Role of NGO in the Development of Sugalis:
A Case Study of a Settlement in Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT Role of Non-government Organisations (NGOs) in the development process in the third world countries like India is very crucial, especially in the 21st Century. They have a greater role to play in the lives and livelihoods of the tribal and backward communities of India today. An attempt has been made in this paper to see the role of an NGO in the development of a Sugali settlement. It is also attempted to understand how the information and support from the agency (NGO) helped the community to become self-reliant. The present paper is an outcome of fieldwork among Sugalis settlement in the Adadakulapalle as part of PhD work. An NGO by name Social Education Development Society (SEDS) is working for the development of Sugalis, a dominant tribe (economically, socially, politically and numerically in Andhra Pradesh), inhabited in Adadakulapalle settlement of Anantapur District in Andhra Pradesh. The drawbacks of the developmental interventions of the agency or civil society are also examined in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

The tribal communities constitute about 7 percent of the total population (now it is over 8 percent) in India. The tribal communities generally live in the inaccessible hilly and forest regions. The economy is largely self-sufficient, unstructured and non-specialized. Their social system is simple. This situation has however changed with the process of new developments in India. Industrial and mining complexes have been established making the tribal economy quite uneven. Coupled with it the government policies and programmes also alienated the tribals from natural resources such as land, forest produce, etc. (Sharma 1977).

Eswarappa (2007) in his recent paper, ‘Development and Change among Sugalis’, tried to portray that the impact of developmental efforts made by both the government and non-government agencies is to bring desired socio-economic changes in the lives of the marginalized tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh. Further, Baviskar (2001) has rightly mentioned that the decline of the State is accompanied by increasing attention towards civil society institutions. Among the social groups and associations of various kinds that are considered to make up civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have become especially prominent in the last two decades. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged around the world - as major players in the developmental action (Meyer 1996: 453).

Given the profound implications of NGO involvement in development, there is a great need to essentially examine the changing relations between NGOs, State agencies, multilateral and bilateral funding institutions, and other social groups. The NGO sector in India is characterized by tremendous diversity and heterogeneity. Ignoring this diversity, unfounded generalisations are often put forward and unfair comments and criticisms are offered. NGOs differ from one another in size, in funding, in functions; in the levels at which they operate; and in organisational structures, goals and membership (cited in Baviskar 2001: 4-5). In India, there are 14,000 NGOs registered under the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act. In all, there may be over 30,000 NGOs in India. The close collaboration between academics and the NGOs practical work is one of the reasons for the absence of rigorous studies. Social scientists have close links with NGOs, and since many NGOs operate in the cross-disciplinary space between academic research and activist intervention, they offer to academics many opportunities to pursue their work into the domain of non-academic practice.

There are many definitions of NGOs. The voluntary sector includes non-governmental, non-profit organisations. They may be engaged in a variety of activities: implementing grassroots/sustainable development, promoting human
rights and social justice, protesting against environmental degradation, and many other similar tasks. Baviskar (2001) as mentioned that some activists resent and reject the term non-governmental organisation and instead designate themselves as social action groups, political action groups or social movements. Anna Hazare’s village development group at Ralegan Siddhi in Maharashtra and Ela R. Bhatt’s Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in Gujarat are both identified as NGOs but are very different from each other in terms of size, membership, funding, approaches, strategies and outcomes.

I quote from Baviskar (2001) who also said that while there are many definitions of NGOs, there are several classifications too. Shah and Cahturvedi (1983) divide NGOs in three main categories: techno-managerial, reformist, and radical. Hirway (1995) classified NGOs in Gujarat into welfare-oriented, development organisations, and empowering NGOs. Iyengar (1998) classified NGOs in Gujarart into four categories: Gandhian, service delivery organisations, professional organisations, and mobilisational organisations.

There are studies which explains the link between NGO, CBO, Civil Society and DWCRA is cordial and making a good success all over India and most importantly in Andhra Pradesh. Andhra Pradesh role in the country is highest in the SHG’s and NGO’s and they are acting as good agents of the development. Namerta (1995) as rightly said that the NGOs could only facilitates the undertaking of subsistence activities, and income from such activities was either equal to or less than the existing wage income. These activities made a difference to the people in so far as they could be undertaken during the lean season and that the problem of seasonal unemployment could be, to some extent, solved (Radhakrishna and Ray 2005).

In Andhra Pradesh, we have different districts where different NGO’s and CBO’s are working actively among the people of the marginalized sections. In Anantapur, we have some NGO’s working for the development of the weaker sections. Here the reference can be made about Rural development Trust, which has its activity all over the district except in two Mandals, i.e., Penukonda and Hindupur. In the above two mandals there are two different NGO’s are working in the respective mandals vigorously. Like wise, we have Social Education and Development Society (SEDS) in Penukonda, Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEDS IN THE AREA AND IN THE SUGALI SETTLEMENT

In 1980, with six years of nonprofit work in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh already under his belt, Rajen Joshua set out to register his own NGO and the Social Education and Development Society (SEDS) was born. With the help of his wife and eight friends, he established a central campus on a farm in the village of Anandapuram and began working with the local population towards improved community organization. Twenty-one years later, it has blossomed to employ 35 full-time staff, organize 60 village health workers (soon to be more than 100) and often day labor for up to 500 people. Its programs have expanded from simple community organization to include large-scale watershed, child sponsorship, village health, and community and women’s empowerment programs serving 120 villages with more than 100,000 people.

Though SEDS’s initial work focused on community organization, this soon evolved into efforts to deal with issues that were perceived to lie at the heart of the area’s problems. The Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh is still the second most drought-prone Indian region. When SEDS started its activities in the area, there were massive deforestation and intense population pressure on the land and its natural resources had significantly contributed to the widespread hunger and general poverty experienced by the local population (Eswarappa and Siva Prasad 2005).

In response, SEDS began an environmental campaign in 1984 that would soon be changed into its principle program. The degradation of soil and depletion of surface water in the open wells used by villages made it clear that something had to be done. SEDS’s initial efforts therefore included homestead plantations, revival of Tamarind orchards and community wood lots. By increasing the overall number of trees, SEDS was able to check erosion and begin recharging a water table that had fallen dramatically. In conjunction with kitchen gardens and individual plantations that provided means for subsistence and income generation, community awareness slowly began to increase and the first signs of acceptance by the local population emerged.
At the same time that these efforts took root, their interrelation with community issues such as organization and mobilization became increasingly apparent and SEDS began to redirect and expand its efforts in this area. In 1988, the group began Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) which consisted of direct consultation with villagers before any watershed work was initiated in their community. Input was gathered from the people who both knew the land best and would be the future beneficiaries of any improvements made. In this manner, SEDS was able to assure maximum results at the same time it built a solid rapport with villagers.

Further reasoning behind this interaction came from SEDS's continued focus on a pragmatic approach to its work that encouraged participatory development. Acknowledging the failure of simple charity to achieve long-term results, SEDS's efforts relied on community involvement and the standard principle of 'helping people to help themselves'. When trees have distributed free as part of the initial drought-relief efforts, they were not cared for it. It was later revealed, by the beneficiaries, that such handouts were not valued and therefore not looked after once SEDS stopped supervising completed project areas. The group therefore began emphasizing sustainability through direct community involvement in its efforts and this has evolved as the central focus of nearly all its work. However, SEDS's efforts were hardly limited to watershed development. Health, children, education and awareness all received particular attention and developed into extensive programs that helped define and round out the overall organization.

By the mid-80's SEDS had initiated its action in the health conditions of the people in the region. Rampant disease, high infant mortality and extremely poor sanitary conditions spurred the organization of extensive cleaning and educational efforts. Toilets were constructed and proper sanitation habits explained. Traditional village midwives were specified basic medical training and using their skills, formed a network of village health workers. Eventually the farm built its own clinic and, in addition to its ongoing trainings, began holding health camps with licensed doctors from a hospital in Bangalore. These efforts are significantly improve the conditions in an area very much in need (Eswarappa 2006).

Another crucial aspect of the health program, observed Eswarappa (2006), was its focus on children. Recognizing a high incidence of malnourishment, SEDS began a nutritional/kindergarten program for children under 5 years old. There are extensive child sponsorship programs, which were integrated with the cooperation of Action Aid Australia, a group that had previously been involved with watershed funding. Eventually this also included a hostel on the SEDS farm in Anandapuram that takes cares for especially destitute children (primarily orphans or from one-parent families).

Apparently, with a stronger emphasis on children through its sponsorship program, it was essential that SEDS involve itself in local educational issues. It began subsidizing teacher salaries at local schools and contributed to the construction of school buildings and facilities. These efforts within the villages allowed the group to tie together its community organization, watershed, children and educational programs so that inter-reliance began to form and each took on characteristics or began to influence the others.

Eswarappa and Siva Prasad (2005) felt that, as the web of its programs and their interactions steadily increased over the years, NGO/Civil Society was able to cement its standing in the region and expand its influence throughout the entire local society. With its achievements in each sphere, be it water development or improved health conditions, the respect that it earned from the local population gave it renewed strength and confidence to branch out into those areas it perceived to be in need.

Further it is viewed that, however as with nearly all development ventures, things were not always so easy. Especially, in its initial phases, the organization lacked funding and supports both from within and outside the communities. Nevertheless, despite death threats, intense pressure to leave from other unreceptive NGO's, severe funding shortages, and the continual challenges of trying to change an uneducated village mentality, the organization was able to not only survive but also prosper. As the first signs of success began to appear in field after field, SEDS earned the respect and support of villagers and now draws one of its principal strengths from this fact. Without the understanding and acceptance by the local community, it would never have been able to remain operational for more than 20 years, as explained by the beneficial.
As this understanding and respect were steadily earned and its various programs continued to develop despite the numerous challenges the organization faced, SEDS evolved into the program it is today. Its health program has helped to virtually eradicate child malnourishment, significantly improve sanitation habits and dramatically decrease the child mortality rate. Its watershed program has planted nearly 10 million trees and helped bring about a rise of 38 feet in the regional water table. The children’s program boasts a hostel with 27 residents, a newly constructed school on the SEDS farm and sponsorship of 67 local children (SEDS 2002-2004).

In a field of work with an extremely high turnover rate, SEDS accomplishments and sheer staying power are highly impressive. While most NGO’s prove to be unreliable operations SEDS has remained stationary and expanding for more than two decades. Its consistency and pragmatic approach have built a powerful rapport both with donor agencies and with local communities that facilitates its current projects and programs and assures that SEDS will continue to expand and assist a needy local population and environment.

While SEDS has numerous accomplishments to which it can point, it is hardly resting on its laurels, and the future of the organization in many ways looks towards its initial goals. With a large expansion and continued focus on the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that have become the central aspect of its community efforts, SEDS has begun focusing increasingly on the sustainability of its efforts and the transfer of responsibility to villagers. Through education and involvement, it is attempting to create a situation whereby its direct involvement in local affairs would no longer be necessary and it would be able to serve merely a consulting role to communities that take the initiative to realize the necessary reforms and improvements of their own accord.

However, the full accomplishment of this ideal is still some time off and though significant progress has been made, SEDS still remains committed and functioning in the day-to-day work that consumes the region. Overseeing and organizing watershed developments, caring for desperate children, providing education and community support, and tending to the various basic health needs are still SEDS’s defining characteristics and will continue to be for some time to come.

Through its efforts SEDS has made a significant impact, which is generally all that can be truly desired in development work. The problems of poverty and drought that plague the region will never be solved entirely, but through its work, and the work of other like-minded NGO’s, both the local environment and population have seen improvements that make the situation for today’s community far better than that in which SEDS found it when it arrived more than 20 year ago. In that respect, SEDS has been, and will hopefully continue to be, a huge success.

**Land Development Programme (LDP)**

Under this programme, Eswarappa and Siva Prasad (2005) observed that, wastelands have been converted into agricultural fields through soil conservation. Soil conservation works include Stone Bunding, Gully checks, Spill ways, Woodlots, fire tracing, ploughing, and trenching activities. All these works are being undertaken in the summer season, which provides some wage works to the people of the village. Collecting some contribution from the beneficiaries carries some of the works like stone bunding, ploughing, fire tracing, and trenching. The share is like this: NGO’s share is 75% and the beneficiary has to bear 25% of the total costs incurred for the works. The land development programme has benefited to the Sugalis in the Thanda, to a certain extent only. The implementation of the programme was initiated in the year 2001 and some benefits were derived in the following year. Subsequently, due to failure of monsoons, the programme did not take off. Moreover, as mentioned before majority of the Sugalis are landless this programme has not been of much relevance to them. Table 1 shows the details of the implementation of the scheme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Activity</th>
<th>Total Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>100 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasteland Plantation</td>
<td>250 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Ponds</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Tracing</td>
<td>32988.80sqm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check Dams Desilting</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gully Checks</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil Bunding</td>
<td>50 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed Dibbling</td>
<td>50Kgs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avenue Plantation</td>
<td>4kms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: SEDS Office, Mekalapalle Anandapuram*
Women Empowerment

Women constitute 48.1 percent of the country's population. They are playing an important role in various fields such as agriculture, dairy farming, handicraft, etc., but their contribution in these fields has not been viewed as economic activity. A large number of them work in the primary sector as unskilled workforce and get wages lower than men. A large number of women are illiterate; hence, most of them suffer from economic subjugation, powerlessness, isolation, vulnerability, and poverty. The issues of economic upliftment of women and their empowerment have been the prime concern of the government in various schemes. The government felt that NGO’s might be involved in this area for implementation of some of the programmes such as DWCRA by organizing self-help groups (SHGs).

It can be noted from the above that the SEDS working in this area has been focusing mainly on the economic development of the schemes by involving particularly youth, women and poor and marginal farmers. As there are functionaries of this NGO at the grass root level to organize local communities in the village there is a possibility of effective implementation of the schemes. More over it deals with the primary concerns of the people- food and clothing. To make people self-reliant and the NGO plans to slowly withdraw, so that dependency of the people on external agencies may be minimized which is sound objective for the real development of the local communities.

There are 4 SHGs functioning in the Thanda. The women were attracted to the benefits such as savings, availability of loans for purchase of sheep, buffalo and other cattle. After the formation of one group, people realized the importance of such groups and slowly new groups emerged. The group members meet regularly and decide the future course of action. In these meetings the SEDS functionaries educate them about savings, health etc. Due to regular meetings and Gram sabhas conducted by SEDS their awareness level has increased enormously about their health, children’s education and, most importantly, savings. As savings accumulated women members are able to withdraw money during emergency. According to Radha Bai, 42 years, before the formation of the groups, if anybody was ill in the family, they had to rush to moneylender for help. Where as now, there are SHGs to help them. They borrow money from the group. The lending of money one’s own or children’s is decided on the severity or necessity of the person or demand, which they feel urgent, such as health, or children’s school fee or any other urgent need.

It is observed from the field study that till recently, due to lack of work and consequently no wages, Sugali have spent sleepless nights. They used to migrate to other areas for wage labour. Wages were also very less and working hours were more as opined by the informants. They were not aware of their health, children’s education, sanitation, savings, etc. Earlier they also felt that for women there was no role to play in the family or household decision-making process except to nod her head to the mothers-in-law and the husband’s opinion. Women were not aware of the programmes like Balika samriddhi Yojana (Girl Child Development Programme), mother and children’s protection, etc. After the entry of SEDS, works such as pebble bunding and contour bundings have become regular. Another important feature is that there is no difference in wage rates for men and women. Women felt very happy that there is no gender discrimination in the rates of wages. Their saving levels, according to them, have improved enormously due to the efforts of the SEDS. Majority of the women are sending their children to schools as they have realised about the significance of education. They also have plans to contest and win the elections in the village and thus participate in the village administration and policymaking process.

Capacity Building

The SEDS have trained around 20 youth from the village in the last four years at their vocational training centre located in Penukonda. They have been training indifferent traders as mentioned earlier. Almost all of them found employment in the nearby towns and settled there itself. Some of them established their own private enterprises competing with non-Sugalis.

Adadakulapalle Settlement

The Village under study is situated in the Penukonda Mandal in Anantapur district and is about 10 kilometres away from Penukonda, the Mandal headquarters. Adadakulapalle is a multi-
caste village consisting of 439 households of which 155 (35.6%) households belongs to Sugali a Scheduled Tribe, who form a separate constituent of the village (Table 2). The habitations of Sugali are called as Thandas, which locate Thandas a little away from the main multi-caste villages are identified as the Thandas of the villages. Anthropologists are familiar with these multi-caste villages by the writings of M.N. Srinivas, Mckim Marriot and others. However, there are multi-castes villages, which incorporate the tribal populations also (Dube 1958) and Adadakulapalle is one of such villages (Eswarappa 2005).

The Thanda under study is included in Adadakulapalle village Panchayat of Penukonda Mandal. The Sugalis are divided into two Thandas and known as Jalapalle Thanda or Patha Thanda (old Thanda) and Kothapalle Thanda (new Thanda) and two members represent one each from these wards in the Adadakulapalle Panchayat. Adadakulapalle Panchayat is reserved for Sugalis. Kothapalle Thanda is a new colony of houses built during the earlier Congress rule during 1989-94 in the same old Thanda area. The inhabitants of the Thandas belong to two different clans and each clan members live separately. Further, these two clans are affiliated to two different factions of the main village, who incidentally belong to two different political parties.

In Adadakulapalle the majority of Sugalis are small and marginal farmers. The type of land available in the village is dry land and only one Sugali farmer has a tube (bore) well in his land as against 90 borewells owned other castes in the village and the rest of the Sugalis depend upon monsoon. The major crops cultivated are groundnut, ragi and paddy. Ragi and Paddy are the staple crops and they constitute the staple diet of the farmers and agricultural labourers.

The livelihoods activities of Sugalis are cultivation, followed by daily wage works, and petty business (running own and rented autos and kirana (provisions) shop and hotel (tea and tiffin stall). Majority of them depend on agricultural labour, construction or repair works in and outside the village. Since the type of land available is dry land, they have to depend upon monsoon for their cultivation. Frequent failure of the monsoons made the people to migrate to other areas. People from the Thanda explained that seasonal migration is high in the area as majority of them are marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers. Almost half of the households in the Thanda migrate to towns in the off-season, according to the Gram Panchayat Sarpanch. One informant stated that they are helpless and there is no other way except to migrate to other areas. Some of them have settled in the towns leaving their old in the Thanda and support by their remittances. Younger people migrate to towns in the off seasons and come back to Thanda during rainy season, to cultivate land or work as farm labourers. Agriculture is their main source of livelihood followed by agricultural labour and seasonal migration. Cattle, goat, and sheep are the major livestock in the area. Several varieties of grass along with stocked paddy straw; maize stalk, groundnut and bhoosa are used as fodder. Individual households raise country chicken in their houses.

Since five years they did not have one good crop due to drought in the area and their lives and livelihoods have been threatened. Even when they get any yields, they are low and are further affected by the vagaries of the market. It further aggravates their poverty situation in the village.

People who suffer most from crop failures have no option but migrate while leaving women, children and the old in the village. Sometimes they do not get even a square meal in a day. Women face severe stress due to the migration of male members of the family. They have to take care of children as well as older people, in addition to cattle. As stated by some of the elderly Sugalis,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Type of House</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribe</th>
<th>Scheduled Caste</th>
<th>Backward Caste</th>
<th>Other Castes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stone Houses</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mud Houses</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Huts</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>439</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: SEDS Office, Mekalapalle Anandapuram
some of the youth, who are educated, remain idle at home without any work. They hesitate to go for wage works available in the area and have become a burden to their parents.

Obstacles to Development

In spite of the above-mentioned efforts of NGO, Sugalis position in the Thanda has not changed significantly. One dominant reason for such static conditions in spite of efforts made to effect change is obviously as in any other part of the country due to the apathy of the government functionaries at different levels (Eswarappa 2005). Local conditions such as poor infrastructural development, failure of monsoons, interests of the communities are also to some extent responsible for the inertia.

It is contended that even the NGO does not perform its function objectively. It is believed that the NGO is favouring one section of the Sugalis in the Thanda and delivers all its services to the same section of the Sugalis and deliberately neglecting the other. This is due to the party politics prevalent in the village. The NGO manager, who is based in the Thanda, has resigned from his post to put his supporter as Telugu Desam party candidate in the last Local Body elections. Some of the youth from the Thanda openly opposed to the NGO’s stand but it was of no use. The manager accepted the role-played by him in the last elections and said that there was no other way for him except to support Telugu Desam party for their survival and existence in the area. Thus, the party politics have a direct bearing on the development efforts, either by NGO or government machinery.

The levels of interaction of Sugalis with both the government officials and NGO can be seen in terms of their involvement in the party politics and factions. Ruling party is always ahead in the factional politics in the village and Sugalis have to take sides with one of the party’s or factions. Present Sarpanch was elected on Telugu Desam party ticket twice and his group is representing one section of the Sugalis in the village. The NGO is also supporting this group in the village at the cost of the other section. Even though there is no significant socio-economic change of the Sugalis compare to the non-Sugali population in the village, it cannot be denied some qualitative change in the lives of the Sugalis. In terms of quantity that is the number of households who cross the below poverty line due to the efforts of the government and the SEDS, there is initiation of change among Sugalis which may take some time to yield perceptible results. Some micro level changes, which are qualitative in nature likely to produce results, have been noticed in the study. It shall now be attempted to understand these changes.

CONCLUSION

In order to understand the impact of the interventions of the civil societies or agencies to bring socio-economic development, the paper tries to understand the agency/NGO role in the development process at micro level. At the micro level, the programmes are beset with problems relating to coordination of various elements that necessarily intervene and intersect the areas of operation. These include human elements—discharging the duties of the functionaries, location of the institutions, power politics and natural local conditions. There is a complex relationship of these elements. Thus, it is here the introduction of Right to Information Act has relevance to understand the problems better and make beneficiaries more involved. Civil society organisations have expressed a genuine interest in liaising and working towards building strategic partnerships with government where possible to assist in the implementation process. Civil society is also likely to take a lead in raising public awareness about the new law (Devasher 2005). The paper suggests that in addition to the involvement of the NGOs, there is a need of having association with the government partners to make more effective of the implementation of the Right to Information as a basic means to achieve the desired goals of the marginal tribal development in India.

REFERENCES


