
UNIT 6 ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Structure

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the concept of voluntary organisations;
- Describe the role played by voluntary organisations in socio-economic development;
- Discuss the various advantages of voluntary organisations; and
- Examine the challenges faced by voluntary organisations.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Apart from the governments at different levels, various organisations and associations play a vital role in the country's development process. Voluntary associations are one of their kind, which significantly contribute to society's welfare, integration and solidarity. They are an

extended part of civil society, acting as a catalyst for social development. Voluntary organisations are one of the most vital and credible institutions for participatory development. Their work at the grassroots level gives them an edge in understanding the needs and aspirations of people and establishing direct contact with them. To facilitate the immense contribution of voluntary organisations, the UN General Assembly declared the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers.

During the nineties, voluntary organisations emerged as powerful, potent partners for development. Their role was recognised during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. Henceforth, they have fully contributed to the cause of action and well-being of society both at the international and national levels. Acknowledging their contribution to development, they are also known as the third sector of the government. India has witnessed voluntary services and institutions serving the society as an inherent part of its culture and tradition. In this unit, we shall acquaint you with the role, potential and contribution of voluntary organisations towards the development.

6.2. VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS: CONCEPT

The feeling of helping fellow human beings and doing something for society emerges from human values and conscience. The word 'Voluntary' has emerged from the Latin word 'Voluntas'. It means 'will' or 'freedom'. It implies wilful association of people for some common purpose. People can willfully come together for some personal interest or in the more significant interest of society, to challenge any injustice or to promote any social cause or to pursue development and growth. There can be different factors and basis for forming associations. Religion, mutual aid, business, philanthropy, commitment to specific values and government issues are some of them. They are known as Action Groups, Voluntary Agencies and sometimes NGOs. Various authors have defined voluntary associations differently.

According to Lord Beveridge, A voluntary organisation, is an organisation that is started and overseen by its own members without outside control. Michall Banton describes it as a group organised for the quest of common interests. As per David L. Sills, voluntary organisation, is a group of persons organised based on voluntary membership without State control for the furtherance of some shared interests of its members.

Norman Johnson has given four main features of voluntary associations:

1. Method of formation: voluntary
2. Method of government: self-governance structure with own office bearers, rules and policies.
3. Method of financing: some sources from the voluntary contribution of members of society.
4. Motives: Non-Profit.

Harold Laski has termed “Freedom of Association” as the legal right of people to join hands for a common purpose. This common purpose is often complementary to the growth process of different parts and sections of the social world. So we can conclude that VO is a formally registered institution that seeks to promote and garner human development through non-for-profit motive.

6.3 VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS IN INDIA : EVOLUTION

India has inherited a rich tradition of voluntary organisations. The factors contributing to the existence and growth of voluntary action in India are indigenous traditions, value systems and the interface of Indian and western culture. Indian customs and value systems are deeply rooted in the religious philosophy that mandates a social code of conduct. In India there has been a tradition of serving the society, charity, sharing and caring of the poor and disadvantaged people. These religious, philanthropic and individual acts are significant sources of voluntary actions. Different religious institutions such as temples, Ashrams,, Waqfs , Gurudwaras and other organisations managed by several sects have further institutionalised voluntarism in India. After the advent of the British, Christian Missionaries specifically focused on welfare activities in the tribal areas. This motivated western educated people and made revivalists take up this task. As a result, BrahmoSamaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, Satya Sodhak Samaj and so on made noteworthy contributions to expanding the voluntary services in the country. Mahatma Gandhi also developed this great tradition of voluntarism.

At the time of India's independence, our Constitution makers understood well that the country's development could not be achieved without the meaningful involvement of civil society. It was best possible through voluntary action. Voluntary organisations are the best medium for resource mobilisation, public cooperation, and social capital. Henceforth voluntary organisations have found a specific place in India's development strategy, i.e., various five-year plans.

Majorly there are two types of voluntary organisations in India-registered and unregistered. Many organisations have not registered themselves under any legislation and walk purely out of philanthropic motives. As far as noted voluntary organisations are concerned, there are different legislations under which voluntary organisations can get themselves registered as per their purpose, such as the Societies registration Act 1860, the Indian trusts Act, 1920 or Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956. As far as classification based on the field of work is concerned, it is getting more complex daily. They work for children, women, disabled, SCs, STs, disadvantaged groups, elderly, education, health, environment, human rights etc. They may take up any local issue or can become partners. Tandon (2001) has given the following classification of voluntary organisations.

1. Religious Associations.
2. Social Movements.
3. Membership Associations.
4. Intermediary Associations-like bureaucracy, judiciary.

The Indian Constitution recognises this freedom of association under article 19 (1) (c), which enables Indian citizens to form associations with certain limitations. So on this basis, we can say that all charitable organisations, professional membership associations, NGOs, community based organisations are different types of voluntary organisations. Based on the above definitions, we can summarise the basic features of voluntary organisations as:-

1. It has definite aims and objectives. All the members of the association voluntarily come together to achieve this purpose.
2. It has well defined administrative structure, management and executive team.
3. It is initiated, and run by the willful desire of people with any sectional interference.

4. It raises funds from the contributions and subscriptions of its members and from grants-in-aid from the government.
5. It is registered under different government acts such as in India voluntary organisations have to be registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1880, The Indian Trust Act, 1882, The Cooperative Societies Act, 1904 or Joint Stock Companies Act, 1959.

6.4 ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Voluntary organisations are a great force of development. The State alone does not have the capacity and time to deal with multi-dimensional aspects of development. It needs to partner with other institutions outside its formal structure and can complement its efforts for development. Voluntary organisations are the best expression of informal support and contribution toward the State's development goals. Due to their personal touch and close connection with the people, voluntary organisations can play a pioneering role in the country's development.

They serve in the following ways:-

1. They function as a link between the State and people. They act as a reliable source of information and feedback to the government, thus helping the design and implementation of development plans. Due to their informal networking, they serve as the voice of the people and ears of the government.
2. They act as a mechanism for information dissemination. Despite the State's efforts, many people who are poor, uneducated, and unaware do not know about various development schemes and plans. Voluntary organisations disseminate this knowledge among people and make them accessible to them.
3. Voluntary organisations reach many people and take the development plans to the grassroots levels, which in some areas may be difficult in rigid government structures.
4. Voluntary organisations also help implement various development plans and programmes; for example, Akshay-Patra of Rajasthan helps the government implement the Mud-Day meal scheme in Jaipur.

5. Their continuous awareness and follow-up keep the government and administration on being alert and responsive to people 's needs and demands. Various measures such as Public Interest Litigation, Right to Information, sensitise the system for development plans.
6. Due to their personal touch, they can better mobilise the public and community resources. During the Covid-19 period, voluntary organisations came forward as a greater force for resource mobilisation.
7. During disasters, voluntary organisations help in fast and rapid action by mobilising the local resources and providing in-house arrangements to deal with the same.
8. Voluntary associations are essential platforms to nurture democratic values and the holistic development of individuals. They channelise individual energies into the collective whole and mobilise them for the more significant benefit of society.
9. Voluntary organisations promote diversity and open-mindedness in society while guarding and reinforcing cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other identities.
10. Voluntary organisations generate a substitute to centralised state agencies and provide services with more objectivity and flexibility.
11. Voluntary organisations inspire citizens in all facets of society to act rather than rest on State authority and charity.
12. Voluntary organisations create the apparatuses by which governments and the market can be held accountable by the public.

The development administration demands the involvement of people for whom different plans and programmes are formulated. Voluntary organisations play a significant role as they fulfill the need for micro-level institutions that engage people in developing, implementing, and supervising the programmes. Various voluntary organisations engage themselves in providing welfare services to the people such as health, education etc. Some voluntary organisations focus on the development needs of the society like technical know-how, seeds, fertilisers etc. They also play an essential role in building the first stage of development: mobilising people and raising

their consciousness. It organises people to lay out priorities to development issues like social justice and providing opportunities to the disadvantaged and excluded exploited groups. .As far as the development works of volunteer associations are concerned, they are multifarious, performing in almost all walks of life. From large to small, from international to national and regional to different local types of voluntary organisations are contributing towards the betterment of society.

In India, some international voluntary organisations are also playing an important role. Green peace is a voluntary organisation that works toward sustainable development and issues related to climate change. It works mainly towards air pollution, using renewable sources of energy. The World Wildlife Fund or WWF is another International voluntary organisation that promotes the cause of the natural environment. It aims to protect the earth's biodiversity and reduce or minimise the impact of climate change, tackling pollution and better policy formulation for environmental governance. Action Aid is a voluntary organisation with a network of over 40 countries worldwide. It works towards the upliftment of marginalised and disadvantaged sections of India. It also contributes towards poverty eradication, child rights, environmental protection and development of women entrepreneurs.

Various voluntary organisations are dedicated to specific targeted groups like Salam Baalak trust which works for providing food, shelter and support to the homeless street children. They also train the street children to become professional travel guides. CRY- Child Rights and You is another voluntary organisation dedicated to children. It works to ensure that every child in India enjoys the childhood. It takes up issues like child trafficking, child marriage, child labour, malnutrition, and children's education. Helpage India is a voluntary organisation that works for senior citizens and provides them with basic facilities such as food, shelter and medical care. CARE is a voluntary organisation dedicated to uplifting and justice for women and girls. It looks after women's health, education, skill development and employment generation. Make a difference, is another such voluntary association that works for the development of children. It saves the children from exploitation and gives them the skill and orientation to living their life from a new beginning. There are voluntary organisations working towards the upliftment of women. Some focus on acid attack survivors and work for rehabilitation by providing them with the necessary skills, vocational training, and educational and psychological counseling support.

Various voluntary organisations work for a particular field like education, environment etc. Volunteer Ladakh is one such voluntary organisation that works for sustainable development and protection of the environment of that area by educating the local population. Similarly, Sadhana Forest is another voluntary organisation that works for ecological improvement in Tamil Nādu. It also focuses on sustainable development by educating the children and villagers. Human wave is a voluntary organisation that works for the health sector in West Bengal. Robin Hood army is a voluntary organisation that works with the aim of food for all. It provides food to different people in need at night shelters and help homeless families, orphanages, and public hospitals. Sewa Mandir of Udaipur offers many services related to education, women empowerment, healthcare, and child development.

Voluntary associations work for human beings and care for the entire ecological system. One such voluntary association is People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). It fights against animal abuse and saves them from different experiments or being used as a source of entertainment. Spreading awareness about the animals' rights has made a significant dent on society.

National Policy on Voluntary Sector

The Indian government has duly recognised the voluntary sector's role in the development process. So the government adopted National Policy on the Voluntary Sector in 2007. It has highlighted the vital part of the voluntary sector by stating: "The voluntary sector has contributed significantly to finding innovative solutions to poverty, deprivation, discrimination and exclusion, through means such as awareness-raising, social mobilisation, service delivery, training, research and advocacy. The voluntary sector has been an effective non-political link between the people and the government. This policy recognises the voluntary sector's important role in various areas and affirms the growing need for collaboration at the local, provincial and national levels."

This policy talks about establishing an enabling environment, ensuring the partnership of the voluntary sector in the development, and strengthening the voluntary sector. Through this policy,

the government wants to protect voluntary organisations' autonomy and identity. It also intends to provide a legitimate platform through which the voluntary sector can mobilise resources from abroad. It also looks forward to identifying various systems through which government can work in partnership with the voluntary sector. It also encourages voluntary organisations to have an accountable and transparent governance system. This policy encourages independent philanthropic institutions. It also provides a simple and liberal central law to register different forms of voluntary organisations like societies, trusts and non-profit organisations. Hence this policy looks forward to a constructive role played by the voluntary organisations in the development activities. It ensures that:

- Every voluntary organisation shall have transparent, accountable and participatory governance.
- It must complete all mandatory rules like registration, taxation, FCRA, etc.
- It must make its audited statement and annual report public.
- All voluntary organisations must have an active governing board. Its proceedings need to be appropriately recorded.
- It must furnish all the relevant information under the Right to Information Act.
- Every voluntary organisation must have policies on operational issues such as gender diversity, financial transparency etc.

The Government of India recognises the voluntary sector's cooperative role in the country's socio-economic development. For this purpose, NITI Aayog has established a dedicated Voluntary Cell. Its main functions are preparation of the policy guidelines for the voluntary sector, operationalisation of national policy on the voluntary sector, 2007; practice of guidelines for implementation of various schemes of the government through voluntary organisations, maintenance of a database of NGOs/Voluntary organisations etc. It maintains NGO Darpan Portal, which serves as an electronic database of voluntary organisations /NGOs. All the voluntary organisations who want to work with the government or apply/renew FCRA numbers need to register first with this portal.

6.5 ADVANTGES OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Voluntary organisations have some inherited advantages. They have a high degree of flexibility in their working methods and approaches. Being local and small, they have a deep reach to the people. They adopt a style of working that suits the needs of local people. Since they are not formed out of any external force but with full consciousness, they take more interest in solving people's problems. They better understand the local issues and are more responsive to them. Voluntary organisations take up the need and hence are more goal-oriented.

Their formation is owed to commitment to a particular purpose as they work passionately to achieve the same. Most voluntary organisations are formed out of local needs. They are very innovative. They ensure people's participation and find out unique solutions for the issues. The innovative credit programme of Grameen, the bank of Bangladesh, is an example. Voluntary organisations in their functioning are free of government hierarchy and rigid rules. They have their autonomous governing boards. They are more independent in their functioning and they work without any pressure from local power structures. The members of voluntary organisations are passionate and motivated for a specific cause. So it gives it a boost to face different hardships associated with development works. They cater to the local needs with purposive follow-up of the problems. It facilitates their conspicuous role in diversity, hence the immense benefit to targeted beneficiaries. It facilitates their conspicuous role in various development programmes.

6.6 VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS: CHALLENGES

Any voluntary organisation that depends on the time, effort, and labour of volunteers to achieve its objectives has numerous continuous difficulties. From mobilising the people for a cause to garnering support within the system is not an easy task. They face a number of challenges regarding funds, functions, functionaries and regulations. Meeting long-term objectives and individual members' requirements, balancing member benefits and public benefits, establishing priorities in the face of conflicting interests, managing member volunteers, and integrating paid employees are the five main issues of associational organisations. Some of them are given below:

Lack of Youth Volunteerism

The fundamental quality of voluntary organisations is volunteerism. Earlier, children doing voluntary work accepted it as their job, but these days, enthusiasm seems to be waning. Volunteerism is becoming less widespread each day. This area is getting professionalised. Even young people, social work graduates are interested in making it as a professional career. This results in a shortage of effective volunteers for voluntary organisations.

Modernisation

Owing to modernisation traditional voluntary organisations require a minimum level of infrastructure and administrative costs in addition to professionalisation and management practices. Regulators for grants-in-aid regrettably do not permit such administrative expenses other than contingencies. This causes the waning of conventional voluntary organisations that were once led by outstanding leaders.

Insufficient Trained Staff

There is a perception that the staff members of voluntary organisations have a sense of commitment, dedication, and interest in the social services. Previously, it was believed that voluntary organisations could be handled by unpaid social workers who were motivated by a sense of service and did not need any specialised education or training. However, the current trend shows that people with professional training are not eager to work for voluntary organisations. Their perspective has altered, and they are now exclusively interested in working in cities. Since most voluntary organisations operate in rural areas, it is quite difficult to find trained individuals who are both willing and trained to work there. Furthermore, most voluntary organisations are unable to spend additional funds on providing training to their staff members due to insufficient resources.

Lack of Funds

Voluntary organisations are having trouble securing enough, suitable, and ongoing funding for their activity. Both coping with their funding circumstances and gaining access to sponsors present difficulties for them. The government does not sanction funds for several programmes immediately or at 100% of the requested amount. NGOs are required to provide matching contributions, which they occasionally find difficult to afford. As a result, they are unable to

utilise the grants. Donor reliance is significant, and interventions have a propensity to change to reflect donor preferences.

Lack of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is rare among voluntary organisations, which prevents them from taking ownership of their mission, beliefs, and operations. As a result, they are susceptible to the whims of contributors, and it is challenging to gauge their impact over time.

Transparency Issues

Many voluntary organisations in India lack transparency when it comes to issues involving their funding and activities. Such a lack of transparency frequently results in reduction in donations.

Poor Governance

There is a huge disparity in the level of knowledge about good governance, with some regions showing very little comprehension of the need for boards of directors for voluntary organisations or what their tasks and responsibilities should be. In many cases founders intend to own their voluntary organisations in pursuit of their own goals making it difficult to create good governance.

Poor Networking

One of the biggest problems was poor networking. This many a time results in duplication of efforts, competing community-level tactics, a failure to learn from past mistakes, and voluntary organisation's incapacity to address local structural reasons of poverty, hardship, and underdevelopment. The upshot is widespread mistrust, secrecy, and a lack of transparency among voluntary organisations.

Limited Capacity: Many voluntary organisations are aware of their limited organisational and technical capacity. Very few of them have the funds or are eager to pay for this kind of capacity building. This results in weaknesses in leadership and management, governance, technical development areas, fundraising etc.

Lack of Coordination

Lack of cooperation among voluntary organisations operating at the municipal, state, and federal levels is to blame for issues including redundancy, overlapping efforts, and lack of coordination, among others. Absence of such a platform also makes it impossible for voluntary organisations to take a unified stance against the government when it degrades them for unimportant reasons at the whim of politicians and egotistical government officials. Additionally, the current situation does not encourage the exchange of information, the gathering of data, study, training, or publication. It also does not establish the right forum for bringing common problems to the government.

Monopoly by New Elites

It has been noted that there is a growing trend toward monopolisation and interlocking of leadership at the highest levels of volunteer action groups and organisations, as evidenced by the fact that the same person serves as president, secretary, treasurer, and a member of the executive in different organisations. The coordination of policies, programmes, and actions, the facilitation of the interchange of technical know-how and experience, and the mobilisation of people toward a single objective can benefit from this interlocking of leadership. But the biggest drawback of such leadership is that it prevents new blood from entering the organisation and leadership.

Opposition by Powerful sections in Rural Areas

Landed gentry control a substantial portion of leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Poor people, especially those from marginalised groups, don't have a strong voice or influence in Panchayati Raj institutions. In such a scenario, castes and classes in rural areas that are politically and economically powerful come into conflict with Voluntary organisations that genuinely work to uplift the poor, women, and disadvantaged groups. At times the dominant, entrenched interests in rural society go to great lengths to obstruct the operation of voluntary organisations there. Local rural residents are frequently incited against them based on misleading, spurious, emotive, cultural, or religious grounds.

Challenges of Unregistered Voluntary organisations

Unregistered VOs cause a variety of issues that are both many and complex, making it difficult to make any generalisations. Broadly speaking, they lack knowledge of contemporary

management principles. They typically have a low organisational capacity to accept professional, technical, or scientific inputs. There is dearth of the necessary skills to handle more advanced and complicated organisational duties. They lack understanding about how to comply with the law while dealing with government agencies. As a result, the main issue with unregistered VOs is their lack of capacity, which calls for capacity growth. Because unregistered VOs' work best exemplifies "volunteering," a system for training such volunteers is a prerequisite for improving the capability of such VOs.

Activity :Visit few voluntary organisations in your area and get acquainted with their functions and also discuss about the problem areas.

6.7 CONCLUSION

In this way, we can say that voluntary organisations complement and do not compete with the State's development plans. Both share the same development goals but have different approaches to attain it. Given the magnitude of development problems such as poverty, ignorance, unemployment, gender issues, health, environment etc. state alone cannot tackle them. Hence, the State must involve and channelise voluntary organisations to achieve development goals. It must involve them in formulating and implementing various development plans as per their specialisation. State also regulates the funding to these voluntary organisations and ensures their accountability and transparency. A voluntary organisation's role is becoming more significant and integral to the development administration. They act as the government's think tank, provide innovative alternates and ensure community empowerment and participation in that development process. The need of hour is to establish a healthy link between government and voluntary organisations.

6.8. REFERENCES

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