



Role of Voluntary Agencies in Rural Development with Special Reference to Management

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ABSTRACT

In a country like ours, where three-fourths of its total population lives in villages, the all-round development of rural areas acquires a significant importance. In the Indian context Rural Development can be defined as “integrated development of the area and the people through optimum development and utilization (and conservation where necessary) of local resources-physical, biological and human-and by bringing about necessary institutional structural and attitudinal changes by delivering a package of services to encompass not only the economic field i.e., agriculture allied activities rural Industries but also establishment of required social infrastructure and services in the area of health and nutrition sanitation housing, drinking water and literacy, with the ultimate objective of improving quality of life of rural poor and the rural weak. Thus rural development refers to the process of improving living conditions providing minimum needs increasing productivity and employment opportunities and developing potentials of rural resources through integration of spatial functional and temporal aspects. In view of stupendous task involved in the process of rural development, Government industries, voluntary, agencies, institutions, banks, Christian missionaries, business houses, trade unions etc. are increasingly getting involved in various developmental endeavors in rural areas. In this context the role of voluntary agencies assumes crucial importance and of late they have acquired greater significance than before.

KEY WORDS

Voluntary agencies, Anti-Poverty Schemes, Rural Development, Economic Regeneration.

INTRODUCTION

A voluntary agency may be defined as “an organizational entity set up by a group of persons on their own initiative or partly by an outside motivation to help the people of a locality to undertake activities in a self-reliant manner (partly or wholly) to satisfy needs and also bring them and the public sector extension services closer to one another for more equitable and effective development of the various sections of the rural poor”. Thus voluntary agencies are non-profit organizations primarily established to represent the needs and aspirations of the people intended to serve.

Emergence of Voluntary Agencies

Voluntary action has been a long tradition in India and occupies a pride place, especially in the field of welfare. The role of voluntary agencies is well-recognized and the policy-makers and administrators also recognize its contribution. They are engaged in various activities closely related to rural development. While some are specialists in various branches of know-ledge and social workers together for seminars conferences and workshops to exchange experiences and learn from each other.

There has been enormous increase in the number of voluntary agencies all over the country since Independence. They have registered five-fold increase from 1,739 in 1953 to 8,052 in 1980 and at present it is estimated that there are more than 10,000 voluntary agencies engaged in various welfare and developmental works. Activities of voluntary agencies in our country can be broadly classified into the following categories:

1. **Charity:** Giving food, clothing, medicine, land, buildings, etc., and alms in cash and kind.
2. **Relief:** Responding to call of duties during natural calamities, like floods, drought, earthquakes, etc., and man-made calamities, like refugee influx, ravages of war, etc.
3. **Rehabilitation:** Continuing and follow-up of the work in areas struck by calamities and starting activities that is durable in nature.
4. **Services:** Building up infrastructure in depressed backward areas such as tractor hiring services providing or facilitating credit supply of seeds fertilizers technical know- how etc.

These activities cover women children handicapped the aged the youth Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes landless and small farmers artisans etc.

Voluntary Efforts in Rural Development

The basic aim of implementing various rural development programmers in our country is to improve the living conditions of rural poor, who form the majority among the poor. Voluntary Agencies were the early catalysts for new thrust in rural transformation and their role was very important. With the increase in implementation of various poverty alleviation programmers in rural areas, the involvement of voluntary agencies is also on the increase. The much increased stress on rural development in recent years has induced voluntary agencies to take up several developmental activities. From the once welfare and charity approach, the voluntary agencies are gradually changing and widening their outlook towards area development. Documents of successive Five- Year Plans have laid emphasis on the need for involvement of voluntary agencies as a significant aspect of participation of people in various developmental endeavors. Voluntary agencies have, by and large, assisted Governmental efforts in:

- (1) Bringing to the knowledge of the Government the difficulties experienced by people in getting the benefit of Government programmers to which they are entitled.
- (2) Reporting the irregularities in implementation of programmers.

The role of voluntary agencies in rural development has importance in special qualities such as creativeness commitment among workers for effective implementation flexibility in approach to suit local conditions close contacts with local people high level of motivation minimum procedural practices which are known to be

missing among Government functionaries. In general the main goals of voluntary agencies in rural development are:

- (1) To help the people to help themselves in their endeavours of progress.
- (2) To stimulate and promote growth of inherent potentials among people for their development.
- (3) To initiate a process of participatory development.
- (4) To bring about social justice for disadvantaged group and create awareness about their rights and duties in our society.
- (5) To promote growth in social political and economic aspects of life in rural areas.

Merits and Limitations

Since rendering service to poor is the main objective of voluntary agencies. They have inherent capacity to organize rural poor and weaker sections for defending their rights. They are in a better position to organize rural masses for availing the collective benefits. Further, they can also make a positive contribution as watchdogs of public interest close to the community. They are supposed to be potentially superior to official agencies in the following three respects:

- (i) Their workers can be more sincerely devoted than Government staff to the task of reducing the sufferings of the poor;
- (ii) They can have a better rapport with the rural poor than Government employees; and
- (iii) Since they are not bound by rigid bureaucratic rules and procedures and can adjust their activities quickly and continuously learning from their experience.

Further their natural capabilities-like raising funds nearness to community ability to experiment flexibility in approach human touch better grasp of the needs and problems of people etc.-put them in an advantageous position to undertake rural development programmes.

Limitations

Though voluntary agencies are in a better position to undertake rural development programmes yet the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development convened by the United Nations in 1979. The conference also recognized the significance of people's participation and positive role of voluntary agencies in rural development which were synonymous. Further Reddy has observed some common irregularities among the voluntary agencies as follows:

- (i) Most of the agencies are headed by a strong and dominant personality without much devolution of power and autonomy to the lower sections, thereby giving an impression that these are one-man shows.
- (ii) Recruitment of personnel is generally done on the basis of caste religion and other personal considerations rather than judging the commitment and aptitude of the recruits.
- (iii) Exploitation of unemployed educated young men and women by paying meager salaries and by using them sometimes for anti-social activities.
- (iv) The programmes implemented are by and large "agency-oriented" or "donor-oriented" rather than "people-oriented".
- (v) Over-dependence on funding agencies and Government rather than mobilizing local resources and funds.
- (vi) A general tendency to blame other agencies and authorities in case of failures without attempting to recognize their own approach and working methods.

Further voluntary agencies cannot do the jobs in certain areas like power mining of coal and minerals industry savings and investments magnitudes and equations balance of payment flows capacity utilization pricing and money and credit supplies both because of nation-wide actions and decisions involved which no voluntary agency is equipped to undertake or deal with and because of the magnitude of finances called for.

Thus no area of national life and development which required massive action through a nation-wide network and or large resources financial and human is appropriate for voluntary agency action. In addition voluntary agencies also suffer from lack of professionalism. Most of the trained workers prefer to work in urban areas rather than in rural areas. Thus these agencies do not have enough expertise and skills to complete various aspects of their work like preparing project proposals statement of accounts planning and implementation of schemes etc. Further they are heavily depending on dedication and sacrifice rather than competence and consistency. Above all the major limitation is lack of sufficient funds for implementing the programmes.

CONCLUSION

In spite of several limitations involvement of voluntary agencies in the process of rural development has become essential due to Government's inherent limitations in reaching the rural poor. If sufficient funds and guidance are provided voluntary agencies can play a vital supportive role in developing rural areas.

To conclude it can be said that involvement of voluntary agencies in the process of rural development is one of the appropriate strategy for successful implementation of various poverty alleviation programmes. Although Government may succeed in improving economic conditions of individuals the voluntary agencies can help in uplifting weaker sections through collective efforts like community irrigation collective farming, community bio-gas social forestry etc. where they can motivate and provide managerial support for availing benefits collectively for community welfare. The Government should recognize their role and should increase financial support relax rules and regulations and thus encourage them to take up various developmental programmes which will certainly prove a major step in the process of rural transformation.

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