NGOs with such activities like provision of health, family planning or education services. The programme is designed by the NGO and people are expected to participate in its implementation and be the recipients of the the service.
- c) **Participatory orientation:** It includes NGOs with projects where local people participate, particularly in the implementation of projects by contributing cash, tools, land, materials, labour etc. Many self-help projects come under this type.
- d) **Empowering orientation:** The aim of such NGO is to help poor people develop a clearer understanding of the social, political and economic factors affecting their lives, and to strengthen their awareness of their own potential power to control their lives.

4. According to their strategy of intervention

- a) **Single sectoral approach:** NGOs working only in single sector like health, education, sanitation, drinking water, housing, income-generation, etc.
- b) **Multi-sectoral approach:** NGOs in this category have their interventions in more than one sector and have interlinking across different sectors, like education, health and sanitation.
- c) **Homogenous clientele approach:** such organisations focus their area of work on homogenous groups like tribal population, Dalits, women, slum dwellers etc.
- d) **Heterogeneous clientele approach:** These address multiple heterogeneous clients, with different groups being covered by different programmes or the same programme.

5. As per their nature of functions

- a) **Programme implementation:** Field based organisations working directly with the communities. They take up issues and implement programmes directly. Such organisations act as pressure groups representing the interests of the communities falling in the same social economic strata. Eg. Workers' union
- b) **Support to field based organisations:** These organisations promote community groups to take up issues and implement programmes. They perform a support function for field based organisations. They also provide support in information dissemination, research to technical support in the field, etc.
- c) **Networking:** Networking organisations are gaining especially in the field of women and environmental issues, they promote advocacy and public education on different issues.
- d) **Association:** The organisation represents the interests of its registered members actively, and is involved in pursuing a specific common goal. For eg. Cooperative societies, community based organisations, etc.
- e) **Policy advocacy:** the primary purpose of such NGOs is to defend or promote a specific cause, and influence the policies and practices of national and /or international organisations. They play an important role in identifying unaddressed problems and bringing them to public attention, in protecting basic human rights, in giving voice to a variety of social, political, environmental, ethnic, and community interests and concerns.

Advantages of NGO

The following are some of the advantages/strengths of NGO :

- **Ability to innovate and adapt:** NGOs have the ability to experiment freely with innovative approaches and to take risks
- **Field-based development expertise:** They are flexible in adapting to local situations and responding to local needs and therefore able to develop integrated projects, as well as sector based projects
- **Strong grassroots links:** 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 cater 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.
- **Process-oriented approach** to development
- **Participatory methodologies and tools**
- **Long-term commitment and emphasis on sustainability**
- **Cost-effectiveness**

Weaknesses associated with NGOs:

- ▶ **Lack of experienced manpower**
- ▶ **Limited financial and management expertise**
- ▶ **Limited institutional capacity**
- ▶ **Low levels of self-sustainability**
- ▶ **High rate of growth in number of NGOs**
- ▶ **Lack of inter-organizational communication and coordination**
- ▶ **Small scale interventions**
- ▶ **Lack of understanding of the broader social and economic context**

NGOs are groups or institutions that are mostly independent of government and have primarily humanitarian objectives rather than commercial objectives. They vary greatly in their philosophy, purpose, programs, approach, scope of activities, expertise and structures. They have legal existence as they are registered groups/institutions. Most of these organisations have proximity to grass root level and work for the concerns and problems of the common man and for the development of the society/nation. Thus they contribute to and supplement the effort of the government towards development, especially in addressing the problems of the weaker sections of the society, the marginalized, environment, health, education and many other concerns.