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NGOs – Are they Pressure Groups

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Abstract

NGOs, or Non-Governmental Organizations, operate independently of governments and businesses, with a diverse range of activities worldwide. In India, their numbers have surged, reaching around 2 million in 2009. NGOs can be funded by various sources, including governments, foundations, businesses, or individuals, and may function with or without formal funding.

Pros include their positive impact on societal development, reaching rural areas, and addressing issues like self-employment, education, and women's empowerment. However, concerns arise regarding their political influence, potential to affect businesses, and instances of focusing on tax evasion rather than public welfare.

Government-NGO relations have evolved, with NGOs adapting to government agendas. In the 1990s, as the government shifted focus, NGOs collaborated on poverty reduction. Despite shared goals, differences in approaches exist, with NGOs being more flexible and responsive to local needs. However, reliance on government funding poses risks to their autonomy.

Foreign funding allegations have surfaced, with an Intelligence Bureau report suggesting some NGOs serve as tools for Western foreign policy interests. Accusations include disrupting development projects and negatively impacting GDP growth. Specific cases, such as protests against the Kudankulam nuclear project, have drawn attention, leading to scrutiny of NGO finances by security agencies

Keywords:

NGOs, Global Activities, India, Funding Sources, Government-NGO Relations, , Foreign Funding Allegations.

Introduction:

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in shaping societal dynamics, serving as advocates for people's interests and engaging in diverse activities globally. This discussion explores the increasing prevalence of NGOs, their pros and cons, their evolving relationship with governments, and the controversies surrounding foreign funding.

Non Government Organization or NGO is an organization which works for the people to protect the interest of people. They are the voice of people. The number of NGOs in India is increasing day by day.

- The number of NGOs in the United States is estimated at 1.5 million. Russia has 277,000 NGOs. India is estimated to have had around 2 million NGOs in 2009, just over one NGO per 600 Indians, and many times the number of primary schools and primary health centres in India.
- A non-governmental organization (NGO) is an organization that is neither a part of a government nor a conventional for-profit business.
- Usually set up by ordinary citizens, NGOs may be funded by governments, foundations, businesses, or private persons. Some avoid formal funding altogether and are run primarily by volunteers.
- NGOs are highly diverse groups of organizations engaged in a wide range of activities, and take different forms in different parts of the world. Some may have charitable status, while others may be fronts for political, religious, or other interests.

Pros:

- NGO's serve peoples interest positively by utilizing the funds that come either from foreign countries or native countries for their development without being pressurized by any other section.
- These organizations have come into the picture to protect the interests of people of the country.
- They are also the representative of general public to voice against any issue that goes against their interests.
- NGOs have shown that they are in a better position to handle social issues than the government.
- They reach out to people in rural areas where it is very inconvenient to reach and understand their concerns and try to improve their lives with the aid which they get from foreign countries, companies, government bodies.
- They run various programs which are responsible for sudden and decisive increase in self employment, level of education, woman empowerment etc.

Cons:

- The NGOs have a major role to play in politics as they serve peoples opinion.
- As they enjoy lot of support from a large portion of population which make them powerful.
- They are so powerful that they can make or break a business.
- They work hard to solve general public issues and in order to do that they pressurize the concerned authority.
- Some NGOs are working only to evade taxes and not for the welfare of general public.

Government–NGO Relations

- NGOs have responded to the government's socioeconomic development agenda over the years. Thus, when the government changed emphasis from capital-oriented growth to anti-poverty programs, NGOs made a distinct shift from welfare and service delivery interventions to a direct attack on poverty.
- Subsequently, in the 1990s, when the state moved on to macroeconomic and structural reforms, NGOs began to focus on scaling up their activities. This led to their working with the state to develop innovative methods and ensure commensurate changes in policy.
- They also stepped up advocacy and lobbying, increased networking, expanded their range of operations, and targeted marginalized groups. The 1990s also saw the establishment of several forums to promote dialogue between the government and NGOs.
- The Planning Commission initiated an NGO– government interface through a series of conferences and, in 2000, was appointed the nodal agency for NGO–state interactions.
- In the second half of the 1990s, the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) was decentralized so that envisaged benefits from NGO activities could also spread to the less explored and extremely poor areas of the country. (CAPART was created in 1986 to promote and assist voluntary efforts in implementing rural development programs).
- Goals of the state and NGOs have converged, particularly in the areas of empowering communities, encouraging participation, strengthening democratic institutions, and improving access to basic services like health and education.
- They differ in the uniform, bureaucratic processes adopted by the state, contrasted with the NGOs' more flexible response to local needs. The government has set up several institutions to promote funding of NGOs (e.g., Khadi and Village Industries Cooperatives, Central Social Welfare Board, National Wasteland Development Board, CAPART).
- This has led to the beneficiaries' dependence on the state. NGO reliance on such funding has also introduced the risk that they will lose their autonomy and become mere implementers of public sector projects.
- NGO approaches to government now range from strongly oppositional to closely collaborative, with the majority of NGOs keeping an uneasy, sometimes reluctant, but pragmatic and often sophisticated partnership with the state in its various forms.

Foreign Funding Allegation

- Intelligence Bureau, in a report (2014) accused "foreign-funded" NGOs of "serving as tools for foreign policy interests of western governments" by sponsoring agitations against nuclear and coal-fired power plants and anti-GMO agitation across the country.
- The report was commissioned by the previous government and has been submitted to the new government.
- The NGOs are said to be working through a network of local organisations to negatively impact GDP growth by 2–3%.[2] The report says that a significant number of Indian NGOs funded by donors based in US, UK,

Germany and Netherlands have been noticed to be using people-centric issues to create an environment, which lends itself to stalling development projects.

- The Intelligence Bureau said the foreign NGOs and their Indian arms were serving as tools to advance Western foreign policy interests. Greenpeace aims to fundamentally change the dynamics of India's energy mix by disrupting and weakening the relationship between key players, the IB report said.
- Four NGOs were put under the scanner in 2012 for allegedly fueling protests against the Kudankulam nuclear project in Tamil Nadu. The accounts of several Indian NGOs were put in the watch list with regard to allegations of funds diversion, after a discreet probe by security agencies with the help of Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and Central Economic Intelligence Bureau.

Conclusion:

In summary, NGOs function as vital agents for social change, amplifying the voices of ordinary citizens and addressing critical issues. While their positive impact is evident in areas such as rural development and empowerment programs, concerns arise regarding their political influence and potential misuse of power. The complex dynamics between NGOs and governments highlight the challenges of maintaining autonomy while collaborating on shared goals. The foreign funding allegations underscore the delicate balance between serving public interests and navigating geopolitical complexities. NGOs, as influential actors, continue to navigate a landscape where their actions resonate beyond borders, influencing both local communities and global agendas.

