NGOs and Women Empowerment: International and National Organizations

Dr. Vaishali Devpura
Assistant Professor,
Department of Political Science,
Govt. Meera Girls College,
Udaipur (Rajasthan)

ABSTRACT

The 20th century has witnessed the upsurge of women empowerment movement universally. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights reaffirming faith in the fundamental rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women, contemplated the entitlement of all cherished freedoms to all human beings without any distinction, including discrimination based on sex. The empowerment of women is one of the major central issues in the process of development of countries all over the world. Empowerment of women is necessary for the holistic development of society. Many studies have shown that majority of people who participate in voluntary community work are service providers for women and development issues. They contribute in raising the awareness, attitudes, skills, capacities and overall development of the underprivileged sections of society. Voluntary organizations play significant role in the empowerment of women but there are many challenges faced by these voluntary organizations. The paper is an attempt to seek the role of NGOs in women empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Voluntary action and Non Government Organisations have been part of the historical legacy all over the world. NGOs have been actively engaging in local, regional, national and international matters with (or against) government and business sectors since their beginning. Their numbers have grown exponentially. The gap filling role of NGOs depends on the government’s lack of capacity and they increasingly demand that governmental priorities should be changed by paying more attention to those people who have not yet been reached.

What do we mean by NGO - The term NGO is applied to a wide range of organizations which are not established or operated by government. NGOs are usually private, non-profit organizations which are run by their members for social welfare.
What is Women Empowerment- The word women empowerment essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day to day lives in social, political and economic terms, a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the center stage. Empowerment is an active and multidimensional process which enables women to realize their identity and power in all aspects of life.

An old adage says, “If you think knowledge is unimportant, try ignorance.” A state of not knowing is one which is not desirable for anyone and is more devastating when a woman does not knows. Thus, women are most likely to transfer this ignorance to next generation. Women play an important role in the family and society, but in all areas of life women are generally at a serious disadvantage as compared with men, whether in the terms of education, income, partner choice, inheritance laws, community organization or access to leadership positions in education, business or politics. The need for empowerment of women arises from this harsh social scenario. Women have attained a great deal in the past few years but there are still areas of discrimination which exists largely. Work with and for women in the interest of women empowerment will continue to be one of the main concerns of society.

NGOs are seen to have a central role in development work. They are the organizations that have some form of institutional base, are private, nonprofit, self-governing, and voluntary in nature and registered with the government. As new concerns have arisen and the capacities of governments to meet the needs of their citizens have been reduced by globalization and economic constraints, the role of NGOs has expanded. Governments are not able to support the upkeep of social services because of huge expenditure on infrastructure. Infrastructure is accepted as an urgent need, essentials to reach development and modernity in the developing countries. Most government’s expenditures have gone on large scale projects like dams, hospitals, school, water and waste water channels etc. Governments have generally failed to separate income generating activities and employment investments. Therefore, NGOs have become an alternative sector, some development studies describe it as the “Third Sector” in relation to the public and the private sector. NGOs may perform several activities but are usually associated with humanitarian services and one of them is women empowerment.

This study is an effort to analyze the functioning of NGOs as an effective agents of change with special reference to women empowerment. Since the past few years, the concept and subject of NGOs have attracted an international and national limelight more than a voluntary organization. One of the main reason for the popular image of NGOs is due to its response as an active agent of development towards unsatisfactory or pathetic condition of people. The proposed study will be an explorative and descriptive in
nature to examine the role of NGOs at International and national levels in facilitating development programmes for women.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To study the role of NGOs in empowering women.
- To analyze the functions of NGOs at various platforms with special concern to women development issues.

**International Voluntary Organizations for Women Empowerment:**

Here we are discussing some organizations which are concerned to women empowerment issues at international level. Some of them are:

1. **International Alliance of Women**
   The International Alliance of Women (IAW) is an international NGO comprising 41 member organizations involved in the promotion of women’s human rights. The IAW has general consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council and is accredited to many specialized UN agencies. It has participatory status with the Council of Europe and is represented at the Arab League, the African Union and other international organizations. The International Alliance of Women (IAW) affirms that full and equal enjoyment of human rights – as laid down in treaties, conventions and declarations – is due to all women and girls. The IAW maintains that a prerequisite to securing those rights is the universal ratification and implementation without reservation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). IAW and its members urge governments to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol to CEDAW.

2. **The Center for Women's Global Leadership**
   The Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL) was founded by feminist activist Charlotte Bunch as a project of Douglass College in 1989. CWGL is affiliated with the School of Arts and Sciences, at Rutgers University. It is also part of the Office of International Programs and a member of the institute for women leadership that connects sister institutes and centers that are committed to the progress of women at the university. The Center has trained a generation of women leaders from all regions of the world to use the human rights framework to achieve strategic objectives.
Under the leadership of Radhika Balakrishnan, who assumed the post of executive director in 2009, CWGL expanded its programming to include a focus on economic rights and justice from a feminist perspective, including work to facilitate and disseminate feminist analyses of economic and social rights and macroeconomic policies to better inform the work of civil society organizations and policymakers at the international and national levels.

3. Women without Borders

Women without Borders, with its headquarters in Vienna, Austria, is an advocacy and research organization for women around the globe. They bring together courageous and determined women to create a new female security paradigm. They advocate for a future without fear, suppression and violence. They also promote the role of women in the security sphere and sensitizes mothers in particular to their role and responsibility to challenge violent extremist ideologies. Edit Schlaffer is a social scientist, writer, activist and holds a PhD from the University of Vienna. In 2002, she founded the organization Women without Borders. It is an international research-based NGO, encouraging women to take the lead in their personal and public lives. The research and activities focus on women as agents of change and as driving forces to stabilize an insecure world. In 2008 Edit Schlaffer launched SAVE - Sisters Against Violent Extremism, the world’s first female counter-terrorism platform. SAVE – Sisters Against Violent Extremism is the leading global campaign of Women without Borders. SAVE is a unique transatlantic initiative uniting women (and men) from around the world in the first research-based female counter-terrorism platform.

National Organizations for Women Empowerment:

Here we are mentioning some of the voluntary organizations which are providing their selfless services and majorly paying attention on women issues:

1. CARE

CARE is a not-for-profit organization working in India for over 65 years, focusing on alleviating poverty and social injustice. We do this through well planned and comprehensive projects in health, education, livelihoods and disaster preparedness and response. Their overall goal is the empowerment of women and girls from poor and marginalized communities leading to improvement in their lives and livelihoods.
During Financial Year 2016-17, CARE India directly reached out to 25 million people through 40 projects across 12 states, covering more than 90 districts. CARE focuses on the empowerment of women and girls because they are disproportionately affected by poverty and discrimination; and suffer abuse and violations in the realization of their rights, entitlements and access and control over resources. Also, experience shows that, when equipped with the proper resources, women achieve the power to help entire communities and even overcome the issues of poverty, marginalization and social injustice. CARE India focuses on developing the potential of women and girls to drive long lasting equitable changes. They strategically emphasize on promoting quality healthcare, inclusive education, gender equitable and sustainable livelihood opportunities and disaster relief.

2. Azad Foundation
Azad Foundation is driven by the vision of a world where all women – in particular women from underprivileged backgrounds – enjoy full citizenship, earn a livelihood with dignity and generate wealth and values for all. They operate from four programme offices in Delhi and offices in Jaipur and Kolkata, and through partnerships in Ahmadabad, Bangalore and Indore. Their work is coordinated from head office in Delhi. Azad Foundation’s mission is to equip resource-poor women with knowledge and skills so that they excel as professionals and entrepreneurs, and earn a “livelihood with dignity” in jobs and markets that had traditionally been closed to them.

We believe that when women are socially and economically empowered, they become catalysts of change – not just in their own lives, but also in their families and communities. The Foundation work with resource-poor women to enable them to:
- imagine new roles for themselves
- Get opportunities to work in safe and respectful environments.
- enhance not just their economic status but also their self-respect and dignity
- Build social capital as they transform their lives and lives of people around them.

3. Jagori
JAGORI means "awaken, women!" Their mission is to inform, inspire and empower. JAGORI started out as a collective, and basic commitment to issues was very clear at the outset. The challenge was to take feminist consciousness to rural areas, make activism and theory come close to each other,
and creative working, reaching out to the main constituency, women, and majority of whom were not educated. New communication tools were developed, such as feminist songs, which are still central to JAGORI’s work. Another path-breaking endeavor was feminist training, a collective learning experience, where the methods used were not only participatory, but also based on women’s ways of learning. Jagori have reached out to grassroot women leaders in the states of Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Jagori objectives are:

- Consciousness raising and awareness building on violence, health, education, development, and other issues critical for women’s individual and collective empowerment
- Production and distribution of creative material on feminist issues
- Dissemination of information and knowledge on feminist concerns to meet the needs of women’s groups, NGOs, and development organizations
- Advocacy on women’s rights and gender equality

**Conclusion**

NGOs have been occupying the role of main service providers over the past few years. Today NGOs are acting as an effective agent of change in the society. Government makes development plans for empowering women but unfortunately government is not able to work at grass root level and the implementation part is very weak. So as an alternative, NGOs are a perfect choice. NGOs are an effective structure for programme implementation and also they give people voice to take stand for themselves. Therefore, NGOs may contribute significantly to socio-economic development.
References

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