

NGOs: A BACKBONE FOR RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP – A CASE STUDY OF BREDS

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ABSTRACT

There is no denying of the fact that development of entrepreneurship has emerged as a national movement due to its strengths to solve the twin problems of unemployment and poverty. In fact, the need for development of ‘spirit of enterprise’ among the target population intensified more during the nineties with the failure of the ‘trickle down theory’ to percolate the development benefits to the masses at grass-root level.

It is against this backdrop, several self-employment and anti-poverty programmes like PMRY, TRYSEM etc., involving some entrepreneurial qualities were introduced by the government as a tool of bottom up mode of development. However, these programmes executed by the Government agencies proved ineffective due to their weaknesses of one type or other.

Such a situation necessitated the NGOs to come out of their traditional bounds like health, sanitation, education, family planning, environment protection, etc., to join a noble mission to entrepreneurs the lesser known target groups. The government agencies engaged in this activity strengthened the NGOs by co-opting and collaborating with them to reach the lower rungs of the society.

Rural entrepreneurship has emerged as a dynamic concept. It is generally defined as “entrepreneurship emerging at village level which can take place in a variety of fields of Endeavour such as business, industry, agriculture and acts as a potent factor for economic development”. Development of rural areas, have been linked to entrepreneurship more than ever before.

Today, we have several NGOs contributing to entrepreneurship development in the country. The major ones are National Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs (NAYE), World Assembly of Small and Medium Entrepreneurs (WASME), Xavier institute for Social Studies (XISS), SEWA of Ahmedabad, ‘Y’ Self-Employment of Calcutta, AWAKE (Association of Women

Entrepreneurs of Karnataka), Rural Development and Self-Employment Training Institute (RUDSETIs) and Bapuji Rural Enlightenment and Development Society (BREDS).

This paper makes an attempt to study the role of NGOs in development rural entrepreneurship. It also focuses on the major aspects of rural entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Rural Entrepreneurship, NGOs, BREDS, Training.

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Introduction

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Unemployment of underemployment in the rural areas leads to an influx of people in the cities as they look for new jobs. NGOs committed to rural development act as catalyst and offer then locals opportunities that increase or guarantee chances of growth.

Concept of Rural Entrepreneurship

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Entrepreneurship is now regarded as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate the rural development process by institutions and individuals promoting rural development. Entrepreneurship stands as a vehicle to improve the quality of life for

individuals, families and communities and to sustain a healthy economy and environment. The majority of the rural population depends, directly and indirectly, on agriculture, fishery, animal husbandry or rural wage labour associated with plantations and ranches, along with ancillary activities linked to rural townships.

Rural entrepreneurship development strategies aim at diversifying rural economic activities, which include the development of non-farm economic activities and facilitating the transition of informal activities into the formal growth sector.

Objective of Study:

- ✓ To study and understand the rural entrepreneurship.
- ✓ To study the role of NGOs in development of rural entrepreneurship.
- ✓ To find out the strengths and weakness for NGOs in rural area for the development of rural entrepreneurship.
- ✓ To understand the activities of BREDS.
- ✓ To study the role of BREDS in development of rural entrepreneurship.

Methodology:

The data required for the present study are collected both from primary and secondary sources. Primary data have been collected through personal interview method with officials and beneficiaries from Guntur field office BREDS.

The Secondary data are collected from various published sources such i.e. magazines, newspapers, journals, annual reports, books, and various other publications. Moreover, some important information is also collect from relevant websites. The present study is descriptive in nature.

Importance of the study:

Rural entrepreneurship implies entrepreneurship emerging in rural areas. This means rural entrepreneurship is synonymous with rural industrialization. Diversification into non-agricultural uses of available resources such as catering for tourists, blacksmithing, carpentry, spinning, etc. as well as diversification into activities other than those solely related to agricultural usage, for example, the use of resources other than land such as water, woodlands, buildings, available skills and local features, all fit into rural entrepreneurship. A turnaround is possible in the above trend if employment opportunities are made available in

rural areas along with basic amenities of life. The real solution to India's economic problem is not mass production but production by masses as was suggested by Mahatma Gandhi.

Role of NGOs in Development of Rural Entrepreneurship

Starting an entrepreneurship in the rural areas is not an easy task. There are several aspects that need to be factored in such as where to get capital, how to attract and retain customers as well as the practices to follow. Precisely for this reason, NGOs play an important role in development of rural entrepreneurship.

In rural businesses, creating third party alliances is crucially important though most often, entrepreneurs are afraid of venturing into such opportunities because of the risks involved. NGOs however, serve as great opportunities for such individuals to create their own ideas. However, these programmes executed by the Government agencies proved ineffective due to their weaknesses of one type or other.

Such a situation necessitated the NGOs to come out of their traditional bounds like health, sanitation, education, family planning, environment protection, etc., to join a noble mission to entrepreneurs the lesser known target groups. The government agencies engaged in this activity strengthened the NGOs by co-opting and collaborating with them to reach the lower rungs of the society.

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The role of NGOs in entrepreneurship development can better be understood in terms of their strengths and weaknesses in the context of entrepreneurship development.

The NGOs have revealed the following strengths as an edge over others:

- a. The lean overhead and operating costs to reach the poor and needy.
- b. Flexibility and responsiveness in operation to invent appropriate solution.
- c. Nearness to client groups made them to be sensitive to community need.
- d. Capacity for innovation and experimentation with new groups and untried development approach.

- e. Stimulating and mobilizing interest in the community.
- f. Dependence on customer satisfaction.
- g. Act as a test bed and sound board for government policies and programmes.

The well-noted weaknesses the NGOs suffer from are listed as follows:

- a. Role conflict as to the traditional areas of operation and micro- entrepreneurship development.
- b. Doubtful leadership and succession.
- c. Anti-business philosophy, lack of programme integration due to lack of proper understanding of entrepreneurship approach.
- d. Inadequate opportunities to work as trainer/motivator.
- e. Absence of impact assessment because of self righteousness on the part of NGO leaders.
- f. Not all NGOs are ready and equipped to take up this activity.

In spite of these so-called weaknesses, the role of NGOs in entrepreneurship development cannot be undermined. Evidences are galore to mention that a few NGOs in India have succeeded largely in imparting entrepreneurial skills among the weaker sections of the society.

Role of BREDS in Development of Rural Entrepreneurship

Profile of Bapuji Rural Enlightenment and Development Society BREDS

1. Background

Inspired by the Gandhian philosophy of Gram Swaraj, or 'self-rule', a group of residents of Dimili village, Kotturu Mandal, Srikakulam District of Andhra Pradesh and other area social activists founded the Bapuji Rural Enlightenment and Development Society (BREDS) in 1983. The activists' goal was to serve the most marginalized, vulnerable rural communities and focus on their socio-economic betterment through empowerment and sustainable livelihood promotion. Initially, BREDS opened night schools specializing in adult education. These volunteer-supported classes targeted Adivasis (tribal people) and members of 'Other Backwards Castes' (OBCs) in Dimili and nearby villages. The organization continued to evolve over the next two decades and work with other target populations, but BREDS has experienced its greatest growth from 2001 until today.

Through a combination of teamwork, commitment, strong leadership, government support, and donor participation, BREDS is now recognised as one of the best NGOs in of Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. The organisation has expanded in a number of ways. Now BREDS working in a larger area, with more community members on a variety of projects. Most importantly, it has achieved these goals by gaining the trust of the communities in which it work. During 1996-97, BREDS worked in 33 villages with about 3,000 families; at present, it has the opportunity to work in 445 villages with over 20,500 families towards BREDS goal of sustainable development for the community.

Fired by the twin ideas of cooperation and self-help, BREDS aims to make the target populations aware of their rights and choices, enabling them to control local bodies as policymakers at the grassroots level. In the future, BREDS plan to continue serving vulnerable rural populations while creating innovative strategies for meeting their changing needs.

2. Objectives:

- Capacitate the target community, focusing on role-transformation at all levels, with a special focus on skill development that enables people to control their environment.
- To educate the rural poor, emphasizing the value of education with a special emphasis on the promotion of women and the girl child. BREDS promotes value-based and vocational education to further strengthen the life-support system of the community.
- To protect and restore local ecosystems and the environment, taking special steps for the protection of natural resources. BREDS promotes effective management and treatment of land, water, and forest for the sustainable livelihood promotion of the target community.
- To form and promote Self Help Groups (SHGs), Village Organizations (VOs), and Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies (MACS), which work towards their economic empowerment and a reconstruction of the rural economy through a revival of the cooperative movement.
- To promote sustainable agriculture and value addition through horticulture products and crops. This ensures sustainable food security, enhances income potential, and generates employment opportunities within the target community, thereby stemming the tide of migration.

- To provide relief and rehabilitation packages to rural communities affected by natural disasters and calamities.
- To facilitate all the government's developmental priorities to reconstruct a better rural India that can realize the concept of gram swaraj.
- To initiate any additional development processes that contribute to the holistic growth and sustainable empowerment of the marginalized, vulnerable sections of the society.

3. Programs /Activities of BREDS

At BREDS, they help communities identify their problems and find solutions. They work on a variety of issues, but most of their interventions fit into at least one of these focus areas;

1. Natural Resource Management
2. Sustainable Livelihoods and Food Security
3. Women's Empowerment
4. Community Health and Education
5. People's Self-Governance
6. Environmental Protection & Climate Change Adaptation
7. Youth Empowerment & Sustainable Enterprise development
8. Child Development Initiative of BREDS

Natural Resource Management:

BREDS promote the stewardship of resources in a manner that is beneficial and sustainable for both communities and the environment. By advocating appropriate rural technologies, promoting horticultural programmes, and providing information about marketing strategies, BREDS helps community members to work towards solutions that ensure water safety, food security, and livelihood restoration.

- ✓ Through trainings and models in the field, BREDS teaches community members about strategies for water harvesting, moisture conservation, and control of soil erosion. While villagers implement more sustainable farming methods that generate long-term gains, they also create short term benefits. Villagers are producing more

crops and BREDS helps them access knowledge about better market rates so that they can earn a fair price for their outputs.

- ✓ BREDS Non-Pesticidal Management (NPM) project gives farmers technical support to improve their agricultural production with low investment. BREDS encourages farmers to utilize traditional pest control methods and organic fertilizers that are free of cost because they can be made by the farmers themselves from local, natural products.
- ✓ Through the Andhra Pradesh Community Based Tank Management Project (APCBTMP), BREDS assists villages in organizing its water users and other stakeholders into groups that are committed to systematic tank improvement and management. Additionally, BREDS gives farmers agricultural and livelihood support, including information about crop diversification and generating higher yields for current crops.

Sustainable Livelihoods and Food Security

BREDS believes that in order to improve the overall quality of life of community members, their livelihood base must be secure and strong. Based on available resources, BREDS enables rural communities to add value through non-market interventions such as the provision of start-up capital for livelihood diversification activities or through linkages with skill-development trainings.

- ✓ BREDS helps connect community-based groups to formal financial institutions, where they can access loans for new micro-enterprises and income generating activities (IGAs), freeing them from
- ✓ The Swayamkrushi and Let's Empower And Develop (LEAD) projects help members of the fisherfolk and Dalit communities to create alternative IGAs such as rope-making and coconut broom making, cashew processing and marketing, dry fish preservation, and fish pickling in addition to helping them make connections with local banks to support these new activities.
- ✓ The Subhodayam and Aatma Gouravam projects provide the necessary skill trainings to members of Communities living in the hills and plains rely on the products of the land for their livelihood, and Adivasis and Dalits so that they can engage in supplementary IGAs such as livestock-rearing and dairy milk units. BREDS also offers strategies for watershed development and land conservation, as well as

information about the cultivation and fair marketing of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as cashews, amla, honey, and different fruits.

- ✓ The Subhodayam project meets food security needs and helps prevent families from becoming ensnared in a cycle of chronic debt. BREDS mobilized resources from its partner agencies to establish community grain banks in 102 villages. The communities run the grain banks through management committees, made up of their own members, who distribute the grain during the lean season and decide on appropriate payback measures.

Women's Empowerment

BREDS encourages women's social mobilization and capacity-building through the promotion of community associations such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Village Organizations (VOs), Federations, and Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies (MACS).

- ✓ BREDS helps create bank linkages, allowing women to receive start-up capital to kick-start IGAs and launch other micro-enterprises. Beyond bank linkages, women participating in grassroots associations can learn skills such as bookkeeping, petty business management, financial planning, negotiation tactics, and more that can help them tackle other problems they are facing at home or in their communities.
- ✓ Through the Integrated Nutrition and Health Program (INHP), BREDS facilitated the formation of Mothers' Committees, comprised of community members who are stakeholders in proper service delivery. These women are trained on their entitlements to health care and they now have the knowledge to monitor health care service delivery at the village level and put pressure on local authorities when this fails to occur.
- ✓ Part of BREDS role is to disseminate knowledge amongst women through bi-monthly newsletter, Mahila Vijayam, or 'the victory of women'. BREDS created this publication to provide women with accurate information about the numerous government schemes, packages, and other mechanisms available to address the specific needs of rural women.

People's Self-Governance

In 1993, Andhra Pradesh fully adopted the three-tiered Panchayat Raj system as a mechanism to empower rural people to manage their own affairs at the village, mandal, and district

levels. This decentralization of administration to a more localized level intends for rural people to be in more direct control over the processes of their own governance.

- ✓ BREDS fosters self-managed, grassroots level institutions and networks within the rural populations. Villagers, particularly and predominantly women, are encouraged to form cooperative associations that can influence local decision-making bodies and the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) that manage local affairs.
- ✓ BREDS encourages women's social mobilization and capacity-building through the promotion of community associations such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Village Organizations (VOs), Federations, and Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies (MACS).
- ✓ Physically challenged persons are one of the most overlooked communities in the already marginalized rural areas. Disabilities may make it more difficult for them to engage in stable and sustainable livelihoods. BREDS' Sankalpam project has facilitated the formation of over 132 SHGs and 1 Federation, totalling almost 1,000 members, to meet the needs of this community and build their capacities.
- ✓ BREDS' Subhodayam project connects youth with available government schemes; they are eligible for vocational training programmes in areas like computer training (software/hardware), mobile phone repair, and masonry that can create real livelihood options at the village level. BREDS also provides meetings and awareness trainings for young men and women on important life skills.

Youth Empowerment & Sustainable Enterprise development

Sustainable rural transformation today demands, a strong market-orientation of local production systems and enterprises with an importance on income generating. The provision of market-oriented services to local farmers, youth and women entrepreneurs is largely difficult due to obstacles such as poor infrastructure, geographical isolations, and limited access to state of art technologies and weak institutional structure to manage and sustain on their own.

The development objective of the youth empowerment strategy is to make stronger the skills development systems that perk up employability, promote entrée to employment opportunities and augment incomes for inclusive and sustainable growth. The approach is different from conventional vocational training. It will identify, prospective income generating activities, sustainable enterprise solutions and correlated training needs before

designing the contents of specific training programmes. It engages the local community and other social stakeholders meaningfully in each phase of the process i.e. identification, design, delivery and development. Finally, it facilitates the necessary post-training support services, including guidance in the use of innovative technologies, facilitating access to credit, and providing help for group formation to ensure that individual entrepreneurs or enterprises can set off and sustain income-generating activities.

Conclusion

Rural entrepreneurship is the way of converting developing country into developed nation and the answer to removal of rural poverty in India. Therefore, there should be more stress on integrated rural development programs. The problem is that most of the rural youth do not think of entrepreneurship as the career option. Therefore, the rural youth need to be motivated to take up entrepreneurship as a career, with training and sustaining support systems providing all necessary assistance. There should be efficient regulated market and government should also lend its helping hand in this context. Grading and standardization should be promoted and promotional activities should be enhanced. NGO's should be provided full support by government.

As proverb says “coming together is beginning, keeping together is progress and working together is success”, which became BREDS now being a replicable model to all established and coming up Rural Entrepreneurship programs in three districts of Andhra Pradesh. A creative thinking gave an institutional framework in the form of BREDS which develop the vulnerable communities and empower them to become self employed. BREDS worked on the same line and it plays an important role in identifying and developing hidden competencies, traits, talents and escalating the rural unemployed youth to become self reliant and determined by transforming them into responsible citizens of the nation by its unique interventions.

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