

A few NGOs are headed by women. Many employ women, but women are rarely in the majority. A number of NGOs undertake programs that address gender issues.

Lately, there has been a significant change in the government attitude towards NGOs. Seeing NGOs as alternative agents of change, the Government of India has allocated substantial funds for NGO development activities. The Planning Commission publishes a long list of government programs that support NGOs, including programs for environment, rural and urban development, water and sanitation, agricultural extension, gender and development, health, non-formal education and so on. The Rural Development Ministry formed the Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology to channel government and overseas funds to NGOs and to monitor their progress.

These changes have taken place because of pressure from international agencies and the government's realization that it alone cannot improve the conditions of the poor. Some successful NGOs are headed by distinguished personalities such as retired senior government officers, scientists, professionals, philanthropists and industrialists.

At the state government and lower levels, there is, overall, a negative attitude toward NGOs, although the view differs from state to state and from one official to another. For example, in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, there are many established NGOs that have a good rapport with the government. On the other hand, in Orissa, West Bengal and Bihar, the state governments do not favour NGOs. In Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh, there are fewer NGOs than in other states.

When a department is headed by an official who is "pro-NGO," the department involves NGOs in its programs. The general tendency in the government is to involve "good" NGOs, as determined by the district staff.

The most visible NGOs are engaged in environmental and Women in Development activism. Many of these NGOs and the distinguished individuals associated with them have received national and international recognition. Often their advocacy work attracts media attention. Health and education NGOs have been able to experiment with innovative ideas that have influenced national policies and programs. It is common to find NGO