

Development Administration, Non-Governmental Organisations and the Challenges of International Development¹

Farhad Hossain

Sustainability is an important and central issue to development initiatives by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in developing countries. A development programme is considered sustainable when it is able to deliver an appropriate level of benefits for an extended period of time after major financial, managerial, and technical assistance from an external donor is terminated.

The assumed comparative advantage and sustainability of NGO-led development initiatives have been challenged in the contemporary development aid discourse. The supposed comparative advantages of NGOs, i.e., that they are flexible, innovative, participatory, cost-effective and directed to the poor, etc., have been challenged. In order to examine the sustainability of NGO-led development initiatives, the present study attempted to explore empirically the comparative advantage of this special sector compared to public, private, and traditional institutions by studying the sustainability of selected Nordic NGO-led development initiatives in Bangladesh and Nepal. The role of the recipient states, the donors, and the capacity of NGOs to promote the sustainability of NGO-led development projects has been assessed and analysed.

The methodologies used in this qualitative research include: literature and document review, content analysis, thematic interviews, informal discussion, observation, field visits, participant observation, interviews and the questionnaire survey. Along with the above-mentioned tools, the empirical part of the study in Bangladesh and Nepal was prepared based on the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) method. The PRA tools used include: rapport building, social mapping, Venn diagrams, pair-wise ranking, and time-trend analysis. Empirical information presented in the study has been collected from 1995 to 2001. Theories of administrative sciences, development administration in particular, have been referred to in analysing the findings of the research.

The study of Third Sector organisations, e.g., development NGOs, is central in administrative science and particularly in development administration. The structure of the study is based on the above methodological and theoretical grounds. The central theses of this study can be summarised as follows:

The key concepts, i.e., development administration, NGO and sustainability, have been clarified and analysed. The role of Nordic donors in promoting NGOs in development has been studied. The sustainability of Nordic-supported, NGO-led development initiatives has been described, assessed and analysed. The perspectives from selected Nordic donors and donor NGOs are presented with empirical references.

A general overview is presented on the role of NGOs in the development process of Bangladesh and Nepal. The policies of the governments and the strength and weaknesses of NGOs in development is also presented.

Empirical assessment is presented on the sustainability of selected NGOs with Nordic ties. A perspective from the selected local and Nordic NGOs in Bangladesh and Nepal has been presented in regard to the wider context of their particular activities. The sustainability of their development initiatives has been evaluated compared to public, private and traditional institutions. In this regard, two empirical case studies from Bangladesh and two empirical case studies from Nepal are presented. The sustainability of NGO intervention has been analysed thoroughly with empirical findings in each of four case studies.

The study revealed that the work environment and the attitude of the governments examined are not generally hostile to the professional development of NGOs, rather the government policies in Bangladesh and Nepal are quite supportive to the sector. But the commitment of the official donors and the donor NGOs to support development initiatives still remains unclear to most of the

studied NGOs in the field. Therefore, a degree of uncertainty is present in the NGO sector. The management capacity of NGOs in both countries is weak and institutional initiative to improve the capacity of NGOs is largely lacking.

These key research findings have been presented in the study. Analyses have been made from the perspective of administrative science, particularly based on the factors that affect the sustainability of NGO-led development programmes. The environment, strategies, organisational structure and organisational process of the studied development interventions have been analysed within a broader context. Key factors of sustainability, i.e., government policies, management capacity, organisation, local participation, financial, technological, and socio-cultural issues have been evaluated and presented. The role of the governments in Bangladesh and Nepal, the Nordic official donors and donor NGOs, and the management capacity of NGOs in promoting the sustainability of NGO-led development projects have been studied and analysed. Referring to these key findings, the study argues that the NGO initiatives in Bangladesh and Nepal remain largely unsustainable.

The present study contains six chapters. Chapter 1 gives research descriptions, which includes background, aims, objectives and research questions. The chapter also presents a theoretical basis for the research and gives a detailed description of the methodologies used in this research as well as describes how the study has been implemented. In addition, this chapter gives the structure and limitation of the study.

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical standpoint of administration in developing countries with a note on 'development administration' as a concept. The chapter highlights the conceptual issues of NGOs in development. Analyses have been made on the dynamics and drawbacks of NGOs, aiming to identify the theoretical basis of NGO research. The chapter aims to clarify the notion of sustainability in development projects. A definition of sustainability is presented. The views of the OECD donors concerning sustainability are analysed in the chapter. A note is presented on NGOs as organisations and the sustainability of their projects.

Chapter 3 presents a precise picture of NGOs in Nordic Development Aid with a historical perspective—with special emphasis on Nordic

NGO involvement in Bangladesh and Nepal. The chapter includes information on each country individually.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of NGOs in Bangladesh and Nepal. This chapter also analyses Nordic assistance with a local focus and presents empirical notes on selected Nordic NGOs and their development initiatives in Bangladesh and Nepal.

The empirical part of the study is presented in Chapter 5. Two empirical case studies from Bangladesh and two from Nepal appear in this chapter. The sustainability of NGO-led development programmes has been empirically examined in each of the four case studies.

Chapter 6 analyses the sustainability of NGO-led development initiatives and discusses selected issues from the perspectives of administrative science. The chapter makes brief notes on the role of the recipients (countries), the donors, and on the NGOs in ensuring the sustainability of their development initiatives. The chapter ends with a conclusion on the findings of the whole study and gives insight into the future direction of NGO research by referring to other scholarly works that highlight the need for further systematic study on this aid channel.

I ask you Professor Mohammad Habibur Rahman, as opponent appointed by the Faculty of Economics and Administration of the University of Tampere, to make whatever comments you deem my thesis to call for.

I thank you honourable Professor Mohammad Habibur Rahman for the help you provided me over the months to accomplish and finalise the final version of the thesis. Your comments were very helpful. Let me thank you once more for agreeing to be the opponent of my doctoral dissertation.

NOTE

¹ Lectio Praecursoria at the University of Tampere on 15.6.2001. Opponent at the dissertation was Professor Mohammad Habibur Rahman, Global Affairs Institute at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, USA.