



A NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

*[A Case Study of Shri. Bandu Dhotre, Founder President, Eco-Pro Organization of
Dist. Chandrapur Maharashtra (India)]*

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Abstract:

The present study aims to highlight the voluntary efforts made by Shri. Bandu Dhotre, Founder President of Eco-Pro organization established in the year 2006. The motive to establish this organization was inspired by Gandhian Philosophy of 'Swadeshi and Save Ecology'. This organization has organized various mass movements against unjustified policies of the Government and motivated masses to create awareness about 'Environment Conservation and Other Social Issues'. Eco-Pro has been working for conservation of Environment, Wild life, Heritage, Disaster Relief and other Social Services. Some of the major successive movements were "Adani Go-Back" 2008 (Against Coal Block).

Eco-pro was involved in successful rehabilitation of villages Nimgaon and Jamni affected by Tadoba National Park, Tiger Reserve Project in 2010. Eco-Pro has initiated the task of conserving the historical Heritage Fort Wall surrounding Old Chandrapur City which is 11 K.M.s in circumference in collaboration with Schools, Colleges and Local self Government bodies of Chandrapur with a Slogan "Apala Varsa, Apanach Japuya". Eco-pro has been continuously involved in "Gurakhi Sanwad Abhiyan" for Man-Animal Conflict. Eco-Pro initiated the formation of Eco-pro school clubs in Schools and Colleges of Chandrapur and adjacent places. At present the Eco-pro has 350 Active Members and near about 2000 volunteers are rendering their services for this organization. The most significant thing is that this organization does not receive any funds from the Government and all the activities of Eco-pro are carried out by people's contribution and active involvement of students and localities. More and more members are inspired to join this organization. It is a pride to mention that the work of Eco-pro and specially Shri. Bandu Dhotre was appreciated by Prime

Minister of our Country Hon'ble Shri. Narendrajii Modi in his "Man Ki Baat" Aired on 26 December 2017.

Keywords: Conservation, Movements, Abhiyan, Awareness, Heritage.

Introduction:

What if I told you that in order to save our planet, we would have to change the ways we use energy and way we consume and discard products? Would you be willing to change? Would it help if you knew that there are thousands of organizations, unrelated to governments, that are helping, show us the way to do that? These organizations are called A non-governmental organizations, or an NGO, is an organization that is non profit, is made up of civil society and functions apart from

governmental or intergovernmental organization or agencies. Although civil society organizations have always been around, NGOs officially came into existence in 1945 with the need of the United Nations to mark difference between intergovernmental organizations and international private organizations. NGOs can be organized at a variety of levels for a variety of purposes. They can work at community level, the city level, the country level and even the international level.

Similarly to their sizes the structures and goals of NGOs vary. While most NGOs claim to serve some kind of public good, their ways of serving that public good are vastly different, from advocacy to research to serving humanitarian needs and global crisis. Their causes vary, as well, with numerous NGOs serving a variety of social, political, and environmental causes, from advancing human rights to ending poverty to promoting democracy.

Sustainability is the study of how our natural world functions and of how human beings need to interact with the world in order to keep things in harmony and prevent irrevocable destruction to our planet. Sustainability is vitally important because it is essential not only for the environment, but also for the survival of human beings. Scientist, environmentalist, and other social and political leaders have found that the current rate of human resource extraction and consumption has become unsustainable for our world and that if it continues it will call our planet to become an uninhabitable.

For example, study from the World Wildlife Fund and the United Nations reports that the rate that human beings are extracting and burning fossil fuel and the way that human beings are consuming materials in resources is unsustainable and will irrevocably change the planet in a dangerous way, unless we pivot to more sustainable models of extraction, production and consumption that benefit every human and living being on this planet. The World Wildlife Fund has indicated that there has been a decrease in the biodiversity health of our planet of 28% from 1970 to 2008. Therefore, numerous actors, including non-governmental organizations, have taken up the cause of helping create a more sustainable planet and, in doing so, of saving our environment and human beings. According to environmentalscience.org, the 'three pillars of sustainability' are sustainable Economic Development, sustainable Social Development, and environmental protection-all area in which NGOs have taken a leading role.

Since the 1970's non-governmental organisations have provided more and more of a role in providing assistance in a variety of areas, such as in social, humanitarian, environmental, and political issues that we are facing today. A big way that NGOs have taken a leading role in creating a more sustainable world is by leading the charge in advocating for and working toward a more sustainable way of economic and social development and by fighting for environmental protection.

The Present study attempts to highlight and explore the solo efforts of Shri. Bandu Dhotre, Founder President of Eco-Pro Organization, who from a poor family inspired and motivated by Gandhian Philosophy of Truth, Non-violence and Satyagrah initiated the formation of Eco-Pro organization for the conservation of Environment, Heritage, Wildlife, man-animal conflict and other Social Causes.

Importance of the Topic: Significant role of NGO in conservation of ecology and motivating youngsters for ecological sustainable development.

Methodology: The methodology administered for present study was personal interview with the President of the Eco-Pro Shri. Bandu Dhotre and documented newspaper clippings.

Glimpse of Eco-Pro Formation:

Chandrapur, Located in the extreme east of Maharashtra, was a major factor in the transformation of Bandu Dhotre. The District, one of the eleven in Vidarbha has vast tracts of coal mines, a Paper Mill, Cement factories and Super Thermal Power Station. Nearly 40 Percent of Chandrapur is also under lush forest covers, home to rich and thriving wild life. The District head quarter has heritage structure- temples and Fort walls more than 500 years old-giving it a distinct Character.

Bandu realized that what affected the lives of people in Chandrapur most were environment issues such as frequent flooding during monsoons, man-animal conflict and various Civic and Social problems. His training in Disaster-Management at the Hanuman Vayam Prasarak Mandal and the NCC could help him do something good for the city. He could not guard the

borders (as his dream was to join the army but due to some technical reasons could not join) of the country, but he could defend it internally from calamities.

By 2005, he managed to gather a bunch of young, energetic volunteers, ready to rise to the occasion whenever Chandrapur needed them. He schooled them in Disaster-Management through physical training. His group, which he named Nagar Saurakshak Dal, started helping with rescue work during floods and other emergencies. One day, a cobra (snake) was spotted in a neighbour's home. The practice is to contact the forest Department when a snake is found. They sometimes inform a Sarp Mitra to do the job and the custom is to pay Rs. 100 for it. Bandu realized that people living in slums could barely afford to pay Rs. 100. They would rather kill it. Bandu decided to become a Sarp Mitra and do it for free. This would be his contribution towards his people, as well as wild animals. There was a boost of risk and adventure in the job that attracted him. So Bandu trained himself under a professional snake charmer to learn the skill.

Perhaps, a testament to his love for the regimented life of the army he decided to give his work an organizational structure. And in the year 2006 he formed Eco-Pro organization, a bunch of people dedicated to environmental and wild life protection. He even designed a uniform for Eco-Pro. He selected the trouser cloth used for army fatigue, which speaks of battles and challenges; the T-shirt is white as it symbolized peaceful ways to protest and sacrifices that have to be made. The touch of green on collar and sleeves of T-shirt shows that they work for the Protection of the environment.

Agitation Against Coal Block Allocation (Adani Go Back 2008):

The news of the coal Block allocation had alarmed Bandu. He was appalled that thousands of trees would be felled for mining. The hills that were home to tigers, leopards, sloth bears, wild bears, dholes (Indian wild dogs) many kind of deer, thousands of birds and other endangered animals would be dug up to extricate coal. Bandu, through Eco-Pro had been trying so hard to create awareness about how the Jungles should be protected.

Thus he had walked into the office of the Deputy Conservator of Forests, sending a request for a meeting through a peon. The official's apathy filled Bandu with a quiet rage. Stung by the forest officials' snub Bandu asked for information about the coal block under the then-three-year-old Right to information Act. For a month, he immersed himself in research going through the legalese and intricacies of government policy. He delivered a letter to the District Collector, forest officers and Political leaders, stating why the Coal Block allocation should be stopped.

Through the year 2008, he fought to prevent mining activities in the region. There were many organizations opposing the allocation. He realized he needed to up the ante and take his fight to the doorstep of the Government. The Maharashtra state legislature holds its long winter session in Nagpur-Vice Capital of state. Bandu arrived in Nagpur in December 2008 to Protest against the allotment of mining rights. He sat on a fast in the area marked for agitators outside the legislature building. On the eighth day of his fast, the state Forest minister met him and promised to look into the coal Block allocation. Soon a committee to find methods to reduce the damage caused by mining was formed. Bandu was appointed as one of its members. But he would have none of it. He quit the Panel. Bandu returned to Chandrapur, once again dejected and disappointed.

Bandu went on an indefinite fast from 20 July 2009. While he sat on the fast, his volunteers organized events such as 'Sadbuddhi Mahayagna' (Prayers for good sense to prevail) 'Mundan Andolan' (tonsuring of the head like it is done when, one loses a Parent) and Performing the last rites "of animals that would perish due to the mining activities. The local media covered the agitation and it caught the attention of the city folk and people came out in support. On the ninth day of the fast, a call was sounded for a Chandrapur- Bandh, a Shutdown in Protest. Voluntarily, Shops, organizations and private offices pulled down their Shutters. It was a historic moment for Chandrapur and a big Validation for Bandu and his agitation. Anti mining sentiments were raging in the city and the District.

News of the agitation and support for it reached New Delhi. Hon'ble Jairam Ramesh, who was India's environment minister then wrote to Bandu Promising to look into the matter but on the condition that Bandu first end his fast. Not convinced Bandu continued his agitation, on the thirteenth day of his fast; he got a call from Hon'ble Jairam Ramesh. The Minister

Promised to visit Chandrapur to take stock of the groundrealities, on condition to end the fast. Convinced that something would be done this time Bandu relented.

The Minister Visited Chandrapur. A first-hand evaluation of the situation gave Jairam Ramesh better insight into the issue and the damage that mining would cause. The allocation was stalled. Chandrapur erupted in Joy. Bandu had achieved an epic victory. A slum dweller had stopped the government from carrying out mining in the environmentally sensitive area. Later in February 2014, the coal Block allotment was cancelled.

Wild Life Protection and Conservation

Eco-Pro was associated with wild life and Environmental causes. Bandu had been working closely with forest guards, foresters and forest department officials right up . The rank of Chief Conservator of Forests and Principal Chief Conservators of forests. In 2011-12 Bandu launched an agitation for better tiger protection in which he made sixteen demands. These included declaring Chandrapur a “Tiger district” with Systems in Place for the protection of the big cats outside the core area of National Parks, methods of preventing man-animal conflict, setting up anti-poaching patrols and removing the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra Limited (FDCM) From Chandrapur.

The corporation was set up to monetize ‘Degraded forests’ by cleaning them and Planting teak, sal and other trees that can be sold. According to Bandu, the corporation was pulling down Jungles and Planting trees, and this was reducing the area reserved for tigers. In July 2013, Bandu sat on a fast for eleven days in Nagpur, and the state Government accepted all his demands except the one that involved having the FDCM removed. But they assured him FDCM would also work for wildlife protection.

Protection and Conservation of Heritage fort-wall of Chandrapur (Amcha Varsa Amhi Japuya):

The Fort wall was built by the Gond king Khandkya Ballal Shah, who ruled between 1470 and 1495. It took six generation and 125 years for the Fort walls to be built. The places were located within its walls and later served as Jails. By 2016 the fort wall was falling apart. The walls were crumbling at many Places and in many others were buried under huge dumps of garbage. Bandu and Eco-Pro launched a mammoth cleanliness drive for the Fort-wall from 1 March 2017, after taking permission from the authorities. A ten member armed with brooms, machetes, chainsaws and rock-climbing equipment began the task of cleaning the Chanda Fort-the Chandrapur kills Swachata Abhiyan.

It was a self-driven initiative. Then everyone from students to government employees, shopkeepers, auto-rickshaw drivers and even doctors began to join in, on Sundays and other holidays, hoarders of volunteers would reach the area and help clean the Chanda Fort.

The District Administration to pitched in, notices were issued to people who had encroached upon the space near the Fort wall. Some of the squatters, however, moved out of their own because they realized the importance of the work being done. Eco-Pro with its simple initiative had created a sense of pride among the people for their city and its Heritage structure after 260 days. Bandu and is volunteers had been able to clean most of the Fort. Prime Minister Hon’ble Modiji made mention of the work done by them in his weekly radio broad cast- “Mann Ki Baat” Bandu became the local hero who had gone national. The clean-up of the fort was completed by January, 2021.

Agitation for Air-Pollution:- Three months after the mining-license agitation, in December 2009, Bandu once again sat on a fast to draw attention to the Air Pollution in Chandrapur caused by the open loading and unloading of iron ore and cement on railway wagons. The dust generated, Carried across the city by the wind, was causing acute respiratory problems in the people. Bandu’s Fast Pushed the authorities to act. Within Eight days of the Agitation, Central Railways stopped the activity, Eco-Pro also forced a ban on the use of Kerosene as Fuel by autorikshaw drivers. The agitation did not just help Chandrapur, which is among India’s most polluted cities and Industrial areas, but also brought an awakening among the people about the need to protect the environment.

Movement for over bridge on Railway Crossing:- The Babupeth railway crossing in Chandrapur is considered one of the busiest in Maharashtra. Nearly one-Third of the City's Population has to cross it every day to go to work, school, market or hospitals. The wait at the crossing sparks massive traffic snarls. There had been several instances of delay and deaths because of this until 2009. There was even a woman who had to deliver both her Children at the Babupeth railway crossing because she couldn't get to the hospital in time. Eco-Pro volunteers held a series of meeting in the cities public spaces persuading people to join for the demand of over bridge. It was decided that on 4th February 2010, a procession would march to the district collector office to present their demand. He decided to proceed with the March. As he and his group of Volunteers began walking to the District Collector Office, people came out and joined them from all directions. Many were carrying placards depicting scenes of distress and hardships near the railway crossing. It became the biggest procession the city had ever seen. The authorities accepted the demand for an over bridge, even though construction finally began many years later, in 2019.

Cleanliness of Ramala Talao (Lake):- One of the most prominent landmarks of Chandrapur is the more than 500 year old Ramala Talao, a water body built by the Gond Tribal king Khandkya Ballal Shah, who ruled from the neighboring town Ballarshah. The next Gond King, Ram Shah, renovated and repaired the lake and constructed stone Ghats. The water body was named after him. Until 2009 the Ramala Talao was covered with water hyacinth, an invasive, fast growing plant species that chokes water bodies by consuming the dissolved oxygen in water, which kills aquatic life. Eco-Pro divided into the work of resuscitating the lake. Young and old, including from other established local organizations, joined the movement to clean the lake. Again in February 2022 Bandu sat on a fast for 12 days to attract attention of the authorities of the local bodies for cleanliness and beautification of the Ramala Talav, which was done.

Movements against other Social Issues:-

(a) Rehabilitation of villages affected by Tadoba Tiger Reserve Project:- Eco-Pro organization was involved in Rehabilitation of Villages, Nawegaon and Jamni affected by the Tadoba Tiger Reserve Project. The District Government Authorities were unable to convince the villages for Rehabilitation. They asked Eco-pro to intervene in the matter. Eco-pro convinced the villagers and they got Ready for Rehabilitation.

(b) Gurakhi Sanwad Abhiyan (Cowherd talk campaign):- Chandrapur surrounded by Forests, and due to deforestation during last few years there had been frequent Man-Animal conflict. To stop this Man Animal conflict the Eco-pro had started an 'Gurakhi Sanwad Abhiyan'. The Volunteers of Eco-Pro goes to the adjacent villagers near the Forest and have a talk with the Gurakhi (cowherd) and villagers and discuss with them about precaution to be taken to avoid Man-animal conflict.

Recognition & Awards:

In 2015 Indian's Ministry of Youth Affairs and sports conferred a National Award for Community Service on Bandu Dhotre. In 2019 Eco-Pro received the National Youth Award from Indian Youth welfare and sports Ministry. Bandu Dhotre and Eco-pro were conferred many awards for his selfless services at District level, State level and National level by various Bodies. Prime Minister Modi made mention of the work done by Bandu Dhotre and Eco-pro in his weekly radio Broad Cast, Mann ki baat. This was a great moment for peoples of Chandrapur.

Eco-Pro School Clubs :-

Eco-pro has initiated Eco-pro School Clubs in schools, colleges of Chandrapur and adjacent villages, to Create Awareness about Environment protection and conservation among School going Children's and Youths.

Conclusion:-

Bandu Dhotre a slum dweller from a poor family wanted to Join Army. But due to some technical reasons could not Join. Although he could not guard the Boundaries of the country, he was determined to serve the country and its peoples internally. He was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy of Truth, Non-Violence and satyagraha. His Solo efforts to serve people's resulted in an organization Named Eco-pro Organization. Right from the inception of this organization Bandu has frequently Agitated for Social causes. Bandu's Journey as a snake charmer to Tiger Charmer has many up's and downs, Agitating and

working against the unjustified Policies. The Eco-pro organization has been working for Environment-Pollution, Disaster management, Heritage conservation, Health awareness and Emergent Social issues. At present 350 volunteers are regular volunteers who works as NagarSanrakshan Dal in town, wild life 'Sanrakshan dal' and Gram 'Sanrakshan Dal' in rural Areas. Near about 2000 Volunteers are attached with Eco-pro who gives their services in their free time. Inspired by the work of Eco-pro and Bandu Dhotre, more and more peoples are joining as volunteers to serve the community and save Eco-logy. Many of the Colleges of Chandrapur District and some within state and country had signed MoU's with Eco-Pro. These colleges had been inviting Shri. Bandu Dhotre to inspire and Motivate College Students for Environment Protection and conservation.

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