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THE ROLE OF NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION (NGO) IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN ASSAM: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RURAL VOLUNTEER CENTRE, AKAJAN, DHEMAJI, ASSAM

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ABSTRACT:

Generally Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a very important role in addressing social, environmental, and economic issues and vital role in socio-economic development. It works acting as a bridge between communities and governments. Thus it often fills gaps in service delivery. In Assam, role of NGOs contribute significantly to socio-economic development by addressing critical needs, empowering communities, and promoting sustainable solutions. NGOs play a vital role in complementing government efforts and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Rural Volunteer Centre (RVC) is a renowned NGO located at Dhemaji districts of Assam who has been serving the rural society for its socio-economic sustainability for more than thirty two years and have able to achieve their goals in many sectors in poverty elevation. This paper tries to focus on over all activities and development works of NGOs and specially Rural Voluntary Centre.

Key words: NGO, socio-economic, development, RVC, Rural Development Schemes.

Introduction:

NGO, literary abbreviation is Non-governmental organizations. They have a vital role in socio-economic development, environmental preservation, community education, health care, social justice son and so forth.

There is legal entity of NGOs. It is basically of three types of organizations registered under three different legal provisions are called non-profit organization, voluntary organization, civil society organization, community based organisation or NGO.

Tasaduk Ariful Hussain (2013) mentioned,

- All the organizations registered under the Society Registration Act, 1860 [Act No. 21 of Yr. 1860]
- All the organizations registered under the Indian Trust Act 1882; and it came into force on the first day of March, 1882
- All the organizations registered under the Section 25 in The Companies Act, 1956.”

It has found that the concept of NGOs in Assam gained significant traction after the 1990s, particularly following the tragic incident involving Sanjoy Ghosh, an NGO worker who was abducted and killed while working in Majuli. Before this, NGOs were not a widely recognized term in the state. The incident brought NGOs into public consciousness and transformed them into a respected and admired institution, while also affecting the public perception of the group ULFA.

The role of NGOs in Assam has diversified. They are working as bridging the gap between government programmes and schemes. They fields where government programmes may overlook providing services in areas like healthcare, education, and social welfare. They advocate for the rights and needs of marginalized communities, influencing policy changes and promoting social justice. Normally they give focus on building self-reliance and resilience within communities, particularly among women and vulnerable groups. Besides, they conduct research to identify solutions to social problems and develop innovative approaches to development.

They work on women empowerment through economic opportunities, skill development, and social awareness programs. NGOs aimed at reducing poverty through sustainable solutions, including livelihoods support and skill development, in disaster preparedness, relief, and rehabilitation efforts, and environmental conservation, promoting sustainable practices, and raising awareness about environmental issues.

Role of NGO and Rural Development Schemes:

NGOs take active participation in rural development. It has observed that the rural poor and socially depressed classes are mainly depending upon the governmental schemes and the NGOs. They have been giving service in the field of (Goswami, 2024)-

- i. Agricultural related programmes like training and providing assistance in distribution planting materials, cattle, pigs, poultry and free health checkup and vaccination.
- ii. In health care programmes for human and animals by providing good drinking water, regular health checkup
- iii. In human resource development programmes, like skill development educational and integrated developments projects.
- iv. In trade and industrial promotion, by teaching them the market linkage and importance of marketing for economic development of the rural farmers.
- v. Besides, the NGOs help by awaking various governmental programmes, developmental schemes and their successful implementations.

Some schemes (R, 2020) which are meant for rural development are-

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)
2. Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY)
3. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)
4. Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY)
5. National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)
6. Department of Land Resources-DoLR
7. National Land Records Modernization Programme (NLRMP)
8. Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP)

A brief introduction of Rural Volunteer Centre:

This is popularly known as RVC, a non-governmental, non-profit organization that has been serving communities of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh since 1993. For more than three decades, this organization has been at the vanguard of grassroots development, focusing on improving lives, reducing poverty, and promoting a healthier, more equitable society for all. Its permanent office location is at Akajan village, under Akajan Gram Panchayat, Sissiborgaon Rev. Circle, Dhemaji district of Assam. It registered under 1860 Society Registration Act, established in the year 1993. The founder director of RVC was Ravindra Nath, former Executive Director at SAMPDA (Indian Network of Barefoot College) and the present director of RVC is Luit Gotswami.

Missions of RVC is mainly to build an epidemic-free, just society in the rural heartlands of the Upper Brahmaputra River basin. It has been working tirelessly, through community –driven solutions, to address local needs, from disaster preparedness to health.

RVC have been working across 11 Development Blocks, 45 Panchayats, and more than 750 villages. It includes among the remote communities in Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, and Majuli districts of Assam. Besides, it has already covered East Siang and West Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The main approaches are to build on collaboration, trust. And empowering the most marginalized communities particularly women, children and youth.

More broadly their focus areas are-

1. Climate –resilient livelihoods
2. Technology in education
3. Health and nutrition
4. Child protection & rights
5. Gender equality

The core values of RVC:

1. **Community-Centric Development:** Placing communities at the heart of decision-making.
2. **Equity and Justice:** Promoting fairness and inclusion across all programs.
3. **Sustainability:** Ensuring that our interventions have long-term positive impacts.
4. **Collaboration:** Partnering with global and national organizations to amplify impact.

Partner of RVC:

RVC has a strong partnerships provide the resources and expertise needed to address critical challenges in disaster management, education, health, and sustainable development. They are (Nath, (Nath, 2024))-

- i. ECHO (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations)
- ii. DFID (Department for International Development, UK)
- iii. UNICEF
- iv. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)
- v. Action Aid
- vi. Oxfam
- vii. CRS (Catholic Relief Services)
- viii. Save the Children
- ix. Christian Aid
- x. AFNA (American Friends of Needy Asians)
- xi. TATA TRUST

Their beginning:

Most particularly RVC was born out of community spirit and determination. It was started on community donated land, with materials and labour provided by local peoples. Initially the organization took support from SWRC (Social Work & Research Centre), Tilonia. Their initial efforts focused on helping flood-affected populations and gradually expended to address broader development challenges.

The team of RVC is basically driven by a team of dedicated person of development professionals, community leaders, and volunteers. They always work to bring expertise in disaster management, education, health, gender equality, and sustainable livelihoods, working tirelessly to create a better future for underserved communities.

The impact:

During the more than three decades of social service and extension activities, RVC have able to touch lives through building disaster-resilient communities, advancing primary education and gender equality, promoting health, nutrition, and sustainable livelihoods, and advocating for children's rights and protection.

Some important schemes successfully implemented by RVC, Akajan:



Pic, 1: Raised Toilet in Flood Prone Area at Sonari Ghat, Dhemaji District of Assam.



Pic, 2: Raised Hand pump in Flood Prone Area at Bahir Jonai, Dhemaji District of Assam.

Some programmes conducted by RVC Akajan in various places:



Pic, 3: Conducting Awareness program on ending child marriage at Kherkata GP, Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur District



Pic, 4: Saturday Resilient program on Disaster Management at Various schools under Majuli District



Pic, 5: Providing workshop to the youth and NSS Volunteers on impacts of climate changes on children's Right in Disaster prone District of Assam.



Pic, 6: Conducting Awareness program on waste management at various schools under Dhakuakhana Block, Lakhimpur District of Assam

Conclusion:

In the last few decades reveal that there have been significant growth and development in the rural society of the Assam. Due to their constant efforts they ensured effective people's participation and participatory development. They are now able to provide structures and mechanisms for the involvement of people. It came because of their access to grassroots community groups; they are in touch with local realities. NGOs articulate the problems found at grassroots level and assist communities in seeking solutions. Thus they conceptualize and formulate projects that respond to communities' particular needs and constraints. Thus the rate of peoples' empowerment increases. Thought peoples' participation political, social and economic rights can be achieved.

NGOs play an increasingly significant role in promoting people-centered development activities at the grassroots as well as national and international levels. The bilateral and multilateral donors are exhibiting a growing interest in and support for NGOs.

After coming of NGOs in Assam the living standard of the rural folk changed. People became more aware to their rights, duty for their upliftment. New ideas, new hope came into the people of Assam. They started various socio economic activities to sustain economically.

In particular, Rural Volunteer Centre, Akajan started work on economic activities like mushroom culture, livestock farming and agriculture and allied sectors. They adopted new technique to survive in flood prone areas like Dhemaji, Majuli and Lakhimpur district of Assam. The concept of raised platform for people and the animals, pure and safe drinking water was advocated by the RVC. In many flood prone villages they started to construct *chang* (plinth) type sanitary latrine and tube well. They have been working in the field of climate –resilient livelihoods, technology in education, health and nutrition, child protection & rights and gender equality. Thus it has successfully rooted in the mind of the rural and poor villagers of Dhemaji, Majuli and Lakhimpur district of Assam.

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