

CONTRIBUTION AND CHALLENGES OF VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS WORKING WITH WOMEN

A PRIMER OF THE STUDY REPORT



VOICE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR
VANI



Voluntary Action Network India (VANI)

Contribution and Challenges of Voluntary Organisations working with Women: A Primer of the Study Report

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Context:

Women have been fighting for their rights since ages. They are denied access to political institutions, public services (education, healthcare) etc.¹ Attempts by women's groups to fight for their human rights and lawful entitlement have met with resistance. The Indian constitution provides many legal safeguards to women and special provisions are made for their social and economic growth. Despite these special provisions, women in India face all types of disparity in the public sphere. The status of women in India has always been a controversial one where on the one hand they are worshiped in the form of a goddess and on the other hand, they are subjugated by its own society. There is a huge dichotomy regarding the status of women. This fall in status has led to socio-economic and religious-cultural deprivation of women. Evil customs like sati, purdah, child marriage, enforced widowhood, dowry system, gradually crept into the society and this led to of a decline in the status women inside and outside the house. Across social groups women face discrimination in many areas. The harsh reality since ages is that the women population is still fighting for their basic rights without equal development as men and thus their status remains the same.

1. Sarah Byrne and Devanshu Chakravarti, *Inequality, Power and Social Exclusion in India*, brief no 5, March 2009

Empowerment of women is high on the agenda in the development plan and policies. VOs have the potential to initiate this process and they have been actively involved in planning process and implementing of various policies related to women. They are also supplementing government efforts to work together. They are responding to the needs and aspiration of the vulnerable groups. VOs have been making tremendous efforts for the upliftment of the women. They are fighting for their rights and making them more self reliant.

Contribution of VOs working towards issues of women

The contribution of VOs is very crucial in development in the Indian social milieu. VOs are involved in a lot of programmes for women like contributing to their socio-economic empowerment, health awareness, gender sensitization, vocational training, education, employment, etc. Their involvement in the development issues have led to many changes at the structural and policy level. It has given impetus to the development prospects of the women rights. There have been certain restrictions in terms of social, religious values, belief's and norms which at times restrict women to actively participate in social change. Many development organizations have made efforts to reclaim the declining status of women.

VOs over the years have linked the needs and concerns of women to various critical issues on the national, regional, and global agenda. This widespread agitation gave visibility to the issue of women which can no more be taken nonchalantly. In India, the VOs can be divided into three categories namely:

1. Research and advocacy
2. Service delivery
3. Right and entitlement

Research and advocacy

VOs are carrying collaborative advocacy research with the community to fill knowledge gaps on the current policies and programmes. These provide important inputs to policy makers and planners in ensuring inclusive development. They empower

| WOMEN AND THE VOTE - THEN AND NOW | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 1960s | 1970s | 1980s | 1990s | 2000s |
| Bihar | 567 | 573 | 625 | 701 | 783 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 614 | 667 | 660 | 671 | 761 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 675 | 802 | 957 | 970 | 1,029 |
| Tamil Nadu | 949 | 917 | 926 | 923 | 961 |
| Kerala | 981 | 1,034 | 1,017 | 1,027 | 1,046 |

(female voters for every 1,000 male voters in assembly elections)

Source-<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/rising-female-voter-turnout-the-big-story-of-50years/article5326782.ece>

women by conducting training programs that promote a solid base of conceptual, theoretical, and practical skills.

There are various VOs involved in propagating the issues of women and advocating inclusion of legislation, safeguarding the interest of women in the framework of local or national policy making. There are various feminist VOs that help in the dissemination of information on issues like sexual harassment and domestic violence and challenge the law to counter gender discrimination.

Some of the various advocacy campaigns are:

- Thematic advocacy campaigns
- Creating resource material for the media
- Public events such as screening of films, plays, and seminars
- Participation in coalition-based advocacy

Networking is also an important component of advocacy. It can be seen that women's organizations prefer to have limited network and partnership with individuals and organizations connected to their area. For example, **crime prevention and victim care (PCVC)** extensively works with hospitals and police stations and in some cases local VOs who refer domestic violence cases to them. There are very few which attempt to build

relationship beyond their area of concern. The VOs are also involved in creating feminist consciousness to rural areas, reaching out to the main constituency.

Training

The VOs have various training programmes in the community and work with the community-based organizations, collectives, and the various women's groups.

These trainings and capacity building workshops also facilitate and create close linkages and bond with the grassroots level communities. This leads to formation of various social movements which influences policies and strengthens local efforts towards achieving the development of women.

Service delivery

VOs are attempting to encourage more women to come in the fore-front and form a strong leadership in the various women related movements and issues. Various VOs are building a strong line of leadership for the women movement. The organizations are targeting young girls to work with them and empower them. The VOs are pursuing innovative ideas to broaden the outreach programmes. They are making efforts in bringing change in caste-based discrimination through effective grassroots-level intervention.

Some of the programmes carried out by VOs are:



Source-<http://raihaneh.com/news/1745/Women-Empowerment-Program-in-India>

- **Awareness Generation Programme** where VOs are involved in discussion and debate, share information about women's issues and influence public opinion. They engage with educational institutions, police, judiciary and community groups. They lobby for socio-legal changes with different state agencies.
- **Skill enhancement training** - They conduct and organize training programmes for non-governmental organizations working on women's rights and other social issues. Some of the issues covered in such trainings are gender and development, advocacy, health and reproductive rights, organizational development and management, communication skills, handling technology, etc.
- **Community participation** - VOs work closely with community and attend various meetings and undertake exposure visits. This collective reflection leads to a better understanding of the issues.

- **General workshops** – The VOs attempt to bring women belonging to different support groups to meet each other. These workshops are conducted so that women can come on a common platform, discuss their struggles and challenge the unjust male patriarchy that exists in the society. The workshops are also used to discuss various services and activities to provide information on various rights related to women. They do these activities through discussions and games and help them connect their personal struggle with the initiatives of the women’s movement to challenge the existing unequal social order.

Rights-based entitlement

VOs working on rights-based approach have always been a bone of contention in the Indian scenario. There is some amount of opposition from the government towards these organizations. The efforts of the rights-based organizations cannot be ignored. This approach directly impacts the vulnerable group and the VOs become the voices of the unheard. They are making tremendous contribution both in a formal and informal set up.

Thus, keeping in mind the various harsh realities and oppression faced by them, the VOs are constantly struggling to achieve enforcement of human rights in ensuring women’s upliftment, and

development and equality with regard to food, water, and livelihood. International human rights framework and corresponding Indian constitutional legislation and policies are used as benchmark.



Source-http://www.gulabigang.in/women_empowerment.html

Political Empowerment

In order to protect and make full use of their rights, women must be given right to participate in politics. VOs are building capacities and making the women aware of their legal and political rights, issues and opportunities like knowing the relevant government schemes, structure and operation of panchayats, existing development programmes, and legal provision with implication on women's lives such as laws pertaining to dowry, divorce, and child marriage.

Economic Empowerment

VOs are encouraging women to be economically dependent. They strive to make them wage earners and empower them so that they can make financial decisions. Groups like Mahila mandals, and

participatory self-help groups provide a platform through which women are involved in credit and saving initiatives aimed at meeting their financial needs and providing initial investment for micro enterprises.

Some of the core issues the VOs work on are:

Domestic violence: Women's groups were successful in their struggle to introduce a legal provision which established domestic violence as a crime which the police were obliged to register and act upon under section 498 A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Under this, violence inflicted on a woman by her husband or family was declared a non- bailable, non-cognizable offence.



Source-<http://www.mehk.in/women-empowerment/>

Women's right to health: VOs are making efforts for equal accessibility towards health care for women. They are spreading awareness at both the national and international levels. VOs are actively involved in decision making and carrying out various health care initiatives. They are providing knowledge and education about maternal health to women and their families to make them aware of various health facilities. They are stressing

on girl's access to education in order to delay early child bearing and empower women.

Right to education: Across India, especially in rural areas, girls remain illiterate and are oblivious of their



Source - http://cqpublish.dev.undp.org/content/india/en/home/operations/projects/womens_empowerment/

own fundamental rights. This is due to low-quality education, lack of awareness among parents, shortage of teachers, poverty, and lack of sensitivity towards girls. Many efforts have been made for creating awareness about girl's education in India by the VOs.

Recommendations

- Social mobilization approach should be integrated while working with women especially in rural areas. The women at the grass root level should be involved in the various social movements and social action so that they are very much part of the whole process towards bringing a constructive transformation to women's rights. There should be focus on the definitive and positive focus on the disadvantaged.

- VOs should promote more acceptance of women's organizations in the society. There is a need to bring attitudinal change among the development functionaries, people's representatives, and civil society organizations.
- Equality, justice, and gender sensitization should be an important agenda of the organizations.
- Women's groups should have more visibility so that local stakeholders and community people are well aware of their existence within their vicinity.
- It's very essential for VOs to build trust within their local community for any kind of successful intervention and more effectiveness. VOs should be able to stimulate active participation of women. They should also be able to involve beneficiaries in the decision making processes.
- VOs should make efforts in spreading more awareness on government flagship programmes related to women's rights and focus on advocacy.

LIST OF VANI PUBLICATIONS

Economic Policy

1. GATT, WTO and the Developing Countries (Hindi & English)
2. Proposals for National Union Budget for 1993-94: An alternative to the Fund Bank dictated Union Budget (English)

Panchayati Raj

1. Local Self-Governance: The Role of Voluntary Organisations (English & Hindi)
2. Nagarpalika (74th Amendment) Act, 1992: The Role of Voluntary Organisations (English and Hindi).
3. State Panchayat Acts: A Critical Review (Hindi and English)

Social Development

1. Summary of Declaration and Programme of Action of UN World Summit for Social Development (Hindi & English)
2. State Reports on Social Development: Assam; Bihar; Gujarat; Haryana; Karnataka; Kerala; Maharashtra; Madhya Pradesh; Orissa; Tamil Nadu; Uttar Pradesh; West Bengal.
3. Community Based Disaster Management: an information Guide (Hindi & English)

Law and Rules

1. Report of the Task Forces: To review and simplify Acts, Rules, Procedures affecting Voluntary Organisations (Hindi & English)
2. Laws, Rules and Regulations for the Voluntary Sector-Report of the South Asian Conference (English)
3. Action Plan to bring about a collaborative relationship between Voluntary Organisations and Government (Hindi & English)
4. FCR Bill 2006 (Marathi).

Promoting Voluntarism

1. Youth & Voluntarism (Hindi & English)
2. Into the Media World: An Introduction to Media Relation for Voluntary Activists.
3. Voluntary Development Organisations: The Guiding Principles (English & Hindi)
4. Non-Governmental Organizations: Guidelines for Good Policy and Practice (Hindi and English)
5. Voluntary Organisations Responsible Partners in Nation Building (English)
6. Voluntarism & Politics (English & Hindi)

General/Issues Concerning the Voluntary Sector

1. India's Living Legends Savants of Voluntary Action (English)
2. Voluntary Organisations Responsible Partners in National Building (English)
3. The Election Process –Voters Know-How (English & Hindi))
4. Voluntarism & Govt: Policy, Programme & Assistance
5. Visioning Voluntary Sector in Emerging India: A Report on National Convention 2006
6. Status of NREGA in Chattisgarh: Key Issues and Hard Options, A Report on State Tribunal 2006 (English & Hindi)
7. Civil Society Security and Aid in India : A report on Roundtable December 2006 (E&H)
8. National Policy on the VS & Eleventh Five year Plan 2007
9. Civil Society Accountability Principles and Practice (India Toolkit) (English)
10. Enabling environment for Voluntary Organisations A Global Campaign (Book)
11. Model Policies for International Good Governance in Voluntary Organizations
12. The Hand Book in Good Governance for the Voluntary Sector
13. Status of the Voluntary Sector in India A Report
14. Status of the Voluntary Sector in India (Primer) English & Hindi))
15. Civil Society Engagement in Aid Effectiveness Discourse
16. Changing Dynamics Between VOs and Private Sector
17. Involving Voluntary Organizations in Governments Plans and Projects
18. India's Global Footprints



About Christian Aid

Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists that the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty. They provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes. They are an agency of their churches in Britain and Ireland and are mandated to work on relief, development and advocacy for poverty eradication. Christian Aid's work was founded on Christian faith, inspired by hope and acts to change an unjust world through charity – a practical love and care for neighbours.

They work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. They are part of a wider movement for social justice.

They provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

From April 2012, Christian Aid's work has been focused around the goals and objectives identified in their corporate strategy, 'Partnership for change – the power to end poverty'.

About VANI

Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) is an apex body of the Voluntary Organisations.

- Founded in 1988 to act as a promoter/Protector and collective voice of the voluntary sector.
- Base of 8000 non-governmental organisations spread in 25 states of India.
- Resource Centre for publications, research work, articles, important documents and information about and related to the voluntary sector.

Objectives:

- As a platform, to promote voluntarism and create space for voluntary action.
- As a network, attempt to bring about a convergence of common sectoral issues and concerns for building a truly national agenda of voluntary action in India. In addition, facilitate linkages of various efforts and initiatives of the Indian voluntary sector, which succeed in strengthening a united and sustainable movement of change.
- As an association, work towards fostering value based voluntary action and long term sustainability especially amongst our members.

Areas of work

- Promoting practices of good governance in the voluntary sector.
- Strengthening networks
- Articulating independent voices of the sector.
- Research and advocacy of policies and law affecting the voluntary sector.



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