



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ROLE OF NGOS IN THE REHABILITATION OF CONFLICT VICTIMS IN KASHMIR.

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ABSTRACT

The state of Jammu and Kashmir has been witnessing Armed Conflict from the last two decades, and Kashmir region in particular has been the most affected. The conflict has led to the loss of human resource and caused infrastructural damage to some of the important institutions. The children lost the parental support while as thousands of families lost their bread earners. The conflict has also taken a toll on the mental health of the general population of the valley. As in other conflict zones of the world, Non Governmental Organizations also started operating their programs for the rehabilitation of the conflict-affected population. The present paper is an attempt to understand the role of NGOs in the rehabilitation of conflict affected victims. It tries to understand the programs introduced by these voluntary organizations and its impact on human development.

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INTRODUCTION

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been defined by the World Bank as 'private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development. As per UN A Non Governmental Organization is any non profit, voluntary citizens group which is organised on local, national or international level, Task oriented and people driven by common interest. The role NGOs play in providing humanitarian relief has significantly increased in the past decade and a half, a fact demonstrated by the crisis in different parts of the world today. NGOs are growing in number, size, and consequently in influence. It is also widely believed that Non Governmental Organizations are responding significantly quicker than other types of organizations involved in humanitarian affairs.

Kashmir did not had the presence of vibrant Non Governmental sector prior to 1989 although some organizations were present however they had confined their role to the spread of the religious education and helping the poor families. After the 1989, the conflict situation in Kashmir lead to loss of the human lives and other socio economic implications.

Kashmir traditionally has been a plural society and very close-knit religious society. So there was very less scope for the NGOs to work in social sphere. If a child was without parent he/she would be supported his /her relatives. However, it was only after 1989, which lead to the entry of many NGOs in Kashmir. The reasons for the entry of NGOs has been the increasing victims of violence, curfews, close down of business and tourism, at the same time increased number of children who lost parents, psychiatric disorders etc. It has been also noticed that the earthquake of 2005 in Kashmir also led to the entry of some voluntary organizations to the valley.

Suri in his work on NGOs in Kashmir Agents of peace and development points that holding of elections in 1996 also helped in the establishment of NGO culture as government allowed media and NGOs to monitor the elections as being free and fair. The government also felt that these organizations could help in projecting a democratic image at the international and domestic level. This led to the dramatic increase in number of NGOs in Kashmir during 1996-1997, the author points. There are around 100,000 children without parental support in Kashmir (UNICEF). Margoob (2006) mentions that the number of institutions in Kashmir were very less or almost does not exist before 1990. As before 1986 there was only one institution in Srinagar. The requirements of institutions were increased after 1990s and most of the cases are chronic conflict. Conflict also had significant impact on the mental health of the people of valley. This is also revealed by the number of patients who are attending psychiatric hospital in Kashmir which has increased immensely since nineties.

Thus Non Governmental Organizations found space and started working in different areas in Kashmir. These responses came at three levels, Local Organizations, National and International Non Governmental Organizations.

Research frame work

In order to understand the role of NGOs in the rehabilitation of the victims of conflict the annual reports of the functional Non Governmental Organizations working in the Kashmir division of the state of Jammu and Kashmir were consulted. Further the available reports of the various voluntary organizations reflecting their work were examined. This was also followed by the assessment of the information available on the websites of these Organizations.

Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Kashmir

Non Governmental Organizations responded to the victims of the conflict affected at various levels. One response was in the

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form of humanitarian aid to the affected population This was in the form of providing relief and other essentials which are necessary for the survival.

The other response which arrived as the situation in the valley started bit improving and therefore these organizations started, long term intervention like forming Self-help groups, working on the quality of education, child health etc.

The programs of the NGOs in Kashmir can also be categorized in terms of Institutional and Non Institutional programs. The institutional programs were in the form of orphanages, residential facilities of children, disable etc .Non institutional programs were the community based programs meant for the victims of the conflict. The below mentioned sections discusses the principle activities of the Non Governmental Organizations for the conflict affected population in Kashmir.

Principle Activities of the NGOs in Kashmir

Education

The turmoil in the valley affected many institutions and one of them were educational institutions. The immediate response by the Non-Governmental organization was in the form of providing educational support. This was done by some international organizations INGOs who were working on children in Kashmir. The support was offered in the form of teaching aid material like the black board, matting and text books. As has been mentioned earlier that the conflict also lead to the drop out of children from the schools and many of them were engaged as child labours in order to support the family income. It was also found that girls left their schooling due to fear and long distances. Some Non Governmental organizations started running NFE (Non formal education Centres) to those who had left the mainstream education. Non formal Education means any organized and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the definition of formal education .Non formal education may therefore take place both within and outside the educational institutions and cater to persons of all ages. Depending on country contexts, it may cover educational programmes to impart adult literacy, basic education for out of school children, life skills, work skills and general culture .Non formal education programmes do not necessarily follow the ladder system and may have different durations, and may or may not confer certification of the learning achieved. (UNESCO 1997).In Kashmir the Non formal education centres started functioning within the communities by local educated volunteers who were identified by the Organization. The NFE teachers were provided training and the teaching material by the Organizations. Adolescent girls who could not attend the formal schools were also covered under such program. Though by means of these centres, Non formal education was imparted, however the NFE teachers found it difficult to motivate the children as they used to be engaged with their work.

The other major response in Kashmir by the Non Governmental Organizations was in the form of orphanages. The orphanages were established mainly by the local NGOs which provided residential care to the children who were victims of the conflict .These orphanage's used to offer free education to the children. Some of them started running schools within the orphanages' while other would send

children to the private or the government run schools. The need to send the child to the orphanage was due to the loss of the bread winner of the family thereby affecting the income of the family. Further the diminishing traditional support system in Kashmir lead to the establishment of the Orphanages.

Voluntary Organizations also started working with the Government schools in the area of intervention. This intervention used to be in the form of conducting certain competitions like art, sports etc. In the recent past many voluntary organizations have started offering scholarships to the children to pursue their education. The scholarships are provided to the children who are orphans or have incapacitated parental support. Some of the organizations have also started conducting researches to improve the quality of education.

Health

The ongoing conflict also had relentless consequence on the health of the people. The general health of the people deteriorated and more specifically the mental health. There were limited organizations who specifically worked in the area of health. Many Voluntary Organizations used to organize medical camps providing free checkups and medicines. In 2001 some International Humanitarian organizations started working on Mental Health. The help was provided mainly in terms of Mental health counselling and also basic health care in some remote areas of the valley like Kupwara where the Government health structure is either very poor or doesn't exist at all. Although the organizations primary target beneficiaries are the victims of violence, at the same time they started working on people affected by other stress-related mental health problems. Besides the needs of those who are referred for having psychological problems of varied nature and causes, other than the trauma-related stress. In the basic health care component these organizations started providing free consultations and medication with a special focus on children and women. This was done through stable facilities and also outreaches activities.

Some of the international NGOs started working on the mental health. The intervention on mental health took place at two levels one was stable and the community outreach programs Later on these organizations also started expanding their programs The Mental health support programme had two components-stable and community outreach. At its stable facilities, these organizations had established counselling centres at all major hospitals of the valley, like Psychiatric hospital, SKIMS (Sher -I- Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences) Soura, SMHS, SKIMS Bemina, and other district hospitals. The clients were generally referred by the psychiatric and neuro science OPDs for counselling by mental health experts. Sometimes counsellors also refer clients for psychiatric and medical help if such a need is identified in a client. As for the community outreach programs, mobile mental health clinics at selected locations were set up. The activities include raising awareness about causes, sign, symptoms of stress and encouraging positive coping mechanisms, thus helping communities identify and deal with the mental health issues. One of the very important things done during these programs is encouraging people to seek help when needed and reduce or remove the stigma associated with Mental Health problems. Activities are conducted with various groups in the community like adult males and females and also youth groups. Sessions are also conducted in educational

institutions with teachers and adolescent students. People are empowered to identify the symptoms of Mental Health issues in themselves and others and are encouraged to come for help which is provided at the mobile clinics set up in their own villages. Besides offering help in terms of counselling, free psychiatric consultation and medication is also made available once a week every month. Some of them also keep this Mobile clinic shifting from one target location to another every six or eight months, depending upon the need.

Apart from this, some organizations also started providing assistance during natural disasters also. The Non Governmental organizations also responded to the earthquake Victims of 2005 in Kashmir. Along with relief, food and non food items, psychosocial support was provided too to the survivors of natural calamities. In the recent past some local organizations have started establishing hospitals and medical diagnostic facilities particularly for the poor sections of the society. Medical practitioners also formed some associations who worked on voluntary basis to offer their services in organizing medical camps.

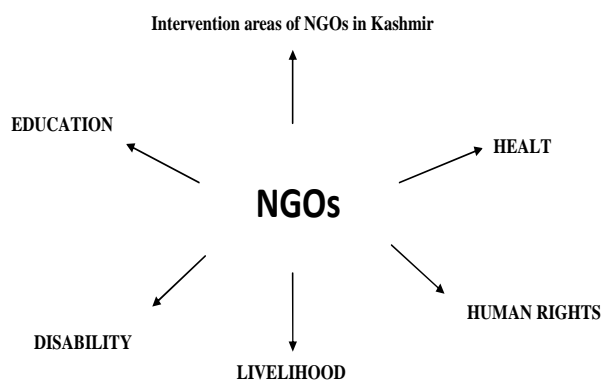


Diagram Showing The Major Areas Of Work By Ngos In Kashmir

Disability

The ongoing turmoil in the state also became one of the factor which lead to the increase in the number of disability cases. According to the census 2001 there are 302670 disable persons in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. It is also widely believed that the number of such persons has also increased in the last one decade. (Dabla). Many injured due to incidents of violence in the valley lead to disability. The voluntary sector did not respond immediately to the problems of disable, it has been found that most of the Ngos who started working on disable in Kashmir got established after the 2000. Most these Ngos were local organizations who started establishing special schools particularly for the mentally challenged children.

In district Anantnag a local Ngo has started running a school for blind in which various students are learning Braille system of education. The school is first of its kind and 2nd of its kind in the Kashmir valley. The students are given totally free education. Further it has been running a school for differently able children at Bijbehara, where all types of disable children are seeking Education through Braille, Sign language and other special medium of instructions.

The organization has been running a computer centre and vocational training centre for down trodden people especially physically challenged people. Currently the organization is working in 6 villages in tehsil Bijbehara of district Anantnag and has complete Base level information.

The special children are given daily activities and vocational trainings to live a dignified life. The visually impaired children are given Braille education and cerebral palsy affected children treated with physiotherapy technique. In the recent past the local organizations succeeded in filing a PIL in the J&K High Court which resulted in formulation of policy for physically challenged and provision of 3% reservations in Employment and Education. The Scholarships for Academic and professional courses were all included in the policy. The organization works for disability Rights in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Organizes workshops on Child Rights, Disability Rights, and Women Empowerment etc.

In district Srinagar few Local Non Governmental Organizations started special school for mentally challenged children. These children coming from different areas and different backgrounds, are provided education and are also taught different sort of training skills so as to improve their condition and make them self reliant. There is a team of special educators who deal with such children. The children are taught to learn the basic daily living activities. The school is also providing physiotherapy classes to the children. They are trained to help children in restoring their physical capacities. In Special Education class children are trained in a play way method in order to improve their concentration and vision. The school is also providing vocational training to the children so that they can learn some skills which can help them in future in earning their livelihood.

Community Based Programs for disable in Kashmir

Further these organizations have also started working in the area of disability at the community level. The organization is also working at the community level in different districts of the Kashmir valley mainly in Srinagar and budgam, Anantnag on disability. The main areas of intervention are the immunization, birth registration and awareness about different schemes for the differently able and the process of getting it. These agencies started working in collaboration with different government department like ICDS for the early detection of the disable children.

Livelihood

In conflict situation livelihood becomes a matter of grave concern. The family losses the bread earner thereby affecting all its members. Ngos in Kashmir also played a role in providing livelihood to the victims of conflict. The Humanitarian Aid in the form of livelihood support was also provided to the victims of the conflict. However the approach of providing livelihood opportunities varied with different organizations. The various programs for livelihood by the voluntary organizations were in the form of

1. SHGs
2. Vocational training
3. FSP (Family support Program)
- 4 LSSP (Life Skill support program)

Self Help Group Formation

Under this program these organizations involved individuals who were having skill in a particular area like the local artisans involved with the craft of paper machine. After the identification process, they start forming the cluster for the formation of SHGs. This is done by meeting the locality heads and sharing the work details with them. Further awareness

programs are organized and information is disseminated to the public. Thus SHGs are formed comprising of 10-19 members. This is followed by the consultations with the community mobilizes who are trained in SHG management facilitate and the weekly meetings of these SHG. In these weekly meetings group members voluntarily save some amount. As the saving amount reaches 500 or more the saving bank account of the group is opened in the bank. Later the group members continue the saving process and they themselves visit banks to deposit savings. The linking to the bank is also facilitated by the organization.

Family Support Program

Family support program FSP was started for orphans and widows who were directly hit by the conflict and families were assisted by starting some income generating units for them and helping them in promoting their business.

Life skills support program LSSP

This program was started for children who were indirectly hit by the conflict like hanji community. Under this program, economic groups for adolescent girls having the skill of Aari work, commercial art were formed. Capacities were built up vis a vis non formal education, skill enhancement, exposure visit's marketing skills.

Human Rights

Realisation of Human rights becomes the first casualty of the armed conflict. In Kashmir also human rights violations become a continuous phenomenon. There were limited number of NGOs who worked in the area of human rights. This was due to uncertain conditions in the valley. In the recent past some of the coalitions of civil societies have been formed. The human rights coalitions started highlighting the human rights violations. This also led to the establishment of certain association of disappeared. Also some law networks started working in the area of human rights. These organizations started working in the area of human rights. These organization started establishing facts pertaining to the violation of the human rights and enforced disappearances. Besides the legal aid was also provided to the victims of conflict. Some of the NGOs also started working for various entitlements in terms of generating awareness about the various government schemes in different areas of the Kashmir. Few organizations have also started working in the area of right to information.

Areas of Concern and Improvement

There is no denying the fact that the Non Governmental Organizations have played an important role in the rehabilitation of the victims of the conflict. However, there are areas of concerns and improvement as well.

The work of the most of the NGOs in Kashmir has been project based, means it lasts for some time and is closed which leaves the limited possibility of bringing out desired changes and most of these projects last for one year or two. Thus to bring changes within the short period of time is very challenging. The intervention has been mostly the activity specific rather than looking for a long term change. It has also been found that majority of the local NGOs have not been able to develop a system of raising funds on professional lines. As a result of which they are dependent on

the funding on national and international funding organizations.

The immediate intervention to the problem of children and women in Kashmir by the Non-governmental organizations was not proper planning or vision. It was an adhoc intervention with no long term plans for their rehabilitation. There has also been lack of coordination between the Non Governmental Organization and different government department. This in many cases has led to overlapping and duplication of resources.

Ngos could not flourish as the centres of Training development and research based Organizations as is the case in different states of country.

NGO Projects were decided not taking in view the ground realities. The approach was selective in nature.

It has been also observed that some Ngos defamed the work of the other credible Non-governmental organizations who as per some reports were found engaged with some other activities. In many cases it has also been noticed that once the organizations move out of the communities there were limited follow ups of their work. It has been also observed that the some of voluntary organizations invested more in organizing mega workshops on certain issues. These workshops were meant for those who already were having know how of the problems. Thus utilizations of resources were not channelized properly.

All these NGOs could not form networks with each other. The formation of network can lead to the sharing of resources and services eliminate word there by and thereby. Even though Formation of SHGs is being considered as a sustainable way of generating income, reality is quite different. Concept of self-help becomes confined to saving some money only. There are very rare cases where the group members actually use this amount for income generating. Mostly this amount is used for inter loaning. Repayment rate is very less.

One of the areas of concern has also been the recruitment of Non Professionals in these Organizations.

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