CHAPTER VII

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AND THE COMMUNITY

Voluntary organisations are often referred to as people's organisations because they originate from the felt needs of the people and are built around people's participation. The activities of VOs are mainly directed towards betterment of society in any manner or field whatsoever. VOs are considered to have certain advantages over other agencies when it comes to initiating welfare programmes for the community. As VOs have better rapport with the community than government agencies, they are expected to get better response from the people for their programmes. Through closer personal contact they are supposed to be able to mobilise the community and its resources for the welfare programmes. (Mathivanaan, 1991:1-2). This chapter discusses participation and involvement of community in the activities of the VOs and the methods and techniques adopted by the VOs for mobilising community support. It also highlights the views and opinions of community members about the VOs and their activities and examines the status of the VOs and their members in society.

1. Community Members' Participation in the Activities of the VOs

Participation of community members, particularly the parents or guardians of children, in the programmes of the VOs for child welfare is crucial for success of the
programmes. As has been mentioned earlier, VOs are considered to be some such institutions in society which can mobilise people at the grass root level to get involved with any developmental initiative for the people. In this backdrop it is but natural to assume that the VOs working for children are aptly supported by the community in general and parents or guardians of beneficiary children in particular. Efforts have been made in the present study to find out the extent of community participation in the programmes of child welfare of the VOs. It may be clarified that the term ‘community’, for the purpose of this study, refers to the group(s) of people amongst whom the VOs are working.

Different authors have sought to explain community participation in different manners. However, United Nations’ Social Development Division has put forward the most widely accepted explanation of community participation in welfare/developmental activities. It defines community participation as a process of activities comprising people’s involvement in decision making, contributions to the developmental effort and sharing the benefits derived from them (Goyal, 1990:12). Thus, community’s participation in welfare/developmental programmes can be discussed in terms of three aspects. First, community influence in the welfare programme, that is, how far the community has been able to influence decisions like what activities be taken up, how these to be carried out, etc. Second, community contributions towards the programme, whether or not the community concerned has been contributing, in some manner or other, for the programme. Third, utilisation of the services available under the programmes, that is, the community, particularly the eligible and targeted beneficiaries, have utilised the
services or not. These three dimensions have been examined in this study to understand the extent of community participation in the programmes of child welfare of the VOs.

As people centred organisations VOs are expected to create enough opportunities for the cross section of the community to constructively influence the welfare programmes for children. Thus, queries were made to the respondent parents of beneficiary children on whether they have been consulted during planning, implementation and evaluation of the programmes. It has been found that less than one fourth (24%) of the parents of beneficiaries only have been consulted by the VOs while planning their programmes. Again, during implementation stage also, same number of parents, that is, 24 per cent only were involved in various decision making processes. For evaluation of their programmes, the VOs however, reportedly consulted slightly larger number of community members. As per the responses, 34 per cent of the beneficiary parents have been consulted by the VOs for evaluating the programmes. The above data make it clear that the majority of the community members do not get any scope for influencing the programmes of the VOs. This is because the VOs seldom create opportunities for members of the community to take part in decision making process. In this context reference may also be made of the data presented in table 13 in Chapter V. Data in table 13 also show that only 13 per cent of the VOs consulted community members while planning programmes.

Contributions by the community members towards the programme is another important indicator of community participation. The types of contributions may vary greatly depending on the nature of programmes, requirements of the VOs and resources
available to the community. Responses have been collected from the selected parents of beneficiary children regarding the contributions they have made to the VOs from which their children are receiving services. Table 28 shows the number of parents making contributions and the nature of their contributions.

Table 28

Table showing contributions of parents of beneficiaries towards the VOs (Multiple response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of contributions</th>
<th>No. of contributing Parents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials/equipments</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>05.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food stuffs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>05.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour/Servivee</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No contributions</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from the table that only one-fourth of the beneficiary parents have made some contributions to the VOs. Majority of the parents and guardians (75%) have not contributed in any manner. Again, considering the fact that the VOs offer their services mostly to the economically weaker sections, one would expect that there would be no or very little contributions in cash from beneficiary parents. However, table 28 makes it clear that majority of those who contributed, made it in cash besides any other kind of contributions. Assisting and helping the VOs with free services or labour in various tasks is a kind of possible contribution that a community can make. Thus, some
parents (15%) also contribute by way of offering their services or labour to the VOs. As the table shows, a few parents have contributed materials/equipments, foodstuff, etc. to the VOs. Some of the parents who reportedly contributed in cash, have actually been paying a regular fee to the VOs for their services.

Following are the two cases of beneficiary parents helping and supporting the concerned VOs in their own ways.

- Mr. Saikia (45) is a resident of East Sarania area of Guwahati. An engineer by profession, Mr. Saikia is the father of two male children aged 10 years and 6 years. His elder son is a victim of cerebral palsy, a condition caused by damage to the brain. The boy’s brain was damaged partially due to some complications at birth. At present, the boy is suffering from multiple disabilities. Mr. Saikia was aware about a particular VO in Guwahati working for such children. He admitted his son in the institution run by the VO about 5 years ago. In this institution the boy is receiving special education, physiotherapy, speech therapy, etc. and his condition is gradually improving. Basically due to the concern for their child both Mr. Saikia and his wife used to visit the VO and frequently interacted with the office bearers and functionaries of the VO. During such interactions the members of the VO apprised them about the need for cooperation of the parents of children in making the services of the VO more effective and requested for all possible helps and assistance. In course of time both Mr. and Mrs. Saikia became closely involved with the activities of the VO. Observing the good work done by the functionaries of the VO, and realising the need for dedicated manpower to run the institution, the couple now occasionally act as volunteers. Both Mr. and Mrs. Saikia take active part in awareness campaigns, seminars, out-reach activities, etc. organised by the VO. As parent members of the VO, they are also involved in planning and evaluation of the activities of the VO. Mr. Saikia has been paying a regular fee to the VO at a stipulated rate for its services to his son. On some special occasion like the Children’s Day, World Disabled Day, etc. Mr. Saikia alongwith a few other
parents distribute sweets and fruits to the children. According to Mr. Saikia, he has been involved with the activities of the VO not only for the sake of his son but also because of the motivation to support a noble cause.

Mr. Deka (36) is a mason by profession who live at Moukuchi village in Kamrup. He has a small family with his wife and two daughters aged 7 years and 5 years. Though Mr. Deka is a skilled mason, due to lack of adequate jobs in the village and the adjoining areas, his financial condition is rather poor. His elder daughter goes to the village primary school and the younger daughter attends a pre-school centre run by a local VO. His wife and daughters have also availed some other services organised by the VO like free health check-up, and also vaccinations for the daughters. Mr. Deka knows the office bearers, members and functionaries of the VO as they are from the same village. Although Mr. Deka appreciates the services rendered by the VO, he has not so far associated himself with the VO. He is too preoccupied with his profession and other problems relating to his family, and neither has the time nor the urge to get involved with the VO. He does not have to pay any fee to the VO for its services. He is vaguely aware that the VO gets government grants for its activities and that sometimes it collects donations from wealthy persons of the area. He has never contributed any money to the VO and the VO also has never made such a request. On several occasions, however, Mr. Deka has helped the VO in repairing the small building which houses the office and the pre-school centre of the VO. He never takes his usual wage for his labour for such work and rather feels happy to help the VO which is serving his family members along with other villagers.

On being asked about the reasons for not contributing in any manner, 48 out of 75 per cent of the parents pointed out that they were not approached or asked by the concerned VOs for any contribution. A sizeable number of parents (21%), on the other hand, stated that they have not contribute because of their poor economic condition. Some of them are also not keen to contribute and consider that it is the duty of the VOs to help their children. A small group (06%), however, are willing to contribute in some
Two cases of such parents are presented below:

Mrs. Devi (42) and her husband Mr. Prasad (50) live with their five children at Kalibari, near Guwahati Railway Station. The ages of the children ranged from 4 years to 14 years. Amongst the children there are 2 boys and 3 girls. Both Mrs. Devi and her husband are daily wage earners, but even with the labour of both of them they could hardly manage two meals a day for themselves and their children. None of their children go to school. The elder children roam about in the railway station and nearby areas for most part of the day and use to come home only for food and to sleep at night. About a year back the functionaries of a VO enrolled two of the elder children at the centre opened for street and working children in that area. Since then both the children, the eldest boy and next one a girl, are attending the centre. In the centre the children are learning to read and write, and are receiving training in cutting, tailoring, stitching and other vocations. They are given one meal everyday and are provided with uniforms and books. Besides, some recreational activities are also organised by the VO for the children. The functionaries of the VO have visited the house of Mrs. Devi and Mr. Prasad on several occasions. The functionaries have explained to them about the need for sending their two children to the centre regularly. Mrs. Devi and Mr. Prasad are happy that at least two of their children are engaged in some meaningful activities instead of roaming about. They are, however, not aware as to how that particular VO has been organising those services and are also not bothered to know about it. They have never contributed anything in any way to the VO and have never thought about it. The VO has also not asked them to contribute in any manner. Mrs. Devi and her husband is of the opinion that even if the VO had approached, they are not in a position to help the VO because of their economic condition. Besides, they are too busy with their work for managing two meals a day and cannot think of sparing any time for the
Mr. Kathar (57) is a resident of a remote tribal village called Nortap in Sonapur area of Kamrup. A poor cultivator, Mr. Kathar is the father of 4 children. About two years back his youngest daughter, aged 7 years then, met with a road accident. Though the girl survived, she developed some deformities in her right leg. As a result she lost the ability to stand in a normal posture and could not walk without help. Mr. Kathar was not in a position to go for better treatment of his daughter and almost resigned and gave up all hopes and took it as the fate’s play. Then one of his neighbours informed him about a VO working for disabled children in that area. With the help of his neighbour Mr. Kathar approached the VO. The functionaries of the VO immediately got the girl examined by specialist doctors at Guwahati Medical College Hospital who suggested corrective surgery. Taking into consideration the financial condition of Mr. Kathar the VO took all responsibilities, financial and others, relating to the girl’s treatment. Subsequently the girl was successfully operated upon nearly six months ago. At the time of this interview she has been undergoing physiotherapy under qualified therapist of the VO. The condition of the girl has improved considerably. Now she can stand up almost normally and can even take a few steps without support. During the whole process Mr. Kathar has not spent any amount and all expenditures are borne by the VO. As the VO has not asked Mr. Kathar to share some part of the expenditures, he has not given a thought to it. While Mr. Kathar is extremely grateful to the VO, he cannot figure out how he can support the VO in return.

However, it would not be entirely correct to conclude that VOs do not depend or receive support from the larger community. In fact, a considerable number of VOs are substantially supported by some sections of community and other institutions and organisations within the community. They are the well-to-do and affluent sections of the society and organisations like business houses, charity trusts, etc. As has been mentioned...
in Chapter IV, 84 per cent of the VOs in the present study reportedly received various kinds of support from such sections of community and organisations. The contributions include cash, land, building, furniture, equipments, vehicle, food stuff and also free services for implementation of the programmes. However, in most cases the donors’ children are not necessarily the beneficiaries of the programmes of these VOs. There are certain instances when local community intervened to save some VOs from certain crisis as in the following cases.

■ A state level VO is running an orphanage/destitute home for boys at Guwahati. The VO is dependent mainly on government grants for managing the institution. Local community including the officials and staff of nearby Guwahati Oil Refinery of Indian Oil Corporation also occasionally extend various kinds of assistance to the VO. However, once in the mid nineties the VO was not getting the government grants for maintenance of the inmates for a very long period. For a few months the VO managed to meet the essential expenditures for food, etc. with its own resources. Then a time came when the VO exhausted its resources and the office bearers and the functionaries expressed their helplessness at the state of affairs. There was then no option for the young children but to starve. At this point of time a group of women consisting mostly of the wives of the staff of Guwahati Refinery and also some other local women intervened. This group collected funds through donations and started providing the starving children with food and other essentials. They continued their support till government assistance was resumed. ■

■ A VO in Guwahati running a Child Guidance Centre was facing the problem of accommodation as the VO had to suddenly vacate the part of a school building it was occupying. Although the VO required a spacious accommodation for its activities yet due to lack of sufficient fund took only one part of a double storied building on rent. In the meantime the VO approached several industrial and business houses for assistance. Immediately thereafter, one fine morning a
few officials from an industrial house, India Carbon Limited of Guwahati, visited
the VO. The officials observed the activities of the VO and discussed about the
problem of accommodation with the office bearers of the VO. Later on the
company offered to bear the rent of not only the already occupied part but the
whole building for smooth conduct of the activities for as long as necessary. The
VO gratefully accepted the offer and is continuing its activities in the spacious
building.

It has been observed that the VOs located in urban areas, particularly in Guwahati
city easily receive support from individuals as well as organisations and institutions like
business houses, banks, etc. This is because those VOs in Guwahati city which are doing
commendable work easily get noticed and come to prominence. Business firms or other
institutions willingly come forward to assist such VOs. On the other hand, the VOs
located in interior rural areas with relatively a smaller scale of operation remain mostly
obscure. At the same time, there are very few big business houses or such organisations
in rural Kamrup. Therefore, the VOs in rural areas of the district seldom receive any help
from such organisations and depend mostly upon the affluent and well-to-do individuals
in their areas of operation for support and contribution.

When it comes to utilisation of services of the VOs, it has been found that mostly
poorer sections of the community avail the services of the VOs. Table 29 shows
distribution of families of beneficiary children according to income range. It can be seen
from the table that most of the beneficiary families belong to lower income categories.
Children of only a small number of families from higher income range utilise the services
as can be observed from the table. VOs usually organise their services targeting the
children of weaker section of society. Children from higher income families do not
generally require such interventions. Therefore, the utilisation rate is lower in higher income range. There are, however, certain programmes and activities of the VOs which are meant for children of all sections of community. These include services for disabled children, some recreational and hobby development activities like sports, music, etc. Such programmes of the VOs are availed by all the children of the area where a VO is working irrespective of the income of the family. Thus, by and large, it can be said that the benefits of the efforts of the VOs for welfare of children are received and utilised by the target population.

Table 29

Distribution of families of beneficiary children according to income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly income range (in Rs.)</th>
<th>No. of families</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1000 and below</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001-3000</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3001-5000</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5001-7000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>07.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7001-9000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>07.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9001-11000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>06.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 11000</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>09.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the discussion in the foregoing paras it can be summarised that the three indicators of community participation in the programmes of the VOs show different trends. Participation of community in terms of influencing the programmes of child
welfare is rather minimal. Very few VOs actually consult and involve community members while taking major decisions regarding their activities. Most of the VOs, however, garner support and contributions in different forms from the community while implementing the programmes. It must, of course, be mentioned that only a section (one-fourth) of the parents beneficiary children have actually extended support and contributed to the VOs. The bulk of the assistance and contributions have come from the affluent sections of the community whose children are not always targeted by many of the services of the VOs. The VOs tend to depend more upon the affluent sections of community for support rather than the target population of their programmes. It is usually assumed by the VOs that being poor the target or beneficiary population would not be in a position to render any help. Similar findings have also been reported in a study carried out by the then Central Institute of Research and Training in Public Cooperation (CIRTPC). The main approach of the VOs seemed to be confined to the collection of funds or acquiring other similar helps from the upper middle class population who give big donations. The need to involve many by accepting small contributions in any manner has not been adequately recognised by many VOs (CIRTPC, 1971:155). In respect of utilisation, of course, the services of the VOs can be said to have benefited those who actually needed it.

2. Methods Adopted by the Voluntary Organisations for Mobilising Community and their Resources

To elicit their participation the community members need to be approached, motivated and mobilised. It has been found that 79 per cent of the VOs make conscious efforts to motivate and mobilise the community for supporting their programmes. These
VOs adopted one or other method or a combination of methods for mobilising people. Table 30 shows the method(s) utilised by the VOs for mobilising the community.

Table 30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods used</th>
<th>No. of VOs</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holding community meeting</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal contact/house to house visit</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>53.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formation of parents associations/local</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>21.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committees, etc.</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>21.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness programmes and allied activities</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of media</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>08.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No efforts made</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>21.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table illustrates that the VOs adopt a variety of methods for community mobilisation. The data in the table also establish that large sections of VOs rely on conventional methods like conducting community meetings, making personal contacts, house to house visit, etc. for mobilising the community. Other methods of community mobilisation are utilised by comparatively lesser number of VOs. Parents associations, local committees or village level committees or womens groups are formed by quite a few VOs as a strategy of mobilising supports from the community. Such committees or groups are usually entrusted with some responsibilities to instill a sense of involvement among the community members. It facilitates in obtaining necessary supports and
contributions from the larger community. Some of the VOs undertake awareness programmes and some allied activities with the aim of motivating and mobilising people to participate in the programmes of the VOs. Amongst these VOs there are a few who have adopted innovative methods for this purpose. *Shramdaan* (contribution of labour) is one such method undertaken by two of the VOs for community mobilisation. In this particular approach the volunteers of the concerned VOs engage themselves in certain activities like developing the village roads, cleaning the village pond, cleaning the village, etc. Such acts of the volunteers naturally motivate the larger village community to come forward and assist the VOs in other endeavours too. Another VO, again, organised *padayatra* (foot march) through the interior areas to raise awareness amongst the people and to motivate them to support the VO for initiating welfare programmes for children. Various community based methods like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) are used by two VOs for mobilising the community and their resources. As table 30 indicates, a very small number of VOs have also taken the help of the print media, to mobilise people to support their activities. Again, it may be noted that 21 per cent of the VOs did not make any efforts for eliciting community support.

Queries were also made to the respondent parents of beneficiary children on whether they have been ever approached by the VOs for extending support to their activities. It came to light that nearly half of the beneficiary parents (48%) were never approached by the VOs for any kind of support. On the other hand, majority of the VOs reported adopting one or other method(s) for community mobilisation. Such disparity in responses from two categories of respondents on the same issue has occurred mainly for
two reasons. Firstly, although majority VOs undertake community mobilisation drives, such campaigns do not always target those sections of community whose children are served by the VOs. Rather, the campaigns aim the elite and affluent sections of community who are identified as potential donors or whose patronage in any manner can strengthen the VOs. Children of such community members are not generally the beneficiaries of the VOs’ services. As has also been mentioned earlier in this chapter, many VOs do not approach the parents of beneficiary children who come from lower income groups for support and contributions. It is usually assumed that such weaker sections of community would not be in a position to extend any support other than receiving the services. VOs based on religious or philanthropic ideology also do not deem it proper to seek any kind of helps or contributions from the target community. Therefore, when parents of beneficiary children were asked whether they have been requested by the VOs for any kind of support and contributions, many of them replied in negative. Secondly, most of the VOs who undertake community mobilisation drives adopt some such methods like organising meetings or making personal contacts, etc. that it cannot reach the cross section of people in the community. At the same time, such efforts are also very sparse and not well planned. For instance, majority of the VOs reported that community meetings are held only once in a year. Presumably, neither all community members were invited nor all of them attended the meetings. In the process, a large section of the community including parents of beneficiary children remained untouched. For these reasons the disparity in responses of the two categories of respondents have emerged.
3. Views and Opinion of Community Members About the VOs and their Activities

Views and opinions of the community about the voluntary organisations that fulfills some of their needs are crucial for understanding the VOs vis-à-vis the people. Community opinions are also to some extent indicative of the status of the VOs in the society. Performance of the organisations too, can be gauged through such opinions. If the community has opined favourably it can be regarded, to a certain extent, as a measure of success and efficiency of the VOs. Unfavourable opinions, on the other hand, may mean that the organisation have failed to meet the aspirations and expectations of the community (Bhatia, 2000: 196). Thus, in the presenty study opinions of the community members, more specifically the parents of children have been sought on certain aspects relating to the VOs and their activities.

It has been found that majority of the parents (55%) have come to know about the VOs and their activities only when their children started receiving the services of the VOs. On the other hand, 45 per cent of the parents knew about the VOs long before their children began availing the services provided by the VOs. It is observed that in rural areas people are more acquainted with the VOs and their activities than in urban areas. This is because in rural set up due to closer interaction, people are generally more aware of the existence of the VOs or any other institution in the locality. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that all villagers get involved with the VOs. In urban setting mainly for loose social ties, many people do not know about the VOs till they come in contact with these organisations.
Most of the parents of beneficiary children, that is, 89 per cent opined that the VOs are one of the important parts of the society. The respondents have put forward various arguments in favour of such an opinion in their own language. These arguments can be summarised as follows -- the VOs take the responsibility of fulfilling some of the diverse needs of the weaker and vulnerable sections of the society. The VOs are a kind of institutional mechanism to look after those who need help and thus constitute an important part of the society. A small section of the parents (11%) are, however, not very sure whether VOs really constitute an important part of the society. Almost all the parents (98%) consider the services offered by the VOs in various sectors as essential for their children. These parents opined that in absence of the VOs, their children would have been deprived of some essential services. A very small number of parents (02%), of course, stated that they do not find the services of the VOs indispensable for well being of their children.

Voluntary organisations working for welfare of children are expected to be non-partisan and rational in terms of coverage of the beneficiaries through their activities. According to 77 per cent of the respondents the VOs are working for all sections of people irrespective of caste and creed. The emphasis of all the VOs is, however, always on covering the backward and poorer sections of community. The rest 23 per cent of the parents expressed that they are not aware whether the VOs serve the communities without any discrimination or not. The parents/guardians have also enumerated a host of benefits received by their children through the services of the VOs. A large section of the parents (55%) have also suggested some more activities to be taken up by the VOs. It has been found that some of them have suggested the activities keeping in view the interests
of their children. For example, the parents of disabled children stressed more on vocational guidance and training for such children. On the other hand, some other parents/guardians have advocated for more intensive and diverse activities for serving greater number of children of the community. The rest 45 per cent of the respondents parents, of course, expressed that they are not sure what additional activities should be taken up by the VOs.

It has been revealed that the community holds the persons associated with the VOs in high esteem. An overwhelming 91 per cent of the parents opined that the members of the VOs deserve a high status in society. According to these parents the members of the VOs should be accorded a revered status as they sincerely work for the welfare of the vulnerable sections of the society including children. The respondents have also been asked whether they think that the concerned VOs and their members also benefit in any manner from the activities of the VOs. More than one-third of the respondents (36%) believe that the VOs or their members do not benefit from the activities of the VOs. On the other hand, majority of the respondents (59%) expressed that they are not aware if any benefits are derived by the VOs or their members. Only a very small section of the parents (05%) think that the VOs and the members also benefit from the activities of the VOs. Likewise, majority of the respondents (73%) stated that they do not know if some members of the VOs utilise the forum of the VOs for any personal purpose. One fourth of the respondents (25%) are, however, firm in their opinion that the members do not utilise the VO for any personal achievements. Very few parents (02%) do think that some members also use the VOs for personal gain.
The following cases can be considered for understanding the opinions of community members about the VOs, their activities and the members and the functionaries.

Mr. Kalita (35) is a poor farmer who live at a remote village Kumtibari near Rangia in Kamrup. He has a small family with his wife and two children, a boy aged 5 years and a girl aged 3 years. Both of his children go to the crèche run by the VO in their village when Mr. Kalita and his wife go out to work in the field everyday. The children stay at the crèche from about 9'o clock in the morning till about 1'o clock in the afternoon. When Mr. Kalita's wife returns from her work in the field, she picks up the children from the crèche. Mr. Kalita informed that during their stay at the crèche, they are looked after by two lady attendants. Children of many other parents like Mr. Kalitas also go to the crèche. At the crèche the children play, learn to sing rhymes, listen to stories narrated by the attendants and get engaged in many other activities which they enjoy. Children are also given various food stuff to eat by the VO. Mr. Kalita feels that the crèche being run by the VO has become immensely useful for parents like them. This is because their children are looked after by the crèche when both husband and wife have to go out for work and there is no other to take care of the children. Mr. Kalita knows about the VO very well because it belongs to his village and has been functioning since his childhood. The crèche unit, however, has been started only a few years back by the VO. Besides, the VO is also engaged in organising health care programmes, educational programmes for children and other sections of villagers. Although Mr. Kalita has never been a member of the VO, yet he has close relationships with the office bearers and other functionaries of the VO. He respects the persons associated with the VO very much for their selfless services to the village children, particularly children of poor people like him. He opined that the VO has now become an important part of the village society and rendering essential services to the village people. Mr. Kalita does not see any other motive of the members of the VO behind their services other than welfare of village people including children. He also opined that the VO offers its services to all the villagers without any discrimination of
caste, religion etc. Though Mr. Kalita appreciates the contributions made by the VO in the field of health, education, etc. he desires that the VO takes up more health care oriented activities as health is a major problem of the village children.

Mrs. Rahangpi is a 36 years old housewife who belongs to Karbi tribe of Assam. She lives with her husband and two children at Gariaghuli village about 35 kilometres from Guwahati. Mrs. Rahangpi's husband is a farmer by occupation. As his own land holding is small, he also share crops others land to augment his income. Both of their children, however, are going to school. The elder of the two children, a girl, is 13 years old and is studying at class VI. The younger, a boy of about 10 years is going to the village primary school. Mrs. Rohangpi’s family particularly the two children are the beneficiaries of some welfare programmes of a VO operating in that area. According to Mrs. Rahangpi, about two years ago the functionaries of the VO based in Guwahati visited their village and held meetings with the village people and their leaders. Thereafter, the VO carried out various activities for the villagers, more particularly the children. It organises health checkup, distributes medicines, helps the villagers to improve the village roads, repair the school building, etc. It also distributes mosquito nets to prevent malaria amongst the villagers and supplies books and uniforms to school going children. At present the VO is helping Mrs. Rahangpi's daughter in a big way by arranging a sponsor for her education. Considering the fact that Mrs. Rohangpi’s daughter is a very bright student but her family’s economic condition would soon hamper in her studies unless outside support is provided, the VO arranged for a sponsor. The sponsor, who lives in far away Chennai, meets all expenditures pertaining to the girls’ education and keeps in constant touch through the VO. Mrs. Rahangpi and her family members feel ever grateful to the members of the VO for their services. She thinks that the interventions by the VO through different activities in the last two years have brought in a lot of changers in their lives. She considers that the services of the VO have turned out to be essential particularly for shaping the futures of her children. Mrs. Rahangpi, however, does not know whether the VO offers their services to all sections of people or not. In her village, she has, of course, seen that the VO is serving both tribal and caste communities. She does not have any
idea if the VO or its members benefit in any way from their activities or if they utilise the VO for some other purposes also. Mrs. Rahangpi admits that such VOs are some important organs of the society because, these often come to the rescue of people like her. She holds the persons associated with the VOs in high esteem for their services to the society.

Mr. Kakati (54) is a senior executive of a public sector oil company who lives at a posh colony in Guwahati. His youngest daughter who is about 14 years of age now, had been diagnosed as a mentally retarded child when she was only about 5 years old. Initially after the diagnosis Mr. Kakati consulted many psychiatrists, psychologists, etc. with the hope of curing her through some sort of treatment. However, all such experts informed him that there is no such cure to her problem and advised him to admit her in an institution for mentally retarded children so that her condition could be improved through special education and therapy. Mr. Kakati then admitted the girl in an institution for mentally retarded children, which is managed by a VO in Guwahati as a day scholar, however, Mr. Kakati did not like the services of the institution and withdrew his daughter from the institution. After that Mr. Kakati just confined the girl at home with the hope that her condition would improve as she grows up. Of course, the condition of the girl did not improve as expected and gradually it became difficult to manage her at home. Then about three years age one of the neighbours of Mr. Kakati informed him about another VO which runs a Day Care Centre for mentally retarded children. Since then the girl is sent to the Day Care Centre of the VO. She spends about six hours at the centre everyday where she receives special education, various kinds of skill training, vocational training, etc. For the services of the VO Mr. Kakati has to pay a fee, which according to Mr. Kakati, is quite high. Mr. Kakati opined that even after attending the centre for nearly three years his daughter’s condition has not improved much. He, thus, feels that the services of the VO are not indispensable for his daughter as these have not made much differences to her plight. He is also not sure whether the VO is really an important part of the society. Mr. Kakati has doubts that all sections of people can avail the services of the VO as it charges a high fee. According to him, although the VO claims that it does not take any fee from the poor beneficiaries, in reality the services of the VO are out of reach for the poor community. Mr.
Kakati expects the VO to improve the facilities at the centre and to introduce latest scientific methods of dealing with mentally retarded children with a team of specialists in the relevant fields. He thinks that the Day Care Centre is being run not only to help the needy children, but it is also a source of income for the office bearers and the functionaries. Therefore, the VO should commit itself to provide better service to the clients.

While summing up it needs to be kept in mind that there are always the possibilities of opinions being influenced by various factors. In certain cases self interests or a sense of obligation may induce parents of beneficiaries to give only positive opinions about the VOs or their members. Again, dissatisfaction or some clash of interests may also prompt some respondents to give biased opinions. Lack of knowledge about the VOs and also lack of interactions between the members of the VOs and the parents of beneficiaries may also lead to incorrect assumptions. Therefore, the opinions cannot always be taken as the absolute indicator of the underlying facts. Nevertheless, mass opinions certainly project the overall trends. Thus, an analysis of the opinions put forward by the respondents as presented in the foregoing paras clearly show that the VOs and their members enjoy a respectable status amongst the community they work with. The special status is accorded to the VOs and the members mainly because of the services rendered by them for the underprivileged children. Besides, the opinions of the parents of beneficiary children also indicate that the community members are, by and large, satisfied with the role played by the VOs in initiating welfare of their children.