
UNIT 10 ROLE OF NGOs

Structure

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- understand the need of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in a society,
- know about the developmental role being played by NGOs,
- appreciate the interventions being made by NGOs in the area of tourism, and
- understand their role in creating tourism awareness and demanding a decisive role for the local communities in tourism development.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit has been conceptualised keeping in view the experiences of EQUATIONS an NGO established for research, training and promotion of holistic tourism. This NGO works towards transforming the inherently exploitative nature of mass commercial tourism and questions the real benefits of tourism to the host communities as well as its socio-cultural and economic impacts.

The NGO are playing a crucial role in community development which is likely to expand in the coming years. As a result of the negative impacts of mass tourism, at many destinations the NGO are raising vital issues. These issues have to be taken account of in destination development, planning and marketing.

The Unit starts with the role of NGOs as agents of social change in monolithic state structure. It further deals with their intervention in tourism and their role at destinations.

10.2 STATE STRUCTURE, SOCIAL CHANGE AND NGOs

The traditional role of the State is to provide for the well-being of its citizens. The State has taken upon itself to deliver more and more ingredients of the constitutive factors of well-being. Although there are constitutional obligations the State has vis-a-vis its citizens because of the way the political and administrative systems are structured and work, most of these obligations are not delivered to those whom they are meant for. The worst hit are usually the poor, the needy and those who naturally do not have access to power, participation and, therefore, decision making, thus leading to their marginalisation. In a large, heterogeneous mass that constitutes the notion of a country, bureaucratic responses or delivery systems fall far short of peoples needs. This gap has created the space for new ways of reaching people on the margins and finding solutions for their needs.

Traditionally, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) began with the **idea of addressing contemporary society's problems, in a way which was different to that of the structured,**

in the critique of the functioning of such institutions which were supposed to deliver social services like education, public health, rural development etc.

NGOs play an important supportive role as **mediators and facilitators to ensure equity and participation in the development process**. NGOs in Third World countries are operating in an increasingly global context to strengthen the voice of the poor and alienated by defining the reasons for their plight in the context of larger global structural issues and give a voice to peoples issues in the domestic and international arena.

Every economic activity is determined by the Central Government. Since the Government controls most federal/state activity through policies, it emerges as the centre of power. Most policies are the representations of the Central Government and the political party in power. Local State Governments implement these policies even when they represent different economic or cultural specificities. This reveals the fact that they have no major differences of opinion in policy matters from that of the Central Government.

A vast nation like India, with innumerable nationalities and geographic boundaries, lacks a well developed federal structure. Hence, policy implementation overlooks geographical, economic and cultural specificities of individual states, regions and people.

The state structure which is monolithic, helps the Centre in the unilateral implementation of policies, denying any space for pluralistic intervention. The assumption is that once 'democratically' elected to power, there is a mandate to 'act for the whole' and enforce any policy which is thought fit. This self assertive notion to act for the whole should be the very basis of our debate, even if we are to assume that there are no vested interests in these policies. The debate originates from the premise, that any policy with nation-wide consequences, requires the approval of the people or a general mandate, prior to decision making. Implicit, here is the understanding of the role of the Government, that it derives its legitimacy from the social acceptance of its authority and it depends on the tacit assent of the governed.

Social movements have traditionally been associated with class-based struggles of workers' movements but since the 1960s a wider variety of social movements have emerged. There are three main characteristics of 'new' social movements:

- **First, new movements are primarily social and not directly political in character.** They are principally concerned with cultural issues rather than seeking to over-throw control.
- **Second, and consistent with this view, new social movements are not concerned with direct challenges to the state,** rather they aim to protect civil society from increasing technocratic influences of modern life.
- **Third, new social movements attempt to bring about change through presenting different value frameworks and demonstrate alternative ways of being.** This extends to the social actors within the movements who demonstrate their challenge, on one level, in the way they conduct their meetings, the structures they create for their organisations and the legitimising of an emotional discourse into working agendas.

The NGOs in fact, act as agents of social change.

10.3 NGO'S INTERVENTION IN TOURISM

The role of the NGOs in tourism is based on the understanding of the new economic, social and the political processes that accept the reliance on markets and private sector initiative as the most efficient mechanism for achieving economic growth, producing goods, providing most services to most people, etc. Markets are also posited as being a necessary condition for sustaining democracy, because they provide the basis for strong centres of power (i.e. interest groups) independent of the state.

People at the destination have unilateral tourism policies imposed on them. Tourism policies identify every hill, seashore, forest and place of worship as a potential site for tourism activity. At the same time these policies refuse to recognise the traditional income generation methods of the people at tourism destinations, and that the forests and seashores have their own natural and historic functions.

We should not forget that tourism has emerged in the context of unresolved socio-economic structural issues, such as land distribution patterns or the take over of traditional occupations by modern mechanised capital. Any initiative by the government in tourism by way of legislation or direct investment is envisaged within the framework of the tourism policy.

Tourism is not a voluntary activity in a nation like ours. It is planned and imposed on the people through policies. At the same time people have every right to differ from these policies which means challenging the state structure and the political system. Such differences help to formulate new models rather than alien models dictated by the government or outside agencies. In the face of the unhindered entry of international capital and successive alienation, perhaps it is difficult to agree that the future is in our hands.

As a critique of the developmental role of tourism it emerges that tourism:

- is viewed in the context of a development model which has a political character,
- development has taken place along with increased elitism, authoritarianism, militarism and various forms of State repression in different parts of the world; all of these are threats to the culture, economy and empowerment of communities,
- development along with globalisation threatens the sovereignty of the nation,
- culogises a certain consumptive and luxurious lifestyle which is unsustainable by any means in most developing countries,
- promotes net outflow of capital to affluent sections internally, and
- is based on the objectified view of the world where beaches, sanctuaries and mountains are seen as objects of pleasure which negates possible meaningful relationships between people and their environments.

People in tourism destinations do not have the luxury to debate various forms of tourism. Nor can they afford to treat each violation at tourism destinations as an aberration. Every undemocratic policy does violence to the people who seek some solution to their daily struggle for survival.

It is here that the NGOs play an important role in the socio-economic development of the nation. These organisations are formed for various purposes on the basis of ideas conceived by individuals/group for certain objectives and goals. The distinguishing role of the NGO is its **voluntarism** - the fact that an NGO can only invite voluntary involvement in its activities and must, therefore, use discussion, bargaining, accommodation and persuasion in its dealings rather than bureaucratic control. But in the final analysis it is the quality of participation that determines the legitimacy of decision making. Those who will be affected should have the right to be consulted in this process as well as a forum to express their needs. NGOs provide such a window.

Over the past years, there has been a clear trend among NGOs for a broader process of development – a concern for people rather than projects and, therefore, training, awareness-nurturing, capacity-building, social organisation and institutional-development have become important items on their agenda. This is evidenced in:

- the strategy to increase NGOs impact, as a catalyst developing, multiplicative and diffusive strategies whereby they aim to influence others through working together, sharing ideas, training, etc.
- the increasing importance of information in NGO work as they utilise the power of ideas and information to promote positive change in the wider structures of government,
- the role of advocacy – using experience from the grassroots to influence others at local, national and international levels to reshape resource allocation and promote policy change, and
- internal organisational changes required to support moves, with special emphasis on learning, flexibility, decentralisation and innovation. These changes are seen as essential if NGOs are to preserve traditional strengths, such as their independence and value base, which enable them to pursue a mission rather than follow a market.

Check Your Progress-1

1) What is the critique of the developmental role of tourism?

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2) What role do the NGOs play in a society?

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10.4 NGO's ROLE IN TOURISM AWARENESS

There are different types of roles that NGOs play in tourism:

- i) There are tourism NGOs that are involved in criticizing the policy in the hope of making it more just. These NGOs are located in the processes described above.
- ii) There are other NGOs in tourism, that work at tourism destinations, with problems directly borne out of tourism development at the site. The former are not necessarily located in tourism destinations but play a supportive role to the NGOs in tourism areas.
- iii) There is a third kind of NGO – one involved in policy- making on tourism. A relatively new phenomenon, such NGOs play the role of consensus-building for narrower purposes of the State machinery. By their very existence, however, these NGOs recognise the strength of the methodology of the other type of NGOs and de-structure the centralisation of the decision making process.

The tourism NGOs make a critique of the policy, by exposing the problems in it. These NGOs are research groups that make a detailed study report of the policy. Their findings are circulated among other researchers, activists, individuals, NGOs, Governments etc. after which they come up with an alternate policy/critique. The Government at some point takes into account the voices of these NGOs and their findings and inputs them into the policy. By this action the government is involving the NGOs in a sense of policy making. The NGOs consider their critiques and alternative policy models as a check or pressure against the government policies.

A major aspect of a tourism NGO is to raise awareness among people about their power to intervene with the centre of the power, with policies that they deem fit. The seeds of an alternative lie in the peoples' ability to 'differ' on policies at one level which can be done with the inputs of the tourism NGOs, and policy manifestations at tourism destinations by NGOs in tourism on the other. It also lies in the realisation of people in tourism destinations that the ultimate power lies in their hand in decision making, since it is their little world that is at stake. It is this process of decision making that determines what kind of tourism a particular people/region should have, if this particular people/region should have tourism at all.

To 'differ' on policy is not alternative policy making. It is to perpetuate and widen the area of dispute and enhance the collective identity of people in dispute. This act of 'differing' with the dominant power structure will influence central political power. With the positive and negative impacts of earlier policies of the Centre, tourism NGOs can evaluate the effectiveness of present policies.

10.5 NGO's ROLE AT THE DESTINATION

NGOs in tourism destination areas work on tourism issues based on their need to understand changes affecting the communities in which they are working in, due to tourism development. These issues could be of various kinds, like:

- i) lack of civil amenities,
- ii) increasing pressure on common resources,
- iii) displacement caused due to large tourism projects requiring land,
- iv) changes occurring in cultural modes of the local 'host' community etc. and
- v) interacting with local NGOs working on day to day issues.

These groups then look out for ways of understanding the changes affecting the area and the communities that they work with. This is where the symbiotic relationship between the tourism NGOs and those NGOs working in the tourist areas emerge. The former working on the larger structural issues also need to work on specific issues, areas, people and context to validate their theoretical framework as well as to engage with the 'real' world. Whereas the NGOs in the destination areas are so involved in the meeting with the day-to-day issues of their constituents, they find it difficult to engage in thinking through broader strategies.

The tourism NGOs as part of their research at one level, focus on a particular place or issue of tourism importance. They report and document in detail the tourism movement in that area. Their role is to create a data bank by collecting relevant news-clippings and case studies. Surveys are conducted with the local groups, networks and linkages are formed with interested groups for active participation. They produce backgrounders on particular situations which facilitate scientific research on environmental, socio-political and related issues.

Through a process of awareness-building, training, lobbying and advocacy these NGOs put destination specific issues in tourism on the national agenda. They are resource centres which provide publications not only to activists but also to tourists, the travel trade and the residents. They provide direct support for local action with resources and information.

For information collection and dissemination, these tourism NGOs collaborate with local groups at the tourism destinations to collect basic empirical facts and impacts. Brief fact sheets in basic English and vernacular languages are produced. These NGOs formulate guidelines for assessing tourism from a different perspective which is then used in various local situations. They also have a wider role to play.

Tourism NGOs monitor tourism policy and legislation to see which will affect tourism issues. One of the important functions related to monitoring is that of disseminating the information to the larger public. This dissemination is done through active engagement with the host population and the media. Through the medium of active involvement with the host population, these NGOs get this group of people to perceive their problems in the light of serious studies and analysis. In the case of the media, being one of the largest disseminators of information, a larger broader section of the society is confronted with these issues so that there can be a change in the way that the relative merits of tourism development are discussed. The ultimate purpose of all these interventions is of course to bring change to the lives of people, not only in the destination areas, but also the society at large which many a times remains a mute spectator to the changes affecting people in distant places.

To sum up, the role of the NGOs in the process of developing a Tourist destination, is to bring together information from a multiplicity of sources, rather than looking at tourism issues only from the point of view of the economic needs and problems of a country, a state or a region

10.6 LET US SUM UP

The role of NGOs in tourism is important because they point out the imbalances in development along with the people's perceptions of that development. They create awareness among the people regarding the use or mis-use of their resources and assets in relation to tourism development. Besides offering a critique they also point out the direction in which such development should take place. They have demonstrated the negative impacts of tourism on environment, land use, culture, etc. The tourism industry and organisations must take note of the NGO's viewpoint while designing, developing and promoting tourism products.

10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Base your answer on the critique mentioned in Sec. 10.3.
- 2) See Sec. 10.2.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) Sec. 10.4 deals with this aspect. Compare your answer with the contents of this Section.
- 2) Read Sec. 10.5