

# NGOs AS THE GUARDIANS OF ENVIRONMENT

*M. Bisht<sup>1</sup> and M. Kumaiyan<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>*Dept. of Pol. Sc., D.S.B. Campus Kumaun University, Nainital-263002, Uttarakhand, India*

<sup>2</sup>*CHEA, 6 Waldorf Compound, Mallital, Nainital-263001, Uttarakhand*

## Introduction

As early as 1896, the Swedish Scientist Svante Arrhenius had predicted that human activities would interfere with the way the sun interacts with the earth, resulting in global warming and climate change. Another Scientist Peter Vitousek and his co-authors stated in a 1997 article in *Science*: “We are changing earth more rapidly than we understanding it. *We live on a human-dominated planet and the momentum of human population growth, together with the imperative for further economic development in most of the world, ensures that our dominance will increase... Humanity’s dominance of Earth means that we cannot escape responsibility for managing the planet.*”

The intactness and purity of the environment and its natural resources is of utmost importance, not only by itself, but also because it holds a great value to humans by providing the ecosystem services. Thus, the conservation of natural environment is a major concern worldwide, because directly air, water and land pollution or degradation does not recognize borders, and indirectly poor soil conditions of one nation may reduce the availability of food to another country.

In the present scenario, the world governments, viz., UN and other development organizations, and the third sector or voluntary sector, comprising of a large number of NGOs from all over the world, are actively involved in raising concern about the environmental impacts of the development processes and in providing solutions for sustainable development.

To put it in the words of environmentalist journalist *Mark Hertsgaard* (1998): ‘In fact, if humans are smart, repairing the environment could become one of the biggest businesses of the coming century, a huge source of profits, job, and general well-being.’

## Discussion

Non-governmental organizations are also emerging as an important element of contemporary Indian society and alike between in the grassroots and civil society. The great expansion of the network of NGOs in India has also strengthened the rise and growth of environmental movements. The field experiences and understanding of the NGOs highlight the fact that the best way to safeguard the environment, to restore ecological balance and to promote sustainable and environment friendly is through people participation. Putting the common or indigenous people at the centre stage and making them active partners and managers of resources not only raises their awareness about environment related issues but also bring to the forefront the ultimate tool of local knowledge and traditional wisdom that has for ages worked well in nurturing and conserving the life sustaining ecosystems on earth.

Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), an NGO, undertook the challenging task of preserving the rich bio-diversity and gene pool of the valley from the dangers of the proposed dam construction on the River Kuntipuzha and the ruthless deforestation. Thus, the Silent Valley Campaign became a landmark in India’s Environmental Movement, where community participated in protest against the destruction of the environment and convinced the decision making authorities that alternatives with less impact on the environment existed, that have good economic and social outputs. It played a significant role in creating favourable public opinion by associating the young people, college students in major cities of Kerala, by imparting environmental education and awareness at various levels in an informal manner to make the general public understand the linkages that the nature and its conservation have with the various dimensions of their lives- social, cultural, economic, etc. Several other scientific bodies also lent their support to the movement. The Bombay Natural History Society, the oldest environmental NGO of India, also supported the campaign. The campaign led to the declaring of the Silent Valley as a National Park in 1985.

The joint action and struggle of Tarun Bhagat Sangh, a voluntary organization and the villagers over a long period of 15 years led to an economic and ecological miracle creating another success story in the twin villages of Bhaonta-Koyalala, nestled in the Aravalli hill ranges in the Alwar district of Rajasthan. Their remarkable work led to the reviving of the traditional water

harvesting structures, locally known as Johads (check dams) that resulted in rejuvenation of rivulets in the basin of the Aravalli.

The above examples of building a strong village level organization and using collective decision-making to tackle all issues of village development and upliftment also demonstrate that government's effort at conservation and sustainable development can be made significantly easier and more effective if the communities are given a chance and appropriate policy support.

Presently in India, many national level environmental NGOs are functioning in the field of conservation and sustainable development. The prominent ones are TERI (Tata Energy Research Institute), New Delhi; KALPAVRIKSHA based at Pune, SAFE (South Asian Foundation for Environment); ATREE (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment); CSE (Centre for Science and Environment); ESG (Environment Support Group), Green Peace India; LEAD India, NCF (Nature Conservation Foundation) EXNORA International, CERE India, AWAAZ Foundation, Foundation for Ecological Security, CONSERVE India, WWF India to name a few.

A prominent Indian NG, Centre for Science and Environment, which started in 1980, has over the past thirty years done a commendable job in developing a knowledge portal - a comprehensive website and series of publication on environmental issues. It has also created an innovative mechanism for pollution monitoring such as Green Rating points for the industries and thus initiated a knowledge based environment activism in India.

According to a report of ATREE (2007), an NGO named, Himal Prakruthi have worked for nearly 15 years in the landscape, especially with 88 villages in the Gori basin towards environmental management. The Foundation for Ecological Security has been working with 2208 villages' institution across 27 districts across 6 states in order to protect 1,30,000 hectare of revenue wasteland, degraded grazing lands forest lands. About 5000 civic EXNORAS in India are targeting 30000 streets and settlements to clean the streets and environment.

The Newsletter of LEAD India (2009) highlight the fact Central Himalayan Environment Association (CHEA), an NGO based at Nainital has volunteered to ensure that the national policy makers are well-informed of regional climate change priorities in the two Himalayan regions of India (Northern-Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Gangetic Plains parts of Uttar Pradesh; and North-eastern - Assam, Sikkim, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and West Bengal). Their remarkable work can also be used as a model for other regions in India and countries in South Asia. CHIRAG (Central Himalayan Rural Action Group) based at Natuwakhan, SUDHA (Society for Uttaranchal Development & Himalayan Action), INHERE (Institute of Himalayan Environmental Research and Education) headquartered at Massi (Almora), HOPE (Himalayan Organization for Protecting Environment), Ranikhet ; HESCO (Himalayan Environment Studies and Conservation Organization), Dehradun ; Grassroots Organization, Ranikhet; HIMCON (Himalayan Consortium for Himalaya Conservation), Ranichpuri; CEDAR (Centre for Ecology Development and Research), Dehradun are few other environmental and development NGOs notable for their work in the region.

The environmental NGOs also collaborate with the media to bring to the forefront the issues that need immediate attention of the government and law enforcing agencies, for instance, towards the flouting of the environmental laws by the Lavasa Corporation in creating the so-called "India's First Planned Hill City". On the other hand a growing number of companies in India are joining hands with ENGOs in order to observe their Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR). The industries are entering into strategic dialogues with them on matters related to product development, process, project management, promotion and recyclability. The PepsiCo has partnered with an NGO named EXNORA to create replicable models of community waste disposal across the cities such as Chennai, Panipat, Cuddalore and others.

## **Conclusion**

The creativity, flexibility, advocacy, entrepreneurial nature, and capacity for vision and long-term thinking has set NGOs as a facilitator in promoting sustainable community development, striking a balance between environmental concerns and development objectives, enhancing local social relationships, protecting environment and creating more humane and self-sustained local societies.

The formidable role played by NGOs and the reverberation of their prominent works in the protection of the environment has led to the growing realization that both government and environmental NGOs together can create a safe and green future. No amount of laws and acts alone can achieve the objectives of sustainable environmental friendly development until and unless it



is backed by the unrelenting force of environmentally aware and motivated individuals and societies. One of the plausible ways to achieve this is through the organised response of our civil society in the form of a network of intensely enthused and committed NGOs and other voluntary organizations.

## References

General Aspects of Energy Management and Energy Audit. Guide Book, 2005. Global Environmental Concerns. Second Edition. Book 1, Chapter 9. Bureau of Energy Efficiency. New Delhi, India.

Vitousek PM, Harold A, Mooney, JL & Jerry MM. 1997. Human Domination of Earth's Ecosystems. *Science* 227(5325): 494-499

Hertsagaart M 1998. *Earth Odyssey: Around the World in Search of Our Environmental Future*. Broadway Books, New York.

ATREE, 2007. *Biodiversity Conservation and Rural Livelihood Improvement Project: Social & Environmental Assessment of Askot Landscape*. Final Report.

<http://fes.org.in/>

Exnora International, 2011. *About Exnora*. [Online] [www.exnora.org/aboutus.php](http://www.exnora.org/aboutus.php)

LEAD India, 2009. *Climate Change and Sustaining mountain Ecosystems*. Climate Change Leaders Programme. Newsletter Issue 1.