



Working Paper

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NGOs and Human Security

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Introduction

Voluntary organizations carry a broad range of social development functions with and on behalf of people. They provide a structure for local action, communication, and dispense resources when no other structures exist. The vast majority of "Non-governmental organizations" (NGOs) exist outside of government and, thus, their programs emanate more from the expressed needs of people rather than from the governments. In recent years, NGOs have emerged as powerful sources for social change within developing countries. Their efforts have been particularly noteworthy in the areas of social service delivery, advocacy, protection of the natural environment, and in establishing new institutions to reflect the changing needs of impoverished peoples (e.g., credit unions, agricultural cooperatives, day-care for age-dependent and sick persons, etc.)

Many NGOs operate under religious sponsorship; others are non-sectarian in auspice and, today, even government-sponsored NGOs have come into being (GONGO). Whatever their auspices, the majority of NGOs devote their attention to service, advocacy, and social change efforts focusing on women, the aged, physically and mentally disabled persons, the poor, as well as various social groups that have been "marginalized" by virtue of race, religion, ethnicity, caste, social class, etc.

In the related fields of humanitarian activities, NGOs play a significant role as one of the most visible sets of actors in helping to achieve human security. These organisations are especially well suited to action for human security because of their informal approach, size, reach, proximity with local community, low cost delivery, and ability to address transnational threats through coalition-building etc. Though they face many hurdles in reorienting their activities including timely sanctions on aid , favourable policy issues of the state and association of like minded persons- some of them are visible, well adored by their contribution to human development. Here the example of BRAC in Bangladesh may be

cited for reference that have diversified their activities from handling complex emergencies to promote long term socio economic development in poverty stricken areasⁱ. International Committee of the Red Cross is another organisation which developed from a small national relief organisation to a multinational charity, with networks in many countries of the world. Of late, the work of NGOs has also expanded to include the promulgation and monitoring of human rights and the pursuit of peace and non-violence.ⁱⁱ Active human rights NGOs also contribute to public policy debates and to contribute to increasing public responsiveness and accountability at all levels of Government.ⁱⁱⁱ The best-known NGO in this category is Amnesty International, which dates back to 1961; today it has more than 2.2 million members spread through 150 countries.^{iv}

The co-operation by the international financial institutions and large aid-donor organisations like the UN Agencies, Bilateral Agencies and International NGOs, throughout the last decades have created considerable space for NGOs, and provided significant assistance in developing their strategies to make them key figures in a wide range of social sectors. In countries like Haiti, Guatemala, Argentina, El Salvador and Nicaragua, the government is relying on implementing large performance based programs with NGOs, mostly among the country's indigenous populations. By the year 2000, a total no of 89 NGOs in Guatemala were involved by the government to provide health care services to almost 3.7 million people under 137 contracts.^v The provision of basic health care & education services given by NGOs in comparison to the local government are rated as of a much higher quality. In countries like Zambia and Sri Lanka NGOs are considered as pioneers in providing health care, education, human rights advocacy on a larger scale.^{vi} As NGOs are seen increasingly as potential partners in providing such essential services to the local population, they have also become critical in ensuring human security particularly in remote and underserved areas. Though external donors fund the technological components of the programs, these institutions play catalytic roles in the actual implementation process.^{vii} They play a commendable role in extending humanitarian aid helping many people, like after the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, India^{viii} and the cyclone that devastated Mozambique in 2000.^{ix} The effectiveness of a well-co-ordinated NGO network has been observed in other complex emergencies around the world.

Recently, however, local NGOs originating in South Asian communities have increased their capabilities and professionalism and have become prominent forces in development. In countries like India and Bangladesh, local NGOs now demonstrate their effectiveness to their Northern counterparts in terms of their size, impact, technique and initiatives.^x Despite their small size, some of the indigenous NGOs came to be perceived as having comparative advantages in local area development because of their flexibility, access to local expertise, innovations & cost effective delivery of services.

The shift in focus of international approaches to development from economic to social development context over last few decades gradually emerged in placing greater importance on the community participation in local development initiatives. Such trends in the changes of civil society structures opened the doors for a global increase in the number and range of local NGOs aiming at a non-profit transfer of knowledge and skills in the developing world. With the end of the cold war, under the New Policy Agenda, NGOs were seen as the most efficient mechanism for providing social services in Third World countries to fill up the gap of the government's inability to reach the resource poor.^{xi} Today, many southern NGOs have become key players in international development, major contributors to development processes within their communities and countries and continue to experience incredible growth fuelled with sufficient funds from external sources.^{xii} These organisations tend to be highly flexible and are more apt at incorporating local contexts than Governments or International donor organisations. They play as prominent advocates of human rights, advocating on behalf of disadvantageously placed groups including women and children. The impact of these local community organisations is considered to be strong and long lasting to address the needs of poor in individual country contexts.^{xiii} While there are many, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC), and Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are known worldwide for their wider coverage for the cause of human development.

While the flow of official receipts of funds on the continent has declined by more than 30% since 1994, the proportion of donor funding through NGOs are increasing. Both the American and Dutch governments decided to disburse an increasing proportion of their development assistance in Africa towards NGOs, not to the Government.^{xiv} Almost 28% of US Agency International Development (USAID) aid is delivered through northern and

southern NGOs.^{xv} However in many instances, donor funding has helped many local NGOs to take active part in development processes and planning.^{xvi} Not only these NGOs have turned out to be useful instruments of human development and human rights counted on by governments, donor agencies, international financial institutions, but also they have been preferred by millions of people worldwide they serve.^{xvii}

Of all the working definitions of human security, the definition provided by the International Commission on Human Security as “to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment” and which encompasses human rights, good governances, access to education and health care.....the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment” is most notable.^{xviii} Human security concerns cut across the traditional sectors of development activity including wider political, policy and various non-governmental and regional initiatives. Hence, the concept of human security and the larger discourse it is associated with which focuses on immediate concerns like providing basic needs and peace towards the most vulnerable have forged a confluence of various groups in the international policy community.

There is thus an increasing recognition of the significance of NGOs as key actors in conflict resolution and suggestion that they should adopt long-term perspectives in their strategies.^{xix} NGOs can play non controversial independent third party role due to the comparative advantages they possess over other actors.

1. NGOs have wider reach

The global rise of NGOs in their sizes, reach & scope of work are debated as their strong advantages on contributions to human security work. Over the past few years the different advocacy networks of NGOs related to human rights concerns have expanded and opened up scope for funding from private foundations as well as Government sources. The efforts made by certain US and European based larger NGOs are commendable for the growth and movement of these advocacy networks in global sphere.^{xx} With the development of NGOs movement for their quality of work, certain local and International NGOs have expanded their services reaching a larger number of people and have set up regional offices for their

local operations in many countries.^{xxi} Since local NGOs know the local conditions better, they are in much advantageous position to abridge the link between the communities and policy makers.^{xxii} For their closeness to public millions rely for their health, education and economic development needs to the local groups. For example, countries like Bangladesh and Philippines have few NGOs however, they operate with greater outreach. Among the thousand plus listed organisations in Bangladesh, Grameen Bank, BRAC (Building Resources Across Communities formerly known as Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), Prosika and ASA (Association for Social Advancement), account for nearly 70% of the total clients of the country. Likewise in the Philippines, top 10 MFIs of the country provide service to 60% of the country's population.^{xxiii} In developing nations there has been increasing reliance by the state and central Governments on the local NGOs as important service providers. Moreover, in countries like the US it has been observed that the state and local governments show growing dependence on the local NGOs to provide humanitarian services.^{xxiv}

However in the late twentieth century the developing world has seen rapid growth of NGOs in size and reach in response to influx of international aid, especially those in South Asia. The movement has been succeeded further with the help of the global network of NGOs.^{xxv} Today, many Japanese NGOs establish close partnership with local counterparts and promote grass root development through them. Some Japanese NGOs working in Cambodia have established a network in 1992, which facilitates communication and co-operation among NGOs engaged in humanitarian aid to Cambodia.^{xxvi} For example, Basic Human Needs (BHN) Association, a Japanese NGO in 2005 by donated transmission equipment and 5000 radios to improve communication to Tsunami affected communities was commendable.^{xxvii}

In addition, to the growth in number, certain NGOs have grown in size and offer a wide array of services to millions of people in many countries and more and more operating like corporations.^{xxviii} The increasing growth of NGOs in Asia, Latin America and Africa is regarded as quite incredible. Some of them have not only grown in number, they have grown in size, effectiveness and doing well as regional and national organisations.^{xxix} In Kenya, there are many local NGOs have achieved nation-wide representation, of which more than 100 are international in their operations.^{xxx} In their effort to be closer to give services to people, many NGOs in Uganda as well as other African Countries they have established their

offices in remote areas to make faster their decision making and delivering programming responsibilities. As a result of such initiatives now many in isolated rural communities, have access to effective social development programs which help to protect them from various forms of insecurity and increase their stake in the development process.^{xxxii}

It is worth appreciating today that the NGOs working for the community offer their beneficiaries a wide and often diverse range of services. Whether they are world class, intermediary, medium sized or local and each group adopt different strategy to reach to the heart of society and its culture.^{xxxiii} While the local Palestine NGOs activities in Israel are not limited to the service provision only, for example, rather they focus on a range of social and political issues like lobbying, culture and to some extent like to assert the religious identity of the community.^{xxxiiii} WWF in India, while offering its members with necessary business and leadership skills for a harmonious life, also incorporate other aspects of their members' livelihoods and security into their work like, promoting consciousness on various societal issues and improving the overall quality of life and living conditions of women.^{xxxv} Self – Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has set another successful model in India which promotes collective empowerment through provision of credit, health care, child care, literacy and community leadership training.^{xxxvi}

The proliferation of various activities of the NGOs on issues of human security has attracted donor agencies and multilateral agencies interested in funding human security initiatives.. Thus, due to their approach and attitude for instant action, few NGOs have been claimed to be the legitimate security agencies for providing human security to the disadvantaged population by taking care of their basic needs.^{xxxvii} Initiating global action is possible because of their scope, size, network and ability to perform.

2. NGOs are best suited to address human security initiatives

NGOs have many positive virtues to identify proper strategies to improve the qualities of work and mitigate conflicts. Because of their actions and development over the years the movement has plagued many such institutions in different forms at many different levels in the world. Of late NGOs play a critical role as agents of development and delivering service oriented partnership make them particularly well-suited to human security initiatives.

Adhering to the ideology of not for profit motive comprises the unique characteristic of such organisations.^{xxxvii}

NGOs have the greatest advantage in form of human resources as resourceful assets to serve the people in difficult situations. They work with lot of flexibility and uncertainty of fund support. For a long period of time, voluntary organisations were alone working as the service delivery channels for rural people in India. In spite of their less financial administration and academic ability they have certain merits to be appreciated. They can reach marginalised sections of the population destitute, sex workers, drug addicts, tribes, children, the aged, and people with disability and undertake projects with limited resources. Since they are quite accessible to the community they have better understanding of the need of the community and invent appropriate solutions to the human security concerns of people in a much better way.^{xxxviii} Hence they are perceived as a cohesive alternative force promoting a more responsive and sustained approach initiating development activities for mass population. Because of their informality, they can respond quickly and directly to the humanitarian needs of the people and mobilise broad and active participation and support for broader development activities.^{xxxix} Moreover the use of internet and browsing through web have enabled the NGOs to co-ordinate their activities effectively.

Some NGOs do commendable work in some countries in providing community mental health services through participatory action approach in spite of difficulties in establishing themselves in the situations.^{xl} One service oriented NGO Kenya Water for Health (KWAHO) has worked to extend public service on water and sewerage through involvement of government as well as community members. The organisation also mobilised successfully support from Norwegian Aid Agency to improve the sanitation system in Liberia.^{xli} Despite much criticism for NGOs like, absence of proper staff, paucity of funds, unclear strategy, lack of transparency etc., they implement programs which give lasting benefits to local population. They are innovative and devise suitable models for rural transformation.^{xlii} Since they are well aware of the short term nature of donor funding and limited use of the budget to project expenditures they remain prepared and adapt their strategies accordingly. Hence, this promptness of NGOs make them able to come forward to play a significant role in mitigating sudden threats to human security for the people. Local organisations are best suited to undertake such tasks as they have in depth understanding on local social, cultural and

environmental contexts, and on mobilising and ensuring the meaningful participation of local populations.^{xliii}

3. NGOs are spontaneous to address threats to human security

NGOs are spontaneous and willing to confront to human security efforts. Due to misplaced priorities, absence of vision, not enough commitment by leaders and followed by resource constraints by Governments as well as many organisations lack of access to basic education and health care are both insecurities. This has been further aggravated in many developing countries due to underinvestment in the sector providing basic social services to the women, children and needy.^{xliv} But in many contexts NGOs being people centred operators do more than providing service delivery to local people. While governments being formal bureaucratic structures focus on broad strategies for nation as a whole, NGOs are expert to focus on individuals and communities as a part of their ongoing development approach. Such an approach has significant advantage on sustainable environment development and human security.^{xlv}

The global success of NGOs through their micro finance activities is a much highlighted one in today's world. They have made a remarkable positive contribution to human security through servicing small loans to poor who were otherwise denied any financial support by formal institutions to improve their economic condition. Continuous credit support by the NGOs have improved people's ability to livelihoods. Moreover, the very structure of micro finance has encouraged women to build social networks, gain rights to property and common resources, increase participation in common decision making and initiate collective action for sustainable development thereby reducing vulnerability and promoting human security.^{xlvi} By protecting the livelihoods of self employed and informal workers through the provision of credit and lobbying for their labour rights, SEWA in India has made a significant contribution to reducing the threats to their security that neither the Government nor any other institutions were very keen to address. SEWA promotes women empowerment through democratically managed member based organisations and has set up specialised institutions to service its member's needs including health care, education, income generation, housing etc.^{xlvii}

4. NGOs can address political threats to human security

Many threats to human security often result from the adverse effect of government policies and ineffective political institutions or regulatory frameworks. Many of these policies have created considerable space for individual social activists and NGOs to act as agents of human security. Among many such NGOs Green Peace acts as catalysts to influence on government policies, make improvement on people's lives and transform international system. The effort of NGOs were appreciated by Nobel Peace Committee in 1997 while conferring the Peace award to social activist Jody William for her initiative with the network to pressure governments to adapt a ban on land mines in 60 countries of the developing world.^{xlviii} OXFAM Australia and World Vision work hard to gain access to the highest level of development decision making in many agencies in the multilateral agencies system including the United Nations and national policy making institutions.^{xlix}

While local NGOs having the expertise on local knowledge and experience, their role is relevant in countries to confront the underlying political issues which affect the human security. For instance, a number of local grass root civil society organisations formed an alliance with International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), a non profit organisation, called “ For Clean Elections” to conduct awareness on voter education and citizens civic rights in Kyrgyzstan. This group of NGOs also helped to motivate larger youth participation in the Presidential election of 2005 within their countries.¹ It is also seen that the NGOs have tremendous influence in the African Human rights system. Their contribution to the development of issues relating to human security is well recognised and they exert influence on the human security agenda at the level of interaction with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR).^{li} Many such initiatives by strong civil society networks and like-minded groups broaden the range of opportunities for people to see that state action, institutional frameworks and threats to their security are linked properly.

5. NGOs can address transnational threats to human security

Threats to human security are increasingly becoming transnational in nature. Apart from recognized human security threats such as civil war, environmental degradation, organised crime and terrorism which cross borders, there are also life styles threats occur due to spread

of infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS and through the threat of bio warfare. The rapidity of such threats flows cross border population and foster various problems within and between states.^{lii} In order to develop appropriate strategies to combat transnational threats, transnational entities are more preferred to be involved at every level of the process, from planning to implementation, as states are not transnational entities and may not attend beyond boundary. Such situation in global phenomenon has increasingly created wider scope for NGOs to operate transnational and remain active around the globe to minimise threats to human security.

There are several NGOs operate as international structures having their state offices in individual countries like Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam), Humanist Institute for Development Co-operation (HIVOS) and many others to support global human security initiatives in many countries. Besides, there are a number of local NGOs starting from their own countries have played crucial role in ensuring human security through livelihoods in neighbouring countries. This apart strong NGO networks are also quite beneficial in which NGOs are well-equipped to address transnational threats to human security. Many such NGO networks exist by the diversity of their members and work worldwide through alliances.^{liii}

Thus NGOs and civil society organisations have come to play a major role in advocating human development and human rights concerns and are well recognised by Human Security Network for their practical involvement in all human securities issues.^{liv} Particularly in the reconstruction of democratic entities in conflict zones, restoring infrastructure and providing basic services to the earthquake or cyclone affected victims, NGOs discharge quite meaningful role that state and its agencies may not be able to do.^{lv} Though the governments may have the responsibility to tackle the human security needs of their citizens, in case of complex interrelated factors that arise out of state boundaries they are often confined to their actions and their own policy decisions which NGOs address through their activities and wide networks.

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