

Status of Voluntary Organizations in Disturbed States

A Study Report



VOICE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

VANI

Voluntary Action Network India

Status of Voluntary Organizations in Disturbed States: A Study Report

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SECTION-I

Background of the study

Over the past few years, voluntary organizations have increased in considerable number, acquired greater importance and significance and put up endeavors in the field of social development. Also, they have played a crucial role in overall development and upliftment of the society by supplementing government efforts. However, the recognition and contribution of the sector is ignored by all the segments of the society. Therefore, VANI felt that there is a dearth of literature assessing the status of the VOs working in the country. Based on the need VANI initiated this exercise, wherein the contribution, impact and challenges of the VOs were documented and experiences and lessons were acknowledged in most disturbed states in India.

Being an apex body of voluntary organizations, VANI undertook this exercise of preparing eleven¹ state level citizens report as part of its advocacy. This initiative was taken to get field level data on the experiences related with law enforcement machineries, support mechanisms from the state, internal governance system, identity of the sector and funding scenario. Based on this report, concerns of voluntary sector were articulated and shared with policy makers, media and public to dialogue on how to nurture enabling environment for the voluntary sector.

This Study was based both on an analysis of secondary information and primary data collected through a structured questionnaire and field visits. Also, VANI conducted workshops in these states among the local voluntary organizations. This was done not only to solicit their feedback on the process but also develop ownership of the process. This was considered as the key step towards reducing the isolation within the voluntary sector and step towards collectivization. Based on the citizen's report of eleven states a short summary of the voice of the sector – state wise was brought out that summarizes the narrative report in such a way that one can acquaint with the information, concise analysis and main conclusions. The primer has been widely shared with the members and other networks apart from being uploaded on VANI's website.² In the end, it was realized that this has to be an ongoing initiative where such reports are also shared with media, academia, government and other stakeholders. Therefore,

¹ Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Orissa, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh West Bengal and North-east region

² <http://www.vaniindia.org/publication.php>

in the current year, VANI identified five disturbed states i.e. Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, North-east region and Odisha to discuss and highlight the issues of VOs working in these critically disturbed states in detail. In these states there has been violation of human rights that has curtailed the activities undertaken by voluntary organizations. This study will further help the policy makers understand better the issues of harassment of VOs and creating an enabling environment for the sector.

SECTION-II

Introduction

India is a vast country and its constitution, programs and policies have played pivotal roles in the field of socio-economic development. The welfare, growth and development of the people are the constitutional obligation and responsibility of the central government and the states. There are numerous initiatives, schemes, flagship programmes and policy launched by the government of India to bridge the education, health and nutrition, livelihood and infrastructure divide. The objective is to ensure growth, improvement in the living standards of the people and well-being. In spite of the efforts by the government there are states and regions that are marginalized, underdeveloped and disturbed. The unjust land acquisition, exploitation of water and forest resources undermines the rights of the local people that affect the social welfare status of the poor - health, food security, rural governance and access to entitlement. There has been insurgency in many parts of the states. They have been in the grip of more than one form of conflict: secessionist insurgencies, separatism within India, struggles for local autonomy, inter- and intra-tribal clashes, local versus immigrants, language tussles, boundary clashes and so forth.

In context to above challenges, it has been observed that the VOs have acquired greater importance and significance than before because the administration has not been able to reach the people, especially the poor and weaker sections.³ Intervention of VOs in these disturbed states has played a critical role in bridging the gap; contributing towards the welfare of the people; fighting for their rights be it forest rights act (FRA), right to education (RTE), right to information (RTI), right to food (RTF), etc.

³ <http://www.ijbmi.org/papers/Vol%282%294/version-1/D241935.pdf>

VANI since its inception has been working on the issue of enabling environment of voluntary development organizations in India. Over the past few years, through its interventions, VANI has observed that small and medium voluntary organizations (VOs) working in conflict zones have been facing newer challenges, which in a way restricts the democratic space and rights provided by the Constitution of India. Although, majority of laws, which regulate the sector, are national but their interpretation and implementation vary from state to state. Similarly, the registration laws are also state subject. The space to participate in the development efforts also varies from state to state. These have resulted in violation of human rights, curbed the activities of VOs and evoked issues with government machinery. Hence, VANI made an attempt to document the experiences and lessons in selected states that are termed as disturbed i.e. Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and North East Region.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand and analyse the issues of harassment in 5 target states
2. To undertake advocacy with various stakeholders especially the policy makers
3. To design and articulate strategies for creating a better enabling environment.

Research Methodology

The present report is an outcome of the collective efforts of several people. A participatory procedure was followed in preparing this report. The approach and methodology used in the study evolved through regular state and regional consultations with VOs.

Research and Documentation: The study is based both on an analysis of secondary information and primary data collected through workshops, state visits and direct interaction with VOs.

Secondary information: Information available at the government websites, VO networks and past studies on the sector were put together. In addition, data and inputs were collected from background papers, reports and journals.

Primary Information: primary data was collected through state, regional and national level workshops conducted by VANI in these five disturbed states.

SECTION-III

Issues of Five Disturbed States

The study is an effort to understand the current status of VOs in the state specific regions. As the VOs are divided due to varying thematic, geographic and strategic orientations, it is very difficult to understand one common thread that can address their problems in one go. While undertaking research based advocacy with the national government, one factor which plays important role is to document and record such variations. However effort is done to articulate the issues based on the information provided by the small and medium voluntary organizations during various workshops as well as the analysis done by the researcher. The report is written to highlight the challenges and recommendations in improving the status of voluntary organizations.

The issues of five disturbed states are discussed below:

Bihar

Bihar is prone to multi-hazards like flood, earthquake, high wind velocity, cold wave as well as recurrent village fires in summer. Flood has been a recurrent phenomenon in the state for quite some time. The total flood prone area in the State of Bihar is 73.06 percent (68.8 thousand square km) of its total geographical area, while it stands at 17.2 percent of the flood prone area and 22.1 percent of the flood-affected population in the country. The flood situation is most severe in the northern plains of Bihar. Every year large tracts of land gets inundated and large number of villages is marooned. It affects their crops/food, livestock, property and life very often. On the other hand south Bihar is prone to dry spells.⁴

The problem of this area is immense however, poverty, issues of livelihood, outreach of social security schemes, deep rooted caste system and feudalism are major. Among all, it is realized that the community need regular employment for livelihood in the first place.⁵

⁴ Annual Activity Report, April 2012-March 2013, Integrated Development Foundation, Patna

⁵ Ibid

“A significant aspect highlighted in the consultation was the lack of case studies and best practices collected from the field. It was noticed that the participants were upfront in citing examples of harassment and challenges faced by them but because of fear they were not ready to put it in writing. The VOs should own up and highlight the issues and challenges faced by them.”

- *The National Consultation on Enabling Environment in Critical States held on 23 July 2014 at New Delhi*

Contribution and Impact of VOs in Bihar

The VOs in Bihar are instrumental in running the government run programs and schemes initiated by the central and state governments through which the VOs can have direct access to resources for the socio-economic development. The programmes and activities being run includes:⁶

- a) Health education and promotion of primary health care with an emphasis on reproductive and child health, water, sanitation and hygiene.
- b) Income generation, ensuring just wages, enabling access to the government employment generation programmes.
- c) Non formal education and an equal opportunity of participation for the girl child.
- d) Conscious raising on relief and rehabilitation interventions and running pilots on disaster preparedness.
- e) Community organization, social mobilization initiatives and outreach to cover majority of the areas spread over other districts of Bihar.
- f) Training and capacity building of the organizational staff and other stakeholders, information, education and communication through thematic publications on issues relevant to the development of the marginalized.

Key Issues and Implications

1. ***Entry of Agencies from Outside:*** With the entry of VOs from outside the state, local organizations get deprived of opportunities. VOs from outside are found to work in a more technical manner, whereas organizations working at the local level have shortcomings regarding information and expertise.

⁶ <http://www.ssvk.org/activities.htm#>

2. **Skill Gap:** The VOs are faced with inadequacies among their staff that intensify the challenges before them. There is a lack of expertise in computers, English language that concerns project formulation, documentation, preparation of data base, presentations, which causes a number of hardships for the VOs.

A comparative analysis of the foreign contribution received during 2011-12 to 2009-10			
State	Amount (in crore) FY 2011-12	Amount (in crore) FY 2010-11	Amount (in crore) FY 2009-10
Bihar	179.31	144.11	138.78
Andhra Pradesh	1258.52	1176.79	1324.87

Source: FCRA Annual Report of 2009-10, 2010-11 & 2011-12

3. **Implementation Challenges:** Infrastructure like poor communication, absence of transportation facilities, bad roads and connectivity, blackout & lack of electricity adds to challenges faced by the VOs. Field level activities remain highly challenging during floods and other natural disasters. Foreign donors also take greater interest in assisting those VOs which have a better infrastructure, whereas the others face several difficulties.
4. **Government schemes and programmes:** The present system of issuing tenders has led to an erosion of the dignity of VOs. The introduction of the system of tenders has increasingly led to competition among the VOs vying for tenders. The VOs are dependent upon government assistance.

APMAS a technical resource organization and a public-private partnership initiative is a registered non-government organization, in Andhra Pradesh. Over the years, it has evolved into a National Level Resource Organization, providing technical and managerial support services to strengthen the women self-help movement in India and to promote livelihoods. During 2013-14 it provided services in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, North-East (Assam & Manipur), Odisha, Rajasthan, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal through direct involvement and network partners.⁷

- APMAS got another prestigious collaboration in Bihar with SPUR, (Support Programme for Urban Reforms), a state government initiative.⁸

⁷ <http://www.apmas.org/annual13-14.pdf>

⁸ Ibid

Recommendations

- **Timely release of Funds:** The government aided projects should be released as per the stipulated time period. This will ensure smooth functioning and completion of the activities. Alternatively a dialogue should be established with the government to discuss the issues faced by the voluntary organizations from time to time.
- **Resource mobilization:** There is a need to explore and find an alternative source of funding and focus should be on finding new ways to raise resources. The VOs should strategize to tap individual donations and organizations and build a corpus for financial sustainability.
- **Internal capacity building for grass root organizations:** Training and capacity building of the organizational staff should be deliberated. This will enhance the skill of the existing human resources and they will remain updated about the latest facts, policy changes and development in the sector.
- **Credibility of the Voluntary Organizations:** At present there is no universally accepted credibility ranking mechanism in place, which can segregate the good organizations from the bad ones. Therefore, there is an urgent need of establishment of universally accepted credibility ranking mechanism in the voluntary sector, which can help in maintaining the quality standard and protection of image of the voluntary sector.
- **Promote collectivization and collaboration within the sector:** Improved networking and collectivization amongst VOs will lead to more consensus based collective regulation. “A respondent stated that the collective organizational relationship with the people and community should be strengthened.”

Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh state is predominantly tribal belt and has the largest forest cover in the country. The Forest Rights Act is a major milestone in the context of recognizing the rights of the forest dwelling community, predominantly the tribal, on forest land and its resources. It is manifested with naxal issues and is generally termed as disturbed. The state is rich in mineral resources and mining is one of the major works. The community based organizations and voluntary development organizations are working on the issue of livelihood, governance, forest rights, and land rights, Women’s empowerment and implementation of policies and government led schemes and programmes.

Contribution and Impact of VOs in Chhattisgarh

As stated by the respondents in the National Consultation on Enabling Environment in Critical States held on 23 July 2014 at New Delhi, “The long drawn history depicts that NGOs have been working immensely in contributing to the development programme. The government has not been able to create that space and fulfil the socio-economic agenda and growth models. For example in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh due to the intervention of NGOs has seen the creation of a relationship of mutual trust.”

“Major aspect in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh is of land acquisition which is taking place. The activists who are protesting on behalf of the community and raising voice against *Jal, Jungle and zameen* are termed as anti-national. Similarly the forest land issues should not get diluted. VANI’s liaisons with the government are good which can enable it to evolve a system to set parameters for credibility.”⁹

Key Issues and Implications

- 1. Confused Identity of the voluntary sector:** “Mr. Murlidhar Chandram from Srijan Kendra Chhattisgarh is of the view that present times for the voluntary sector are full of challenges and this is an opportune time to come together, strategize and overcome the challenges. There is a need to come together as a unit and advocate against these issues - *VOICE 2013 held at Raipur on September 20, 2013 : Collectivization of Voluntary Sector: CBOs-VOs-Foundation: A triangular relationship*
- 2. Collectivization and collaboration within the voluntary sector:** The role of voluntary sector is declining due to the internal turbulences. Another respondent highlighted the plight of small organizations and the internal governance system. It was stated that there should be a scope of employees’ protection and their security of service should be taken into consideration.
- 3. The sector is being controlled rather than regulated:** According to Mr. Amitabh Behar, Executive Director, National Foundation of India. “In last 20 years the state has evolved from a welfare state to a regulatory dispensation.

⁹ National Consultation on Enabling Environment in Critical States held on 23 July 2014 at New Delhi,

- 4. Changing nature of Resources/grants to voluntary organizations:** The relationship between the voluntary organizations and the government has changed from being partner in development process to that of a sub-contractor.

“The service delivery and implementation of govt. run schemes and programmes have led to a sub-contractor system and are vulnerable to state suppression.”

With the entry of the corporate social responsibility, the role of corporate sector in the development process is enhanced and they have a major say in the schemes, policies allocated for the development of the country. A differentiation has been witnessed on the basis of small, medium and large organisations.¹⁰

“One of the respondent stated that the advocacy with the government is essential and similarly the tendering process to get the projects and activities from the government should be stopped.”

- 5. Reduced funding on rights based approach (RBA):** There has been a shift in donors approach and with the stricter provisions in the FCRA 2010 and Direct Tax code bill 2009, the organizations working on rights based issues have been targeted. This has led to the shrinking of space for the voluntary action work in the country. Very few donor agencies are funding on issues pertaining to rights and entitlement of community that involve community mobilization to raise questions on the policies and action or holding the government accountable.

“VOs working on rights-based approach, FRA, PDS, NREGA, Women’s empowerment etc. for the benefit of the poor is the most targeted VOs.”

- 6. Lack of technical competencies, especially grass-root VOs:** The grass-root organizations work in isolation and due to the geographical location they are not able to get information. There is a lack of capacity building and training support.

¹⁰ VOICE 2013 held at Raipur on September 20, 2013 : Collectivization of Voluntary Sector: CBOs-VOs-Foundation: A triangular relationship

“Mr. Amitabh Behar, Executive Director, National Foundation of India, stated that since independence state were to play a major role in the overall development process of the country. However, in last 20 years a radical shift has been observed in the role of state.

He mentioned the role of foundations and how they were not part of any discussions as they used to be at the back stage. Both parties' i.e. voluntary sector and the foundations were clear about each other's role. But now it is seen that private sector is coming into forefront with a blue print and its stakeholders have to work as per their ideology. Private sector has excelled in business and now they feel that they know the solution to all the problems of the society and will surpass in this arena. On the contrary the voluntary organizations know the ground reality and have been associated with the community for a long time.

He referred that VANI is majorly focusing on development organizations and voluntary sector is known for its innovation and pillars of democracy are shaking and it is the responsibility of voluntary sector to infuse that vacuum.

– VOICE 2013 held at Raipur on September 20, 2013: *Collectivization of Voluntary Sector: CBOs-VOs-Foundation: A triangular relationship.*

Recommendations

As per the respondents views following recommendations were tabled in the State visit.

- To regularly share and circulate the information and any other changes in the voluntary sector to its partners in simple language.
- The need to have strong network in Chhattisgarh which will further help in promoting and creating an enabling environment for the voluntary sector.
- To conduct quarterly workshops in the region and do the capacity building of VOs on Internal governance and management practices.
- To take up the challenges faced by the VOs working on rights based approach.
- Networks and representatives from different regions to take the responsibility/charge in their respective locations and conduct the training programmes in which VANI will provide them with the resource persons.
- The VOs require VANI's help and support in doing advocacy with the state government and take up the grievances of the VOs that are working on rights-based approach and are the most targeted VOs.

– *Chhattisgarh State visit on October 27, 2014*

Jharkhand

In recent times, many non-governmental organizations have been concentrating on social mobilization on contemporary issues of importance such as women empowerment, human rights, and implementation of various central and state government development programs. The NGOs in India have contributed handsomely towards social mobilization and social activism through their intensive campaigns, people's mobilization programs and effective networks. The NGO as a social force facilitates collective action and people mobilization for the purpose of achieving the desired objectives. By deploying various people-oriented as well as people-centered strategies, and these organizations build rapport with the people and mobilize them. The NGOs play in making the people environmentally aware and sensitive to take part in the development process (Biswambhar Panda et.al -2003).¹¹

Contribution and Impact of VOs in Jharkhand

In Jharkhand the VOs are actively involved in issue based work. They have been working on education, health, land, forests and water and sanitation, tribal rights, human rights, women's empowerment, human trafficking and helping in the formation of self-help groups and in raising their capacities and to establish linkages with banks, etc.

Key Issues and Implications

- 1. Changing nature of grants/funds:** Bidding, tender based funding is on the rise. In the bilateral agencies, filing, skill and competency, management and governance standards have led to the participation of large organizations that were very technical in nature. They are getting the projects sanctioned and have bigger tenders in there offing. On the other hand the small and medium sized organizations condition is pathetic and has major funding issues. The nature and activity of such voluntary organizations are changing and with lack of activity and programmes in due course of time they will be shut down.
- 2. Shrinking of space for the VOs:** "Now the trend is different in the NGO sector and there is interference of the corporate sector which is not right.

¹¹ *The role of NGOs in socio-economic development of Jharkhand – An overview* (<http://www.ijbmi.org/papers/Vol%282%294/version-1/D241935.pdf>)

“Mr. Ashok Singh, Director, Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra stated that In the last 10-15 years the role of voluntary organisations has undergone a change. With security threats the government linked the voluntary organizations and there budgetary expenses were monitored.

From 2000-2010 the voluntary sector strengthened the panchayat in training, capacity building and other engagements. But the government felt that it has more of the nuisance value than the creative value. The FCRA and DTC Act are controlling and restrictive in nature. With the changes in GDP and economic reforms taking place, funding agencies that were spending for the socio-economic development have slowly started to change their course, withdraw and divert from India in leaps and bounds. On the contrary the funding of the corporate sector have increased and their requirement of recruiting competent, professional, experienced human resources who can manage the logical framework, result based management, input-output analysis on software and computers have increased. Hence there is shift in the technical professional resources.

– State level workshop on Opportunities and Challenges for the voluntary sector in Jharkhand on April 23, 2012

For example if it is Jindal Steel or Mittal industries the VOs are joining hands with them. The corporates extend good services like infrastructure facilities and salary package which is also a challenge for our sector. In our sector the question is not of FCRA and other regulatory mechanisms but that of struggle and awareness generation in every region of Jharkhand. If one campaigns and advocates by way of movement and struggle then you are termed anti-social, maoist and arrested by the state machinery.

“Mr Arvind Kumar, Lok Jagriti Kendra, Deoghar firmly mentioned that it is his belief that without any political action nothing happens or moves. He further stated that the challenges faced by the Jharkhand State is concerned – The FCRA or the ones who are working on the developmental issues then for most of the organizations the struggle and fight is with the SPT Act¹² and CNT Act¹³ in the State.”

¹² SPT Act is the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act (India)

¹³ CNT Act is the Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908 – More than 103 years have passed since Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 was enacted as landmark Adivasi land rights protection legislation and it comes to serve its purpose. This was an Act to amend and consolidate certain amendments relating to the law of landlord and tenant and the settlement of rents in Chhotanagpur. The Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908 prohibits transfer of lands by sale etc. except with the previous sanction of the Deputy Commissioner. It also prohibits the alienation of land of the tribals. It also provides for restoration of alienated land to the tribals or when converted for urban use, to give them equivalent lands.

- 3. VO-Government Relationship:** “One of the respondent mentioned that it has been ten years back that he spent time and energy effortlessly with exaltation, enthusiasm, principles and with sensitivity, did training of trainers etc. and associated with the voluntary sector for the past 15-16 years. But the organizations which came into existence later i.e. 2-3 years before are doing extremely well and have projects worth 1-2 crore. It is also not known that they are working on similar area/region and on related issues but they have setting with the government and thus get the projects easily. There is a scatter and division in the principle and team work with which we were working together. It is very sad and painful that the ideology and outlook has undergone a change. As an example he stated that an organization having 12a and 80 G sent message to purchase the voluntary organization for rupees one lakh. Hence organizations are also on sale. There is a serious crisis of identity.”¹⁴
- 4. Sector lacks representation:** “Mr. Harsh Jaitli, VANI quoted from the recently held National Convention held in New Delhi in 2014 mentioned Mr Rajesh Tandon, Director PRIA statement that we do not share who we are, where we work and sometimes mention that we are professors in order to avoid dialogue and discussion on the state of voluntary organizations. **The sector is facing the problem of identity.**”
- 5. There is dearth of skill which needs to be utilized** and the challenge is what the course of direction should be and what needs to be done. Now the private sector has also started coining the terminology and using jargons like social justice, equity and holistic approach though the parameter is different. For example the Bharati foundation has schools all over the country and they show expenditure only. The government is also in a comfortable position as their agenda is being met by the private sector. **In the coming times there would be a crisis in Human Resources.**
- 6. In order to get funds one needs lobbying and references without which nothing can be done.** “One of the respondent stated that our transparency is at stake and even the bureaucrats do not want that an NGO culture is developed. For example Chartered Accountants would submit audit report by spending money and taking the wrong course in order to survive. Hence there are various challenges. When it comes to the private sector there is a

¹⁴ State level workshop on Opportunities and Challenges for the voluntary sector in Jharkhand on April 23, 2012

talk of taking over and on the contrary with respect to NGO it is said that one would like to purchase an NGO.”

7. **Scarcity of Human Resources:** “Mr. Ashok Singh, Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra commented on the works of voluntary organization in the issues such as, governance (which should be transparent), displacement, etc. and how the VOs are lacking of good human resource. Today voluntary organizations are bringing funds in the country for the development works. The VOs groom and do the capacity building of the human resource but unfortunately they switch over and take up another job for good salary package.”¹⁵
8. **Lack of Unity:** “Mr Arvind Kumar, Lok Jagriti Kendra emphasized on the intra conflicts which are existent within the voluntary organizations. He said that we are not organized within ourselves (voluntary organization), challenges are within ourselves. We are being controlled by the legal laws and bylaws, such as FCRA, Registration Act, etc.”¹⁶

Recommendations

- **To form a network in Jharkhand:** To revive the Jharkhand Chapter Network – Jharkhand Voluntary Action Network (JVAN) - a network which was actively formed by the civil society organizations of Jharkhand. The JVAN should be revived and activated and a location needs to be identified from where they can function and coordinate the opportunities and threats faced by the organizations. In order to execute the responsibility of the network a professional personnel would be identified. A decision would be taken for taking forward the steps for the network at the earliest. More members to be invited/ included in the committee formed. As a follow up action and to further sensitize the issues related to the voluntary organizations, a state level activity to be organized within 2-3 months. This will take forward the difficulties faced by the VOs.
- **Collectivization and collaboration within the sector:** It was observed that the zeal among the VOs to work together is absent. An inertia among them exists which is abstaining them to unite. Hence initiative needs to be taken to break the shackle and collaborate with each other. The best practices and innovative ideas should be shared and appreciated among the VOs and with

¹⁵ Meeting on State of VOs: Challenges & Opportunities held at Ranchi, Jharkhand on July 15, 2014

¹⁶ Ibid

other stakeholders. Improved networking and collectivization will lead to more consensus based collective regulation.

- **Technical skill training and capacity building of the staff:** Regular capacity building exercises, trainings and skill development programmes should be planned and conducted for the small and grassroot organizations to remain updated about the current and latest information and development in the sector.
- **Strategies to engage with the government:** The relation and partnership between the government and the VOs needs to be strengthened. The VOs should interact and involve the government officials in seminars, capacity building workshops and programmes.
- **Resource mobilization:** There is an urgent requirement to further explore newer and alternative source of funding. The VOs should strategize to tap individual donations and organizations and build a corpus for financial sustainability.

North East Region

Northeast region includes the ‘seven sister states’ (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura). The river systems and their tributaries cover the Northeast region and two-third of the region is hilly terrain interspersed with valleys and plains. Although it is covered by large river systems, massive floods and erosion of riverbanks cause enormous loss of life, property and livelihood. Almost 52 percent of the total geographical area of the north east region is covered by forest. The region holds one fifth of the country’s total potential of petroleum and natural gas.

There has been a climate of insurgency in many parts of the region. The seven states have been in the grip of more than one form of conflict: secessionist insurgency, separatism within India, struggles for local autonomy, inter- and intra-tribal clashes, locals versus ‘outsiders,’ locals versus immigrant Muslims from Bangladesh, language tussles, boundary clashes within the region, and so forth. The slow pace of development has stimulated this climate further causing political fragmentation of the region. The difficult terrain, dense forest cover and open borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh have provided a congenial environment for some of these insurgencies.

Contribution and Impact of VOs in North East Region

“Non-governmental organisations are playing an increasingly decisive role in shaping the economy and facilitating inclusive growth at the grassroots level in a large, multi-ethnic and highly populated country like India, where it is not always possible for the government to ensure that its development schemes and policies reach the backwaters of society.”

“*NGOs in Northeast India* attempts to highlight the activities of these organisations in the region and educate people on the role played by these in facilitating inclusive growth, thus ensuring development in every strata of society. The NGOs facilitate healthcare initiatives like spreading awareness about blood donation and government healthcare schemes, the role of microfinance organisations and NGOs in shaping the economy of the region. The NGOs are engaged in empowering women through specific capacity-building projects and the activities of specific organisations in spreading healthcare and education among the poor and backward sections of society. They ensure protection of human rights and in spreading awareness about the same among the masses.”¹⁷

Key Issues and Implications

1. Bidding and tendering system : The flagship projects and programmes were initially undertaken by the voluntary organizations but lately the contractors and builders have registered their own organizations and bidding on the projects on water & sanitation and other issues. This has led to the conflict between the villagers and contractors. There is trust deficit which has impact on voluntary organizations also.

(This information was shared by one of the participants in the National Consultation on Enabling Environment in Critical States held on 23 July 2014).

2. Implementation related challenges in extremist affected areas: Due to the extremist prone areas: commission based activities are operational and the genuine organizations suffer. According to the Assam based organization – due to the Intelligence Bureau report leak¹⁸ – are facing problems. The IB has frequented these organizations and investigations

¹⁷ Singha Seema S and Nath Chimun kr : *NGOs in Northeast India: A Kaleidoscopic Observation*
http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120914/jsp/northeast/story_15968412.jsp#.VH7tpZWUeQc

¹⁸ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/229511459/IB-Report-NGOs-June-2014>

have increased. This is a recent trend and it is very alarming. Various VOs working in insurgency prone areas experienced threats from the underground groups. Some organizations had also reported that their work and outreach to the community is sometimes restricted due to the interference of security personnel who were working under AFSPA.

- 3. Relationship with the government:** The VOs face difficulty in approaching the government line departments and officials. One of the respondent shared in the National Consultation on Enabling Environment in Critical States held on 23 July 2014 – that a GO- NGO – disaster management meeting was held by the state government in Guwahati and the NGO participants were not listed and the genuine organizations not invited.
- 4. Sector being controlled rather than regulated:** It has been felt that the FCRA, 2010 has been introduced to restrict the flow of foreign contribution to the voluntary sector. One of the respondent mentioned the challenges faced by him. “There were many things we've found out on conflict and controversy between FCR Act Sections and FCR Rules as well interpretation ascribed to what is political in nature. One organization is made to pay of Rs. 6000/- annually without having received any foreign funding in the last so many years and receipt not issued at all. They have always submitted nil balance and nil receipt of foreign funds as required under FCR Rules but yet, have to make the above payment. Then YWCA, Shillong is blacklisted as per IB report and published in Sentinel but they do not receive foreign funding and have never been registered under FCRA. So the matter of compliance report submission etc. does not arise.”
- 5. Myth and false information on FCRA renewal:** A Guwahati based organization received notification from the State Bank of India stating that the FCRA certificate has expired and it is requested to renew and arrange to send the renewed certificate within 30th June 2014. On the contrary FCRA 2010 provides for renewal every 5 years. Moreover the Act has provided relief to all the existing NGOs for the first five years from the date of enactment. In other words, all existing NGOs have to renew their registration at the end of the period of enactment of FCRA 2010. This implies that the renewal of all existing NGOs will become due on 1st May 2016.
- 6. Transparency and Accountability:** There is no system, mechanism to

identify good voluntary organizations and the only solution is the network taking it up. The government can validate whether that network is genuine or not.

“Another major concern cited by the NGOs was that of credibility mechanism, which is nonexistent. There should be a uniform, single window system that processes, inspects and grants credibility report to the NGOs. This will help in getting funding, proposals, approval and timely grant and submission of RFP etc.”

- 7. Lack of freedom of expression in extremist affected areas:** Numerous respondents shared that extortion and demand of donation by the so called home grown mafias and syndicates dictating the development and governance agenda is inherent. Hence numerous genuine VOs were compelled to discontinue the development activities because of this challenge. These VOs were forced by the so-called underground activists to share the log frame and confidential organization information with them.

“The Eleventh Plan outlay for the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) was Rs 14,409.08 crore. The swindling of public funds is a critical factor as the wide development gaps are reflected as compared to the rest of the country. This pattern of development is due to the home-grown mafias and that syndicates dictating the development and governance “agenda” despite the presence of democratically-elected governments.”

*– Syed Sultan Kazi, North East Development Foundation,
Economic and Political Weekly, November 2, 2013*

- 8. Resistance and lesser scope for rights-based work:** The VOs that are engaged in activities of rights based approach have to intimate the local police station on regular basis about its activities and action plan and movement of its staff in the project area. They were compelled to inform the authorities in advance in order to conduct village level meetings. Failure to inform generally led to harassment and action against the VOs.

Therefore the functioning of the VOs becomes a challenge in the states that is disturbed by extremists. The grass roots VOs face the threat and it affects the mobility of the members of the organizations and they operate in a state of fear. There is police interference, Intelligence Bureau (IB) and local authority’s intervention in VOs operation in the affected states.

According to one of the respondents, “another aspect that was highlighted and did not surface in the citizen’s report was that, VOs were favoured and

blacklisted as per the ideology of the organizations by the ruling government in the states. Therefore the VOs face major problems as service providers.”

Recommendations

- **Strategies to engage with the government:** A few concrete steps needs to be taken by the government in consultation with the voluntary sector for increasing transparency and simplicity of its official procedures with regard to registration, grants and other works related to the voluntary sector.
- **Capacity building exercise:** Government can join hands with the voluntary sector in building capacities of small and struggling voluntary organizations.
- **Credibility of the sector:** The voluntary sector needs to increase its sectorial transparency by emphasizing on credibility parameters and by dealing with dishonest and fake groups.
- **To strengthen the network NE VANI:** There is an urgent need to strengthen the platform and all contextual issues pertaining to their own operation can be addressed. This will further link all the VOs in the region and tackle the challenges faced by them.
- The voluntary sector of this region should be more active in organizing its networking within the Northeast India and also with the rest of India and for understanding and keeping pace with the global trends.

Odisha¹⁹

Odisha, located in the eastern coast of India is a state with immense potential in natural resources. However absolute poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition are fundamental forms of deprivation and one of the challenges to sustainable development in Odisha is its vulnerability to recurrent natural disasters in the form of drought conditions and floods & cyclonic storms.

Contribution and Impact of VOs in Odisha

The VOs in Odisha has been actively working for genuine social development programmes and welfare activities of urban and rural communities. They are

¹⁹ <http://orissa.ngosindia.com/>

functioning for child rights, women empowerment, old age homes for aged persons, physically and mentally handicap persons etc. They are organizing education, health, social justice, disaster management, natural resource management, agriculture development, social awareness, upliftment of marginalized communities, poverty and distress relief programmes. The issues like conservation and protection of environment, human rights, social equality, drinking water issues, legal awareness & aid, nutrition, right to information, rural and urban development, forming and supporting self-help groups, research and development are main part of major active NGOs in Odisha.²⁰

“Mr. Jagadanand highlighted the contribution and activities that are done by the MNGOs. He advised the VOs to identify four to five issues in order to work upon. He cited his own experiences with the Chief Minister and the Secretaries to the Government, particularly with regard to the challenges faced by the VOs. He said that the good work needs to be published, disseminated and a continuous dialogue should continue. He further emphasized on the need of identifying the key issues, about the SLCC, adapt different practices and experiments undertaken by different civil society organizations in other countries like Bangladesh, Ghana, Philippines etc. He also cited his experience of work ethics and suggested forming 4 to 5 volunteers (small groups). He stated that people need to be trusted and relied on. Lastly he advised the VOs to prepare a work plan and underlined the importance of documenting the works.”²¹

Key Issues and Implications

- 1. Stringent funding laws and policies enforced by the government:** In the state of Odisha registration of VOs is done at two levels - one at the state level with the Registrar of Society (IGR) and at the district level with the Additional Registrar of Society.²² The respondents raised concerns related to district registration. There are confusing by-laws at the districts level with no clarity on the operational areas of work. For example an organization is registered at the district level and in order to extend the activity in other districts of the state as well, then in that case there is no clarity. The respondents mentioned that there are confusing by-laws. Registration/renewal depends on the mercy of the district administration.
- 2. Corruption among voluntary organizations:** “The respondents stated that exhaustive documentation is required for registration and it varies from

¹⁹ <http://orissa.ngosindia.com/>

²¹ *State level Workshop on Challenges of Voluntary Organizations in the Changing Scenario on 22-23 May 2013 at Odisha*

²² *Focus group discussion in Odisha on 16 April, 2014*

district to district. This practice has led to minting money and promotion of corruption. It was suggested that the registration process should be time bound. Few organizations felt that online system of registration should be done at the state and national level which will enhance the process efficiently and less prone to corruption.”²³

3. **Skill gap:** The grass root and small organizations felt the skill gap as one of the inhibiting factors for registration is that the laws are written only in the English language. On the contrary these organizations are proficient in the use of regional languages and their own mother tongue. Organizational representatives stated that the laws should be made available in simple regional languages.
4. **Innovation and Creativity is Declining:** The donor agencies, government and corporates have become increasingly aggressive with respect to their planned activity and implementation process undertaken. Therefore it restricts freedom of choice. This has an impact on the grass root level organization and thus stifling the unique voice from the field. The funding pattern resources that provide scope for creativity and innovation are declining.
5. **Absence of collectivization and collaboration:** There is lack of united and collective force and district/state level network. Due to the absence of unity and networking among the VOs there is no monitoring, communication and focused action.

Recommendations

- **Strategies to engage with the stakeholders:** To strengthen the engagement with media, government and coordinate with the government bodies. A mechanism needs to be framed at the state and district level level.
- **Act as a watchdog:** The VOs need to critically evaluate the policies and schemes of the government and guide the people. They should play a role of a catalyst and watch dog function for tracking government policy.
- **Capacity building of VOs:** “Few respondents stressed upon the need for more discussion on the technical aspects like challenges in the field of foreign funding i.e. FCRA, IT etc. The small and grass root organizations require training and capacity building in legal compliances from time to time.”²⁴

²³ Focus group discussion in Odisha on 16 April, 2014

²⁴ State level Workshop on Challenges of Voluntary Organizations in the Changing Scenario on 22-23 May 2013 at Odisha

- VOs need to mobilize resources and be financially sustainable in order to function efficiently and effectively and achieve the goal of financial accountability, transparency and internal governance and management systems.
- **To strengthen relationship among VOs:** There is a need to improve the networking and collectivization among the VOs that will lead to more consensus based collective regulation.

“The Voluntary Sector has to rise to the challenges and set precedents in accountability and to keep innovating by cultivating a culture of organizational learning. Since the intention of having the National Policy was quite clear in trying to enable and empower the Voluntary Sector, he asked the participants from the Voluntary Sector to give a critique of the National Policy. Their feedback was important so that efforts could be made to take the Policy forward and would help work towards a State Policy on the lines of the National Policy. He assured them that the important issues and questions emerging from the Consultation would be communicated to the Policymakers in the Government.”

– Prof. Radhamohan, senior social activist and former State Information Commissioner

SECTION–IV

Outcome

The issues faced by the VOs in disturbed states are quite different from the ones that are faced in other parts of the country. The state intervention, Intelligence bureau and the local authorities put vigilance on the organizations that are working with the community as they act as the citizen’s watch dog for holding the government accountable. The interference of police and local authorities in the operation of the organization has increased immensely. The VOs are required to inform/intimate the local police station on regular basis. They often receive notices/letters seeking clarification on organizations operation. The VOs working on rights based approach are subject to enquiry and scrutiny and they are ordered to submit detailed report on the activities undertaken by them. The local authorities pressurize the VOs and the community-based organizations and there prevails distrust on the programmes and activities.

Recommendations

1. To strengthen the communication channels and outreach programmes: The information on legal compliances, new opportunities and announcements are not received by the grassroots level organizations based in disturbed states.
2. The challenges and problems faced by the grassroots level organizations and those based in remote areas needs to be articulated at the state level and shared at the national level.
3. Capacity building of the organizations on legal compliances, internal governance is required.
4. There is a need to encourage grassroots organizations to adopt self-certification model and code of conduct.
5. To adapt the mechanism and formation of federation, state level network and collectivization.
6. To extend financial support to the VOs based in there area of work and participate in the capacity building exercise.

This present report compiles and analyzes the research findings, highlights and discusses the components of the enabling environment for VOs. It also seeks to promote thinking on ways in which the suggestions and recommendations can be adapted in the context of the voluntary sector. The process identified the difficulties faced by the VOs. The issues will be documented and shared with the state government and local bodies and the media. The purpose of this initiative is to highlight the problems and engage in networking and strengthening the sector.

This report was possible due to the encouraging response of the leaders of voluntary organizations. They have shared their information with a trust and a spirit of solidarity.

Box 1:

Impact on the development and on tribal, community and society at large in the disturbed states

Maoists, class, community and the struggles have erupted in most of the states of India. The most common protests are Vedanta²⁵ and Posco in Orissa where the democratic forces are struggling despite the repression of the state. However these specific and localized struggles have been overshadowed by the conflict between the Maoists and the State government, which has structured the plight of the tribal people in these regions. This has led to the uneven development of the tribal areas- alienation that has resulted from the land acquisition process and the lack of settlement of rights over natural resources. The above factors have led to the atrocities against the tribal people, community inhabitants by the implementers of the state and particularly by the police and administration.

In the States of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh the scenario is extremely different and in sharp contrast. The tribal people have a history of losing their lands to the non-tribal farmers, moneylenders and traders. This has played an important role in creating the space for the Maoists in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

These problems of uneven development are likely to get emphasized unless the larger democratic movement does not develop a new egalitarian vision of tribal development.

The Northeastern region comprises of states - Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. For many decades, there has been a climate of insurgency in many parts of the region and the states have been in the grip of more than one form of conflict or the other. This has resulted in a slow pace of development that has further stimulated this climate causing political fragmentation of the region. Also the north eastern region has a difficult terrain, dense forest cover and open borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh which has provided a congenial environment for some of these insurgencies.

The central government has been instrumental in sanctioning special packages and huge amount of central funds are being given to the northeastern region. Through the non-lapsable central pool of resources (NLCPR). But most of the resources lapse due to unspent budget.

²⁵ www.pib.nic.in

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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 10000 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.
- 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 effecting the voluntary sector.



VOICE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

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