

## NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

### 26.1 INTRODUCTION

Non-Governmental Organisations, or NGOs in brief, have been engaged in many social development activities. They are organised by a group of people who feel that they have a moral duty to serve the community. Organisations like Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity or Ramakrishna Mission have been known for their commitment to the welfare of the poor, the homeless and the distressed and disadvantaged population. They are organised on a voluntary basis on the principle of service to the socially disadvantaged classes. Their efforts supplement those of the government. Also, they can take up many activities, like organising the poor, which the government bureaucracy is not generally capable of taking up. In the third world countries, the role of NGOs in development activities is being increasingly emphasised in such fields as child and women's development, slums improvement, poverty amelioration, environmental conservation, educational development and political movements.

### 26.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to

- recall the nature of non-government organisations,
- identify the role of the NGO's in the functioning of Indian democracy,
- realise the importance of voluntary efforts of the NGO's in such fields as social, economic, educational, political and environmental development, and
- appreciate the useful role being played by particular NGOs like Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity or Ramakrishna Mission.

### 26.3 NATURE OF NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

Government does many things. But cannot do everything. Society runs its affairs with or without government support. A tribal group manages its own affairs. A local sports club organises sports activities with the help of its members. Voluntary social efforts supplement government efforts. Look at Mother Teresa's organisation - the Missionaries of Charity. Her organisation helps the poor, gives them shelter and medical care. Again, there is the



Fig. 26.1 Mother Teresa

Ramakrishna Mission which is well-known for its work for the poor and the needy. The Mission runs schools for blind boys and has set up many schools and colleges. For the poor villagers, the Mission has taken up many rural development works including rural sanitation. These are examples of non-government organisations engaged in a variety of social development activities. As they do these activities on their own voluntarily, they are known as voluntary organisations, or voluntary agencies. A voluntary organisation is an organisation created by a group to promote the common interests of its members. Voluntarism and self-help are important features of a voluntary organisation.

The voluntary organisations have been called the 'third sector', the other two sectors being the government sector and the private sector. The government sector maintains law and

order, resolves conflicts and protects the country from external threats. But, in contrast, the private sector engaged in business, commerce and industry carries on production activities for profit making. Voluntary organisations, forming the 'third sector', raise their own resources and undertake a variety of social development functions. *It is service rather than profit that informs their activities.*

## INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.1

1. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words given in the brackets :
  - (a) Non-Government Organisations are organised on \_\_\_\_\_ basis on the principle of services to the socially disadvantaged classes. (voluntary/non-voluntary)
  - (b) In the third world countries, the role of NGOs in \_\_\_\_\_ activities is being increasingly emphasized. (underdevelopment/development)
  - (c) The name of Mother Teresa's organisation is \_\_\_\_\_. (Ramakrishna Mission/Missionaries of Charity)
  - (d) Voluntary organisations have been called the \_\_\_\_\_ sector. (fourth/third)
  - (e) It is \_\_\_\_\_ rather than profit that informs their activities. (business/service)

## 26.4 ROLE OF NGOS IN INDIA

In India, the role of the voluntary organisations has long been recognised as indispensable for rural development and the welfare of the poor. The Gandhian view of local level self-help activities for the upliftment of the poor and for village development generally gained wide recognition even before Independence. After independence, the role of voluntary agencies has been advocated as partners of the state and panchayati raj institutions in the task of rural development and poverty removal. The arguments in favour of these agencies

have been as follows :

- (a) Voluntary organisations are able to encourage popular participation in development works like forest protection, agricultural improvement, irrigation management, etc. Government bureaucracy has in general failed to work with people.
- (b) Government bureaucracy has to work on the basis of rigid rules and regulations. Voluntary organisations are more flexible in their approaches and are work-oriented rather than rule-oriented.
- (c) Voluntary organisations have the right kind of commitment and motivation to work for the poor. They are more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the poor. Government bureaucracy is more impersonal and self-interested. Also, their members are transferable, and hence, unable to develop attachment to a place or a target group.
- (d) Because of their moral commitment, voluntary agencies show solidarity to members and the client groups they serve. Their strength lies in informal structures of membership. Voluntaryism and services on an honorary basis of most of the members distinguish their working style from government operations by salaried employees functioning within a hierarchical and rule-bound structures.
- (e) NGOs as the third sector have the skill and motivation to organise and motivate people at the grassroots level. They have been successful in organising the poor in rural and urban areas to pursue their self-development, fight for their rights and apply pressures on government.
- (f) These voluntary organisations have greatly eased the burden of government expenditure by mobilising resources for development. Their success lies in their capacity to tap vast reservoirs of social energy not easily accessible to government organisations or their private enterprises.
- (g) It is now generally accepted that democracy is best promoted through plurality of organisations. Power is dispersed in this way and people get opportunity to take part in social problem-solving. Thus, voluntary organisations are good for the health of a democracy.
- (h) Many alternative ways of organising development works become possible when there are many voluntary organisations engaged in development activities. Voluntary agencies, therefore, open up possibilities of new experiments in social development work.
- (i) Bureaucracies are criticised for their lack of responsiveness to public services at the local level. An irrigation channel may be constructed without consulting the local farmers and it may not be able to serve the needs of those at the end point. Service responsiveness is better assured when voluntary organisations who work in close association with the local people who are in charge of the delivery system.

## INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.2

1. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words given in the brackets :

- (a) The \_\_\_\_\_ view of local level self-help activities for the upliftment of the poor gained wide recognition even before Independence. (Marxian/Gandhian)
- (b) Voluntary organisations are able to \_\_\_\_\_ popular participation. (discourage/encourage)

- (c) Government bureaucracy has to work on the basis of \_\_\_\_\_ regulations. (flexible/rigid)
- (d) Voluntary organisations are \_\_\_\_\_ responsive to the needs of the people (more)
- (e) Voluntary organisations' strength lies in \_\_\_\_\_ structure of membership (informal/formal)
- (f) NGOs motivate people at the \_\_\_\_\_ level. (elite/grassroot)
- (g) Voluntary organisations have \_\_\_\_\_ the burden of government. (eased/increased)
- (h) Voluntary organisations are \_\_\_\_\_ for the health of democracy. (bad/good)
- (i) Voluntary agencies open up possibilities of \_\_\_\_\_ experiments in social development work. (old/new)

### 26.5 ROLE OF NGOS AS DISCUSSED IN FIVE-YEAR PLANS

Because of these features and advantages of voluntary organisations, many official committees in India have recommended their role as partners of the state and panchayati raj institutions. Since the Sixth Five-Year Plan, an important feature of our development policy has been to encourage voluntary action and to get more and more development projects planned and executed by voluntary agencies. NGOs have been promoting social and economic development in many states, specially at the grassroot level. They are participating in Integrated Rural Development Programme, (IRDP), and other activities such as agricultural extension, adult education, health care and family planning, relief and rehabilitation of the disabled, micro or local level planning, and special schemes for poverty alleviation. Ramakrishna Mission, Tagore Society for Rural Development (West Bengal), Mitran (Kerala), Banwasi Seva Ashram (Uttar Pradesh) are some of the well-known voluntary organisations that are actively engaged in different aspects of rural development. At the all-India level, the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD) acts as the central coordinating body of voluntary organisations.

The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) emphasised the importance of NGOs in carrying out development activities at the local level. New areas were identified where NGOs could work to create public awareness and involve people's participation. Some of the development activities as identified were :

- (a) development of renewable source of energy including social forestry;
- (b) family welfare, health and nutrition education;
- (c) water management and soil conservation;
- (d) welfare programmes for weaker sections;
- (e) implementation of minimum needs programme;
- (f) disaster preparedness and management (floods, cyclones, etc.);
- (g) promotion of ecology and tribal development and
- (h) environmental protection and education.

Particular types of NGOs that were called upon to undertake these development activities were youth and women's organisations, specific beneficiary or interest groups like employed women, farmers in command areas of irrigation projects and watershed area unirrigated areas, social and cultural organisations like Rotary and Lions Clubs, professional organisations and educational institutions.

The Seventh Plan (1985-90) recommended a more active role for voluntary organisations in order to make the local communities as self-reliant as possible. The idea was to make full use of local village resources including human resources. By utilising local resources like land, water, forests, etc. and by creating public awareness and new skills, it was thought that grassroots workers would be able to take up their own local development work. It would thus be possible to raise resources from local communities, organise the poor and disadvantaged groups, and create in the process self-reliant and decentralised development. People would be able to demand more quality services and hold the local functionaries of the government accountable to the local community.

Today, in different parts of India voluntary efforts by NGOs are recognised as essential for people's awareness and local need-based development. There are, of course, weaknesses in NGO activities, and it is not true that voluntary organisations have been a success everywhere. But, in local social development, the culture of voluntary work has come to stay. That is why the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) has laid similar emphasis on NGO-led local activities with more and more public participation in grassroot welfare and development work. In the Indian situation, there are other types of voluntary organisations also that are often critical of government activities and involved in organising the people to resist anti-people policies — be it forest policy or irrigation and electricity rate policy. It is not unusual therefore for NGOs to get politically involved, although the general notion about welfare NGOs is that they are non-political. Political NGOs, by organising public opinion and mobilising the people, can be useful for Indian democracy. Constructive opposition and critical outlook may not always be to the liking of government. Yet, for the health of a functioning democracy, this is of considerable significance.

### INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.3

1. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words given in the brackets :

- Since the \_\_\_\_\_ Five Year Plan an important feature of our development policy has been to encourage voluntary action. (Fifth/Sixth)
- Rotary Club is a \_\_\_\_\_ voluntary organisation. (cultural/political)
- The Seventh Five Year Plan recommended a \_\_\_\_\_ active role for voluntary organisations. (less/more)
- NGOs would help to create more self-reliant and \_\_\_\_\_ development. (centralised/decentralised)
- The Eighth Five Year Plan has emphasized \_\_\_\_\_ led local activities. (NGO/Government)

### 26.6 IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

We can now realise the importance of voluntary organisation in bringing about various kinds of social development. The government alone is unable to take the heavy burden of social development. The efforts of NGOs ease the government's burden, both financial and organisational. It is not possible for the government to look into the details of a local situation, as in the case of flood relief or poverty amelioration, local public health and sanitation. The NGOs working with the local people get to know the local situation better. They earn the trust of the local people and can enlist their active support in such activities as literacy movement, forest conservation, nutrition and child health etc. Voluntary effort is society's own effort. So, voluntary organisations are able to draw on social energy. Because of information and flexibility in operation, NGOs can innovate and suggest new

ways of doing things like rural water supply, soil conservation and newer ways of creating opportunities for the poor people to improve their economic condition. Working with people democratises NGO operations. People freely express their views about their real needs and participate in decision-making relating to the planning and implementation of local development projects. The quality of work, therefore, is likely to improve when NGOs will be involved in development. The cost of development work is also expected to be less, as the people themselves will mobilise resources and execute the work.

Welfare and developmental NGOs are not the only ones in the field; there are political NGOs also that mobilise public opinion against government policies and actions. The resistance can be against government's policy of forest conservation, price increase or subsidy reduction, say in electricity, fertiliser, or irrigation water. To the extent such NGOs are able to educate the public and put pressure on public policy, they act as important pressure groups in a democracy.

The range of NGO activities is very wide. They have been active in social work (relief and rehabilitation), economic development (irrigation and watershed management), educational upliftment (literacy movement, primary education), political movement (mobilising people to influence government policy), and environmental development (forest conservation, and natural resource management). This shows the importance of NGO activities in a developing country like ours, where socio-economic problems are too numerous to be handled by government alone.

## 26.7 USEFULNESS OF PARTICULAR NGOS

Particular NGOs like Ramakrishna Mission, Missionaries of Charity or various educational societies in Western and Southern India have long been engaged in various social development activities. Their contributions in different fields are too well known to be repeated here. Their commitment to social welfare and self-less work for the needy, the sick and the poor and the disadvantaged has been nationally and internationally recognised. Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Prize for her life-long work for the socially and economically disadvantaged group in society.

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### INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.4

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1. Answer in Yes or No.
    - (a) The efforts of NGOs ease government's burden.
    - (b) It is always possible for government to look into details of a local situation.
    - (c) Voluntary organisations are able to draw social energy.
    - (d) There are no political NGOs.
    - (e) NGOs have been engaged in educational upliftment.
    - (f) Ramakrishna Mission and Missionaries of Charity are political organisations.
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### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

Non-Government Organisations have been engaged in many social development activities. They are organised on a voluntary basis, by a group of people who feel that they have a moral duty to serve the community. It is service rather than profit that informs their activities. In India, the role of voluntary organisations has long been recognised for rural development and the welfare of the poor. Since the Sixth Five Year Plan, an important

feature of our development policy has been to encourage voluntary action and to get more and more development projects planned and executed by voluntary agencies. The Seventh Plan (1985-90) recommended a more active role for voluntary organisations in order to make full use of local communities and local resources. Government alone is unable to take the heavy burden of social development. The efforts of NGOs lighten the government's burden, both financial and organisational, and create local capacities for self-reliant development.

### **TERMINAL EXERCISES**

1. Discuss the nature of Non-Governmental Organisations.
2. What are the arguments in favour of Non-Governmental Organisations?
3. Name some of the NGOs acting in different parts of India.
4. What were the new areas which were identified by the Sixth Five Year Plan where NGOs could work?
5. How did the Seventh Plan discuss the role of NGOs?
6. Write a brief note on the importance of Voluntary Organisations.
7. Discuss the contribution of Missionaries of Charity.

## **CHECK YOUR ANSWERS**

### **INTEXT QUESTIONS**

26.1.1. (a) Voluntary, (b) development, (c) Missionaries of Charity, (d) third, (e) service.

26.4.1. (a) Gandhian, (b) encourage, (c) rigid, (d) more (e) informal, (f) grassroots, (g) eased.

26.5.1. (a) Fifth, (b) cultural, (c) more, (d) decentralised, (e) NGO

26.6.1. (a) Yes, (b) No, (c) Yes, (d) No, (e) Yes, (f) No.

### **TERMINAL EXERCISES**

1. Refer to Section 26.3
2. Refer to Section 26.3
3. Refer to Section 26.4
4. Refer to Section 26.5
5. Refer to Section 26.5
6. Refer to Section 26.6
7. Refer to Section 26.7