CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present study entitled 'Role of Voluntary Organisations in Child Welfare in Kamrup District of Assam' covered 38 VOs located within the district and engaged in multifarious activities for welfare of children. The main areas of investigation included background of emergence of the VOs and their organisational structures, activities undertaken for child welfare and strategies of planning, implementing and evaluating the activities. The study also focused on extent of participation of community in the activities of the VOs, methods of community mobilisational, profile of the functionaries of the VOs, and the problems faced by the VOs. This chapter summarises the findings of the investigation and attempts to draw conclusions on the role played by these VOs for welfare of children in the district.

The study has brought to light that concern of some people for welfare of fellow human beings acted as the major driving force behind the formation of the VOs. The VOs covered under the study differed in the ways they had come into existence, in their ideologies, areas of work and manner of functioning. However, the basic aim of all these VOs, is welfare of weaker and vulnerable sections of the society. The organisational set up of the VOs consists of the usual two tier structure - the general body and the executive committee. The general body includes all members of the VO. The executive
committee is constituted, as per the provisions of the constitution of the VO, by the
general body and is empowered to manage the affairs of the VO. The member strength of
the majority VOs is moderate with a maximum of 100 members. The number of members
in the executive committees varied from 5 to 34 in different VOs. Youths predominate
amongst the members in a good number of VOs. There are a few VOs in which only
women are the members. Most of the VOs have elaborate ranks of office bearers. The
members of the executive committee are usually elected or nominated. The VOs
generally run on democratic principle, but instances have been found where the executive
committee exists only for names sake and one or a few persons actually control the
affairs of the VOs. There are a few VOs which are doing praiseworthy work but the
members of the some family literally manage the VOs. Thus, power structure of the VOs
is not always based on democratic norms. Similar observations have also been made by
Gangrade (1987:227), Das (1988:50) et al. in their studies of the VOs in different parts of
the India.

Activities for welfare of children is one of the prime agenda of the VOs. In fact,
quite a good number of the VOs have come into existence to work exclusively for
children. Various factors have motivated the VOs to work for needy children. As children
are considered the most vulnerable, helpless and innocent section of population, the VOs
tend to target the children through their services ahead of others. Personal experiences of
the plight of disabled, orphan and destitute children have moved members of many VOs
to undertake programmes for such children. A few VOs are serving children as a part of
religious activities. Schemes of assistance of the government for child welfare also
induce some VOs to take up activities in this area.
The VOs in Kamrup district have undertaken activities for children in diverse fields such as health, education, recreation, care of children with special problems, etc. The VOs plan the activities based on their objects and ideologies, experiences and ideas of the members, needs of children and in a few cases, at the suggestion of consultants or experts. A large number of VOs also tend to take up those activities for which financial assistance is readily available from the government under some schemes. As community based organisation the VOs are expected to consult community members while planning their programmes. However, only a few VOs have been found to do so. Majority of the VOs also do not undertake any systematic exercises to understand the needs and problems of children in their areas of operation. Rather, the VOs mostly rely on secondary information and also on their own ideas and assumptions about the needs of children and accordingly take up the programmes.

Health and nutrition is a known problem area affecting children as well as adults. Thus, health and nutritional care of children has become an important field of activity for the VOs. Most of the VOs are, however, not equipped in terms of human, technical and material resources for providing direct interventions for health care of children. Therefore, the VOs play more of a supportive role in this regard. The government agencies too provide enough scope through their policies and programmes, for participation of the VOs in the government initiatives for health care of children. The common programmes of the VOs for health and nutritional care of children include organisation of periodic health check up and immunisation camps, activities for control and prevention of malnutrition, awareness generation and health education of communities, etc. A small number of VOs are also acting as partners in implementation
of Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) programme of the government. Promotion of
traditional system of medicine, organisation of trainings for grass root level supportive
health workers are the other activities in which a few VOs are engaged in. Most of these
activities are carried out by the VOs in collaboration and coordination with government
agencies. A very small number of VOs are, of course, implementing some innovative
programmes like 24 Hours Famine, Khoj, etc. on their own without much support from
the government agencies.

Education of children is another important concern and a considerable number of
VOs are engaged in activities related to education for children. In the field of education
too, most of the activities of the VOs are somewhat supportive and supplementary in
nature. A small number of the VOs run pre school centres for young children and a very
few of them are even running primary, middle and high schools. However, the bulk of the
VOs undertake such activities which facilitate or help needy children to pursue education.
These include sponsoring education of children by providing text books and other
materials, dresses and school fees of poor students, library/book bank services, free
coaching for school students, moral education classes for young children, infrastructure
development of village schools, etc.

The VOs are rendering pioneering services in care and management of children
with special problems. Unlike in the health or education sector, the VOs are the major
care givers to disabled, orphan, destitute and other children in difficult circumstances.
The activities of the VOs for these children are mainly aimed at management and
rehabilitation of such children. For the orphan, destitute and other neglected children,
both institutional and non-institutional services are organised by the VOs. Greater number of VOs, however, have organised institutional services for the orphan and destitute children. The institutional programmes include orphanages, destitute homes set up by the VOs. The SOS Children's Village established at Guwahati by SOS Children's Villages of India is one of the most prominent institutions for the orphan and destitute children in the district. These institutions not only provide food, shelter, clothing and other essentials of life but also give education, vocational training and most importantly, love and care to these neglected children. The ultimate aim of these institutions is to rehabilitate the children in society. The non-institutional programme of the VOs in the district for orphan children is limited to arranging for adoption of such children by eligible couples. As mentioned, only a few VOs offer this service. A small number of the VOs have also taken up activities to help the street and working children in Guwahati city.

Quite a few VOs of the district are working for disabled children. These VOs are offering specialised service for different categorises of disabled children like the mentally retarded, children with locomotor problems, spastic children, hearing impaired, visually handicapped and also children with developmental disorders. The services of the VOs for the disabled include diagnosis of children with problems, day care of the disabled, activities for rehabilitation of the disabled children, awareness generation for prevention and early identification of disabilities among children, etc. A notable feature of the VOs working for disabled children is that, all these VOs are located in Guwahati city. However, few among them make special efforts to extend their services to rural children through their out reach programmes.
Running crèches for children of working and ailing parents is another common activity of the VOs for children in the district. Many VOs in Kamrup district have set up crèches not only because they have felt the need for such a programme but because the ASSWAB provides financial assistance to the VOs for opening crèches. The study has found that many local level VOs in remote rural areas are running crèches mainly because they could get grants from the ASSWAB for this purpose. Nevertheless, these crèches are serving a section of the children of the district. A good number of VOs in the district organise recreational activities as services for welfare of children. The specific activities organised by these VOs include games and sports, music as well other forms of art, hobby development activities, meditation, yoga, etc.

The VOs serve different categories of children through their activities based on needs or problems of the children, age group, economic condition of parents, etc. In terms of number, some programmes like the crèches, pre-school centres or an institution for disabled children cater to limited number of children, depending upon intake capacities and also the provisions under the schemes. However, programmes like health check up and immunisation camps or recreational activities like sports, music, etc. usually cover larger number of children at a time. Bulk of the VOs target the children of poorer sections of community through their activities. However, services for disabled children cover all needy children irrespective of economic condition of the parents.

The VOs carry out their activities with support from various government/statutory bodies and also other VOs and non-government agencies. For this purpose the VOs regularly interact and coordinate with these agencies. The support thus received
includes financial assistance, technical know-how, materials and equipments, etc. The VOs usually entrust the responsibility of implementing a programme upon one or more members of the organisations. Depending on the nature of programmes and scale of operation the VOs also hire the services of some people against payments for programme implementation. In most of the VOs designated office bearers or the executive committees are empowered to supervise the functionaries engaged in carrying out the activities. Although informal manner of functioning is regarded as a characteristic feature of the VOs, the findings of the present study indicate that many VOs are now adopting formal methods of management of the programmes. For example, in majority of the VOs under study the functionaries responsible for implementation of a programme have to submit written reports to their supervisors over and above any verbal communication. More than two-third of the VOs evaluate their activities in some way or other. The evaluation exercises are usually carried out by the VO themselves. Sometimes the funding agencies also do the evaluation. Contrary to the assumption, only a small section of the VOs involve community members while evaluating their programmes.

The profile of the functionaries reveals that persons of both the sexes in almost equal number are involved with the VOs. Younger generation of people upto 40 years of age predominate amongst the functionaries. The functionaries are also fairly educated with almost half of them being graduates and some even having post graduate degrees. However, only a few of them possess specialised qualifications for care of children. Majority of the functionaries receive salaries or honorariums for their services and most of these paid functionaries are whole time or full time workers of the VOs. Only about one-third of the functionaries of the VOs render honorary services for welfare of children.
Usually the VOs induct the members or other personnel in three different ways. Those who come voluntarily or of their own free will are enrolled into the VOs provided they fulfill the criteria laid down by the VOs. Majority of the functionaries have joined the VOs in this manner. Some of the VOs try to motivate some persons to join their organisations. Thus, a large group of the functionaries covered by the study have joined because they have been requested by the members of some VOs to be a part of them. The third mode of inducting the functionaries practiced by the VOs is to appoint them on certain terms and conditions after selecting the eligible ones through some kind of formal or informal selection procedure. About one-fourth of the functionaries have been appointed in this manner. For inducting the functionaries the VOs, based on their philosophy, objects and nature of work, prescribe different criteria which usually vary from organisation to organisation. However, for all the VOs the common basic quality required by a person for entry into the VOs is, zeal to serve the disadvantaged sections of society.

The study brings to light that various factors motivated people to join the VOs. Among these, altruistic factors like inclination towards social work, inner urge to help the needy children, etc. are most common and motivated the majority of the functionaries to become a part of the VOs. Alongwith altruistic reasons, some other factors are also at work to induce people to join the VOs. These include, selection of social work as a profession, desire to attain a respectable position in the society, religious inspiration, personal life experiences, etc. A sex difference is also observed in terms of influence of some of these factors. Data reveal that greater number of male functionaries than female functionaries are motivated by the desire to serve the children. On the other hand, more
women have joined the VOs because they have adopted social work as a profession. Some factors like religious inspirations, personal life experiences, utilising leisure time etc. have been found to be applicable to women functionaries only. Likewise, desire to attain respectable position in society has motivated only male functionaries to join the VOs. The findings regarding the motivational factors also support the assumption that people join voluntary organisations not only for altruistic reasons, but also because of other reasons.

Most of the functionaries of the VOs opined that they derive satisfaction by rendering their services for children through the VOs. Majority of the functionaries expressed satisfaction about five aspects of their work which include, nature of responsibilities bestowed upon them, the working hours, cooperation of colleagues, recognition received for their services, and also leadership of the VOs. However, majority of the functionaries have expressed dissatisfaction with the facilities available to them at the VOs for carrying out different activities. Then a large group of paid functionaries also stated that they are not satisfied with their pay/honorarium packets. Though not in majority, yet, a good number functionaries are also dissatisfied with the leadership of the VOs. However, inspite of the few factors of dissatisfaction most of the functionaries are happy to be involved with the VOs.

The extent of community’s participation and involvement in the activities of the VOs has been discussed in terms of three parameters in the present study. These are, influence of community members in decision making, contribution of the community towards the programmes of the VOs and utilisation of benefits of the programmes.
Findings of the study make it clear that majority of the community members do not get any scope for influencing the programmes of the VOs. Data show that less than one-fourth of the community members have been consulted and involved in planning and implementation of the programmes. Again, only about one-third of the members of community have been involved while evaluating the programmes. Thus, the VOs seldom create opportunities for members of community to take part in decision making process and influence the programme. The findings also disprove the assumption that as community based organisations the VOs involve community in planning and implementation of their programmes. When it comes to contributions from the community, most of the VOs have received these in one form or the other. However, only one-fourth of the beneficiary parents found to have made some contributions towards the VOs. In fact, substantial part of the contributions received by most of the VOs have come from affluent sections of society who are not always the beneficiaries of the activities of the VOs. The third indicator of community participation, that is, utilisation of services point out that the services of the VOs are utilised by all categorises of people. Although most of the beneficiary families belong to lower income categories, yet, there are certain programmes which are availed by all children irrespective of income of the family. By and large, it can be said that the benefits of the services of the VOs for welfare of children are utilised by all members of the community.

Most of the VOs make efforts to mobilise the community for eliciting their support. The VOs use a variety of methods for this purpose. A large section of the VOs rely on conventional methods like holding meetings with community members, making personal contacts, etc. Only very few VOs use some uncommon and innovative methods
like shramdan, padayatra, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Participatory Learning and Action, etc. to mobilise the community and its resources. Community mobilisation drives of many VOs, however, do not always target the parents of beneficiary children who come from lower income groups. These VOs tend to assume that such weaker sections of community would not be in a position to extend any support other than receiving the services. These VOs, therefore, mainly try to mobilise the affluent section of community who can support the VOs in a big way.

The parents of the beneficiary children have a very high opinion about the VOs. The VOs are considered as some important parts of society as they render essential services to not only children but also other weaker sections of people. Although a small percentage of people express slight reservations about the actual motives behind the services of the VOs, the large majority of the community holds the persons associated with the VOs in high esteem and accord them a revered status.

While working for welfare of children the VOs in the district confront various problems. The problems are mainly related to financial matter programme implementation, functionaries of the VOs and coordination with other agencies. Financial constraints is the most common problem faced by majority of the VOs. Lack of adequate funds again leads to some other problems. It hampers in appropriate implementation of the programmes, prevents the VOs from developing their infrastructures and facilities, so on and so forth. The VOs also face problem due to dearth of qualified and skilled persons for managing the activities for welfare of children. Apathy of some sections of
government functionaries and their non-cooperative attitude also create problems for proper coordination between the VOs and the government agencies.

Inspite of the plethora of problems, the VOs in Kamrup district have made significant contributions for welfare of children. As discussed earlier, child welfare includes services that fulfill both the basic needs of children like health, education, recreation, etc., and also special needs of physically, mentally and socially handicapped children. From the account of the activities of the VOs in Kamrup it becomes clear that these activities meet some of both the basic needs and the special needs of the children. However, while meeting some of these needs, the VOs are playing a major and predominant role and in case of some other needs, the VOs are playing a supportive role. The VOs are the major service providers for care protection and rehabilitation of orphans, destitutes and other children with similar problems. Likewise, the VOs are also leading the way in care and management of children with different kinds of disabilities. Although the government often provides assistance to the VOs for organising services for such children, it is basically the concern and efforts of the VOs through which the sufferings of these children could be mitigated to a large extent.

When it comes to organising services for meeting some basic needs of children like health and education, the VOs are playing a supportive role. In the field of health and nutritional care of children the VOs are supporting the government, and, at times, acting as its partners for successful implementation of government programmes. The VOs have been instrumental in carrying the health care initiatives of the government to the grass root level benefiting the children in the nooks and corner of the district. In the area of
education the VOs are supplementing the efforts of the government for spread of
education, particularly among children of poorer sections of people. Opportunities for
recreation is another basic need of children. The VOs in Kamrup are also contributing for
fulfillment of this particular need of children to a great extent through diverse
recreational activities.

In conclusion it can be stated that the VOs in Kamrup district are playing a
pivotal role for welfare of children. Kamrup being a strategically located district with the
state capital in it, has a concentration of VOs which are carrying out diverse activities for
wellbeing of children. Although the VOs in the district had come into existence under
varied circumstances with a multitude of objectives, welfare of children has been a prime
agenda of the VOs. In fact, quite a few VOs had been formed exclusively to serve the
children. Different VOs have undertaken various activities for welfare of children in
Kamrup depending on the organisations' objects, ideologies, experiences, and ideas of
the members and also needs of the children. The VOs have also taken up activities that
commensurate with the ongoing programmes and schemes of the government. The VOs
are inclined to do so because they receive substantial amount of financial and other
assistance from the government. While such an approach of the VOs has consolidated the
efforts of the government to ensure well being of children on one hand, it has also
resulted in excessive dependence of the VOs upon the government. That the VOs are
heavily dependent upon the government becomes evident when some of these VOs face
severe crisis for managing their programmes when the government assistance are not
made available.
Involvement of the community members in the activities of the VOs is minimal. Contrary to the assumption only few VOs consult the community while planning and implementing the activities. The VOs mostly consider the target communities as capable on only receiving the services. Although the VOs make efforts to elicit supports from the community, yet, the actual beneficiaries are seldom approached. Rather the VOs try to mobilise the non-beneficiary affluent sections for obtaining their assistance and contributions in various forms.

The problems confronted by the VOs have prevented them to a large extent to play a more effective role in improving the status of children in the district. Of the various problems, financial constraints have affected the VOs in most adverse manner. This particular problem has led to a chain of other problems that have weakened the VOs. It must be mentioned that too much dependence on government grants and lack of a broad community base have further aggravated the problems for many VOs. Those VOs which have made efforts to generate their own income and at the same time, have involved all sections of the community in their approach to initiate welfare of children, have felt the brunt of financial and other problems much lesser than others. The process of coordination with the government agencies and other VOs also often meet with hiccups for various reasons. These include, complicated government rules, elements of mistrust between the VOs and the government agencies, a sense of unnecessary competitiveness amongst some VOs, etc. Absence of proper coordination also hamper in the functioning of the VOs.
The persons involved with the VOs are mostly driven by altruistic motives. Besides, some other factors have also motivated people to join the VOs. However, altruism predominates other motives and it has given the VOs their unique strength to carry on with their missions of serving the children braving numerous odds. Members and functionaries of the VOs enjoy a revered status amongst the community they work with. The special status is accorded primarily because of selfless services rendered by them for welfare of children and other vulnerable sections of people.

A Few Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study the following humble suggestions are made for strengthening the voluntary organisations and to enable them to render ever more effective service for welfare of children.

1. The study revealed that many of the VOs in Kamrup district do not attempt to identify the needs of children while undertaking activities for welfare of children in an area. It is felt that the VOs should carry out methodical need assessment exercises before planning and executing programmes for children. Such an approach would help in making the programmes need based and suited to the local conditions and can expected to be more effective in improving the condition of children. Naturally, the community would also be more responsive towards these programmes.

2. The programmes of the VOs for disabled children are mainly concentrated in Guwahati city. As such, children of Guwahati city and nearby areas only can
have easy access to these services. Majority of the disabled children living in the remote villages of the district, particularly those from poorer families, are usually deprived from such services. Therefore, the VOs should make efforts to extend the services for disabled children to the interior villages of the district to effectively serve these children.

(3) The VOs in Kamrup are mostly offering institutional services for care, protection and rehabilitation of orphan, destitute and other neglected children. While the importance of institutional services for these children cannot be denied, there are some non-institutional options for care of such children like adoption, foster care, etc. These services sometimes turn out to be more effective than institutional programmes. However, only few VOs in Kamrup are organising these services. Keeping in view the relative effectiveness of these services, more VOs should take up non-institutional programmes for orphan and destitute children in the district.

(4) The financial allocations of many government schemes of assistance to the VOs are made years earlier and usually no revision is made for a long time. On the other hand, the expenditure involved for the activities under the scheme may escalate manifold. It puts most of the VOs into a financial condition. Therefore, there is a need for periodical revision of budgetary provisions of various schemes in a realistic manner.
(5) Timely release of funds by the fund giving bodies is important for not only relieving the VOs of financial constraints but also for ensuring proper implementation of the programmes. It is necessary to simplify the procedures of sanction and release of funds by particularly the government fund giving agencies. While on one hand there is a need for strict vigilance against fake organisations or misutilisation of funds, on the other hand, it is necessary not to over burden the VOs with avoidable formalities or paper works. Therefore, it would do well to strike a balance between the two. On their part, the VOs must be sincere and transparent and should stick to the rules while utilising the funds and provide all required information as and when asked for.

(6) In order to tackle the problem of financial hardship the VOs should try to mobilise all possible sources of funds equally rather than depending more upon the government grants. The VOs should stress on generating their own income through innovative, community based activities. The VOs must also emphasise the need to involve all members of community in fund raising drives by accepting smallest of contributions rather than depending only upon sparse, big donations from selected members of the community.

(7) In order to bring about effective coordination, regular interactions and exchanges should take place between the functionaries of the concerned government agencies and the VOs. Such interface between the two at various levels would help in sorting out problems and would enhance mutual trust. It can also pave the way for chalking out viable strategies for joint efforts for
welfare of children. Although occasional meetings between the government agencies and the VOs take place, it is yet to become a meaningful and continuous process. A suitable mechanism for this purpose need to be developed and initiatives in this regard should be taken up by the government.

(8) The VOs of Kamrup working for children should form a common forum which can facilitate coordination amongst the VOs. Besides promoting interactions and exchanges amongst the VOs for mutual support, the forum can also act as the representative of the VOs on occasions. The forum can also look after some common interests of the VOs and can even guard against fictitious and fraudulent organisations. Prominent, resourceful VOs of the district should take the lead for forming such a forum and incorporate all genuine VOs working at various levels in the district.

(9) There is no schools of social work to produce professional social workers not only in Kamrup district or the state of Assam, but in the entire northeastern region. This is one of the reasons for dearth of trained and qualified social workers in Kamrup. Only a few years back Assam University of Silchar in Assam has opened the Department of Social Work. However, only one university department does not seem to be sufficient and a school or a few more departments of social work in the universities might be able produce enough qualified social workers to cater to not only Kamrup or Assam but also the other states of the region.
Training is an essential input for developing the human resources of the VOs. Keeping in view the large number of untrained functionaries, the VOs in Kamrup should take urgent initiatives for organising trainings for these functionaries. Various options of training should be utilised for this purpose. In some cases institutions like NIPCCD can train senior level office bearers and functionaries, who, in turn, can impart trainings to those at the grass root level. Some district or state level organisations can also be identified for organising need based trainings for the functionaries of the VOs. Some VOs having the required infrastructures and human and other resources may be entrusted with the responsibility of conducting trainings with financial support from the government. Besides such institutional trainings, the management of the VOs also need to continuously provide on-the-job training and guidance to the functionaries for updating knowledge and improving skills.

The VOs should avoid engaging personnel without proper qualifications and trainings for managing the activities of the VOs as far as possible. Although dearth of qualified and trained social workers is a common problem of the VOs, yet, such a measure is necessary to maintain a certain minimum standard in the activities of the VOs. Maximum efforts should be made to avail and retain the services of the skilled functionaries by providing them with required facilities and paying them salaries/honorariums to commensurate with their qualifications.
Availability of appropriate infrastructures and facilities is an important precondition for successful implementation of the programmes of the VOs. It is felt that there is a need for strengthening the infrastructures and facilities of the VOs in the district. The VOs should try to mobilise resources for this purpose. The VOs in Kamrup can particularly approach the large number of commercial and business establishments, industrial houses and other public sector enterprises located in Guwahati city in this regard. There are instances when these organisations have helped the deserving VOs to develop their infrastructures and facilities. The government should also earmark specific funds for infrastructure development in their different schemes of assistance for the VOs.

The extent of participation and involvement of the community in the activities of the VOs of the district is much less than desired. The VOs should make conscious efforts to involve the larger community including the beneficiary parents at all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation of the programmes. The target communities of the services should not be considered as capable only of receiving the services. It properly mobilised, the poorest of the poor community can make small but significant contributions, in some manner or other, towards the programmes for welfare of their children. Such a move by the VOs would also help in alleviating many problems of the VOs and would bring them closer to the people.
Most of the VOs in Kamrup district stick to conventional methods for community contact and mobilisation, which do not always yield desired result. The VOs should devise innovative ways for mobilising the community and its resources. Effective participatory methods like Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), etc. and also different kinds of media should be extensively used for this purpose.

Stronghold of one or a few persons in management of the affairs of the VOs has to be discouraged. The concerned person(s) may be dedicated and honest, yet, such a trend results in erosion of credibility of the VOs amongst the community. Besides, it leads to autocracy and often gives rise to resentments amongst the functionaries and demotivates them. It also increases the chances of mismanagement. Therefore, the VOs should maintain the democratic norm of functioning. The fund giving bodies may also consider to insist upon it as one of the preconditions for grant of funds to the VOs.

Although majority of the VOs in Kamrup evaluate their programmes and activities, only a small section of these involve the community members, particularly the parents of beneficiaries, in the process. Evaluation exercises that do not take into account the views and opinions of the beneficiaries cannot be expected to provide objective feedback. Therefore, it is suggested that the VOs should carry out systematic evaluation of their programmes and the views and opinions of the parents and guardians of beneficiary children be invariably taken into account for this purpose.