Chapter VII

Recommendations and Policy Implications

Reducing imbalances in status of men and women in all fields - social, legal, economic and political - has concerned social reformers and activist’s world over for many decades. In many countries, the thrust for change was towards reducing discrimination against women, in employment and wages in the organized and unorganized industrial sectors. A number of activists, in developing countries of the North, where some democratic institutions had been published and had matured during almost a century before the two World Wars, pushed for universal franchise as an empowering agent for the poor and women through election of their representatives. If one looks at the history of the struggle for women’s rights, both in India and the world over, the last four decades has been the most eventful in bringing about the necessary shifts in thinking and in the achievement of practical policy changes. From the fervent feminism of the sixties to the introspection on the status of women in the seventies, to women-in-development debate in the eighties and gender equality issues in the Nineties, the forty years have been a short but momentous in transition towards gender equality, which is an essential input for participatory democracy.

In Indian society, there has been a mutually complementary relationship between the government, the women’s movement and non-governmental organizations in efforts for empowerment of women. The women’s movement has continuously interacted with and influenced government action while NGOs have supplemented both governments’ and movement’ efforts for empowerment of women through grass root women’s I development projects.

There are three agent for empowerment of women: Government, Activists and NGOs (some have listed business also as one of the agents, which according to us is an insignificant instrument and its motive is social welfare and not necessarily empowerment). The International aid and development agencies have also been instrumental in pressurizing the governments to take appropriate action for ensuring gender equality, participatory democracy and development of women. The
Government in India, has been playing a supportive and complementary role, for women activists who have a ‘Strategic Gender Interest (SGI)’, by bringing about changes in policies and laws to make institutions, government departments and judicial systems, gender equal and by giving financial support to grass-root women NGOs who have a Practical Gender-need Interest (PGI) in implementing grass-root women’s empowerment programmes.

Methodological framework has been evolved by planning multifaceted projects for empowerment of women to bring together collaborative effort of the three agents of change. The multifaceted projects are based on conceptual framework discussed and deliberated on strategic gender interest (lobbied by women activists) in order to incorporate various aspects of empowerment - economic, political, social etc. The projects are usually developed around a collective central interest of the beneficiaries. But to achieve social change, the project design usually includes conscientization of the effected group on cognitive empowerment, their rights and obligations and need to develop self confidence through collective voice for elimination of disabilities based on gender. The project’ main focus could be organizing self-help group with a built-in component of micro-credit for economic grains, for non-formal education, training in skill etc. Thus both strategic and practical aspects of empowerment are brought together in one continuum. Addressing one type of need without the other is not sufficient to eliminate unjust and oppressive conditions or to satisfy basic needs. … Projects thus designed bring the strength of women activists’ vision and goals and grass root NGOs capacity for implementation of goals into one continuum. This gives strength to the macro level advocacy and policy interventions and expands the base of conscientized empowered women and their voices upwards. Through this process many grass-roots organization (NGOs) that are originally intended to meet basic needs, expand their awareness and activities to challenge oppressive social barriers. Such projects, if successfully implemented, ensure participation of poorer women beyond the project level and intervene in the broader policy-making agenda. The process which develops poor women’s strategic interests makes an enduring influence on the course of development achieving multiple dimensions of empowerment which combine individual and social change.
As mentioned above there are three agencies, which work for the welfare of the oppressed and the needy; the government, business sector and NGOs. Government is basically power oriented & has a tendency to try control and dictate. Similarly business sector tries to maximize profit, employing fair and foul means. In such a situation the civil society sector has to try to restrain both government and business sector and take the side of the people in order to protect their rights interests. If the civil society is strong the government will try to become more democratic and people-welfare-oriented. Similarly the business sector will also become more responsible and sensitive. Also the government can never reach out to meet all the needs of the people therefore the NGOs find a niche for themselves where government does not reach or has not paid adequate attention. The role of NGOs is to evolve through micro-level experimentation such model of people-oriented, self-reliant development which can be used by government agencies for large scale duplication.

One of major recommendation emerges from the study is that to ensure equity and equality, the NGOs should perform positive Functions which include:

- To educate people about laws, entitlements, etc;
- To advocate for changes in society or in structured inequality;
- To monitor governments both local and national so that the elites and multinationals are partly controlled;
- While providing credit and helping individual members improve themselves financially, the NGOs, empower women and the poor to stand up for themselves; They help create an alternative model of development; which is modeled on participatory decision-making;
- Develop processes of empowerment of local people, so that development can spread from village to village without help of the NGOs.

However, one of major observation of the study is that neither the women’s movement nor the NGOs have taken seriously, education in the broader sense as a tool for empowerment; some have adult education and basic literacy as part of multi-faced programmes, which in our opinion has been a major lacuna in the movement and has as a result slowed down the process of empowerment, and therefore needs to be addressed.
at the policy formulation stage. It is widely agreed fact that most NGOs are result oriented, effective & efficient. However, they have a limited coverage and outreach because of their structural and financial constraint, lack of co-ordination and access to information. Their goals also, as mentioned above get diluted, because of pressure of the funding agencies that might have different objectives and goals then what the fund receiving NGO might have. The detailed analysis of functioning of the selected NGOs revealed the following observations:

- NGOs are often small and have small budgets compared to governments and to the number of people needing help.
- The micro-finance and micro-enterprise projects undertaken by NGOs, do help people but tend to stabilize them at a very low socio-economic level.
- Because of their lack of regular financial support and need to pay their staff, the NGOs often have to compromise on what they consider to be the ‘right approach’ and do what funders want or what there is money available for.
- They, particularly the grassroots NGOs often lack access to mass media.
- The perfect complimentarily between the main objectives of NGOs who have a Strategy Gender Interest and grass-root NGOs who have a practical gender interest need to be established as two types of NGOs, however, are complementary to each other and both are important for empowerment of women. In case the women movement led by SGI slow down, it will slow down the work of PGI NGOs and the empowerment of grass-root women who form the large majority of women. In this context, the major policy implication is that the NGOs working at the State and National levels need to harmonize their objectives with the type of functions being undertaken by the grass root level NGOs, otherwise the disconnect between the two would jeopardize the whole process of women empowerment. For instance, National and State Women Commission as well as the Central and State Welfare Board should develop the perfect coordination and harmonization with the perceptions of grass root level NGOs in their region. Similarly, harmony in the vision and
objectives of the financial institutions and the NGOs a various levels need to be established

The movements for social transformation initiated by civil society has largely been conducted within a framework of ‘participative and mobilization politics’. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have played and continue to play a vital role in the shaping and Implementation of participatory democracy. Due to their wide range of experience over many decades. NGOs are increasingly well positioned to play an important role in helping society move away from unsustainable development patterns. NGOs possess “well-established and diverse experiences, expertise and capacity” which is “important to the review and implementation of environmentally sound and socially responsible sustainable development”.

The NGOs are indispensable to health promotion of the flexibility of their programmes and the extent of penetration. This has been the main area where government and NGO work is complementary in its implementation. The civil society organizations have often remains confined to the civil society domain, thus being unable to transcend the boundaries of mass mobilization and direct confrontation to effectively engage with the state. In recent years, however, the civil society space has witnessed the growth of organizations that devise innovative strategies that straddle the practice of mass mobilization with effective engagement with the state. These include efforts that emphasize on budget, research; participatory planning and public interest litigation amongst others.

There is need for strengthening all the NGOs with different and multi-variate objectives because they are all complementary to each other. There is also a need to develop inter-linking agents/forums between these different sets of empowerment agents. From the existing structures, it is recommended that only National Commission for Women (NCW) to take over this role. The NCW has a status with the government and international agencies; it is respected by women activist and is looked upon by grass-root NGOs for financial support. However, it will need to distance itself from government patronage and instead come closer to NGOs and activists, providing them the necessary forum for collective lobbying for issues. Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) is another all India body with its state levels offices which gives support to
grass-root NGOs, but it has no rapport with them. It is perceived more as an agent for implementation of welfare programmes of the government which may not necessarily lead to empowerment.

There is need for strengthening NGOs capacity through financial support which will enable them to carry on their respective empowerment initiatives. There has been lot of criticism for non-accountability and lack of transparency in working of NGOs. This perceived/real deficiency can be easily overcome by instituting fool-proof evaluation mechanism. The rapid mushrooming of NGOs, with financial support from financial aid agencies (Government, International, Bi-lateral and individual) with different objectives and programmes for empowerment can lead to conflict in objectives of the women’s movements as well as government policies. It is an opportune time that a further research is carried out in working of the NGOs as well as government agencies (like NCW and state level women’s commission) in order to ensure viable institutional structures, coordination (between different agents) and conformity with broader national policy goals.

Keeping in view the fact that NGOs have become the inevitable partners in the process of development specially in the social development of the society in the context of the marginalized groups such as women, the study perceives the following roles of the NGOs in the ensuing years, which the policy makers and administrators may weave in the policies to be made for the development and empowerment of women:

a) The first role that NGO have is to help build grassroots women’s movements where they don’t exist. They have to be catalysts in creating spaces for poor women to gather, mobilize, and organize. Their first priority of NGOs should be to catalysts and enable the formation of grassroots women’s organizations.

b) The second critical role NGOs have to play is supporting grassroots organizations, linking them together and helping transform them into a movement. They must also support women’s groups to develop critical social change and action agendas. It is important that they do not to impose agendas but provide information, analysis, and alternative viewpoints about issues. For example, if there are women who are facing the collapse of a market for resin
that they used to gather from the forest, it is essential for NGOs help women understand the factors and the larger forces that might have led to that collapse. Such factors include examining how liberalization, deregulation and de-controlling of certain markets might have allowed very cheap synthetic resin to be imported which has totally replaced their economic activity. This is a concrete example of NGOs can help facilitate the building of agendas and broadening of the information base and analytical frameworks that grassroots women should have with full claims and rights.

c) The third role is to step back and support the movement and its leadership in multiple ways. One such way is by opening up advocacy spaces - instead of occupying the advocacy spaces themselves, which is what they tend to do now. They should encourage movements to use things like research, data collection, and the creation of alternative analyses, as well as to promote changes in the patterns of engagement and negotiation with state authorities so that this relationship is not always one of confrontation or supplication, but it can move towards partnership and negotiation.

d) The fourth important role that NGOs can play is to enable grassroots women’s movements to form alliances and partnerships with a range of other movements and other civil society actors, in order to change the agendas and perspectives of these other movements. If women have a formidable mass base they can’t be ignored. But today women are not seen, in many parts of the world, as any kind of political force or as a mass base. This is partly because NGOs have been content to treat them as beneficiaries of various kinds of economic development programs. They are content to organize them into extremely successful savings and credit groups, for example, or into extremely successful microenterprise programs.

e) The fifth role of which NGOs have to assume to themselves is to constantly re-examine their role and relationship vis-a-vis grassroots women’s organizations and later when they become movements. This role is to critical in examining how their role and relationship vis-à-vis organization and movement building is changing. In case there is a very fundamental shift, NGOs might not be facilitating the emergence of a movement.
As regards an increase in professionalization within NGOs, private foundations, bilateral funders, the development banks, etc. - have certainly pushed for greater professionalization among their partners NGOs. There is a strong push for impact assessments, indicators, measurements of change, and so on. Besides, there has been a lot of “projectization” of NGOs, which is very connected to the question about the role of NGOs in building women’s’ movements. One of the reason that NGOs have been unable in playing movement building role is the projectization of funding. It is much harder now to get money to do basic mobilization and movement building as it is difficult to measure and show the impact of funding. But if an NGO is working on savings and credit project or an income generation project you can show in numbers your impact. Therefore, funders have had a big role to play in de-politicizing the role of the NGO sector as a change agents.