

Alternative Development (Non-Government Organisations In Third-World Countries)

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It is worthwhile to recall what Ms. Hillary Rodham Clinton stated at the Rajiv Gandhi foundation speech in March 1995,

"NGO's are often created by individuals with a dream. of a better world. NGO's can give voice to the aspirations of people who are left out of the modern economy, and whose influence on the Government may otherwise be small. In no area are NGO's more important than in efforts to educate and empower women".

India is a developing nation. As with all countries in the third world, she is caught up in a vicious, circle of poverty. Everything about the 'poor' and 'poverty' in India is defined in terms of a 'lack' - *powerlessness, apathy and disorganisation* are some of the major attributes we use to define and describe the poor.¹

This has fateful consequences on the planning for the poor as the poor are treated as *objects* of change, not *subjects*.

In this regard, the Declaration adopted by UN world conference on Human Rights (Vienna 25th June 1993) reads:²

(Para 6.2) the human person is the central subject of Development"
(Para 13) "Extreme poverty and social exclusion constitute a violation of human dignity. Urgent steps are necessary to promote the human rights of the poorest and to foster participation by the poorest people in decision- making processes".

Sociologists argue that mere lifting of people above the poverty line is not enough. It is necessary to equip people with capabilities to be able to help themselves out of the 'culture of poverty'.³ For this to happen, social and state forces which create and maintain this 'culture of poverty', must be fought.

For a long time, economists beleived in the trickledown strategy for development. Trickle-down strategy⁴ Implies that the effects of rising incomes and

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1. Upendra Baxi (ed), *Law & Poverty*, (1988).
2. VIII *Legal News and Views* 29 (1994).
3. Upendra Baxi, *op. cit.* at viii.
4. I. C. Dhingra, *The Indian Economy* 17 (1988).

outputs would ultimately trickle down to the poor so that they would benefit as well as the rich. Modern economists however reject this view. Many (perhaps most) of the development programmes implemented by governments in third-world countries have actually damaged the position of the poor.⁵ This is the inevitable result of encouraging the existing social and political structures that exploit the poor. The non-government sector (People's movements, NGO's etc) has devised an alternative development strategy specifically intended to empower the poorest sections of society. Programmes started by NGO's aimed at helping the poor to change their lives deal with the situation more realistically than Government programmes, which merely aim at increasing growth and production by mobilising the resources of those who have them.

The general aim of the Government has always been to increase production and growth. Their thinking has been to increase growth by mobilising the resources of those who have them (and on whose loyalty the Government can count).

The Indian development model is a variant of the Lewis model.⁶ In the Nehru Mahalanobis model of development, an active role was allotted to the state and the bureaucracy. This model failed as a redistribution device because the initial distribution of income-yielding assets, such as land, was unequal. The State had very few instruments of control to siphon off rising private incomes into additional public savings.⁷ Thus, rather than benefiting the poor, the situation worsened. NGO's believe that the poor are kept that way by certain social and economic structures. Unless these basic structures are changed, the situation of the poor cannot be improved. It is very important for the beneficiaries of development programmes to actively participate in decisions about their own livelihood. Special efforts are needed to persuade poor people that they can initiate and organise their own development. Perhaps in recognition of this, the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution was introduced in 1992. It talks about the measures needed to augment the consolidated fund of a state to supplement the resources of the panchayats in the State. Outsiders should recognise the value of indigenous knowledge, collect it systematically and incorporate it into development programmes.

Developmental ideas and technology lifted from the predominantly capitalistic countries in the West have to be modified before they can be used for the rural poor. Most of the rural poor are subsistence farmers who sell any surplus. The Indian Government has adopted the wrong attitude towards providing the cash and capital necessary to the rural farmers. Government loan melas and loan waivers merely worsen the situation, wherein loans taken from banks are

5. Richard Holloway, (ed), *Doing Developments*, (1989).

6. I. C. Dhingra, *op.cit.* p. 30

7. *Ibid.*

considered as 'free money' by farmers (due to almost zero-interest rates). The procedure of politicians in writing off loans is too economically unsound.

The NGO paradigm of promoting development at the grass roots level is more effective. It is particularly beneficial to rural women. These women face unique problems incomprehensible to urban male experts who are the usual framers of government development programmes.

There is a danger, however, in suggesting that all NGO-sponsored activities are admirable and worth replicating. Many NGO sponsored activities are too small and localised to have an important regional, or national impact. Also, sponsorship politics impede NGO's. Because of their lack of resources, they are compelled to follow the dictates of their sponsors. Dedication and motivation of NGO members is a major force behind the success of their programmes. Where the motivating force behind the success of an NGO cannot be recreated, the activities themselves cannot be replicated. Overall results are also affected due to lack of sufficient data and limited technical, managerial or economic skills.

It is very important for the state to relate to voluntary agencies and to create favourable conditions to ensure full and effective enjoyment of human rights.

Para 7, Declaration adopted by UN world conference on Human rights, Vienna 1993.

The State is an all powerful, all-controlling, all resource-owning entity. In comparisons, an individual voluntary agency (or even a group of them) is relatively powerless, resourceless and isolated. It is tempting for the State (in this situation of unequal power) to dictate terms and conditions of alignment with NGO's. A climate of opinion must be developed in the Government in which NGO ideas can be well-received. Planning for development must include alternative policies within which NGO ideas could work along with government initiatives.

The Indian legal system has to be refurbished and reoriented to pro-poor directions.⁹ Social action litigation has shown how a whole range of new rights for the impoverished may be evolved. It is possible for the legal order to accomplish the difficult task of serving the interests of the dominated while at the same time preserving the interests of the dominant.

Development, in order to be successful, must be people-specific. It is the NGO's and voluntary organisations in third-world countries who are striving to bring about this kind of development. Their initiatives must be acknowledged and appreciated.

8. Upendra Baxi, *op.cit.* p. XIV.

9. Upendra Baxi, *op.cit.*, p.x.