

Navigating Challenges: Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Their Pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have expanded their tasks and activities in developed as well as underdeveloped countries. They mobilize the community to be self-sufficient, support communities to discover their own abilities, and depend on their own resources. In Balochistan NGOs face a lot of challenges to implement the community development projects to achieve sustainable development goals. This study examined the role of NGOs towards Health, poverty and education in communities and to find the reasons of slow development rate in communities. The timeframe for this study was short therefore the data was collected from 6 International NGOs and 4 Local NGOs working on community development projects in Balochistan. Qualitative method with purposive sampling were used and structured interviews were conducted from NGOs to collect data, the data was examined through thematic analysis. Findings and references that occurred from the study will serve as a beginning point to generate interest for additional research into the other aspects of the activities of NGOs

Keywords: - NGO (Non-Government Organization), Government, Community Development, CSO (Civil Society Organization), Sustainable Development Goals.

Introduction

In today's world, the efforts of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are appreciated, the non-profit organization's work in development sector is actually admirable. Other than a few government organizations, it is the NGOs that put efforts and resources to fight the social and community injustices and issues embedded in societies. NGOs are playing a vital role in development of healthy and literate communities by providing their services and assistance which leads to economic mobility and stability.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have a distinct advantage in addressing societal needs due to their agility and ability to act promptly in times of crisis. The response of NGOs is relatively faster than Government agencies due to the organizational structure. In case of need in trouble and pressing issues, they have a strategy in order to respond quickly. When a local population is involved in the aid providing process, it is easier to address basic issues. For example, in a natural disaster or epidemic, blasts of help is provided by these Rand in the affected areas before any other organization gets a set up (Smith et al., 2024). One of the factors potency of NGOs is in promoting non-government organization led approaches focusing on individual and community returns. They teach the people to take the lead in solving problems hence taking responsibility. Looking at the objectives of NGOs, that is necessity in education, health, and even in responding to a disaster, all efforts made by NGOs are precise, accurate, and efficient. In most instances, they are the last option giren the applicable areas which government systems lack or failed to serve (Johnson & Lee, 2024).

An edge-to-edge distinction of NGO work is the community's active participation in most of the processes including the development. Rather than engagement for a particular period of time, the NGOs' approach requires the people living in the area of a particular program to be a moving force in starts, designing and executing plans. This levels the overall collaboration, which not only improves the sustainability. For example, programs designed to improve access to clean water or education are more likely to succeed when community members are engaged in every phase, from design to execution (Gonzalez et al., 2024). By addressing critical gaps in governance and service delivery, NGOs play an essential role in ensuring that marginalized communities receive the support they need to meet their basic necessities. Their unique ability to adapt and mobilize resources efficiently makes them indispensable partners in the pursuit of sustainable development goals.

Background of the Study:

NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations) are non-profit bodies, working for social welfare and development of the societies in different areas around the world. NGO's are the main actors of development in local communities globally. The existence of the NGO's can be traced back to the late 18th century, in 1914 at the start of the world war I

there were about 1083 NGOs (Davies, 2014). The INGO's were important in the anti-slavery and women's suffrage (decades-long fight to win the right to vote for women in the United States). Non-Governmental organizations have played an important role in pushing sustainable development at many levels.

According to (Ephraim, 2018), Today the government is facing many challenges than ever, there are more people competing for the services the government is making available in different sectors. There are systematic failures in public institutions that's why the water and electricity have become luxuries. This is the main cause NGOs try to provide these services to the public and make their lives better. One main advantage of NGOs in supporting the communities is that they act and work faster than the government. They work with the people closely on the field and rapidly access the current area in the occurrence of an issue. The NGOs are always present to provide relief to the effected whatever the problem is, whether poverty, natural disasters, health or education they are always ready for solving these issues.

Stromquist (2002) posits that NGOs perform three primary functions: Providing educational services such as primary and basic schooling, providing direct services such as providing aids and shelter, and defending public policy such as policy on avoidance of corruption. While Community development is a process where the members of the community are assisted and supported by different agencies to identify the issues and take action when needed. Community development makes more strong and connected communities. According to Kenny (2007), Community development is a comprehensive approach based on principles of human rights, Participation and involvement, social equality and justice. Community development focuses on members of the community to be expert in their lives and give values to community education and wisdom. Community development programs are led by NGOs for promoting sustainable development goals. Furthermore, (Bashir, 2016) The approach for community development can be achieved through various ways and institutions which includes, the government of the state and NGOs (Non-Government Organizations).

(Butlin, 1989) stated that Our Common Future delivered the idea of "Sustainable Development" squarely into the scope of government and public across the world. The audience globally pinned hopes to sustainable development as an efficient solution to

urgent societal and environmental problems where business as usual mostly failed. As (Loginova et al., 2022) It seems that there are more and more youth movements in schools, universities and youth sustainable entrepreneurial and non-profit initiatives donating locally to the achievement of the Sustainable development goals. (Krut, 1997) The number of NGOs has been increasing since the 1980s, mostly in reaction to the state's failure to deliver social facilities and services to public.

The origin of NGOs in Pakistan can be traced back to the partition in 1947, when the subcontinent was divided into two states India and Pakistan. Many Non-profit organizations were formed to give aid to refugees for settling in newly established state. In the first few years many NGOs started on providing basics services such as education, housing, health and etc. According to (Alam, 2008) In Pakistan, Non-profit Organizations are more active CSOs (Civil Society Organizations that gives assistance to a number of communities to identify their issues in the community and try to improve the quality of their life. NGOs are the significant development bodies, which played a vital role in Pakistan for socio-economic development. According to (Naviwala, 2010) The highest proportion of NGOs involved in education that is 46%, only 6% are health area NGOs in Pakistan In the remainder of 2020–2030, or the so-called “Decade of Action”, youth will be a vital driving strength behind the execution of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Problem statement:

NGOs operate in different countries, especially in developing countries, to help the governments to boost basic level of facilities, which government alone cannot do due to limited resources. However, in Pakistan, particularly, in Baluchistan, NGOs have not been successful to show an impact in basic education, health facilities and reducing poverty. As per (IBRD, 2018) report, among the four provinces in Pakistan, Baluchistan had the worst education indicators. The demography of the province had been adversely affected over the last few years because of natural calamities and ethnic clashes. The area had very basic social service because of lack of finances and a well defined governance structure. The area had geographic disparity with sparse populations and poor road and internet accessibility which limited education and health services to its people. The Government of Baluchistan has been having a lot of problems in maintaining schools,

hospitals and BHU's (Basic Health Units) due to very poor infrastructure and even worse supervision.

It is a sad situation that most NGOs working in the development field face the challenge of fragmentation and poor cohesion especially at the community level. This mostly creates redundancy in work and inefficient utilization of the limited resources available at hand. In addition, many NGOs do not take the relevant populations into account in their activities. Where the recipients do not participate actively, then a lack of sense of ownership problem emerges and this causes a reduced level of effort to keep the projects alive in the years to come. Similarly, another problem which is equally important is minimal project evaluation to check on how the projects are functioning and what impact they are having. Lack of these mechanisms increases the probability of project dilapidation caused by failure to monitor the projects and follow up with maintenance and repair work. This lack of oversight diminishes the long-term effectiveness of development programs and erodes community trust in NGOs. Addressing these challenges requires fostering better coordination among NGOs to avoid redundancy and ensure optimal resource utilization. Equally important is prioritizing community participation at every stage of project planning and implementation. When local people are involved, they develop a sense of responsibility and ownership, which enhances the sustainability of development initiatives. With improved collaboration and active community engagement, NGOs can maximize their impact and contribute more effectively to sustainable development goals.

Significance of the study:

This study examines the impact of community development activities performed by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The study will be a product of the realization of the existence of evidence between the growing number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the state of community development progress in most rural communities. This study observes that although the number of non government organizations promoting community development in variety of rural areas has increased, there seems to be little commensurate advancement among such specific targeted communities in their active participation towards NGO initiated community development efforts. Claims and conclusions which developed in this study will mark the

starting location which might be exploited to engender the interest for further investigations with respect to the approach of other activities of Non-Governmental organizations. In conclusion, the role of NGOs in the development of nations will be an important contribution to the body of literature on the subject, and it will aid as a reference for policy formulation and implementation, as well as to the body of theoretical knowledge. The research will serve as an adequate source of literature review for the stakeholders, in this case, the researchers, and will also act as a springboard for future research. It will also contribute to empirical, conceptual, theoretical and methodological knowledge about the problem on the activities and efforts of NGOs to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged people in society.

Objectives of the Study:

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To find the reasons of the slow developmental rate in the districts and the role of the NGO in supporting community development in the district will be addressed and solutions identified.
- To examine the challenges faced by the NGOs in implementing the projects of community development.
- To determine that how NGOs measure their organizations impact.

Research Questions:

- What is the level of local people's participation in carrying out NGOs' activities?
- What is the Local community's perception on the presence of NGOs' in their areas?
- Which methods and approaches are used by NGOs' to promote local Participation?
- How to connect work of NGO'S to the sustainable development goals?
- How NGO'S start measuring their organization's impact?

Literature Review

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

NGOs are perceived by their advocates as a catalyst for communal change because they are responsive to the necessities and problems of their clients, usually the women, children and poor. Because of directing and being responsive to marginalized communities in society, NGOs are being indicated as important vehicles for democratization, empowerment and economic development (Dicklitch, 2001).

Willets (2010) categorizes NGOs into two broad groups: operative and campaigning. Operative NGOs main mission is to carry out development projects for underserved people such as the disabled, poor, elderly, and troubled. Meanwhile, campaigning NGOs are organizations whose primary objective is to impact a country's policy making process. Logically, operative NGOs need resources in the form of monetary support, equipment, or voluntary labor to bring out their projects and programs. In comparison to operative NGOs, campaigning NGOs depend on more intangible capitals to mobilize the tasks they accomplish, such as concepts, expertise, experience, and time from other fellows and individuals. Thus, NGOs are defined as growth actors that can donate to the establishment of social associations and cross-networks that can help as a foundation for communal action and increased self-governing participation.

The Concept of Community Development:

Community development is a planned and dynamic self-acting expedient that seeks to upgrade the quality of life of an individual and the welfare of the society as a whole. Spijkers and Honniball (2015) argues that this involves helping the community and its people with the greater authorities in order to framework the social, economic and cultural aspects of the society. In this respect, such amalgamation does not only enable communities to fully participate in national building, but also supplement them to wider nationals and regional systems to guarantee the aspect of inclusiveness and fairness. The wants of community development's objectives is primarily focused on the goals of enhancement and expansion of activities at the community levels on people's participation and voluntary contributions, effective utilization of resources, accountability and self-governance. These are all expected to address equity and equity of access, self-determination and cohesive community, enhanced engagement, and promotion of fairness in social processes (Odoom et al 2022). In whichever the case, through addressing such objectives of community development people and population become stakeholders in the direction of movement of their development. As noted by Pawar (2014), community development should be regarded as a system with a specific aim of peoples' voluntary effort in the informal groups to work in an organized fashion for the attainment of beneficial changes. These changes are however in most cases

focused on the community development needs, policies and programs emphasizing the different aspects such as health, education, housing and recreation.

The Relationship between NGOs and Community Development:

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can be characterized as central actors when it comes to community development, especially in the area of mobilizing the locality and ensuring the cohesion of the society. Their aims target the creation of those communities that will be able to meet economic needs, protect the environment, and strengthen the social aspect. Foster (1997) for instance argues that as a result of the modern-day's increasing globalization and civil unrest issues, NGOs have become a key factor in issues of community level development and indeed accomplishing global goals. Acioly (1993) on the other hand outlined a number of prominent functions that NGOs have with regard to the promotion of community development. Such roles include building some of the basics such facilities, providing ground breaking activities, acting as a nexus for local people and government communication, offering skills, conducting research and surveys and supporting the rights of self disadvantaged groups. Together, these functions demonstrate the ways in which civil society organizations compete and complement government initiatives especially in areas where public service systems are unable to meet the increasing needs for the basic services and developmental projects.

Non-government organizations have been increasing in their significance primarily due to the role they play in furthering the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). However, if authority in general or service provision in particular is not satisfactory, negative circumstance arises in the majority of the rural and urban populations. It can reasonably be presumed that their presence in the 21st century is largely the result of authorities' incapacity to cope with multiple problems such as their economy, public healthcare and education, infrastructure expansion, etc. Nyangosi et al. (2016) observed that these inefficiencies have indeed enabled NGOs to operate by providing core services where the state is not able to. Furthermore, as the World Health Organization pointed out (WHO, 2018), health is an aspect around which various initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable development revolve.

Moreover, non-government organizations address resource distribution issues and other social and environmental vulnerabilities thus engaging in health risk prevention, which compliments their goals with global SDG objectives. A significant benefit of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is their ability to interact with people and groups allowing them to identify and solve community problems. As pointed out by Abiddin et al. (2022), community development has been described as a means of social change, especially if it is done using participatory methods. Head (2007) underlined the need of community involvement in addressing common problems because of the fact that participation invokes quite a number of approaches and forms of organization. This can be done by using knowledge transfer, encouraging communication, giving up power, and giving responsibility for implementation to community organizations. Allan et al. (2022) remarked that the collaborative governance approaches are increasingly important for maintaining a shared responsibility for development projects as governments are using strategies that are supposed to improve people's participation in planning and policy making.

Pearce (2000) contended that successful community development strategies should emphasize empowerment, inclusive leadership, and innovation driven by dialogue. For sustainability to be achieved, it is essential that communities, whether rural or urban, engage in all stages of the development process, from needs assessment to the planning and implementation of solutions. This methodology guarantees that initiatives target vital goals, such as enhancing access to education, healthcare, and recreational facilities, promoting leadership, and bolstering local capabilities in resource management. By customizing development programs to address the distinct needs of individual communities, NGOs not only empower individuals but also establish enduring solutions that persist long after the project's completion.

Eventually, NGOs are crucial to economic community improvement. They address basic holes in administration and benefit arrangement whereas supporting for systemic changes and cultivating grassroots activities. By manufacturing associations with governments, businesses, and nearby organizations, NGOs engage communities to require possession of their development and improvement. Their endeavors are instrumental in accomplishing a more evenhanded and feasible future, making them

basic partners in tending to the multifaceted challenges of worldwide advancement. Their endeavors are central to accomplishing social, financial, and natural supportability, making them fundamental partners within the interest of a more evenhanded and economical future.

NGOs and Public Participation:

As (Štuopytė, 2022) noted about the experience of people who took part in education programs conducted through the activities of NGOs, there are such motives for participation in humanitarian organizations which are related to the need for communication and self-fulfillment as well as integration, social elevation and adjusting to the constant changes in the society. NGO's for the bettering the communities and imparting the new set of skills and knowledge on the people have to work on educating the people, removing the individual passiveness as well as the insecurity to encourage people to participate more. In addition, it is also necessary to pay attention to the organizational aspect. 'Institute of Public Participation' (IAPP). The IAPP developed five major models of citizen engagement which are Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower. These serve to suggest a spectrum of participation strategies, from the less participatory to the more participatory. Every technique has an inherent commitment and an expectation of engagement from the public about the nature and intention of engagement, therefore reducing the chances of ambiguity or doubt regarding the expected outcome. Tools that are commonly associated with engagement of a type of technique are also included.

Research Methodology

The Research Design:

This study is based on a qualitative in nature that seeks to capture the involvement and participation of communities with NGOs. This design provides an insight into challenges, participation, involvement and implementation of projects in communities the data is gathered on basis of projects like education, health and poverty. Qualitative research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter being explored. It is particularly effective for examining people's broader perceptions of everyday behavior

and understanding how individuals interpret their experiences and construct meaning in the world around them.

Data Collection:

The study relied on structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Interviews are one of the most widely used techniques in qualitative research and, when conducted effectively, provide a powerful way to gather valuable insights. They are also applicable in quantitative studies, depending on the research objectives. For this study, the researcher conducted interviews with Project Evaluation Officers from various NGOs. These discussions aimed to explore their perspectives on the challenges hindering community development and the reasons behind the slow progress and shortcomings of related projects.

Sampling:

Sampling is done to make simple and easier the whole investigation and study. Non probability sampling technique was used for selecting the sample. In non-probability, purposive sampling was used. By using this sampling technique 10 NGOs were selected (6 INGOs, 4 Local NGOs) working on community development more than 5 years. The criteria of more than 5 years was selected because community development is a long term process, the strategies set by NGOs for community development projects to meet sustainable development goals are always long run strategies and long term goals are always more than 3 years, another reason of selecting the criteria is, the NGOs collaborate with government, the government tenure is 5 years in Pakistan. So collecting data from those NGOs which have been working on these projects of community development gave accurate and effective data.

Research Analysis Tool:

The data is examined through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis recognized as a qualitative research method. In thematic analysis it needs to decide what exactly the themes identified in the analysis represent. Themes are the specific pattern of meaning found in the data. After Conducting interviews, the researcher transcribed the interviews from different sources then build themes from gathered data.

Results

The findings from structured interviews with representatives of international and local NGOs working in Balochistan reveal numerous challenges that impact the effectiveness of community development projects. These include cultural opposition, tribal affiliations, funding constraints, and a lack of accountability and monitoring mechanisms. The insights gained provide a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles faced by NGOs and highlight areas for improvement. The results are presented thematically, capturing the core issues and respondent perspectives.

Challenges Faced by NGOs in Community Development

Rigid Cultural Strains

Cultural factors rank as one of the most serious obstacles that hinder effective community development in Balochistan. It appears that the communities' attitudes towards the region are influenced by their historical practices and misconceptions about the activities undertaken by Ngo. There are communities which see non-governmental organizations as foreign forces which seek to promoting the Western way of life which breeds suspicion.

A respondent (R1) stated:

“The participation of local people in the development activities is a little bit disappointing. People still have the view that these NGOs are extensions of the west who have come to destroy our Islamic faith and cultural practices.”

Another respondent (R2) elaborated:

“It has now also become a matter of life and death during vaccination drives, people perceive vaccination drives as a front for foreign powers to reduce population. This underscores the importance of campaigns to promote correct understanding of Islam carried out both by the NGOs and Islamic leaders.”

In this respect, NGOs to avoid this, need to team up with the religious leaders and local opinion leaders. Other methods may also include educational campaigns to inform communities about the objectives of NGOs working in the community as development oriented.

Tribal Affiliation

The tribal structure of Balochistan plays a critical role in shaping community dynamics. Tribal affiliations often create barriers to equitable participation in development projects. Traditional leaders, or "Maliks," frequently exert significant influence over community decisions, sometimes prioritizing their interests over collective well-being.

A respondent (R3) observed:

"Tribal loyalties are strong, and people prefer to resolve issues within their tribal framework. This limits the impact of development projects that require broader collaboration."

However, some NGOs have successfully leveraged the tribal system to promote community participation. One respondent (R4) noted:

"By engaging tribal leaders early in the planning process, we have been able to gain their support, which in turn encourages community members to participate actively."

Lack of Funding

Funding constraints are a persistent challenge for NGOs in Balochistan, affecting the scope and sustainability of their projects. Many NGOs rely heavily on international donors, whose priorities may not always align with local needs.

A respondent (R5) shared:

"Securing sustainable funding is an ongoing struggle. Donors often have their own agendas, forcing us to align our projects with their goals rather than the actual needs of the community."

Another respondent (R6) added:

"We need to diversify our funding sources, including seeking local support, to reduce dependency on international donors and ensure our projects are truly community-focused."

This reliance on donor-driven funding highlights the need for strategic resource mobilization and financial planning within NGOs.

Lack of Monitoring and Accountability

The absence of robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms significantly impacts the effectiveness of NGOs. Without proper systems to evaluate project outcomes, it becomes difficult to ensure transparency and sustained impact.

A respondent (R7) emphasized:

"Accountability is key to maintaining trust with the community and donors. Regular monitoring, end-line evaluations, and public reporting of budgets and outcomes are essential steps toward building credibility."

The establishment of standardized accountability frameworks, including third-party evaluations, could enhance the reliability and impact of NGO projects.

Mobilization and Community Engagement

Community engagement is critical for the success of development initiatives, yet it remains inconsistent across projects. Many respondents highlighted the importance of involving local stakeholders in all stages of the project cycle, from planning to implementation.

One respondent (R8) noted:

"People participate when they feel their voices are heard and their needs are prioritized. Building relationships with local leaders and offering tangible benefits can significantly improve engagement."

NGOs have employed various participatory methods, including workshops, focus group discussions, and community forums, to strengthen ties with local communities. These efforts have yielded positive outcomes in terms of trust-building and collaboration.

Capacity Building and Sustainability

Building the capacity of local communities is a cornerstone of sustainable development. NGOs aim to equip individuals and groups with the skills and resources needed to drive their development independently.

A respondent (R9) highlighted:

"Our goal is to create self-reliant communities that can identify their challenges and develop solutions without constant external support."

Programs focusing on education, healthcare, and economic empowerment have been particularly effective in fostering long-term sustainability. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure and institutional capacity often hinder progress.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the importance of fostering community participation in development activities. There should be no strict requirement for financial or in-kind contributions from communities; rather, the focus should be on building strong, positive relationships between NGOs and local communities. These connections are crucial for ensuring active participation in development efforts. Several challenges, such as the influence of traditional leaders and the lack of a conducive environment within organizations, hinder community involvement and undermine the sustainability of

development initiatives. Furthermore, under neoliberal frameworks, participatory development has often been co-opted by funding organizations, leading to the erosion of its original intent.

In order for NGOs to function better in the area of community development, it is recommended to make a number of essential changes. First, there is a need to strengthen community organizations through provision of adequate capacity and assisting them to improve coordination functions within the local government and other community-based organizations. Joint action by the governments, NGOs, and other players is also required, especially in the context of development assistance, capacity-building activities, and enhancing the conditions for the community-led initiatives to flourish. There are some analysts that claim that NGOs should be provided with stable funding by the government while also being regulated to facilitate participatory development. In addition, NGOs should be encouraged to employ better monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of their activities on the most vulnerable populations. The role of women, and enabling them to be part of the decision-making processes is also essential for development.

In addition to this, the study suggests NGOs to involve the target beneficiaries inclusively in the process of community development. In order to ensure that development projects respond to the needs of the people, the said people should be involved in every phase of the development cycle. Additionally, the government ought to develop mechanisms that will disburse donor funds to NGOs in accordance with the laid down participatory principles, enhancing responsibility and confidence about the developmental processes. For that reason, NGOs focus on the development of community's heritage and culture, their successful operation is characterized by active interaction with population, networking, and cooperation with other partners. Through strengthening community organization effectiveness and ensuring the lasting viability of developmental programs, NGOs can enhance their contribution to the betterment of people living in deprived areas.

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