

Intervention of NGOs in the Process of Social Action

Introduction

Social action means organised efforts by a group of people to bring about change in society — fighting against injustice, inequality, and oppression. In this process, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) play a very important role. They act as the **voice of the people**, work as a **bridge between the government and community**, and serve as **agents of social change** and **protectors of human rights**.

NGO intervention means the planned and purposeful actions taken by an NGO to help individuals, groups, or communities deal with a problem or bring about positive change. It is not random help — it is goal-oriented and based on a clear understanding of the problem.

Levels of NGO Intervention in Social Action

NGOs intervene at three different levels depending on the scale and nature of the problem:

1. Micro Level — Individual and Family

At this level, NGOs work directly with individuals and families facing personal problems like poverty, abuse, illness, or disability. The focus is on direct personal support and care.

Example: An NGO counselling a domestic violence survivor, helping her access legal aid and safe shelter — this is a micro-level intervention where one person's life is directly changed.

2. Mezzo Level — Group and Community

At this level, NGOs work with groups, Self Help Groups (SHGs), and local communities. They build collective strength, raise awareness, and develop local leadership for community development.

Example: SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) organises poor women workers in a community into a cooperative so they can collectively demand fair wages and better working conditions.

3. Macro Level — Policy and Society

At this level, NGOs work at the national or societal level to influence laws, policies, and social systems. They act as pressure groups and advocates for large-scale structural change.

Example: NGOs lobbied and advocated for the Right to Education Act (2009), pressuring the government to make free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children aged 6 to 14.

Areas of NGO Intervention in Social Action

1. Social Welfare and Service Delivery

NGOs directly provide services to people who are deprived or marginalised. This includes education programmes, health camps, nutrition support, shelter homes, and rehabilitation services. These services build trust with the community and strengthen the base of the social action movement.

Example: CRY (Child Rights and You) runs free education programmes for underprivileged children across India, ensuring that lack of money does not become a barrier to learning.

2. Advocacy and Policy Influence

NGOs conduct research, collect data, lobby with policymakers, submit memoranda, and even file Public Interest Litigations (PILs) to bring about changes in laws and policies. This is one of the most powerful forms of social action.

Example: Several NGOs and child rights organisations continuously lobbied the government using research and data on out-of-school children. Their sustained advocacy was a key force behind the passage of the Right to Education Act in 2009.

3. Community Mobilisation

NGOs raise awareness among people, encourage their participation, and build local leadership. When people from a community come together and start speaking for themselves, real and lasting change becomes possible.

Example: SEWA organises poor women workers — many of whom are daily wage earners, street vendors, and domestic workers — into collectives. By bringing them together, SEWA gives them a collective voice and economic strength they could never have alone.

4. Empowerment of Marginalised Groups

NGOs focus special attention on groups that are most ignored or oppressed in society — women, children, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, persons with disabilities, and minorities. Social action is meaningful only when it reaches those who need it the most.

Example: SEWA not only organises women but also empowers them through financial literacy, legal awareness, and leadership training — transforming them from silent sufferers to confident leaders of their own lives.

5. Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation

During times of crisis — floods, earthquakes, or pandemics — NGOs are often the first to respond. They provide emergency relief, medical aid, temporary shelter, and long-term rehabilitation. This builds their credibility and strengthens their relationship with communities.

Example: Goonj, an Indian NGO, distributed relief materials, clothing, and essential goods during multiple flood crises across different states. It also turned disaster relief into a dignity-centred process — treating affected people as partners, not just recipients.

6. Capacity Building and Training

NGOs invest in building the skills and capacities of community members — through vocational training, leadership development workshops, and awareness programmes. A community that is trained and informed can sustain social action on its own even without outside support.

Example: Pratham, one of India's largest education NGOs, trains rural youth in livelihood and vocational skills. By building their capacities, Pratham helps young people become self-reliant and reduces their dependence on others.

Why NGO Intervention is Important in Social Action

NGOs bring several unique strengths to the process of social action:

They are **closer to the community** than the government and understand ground realities better. They are **flexible and innovative** in their approach. They **give voice to those who are unheard** — the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalised. They

build **pressure on governments** to fulfil their responsibilities. And they **connect local struggles to national and international platforms**, giving small communities a larger audience.

Conclusion

NGOs are not just service providers — they are powerful agents of social change. Whether working at the individual level or fighting for national policy reform, their intervention in social action makes movements more organised, sustained, and impactful. As social work scholar Gabriel Britto emphasised, social action is about giving power back to the people. NGOs are the vehicles through which that power is built, mobilised, and expressed.

In the words that capture the spirit of social work — *"Social work is not charity — it is justice. And social action is how we fight for it."*