

Golden Research Thoughts

EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGOs: AN OVERVIEW

ABSTRACT:-

In India, the expanding NGOs activity in the field of environment is a welcome sign for making people aware about the environmental problems. NGOs also create an open forum for dialogue among all concerned, co-coordinate with the agencies involved, and provide inputs for policy making. At the grassroots level, they deal with locally relevant environmental issues. Since 1970 Non-government organizations have played an increasingly important role in promoting environmental awareness. The present paper is based on secondary sources. The present paper discuss the concept of Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), emergence of environmental NGOs at International level and in India, methods and strategies adopted by environmental NGOs, role and contributions of NGOs for environmental protection, and limitations in the performance of environmental NGOs in India.



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INTRODUCTION**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs): CONCEPT**

The term, 'non-governmental organization' or NGO, "came into currency in 1945 because of the need for the UN to differentiate in its Charter between participation rights for intergovernmental specialized agencies and those for international private organizations. ...At the UN, virtually all types of private bodies can be recognized as NGOs. They only have to be independent from government control, not seeking to challenge governments either as a political party or by a narrow focus on human rights, non-profit-making and non-criminal, the structures of NGOs vary considerably.....With the improvement in communications, more locally-based groups, referred to as grass-roots organizations or community based organizations, have become active at the national or even the global level. Increasingly this occurs through the formation of coalitions. There are international umbrellas NGOs, providing an institutional structure for different NGOs that do not share a common identity. There are also looser issue-based networks and advoc causes" (Salunkhe, S. A. 2011: 3-4).

The term non-governmental organization is an ambiguous term. It is widely used to refer to a variety of nonprofit organizations. By citing the definition of NGOs given by Michael Cernea, he brings out that NGOs are "entirely or largely independent of government and are characterized primarily by humanitarian and cooperative, rather than commercial objectives."...When referring to NGOs in developing countries, the term is used interchangeably with private voluntary organizations which are governed by a group of private citizens for a stated philanthropic purpose, and supported by voluntary individual contributions (Meyer, Carrie A. 1993: 192-193).

EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL:

Princen, Thomas and Matthias Finger (2001) have noted that, "International organizations generally have grown rapidly in 20th century...Comparable data on international environmental NGOs is not available, but indirect indicators suggest that their growth has been at least as dramatic as that of international NGOs generally. In fact, almost all environmental NGOs, networks, and coalitions were started in the 1980s. Membership of international NGOs coordinating bodies is one indicator of NGO growth....Another indicator of the growing numbers and prominence of NGOs worldwide is the number of directories that have sprung up in recent years. Yet another indicator of growing NGO prominence is the organizational growth which many individual NGOs, especially some of the more prominent Northern groups, have experienced since the early 1980s" (Princen, Thomas and Finger, Matthias 2001: 1-2).

The evolution of environmental issues on the agendas of international institutions can be better understood by dividing the postwar period into three periods defined by two landmark meetings – the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which was convened in Stockholm in June 1972 and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the Earth Summit, which was held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. The first, or pre-Stockholm era, extends to 1968, the year in which the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to convene the Stockholm Conference four years later. The second, or the Stockholm era, spans two decades, from 1968 to 1987...The third, or Rio de Janeiro era, commences in 1987 with the release of the influential report of the Brundtland Commission entitled 'Our Common Future' (Soors, Marvin S. 2006: 28-29).

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS:

Finger, Matthias (2001) points out that, UNCED established new and different kinds of NGO relations, significantly contributing to the transcendence of many NGOs from traditional politics, as well as from the environmental movements from which they originated.....Through UNCED these NGOs established relationships with the most vocal governments in UNCED, in particular the United States, Canada, India, Pakistan, and Malaysia, with UN agencies, and even with industry, especially transnational corporations. Overall, NGOs as a category of actors in international environment and development politics have improved their status and their bargaining power.....asserting themselves as international environmental actors, these NGOs have gone beyond traditional national politics, as well as the environmental movement from which they originated (Finger, Matthias 2001: 209).

The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are increasingly important participants in international environmental institutions. NGOs have been formally but not fully incorporated into what were previously 'states only' activities...“The NGOs are distinctive entities with important skills and resources to deploy in the process of international environmental cooperation. Rather than undermining state sovereignty, active NGOs participation enhances the abilities of states to regulate globally....that NGOs are now more pervasive in international environmental institutions illustrate the expansion, not the retreat, of the state in addressing global environmental problems” (Raustiala, Kal 1997: 719).

Many Third World-based environmental NGOs (ENGOS) are mainly concerned with development issues, notably the promotion of social justice. Yet what often distinguishes them from 'regular' development NGOs is their emphasis on the need to pursue such objectives via the mechanisms of environmental conservation. Social justice and equity is attained by ensuring that the poor gain access to local environmental resources (that is, timber, fuel, clean water)....the rise of ENGOS in most Third World countries since the late 1970s can be seen to reflect the growing power and assertiveness of 'civil society' vis-à-vis the state. Throughout Asia, communities are fighting against mega dams which threaten to displace them and submerge forests.....Although most Third World ENGOS are community-based

grassroots organizations dedicated to the direct protection of local livelihoods....All over the Third World, environmental groups remain to articulate their struggle against environmental degradation with the struggle against capitalist economic structures and western political and cultural imperialism (Van Der Heijden, Hein Anton 1999: 207-210).

EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS IN INDIA:

The genesis of concern for environmental protection in India, "can be traced back to the early twentieth century when people protested against the commercialization of forest resources during the British colonial period....It was only in the 1970s a coherent and relatively organized awareness of the ecological impact of state-monolithic development process started to develop, to grow into a full fledged understanding of the limited nature of natural resources and to prevent the depletion of natural resources" (Sahu, Geetanjoy 2007: 3).

The most significant feature of environmental movements in India is that, there is involvement of local voluntary organizations or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in these movements. Many examples can be cited. In case of the famous Chipko Movement, the work of Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal (DGSM), Gopeswar, which was engaged in social work in the Uttarakhand, was significant.... Silent Valley Movement, the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), an NGO, was working for three decades among masses of Kerala for growing environmental awareness....Many NGOs are also connected with the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Salunkhe, S. A. 2011: 17-18; Dhanawade, Satish 2013: 16).

Methods and Strategies Adopted By Environmental NGOs:

McCormick, John (2006: 65-68) has discussed the following methods and strategies adopted by environmental NGOs: 1] Working with elected official, bureaucrats, and Employees of Corporations, 2] Raising and spending money, 3] Campaigning and Organizing Public Protests, 4] Promoting Media coverage of Environmental Issues, 5] Litigation and Monitoring the Implementation of Environmental Law, 6] Information Exchange, 7] Understanding Research, 8] Acquiring and managing property, 9] Generating local community involvement in environmental protection.

ROLE OF NGOS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION:

Jeffrey, D. W. (2001: 152-155) has described the following roles have been played by environmental NGOs:

a] Providing inputs to policy, b] Expressing opinions on current issues, c] Foster environmental awareness and education, d] Advising on technical matters, e] Engaging in political lobbying, f] Interrelate with international agencies, g] Owning and managing property, h] Forming coalitions, i] Litigating interacting with development planning and j] Taking direct action.

Sabharwal, Y. K. (2006) Chief Justice of India pointed out that, NGOs can make the following contributions for environmental protection: a) conducting education and citizen awareness programmes in the field of environment, b) fact-finding and analysis, c) providing factual and reliable information with a network of professional expert staff, d) remaining independent while passing relevant information to the public and governmental bodies, e) solidarity and support to environmental defenders, f) working in collaboration with the government for capacity building and promotion of community participation in environmental awareness and protection, and g) working out at the grassroots level and reaching far-flung areas with or without the government invitation.

LIMITATIONS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS IN INDIA:

Agarwal, Anjali (2008) has given following limitations in the performance of environmental NGOs in India: 1] Shortage of trained personnel in the field of environmental protection, 2] Lack of research and development facilities, 3] Financial constraints, 4] Lack of co-operation from the governmental agencies, 5] Difficulties in the mobility on account of lack of transport facilities, 6] Environmental NGOs are facing a credibility crisis with a number of cases of misappropriation and scandals involving some of them coming to the fore (Agarwal, Anjali 2008: 937).

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