

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY ON NGOs AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES OF MAJULI DISTRICT, ASSAM

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Abstract: The study was conducted among three selected NGOs of Majuli district, Assam (largest Riverine Island in the world). This paper deals with the understanding of the concept of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), their nature and their functioning. Besides, it also tries to bring out the picture of how NGOs have been engaging themselves with developmental activities therein besides highlighting the issues and challenges encountered by the NGOs in Majuli. The present study tries to bring out the ground realities on how NGOs have been working for the development of the people in Majuli especially on providing social justice, development and working for human rights, especially for the poor and weaker section of society, focusing on poverty alleviation, etc. It also attempts to reflect on various important roles that the NGOs engage in shaping and implementation for valuable solutions towards minimizing local issues. It also highlights how NGOs become a powerful catalyst for identifying ground realities and also for realizing the needs of the communities through promoting citizen participation in various developmental activities initiated in the community.

Introduction

Today NGOs have seemed to occupy a very significant place in the various areas of development, serving millions of citizens in many countries. They are claimed as one of the fastest-growing segments all over the globe, with social entrepreneurs who are increasingly getting involved in solving societal problems and bringing them to attention

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for government to look upon. Their reach and scope often eclipse both the private and public sector, touching and affecting the lives of every citizen, often more profoundly than the forces of the marketplace or the agencies and bureaucracies of government. They are characterized as non-state organizations independent from for-profit businesses working in international development, humanitarian action, human rights, or the environment. The term “Non-government organization” is used to mean all those NGOs, located in a developed country, which operates internationally and have networks with many other kinds of non-profit organizations throughout the world (Fisher, 1998, cited in Share, 2018: 17-18).

Understanding the concept of NGO: The term Non-Governmental Organization came into use and was popularized in the year 1945 along with the formation of the United Nations. Later in the year 1980, the role of NGOs was assumed to be greater in the sectors of development. There has been a lot of debate in putting a clear definition of the term NGO. This is because a precise definition for the term varies with its characteristics and types that are identified or tagged as an NGO. The roles played by NGOs are different in different societies and are interpreted differently in different contexts. This could be understood in the fact that it is a non-government and non-profit organization and on the other, it is funded extensively by the government and generates profit to support their organization (Lewis, 2010: 2-3). Several definitions on understanding the concept of NGOs have been put forwarded by scholars.

The World Bank's Operational Directive on the NGOs (1989) has defined the NGOs “as groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of the governmental organizations and are characterized primarily by the humanitarian or co-operative, rather than commercial objectives” (Sharare, 2018: 18). Korten (1990) highlights that civil society organizations are composed of individuals which provide maximum opportunity to people in developing and expressing their full creative potentiality in unfolding various possibilities of life. Prabakaran (1992), states that a voluntary organization is an agency, structured or unstructured, organized, or unorganized, that works in any given area for the welfare of a community. It is a group of well-trained committed individuals living inactivity and interacting with the villagers. Clarke (2006), in his book “Politics of NGOs in South-East India” defined NGOs as an organization that is private, non-profit, professional with a distinctive legal character primarily concerned with the welfare of the public. Murthy (1997) stated that NGOs are those organizations, which possess distinct characteristics; voluntary formation, working towards development, working with non-self-serving aims and relative independence. They are development-oriented in the sense that they are concerned with improving the condition and position of oppressed society, as opposed to other goals like entertainment, promotion of religion,

etc. But non-government organizations work within the parameters of government legislations and policies formulated for them.

NGOs in India and its classification: In India, it has been noticed that before independence, people have been found to extend their help to people in need and difficulty. They have always volunteered their service to the people in the field of health, education, outbreak of disasters like floods, earthquakes, famines, fires, epidemics, etc., as a part of charity work or by holding several self-help programs in the process of their own development. This phase took a turn to the form of religious and social reforms, believing to the fact that service to mankind would be service to God. They believed that attaining spiritual salvation and atonement to any of their sinful act could be done by rendering service to humanity. In the past, the spirit of charity and altruism motivated charitable action, which was articulated in varied ways, including beyond the formally defined religious networks (Punalekar, 2004, cited in Pawar *et al.* 2004: 31-36).

Every religion whether it is Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, or Sikhism, have taken inspiration from their own religious learnings and inculcated it into their voluntary actions. The works of voluntary organizations, in India, have primarily been spiritual in nature. During the Buddha period, it was observed that the Buddhist monks through their preaching and service have focused mainly on the basic principles of life based on equality. Similarly, rendering help and service to the needy and people in distress has also been noticed during the Gupta period. The Mughal Empire too had undertaken the same path of offering voluntary services and help for the poor and needy people. In the British period, the British government in India formed the Royal Commission on Agriculture during the 17th and 18th centuries and had worked towards rural agricultural development in India (Doshi & Jain, 1999).

During the 19th century, the reform movements were recognized as the first organized forms of voluntary action in the service of society. The voluntary activities were evident in three main directions, namely, religious, social, and voluntary reforms. Many social reformers came forward in finding opportunities to protest the rigid caste-based stratification, the evil customs, and practices. In different parts of the country, many associations and organizations were emerging which attracted the attention of people over the nation. They promoted selfless services to the needy and together marched towards the abolishment of anti-social and caste-related practices. Many associations were formed during this time, among those were *Atmiya society (1815)*, *Arya Samaj(1875)*, *Ram Krishna Mission (1897)*, (Gangrade and Sooryamoorthy, 1995).

At the beginning of the 20th century, religious vehemence gave way to more rationalist principles. This gave birth to the Servants of Indian Society which laid the foundation of secular voluntary action in India (Punalekar, 2004). Mahatma Gandhi too had a strong

adherence to high social ideals and had an immense concern with issues and evils that people were dealing with. He with his deep-rooted ideals and principles on social reconstruction, self-help, had volunteered in the fight to eliminate evil from society. He was against the concepts of untouchability and prohibition, caste segregation which led to the formation of several voluntary organizations finding solutions against such issues. Among them were the organizations such as *Seva, Eklavya, Disha*, etc. which were formed under the influence of ideals set by Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi also initiated several social welfare programs believing in the potential of rural India. He founded programs like *Charkeba, Gramodyog, Khadi*, and founded associations like *Harijan Sevak Sangh, Hindustan Talim Sangh, Adivasi Seva Mandals, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust*, etc. (Gangrade & Sooryamoorthy, 1995).

Significant growth of NGOs was observed in India after the independence. The government of India had then put more effort into identifying the areas that needed to be put state intervention. These areas were largely based on education, health, infrastructure, industries and social welfare. At the same time, NGOs were extended full support to look upon these areas and work for the welfare of the state. These were very strategically planned, and several development projects were undertaken by the NGOs in the field of children and youth development, women empowerment, serving the poor and handicapped in both the urban and rural setups (Shahare, 2018: 18-19). During this time democracy was established and the people of India eventually had adapted to understand the value of equality, humanity, brotherhood, and the meaning of freedom and speech. Allocations of funds from the government were made to the voluntary organizations to carry out different developmental activities especially in the rural areas of India. NGOs through their allocated funds from the government had active participation in the development process in working towards the anti-poverty and other need-based programs (Behar and Prakash, 2004).

In India, till date, there could be seen several NGOs and voluntary organisations which are actively working in different sectors. They are rendering their service to the poor and needy belonging to different sections of the society, irrespective of caste, gender, region, and religion. “NGOs are classified differently by different scholars. For example, Korten (1990) has classified NGOs as (i) relief and welfare organisations, and (ii) coalitions building community organisations. Shah and Chaturvedi (1983) have classified them as (i) techno-managerial, (ii) reformist, and (iii) radical. Hirway (1995), have described NGOs in three different types: (i) welfare-oriented (including health and education), (ii) development organisations, and (iii) empowering NGOs. According to Elliot (1987), there are also three different types of NGOs: (i) charity, (ii) development, and (iii) empowerment NGOs” (Pawar *et al.*, 2004, p. 15).

NGOs in Majuli: The importance of NGOs in Majuli has been always felt unlimited and essential due to the isolated geographical characteristics and underdeveloped communication facilities the island possesses. Majuli has always been affected by flood devastation caused by the mighty Brahmaputra River and soil erosion which has caused a threat to the physical and geographical structure of the island. The contribution of various social and non-government organizations in the development of Majuli under such an adverse situation is always noteworthy. However, once various temples, religious institutions have played the role of NGOs and social organizations by involving themselves in various activities to preserve the culture, habitat and maintain ecological balance besides creating health awareness or to open doors for tourists from a foreign land.

There are thirty-four registered NGOs under the Farm and Societies Registration Act 1860, among which only a few are actively engaging in various developmental programmes due to a shortage of funds and lack of skilled personnel in the region. At present, there could be seen only a few working for socio-economic and socio-cultural development of Majuli. Some of which are IMPACT-NE (Integrated Mass Participation in Agriculture & Creative Technology-North East), REDS, Kalabhumij Majuli, River People, Shradha NGO, Sadbhavana, etc. (Pegu, 2014, p. 96). The NGOs are working to create awareness among the people of Majuli for their own development and showing the path of gaining various livelihood sources to the educated unemployed, preserving its cultural heritage, uplifting the health status and so on.

Objectives

The paper shall discuss the following main objectives of the study:

- To understand the nature and the historical backdrop for the formation of the NGOs in Majuli.
- To study the organisational structure and functioning of the NGOs.
- To examine the activities or interventions taken up by the NGOs in the study area.
- To identify the problems and challenges encountered by the NGOs working in Majuli.

Methodology

For the study, various research tools and techniques were employed for data collection. Both qualitative methods and quantitative methods of data collection were carried out during the fieldwork. The study was carried out among three NGOs working in the Majuli district of Assam. The NGOs for the study are Integrated Mass Participation in Agriculture

and Creative Technology-North East (IMPACT-NE), Ayang, and Amar Majuli. They are based in Majuli and have been working with different tribes and groups residing in Majuli, especially with the *Mishing* tribe (one of the major and largely populated tribes in Majuli) of Assam.

Tools and Techniques: For carrying out the anthropological research, the following tools and techniques have been applied:

- (a) **Sampling:** For identifying the participants for the study, the snowball sampling technique has been used. Snowball sampling technique has helped identify the additional participants from the initial participants which later helped in identifying the potential participants for the study.
- (b) **Observation:** This method was used to observe the day-to-day ongoing activities of the people as well as the NGOs. Observing here does not only imply watching or looking but is a systematized and deliberate way of looking into a phenomenon. Both the participant and non-participant way of observation was implied depending on the nature or practical demand of the situation. Participant observation was extensively used to feel the pulse of the situation taking place in its natural setting while being a part of it.
- (c) **Interview:** For the collection of data, the interview technique was primarily used in both unstructured and semi-structured form depending on the type of information to be gathered at a particular moment. The interviews were conducted with the help of an interview guide, which included a list of topics. The unstructured interview helped in establishing a good rapport with the people of the area as well as with NGO staff and members, where there is no pre-determined set of questions arranged or decided in advance. The semi-structured interview was conducted with pre-determined open-ended questions, especially to explore the participant's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on a particular topic.
- (d) **Data analysis:** Data analysis in qualitative research occurs as an explicit step in conceptually interpreting the data set as a whole. It is obtained by using specific analytic strategies to transform the raw data into a new and coherent depiction of the topic that is being studied (Thorne, 2000, 68). While analyzing qualitative data, the investigator searches for patterns of data. This may be in the form of recurrent behaviours, events, etc. and when such patterns are identified, the researcher interprets them, moving from description of empirical data to interpretation of meaning (Sarantakos 1998, p. 314).

For the collection of data, in-depth interviews with the members of the selected NGOs were conducted. Audio-recording of every conversation, meeting, and event, as

well as jotting down in the form of field notes was done. Every experience and observation made during the field has later helped in developing new ideas and interpretations. In addition, case studies were also collected on various issues relating to the activities of NGOs, problems and challenges encountered by NGOs, etc. This has helped in sifting and sorting through very pieces of data collected for the study. Moreover, it also helps to interpret them by categorizing data for relevant conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Background of the NGOs

IMPACT-NE renders its service in sectors of socio-economic, health, education, environmental, and cultural activities. They have expanded its services and activities to the adjoining districts of Assam. Every year they put their attention towards helping and providing aids to the flood and river erosion victims of Majuli. It gained its full shape in the year 2003, situated at the *Kamalabari* area of Majuli, with two branches at Jorhat and Lakhimpur of Assam. The organization had started its journey with the collective efforts of a few youths from *Belesidhia Satra*, Majuli. They had formed a “*Sangha*” (organization), in the year 2000 and named it “*Majuli Progoti Sangha*”. The *Majuli Progoti Sangha* later in the year 2003 united with another organization named “*Brahmaputra Club*”, formed in the year 1997 by youths of *Kolonibari* village of Upper Majuli. Both the organization united and gave shape to IMPACT-NE. Since then, the members of IMPACT-NE have been rendering their service to the deprived and poverty-stricken areas of Majuli.

Amar Majuli (the word ‘*Amar*’ meaning ‘*our*’ in Assamese language, together meaning ‘*Our Majuli*’) is a locally-based non-profit organization of Majuli. It holds its significance in the field of livelihood and leadership programmes specifically concentrating on the womenfolk of Majuli. The organization was formed with the initiatives taken by the local communities alongside the youths from Israel visiting Majuli concerning their academic programme. It has got into its shape in the year 2011 with the initiative taken by an Israeli citizen on her visit to Majuli, Assam, as a part of her academic program. Gili Navon, the founding Director of the organization along with some residents of Majuli had come forward to form a community-based organization, with the vision to work for the poor rural communities of Majuli. The organization strives to work for the poor rural communities by trying to identify their social and economic needs.

On the other hand, *Ayang* was formed with the initiative taken up by the team of Hummingbird School in Majuli. The concept of Hummingbird school came into existence with the constant effort of Mr. Bipin Shivaji Dhane along with the people of Majuli belonging from 19 different villages in 2016. The primary objective of Hummingbird

school is to provide a contextual and holistic education for the children of Majuli, especially the marginalized flood-affected communities. It was started by the villagers of the *Kulamua* village of Majuli. 19 villages participated in the project and had extended their help to Mr. Bipin Shivaji Dhane by donating land and raw materials to construct the school. With much effort from the villagers and founder Bipin Shivaji Dhane, they were able to register a total number of 110 students from the nearby villages to register. The first session of the school started in January 2017. Later in November of the same year, after the successful attempt to create the school, the team with the help of the villagers decided to register the organization as a trust. They named it *Ayang* which is a *Mishing* word, meaning “love, affection”. *Ayang*'s human-centric approach embraces the principles of compassion, empathy, and cooperation. The organization initiated its service in three main themes, viz, education, healthcare, and livelihood.

Broad Objectives

The selected NGOs have pointed out the primary objectives of their respective organization. The studies NGOs have a different set of objectives and motives for their development in the area. In order to bring clarity, the following are some of the important objectives of the studies NGOs as informed by officials of the concerned NGOs:

(a) IMPACT-NE

- To design and implement various schemes and programs for the elimination of poverty.
- To create awareness among the people in the fields of health, sanitation, environment, effects of drugs and alcohol, providing family counselling on family-related issues, etc.
- To organise and implement different plans in the education sectors, focussing on pre-primary education, adult education, women education, and vocational education.
- To plan and execute ventures in the field of agriculture, fishery, dairy, piggyery, sericulture, food processing, cottage industry, handloom and textiles in order to improvise the financial capabilities of the targeted group.
- To form self-help groups to create an interface with the Government and Non-government departments to undertake various plans.
- To help victims of flood, river erosional activities and other natural calamities.

(b) Amar Majuli

- To work and design development programmes in the sector of women's livelihood and leadership initiatives.

- To formulate possible agricultural solutions and create awareness of technological innovations in the field of subsistence agriculture.
- To promote local youth volunteers and citizen engagement to identify the needs and problems of the communities and address them will well strategize a plan.
- To help the people of Majuli during the flood season by finding solutions and ways to deal with the adverse effect of flood on their health and livelihood.

(c) Ayang

- To work towards capacity building in the areas of education, healthcare, and livelihood for contributing towards a better social and economic justice.
- To formulate designs based on continuous learning and innovations.
- To help people in finding sustainable outcomes by empowering the local communities of Majuli.

Organizational Structure and its Functioning

The organization has its board of trustees, advisors, and the team, who has been running the organization and looking after it relentlessly. The Board of trustees has three members including the founder of Hummingbird school, Bipin Shivaji Dhane, Krishna Kanta Pegu, a local resident of Majuli. Bipin Shivaji Dhane along with three other members has founded the Hummingbird school and *Ayang* trust. He also serves as the principal secretary of *Ayang* Trust. Basically, Bipin Shivaji Dhane belongs to a place called *Satara* in Maharashtra State.

As a part of the system, *Ayang* has a district advisory board, which consists of a Chief Advisor, Primary Advisor, Legal Advisor, Member Advisor, President, Vice President, Principal Secretary and Assistant Secretary. The Chief advisor is Sri Janardandev Goswami, Satradhikar of Uttar Kamalabari Satra, Majuli. The advisory board has its members from diverse backgrounds socio-economic backgrounds. The team of *Ayang* has individuals from Assam as well as from other states of India. They have a dynamic and enthusiastic team that are excellent in their field of work and management. Their team comprises of the three founder members, along with a director, program managers, program associate, operations coordinator, accounts and administrative associate, facilitator for various programs, sustainability educator, community mobilizer, and office assistant. Among the three co-founders, they are also serving as the Director of Hummingbird School, Director Education and Director Livelihood. The office of *Ayang* is at Garamur, the district headquarters of the Majuli district.

The core team members of *Ayang* operate from this office. The management of every program of *Ayang* is run from their office established at Garamur. As mentioned

earlier, they have different program managers assigned for different programs. Likewise, the facilitators are also involved and assigned to different projects. *Ayang* has been running several projects based on education, livelihood, and healthcare. They have undertaken several education-related projects which are managed by its program manager and facilitators. In addition, there are certain numbers of facilitators assigned under a program manager for different programs to undertake. The role of the program manager is to design and strategize the whole program as per the need of the beneficiaries. The program manager ensures running the project with utmost responsibility for leading the project and executing the project deliverables. The facilitator under every project is assigned with work to meet the objectives of the team with their full participation in the project. As per the requirement of the projects the facilitator sometimes had to visit the allotted field area and report daily activity carried out by them during the visit. The facilitator with the consultation of their program managers takes up workshops and other group activities on his own. They are to report the day-to-day planning of their work and activities conducted in their field visit. At the end of the day the facilitators who are out in the fieldwork, visit the *Ayang* office to consult, report, and plan for the upcoming day's activity with their program managers. *Ayang* has partnered with several organizations across the country that extends their financial support. The partner organizations apart from providing financial support also provide aids and guidance on projects. *Ayang* is also trying to get governmental support for taking up new projects in Majuli. They are in the process of working in collaboration with the Majuli district administration.

On the other hand, *Amar Majuli* is registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860. It has developed as a community based non-profit organization working towards enhancing the livelihood possibilities, building capacity, and wellbeing of its members. *Amar Majuli* has an active local board that consists of members from the local communities of Majuli. It has a President, Secretary, Treasurer, and five other members who are dedicatedly working for *Amar Majuli*. Apart from its board members, *Amar Majuli* has a team that includes its staff members and volunteers. Gili Navon holds the position of managing director in *Amar Majuli*. Mr. Bedabrat Dutta, the President of *Amar Majuli*, is a social entrepreneur and the secretary of Majuli tourism. He belongs to Majuli and aspires to work for the people of Majuli. Mrs. Minu Gam (Secretary, *Amar Majuli*) and Dipa Rani Payun (Treasurer, *Amar Majuli/Rengam*) both have been a part of the organisation since its inception. Mrs. Minu Gam is a local inhabitant of the island, working as a women rights activist. She is an entrepreneur dealing with tribal art and a master weaver of traditional *Mishing* attires. She had trained a lot of women in mastering different intricate designs of traditional attire. Dipa Rani Payun runs *Rengam* which is running as an outlet of traditional attires, prepared and led by the local *Mishing* women of Majuli. The *Rengam* is taken from

the local *Mishing* word which literally means “a united group”. With the involvement of local *Mishing* women from their community, they organise to help the local women by helping them in creating opportunities to support their families. In addition, *Amar Majuli* does not hold a specific office area in the town. The operation of its activities and programs are executed from the *Yggdrasill bamboo cottage*, which is situated in *Kerela Gaon*, Majuli. *Kerela Gaon* is situated between the way from *Kamala bari* town to *Garamur* town. The cottage holds a facility of lodging and food for tourists. It is owned by Bedabrat Dutta (President, *Amar Majuli*) and is also used for operating official works of *Amar Majuli*. Outstation volunteers come and stay in the cottage and serve the NGO by sharing their skills and knowledge with the islanders. *Amar Majuli* has been receiving support and help from several national and international organizations. Many of them work as partners with *Amar Majuli* in teaming and designing programs for the benefit of the people of Majuli. They receive support in the form of funds for the successful running of their programs and also in strategizing and designing programs based on livelihood, women empowerment, etc. from their partnered organizations.

IMPACT-NE as an organization is also registered under the Societies Registration Act, XXI of 1860. The organization is composed of two committees, the Advisory Committee and the General Committee. The general committee is managed by the board of directors and the executive body. The board of directors of IMPACT-NE consists of one President/Chairman, along with five other members. The Executive Committee is formed by a President, Vice President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer and ten other members who include the office staff and project staff. The President/Chairman acts as the chief of the operating staff and is responsible for the proper functioning of the NGO. He is selected by the Executive Committee of the organization. For the selection of the organizational members, a recommendation from the executive committee of the organization is put into consideration. Any individual can become a member of the NGO, who desires to work in co-operation with the NGO. The secretary acts as the legal representative of the organization and is an active member and administers for the proper functioning of the activities taking place. The office at *Kamalabari* is the head office for administering and functioning every project undertaken by the organization. The office is in the vicinity of the *Kamalabari* town and is situated near *Uttar Kamalabari Satra*. Every functioning and operation of projects is carried out from the *Kamalabari* office due to its accessibility to other places. They have their own staff that looks upon their publications, networking, and media handles.

Area of Work and its Interventions

In the area of health, IMPACT-NE has been contributing largely towards the reproductive healthcare of women. They had undertaken a project on reproductive child health in the

year 2011-12 supported by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Under the RCH (Reproductive Child Health) Project, the organization had carried out activities, sensitization programs, street plays, health day celebrations and organizing health *mela*. Under the same area of work, IMPACT-NE has been implanting a continuous project since the year 2007 on HIV/AIDS. They have named it as Targeted Intervention Project (T.I. Project). The T.I. projects especially work for the vulnerable sections of the society, who are least aware of the hazardous outcomes of unsafe intercourse and sexually transmitted diseases. Under this project, the organization carries out community-based activities such as organizing health camps for awareness of sexually transmit diseases, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) treatment, capacity building programs, street plays, the establishment of Integrated Counselling and Testing Centre (ICTC), where counselling on STI and distribution of condom through peer educators are done.

IMPACT-NE has also been working for the change and development of individuals, families, groups, and communities. They have formed a family counselling centre with the help of the Central Social Welfare Board, under the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. They have trained counsellors who look after the matter relating to family clashes, disputes and controversies among married couples, family planning, and other related issues. They have started the counselling centre in October 2008 and are continuing its service for the communities in the study area.

To enhance the socio-economic sector of Majuli and to create livelihood opportunities, IMPACT-NE has been running a project on mustard cultivation and mustard oil production. The “Majuli Brand Mustard Oil” is a project implemented since 2005, which ensures financial benefits. This has generated scope for employment for the local communities and their youth. Through this, IMPACT-NE has also attempted to provide the farmers with a direct market linkage. Another project undertaken by the organization is on the Self Help Empowerment and Linkage for Training Employment and Reforms (SHELTER) Project. This project aimed to extend financial support to Self Help Groups (SHGs) through credit linkage from financial institutions. The project is designed to benefit the SHGs by empowering them economically. While considering the womenfolk of Majuli, the organization has taken up a project on empowering women and making them self-sufficient through their traditional skills. *Ambedkar Hastasilpa Vikash Yojna* (AHVY) is a project promoting *Mishing* community artisans by establishing a worldwide market to sell their products. The main objective of the scheme is to develop the *Mishing* community by empowering its women and to upgrade the socio-economic development of the area.

Table 1: Programmes and initiatives are undertaken by IMPACT-NE (Integrated Mass Participation in Agriculture & Creative Technology-North East)

IMPACT-NE	
<i>Area of work/ Interventions</i>	<i>Programmes/ Initiatives undertaken</i>
Healthcare sector	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Programme on family counselling 2) Targeted Intervention project 3) Reproductive child health project 4) Total sanitation campaign
Socio-economic sector	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Project on Majuli Brand mustard oil 2) Professional leadership workshop 3) Entrepreneurship and skill development programmes 4) Shelter project 5) Asha skill development training 6) Organising exposure visits for artisans 7) National agricultural innovative project

However, *Amar Majuli* strives to work on four main themes, which are women’s livelihood and leadership, sustainable agriculture, youth leadership and local volunteerism, and flood adaptation and relief activities. The organization has undertaken several initiatives under the four mentioned themes. In initiating women’s livelihood and leadership programs *Amar Majuli* has been associated with *Rengam*, which is a women weavers’ cooperative member. The organization has been providing their support to the members of *Rengam* through capacity building. Here they have included training programs for the weavers, giving them exposure to various advanced techniques in the weaving process, helping them to create a platform in national and international trade markets. The organization has also introduced and formed a women’s cycle bank model for the womenfolk of Majuli. This initiative was undertaken to address the challenges and limitations of transportation facilities of many villages. This was to provide support to many women especially from the flood-affected areas to conveniently travel to marketplaces or hospitals.

In the sector of agriculture, *Amar Majuli* had developed ways for sustainable agriculture to improve food security and availability throughout the year. As mentioned, Majuli is a flood-prone area and vulnerable to environmental hazards, the situation leaves the land infertile and polluted. Considering these factors *Amar Majuli* has established “Community Demonstration Plots”. Community Demonstration Plots are meant for the demonstration of suitable and innovative technologies that can be used in agricultural fields for the farmers,

which is used to demonstrate several innovative techniques and sustainable sources of producing agricultural produces. These demonstration plots work as a place for practical learning of different technologies used in agricultural practice by experts and local farmers. They have designed a program for the youths where these volunteers extend their help and support to the most vulnerable sections of society. They are trained to address the ongoing problems of society and create awareness among the people. Simultaneously, *Amar Majuli* has been conducting relief camps for the flood victims of the island. They have been extending their help and support related to health issues during the time of floods in Majuli.

Table 2: Programmes and initiatives are undertaken by *Amar Majuli*

AMAR MAJULI	
<i>Area of work/ Interventions</i>	<i>Programmes/ Initiatives undertaken</i>
Women and youth development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Livelihood and leadership programmes in association with <i>Rengam</i> 2) Women mobilizing and training programmes 3) Local volunteerism and youth leadership programmes
Agricultural sector	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Programmes on subsistence agriculture in the flood-affected areas of Majuli

Besides active engagement by other NGOs in the study area, *Ayang* has its work prioritized in education, healthcare and livelihood. Their first step towards shaping social change is through empowering the local communities starting with the children of the communities. This could be done by promoting quality education for the children of an unprivileged section of society. *Ayang's* first initiative taken for the society was in the sector of education in the form of Hummingbird School. Later they have developed many programmes and undertaken initiatives in the field of education. *Ayang* had set certain goals on the need of educating the children and the crisis of proper elementary level education in the flood-affected areas of Majuli. Their prime motto is to make the schools the centre of social change. They believed that only through a proper learning space and environment they could reach nearer to their desired goal. And this could be done by providing the children of the local communities with adequate learning facilities. In this regard, *Ayang* had put an effort in identifying the varied aspects of education that could be incorporated within their programme. They have developed different curriculum depending on the need and understanding of a child. They have also put much attention on nurturing a child growth towards becoming socially connected and emotionally resilient individuals. *Ayang* believes in utilizing the natural resources available and creating an ecologically

sustainable source of livelihood. They are aiming in creating a subsistence economic solution to deal with the economic crisis of the marginalised communities. Through this, they could help in the growing local economy and enhance the standard of living in Majuli. Their primary aim is to help build the community to a stage of self-sufficiency and promote entrepreneurship. Since the island consists of a mixed population ranging from scheduled tribes to other populations, *Ayang* promotes working in collaboration among the communities. Through their livelihood intervention, *Ayang* is facilitating a cooperative model achieving to reach community resilience based on access and creating equal opportunities. *Ayang* had organized a group of women specialized and skilled in handloom activities. These women are weavers, an expert in creating their own traditional attire for both men and women folk. *Ayang* provided them with raw materials and equipment for weaving traditional dresses and helping them to sell their final products to tourists and other people. This was done by forming a cooperative model for maintaining the entire process. *Ayang* provides the members with quality yarn, helps in promoting their products and reaches potential buyers through their producer's collective programme. They had constructed a separate place where the members of the producer's unit come and work together.

It is also necessary to mention that *Ayang* had been advocating programmes and models depending on the physical and emotional wellbeing of the people. Their aim is to carry out such programmes by collaborating with local communities and together forming a collective effort in creating health awareness campaigns. Their awareness campaigns are carried out on health hazards due to the aftereffects of the flood situation. Because of stagnant water bodies, sensitization programmes were conducted on water-borne diseases and other mosquito-borne diseases like malaria. *Ayang* had facilitated access to the communities affected by flood with primary healthcare, diagnostics, and providing medicines through their health camp. Alongside they carry out sensitization programmes on women health and menstrual hygiene.

Table 3: Programmes and initiatives are undertaken by *Ayang*

AYANG	
<i>Area of work / Interventions</i>	<i>Programmes/ Initiatives undertaken</i>
Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Whole school transformation programme 2) Community children library 3) Mobile library and STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) 4) Ayang Manthan fellowship programme
Livelihood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Producer's collective programme

Major Challenges of the NGOs

IMPACT-NE, *Amar Majuli* and *Ayang*, have been over the years marked a significant impact on the people of the island. They have been rendering their services and implementing multiple projects and self-initiated programmes for eradicating the major problems of the people of Majuli. The organizations have been working rigorously in achieving their goals and objectives. But every organization has in some way or the other faced several obstacles and challenges in the path they choose to take. The NGOs have and are facing problems and challenges in varied aspects, primarily related to funds, skilled and qualified personals, accountability, absence of networking, lack of maintenance, and many such related problems.

As Majuli is challenged for its environmental and geographical adversities, at times carrying out different projects and working in its remotest areas becomes difficult. Due to extensive riverbank erosion and floods each year, communication and transportation become challenging. It hampers the mobility of the resource persons of the organizations as well making it difficult for its inhabitants. This might create a delay in the work progress of the organizations and fulfil their task on time. The only transportation facility that is available in connecting to many of the villages during the flood season, are small traditional boats made from split timber, locally known as “*nau*”. The boats could only carry 10-15 individuals at a time and are manually operated. Apart from the facility of boats during monsoon, the organization must manage their own vehicles to visit the villages. This is due to less availability of public transport on the island.

Another common issue faced by all the NGOs is management and the availability of skilled, qualified, and dedicated personnel. For organizing several programs and workshops, well-trained persons are few on the island. As the education sector of the island is in a developing stage, it has lesser opportunities in providing higher education. Most of the students, for their higher studies or their preliminary studies, go to the nearby towns to obtain it. They search for opportunities in developed areas of the state which has resulted in a lack of qualified and educated individuals in the area. Many of the employees which are hired by the organizations are from outside the island. Most of them were seen to be very much fascinated and interested in the island and its communities. But there is always a possibility of a lack of retaining the employees for a longer period. People are always in search of better opportunities in life. This finally decreases the efficiency of credibility of the organizations.

IMPACT-NE being one of the oldest NGOs in Majuli has gained a lot of popularity across the state and overseas. In their many years of services, IMPACT-NE had undertaken many projects funded by the government of India. They have undertaken schemes supported by NABARD and other government schemes for SHGs. Due to their successful

completion of projects, and carrying out many developmental activities, funding was relatively better for IMPACT-NE. They have managed to gather funds from different agencies to run their activities and events but is not free from problems. *Ayang*, too had managed to secure funds from other non-governmental agencies. They are still looking forward to government financial aid to expand their work horizon.

On the contrary, *Amar Majuli* over the years has struggled in maintaining the basic financial need of the organization. The president of *Amar Majuli* shared about how the organization is facing to gather financial aid to run the organization and the ongoing self-initiated projects. He further mentioned that due to the struggle of financial aid, the organization could not retain its employees for long. The employees, if get better options, go for other opportunities at other organizations. This creates a delay in achieving the goal of the project and initiative undertaken. Due to a lack of funds, there is also a lack of well-trained and skilled manpower. On several occasions, it has also become difficult for the organization to retain its employees. In connection to this, several other problems were seen to arise. With a lack of manpower, a single person must undergo multiple tasks, which in turn does not end up giving the expected result. In solution to their problem, *Amar Majuli* has been working in collaboration with the local educated youth of Majuli. They welcome volunteers across the globe to work and render their services for the underprivileged sections of society.

Conclusion

The study has been an attempt to observe the growth, its historical background, characteristics, organizational structure, its functions, work pattern, area of work and interventions, their activities, and challenges faced by the NGOs, based on the first-hand fieldwork. In the study, it is found that the NGOs in Majuli have made decent contributions in the field of health, education, culture, economy, and environment. They played a crucial role in creating awareness and implementing several programmes and projects for the people of Majuli. They have created platforms for employment, as well as promoting entrepreneurship with the available resources. As Majuli is tremendously affected by yearly flood and river erosional activities, the dilemma of the local people residing near the shores and banks of the rivers are not unnoticed. The NGOs take steps in reaching the victims of such natural disasters. Organizing flood relief camps to help with basic amenities (like food, clothing, healthcare, provision of drinking water, etc.) and distributing essentials for the flood victims is one of the many activities taken up by the NGOs. Every year, the organizations in Majuli show active participation during the time of the flood.

The study reveals that the selected NGOs, in due course of time have tried to be people friendly and implement programmes in cooperation and support from the people

of Majuli. The NGOs are working as facilitators for several development programmes and are actively engaged in involving the people. The organization for its better functioning must focus on several factors, such as organizational setup, mode of functioning of the organization, availability, and size of the fund, etc. The three NGOs are facing several problems related to lack of management, lack of skilled personals, lack of funds, lack of proper infrastructure, and disorganized networking, etc. Apart from the mentioned factors, the NGOs should focus on working in collaboration with more people. Active participation and engagement of the people are very important for successfully implementing a programme. Their approach should aim in incorporating the opinions and knowledge of the people in the management and planning of programmes and projects.

Recommendation: Based on the primary data collected on the NGOs in Majuli, for conducting the research, few recommendations have been put forward. NGOs should try to enhance their outreach to several villages and far geographical locations to fulfil the needs equitably. They should create and engage more volunteers to spread awareness and organise campaigns and training. Volunteers from the local communities should be encouraged to come and participate in the betterment of their own community. The organizations should try to implement the programmes and complete projects efficiently. Attempts should be made to complete the tasks within fixed deadlines so that they can build trust and good rapport among the communities.

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