



## **NGO sectors of Bangladesh: Controversies and Contradictions**

*by*

***Fahmida Islam***

### **Abstract**

In this paper, we can see the benefits and drawbacks of NGOs. The background of NGOs in the post liberation war conditions in Bangladesh has got no similarities with the current times conditions of NGOs operating in Bangladesh. The paper discusses the functions of various NGOs along with their good and bad terms with the government of Bangladesh, their promises towards their clients and the maintenance of activities. Most importantly, the possibilities of the presence of any loopholes to be present in the general activities carried out by the NGOs, the balance between the optimistic efforts and pessimistic outcomes to be unfolded.

### **Background of NGO sectors in Bangladesh: Pre and post liberation war of 1971**

Around 1970s, an exception of NGO was CUSO- Canadian University Students' Organisation. Among Bangladesh, it truly brought a change of air, supposedly holding Paulo Freire's subaltern views as its thematic perspective. It shifted most of its responsibilities to BRAC before closing on the certainty that native leadership has improved by quality. Nowadays, the renowned NGOs within Bangladesh have helped around five million families over here. Beforehand, people used to take loans on interest rates around 3 to 5 percent from the Pally Karma Shohayok Foundation (PKSF- The national apex foundation funding NGOs). (Islam, 1999). However, the main motto of tarnishing poverty trap is still into question. Most of the NGOs back in that time were founded given the post-war condition of the then Bangladesh in 1971. The scenario was somewhat of an anarchy prone country with so many hunger stricken faces to be fed. At that point many third parties they call as *Mahajans* erupted to take advantage of the

disastrous atmosphere and used to charge a higher interest rate on the people who were suffering from financial crisis. The basic intention to set up NGOs in the forms of *Shamity* back in that time was to save the people from the paw of those brutal *Mahajans*.

## **Operations of renowned NGOs in Bangladesh**

NGOs even vary in structures and funding procedures (Lewis, 2010). Those who are externally funded have their bindings towards them and those who are locally funded they follow different criteria. Proshika was formed as the local NGO back at that time. To be claimed as a not for profit organization, an NGO needs to be registered under the department of social welfare. Yet under some special circumstances, some have asked to register under the cooperative society, the directorate of women affairs or the joint stock companies. The first success was made by the Grameen Bank around 1980s. (Zohir, 2004). Let us focus on the credit giving policies of Grameen Bank. In the year 2002, the active members of Grameen Bank has exceeded 14 million and their savings were more than taka 12 billion circling in the economy of Bangladesh. Size of loans to be allotted are usually less than taka 10000 which have to be repaid in 50 weekly installments throughout a year. Rate of interest usually varies between 18 to 40 percent. (Zohir, 2004).

One of the major initiatives taken by the NGOs are said to be as “women empowerment.” As in a platform of a backstage Bangladesh is, here women are continuously suppressed due to the illiterate atmosphere. Even the literate ones who have academic degrees tend to dominate the females one way or the other. Women are always in an upsurge to reveal their identities over here. NGOs have initiated the platform where the microcredit is allotted to the women of the family. And the feedback was recorded majority as positive. As women were never counted as somebody to be relied upon with a greater responsibility other than just managing household stuffs. And majority NGOs have reported it that they got positive feedbacks from women by depending on them with these huge loan issues. This is how NGOs have established a social transformation. They are trying to wipe off the discrimination from the core.

## **Issues against social transformation**

BRAC has developed a strong image in the minds of their clients that they do even agree to pay off the highest rate of interest it asks for. BRAC lends to those only who can or are able to pay back the loans. And to ensure that they are that much in safe terms with their clients that they cross check several times the client's background and then go for a deal. NGOs have also set itself as a substitute of Government back in that time regarding providing incentives to boost up progresses in cases of informal education or a range of agriculture services. NGOs mostly to provide microcredit availability, healthcare and education; however, they partially create an atmosphere where the people mostly in the rural areas tend to be dependent on them fully. If the bottom line is to make the people independent then this activity provides a contradictory image of the NGOs. Then what is the point of shifting dependency from one to the other? Moreover, the NGOs do not provide loans in a random process. They provide loans in a much selective way which, according to what they term it; is for the security purposes of credit transactions. Since they need to make sure that they are not ending up lending credit to any fraud cases. However, this could be a scenario of discriminating amongst clients that those who are taking microcredit are only eligible to get services from the NGOs; not the others. Then how does the commitment of serving those poor rural people take place when its activities are nothing much different than the traditional banking system. Even some of the employees working in the NGOs claimed that they have to pay off the credits from their own pockets whenever any clients brought by them go bankrupt. Except for BRAC, where credit is provided to very short listed candidates who are cleared of any charges beforehand. So that no chances of bankruptcy can take place.

## **Reasons for rapid growth of NGO sectors in Bangladesh**

It is argued that Bangladesh being the over populated developing country get itself engaged in certain huge projects such as making roads and highways, multicomplex buildings, metro shopping malls, flyovers- overall huge investments behind creating proper infrastructure has

made it away from concentrating in grassroot level. (Bagci, 2003). Therefore international donor agency's first option is NGOs, who can easily reach out to the poor people suffering in the remote or rural areas. Besides improving health and education services, they introduce ideas to the women of the rural areas of how to generate income; people of disaster prone areas are trained on how to tackle the impacts of natural disasters. (Khan, 2015). Many would term the rise of microfinance in NGOs as the deliberate uprising of a special kind of entrepreneurship in the motto of unambiguous commercial moves. (Zohir, 2004).

A broader aspect of the NGOs is that they could set up an acquaintance with international counterparts and communities. The concept of NGOs was formed basically on the ideas of charity foundations. Though not being a part of government, the NGOs work within the legal framework of the governments. (Halim, 1993). It is basically a sector which does not fall into the category of neither a government related nor a profit making business organizations with a preliminary intention of working for development in both local and international grounds (Lewis, 2010). "The NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) simply refers to the voluntary organizations, private voluntary non-profit organizations or not-for-profit organizations." (Islam, 2016). Irony is, this concept of being a not for profit organization has come from the USA, since NGOs who work for the betterment of the others; not concentrating on their own profit making issues, are awarded by the US government. However, people keep on getting somewhat closer ideas when they hear the term "NGO" even over here in this developing country. (Rahman, 2003). But the question comes, does that actually happen? Do they actually do it as a not for profit organization?

## **Conclusion**

Shamima Dastagir, has been assigned as a field worker of the Bogra branch of TMSS (Thengamara Mohila Shobuj Shongho); one of the well known NGOs operating in the north Bengal regions of Bangladesh. Shamima was from a lower middle class family in Bogra. She has completed her Bachelors but was one step behind to add another degree in her academic tract record. Her spouse severely whacked her and made her leave the house along with two kids; after spending 20 years of life together. After remaining in her father's for almost two years,

Shamima has been employed in TMSS through one of her cousin's recommendations. Immediately after she got the job, she received a formal phone call from her mother-in-law who have not taken the simple initiative to know about Shamima's or kids' whereabouts in all these two years. Even Shamima found her mother-in law to talk in favor of her, and even urged her to go back to their house, considering now that they understand that their son is not up to the mark.

This is the major picture of tortures and suppression that go on the women of Bangladesh, especially in the rural areas where girls are not educated properly. Human instincts lead the males to be dominating over the females since they find them weak and humble, unable to gather enough strength to fight back. In these kinds of scenarios one has no option other than to be financially independent where she can establish her ideas and choices without any hesitation.

However, to not go for a temporary solution would be my suggestion. As the problem remains deep rooted yet whenever the husband of the family needs money they snatch it from their wives' earnings. I would suggest wives to get their degrees in order to improve their academic tract records. A lead of women in the higher positions would ultimately lead the males to prepare themselves for being compatible with their female counterparts.

Thus, whenever the problem arrives it is always advisable to follow the pathways of eliminating the problem from the roots. Then the third sectors who could possibly take advantage of these situations as in, discrimination regarding microcredit loan dispersion, taking a highest rate of return as interest for the loans; could be resolved.

## **References:**

- Bagci, C. (2003). "Historical evolution of NGOs: NGO proliferation in the post-Cold War era." *Avrupa Gunlugu*, 4, 299-326.
- Davis, John. K. (2006). "NGOs and Development in Bangladesh: Whose sustainability counts?"
- Halim, M. A. (1993). "Social welfare legislation in Bangladesh: Oihik."
- Islam, Md. Shahidul. (2016). "The NGOs sector in Bangladesh: Emergence, contribution and Current Debate."
- Islam, Tabibul. (1999). "Development-Bangladesh: Critics say NGOs make money on poor."
- Khan, N. A. (2015). "The Daily Star."
- Lewis, D., & Kanji, N. (2009). "Non-governmental organizations and development: Routledge."
- Rahman, A. T. R. (1993). *Volunteerism and nation- building for Bangladesh: Academic Publishers.*
- Zohir, Sajjad. (2004). "NGO sector in Bangladesh: An overview."

