



The Role of NGOs in Livestock-based Livelihood: Challenges and Opportunity (A Case Study of Rural Areas of Saharsa District, Bihar)

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi believed that India lives in its villages, where livestock assets are a critical cornerstone of India's rural economy. Bihar is a predominantly agrarian state, with nearly 80 percent of its population relying on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood while the irony is that 73 percent of total geographical areas of the state are flood affected. Recurring floods in North Bihar cause significant damage to agricultural and livestock-based livelihoods of marginal farmers. Such a situation accelerates seasonal migration and severe economic distress to households. To achieve the goal of sustainable livelihood in such rural areas, NGOs can play an important role due to their grassroot proximity to rural populations. The study evaluates multifaceted operational role, challenges and opportunities faced by NGOs in supporting livestock-based livelihoods in the area surrounded by flood vulnerability. Focusing empirically on the three blocks (Nauhatta, Mehshi, Sattar-Kataiya) of Saharsa districts of Bihar, the study utilizes both primary and secondary data. Data collection utilized a mixed-methods approach. Primary insights were gathered through random sampling surveys, personal observations and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques, including transect walks, key informant interviews with NGO field

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personnel and focus group discussions across fifteen selected sample villages. While secondary data referred to relevant reports, articles, projects and literature etc. The findings indicate that the livestock sector has potential to improve rural livelihoods and NGOs interventions can play a transformative catalyst role in stabilizing livestock-based livelihoods in the district. It shows that 57 percent of households have livestock-based livelihoods option but lack of organized opportunity they suffer from unremunerative pricing. Nevertheless, the sector is continuously facing critical challenges such as, veterinary infrastructure deficits, delayed vaccine supply chain, high mortality rates, limited access to institutional credit, inadequate cold-chain facilities for milk collection and marketing at grassroot level, etc. Farmers have no option except to purchase it from private sources at high cost. Around 85 percent of households lacked access to basic veterinary services on time. Such challenges create a vicious cycle for marginalized farmers. The study highlights that while NGOs possess better grassroots understanding of local community needs, their long-term developmental impact remains severely constrained. The study identifies structural funding bottlenecks, a lack of institutional coordination, and policy gaps as primary barriers preventing NGOs from sustaining livestock welfare projects in the long run. The study advocates that there is need to develop an integrated and holistic approach for livestock-based livelihood. It emphasizes research and development, institutional setup at grassroot level, flood resilient animal shelters, decentralized veterinary care delivery, insurance, capacity development of farmers etc. by fostering strategic Public-Private-NGO partnerships. Such collaborations are vital to enhancing projects sustainability and securing resilient livelihoods for vulnerable agriculture communities. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can play a catalytic role in such development approach.



INTRODUCTION

Livestock plays a crucial role in ensuring food and nutritional security and is a vital source of income for nearly one billion impoverished individuals in developing nations (Frans et al. 2010). In India, livestock has transformed the rural economy, with the development of livestock-based livelihood initiatives significantly contributing to job creation, income generation, poverty reduction, migration control, and socioeconomic progress. It offers livelihood opportunities to people in their current locations and circumstances. Therefore, well-managed livestock systems can be pivotal in achieving sustainable livelihoods. According to the 20th Livestock Census, India holds the largest livestock population globally, with approximately 535.78 million animals. Around 20.5 million individuals rely on livestock for their livelihood. Livestock contributes 16% to the income of small farming households, compared to an average of 14% for all rural households. It supports the livelihoods of two-thirds of rural communities and provides employment to about 8.8% of India's population. Indian farmers practice a mixed farming system, integrating crops and livestock, where the output from one activity serves as the input for another, thus achieving efficient resource use. In India, a significant portion of the population is less educated and lacks skills, relying heavily on agriculture for their livelihood. However, due to the seasonal nature of agriculture, it can only offer employment for up to 180 days annually. Marginal and small-scale farmers turn to livestock to make use of their labor during the off-peak agricultural periods, providing them with employment opportunities. Livestock also acts as an additional income source for numerous families and offers social security to the owners. Moreover, livestock play a role in various socio-religious events. Despite the potential of agriculture and livestock production to support sustainable livelihoods, there is a continuous decline because the current distribution of production resources, productive assets, and capabilities do not align with the requirements (Maske et al. 2011). Consequently, rural development remains a significant challenge. Rural areas frequently face restricted access to vital services, economic opportunities, and infrastructure, leading to ongoing cycles of poverty and marginalization. In this context, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have emerged as crucial contributors to addressing rural development challenges by implementing innovative strategies that focus on communities and complement governmental development initiatives. In the field of rural development, NGOs can play a vital role by providing livelihood opportunities centered around livestock. Their participatory approaches, capacity to engage communities, closeness to grassroots levels, and profound understanding of local needs have positioned NGOs as alternative development agents. They have demonstrated their effectiveness as an institutional framework, serving as catalysts for development and change.



ROLES OF NGOs IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Defining and categorizing NGOs can be challenging, and the term 'NGO' is applied inconsistently. Originating from the United Nations (UN), "NGO" typically describes organizations that are neither part of the government nor traditional for-profit enterprises. These are legally established entities formed by individuals or legal entities, functioning independently from governmental influence. NGOs, with their flexible, locally-focused, need-driven, beneficiary-centered, and dedicated service nature, have carved out numerous roles impacting rural development. They aim to achieve this by participating in micro-finance, micro-insurance, and micro-entrepreneurship initiatives to foster the overall progress of rural regions and enhance the well-being of rural Indian communities. Since the 1960s, the role of NGOs in rural development has significantly evolved, shifting from mainly welfare-based activities to comprehensive development programs. Initially, NGO efforts concentrated on emergency aid and basic service delivery; however, modern NGO strategies prioritize capacity building, institutional enhancement, and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods (Edwards & Hulme, 2014). As development paradigms evolve, there is a growing appreciation for the unique strengths NGOs bring to rural settings. Unlike large international bodies or government entities, NGOs often demonstrate more adaptability, cultural awareness, and a direct approach in working with marginalized groups (Korten, 2015). These attributes have made NGOs crucial collaborators in addressing the intricate and localized challenges inherent in rural development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical records emphasize the essential role of livestock in sustainable agriculture and livelihoods. Cattle were revered as sacred animals and held a significant place in society. The "Ain-i-Akbari," a well-known text by Akbar's court historian Abul Fazal, reveals that cattle were a primary target for taxation during that era, alongside cultivated lands. However, cows were exempt from taxes due to their religious significance (Randhawa M S, 1980). As urban areas expanded and human activities increased, the available space for livestock diminished. This led to a shift towards growing cereals, beets, cabbage, and various fruits (Seidl, 1995). The expansion of livestock farming became feasible only with the introduction of crop rotation, a practice that began in England (Seidl, 1995). In the 18th century, Europe faced a severe outbreak of rinderpest, also known as the "cattle plague," which resulted in the death of millions of cattle around 1765 (Nusshag, 1954). This massive loss prompted the establishment of veterinary schools across Europe, which subsequently led to a significant rise in livestock production. During the Bengal famine of 1770, a substantial number of livestock also perished in India (Hunter 1868). Various theoretical models offer insights into the effectiveness of NGOs in rural development settings. According to social capital theory,

NGOs improve development outcomes by fostering trust, creating social networks, and enhancing the capacity for collective action within communities (Putnam, 2000). Sen's capability approach (1999) highlights the role of NGOs in broadening individual and community capabilities, allowing people to achieve important goals such as education, health, and economic stability. Furthermore, participatory development theory provides a framework for understanding how NGOs promote community involvement in development activities. This theory acknowledges that sustainable development necessitates active participation from beneficiaries in identifying needs, crafting interventions, and executing solutions (Chambers, 2008). NGOs are particularly suited to support these participatory processes due to their grassroots focus and community-based operational strategies. Tandon's article, "The Hidden Universe of Non-profit Organizations in India" (EPW, January 21, 2017), examines the accountability and legal challenges faced by non-profit organizations (NPOs). Tandon points out the absence of a national registry and the lack of comprehensive data on the number and types of registered trusts, resulting in inconsistent statistics. However, the NPO DARPAN portal now exists, providing a platform for NPOs and NGOs to register and obtain a unique identity number. This identifier is essential for organizations seeking grants and is required for registration or renewal under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010, as well as for tax exemptions. As of February 19, 2026, there are 5,25,179 active DARPAN IDs in India, with 50% registered as trusts, 42% as societies, and 8% as Section 8 companies. In the Saharsa district of Bihar, a total of 65 NGOs is currently registered within the sectors of Agriculture and Animal Welfare.

No. of NGOs working in Agriculture & Animal Welfare sectors i				
	Society	Trust	Section 8 Company	Total
In Saharsa District	29	22	14	65
In study area				
Mahishi	0	1	1	2
Nauhatta	1	3	1	5
Sattar Kataiya	0	0	0	0
Total	1	4	2	7
Source: NPO DARPAN Portal, NITI Aayog, GoI				

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- Exploring the involvement of NGOs in supporting livelihoods that rely on livestock



METHODOLOGY

The research examines the diverse roles, obstacles, and prospects that NGOs encounter while aiding livestock-based livelihoods in regions susceptible to flooding. Concentrating on the blocks of Nauhatta, Mehshi, and Sattar-Kataiya within Bihar's Saharsa district, the study employs both primary and secondary data sources. A mixed-methods strategy was implemented for gathering data. Primary data were obtained through random sampling surveys, direct observations, and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods, which included transect walks, interviews with key informants among NGO field staff, and focus group discussions in 15 chosen villages. Secondary data were sourced from peer-reviewed academic journals, NGO reports, local newspapers, and government documents. The study systematically identifies and assesses the role of NGOs in supporting livestock-based livelihoods.

DATA AND COLLECTION METHOD

This study examines the challenges and opportunities NGOs face in supporting livestock-based livelihoods in flood-prone areas of the Nauhatta, Mehshi, and Sattar-Kataiya blocks of Saharsa district, Bihar. For this purpose, data collection used a mixed-method approach, where primary data were collected through random sampling surveys, personal observations, and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques, such as transect walks, key informant interviews with NGO staff, and focus group discussions in fifteen selected sample villages, and secondary data are based on relevant reports, articles, projects, and literature. During the concluding week of October 2024, data was gathered through a field survey employing a structured questionnaire. The sample size was set in advance due to the study's financial and logistical limitations. Errors that were found were addressed by engaging in discussions with the respondents. However, typical errors remained because the farmers did not maintain any records.

SAMPLING:

In sampling, the renowned researcher Snedecor aptly noted, "Physicians draw conclusions about a patient's blood by examining just one drop." This illustrates how samples serve as tools to understand large populations by studying a small number of individuals. Given the descriptive nature of the research study, a random sampling technique was employed, and semi-structured interviews were carried out with the participants..

**SAMPLE SIZE:**

To achieve a sample of 150 beneficiary respondents for the study, 50 individuals were randomly selected from each block using a proportionate sampling technique. Additionally, five non-beneficiaries were chosen from the NGO's operational area through a purposive sampling method, with these individuals being randomly picked from the seven registered NGOs. The effectiveness of the NGOs was evaluated by engaging in discussions with the respondents, focusing on their perceptions and experiences. This evaluation was captured in the Evaluative Perception Index (EPI), which was developed and standardized by identifying the key roles of the NGOs. The index employed a five-point scale ranging from very strong to very weak.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

Research indicates that a majority of NGOs engage in activities related to agriculture, health and hygiene education, and flood response. Despite their involvement, these organizations often lack the necessary expertise to implement livestock-focused programmes effectively. Financial constraints are identified as a key factor contributing to these challenges. The study also finds that villagers appreciate the positive impact of NGO initiatives. It underscores the widespread acceptance of NGOs as a valuable resource for advancing rural development across different community groups. One of the major hurdles for NGOs engaged in rural development is the limitation of funding, which hampers their capacity to carry out extensive programs and maintain ongoing interventions. A significant number of NGOs rely on donor contributions, which can be erratic, limited in focus, or influenced by shifting donor interests. This unpredictability in funding can interrupt the consistency of programs and restrict NGOs from making enduring commitments to the communities they serve. Numerous NGOs engaged in rural development encounter challenges related to their internal capacity, which restrict their ability to function effectively. These challenges include a shortage of technical skills in specific areas, weak systems for monitoring and evaluation, and a lack of support for organizational growth. Additionally, broader systemic issues, such as limited access to education and inadequate infrastructure, further complicate NGO operations. These issues make it difficult to attract skilled personnel, acquire necessary technology, and maintain effective communication with rural communities that are often remote. Bringing together different stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, private enterprises, and community groups, is essential for rural development coordination. This process is frequently hindered by the varied organizational cultures, differing objectives, and restricted communication pathways among these entities. In numerous rural regions, poor coordination results in either overlapping efforts by various organizations or inadequate service delivery in certain areas. The NGO



sector still grapples with the task of improving coordination strategies and creating successful partnership frameworks.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving NGO effectiveness in rural development requires sustained investment in organizational capacity building. This includes enhancing technical expertise, improving monitoring and evaluation systems, and strengthening financial management capabilities. Donor organizations and government agencies can support these capacity-building efforts through targeted funding and technical assistance programs. Professional development opportunities for NGO staff, particularly in specialized technical areas, can significantly enhance program quality and impact. Developing more effective coordination mechanisms among NGOs, government agencies, and other development actors can significantly improve the overall impact of rural development efforts in the region. This may include establishing formal coordination platforms, developing shared information systems, and creating incentives for collaboration. Regular coordination meetings and joint planning processes can help reduce duplication and identify opportunities for collaboration. Enhancing the capacity of NGOs to sustain long-term commitments to rural communities can be achieved by decreasing reliance on donor funding and creating more sustainable financial models. This approach could involve establishing social enterprise elements, tapping into government funding sources, and forming collaborations with private sector organizations.

CONCLUSIONS:

Sustainable Livestock and fish culture is considered as one of the key thrust areas for National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA). Aligning to the mission, this research highlights the essential roles that NGOs fulfill in rural development, acting as catalysts for sustainable change through their distinctive blend of grassroots involvement, limited technical expertise, and innovative strategies. Nonetheless, the success of NGOs in rural development hinges on several key elements, such as sufficient funding, supportive regulatory frameworks, strong partnerships, and robust organizational capacity. The obstacles NGOs encounter, particularly financial limitations and coordination challenges, underscore the necessity for systemic enhancements in the development sector to maximize NGO contributions to rural transformation. The study stresses the significance of participatory methods, integrated programming, and adaptive management strategies. NGOs that consistently achieve substantial impact in rural development share common traits that are they heavily invest in community engagement, embrace holistic approaches to development issues, maintain adaptable programming strategies, and forge strong partnerships with diverse stakeholders. The sustainability of NGO contributions to rural development will rely on developing more



diversified financing models and strengthening the institutional frameworks that support NGO operations. The role of NGOs in rural development is likely to continue evolving as development challenges become more complex and interconnected. Climate change, technological progress, and shifting demographics will present new opportunities and challenges for NGOs working in rural areas. Successfully addressing these emerging challenges will require ongoing innovation, learning, and adaptation by NGOs and their partners in the development sector. Ultimately, this research confirms that NGOs are valuable assets in the pursuit of sustainable rural development. Despite facing constraints and challenges, their contributions provide essential services and empowerment opportunities that complement government efforts and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes. Maximizing their potential necessitates continued support for their capacity development, improved coordination mechanisms, and recognition of their unique contributions to rural transformation processes.

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