

Thematic Distribution And Sectoral Engagement Of NGOs: A Study In Visakhapatnam District

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Abstract:

Background: The NGOs have increasingly expanded their role across social and development sectors, focusing on addressing the needs of vulnerable and marginalized communities. In this context, understanding the thematic orientation of NGO activities is essential for assessing their developmental priorities and contributions.

Materials and Methods: This study examines the distribution of NGO engagement across different thematic areas in Visakhapatnam District. These active NGOs constitute the universe of the present study, as they are directly involved in development activities and field-level operations. From this universe, a sample of 50 NGOs was selected using simple random sampling who were willing to provide data.

Results: The analysis highlights the varying focus of NGOs across sectors and indicates that their interventions are largely shaped by immediate community needs. It is observed that a moderate levels of engagement in women empowerment and rights at 36.0 percent, elderly care and support at 32.0 percent, and both youth development and empowerment and livelihood and economic development at 30.0 percent each.

Conclusion: The study concludes that there is a need for a more balanced and inclusive thematic approach in NGO engagement to strengthen overall development outcomes.

Key Word: NGOs, Thrust areas, Thematic distribution, Key functionaries.

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I. Introduction

Today, countless voluntary organizations around the world including Non-governmental organizations, Non-profit organizations and groups work tirelessly for the betterment of society. These organizations play a vital role in supporting communities, addressing global challenges, and promoting sustainable development, often reaching places where government efforts are limited (Anheier, 2014; Lewis, 2014)^[1, 2]. The Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in India's development by addressing gaps in public service delivery and supporting marginalized communities. NGOs in India often collaborate with government agencies and international bodies to implement grassroots programs, promote community participation, and ensure sustainable development outcomes. Their efforts are especially important in areas such as poverty alleviation, health services, and environmental protection (NITI Aayog, 2021; World Bank, 2020)^[3, 4].

India has one of the largest and most diverse non-profit sectors in the world. Estimates suggest that there are around 3.3 million NGOs operating across the country, reflecting a high level of civic engagement and voluntary action. These organizations play a crucial role in areas such as education, healthcare, rural development, and social welfare, often complementing government efforts in addressing socio-economic challenges (CBI, 2015). Against this background, the present study aims to analyze the thematic and thrust area-wise distribution of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh, India.

Registration of NGOs

The registration of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in India is governed by a structured legal framework that provides multiple institutional pathways depending on the organization's objectives, scale, and governance model. Broadly, NGOs can be established as Trusts, Societies, or Section 8 Companies, each governed by distinct legislation and administrative authorities (Government of India, 1882; Government of India, 2013). Trusts are regulated under the Indian Trusts Act, 1882, and are generally preferred for philanthropic or family-led initiatives due to their simpler compliance requirements (Government of India, 1882). Societies, governed by the Societies Registration Act, 1860, are suitable for collective activities such as education, culture, and social welfare, requiring a minimum of seven members and democratic governance (Government of India, 1860). In contrast, Section 8 Companies, incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013

and regulated by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, represent the most formalized structure, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and scalability (Government of India, 2013)^[5, 6].

Organizational Governance

The General Body and the Governing Body represent two distinct yet interdependent tiers of governance that ensure institutional accountability and operational efficiency. The General Body, comprising all registered members, functions as the supreme decision-making authority, responsible for setting broad policy directions, approving annual budgets and programs, amending constitutional documents, and electing the Governing Body. It embodies the democratic character of the NGO and typically convenes through Annual General Meetings to review performance and strategic direction. In contrast, the Governing Body also referred to as the Executive Committee or Board of Directors/Trustees acts as the executive arm, entrusted with the implementation of policies, day-to-day administration, financial management, and regulatory compliance (Government of India, 1860). This structure is commonly observed under frameworks such as the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and governance guidelines issued (NITI Aayog, 2021)^[3]. The dynamic between these two bodies reflects a governance model that balances participatory oversight with managerial efficiency, thereby strengthening transparency, legitimacy, and sustainability in NGO operations.

Key thematic and thrust areas of NGOs

The themes and thrust areas of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in India reflect a broad, interdisciplinary approach to social development, targeting both immediate welfare needs and long-term structural change. Core thematic domains include education, health, women and child welfare, rural development, and environmental sustainability, which collectively address fundamental human development indicators. NGOs also engage significantly in cross-cutting thrust areas such as human rights advocacy, poverty alleviation, disaster management, and skill development, often focusing on marginalized and vulnerable populations (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2020). These organizations function as critical intermediaries between the state and civil society, complementing public policy efforts and filling gaps in service delivery (World Bank, 2019). Their activities are frequently aligned with national development priorities and regulatory frameworks overseen by institutions such as the Ministry of Corporate Affairs and, in the context of foreign funding and compliance, the Ministry of Home Affairs (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India, 2013). Overall, NGOs play a pivotal role in promoting inclusive growth, participatory governance, and sustainable development through diverse yet interconnected thematic interventions (United Nations Development Programme, 2020)^[7].

Objectives of the study:

- 1) To examine the distribution of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) across various thrust areas in Visakhapatnam District.
- 2) To identify the level of NGO involvement in key thematic sectors such as health, education, child development, women empowerment, livelihoods, agriculture, and environment.
- 3) To analyze the pattern of sectoral priorities adopted by NGOs in the study area.

II. Material And Methods

The present study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the thematic distribution of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Visakhapatnam District.

Research design: The design is appropriate as it enables a systematic description and analysis of NGO involvement across various thrust areas without manipulating any variables.

Research Location: Visakhapatnam is a coastal, port city, often called “The Jewel of the East Coast”, situated in the of Andhra Pradesh, located on the eastern shore of India, nestled among the hills of the Eastern Ghats and facing the Bay of Bengal to the east. The district presents a unique socio-geographical composition, as it is a combination of urban, rural, and tribal regions. It is primarily an industrial city, apart from being a port city. It is also home to the Eastern Naval Command. It is a primarily maritime district and a large population of fishers from the adjacent district seek their livelihood depending upon the sea food. The population of the district is 19.6 lakhs as per 2011 Census with 11.96% of growth rate and this constituted 3.95% of the population of the state while the Geographical area of the District is 1049 Sq. KM. which is only 0.64% of the area of the State. Out of the total population 9.88 lakhs are Males and 9.71 lakhs are Females. The District has Density of population of 1869 per Sq.Km. There are 13.90 lakhs literates forming 78.57% of the total population of the District (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011)^[8, 9]. The tribal belt of Visakhapatnam district, particularly in the Eastern Ghats region (Agency areas), is home to several indigenous communities such as the Kondh, Koya, Gadaba, and Savara tribes.

Study Duration: November 2024 to November 2025.

Sample size: 50 Key functionaries of NGOs.

Sample size calculation: According to the NGO-DARPAN Portal (Government of India), there are 1,115 NGOs registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and the Andhra Pradesh Societies Registration Act, 2001 in Visakhapatnam district at the time the study was conducted. However, it is important to note that there may be additional organizations that are not registered on the DARPAN portal. Out of the total registered NGOs, only 150 NGOs were identified as actively functioning. These active NGOs constitute the universe of the present study, as they are directly involved in development activities and field-level operations. From this universe, a sample of 50 NGOs was selected using simple random sampling who were willing to provide data. Key functionaries such as directors, managers, and secretaries were chosen as respondents. Only NGOs with a minimum of two years of operational experience were included to ensure reliability of responses.

Data Collection and analysis: A structured interview schedule was used to collect information regarding the involvement of NGOs in various thrust areas such as health, education, child development, women empowerment, livelihoods, agriculture, and environment. The selection of NGOs was done using simple random sampling from the universe of actively functioning organizations. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, primarily percentage analysis. In addition, the demographic profile of key functionaries was examined to support the interpretation of NGO involvement across different thematic areas.

III. Results

Table-1 presents that a demographic profile of the respondents, reveals the important insights into composition of leadership within the selected NGOs. With respect to gender, a predominant majority of respondents are male (82%), while females constitute only 18%, indicating a noticeable gender imbalance in NGO leadership positions. This suggests that, despite the inclusive nature of NGOs, leadership roles continue to be largely male-dominated.

Table No- 1: Demographic Profile of the Key functionaries of NGOs

S. No	Variable	Category	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	41	82.00
		Female	9	18.00
2	Educational Qualification	Up to 10th Standard	7	14.00
		Intermediate	2	4.00
		Graduate	15	30.00
		Post-Graduate	24	48.00
		Ph.D	2	4.00
3	Designation	Director	3	6.00
		President	25	50.00
		Secretary	15	30.00
		Chairman	7	14.00
4	Experience (years)	More than 30 years	11	22.00
		21-30years	15	30.00
		11-20 years	18	36.00
		2-10 years	6	12.00

In terms of educational qualifications, the data shows that respondents are generally well-qualified. Nearly half of them (48%) hold postgraduate degrees, followed by 30% who are graduates. A smaller proportion has education up to the 10th standard (14%) and intermediate level (4%), while 4% possess a Doctor of Philosophy. This indicates that NGO leadership is primarily driven by individuals with higher educational attainment, which may contribute to better organizational management and decision-making. Regarding designation, half of the respondents (50%) occupy the position of President, making it the most represented role in the study. Secretaries account for 30%, followed by Chairmen (14%) and Directors (6%). This distribution highlights that the majority of respondents are in key executive and decision-making positions within their organizations.

With respect to years of experience, the findings indicate that most respondents have substantial experience in the NGO sector. A significant 36% have 11–20 years of experience, while 30% have 21–30 years, and 22% possess more than 30 years of experience. Only a small proportion (12%) has relatively limited experience of 2–10 years. Overall, the data suggests that NGO leadership is characterized by experienced

individuals with considerable exposure to the sector, although the persistence of gender disparity remains a notable concern.

Table No.2: Distribution of NGOs by Thrust areas (N= 50)

Thrust area	Involved	Not involved
Health interventions	28 (56.0%)	22 (44.0%)
Educational interventions	22 (44.0%)	28 (56.0%)
Child rights and Development	23 (46.0%)	27 (54.0%)
Youth development and Empowerment	15 (30.0%)	35 (70.0%)
Women empowerment and Rights	18 (36.0%)	32 (64.0%)
Elderly care and Support	16 (32.0%)	34 (68.0%)
Rights and Entitlements of Marginalized	23 (46.0%)	27 (54.0%)
Agriculture and Allied activities	7 (14.0%)	43 (86%)
Livelihood and Economic development	15 (30.0%)	35 (70.0%)
Sanitation, environment and Climate change	8 (16.0%)	42 (84.0%)

The table-2 presents the distribution of NGOs across different thrust areas in terms of involvement and non-involvement among 50 organizations operating in Visakhapatnam District. The findings reveal a clear variation in the level of engagement across sectors within the study area. Health interventions record the highest level of involvement, with 56.0 percent of NGOs engaged in this area, indicating that health is the most prioritized sector among the sampled organizations. These interventions typically address children, women including those from marginalized communities, and elderly populations through preventive, promotive, and curative healthcare services. In addition, a significant number of NGOs are actively involved in addressing HIV/AIDS, providing specialized services for people living with HIV (PLHIV), as well as programs targeting tuberculosis (TB) control and rehabilitation services for affected individuals.

Child rights and development and rights and entitlements of marginalized groups both show equal levels of engagement at 46.0 percent. Child rights and development initiatives generally include nutrition and education in pre-schools and schools, implementation of the Right to Education, welfare hostels, and issues related to the girl child. Rights and entitlements of marginalized groups extend to children, elderly, and women, as well as Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and Backward Class communities, reflecting a strong rights-based and inclusive approach within the district.

Educational interventions account for 44.0 percent involvement, indicating the continued importance of education as a key sector of NGO activity. These programmes primarily focus on inclusive and child-centred educational support, often overlapping with child development initiatives. In particular, a significant share of these interventions is directed towards urban slum children, school dropouts, street children, and rag-pickers, aiming to ensure their reintegration into formal education systems and improve access to basic learning opportunities.

However, moderate levels of engagement are observed in women empowerment and rights at 36.0 percent, elderly care and support at 32.0 percent, and both youth development and empowerment and livelihood and economic development at 30.0 percent each. Women’s empowerment and rights programmes focus on protection, employment opportunities, legal rights, family welfare, safety, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and socioeconomic development. The women’s component is included in almost all state and central government programmes. Elderly care and support includes geriatric care, senior citizen rights, and counseling services. Youth development and empowerment primarily involves skill development and employment-oriented training. Livelihood and economic development initiatives focus on income generation support for poor and marginalized households.

Agriculture and allied activities exhibit the lowest level of involvement at 14.0 percent, indicating limited NGO participation in this sector. These interventions include non-pesticide management, promotion of government subsidies, addressing farmer suicides, natural farming, tenant farmer issues, crop insurance, and implementation of forest rights act and distribution of agricultural inputs such as seeds. Sanitation, environment, and climate change interventions also show low engagement at 16.0 percent. These activities primarily involve advocacy and lobbying on environmental issues along with awareness creation on sanitation and hygiene practices. Despite Visakhapatnam District being characterized by the presence of industrial corridors and Special Economic Zones, NGO involvement in environmental and climate change-related issues remains limited. This indicates a gap between the environmental challenges associated with industrialization and the level of civil society engagement in addressing these concerns. The relatively low participation in this sector may be attributed to the technical complexity of environmental interventions, lower prioritization compared to immediate social service needs, and reliance on regulatory frameworks managed by government institutions. In this context, NGOs also work in collaboration with the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) and engage with urban slum communities to support sanitation improvements, waste management initiatives, and hygiene awareness programs.

Overall, the findings suggest that NGOs in Visakhapatnam District are predominantly concentrated in social service and rights-based sectors such as health, education, and child development, while comparatively less emphasis is placed on agriculture, environmental sustainability, and livelihood-related activities. This pattern reflects a broader tendency to prioritize sectors that yield immediate and visible social impact over structurally complex and resource-intensive domains.

IV. Limitations

Limited sample size: The study is based on 50 NGOs selected from a universe of 150 active NGOs in Visakhapatnam district. Hence, the findings may not fully represent all NGOs operating in the region. Also the data reflects NGO activities at the time of the study and does not capture changes over time in NGO interventions.

V. Conclusion

The study of NGOs in Visakhapatnam District reveals a clear concentration of activities in social service and rights-based sectors, particularly health, education, and child development. Moderate engagement is observed in women empowerment, youth development, elderly care, and livelihoods, while agriculture and environmental sectors receive comparatively limited attention. Despite the presence of industrial corridors and Special Economic Zones, NGO involvement in environment and climate change remains low, indicating a gap between development pressures and sustainability interventions. Findings of the study highlight the need for greater sectoral balance, with increased focus on agriculture, environment, and climate-related issues to ensure more comprehensive and sustainable development.

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