

NGOs In Environmental Education

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HUMAN history speaks of two very significant revolutions. These were agricultural and industrial ones. Invention of agriculture about ten thousand years ago sparked off the agricultural revolution to change the fate of humanity in a profound way. The earthshaking second change came after the industrial revolution. Following this revolution, production centered development came in a more pronounced way. Economic expansion in the countries touched off by industrial revolution needed markets for purchase of raw materials cheaply and sale of their produced goods and services with profit. Humanity saw the rise of colonial and imperial powers fighting devastating wars on a global scale for gaining more access to markets and control of existing ones in order to get more wealth out of these. After the war, both the victors and the vanquished felt the need for accelerated production to make up the loss arising out of the wars. In Western Europe, the slogan was: "Produce or perish." Subsequently, all industrial countries known as 'Second Wave' nations pursued a policy of "mass production, mass consumption and their ultimate equilibrium." After the Second World War, many newly independent low income countries also adopted the policy and strategy of production-centered development blindly to change their conditions.

The vision that influenced the pursuance of such policy and strategy is growth centered development. Can infinite growth happen in a finite world? Answer is 'no.' It is contrary to logic and reality. The sources of resources and the sinks to absorb the wastes and pollutants released by growth centered human economy have their limits. These cannot bear unlimited loads. At the threshold of 21st century, it is clearly felt that economic expansion worldwide particularly in the 'Second Wave' nations, exponential population growth as consumption have widened the pace and process of unsustainability and environmental degradation. The situation should not continue. So, humanity needs a new worldview which should be grounded in the reality of the present: a time when the world is small and people are many. Life supporting ecosystems have become vulnerable and fragile due to developmental activities carried under the influence of growth centered development vision and belief. In fact, economy and human community should be subsets of the broader ecosystem. This worldview or paradigm used as lens to filter the day to day perception of people should be implanted to a vast majority of population through both formal and non-formal environmental education. Formal education in low-income countries can cover only a small percentage of their population.

Alternative non-formal environmental education or project approach has been designed to reach people whom formal environmental education either cannot reach or has excluded. They include the poor, women, members of the rural community, slum-dwellers, outcasts, unreachables and adult illiterates. One

great strength of non-formal project is that they are often goal specific. This also means that if they are successful they do not need to be sustained. Although non-formal approach has sometimes difficulties of organization, management, resources and status, this approach was and is the best means of promoting goal specific improvements — as with health education, environmental education, adult education, etc. NGOs as the alternative development institutions have the vision, imagination, flexibility, autonomy, creativity, innovation, experience, resources and strategies of implementing programmes including non-formal environmental education. NGOs have different generations of strategies.

NGOs with first generation strategies used to involve themselves in the direct delivery of services during an emergency (relief and welfare). Second generation strategies involve the NGOs on developing the capabilities of the people to better meet their own needs through self-reliant local actions (small-scale, self-reliant local development/community development). Third generation strategies seek changes in specific policies and institutions at local, national and global levels looking beyond the individual community (sustainable system of development). Going beyond 'the repair works', of earlier generations, fourth generation strategy involves NGOs in peoples' development movements. As a matter of priority, NGOs while doing holistic development work can incorporate non-formal environmental education in process.

Environmental education generally refers to education which is intended to influence human behaviour in environmentally sound way. An old Inca proverb says that a frog does not eat up the pond in which it lives. An environmentally sound person cannot spoil the environment in which he/she lives. This education has been emerging as a different discipline in response to current needs and is grounded on the worldview through which people need to perceive that the planet earth is a life sustaining spaceship with a finite store of physical and environmental resources. This perception calls for change in behaviour conducive to caring for earth through conservation and sustainable use of resources. Education propped by this perception needs creative planning to develop educational materials, methods, approaches, instructions and related activities. The emerging environmental education can be formal as well as non-formal. Non-formal education is in between two extremes — informal and formal. Through the non-formal methods and approaches, people can be reached who otherwise can't be. Non-formal environmental education can take place in any place whereas formal education is given in school classrooms. This project approach allows experimentation to develop the effective model. Community can be involved either by community-based organizations or

group approach. As a means, it is flexible and can use a range of institutions from rural canvasser to sophisticated electronic media.

NGOs' role with regard to non-formal environmental education can be varied and profound. They play important roles in the areas of need assessment, data, information collection, participatory need-based environmental educational planning and programming, organizing the people to attain the objectives, implementing the programmes with the organizations devised and resources available for the purpose, monitoring and evaluating for development of effective programmes and their replication including other operative functions like fund raising and allocating, training of trainers for non-formal environmental education, material development, demonstration and trend setting, documentation and research, acculturation, networking, partnership and coalition etc.

In order to understand the roles in the above mention areas, further explanation and clarification is given below:

a) Need assessment: NGOs have the advantage of working with the poor, women, and other disadvantaged people who often have different perceptions about the environment and the reality of nature compared to educated people. NGO personnel can assess the need of environmental education for these people through personal observation and interaction as well as application of many sophisticated methods for the purpose. For example, many people have the fatalistic attitude of having more children because of their belief that children born are fed and taken care of by God. So, they prefer to have more children as a source of their power. Because the grown up children will help them in future. They also have the attitude of treating women as inferior segment of society. Some adult illiterates may also believe that some fish-eggs and fry grow out of the soil in the rainy season. So, need assessment in connection with non-formal environmental education is an important area where the NGOs can play their important role.

b) Information/Data Collection: Effective planning and programming for non-formal environmental education require reliable data and information. NGOs can use both primary and secondary sources for the purpose. They can use many informal ways like personal observation, conversation, friendship, etc. to formal methods like surveys, depth interview, village books maintained by partner village organizations assisted by NGOs, rapid rural appraisal (diagnostic), participatory rural appraisal (empowering), etc.

c) Participatory need-based non-formal environmental education planning, programming and implementation: After the proper need assessment and reliable data and information collection, action plans and programmes in the light of institutional policy and strategy can be formulated. These plans and programmes may include necessary environmental subject in group discus-

sion, community meeting, traditional folk songs and drama, poster and banners, cinema and video show, the non-formal primary education and adult literacy programme, service of village leaders, imams, etc. What, where, who, when, how, of planning and programming and implementation will take necessary inputs and participation from the participants and beneficiaries. In Bangladesh NGOs like BRAC, NIJERA KORI, PROSHIKA-MUK, COMILLA PROSHIKA, POUSH, ACTION AID, CARITAS, GUP, GSS, and many other medium and small NGOs have been programming and implementing non-formal education with participation of the beneficiaries in Bangladesh. They also implement some non-formal environmental education programme. Their programmes can be improved by incorporating up-to-date and appropriate environmental educational materials, methods and subjects.

d) Organizing people to attain the objective: This is another area where NGOs can play an effective role. In order to enable the process of sustainable development including non-formal environmental education NGOs have been organizing the poor, the landless, the marginal and other disadvantaged people community based organizations and village partner groups can be appropriate forums for spread of environmental knowledge. Most of the NGOs in Bangladesh have the experience of organizing people to achieve their predetermined objective.

e) Monitoring and evaluating for development of effective programmes and their replication: This is another area where the role of NGOs for effective programme development and subsequent replication is recognized. Non-formal environmental has been emerging. NGOs with imagination, creativity, innovation and motivation can do a lot in non-formal environmental education development. BRAC, GSS, ACTION-AID and many other NGOs have developed effective non-formal education programme through application of monitoring and evaluation tool.

f) Fund raising and allocating: Raising resource for non-formal environmental education is no less important in present situation of critical environment in low-income countries. NGOs have the information, connection, and the ability to raise funds from various sources including small donation from the potential individuals. They know where to allocate the funds for the purpose. These activities range from environmental rallies to purchase of posters from IUCN and other sources to be hung in the remote offices and non-formal primary education centres of NGOs.

g) Training of Trainers of formal environmental education: Once the goal, the objectives, programmes, the process, the organization, etc are ready for implementation purpose, right person be identified, oriented and for training trainers to improve environmental education.

(To be continued)