



## **ROLE OF NGO TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN BIHAR**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Rural development is an old theme, although the concept has experienced continuous evolution in contents and concerns for organising development in the rural areas. The primacy of rural development in less developed countries emerges due to the overwhelming significance of rural dimensions in their economies. Rural development, like economic development, reflects concern for the reduction in poverty, inequality and exploitation. In most countries, this may also be taken as a concern for 'urban biases' in development since most of the socio-economic indicators such as income, nutrition, life expectancy, physical infrastructure, literacy, provision of social services in the rural areas compare unfavourably with those in the urban areas. Rural development implies desired positive change in the rural areas both in a qualitative and quantitative sense. The reduction of hunger, poverty, unemployment and inequality constitutes rural development, which in term improves the quality of life and level of living of the rural masses.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In general, rural development is conceived as a strategy designed to improve the socio-economic life of the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the pores in the rural areas e.g., small farmers, tenants, landless and other disadvantaged groups. Since the prime objective of rural development is to reduce poverty, the rural development programmes must be designed to increase production, raise productivity, promote human resource development and expand employment opportunities. Moreover, the development process must not sacrifice the environmental basis of sustainability. To emphasise the mutually reinforcing and multi-faceted nature of rural development activities and the belief that rural development planning with a single focus is unlikely to be truly developmental, the phrase 'integrated rural development' is commonly used to indicate a multipurpose thrust of rural development.

Rural development recognises, however, that improved food supplies and nutrition, together with basic services such as health and education, can not only directly improve the physical well-being and quality of life of the rural poor, but can also indirectly enhance their productivity and their ability to contribute to the national economy. It is concerned with the modernisation and magnetisation of rural

society and with its transition from traditional isolation to integration with the national economy. The objectives of rural development, thus, extend beyond any particular sector. They encompass improved productivity, increased employment and thus higher incomes for target groups, as well as minimum acceptable levels of food, shelter, education and health.

While agricultural development, welfare orientation and poverty alleviation are certainly important elements of the rural development processes; rural development has a much wider connotation. It includes values like participation, along with the socio-political and sustainable development of the rural society.

Since the creation of Bihar, Rural Development has always been considered a multi-purpose activity. Almost all the nation-building and development programmes include a major component that spread in rural areas. The major activities related to agriculture, food, land, irrigation, water resources management, livestock, forestry, cottage industries, health, family planning and education etc. are significantly related to the development of the rural areas and the people living there. Rural development, therefore, has become a conglomerate of diverse aims, objectives and activities involving different sectors and institutions both government and non-government.



While pursuing the rural infrastructure development and projects like building dams and construction of flood protection embankments and roads the implications for the environment and likely ecological implications were never been taken into account. This resulted in phenomenal degradation of the environment, the rural ecosystem and the natural resources in the rural areas upon which the rural people depend for their sustenance. The situation has become so grave that it brought an additional number of people into the fold of the already dominant poverty trap. It has, therefore, become imperative that considerations related to ecology and resource conservation are integrated with development efforts in the rural areas, which aim to provide the basic needs to the rural poor. This is particularly important for Bihar where most of the development efforts affect the status of rural resources.

Some analysts say that in Bihar, the preoccupation with fighting against poverty has overshadowed environmental issues. It is argued that the relative neglect of environmental degradation has made the long-term battle to overcome poverty more difficult. The perpetual neglect continued by various governments has brought the nation to such a pass that the livelihood of more than half of the rural people in Bihar who are already living below the poverty line has been seriously threatened.

The extremely high population density of Bihar is a major factor contributing to the intense and overuse of forests, fisheries and a certain extent even soil and water resources. A majority of households with no sufficient land to raise enough food to meet their needs; and fuelwood to meet their domestic energy requirements have to depend on crop residues and dung for fuel needs.

Alleviation of poverty is seen to be a major objective of both government and NGOs in the context of the rural development of Bihar. Though rural Bihar sustains in the culture of poverty, it nonetheless, possesses certain innately human qualities that provide a point of optimism for socio-economic development. Against many odds and making good use of this positive factor a large number of NGOs are engaged, side by side with the government agencies in bringing up a socio-economic transformation of the rural society, by involving the people in the process of development.

Though environment, conservation and sustainable development do not specifically appear in the policy developments, the majority of NGO activities in the rural areas have a direct bearing on environment conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. They are actively involved in implementing rural development schemes related to agriculture, forestry, agroforestry, fisheries, population control, rural works programmes, health

and nutrition, water and sanitation and non-agricultural income-generating activities which have a considerable impact on the improvement of a rural environment, conservation of resources and sustainable development.

Development NGOs with environment and conservation-oriented programmes are sizeable in number. Many components of the development programmes of the NGOs are, in fact, environmental programmes incognito having direct or indirect, positive impact on the environment and conservation of resources at household, community and regional level. Though environment and conservation concerns had not been explicitly mentioned in the policy or strategy documents of the development NGOs in Bihar, the agencies had been pursuing such programmes as already bore environmental significance long before the term environment or conservation became a global concern.

Agriculture and related activities are considered one of the most important and major sectors that have a direct bearing on rural development. Agriculture is not only the major source of income and employment; it is also the source of food supply. For the majority who live in the villages, the only escape from poverty is also through increased production in agriculture and related activities. But again, the extreme population growth coupled with skewed land distribution pattern caused a great number of people to remain unemployed for most of their time to the detriment of the ambient environment in which they live upon.

The development models being followed by Bihar itself has created problems of displacement, degradation of ecology and environment, deforestation, poverty, unemployment and slums etc. The pronounced goal of development as enshrined in the Bihar Constitution was to create an egalitarian social order based on values of equality, freedom and justice. But this has been belied as poverty and disparities have grown many-fold despite economic growth. Pauperisation in the stateside has been continuously pushing people in very large numbers to the cities in search of employment, where they are forced to live in slums in most human conditions. In the face of growing miseries, perpetrated by the development model followed so far, 60 per cent of our population is forced to live on a below subsistence level.

## NGO & BIHAR

Bihar, situated in east India, is one of the densely populated countries in theregion with a population size of over fourteen million in a land area of one lakh fourteen thousand square miles, is practically considered to be a hub of voluntary organisations. Possibly the India and Bihar Govt.



abodes a massive concentration of non-government organisations the world ever

witnessed. Like many developing countries, voluntary efforts at the non-governmental level intended to improve the socio-economic conditions of the underprivileged sections of the population is not new in Bihar. Many individuals and organisations have been utilising their time, energy and resources in organising action-oriented participatory programmes to ameliorate the standard of living of the majority of people, particularly those living in rural areas. These programmes have had a significant influence on a variety of people encompassing diverse areas, like health, education, agriculture, fisheries, livestock, small industries and rural entrepreneurship.

Subsequently, NGO operations were spread out in the worst poverty hit areas of rural Bihar. The problem of bare minimum survival of the poor and landless people was extremely acute particularly in the eastern region of the state, which houses pockets of perennial poverty. Over time the NGO activities continue to unfold and shot into prominence in the rural development scenario. The impact of the NGOs has been so visible and effective that at times it is called “poor men God”. The reasons being cited that the trust and goodwill they have earned because of their commitment and devotions for their efforts in salvaging out the poor people from the morass of poverty, illiteracy, hunger and malnutrition and thereby ameliorating the lifestyle of the poor people.

### **BASIC OBJECTIVES OF NGOS**

The objectives of NGOs in Bihar are varied and so are the functions. One way of looking at NGOs is to attempt to place their objectives and functions into broad categories. Rahman H. identified three broad objectives and functions of NGOs, which are human development, socio-economic development and micro-social transformation. According to him these three objectives broadly cover the scope of activities of almost all NGOs in the state. On the basis of functions and activities of NGOs in Bihar can be grouped under four broad headings. These are employment and income generation (EIG), health and family planning, education, and organising the poor<sup>19</sup> of which major activities of NGOs are mostly centred around the creation of employment opportunities and generation of income for the poor.

The target of EIG activities has been landless labourers, poor rural women, small peasants and sharecroppers, fishermen, destitute women and the like. EIG activities have been supported by credit, training and appropriate technology made available by NGOs to their respective clientele.

Another area, where NGO activities have had some success, is creating job opportunities for landless and rural poor women. The main concentration here has been on handicrafts. NGOs have also made significant strides in generating income and employment opportunities for rural ladles men in such areas as cattle “Caring, nursery preparation, agriculture and pisciculture”.

The most crucial and challenging role the NGOs play in Bihar is how best to organise the poor for their effective participation in the development process. Consequently, promoting and sustaining organisation for the poor has been an abiding interest of NGOs. This has brought the formation of groups of individuals belonging to the same profession or is considered to be at the same economic level. Participation of group members in every phase planning, implementation and evaluation- of group activities is considered not only desirable but also imperative for sustenance and propriety of the group. This is the area where the government has

miserably failed to involve the poor in the development process. It is aptly argued by some that NGOs in Bihar have come to stay. They will continue to play a role as a saviour of silent emergencies. of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and degradation of rural environments in the days to come. As of now their contributions towards fighting the “silent emergencies” is by no means insignificant. They have set in a new trend in nation-building and socio-economic progress of the poverty-stricken at Bihar.

### **SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Rural development in Bihar has always been a multi-sector activity. Almost all the nation-building and development programmes include a major component that spread in rural areas. The major activities related to agriculture, food, land, irrigation, water resources management, livestock, forestry, cottage industries, health, family planning and education etc. are significantly related to the development of rural areas and the people living there. Rural development, therefore, has become a conglomerate of diverse aims, objectives and activities involving different sectors and institutions both Govt. and Non-government.

Agriculture and related activities constitute the most important and major sector which have a direct bearing on rural development. Agriculture is not only the major source of income and employment; it is also the source of food supply. Even, other sectors of the economy are presently unable to take up the growing labour force especially in the rural areas. At the same time, for the majority in agriculture who live in the villages, the only escape from poverty is also through increased production and efficiency in agriculture and related



activities. In the national effort to break out of the presently deepening poverty trap, the state has to depend mainly on agriculture and ensure that the agricultural growth rate significantly exceeds the population growth rate where the rural population is the major contributing factor.

The trends in the growth and performance of the agriculture sector are inevitably linked with the existing situations and weaknesses in other affiliated sectors such as inefficient use of land over various land holding and farm sizes resulting from the existing land ownership patterns and tenancy relationships. The low proportion of cultivated areas under effective irrigation and water control, inadequate availability of credit, deficiency in soil nutrients, deterioration of soil quality, inadequate physical and institutional infrastructure, etc are important issues having a direct impact on agriculture and rural development.

To understand the state of Bihar rural development and its implication on sustainable development one has to go back to the state's past while it was under colonial rule for a very long period. The causes of backwardness of the rural areas coupled with poverty can be rooted in the perpetual neglect accompanied by exploitation and distortion of the economy and manipulation of the social structure by successive colonial regimes to their advantage.

Thus, the need for training of villagers for rural development was well understood by some individual British officers and Indian social workers in the very early part of this century and positive steps in this direction were initiated. However, in the absence of initialisation of such training and a comprehensive rural development training policy, these efforts disappeared with the departure of the individual officer or the social worker that had initiated such training activities.

## CONCLUSION

Given these phenomena, in its latest document, the Planning commission acknowledged "the enormity of the unemployment problem in the state", calling for a comprehensive programme for employment generation and human resources development. The draft perspective plan for the rural sector envisages the continuation and expansion of successful targeted poverty alleviation programmes/projects and the addition of new pro-poor projects based on social mobilisation. In these projects, the poor at the grassroots will be enabled to organise themselves, identify their problems, make their own development decisions, particularly in areas, which concern them, most. For the first time, the government with a deviation from its earlier stands from time to time acknowledged the role of NGOs in rural development undertakings. It

emphasized the need for social mobilisation with the active support of NGOs aimed at the reduction of rural poverty by the sustained increase in productive employment, particularly self-employment opportunities in activities like animal husbandry, fisheries, poultry, horticulture and various non-farm activities have better potentials of better economic returns. It also calls for social mobilisation aiming at the social development of the poor in education, health and sanitation, family planning and population control by linking the poor with the government's programmes in these sectors.

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