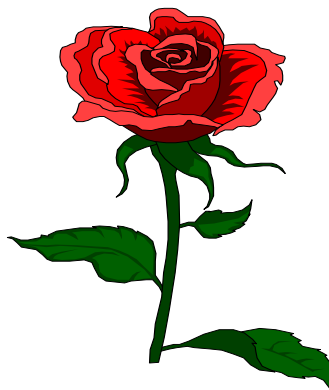


**FUTURE OF THE  
NON GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS**

**AUTHOR**

**M. S. R. PREM KUMAR  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
YOUTH CHARITABLE ORGANISATION  
YELLAMANCHILI 531 055, INDIA**



**PRESENTED TO**

**Ms. (Dr) KIMBERLY JANE REID (KIM), CANADA  
AS KEEPSAKE OF THE FRIENDSHIP**

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

During the 80s and 90s NGO sector has grown considerably. Government has begun invoking the NGOs in many area of its programmes for the poor and the down trodden. It has also designed various programmes under the five-year Plan exclusively to be implemented by the NGOs. NGOs themselves have taken up many issues of public interest relating to ecology & environment, micro finance, safeguarding of natural resources, protection of human rights, struggles against exploitation, oppression etc., Also collaborated with government programmes and other mass movements.

Yet, there is insufficient material concerning NGOs, its nature and functions, origin and growth etc., As a development worker, I tried to fill in this gap, pooling together my own as well as of other's experiences from pre-independence struggle to the present day. I tried to present the historic perspective of NGOs. My hope is that this book let will enable many to have some clarity of thought and enlighten those who are involved in this sector to function in a more effective and meaningful way.

Ms. (Dr) KIMBERLY JANE REID (I call her as KIM) who came from CANADA to YCO to assist YCO. Her reactions after seriously observing different programmes particularly the Micro and Shelter finance programmes, her report helped us as revelation. She is the inspiration to write this book openly share our experiences and planning future directions to YCO as an NGO. As a token of best friendship, I am presenting this book as KEEPSAKE of our friendship and love.

M. S. R. PREM KUMAR

## PREFACE

The nineties promise to be a very critical stage in the history of India. The strong pressure towards globalisation of the market economy has resulted in an economic policy for our country, which will take good care of the small percentage, the elite, on the top of the economic pyramid. However, it has very little concern, except in words and on paper, for the majority of our people who are struggling in poverty, misery and exploitation.

We seem to be conditioned to a growth centred vision of development and tend to equate human progress with an increase in economic output. Such a vision is based on a number of assumptions. First, it holds that poverty is the result of inadequate growth. Inadequate investment or capital causes this in turn. Second, it believes that modernisation and its corollaries, specialisation, the free market and international trade, enhance economic efficiency. These latter must decide what we have to produce, what the majority of our population needs is not matter for much consideration!

To add to this international economic pressure, there is the strong tidal wave of homogenisation of culture through the invasion of Star TV and other means of commercial communication. These are a new form of colonialisation far subtler, dangerous and impregnable than the one we fought against until 1947. They forebode the death of any indigenous culture!

We cannot expect the Government machinery to fight effectively against these forces that are over-running our country, of the people in power and the elite who bring them into power see these forces as beneficial to themselves. Hence, voluntary action is the only potential catalyst that will be able to motivate our people to contend against these strong currents and bring our nation back on an even keel of justice, humanity and our traditional culture.

Voluntary action has been achieved for the past four decades by the voluntary agencies, or NGOs. They have worked intensively, struggled, suffered and many of their members have even lost their lives for the cause of the poor

and oppressed. However, with the passing of time, there is a change-taking place in the NGO culture, which may not be desirable. We have to be aware of the factors causing this change and must act quickly and effectively to help the whole voluntary sector to renew its pristine spirit and creative dynamism.

This little book is offered to its readers in the hope that it will help them to reflect on the present condition of the voluntary sector and to catalyse a change so that the voluntary agencies or NGOs and groups will once more become active agents who work selflessly and ceaselessly for the full development of our people and of a society in which accounts to each and everyone freedom and the respect befitting her or his human dignity!

## CHAPTER - I

### THE NGO PERSPECTIVE:

#### THE INDIAN SITUATION TODAY:

The trend of instability, unevenness and fragmentation of political development in India has shaped up to an unusual extent at this point of time. A very conscious ideological and political strategy is at work, deliberately shut out from our people. We need a realistic understanding of what has gone wrong with our polity. There is a grim consensus that India is passing through a period of major crises: economic, political, social, cultural and religious. The system has become inequitable and incapable of serving the people of India. Millions are unemployed and unchecked population growth continues to increase the number of hungry, desperate Indians.

In the context of local problems, a national problem, which has an all-pervasive impact, should not be overlooked. This is the present national economic crisis. When presenting the budget on 24 July 1991 the then finance minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said "this is the deepest and most acute crisis that Indian economy has faced since independence." The crisis he was referring to was the revenue crisis.

Several aspects have led to this crisis: the lack of will and the inability of the Government to control non-plan expenditure, which has led to burgeoning revenue deficits, the inability to generate additional employment in the organised secondary sector, continuing reduction in the country's share of global exports; slowdown in investment in capital and intermediate goods, increased inflationary pressure (despite a better than expected agricultural performance over the last few years), are few other symptoms of the structural crisis. The green revolution techniques do not seem to be able to expand agricultural productivity anymore.

Since the time the Indian planning process was initiated, the major emphasis has been on maximising our economic growth. This has been the broad

focus of all our planning exercises. A mere lip service has been provided to the issues of equity and social justice. We are simply following the trickle down theory of development. Here, one assumes that the benefits of rapid economic growth will percolate down to those segments of the economy, which are not directly involved in such growth. Experiences of several countries have definitely proved that this trickle down approach has never worked to bring about social reform and the uplift of the lower, sections of society.

The new environment that these reforms seek is to create a more open economy, with more intense interlinkages with the world economy. It can also make the economy more susceptible to external shocks and pressures. We have not been exposed to these earlier to such an extent due to our insular policies. It would also perpetuate a greater divide between Indian and Bharat, unless specific remedial measures are undertaken to rectify this dualism.

A very important question to ask here is: why are we bending to international pressure to radically alter our economic system with a suddenness and in a direction that may lead to large number of closures, increased unemployment and a greater neglect of the poor. Because of this economic policy, the poor are going to suffer very much more. It has been said that the rich are taxed and the poor spared. However, in reality it is the other way around, for whatever the pressures on the rich, they will pass the burden on to the poor. Because of this policy, the competition generated by the open market economy will push our own producers far behind the foreign elements that are going to be allowed in our country. A higher capital intensive industrialisation will deprive millions of employment. All welfare programmes as if health, education and housing etc., will be given second place to other programmes, most of which will be oriented to satisfying the foreign markets. There is the danger that subjects like education and health will be privatised, which means that the poor, especially the rural poor, will have no chance of education or health care.

Unless we orient the Indian economy to the vast number of people in our country, we are not going to stem the onslaught of international capitalism. This capitalism is today at it's highest and therefore can exert tremendous pressure.

#### **THE ROOT CAUSE OF ALL PROBLEMS: SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE:**

In spite of all the promises that these political parties and their minions make to us, India is still a developing country. Most Indians lack the basic human necessities of food, cloth and shelter. Much less, can they afford education or cultural leisure? The majority of India's people are poor, marginalised and oppressed. In fact, a predominant characteristic of the Indian situation is a total misery and poverty of the Indian masses. An unequal sharing of whatever gains there are in the economic field has frustrated the realisation of the objective of social justice and has deepened the disparity in income distribution. The demand and supply operation in today's economic system leaves very large pockets of poverty.

In fact, India is not just a developing country, but truly under-developed country. Though it is a nation that has good potential prospectus for using more capital, labour and other available resources to support its present population at a high level of living, yet there exists in it an exploitation so oppressive that the vast majority of its people live at a sub-human level.

It is very clear that more than 40 percent of Indians, numbering more than 340 million, are living below the poverty line. Many are tumbling every year below this line, mainly because prices have risen in each year of the Eight Plans, and everybody knows how they are still increasing unbelievably today! The majority of our people are living in the culture of poverty.

#### **THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF THIS CULTURE ARE:**

1. A tendency for disintegration in the name of religion, caste, economic status and educational disparities.
2. Inability to forego immediate gratification in favour of a better future

3. A sense of resignation and fatalism
4. Male superiority
5. Weak ego born out of a state of poverty and suffering
6. Sexual inhibitions and superstitions

If we were to delineate in sharp terms the actual situation in our country today at the beginning of the decade, we could state that they are the following:

- a) Widening gap between the rich and poor. Some of the poor are practically ignored in the process of development, like the tribals, while others are in very subtle way kept on the lowest level of society, like untouchables.
- b) Process of improvement is slow. It has adverse effect especially on the landless labourers and small farmers whom are losing their land to the rich and migrating to the slums.
- c) Inability of the Government to implement judicial and practical consequences of principles of equity laid down in the constitution, or with problems created by growing disparity and by poverty itself.
- d) Low priority for women and children is reflected in the diminishing allocation to education, health and formation programmes in the national budget. They are the hardest hit victims.
- e) The West decides the price of goods produced here.
- f) The multinationals and elite of our country are despicably plundering our forests.
- g) The population explosion hampers speedy development. People's growth is not harnessed through education and employment facilities.
- h) Corruption is a way of life in our country like in many developing countries, where it sometimes goes by euphemistic label e.g. in disorderly expenses (Thailand); wise action (Indonesia).
- i) Most Indians have a white-collar mentality, and are not ready to work at menial jobs or jobs unattached to an office stool.

j) The policies of the international financial system like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund contribute greatly to widening the gap between the rich and poor within a country and between countries.

From this if we were to select the major national problems besetting the majority of our population they would be the following:

- a) Poverty
- b) Unemployment
- c) Illiteracy
- d) Social inequality, gender, tribal and caste discrimination
- e) Corruption
- f) Religious fundamentalism and communalism

Linked up with these problems are the real issues in the concrete present situation in India:

- Prices
- Corruption
- Communal division
- Overpopulation
- Unjust economic growth
- Lack of quality education
- No responsive and accountable government

These are the issues on which the people have to assert themselves vigorously in every forum that is available to them. To help them do so is the *raison d'être* of every development NGOs.

However, given the a crisis in which our country is and the clear signs that it is plunging still deeper into the morass of chaos and inhuman inequity, is social change at all possible? Has it ever taken place in human history?

**BUT WE HAVE A DREAM:**

- A dream in which children will no longer be put to inhuman work in the match factories and cashew industries, in the homes of the rich as domestic workers, in restaurants and hotels to do the most menial and degrading jobs, but will be able to go to school, and develop with the full potential and human dignity that every person has a right to.
- A dream in which women are treated as equal to men with regard to respect, ownership and companionship, and are not in any danger of being burnt as brides, or sold for dowry, or malnourished and ill-treated from the very moment of their birth - if they are allowed to be born at all!
- A dream in which there will not be a segregation of untouchables in remote, unhygienic, filthy and sordid cheris or hamlets, but can live with their other fellow person in dignity, can work side by side with people of all castes, and can take their rightful place in society as Indian Citizens.
- A dream in which tribals will not be evicted from their natural habitats which are the forests and scattered among the people of the plains. A dream of the tribals preserving their genuine and uniquely human culture and value system and sharing them with the other cultures that need humanising. A dream in which they are not made victims economically, socially, psychologically and spiritually of the swindlers and bandits who wait in the cities and plains for them as easy prey.
- A dream of fulfilling people's democratic aspirations which are the fulfilment of minimum provisions and facilities for all, in food, in access to drinking water, in health and nutrition through paramedical and ancillary services; through education that focuses on literacy and elementary and vocational education for all; through transport and roads and area planning that is built through intermediate and relevant technologies; through a system of welfare that caters to basic minimum needs of the poor and rural people; through a structure of administration that deals with these minimum demands instead

of some more sophisticated and computerised model of governance; through judicial institutions that attend to people's pressing problems and conflicts.

But today at the turn of the decade, we have to take stock and seriously consider whether NGOs have been effectively working to make this dream come true, whether they have been fulfilling the goal for which they came into existence. We have to determine carefully what approach and strategies they must adopt in order to realise this dream and be relevant and useful in the future to the millions whom are hungering and thirsting after justice, peace and human dignity.

In order to understand the role and function of the NGOs in the present decade, it is important that we see the development of the voluntary development sector in the past four decades since it took shape in our country.

#### **VOLUNTARY GROUPS IN THE FIFTIES:**

The present development efforts in India find their roots in the movement for independence already in early thirties. There were many groups of young people that banded together to work for independence. They took up various activities on their own or within the national movement for independence in order to disrupt the British rule, created law and order problems for the authorities and joined in protest marches, sathyagrahas etc.,

When independence was achieved, most of these groups were disbanded. But many of them, especially those in the rural areas and the ones from urban regions adjacent to rural areas, turned their attention to helping people in the villages to improve their socio-economic situation. They initiated various programmes for literacy, health care, especially the building of latrines and other amenities, desilting of village tanks, and in general, doing anything that the villagers needed, or that they felt the villagers should have.

This activity was primarily rooted in a political vision of enabling the people of independent India to rule themselves. These young people adhered to several different ideologies. Many of them, especially those political affiliation

was to the Congress, were Gandhians. There were also those who belonging to the Hindu revivalist associations, like the Ramakrishna Mission. Many of the young people were Marxists or belonged to other leftist groups. Some of these groups were Christian, having been influenced or motivated by AICUF (All Indian Catholic University Federation) and SCM (Students Christian Movement).

However, these Christian groups were generally not politically oriented. Their primary inspiration to work for the poor and suffering came from their religious faith. At the time of independence, the Christian Church had generally kept aloof from the political field, because it realised that the new rulers would not be as favourable to it as the British. This attitude of alienation from politics was handed down to the Christian communities and Christian individuals in general. Hence, those Christian groups who worked for development after independence kept away from any political thinking or association.

There was a tremendous elan that was almost tangible in these young people working for their fellowmen. They worked together and also in collaboration with the villagers, irrespective of caste or religion. Then came the Community Development Programme of the Government, initiated on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1952. This programme in practice aimed at 55 community projects, covering more or less 1300 sq.kms. in three development blocks, each with 300 villages and 2 lakh people. These subdivided into units of villages having one multipurpose village level worker. These were controlled by the Development Commissioner who worked in close collaboration with other technical departments. The actual execution of this community development programme was the responsibility of the State Governments. At the district level, there was the Deputy Commissioner. The coordination of different departments was done by the Block Development Officer (or Mandal Development Officer in Andhra Pradesh) assisted by specialists in agriculture, animal husbandry, nutrition and education etc.,

But this did not succeed mainly because of three reasons. First of all, the major benefits were monopolised by the land owning castes and classes. This led

to further increase in inequality. Then the issue of reducing inequalities was by passed in favour of faster economic growth, e.g. the Green Revolution. Finally, the fruits of the Community Development Programme were not evenly distributed.

The major causes of the failure of the community development programmes and of subsequent Government development programmes is that the planners and the Government personnel perceive the problem as one of policy and implementation. There is an absence of political commitment and strong leadership. They trace the problem to absence of structural changes in society. It is not so much development, which produces structural change, but societal structural transformation, which permits effective development.

The whole concept of the Community development programme and of the subsequent development programmes as well as the National Education scheme assume that the village community has many common interests and accepts implicitly the state as impartial, supra-class and non-partisan body. No effort made to organise the masses or to impress upon their stake in agitating for a break up of the country's rigid inegalitarian social and economic structure.<sup>1</sup>

While it was intended to extend development activities and benefits to all the poor in the country, especially in the rural areas, the attitudes the Community Development Programme generated were deleterious to the real development of people. People began to see development as a job. A bureaucratic spirit seeped into the whole process. The Government officials appointed for development work looked on the people as objects to be used to nurture their own careers.

In this atmosphere, salaries and jobs took precedence and motivation and commitment to the poor were given less importance and subsequently, eroded. Class distinction and caste discrimination was heightened. The villagers were not seen as people who could make any decisions on their own, but as beneficiaries

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<sup>1</sup> Gunnar Myrdal: Asian Drama p.1344

who were to be helped, as the target population or statistics on whom jobs and tasks were to be effected.

The Government and other organisations, which were concerned about the uplift of the millions of poor people in India, emulated the pioneering efforts of the Christian missionaries about health and education. They vied with them in the construction and running of schools and hospitals till it has become, to some measure, a competition between the Church and the Government as to running the better educational and health institutions.

### **DEVELOPMENT POLICIES IN THE SIXTIES:**

The sixties were called first development decade and they started with an overwhelming optimism and hope. It was generally felt that the transfer of capital and technical know-how which had revived Europe after second world war could now be extended to the Third World and it would bring about a similar economic growth to the developing countries. The development stress in our country was along these lines, and a heavy emphasis was placed on industrialisation and technological expertise. Development programmes were oriented to self-employment schemes and rural development through agriculture and agro-based industries.

Carried on by this wave of optimism, it was felt that development lay in the increase of educational and health institutions. Most social workers and the Government believed that these institutions were the best mode of serving the country. Western standards were taken as norm for most urban schools, colleges and hospitals, and in the rural areas, it was hoped that with greater literacy and education and the improvement of health, there would follow the introduction of sophisticated technology, resulting in economic growth, greater employment and social change geared to an industrial revolution.

In the sixties, there arose a certain amount of questioning and reflection among many people about the relevance of big institutions and of welfare oriented activities to the real integrated development of people. However, on

the whole, even while initiating economic programmes, many agencies, both religious and secular, which were running development projects, failed to break away from the charity and welfare oriented mentality. As matter of fact, in practically most organisations, development programmes became organised forms of doling out charity instead of becoming means of making the people self-sufficient. Some studies indicate that this has in fact continued the sense of dependence among the people who were developed and has even transferred it from the village headman, the money lenders, the middlemen and the landlord to the project holder.

Such dependence was caused not only by relief programmes. Even a well organised project created or continued domination and dependence relationships, when the project holder acted as a middlemen between the people and the foreign resource agency, and not as a catalytic agent to help the people develop themselves and bring about their own liberation from the many bondages that press down upon them.

#### **POLICIES OF SEVENTIES:**

The various educational institutions in the country had produced a large number of educated people. Some of them had become aware of their role and responsibilities to their fellow citizens and they wanted to be involved in social work. From such people sprang up several groups, secular and religious, who initiated programmes for the community development of the poor, either with foreign help or with indigenous resources.

The concept of transfer of capital and technical know how to bring economic growth to the developing countries, so popular in the sixties, had not succeeded. In the seventies, a small number of groups in the country realised dangers inherent to a purely technological, economic or paternalistic approach. This led to their re-thinking of their role in development. They believed that they had to pay greater attention to the human aspects of development and to the organisation of the people.

At that time, some foreign resource agencies began to insist on a viable organisation with people's participation to run the projects and give them continuity. Hence, many organisations turned to initiating development projects as registered cooperatives. The cooperatives, however, did not prove to be a success in giving the people a more equitable share in the benefits, for rather than being cooperation among equals, they turned out to be competition among un-equals. The richer members derived far greater benefits than the poorer ones. The inequality was rooted in the very system.

However, the emergency, which was declared in India by Mrs. Indira Gandhi on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1975 sparked off a host of young people who realised that it was a dangerous move towards tyranny and dictatorship. Their version of society was one in which every citizen would be able freely to make his or her own decision in the economic, social and political spheres. Hence, they felt the need of educating the grassroots people about the inherent dangers of the emergency and about their won rights and responsibilities in society. These young activists asked themselves very fundamental questions about the development process. Triggered off by various youth movements, both Christian, like the AICUF and SCM, and Non-Christian like Gandhian, the sarvodaya groups and various leftist movements, these groups of young people reflected on the social work as it was being carried out and the impact which it had, or did not have, on the social structure.

As a result of their reflection, these groups realised that economic programmes were by themselves ineffective and that greater emphasis had to be given to the social and human factors. They realised that in order to bring about a real change in the lives and situations of the millions who live below the poverty line in our country, a deep structural analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural situation in our country is an essential foundation. They became convinced that in the Indian context, where the aim of development should be the enabling of the people to take their own decisions in every sphere of their human life, development necessarily becomes political action. They saw

their own role as shares in the act of liberation from unjust structures. Concentrating on human resources, they used non-formal education and awareness building leading to people's organisation as the only mode of action.

#### **THE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES OF EIGHTIES AND NINTIES:**

The eighties and nineties brought a further evolution in the ideas and methods of some development groups. This evolution was caused by many factors, some of which were the changing situation in India, the interaction and dialogue that the groups have with one another working in the field of development and the insights they gain by sharing concepts, approaches and methodologies with visiting foreign experts and resource agency representatives.

The majority of organisations who are sincerely striving for development of the Indian people realise that a piecemeal approach is no longer valid. Most groups had until then tried to tackle isolated problems and issues, such as economic backwardness, lack of education, ill-health, women's issues, the ecological, caste, communal, political or other problems. A few groups now felt it necessary to take an integral approach and make education, that is, awareness building, and people's organisation the main tool for bring about a just, participatory and sustainable society. The economic factor, they realised, cannot be overlooked, but it must be taken as an entry point or as the basis for education and awareness building of the people.

A further step taken by these groups is the building up of networks or federations of many action groups. However, these federations run the danger of becoming closed cliques, or middlemen's clubs in which representatives of action groups meet from time to time to discuss developmental issues. They do not generally lead to the building up or strengthening of people's movements. Unfortunately, by and large, the church organisations which constitute a large proportion of social work agencies and which have access to a very great share of foreign resources, are generally very closed in on themselves. Neither do

they join with other Non-Christian organisations, nor do they try to form any network or union of organisations. However, it is heartening to note that in the south, some church groups are forming effective networks, and even working in collaboration with secular organisations for the building up of people's movements.

The latter part of the eighties and early nineties has seen the rise of issue-based networks. Efforts are being made by groups to unite or collaborate on various specific issues. Groups that are working with fishermen are attempting to form networks, as are the groups working on women's issues, or on the ecological issue, on legal aid, human rights or on peace. It is hoped that the formation of such networks will consolidate the ideologies of the member groups and open up avenues for concerted actions and strategies, which will eventually give more effectiveness to the process and the struggle for the liberation of people.

## **CHAPTER: II**

### **THE PRESENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTARY AGENCIES**

There has been an evolution in the approach of the NGO sector concerning development. All the various approaches from the first primitive one of charity and welfare to the politically oriented action groups are co-existing at present in India.

#### **CHARITY APPROACH, RELIEF, WELFARE AND REHABILITATION (RE-ESTABLISHING WHAT WAS THE SITUATION OF THE PEOPLE BEFORE)**

On the first level are programmes run on a charity-basis, where the relationship is purely that of giver and receiver. These programmes spring up where there is need of relief and welfare due to natural or humanly caused catastrophes. They originate from the feeling that people are in misery, must be helped immediately without asking if this help does help at all on the middle or long term perspective. Their motivation is compassion and love of the sufferer who very often is treated as the raw material for the salvation of the giver!

Normally, such programmes do not touch the root of the suffering of the people, but tend to become paternalistic, leading to dependency and passivity. However, in some cases, when their charity and welfare approaches is linked up with awareness building and organisation, these programmes help to achieve liberation.

The NGOs that take up such programmes are generally religious in nature and their concept of society is that it is essentially harmonious and that the system is good, and only individuals in it are weak or corrupt.

We still have plenty of such welfare projects where the immediate humanitarian sentiments prevail and there is no intention to effect permanent change. These fail to confront inherent social inequalities or to mobilise popular involvement, and their effects are usually milked away by exploitation or corruption by the power structure.

## THE GROWTH APPROACH

The next generation of social action works along the growth approach. This approach aims at the integration of India into the world economy on the basis of a liberal world trade order, a development through maximisation of economic growth and the promotion of the industrial sector. The NGOs that follow this approach work for all kinds of growth be it industrial growth, agricultural growth, or growth of education system. India is a top example of this growth approach. Take for example the education sphere where the number of institutions is indeed very large, but still 68% of the population remains illiterate!

The analysis made by these groups is deficient, for it sees backwardness as caused by climatic, geographic, socio-cultural, and racial and caste, demographical or economic factors. Such an ideology believes in the trickle down theory and its development strategy is aimed at "catching up" with the development country. It is oriented towards a sophistication, modernisation, and growth thereby forgetting the majority who are marginalised.

Many NGOs, especially those in the field of vocational training, which ends up serving industry, support the Indian economic policy about industrial growth. In the agricultural sector, many NGOs are concentrating on the follow-up or enforcement of the green revolution strategy. They do not consider the land distribution pattern. So their approach ends up by making the rich farmers richer, and the poor landless poorer.

The NGOs that are involved in the education sphere, are mostly the church organisations. However, the education they are providing is mainly of an elite, western type. In the rural areas, the Church schools are training children mainly for white-collar jobs, which end up by causing a brain drain from the villages. The health system that many NGOs adopt is one that caters to the multinational pharmaceutical industry. Forty percent of hospital beds in our country are found in Church run hospitals. They could have brought about a

change, but they went into the growth approach, which has made them and health care increasingly costly!

A corollary to the growth approach is the introduction of democratic institutions like cooperatives. In the initial stages, these were open Cooperative, whose membership was open to all and sundry. However, later, when experience showed that these were dominated by the rich, voluntary agencies moved towards the target group oriented cooperatives, which were meant only for the poorer groups. However, inequality is still found among them. Many have become exclusive clubs, which has closed the doors to more members, although these belong to the most needy sectors of society. They have concentrated on economic growth. However, values of sharing, community concern, etc., are missing.

These growth-oriented programmes can be divided in those in which there is no functional education and those which provide this kind of education. Again, there is no participation at all by the community while in others there is a varying degree of this participation in some. The groups working with this approach would have better contact with people than government officials, therefore they are more successful in their work than the government officials, therefore they are more successful in their work than the government community development officials.

The success of the efforts of these groups is in proportion to their concentrating on human development rather than physical targets and lay main stress on training of people for continuing efforts than on technical inputs. Success also depends on the level of people's participation in the entire process and the emphasis these groups lay on tapping local resources before seeking outside help.

### **CRITICAL AWARENESS BUILDING AND PEOPLE'S ORGANISATIONS**

The next category of social action groups has progressed further from this participation. They have been able to form animators from among the local

people. Through these animators, primarily a relationship is built between the agency and the people. Their primary objective is awareness building with the enabling of people's organisation. These are with or without any development programmes. Their primary goal is liberation of the people through the transformation of society.

Among these groups, the term "liberation" is preferred to 'development' because the issue is power. People are oppressed, victims of power. Within and between individuals, there are structures of dominating power, which exploit people. The struggle is to break fetters of oppression.

The world 'development' on the other and, was put into use by rich nations, comparing themselves as developed and the poorer countries as 'developing' as if the difference was quantitative and the reasons unrelated. In this context, terms that are more appropriate would be 'domination' and 'dependence.' This domination is not only by the richer nations but also by the elite of the developing countries in alliance with them.

The interests of the western nations and the indigenous elite are not served by a development strategy based on the concept of basic needs. Such a strategy would be productive and equitable for indigenous markets, not for the western ones. The elite has created a subservient state, dependent on a close alliance with foreign powers and oppressive states, in order to keep our people submissive to their purpose.

The groups that opt for this justice approach aim first at the fulfilment of basic needs about food, clothing, shelter, education, health and employment. Their driving force is justice and sharing. They are fully convinced of the essential political dimension of the work for liberation and development of the poor oppressed majority of the Indian population. Hence, some of them are semi-political action groups. Others are aiming at becoming Non Party Political Formations. There are still others who are nothing else than front organisations of political parties.

## PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS: A SOURCE OF HOPE

There are other groups which concentrate solely on building up people's movements along the road of politicisation. They emphasis mobilisation of the people, their education through the building people's awareness and the formation and full participation by the people in their own organisations. They work for a people's movement, in which the people are actually the activists, that is, the primary agents of their own liberation.

Politicisation is taken further in some places, when the people's movement develops relationships and cooperatives with particular political parties and when, in revolutionary situations, becomes absorbed in the total national struggle. These last two processes involve participation in a struggle for state power.

But it must be noted that there are varied attitudes to people's movements among the NGOs that purport to catalyse them. In fact, in many instances, questions can be raised about whether they are really initiated by the NGOs. Many are the cases where a people's sangam has already been existing before the agency took over. The agency co-opts it, and proclaims it especially to the donor agency as a sangam of its creation. In the process, it destroys its authenticity, and unfortunately, converts the sangam into a kind of executive branch that implements on its behalf what had been planned by the collusion of resource and NGOs, without the involvement of the people's themselves.

Hence, the underlying issue is: who really takes the real and vital decision? Is it the agencies, both funding and implementing or the people? As it stands today, in most of the cases, the decisions are taken by the resource agencies and the project holder. Too often, the latter is subtly oriented to the decision of the donor agency, because he or she still has the vestiges of the traditional colonial value system adhering on, so that he or she becomes subservient to every desire, spoken or unspoken, by the representative of the foreign funding agency.

However, in the midst of such a dehumanising socio-economic and political situation and the far-spreading deviation among voluntary social work agencies from their pristine commitment to the people, we can still discover a ray of hope. The deep longing of the marginalised to be free cannot be stifled for too long. We find that many of the neglected and oppressed poor have begun to mobilise their dormant power, assert their inalienable right to participate in decision making processes society. The widespread emergence of militant peasant and dalit movements, tribal movements, civil right, women and youth movements, ecological movements, are clear indications of the rising consciousness of the grassroots people as relevant political forces.

These movements are viewed as threats to the designs of the ruling classes and their allied personal stakes. They project these legitimate struggles as a law and order problem and as endangering national security. They enact laws to curb these movements. Directly or indirectly, the landlords and other powerful sectors, through their private armies and hordes of rowdies or goondas, unleash a reign of terror in the countryside and in the cities. The police frequently intrude into the civil life of the citizens, especially those who constitute the poorest sections of society. All these efforts are designed at suppressing the genuine aspirations and legitimate dissent of the people.

## **THE KEY ISSUE ORIENTED NETWORKING APPROACH**

During the past decade, several efforts have been made to build up networks of voluntary agencies so that they might be able to devise a common ideology and strategy, that they might be able to work together in a co-ordinated fashion to build a people's movement. But these have not met with any success. Rather in most cases, these have become nothing else than middlemen's club where the representatives of the voluntary agencies meet from time to time, discuss certain issues and exchange notes about their own programmes. There has not yet been any trickling down of this networking to the people to form a vaster people's movement encompassing all the programmes of the members of these networks.

Each group has its own orientation, dynamism, approach and selection of development sector, whether it be health, agriculture, education etc., or concerned with a specific issue. Obviously therefore, they are not concerned about the issues others are involved in. In many programmes, women or ecology are sorely neglected. Hence, there has been a move towards building up networks of voluntary action groups working on specific issues.

Today there are several such groups, known as Transformative Action Groups, each working on specific issues like human rights and peace, ecological issues, the feminist issue, and alternative professional association (fighting their own establishments and working at grassroots), and legal aid groups. This issue orientation cuts across various social and economic divisions of society. Hence there is a possibility that this kind of networking will draw much bigger numbers on each issue and therefore have a greater chance of building up on public opinion and bringing about a change in society with respect to specific issues and problems.

## **VALUE ORIENTED APPROACH**

It is now realised that unless the superstructure, that is the attitudes, values, and behaviour patterns are changed, other changes in society or in individuals can be meaningless. Hence, there is a new thrust on human values, which run counter to the present culture of modernisation. Allied to this, among some of the groups, which are working towards a change of values is found the need of developing a spiritual basis for their work. This basis is not necessarily a religious one but is rooted in an acceptance that the human person is not a mere material being but a being endowed with a spiritual dimension, which cannot be ignored if perseverance and commitment are to be sustained in one's work for the transformation of society.

#### **WHAT MAKES A VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION COMES INTO BEING?**

It would be quite right to say that these various approaches flow from the different ways in which the agency people understand the problem that they intend to tackle through their work. If they see the problem as one of poverty, charity would be the approach called for. If it is a process of people working for their own development, they work for community participation. This is intensified towards local animators and people's movement insofar as the agency sees its own role as purely that of a catalyst aiding the people as and when they need its help in educating and organising them. In other words, the analysis a group makes of society on a micro and macro level and its ideology determine the approach and strategy to bring about the transformation of society.

In the socio-political world, there are several and even contradictory opinions about NGOs. Some people, represented by social analysis like Kothari, Sheth, Sethi etc., see them as searching for and discovering new and alternative approach to development. They attribute the growth of action groups to the socio-economic and political crises affecting Indian society since the late 60's. D.L. Sethi says " these groups are reflection of a growing disenchantment with traditional roles and organisations and are attempts by alienated sections to bring meaning and relevance into their actors."

Largely, these social analysts would agree that there are some valuably positive aspects to be noted regarding NGOs. They are capable of reaching the inaccessible people in the most remote part of the country. They will go to places where no government official has set foot and no official jeep has been driven. In addition, NGOs have been able to take risks beyond the possibilities of the government machinery and through their success in risky ventures have been able to provide indications for future Government attempts. Finally, NGOs have also shown and continue to show that many Government systems, approaches and schemes do not work and are not capable of working because of inherent obstacles.

Others, many leftist analysts like Omveldt and the CPM, see them as reformist deviations, attacking politics and leftist parties and defusing class struggle. The CPM, in particular, avers that imperialism utilises Action Groups and NGOs to halt its decline. Other leftists hold that these groups are part of world wide radical and humanist movement in the Christian world. The RSS looks at the voluntary sector as the outcome of a plot of Christians to break up Hindu society.

### CHAPTER III OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

#### THE KINGDOM PHENOMENON

Many voluntary agencies have become generally centralised in power. Their Directors have turned autocratic and there seems to be no semblance of democracy in any of their relationships with their workers. Their culture seems very clearly to be feudal. Their background prepares them for this feudalistic culture, in which knowledge is power, so if it is shared with one's co-workers or the people, it will be diminished. Hence, knowledge and ideology are only transferred to the staff and people through orders and instructions.

Obviously, in such programmes, there is very little identity of the director and personnel of the agency with the people. To the people, the persons of the agency are in fact, mere middlemen. They are the new thekedars, and landlords. They have replaced the moneylenders and the powerful in villages. Because of their life style and easy access to money, people often see them as exploiters and carpetbaggers.

At the other end, this feudal spirit has developed a sort of landlordism insofar as the agency, both its director and personnel treat what they call their target population as their property or serfs whom they use as well as protect. This has led to a process of charity. They dole out what they believe the people need for their sustenance and development in the way of health, education and employment opportunities. Therefore, a deep sense of dependency on and even subservience to them has developed among the poor and oppressed. This has, in a number of places, continued, together with a complete absorption by the people of the culture, values and attitudes of the agency. Unfortunately, this attitude of subservience is also shared or has been become, to some extent, transferred towards the resource agencies and their representatives who visit India.

## THE INSTITUTIONALISING OF DEVELOPMENT

This feudal mentality together with the easy availability of considerable resources has made many voluntary organisations develop into large institutions, some of which can very naturally be called parallel governments. And with the evolution of these big, sometimes massive institutions, it is very clear that the original idea which caused the start of the process has been buried under quantities of bureaucratic procedures and red tape which betray a total disregard of human persons.

This disregard causes the agency to see people as statistics and numbers. Emphasis is laid on uniformity and discipline among the members of the agency and among the people. The agency becomes as it were like the Roman God Janus. It faces both ways. The message it stands for is a promise of freedom. However, because it has developed into an institution, it takes on the life of its own, requiring and laying stress on stability, protection to grow and centralisation. Gradually the agency becomes rigid and starts to support the status quo. It is very important that large agencies watch for the moment when the structure becomes more important than the goal, when the institution makes its members forget the vision of a transformed society. It is time, then, to return to the message.

Within such a framework of opinion and attitude, it does happen that the directors and workers of a voluntary agency do not feel the necessity to analyse the present socio-economic, political and ideological forces that are at work in India or to understand the implications of these forces. They seem to be under the impression that their institution would have good contacts with the Government and ruling power and be strong enough to withstand these forces. They are carried away by very simplistic notions about the society and perform a social action, which expresses itself in a paternalistic attitude to the poor. Beside all this indicates a close affiliation to the rich and the powerful.

This institutionalism is a heavy barrier to a real development approach. It has led to a dereliction of active concern for the plight of the oppressed and downtrodden. Many are the issues and events in recent history that manifests this lack of concern. The voluntary agencies in India, largely, have not raised any voice of protest against the grave and oppressive situations prevalent in the country.

### **NOT SUFFICIENTLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE POOR**

Over emphasising the institutional reality of their agencies, the ones who are in authority often endeavour to bolster it through material resources, and in their anxious quest for security, have given the impression of a worldliness that seems to compete with the multinational corporations. This adversely affects the credibility of the NGOs when it proclaims its objective to transform society, to show concern for the downtrodden and work for justice.

Added to this, because of the type of education they have received which is a legacy of colonialism, their style of life is a positive point when dealing with representatives funding agencies, who relate more easily to them because of similarity of tastes, culture, language and interests. However, it alienates them from the poor, who see them as foreign to their own life style, culture of poverty and way of looking at the day to day realities of life. The image the leaders and some of the personnel of these agencies project is that of opulene. This is another reason why the development programmes they plan are not people based. Rather, they draw on what these NGOs personnel, from a remote view point deriving from their academic oriented university social work courses, think the people need. For them, development means raising the living standards of the people, while the people's participation in planning, decision making, implementation and management of the development projects is not considered seriously.

Today, more than ever, there is need for the social worker, if he is to be considered an activist, to be more committed to the poor and impoverished people in our country. There is need not only for reform but also for a process of liberation by which the poor regain their dignity and help to build a more just and fraternal society.

### **BURNT OUT SOCIAL WORKERS**

In the beginning of the nineties, we find two kinds of social workers in the NGO sector. Some work at an impressive speed, contribute hugely and go on working until retirement or death parts them from their work. Their spirit remains undaunted, their creativity undiminished, their commitment to the poor ardent.

But there are others, unfortunately too many, who have been working for more than a decade who have now wilted after their long spurt of enthusiasm. Their contributions have waned, they seem to have turned a shadow of their former robust selves. After years of fruitful work conducting education, programmes for the people and helping them to organise themselves, sometimes these social workers have suddenly found it a chore rather than a pleasure. They no longer enjoy what they have relished for a long time. Their duties seem a burden, the relationships feel joyless. If there are problems, they seem infinitely wearying: if there are not, there seems to be no remaining challenge. Their batteries have been drained too long without a recharge.

What happens to these people? What causes their lamentable burnout? Essentially, it is because they do not get the sustenance they need to replenish the energy they have been using up. People need food and rest to recuperate whether they are running a marathon or an intensive social work programme. Those physical needs are paralleled by mental and emotional needs that too demand refilling. Doctors cannot remain good doctors if they have no further access to medical knowledge once they have completed medical school. This is not simply because of obsolescence of knowledge starts blurring without the

renewing contact of new knowledge, their mind starts losing its edge without the regular honing of new learning.

It is the same with the social activist. His or her work is a multi-faceted one. It involves knowing and exercising skills in enabling people to become critically aware, making structural analysis, organising themselves. It involves making decisions, solving problems, preparing plans and enabling people to do the same. It involves animation, assessing, developing and caring for people. The demands on both intellectual and emotional planes are often enormous. So are the possibilities of bleak burnout.

The first sign of burnout is dissatisfaction, profound and prolonged. Motivated social activists find even routines reassuring, crises exhilarating; everything they look at appear full of promise and excitement. Burnout changes all that. Hours look long, duties exacting, those in authority in the agency critical, colleagues unreliable, grassroots people unreasonable, travel to places of work tedious.

The second sign of burnout is depletion, a sense of being exhausted from the labour mobilising people and working on determined and time-bound strategies and meeting targets. Social activists feel drained, empty of new ideas, their creative juices evaporated. They sense themselves part of a charade, where they act out gestures with perfunctory precision, but the result has long ceased to have any personal meaning.

The third sign of burnout is depersonalisation, a deliberate distancing from other people. The essence of the work of social activists is to build up valuable links with others, both in the agency as well as among the grassroot people. It is vital that they have personal knowledge of the people they are working with. But after years of working in many cases, the people become mere statistics to be dealt with, to be achieved as measures of success. Burnout brings growing alienation from them; sometimes doubts and distrust, sometimes deep dislike and depreciation. All their anger and frustration are focused on the people around them. It is tragic that many of the NGOs have lost their pristine

vision and therefore are being passively spun around in a whirlpool of activism. This has led to a depletion of motivation and a strengthening of institutionalism, where regulations, organisational structure, activity and success, no matter in what direction, have taken precedence over persons. The ones who suffer most from this are the personnel at the lower levels in the NGOs. Very often, they are victims of the injustice and inequality that the agency professes to work for among the poorest of the poor. Just before us at this moment, is a project proposal. Looking at the budget we find:

Salary of Director:	Rs. 10,000
Further along the budget we see the following:	
Salary of Senior Accountant:	Rs. 5,000
Agricultural Officer:	Rs. 3,000
Sweeper (Part time)	Rs. 200

A deeper analysis of this phenomenon of burnout indicates that there has not been a refurbishing of the spirit while the social activists have been spending themselves in their work with the people. It is generally found that many of those who have opted to work for social action especially in the way of transforming the system linked up the injustice in this system with their traditional religious beliefs and practices. Hence, they have given up these beliefs and practices. But they have linked spirituality with these religious elements, and in discarding religion, they have also discarded spirituality. Throwing away the baby with the bath water, they have become impoverished because they have starved an important dimension of their personality.

Every human being needs a spiritual aspect to motivate and give dynamism to his or her actions, especially if these are in the area of working for justice in the world. In this sphere, there are bound to be many and deep set backs, failures and disappointments, leading very often to despair. But only a spirituality which involves a faith in one's fellow human beings, however suppressed they be, a hope built on their potential to read and write their own history and a love of those who eke out their existence in inhuman conditions. It is essential that one recognises these people as worth of equal dignity as

oneself. It is only when one is able to discern the divinity in the spirituality will provide the elan and vitality to keep on working with the poor and marginalised of our society.

## **FEAR OF CONFLICT**

The next most debilitating factor on the part of many NGOs, especially those who have not made an adequate analysis and are content with welfare or economic programmes is a mistaken understanding of the function of conflict. Conflict is thought of as something undesirable and as such to be avoided at all costs. Many social workers, and even those who term themselves activists, think that change leading to greater justice can be effected by conversion of heart of the exploiters towards the exploited. But they ignore the fact that at no time in history has social justice been realised through conversion of heart of the dominant classes of society. Rather, it has been realised when the exploited have become aware of their situation and have struggled untidily for the God-given rights. Because of its efforts to avoid conflict, a social work agency runs the risk of becoming flabby and apathetic.

When we say that conflict is needed in order to bring about authentic social transformation, we do not imply that conflict means violence, nor that it justifies the extremities or violence that have actually broken out in some instances. We would rather stress that conflict or confrontation in itself is not wrong and that violence can be avoided if the exploited are made aware of their actual situation and its root cause, and if they are united and organised in sufficiently large numbers.

“The Significant thing about the division between rich and poor people, rich and poor nations, is not simply that one has the resources to provide comfort for all its citizens and the other cannot provide basic needs and services. The reality and depth of the problem arises because the man who is rich has power over the lives of those who are poor, and the rich nation has power over the policies of those which are not rich. And even more important is

that our social and economic system, nationally and internationally, supports those divisions and constantly increases them, so that the rich get ever richer and more powerful, while the poor get relatively poorer and less able to control their own future.

My purpose today is to suggest to you that.....the development of people means rebellion. At a given and decisive point in history, people decide to act against these conditions which restrict their freedom as people. I am suggesting that unless we participate actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organisations which condemn people to poverty, humiliation and degradation, (we) will serve no purpose comprehensible to the modern world..."

The NGO and the social activists have to help people rebel against the inhuman conditions in their villages and in their slums; they have to help people to do this in the most effective way it can be done. But above all, they must be obviously and openly fighting all those institutions and power groups, which contribute to the existence and maintenance of the physical and spiritual slums-regardless of the consequences to themselves. The social activists must work with the people in building a future based on social justice. They must participate actively in initiating, securing and creating the changes which are necessary. Their love for the people must be expressed in action against evil and for good. For, if the social work organisation acquiesces in established evils, it is identifying itself with injustice by its continuing presence.

## **THE IDEOLOGICAL DEFICIENCIES OF SOCIAL WORK AGENCIES**

The ideological basis of many social work organisations in general, too, does not help them to become agents for social transformation. Their ideology is rooted in a capitalist, society based on competition, free market and the cultural and economic homogenisation based on western patterns, which is taking place today in Eastern Europe.

They need a new ideology which is oriented to the people, to enable them to think of themselves, form their own associations and unions, decide for themselves in every aspect of their human existence and have an equal right to the opportunity to avail themselves of the human and natural resources of the society of which they are citizens.

But if this new ideological line is accepted, it would mean, as one social work agency leader told the writer, "we will not have the right to continue living as we have been, and we shall be forced to change!" The urge or desire to change has always been and will ever be one faced by resistance, both on individual and societal levels. But the important thing to bear in mind is that commitment to justice demands conversation not only of head and of heart, but also of praxis—a total moving away from whatever is self centred and unjust, from indifference and lethargy to the building up of a society of justice and peace, of love and understanding, of mercy and solidarity.

However, this praxis is not easily accepted, for it would also mean that values which have now become traditional, namely the ones deriving from capitalism, like consumerism, competition, prestige, self-aggrandisement, etc., and other aspects of Western civilisation have to be subjected to a critical evaluation. All conservative tendencies are engaged in preserving the life style they have grown accustomed to. For them, sin and evil are not recognised in the realm of economics. Rather, they would find sin mainly in the sphere of sexuality and in the legalistic observance of ritual, not in the societal acceptance, whether silent or expressed, of the injustice and inequality prevalent today.

Often stereotyped formulae and clichés have been pretexts for escaping the responsibility of facing up to the facts and to those who hold the reins of

power in the social work organisations. Servile conformity to a system of traditional interpretation for fear of incurring the displeasure of authorities and losing FCRA number, positions and privileges has kept many social activists silent. This silence has contributed to the justification and the consequent perpetuation of injustices and has encouraged authoritarian practices.

### **LACK OF SUFFICIENT ANALYSIS**

A very common weakness that leads to deviations from the authentic development priorities and policies of some agencies in India is the lack of a previous sufficient analysis or the lack of an on-going deepening and contextualising of the original analysis with which they started the programme. Added to this, a surprisingly large percentage of these social work organisations manifest a lack of clear conspectus for the future.

Because of the absence of a real analysis of the structure of our society, these social service agencies do not see the real root cause of the under development and oppression which prevails. Even if they do, they are unable to tackle the issues that are relevant at the present. Their sight is focuses only on the present, hence they follow an ad-hoc approach, which may seem very pragmatic and appears to be leading to immediate results, but may not be effective in the long run in view of enabling the people to achieve greater self-reliance and power.

A social worker of repute who is constantly in contact with various development programmes in India and abroad, complained that "if you ask me about the various social work programmes I know of, I can say without hesitation that a surprising number of them are not based on an in-depth analysis. They may be based on the 'felt needs' of the people, but not on analysed needs. Very little attempt is made to find out whether the implementation of a programme will ultimately help the weaker sections to gather enough momentum firstly to retain the gains out of the programme or

even to steer themselves upstream subsequently." It was quite a jolt recently to hear in an important regional conference, a woman, director of a women's development programme, who has been quite a leading light in the development field in her state, declare publicly, "I do not believe in wasting time on analysis!"

Survey and programme planning, more often than not, tend to be more alert to the reaction of the donor agency than the people concerned. Consequently, many of the social service organisations tend to develop sophisticated programmes, which do not allow the people's organisation to have its natural organic growth.

A clear vision and coherent ideology are an essential factor for authentic development. As one social worker picturesquely said, "Many forces have been on the battlefield, but were not winners because they lacked a strong ideology." Their grassroots work may in some instances be remarkable, but because of a lack of overall vision, they achieve nothing in the line of social transformation. Rather, they often become a screen or even a force that orients the people in the wrong direction. They are, to quote one social worker, "building roads, but not knowing where these roads leads."

This lack of analysis has had and can still have grave consequences for social work as this extract from a statement by three hundred social workers of Brazil stresses:

"It is in the framework of paternalism that many people approach present day realities and social problems. They establish countless charitable organisations, social programmes and money campaigns. They universally launch philanthropic initiatives that are dear to the middle-class, because the latter can thereby work off their feelings of guilt and the responsibility they bear for the gap which separates their standard of living from that of the impoverished people around them. People try to alleviate the efforts produced without tackling the causes behind them. In practice, the line of action of many social work agencies makes them **ACCOMPLICES IN THE BRUTAL EXPLOITATION**

of the people and in the misguided effort to solve poverty and illness on an individual level."

### **ISOLATION AND LACK OF UNITY**

Another problem is that lack of unity and collaboration between various NGOs in India. In fact, there is a very definite isolation prevailing among the organisations aided by different foreign resource agencies, almost bordering on rivalry. Barring a few exceptions, there is very little coordination or cooperation among the organisations of a particular region, much less, among the various states. Such collaboration would generally be looked upon with suspicion as weakening the autonomy of each organisation, or rather, of its director.

Underlying this isolation is the feudal attitude which we referred to earlier. This is prevalent in most development organisations. It has been noticed that very often, when a person in charge of a development organisation receives the necessary funds from a resource agency for running its programme, he feels a sense of power over money as well as over people. He builds his kingdom, in which he reigns isolatedly from other organisations. In fact, we would in no way be exaggerating if we say that many such directors look upon other development agencies as "rival kingdoms"!

This was very clearly manifested in an incident where we were involved in an evaluation of a development programme. We found that one village was struggling with a problem which had been solved a little earlier in another village in a different programme in the same district. We suggested to the director of the programme we were evaluating, that he could send a delegation from the village where the problem existed to visit the villagers who had solved in the same problem. Through a discussion with these villagers, they could perhaps find a way to resolving their own difficulty.

The villagers were sent and they discussed with the other villagers, and found an appropriate solution to their problem. But promptly, a letter was sent from the director to this other organisation, asking the first director how he

could dare to send his people into the area of his programme without asking his permission. Ironically, both the directors belonged to a network of NGOs, founded to improve cooperation among these agencies. One of these directors, the one who wrote the letter of protest, was the treasurer of the NGO network of the area.

### **ALIEN MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT**

A Problem that exists in many programmes in India is that these are not patterned on an indigenous model of development. After the Second World War, the Western countries were rehabilitated through the Marshal Plan, by means of the import of institutions and of an economic system from America. When these countries initiated a process of development aid for the Third World in the Sixties, they believed that the same approach would be effective. They therefore followed the general development trend of transferring of institutions, especially like technical training schools, and other that had been successful and relevant in the First world, expecting them to be as relevant to the Third World.

The model of development generally accepted by most NGOs is not relevant to our country. This model normally demands planning that is made at least a year ahead. Such a planning disregards the actual situation of the people at the grassroots whose lives depend on circumstances that often are unpredictable. Practically speaking, if they, or we with them, could plan beforehand, they would not be poor! If we consider the national policy of development, we will see the same phenomenon, namely, that the model adopted by our country needs competent experts and bureaucrats versed in Western models of development. Since our bureaucrats and experts are not sufficiently versed in these models, they are manipulated and exploited by imported Western technocrats.

Influenced by the First World, and especially by the foreign resource agencies, nearly all the NGOs involved in development work in India, as in other

Third world countries, have willingly accepted this approach. For example, they have taken up the health system that came from the West and was adopted by the Indian Government, and even ran them better than the government. The traditional community based health system that relied almost entirely on indigenous medicines that had stood the test of centuries in our country was totally neglected.

The flow of technology linked with the aid from the First World goes on at present to a great extent. Not only does it ignore the indigenous health systems, but also all other development and community oriented approaches that might be perhaps more effective. In fact, this borrowing of Western approaches to development can be deleterious to our country, even though our rulers and experts may be aware of or ignore its ill effects. One example that stands out at the moment of writing is the fact that the World Bank is giving 750 crores for sericulture development. Has it, or we for that matter, raised the following questions about the plan: What is the implication of mulberry culture for the poor? What is the implication of mulberry culture for the NGOs in income generation?

Only a voluntary agency that is naïve implements this programme - and efficiently! Has it even tried to study how injurious to the soil is the planting mulberry? It is tragic that while the World Bank comes with poison we take it because it keeps us working for the next five years! We do not feel it is healthy to have such a sense of dependence on whatever we receive from the First world, as though it is the spring from which all our development will flow. It is good to remember in this context that the net outflow from the Third World to the First world through loans, business and the transnational corporations is far more than the aid that the Third world receives from First world!

We are all aware of movements that spring up in various parts of the world, as it were spontaneously, capturing the imagination and enthusiasm of the grass-root people and spreading over a vast area. Such, for example, were the

movement for freedom in the Philippines in 1986, and those of the Blacks in South Africa.

Coming to India, we find the Anti-liquor movement in Andhra Pradesh and Jaiprakash Narayana Movement of Total Revolution in the early seventies, the Telengana movement before that and the Chipko movement in north India and Apiko movement in Karnataka. These movements developed from among the local people, without the help of foreign aid or development organisations. They were real people's movements. We ask ourselves why they could be so much more successful than the efforts of so many development agencies that have been working for so many years with a heavy expenditure by way of personnel, energy, time and financial resources. Is it not because they followed a pattern of inspiration and action that was totally indigenous to the people?

We have to admit that in the development programmes of many social service organisations, whether they be aimed at development of agriculture methods, or dealing with community building, construction of houses or even of latrines, the orientations of the programme derive from the west. The major reason for this is that the decision for the type of programme, its approach, its strategy and its implementation is very often left to the representatives of the resource agency. This agency provides the funds, therefore, the Indian social work agency director takes it that he must call the tune in all aspects of the work!

It so happens that the local partner will almost inevitably design and organise the activities of his programme to suit the donor. Each foreign resource or aid agency, has its own procedures, priorities, criteria, pattern of decision-making, reporting and evaluation. Most of the Third World partners tend to tailor their activities in the forum of a "project" that is, a concise, planned activity calculated to take place over a limited number of years and aiming for certain measurable results.

In spite of a latitude that may be offered by the aid agency, the natural stream of improving and responding to an ever-changing environment and to the

changing needs of the people is frozen into some blue print and both donor and implementing agencies tend to restrict themselves to examining whether future activities match the proposed project plan instead of looking at their overall impact, also outside the project.

Such an approach requires a leadership in NGOs which comes from the higher strata of society, for it calls for a high level of managerial and planning skill. It introduces a way of thinking and decision making that does not usually help for real participation by the lower echelons of workers in NGOs, and much less by the people at the grass-roots. What is worse is that however much insistence is placed on the people's participation, the whole thinking pattern and cultural frame work underlying this 'project' approach is alien to the native ethos and mind-set of the rural people of India.

Another problem that can, and in some cases, does arise, is the possible backlash of receiving foreign aid for development. It is a well-known fact of experience that if one has the right contacts or knows how to write a good project proposal, he or she can have easy access to money from foreign aid agencies. A statement made by one social worker is worth reflecting upon: " so far as the money is coming in, institutions grows, - but not movements. Leadership may grow, but it is not the people's leadership."

There is an urgent need to relate to people in new ways: believing in them, identifying with them, opening the programme to them. Only thus could the social activist and the people together experience a whole new process of arousing and motivating and analysing, or mobilising inactive people and systematising scattered ideas. It is only in this way that there can be a continuing dialogue in which all become more critical of conditions, more knowledgeable about causes, more ready to act collectively. Only through this new kind of relationship, could the activist and people together contribute to the creation of a new community, when everyone who is really involved in the actual situation will have participated in the process of shaping and attaining their destiny as people.

Development strategies are too often unrealistic, due to a lack of comprehensive socio-economic-political and cultural analysis in the area of the programme operation and because social work agency leadership has not really come to grips with issues of development, the struggles for justice and the need for social transformation.

### **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CORRUPTION IN AID?**

World Bank President Mr. James Wolfensohn's pronouncement that the 'cancer' of corruption seriously undermines development and will not be tolerated in future Bank-funded projects prompts one to ask: where and when did this corruption originate? How much corruption is acceptable to the World Bank and donor community? For many years the World Bank tended to ignore or discount the significance of corruption in its operations. Donor agencies in general seem to have a very high tolerance for the misuse of their money. Now that the Bank, the UK system, and bilateral agencies are under growing pressure to improve their performance, they are seeking ways to limit the corrupt use of aid money. For the moment, there is little or no evidence that they have any idea of how to go about the task.

One of the main reasons for the disappointing performance of structural adjustment programmes is the misuse of donor money, including systematic corruption. An extreme example is Tanzania's import support programme, which allowed local manufacturers and traders to import raw materials and finished goods. An increasing number of companies, both private and parastatal, began to abuse the system. They stopped paying counterpart funds. Import duty and sales tax were not paid on imports. Neither the Treasury nor the commercial banks had the administrative capacity or the integrity to handle large volumes of free foreign exchange, but the donors ignored the problem. Only when the scandalous behaviour of the banks, the Treasury and the Minister of Finance had reached epic proportions, fuelling inflation and completely derailing the

budgetary process, did the World Bank and other donors finally pull the plug on import support.

In December 1996, the IMF started disbursing a US\$ 240 million enhanced structural adjustment loan, but to date not one private or parastatal company has been put in receivership for the hundreds of millions of donor dollars which went astray via import support. This casual approach to large-scale corruption has been the norm among donors.

Some bilateral donors have cut the number of countries which they assist, and eradicated funds to those remaining. To increase aid effectiveness some of them have also reduced the number of sectors they support per country. Add to this the tendency for the whole donor community to move into new activities at the same time, and you have a recipe for too much aid chasing too little 'absorptive capacity' in the countries of concentration, which include Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, Pressure to spend has led to unbelievable over funding in certain sectors. Well-known examples are NGOs, many of which are created with the sole objective of embezzling donor money.<sup>2</sup>

With the coming of political pluralism, a growing volume of aid money has been channelled into 'governance' activities. The disadvantages of governance from the donor perspective are the donors have little experience in this field, and the amounts of money which can be disbursed, compared to the amount of administrative work involved, are relatively trivial. Still, the 1995 Tanzanian Presidential elections did allow the donors to unload about US\$ 20 million: nearly one million was spent on ink alone! Most of this money has not been accounted for to date.

Aid has served to encourage the establishment of a whole range of corrupt activities in 'civil society' to add to those which already existed in the state apparatus. Many of those managing the corruption are recent migrants

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Brian Cooksey, Transparency International (TI) an international watchdog NGO to monitor and combat corruption world wide, once again published its Corruption Perception Index. It is considered to be the most reliable and up-to-date information on how corruption levels in particular countries are perceived by business circles.

from the state sector, or straddle both public and private sectors. The politically acceptable employment of more local personnel as desk officers has served to increase the rate of corruption. The chances of being caught or punished are minimal. The charlatans and opportunists crowd out the few genuine local change agents. The imperative to disburse at all costs makes it very difficult for donors to adequately monitor or evaluate the quality of their assistance, since it would put the agencies in a poor light if they were seen to be supporting non-performing and corrupt activities. Thus, as has generally been the case, the donors pretend that their assistance is being well used, and are even prepared to deny well founded allegations of the misuse of project funds.

The new aid activities discussed above account for a relatively small proportion of total aid flows, however. The basic issue is the amount of uncontrolled corruption, which still characterises the World Bank and other donors' more traditional project, programme, and financial support. Here too one finds projects of ever growing magnitude, as the big spending goes on. The continued availability of the volume of aid, not performance, structural reforms, or impacts on 'target groups'. Although further project aid cannot be justified on the basis of past performance, it continues to be a major form of aid delivery by both the World Bank and other donor agencies. If corruption has become one of the major international issues of modern times, it would hardly be surprising to find that the virus has already infected and is spreading within the major agencies.

If countries with as much corruption as Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya can continue to enjoy billions of dollars of aid every year, it is not because they have demonstrated their ability to use aid wisely. But the donors are not well placed to extol the virtues of transparency and accountability which they do not practice themselves. To address the question of corruption in aid, the World Bank and other agencies will have to take a long look at their own role in creating the problem, which they now propose to cure.<sup>3</sup>

#### **ATTITUDE OF THE GOVERNMENT TO THE NGOs**

The Government's policy relating to NGOs is clearly moving towards curtailing their autonomy, divesting them to the identify, and making them agents of the system, instead of being true champions of the people's rights and interests.

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) number is used as a sword of Damocles over the head of all NGOs who are working for true development in trying to give power to the people. We are all aware of several instances where this number has been revoked from an organisation. The reasons given are often either non-existent or vague and irrelevant. Trying to fight against the irrational decision by the Government in revoking the number only ends up in a monstrous waste of time, energy and money, besides causing a lull and often an undoing of the people's movement that might have been initiated by the agency.

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<sup>3</sup> Mr. Brian Cooksey, Transparency International (TI) also made a comment that at the top of the list of 52 countries are the three Nordic states Denmark, Finland and Sweden. At the bottom, one can find Colombia, Bolivia and Nigeria. Germany ranks 13, the USA 16 and Japan 21. TI Chairman Mr. Peter Eigen said that when reporting on the CPI the press focuses on the developing countries of the world, because corruption is perceived to be greatest there, but I urge the public to recognise that a large share of the corruption is the explicit product of multinational corporations, head quartered in leading industrialised countries.

The role of NGO is seen as complementary and supplementary to the Government. Besides, it is expected, according to some government documents on the subject, to act or to help the people to act as 'watchdog' to see that Government programmes are properly and justly implemented. But if and when the NGO has fulfilled this role, the Government has come down heavily upon it, and has in several cases, vindictively withdrawn its FCRA number on some very specious grounds.

There is growing opposition to NGOs from various vested interests in the political sphere. In many cases, discussions with MLAs (Member of Legislative Assembly) and other political are to no avail. These politicians see the work of the NGOs as a taking over of the area of their operation, for they have a reduced space of underdevelopment which they can use as objects of future promises they can make at election time! Because they receive foreign funds for their activities, NGOs are dubbed 'CIA agents or many similar invectives showered on them. The traditional ones, mostly those belong to religious groups, who dole out charity are treated more benignly by the Government and those in power.

The alternative to using foreign funds for development work is getting government funds. But getting cooperation of the Government in running the programme and more, in the obtaining of funds are beset with tremendous bureaucratic difficulties.

The bribes demanded by various petty officials to get the programme through and the actual transfer of the needed funds drain the effectiveness of the programmes. Besides, once the first instalment is received, one can never be sure whether the subsequent ones may come at the time when they are urgently needed or whether they come at all! This procedural delay is so regular that one is tempted to ask whether the deliberate intent of the Government it is to make the people lose faith in the NGO which has started work with them and then is unable to continue it when it reaches a critical state.

## **MANAGEMENT ORIENTATION TO DEVELOPMENT**

While the seventies saw the growth of many grassroots groups committed to the cause of justice, the eighties gave birth to a new breed of development workers. These have made us realise that the NGO sector was no longer Gandhian, unprofessional and wooly-headed about issues. The new breed was more rupee, professional and technology oriented.

The men and women of action have been replaced by slick foreign returned manipulators, who thrive on forming instant NGOs with no base and no roots. It is but to be expected that their knowledge of the national and micro level situation will be superficial and based on third rate evidence. Mixed up in it were a lot of instant reformers, carpet baggers and people with hidden agendas who were taking the whole development process back to square one.

In many cases, the NGO is an income generating structure, sometimes directly contradictory to simplicity and without any vestige of identification or close rapport to the poor. It does not live as an example to the people. Besides, its personnel often speak of feminism, but live in direct contradiction in terms of relationship to their own wives, their female staff members and the village women.

There are several causes for this situation. But one of the striking ones is the business orientation to development that is growing all over in the NGO sector. To some extent, this is due to influence of the foreign resource agency. There is no doubt that today, the distribution of resources for development from to the Third World has become a big business in the First World. The ambiance and culture of some of the resource agencies in the west is not very much different from that of the commercial firms functioning in the developed countries.

It is not just a matter of the sophisticated technology that is used in these resource agency offices, but also the recruiting of top quality hi-tech specialists in them that are to some extent responsible for a impersonal

business culture that is shared even by representatives of these agencies who come to India. This culture is transferred by a kind of osmosis to their contacts in the NGOs.

The image that might be created by several NGOs today is that they are like any other service sector, with a paid, not a voluntary staff, with a director and hierarchical management, and with strong tendencies to institutionalism. These organisations too are increasingly becoming business minded and impersonal in their dealing with the people who today are in a real sense reduced only to 'target population' and 'beneficiaries.'

This culture has an impact on all the personnel of the development agency. Together with the reliance these people have on the financial resources that come from outside and the ease with which resources are made available, they undergo social and psychological changes. They no longer feel the pinch of insecurity, they have secure jobs, with more than adequate salaries, they have managed to pick up quite a number of perks, linked up with their work, so that the equipment meant for the programme are without any scruple monopolised by many of them, e.g. jeeps, vehicles, TV and video sets, cameras etc.

If any organisation is truly committed to development, it is in the remote areas that it will put its best and most competent leaders and animators. But the Government and the social work agencies generally put the weakest there, sending the most competent to the metropolitan centres which have access to the above mentioned perks.

The excess of funds that are poured out by the resource agencies are also, to a great extent, the cause for this deterioration and for the killing of the right motivation for social work. These agencies and their representatives, no matter how committed they may be to the cause of authentic development, are only transitory visitors, and it is impossible for them to really know the situation of a specific area or people for whom a programme is run.

The ease with which those who know the right jargon and the tricks of the trade can manipulate them makes them easy victims of developmental

skulduggery. This is confirmed by the number of times we have actually witnessed their rejection of programme which are sincerely and authentically people oriented, small budgeted, and low images ones, simply because the project holders who contact them are too simple, honest and straight forward. They do not speak the right jargon, they do not have the skills of sycophancy or adulteration when relating to outsiders. Hence, they do not make much of an impact on them.

Money has a tremendously powerful role in the carving out of decisions. Not only the money of the resource agency, but also the money at hand with the NGO can to a great extent determine the kind of programme which is run in a project. The people too, are influenced by the money that flows into a project. They might see their need in a different area, but if money is being offered for a particular purpose, they will put aside that need and avail of the benefits of this money. Thus, the whole process of development and liberation is diverted by the flow of money.

The workers in an NGO are also influenced by money. Questions predominant in their minds are 'who will look after my family if I rely solely on sincerity and commitment? I cannot work without pay. But I am to be paid, from where will the money come?' These questions ultimately lead to the same direction: power is where the money is!

The result of all this is that genuine 'voluntarism' is practically dead in our country. The voluntary agencies have, by and large, forgotten what they are really trying to do. They are oblivious to the problem of lack of continuity, either when the man on top is changed, or when the funds stop coming from abroad.

Neither are many of them concerned with moving from the micro-level to the macro-level. This is mainly because they have not developed a deep analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural systems prevailing in our country and which necessarily have a continuous and strong impact on anything effected on the micro-level.

It is clear that what is needed is a deepening of motivation of those working for the liberation of the poor and exploited people in our country. Fresh blood is required in all the NGO sector, so that new motivation, enthusiasm and new strategies can be effected. There should definitely be a very great reduction in the dependence of funds, especially those coming from abroad.

Of course, a major part of the problem would be solved if the foreign resource agencies discovered their authentic place in the process of development, realised their own limitations and gave much more importance to the knowledge and experience of people actually in the field, and not just to their mediators, who work from behind desks in the capital and other major cities of India.

As long as there is greed in the world and selfishness in the individual human person, all good things will become corrupt. Our good definition of development will also become corrupt and has to be redeemed. Is every NGO prepared to have a second look at all that it thought good: training programmes, cultures, ideology.....?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Princess of Poverty” article published in the Outlook magazine of April, 1995 written by Mr. Harikrishan

## CHAPTER IV VOLUNTARISM NOT DEAD!

While we have painted a rather gloomy picture of the NGOs working for development in India, we can joyfully assert that there are many which have still preserved their pristine enthusiasm and selfless commitment to the poor and marginalised. There is an encouraging growth of voluntarism which has initiated the rise of several movements that we have already referred to, like those of the freedom movement, of women, tribals, Dalits, and the ecological and civil liberties movements. We can gladly say that also in the bureaucracy, we have come across several individuals with a vision for justice and a respect for the human person.

We can still see in India a number of people, old and young, working with the grassroots people. They are simple, dignified, genuine and exuding courage. They have obstacles in their stride and still maintain their optimism for the future. We are impressed by their laughing away failures and encouraging the bruised among themselves and among the people to look on the experience as an educative one.

The hope of the NGO sector is in some individuals who are always willing to help, never pontificating and accessible to the misguided, the perplexed and the lonely looking for direction. They are the ones who will get no national or international awards, for they avoid crowds and public speeches and they see their life mission as oriented to assist without giving the impression of charity, to guide without being patronising, to prod, push and encourage the depressed and the deprived whose spirit had been broken, to mend and mend again without taking credit for the rehabilitation.<sup>5</sup>

There are still some of this species left, and they are the ones in the villages and slums who will keep this country together, inject hope in the system

and give reason for living in this great nation. At the village level, there are hundreds of small struggling groups who receive funds from abroad and even from the Government. Many among them have been victimised, harassed and hounded by the police at the instigation of politicians, landlords and village dadas (blackmailers). Given a choice, many of them would still welcome funds from the Government instead of foreign agencies because that would give them credibility, but they are then not sure of their continuity and stability.

### **HOW DO WE SEE THE ROLE NGOs IN THE FUTURE?**

At the outset, it is good to remind us that development is more than economic growth. IT IS PEOPLE! Development is a process beginning and ending with the human person, requiring people's active and conscious participation. The grassroots people must animate the whole process. Agencies and workers are only facilitators.

The topic "NGOs in the Future" is today being discussed in several NGO circles. In most of them, we hear that there is need of very elaborate planning by NGOs, that there must be a new form of collaboration with the funding agencies. Some agencies suggest that there must be a geo-political approach to development, and that there must be better management, administration, and organisation of the NGO and the voluntary sector in general. A resource agency, considering the expenses incurred for running small and big programmes, has decided that it is only going to aid big projects. The needs of the people are not the primary concern by the administrative costs of running programmes! Does this not forget the fundamental principle that the people are to be the planning subjects and the primary agents of their own development?

For the solution to the various problems that development agencies encounter, the answer is to be found, not on the top, not at the level of the agencies, but at the level of the people. We must go to the people. They are the

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<sup>5</sup> Col. B. L. Verma (Rtd), Management Consultant and former Head of the Water Resources Department of Action for Food Production (AFPRO), New Delhi in his un-published paper submitted at AFPRO National Conference held at New Delhi in 1989..

ones who are really weighed down by the reality of poverty, deprivation, neglect, marginalisation and exploitation. The time has come for us to think again, in the right connotation that 'We the People' which is the first phrase of the Preamble to the Constitution, really means the people of India, the majority of whom are these poor and downtrodden masses.

## **ISSUES THAT THE NGO SECTOR MUST TACKLE TODAY:**

### **1. PEOPLE'S ORGANISATION**

When making people the primary agents of their development and liberation, it is essential that we realise that our chief objective would be to enable them to organise themselves. The community of the grassroots people must be awakened, trained and organised to become strong and take their own future in hand. Unfortunately, in many NGO circles, the word 'organisation' is become another cliché like conscientisation, participatory research, and today, human resource development! Activists say that they are organising the people when all they are doing is forming a small group of dynamic youth, or gathering people regularly to have talks or discussion on various topics relating to the village life.<sup>6</sup>

### **2. GENUINE ORGANISATION IMPLIES A NUMBER OF THINGS**

- The action that is planned by the organised group must be done in ordered way, the work divided among different individuals who are responsible for its execution.
- The leadership should be collective. Single leadership can be abused, sold, bought and destroyed.
- There have to be regular meetings of all to take decisions and see to their execution.
- Records of meetings must be maintained and read to see what has been executed, and who is responsible.
- Tasks are evenly divided with all, be they young or old, men or women, being given their tasks. This used to be the case in organisation of traditional villages and families.

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<sup>6</sup> Mr. Aloysius Fernandez, Executive Director, MYRADA, Bangalore in 'Alternative Management systems in savings and credit groups', published in 1993.

- The community must raise at least part of its own resources, through voluntary labour, material, money. Sound accounting is essential, so that all know what is contributed, how it is spent, what remains and what is to be done with it.
- The most *essential* element in organisation is a **spirit** of co-operation and unity. Power comes from **Unity**.

### 3. BUILDING UP OF PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS

Development is only going to be effective if it leads to the formation of a people's movement. For such movements, resources should be tapped locally and from the people themselves as far as possible. It has been proved that external resources deter any growth of authentic people's movements. Community development and liberation, as well as social transformation must be the action of the people at the grassroots. They must be the planning subjects, the primary agents and the authentic results of the whole liberation process. We who come from another background, are really outsiders, however much we might feel that we belong to them, and we must have the humility to accept that and give the power to them to be the primary agent of their liberation. All the social activist can do is to enable them to have a critical awareness of their situation and of their own potentialities and limitations. We must be catalysts in the process of their organisations and mobilising themselves. In this process, we have to realise that our responsibilities are limited. We are working with the unorganised and are hopeful of organising them. However, this organisation will not be big or strong enough to make a sufficient impact on the system.

We, the representatives of the development NGOs too often see ourselves as if we were some kind of saviours who have descended on earth and will be able to change it on our terms. We have not put ourselves in a realistic context. When we try to organise the unorganised, we find that since we have not a national united structure, our efforts are hamstrung. The people need an association that is already organised in order to be strengthened on a wider level. The only one they will find will be a political

party, which has a force that can have a national or regional impact. We may be dismayed that the group we have been working with will go on to collaborate with a political party.

It is imperative that we have a critical perspective on this. We must enable the people we are working with to have a deeper perception, which will bring to bear on the political party with which they are collaborating. Our role is an important one, though a preliminary 'precursor' one. We have to organise the unorganised so that they can of their own freewill and decision join whatever organised institutions that exist and are powerful enough to help them effectively to win in their struggle for their rights.

#### **4. NETWORKING**

To break away from the isolation that prevails among the NGOs, it is important that networks be initiated on two level: among NGOs and groups and among the grassroots people's organisations. This seems to be most difficult in the present day feudal culture, which is prevalent in the NGO sector. Each NGO vaunts itself to be doing the only thing that is required for development, and looks down on others, which it considers as rivals. There is a tendency to build up kingdoms which are isolated from one another and which do not want to learn from one another. The seminar syndrome that seems to be current in the NGO sector today does not help to bring people to work together. Most use it as a platform to publicise their ideologies and approaches. If they learn from others, it is only in the way of recipes, gimmicks and methods that can produce instant successes!

It is urgent that a spirit of humility finds its way into the NGO sector, so that each NGO will see itself as part of a whole process that aims at bringing about a union and movement of the people. It must realise that this movement will only come about when the agencies are united in purpose, ideology, approach and strategies.

#### **5. ISSUE ORIENTATION RATHER THAN PROGRAMMES**

It is realised today that instead of working on projects and programmes, there is a real need to concentrate on the burning issues of our times. There are for example the few weakest sectors of society: women, Dalits and tribals. The issue of the urban poor too needs concentrating on. Communalism and Fundamentalism have to be fought against and efforts must be made to discover the right meaning of secularism and make the people aware of it. Secularism as it exists today, is guided and controlled by the elite and has become a tool or weapon in the hands of the elite for their vested interests. This is the reason behind all communalism. The ecological issue cannot be neglected, if we want to save our planet for our coming generations.

## **6. ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

Fortunately, there is a trend among a rather small number of NGOs to try to rediscover alternate development approaches, deriving from the traditional ones which are lost. Such are for example, ecological and organic farming and tree cropping methods, soil conservation, water harvesting etc., already in the people's culture. Also earlier infant survival methods e.g. alternate health care are being rediscovered and propagated. Groups are coming together to focus on drought, and search for alternatives with regard to agriculture, etc., and search for alternatives with regard to agriculture etc., which have in early times been used by our people in the villages when they prepared themselves for drought and disaster by means of very simple but effective approaches.

## **7. VALUE FORMATION**

Today, a new phase is coming through very strongly in the development field. It is being realised that development will have absolutely no meaning unless it is rooted in a formation and recapturing of human values. This is going to be an uphill task, given the fact that the values of modernisation have captured not only the elite, but also the poorest person in the most remote village in our country. The TV and other media have created a culture

of consumerism, and this culture will automatically annihilate any progress that will have been made in the line of development of the poorest and neglected sectors of our society. The tragic reality is that this culture of modernisation which concretely manifests itself in consumerism has permeated the NGO sector itself to a very great extent!

### **THE IMAGE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR TODAY**

Finally, it is urgent that the NGO sector enhances its public image. There is need for a better deal in NGOs especially with regard to its integrity. An NGO's credibility is derived from the congruence of its vision, objectives and its activities, the transparency of what it is, what it intends to do, and how the work is accomplished. Above all there should be a transparency in all its financial operations so that these can be open and convincing to the grassroots people, who, as has been said earlier, are the primary agents of the whole development process. The life style of an NGO should be simple and unostentatious. Lastly, its programmes should definitely be cost-effective.

Such transparency and accountability must be directed to the people, as well as to the members of the agency and the resource agency. This calls openness in its dealings, sharing of information through appropriate forums and continual dialogue. The gap between promise and performance erodes credibility and this gap can be bridged by constant reflection on reality as well as effective monitoring and evaluation. Ideology and action must be brought on a converging track.

Our wish for the future that has dawned is that the NGOs throughout the country avert the crisis that is deepening within the voluntary sector. This can be effected by a clarity of vision, derived from an on going structural analysis on the micro and macro levels and above all, a respect for the grassroots people with a faith in their potential to bring about a lasting and just transformation of society.

When they first made their appearance in early 1970, the Indian development voluntary agencies clearly proclaimed themselves as an alternative movement against the technocratic, bureaucratic and capitalistic development models promoted by the UN Development Decade Programme and then applied in many of its member countries, including India.

We can rightly say that at the beginning, the launching out of Indian Voluntary agencies was actually a concrete phenomenon of the sharp critique on the development paradigm of that time, which in reality benefited merely a small group of people who have control of political, economic and cultural power. It was very often explicitly stated by NGOs that development programmes would primarily be a process of people's liberation, especially of the poorest of the poor, from the oppression political, social, economic and cultural structures.

But as time goes on, and as foreign funds become increasingly easier to obtain, the majority, if not all the NGOs make deviations in the use of programme resources, forms, orientation, organisational structure, and what is most important, even in the primary vision and initial mission as an alternative movement which takes sides with the poorest of the poor. Sadly enough, it is no longer a secret that manipulation, corruption, mis-management and misappropriation are general phenomena within many Indian NGOs today.

Even today, after so many decades of unsuccessful experiences, the majority of NGOs are still imbued with a 'project' outlook. Their programmes are projects in nature, determined not by the people but the outsiders, mostly partial and artificial, target not people-oriented, and in most cases not at all different from the development programmes that they themselves had sharply criticised in previous years. Most NGOs are just implementers of projects, not catalysts with the people in their struggle for liberation and justice.

Today, many NGOs have become heavily hierarchical, bureaucratic, centralist and elitist. This is particularly evident with big NGOs which intentionally apply the principles of professional management adapted from the industrial world. The values behind these principles are generally in e underlying

development work, which places a premium on human dignity, democracy and respect for the right of each individual to make his or her own decisions.

All these deviations eventually lead to NGOs being mirrors of the Government systems, the systems of industry, big business and commerce, which at the beginning were clearly recognised as the exploitative systems in which injustice is inherent! The NGOs have therefore become infertile. They lose their identity, forgetting their primary vision and initial mission as an alternative movement for liberating the oppressed.

If such a situation is allowed to go on, we can only say that there will be a time, and that not very far away, when the development NGOs will only articulate themselves as the people's enemy. In fact, we can say without hesitation, that we have witnessed cases where the people have organised themselves against the NGOs that professed to come among them to bring about their development!

In order to put the NGOs back in their role as a catalyst for the struggle of the people to bring about their own liberation we need to rethink the role of these agencies. The time has come for the Indian NGOs to have the courage to look at themselves critically and openly with regard to everything they have been doing until now. This requires that they reformulate their nature of existence, their position and role within the overall social systems and problems which prevail today and which will be present in the future.

This critical reflection is urgent because it becomes evident that the central problem we are facing now is not a small problem at local and micro levels but rather the oppressive power of international capitalistic hegemony as a dominant super force that is the main source of all structural problems such as poverty, backwardness, exploitation, religious, communal, race and caste discrimination, particularly in the Third World like India.

In order not to fall into the trap of this international capitalist hegemony, the development NGOs should first discover or regain a clear vision and political attitude so that they can resist it ideologically and strategically.

There is no option for them but to act on their primary objective that is to straighten up the democratic and just social system at all levels. It is only with a firm commitment to democracy and justice that the international capitalistic hegemony that is characterised by domination and exploitation can be encountered significantly.

The NGOs should therefore continuously transform themselves into an instrument and catalyst of the people's movements, in which the people are the primary actors, with a collective leadership and decision-making pattern. They are to see themselves as accountable to the people before being accountable to any other agency. This means that they should be prepared to let themselves be controlled openly and directly by the people. Most important of all, they must be outstanding in their transparency and integrity, thus undoing the general image that is held today in society of the self-serving vested interests of development NGOs.

As catalysts of the people's movements, the NGOs should carry out activities which orientated towards real actions, distribution of information, and political education to the people, based on the principles of non violence and very important, of solidarity between the people and the NGO and among the agencies themselves. This means that the NGOs should give more emphasis to advocacy activities and people's organisation, avoiding at all costs, short term projects which in fact even diminish the dynamic of struggle of the poorest.

Most especially, Indian NGOs should urgently and in collaboration with one another, review their patterns of relationship with funding agencies. These funding agencies are one of the most crucial factors influential on the implementation of development programmes. The widespread deviation from the vision and mission of the NGOs which is the building up of a true people's movement finds its roots in most cases in the policy and attitude of the funding agencies. It is therefore important the NGOs pose funding agencies not as the one and only resource. When co-operation with funding agencies is necessary, the NGOs should make a critical selection, taking into account the political

background of vision and mission of the concerned funding agencies.

### **THE ROLE OF RESOURCE AGENCY:**

It is rather clear that the resource agency should challenge an implementing agency into sharpening its vision and ideology. This does not mean that it should dictate terms or order the very running of the implementing agency, but that since both of them have entered into a contract once the funding started, they both have the responsibility to see that the objectives commonly agreed are actually being fulfilled. It could be that for a year or two there could be a sort of silent awaiting for the agency to find its way, but sooner or later, the resource agency should either questions the deficiency with regard to achieving the objectives or give some directions as to how to do this.

In general, we feel there is very much more to the partnership from the part of the resource agency than just the giving of funds. Even if this agency, being foreign to our country, is mainly a learner with hardly anything of its own to offer, yes, because of its relationship with several agencies in the Third World as well as in the First World, the resource agency can offer constructive orientations to an implementing agency, especially if it is raw in a new venture. In any case, in such new ventures, the resource agency can, either directly or through some one reliable in the country, accompany the project in its early stages, so that a right orientation and proper working culture can be established at the very outset.

Now, after so many years of experience in the NGO sector, we see the voluntarism is a very, very rare commodity. People are in development not because of their dedication to the poor as for earning a good salary. The author remembers asking a top Government official some time back why there were so many NGOs mushrooming all over the country, and suggested that it might be

due to unemployment. His reply was "Rather it is because of unemployability!" Without being cynical, we can ask the representatives of funding agencies who visit India if they were the director of a commercial or business firm, how many of the people they meet in development, even directors of certain agencies, would they really entrust with a responsible job and give a fat salary? We have had too many disheartening experiences of people who are drawing very high salaries with a competence that is practically negligible. Just recently, we were told that the salary of a field officer in one of the big agencies here is more than Rs. 8000 per month. I know one of them very well as a person whose only competence is his ability to use the most radical terminology but who has absolutely no concern whatsoever for the poor.

One of the main reasons of the move away from voluntarism is the easy flow of foreign funds. Everyone is aware of the many agencies who have absolutely no knowledge of the situation in our country and are boosting up salaries and creating an ambience competition in the whole development sector because of this. This is also the case with agencies that have their expatriate base in India and who are forced to pay their boost the salaries of their Indian workers to an irrational degree. However, this situation has created a competition and striving to raise salaries in all agencies.

On the other hand, development is no longer the voluntary amateurish task that was taken up by well-motivated people who were more concerned about the people they were working with in order to educate and organise them than their own security and future. In those days, salaries were secondary. What mattered was the development of the poor and oppressed. Today, development has become a specialised affair. If a housing programme is initiated, it implies the employment of architects who are not only competent in their own profession but also with a certain orientation to development, people's mobilisation etc., If it is a tourism development programme, there is need of people who have an insight into the various issues linked up with tourism, conversant with problems related to ecology, women, fishermen and coastal

people who are threatened by sea resorts, tribal and mountain people who can be threatened by hill resorts. They are to be at the same time caught up with the desire to bring justice in the country's economy, social relationships etc., Without all these skills and orientations, there will be a danger of sheer amateurism and naïve experimentation that will get nowhere.

Consequently, such people have to be carefully selected and their collaboration assured not only by the implementing agency but also by resource agency, for it is equally responsible as the implementing agency for the success of the programme in the achieving of its objectives. When they are selected, it is but just that they be paid commensurate salaries to the skills demanded of them, and hence, voluntarism will take the last place. Hence, we believe that the salaries of people in NGOs who are doing a specialised job should be those of people who are competent in their professions. However, before that, both resource and implementing agencies had a responsibility to assure that these were competent. Besides, competent people will not come for salaries that are not adequate to their skills in such a specialised type of development activity.<sup>7</sup>

It is in this context that we bring in a reference to the salaries of the agency people in the West. These are certainly very high in comparison with those received in our country; and quite understandably, we believe. However, is the competence of many of the people working in development in our country not on a par with or sometimes more than of those working in development resource agencies in the West? An incident that took place just last year comes to mind. A well known Indian Architect who has long been involved in working for the poor and homeless, was visited by an architect from a resource agency, he did not tell us which one, and in the course of their discussing the plans linked up with the project, that person showed a real ignorance of certain important architectural points. The Indian architect asked him how much salary he was drawing. The

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<sup>7</sup> Funding Community Initiatives Publication of Earthscan, 1994 p37-39 Silvinia Arrossi, Felix Bombarolo, Diana Mitlin

response was a staggering figure in foreign currency. The Indian told him "If you were working for me, I would not give you even Rs. 800/- a month."

What we want to say through all this is that people from the Western agencies should now accept that salaries are no longer given on a basis of voluntarism but on the professional skills of the people involved. Here is where they have to see that is the proportion (We do not mean equality!) of the salary they themselves receive in comparison to the one they are allotting to people in Third World with the same degree of skills. Hence, there is a greater responsibility on their part to make sure that the right people are selected who do not only have the skill proper to their profession, but also a developmental orientation which gives primacy to the people's participation and mobilisation.

#### **WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR THE NGO SECTOR**

There is need to launch out on a new tactic. Instead of having these massive NGOs, it would be more effective to have small groups of committed individuals entering an area, identifying a small core group of local young people who will constitute the cadre. They will spend their time training them and leaving them to work out their own development programmes. The initiating group can help in guiding them and training them wherever and in whatever skills are thought necessary. When this cadre is formed the group can move into other areas and repeat the process of forming cadres in these areas. After some time when a number of areas are covered, the group can help to build up a network, stay in the area and help the people through coordination, provide regular training and enable them to form their own people's organisation to struggle on their own issues.<sup>8</sup>

As for financing this programme, experience with some groups shows that this is possible through the local people's resources. If each adult in the community of marginalised people can contribute one day's labour per month, it

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should average Rs. 30/- per person. If there are 1000 persons involved, this will total up to Rs. 3,60,000/- per year, quite a tidy sum to help the people on their process towards economic stability and liberation.

Basically we in the NGO sector have to work harder towards entitling the people. We have to entitle them both politically and economically. But this is a very difficult process. If we succeed in any measure, however small, there will be severe repercussions on them. The landless agricultural labourers today are a rather dispensable commodity. For in the present situation, it is much better for an Andhra farmer to acquire a harvester combine than to get workers from Andhra or even from Tamilnadu.

Finally, in view of the tremendous changes that will be brought about the recent shift to the market economy, we will have to change our strategies of working with the poor. Some of the orientation that we NGOs will have to give thought to are the following:

- (a) It is urgent that we NGOs draw out strategies to work with the poor, not as isolated voluntary agencies, but in a network that is based on specific areas, on particular issues, or on various groups of people, like dalits, tribals or women etc.,
- (b) We shall have to concentrate much more on awareness training of people and helping them to organise themselves to demand their rights from the Government.
- (c) At the same time, we have to pay attention to economic development of our people in the economic climate which prevails in the country. We must help them to enter into a market economy which will affect rural areas and agriculture, being cognisant of the fact that the two forces, the industrial and agricultural are merging and will provide a stronger front against us.
- (d) Above all, we must concentrate our efforts to enable the people to fight against the inhuman values which are the underpinning of the free market economy. The market by nature is opposed to the values that we uphold. We

must help our people to retain their traditional values which are rooted in human nature.

We firmly believe that truly human values can be inculcated only by the people who are going to be the true agents of change. These are the poor, the marginalised and the exploited. If we can build up self reliant communities among these people, sharing in the same goals and working together in a spirit of love and unity, we have a strong hope of rebuilding a human society that will be just, participatory and sustainable. Where there is competition and rivalry, we must help our people by example and practice to build up collaboration and cooperation. **We must help our people to fight against individualism and maximising of individual profits through community life founded on sharing and solidarity.** A spirit of service and a simplicity of lifestyle in our NGOs, lived among the people will help them to confront the spirit of prestige and consumerism.

Good Luck!

NO OUTSIDER WILL CARE FOR OUR INTERESTS.  
WE HAVE TO LOOK AFTER OURSELVES.  
AND THIS RESPONSIBILITY IS NOT MINE ALONE.  
I MAY BE HERE TODAY AND MAY NOT BE HERE TOMORROW.  
BUT THE RESPONSIBILITY IS ON THE SHOULDERS OF EVERY  
MEMBER OF YCO (CITIZEN OF INDIA).

I HOPE THAT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE,  
OUR WOMEN, EVERYONE,  
WILL THINK OF THIS AND TAKE  
THE RESPONSIBILITIES UPON  
THEIR SHOULDERS, AND NOT LOOK UP TO  
ANYONE AS LEADERS.

LEADERS COME AND GO.

From Last Public Speech of  
Smt. Indira Gandhi  
Former Prime Minister of India  
on 30th October, 1984.