



The Role of NGO in Empowering Children and Women: A Case Study of 'SHAKTI SADAN' Cachar, Assam

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Abstract: Women and children are crucial to a prosperous society, promoting social transformation and cultural progress. Empowering women and ensuring children's well-being promote sustainable development, poverty reduction and a more just and prosperous community. However, despite their crucial role, they continue to face numerous challenges related to discrimination and inequality, gender-based violence, lack of education and healthcare, social stigma and barriers. Organizations like- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Non-profit organizations (NPOs) make a crucial contribution in promoting social, cultural, educational, political and economic empowerment, especially for disadvantaged groups such as women and children. This article examines the importance and effect of Shakti Sadan in empowering these groups. Shakti Sadan works as an Integrated Relief and Rehabilitation Home for women and children facing affliction, distress and challenging circumstances. It provides necessary services such as shelter, food, clothing, counseling and primary healthcare, together with vocational training and social security benefits to help women overcome misfortune. Shakti Sadan is an integrated scheme that merges Swadhar Greh, which supports women in difficult situations and Ujjawala, which focuses on preventing trafficking. It operates under the Mission Shakti program, an umbrella initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development aimed at ensuring women's safety, security and empowerment addressing issues across all stages of a woman's life and empowering them to become competent partners in

nation-building. This study is based on a case study of the NGO Shakti Sadan, located in Silchar, Cachar, Assam.

Keywords: *NGO, Empowerment, Shakti Sadan, Children, Women*

1. Introduction

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are independent, non-profit entities and voluntary social organizations comprising social activists, communities, volunteers and concerned citizens committed to social welfare and development functioning at local, national and international levels. They link the gap between governments and the public, tackling issues that might not be effectively addressed by authorities. NGOs play a crucial role in advocating for environmental conservation, education, health care, cultural empowerment, gender equality, gender-based violence, economic empowerment and human rights. NGOs provide humanitarian aid, conduct development programs, influence policy-making and hold authorities accountable through advocacy and awareness campaigns. They vary in focus, from humanitarian relief and environmental protection to human rights and governance, addressing societal challenges that may not be effectively tackled by governments alone (Jianxiu, 2006).

Women and children form the backbone of a flourishing society, playing a vital role in its social, economic and cultural advancement. Women, as caregivers, educators, professionals and leaders, shape future generations and are key drivers of societal progress. Empowering women leads to significant improvements in social and cultural change, health and well being, education, legal rights and protection, technology and digital access and economic stability—laying the bedrock for a more just and prosperous community. Similarly, children embody the future. They require proper care, education and protection to grow into responsible citizens and innovators who will lead the nation forward. Supporting the rights as well as the health and welfare of women and children is crucial for social harmony, sustainable development and poverty reduction making them central to a nation's overall growth and stability (Blossfeld, et., al 2019). Even though women and children are central to society in India, they continue to face widespread harassment, gender prejudice and discrimination in various aspects of life, regardless of geographic location be it the north, south, east, west or the farthest corners of the country (Basumatary, 2022). These ongoing issues demand continuous and collective efforts. To tackle and resolve these challenges, both the Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are working tirelessly, implementing various policies and initiatives

aimed at fixing the rights, safety and development of women and children. NGOs alone across the nation are committed to improving their living conditions, protecting their rights and empowering them to lead distinguished and fulfilling lives.

Prominent organizations such as CRY (Child Rights and You), Save the Children, Smile Foundation are committed to providing education, healthcare, protection and overall well-being to underprivileged children and their families. 'CRY' (Child Rights and You) works to ensure every child has a safe, healthy and nourishing childhood by offering access to quality education, primary healthcare, protection from abuse and exploitation, reducing malnutrition and enhancing children's voices. 'Save the Children' is an International child rights NGO. These organization works to assure children survive and prosper by providing education, healthcare, protection and emergency aid. In India, the operations started in 2008 as Bal Raksha Bharat and has since impacted over 10.1 million children across 19 states. And 'Smile Foundation' assists over 750,000 children and families across 25 states through program in education, healthcare, livelihood and women empowerment with a powerful emphasis on education as an instrument for change. Their attempts create better opportunities and a safer environment, ensuring children can grow and prosper (Child Help Foundation, n.d). Similarly, Organizations such as Azad Foundation, Snehalaya and SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) focus on empowering women by promoting self-sufficiency, financial independence and social security. Azad Foundation supports marginalized women through skill training, livelihoods and leadership development, promoting gender justice and economic equity via non-traditional jobs (Azad Foundation. n.d.). Snehalaya, was founded to support women, children and LGBTQ+ communities affected by HIV/AIDS, trafficking, sexual violence and poverty. This NGO serves over 15,000 people annually and is based in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra (Snehalaya. n.d.). And SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) is a national trade union of self-employed women workers in India. It empowers poor, informal-sector women by organizing them for economic self-reliance, providing access to livelihoods, healthcare, childcare, insurance and housing. SEWA promotes women's rights, dignity and collective strength across sectors (SEWA. n.d.).

1.1 Background of BVWDS (Barak Valley Welfare Development Society)

Like in many other regions, Silchar also has many non-governmental organizations playing an essential part in ensuring the overall well-being of underprivileged, deprived and disadvantaged sections of society. They work tirelessly to uplift women, children and

marginalized communities in and around the city. A notable organization in this field is the Barak Valley Welfare Development Society (BVWDS), located in the heart of Silchar on Ramkrishna Mission Road. Established on March 31, 2003, Barak Valley Welfare Development Society (BVWDS) was officially registered under the Societies Registration Act XXXI of 1860 in 2004 with the Registration of Firms and Societies, Assam. Barak Valley Welfare Development Society was founded by dedicated social activists from Barak Valley, its key goal has been to improve the socio-economic conditions of the region's disadvantaged population. Over time, this organization has extended its influence beyond Barak Valley, establishing a presence in Darrang, Sonitpur and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. Barak Valley Welfare Development Society implements several development projects aimed at fostering holistic growth for underprivileged communities. The organization core of areas are- Women empowerment, modern education, employment generation and skill training, environment protection, relief and rehabilitation empowerment.

The organization's mission is to empower underprivileged and marginalized communities, especially women, by breaking the cycle of poverty, injustice and exploitation. It promotes community participation for sustainable development. Its vision is a just and equal society, free from hunger and exploitation, where people live in harmony with nature, fostering respect, self-reliance and collective well-being.

Barak Valley Welfare Development Society implements various welfare schemes and projects, including One Stop Centre, Open Shelter Home for Boys, Targeted Intervention (TI Truckers), Working Women's Hostel and Ujjawala. Ujjawala is an integrated initiative focused on the prevention of trafficking and the rehabilitation of victims of commercial sexual exploitation with particular emphasis on women and children at risk.

Ujjawala scheme was initiated in December 2007 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India and it was instituted in the year 2012 in BVWDS (Barak valley welfare development society). In the year 2022(April), the Ujjawala scheme was merged with Swadhar Greh and rename as Shakti Sadan. Subsequently, Barak valley welfare development society has been actively implementing this integrated project, stimulating its mission to protect and rehabilitate vulnerable women and children.

1.2 Data of Shakti Sadan, Silchar Assam

Shakti Sadan scheme, silchar managed a total of one thousand five hundred sixty (1,560) registered cases ever since it was launched by the Barak Valley Welfare Development Society,

silchar in the year 2022, April. Among these cases, eight hundred forty-seven (847) cases involved minors, whereas seven hundred thirteen (713) cases pertained to adults (Table 1).

The victims and survivors supported by the Barak Valley Welfare Development Society hail not only from Silchar, Barak Valley and other regions of Assam but also from neighboring states such as West Bengal and even international regions like Nepal. This emphasizes the organization's extensive reach in providing shelter, rehabilitation and support to those in need, regardless of geographic boundaries.

Table: 1 (Sources- Barak valley welfare development society)

Year	Cases/Issues	Minor (below 18 years old)	Major (18 and above years old)
2022 April	Trafficking	Nil	
	Sexual abuse	70	
	Kidnapping	80	
	Rape	18	
	Child marriage	90	
	Domestic violence		60
	Abandonment		30
	Widowhood		43
	Socially & economically weak		39
	Others		30
2023	Trafficking	3	
	Sexual abuse	68	
	Kidnapping	73	
	Rape	69	
	Child marriage	69	
	Domestic violence		67
	Abandonment		48
	Widowhood		45
	Socially & economically weak		39
	Others		19
2024	Trafficking	2	2
	Sexual abuse	45	2
	Kidnapping	52	
	Rape	48	8
	Child marriage	92	
	Domestic violence		81

	Abandonment		45
	Widowhood		29
	Socially & economically weak		57
	Others		37
2025 February	Trafficking	Nil	
	Sexual abuse	23	
	Kidnapping	15	
	Rape	5	
	Child marriage	25	
	Domestic violence		7
	Abandonment		9
	Widowhood		5
	Socially & economically weak		9
	Others		2
	Total	847	713

2. Overview of ‘Shakti Sadan’

The Ministry of Women and Child Development previously implemented two major schemes-Swadhar Greh, for women in vulnerable conditions and Ujjawala, for preventing trafficking. These initiatives aimed to ensure a secure and nurturing setting for distressed and trafficked women, empowering them to rebuild their lives. For improved administrative efficiency, the two schemes have been combined into a unified program called Shakti Sadan – Integrated Relief and Rehabilitation Home. Under this new scheme, States and Union Territories may run homes for different categories of women either within a single building or separate units on the same premises. Additionally, homes for mentally challenged or differently-abled (Divyang) women can be developed in convergence with schemes operated by the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment and the Department responsible for the welfare and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. Only proposals from State or Union Territories governments will be eligible for financial assistance, limited to operational costs- not for construction. Presently functioning NGO- managed shelters will be allowed to employ until March 31, 2024, after which states must merged them into the new structure.

Shakti Sadan bestows women with food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, daily necessities, vocational training, legal aid and psycho-social counseling. Every inhabitant will have a bank

account, into which ₹500 is credited monthly. This amount cannot be acquire during their stay but may be used to pay the insurance fee for schemes like Prime Minister Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana or Prime Minister Suraksha Bima Yojana. At the time of leaving, the collected savings and interest will act as seed money to support their reintegration. Inhabitants are also eligible for Ayushman Bharat, disability pensions and additional welfare programs aligned through inter-department coordination. People with additional needs will be handled and legal and counseling services will be managed by a collective pool of specialists under One Stop Centres (OSCs). Women survivors who came with their children can also be accommodated with them in the shelter home. Girls of any age who are unmarried and boys up to 12 years may remain in Shakti Sadan with their mothers. And boys older than 12years old will be transferred to homes under the Juvenile Justice Act or ICPS. Women survivors requiring short-term support (e.g :. in cases of domestic violence) will initially be assisted by One Stop Centre and may remain there up to five days, after which long-term support will be facilitated through Shakti Sadan for a maximum of three years. Women who are above 55 years old may remain for a maximum of five years, following which they are to be shifted to old age homes.

Eventually, Shakti Sadans and One Stop Centres will collaborate closely with Women Help Desks (WHDs), Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) and civil society organizations to locate, rescue and rehabilitate victims. This incorporates applying to Magistrates or Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) for the formal rescue and records of women and children.

3. Objectives and Methodology

A case study approach is utilized in this research to analyze the role of Shakti Sadan, Cachar, Assam, in empowering women and children. For a study, primary data is collected through interviews with NGO staffs, beneficiaries or inhabitants to evaluate the impact of rehabilitation and skill development programs. And secondary data is collected from government reports, NGOs documents and existing research on women and child welfare.

4. Findings and Discussion

Shakti Sadan in silchar, Assam plays a crucial role in empowering both women and children by providing support in various aspects of their lives. This includes:-

4.1 Protection and Rehabilitation

Shakti Sadan provides care and protection to both victims and survivors. Children who are affected by child marriage, sexual abuse, trafficking, kidnapping sexual harassment and rape are brought to the shelter home by the police, anti-human trafficking units, child welfare committees and district child protection units. Shakti Sadan ensures a protective and nurturing environment for children. Likewise, women facing domestic violence, abandonment, desertion, widowhood or lack of social and economic support find protection at Shakti Sadan, escaping physical, emotional and psychological pain. Shakti Sadan acts as a temporary shelter, offering safety, stability and a new beginning. Women and Children who are in the shelter home receive basic necessities such as food, clothing, toiletries and medical aid. As of the time of admission, trained staff, social workers and counselors provide round-the-clock emotional support and guidance, encouraging survivors with motivational words to help them overcome their obstacles. Emergency medical services are provided to those suffering from injuries, malnourishment or trauma-related health issues.

4.2 Education and Skill Development

‘Education is pivotal for individual growth, development and societal advancement’. Shakti Sadan is dedicated to promoting education and skill enhancement to empower women and children. ‘Basic Education and Literacy Programs’, helps children who have limited access to formal schooling. Children in need of care and protection often stay at the shelter home while their cases are under trial, which can span several months to as long as a year. Children while residing there, they are provided with informal learning to strengthen reading and writing skills and engage in extracurricular activities such as playing, singing, dancing and painting. In addition, the organization offers vocational training in handicrafts, tailoring and digital skills to provide women with functional skills for sustainable livelihoods. Career guidance is also provided to assist women explore job opportunities, pursue employment or achieve self-reliance.

4.3 Legal and Psychological Support

‘Psychological support is a type of therapy or intervention that focuses to improve mental health and well-being by helping individuals express their problems’ Here, Shakti Sadan provides psychological support, including individual or group counseling, therapy sessions, crisis intervention, mental health assessments and emotional assistance to all victims and survivors. Psychotherapist or Professional counselors assist individuals cope with anxiety, trauma and depression, empowering them to strengthen their confidence and capacity to

overcome challenges. Shakti Sadan also offers holistic legal support to children and women experiencing difficulties such as child marriage, domestic violence, trafficking, sexual abuse, kidnapping and child custody disputes. 'Legal Aid and Assistance program', helps individuals address the legal system by assisting with police reports, protection orders and access to justice. In addition, Shakti Sadan raises awareness about legal rights, educating women and children on how to safeguard themselves against future exploitation.

4.4 Health and Nutrition

'Good health is pivotal for every individual as it enables people to participate fully in life.' Acknowledging the importance of good health for empowerment, Shakti Sadan prioritizes healthcare services for women and children. It provides regular health check-ups, child nutrition programs and maternal care to ensure overall well-being. The organization(BVWDS) also undertake 'Hygiene and Wellness Awareness programs' frequently in collaboration with other organizations, enlightening women and children on personal hygiene, reproductive health, menstrual health and disease prevention. Supplementary support is provided for pregnant women and mothers, assuring they receive essential healthcare services and nutritional assistance, protecting both maternal and child health.

4.5 Economic Empowerment and Self-Sufficiency

'Economic empowerment refers to the process of enabling individuals to have greater control over their economic conditions'. Shakti Sadan is committed to empowering rehabilitated women achieve financial independence and long-term stability. Shakti Sadan scheme assists women in securing employment and offers opportunities to start small businesses. The organization (BVWDS) links women with microfinance opportunities, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and government schemes, offering them access to financial resources for growth and empowerment. In addition, women receive assistance in opening bank accounts in their names where ₹500 per month is credited but cannot be withdrawn during their stay in the shelter home. Women survivors can also choose to enroll in schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana or Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, with the premiums taken out of their deposits. Women after leaving the shelter home, the collected savings and interest serve as seed money for a fresh begin. Additionally, beneficiaries gain access to welfare schemes like 'Ayushman Bharat Yojana' and 'Disability pensions' through collaboration with relevant departments. These programs empower women to overcome from economic dependence and become self-reliant.

4.6 Reintegration into Society

Shakti Sadan is dedicated to ensuring that survivors or victims restore independence and acceptance within their communities. The organization execute community awareness programs, especially in and around Silchar, to minimize social stigma and promote support for survivors. Family counseling assistance are also available where trained professionals or experts resolve between survivors and their families to facilitate reconciliation once it is safe and valuable. Furthermore, Shakti Sadan follows up with survivors and victims to monitor their safety and personal growth, ensuring their effective reintegration into society with self - assurance and self - respect.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, NGOs serve a critical function in fostering social change, particularly by uplifting and empowering vulnerable women and children. The Barak Valley Welfare Development Society (BVWDS), through its Shakti Sadan initiative, has demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting and rehabilitating victims of trafficking, abuse and exploitation. By providing safe shelter, access to education, vocational training, legal aid, psychological counseling and healthcare, Shakti Sadan enables individuals to regain their dignity, independence and self-sufficiency.

Initiatives like Shakti Sadan serve as beacons of hope, illustrating the transformative impact of NGOs in advancing social justice and sustainable development. By offering holistic support, these programs help survivors reintegrate into society, equipping them with essential skills and resources to build a stable and empowered future. Continued support, awareness, and collaboration with stakeholders—governments, communities and private organizations - can amplify the reach of such initiatives, ensuring that countless more women and children receive the assistance they need.

As society evolves, the contribution of NGOs in tackling long-standing social challenges becomes increasingly vital. Their steadfast commitment to eliminating exploitation and promoting inclusion is key to building a fair, equal and compassionate world. Although they frequently encounter financial limitations, political hurdles and operational difficulties, NGOs continue to be powerful agents of progress, playing an essential role in creating a more just, equitable and sustainable future.

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