Chapter 5

Community Empowerment Initiatives of Faith-Based NGOs: A Case Study in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This chapter has been prepared for pursuing the first author’s PhD study. It contains the basic components of a research proposal such as the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, scope, study significance, methodology, and the literature review including conceptual and theoretical framework, etc. The proposal found that the immediate response to humanitarian crisis, healthcare, the importance of values and cultural context in the operation area have made faith-based non-governmental organizations (FBNGOs) as a vital stakeholder in development. However, there is still a debate about the claim of having the advantage of FBNGOs in development intervention. Based on this proposal, the study is being conducted on an international FBNGO, working in Bangladesh, to investigate its community empowerment initiatives. The proposal could be a practical guideline for the academicians who are interested in studying the contribution of NGOs’ in development discourse.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7897-0.ch005
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The engagement of the faith-based non-governmental organizations (FBNGOs) in development discourse has a long background. There is a wide range of variation of such organizations in terms of their names, types, nature, and scope, working approach, objectives and motives of development. In general, the word faith-based organizations (FBOs) include a variety of entities which ranges from informal groups based in a congregation to international NGOs. However, with a long history, the FBOs including FBNGOs have been stayed away in welfare and development arena due to a number of reasons. In this perspective, several studies (for example Berger, 2003; Lunn, 2009 etc.) show a number of factors that contributed to the underrepresentation of this kind of organization. These include the lasting legacy of modernism, the dominance of neo-Marxist theory, the post-enlightenment effort and mentality that considered religion as a matter of public life.

In the recent years, the widespread use of such organizations in development is considered as a significant swing in development approaches. The previous disappointing result of the secular-based development strategy persuaded the international donor agencies to put a place for religiously motivated organizations to work in the development arena. As a result a large number of faith-based NGOs got space to work development, politics and social issue related areas along with the secular development organizations (Alkire, 2006; Holenstein, 2005; Marshall, 2005a, 2005b: Haynes, 2007a; Rees, 2009; terHaar, 2011, in Carbonnier, 2016). In the USA, a significant number of international FBNGOs are active and in 2013, four of these type of organizations collected the largest amount of private donation which was reported as 20% of the total donations given to international affairs (Heist &Cnaan, 2016). The international development organizations such as the World Bank, DFID, UNDP IDB and UNFPA have also changed their views and engaged faith-based NGOs to reduce poverty and attain their development goals (Haynes, 2013). For example, the UNDP (2014) considers them as vital stakeholders in the development and mentions some of the advantages of their engagement. They play role in expanding coverage of intervention, improving cost efficiency, amplifying advocacy and communications, catalyzing learning and facilitating cross-section engagement and management. As a result, incorporation of faith-based NGOs in development discourse which was once upon a time considered as a relic of superstitious past and the curse of a backward world (Willis, 2013), has now become an almost obligatory buzzword (Fountain, 2013).
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