

# ROLE OF NGOS IN DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE SOCIETY: IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** Service has always been the main motive of mankind. To give an actual meaning to this, the Non-Government Organizations came into existence. Along with serving the society, they have always aimed at maintaining a sustainable environment. They not only help in uplifting the weaker sections of the society but also contribute to the concept of inclusive growth which India is aiming at from past few years. Despite having limited resources, these organizations could optimize them and offer their services to the society. Thus, aligning themselves to move on the path of sustainable development. This paper aims at answering the questions, as to “How the NGOs help in Sustainable Development? How far have they been successful in developing a sustainable environment for the society? And how well have they managed to make a judicious use of the resources for the welfare of the society?” The NGOs have very well expanded their scope to various sectors like education, health, environment, human rights etc. This way they have shaped a secure and sustainable environment for the deprived sections of the society. NGOs have created an environment where people can live, grow, learn and also develop themselves. Sustainable Development aims at bridging the gap between ecological services and the quality of life and NGOs have very successfully merged the two, as they are in harmony with the nature and in the cradle of the same nature they nurture mankind. NGOs today are also looking after the environmental issues and promoting eco-friendly practices and with the same ideology they are marching towards the development of the viable society. This way these have built a symbiotic relationship between the environment and the society as both are mutually benefited. It is a cyclic process as the development of the weaker section of the society will contribute in growth, and growth again will result in more opportunities for the rise of the deprived sections. This is how these organizations help in creating a sustainable environment. This holistic approach of these organizations makes them a very influential tool to achieve sustainable development. The country

today, needs a model which addresses a long term development in the rural sector by optimizing the use of resources on a sustainable basis and NGOs are surely working in this direction.

**Keywords:** inclusive growth, optimization, social service, sustainability, symbiotic relationship

## INTRODUCTION

*“Ten years ago there was little talk of civil society in the corridors of power, but now the walls reverberate with at least the rhetoric of partnership, participation, and the role of citizens’ groups in promoting sustainable development.”*(Global Citizen Action, edited by Michael Edwards and John Gavendta, Lynne Rienner publications, Inc, 2001)

In today’s dynamic, ever evolving and competitive world, growth is very important in all the spheres. For developing countries like India, a sustainable growth is required which should not be area specific but should be holistic in nature. Generally, the government focuses on the economic and political growth and the other areas remain unnoticed. Whereas, to attain inclusive growth, all the sectors of both urban and rural areas are to be catered. Being a developing nation, there are various constraints which the nation has to face like limited finances, improper utilization of resources and lack of good governance and negligence of the deprived section of the society. As a result of which only a part of the nation gets a raise while the other sectors remain at inertia, overall hampering the growth. The ideals of inclusive growth can only be achieved when each and every sector socially, economically and politically is brought up to the level of sustainable growth. For this purpose a sustainable approach has to be adopted which not only satisfies the present but also secures the future. Social and environmental sectors play a very crucial role in the development process and often these sectors are neglected. Therefore, to take care of the deprived or the unnoticed sections of the society Non-profit organizations came into existence. With the whole sole aim of serving the mankind

without any monetary benefits, these organizations are shaping a sustainable environment for the people which are largely directed towards the idea of inclusive growth. By the efforts of these organizations the gulf between people's needs and services being offered can be bridged. These organizations with their myopic vision not only cure the present but also pave a way for better future, thus aligning themselves to the principles of sustainable development. NGOs, help in developing community capacities such as ability, skill and knowledge of mobilizing resources, planning and evaluating community initiation and solving problems to improve the quality of their life, they also by this aims at making them economically sound which in long run would contribute to sustainable development.<sup>[1]</sup> They maintain a symbiotic relation between the society and the environment as for the betterment of the society they make an optimum utilization of the resources and then in return with the help of the same society they work for the protection of the environment and this way NGOs have very significantly helped in developing a sustainable environment for the society.

### **Beginnings of NGOs**

Service is the main motive of mankind and to fulfil that a new set of organizations came into existence which work for the welfare of the society without any profit motive. These organizations became the godfathers of the needy segments of the society and started serving them in the best possible way.

**Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** are legally constituted corporations created by natural or legal people that function independently without the indulgence of the government. The term originated from the United Nations, and normally refers to organizations that are not attached to government and are not into profit businesses. Even if the NGO is funded totally or partially by governments, the NGO does not include any government representative as its member, thus, maintain its non-government status. These organizations majorly have social aims and function for the betterment of the society. The number of NGOs operating in the United States is estimated at 1.5 million. Russia has 277,000 NGOs. India is estimated to have had around 3.3 million NGOs in 2009, just over one NGO per 400 Indians, and many times the number of primary schools and primary health centres in India.<sup>[2][3][4]</sup>

### **What is Sustainable Development?**

The word sustainable means to maintain or support and the word development means growth, expansion or progress, on clubbing the two, we can define Sustainable development as a growth or development process which is stable and is maintained throughout

for /in a longer run. In other words, "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."<sup>[5]</sup>

### **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

It is important that the NGOs working towards the environment and society meet their set goals of developing a sustainable environment. The success of these NGOs will depend highly on their ability to mobilize and optimize the use of resources, proper planning and appropriate implementation for the attainment of their mentioned goals. So, keeping in view the necessity of aforesaid subject, an attempt was made to understand the role of the NGOs in developing sustainable environment for the society.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

(a) To study how NGOs help in Sustainable Development (b) To explain the proposed models for NGOs functioning to create sustainable environment for the society (c) To study the contribution of some selected NGOs in developing sustainable environment.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The scope of this paper is confined to the above mentioned objectives and limited to the available secondary information of various NGOs of India. The outcome of this study provides insight and information about the role of NGOs in developing the sustainable environment for society in India.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on secondary data. The required data have been collected from various sources i.e. through books, magazines, articles, previous studies, websites like, [www.india.gov.in](http://www.india.gov.in), [www.indiastat.com](http://www.indiastat.com), [www.articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), etc.

### **Aim of NGOs in India**

India is a developing country with ever growing population of 1.237 billion (2012 est.) people out of which 21.9 % (2012 est.) people are below poverty line and are leading a very challenging life. This segment of the of the society remains deprived of basic amenities like food, health and hygiene facilities, shelter, education, livelihood, etc. Expecting only the government and the private sector to cure all these ailing issues is like building a Utopia and that is why the third sector players i.e. the NGOs came forward and took hold of this problem. Along with the society they even showed their concern over the petty state of the environment which is now at the verge of degradation, as that is the powerhouse of all the resources which are recklessly being used by the mankind. It is with the help of those resources only,

the basic needs of society can be addressed. Today in India there are 3.2 million registered NGOs, under different acts like: (a) The Society registration act (b) The Company's act (c) The Indian Trust act (d) The Charitable & religious trust act (e) The FCR act

The majority of these NGOs, are working in the various sectors like- (a) Education & Literacy (38752) (b) Health & Family Welfare (32978) (c) Children (29936) (d) Environment & Forests (28087) (e) HIV/AIDS (25962) (f) Agriculture (24152) (g) Art & Culture (23361) (h) Women's Development & Empowerment (22154) (i) Rural Development & Poverty Alleviation (21755) (j) Drinking Water (21202) (k) Human Rights (20229), etc. (Source: Sector wise list of NGOs-[www.india.gov.in](http://www.india.gov.in))

### **How Sustainable Development can be achieved?**

In developing the sustainable environment for the society the basic problem arises because of unavailability of the resources to the weaker sections and the scarcity of resources is because of improper planning and use and improper balance in the environment. It is a cyclic process and therefore, to have smooth functioning a sustainable environment must be created, which is one of the main aims of the NGOs and they are thriving to achieve that only by the means of sustainable practices. (Fig 1. Illustrates this cycle)

This model suggests that a sustainable environment can be created when there is optimum utilization of resources and these resources help in improving the quality of life of the weaker sections of the society, when there is up gradation in the quality of life of the deprived section then they make a good human resource which in return work for maintaining a healthy, sustainable environment and this way the cycle goes on leading to the sustainable development as a whole.

Air and water Pollution, deforestation, greenhouse effect, global warming, and depletion of natural resources at fast pace are some of the serious issues. Therefore, NGOs have taken some immediate actions to slow and reverse the environment degradation as they are working on Environmental sustainability. Environmental Sustainability deals with maintenance or improvement of the quality of environment for the society in the long run.

### **Role of NGOs in maintaining Sustainable Environment:**

NGOs widely act as a, Implementer, Catalyst and Partner.<sup>[6]</sup>

### **Implementer**

The NGOs help in mobilising the resources to provide goods and services in the best possible way. Through their activities and programmes like health care initiatives, advocating environmental issues, carrying out various drives, etc., they work for the society. They carry out their operations and implement well all their projects.

### **Catalyst**

As the role of a catalyst is to increase the efficiency of the operation, similarly, the NGOs inspire and improve the skills, capabilities, lifestyle and social condition of the people giving a thrust to development. This results in the empowerment, capacity building and shaping a sustainable social environment for the society.

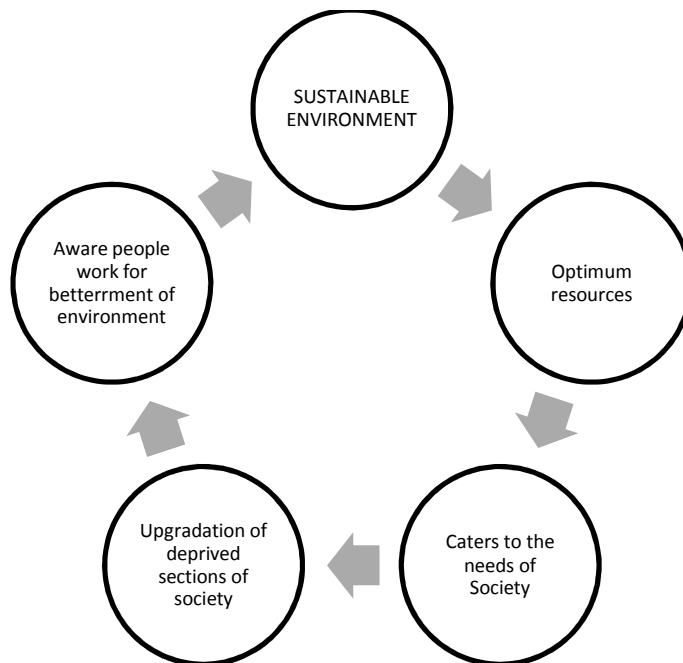
### **Partner**

NGOs now days are working with the private sector or the corporate world. There is a budding relationship between the two as by this coalition both are mutually benefitted. The corporate covers it as a part of Corporate Social Responsibility while the NGOs get the funds or other aids. It is seen that many corporate bodies are supporting NGOs for their noble work. Big names of the FMCG sector like P&G, ITC's Classmate have started donating Re 1. With the purchase of some of the products to the NGO's. Similarly, companies like WIPRO, P& G, ITC with the generous donations registering their support to these voluntary organizations. This shows that the scope of NGOs is widening up as there is indulgence of even the corporate sector for the welfare of the society.

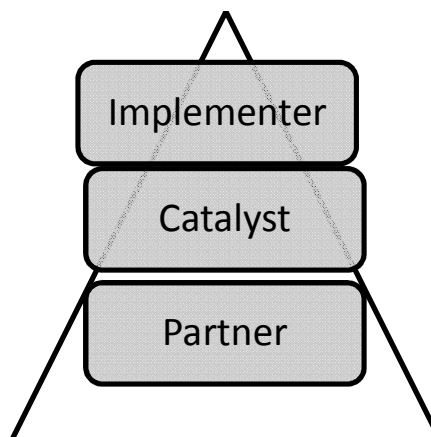
The Indian NGOs are working on the following model too: The NGOs function in such a way that it becomes beneficial for both, the society and the environment, on the whole resulting in a sustainable environment.

### **Functions of NGOs and Sustainable Development**

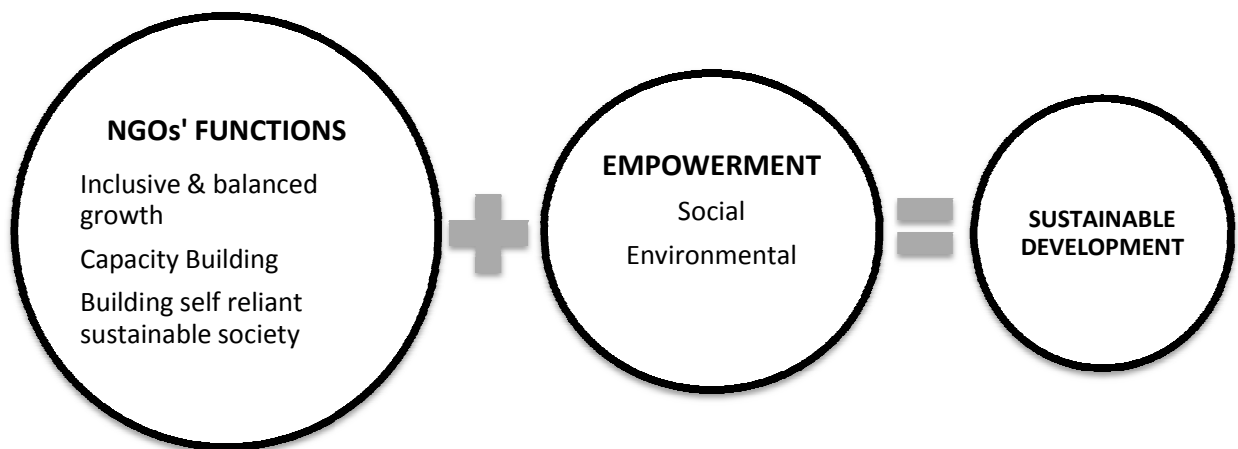
This model describes the various major functions of NGOs and the elevation of Sustainable Development by empowering social, environmental and other related issues. The discussions are specifically on functions related to inclusive & balanced growth of society, capacity building and building self-reliant society. Ultimately, sustainable development will only be achieved particularly when society is empowered.



**Figure 1:** How Sustainable Development can be achieved?



**Figure 2:** NGOs widely act as a, Implementer, Catalyst and Partner



**Figure 3:** Illustrates a theoretical framework of the functions of NGOs in promoting sustainable development of the society.

According to Finger (1994), the bottom-up approach emphasizes community participation, grassroots movements and local decision making. It argues that community participation and grassroots initiatives promote participatory decision making and local self-reliance (Panda 2007).<sup>[7]</sup> This approach in social development would likely to bring about empowerment to the society and its environment and finally results in sustainable development of the society as a whole. In this people are able to state their own problems and having capability and aptitude to solve it through optimizing and managing themselves.

***Inclusive & balanced growth and Sustainable development***

Inclusive growth refers both to the pace and pattern of growth, which are considered interlinked, and therefore in need to be addressed together. The idea that both the pace and pattern of growth are critical for achieving a high, sustainable growth record, as well as poverty reduction, is consistent with the findings in the Growth Report: Strategies for Sustained Growth and Inclusive Development (Commission on Growth and Development, 2008).

<sup>[8]</sup>The commission notes that inclusiveness – a concept that encompasses equity, equality of opportunity and is an essential ingredient of any successful growth strategy. Inclusive growth also means making the best use of all resources, young, old, men and women. Labour market, education and training programmes must all work to maximise opportunity and inclusiveness. (OECD Forum)

Balanced Growth refers to a specific type of economic growth that is sustainable in the long term. NGOs work on the same concept of inclusive as well as balanced growth. NGOs concern for the environment always focuses on the mix of renewable resources as well as non-renewable growth in order to maintain the balanced growth. NGOs are the best medium to initiate the concept of inclusive growth in a country like India. As the major function of the NGOs is to ensure overall and inclusive development of the society. Every individual NGO focuses on the different but specific areas but always perform its duties and responsibilities to maintain sustainability of the environment. It means it always take care of all the sections and every single unit of the society.

As Nandan Nilekani summaries in his book *Imagining India* (2008): “India now stands evenly balanced, between our reluctance to change in the face of immense challenges and the possibilities we do have if we do tackle these issues head-on. The consequences of these two choices are in extremes in the long term we will either become a country that greatly disappoints when compared to our potential or one that beats all expectations.”<sup>[6]</sup> NGOs today focusing to optimally utilize the available opportunities and tackle each and every issue directly to provide a sustainable environment for the society.

***Capacity Building and Sustainable development***

‘If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward.’ -Martin Luther King

**Table 1:** Examples of some national, regional and local NGOs that have contributed to sustainable environment

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Activity/ Impact</b>
1.	GreenpeaceIndia	Climate Change, Toxic Waste, Nuclear Safety, Overfishing Protection, Environment degradation	Pushed the Indian Govt. for Unlimited Liability of Supplier which led to increase in Liability of Suppliers from 5 Billion. To 15Billion in the Nuclear Liability Bill; In 2008, Greenpeace organized the meeting of major electronic manufacture on e-waste which leads to the ball rolling for a formal law governing e-waste; Exposed presence & sale of Genetically Engineered food in the country leading to investigation by Director general of Foreign Trade. <sup>[11]</sup>
2.	Sanjeevani- VikasEvam Jan KalyanSamiti	Rural Water Supply Sanitation services	It is working on SWAp Program i.e. sectorwise approach programme. The project envisages upgrading no or partial coverage of water supply to full coverage with sustainable services, benefiting at least 1.2 million people, or 20% of the rural population. <sup>[12]</sup>
3.	Udaan Welfare Foundation, Mumbai	Health and Nutrition Education Environment	It concentrates on children, women, Environment etc. and run several programs for the same like, Rain water harvesting project in 2011 in which save about 200-250 million litres of water and help to grow vegetations in the 65 acre land. The various other programs are also organized by the NGO like Tree Plantation- MuktaJeevan and Waste water recycling project which leads them towards attaining sustainable environment for the society. <sup>[13]</sup>
4.	Deepalaya- Enabling self-reliance	Community health Illiteracy Education Women Empowerment Institutional care	It has reached out to more than 2,70,000 children, given vocational training to 9,700 adults and helped form more than 1,000 Self Help Groups with 11,000 women who have together saved Rs.408 million with a community revolving fund of Rs.1053 million. It also operates several schools, that cater to more than 1,00,000 beneficiaries.In 2012, the women Self Help Groups saved Rs. 14.56 million and their total savings have increased to Rs. 46.84 million. From the savings alone they have given out loans worth Rs. 927 lakh. <sup>[14]</sup>
5.	P.R.I.D.E India	Livelihood Development Relief & Rehabilitation Ideal Village Health, etc.	Planning rural-Urban Integrated Development through Education, India focuses on holistic development of marginalized rural people, considering the family as a unit, by adopting an integrated approach with the main emphasis on health, education and empowerment. To date, 671 beneficiaries have been given financial assistance for purchasing cattle, 134 for starting small orchards, and 257 for strengthening small business units, 37800 people have so far benefitted from P.R.I.D.E.'s Relief Camps. It was instrumental in helping 44 beneficiaries to construct individual toilet units along with initiating 4 self-help groups of women in the village of Nagaon. It also helped in the construction of schools and general sanitation needs. <sup>[15]</sup>

6.	Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)	Ecological Restoration Livelihood development	FES is functioning towards the ecological restoration and preservation of land and water resources in ecologically fragile, degraded and sidelined regions of the country, through concentrated and collective efforts of village communities. As of March, 2013 FES works with 28 districts in 7 states of the country engaging with 5323 village institutions and protecting around 4,71,521 hectares of revenue wastelands, forest lands and Panchayat grazing lands creating a difference in the lives of 28,95,024 individuals. The organisation uses a holistic approach to resource management by “intertwining principles of nature conservation and local self-governance in order to accelerate ecological restoration, as well as improve the living conditions of the poor.” <sup>[16]</sup>
7.	Centre for Environmental Research and Education (CERE)	Environmental sustainability Education	CERE carry out a range of consultancy that will help organizations achieve its sustainability goals. CERE has magnificently completed projects in both urban and rural India having worked with different government departments, educational institutions, multinational companies and civil society organizations. CERE is also a pioneer in the field of corporate sustainability & carbon management systems where they help organisations map their carbon footprint, meet international reporting standards, implement low cost carbon reductions strategies which ensure considerable financial savings and engage in staff awareness activities. <sup>[17]</sup>
8.	Chintan- Environmental Research and Action group, New Delhi-NCR	Sustainable consumption Environmental Social justice	Chintan organize Waste programme functions at the grassroots and reminds the world that waste is as much about people as it is about materials. In India, particularly, it is about the millions of poor who handle waste, saving public money and reducing greenhouse gases. It works with partners such as the New Delhi Municipal Council, Ghaziabad Nagar Nigam, SafaiSena and other agencies to help set up solid-waste handling systems that result in green jobs. It handles over 10 tonnes of waste a day through its solid waste programme. It seeks to improve post-consumer e-waste handling by advocating for better policies, organizing and building the capacity of e-waste handlers for green jobs, and by telling the story constantly to engage the larger public. <sup>[18]</sup>

9.	SPHEEHA- Society for Preservation of Healthy Environment and Ecology and Heritage of Agra, Agra	Environment preservation Ecological balance Afforestation	SPHEEHA's vision is to make all Urban Habitats Eco-Friendly and Sustainable. Despite its limited means and resources it took a bold step in this direction and launched an intensive tree plantation drive in the city. In the year 2009-10 more than 1300 saplings were planted in Zone 2 of the city. Beside this it also take remarkable steps in the area of water and waste management. The most remarkable achievement of SPHEEHA is in the field of energy by promoting use of solar energy for electricity. The colony of Dayalbagh and DEI University in Agra use Solar based electricity. DEI University became the first university to go 100% on Solar Energy! <sup>[19]</sup>
10.	Siruthuli, Coimbatore	Water Management Afforestation Waste management	Siruthuli has done work to improve the water management system of Coimbatore and nearby areas by promoting Rain water harvesting. It also focuses on Afforestation and Mass education program. It launches drive against non-bio degradable wastes as well. The project of the NGO to plant 1.04 lakh saplings in and around the city has now been extended to the industry as well. <sup>[20]</sup>

Capacity building is one of the approaches of NGOs that helps to promote sustainable development of the society. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed an understanding of society capacity building or development. The UNDP defines capacity building as a 'long-term continual process of development that involves all stakeholders; including ministries, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, professionals, community members, academics and more.'<sup>[9]</sup> Capacity building utilizes the human resources, scientific, technical, organizational, and resource capabilities of the country. The Capacity building aims to challengedifficultiesrelated to policy and methods framed for development, with consideration of the potential, restrictions and needs of the people of the country concerned. The three levels are framed as individual, an institutional and the societal level by UNDP by which capacity building takes place.

#### **Individual level**

Society capacity-building on an individual level involves the development of conditions that allow individual participants to develop existing knowledge and skills.

#### **Institutional level**

Society capacity building on an institutional level essentially involves serving current institutions in developing countries. Creating new institutions should not be involved, rather renovating existing institutions and supporting them in making comprehensive policies, organizational structures,

and effective methods of management and revenue control.

#### **Societal level**

Society capacity building at the societal level should support the establishment of a more "interactive public administration that learns equally from its actions and from feedback it receives from the population at large." Society capacity building must be used to develop public administrators that are responsive and accountable.

(Source: United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (2006). "Definition of basic concepts and terminologies in governance and public administration". United Nations Economic and Social Council.)

NGOs through the providing education, skill and knowledge, develop the aptitude of society towards attaining sustainable environment. The point of empowerment is the product of the capacity building of the society. It is discussed that empowerment starts with changes in skills, knowledge level, awareness etc. at an individual level and further escalates in form of major social developments and restructuring that help in optimizing the resources and increasing the opportunities which leads to sustainability. It is always believed by many of the researchers that capacity building of society and encouraging empowerment are much more effective than any other medium like programs and policy formations.



### ***Building self-reliant sustainable society and sustainable development***

Building self-reliant is another major function of NGOs that affects sustainable development of the society. The better development of the sustainable society highly depends on the self-reliance. The concept of self-reliance is deliberately positioned within the essence of the social development. It is related to the various concepts like mutual help, self-help, and rural area development. It develops the need for the people to use local initiatives, abilities and their own properties to improve their circumstances. Self-reliance means that the people depend on their own resources and are free from funds sourced outside the community. The requirements of the self-reliant approach are the discretionary use of all available human, natural and technological resources. So, to achieve self-reliance NGOs and social groups need to determine their individual potential and find other appropriate means in order to develop the potential. According to Korten (1990), the strategy of the NGOs focuses on developing the capacities of the people to better meet their own needs through self-reliant local action. In the second generation strategy, Korten (1990), mentioned that the local inertia is the heart of problem in a village or community.<sup>[10]</sup> There is a potential energy in a community but remains inactive because of the inertia of tradition, isolation and lack of education. But this inertia can be broken through the intervention of an outside change agent (NGOs and other agents) who helps the community realize its potentials through education, organization, consciousness raising, small loans and the introduction of simple new technologies.

The NGOs are more towards the awareness and capacity building of the society which must result in inclusive and balanced growth and at last sustainable growth but for this it is very much necessary to make people of the society self-reliant. This can only be possible through focused and frequent programs and campaigns which help to make people aware about recognising their hidden potential, especially to those who are illiterate and still unaware about it. So that they can sustain in the present environment and mutually work to develop the sustainable environment for the society.

These functions are concerned with the empowerment of the society and its people as well as of the environment. Beside this functions like micro finance, support to government policies in implementation, making sound and executable plans for the sustainable development of the society, are some other functions of the NGOs which simultaneously empower the social, environmental

and other factors which results in creating the sustainable environment for the society.

### **CONCLUSION**

The NGOs came forward as potentially promising group working for the betterment of the society in a holistic manner. Along with economic, educational, health care, human rights and other social parameters. These also focused on the environmental issues. They carry out their operations in such a way that proper judicious utilization of resources takes place for social service without disturbing or causing any harm to the environmental balance. The proposed models suggest how these organizations work in cohesion with the social and environmental issues, therefore marching towards the goal of sustainable development. It is because of the constant efforts of these organizations that issues like carbon emission, forest wasteland, global warming, excessive pollution, water scarcity and many more are being looked upon.

The examples quoted in the paper clearly show how well the NGOs are doing in creating a sustainable environment as their activities serve the dual purpose of protecting the environment and helping people to lead a better life in a safe and healthy environment. They are shaping an environment which is self-sustaining and has enough resources for the growing needs of the society not only for today but also for tomorrow. Thus, they are marching on the path of sustainability/ sustainable development in order to attain inclusive growth by developing a sustainable environment for the society.

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