WORKING PAPER 114

PEOPLE, GOVERNMENT AND THE NGOs

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PEOPLE, GOVERNMENT AND THE NGOs

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Abstract

The decade of 1990s witnessed an improved interface between the governments at various levels and NGOs. Questions on the nature of interface and the role of people in the process are, however, frequently raised. This paper seeks to analyse the nature of interface between government, NGOs and people on the basis of evidence from a large number of NGOs from south India. The main argument put forward is that the nature of interface is co-option and collaboration. The relationship between the government and NGOs is contractual, and can be characterised as 'donor and recipient' relationship. The involvement of people is still marginal and the interface process is not progressing towards the empowerment of people.

Introduction

Reviewing the development experience in many developing countries, scholars, most donors and some governments visualise that sustainable development can be brought about through an improved relationship between important development actors, namely, government, local self-government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and peoples' institutions. This is especially so in the case of the interface between the government at various levels and NGOs, because the former in spite of having sufficient resources has failed in its efficient utilisation due to lack of people's participation, innovative models, cost-effective strategies and so on. The relationship between government and NGOs has received some attention as NGOs have comparative advantages in ensuring people's participation in development programmes (Wils, 1996; Reddy and Rajasekhar, 1997; Rajasekhar, 1998). Despite NGO weaknesses such as spatial limitation, allegations on their accountability and constraints in working at micro and macro levels, they have been gaining importance in service delivery, have become a prominent part of civil society and collaborate with the government at various levels.

Since the late 1980s, a number of government programmes have been implemented and the quantum of government assistance channelled for development through NGOs has increased significantly. This has influenced NGOs, who were almost totally dependent on the external funding agencies until then, to explore and exploit the resources

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available with the government for their own programmes and for their target groups.

While this paradigm shift has contributed to the improved interface between governments at various levels and NGOs, it raises the following issues: should the NGO sector permanently supplement the developmental efforts of the government and thereby reduce the role of government? Or, should the NGO sector supplant the developmental efforts of the government, and thereby make the government wither away from the development process? Or, should NGOs form people's institutions and build up their capacity to establish an institutional framework to ensure responsiveness on the part of line departments, and influence government policies in favour of the poor?

This paper seeks to analyse the nature of interface between government, NGOs and people on the basis of evidence from a large number of NGOs from south India. The main argument put forward is that the nature of interface is co-option and collaboration. The relationship between the government and NGOs is contractual, and can be characterised as 'donor and recipient' relationship. The involvement of people is still marginal and the interface process is not progressing towards the empowerment of people.

Interface between Government and NGOs in India

An analysis of interface between the government and NGOs cannot be introduced without delineating the typology of NGOs and the nature of interface established by each type of NGO with the government. Based on the objectives, ideologies, nature of activities and location, NGOs can be classified under four broad categories:

- Operational or grassroots NGOs
- Support NGOs
- Network NGOs
- Funding NGOs

Operational or Grassroots NGOs directly work with the oppressed sections of society. As the size, approach and orientation of grassroots NGOs differ, the following distinction can be made among them. *Charity and welfare NGOs* are involved in charity, welfare, relief and rehabilitation. *Development NGOs* concentrate on the development of the socio-economic environment of human beings and provide (or facilitate the provision of) development services such as credit, seeds, fertilisers and technical know-how. *Social Action Groups (SAGs)* focus on mobilising marginalised sections around specific issues, which challenge the distribution of power and resources in a society, and involve in raising the

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consciousness of the people. Empowerment NGOs combine development activities with issue-based struggles. They may be involved in the provision of services such as savings and credit, but they utilise such activities for social, economic, political and cultural empowerment of the poor.

Support NGOs mainly provide services that would strengthen the capacities of grassroots NGOs, Panchayat Raj Institutions, Co-operatives and others to function more effectively through training programmes and by bringing out periodicals. **Network NGOs** are formal or informal associations of grassroots and/or support NGOs which meet periodically to act as a forum to share experiences, carry out joint development endeavours as well as engage in lobbying and advocacy. The primary activity of **Funding NGOs** is to provide funding support to grassroots NGOs, support NGOs or people's organisations. Most of the funding NGOs in India obtain resources from foreign sources though efforts to raise funds from within India have, of late, assumed importance.[1]

Interface between Government and NGOs in the Past

The interface between NGOs and the government in the past can be seen in four phases:

- Co-operative relationship (1947 to late 1950s)
- Antagonistic relationship (late 1960s to early 1970s)
- Professional relationship (mid-1980s to early 1990s)
- Search for a shadow state (late 1990s).

Era of co-operation: 1947 to the late 1950s: Soon after independence, Gandhian and religious (both Christian and non-Christian) NGOs made their appearance in different parts of the country. The former were engaged in the promotion of agricultural and extension programmes, khadi and village industries, and livestock development. The latter were providing charity, relief and rehabilitation and also helping the poor to meet their health and nutrition needs, which should have been, otherwise, provided by the government. The government provided financial assistance and technical support to most of these NGOs (Chowdhary, 1987 and Maheshwari, 1987) and engaged them in training the officials involved in the development process (Sen, 1999; Kudva, 1996). Many prominent people like late Jawaharlal Nehru opined that social work should be left to the NGO sector as it was capable of alleviating social problems, while the government should extend financial and technical support (Chowdhary, 1987).

These NGOs, which were welcomed by the government to become partners in its development process, remained as 'silent partners' with the government. As the services delivered by such NGOs supplemented the government's effort, there was no conflict. Thus, a co-operative relationship developed as both the actors had common

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objectives and shared a common belief in development (Sen, 1999; Kudva, 1996).

Emergence of antagonism: the 1960s and 1970s: This phase witnessed the emergence of different types of NGOs: Development NGOs, Empowerment NGOs, SAGs.[2] Community Based Organisations (CBOs) were also formed by the poor themselves with or without NGOs' help. With a diversity in the institutional histories, motivation for forming these NGOs and their attitudes towards the government, the interface that emerged was also different.

Gandhian and religious NGOs continued to have the same functions (Sen, 1999; Kudva, 1996), though some of them expanded their activities to tackle the symptoms of poverty (low educational standards, ill-health, poor sanitation and housing) in a project mode, while others sought to enhance assets and income earning potential of the poor through activities relating to land development, credit, skills and extension services. A series of wars and droughts during this period contributed to a decline in funding to welfare and relief NGOs. It was speculated that this, in turn, contributed to the decline of charity and relief NGOs and general disillusionment with the government (Tandon and Brown, 1990) leading to the emergence of antagonism.

The limited success of the government to overcome the problems of unemployment and poverty, together with apathy of political parties and bureaucrats towards the poor, contributed to the emergence of SAGs. Since the late 1970s, SAGs politicised the poor and poverty, and started to attack the dominant social and economic structure (Unia, 1991; Sen, 1999). The CBOs formed by them were antagonistic towards the government in their delivery system. The disillusionment with the government and its development models led to antagonism between the government and the SAGs. They were vociferous in their opposition to government programmes, which failed to improve the lives of the poor, weaker sections and downtrodden of society (Ramachandran, 1995).

The government extended its support to welfare and development NGOs, but kept SAGs at some distance since they were critical of government policies. While the government supported foreign-funded welfare NGOs, it opposed and started to control the foreign funding for SAGs. The nature of interface between the government and SAGs was described as a 'cat and mouse' partnership. On the other hand, development NGOs were looked upon favourably because they supplemented the government's development efforts. Thus, during this phase, while the welfare, Gandhian and development NGOs collaborated with the government, SAGs were critical of the government, resulting in either an antagonistic relationship or no collaboration.

Diversity of Government - NGO relationship: the 1980s and 1990s: This phase of Government - NGO collaboration has seen

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the following three important trends. With the maturing of the NGO sector, young professionals, retired bureaucrats, members of political parties, and business people, motivated by job prospects rather than commitment to radical social transformation, started to work at grassroots. Some of them provided support (research consultancy, training, evaluation and documentation) to the government, smaller NGOs and CBOs. As the NGO sector was undergoing diversification, the nature of interface also started to take different shape. NGOs seemed to have moved from a focus on relief and welfare (first generation) to address the structural context of local self-help action, formation of people's institutions and mobilising local resources (second generation). This included seeking changes in the institutions and policies at national and sub-national levels that inhibit effective self-help action (third generation) (Korten, 1987).

The institutional histories, the social origins and motivations of the NGOs became important in shaping the nature of interface. For instance, the NGOs started by retired bureaucrats, established quick and good relationship with the government, and managed to obtain government funds for undertaking development activities. Similarly, in order to maintain good relationship with the government for reasons such as their survival, support NGOs depended on government projects.

Second, while the empowerment NGOs started to collaborate with the government as the concerns for survival dominated, the SAGs began to include the development component in their projects as they realised the difficulties in sustaining struggle-oriented activities without meeting the basic needs of the people.[3] Thus, by the mid-1980s, some SAGs began to collaborate with the government in order to include a development component in their projects. However, this was not a general phenomenon. Some SAGs continued to have antipathy towards the government, saw the government as oppressive and exploitative, and opposed the government policies on the grounds that these will impoverish the poor further (Chandhoke and Ghosh, 1995).

Third, this phase also witnessed the emergence of network NGOs to take up some strategic issues of government policies in relation to energy, environment, women's rights, anti-arrack movement, eradication of dowry and poverty by advocacy and lobbying. Such NGOs established mostly a critical collaboration with the government, for instance, the Narmada Bachao Andolan. There have been initiatives aimed at establishing NGO networks at different levels (Rajasekhar and Nair, 1995) with an explicit objective of influencing the government policies in favour of the poor, though the concerns of fund raising and recognition also dominate the agenda.

To check the rapid growth in the NGO sector, the government sought to control their operations by defining their role and introducing stringent regulations.[4] This contributed to a further divide between the government, and empowerment NGOs and SAGs.

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Moving towards an era of 'Shadow State': Though the government made efforts to establish a 'Shadow State' soon after independence, it gained momentum only with the introduction of economic reforms, prescriptions to reduce the government role in social sector development and a decline in the budget for the social sector. Over time, the government gradually transferred the responsibility of social services to the NGO to establish a 'Shadow State'.[5] The NGOs, therefore, were expected to assume greater role in providing social services. They were also expected to mobilise the poor and build up their institutional capabilities and form organisations among them to enable them to reap the benefits of economic development arising out of globalisation. However, setting up a 'Shadow State' faced many deterrents such as delay in the disbursement of funds, red-tapism and apathy of bureaucrats (Sen, 1999).

To conclude, immediately after independence, there was no conflict between the government and NGOs as they had common objectives and beliefs on development. Subsequently, the nature of the government and the socio-political context under which the NGOs emerged shaped the nature of interface. In the late 1990s, the government started making efforts to establish a 'Shadow State' to transfer its role in service delivery. Thus, the nature of interface largely depended on organisational complexities, identities, motivations, its social origin and histories, characteristics and political, social and economic realities, local politics, the actions of the local agents, local institutional behaviour with the local government, views of individuals and nature of NGOs' own programmes (Sen, 1999).

Concept and Types of Interface

In simple terms, interface implies type of relationship between two organisations having similar objectives, activities and serving the same group of people. Three types of relationship between government and NGOs have been discussed:

i) Contractual collaboration

The contractual arrangements may be bilateral or schematic. Bilateral relationship refers to a situation where a single NGO enters into an agreement with the government to perform certain pre-defined tasks, and hence, this can be termed as a one-to-one relationship. The salient features of this are measurable outputs, fixed targets, pre-determined costs and, reimbursement of funds when tasks are complete. It is the government that can change the programme and evaluate with its own criteria. Once the NGOs enter into an agreement, they have little flexibility as the powers to modify programme norms rest with the government. Selection of NGOs or dropping them is done at the discretion of officials

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(Ramachandran, 1995). But, flexibility to NGOs depends on what level of agreement has been entered into and reimbursement of funds depends on the evaluation outcomes.

Contractual collaboration may also be schematic in which the government, in order to fulfil its targets, involves NGO participation in implementing its schemes. A large number of NGOs receive funds from the government under a common scheme, and hence, this can be termed as many-to-one relationship. With little flexibility to modify the schemes in accordance with specific needs of the poor, the needs of the local people and their participation at different levels are rarely considered. The government does not approach the people directly. The relationship between the government and NGOs is of donor and recipient. There is no forum for NGOs to offer their feedback on implementation of the programme or any innovative way of implementation (Figure 1).

ii) Institutional interface

Under this arrangement, the government and the NGOs perform inter-related roles and work with each other for meeting shared development goals. The NGOs play a complementary role in the formation of groups, providing training and awareness, and ensuring equity and participation, while government implements physical works through the NGO groups formed. In this form, since NGOs are assigned more of a process-oriented role, the targets to be achieved are both quantitative and qualitative.

Important features of institutional interface are relative flexibility enjoyed by the NGOs in their budgets and greater opportunity for mutual exposure and cross learning between the government and the NGOs (PRADAN, 1996). The three way links: Government, NGOs and target-group, are strong. This implies that these three actors have a direct relationship, and thus, utilise their comparative advantages towards evolving innovative methods of planning and implementation (Figure 2). The NGOs have to be more accountable and transparent in their actions and performance.

iii) Facilitative interface

In a mutually facilitative interface the NGOs interact with the government machinery on a variety of issues concerning the communities with which they work, whether or not the government seeks their help on these issues. Both government and NGOs agree on the merit of these issues but their approaches and motivation may differ. The NGO will play an important role in capacity building of the people while seeking to strengthen the links between the government and the people. The NGOs' role with the government is catalytic, pro-actively supporting and inducing it to respond to the people's needs. The government has direct contact

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with the people, while the role of NGO is that of facilitator (Figure 3). There is no direct financial relationship between the government and the NGO. The strong link between the government and target-group is found at different levels of the development process and is sustainable. Depending on the issues at hand, the required intervention, the strategy adopted by the NGOs and the government's response, the nature of interface may change over time.
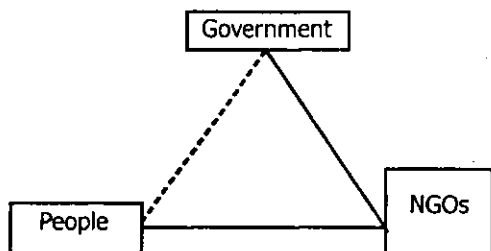
Figure 1: Contractual Collaboration

Figure 2: Institutional Interface
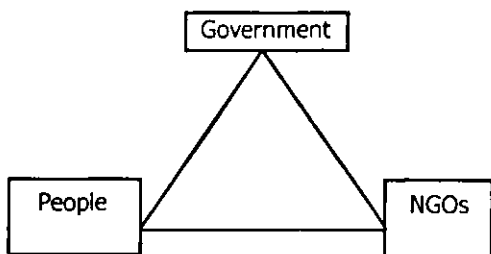
Figure 3: Facilitative Interface
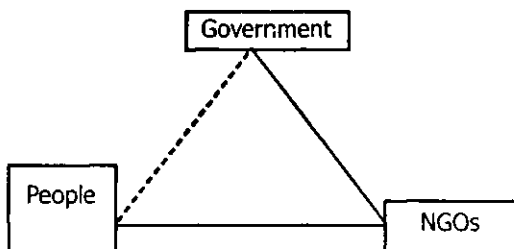
Note: Thick line indicates direct interface and the dotted line indicates indirect interface.

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The above typologies do not include the role of donors. With recent introduction of economic reforms to bring about efficient use of resources and prescription that the role of government in service delivery should be reduced, there has been a search for establishing a more pronounced 'Shadow State'. In the light of economic liberalisation and structural adjustment programmes, most of the third world governments had to cut down their expenditure on public services in a phased manner and also gradually reduce their role in social and economic development of the country. In this context, NGOs are expected to enter into contractual agreements with donor or governments to play a service delivery role to provide public services as governments withdraw from such a role (Sen, 1999).

Thus, factors making it imperative for the interface are substantially different now compared to the past. With the emergence of empowerment NGOs and change in strategies of SAGs, each of the organisations may have recognised the strength of the other and weaknesses of its own, and hence, is willing to collaborate. Second, there may be compelling factors (such as changes in donor policies) for both the government and NGOs to collaborate with each other. Based on which of the above is a dominant factor, the interface may take three routes:

- **Mobilisation of government resources by NGOs for the poor.** Here, the NGOs play a dominant role as compared to the people and government because they are compelled to mobilise the resources for their survival or the donor agency has prescribed such a role. This may be called as collaboration (Figure 4) wherein NGOs mobilise schemes and programmes meant for the people at the instance of donors.

- **Implementation of government programmes or service delivery by NGOs for the poor.** This may take the form of collaboration or co-optation of NGOs by the government. The former would take place when each organisation recognises (or is made to recognise) the strengths of the other. The government by contracting out certain activities and services takes the assistance of NGOs, and co-opts them into the mode of government functioning. In this, the role of the government is dominant as compared to the people and NGOs. The collaboration takes place within the existing framework of government policies, approach and procedures, and there may not be much scope for either people or NGOs to change this framework (Figure 5).

- **NGOs playing need-based and process-oriented role in the interface process.** First, NGOs provide information on government resources. Second, they build the capacity of the people in accessing the resources within the framework of rights
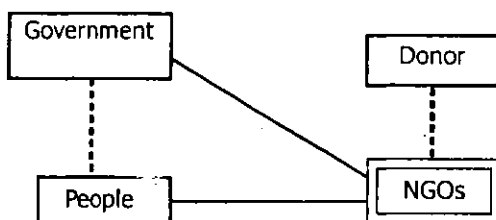
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Figure 4: Collaboration

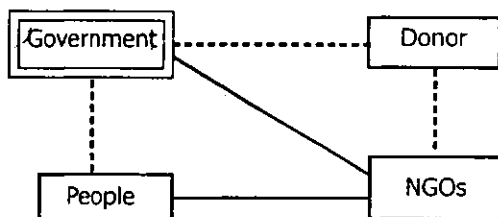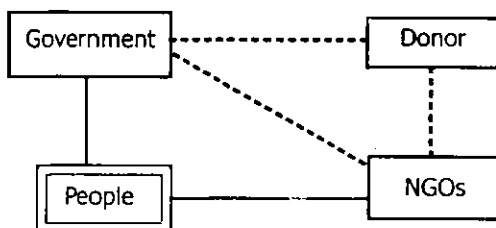**Figure 5: Co-option in the Guise of Collaboration**

Figure 6: Critical Collaboration

Note: Doubled line indicates the dominant role for the actor in the process of interface, and the straight line refers to the strong and direct interface.

and entitlements while effectively utilising the same. Third, building organisational strength among the poor, not only to question the parameters that determine the quantum and flow of resources to the poor (policy advocacy) but also to ensure regular flow of resources to the poor (sustainability). In the entire process, NGOs would play an active role in the beginning, and subsequently, people would play a dominant role compared to the NGOs and government (Figure 6). This process may be called critical collaboration wherein the NGOs and people collaborate with the government, while at the same time criticise those government policies which are anti-poor (Reddy and Rajasekhar, 1997).

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Interface between Government, NGOs and People: Evidence

The foregoing discussion suggests that there have been changes in the nature of interface during the post-independence period. What is the emerging and predominant type of interface? This paper puts together the data from nine NGOs from South Indian states. Four NGOs are from different districts in Andhra Pradesh, two are from Karnataka, one from Kerala and two from Tamil Nadu. These organisations emerged in different years, but the origin of most of them could be traced either to the late 1980s or the early 1990s.

Did these NGOs establish any interface with the government? This question has its answer in the evidence on the proportion of government funds in the total budget of the NGO programmes, number of people availing assistance from the government and quantum of such assistance. The distribution of total budget by different sources in 1996 is compared with that in 1998 (Table 1). This information, which could not be obtained from all the NGOs for both the years, shows that the total quantum of funding has increased in almost all the NGOs. Between 1996 and 1998, the share of donors in the total funding of all the NGOs declined, while that of the government increased. In 1996, the share of donors in the total fund was relatively high in NGOs 9, 6 and 3. By 1998, share of the government was substantially high in NGOs 4, 2, 5 and 7. Interestingly, in the case of three NGOs (8, 1 and 9) own sources became significant. One of these NGOs runs a production-cum-marketing centre, and the resources are being utilised for development activities. Another NGO has its own income generation centre (started with the support of a donor) and the proceeds of which are used for developmental activities. More importantly, only four NGOs (3, 6, 9 and 5) depended somewhat heavily on donors in 1998 for carrying out the developmental work. This information, thus, indicates that there is a shift from donors to the government in the dependence of NGOs.

Table 2 further corroborates this. There is a substantial increase in the number of people and quantum of resources obtained from the government. The average amount of assistance also increased, though there are differences across the states in so far as pace of increase was concerned. Although the number of members receiving assistance increased at a rapid rate in the case of Andhra NGOs, the quantum of assistance increased at a slow rate. Consequently, the average amount of assistance declined. In Karnataka and Kerala, the average amount was not only high, but also increased, as much of the assistance was obtained as loan from banks and other agencies.

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Table 1: Details of Funds Mobilised by the NGOs

NGOs	Total Funding (Rs)	Proportion of funding in 1996 by			Total Funding (Rs)	Proportion of funding in 1998 by		
		Donor	Self	Government		Donor	Self	Government
NGO 1	—	—	—	—	4,150,026	18.73	44.82	36.46
NGO 2	1,351,500	22.20	—	77.80	866,000	20.55	—	79.45
NGO 3	1,465,653	82.67	—	17.67	2,875,748*	95.55	—	4.45
NGO 4	1,191,645	48.40	—	51.60	3,835,232	19.74	—	80.26
NGO 5	—	—	—	—	25,193,544	32.03	17.73	50.24
NGO 6	4,908,587	71.75	11.68	16.57	7,337,392	54.95	26.34	18.71
NGO 7	6,919,093	23.60	45.01	31.39	9,547,394	15.87	38.17	45.10
NGO 8	—	—	—	—	4,341,127	19.20	75.55	5.25
NGO 9	5,244,130	89.74	3.29	6.97	2,299,190	51.04	42.56	6.38
All NGOs	21,080,608	56.70	18.30	25.00	60,445,654	33.23	26.74	40.03

* Data pertain to 1997.

Source: Compiled from the case studies of NGOs.

Table 2: Mobilisation of Resources from Government by NGOs

NGOs from	No of people obtaining the resources		Amount of grant/ loan (Rs)		Average amount (Rs) of assistance	
	1996	1998	1996	1998	1996	1998
Andhra Pradesh	2,488	4,025	4,034,569	5,586,889	1,622	1,388
Karnataka	1,348	1,989	4,928,500	14,053,440	3,656	7,066
Kerala	357	471	4,646,668	8,187,962	13,016	17,384
Tamil Nadu	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Total	4,193	6,485	13,609,737	27,828,291	3,246	4,291

Need for Interface

Evidence on the perceived need for interface by NGOs has been examined below to obtain some clues on the type of interface practised. For instance, if empowerment of the poor is the main factor making it necessary to have interface, then critical collaboration is the likely outcome. On the other hand, when survival concerns influence NGOs to have interface, they may be forced to get co-opted by the government.

Objectives and Activities

For a majority of the NGOs, empowerment of the members in groups is an important objective. In broader terms, empowerment is defined as 'a process where powerless people become conscious of their situation and organise to empower and access opportunities' (Mayoux and Johnson, 1997). Four dimensions of empowerment can be distinguished:

- Power within, individual changes in confidence and consciousness.
- Power to: increase in skills, abilities, including earning on income, access to markets and networks;
- Power over: changes in power relations within the households, communities and at the macro level;
- Power with: organisation of the powerless to enhance individual abilities and/or ability to challenge and change power relations.

If this is the conceptual background to empowerment, then activities such as imparting education and awareness, and raising consciousness are needed to bring changes within. Organising training programmes, therefore, becomes an important activity, which has been undertaken by almost all NGOs. Second, mobilising the people into organisations, and sustaining them through activities such as savings and credit and interfacing with the government is necessary to enable the people to have power within, power over, and power with. Five out of 9 NGOs stated that they organised the disadvantaged groups of women and men, built their confidence and strengthened their institutional capacity by providing training, awareness and leadership qualities to establish linkages with the government at various levels.

Scaling up and Influencing Government Policy in Favour of the Poor

The NGOs have spatial limitation (Webster, 1995). Further, they are not 'magic bullets' (Edwards and Hulme, 1995) to solve all problems of the poor. Interface with government is, therefore, considered to be essential for NGOs to 'scale up' their development programmes. Since the government controls the wide frameworks and policy environment within

which people and their institutions have to operate, two of the NGOs stated that they sought to have a positive and creative relationship with government agencies. This not only enables the poor to assert their rights and help them in getting benefits from the government but also provides grassroots experience to get integrated into micro-level planning.

These NGOs also stated that interface was needed to support innovative schemes of the government. If the government initiated pro-poor and people-centred development programmes, NGOs came forward to contribute their comparative advantages for the success of the programmes. Even if the government development paradigm was not favourable to the poor, at times NGOs entered into collaboration with the government to get a chance to change the policy climate or programme approaches. Establishing linkages has been felt necessary by three out of four NGOs to influence the government policies in favour of the poor. Though the NGOs were working in limited areas, they could change the perception of the government on planning, implementation, maintenance and evaluation of development interventions through lobbying, advocacy and networks so that the poor in those areas not covered by the NGOs could also be benefited in the process.

Growth in the Size of the Organisation

The growth in the number of people with whom they are working, and the need to meet their expectations compelled NGOs to establish interface. There has been an increase in the size of all NGOs in terms of villages, peoples' institutions and people during 1996-98 (Table 3). This implies that more resources were required to administer the projects, and also meet the hopes and aspirations of the people. However, the uncertain donor environment in the late 1990s (Reddy and Rajasekhar 1997:9) resulted in a gradual decline of funds to NGOs. Some of the NGOs, which initially depended almost entirely on external donor agencies for funding, have been experiencing the problems of uncertain donor environment in terms of reduced funds (see Table 1), and hence, started to look for alternatives in terms of linkages. NGOs have also realised that continued dependence on foreign funding not only limits their autonomy but also does not sustain the development process. Further, of late, donor agencies have been suggesting that resources at the disposal of central and state governments have not properly been used to alleviate poverty, and NGOs need to facilitate the flow of these resources for poverty alleviation. All these factors have made NGOs, especially small ones, to establish linkages and mobilise resources from the government.

Four of the NGOs felt the need for interface as the government resources are cornered by the affluent sections of society. This is due to lack of institutional capacity of the poor to demand their due share from the system and the government.

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Table 3: Changes in the Number of Villages, SHGs and Total Members

NGOs		No of villages		No of SHGs formed		Total members	
		1996	1998	1996	1998	1996	1998
NGO	1	9	11	40	84	510	1,068
NGO	2	20	40	37	110	592	1,760
NGO	3	20	50	95	271	2,050	4,840
NGO	4	28	75	53	93	1,579	3,500
NGO	5	104	112	114	172	3,488	3,790
NGO	6	40	136	160	309	3,153	4,816
NGO	7	5	7	256	336	8,560	11,483
NGO	8	27	50	NA	9	NA	NA
NGO	9	25	30	25	30	750	750
All NGOs		278	511	780	1,414	20,682	32,007

Limited Success of Government Programmes

Inability and lack of skills among the government officials to identify the poor and play a facilitating role and involve them in the development process to address their basic needs motivated six NGOs to establish linkages. Two of them stated that some of the government officials were not even aware of the programmes started by their department. To provide information and publicise these programmes with the officials as well as people, establishing linkages was felt essential to achieve better results.

Thus, most of the NGOs stated that the uncertain donor environment is an important reason for establishing the interface. On the basis of this, one can conclude that the nature of interface is most likely to have been either a collaboration or co-option. But, some of these NGOs have also stated that their own programme objectives, and limited success of government programmes contributed to the interface. Since this discussion does not provide conclusive evidence on the type of interface, let us look at evidence on strategies.

Strategies Adopted to Establish Interface

Institutional Building

One of the important strategies of the NGOs was the formation and promotion of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The NGOs, which combined empowerment and development components in their work, sought to

build people's institutions based on self-help and establish linkages with government departments to either tap the resources or change the State-led development paradigm by involving the government machinery in the process. Although the formation of people's institution was an entry point for almost all the NGOs, only five of them explicitly mentioned that these were used to establish linkages and access resources.

The participation of members in gram sabhas and as members in the gram panchayats has potential to influence the development agenda at the local level in favour of the poor. Most of the NGOs stated that they have realised the importance of participation of members in gram panchayats as this would make a difference to the quality of local development. Some of them have also enabled their members to contest and win the election. On the whole, there are no substantive and meaningful linkages between SHGs formed by the NGOs and gram panchayats.

While SHGs are necessary means to establish linkages with the local government, NGO networks at district, state and national levels are considered to be important to establish interface with the government at higher levels,[6] and influence the policies and programmes in the government. Many NGOs are members of networks at district and state levels; but the evidence on networks having a positive impact on interface (both in accessing the resources and influencing the policies and programmes of the government) is scanty.

Building Goodwill among the Government Officials

The organisation of workshops and meetings with government officials contribute to the process of interface as these provide an opportunity for NGOs to present their activities and progress to the different development actors. Three NGOs have organised workshops and meetings with peoples' representatives and government officials and presented their programmes. While doing this, NGOs used their comparative advantages. Maintenance and updating of records on development activities of NGOs helped in rendering prompt and quick responses to enquiring officials. This has also showed that the NGOs were transparent. Secondly, impressive presentation of the problem of the poor with proper data and information also helped. This has created positive appreciation among the development partners, especially the government, leading to the interface process and people accessing resources.

Face-to-face dialogue meetings between the poor and government officials at different levels were used by seven NGOs to present the felt needs of the community and work out ways and means to address them. The people could also put forward the problems faced in accessing government programmes.

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The participation of NGO staff in the meetings or discussions organised by the government is another contributing factor. Many NGOs have reported regular participation of their staff at government meetings, training programmes, review meetings, exposure, etc., and thereby building rapport with the government officials.

Five of the NGOs have utilised demonstration and procession to build pressure on government officials. Whenever there was a delay in releasing the resources and the non-response from the government officials, demonstrations and processions, calling press meetings, organising dharnas and direct letter correspondence are the strategies used by these NGOs to put pressure on government officials. The demonstrations and processions by NGOs made the government officials more alert and gave them confidence to bring about changes in the prevailing institutional framework in favour of their clients.

Evolving Suitable Models

Innovative and cost-effective models of NGOs would attract the government development machinery to jointly undertake the development work. Four of the NGOs have developed an innovative, and people-centred approach in the identification of the poor, formation and development of SHGs in micro-finance. Attracted by these approaches, banks have established interface with SHGs under National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development's (NABARD) programme on Bank-SHG linkage.

To conclude, although all the NGOs have formed and promoted SHGs, the way in which the collective strength of the people in the groups was used to establish interface was not clear. This indicates that collaboration or co-option is the predominant type of interface. Although building pressure on government officials is cited by most of the NGOs as a strategy, this itself cannot be taken as evidence pointing towards critical collaboration. This is because dialogue meeting *per se* does not suggest any type of collaboration. What is important is the role and participation of people in these meetings. Further, dialogue meeting would become necessary even under collaboration and co-option. On the whole, evidence on need and strategies is not conclusive on the type of interface.

Problems Faced by the NGOs and People

Establishing interface between the government and people was not an easy exercise for many NGOs, whose hands were often into the pockets of the government. As a matter of fact, many bureaucrats did not welcome the entry of NGOs into the domain of the government, as this threatened to reduce their importance in the eyes of the people. Therefore, government officials were often a major hurdle in the process of

establishing the interface. Some of the problems faced by either NGOs or/and members while establishing linkages and mobilising the resources are:

- One of the widespread and persistent problems was the inordinate *delay in releasing the funds* (PRADAN, 1996; Sen, 1999; Bhat and Satish, 1993; AVARD, 1992), which have resulted in slow progress and even stoppage of development projects initiated by NGOs. This problem seems to be continuing. Almost all the NGOs reported that they faced the problem of inordinate delays in getting funds released.

- While accessing the resources, a large number of NGOs faced the problems of *widespread corruption, confusing and complicating procedures,* non-availability of information and involvement of vested interests. There are innumerable rules and regulations to be fulfilled by the NGOs. This leads to further delay in the completion of the project and deriving results.

- It was mentioned that NGOs promoted by the politicians and contractors do not hesitate to bribe the officials and have a tendency to keep information to themselves. Therefore, they were far more successful in mobilising the resources as compared to those NGOs with social commitment and values.

- Another serious problem has been the *frequent transfer and discontinuity* of government officials. An enormous amount of time and energy was spent to re-establish their credentials and familiarise and convince the new incumbents the need for fulfilling commitments made by his/her predecessor. This effort would be a waste if the new person was against the interface or did not honour the commitment made by the preceding officer.

- Frequent visits, appeasement or even bribing the bureaucrats who handle the government's developmental programmes are needed to ensure the speedy process relating to movement of files, sanctioning of funds, providing of technical details of the schemes and so on. This needs to be seen in the context that most of the officials are not positive in their thinking and attitude towards NGOs, and there exists mutual distrust. This happened when NGOs were perceived to encroach upon the professional domain of government functionaries and gain the goodwill of local people as against the government.

- Low level of capacity and lack of motivation among lower level officials often became obstacles to the interface and this reportedly took lot of time and energy of the NGOs to convince and establish a rapport with the government officials every time.

- Establishing linkages between the government officials and the members become easy when the latter are literate and cognisant. *Widespread illiteracy* among members was a problem while facilitating the linkage process with the government. Due to illiteracy, the people were not very well aware of the various government departments, schemes, eligibility, procedure and so on.

- *Lack of dissemination of information* on rural development programmes designed by the government at higher levels to lower level officials was another problem. The decisions were orally communicated leading to confusion and lack of clarity. At times, this also led to manipulation by the lower level officials.

- *Local political intervention* in many of the internal affairs was cited by two NGOs to be another problem. The local political leaders, driven by vested interests, often cause hindrance in establishing linkages and allowing access of resources to the poor since their importance in the eyes of the poor would decline.

This discussion also does not provide conclusive evidence on the type of interface, though it suggests that co-option is the emerging type of interface. Delays in releasing funds, complicated procedures, *red tapism* and corruption were cited to be the important problems in establishing interface in the early 1990s (PRADAN, 1996; Bhat and Satish, 1993; Sethna and Satish, 1993; AVARD, 1992). Interestingly, these are the problems faced by almost all NGOs in our study. This implies that all types of interface are possible, and that, interface is not institutionalised. Problems such as illiteracy, ignorance and lack of information are more related to the critical collaboration; but, only a few of the NGOs seem to have faced these problems. Hence, there is need to turn to people's perceptions on the interface to find out the type of interface.

Perceptions of the Members

The main data source for this section was the primary data collected from 20 randomly selected SHG members in each NGO project area through a questionnaire. It covered questions on the socio-economic background, levels of awareness, access and utilisation of government programmes, problems faced in approaching the officials and levels of independence in approaching and accessing the programmes. In all, the data were collected from 176 member households from all the project areas. The distribution of these households by land ownership shows that about one-third each were landless and marginal farmers. Less than one-fourth were small farmers. Nearly 45 per cent of them belonged to SC/ST categories, while about 37 per cent belonged to backward castes. The information, thus, shows that most members were poor and belonged to the depressed castes.

The sample members stated that they were provided with information on various schemes of the government by NGO staff in weekly/ monthly meetings of SHGs or in the training programmes at the project level. Schemes on which information provided included Development of Women and Child in Rural Areas (DWCRA), schemes by SC/ST Corporation, housing, sanitary facilities, loans for undertaking Income Generating Activities (IGAs), welfare schemes and loans for agricultural development. In general, most of them were aware of IRDP, programmes relating basic amenities, and minimum needs such as old age pension. Of those members who came to know about these programmes, a majority could access the resources. Performance in terms of productive utilisation was even better. However, variations among the NGOs could be observed in terms of level of awareness, and proportions of members obtaining resources. An attempt to relate this information with NGO statements on the need for interface, strategies adopted and problems faced did not provide a meaningful pattern.

In contrast, the proportion of members successfully utilising the resources provided by the government did not vary significantly across the NGO project areas. This suggests that once the SHG members obtained resources, they utilised the resources efficiently and retained the assets acquired with the help of these resources. Most of the members reported an increase in employment and income.

To a question whether members of SHG faced problems in approaching the government officials to access the resources, it was learnt that only a small proportion of the members actually met the concerned officials due to the following: First, the government offices were distantly located, and hence, opportunity costs in terms of wage income forgone had come in the way of continuous follow-up to the offices. Second, the male members of their households often were not supportive of their visits to government offices. Third, the complicated procedures and indifferent attitude of the officials were cited as important problems by a few of the sample members. Fourth, a significant proportion of members stated that there was enormous delay between the application and sanction, and finally disbursal. This was mainly due to lack of follow-up, compounded by the problems of distant location and also the unsympathetic attitude of the male household members.

Interestingly, a large proportion of the sample members visited government offices, but rarely interacted with government officials as the NGO itself mobilised the resources based on its reputation in the local area, and groundwork (in terms of dialogue meetings inviting the concerned officials to the project area, etc) before mobilising the resources. The NGO staff prepared the applications, submitted the same and followed up with concerned officials. Hence, there was no need to meet the concerned officials, except when assistance was actually provided to them.

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The pattern on whether or not members visited government offices could be related to the type of interface practised by NGOs. A few of the NGOs mobilised the resources on their own, and hence, did not make any significant efforts to involve the people in the interface process. This was done because the government departments themselves invited four of the NGOs to participate in the implementation of programmes such as sanitation, DWCRA and Income Generation programmes. The second group of NGOs played a dominant role in the interface process as compared to the people, either because of survival concerns or pressures from the donor. The staff in these NGOs played a major role in the interface process to achieve targets set either by the NGO or donor. Three NGOs belonged to this category. The third type of NGOs made efforts to build the institutional capacity of the members, who were in the forefront as far as the interface process was concerned. Two NGOs belonged to this category. First category of NGOs is characterised by co-option, the second by collaboration and third by critical collaboration. Reorganisation of primary data (Tables 4 and 5) along these three categories provides meaningful patterns.

Table 4 provides information on the levels of awareness, access and utilisation of government programmes among members by the type of NGOs. An important finding has been that the level of awareness was in general high among members from the project areas of NGOs pursuing critical collaboration. These NGOs have made dissemination of information as an important component of their programmes. Information was provided to the members in SHG meetings and special training programmes. On the other hand, the level of awareness among the members·from the project areas of NGOs pursuing collaboration or characterised by co-option has been less. Imparting awareness on the programmes was given less emphasis as the individual NGOs obtained government resources on their own strength or their own persuasion. Another important feature was that some of the members obtained information on these programmes through different channels, such as from the local decentralised government or the government directly.

There are also differences in so far as accessing the resources by the type of NGOs. In general, a larger proportion of members from the project areas of NGOs pursuing critical collaboration accessed resources as compared to the other two types. However, the difference is not significant, and in the case of a few programmes, a larger proportion of members from the NGOs, characterised by co-option, accessed the resources. But this was mostly because the NGO was in the forefront to mobilise these resources from the government.

When it comes to productive utilisation of resources, the performance of the members from the project areas of NGOs pursuing critical collaboration was far better. This was because these NGOs gave utmost importance to build the capacity of members in the productive

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Table 4: Levels of Awareness, Access and Utilisation of the Government Programmes by the Type of NGOs

Particulars	NGOs characterised by											
	Co-option			Collaboration			Critical collaboration			All NGOs		
	Aw	Obtn	Utln	Aw	Obtn	Utln	Aw	Obtn	Utln	Aw	Obtn	Utln
DWCRA	25.00	89.47	88.24	23.33	92.86	76.92	35.00	85.71	100.00	26.70	89.36	88.10
SC/ST Corporation Scheme	15.79	66.67	62.50	15.00	77.78	85.71	50.00	100.00	100.00	23.30	85.37	88.57ª
Land site for housing	25.00	52.63	20.00	30.00	55.56	100.00	65.00	69.23	77.78	35.80	60.32	68.42
Sanitary facilities, drinking water, PMRY, JRY	32.89	100.00	84.00	51.67	38.71	83.33	67.50	59.26	93.75	47.16	63.86	86.79
Loans to support rural artisans (TRYSEM,IRDP)	57.89	31.82	71.43	65.00	48.72	57.89	55.00	81.82	88.89	59.66	48.57	72.55
Schemes relating to OAP, education, hostel, electricity, family planning, widower pension, etc.	61.84	36.17	76.47	25.00	46.67	100.00	37.50	93.33	71.43	43.75	49.35	78.95
Loans to agriculture (tank Desiltation, livestock, GKY, KBS)	31.58	75.00	83.33	45.00	92.59	72.00	57.50	47.83	100.00	42.05	72.97	81.48

Note: Aw: % of members aware of the programmes
Obtn: % of members obtaining the programmes
Utln: % of members productively utilising the programmes

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utilisation of government resources as this would have a bearing on the sustainable interface. One of the NGOs prepared the members in terms of providing training on business development. When government sanctioned a scheme relating to individual sanitary facilities, the implementation was done through beneficiary committees, which ensured quality and cost-effectiveness.

Thus, although all types of NGOs have succeeded in having interface between the people and government departments, the quality varied. The role of people was much less in the case of the first two types of NGOs as compared to the third type. This would have an impact on the sustainability of the interface process.

Table 5 provides more conclusive evidence on the type of interface. More than two thirds of members from the project areas of NGOs characterised by co-option stated that they depended on NGOs to obtain resources from the government. About one fifth of members stated that they were independent in approaching the government officials and accessing resources. The situation is significantly better in the case of NGOs pursuing collaboration. About 38 per cent stated that they became independent while less than one-fifth stated they were likely to become independent in the long run. In contrast, nearly two-thirds of members from the project areas of NGOs pursuing critical collaboration stated that they were independent. This is because the role of people in establishing and sustaining the interface by undertaking the following activities has been stressed from the beginning in these programmes. Information on programmes was provided. Efforts to improve their capacity to approach the officials were made. The NGO staff was told to play a facilitative rather than a dominant role under which their own involvement gradually declined. Formats to monitor the process of interface were developed. These were reviewed in monthly meetings. Once the members obtained the resources, their utilisation and repayment of loans, if any, were monitored along with leaders of SHGs. Because of this intensive process, quality of the interface process was different and it had a potential to become sustainable.

Table 5: Dependence (%) of People on NGOs in Approaching the Government Officials and Accessing the Resources

Particulars	NGOs characterised by			All NGOs
	Co-option	Collabo-ration	Critical collaboration	
Dependence on NGOs	64.47	43.33	17.50	46.60
Independent in approaching	21.05	38.33	62.50	36.40
Independent in the long run	10.53	18.00	20.00	15.30
Did not meet officials	3.95	0.00	0.00	1.70
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Actual	**76**	**60**	**40**	**176**

Conclusions

The paper has sought to analyse the type of interface between the government, NGOs and people. The main conclusion is that of the nine NGOs, four are characterised by co-option, three by collaboration and two by critical collaboration. Thus, the dominant form of interface is either co-option or collaboration.

The NGOs characterised by co-option or collaboration chose their respective paths due to the pressure of donors or compulsions created out of an increase in the size of NGOs in terms of number of villages, groups and members. With an uncertain donor environment, they were compelled to access the resources for their own survival or for the people. When NGOs do not have autonomy in terms of funding or development vision, co-option or collaboration seems to be the mostly likely outcome.

The type of interface has implications on people-centred development and sustainability. It appears that peoples' participation in the true sense is not needed in collaboration or co-option. This has implications on the dependence of the people on NGOs for establishing linkages with government departments. If NGOs become contractors or middle agencies between the government and people, there would always arise questions on accountability and their very purpose for this type of development.

Only two NGOs seem to be pursuing critical collaboration, largely because of support that they have received from donors in terms of vision development and continued funding support. Critical collaboration wherein the people gradually take control of the interface process is needed, but this has implications in terms of costs and benefits, and raises the questions such as 'who has to meet these costs?' and 'for how long?'

Finally, if the government and donor agencies, consciously or unconsciously, push NGOs to follow the path of co-option or simple collaboration, questions 'whether this is needed or not?' and 'why efforts to change the attitude of development bureaucracy are not made instead of concentrating on NGO mediated interface?' arise.

Notes

1. For more details on this typology of NGOs, see Rajasekhar (2000).

2. These were formed by the educated, middle and lower middle class youth who were dissatisfied with the government programmes which widened the gap between the rich and the poor. These people were unhappy with the Left parties, which failed to consider the problems of the poorest (Fernandes, 1985; Sethi and Kothari, 1984). Influenced by the Western

Marxist thought, SAGs criticised that the government neither had the capacity nor the political will to improve the living standards of the poor.

3. Throughout this paper, we use the term 'people', instead of target group, to denote the groups of people belonging to depressed castes and vulnerable sections with which an NGO or government works with.

4. These were FCRA, Financial Act of 1983, banning of foreign funding for NGOs involved in empowerment activities, removal of tax exemptions from all income generating activities of NGOs, etc.

5. The term was coined by Wolch (1990) while analysing the state-non profit sector relations in the United States and United Kingdom. A shadow state refers to a parastatal apparatus consisting of voluntary organisations charged with the responsibility of providing services, which, otherwise, would have been provided by the state.

6. Federation of Voluntary Organisation for Rural Development in Karnataka (FEVORD-K) and VANI are examples of NGOs' network.

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