The Persons With Disabilities – Their Struggle for Recognition, Rights and for Improving Their Quality of Life: Role of the Ngos

M.G. Basava Raja

The PWDs in India with the active support of NGOs have begun to achieve the recognition that disability is as an equal opportunities issue as race and gender. The growing social and political movement of PWDs has had a major impact both on theories about the nature of disability and on the implementation of a program of equal opportunities policies for the development of PWDs. The term development, in this context, refers to an integrated process which includes social, political, economic, and spiritual development of PWDs containing the core objectives of – (1) food for hungry people (2) acquisition of language for expressing their ideas (3) appropriate education / employment / equal opportunities.

The innate abilities of PWDs have to be rightly recognized. The PWDs should not be excluded from the mainstream of society. If they are appropriately motivated and supported in the form of education, training, opportunity, they can contribute their mite to the society and economic development of the country. The state agencies alone cannot deal with the different kinds of problems of PWDs in an effective manner; hence there is need for the involvement of NGOs.

Role of NGOs in the Promotion of the Welfare of PWDs

The role of NGOs in the promotion of the welfare of PWDs has been recognized and considered vital because of their special qualities in their style of functioning such as innovation, flexibility in operation, and sensitivity to the changing needs and the high level of motivation of the functionaries. NGOs aim at helping the PWDs to help themselves by mobilizing their own resources, tapping their potential, identifying problems, finding solutions to them, and implementing them to achieve their goals. Government of India, States and Union Territories are increasingly seeking consultation with NGOs and providing funds to support their development activities indicating that the Government values the role that they play in the welfare of PWDs.

To study the different development aspects of PWDs, various Committees / Working Groups have been set up in India. The reports of these committees and WGs reveal that in many cases, the living conditions of PWDs would not have improved but for the efforts of Government Welfare programs and NGOs. However, some gaps in the strategy of development of PWDs are also found in the reports. For example, the extent availment of welfare facilities by the PWDs of urban areas is greater as compared to the extent of availment by the PWDs of rural areas. Many of the welfare schemes for uplifting PWDs are not implemented in full measure due to lack of response from beneficiary PWDs. There is lack of adequate co-ordination amongst different government agencies in the matter of proper implementation of welfare schemes of PWDs. In order to overcome these drawbacks, the role of NGOs is also of vital importance.
Methodology of the study

This study is empirical in nature; it has collected primary as well as secondary data. We have contacted 150 PWDs in the two sample districts of Karnataka viz., Raichur and Kodagu. Stratified-random-sampling procedure is followed to choose sample beneficiaries assisted by state agencies and NGOs. The structured-schedule-cum-questionnaire in respect of beneficiaries is utilized for collecting data / information. On the basis of the information collected from field study, comparing the post assistance position with the pre-assistance position, the impact of welfare facilities on the overall quality of life of the beneficiary PWDs is assessed.

Findings of the study

The findings of this study are summarized below:

- NGOs can play a crucial role in promoting the welfare of PWDs by supplementing government efforts as they are close to the minds and hearts of PWDs.

- They have the roots in the PWDs and can respond to their needs and aspirations very effectively. They experiment with new approaches to the development of PWDs.

- The NGOs, however face problems in terms of funding, recruitment and retention of trained / qualified personnel, lack of professional approach, in some cases apathy of the government authorities towards them and the tendency of the politicians and others to use them for personal / political gain.

- There is a need to take some measures such as simplifying and streamlining grants-in-aid procedures, training of staff, improving the organizational structure and administrative competence of the staff to strengthen the NGOs.