

Globalization and Voluntary Action – A Development Perspective

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Abstract

In recent decades there has been a total rethinking of the developmental strategies we adopted in the post-independence period. This rethinking has been partly stimulated by the still persisting socio-economic problems of both rural and urban masses as well as the neglected tribes of the hilly regions. These developmental strategies have not only failed to solve the problems of poverty, illiteracy and health insecurities but also instead added newer problems to the existing list of issues. The modern notion of voluntary action has its origins in Protestant Christianity. Conceptually, it just means anything we involve out of our own choice without any compulsion. Having a purpose or meaning in the action is important for an action to be voluntary. The need for voluntary action arises when individuals feel that the existing socio-political and economic structures of the society are not paying sufficient attention towards some aspects of the society. Or it could be that those structures are not in a position to respond to some issues arising in the society. The motivation to do such action is very often unrelated to one's self-interest.

Keywords: Globalisation, Voluntary Action and Development.

Introduction

Globalization has become a way of life for the subjects of many countries across the world reflecting a paradigm shift in the development strategy. The nature and impact of globalization however, differs from country to country. Globalization is defined more as a process and not a state of being. It could be considered as a move or series of moves towards what may be described as a global economy. "The world is moving towards it but is not there yet". These moves are not merely to be understood as conscious efforts by individuals, businesses, governments and other organizations. "These are often responses to impersonal forces of markets and technology rather than originations of what is best seen as move away from national economies interacting with each other in a variety of ways, towards a fully integrated world economy".

Globalization is going to stay at somewhere? Every sector of the economy is being exposed to foreign competition. Certain sectors, sections and regions are being marginalized in the process of globalization. When the poor are going to be adversely affected, we have to evolve strategies to minimize the adverse effects of globalization. Rural India is vast in size and its problems are complex. It is, in this context that voluntary sector has an important role to play in revitalizing the rural sector. An attempt is made in this paper to present the importance and limitations of voluntary sector, and measures needed to strengthen it.

Globalization has intensified competition in many spheres. This has no doubt achieved a higher rate of growth. But, the growth process has bypassed some sections and regions. The situation worsened with too much stress on globalization, privatization and competition. The increasing alienation of people from the process of

social change and development initiated by the state and the market has led many towards civil society general, and the NGOs at the grassroots level in remote areas.

The term “voluntarism” is derived from the Latin word “voluntas” which means “will”. This assumes various forms of impulses, passions, appetites or desires. It is prior to as well as superior to the intellect or reason. The theories of voluntarism interpret various aspects of experience and nature in the light of the concept of will. It is the will that may produce ‘Miracles’ ... and thereby some of the social evils, of which the unfortunate sections of the society are the victims, can be eradicated.

The term ‘volunteer’ is normally used to denote someone who offers unremunerative services for a good cause. People living in an area may wish to improve their social conditions through voluntary action, which is a nursery of democracy, is a sign of social advance in a free society, born out of social conscience and philanthropy.

It is not easy to define voluntary organization in a simple definition. But we can describe the same, its characteristics, types and functions. Two definitions have been given below which give an overall view of a voluntary organization.

A voluntary organizations is a social service and development institution motivated to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged in society, either through direct services to the people or through facilitative / indirect services to other voluntary organizations or Government, non-profit making and not undertaken to be fully funded for its maintenance, directly or indirectly by the Government.

Voluntary organizations are non-profit making agencies that are constituted with a vision by a group of likeminded propel, committed for the uplift of the poor, marginalized, unprivileged, underprivileged, impoverished, downtrodden, and the needy and they are closer and accessible to the target groups, flexible in administration, quicker in decision making timely or indirectly by the Government.

According to S.K. Day (1985) voluntary agencies can innovate and adopt themselves to new circumstances, experiment and take risks. They have thus often played a path-finding role as pilot action research projects, in the field of development. The voluntary organizations tend to revolve around individual personalities i.e., the sponsors or the founders who have been strongly motivated by the men like Gandhi, Tagore and Jayaprakash Narayana etc.

Significant Features of NGO's

The definitions of voluntary organization given above bring out its following main features.

- (i) It is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, section XXI, 1961, Indian Trust Act 1882; Co-operative Societies Act, 1904, the Joint Stock Companies Act, 1959 depending upon the nature and scope of its activities to give it a legal status.
- (ii) It has definite aims and objectives and programmes for their fulfillment and achievement.
- (iii) It has an administrative structure and a duly constituted management and executive committee.
- (iv) It is an organization initiated and governed by its own members on democratic principles without any external control, and

(v) It raises funds for its activities partly from the exchequer in the form of grants in aid and partly in the form of the contributions or subscription from the members of the community or the beneficiaries of the programmes.

Strategies and Approaches for Voluntary Action

Some of the most popular strategies for voluntary action in India:

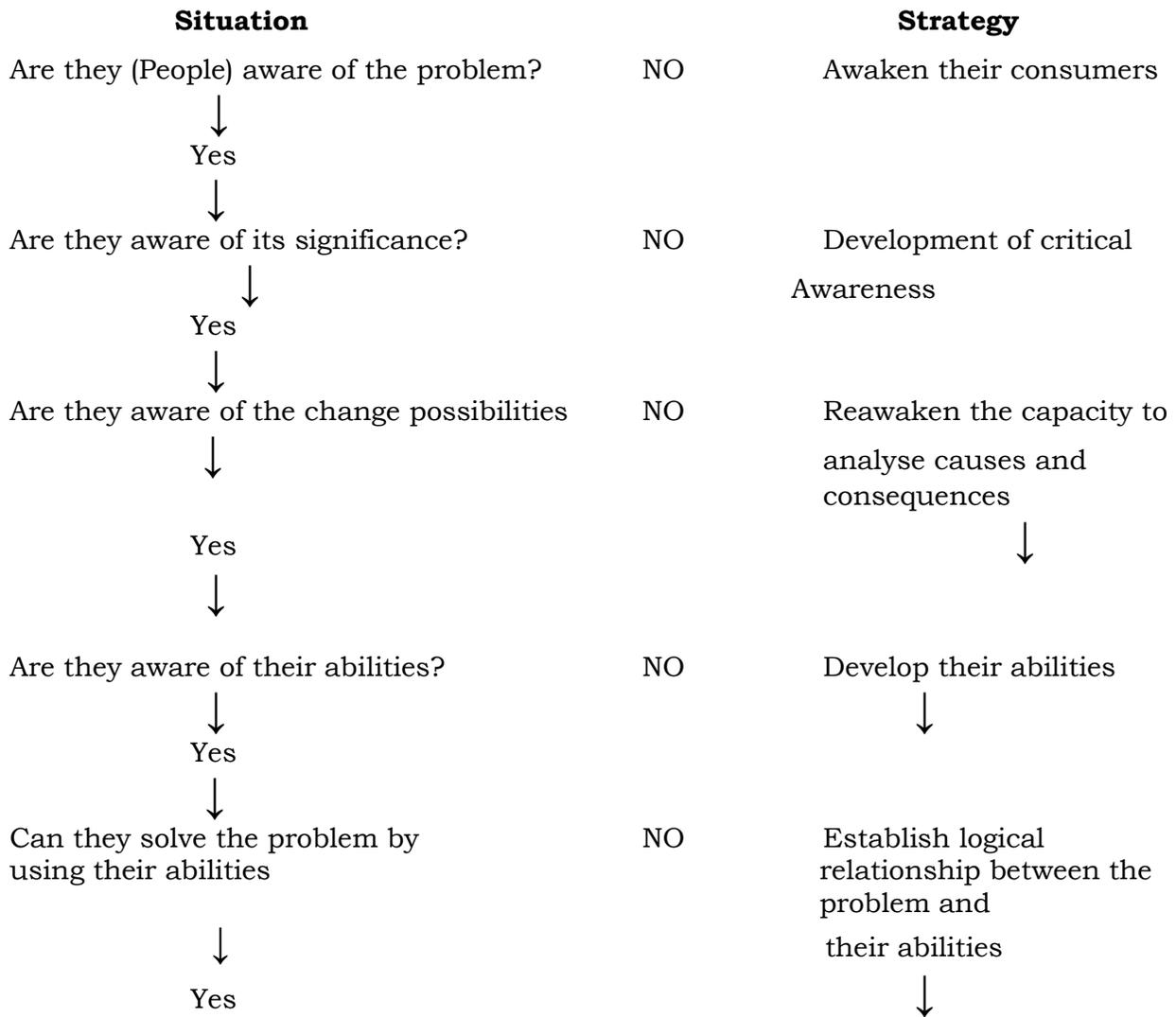
Voluntary action for rural development will be voluntary and development only if voluntary organizations enjoy full autonomy financial, programmatic and administrative and use such autonomy in performing the hard task. In some cases, in India, the situation is that voluntary action is dependent of voluntary organization is no better than the one of governmental departments.

Paulo Freire's conscientisation aptly established that relationship between education and development of literacy cannot be viewed insulation from social context. Adult education must go hand in hand with human liberation in the broadest sense: with health-care, land redistribution, popular participation in the process of political empowerment of the oppressed and in general, with the radical transformation of the social system.

Some voluntary groups unbeliving that the people have problem solving skills go on to supply in puts and benefits. Voluntary action should revolve around the voluntarism on the part of people.

Based on Paulo Freire's "Praxis" an attempt was made to recommend strategies for voluntary action in rural development. The concern is that the voluntary organizations should know how to enter, when to enter, why to enter at what stage to enter, and above all when to withdraw. Unfortunately voluntary organization enter at levels where they should not achieve the task which they should not perform, and do not know when to get out. In the process, voluntary action is held responsible for creating dependency syndrome.

Strategies for Voluntary Action



They don't need you – Get Out

Source: based on Paulo Freire's 'Praxis' 2003.

The following are the new areas and approaches for voluntary organizations to participate for a campaign mode of integrated rural development

- Advocacy to Action
- Promotion of Innovative Rural livelihoods
- Promotion of Innovative Rural Technologies
- Promotion of Right to Information Campaign
- Promotion of Right to Participation Campaign
- Promotion of Right to Environment Campaign
- Promotion of Education for all by 2010
- Promotion of Health for all by 2010

- Promotion of Networking of All Development Functionaries
- Promotion of Pooling of Physical and Financial Resources
- Promotion of Multi –Functional Role for Governmental Officials
- Promotion of Multi-Sectoral Co-ordination
- Promotion of Convergence
- Promotion of Market Opportunities for Self Help Groups
- Promotion of Micro Credit
- Promotion of Mahila Banks
- Promotion of Integrated Wastershed Development
- Training of Government Officials as Social Workers
- Campaigning against Corruption
- Campaigning for Human Values
- Campaigning for Water for all
- Campaigning for Environment for all
- Campaigning for Corporate Social Responsibility
- Campaigning for Development Indicators
- Campaigning for People’s Agenda
- Campaigning for Village, Mandal, Block, District and State Plans
- Sharing of Knowledge and Experience
- Networking of Various Campaigns
- Campaigning Mode of Resources Mobilisation
- Campaigning for Village District and State Agenda
- Campaigning for Self Reliance and Gram Swaraj
- Campaigning with Government of India Campaigning

Merits of Voluntary Action

A great merit of voluntary agencies is their capacity to understand the local needs, problems and resources, their capacity to involve local people and secure their cooperation and participation, and their desire to experiment with new programmes, strategies and approaches for rural development without incurring large expenditure.²

The voluntary agencies focus either on specific issues or adopt a holistic approach to community development. They work on non-profit basis, and are normally political in nature. On achieving goals they may hire the services of professionals.³

The strength of the voluntary agencies lies in their proximity to the people and their sensitivity to the needs of the community. They can give personal touch to the services they offer. They are capable of bringing people together and motivate them to participate in the development process.

The voluntary agencies are most suited to take up some specific programme’s issues. That is why they concentrate on women and child development, environment protection, social uplift of the underprivileged classes, rural development, health and medical aid programmes, rural infrastructure development, organizing people for self-development, self-reliance and self-sufficiency etc.

At present, the rural poor look at the government’s assistance. They are interested in subsidies and other incentives of the Government offers. On the other hand, the voluntary agencies want to dispel this dependency syndrome. They recognize that when people set their own decisions, human creativity and local

problem-solving skills are released, and the resulting development is likely to be self-sustaining.⁵

The voluntary agencies have an edge over government departments. In their case, the distance between leaders and members is minimal. The stress is more on action based forms than on representative bodies. Thus, planning and implementation become proximate.⁶

The voluntary agencies are not handicapped by bureaucratic rules and regulations. They can experiment, and evolve low cost delivery systems in important spheres like education and health.⁷

Thus, voluntary agencies enjoy many advantages in serving the poor, particularly the rural poor. The Government should utilize their services in an appropriate manner.

Limitations of Voluntary Action

The voluntary agencies also suffer from certain limitations. Most of them are centered round an individual or a small group of leaders. They generally concentrate on a limited region.

The voluntary agencies depend too much on governmental and foreign funds. Misuse of funds is also common. Hence, their credibility is low. Some voluntary agencies have no accountability and transparency. There is no internal democracy in the organization.

Most voluntary agencies suffer from leadership crisis and they are controlled by one or a few individuals. They generally lack interest in the growth of the organization. The organization collapses when the leaders depart.⁸

Huge funds are at the disposal of the voluntary sector. For instance, foreign contribution to Indian social sector organizations amounted to Rs. 4535 crore in 2000-01. More than Rs. 65,000 crore was received from abroad during 1994 to 2007. During this period, annual receipts increased from Rs.1865 crore to Rs. 12,290 crore. But, around 50 per cent of the associations do not file reports. Sometimes, local and international NGOs act irresponsibly and undermine the credibility of civil society in general. Organization should be as accountable as the government they criticise.⁹

In some voluntary agencies, there is absolutely no professionalism. Hence, the quality of projects and programmes suffer. They fail to properly assess the development potential of the local and regional resources.¹⁰

Some voluntary agencies are reported to be serving a particular community, and nurturing sectarian ideals causing harm to the social fabric of the society.¹¹ Voluntary workers are being fast replaced by paid workers. Some voluntary agencies are increasingly bureaucratized, undermining their performance.

Strengthening Voluntary Action

One should not be under the wrong impression that voluntary agencies alone can deliver the goods. Government funding is necessary. What is emphasized here is rapport between voluntary agencies and government departments. There is no competition between them. Their roles are complementary to each other.

If voluntary agencies are very efficient in some spheres like adult education, they can be left to these agencies. The government should have no reservations as results/retunes are more important than who implements programmes. Of course, meaningful coordination is needed between voluntary agencies and government department so that precious resources are not wasted.

In maintaining records and accounts, transparency is needed in the voluntary sector; voluntary agencies deal with human beings. They face many hurdles in achieving the goals. The target groups should be engaged in respect of project evaluation. This is necessary to prove one's own motivations and credentials.¹²

The voluntary agencies have to publicise their comprehensive audited balance sheets and sources and utilization of funds in their websites. They must be compelled to declare their foreign sources of funds and other affiliations.¹³

The voluntary agencies should concentrate on income generating projects not only in the interests of the beneficiaries, but even to strengthen their own resource base. The voluntary agencies have to identify the missing links in the rural development chain, and concentrate on them, they should give importance to professionalization to produce better results.

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