SOCIAL CONFLICT, DEVELOPMENT AND NGOs: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

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The paper elucidates on how the implementation of the development programmes undertaken by NGOs are affected by social conflicts. The manifest role of NGOs is to understand the local conflicts and accordingly design the programme for better results. However, the paper shows the divergent views on social conflict as reflected in the design of the programme as well as in the thoughts of the delivery agents (staff of NGOs) on one hand and beneficiaries (clients of the NGOs on the other). This divergent understanding is often counter productive and therefore aggravates the existing conflict instead of mitigating it. The paper concludes by suggesting a possible model to integrate conflict mitigation in the developmental programme executed by the NGOs.

I. INTRODUCTION

The discourses on development are awash with imaginative concepts (for instance, the Community Development Program, Decentralized Planning, Convergent Community Action etc). Its institutions, unfolding the development regime in a particular spatiotemporal dimension, bear the baggage of different theories and paradigms. However, an ideal type of model, irrespective of the theoretical location, seeks to unfold a developmental regime that can ensure social, political and economic progress of the targeted social order. A caveat is in order. Progress is a much contested concept. Here we use it to indicate that the intervention of the development programme must be successful in altering the power relationship in favour of the social groups or individuals who may hitherto have been marginalized by the existing social order and the development regime.

Accordingly, the primary objective of our study will be to analyze the following:

The type and extent of conflict that exist in the area of operation of the four civil actors undertaking various type of developmental intervention i.e. SEVA MANDIR: (working in the region of South Rajasthan- Bordering Gujarat); MARAG (working in the region of South West Gujarat - Kutch); MANAV KALYAN TRUST (working in the region of Northern Gujarat – Sabarkantha); UMBVS (working in the region of Western Rajashtha- Jaiselmer and Jodhpur). For more details, please refer, Annexure I.

The type of intervention that the four civil society actors have undertaken

An exploration of the sensitivity of the civil society actors towards the existing social conflict in terms of

(a)   Design of the programme, and

(b)   The structure, behaviour and functioning of the institutions which are responsible for the execution of the programme

The possible kind of model that can integrate conflict mitigation and development efforts

In this endeavour, the paper is divided into five sections. The following section provides the backdrop on the emergence of civil society as a legitimate actor in the development process. The next section then starts with drawing the linkage between development, social conflicts and the role of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and then goes on to narrate the field-based understanding of development and social conflicts as they exist in the area of operation of four NGOs[1]. The same section then dwells on the nature of development programmes their content and the process of execution. It further explores the understanding of social conflict as understood by the functionaries of the NGOs, followed by what people mean by social conflict in the current socio-economic context. Section four briefly discusses the need for integration of social conflict prevention into the development programme. The concluding section gives an outline of policy suited for mainstreaming conflict prevention in the development processes.

II. BACK DROP

Planning in India was an instrument to unfold the vision of development. The development model that planning was suppose to unfold was based on a "mechanistic world-view and scientific methodology that together created a body of scientific (natural and social) knowledge and the scientific and technological tools and techniques. The scientific knowledge and techniques, if opted, induce change in economy, society and culture, and politics. The industrialised economy - supported by modernised culture and protected by collaborating state - would be geared to serve the goal of continuous macro-economic growth which is equated with development". Therefore, this model relied on economic growth to percolate down and address the issues of marginalization and exclusion. In other words, it was expected and earnestly believed that the economic capacity of people will be inevitably enhanced as the nation's economy moves from an agricultural to industrial economy. With the enhancement of economic capacity and gradual spread of associated modernised culture, the vast gendered mass will come out of its primordial loyalties and contribute to the growth of the modern economy. In this model, as per Chakravarty[2], the planned effort failed because:

(i)   The planning authorities are inefficient in gathering the relevant information,

(ii) The executing bodies take so much time to respond that the underlying situation has by then changed.

(iii) The public agencies through which the plans are to be implemented do not have the capacity to carry them out, and the private agencies combine in strategic ways to disrupt the planning process.

Thus, the planning model as well its misplaced critique (as offered by Chakravarty) presumed that the entire information pertaining to development can be collected by a centralised agency, and if the plan fails, it was indicative of the incapacity of the public functionary to deliver. It became gradually evident that the success of the development process is not only governed by the technical soundness of the plans and the capacity of the public functionary

to deliver. The best of the plans may falter because there may emerge a disjunction between objective realities as seen by the planners and subjective preferences of the target communities. Secondly, the public functionaries executing the plan may deliberately exclude certain social groups from the development process because of their own ideological belief, social and class location. As a result, there emerged a grand disillusionment with the instruments of a centralised state because of the inherent tendency in the process of governance to create marginalisation and exclusion.

It was realised that marginalisation and exclusion do not only lie in the domain of state but their roots lie in the domain of society. It is in this context that the role of decentralised planning, implementation and monitoring of the development process acquired increasing prominence. Thus the disillusionment with the centralised state resulted in forceful advocacy for thinning down the state, especially in the execution of the developmental programmes,[3] and a vibrant promotion of civil society agents to step into the role of state for the same.

It is expected that civil society agents, with the help of local mobilisation, will better appreciate the following:

The issues of development, marginalisation and exclusion are moulded by local and specific factors, which may or may not get governed by universal and technical standardised knowledge of the constraints of development.

It may not be always possible to quantify the developmental problems.

The problem of development is not only low income and hence poverty, but are multidimensional in nature.

The civil society agents are expected to be sensitive to possible social conflict while executing the developmental programmes.

III. THE STUDY

1. Development, Social Conflicts and NGOs

This section draws a linkage between the core elements of the study, that is, development, social conflict and role of NGOs in mitigating conflict. Before we analyse the inter linkages, it may be useful to take into account the functional use of the meaning of these three concepts, viz, development, social conflicts and NGOs.

Development can be understood as the institutionalised use of public resources for addressing the socio-economic ills of the target communities. There always exists a possibility that the pattern and use of the public resources – how the resources are being used and for what particular end – may create a rift between individuals or between different social groups. A recurring contestation on the manner the resources are being used may spur social conflict.

Social conflict in this paper is understood as patterned behaviour between different social groups that results in a strained relationship between two or more individuals or between different social groups. The cause of the strained relationship is generally due to attempts on behalf of the social group(s) to maintain socio-economic status quo in face of opposition/assertion from the other social group(s). Thus conflict exists where two or more sets of actors

are mobilised to achieve incompatible goals, where the other party is perceived to stand in the way of these goals. Developmental resources always have the potency to give birth to newer social conflicts or exacerbate the existing/ dormant social conflicts.

The present literature on developmental intervention gives a primary role to civil society actors or NGOs. NGOs can be thus understood as any organised attempts to intervene in the development process through an institution that is neither established by the government, nor functions under the control of the government. NGOs are expected not only to remove the lacunae of centralised state-led intervention but also address the different social conflicts during the course of interventions, and usher in an equitable and secular developmental regime. The latter is recognition of the fact that various types of social conflicts create a developmental gap and the burden of the missing links has a drastic consequence on the poorest.

2.   Perceptions from the Field: Understanding Development and Conflict

The understanding of this section emanates from the unstructured interviews carried out by the researchers at different time over the period of four months.

Development

The term development is much debated and contested. The scores of interviews made the researcher understand that there are multiple meanings of development.

There is an NGO perspective/ vision on development, as framed by the top functionaries of the organisation, mostly as its mission statement. This vision is based on the nature of the developmental gap and consequent socio-economic problems prevalent in their area of operation, and also spells out the possible nature of intervention required. However, the operational aspect of this vision, i.e. the programmes and strategies, can be remoulded to suit the interest of the donor, while retaining completely/ partially its mission objective.

At the time of execution, the original mandate of the programme is influenced by the perspective on development of the employees of the NGOs responsible for mobilising and executing the developmental programmes. In other words, it is assumed that the delivery institutions are neutral agents of social change, discounting the fact that these individuals and institutions are located in a particular historical- political situation and class/ caste relations and are not immune to power relationships and the influence of the dominant coalition of interests operating at the local level. Moreover, they might have their own interest in stalling the reform process.

Finally there is the perspective of development of the individual/ social group who happen to be the target group for the developmental programmes. Their attitude towards any developmental programme is heavily influenced by the material needs and ideological position. For instance, their experience of labour markets of Adivasi mine workers in Banaskatha in Gujarat determines the choice of sending their wards to school. Similarly, their material needs, personal experience, beliefs and values influence the Adivasi women in Rapar block of Kutch district in Gujarat to articulate their opposition to patriarchal violence in unison, yet choose not to share the utensils of their homes with Dalit women. In effect they uphold the values ingrained in caste philosophy- the bedrock of patriarchy- of 'purity and pollution'.

Two caveats are in order. It is not to argue that these perspectives are autonomous from each other and acquire independent ideological location for ushering/ receiving the developmental programmes. In practice, all of them interact and influence each other. In other words, when the secular discourse of development, as expressed by the NGO's vision, interacts with the communal discourse of the caste and community-based social order, both of them interact and give birth to a new complex social reality. For instance, the capture of common land by Rajputs in Udaipur district brought the Bhel Adivasi as a community in conflict with the former. The social battle here was to protect the commons in the interest of drought-proofing and fodder for the cattle – both of them being secular interests – vis-à-vis the private interest of big landholder(s). However, when it comes to social articulation against Muslims and stereotyping them, the same conflicting social groups form an alliance.

Secondly, in all the above perspectives, the material marginalisation and consequent poverty and inequality remain the root cause of the socio-economic hierarchy. The vision statements of NGOs describe it in most eloquent terms, the executors of developmental schemes agree with it, though they may ignore it repeatedly, at times because of their material interest or ideological beliefs. Finally, the most painful articulation of the same is by the intended beneficiaries of the developmental programmes.

Social Conflict

The field visits reveal that the local socio-economic and political environment of the study area is structured by caste, class, gender and religion. The various social identities operate in different permutations and combinations for maintaining status quo, which in turn result in conflict. The different types of conflicts in the study area are enumerated below.

CHART I- TYPOLOGY OF SOCIAL CONFLICTS		
Class-Based Social Conflicts		
	Groups Involved	**Reason for Conflict**
Inter Class	Labour, Small and Marginal Farmers Versus Landowner, Share Croppers versus landlords	Wage Exploitation, Violent Guarding of Land and Privatised Common Property Resources, Issues pertaining to Water Market, Political Contestation
	Mine owners versus Mine Workers	Benefits etc.
	Labour Contractor versus Labour	Wages
Intra Class	Contract Labour versus Organised Labour	Benefits
	Local versus Migrants	Labour Market Space
	Medium and Small Farmers Versus Big Landowners	Canal Water Distribution. Political Contestations
	Big Farmers versus Big Farmers	Over the control of Cooperative Land Disputes, Political Contestations

'Caste'/ Community -Based Conflicts			Usually
Inter Caste	Dalits versus Upper Caste	Purity and Pollution, though now restructured, Control over Resources, Political Contestations	governed (not always) by protection of class interests
	Hindu Male versus Dalit Female	Sexual Exploitation	
Intra Caste/ Communities	Between Different Sub-Caste of Dalits	Purity and Pollution Issues	
	Adivasis versus Dalits	Purity and Pollution Issues	
Capture of Local Sate			
Inter Caste and Inter Class	Entrenched/ Dominant Versus Socially/ Politically less Powerful	Cornering of State's resources, especially on the question of livelihood diversification	
Gender-Based Conflicts			Usually governed
Inter and Intra Class as well as Inter and Intra Caste	Male vs. Female	Sexual exploitation, Violence against women and Control over Sexuality	(not always) by protection of class interests
	Women versus Women	Purity Pollution Issues, Religious Issues, 'Against Natural Social Order'	
Religion-Based			
Inter and Intra Class and by establishment organic unity amongst different castes	Muslims vs Hindus	Stereotyping Muslims (terrorist, community which infringes the dignity of Hindu Women) Labour Market issues, Political Contestations	
Conflict Between NGO's Beneficiary versus Others Villagers			
Inter Class and Inter Caste		Perceived that they are left out of Beneficiary Lists	

Any development intervention or for that matter any socio-political mobilisation has to filter through the social structures configured by the structures of class, caste, gender and religion. The balance of forces between such different social identities defines the type and intensity of social conflicts.

3.   Narrative of the Conflicts

The class-based social conflicts acquire prominence in the social domain when the dominant or entrenched class try - and are also perceived to be successful in - denying the legitimate rights/claims of other social groups who are 'below' them in the socio-economic hierarchy. The incidence of such denial ranges from capture of common pool resources resulting in denial of fodder to poorer social groups, denial of reasonable wages to labourers, forceful perpetuation of extra-economic compulsions by the employer on the employee, exorbitant rates of interest charged by landlords/ shop owners-cum-money lenders on loans taken by the labouring class as and when they fall short on their consumption requirements, capture of benefits from developmental schemes, denial of right to water - irrigation water as well as water required for household use, cornering of other public benefits announced by the state, manipulation of the local elections in their favour, etc.

The conflicts are not always inter-class in nature but also acquire an intra-class dimension in our study area. For instance, the contest over the space in the labour market often results in conflict between migrant labour and local labour. This conflict is mostly triggered off when the local labour demand market rates for their labouring efforts. In order to avoid the rightful demands of the labour, the owners of economic enterprise seek the help of a labour contractor and procure the required labouring force from a different district or state. The influx of fresh labour force and consequent conflict between the migrant labour and the local labour over labour market space facilitates the owner of the capital to depress the wages. Similarly, there emerges a conflict between the organised labourers and contract informal labourers because the former get social security benefits as well as prescribed official minimum wages. The contract labourers have to be content with market rates, which are mostly below the prescribed minimum wages, and are not entitled to any social security benefits. Further, the intra-class rivalry is not only between the labouring classes but also between owners of the capital. In our study area, this conflict gets most prominently manifested over the sharing of canal irrigation water, local elections- cooperatives as well as Panchayats - and in the fight over the control of skilled labourers.

It may be taken into account that these seemingly secular conflicts over class interests, more often than not, acquire a communal dimension. In the absence of any secular platform to articulate the common interests, the poor find the community identity the only platform for airing their collective voice. It gets mostly manifested and further concretised as conflicts between social group(s) with flow of developmental goods as well lack of them. For instance, both, lack of development and development, can be the cause and consequence of social conflict. Lack of development may spur demands by the poor households for claiming their rights over developmental resources. The demand invariably affects the entrenched/dominant social group who tend to control and channelise the developmental benefits in their favour. Similarly, development initiatives trigger off such conflicts because the poor households may perceive that they are discriminated in resource distribution. In practice, if the discriminator and discriminated happen to be members of different social groups (which they invariably are), the conflict takes the form of inter social-group conflicts.

The conflicts are prone to get articulated on community lines because of the intra-class clash of socio-economic and political interests. For instance, the rural social geography of our study areas ensures that each community not only stays in close proximity but also owns land side-by-side. Due to this historical pattern of ownership of land, there often emerges a conflict over sharing of water. The community owning land closest to the canal (entrenched social groups) not only extract maximum water but also store it in small ponds on their fields. This withdrawal of more than their share of water is at the expense of other dominant as well as marginalised communities down the line of the water channel. The worst sufferers are the tail-end users who happen to be the Dalits and Adivasis. However, this nature of conflict did not result in a natural alliance of communities excluded from their rightful share of water. It resulted in a conflict between the two dominant communities (Darbars and Rajputs) who were placed first and second in sequence on the irrigation canal line.

As a result of the conflict, there emerged an informal agreement between them facilitating some portion of water to reach the land owned by Rajputs. On the other hand, an alliance of all excluded communities may have resulted in a formation of institutions governing the sharing of water equitably. These kind of institutions could not ever be formed in the present political economy of our study area because the extra water extracted from the canal is sold to tail-end users by Darbars (a particular dominant caste group in the region) to members of same marginalised community who were excluded from their rightful claim to water. The Darbars in the areas are entrenched castes dominating the political filed as well as controlling the local economy. Such instances are numerous even among the marginalised social group, where their immediate material or social interest is a trigger for group solidarity, thereby ensuring some kind of conflict between different social groups. The most common source of conflict is the dispute over sharing the common property resources, especially fodder and water. The rampant illegal privatisation of these resources by the entrenched social groups has resulted in fierce conflict between the marginalised social groups over whatever is still left in the public domain. It has been documented by the study that Adivasis and Dalits as a group align with dominant communities against each other, for their short term interest.

The conflict becomes more intense if the developmental initiatives seek to diversify the livelihood opportunities in the face of dwindling income from agricultural produce and agricultureal labour. The new avenues are sought to be captured to their maximum benefit by the more powerful social groups.

Chart II- Stereotype Constructs of Dalit and Adivasis	
Dalits	Adivasis
Eat dead meat hence impure	
Dark skinned	Practice free sex, hence culturally not acceptable
Lazy	
Unskilled and hence fit to serve the rich and dominant through their manual labour	
Demanding and assertive without any reasons	
Thieves, one has to safeguard ones assets when they work at home (Untrustworthy)	
Culturally not fit for dignified social life (badly behaved)	
Pampered by politicians and government	
Low in intellect and intelligence quotient	

The differences between social groups and ensuing conflict over material resources gets more intensified, especially between the dominant communities and marginalised social groups, with the invoking of stereotype construct of the latter. Several developmental activists in the field pointed out that in the face of growing assertion for claiming their rights, the dominant communities are vehemently reinforcing the cultural stereotypes in order to culturally and morally suppress the marginalised groups and thereby maintain the status quo in terms of their dominant status.

The construct of stereotype images also drastically affects the social relationship between different communities. As far the social relationship between Dalits and other Hindu castes

and Adivasis are concerned, it is marked by restructured rules of 'Purity and Pollution'. In some of the regions, the Dalits are not even allowed to wear slippers in front of the higher castes. The utensils are never shared. On one hand, almost every household has separate utensils for serving them tea and refreshments, and on the other, a higher caste rarely takes water or food in a Dalit household. Any inter-caste marriage is vehemently opposed and often results in violence. There may not be any explicit discrimination in school but Dalit students feel that they are not treated on equal terms by the teachers. The Dalits invariably have separate wells. When drinking water is supplied by the government tankers, they have to stand away from the queue, and their turn comes when all other communities have filled their water pots. Such incidence of discrimination against Dalits can be multiplied with scores of examples from our study area.

It may be noted that discrimination of Dalits is not only at the hands of upper castes. The same practice has been culturally internalised by Adivasis and Muslims who consider themselves culturally superior to Dalits. Besides this, there is an internal hierarchy within Dalits too. They also invoke the upper caste norms of 'Purity and Pollution' for ensuring internal differentiation and consequent superior-inferior social status. Harijans, Bhangis, Chamars are considered to be at the lowest ladder of the hierarchy and they are meted thesame treatment by Dalit sub-castes like Balais, Meghwals, and Paswans.

The collective strength of the different castes and communities comes from robust existence of Jati Panchayats (caste assemblies). However, it is not to say that all the all such Jati Panchayats are equally powerful. The most powerful Panchayats in the study area were the ones belonging to the upper castes, namely Patels, Rajputs, Darbars and Jains. They are not only rich but are better organised and have substantial influence in the local economy, polity and society. The difference between the upper castes Panchayats and the lower castes and Adivasi ones being that the latter two are not as competent as the first in influencing the local administration and controlling the local economy. It has been observed that the lower castes and Adivasi Panchayats meet mostly on primordial issues like elopement of women of their community with men of different community/ caste. One development activist described this phenomenon eloquently saying 'It is unfortunate that the Jati Panchayats have never met over issues of natural resource management but always on issues of protecting the dignity of their caste/ community'.

Thus caste and community most jealously make all efforts to control the sexuality of their women. Endogamy, though not historically observed, has become the norm of the present social order. Any violation of the same is met with strictest punishment possible. The nature of punishment is always decided by the Jati Panchayats. However, there again exists a strain in this type of caste and community discourse. A relationship by consent between a man and woman of different castes is despised and held in social contempt, but frequent infringement of the modesty and dignity of lower caste and Adivasi women by upper caste men (invariably outside the marital boundaries) are taken as normal and often considered as the right of the rich and powerful. Moreover, Jati Panchayats hardly ever react against the violence against women within the family.

It seems that the discourse of Jati Panchayats makes a distinction between the private and public. The former implying marriage is considered a private affair and it has to be confined within the caste or community. And violation of this boundary has to be punished. Moreover, the affairs within the family are strictly private and an outside body cannot or should not interfere. In the public domain where the Jati Panchayats of lower castes and Adivasis do not command similar power and status, there is not much chance of taking a belligerent stand against higher castes. Moreover, the public domain is the 'domain of the man'. The male fraternity, it has been observed, is always united against women, irrespective of social location. The best manifestation of this is the practice of Dakan in Udaipur. Dakan is an oppressive practice against women. It is believed when the woman is possessed by an evil spirit, she has to be cured by complex religious rites which are preformed by an Ojha (exorcist). Another explanation of the same social phenomenon points out that the woman is considered to be held by an evil spirit when she starts becoming assertive, and at times violent, against the discrimination and oppression faced by her in the family and outside. On such matters, all the males of the village stand united and force the women to be taken to an Ojha. The symbol of such male unity is also reflected in the fact that all men contribute money, as per their capacity, towards the Ojha's fees.

The violence against women, irrespective of her caste and class, is the most observed phenomenon. It appears there is no specific reason for the violence. In the dominant social construct, the men are supposed to be the main breadwinners, even if the women of the household are contributing substantially to the income basket of the family (given the feminisation of the workforce and increasing casualisation of the male workforce). In this milieu, if the man of the family is not able to make an entry into the labour market, the brunt of his frustration is faced by the woman through frequent beating. Moreover, if he makes an entry in the labour market, he comes back home tired and often drunk and again the brunt of his anger is borne by the woman. Further, the women in the village are extremely discourteous to woman of other religions and lower castes. Some women refer to grassroot NGO leaders as 'misled and confused entities', under the impact of external agencies.

It was documented in the study area being that that the internal contradictions between upper castes and Dalits, between Adivasis and Dalits and between Adivasis and upper castes, and between men and women, all wane vis-à-vis Muslims and Christians. The current dominant political discourse has managed to portray Muslims as 'culturally and socially alien', 'terrorists' and 'supporters of our enemy' that is Pakistan. The Muslim men are considered to be sexual exploiters of Adivasi and Hindu women.

The discourse of right wing communalism is not only limited to Muslims but also takes a tough political stand against Christians. The missionaries are considered to be luring away the innocent Adivasis into the fold of their religion. Note that the Adivasi is now not considered smart and capable of fooling the upper castes, but an innocent person who falls into the trap of missionaries.

In our study area, there have been numerous instances of violence against Muslims and re-conversion of Adivasi Christians to the Hindu fold.

The well-orchestrated political and social discourse against Muslims and Christians is to form an organic unity among the caste Hindus and Adivasis and Dalits. The upper caste Jati Panchayats in association with right wing political parties and social collectives organised a few religious discourses in order to discipline the popular consciousness towards Hinduism. The end objective of all these attempts seems to be to maintain the current socio-economic and political status quo.

Another prominent feature of the study area was the near absence of a local state apparatus for mitigating the social conflicts discussed above. The researcher was repeatedly told that local officials and police choose not to interfere in the affairs of the Jati Panchayats. In other words, there seems be a parallel system of justice operating in our study area. Jati Panchayats seem to be all-powerful bodies in deciding disputes over marriage, inter- caste violence, issues about 'other' women etc.

In some areas, the entrenched castes have even formed their own private armies to protect the captured common land as well as their fields. For instance, in Sabarkantha area, the Patels in alliance with other upper castes have formed a private army to protect their farmlands from, what they call, intrusion of cattle belonging to Dalits and Adivasis. This in local parlance is known as Khem Rakhna . (On further probing, it was found that the entrenched castes in the village had captured all the common grazing land. In absence of grazing land, the cattle of the landless or near-landless peasants often wander on to the fields of upper caste farmers or the erstwhile common grazing land – now privatised. The men employed in the so-called private army move in on horseback and crush/ beat any cattle, and at time their owners, found near their master's fields.

There is a semblance of presence of local state machinery in the central and state government development schemes which are routed through Panchayats. However, it was documented that there is always a nexus between the Patwari, Sachiv and Sarpanch (panchayat officials) which operates in the interest of the dominant castes, though not necessarily upper castes. There is a regular violation of the Gram Sabha leading to numerous types of conflicts.

There also emerges a conflict in our area of study between the beneficiaries of NGO schemes and other natives of the village. The NGOs are perceived to be working for the 'Adivasis, Dalits and women because they have huge inflows of money from foreign lands'. Several of the relatively richer social groups feel that they have been left out of the process. These are the very people, as one NGO functionary pointed out, who create problems in the execution of their plans and programmes.

4. Intervention Issues, Content and Processes

Given the nature of social conflicts in the study area as pointed out above, one of the mandates of the study was to understand the form, content and processes of the program (design and institutions to execute them), and their sensitivity towards the social conflicts in their area of intervention. The following sub-section explores these issues.

The stated mission of all the NGOs is to improve the social and economic conditions of the communities within which they work. However, it should be crucially noted that the

services of the NGOs are more consumer-driven rather than organisationally-driven. The former implies that the NGOs are only able to work on those developmental programmes that find a convergence between the donor's interests and the needs of the local community as understood by the NGOs.

Accordingly, the activities of the NGO in the study area can be broadly categorised as environment protection, income generation, providing market linkages to marketable products, empowerment of the marginalised social groups through establishment of institutions which give them 'voice' in the planning and monitoring of the development processes, agitating against domestic violence and other anti women social rituals and practices, capital expenditure projects of housing and lift irrigation projects, promotion of organic farming etc.

All the NGOs studied have programmes specifically aimed at women. The most prominent is through the promotion of micro-credit groups and these initiatives have varying degrees of success and continuity in our study area.

Another notable initiative by two of the NGOs under our study is the promotion of a platform to discuss the reasons and impact of social conflicts, especially in their select area of operation. The avowed aim of this platform is to generate debate among youth with regard to 'increasing' communalisation and divisiveness in the society because of communal, caste and patriarchal beliefs and values.

Most of these programmes which are being executed by these organisations, more often than not, are 'stand alone' attempts to mitigate the socio-economic ills of the target groups. In other words, the donors have a definitive understanding of the socio- economic problems, and so do the local NGOs. When the understanding of these two institutions over the socio-economic problems converges, the particular developmental programme is funded. The funding source ensures dedicated staff. By its very logic, the life of the particular developmental programme is governed by the time line of the funding.

The organisational hierarchy of these organisations can be broadly classified into four levels. The hierarchy also gives an understanding of the processes of execution of the programme.

Head of the NGOs and other top Functionaries: These are primarily educated males, having a good knowledge of funding sources and who do have a commitment to ushering in social change. They are comfortable speaking with government representatives and international donors, as they are with local staff, village workers and the target community. Their professional interaction is invariably couched in the politically correct terms.

The hierarchy below them is organised either as cluster level staff or project-based staff. The former means that the same people are in-charge of all the programmes. The latter indicates that they are employed for the specific project(s) and their recruitment is limited to the period of the particular project on which they are working. If the appointment is made as cluster level staff, they regularly attend the capacity building workshops as mandated and organised by respective donors. The positive point is that their continuous stay enables them to become well-versed with the local level socio-economic and political structures. However, there is always a chance of slackness creeping in because their work becomes quite routinised and bureaucratic. It may be the case that they become quite bureaucratically

obsessed with accounts and other office affairs. The advantage of project-based staff - freshly recruited and may be specialist or having commitment for the particular issue for which they are recruited - also becomes their disadvantage because the life span of the job is short-lived and finishing the work in quantitative terms becomes most important. In practice, most NGOs have a combination of project-based and cluster level staff. They can be divided into the following ranks.

Chart III- Set of NGOs and the Institutions with NGOs		
Post	Profile of Work	In-charge of the nature of Institutions
Head of the Organisation	Managing the organisation, Liaisoning with external organisations including donors on one hand and host of functionaries and institutions down the chain of command	Donors Institutions with NGOs
Field Manager	Liaisoning between Field Staff and NGO, Directing the field staff for Mobilisation and execution of the Programme	Field Office, People's Group (users groups, self help groups, youth clubs, women's groups, watershed committees, market linkage committees etc.)
Local Supervisor	Mobilisation and Execution	People's Group mobilised for the execution of the programme
Village Level Workers		

(a) *Field Managers*- They constitute the second rung of the hierarchy and are in charge of the field office. Most of them are outsiders with varied degrees of experience. Some of them have begun as grassroot workers and have become managers. In case of large organisations, their profile of work has become quite routinised. They are mostly located at the block level, but travel frequently to the district headquarters where the head office of the NGO is located. In other words, they also work as an effective liaison between the top NGO functionaries and the grassroot workers. The profile of their work is to direct the field level staff in terms of formation of various village level people's groups for mobilising as well as execution of the developmental programmes.

(b) *Local Based Workers and Supervisors*- Local workers are often not from the same village and may hold a professional degree in social work or are at least graduates. They may be working there either because of their commitment or for want of better jobs. They supervise the execution of the developmental programmes and spearhead mobilisation of the target group and execution of the schemes towards the end objectives of such programmes.

(c) *Village Level Workers* – Village level workers are mostly locals. Their attitude in most cases is firmly entrenched in the local social structure. They are recruited because they were able to articulate their opinions in the village level meetings when they were not employed but were amongst the 'target group'.

The interaction with the NGO staff positioned at various hierarchical levels as well as the beneficiaries of their programme tells us about their perception of social conflict. This is discussed in the following section.

5.   The Perspective of NGO Staff towards Social Conflicts

Role of External Agents and Social Conflict- In view of the objective of the research, we had extensive deliberations with the top functionaries with regard to their understanding about the social conflicts in their area. All of them unanimously agreed that various types of social conflicts persist in their respective areas. However, they also seem to converge on the point that that social conflict(s) acquire prominence and manifest in the public domain when an external agent uses the social identity of the locals for meeting their own vested social/political interest. In other words, they seem to opine that social conflicts per se do not flare up unless identities are used for meeting a partisan end. Their argument implies that rural people are able to develop a harmonious form of organic relationship amongst themselves. This harmony gets disturbed by their social identities getting articulated in the public domain, often to meet an end objective, which is not the common good, but emanates from vested political interests

The field managers and the local workers are mostly aware of the local social structure and the social conflict emanating from it. Their attitude towards the social conflict in their area of operation is of *recognition or evasiveness or indifference.* They do recognise that social conflicts hamper equitable development efforts. At the same time, they seem to be evasive in ushering in a completely secular development regime due to the fear of roadblocks which may come up from powerful and entrenched social groups resulting in a crucial waste of time and energy. The attitude of indifference was also documented, which in turn allowed the entrenched social groups to succeed in their attempt. This is generally due to convergence of class interest or ideological beliefs. Further, the senior field managers and local workers (in terms of age) seem to be quite insensitive to gender-related social conflicts, both in the public as well as private domain, prevalent in their area of operation. Their vocabulary of social conflicts is often couched in politically correct words which are mostly used out of context and also without substantive reference to context. It was also apparent during discussions that their understanding of social conflicts relating to caste, religion and class, does not much impact their execution of developmental efforts. The task at hand is often taken as a bureaucratic exercise demanding execution as per the time line. Their interactions with the target groups have also resulted in a patron-client relationship similar to the relationship between the patronising state functionaries and the local population. This is because they seemingly command resources which bring in benefit to the locals. This stature also gives them the prestige and social status to interact with government officials, especially the police department.

The village level worker's perception about the social conflicts reflects the nature of local society. In spite of their deep knowledge about the various types of social conflicts, they mostly consider them as given, i.e. a part and parcel of the 'unchangeable' social

order. The interactions also tell us that the village level workers have at times been party to regressive and reactionary social conflict that happened to take place in their area of residence. However there has been a marked change in the assertion of women workers for their rights against patriarchal values and the social order.

6- The Perspective of People towards Social Conflicts

The perception about people with regards to the social conflict perhaps forms the most interesting core of this sub-section. On the basis of response from various sections of the people, this sub-section has picked up common threads and was successful in generalising four sets of responses. These are discussed below:

Entrenched/ Dominant Castes & Class- This section of people feel that the democratic system of governance in the country has pampered several sections of the population (read Dalits and Adivasis). The entrenched and dominant argue that due to this pampering, the Dalits and Adivasis have started asserting and claiming things which are not due to them. They argue that all the efforts of the government and NGOs are directed towards the so-called poor, thereby ignoring their rightful claims. They vehemently put forward the view point that these people (read Dalits and Adivasis) are poor because they are lazy and not willing to work, and waste all their money in liquor. Further, they opine that when Dalits and Adivasis have nothing to fall back upon, they fight for a share in their wealth and at times the NGOs and the government helps them.

Dalits and Adivasis – This section of our respondents were unanimous in their view that their dignity is frequently infringed by the rich and powerful of the village and they are never treated at equal terms. Some of them also felt that there cannot be friendship between 'them' and 'us'. As one of the respondents pointed out 'we are workers and they are masters…we can never be friends'. The conflict, in their opinion, erupts when the frequent infringement of dignity transcends the limit, or during time of elections, or when the powerful capture the developmental resources which are crucial for their survival.

Women - There are lot of variations in response between the women respondents, depending on their caste and class locations. However, they all seem to converge on the view point that the cause of conflict is primarily because of infringement of their dignity and capture of material resources. Most of the lower caste women in particular seem to be concerned with their inability to move freely in the upper caste residential area. The upper caste women seem to despise the lower caste women because of their 'polluting' food habits. As far as the relationship with men was concerned, most of them despise domestic violence and forceful extraction of their earned money by their men.

Muslims- The Muslims seem to blame the various social and religious collectives in their area for the cause of the conflict between them and Hindus. Further their labour market entry also brings them in conflicting position with other labouring Dalits, Adivasis, and caste Hindus because they are not always favoured, and rather they are the last in preference. As per their understanding, they are also highly disfavoured by the government officials when it comes to developmental benefits under central or state government schemes.

7. Urja Ghar & Social Conflicts

As pointed out before, two of the NGOs under study have launched a platform for youths, where they can deliberate and discuss issues pertaining to social conflicts in their area of operation. This platform is called Urja Gha (literal translation implies entergising people). The executives manning this platform, along with the village level workers, are more sensitive to social conflicts in their area of operation than the top functionaries of their respective organisations. They are also able to provoke debate and discussion on sensitive social issues which were not normally taken up for discussion in this form earlier. However, the functionaries of the Urja Ghar seem to see most of the conflicts in isolation from each other and not as interconnected problems of social life. Another limitation is that it is again a stand-alone programme with no link with livelihood programmes.

IV. THE NEED TO INTEGRATE CONFLICT PREVENTION IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

It has been repeatedly pointed out by commentators and experts that development processes are political and social processes. They cannot be reduced to econometric models and technical knowledge. The best of plans prepared by the most analytically brilliant technical experts could not stand the test of social dynamics. Any developmental programme that does not take the existing social conflict into account will further de-legitimise civil society, ensure the capture of local state apparatus and further contribute towards maintaining socio-economic status quo. Policies helping the poor enter the market process, (livelihood diversification, entrepreneurship, credit facilities), enhancing their basic capabilities (health, education, social empowerment programmes), removing agriculture distress (irrigation, watershed development programmes), and other well-intended measures, turn against people if they do not consider the ongoing social conflict in which they are implemented.

It is argued here that preventive actions can be mainstreamed into development assistance, i.e. towards the causes of reducing and progressively stopping the potential and actual social conflict. Mainstreaming conflict prevention in development has a greater chance of reducing the vast socio-economic inequality and helping in ushering in a caste/class and gender just social order.

V. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Governance and Institutions

The objective of any the governance of conflict should reinforce, build and strengthen institutions which can manage social conflict peacefully. Eventually, peaceful negotiation of conflict is the best guarantee of local level development. Three types of institution will be particularly useful for any conflict prevention attempts which have to be built and institutionalised simultaneously. They are as follows:

(i) Macro Level- Macro level initiatives have to be at two levels, simultaneously feeding into each other. On one hand, this would require sensitisation of the arms of the local state apparatus which are responsible for executing the development schemes. This would require a strong network for like-minded civil society organisations

working at the district level, and their constant interaction with the local state officials. It will also mean advocacy from above, coupled with constant mobilisation from below in order to make the local political process (Panchayati Raj Institutions) more participatory. Further, this process has to relentlessly pursue and ensure the security of the vulnerable as well as quick and fair response from the local justice system. On the other hand, it will also require that donors and their local partners (NGOs) launch programmes and schemes that contribute to building up productive assets, and allow the poor and marginalised to enter the market and negotiate with the market process without the loss of their dignity. In other words, policies and programmes have to be chalked out for the creation of productive wealth where the roles of the poor are broadly delineated in the creation of India's capitalist modernity, not just as labour but as the owners of capital or productive assets. This is most essential because it will give them confidence to assert their rights openly in the public domain. No amount of systematic understanding of their oppression and exploitation will help them to assert their rights against the powerful and entrenched who also happen to control their livelihood avenues.

(ii) Meso Level- This level of work also has to be done simultaneously and on different fronts. An important task at the field level office will be to prepare an atlas of social conflicts in the area of their operation. The profile of such a conflict has to be a part of a base line survey document where any livelihood or other socio-economic capability enhancement project is to be implemented. This would entail gathering information on the following aspects:

What is the history of social conflict(s) in the area and what type of social conflict(s) perpetuates?

Which are the most social conflict(s)-prone sub-areas within the given area of operation?

What are the structural reasons for such conflict(s) (socio-cultural, political, and economic)?

What issues can be considered as proximate cause(s) of conflict(s)?

What issues can further escalate or prolong the conflict(s)?

Who are the actors involved in the conflict(s)?

What are the interests of the actors, their positions and their capacities?

What are the possible solutions for conflict management and peace?

Simultaneously, it is also imperative that the field level officer and her staff is sensitised to the various dimensions of the conflicts. This will require that the field level officer is not a technical or a bureaucratic person but has a multi-disciplinary approach. Her main objective has to be conflict prevention and resolution, which should in turn lead to local level growth and development, and not the other way round. Sustained and regular capacity building workshops have to be organised for the benefit of the field level officer and her staff. Most important, this responsibility of field level supervision cannot be shared by two different specialists. This division

invariably creates a hierarchy of priorities, where it is always assumed that technical and qualitative achievement is more important than unquantifiable achievement like conflict resolution and consequent development. Further, the complete field level team has to be a part of the preparation of the local social conflicts atlas.

(iii) *Micro Level* – The most important task of conflict prevention and resolution has to be done at the micro level, where the actual execution of the programme takes place by the field level workers. An important task at this level would be to try and ensure the de-mobilisation of the platforms (already identified by the conflict atlas) that promote and sustain social conflicts. Along with this demobilisation, the field level staff has to mobilise the same people on a secular platform where discussions and debates can be conducted towards the amicable solution of the social problems. At this level, a synergy with regard to prevention of social conflicts with multiple-people organisations existing in the area has to be brought about.

(b) Development of Indicators

It is essential to conceive some indicators for understanding the level of conflict as well its mitigation and its impact on the development process. This would give some understanding of the results of the efforts and possible help in replication of the experiments, if successful.

(c) The Media, NGOs and Social Conflicts

The role of local media and advertising campaigns has to be fully exploited for bringing out the adverse results of the social conflicts and positive impact on the development process in case of successful mitigation efforts.

Notes

1.   A brief profile of these civil society organisations is discussed in Annexure I.

2.   S. Chakravarty, Development Planning, The Indian Experience

3.   India's Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) document states: "..It is expected that the state yields to the market and the civil society in many areas where it, so far, had a direct but distortion and inefficient presence....it also includes the role of the state as a development catalyst where, perhaps, civil society has better institutional capacity....It means extension of the market and civil society domain at the expense of the state in some areas." (2002:181, Xth Five Year Plan. Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi).

ANNEXURE I

(a) SEVA MANDIR: (South Rajasthan- Bordering Gujarat)

Objective - Empowerment of the least advantaged in society

Target Group and Area - Rural population in Udaipur district in Rajasthan

Intervention - Strengthening livelihood of village communities; building local capabilities in areas of health, education and gender equality; creating autonomous village level institutions

(b) MARAG (South West Gujarat - Kutch)

Objective- Empowerment of the disadvantaged, especially the Maldhari community in Kutch

Target Groups and Area - Maldhari community in Bhuj and Rapar blocks in Kutch and Chotila, Sayla and Patadi blocks of Surendranagar

Intervention- Focus on natural resource development and human resource development, while also trying to do away with age old reactionary customs and traditions like bride purchase and child marriage.

MANAV KALYAN TRUST (Northern Gujarat – Sabarkantha)

Objective - Empowerment of the poor, tribal and rural people particularly the farmers, cattle-rearing families and destitute women, and providing them a common platform to voice their concerns

Target Group - Tribal localities in disaster-prone districts of Northern Gujarat and Kutch region

Intervention – Natural resource management; creating avenues for empowered livelihood opportunities; housing projects; forming micro-credit groups for women; health and education; riot victim rehabilitation ;sexual health projects.

UMBVS (Western Rajashtha- Jaiselmer and Jodhpur)

Objective- Building up collectives of rural artisans and keeping alive the traditional craft of weaving communities.

Target Group- Organising artisans in villages of Jaisalmer and Jodhpur, especially the Dalits and women

Intervention – Organising weavers and facilitating them with market linkages, with a focus of enabling the women of the families to get a share in the economic activities