

# Role of NGOs in Women Empowerment : A Case Study of CASA and CREA

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## Abstract

The role of women in mainstream development is immense. The self-sustainable society is formed through women empowerment. The atrocities inflicted upon women are prevalent everywhere which needs to be tackled through an institutional process. The empowerment of women is located within a broad spectrum of gender equality which may be realized through a systemic approach. The preservation of rights of women is possible through an active participation of women. They may help in generating legal awareness and incapacitating women in their self-employment. Their role is very much visible in mobilization of internal and external resources. NGOs ensure political and economic independence for women through reducing inequality with men and thus putting advanced status for them. NGOs have been influential in shaping the current global policy framework on women's empowerment and gender equality. The NGOs have also been spearheading the program of women entrepreneurship development so that economic freedom may be realized by them. Some of the NGOs have also worked on vocational activation program in order to increase their self-esteem, competence and freedom.

This Paper is an attempt to highlight the role of NGO in empowering women through case study of Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) and Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA).

**Keywords:** *Empowerment, self-employment, development, gender equality, self-esteem, atrocities.*

## Introduction:

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are independent entity away from government and business sector. They are intended to serve the public good rather than cater to individual interests. NGOs have been quite instrumental in improving people's lives (Srivastava & Austin, no date, Binder-Aviles, no date). Most NGOs are founded by people who are

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passionate about their communities or causes (Binder-Aviles, no date). The democratic institutions are developed by NGOs to provide support to the poor and the marginalized communities. In this way, a lasting change may be brought for the community. The visioning sessions are organized by these institutions with assistance of community members where they share their future plans. One of the most significant contribution of NGOs may be seen in leadership building of people (Binder-Aviles, no date). People may be incapacitated through intervention of NGO to articulate for their future. With the assistance of NGO, trust is developed among people. The accountability of government can be set-up through intervention of NGO. They serve people with various kinds of disabilities. The social problems can be eradicated through an active involvement of NGO. The certain features of NGO sector like flexibility of work, cost-effectiveness, wider accessibility, response to emergency situations are very effective in facilitating development at the periphery level (Pattnaik and Panda, 2005). The collective actions are contributed by NGO. NGOs at the grassroots level employ different strategies for creating awareness among the target population after establishing a rapport with it. The NGOs play a very complementary role in mobilizing the community. The women are encouraged to be an active player in development by NGO. Due to intervention of NGO, the status of inequality is reduced and women are considered to be at par with men. The productivity of marginal women is enhanced through NGO (Hossain et al., 2017). Through an active intervention of NGOs, the women remain quite conscious throughout their development arena.

### **Objectives of Research:**

- To identify the role of Non-Governmental Organization in building awareness among women towards their legal rights.
- To highlight the approaches adopted by Non-Governmental Organization in strengthening the capacity of women entrepreneurs.
- To find-out the way to reduce challenges in the way of women empowerment.

### **Methodology:**

The study is based on descriptive research design. The Case study method has been utilized for collection of data. The Case study data has been analyzed based on categorical aggregation method. A sample of 2 NGOs has been taken out of 10 NGOs in the area of women empowerment through purposive sampling technique. The criteria of inclusion of NGOs is their active involvement in the empowerment of women for the last 15 years.

## **Strategy of NGO in empowerment of women:**

The role of NGO has been very pivotal in empowering women through providing basic education, self-employment training, legal aid so that women may get strength to deal with various challenges. The capacity building of women in various sectors like legal aid, micro-credit program, health programs, voting behavior programs is done through various NGOs (Hossain et al., 2017). In contemporary societies, NGOs appear to dominate the field of introducing women empowerment. The formulation of policy is very much impacted by NGOs. The western donors may drive the policies for empowerment of women through active participation of NGO (Umer et al., 2016). NGOs have capability to transform power relations in order to organize masses (Umer et al., 2016). Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) has been working to provide an independent assessment of the impact of better access to family planning services on family planning practice and on empowerment (Umer et al., 2016). The political consciousness is spread among women through different types of programs launched by NGO (Biswas and Rao, 2014, Hossain et al., 2017). It also improves their skills, knowledge and support networks as well as enhancing their status in the community. Increasing women's access to microfinance has led to social and political empowerment (Biswas and Rao, 2014). One of the steps of bringing gender inequality down is through measures of poverty alleviation (Biswas and Rao, 2014, Kumari, 2019). To meet their unmet needs, NGOs convinced women to adopt empowerment. They are very adept in facilitating political awareness of women. The accessibility of poor rural women to educational opportunities equips them to enjoy economic empowerment (Hossain et al., 2017). The microfinance is considered to be a significant milestone in the area of financial empowerment of women because of accessibility of credit to poor rural women (Biswas and Rao, 2014, <https://www.scribd.com/document/104252878/A-Study-on-Microfinance-Sector-in-Karnataka>).

Increasing women representation in microfinance and helping women develop the leadership skills to become innovators in their sector is the key to moving microfinance to a new level (Biswas and Rao, 2014). NGOs perform advocacy and lobbying to meet the challenges. Women headed NGOs are very instrumental in bringing development of women (Dabhi, 2009). The NGOs play a very proactive role in empowering women. They are meant to provide opportunities for positive development of women's interests. NGOs are the ones who really intend to care the uncared sections and the people at the bottom of the social stratum. They can also play a role in making gender-responsive budget initiatives. NGOs have huge capacity to challenge parochial traditions so that women may grow undeterred (Gangmei, 2014). NGOs work closely with communities of marginalized and left-out children, and thus they can serve as critical partners for inclusion (Hanchett, 2008).

NGOs are mostly confined to certain segments of the education system, notably to deal with the hard-to-reach target groups. The collaboration of NGOs with various women's groups has assisted in the process of furthering their goals of women empowerment. The NGO educationists are successful activists and change agents to bring substantive changes in the pedagogy (Jagannathan, 2001). Through substantial investment by NGO in human resources, the empowerment of women at grassroots level may be done. Poor women remain always at the forefront of efforts by NGOs for their empowerment. Their aim is to train and provide them with opportunities of self-employment to improve their social and economic status. NGOs are working towards legal empowerment of women to generate awareness regarding their legal rights and also help them buy land by extending loan facilities (Narumugai & Kumar, 2017). To achieve the desired objectives, the NGOs bring collective action through mass mobilization (Bindia and Rajni, 2015). In order to ensure gender sensitive work environment, it is imperative for NGO to develop robust organizational structure and nurture a good leadership (Dabhi, 2009). The response to crime and atrocities is very much dependent upon active engagement of NGOs in altering power structure and social order (Dabhi, 2009). The collaborative approach may only facilitate the process of developing opportunities for women empowerment. In order to begin with this initiative, various NGOs have to introspect in their working pattern and see gender supportive working environment first within their structure (Dabhi, 2009). NGOs face more direct incentives to manage donor satisfaction than beneficiary welfare. The discrimination against women has been documented by NGOs by viewing women's rights as human rights.

The lives of millions of women are supposed to be improved through these NGOs (Srivastava & Austin, no date). The educational upliftment of women not only means literacy of women but awareness building around various issues (<https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/CH14.PDF>). Local, national and regional NGOs have emerged as major players and partners in both development and conservation activities in the region (Kumari, 2019). NGOs that work at the national level focus mainly on policy work, playing a vital role in the identification of the weaknesses and gaps in current policy or legal frameworks; in information gathering and educating the public, private sector and government (<https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/CH14.PDF>). The activities of NGOs are varied in the sphere of social development. They perform multiple activities ranging from advocacy, capacity building to monitoring and evaluation of programs ([https://dceutkal.ac.in/Downloads/UG\\_SLM/Sociology/Core\\_9.pdf](https://dceutkal.ac.in/Downloads/UG_SLM/Sociology/Core_9.pdf)). NGOs, religious and other voluntary organisations play a major role in raising public awareness for girls' education through development

education. The NGOs have obligation to ensure that quality education is accessible to every girl and expertise of NGO is well articulated. NGOs are viewed as alternative agencies in promoting awareness and development in the society (Shalip, 2006). There is a significant link between NGOs, civil society and state and they have been instrumental in fostering universal growth in the society (Gangmei, 2014). In order to facilitate women in the process of political empowerment, it is quite necessary for an NGO to undertake this initiative on mission mode (Shalip, 2006, Wesely & Dublon, 2015). The NGOs are capable of transforming lives of participants both at individual and family levels. Due to formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), women have started to venture into income-generating activities (Shalip, 2006). The women are made conscious of their rights due to intervention of NGO (Shalip, 2006). The NGOs are very adept in addressing their issues of empowerment through inculcating rights-based approach and social inclusion (Srivastava & Austin, n.d.). In the process of mobilizing the poor, these NGOs assist people in taking control of their lives and making local institutions strong (Hossain et al., 2017; Nikkhah et al., 2010). The local community is made self-reliant by these NGOs. The local communities are encouraged to realize their potential and strengthen their resources (Hossain et al., 2017; Nikkhah et al., 2010). NGOs are also involved in the process of providing capital for entrepreneurship development for women (Hossain et al., 2017; Nikkhah et al., 2010).

The political and economic autonomy of women are being enhanced through reducing inequality with men through intervention of NGOs. The poor and marginalized women are supported by NGOs (Hossain et al., 2017). The unmet needs of women are being fulfilled through an active participation of NGOs. Through inculcating leadership skills among women, the NGOs focus on political empowerment so that these women may lead from the front (Hossain et al., 2017).

The NGOs through formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) can bring economic empowerment of women through convergence of delivery system (Shalip, 2006, Hossain et al., 2017). The agenda of women empowerment has become reality due to active participation of NGOs, Panchayats and SHGs. NGOs can bring to large-scale education projects and programs. In collaboration with government, these NGOs can foster advancement of rights of women. The NGOs address different aspects of educational backwardness and represent a cross-section of target groups. For resolving the problems of women, these NGOs work proactively in the area of multi-dimensional prosperity of women (Zafar, 2016, Shalip, 2006). Their interventions are very successful in advocating for economic and educational rights of women (Zafar, 2016, Shalip, 2006). NGOs are one of the actors playing a significant role in highlighting women's issues, campaigning for

women's empowerment, health and education, violence against women, honour crimes and biased laws. They initiated income-generating projects for women such as providing credit schemes and giving training in home based income-generating activities such as embroidery, sewing cloths, decoration pieces, homemade pickles and so on (Zafar, 2016). With reference to empowerment of women, these NGOs give more attention to women's economic wellbeing, because their financial status is highly contributory to their low status at home (Zafar, 2016, Hossain et al, 2017). NGOs provide financial as well as technical services to the women. It is essential for NGOs to devise projects for women's empowerment that are accepted by the men, so that they permit their females to participate. NGOs have to adopt workable strategies that help them gain wider acceptability among the community; this in turn enables them to work harmoniously, having cast off or amended their negative image (Zafar, 2016). NGOs stress on involvement of women in those sectors where they may find opportunities for vertical and horizontal mobility (Kilby, 2011). NGOs were conscious of women's security, which ensured their active involvement in project activities. They received training from any of their male family members, as women were strictly prohibited to go out from their homes (Zafar, 2016). The NGOs organize gatherings of women in one place for the purposes of training and meetings.

A number of activities ranging from humanitarian activities to monitoring of government policies are performed through NGOs (Mishra, 2017, [https://ddceutkal.ac.in/Downloads/UG\\_SLM/Sociology/Core\\_9.pdf](https://ddceutkal.ac.in/Downloads/UG_SLM/Sociology/Core_9.pdf)). NGOs help women for their development. Non-governmental organizations have gained increasing importance as actors in international relations and world politics. NGOs have been influential in shaping the current global policy framework on women's empowerment and gender equality. NGOs are significant providers of lifelong learning. NGOs are taking action in the scope of reconciliation of professional and family roles. A significant proportion of the NGOs carried out activities aimed at the vocational activation of the unemployed women. Some of these activities were targeted at people experiencing various social problems such as domestic violence or single motherhood (Pokrzywa, 2018). Women are still particularly vulnerable to poverty and exclusion from the labour market. Lifelong learning can thus be an instrument for increasing their professional opportunities and enabling them to return to the labour market and update their skills and qualifications. The education of women is advanced through Non-governmental organizations (Pokrzywa, 2018, [https://ddceutkal.ac.in/Downloads/UG\\_SLM/Sociology/Core\\_9.pdf](https://ddceutkal.ac.in/Downloads/UG_SLM/Sociology/Core_9.pdf)). Non-governmental organizations offer trainings which develop specific competences required

for a particular profession, information technology and language skills, and provide support in starting their own business (Pokrzywa, 2018). NGOs undertake various initiatives to expand their operations to influence public policies and cover a large section of downtrodden community (Guha, 2019). NGO has ability to harness economies of scale by focusing on a particular region, instead encouraging a tendency for piecemeal growth which is inefficient and potentially unsustainable (Guha, 2019). NGOs have concentrated overwhelmingly on training women in traditional skills such as tailoring, embroidery, knitting, and food production, which offer little opportunity for raising income levels significantly or for future expansion (Leach, no date). The interests of women are articulated well due to involvement of NGOs. They pose themselves as an alternative to the state and the market in the process of responding to the needs of the poor (Fernando, 1997). In their competitiveness with the state, NGOs play the role of catalyst for advancement of women's cause. NGOs are very flexible in their approach through which gigantic problems are resolved (Fernando, 1997). Due to their mid position between the socialist and the capitalist projects, the NGOs are considered to be the third sector (Fernando, 1997).

The role of the NGO is basically to assist the poor people to enhance their income, education and health standards so that they may come at par with common people (Fernando, 1997). Those women who have better accessibility to resources, can get benefitted from NGO intervention (Fernando, 1997). The market insight and capacity-building for women entrepreneurs are areas for NGO's intervention (Wesely & Dublon, 2015). The role of NGOs is witnessed in the broader context of promoting community interests and public welfare rather than individual interests (Kilby, 2011). The welfare of the most disadvantaged groups remains at the centre stage for NGO intervention (Kilby, 2011). The sustainability of intervention is brought through self-help and self-reliance. The SHG model of community intervention helps in promoting micro-finance. It is very important to delve into the role of NGO in educational advancement of women through certain case study. Let's see it.

### **Case Study of Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA):**

CASA is a not-for-profit organization (NGOs) which is basically aimed at bringing social justice and self-sufficiency (Gangmei, 2014). CASA, the social action arm of all the protestant and orthodox Churches in India, represented by 24 denominations, was founded on Christian faith and values nearly six decades ago. It believes that man and woman are made equally in the image of God and are equal participants in the body of Christ. CASA committed to take side with the poor and marginalized considers

woman today the most disadvantaged. CASA strives to secure her rightful place that she emerges economically independent and socially dignified thus bringing about a perfect balance between the two faces of the same creation. It actively supports and works for a just and sustainable society. It also supports local self-governance, peace and reconciliation responding to gender mainstreaming. From creating awareness on issues like livelihood to gender mainstreaming, CASA had been building capacities of local organizations that were owned and managed by the community itself. The organization focused on mobilizing and encouraging the women to facilitate the process of change and motivated them towards social transformation. According to Oxfam (2013), around 80 per cent of farm work is undertaken by women in India. However, they own only 13 per cent of the land. The popular myth that women are caring and responsible has unwittingly appointed women the caretaker of not only household but also farm and livestock (CASA, 2019).

Issues related to land ownership, accessibility to entitlements and control, access to credit, farm equipment, subsidies, loan and loan waivers and market are important challenges affecting the economic empowerment of women in agriculture (CASA, 2019, Srivastava & Austin, no date). CASA-NEI extended full support in identifying the institutions (schools, colleges, NGOs and churches etc.) and mobilization of girls and women participants with the help of two CASA project partners in and around Shillong (CASA, 2018). CASA along with Anupama Education Society became genies for them and gave the platform to showcase their talent for a livelihood (CASA, 2018). Each day these women have kept their nose to the grindstone to make Sakhi Bhoj a triumph earning Rs.30,000 per month today (CASA, 2018). CASA empowers women through SHG and cooperative society. CASA in all its programmes uses the transformative approach. CASA has witnessed women sustain livelihood very comfortably aligning them with the earth and not by exploiting nature (CASA, 2016). Women's rights are an important parameter to understand a country's well-being. Women empowerment is an essential tool to bring about changes in their socio-economic condition. Empowerment of women needs to begin with their participation in different spheres of life. Education is a great determinant in this regard. To achieve empowerment, women have to be educated about their rights and privileges in a modern society (CASA, 2016). The women came together and planned how to use the machine and to make profit through collective working. The NGO did various vocational training to women regarding tailoring, embroidery, fabric painting. Gender equality as envisaged by CASA ensures that perceptions, interests, needs and priorities of women and men will be given equal weight in any given

context. CASA's conscious attempt to bring about a gender equitable society was a process of evolution and the historical process could be traced in order. Over the years, through various capacitation efforts of CASA, women are able to bargain their position in the society. With the help of CASA, women were able to fight against alcoholism in Varud Bhakt village in Maharashtra. Through perspective and capacity building programmes, the community was motivated to approach government for their rights. CASA staff empowered the women in their fight against alcoholism. Its 21 partner NGOs are women headed, delivering leadership roles for social change, balancing gender roles and harnessing development opportunities. The intervention is focused on building women leadership, access to rights & entitlements for livelihoods and food security and addressing gender justice-raising gender concerns.

Its goal is to empower the rural marginalized and excluded community by making them aware on their rights under the constitution (CASA Annual Report 2018-19). The organization imparted training on violence against women: punishment and provisions, sexual harassment act 2012, protection of women at workplace, charge sheet, judicial process, important structure of judiciary, FIR, witness, appointment of advocate, free legal aid, how to access free legal aid, etc (CASA Annual Report 2018-19). The participants are trained on gender analysis skills with an orientation on the need of such analysis, gender sensitive indicators, gender concepts and tools, legal legislations and laws to address gender violence, advocacy and gender budget (CASA Annual Report 2018-19).

### **Case Study of Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA):**

Established in 2000 at New Delhi, the organization called CREA works in the area of feminist human rights. It was initiated by some Southern feminists working for promotion of grassroots level women at global south (Batliwala, no date, <https://www.creaworld.org/who-we-are/about-us>). CREA works to prevent the violence and marginalization faced by women, by supporting, strengthening, and advancing the voices and participation of marginalized women in processes of positive social change ([https://www.creaworld.org/what\\_we\\_do/Initiatives/increase-voice-and-visibility-marginalised-women](https://www.creaworld.org/what_we_do/Initiatives/increase-voice-and-visibility-marginalised-women)). Violence against women remains embedded in our societies, both as a daily reality and a hallmark of crisis situations, perpetrated by State and non-State actors. Gender justice is impossible in a world where at least one in three women faces violence in her lifetime, regardless of her culture, religion, socioeconomic class, or education level ([https://www.creaworld.org/what\\_we\\_do/Initiatives/prevent-violence-against-women-and-enhance-women-s-security](https://www.creaworld.org/what_we_do/Initiatives/prevent-violence-against-women-and-enhance-women-s-security)). CREA believes that a

country can be a true democracy only when all women have the security and freedom from violence. Women must be actively involved in the political processes of a country. They must be at the forefront of reform, and their voices, perspectives, and participation must help shape positive change ([https://www.creaworld.org/what\\_we\\_do/Initiatives/prevent-violence-against-women-and-enhance-women-s-security](https://www.creaworld.org/what_we_do/Initiatives/prevent-violence-against-women-and-enhance-women-s-security)). CREA aims to advance a feminist understanding of peace and security, as part of formal and informal democratic processes, and for these processes to address violence against women.

For this, we provide women the tools, skills, and knowledge to challenge patriarchal power structures, and participate in building stable, peaceful nations, which respect the human rights of all sections of society ([https://www.creaworld.org/what\\_we\\_do/Initiatives/prevent-violence-against-women-and-enhance-women-s-security](https://www.creaworld.org/what_we_do/Initiatives/prevent-violence-against-women-and-enhance-women-s-security)). CREA provides them training in international human rights instruments and other aspects of rights advocacy, conducts institutes, disseminates knowledge resources and tools and encourages cross-regional sharing. Secondly, future leaders i.e. young women at the grassroots level, who are likely to become feminist leaders at the national level ([https://www.creaworld.org/what\\_we\\_do/Initiatives/prevent-violence-against-women-and-enhance-women-s-security](https://www.creaworld.org/what_we_do/Initiatives/prevent-violence-against-women-and-enhance-women-s-security)). CREA plans to bring eminent feminist activists together in a panel, to interact with students on issues of sexual violence, women's human rights, legal reform (including the Justice Verma Committee process) and women's representation in the media. It aims to create a cadre of leaders who would advance feminist principles and women's rights in their ongoing work on peace and security. CREA is working towards influencing, or 'shifting', the way people, organizations, and movements think and act, at both professional and personal levels. Their enhanced understanding of the interface between sexuality, gender, and rights impacts the work that they do to empower women and girls in their countries and communities. CREA was also able to support groups to seize critical advocacy opportunities. For example, CREA provided funds to a transgender rights group which works across several states in South India to fight discrimination against transgender people in COVID-19 related service delivery and relief programs (CREA Annual Report 2020-21). CREA's online capacity-building was also extended to trainers who co-lead and implement programs designed for young girls. As the lead of the All Women Count (AWC) consortium, CREA also worked with partners to amplify how community-driven efforts to organize, intervene, and resist issues of violence on the ground have deep value that is often overlooked in top down approaches (CREA Annual Report 2020-21). CREA was integrally involved in feminist organizing online during CSW through active participation in the Women's Rights

Caucus (WRC), a body of more than 200 feminist organizations from around the world dedicated to information-sharing and collective advocacy. Within the WRC, CREA worked, as always to ensure the inclusion of structurally excluded women's voices in the advocacy being conducted around CSW (CREA Annual Report 2020-21).

In addition to local government representatives, CREA also historically works with community-led organizations to ensure that they are better positioned to challenge unjust power structures in their communities. In 2020, CREA worked with its Ibtida network of 30 such women-led organizations to strengthen their organizational feminist leadership capacity (CREA Annual Report 2020-21). CREA's overall capacity building also supported the Ibtida organizations to better integrate women's and girls' issues into their programs (CREA Annual Report 2020-21).

### **Conclusion:**

Women remain in the position of transforming socio-economic structure and participate in decision making activity through their empowerment process. In this regard, the role of NGOs is immense (Hossain et al, 2017). The empowerment of women requires intervention from multiple frontiers which includes educational advancement, gender equity, economic development, awareness building throughout intervention period (Hossain et al, 2017). Through changes in law, women may get their due position in social structure and remain self-sufficient throughout their lives (Hossain et al, 2017). These organizations play the role of facilitator in awareness building activity. Due to its close proximity with community, NGOs are in a position to garner trust of people and develop close bonding. The women develop upward mobility due to regular support from these organizations (Hossain et al, 2017, Divya, 2017).

The NGOs carefully planned each activity by using their grassroots knowledge, showing their ingrained potential to empower women, and for their part, the women were enthusiastic about the changes in their lives (Zafar, 2016). It goes without saying that poor women in India are not a homogenous group, and so no one woman's voice reflects that of all, or even many, marginalized women. In India, marginalization and empowerment vary according to regions and geographical locations (Kilby, 2011). The emergence of SHGs is attributed to regular follow-ups by women's groups across the country. They have made society realize its potential for economic growth which led to strengthening of SHG in every corner of the society. Later on, the NGOs ventured into capacity building exercise of SHG members through financial assistance from government which gave a new direction to this entire paradigm (Kilby, 2011).

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