THE ROLE OF NGOs IN ROAD SAFETY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The World Bank has for some decades collaborated closely in several fields with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This collaboration has become an increasingly important feature of Bank-financed activities.

However, Bangladesh is the first country where the World Bank establish a collaboration with NGOs in the field of road safety. This is done as a part of the Bangladesh Second Road Rehabilitation and Maintenance Project (RRMP-2).

ROAD SAFETY NGOs IN EUROPE

In most of the European countries, the NGOs during the last decades have played an important role in improving the road safety situation. Nearly all the European countries have separate NGOs working only with road safety. These NGOs have developed to become a natural part of the road safety efforts in these countries. A clear majority of these NGOs are working with accident prevention, and are not involved in treatment and rehabilitation of the road accident victims. However, in many countries a close collaboration has been established with NGOs working for victims, assisting in treatment and rehabilitation etc.

The European road safety NGOs mainly work in the fields of:

- road safety education in kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school
- road safety information including campaigns and media-service
- coordination between NGOs and different public sectors

Several years of experience has also shown that NGOs can initiate road safety activities which the public authorities have problems to adress, due to various reasons, eg. for example access to private fundings or receipt of various types of contributions from individuals and corporations.

The road safety NGOs in Europe certainly also need input from international NGOs working in this field. Therefore all the NGOs are members of the international and world wide traffic safety organization «La Prevention Routiere Internationale» (PRI) which is headquartered in Luxembourg. About 60 countries are represented and the number of members is presently increasing rapidly. We also find Asian NGOs represented in PRI, which is devided up into several regional groups. An international traffic safety congress is held every second year, the next one will be held in Lisbon, Portugal, 1998.
2. THE NORWEGIAN SOCIETY FOR ROAD SAFETY (NSRS)

The Norwegian Society for Traffic Safety (NSTS), Trygg Trafikk (TT), was established in 1956 and initiated by the Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, Norwegian Insurance Association and the motoring clubs.

NSRS shall due to its statutes promote best possible road safety for ALL GROUPS OF ROAD-USERS, and is given A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY promoting ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION and INFORMATION being practised as part of the coordinated work to prevent traffic accidents. The statutes of the Society are approved by the Ministry of Transport.

MAIN TASKS

The main tasks of NSRS are the following:

1. Serve the school administration the best way to promote road safety education.
2. Disseminate information for the road-users correct behaviour in traffic situations.
3. Coordinate the voluntary and private traffic safety work.
4. Link and coordinate the voluntary and private road safety groups and the various public traffic safety authorities, eg. Public Roads Administration, traffic police, etc.

POLICY DOCUMENTS

Policy documents including actual strategies are necessary and important tools also for an active and serious NGO. NSRS has the following three vital documents to clarify policy and implementation: 1. Long term (4 years) document: NSRS views on all national traffic safety issues. 2. Long term (4 years) document: Goal and Action Plan describing exactly what the organization intends to do in the actual period. 3. Short term (1 year) document describing all main activities on the national level and in each county including budget, time limits, collaborators, responsibilities etc.

3. THE WORLD BANK WORKING WITH NGOs

LONG TRADITIONS

The World Bank started operational collaboration with NGOs in the 1970s. The collaboration with NGOs has become an increasingly important feature of Bank-financed activities. Growing collaboration with NGOs can be attributed to the expanding role and influence of the NGO sector generally, as well as increasing recognition within the World Bank as to the specific benefits which NGO involvement can bring to Bank-financed operations.

Between 1973 and 1988, only six percent of Bank-financed projects involved NGOs. In 1994 over half of Bank-financed approved projects included some form of NGO involvement. These figures show clearly the increased frequency of Bank-NGO collaboration, but give little
indication of the quality or depth of that interaction. In many cases, the roles played by NGOs are quite minor and frequently limited to project implementation. Achieving the full potential benefits of NGO collaboration implies enhanced roles for NGOs earlier on in the project cycle.

Official World Bank advice or guidelines to work with NGOs is still limited. However, it was in 1995 published a very practical guide to operational collaboration between the World Bank and non-governmental organisations «Working with NGOs». I will in the following present some of the Bank's key points from this guide.

DEFINITION OF NGOs

The World Bank defines NGOs as:

«private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development».

In a wider usage, the term NGO can be applied to any non-profit organization which is independent from government. NGOs are typically value-based organizations which depend, in whole or in part, on charitable donations and voluntary service. Although the NGO sector has become increasingly professionalized over the last two decades, principles of altruism and voluntarism remain key defining characteristics.

CATEGORIES OF NGOs

The World Bank tends to interact with the following two main categories of NGOs:

1) Operational NGOs - whose primary purpose is the design and implementation of development-related projects.
2) Advocacy NGOs - whose primary purpose is to defend or promote a specific cause and who seek to influence the policies and practices of the Bank.

In this presentation I will focus on operational NGOs, which I consider to be most relevant in this particular Bank project. But I want to underline, it will not usually be a question of the one or the other category. Both categories can be included. In addition it should be noted that these two categories are not mutually exclusive.

OPERATIONAL NGOs

The World Bank classifies operational NGOs into three main groups:

1) Community-based organizations (CBOs) - which serve a specific population in a narrow geographic area. CBOs are normally «membership» organizations made up of a group of individuals who have joined together to further their own interests. Also referred to as grassroots organizations or peoples
NGO STRENGTHS

Because the nature and quality of individual NGOs varies greatly, it is extremely difficult to make generalizations about the sector as a whole. Despite the diversity, some specific strengths generally associated with the NGO sector include the following:

- strong grassroots links
- field-based experience
- the ability to innovate and adapt
- process-oriented approach
- participatory methodologies and tools
- long-term commitment and emphasis on sustainability
- cost-effectiveness

(Clark, 1991)

WHY THE WORLD BANK WORKS WITH NGOs

NGO involvement can contribute to the sustainability and effectiveness of Bank-financed projects by introducing innovative approaches and promoting community participation. In addition NGOs can help expand project uptake and reach, and can facilitate greater awareness of diverse stakeholders views.

HOW THE WORLD BANK WORKS WITH NGOs

NGOs are active contributors to the Bank’s economic and sector work (ESW) and participate in lending activities from identification through to evaluation. Currently, NGO involvement is most frequent during implementation. Evidence shows, however, that NGOs can provide valuable input during project identification and design. Where NGOs are expected to participate in implementation, they should also be consulted during design.

SOME KEY ISSUES IN WORKING WITH NGOs

Funding issues.
NGOs are generally cost-effective. They should not be, however, be viewed as a «low-cost alternative» to other types of implementing agencies.
Importance of clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
Establishing and maintaining and effective trilateral working relationship can be a complex task. A number of projects have experienced difficulties due to lack of communication among government, NGO and the Bank and a lack of clarity concerning specific roles, responsibilities and lines of authority.

Access to documents.
It is important to ensure that participating NGOs have access to project documents which relate to their collaboration. Wherever possible, credit agreements and procurement documents should be shared with NGOs. Projects with substantial NGO involvement have usually appointed an official liaison person and established institutional mechanisms to ensure on-going communication throughout the project cycle.

SOME WORLD BANK KEY ISSUES

The World Bank obviously also have follow certain procedures in establishing a collaboration with NGOs. Som of the most important will among others be:

- Identifying an appropriate NGO partner
- Time issues
- Flexibility issues
- Funding issues
- Procurement and disbursement issues
- NGO-Government relations
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Contractual/legal issues
- Capacity-building

4. NGOs INVOLVEMENT IN ROAD SAFETY IN BANGLADESH

The European experience working with NGOs in the field of road safety, shows that the NGOs are a necessary supplement and extension to the governmental efforts. The NGOs normally also reach easier the most important target group which is the road-user. In most of the European countries, the NGOs are considered to be both neutral and trustworthy. One main reasons for this, is that most of the NGOs have a «bottom up» approach fitting also the community level «grasroot level». There is no reason to think that the NGO situation in Bangladesh is much different!

It is already experienced, through well publicized successes of NGOs in Bangladesh, that more and more development assistance has been channeled through different fields. Road safety is not yet addressed by the NGOs in Bangladesh, but this now only a matter of time.

A seminar on «The Role of NGOs in Road Safety» was held on 23 September 1996 in Dhaka. The Seminar was organized by the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) of the Ministry of Communications as part of the World Bank and ODA supported efforts for improving road safety under the RRMP-II project. A number of technical papers were presented by national and
international experts, and representatives from NGOs and government. After detailed plenary discussions, a set of important recommendations were unanimously adopted. The seminar decided that road safety awareness was the most important and cost effective way of reducing accidents and enhancing road safety. A circle of information-education-motivation was considered the best method of achieving this, and a concrete staged approach was identified as the way forward for immediate implementation. It was also decided that the the Government agencies and NGOs should work as genuine partners at all stages of road safety activities from conceptualization to implementation.

The seminar should be considered successful and a good basis for greater understanding between the Government and the NGOs on how they could work together in order to address the very serious road accident situation in Bangladesh.

It is also a great pleasure for me to underline that Bangladesh rightly can take credit in having some of the most innovative programmes initiated by NGOs which are being successfully replicated overseas. Their apex organization, Association of Developing Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), have successfully participated in mass mobilization of social campaigns. This organization with their members emerge as a good platform for creating public awareness for road safety, particularly at the grass root and community level, specially with their «bottom up» approach.

Finally, road safety is becoming an increasingly important issue in most developing countries with rapid expansion of roads and motor vehicles, both in urban and rural areas. The loss of lives and injuries caused by road accidents is alarmingly high and needs to be addressed urgently! It is obvious that governments, even if they do their best, can not manage this challenge alone and therefore need support of the society, including the NGOs which often have proved to play an important role in the work to prevent road accidents.

Let us not forget that we always will be stronger together:

«Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together will make progress. Working together will give success».

REFERENCES


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