

## ROLE OF NGOs IN THE PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENT

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### ABSTRACT

The protection of environment is a pressing issue. Every person, organisation and institution has an obligation and duty to protect it. Environmental protection encompasses not only pollution but also sustainable development and conservation of natural resources and the ecosystem. Today, the necessity of environmental awareness and enforcement is more demanding and urgent than ever before. Despite provisions in Indian Constitution providing for Environmental protection and many statutory provisions, the environment degradation continues. The main cause for environment degradation is lack of effective enforcement of various laws.

The emergence of NGOs represents an organised response by civil society especially in those areas in which the state has either failed to reach or done so inadequately. The importance of public awareness and NGOs involvement in environmental protection is acknowledged worldwide. NGOs have been taking a number of steps to promote discussion and debate about environmental issues, outside the broad spheres of popular media and the educational system. Advocacy and awareness is especially crucial in promoting concepts such as sustainable development, natural resource conservation and the restoration of ecosystems. NGOs can sensitize policy makers about the local needs and priorities. They can often intimate the policy makers about the interests of both the poor and the ecosystem as a whole. In providing training facilities, both at community and government levels, NGOs can play a significant role. They can also contribute significantly by undertaking research and publication on environment and development related issues. It is necessary to support and encourage genuine, small, local level NGOs in different parts of the country which can provide much needed institutional support specific to the local needs. NGOs can make the following Contributions :

- Conducting education and citizen awareness programmes in the field of environment
- Fact – finding and analysis
- Filing public interest litigations
- Innovation and experimenting in areas which are difficult for government agencies to make changes in
- Providing expertise and policy analysis
- Providing factual and reliable information with a network of professional expert staff
- Remaining independent while passing relevant information to the public and governmental bodies
- Solidarity and support to environmental defenders

- Working in collaboration with the government for capacity building and promotion of community participation in environmental awareness and protection and
- Working out at the grassroots level and reaching far – flung areas with or without the government invitation.

Having due regards to the importance of the role of NGOs in motivating the society for participation in environmental conservation programmes the Ministry has launched several programmes, which are being implemented with their active participation. These programmes aim at spreading environmental consciousness not only among the student community, professionals and other intellectuals but also general public.

**Key Words :** Environment, NGOs, Conservation, sustainable development, Evaluation.

### INTRODUCTION

NGOs embrace a wide array of agencies within and across different countries of the world. At their broadest NGOs are simply agencies or groups, which are different from government bodies. However, NGOs are distinctive in containing a voluntary component and also because they do not operate for profit.

Over the past quarter of a century and especially during the past few decades there has been a rapid growth in the numbers of NGOs involved in the development, in the number of people working for NGOs and in the amount of money that flows into these voluntary agencies working in the activities such as –Disaster management and relief, development, public health, rehabilitation, environment protection etc. However, this paper focuses on the role played by NGOs particularly in the protection of environment.<sup>1</sup>

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environment degradation is lack of effective enforcement of various laws.<sup>2-4</sup>

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### HYPOTHESIS

NGOs have played an active role in the

protection of environment in India. These NGOs have been successful in protecting the environment to a great extent, which has resulted in better environmental management in the past few decades.

### OBJECTIVES

- To highlight role of NGOs in the environment protection and to specify the aims and objectives of environmental NGOs
- To describe and analyse achievements of some environmental NGOs in India.
- To point out the limitations in performance of environmental NGOs in India.

### METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

The secondary data available regarding the achievements of environmental NGOs has been discussed and analysed.

#### Aims and objectives of Environmental NGOs

- Conducting education and citizen awareness programmes in the field of environment
- Fact – finding and analysis
- Filing public interest litigations
- Innovation and experimenting in areas which are difficult for government agencies to make changes in
- Providing expertise and policy analysis
- Providing factual and reliable information with a network of professional expert staff
- Remaining independent while passing relevant information to the public and governmental bodies
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#### Achievements of environmental NGOs with special reference to WWF (India), Teri, Clean (India), Sulabh International etc.

It is an acceptable fact that no government can enforce environmental laws to keep cities clean. They rely heavily on NGOs to provide the infrastructure for monitoring, creating awareness and taking action. NGOs are playing a very effective role in presenting the various environmental issues before the people and those in positions of authority. It is also an accepted fact that the civic agencies are more amenable to suggestions and advice by people who work in the field of environment.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a major role in pushing for sustainable development at the international level. Campaigning groups have been key drivers of inter-governmental negotiations, ranging from the regulation of hazardous wastes to a global ban on land mines and the elimination of slavery. Some of the NGOs which have been playing an active role, towards protection of the environment and issues, like, sustainable development, both globally and specifically in India need a special reference here. Following are some of the environmental NGOs in India that have been successful and achieved much in the field of environment protection, conservation and sustainable development.<sup>7</sup>

**WWF (India)** is engaged in a multitude of activities for protection and conservation of the environment in the Indian context. Climate change and energy conservation are among the chief areas of concern for the organisation. The forest and biodiversity conservation division strives to promote and enhance conservation of forest ecosystems in the country through a participatory approach involving key stakeholders. Through its environment education programme, it aims at strengthening individual and institutional capacity in nature conservation and environmental protection through widespread education and awareness.

Intimately involved in the conservation of tigers in India since the late 1960s, WWF's significant efforts culminated in the launch of Project Tiger in 1973. It seeks to conserve and protect the biodiversity of maritime life and resources by sensitising the people at large. The pollution of the river waters and the imminent threat to aquatic life is a cause of great concern. WWF (India) has stepped in on a number of occasions to launch campaigns for securing their habitat, like 'Save the River Dolphin' project. WWF believes that if you secure an animal's habitat, you secure its right to live.<sup>7,8</sup>

### **CLEAN-INDIA**

Deeply concerned with the deteriorating environmental situation in the country, Development Alternatives initiated the CLEAN-India (Community Led Environment Action Network) programme with five schools in the national capital in 1996. Today, CLEAN-Delhi has about forty schools regularly involved in monitoring water and air quality in over 150 locations spread across Delhi. Over 2000 children have been directly trained on environmental assessment and improvement activities. They keep vigil, assess environmental quality, plead, cajole and lead the community in monitoring environment. Action programmes like solid waste management, plantation drives, energy conservation, paper recycling, etc. to improve local environmental conditions have also been initiated by schools, resident welfare associations, business and industrial associations as well as individual households. Campaigns against the use of polybags, firecrackers during Diwali and toxic (chemical-based) colours during Holi and for saving the city's 'Green Treasure' are also carried out. The experience in Delhi indicates that when environment assessment is community based, it mobilises the community to review the local environmental conditions and take requisite measures, without waiting for undue external support.

Encouraged by the Delhi experience, NGOs from different towns have operationalised the CLEAN-India programme. The present CLEAN-India Centers are :

Delhi, Shillong, Faizabad, Ladakh, Bangalore, Berinag (Kumaon Hills), Jhansi, Sagar, Bilaspur, Lalitpur, Madurai and Thiruvananthapuram. Almost 100 NGOs from across the country have expressed their interest to initiate the programme in their respective towns.

### **TERI (INDIA)**

Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) was formally established in 1974 with the purpose of tackling and dealing with the immense and acute problems that mankind is likely to be faced with in the years ahead :

- On account of the gradual depletion of the earth's finite energy resources which are largely non-renewable and
- On account of the existing methods of their use which are polluting

TERI has launched a major project, the first phase of which is completing near completion. This project called growth with resource enhancement of Environment and nature (GREEN INDIA-2047)" has vigorously estimated the reduction in India's key natural resources during the period 1947-97, and has completed economic values of consequent losses, which in some cases are alarmingly high. On the basis of past experience and a careful analysis of the cost behind the degradation that has taken place in the past strategies for the future have been developed, whereby a fresh and creative approach can be taken in the next 50 years.

The global presence and reach attained by TERI are not only substantiated by its presence in different parts of the world, but also in terms of wide geographical relevance of its activities. Symbolic of this fact is the annual Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS), a major event focusing on sustainable

development, the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and assessment of worldwide progress in these critical areas. DSDS attracts the most prominent thinkers and practitioners in a range of fields that impinge on development. Since development worldwide is moving towards an architecture based on partnerships, the leaders who participate in DSDS come from government, business and industry, multilateral and bilateral organizations, research and academic and civil society. Encouraged by the success of DSDS, TERI has now established the World Sustainable Development Forum (WSDF).

### **Sulabh International**

The Sulabh International Social Service Organisation founded by **Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak** in the year 1970, is the largest nationally and internationally recognised pan-India social service outfit with 60,000 volunteers on the rolls who work to promote human rights, environmental sanitation, health and hygiene, non-conventional sources of energy, waste management and social reforms through education, training and awareness campaign. It has developed a scavenging-free two-pit pourflush toilet (Sulabh Shauchalaya) safe and hygienic on-site human waste disposal technology; a new concept of maintenance and construction of pay- and use public toilets, popularly known as Sulabh Complexes with bath, laundry and urinal facilities being used by about ten million people every day and generation of biogas and biofertiliser produced from excreta-based plants, low maintenance waste water treatment plants of medium capacity for institutions and industries. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements has recognised Sulabh's cost-effective and appropriate sanitation system as a global 'Urban Best Practice' at the Habitat-II conference held at Istanbul (Turkey), in June, 1996. The Economic and Social Council of United Nations has granted special consultative status to sulabh in recognition of its outstanding

service to mankind. The Sulabh technology has liberated so far 60,000 scavengers from the demeaning practice of physically cleaning and carrying human excreta. Sulabh is also producing and using biogas from human excreta from its 118 plants which is again an innovation in the areas of non-conventional energy.

### **Limitations in the performance of environmental NGOs in India**

- Shortage of trained personnel in the field of environment protection.
- Lack of research and development facilities.
- Financial constraints.
- Lack of cooperation from the governmental agencies.
- Difficulties in the mobility on account of lack of transport facilities.
- Environmental NGOs are facing a credibility crisis with a number of cases of embezzlement and scandals involving some of them coming to the fore.

### **Suggestions towards environmental protection**

Some suggestions that can be made towards protection of environment could be made in the following areas where NGOs could play an effective role with the assistance of the governmental agencies for achieving the ultimate goal of healthy and blissful environment :

- Educate the students about the pollution problem and the harmful effects of pollution.
- Minimising the use of plastic for different purposes.
- Buy only environmental friendly products i.e. the products which do not reduce the natural resources.
- Not to waste water for various purposes.
- To plant and grow more trees in the house garden.
- To support the NGOs financially which are rendering service to the health and environment sector.
- To motivate research on different

measures to be taken to solve the environmental problems.

- To support the initiatives taken by central and state government in protecting our environment.

### CONCLUSION

Environmental non-governmental organizations, in recent years, have grown in size and in number as a result of governmental negligence towards the environmental crisis. NGOs have grown in importance to a point where they act as key arbitrating agents within the field of environmental policy. By inter-relating global and local concerns, NGOs find themselves able to not only emphasize important ecological issues, but also raise consciousness about the environment.

It can be assessed by the above discussion that the very existence of NGOs and the role played by them in the protection of the environment is not only important but also necessary because no government alone with any amount of laws and acts can achieve the objectives of environment protection without individual and public participation which can be achieved only through a network of motivated and dedicated voluntary organizations, like the NGOs.

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