
UNIT 10 NON-GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES INITIATIVES

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

In Block 2 of this course, you have learnt about the role of various summits and agreements in maintaining the quality of environment for better living humankind. In the present unit of Block 3, we shall discuss the initiatives taken by non-governmental agencies in the upkeep of the human environment. With the emergence of MNCs and TNCs as powerful players in global markets, the role of sovereign governments has almost been reduced to that of maintaining law and order. This has resulted in the emergence of a “third economy” based on local community organisations rooted in “civil society”. These organisations known as Non Governmental Associations or Non Governmental Organisations are seen as either anti-systemic struggle groups or project implementation agencies or constituents of new paradigm of developments.

Many argue that there is a hidden agenda for the NGOs and they act as World Bank’s agents for cooperation regarding development. Some of the NGOs are neither non governmental in their funding sources nor in their local collaborative activities. It is reported that there are about 50 thousand self styled NGOs in the Third World countries receiving more than \$10 billion from diverse sources. Many NGOs have become powerful actors in political and social arenas influencing the public opinion at local levels. The NGO structures are often criticized as internally elitist and externally servile and foster new type of cultural and economic colonialism often “selling” projects to local communities. All this may not be entirely true but is not entirely far from the reality either. This unit examines some of the basic issues related to the NGO’s links with the MNCs and TNCs and their juxtaposition in relation with other socio-political movements.

Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the origin, structure and ideology of NGOs;
- explain the relation between NGOs and MNCs;
- analyse the interrelationship of NGOs and Socio-Political Movements; and
- present your perspective on Alternative NGOs.

10.2 ORIGIN, STRUCTURE AND IDEOLOGY OF NGOs

Let us begin by understanding what an NGO is. A standard definition of NGOs acceptable to a large section of academicians and practitioners is the one given by the World Bank. The World Bank defines NGOs as **groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of government and characterised by humanitarian or cooperative rather than commercial objectives; private organisations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, or undertake community development.**

However, NGOs are organisations that are extremely diverse in nature. It is therefore almost impossible to find a coherent definition that can represent this diversity. According to Joan Mencher, the term NGO is a catchword for an enormous variety of structures, pursuing diverse strategies, of widely differing sizes, aims or missions, and defies definition because of this diversity.

Environmental NGOs may be defined as those civil society based non-profit organisations articulating environmental concerns either from a 'productive', 'protective' or an 'alternative' standpoint.

10.2.1 Understanding the Origin of NGOs

Historically, the origin of NGOs is often traced to the many associations and movements appearing in the United States and Western Europe after the World War II. It is pointed out that these were a result of the initiatives of various middle-class individuals in response to the devastating effects of war; some examples of such NGOs are the International Committee of the Red Cross, CARE, World Vision and Oxfam. These organisations were referred to as "non-governmental organisations" because of their status in the United Nations. It is maintained that these associations and movements were founded for the defence and promotion of various values.

In the Third World, the origins of NGOs could be traced both to the anti-colonial, anti-feudal struggles of the early twentieth century and the nation building exercise in the post-colonial periods of the newly emerging nations during the middle years of the twentieth century.

The Stockholm Conference of 1972 and the Agenda-21 of 1992 that envisaged legal liability regimes, economic regulation and environmental impact assessment as international regulatory instruments for protection of environment certainly had a significant role of NGOs in their making. It is pointed out that the NGOs assembled at the Fleming Park to discuss about various environmental issues. Groups as diverse as the Osho Spiritual Health Organisation, Auroville, Green Peace, and The International Campaign for Tibet, The Royal Institute for International Affairs, and the World Bank expressed different views and perspectives. The International NGO forum coordinated an alternative treaty process initiated by various environmental activists and organisations.

10.2.2 Structure of NGOs

There are perhaps three approaches to understand the structure of the NGOs viz., an approach based on functional indicators and another based on structural or relational indicators. In the first approach, the structure of an NGO could be viewed based on (a) composition, (b) size (c) mission or purpose (d) sources of funding (e) history (f) focus on a specific sector (g) entrepreneurial capabilities and (h) effectiveness in achieving the set tasks.



Fig.10.1: Some NGOs active on environmental issues in the SAARC region

A second approach is based on the idea that the State represents the authority sector and market a profit sector. The NGOs represent a ‘third sector’ and can be classified based on the incentives used to gain cooperation or compliance into voluntary sector, the membership sector, the self-help sector and the participatory or collective action sector.

The third approach to understanding the structure of an NGO is based on its relationship with:

- a) The dominant development paradigm, which, at the moment, is the achievement of development through deregulated, globalised, competitive markets and minimisation of State’s role in the domain of economy;
- b) Different socio-political movements articulating interests of the vulnerable and interests that have been neglected; and different traditional institutions and structures.

While analysing the environmental NGOs, all the above approaches could be relevant. However, there is a tendency for the ‘productivist school’ to use the first approach, the ‘protectionist school’ to use the second and the ‘alternative school’ to use the third approach. And the reasons for this lie in the perspectives the NGOs under consideration adopt. However, before you learn about these perspectives, you might like to apply the above understanding to an NGO in your region.

SAQ 1

Describe the origin and structure, from all three perspectives given above, of a prominent environmental NGO active in your region.

10.2.3 Perspectives on NGOs

There are different perspectives on the role of NGOs. The dominant perspectives may be classified into two broad categories viz. (a) The Development Perspective, and (b) The Advocacy Perspective.

The Development Perspective: The development NGOs have been around since the 1960s. However, they have acquired an important role as part of the economic reforms carried out in the Third World in the post-mid-1980s. The development of NGOs has come to dominate this sector. According to the development perspective, the rise of NGOs is a result of the failure of state-led development model. The state has been criticised for being an inefficient agent in determining the resource allocation.

A major criticism has been that developmental policies in a state-led model are not based on rigorous rational economic reasoning; rather they are an outcome of populist demands. The implementation side in a state-led model has been criticised for being centralised, bureaucratic and often seen to be rampant in the phenomenon of 'rent-seeking'. This perspective endorses the neo-liberal view of the international agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF assigning a major role in determining the development agenda to the Market.

Baumol and Gates (1988) who belong to the development perspective, while analysing the choice of appropriate environmental policy argue that one has to consider costs and benefits of reducing pollution. For example, in order to achieve 100 percent pollution free production, the United States, would have to spend US \$200 billion. They therefore conclude that it is irrational to reduce pollution below a certain level. Thus the development of NGOs operates within the 'Productivist school' of environmental NGOs.

The Advocacy Perspective: Advocacy groups usually find space in societies where institutions, especially the state, are conservative, irresponsive, corrupt or repressive. These groups lobby to influence public policy and are often in conflict with the State and/or the dominant groups in the society. The conflict is often an outcome of differing value frameworks. The advocacy groups talk in terms of alternatives to the dominant models. Their activity involves not only providing humanitarian services but also mobilisation of and articulation of dissenting voices. In this sense they play a role of democratisation and social reform. We may identify NGOs articulating anti-patriarchal, anti-caste, anti-communal, human rights and anti-modernisation perspectives as belonging to this category of NGOs.

These groups not only articulate the interests of those that are marginalised and excluded from the development process, but also point-out to the structural causes and constraints in the system that actually result in the marginalisation and exclusion. These groups usually consist of professionals and activists.

The environmental NGOs that fall under this category are usually those belonging to the biologists school advocating the limits to growth or idealists who believe in the construction of alternative communities through the affirmation of shared spiritual values, or they could be different types of communitarians viz., Conventional Marxists, Ecological Marxists or other non-Marxist traditions of communitarians including anarchism, agrarianism or those that are loosely termed as 'decentralised socialists.'

10.3 NGOs AND MNC LINKS

It is maintained that in the context of recent economic reforms and the emergence of the new trade regime and its consequences for various social groups, and especially its fallout on nature, environmental NGOs have acquired an increased importance. In this section, we focus on this aspect of NGOs.

10.3.1 The New Trade Regime, MNCs, NGOs and Development

In most of the post-colonial Third World countries, the old trade regime adopted, soon after their independence, an import substitution strategy. It was designed to reduce rural poverty, initially through huge investments in agricultural sector and later by way of providing non-formal employment including employment in the manufacturing industries. For a long time, the economic model was designed with the purpose of preventing concentration of economic power and solving the problems of regional imbalances. It was also aimed at improving the standard and quality of life of the rural people by way of regulating the labour markets and implementation of various employment generation and poverty eradication programmes. All these objectives were to be realised by various measures of protection, promotion and

regulation. Ecological consciousness found place in the Third World development policy very recently. The state was again a crucial institution in setting and administering the environmental standards.

The New Trade regime is associated with the policies of deregulation, disinvestments and opening of the economy by removing the barriers to international trade popularly called as the **Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG)** Policies. The old policy was criticised on the basis of the arguments that distortions in the relative prices of inputs and outputs due to the imposition of protective measures lead to inefficiencies in resource allocation that entail a cost for the national economy. It was asserted that protection tends to create monopolistic positions in some industries and the producers will have little incentive for product improvement and technical change. In fact when product quality deteriorates, firms do not take the risk of introducing new products and therefore innovation suffers. By maintaining prices at high levels, the lack of competition limits the expansion of domestic markets. It is further asserted that high levels of protection may affect economic growth in various ways. Unless protection leads to increases in profits that are in turn reinvested, the static cost of protection due to inefficiencies in resource allocation reduces the amount available for investment. Based on this understanding, the economic reforms also called as the structural adjustment policy (SAP), were introduced in various Third World economies.

NGOs and WTO: Though various NGOs have been interested in the GATT since its inception, the period since the creation of the WTO has vividly demonstrated that the multilateral trading system is being scrutinized by public opinion like never before. Ministers adopted the Marrakesh Agreement, they also decided to include a specific reference to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in [Article V:2](#). On 18 July 1996 the General Council further clarified the framework for relations with NGOs by adopting a set of guidelines ([WT/L/162](#)) which "*recognizes the role NGOs can play to increase the awareness of the public in respect of WTO activities*". These guidelines are instrumental for both Members and the WTO Secretariat in maintaining an informal and positive dialogue with the various components of civil society.

Since 1996 there has been a focus on attendance at Ministerial Conferences, participation in issue-specific symposia, and the day-to-day contact between the WTO Secretariat and NGOs. The Geneva Ministerial Conference and 50th Year Celebration of the multilateral trading system epitomised the evolving relationship with NGOs. NGOs were briefed regularly by the WTO Secretariat on the progress of the informal working sessions – a feature welcomed by NGOs as a genuine sign of commitment to ensure transparency and the recognition of civil society as an entity which deserves attention in its own right.

Source: http://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/ngo_e/intro_e.htm

The introduction of the reforms including, de-licensing and removal of protections (removal of product reservations), disinvestments in public sector, reduction and removal of subsidies, removal of quantitative restrictions on imports and reduction of import duties and provision of a freer access to foreign technology etc., have led to an adverse impact on various sections of the society and more often than not, nature also suffered the costs of this new development model. The conditions especially of traditional agriculturists, artisans, those employed in rural service sector, some local industries and labour have been adversely affected. In some of the South-East Asian countries, initially, the reforms were thought to be successful, but later saw political instability, followed by mass violence in the society.

MNCs and Child Labour: Multinational seed giants, including Monsanto, Syngenta, Unilever and Bayer as well as Indian companies continue to benefit from child labour despite efforts by international NGOs and Indian public interest groups to eliminate this pernicious practice, concludes a report by the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN). An estimated 12,375 children are working in horrendous conditions on cottonseed farms in Andhra Pradesh for MNCs, Advanta (Dutch-British), Proagro (a division of Bayer, Germany) and US companies Emergent Genetics and Monsanto. Indian seed companies also employ an additional 70,000 children often bonded to the employers by loans.

These children work for long hours under extremely hazardous conditions and a number of children have died or become seriously ill due to exposure to pesticides. The report finds that efforts by the MV Foundation (MVF) – headed by Magsaysay winner Dr. Shanta Sinha – to persuade these companies to eradicate child labour have been unsuccessful as companies have failed to take concrete measures. The report finds that lack of political will, coupled with reluctance on the part of MNCs to share names of seed organisers is impeding compliance monitoring. MVF contends that these MNCs have reneged on their promise to disclose the names of farmers employing child labour.

(Source: <http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/nov/chi-mnccotton.htm>)

In the Latin American countries such as Mexico there were peasant uprisings against the reform policies. In India, drought and the lack of irrigation and drinking water, a spate of suicides by farmers who cultivated non-traditional crops, starvation deaths of artisans, famine raids, retrenchment of industrial labour, and deterioration in labour, environmental and public health standards have been witnessed. It is therefore pointed out that a large segment of what constitutes the environmental movement is actually a peasant movement draped in the cloth of environmentalist. Thus a number of local initiatives in defence of traditional rights in land, water, forests and other living resources collectively constitute what the sympathetic intellectuals have termed as the ‘environmental’ movement.



Fig.10.2: Electronic waste in India (Source: www.tribuneindia.com)

India’s infrastructure related to the management of e-waste is yet to take a definite shape. The developed countries like the U.S add to the waste that has been already generated. According to a report, nearly 1.38 million obsolete PCs like 486, 386, and 286 have been dumped in India. In Bangalore alone, four lakh PCs have been dumped. The e-waste has adversely affected soil and water bodies, especially groundwater. E-waste needs to be managed efficiently because of the potential health hazards they pose. Heavy metals such as lead, silicon, cadmium, and mercury used in PCs are well-known toxins and carcinogens, the study has said. Metals cause neurological disorders, and liver, kidney, and the lungs can also be severely damaged, according to doctors. Most of this waste finds its way into the landfills on the City’s outskirts, where solid wastes are deposited.

In India there is an abysmal gap between environmental legislation and enforcement. Besides, there is no specific law or legislation to deal with e-waste and, to make matters worse, India allows import of PCs that are less than 10 years old. The present practice to manage e-waste is through various low-end management alternatives such as product reuse, conventional disposal in landfills, and burning in the open air, apart from recycling, which exposes the worker to the hazards of the metals. Some of the NGOs have been working towards an effective e-waste management policy. Such initiatives by NGOs go a long way in ensuring strong safety networks.

Source: “E-waste causing soil, water pollution”, *The Hindu*, June 25, 2003

Following these experiences, it was realised by those strongly advocating reforms that there was a need for what they called a strong ‘safety net’. The civil society organisations such as the NGOs therefore grew extremely important in their effort to prevent a crisis.

10.3.2 The New NGOs

The NGOs that have come as a complement to the reforms agenda are the new NGOs. It is pointed out that the NGOs have an important role in supporting the World Bank’s policies. They are seen as an integral part of the structural adjustment packages through which the World Bank and the IMF impose public sector reforms centred on reducing expenditure, restructuring the public sector and ending state intervention in markets and projects. This is where the NGOs come in, as partners and agents of social funds and other compensatory schemes designed to limit the social and political upheavals resulting from these adjustment programmes. By giving a larger role to the NGOs participating in cushioning the shock of SAPs, and by creating new jobs, the Bank is hoping to gain for itself a ‘kinder, gentler’ image.

10.3.3 NGOs and MNCs

As part of the economic reforms, the role for markets as institutions and MNCs as organisations has increased. And over a period of time, their social relevance has been getting redefined.

Traditionally, it was argued that the purpose of business was only profit-maximisation. It is presumed that in a competitive market, inequalities in wealth are legitimate as the possession of wealth is in essence a reflection of the contribution of its possessor to the generation of wealth. Since more wealth and economic activity meant more opportunities, generation of wealth was seen as a meaningful contribution to the social well-being. Those building business empires were admired as those that contributed to development. However, it was after the bitter experience of the Great Depression of the 1930s, followed by the devastation created by the Second World War that demands for greater egalitarianism were raised by the social justice movements. These took varied forms such as consumer forums, trade unions, human rights and environmental movements. This was also the time when Welfare states became a general model in most of the countries adopting capitalism.

The Welfare state was a strong instrument of redistribution of wealth. It was in this backdrop that notions of ‘free market’ capitalism had to stand the litmus test of their social commitment. It was this social pressure that brought about the concept of ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’. According to Bowen, the social responsibilities of a businessman consisted of obligations “to pursue those policies, make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of objectives and values to society.”

Corporate Bodies and Social work: Many corporate bodies are working together with various NGOs in doing service to the underprivileged and physically challenged. By taking up a social initiative, the companies, of late, have been taking up major responsibility towards the well being of the society. They are extending monetary benefits by contributing certain percentage of their budgets to the social work. Many of the corporate bodies have already been handling community projects along with NGOs. Donations to NGOs call for tax benefits. Though the onus for human development lies with the government, which should use the tax-payers' money for such initiatives, many companies, however, are successfully breaking this mindset, by coming forth and putting into action some social development in conjunction with the Government. The successful scheme of the mid-day meal in the municipal and Government schools has appealed to many firms. Other schemes include: The Larsen and Toubro company provides counselling to people living with HIV and is engaged in partnerships with governmental organisations and NGOs to ensure assistance provision; the Ullas Trust of Polaris Software Labs' scholarships to a number of students, IBM KidSmart programme introducing technology at the pre-school level and Maruti Udyog Limited Company's efforts towards providing a cleaner environment and conserving energy resources and so on. The trend observed in social responsibility initiatives is that the older, traditional firms want to look at long-term projects that they can adopt and nurture over a few years. The corporate giants such as Wipro and Infosys have established respective 'Foundations' through which they accomplish community work.

Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mp/2004/03/22/stories/2004032201850100.htm>;
<http://www.indianngos.com/corporate/l&t/caseexamples.htm>

In the later periods, the World Business Council for sustainable development defined Corporate Social Responsibility as “the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local communities and society at large”. It is as part of this understanding that the corporate sector started actively involving itself in philanthropic activities, contributing by way of direct involvement and/or by providing the necessary resources to a number of activities including Community Development, Educational Foundations, Environmental Protection Projects and Charity. NGOs and the corporate sector find a common ground in these activities.

SAQ 2

Select a specific NGO and evaluate its role in the environmental movements, its relationship with MNCs, if any and its performance.

10.4 NGOs versus SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

The failures of Market, State and the exploitation perpetuated by various structures of dominance in the society have ushered in various transformative socio-political movements in the Third World. These movements have criticised the role played by the NGOs. Some points of this criticism are given below:

On NGO Funding

In a recent move in India, the Home Ministry has decided to regulate funding of various NGOs. It is pointed out that by 31 March, 2001, there were 22,924 NGOs registered as receiving foreign funds. Another 638 NGOs had secured approval for foreign funding. In the year 1999-2000 the total foreign funding received by these NGOs amounted to Rs.39246.3 million. In the following year the foreign funds received by NGOs increased by 15.56 percent to Rs.4, 53,523 million.

Among the nations that were identified as the major donors were the United States, which contributed Rs.6775.9 million, United Kingdom, which contributed Rs.6445.1 million, and Germany (Rs.6445.1 million). Apart from this, in the Seventh Five Year plan, the Government of India has allocated Rs.3800 million for the NGO sector. It is further pointed out that out of these funds, the highest amounts were received mainly by the NGOs specialising in rural development and health and family welfare. A total of Rs.5477.4 million was received for rural development activity, and Rs.4329.8 million towards health and family welfare.

However, it is pointed out that unlike the socio-political activists, those involved in the NGO activity work not because of their idealism, but because they get paid for it. They are like any professional employee in a job. They are often said to be receiving substantial amounts and salaries but their commitment to the cause that they represent, is said to be in doubt.

Accountability of the NGOs: Many of the NGOs in India receive huge funds from the national and international donors. In order to ensure a true presentation of financial statements, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has released the guidelines for the accounting and auditing of the NGOs.

This would ensure transparency and accountability by the NGOs for the optimum utilisation of funds for public welfare. The accounting and auditing procedures vary from one NGO to another lacking uniformity. A uniform procedure can, in the long run, be used as a standard guide so that the discrepancies are avoided.

It is also evident from various experiences that the attitude these NGOs take towards various problems are often mechanistic, aimed more at reaching the targeted numbers to show the on-going work rather than genuine concern, leading to frustration amongst those employees of these organisations that evince passion for social change.

Some Questions about NGO Politics

The functions that NGOs perform and the manner, in which they conduct themselves, according to a school of thought, have great significance in terms of their political implications. In the first place, in continuation of the earlier comment on social activity as a professional obligation rather than a social obligation resulting from the salaried employee status of the activists, it is seen to be part of a larger political process. It is argued that this reduction of social obligation into a professional one is

part of a neo-liberal strategy to de-politicise the problems of the masses. It is also seen as a process of co-option of the politically articulate critiques of the system. It is observed that the bulky salaries, the standards of living, the life styles and the language of conducting the discourse about social change by the employees of some of the affluent NGOs, are quite elitist, alienating themselves from mass politics. Going a little further, there are also the critics who see a conspiracy in the rise of certain types of NGOs. Michael Edwards observes that the concept of development as defined by the NGOs, in fact, reinforces a counter revolutionary thinking. Palmer Jones argues on similar lines that NGOs are essentially status-quoists creating distortions about notions of development and democratisation. There are also some scholars who have seen NGOs as part of the financial capital-based imperialism. It is also alleged that since in the neo-liberal regime both the state and the markets are reluctant to perform the welfare activities, the NGOs are seen as organisations that are cheap substitutes, as they would be willing to carry out the same tasks at far lesser costs.

However, it is pointed out that while these organisations work amongst the poorest of the poor, they actually operate within the framework of the donor country's foreign policy and also indoctrinate people with ideas and opinions that are in essence in the interests of the donor country, thus resulting in what is called 'manufacturing of consent'. In fact, it is also argued that the developed nations do not donate money without expecting any returns. Rather, the act of donation is a conscious self-interested process of moral coercion and is guided by a quid-pro-quo reasoning. There are also other trends of critique, associated with the role of various religion based NGOs, raising controversies about carrying out religious conversions in the garb of developmental activities.

Despite some socio-political movements raising these points of critique, the relationship between NGOs and various socio-political movements is much more intricate and we try to present this below.

Interaction of Socio-Political Movements and NGOs

There are instances where NGOs and socio-political movements have entered into conflicts and there are also instances where they have been able to work together. The relationship often depends on the nature and demands of the socio political movements. It is quite obvious that usually, socio-political movements have much larger concerns than what is possible in the framework of the NGOs. However, it is in instances where certain demands put forth by the NGOs/ socio political movements, reinforce the NGOs' understanding of development and are perceived as a desirable change towards transformation by both the NGOs and the socio-political movements, that both these social forces have struck a common ground. Since the relationship between the NGOs and socio-political movements has been contingent upon the common demands, there are instances where the NGOs and socio-political movements have been conflicting and complementing one another. We present here both the instances.

A Moment of Conflict

We may look at how in some instances, NGOs have entered into a conflict with socio-political movements. In case of the proposed Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) across the Narmada River, certain questions have been raised by movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). It is pointed out that in NBA's understanding, SSP implied:

Unprecedented displacement, violation of the right to life and livelihood of people, the degeneration of land, water and forest resources, the un-tenability of benefits, the staggering financial burden, and the consequent international debt trap...

It is said that to counter Narmada Bachao Andolan's (NBA) criticism of Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP), the Gujarat government organised rallies, festivals, and exhibitions throughout the state and tried to propagate the idea that the SSP was the real lifeline of Gujarat. Amongst those supporting the government's view were various NGOs of Gujarat. Some of these NGOs argued that their primary concern was to bargain for a fair compensation for those affected by the project. The radical opposition by the NBA was characterised by these NGOs as 'lofty ideal' and 'not responsible activism'. The NGOs also maintained that 'rehabilitation was impossible' as 'enough land is not available'. A large number of NGOs therefore took a stand that NBA's total opposition to the project was couched in rhetoric and romanticism.



Fig.10.3: Rooftops are all that remain of a village in the flooded Narmada valley after the sluice gates of the dam were opened (Source: image.pathfinder.com)

However, it is maintained by other scholars such as Kothari, that the stand NBA was taking was 'nothing short of challenging the fundamental structures of power and patronage, received categories and ideologies as well as representative processes that discriminate against the primary victims of economic development'. Thus we find from the above instance that the orientation of the developmental NGOs is quite different from the socio-political movements articulating alternative development thinking, which might as it did in this case, lead to a conflicting relation between the socio-political movements and the NGOs.

A Moment of Solidarity

There are a number of areas where NGOs and socio-political movements have co-operated. A large number of NGOs have been part of the struggle opposing the practice of untouchability against 'lower castes'. The struggle for equal opportunities and dignity for Dalits (who are considered as the lowest in the strata of society) and the abolition of caste system and social transformation are much larger issues being addressed by the Dalit movement. While some NGOs have emerged with the specific objective of addressing Dalit issues, other organisations such as civil liberties and human rights groups have also taken up these problems.

As also in the case of feminist movements, one finds that the feminist movement has solidarity with some NGOs. In the recent constitution of micro-credit societies as part of the formation of self-help groups, for instance, a section of feminists have noted that these societies have certainly contributed to an increased socialisation of women. It is maintained that at least in case of some women, it is for the first time that they have entered the public space.

They have found that these societies might not have actually accomplished the original task of elevating the status of women by providing them with economic independence from the male heads of the household. However, they have certainly contributed towards giving women an opportunity to ventilate their woes, thus reducing their suffering and giving them an opportunity to become aware of the world around them.

SAQ 3

In continuation with your answer to SAQ 2, suggest measures for turning the NGOs into more effective instruments for environmental action that are in sync with the socio-political aspirations of the people.

Addressing the Challenges – the Civil and Political Space

The analysis of the conflicting and solidarity movements between the socio-political movements and the NGOs can be analysed if one takes into consideration the different spaces in which these institutions operate and the interconnections between these spaces. However, even before one starts analysing these interconnections, we may discount those NGOs that have degenerated into commercial ventures and have no real social commitment. We may also find this analysis not relevant for those

political movements that legitimise oppression of the vulnerable by the dominant, whether it be on religious, caste, region, gender or based on any such grounds.

Organisations working for social change have been conceptually classified into civil society organisations and political organisations, though no such strict separation exists. The classification depends on what is the reference point of the organisation, whom is the organisation addressing. If the reference point is the state or various other political organisations, then it is essentially operating in a political space. If the reference point is the various social institutions, whether it is family, caste, community etc., then it is essentially operating in a civil society space. There is a long debate in social and political theories on the relationship between these spaces. While one school of thought believes that the state essentially is an instrument in the hands of those that are dominant in the society, the other school of thought sees no such structured interconnection between the two spaces. It maintains that the state and civil society are completely autonomous of each other.

The Green Belt Movement, Kenya

The Green Belt Movement (GBM) is a grassroots non-governmental organisation based in Kenya that focuses on environmental conservation, community development and capacity building. Prof. Wangari Maathai established GBM in 1977, under the auspices of the National Council of Women of Kenya. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for the year 2004 for her persistent efforts towards the contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace. She has struggled for environmental and human rights, especially the rights of women. She often fought with the Kenyan Government regarding the above issues. Notably, this is the first time ever that an environmentalist has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. This proves that one of the essential factors for a right to livelihood is a clean and green environment. The purpose of the GBM was to create a society of people who consciously work for continued improvement of their green and clean environment, and promote consciousness for self-determination, equity, improved livelihoods, and environmental conservation- using tree planting as an entry point. The GBM helps in reducing the effects of deforestation and providing a forum for women to be creative and effective leaders. It also involves the transfer of technology from experts to the people, turning small scale farmers into agro-foresters. Public awareness was raised on issues related to environment and development. GBM today has over 600 community networks across Kenya that care for 6,000 tree nurseries. It has helped in planting more than 30 million trees on private and public land, protected reserves, and in urban centres. This has resulted in the transformation of many landscapes (forests, steep slopes and other degraded areas) and protection and restoration of habitats for local biodiversity (plants and animals). Awareness of the impacts of ecological decline has increased along with public interest in defending the environment, including forests and public parks and open space. GBM emerged as an empowered community and helped in protecting the natural resources by tree-planting and civic and environmental education programmes. GBM's activities have enabled various communities to understand the essential linkages between their basic needs and a healthy environment and the need for equitable and sustainable development.

Source: <http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/>

A third point of view argues on the lines that despite the fact that the dominant sections in the society do have greater influence on the state, there is also a democratic space which exists as a result of the search of these dominant groups for legitimacy. And it is this self-conflicting act that generates some space for progressive social change.

Thus, despite the structural connection between the civil society and the state, there is a level of autonomy. If one takes the first perspective on the relation between the state and the civil society, all social transformation essentially gets located in the political space. If one takes the second perspective, then social transformation becomes independent of the political space. However, if one takes the third perspective, then social transformation can be seen as a continuum, and both the political and civil society spaces become relevant. These conceptual categories may help us in understanding various NGOs and analysing their relation with different socio-political movements.

10.5 ALTERNATIVE NGOS

Based on the above understanding of NGOs' relation with markets on one hand and their relation with socio-political movements on the other, which is varied and evolving, we may approach the idea of identifying conventional NGOs and the alternative NGOs. In order to understand what alternatives NGOs could mean, we need to, first of all, understand what the conventional NGOs are and also understand the possible alternatives that could exist. As already pointed out, at this point of time, the development NGOs are the conventional NGOs. However, this does not mean that all NGOs that are pursuing development agendas are conventional NGOs. A conventional NGO more specifically refers to those NGOs that have endorsed the view that markets are the primary institutions in accomplishing the tasks of development. However, within this paradigmatic framework, there are possible alternatives.

If the dominant viewpoint in the 'how of development' suggests giving greater role to the industrial sector for instance, the alternative NGOs could mean those that strive to change the priorities and articulate the interests of other sectors for resource allocation. The 'alternative' could also mean how the wealth so generated is distributed and how this perspective of distributive justice is articulated. The conventional NGOs believe in the economic rationale of distribution, by arguing that the method of redistribution must ultimately lead to greater economic benefits than costs. Alternative NGOs would then mean: (a) those that take long term benefits perspective in arguing that the distributive justice might not show up immediate benefits but certainly there would be long term returns or (b) those which could in fact argue for altruism in redistribution.

Apart from these possible meanings of alternative NGOs within the broad conventional framework, alternative NGOs could be those that radically differ with the framework itself and look at themselves as located outside it. Alternative in this sense of the term could be either those NGOs that denounce the proposition of a limitless growth of wealth and argue that the development process must take into consideration the constraints posed, for instance, by nature that have a different set of rules guiding its sustenance and regeneration. Alternative could also mean those NGOs that challenge the very idea of an anthropo-centric worldview. These are the ecology conscious organisations that have altogether different measures of valuing the 'good of the society'. Generation of wealth in this perspective might well be a marginal or an irrelevant indicator of social well-being. While all the above mentioned NGOs are alternative only in an incremental sense, the last variety of NGOs is alternative in a qualitative sense of the term.

10.6 SUMMARY

- The NGOs in general including environmental NGOs are defined in various ways. The NGOs have existed for a very long time but have taken a structured existence only since the post World War II period and "environmentally conscious NGOs" are relatively recent phenomena.
- There are different ways of understanding the structure of NGOs and the role they play in the society. Different analytical perspectives determine the choice of indicators to analyse the structure of NGOs.
- As part of the new economic orientation, there is an increased role of markets and the MNCs have become crucial. While the markets determine the rules of engaging in the process of development, the MNCs control large amounts of resources. Thus it has become necessary for the NGOs to take a clear perspective on their relationship with markets as institutions and the MNCs as business

organisations. This process of taking positions has also changed the character of the NGOs leading to the rise of what are referred to as new NGOs.

- While the market has become central to the development process, interests of the marginalised and the excluded have got articulated through various socio-political movements. These movements have criticised the NGOs about their funding mechanisms, their political positions and questioned their role. While NGOs have remained mostly focused on issues, the socio-political movements have raised structural questions. As the socio-political movements are often mass based, it has become necessary for the NGOs to address them and to define their relationship with these movements.
- Based on the perspectives adopted by the NGOs about the relationship between the civil-society space and the political space, their relationship with socio-political movements get determined. If one understands what type of NGOs have come to be conventional and dominant, and if one grapples with the possibilities within and outside the existing frameworks, we can come up with what alternatives exist for NGOs and what alternative NGOs could mean.

10.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the origin of NGOs and their impact on global policies.
2. Explain the linkages between MNCs and NGOs and their attitude towards development.
3. What, according to you, will be the impact of alternative NGOs on the future society?

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