



The Role of Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) in Promoting Family Rights and Supporting Vulnerable Families: A Review of Strategies, Challenges, and Best Practices

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ABSTRACT

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in promoting family rights and supporting vulnerable families worldwide. These organizations focus on addressing various social issues, such as child labor, abuse, and exploitation, while advocating for policies that protect children's rights. NGOs provide essential services like education, healthcare, and nutritional aid to marginalized families, enhancing their socioeconomic status. They also engage in capacity building, community empowerment, and policy influence to create sustainable change. By collaborating with governments, communities, and policymakers, NGOs help ensure that vulnerable families receive the support they need to thrive. The study on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting family rights and supporting vulnerable families revealed significant positive impacts. NGOs' interventions in education, nutrition, and healthcare led to improved socioeconomic development outcomes for vulnerable families. The study found that NGOs' education aid reduced financial burdens on families and improved learning experiences. Nutritional aid contributed to improved health and well-being, while health aid reduced financial burdens and improved access to healthcare. A statistically significant relationship was found between NGOs' aid and the socioeconomic development of vulnerable families, indicating a strong correlation. Overall, the study highlights the crucial role NGOs play in supporting vulnerable families and promoting their socioeconomic development. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in promoting family rights and supporting vulnerable families. Their interventions in education, nutrition, and healthcare have a significant positive impact on socioeconomic development outcomes. By providing essential services and support, NGOs help alleviate poverty, improve health and well-being, and enhance access to education. The findings underscore the importance of NGOs' work in empowering vulnerable families and promoting their socioeconomic development. Continued support and collaboration with NGOs are essential for ensuring the well-being and prosperity of vulnerable families and communities.

Keywords: NGOs, Family Rights, Vulnerable Families, Family Support Systems, Human Rights and Family Empowerment.

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Introduction

The concept of family rights is anchored in international human rights law, recognizing the family as the fundamental and natural group unit of society entitled to protection by the state and society [1]. Globally, conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) underscore the importance of ensuring that families enjoy social, economic, and cultural rights necessary for their stability and well-being [2]. Regional frameworks, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the European Social Charter, have further reinforced the commitment of states to uphold family protection as a human rights priority [3].

Despite these instruments, disparities persist, especially in developing regions where poverty, displacement, and weak governance undermine effective implementation. Thus, the global and regional perspectives converge on one principle: strengthening families is integral to achieving sustainable development and social justice [4].

Families are central to the social, emotional, and economic fabric of society. They provide the first environment for human development, socialization, and value transmission [5]. However, the structural inequalities that shape modern societies often expose families to multiple vulnerabilities. Poverty, unemployment, displacement due to conflict or climate change, and gender inequality continue to threaten family stability [6].

Vulnerable groups such as refugees, widows, persons with disabilities, and female-headed households are disproportionately affected by social and economic disruptions [7]. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, economic instability and weak social safety nets heighten the risk of family disintegration, child neglect, and domestic violence. Hence, supporting families, particularly the vulnerable has become a global development and humanitarian priority aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 1, SDG 5, and SDG 10), which advocate for poverty eradication, gender equality, and reduced inequalities [8].

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have evolved significantly over the past decades, transitioning from small voluntary organizations to global actors in humanitarian aid, advocacy, and social development [9]. Their growth has been driven by increasing globalization, donor funding, and public trust in civil society institutions [10]. NGOs play critical roles in filling service gaps where state capacity is limited, often providing education, healthcare, and psychosocial support to vulnerable families [11]. They also contribute to shaping policy agendas by advocating for family-friendly legislation and human rights protections. Particularly in post-conflict and low-income regions, NGOs act as mediators between local communities and international agencies, ensuring that assistance is tailored to local needs [12]. Their flexibility, grassroots connections, and innovative approaches have made them indispensable actors in promoting social inclusion and protecting family welfare globally.

The role of NGOs intersects directly with social policy and community development, as they often operate at the frontline of social protection initiatives. By addressing the structural determinants of poverty and inequality, NGOs contribute to building more resilient and inclusive communities. Their interventions align with human rights-based approaches that emphasize empowerment, participation, and accountability [13]. In many countries, NGOs collaborate with governments to implement social programs targeting family welfare, such as microfinance for women, family counselling, and education for marginalized children [14]. Moreover, through advocacy and partnership with international bodies, NGOs play a vital role in translating global human rights norms into local realities. The synergy between NGO initiatives and social policy frameworks ensures that vulnerable families are not merely recipients of aid but active participants in shaping their social and economic futures [15].

This review explores the multidimensional role of NGOs in promoting family rights and supporting vulnerable families within various socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Its primary objective is to synthesize existing literature and evidence on NGO-led interventions, examining their effectiveness, sustainability, and adaptability across different regions. The review also seeks to identify the strategies NGOs employ to strengthen family welfare systems, the challenges they encounter such as funding limitations, political constraints, and operational barriers and the innovative practices that have yielded measurable social outcomes. Furthermore, the review aims to situate NGO efforts within the broader frameworks of social policy, community development, and human rights promotion. Analyzing best practices, it provides insights into how NGOs contribute to social cohesion, economic empowerment, and the realization of family rights in line with international commitments.

This work not only offers an academic synthesis but also highlights policy implications relevant to governments, international organizations, and civil society actors. Ultimately, the purpose of this review is to advance scholarly understanding and inform evidence-based policymaking, emphasizing the need for collaborative and sustainable partnerships to protect and empower families in vulnerable conditions worldwide.

Conceptual and Theoretical Background

Understanding the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting family rights and supporting vulnerable families requires a strong conceptual and theoretical grounding. The concept of family rights is deeply embedded in international human rights law, which recognizes the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society deserving of state and social protection [16]. These rights encompass the family's access to social, economic, and cultural resources essential for their stability and dignity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) have been instrumental in reinforcing these principles, highlighting the family's role as a cornerstone of social development and human well-being [17]. However, in many societies, families, especially those in low-income or conflict-affected regions, face multiple and overlapping challenges such as poverty, gender inequality, displacement, and social exclusion [18]. These challenges not only threaten the stability of families but also impede their ability to fulfill critical nurturing and socializing functions that sustain communities.

The notion of vulnerability within the context of family rights has been conceptualized as a condition of exposure to risk and inability to cope with shocks that affect the family's welfare and functioning [19]. Vulnerability is multidimensional, encompassing economic, social, and psychological aspects that interact within the broader socio-political environment [20]. Families facing poverty, unemployment, displacement, or health crises are particularly vulnerable to social disintegration, abuse, and marginalization. In many cases, these families lack access to state welfare programs or legal protections, which increases their dependency on civil society organizations, including NGOs, for support and advocacy [21]. Addressing such vulnerabilities requires an integrated approach that connects humanitarian assistance with rights protection and social empowerment.

NGOs have become indispensable actors in addressing these challenges by filling critical gaps left by state institutions. They are defined as independent, voluntary, nonprofit organizations dedicated to addressing social, economic, and humanitarian issues [21]. Historically, NGOs evolved from charity-oriented organizations into strategic agents of social transformation, capable of influencing policy and promoting structural change [23]. Their roles now extend beyond direct service delivery to include advocacy, community mobilization, and rights-based programming that targets family welfare and inclusion [24]. Through flexible and participatory approaches, NGOs operate at the grassroots level to provide education, health services, economic empowerment, and legal assistance to vulnerable families [25]. In many developing regions, NGOs serve as intermediaries between marginalized families and government agencies, ensuring that family needs are represented in policy formulation and program implementation [26].

Several theoretical frameworks provide insight into how NGOs contribute to promoting family rights and supporting vulnerable groups.

One of the most influential is the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), which integrates human rights principles such as equality, participation, and accountability into development practice [27]. This approach redefines beneficiaries as rights-holders and development actors as duty-bearers, emphasizing empowerment and structural transformation rather than mere service provision. Similarly, Social Development Theory highlights the need to integrate social and economic policies to enhance human welfare and promote inclusive development [28]. NGOs adopting this framework implement community-driven projects that combine livelihood enhancement with social protection such as microfinance initiatives for women, parenting education, and child protection programs. Another relevant model is Ecological Systems Theory, which views families as systems embedded within broader social, institutional, and policy environments [29]. This perspective helps NGOs design interventions that address the multiple levels, individual, community, and structural that influence

family well-being. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive basis for understanding the multidimensional roles of NGOs in family support systems. The relationship between NGOs, human rights, and social policy is deeply interconnected. NGOs not only complement state efforts but also challenge and shape policy agendas to ensure inclusivity and equity. By translating international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into local actions, NGOs ensure that family rights are operationalized through programs that promote gender equality, poverty reduction, and social protection [30]. In this way, NGOs act as both implementers and advocates, advancing accountability and social justice [31]. Their collaborations with international organizations like UNICEF, UNHCR, and Save the Children further reinforce their capacity to address complex issues such as family reunification, child protection, and gender-based violence [32, 33].

Table 1. Classification of NGOs and their primary family-support roles

NGO Type	Typical Activities (family focus)	Example organisations	Evidence / Notes (citations)
International INGOs	Policy advocacy, large-scale service delivery (child protection, emergency response)	Save the Children; World Vision; Oxfam	Advocacy and large-scale delivery documented [34]
National NGOs	Community programmes, capacity building, legal aid	BRAC (Bangladesh); numerous national CBOs	Strong community integration and livelihood models [35]
Community-based / Grassroots NGOs	Local mobilisation, culturally-sensitive programmes	SEWA (India); local child protection groups	Effective for local ownership and cultural sensitivity [36]
Faith-based NGOs	Welfare, shelter, counselling, community networks	Caritas; Islamic Relief	Critical in humanitarian settings and community trust networks [37]

The Role of NGOs in Promoting Family Rights

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have emerged as key actors in advancing family rights across the globe, particularly in contexts where government structures are weak or social protection systems are inadequate. Their work encompasses advocacy, service provision, empowerment, and policy reform, all directed toward ensuring that families, as fundamental social units, can live in dignity and security. This section discusses the multifaceted role of NGOs in promoting family rights under specific thematic subheadings.

Advocacy and Policy Influence

Advocacy forms one of the central pillars of NGO engagement in the promotion of family rights. Through campaigns, lobbying, and policy dialogue, NGOs push for the recognition and enforcement of family-related rights in legal and institutional frameworks [39]. They work to ensure that national policies align with international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child [40].

Organizations like Save the Children and Human Rights Watch have successfully influenced family welfare legislation in areas such as child protection, reproductive health, and domestic violence prevention [41]. NGOs also serve as watchdogs, monitoring government compliance with family-oriented international obligations and producing shadow reports that hold institutions accountable [42]. Moreover, by amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, NGOs help transform family issues from private struggles into matters of public and policy concern [43].

Service Delivery and Social Support

In addition to advocacy, NGOs play a direct role in providing essential social services to vulnerable families. They often operate where state systems are either under-resourced or absent, ensuring access to healthcare, education, housing, and legal aid [44]. Service delivery models vary but are typically guided by human rights-based and needs-based approaches.

For example, organizations such as World Vision and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) provide psychosocial support, nutrition, and emergency relief for displaced families in conflict zones [45].



Figure 1. The roles of NGOs
Source: [38]

NGOs also run family counseling centers and shelters for victims of domestic violence, thereby strengthening protection mechanisms at the grassroots level [46]. By complementing state efforts, NGOs contribute to social cohesion, resilience, and family reintegration in post-crisis situations [47].

Capacity Building and Empowerment

Empowerment-oriented programs form another major component of NGO intervention in family rights promotion. These initiatives target the socioeconomic and psychological dimensions of family well-being, with a strong focus on gender equality and self-reliance [48]. Training programs in entrepreneurship, parenting skills, and literacy improve household capacities and reduce dependency on external assistance.

For instance, the Grameen Foundation's microfinance schemes have empowered women to make independent financial decisions, contributing to family stability and poverty reduction [49]. Similarly, UNICEF's family-centered development programs promote community participation, child welfare, and gender-sensitive family planning [50]. Through empowerment, NGOs facilitate social transformation from within families, promoting sustainable livelihoods and intergenerational well-being [51].

Community Mobilization and Awareness Creation

Community mobilization is another powerful approach used by NGOs to promote family rights. It involves engaging community members as partners in identifying, designing, and implementing programs that address local family challenges [52]. Through participatory methods, NGOs encourage communities to own the process of change and sustain interventions beyond project cycles.

Awareness creation campaigns through media, workshops, and community forums educate families about their rights and available support systems. For example, Family for Every Child (2021) integrates traditional values with modern rights-based frameworks to foster inclusive community systems that protect children and support caregivers. Such localized engagement ensures that interventions are culturally sensitive, contextually relevant, and socially acceptable [53].

Collaboration and Partnerships

NGOs also leverage partnerships and networks to strengthen their impact in promoting family rights. Collaboration with governments, international agencies, and local organizations allows for knowledge sharing, coordination, and resource pooling. Multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as those between UNICEF and regional NGOs facilitate the implementation of large-scale family welfare initiatives and improve the alignment of NGO programs with national policies [54].

Partnerships with research institutions also enable NGOs to generate evidence-based data to guide family interventions and monitor outcomes. Through global networks, such as the International NGO Council on Violence against Children, NGOs contribute to shaping international standards and best practices [55]. Hence, partnerships enhance legitimacy, efficiency, and the overall sustainability of NGO contributions to family rights protection.

NGO Strategies for Supporting Vulnerable Families

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a transformative role in supporting vulnerable families by implementing

multidimensional strategies aimed at alleviating poverty, enhancing social inclusion, and improving access to basic human needs. NGOs employ diverse strategies ranging from direct welfare interventions to digital innovations that foster resilience and empowerment [56]. This section explores these strategies through thematic dimensions, highlighting their significance and practical outcomes.

Direct Welfare Interventions (Food, Housing, and Healthcare)

Direct welfare support remains the most immediate and visible strategy adopted by NGOs to assist families in crisis. These interventions typically involve the provision of food aid, emergency shelter, healthcare access, and sanitation services [57]. Humanitarian NGOs such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provide emergency health and nutrition programs for families displaced by conflicts or natural disasters [58]. In regions experiencing chronic poverty or health epidemics, NGOs establish community clinics and nutrition programs to prevent child malnutrition and maternal mortality (World Health Organization [59]. For example, Action Against Hunger implements family-centered nutrition initiatives that integrate medical treatment with food assistance, ensuring sustainable health recovery [60]. Direct welfare interventions not only save lives but also create entry points for NGOs to deliver complementary developmental services such as livelihood and education programs.

Livelihood empowerment and Income-Generating Initiatives

Economic empowerment lies at the core of sustainable family support. NGOs recognize that poverty is both a cause and consequence of family vulnerability; therefore, income-generating initiatives are essential for building long-term resilience [61]. Many NGOs implement microfinance schemes, vocational training, and agricultural cooperatives to enhance family income security. For instance, BRAC's "Ultra-Poor Graduation Program" equips vulnerable households with productive assets, entrepreneurship training, and financial literacy, leading to improved food security and social mobility [62]. Similarly, Heifer International's livestock-based model enables families to generate sustainable income through cooperative farming, creating ripple effects across communities [63]. Livelihood programs often include mentorship and savings groups, fostering self-reliance and collective empowerment among low-income families [64].

Child and Maternal Welfare Programs

Protecting mothers and children remains a central focus of many NGO strategies, given their heightened vulnerability in socioeconomically disadvantaged settings. Child and maternal welfare initiatives encompass health, nutrition, education, and protection interventions designed to enhance survival and development outcomes [65]. Save the Children's "Every Last Child" campaign, for example, focuses on ensuring equitable access to education, nutrition, and healthcare for children in marginalized communities [66]. NGOs like Plan International and PATH also lead maternal health programs aimed at reducing preventable deaths through community midwifery, prenatal care, and family planning education [1]. Furthermore, NGO-run child protection programs emphasize the prevention of abuse, exploitation, and neglect, often working in coordination with

local social welfare departments [2]. These efforts contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3 and SDG 5) on health and gender equality.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Projects

NGOs play an essential role in challenging gender inequalities that perpetuate family vulnerability. Through advocacy, education, and capacity-building, NGOs address barriers such as limited access to resources, gender-based violence, and exclusion from decision-making [3]. Women's empowerment initiatives often include leadership training, reproductive health services, and legal literacy campaigns. For example, the Global Fund for Women supports grassroots organizations that promote economic justice and reproductive rights, while NGOs like Women for Women International facilitate post-conflict empowerment programs integrating livelihood support with gender rights education. Evidence suggests that gender-focused interventions improve not only women's autonomy but also family well-being and community development outcomes [4].

By centering women in development, NGOs help dismantle patriarchal structures and promote inclusive family rights.

Education and Psychosocial Support Programs

Education and psychosocial support are key components of NGO strategies targeting vulnerable families. Education fosters social mobility and intergenerational progress, while psychosocial support addresses trauma and strengthens mental health within family systems [5]. NGOs such as Save the Children and Room to Read focus on improving access to quality education for children from low-income or displaced families, emphasizing literacy, life skills, and safe learning environments [6]. Simultaneously, psychosocial support initiatives by organizations like the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and War Child provide trauma-informed counseling for families affected by war, migration, and disaster [7]. These programs are particularly critical in post-conflict or humanitarian contexts where family stability and child development are severely disrupted. By combining educational access with emotional recovery, NGOs promote holistic family well-being.

Table 2. Key NGO Strategies for Supporting Vulnerable Families

Strategy	What it does	Illustrative NGO/program	Evidence of effectiveness
Direct welfare (food, shelter, health)	Immediate needs relief (shelter, food, clinics)	IFRC; MSF emergency health missions	Emergency life-saving impact documented in crisis settings [8]
Livelihood empowerment	Asset transfers, microfinance, vocational training	BRAC, Grameen, Heifer models	Graduation and microfinance show sustained income gains [9]
Child and maternal welfare	Immunization, maternal care, child protection	UNICEF-supported clinics; Save the Children	Reductions in child mortality & improved service access reported [10]
Gender equality / women's empowerment	Leadership, legal literacy, reproductive health	UN Women, CARE, Women for Women Int.	Improves decision-making and family welfare outcomes [11, 12]
Education and psychosocial support	School access, trauma counselling	Room to Read; IRC psychosocial programmes	Improves learning and mental-health outcomes among affected families [13, 14]
Digital and community innovations	mHealth, cash transfers, e-learning	World Bank/UNICEF digital pilots; World Vision vouchers	Digital cash and mHealth increase reach and responsiveness [15]

Best Practices and Successful NGO Models

Globally, several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have demonstrated outstanding effectiveness in promoting family rights and supporting vulnerable families through well-structured, community-centered, and sustainable interventions. The most successful models share key best practices, including participatory program design, multi-sectoral partnerships, adaptive governance, and evidence-based interventions. These elements enable NGOs to build trust, ensure sustainability, and amplify their developmental impact. One of the critical best practices among effective NGOs is community participation in program development and implementation. Research has shown that interventions designed with direct input from beneficiaries are more likely to address real needs and sustain long-term engagement [16]. Organizations such as BRAC in Bangladesh and the Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India exemplify this model. BRAC's approach integrates microfinance, education, and health programs that empower families economically and socially, lifting millions out of poverty through a bottom-up development framework [17]. Similarly, SEWA's participatory model emphasizes collective organization and capacity building for women in the informal sector, leading to improved family welfare and gender equality [18]. These participatory models demonstrate that when communities are treated as partners rather than beneficiaries, programs achieve greater sustainability and social acceptance.

Another hallmark of successful NGO models is multi-sectoral collaboration. NGOs that build strong partnerships with governments, private institutions, and international donors can leverage diverse resources, expertise, and influence for greater impact. For instance, Save the Children and World Vision International work closely with national health ministries to deliver integrated family and child welfare programs across developing nations [19]. These collaborations enhance efficiency and scale by aligning NGO objectives with national development frameworks. The partnership model also enables data sharing and policy advocacy, leading to structural reforms in areas such as child protection and maternal health [20]. Furthermore, evidence-based programming and adaptive learning have emerged as best practices among high-performing NGOs. Organizations like CARE International and Oxfam employ robust monitoring and evaluation systems that allow continuous program refinement based on data-driven insights. CARE's "Community Score Card" model, for example, uses participatory assessment tools to enhance accountability between service providers and communities, leading to measurable improvements in health and education outcomes [21]. Similarly, Oxfam's "Gender Justice Framework" systematically integrates gender equity and social inclusion across all family and community projects, enhancing empowerment outcomes and resilience [22]. These approaches underscore the importance of embedding research, feedback, and adaptability into NGO operations.

A further best practice is financial sustainability through innovative funding models. While donor dependency remains a global challenge, successful NGOs diversify their income through social enterprise initiatives, local philanthropy, and public-private partnerships. For example, Grameen Foundation utilizes microcredit schemes that recycle loan repayments into community development projects, creating a self-sustaining support ecosystem for vulnerable families [23]. Likewise, World Vision's Child Sponsorship Program generates long-term funding stability by linking individual donors with family-oriented development outcomes [24]. These models reduce financial volatility and enable NGOs to maintain continuity in service delivery, even during funding downturns. Finally, technology-driven and innovation-focused strategies have become defining features of modern NGO success. The integration of digital tools enhances outreach, transparency, and efficiency in program delivery. For instance, UNICEF's U-Report platform uses mobile technology to gather feedback from young people and families, influencing policy discussions

and service design [25]. Similarly, Plan International has adopted data-driven mapping systems to identify vulnerable households and deliver targeted family support interventions in real time [26]. These technological innovations not only enhance operational efficiency but also democratize access to information and strengthen participatory governance among communities.

In essence, the success of NGOs in promoting family rights and welfare depends on adopting models that are inclusive, collaborative, financially resilient, and innovation-oriented. The integration of community voices, partnership synergies, evidence-based learning, diversified funding, and technology-enabled solutions has redefined the landscape of family-focused development work. As global challenges such as inequality, climate vulnerability, and post-pandemic recovery persist, scaling these best practices will be crucial for ensuring that NGOs continue to serve as catalysts for sustainable and equitable family well-being worldwide.

Table 3. Best practices and successful NGO models (Replicable elements)

Best Practices	Core element	NGO example (model)	Outcome / Evidence (citations)
Community participation	Participatory design, local governance	BRAC integrated programmes (community committees)	Enhanced sustainability and local ownership [27]
Multi-sector partnerships	Govt + private + NGO coordination	Save the Children + Ministries partnerships	Scaled service delivery and policy uptake [28]
Evidence-based adaptive programming	M&E loops, learning cycles	CARE Community Score Card, Oxfam adaptive programming	Improved accountability and program outcomes [29]
Financial diversification	Social enterprise, donor mix	Grameen/World Vision sponsorship & social business	Greater financial resilience and program continuity [30]
Tech-enabled targeting	Digital registries, mCash	UNICEF U-Report, World Bank pilots	Better targeting, faster aid delivery [31, 32]

Challenges Faced by NGOs in Family Rights Advocacy

NGOs working to promote family rights and to support vulnerable families are increasingly confronted by a range of interlinked challenges that reduce their effectiveness, limit sustainability, and sometimes compromise their ability to deliver rights-based interventions.

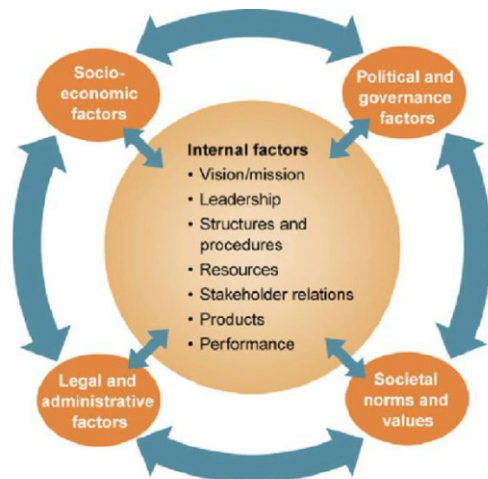


Figure 2. External and internal factors influencing NGO capacity Source: [33]

One of the foremost challenges is monitoring, evaluation, and accountability. In Musoma, Tanzania, many NGOs report insufficient funding, a shortage of skilled personnel in monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and inconsistent reporting requirements from multiple donors, all of which hinder rigorous tracking of program performance and outcomes [34]. Similarly, a study in Bangladesh revealed that while NGOs often ensure accountability to funders and upper management, they have weak accountability mechanisms toward beneficiaries, especially in decision-making and evaluation phases, making

participation superficial rather than meaningful [35]. In Kenya, the APHIA Plus project in Kakamega County shows difficulties in sustaining donor-initiated M&E systems at the service-delivery level, particularly due to narrow donor mandates and limited local capacity to maintain such systems without external support [36].

A second major challenge concerns regulatory and political constraints which restrict the operational freedom of NGOs, especially in advocacy and policy engagement. A large-scale comparative study (“Death by Law”) noted that increased regulatory restrictions disproportionately impact rights-oriented NGOs, particularly those engaging in advocacy, by imposing burdens such as registration requirements, mandated oversight, and restrictions on foreign funding (Fransen *et al.*, 2024). Such regulation often leads NGOs to self-censor or shift their activities toward non-controversial service delivery rather than systemic change threatening to political interests. Furthermore, funding limitations and dependency remain pervasive. Many NGOs rely on short-term project funding tied to specific donor agendas, which affects continuity of support for families when projects end. Sustaining comprehensive family rights programmes that include legal advocacy, psychosocial support, or long-term welfare interventions becomes difficult in such environments. Even when resources are available, they may be earmarked in ways that leave little flexibility for adaptation to local contexts [37].

In addition, coordination and overlap challenges complicate NGO work in many settings. Multiple organizations may deliver similar services in the same geographic areas without adequate communication or planning, leading to resource duplication and inefficiency. This is especially problematic in times of emergency or when systemic interventions (such as legal reforms or large-scale parenting programs) require consistency [38].

Moreover, socio-cultural barriers and beneficiary accountability also limit NGO reach and impact. In Bangladesh, for example, despite NGO programmes being popular, actual engagement of beneficiaries in evaluation and decision making is often limited; participation in many cases remains tokenistic [39]. Cultural norms, stigma, or distrust of external actors can also reduce uptake of family rights interventions in certain communities.

Taken together, these challenges underscore how NGOs are constrained not just by lack of goodwill or dedication but by structural, financial, political, and social forces. For NGOs to meaningfully promote family rights, interventions must address these barriers: building local capacity for M&E; advocating for enabling legal and regulatory frameworks; diversifying funding; and cultivating genuine engagement with beneficiaries. Without such enabling conditions, many programmes may fall short of their transformative potential [40].

Table 4. Common challenges and mitigation strategies for NGOs

Challenges	Why it matters	Mitigation / best practice	References
Funding instability & donor dependence	Short-term funding disrupts continuity	Diversified income, social enterprise, reserve funds	[41]
Restrictive regulation & political risk	Limits advocacy & foreign funding	Legal advocacy, local partnerships, rights-aware programming	[42]
Weak M&E & downward accountability	Hard to prove impact / adapt	Invest in local M&E capacity, participatory monitoring (Kinyina & Mathayo, 2022)	[43]
Coordination gaps / duplication	Inefficient resource use	Joint platforms, shared data systems (OECD, 2021)	[44]
Cultural resistance & social norms	Limits uptake of rights programs	Culturally-informed engagement, faith/community	[45, 46]

Regional Perspectives and Comparative Experiences

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operate within markedly different regional contexts, which shape both their strategies for promoting family rights and the obstacles they face. In Sub-Saharan Africa, NGOs frequently combine humanitarian relief with long-term community development: in many post-conflict and fragile states they deliver food, health and child-protection services while supporting community reconciliation and rebuilding of social services. However, limited state capacity, uneven donor presence, and weak social protection systems constrain scaling and sustainability [47]. Lessons from the region emphasize the need for NGO-NGO-government partnerships that strengthen national systems rather than create parallel services.

In South Asia, NGOs have been especially prominent in advancing women's rights, livelihoods, and child welfare through grassroots mobilisation and micro-enterprise programs. Programs that integrate income generation with rights-education (for example, combined livelihood and gender-norms interventions) have shown positive family-level outcomes, but persistent gender norms and patchy legal enforcement mean NGOs often must balance service delivery with strategic advocacy [48]. Comparative experience suggests that linking local female-led groups to broader policy networks improves both legitimacy and influence.

Latin America presents a strong tradition of grassroots and

social-movement NGOs that combine legal advocacy, land and indigenous rights, and community organising. These actors are effective at politicising family-level injustices and influencing progressive policy reforms, but they also face backlash and political polarization that can limit program continuity (Inter-American [49]). The regional lesson is that legal and rights-based strategies work best when paired with broad coalition-building and protection mechanisms for activists.

In Europe, NGO activity tends to emphasise policy advocacy, service integration, and welfare-state partnerships; NGOs often function as policy partners or contractors for state services, which gives them leverage but also constrains autonomy [50]. Finally, in the Middle East and North Africa, NGOs working with refugee and displaced families operate in high-security and politically sensitive contexts, where access, registration, and donor restrictions frequently limit scope; here, coordination with UN agencies and protection-focused programming are central [51].

Comparatively, effective NGO approaches combine local legitimacy, adaptive programming, and formal partnerships with state and multilateral actors. Regional differences underline that scalable family-rights models must be contextually adapted: what works as grassroots mobilisation in Latin America may require different safeguards and partnership models when transferred to fragile states in Africa or conflict-affected zones in the Middle East.

Table 5. Regional comparison: dominant NGO approaches and constraints

Region	Dominant NGO approaches	Strengths	Primary constraints
Sub-Saharan Africa	Humanitarian + long-term community rebuilding	Rapid crisis response; community networks	Weak state systems, donor volatility [52]
Latin America	Rights/legal advocacy, social movements	Strong legal advocacy & indigenous mobilisation	Political backlash; volatility [53]
South Asia	Grassroots livelihoods, women's empowerment	Strong microfinance & community groups	Gender norms, uneven enforcement of rights [54]
Europe	Policy advocacy, welfare partnerships	Strong policy integration; contracting roles	Less autonomy (NGOs as contractors) [55]

Future Directions

As global social structures evolve, the future of NGOs in promoting family rights and supporting vulnerable families depends on their ability to adapt to emerging development paradigms, technology, and policy trends. NGOs must not only continue providing direct social services but also transition toward systemic, rights-based, and sustainable models of engagement that align with international development goals and community-led resilience frameworks.

One key future direction involves mainstreaming digital innovation and data-driven programming.

The digital transformation of social welfare systems offers NGOs opportunities to improve targeting, transparency, and coordination in family-support programs. [56] notes that digital social registries and interoperable data systems can enhance access to social protection and improve accountability. NGOs can leverage these tools to expand family outreach, particularly through mobile health (mHealth), e-learning, and digital cash-transfer systems that directly support vulnerable households [57]. However, digitalization must be pursued with safeguards to prevent exclusion of digitally marginalised groups and to uphold privacy and ethical standards [58].

Another emerging direction is the strengthening of NGO–state–private sector partnerships to enhance scalability and sustainability. Collaboration between civil society, governments, and businesses is increasingly recognised as essential for achieving inclusive family policies [59]. Public–private partnerships (PPPs) can mobilise resources for education, health, and social protection while allowing NGOs to retain their advocacy role. Such alliances can also foster innovation by integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives with community-driven models, enabling sustainable livelihoods and social entrepreneurship at the family level [60]. Moreover, there is a growing emphasis on localisation and community ownership. [61] and [62] stress that strengthening local NGOs and community-based organisations ensures more culturally responsive and sustainable outcomes. Future development frameworks should decentralise power and funding to local actors who possess deeper contextual understanding and legitimacy within families and communities. This approach aligns with the “localisation agenda” adopted in the Grand Bargain commitments, which aim to ensure that at least 25% of humanitarian funding goes directly to local actors [63].

Policy advocacy and research integration are also pivotal future priorities. NGOs need to bridge the gap between service delivery and evidence-based policy advocacy. Strengthening collaboration between NGOs, academia, and policy institutions will enhance data-driven decision-making and inform national family and social protection policies [64]. Additionally, investing in longitudinal research on family resilience, gender dynamics, and intergenerational well-being will enable NGOs to design adaptive and future-proof interventions.

Finally, NGOs must prioritise resilience and climate adaptation in family support frameworks. Climate change increasingly affects vulnerable families through displacement, livelihood loss, and food insecurity. Integrating climate adaptation into social protection and family support programs will be critical for building resilience among the most affected populations [65]. In essence, the future of NGOs in promoting family rights will depend on how effectively they balance their traditional humanitarian roles with transformative, technology-enabled, and locally grounded strategies. By embracing innovation, partnership, and policy engagement, NGOs can ensure that families remain at the centre of inclusive and sustainable development.

Conclusion

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) remain vital actors in advancing family rights and social welfare across different regions. Through advocacy, service delivery, and capacity-building initiatives, NGOs have filled critical gaps left by limited governmental interventions, particularly in developing contexts. Their focus on protecting vulnerable families, promoting gender equality, and improving access to education and healthcare highlights their central role in achieving sustainable and inclusive development goals.

Despite their successes, NGOs continue to face numerous challenges, including funding constraints, limited accountability mechanisms, and political restrictions that hinder their operations. These constraints often affect program sustainability and the ability to influence long-term policy change. However, innovations such as digital integration, community-led models, and multi-sectoral partnerships have shown promise in enhancing NGO efficiency, transparency, and impact.

Looking forward, strengthening collaboration among governments, NGOs, and private actors will be crucial for scaling effective family-centered interventions. The future of family rights advocacy lies in promoting localization, data-driven decision-making, and adaptive strategies that address emerging global issues such as inequality, conflict, and climate change. By reinforcing accountability and embracing innovation, NGOs can sustain their pivotal role in safeguarding family rights and fostering resilient, equitable societies.

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Conflict of Interest

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