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Editorial

Voluntary Organisations must demand their Legitimate Space in BRICS Structure

Dear Members, Associates and Friends of VANI,

Greetings from VANI!

It has almost been a decade since the BRICS countries have been flexing their collective muscle to demand their legitimate space in the global financial institutions. Undoubtedly, there has been a history of denial of space in these structures to the countries which represent the majority of the population of the world and BRICS has emerged as the forum which is struggling for their space. Many countries which either not part of BRICS or still struggling for their say in the world stage are looking towards BRICS with hope. Interestingly, these BRICS countries are also home to a majority of poor and marginalised, who are also looking towards this new global composition for their solutions. But till date no specific result has come out. There has been talk of BRICS bank which is being structured without much wider consultation.

But on the brighter side of the story it is the opportunity BRICS gives to the civil society of these diverse countries to interact and learn from each other. Being spread in distant continents, BRICS gives us excuse to sit together and contemplate. But now the time has come to demand a permanent structure and space within BRICS for civil society as G20 has started C20. We need to demand for a 'C-BRICS'. In absence of any permanent structure and lack of accountability, the BRICS has high potential of becoming platform to discuss macro-economic theories, or design development support structures which can only benefit private sector. Already there are allegations of these counties forming cartels to extract natural resources from the least developed countries or buying huge land at concessional rates. These BIRCS countries have also started playing an important role in defining new aid structure, which is mostly government to government aid without any participation of local community. It is the duty of the civil society of these countries to become more active and campaign to influence their respective governments. In India we have seen the recent formation of Development Partnership Administration department within Ministry of External Affairs. We feel that it is a golden opportunity for the Indian voluntary sector to collaborate and engage.

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Foreign Funding and Indian Voluntary Development Organisations

Since last week, all the newspapers and TV channels are debating on the so called **“Secret”** report of the IB over the role of foreign Indian NGOs and development economics of India. This is not for the first time that such report has come, which is on one hand declared “confidential” and on the other leaked to media. Unfortunately, since media moves with rapidity on issues, the main crux of such stories remains unaddressed. Through this message we would like to draw the attention of the media as well as government to address the issue more holistically and the prevent harm such report can cause to the outstanding work done by genuine organisations.

1. Being a democratic country, nevertheless, India has had a history where on occasions the state apparatus has arbitrarily used its machinery to silence any form dissent especially with some departments mastering this art. These include income tax, CBI, IB or FCRA. **Unfortunately, being the weakest of such opponents, NGOs become easy targets.** Added to the pain of NGOs is that foreign funding related law is managed by the FCRA department and IB, both of which are inaccessible to the common citizen, say NGOs. **These reports have always been leaked to media but none of them have ever been shared in the public domain or say with an apex body like VANI. So, most of time we end up defending ourselves not only in abstraction but declared guilty without a hearing.**
2. Now, **if one analyses the production of such reports or actions by linking it with the general state of society one can understand the “logic”.** It was in 2009, that Indian NGOs started questioning the promises made by the past regime which led to

the introduction of new FCRA on the pretext of money laundering by NGOs for naxalite menace. Secondly, when not only NGOs but sections of the general population joined the anti-corruption movement in 2011, reports started surfacing which pointed to 70 NGOs being under watch of MHA for misuse of foreign money. Then, when the former PM remarked about the use of foreign money in fuelling the anti-nuclear movement, some bank accounts of southern NGOs were frozen. We are discussing here the numerous Income tax notices which not only NGOs but corporate houses and media got for supporting the movement against corruption. **Now if the current PM is taking of inclusive growth and invoking a new paradigm of development, wherein not only NGOs but every section of society is supporting him, the report has come up to accuse NGOs hindering the national growth, especially citing Gujarat.**

3. Interestingly, most of such reports are **“Futuristic”**, i.e. are in the process of being compiled. **None of such reports have taken issues to their logical end. VANI has always maintained that any miscreant organisation found guilty of violating the law, should be dealt with full strictness.** However we are in anticipation for this report which numerically lists the ‘guilty’ NGOs. Till date the investigation of NGOs accused under Kudankulam agitation is not completed. The FCRA says that MHA will complete its investigation in 90 days, but years have passed none of them have been found guilty. This also stops the victims to go to court of law.
4. Another question is asked why Indian NGOs need foreign money? Can’t they raise money within India?



But before that the question comes why NGOs need money? The basic reason for NGOs asking for financial support is due to type of constituency they serve. Even if they deliver health, education, sanitation, water, etc. their primary beneficiaries are poor people who can't pay for such services. NGOs also need money to conduct evaluation, reviews or generate suggestions for the government projects. These suggestions are then fed into the government mechanism with the objective of improvement of the governance. History is a witness that valuable information provided from grass root organizations has benefited the governance of India. But in last one decade the relationship between government and

NGOs has changed drastically. **Contrarily NGOs are not seen as the partners in development but as sub-contractors.** They are supposed to bid on fixed projects and deliver the projects without asking questions. The sector which was known for its innovations has become tool for delivering the projects. On the other hand the reforms in taxation have not taken place which can facilitate domestic generation of funds. Be it new CSR provisions of Companies Act, or individual philanthropic endeavours. We are still in the charity mode of philanthropy and have not moved to a mature level of society wherein private donation is motivated by the overall development of country.

Few questions:

We do have some questions to ask, not only to the government but also our media colleagues.

1. Don't you think we need to create a mechanism to regulate and promote NGOs in professional way? There is need to have centralised Law for registration of NGOs. This will solve the problem of mushrooming of un-accountable NGOs.
2. Is there not a need to have separate ministry or even a department like Ministry of Corporate Affairs? Such department/ ministry can have much professional regulatory oversight over NGOs.
3. NGOs also have a legitimate right to see such reports. Why are they supposed to be confidential but are often leaked?
4. Don't you think we should also demand some accountability from MHA and ask for follow-up reports on the cases which are not solved till date with the fate of some genuine organisations under perennial suspension?
5. Is it the source of funds for NGO's or their utilization the issue for the government?
6. Don't you think there is need to have taxation reform which can promote domestic giving and domestic foundations?
7. Why has The National policy on Voluntary Sector, which was brainchild of former Prime Minister, Sh Atal Bihari Vajpayee, never been implemented since the last decade?
8. Why is it that we have more than 10 business channels, and even minimal space is not accorded to NGOs to talk about their work and challenges?



An outline of government policies towards VO's

Since the commencement of India's five year plans, voluntary organizations have been given a share of a spatial area in assistance to our welfare state enshrined by the constitution. Outlining the essential role delivered by the organizations in being vents for decentralized democracy, the first five year plan informally delegated the responsibility of carrying nation building efforts to private voluntary organizations. Acknowledging the humble approach undertaken by these organizations, the planners saw them playing a pivotal role in participatory democracy. The Third, Fourth and Seventh Five Year Plans emphasized the cooperation of the voluntary organizations in decisively constructing the ground work for growth.

These specific references to the voluntary sector became evident with the appointment of the Council for Advancement of Rural Technology in 1986. Potentially having a huge scope in rural areas for operations, the government envisaged the strategic role voluntary organizations could deliver in proliferation of development in rural areas. It was time and again reiterated since the plans were envisioned that voluntary organizations would provide the basis for innovation and approaches towards integrated development in securing community level participation.

Similarly the idea of voluntary organizations steering development were replicated in the subsequent Eighth and Ninth Plan where people's participation acquired a more concrete nomenclature. Optimization of decentralized democracy especially with the recent enactment of the Panchayati Raj Act, were seen in concurrence with the voluntary organizations as pioneers in espousing the spirit of grassroot democracy. The formulation of the common minimum programme accorded the facilitative role voluntary organizations could foster, such as

1. Promoting and encouraging people's participatory models

2. Empowering women and the other disadvantaged groups which include Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward classes and minorities
3. Developing innovative approaches for advancement of rural agriculture and development with a view to eradicate poverty and ensure generation of employment
4. Working towards environmental sustainability through mobilizing people
5. Creation of self-help groups, associations, institutions which would be aided by voluntary organizations.

The government has always endeavored to suffice the financial assistance to voluntary organizations in pursuance of its policy to involve and encourage them. Through the medium of grants-in-aid, funding is provided to voluntary organizations which are subject to individual ministerial rules and procedures. Grants-in-aid first came to light in the early fifties with the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) being set as the nodal agency for funds transmission. Similarly subsequent decades were witnesses to different boards, schemes, commissions and committees which were assigned to cater funding to voluntary organizations. Assistance to voluntary organization does not only limit to monetary resources but to technical, material and training. The range of assistance provided also includes subsidies, discount on bank loans, stipends, honorarium etc. Similarly providing assistance such as support for building material, grants for purchase of land, repairs, salaries, costs also come under the gamut of various assistances.

However while grants cannot be provided to all organizations, many have to be dependent on foreign funds which are finite owing to the preliminary purloining by the government. However, whatever percolates is only enough for a handful of organizations to invest in. Compounded by the cumulative effect of the strenuous FCRA provisions and the subjection to Income



Tax laws, funding becomes an issue for the organizations. Although the apotheosis was reached when the draft on National Policy on the Voluntary Sector was formulated in 2007 but consequent silence on the part of the government did not yield results, putting the whole exercise of the drafting futile. The worry for many organizations that does not seem to ebb is the regressive attitude adopted against voluntary organizations. Hostility towards voluntary organizations has seen to occupy the limelight especially in the last 5 years. An explanation for this, which may be insufficient, seems to give a pointer to the government's cozying up to the private sector. The one time primacy consigned to voluntary organizations can be seen in similarity with a dusty book in a shelf, as the pivot of development partnership has moved towards the private sector. This attitude has also seen many organizations being upset with the sub-contract status tendered to voluntary organizations, which many feel tantamount to an insult. It therefore becomes imperative to invoke a new paradigm in re-thinking the institutional framework that forms the linking bridge between the government and voluntary sector. Given the complexities of the of society in evolution, no longer is the state seen dependent on the economic and political structures but has to equally (if not equally then somewhere or the other) be inclusive and accommodative about the civil society. It has been observed that voluntary organizations are held to be

notorious and subverting national interests, motivated only to secure a financial cushion. This flawed perception has released a salvo of negative publicity which is groundless and flawed as only a handful of organizations cannot form the basis of a negative generalization. The tectonic shift in the attitude of the government from bestowing largesse to the sector to curtailing its activities with draconian laws is indiscernible as to why such a psychological transformation has taken place.

Exclusion of voluntary organizations owing to a conservative outlook would result in the degradation of an 'informal opposition'. Deepening democracy is in synonymy with empowering civil society which finds resonance in the constitution. Mitigating conflicts and opening up platforms for dialogues would enable the government and voluntary organizations to mutually understand and reconcile their differences. Voluntary organizations should provide suitable data, outlining and highlighting activities which could vouch for the organization's commitment to social change. The mutual dependence of both these separate entities could well achieve stated goals and conquer the towering mound of social malaise which has derailed our country's growth. However, policies governing voluntary organizations of the government should now employ the same brand of munificence that is an intrinsic attribute of voluntary organizations.

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Unfortunately, local civil society in many developing countries feel disconnect between global platforms like G20, BRICS and IBSA, and their daily struggle on domestic issues. Although these countries are termed as emerging economies, there still exist extreme poverty, deprivation and malnutrition. The local civil society is still struggling to solve these problems. Secondly, they also question the legitimacy of these institutions and feel more comfortable in working with UN. For example, Indian Civil Society is very active in dealing and influencing the UN whereas we don't see similar motivation to link up with G20, IBSA or BRICS. Even parliamentarians and media have least interest. In fact there are only handfuls of persons in government who have any knowledge of working of these new global platforms.

Therefore, there is need to have much more collaboration between the civil society of BRICS countries to demand accountability from structures like G20 and BRICS. We need to monitor the formation of BRICS bank. And lastly, demand the legitimate space for the civil society in the BRICS system.

Harsh Jaitli
Chief Executive Officer



Developing Unique Skills and Innovative Mechanisms

(For the future sustenance of voluntary organizations)

Uniqueness and innovation are the prime virtues of being a successful organization in the contemporary milieu. The distinguishing identity among all forms of commonality lends the organization the edge over its competitors in terms of being outstanding and conspicuous. While these traits are more apt for corporate organizations, the exclusion of voluntary organizations from this categorization is certainly of an archaic perception. Voluntary organizations are service providers, think tanks and change makers for the society, whose contribution largely revolves around the idea of bettering society. A prevalent view that exists is of voluntary organizations being part of a generalized collective with constituent units pursuing a common activity. This perception however, disagreeable to many organizations is nevertheless true. As observed many organizations have replicated models and systems from other organizations, which have unintentionally had degradation in their efficiency and a lowering in their potential to be service providers due to the congestion of voluntary organizations providing the same kind of services. Similarity in the methodologies employed for service providing is obviously a necessity in providing a quantum thrust to collective development however the differentiation should be emergent in the approach or route which has been taken by the organization. The list of advantages can be enumerated if an organization takes up the ideation and evolving unique skills for itself by revamping its strategies and infusing rejuvenation into its programmes. A common question that usually bothers many voluntary organizations or usually remains at bay is why evolve unique skills and innovative mechanisms if the sector's main purpose is to be engaged in social work. For answering this question, VO's should embrace the idea of gazing into the crystal ball and be omniscient about the current and future trends if they want to survive. Numerous academicians have pointed out the emerging 'cascading redundancy' which is slowly grappling the sector that will eventually phase out its



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existence in the coming years. While many voluntary organizations driven by the spirit of altruism may express discomfiture with this, the confronting truth that haunts is the consistent empowerment of people which is leading to this 'cascading redundancy'. India's progress both on the economic as well as political front is a reality



which has put the nation on track with the developed world. However the evident large scale poverty, malnutrition, health problems etc. provide ample opportunities for the voluntary organizations to concentrate on such issues as there is minimal improvement in social indicators.

Funding is the lifeline for many organizations, without which their sustainability may be at the crossroads of an existential threat as it occupies the centre-stage for voluntary organizations in terms of insuring their sustainability. For voluntary organizations, funding is the primary target so as to provide the necessary impetus to work for society. But the provisions of funds for the disposal at behest of voluntary organizations remain limited to certain organizations or are marked with acute absenteeism. A scrutiny of the prevailing climate reveals that the voluntary organizations are destined to face a resource crunch. Unless and until renewed strategies are deployed to bridge the resource deficit gap, the voluntary sector may find itself in the doldrums. The dimensions of voluntary work are colossal and mobile in itself that it becomes imperative to construct newer, refreshing models for implementation. In order to plug in the resource crunch it becomes imperative for the voluntary organizations to articulate the devised mechanisms and techniques through which they would be able to solve a particular problem. Donors and funders are primarily motivated to invest when they see a project which would reap future results. Capturing their attention, rife with unique specification solutions will push the voluntary organizations in the limelight and provide the succor they need for funding. Also one of the fears is the encroachment by the government on the traditional space which was occupied by the voluntary sector. The regressive provisions of the FCRA and Income Tax laws may well jeopardize the sustainability of voluntary organizations putting their future at stake. It is futile to hide the fact that the government has adopted an antagonistic attitude towards voluntary organizations. Recent closures and de-recognitions, speak volumes of the intolerance growing within the government to dissuade organizations. Renewed strategies may bring an attitudinal transformation in the perception of the government likely initiating them to gravitate towards working with voluntary organizations. A core issue of funding is governed by the selection of a specific sector

where a development deficit is noticeable. Many donors have realized that there are certain problems where funding can be concentrated on. The underlying objective of the donors when funding projects is to see a project's completion in short term coupled with the people-centric models coming to tangible fulfillment. Being a recipient of funding usually entails hard work and adherence to standards and norms. The sector brimming with unauthentic organizations has been generalized in the view of many into perceiving it as an easy outlet for quick money. In this regard, voluntary organizations should give utmost precedence in carving their goodwill.

The success of the organization will be easily discerned if it assiduously follows

- 1) Unique skill development for problem solving. Specifically targeting those areas where problems need an urgent requirement of attention.
- 2) Being focused on one area and not venturing into other territories is sure enough to exclude other problems which may burden voluntary organizations.
- 3) Evolving toolkits to address the problems.

Voluntary organizations should culminate all their energies in ideation and brainstorming activities. Discussions in the direction of giving new approaches and solutions for partnering with donor agencies will be a healthy exercise for the organization. Bringing into the foray of project research, voluntary organizations must be innovative in their strategies. All obsolete approaches have to discontinue by revamping the organization's objectives. Such techniques will not only ease organizations for receiving funding but will place them in vogue within the development paradigm.

Skill building and patterning of unique solutions will assist the organization in revamping itself, augmenting the profile. Donor dependency although of short term nature may convert for a longer term. The need of the hour for voluntary organizations is to match the footsteps of the world and invoke professionalism in their in-house activities.

— **Arjun Kumar Phillips,**
Communications Executive, VANI, New Delhi



NGO's in Bangladesh

(An excerpt from Economic and Political Weekly by Sajjad Zohir)

The image of Bangladesh has undergone a major transformation from a famine-stricken 'basket case' during the early 1970s, to a flooded plain and in persistent need of food relief till the late 1980s, to an innovator in the delivery of services to the poor thereafter. The decade of 1990s experienced significant changes in the political structure, as well as noticeable improvements in human development and empowerment of women among the rural population. While nature continues to play havoc and governments often falter, the annual meeting of donors under the umbrella of the Bangladesh Development Forum during May 2004 was unanimous in noting that the economy and society of Bangladesh have attained a high degree of resilience to shocks. Much of the successes are commonly attributed to the activities undertaken by the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the country. However, the government's relations with the nongovernmental organisations (often referred to as GO-NGO relations) are yet to stabilize. The term 'NGO' encompasses a broad array of organisations, varying in their specific purpose, philosophy, sectoral expertise and scope of activities. In two important ways the NGOs in Bangladesh stand out from the traditional private voluntary organisations (PVOs). First, NGOs engage in activities, which had traditionally been in the domain of the government agencies, and it is the failure of the latter, which prompted donors to route funds through these organisations.¹ Second, NGOs are largely participatory in their approach – at least, during the early phase of their development, which enables them to

deliver the services to targeted groups of population better than the hierarchically structured government agencies. In Bangladesh, such organisations first emerged soon after the war of liberation in 1971. For example, Gano Shasthya has its root in a mobile medical unit that provided support to the freedom fighters in 1971; RDRS started its activities by providing postwar rehabilitation services and supporting infrastructure development in the north-west region; and BRAC2 commenced its activities by providing relief and rehabilitation assistance to the community of fishermen in the north-east, who were displaced due to the atrocities during 1971.

Most of the NGOs during the early 1970s had their origins from outside Bangladesh. Activities of these NGOs had a narrow focus, e.g., rehabilitating infants and the 'unwanted' children of the war in Kurigram (Terre des Hommes), providing shelter and protection (Action Aid) to segments of the non-Bengali community, organise relief and rehabilitation activities in the northwest immediately after the 1974 famine, etc. An exception was the CUSO – Canadian University Students' Organisation – which had a wider ideological perspective, allegedly rooted in Paulo Freire's subaltern philosophy. CUSO closed its activities in 1976 with the conviction that local leadership had developed sufficiently. Thus, PROSHIKA was formed as a local NGO, and several training centres of CUSO were reportedly handed over to BARC.

During most of the 1970s, the NGOs were providing services in social sectors, e.g., education, health and sanitation, family planning, etc. There were also some local movements for self-reliance, culminating into the formation of Swanirvar Bangladesh. Pilot experiments into the provision of microcredit to small groups were made only towards the end of the 1970s. With the success of the Grameen Bank, the 1980s experienced a gradual acceptance of microcredit activities by NGOs. New institutions, often with indigenous effort, emerged during the late 1980s and early 1990s, though many of the first generation NGOs continued to engage in the delivery of social services. In spite of their induced interest in credit delivery, many of the newly emerging micro-finance institutions (MFIs), which are also included





in the domain of NGOs, have exclusive focus on microcredit.

In the specific context of Bangladesh, the distinction between NGOs and MFIs therefore often gets blurred. While the act of financial intermediation may require special focus, the microcredit organisations (MCOs)⁶ quite often engage as agents in the NGO sector as well. Figure describes the broad activities undertaken by the NGOs. Most NGOs engage in group-formation and provide financial services to group members. Some also engage in providing social services – health, education, water and sanitation, training and skill development and awareness building. There are others who may also engage as economic agents, such as, through providing marketing support to the beneficiaries, or, as provider of wage employment. The currently observed mix of activities has a long history; and the NGO sector in Bangladesh has been an ever-changing sector. Broadly speaking, while the NGOs may differ in their early engagements, their commonality is derived from the network of groups, of primarily women members, which underlie most NGO activities. Most NGOs also engage in providing financial services. While primary research into the paths of institutional savings and asset accumulation is yet absent, there is enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that this is underway in a significant way. Two other areas of engagements, often undertaken in conjunction with one or more of the four interventions listed above, are advocacy and research. Advocacy is a tool used to promote improved performance, shift priorities and highlight areas of concern. It is also an essential ingredient to social mobilisation. Thus, advocacy may overlap with all the market spaces identified in the figure. The same holds for research. However, both these activities may turn out to be saleable services, which a commercially motivated NGO may decide to deliver.

Due to the absence of registration practices with any one authority, and because more than one kind of organisations may register with the same authority, there is no exact estimate of the number of NGOs. If non-registered societies (such as, clubs and informal savings and credit associations, many of which may operate within the periphery of a single village), are included, then some guesstimates put the figure in the range of 22,000 to 24,000. However, it is only a small subset of these, whose work style and activities appear to be similar, that are commonly considered as NGOs. They are

mostly registered, even though there may always be some who are aspiring to get registered.

A formal management structure is generally in place, even if it is on paper and one or a few individuals may exercise exclusive authority in practice. The management, as well as the other working staff, are salaried staff; and the works are normally carried out within an (management-) approved annual work plan, which specifies various programmes to be pursued in relation to the targets set under each programme.

The ADAB directory lists 1,007 NGOs, including 376 non-member NGOs.³ The NGO Affairs Bureau (NAB) of the government of Bangladesh (GOB), which has to approve all foreign grants to NGOs working in Bangladesh, released grants worth about US\$ 250 million in FY 1996-97 to 1,132 NGOs, of which 997 are local and 135 are foreign [NGO Affairs Bureau 1998]. Most people, familiar with the canvas of NGO activities, suggest that the number of active NGOs in Bangladesh, as of June 2002, is more than 1,200.

NGOs in Bangladesh have played a very significant role in opening up access to credit for the poor and people in distant areas. Traditional banking had failed to reach the poor since ownership of collateral was a prerequisite for having access to bank credit. One corollary of collateral-based lending practices was that the poor were not bankable. The NGOs in Bangladesh and the Grameen Bank, established, to the contrary, that it is very much feasible to lend to the poor and ensure good recovery rate, and that such lending did not require collateral in the form of tangible assets. In the process, a new approach to banking has gained global recognition, and its efficacy in addressing needs of the poor is widely acknowledged. As mentioned earlier, Bangladeshi NGOs did not start off with microcredit – rather they depended exclusively on external funding to deliver social services to the poor.

In general, NGOs in Bangladesh focus their work on the very poorest sectors of society such as the landless, women and the rural poor.

Undeniably, there is now a proliferation of NGOs in Bangladesh. According to the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), an apex forum of NGOs founded in 1974 with the objectives of facilitating information exchange among its member organizations, about 135 NGOs are presently involved in agricultural programs alone (see Table 1).



Table 1
NGOs with a Program on Natural Resource Management

Name of Programs	International	National	Local	Total
Agriculture	12	22	101	135
Sericulture	3	6	19	28
Horticulture	0	2	2	4
Fisheries	7	15	96	118
Social Forestry	6	20	92	118
Land Reform	0	3	2	5
TOTAL	28	68	312	408

Source: ADAB, Computer Data Base on NGOs, ADAB, Dhaka, 1990

Table 1 indicates that there is an increasing trend of NGOs becoming more interested in the Natural Resource Management Program. One study stated: "In the field of Agriculture, NGOs have introduced new crops and cropping pattern. They have also been involved in large scale agricultural extension. Experiments in collective land use and testing of irrigation equipment as assets for landless are now going on".

However, there are only a few NGOs in Bangladesh that promote the importance of sustainable agriculture among the farmers such as PROSHIKA-MUK, Friends in Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB), CARE International and Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS). Their concept of sustainable agriculture "entails an eco-friendly agricultural system whereby people in the community optimize the use of their resources through traditional, indigenous, as well as modern science."

Because sustainable agriculture is still a new concept which at this point in time, and is still at the experimental stage, NGOs' main strategy is directed at meeting the subsistence needs of the farmers (Hirschman 1984).

NGOs in Bangladesh constitute a dynamic entity, which continues to table new challenges for the intellect as well as for the polity in the country. As a body of institutional arrangements, it surfaced as a result of failures in government delivery of certain social services. Eventually however the institutional dynamics and compulsions arising out of a participatory approach to grass roots

development, the NGOs trespassed into many other territories. The expansion path has not always been devoid of sins; yet, the society has come to terms with their existence. This paper has only highlighted the broad path traversed.

The NGOs have engaged in several areas and in most of these areas, there are other actors in the field with whom performances of the NGOs may be compared. In some such activities, the society may gain by providing a larger space to the NGOs substituting for the old agents, while in others, a new form of partnership between the old agents (both government agencies and private sector) and the NGOs may be envisaged.¹⁷ Our analysis takes into cognizance the possibility of a 'non-for-profit' organisation transcending into one which undertakes commercial ventures, giving priority to economic efficiency; and yet continues to subsidize programmes with social objectives. It is also true that the dynamics within the NGOs, the internal incentives, the pressures of donors and the domestic government, all shape the scope and character of NGO activities in Bangladesh. Thus, policies are important instruments, which may enhance the scope of NGO contribution to the economic and social development of Bangladesh. At the same time, excessive interventions and regulations by public agencies may often thwart the growth of an innovative sector, such as that of the NGOs.



Volunteerism as a profession

The definition of voluntary action has come to occupy different overtones in diverse cultures. The variability in this social activity is unique to each geographical location but the rudimentary drive remains to be the desire to help the needy and the down-trodden. Welfare activities find expression in divergent ideas, be they religious or political, the motivation and intention is to serve the society at large. Volunteerism thus can be informally defined as the individual or collective effort in plugging the lacunae in society by engaging in social work. While such connotations do not confer justice to the term, it nevertheless gives a broad outline. In the context of social welfare, volunteering is the conscious desire of an individual to assist a fellow human being in overcoming hardships and handicaps which are hindrances to the latter's overall well-being. The main thematic propensity for a volunteer is governed by the freedom of will and the exclusion of any sort of compulsion.

Voluntary action then succeeds with the cohesion of volunteers working on a platform i.e. an organization full time/part time with or without any financial remuneration in exchange for his or her services.

The differentiation of volunteers is vital in understanding the work profiles of volunteers.

They can be broadly classified into

- 1) **Administrative Volunteers:** Those who undertake administrative responsibilities which includes maintenance of accounts, official dispatches etc.
- 2) **Professional Volunteers:** Those maintaining simultaneously their professions by engaging in voluntary work example doctors, chartered accountants, Engineers, psychologists etc.
- 3) **Social Activists:** This category of volunteers is selflessly dedicated in working with the disadvantaged. India's long history has had social activists engaging themselves in crucial work for the society motivated by religion and later on ideologically nurtured by Gandhian thought.



Social Work as a profession

The emergence of social work as an occupation is a recent trend with many organizations trying to professionalize their work so as achieve a wider scope of results. Even though professionalism does not find the required space in volunteerism, its emergence as a crucial factor for carrying out social work cannot be downplayed. The ubiquitous corporate culture has initiated social work to take form as a profession as the compulsions to operate with efficacy is pre-requisite for survival. Although there is no unanimity within the sector whether professionalism is necessary, a majority of organizations have habituated themselves to this convention. Many sociologists have termed volunteerism a semi-profession as they point out that volunteerism when compared with other professions has an underdeveloped theoretical knowledge; a low professional autonomy and authority.

However the nuances of professionalism that have attached to social work are of a recent trend with many organizations still struggling in some corners to achieve that particular status.

While studies on social work as a profession are inconspicuous, the difficulty to study it holistically emerges as well. Social work had been confined to the welfare activities of religious groups or philanthropies.



The emergence of laws such as registration, certification and the consequent enactment of FCRA Act in 1976, pushed volunteerism to acquire a professional stature. Laws and Regulations promulgated by the government metamorphosed the blueprint of voluntary organizations overnight. Professionalism in voluntary sector became more visible and practiced with the influx of professionals (doctors, lawyers, engineers who found service to the poor and the needy a noble cause) who brought in their expertise into the sector, thereby reinventing the pattern of working which had been in conformance to an informal collective 'effort'. The professionalism professed by voluntary organizations worked in a dichotomous paradigm, as the narrative to label its benefits and draw

The zeal for professionalism in the sector has realigned it from the path of the traditional welfarist approach to embrace social work with pragmatism which has finessed it as a legitimate unit with the potential to provide, change and transform society by virtue of the monumental social work tendered.

out its consequences are still being debated. One of the main worries for professionalism is its gradualism into bureaucracy which will lead to degradation in the volunteerism as a profession.

Professional social workers

Realizing the growing strength of the voluntary sector, educational institutions have made available professional courses for certification of volunteers (MSW etc.) This has provided the boost for the voluntary sector to adopt professional codes and standards. This has also pervaded the sector to adopt and include newer facets in defining itself, an example being that of a think tank, carrying out research work in governmental plans and policies integrated by lending their intellectual resources for disposal at the request of the government. Constructing models ranging from governance to sociological, studying the responses and behavior of participants have helped in providing generic solutions to government in addressing problems of deprivation, disempowerment, disadvantage etc. Inferences, conclusions and references drawn from the data provided by voluntary organizations have contributed substantially to the government in devising, revising and shaping schemes and projects for the poor. The zeal for professionalism in the sector has realigned it from the path of the traditional welfarist approach to embrace social work with pragmatism which has finessed it as a legitimate unit with the potential to provide, change and transform society by virtue of the monumental social work tendered. Professionalism per se has developed the institutional framework and amplified the capacity building of the organizations as the proliferation of their varied activities have reaped tangible results. With a contoured and defined organization, voluntary organizations have been able to direct and concentrate on a cynosure of a problem sufficing with suitable results. Any project cannot succeed without a phased implementation mechanism and voluntary organizations have to dutifully follow this regimen. The incumbency of voluntary organizations equipped with professionalism cannot be discounted by the government as their role in being the hind legs for democracy is cardinal for the future. The narratives regarding professionalism and its applicability in the voluntary sector may not reconcile but acceptance of its virtues has to borne in mind.



Voice from Andhra Pradesh

— By VANI

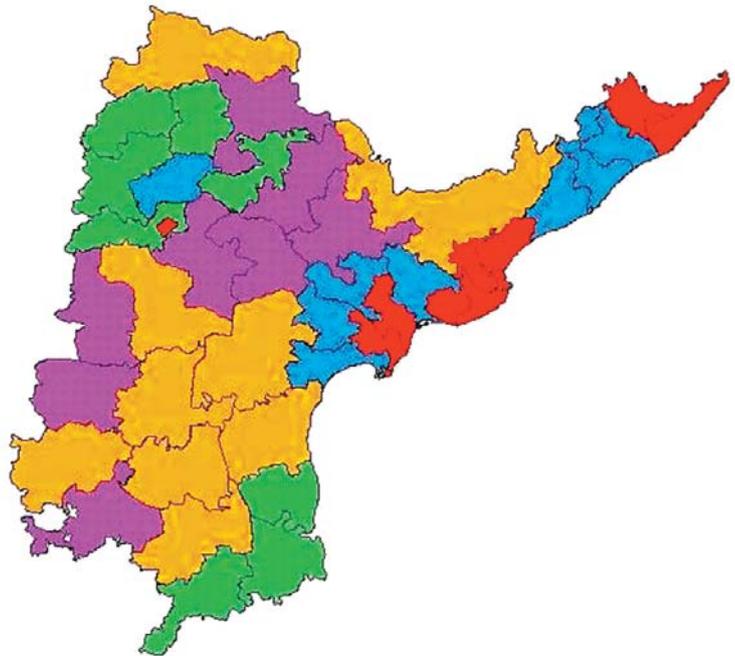
Andhra Pradesh is popularly known as the “Rice Bowl of India”. It is the fourth largest state by area and the fifth largest populous state. It was established on November 1, 1956 with the merger of Telengana and Andhra Pradesh state. The capital of Andhra Pradesh is Hyderabad and Warangal, Vijayawada and Vishakhapatnam are the other key cities. There are 23 districts out of which 9 are in coastal Andhra, 10 in Telengana and 4 in Rayalaseema. In the state Anantapur is the largest district and Hyderabad the smallest. Also the HDI value of Andhra Pradesh is 0.473 which shows low human development in the state. Andhra Pradesh is the third largest state receiving maximum foreign funding after Delhi and Tamil Nadu in the country

Contribution and Impact of VOs in Andhra Pradesh

1. VOs and the government collaboration are established in programmes like TRYSEM, MGNREGS, Vana Samrakshana Samithis, watersheds etc.
2. VOs have played pivotal role in accessing primary education to the rural poor with innovative schemes, using hands-on approaches.
3. The role of VOs in organizing women and forming SHGS has been recognized and they have also played a prominent role in highlighting the cause of social evils like dowry, female infanticide, and domestic violence.
4. In health care systems mass awareness was created by VOs on immunization and child health programmes using innovative methods and cultural media. The VOs and the government have been working together in addressing HIV/AIDS. Setting up APSACS and its existing collaboration with large number of VOs is only the beginning in combating HIV/AIDS.
5. VOs have played a pioneering role in creating awareness on environmental issues, stimulating civil societal response, and engaging in advocacy with government and initiating environment protection and promotion programmes like watersheds, rainwater harvesting, and tree-plantation.
6. Partnership between the voluntary sector and the government was remarkable in the state in terms of Food Assurance schemes where the VOs played a dominant role in policy making

Challenges faced by the VOs in Andhra Pradesh

Despite its size and historical significance, the voluntary sector in Andhra Pradesh is experiencing a tough time. Though the need for social services has increased with time to address the needs and requirements of the marginalized and the deprived communities, societies and charities are forced to compete with each other on account of the scarcity of government funding and other regulatory changes. The challenges faced by the sector are discussed under broad heads:





- **Lack of Funding Sources:** Information regarding sources of funding is limited among VOs and the long gestation period of fund sanctioning is a major concern. The funding volume has decreased compared to preceding years and it was stated that this may be due to competition existing among VOs for obtaining foreign funding. There has been a high increase in the number of VOs in the state on account of which there is confusion among donors regarding the identification of genuine organizations.

Moreover the government funding is not adequate to carry out developmental activities. Red-Tapism coupled with vested political interests and corruption among few government officials at the lower level obstructs work undertaken by these organizations. Hence VOs divert its resources to accomplish the works of government either due to the delay in getting grants or the small amount of funding

- **Lack of Internal good Governance:** As per the inferences drawn there was an absence of effective management systems among many VOs. Most of the policies which are the basic parameter and indicator of good management practice were missing among various organizations. However many organizations had well formulated operational and management policies.
- **Skill Gap:** There exists a huge skill gap, technical knowledge, stability and commitment among existing staff of VOs of Andhra Pradesh. The low and meager salary package hinders appointment and on the contrary the skilled and qualified personnel attract remuneration which is value for work. Moreover after gainful experience in the sector the employees leave for better opportunities. It poses a threat to the existence and sustainability of the sector and the grassroots VOs that are located in rural areas. On the contrary larger organizations possess both the resources and qualified personnel.
- **Ideological difference between the VOs:** There is significant inter agency collaboration among VOs in Andhra Pradesh and a number of VOs are engaged

with other local VOs, local CBO's, networks and federations in implementation of watershed projects, agriculture, education, health, livelihood, women empowerment programs, skill development, capacity-building and vocational training programs. This collaboration has proved to be fruitful and helped in expertise, exposure and smooth delivery of mass services. However there exist ideological differences, mutual distrust, non-cooperation and non-coordination among the voluntary organizations in the state, which needs to be worked out for the long and better sustenance of this sector.

Recommendations & Suggestions

Recommendation to the Government:

- **Three tier approval machinery:** The procedures of district administration scrutiny, state government's recommendation and subsequently sanction of funds by central government should be reduced to an easy and liberal process.
 - Strategic procedures and policies laid down by government should be simplified and rationalized for timely clearance of approved budget.
 - Institutional building and organizational skill development should be allocated even in government aided projects.
 - Government should frame workable policies to extend funding to genuine organizations having base at grassroots and carrying out the development work.
 - Government should strengthen the GO-NGO (which is presently not functional)
- Coordination Committees in the interest of the disadvantaged people and community at state, district and block level as effective and meaningful collaboration of both the parties will help in accelerating development activities and help in building and ensuring good governance.
- Government should involve planning, monitoring and implementing the poverty eradication programme.



- There is a need to look at the critical aspect of the Corporate Social Responsibility.

One of the respondent interviewed commented, “There is every scope to improve the skills of the existing staff and the organization is striving to improve the same through refresher and skill development programs continually. However, lack of adequate budgetary allocations is the major constraint”.

Technical institutes of the state in some way adding to the capacity of the VOs.

Technical Institutes at various instances extended their supports to VOs in the form of trainings and skill development activities. Collaboration was seen in the field of organic farming and entrepreneurship development among VOs, and research and technical institutes. Various research institutes and centers are providing training support to VOs by introducing certificate courses for dissemination of information relating to skill development and professional exposure. Even in Anantapur there have been various efforts to have a common platform for VOs. However it is difficult to keep unity between members when some members have better continuity of funds and others lesser and some members have a good level of honesty and transparency and others not. If there is some commonality not in size of the organization or in type of work but at least in stability of regular funding and honesty and transparency it would be easier for VOs to share a common platform.

Respondent from Andhra Pradesh

- (CSR) of the private sector, which is not providing enough space to the voluntary sector to operate and function.
- Necessary changes to be made in the Companies Bill 2012. The bill focuses on the voluntary adoption of social welfare schemes among the corporate sector, which is providing ample scope for corporates to escape from their commitment towards the society.
- Government should give priority to the VOs working for SC, ST, backward communities, minorities, dalit etc. and support them in the form of funding and formulation and easy execution of operational and management policies.

Recommendation to the Private Sector:

- Indian private companies and corporate sector could extend funding to the voluntary sector as a part of fulfilling their social responsibility.
- Initiatives to be made by the corporate houses to engage with the voluntary organizations in an effective manner so that the interaction can be more productive and prolific.

Recommendation to the VOs

- To sensitize people in India to contribute towards development of their own people living in poverty situation.
- There is a need to enhance and augment inter agency collaboration among the grassroot organizations which should more focus on working collectively rather individually.
- Skill gaps could be curtailed by organizing trainings covering various facets of development (Management/Gender/Development Leadership/Community Organization & Professional/technical trainings) and various sectorial interventions (Health/Medical/Disability/Ecology & Environment) with the help of internal and external resource persons. Upgrading skills of senior and middle level managerial staff concerning new concepts (e.g., Social Business) is also suggested since many international donor agencies now-a-days link their funding to those concepts.
- Need to formulate guidelines to identify genuine VOs in each districts of the state.
- The NGO members of the GO-NGO Coordination Committee (APGONGO) should take initiative to revive the committee, which is presently non-functional and ineffective.



FCRA and the hypocrisy on the part of political parties

The contentious issue of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 2010 has surfaced yet again, especially with the recent cognizance made by the Delhi High Court in regard to its misappropriation by political parties for securing financial funding for elections and allied political activities. FCRA, with all its punitive provisions was incorporated in 1976 to curb foreign funding and restrain foreign interventions in domestic affairs. At the centrality of the act lies the voluntary sector which has been consistently facing its wrath, as it has been articulate enough to delineate the sector as the potential 'foreign fund recipient'. The Act became more tyrannical in 2010, when the UPA government decided to make it more belligerent and clamped down several voluntary organizations under the garb of labeling them 'conduits for foreign activities' as the precedent for such behavior was born out of the Kudankulam and Dantewada protests. Such instances on the part of the government have proceeded to corrode the facilitative environment for voluntary organizations and effectively impeded their growth. But what occupies the limelight is the hypocritical stand adopted by political parties in respect to their arbitrary usage of FCRA. The ruling made by the Delhi High Court stated the routing of foreign funds especially from foreign companies for political activity surmounting to a gross violation of the FCRA act. It may be recalled that such a similar instance was witnessed in regard to the ruckus created by the political parties on the question of funding to the Aam Aadmi Party. FCRA stipulates restrictions on receiving 'donations' from foreign sources, a prima facie act which proves the culpability of two major national parties. But what constitutes a subversion of justice is the regressive approach adopted against civil society groups, whose involvement in development of the country surpasses that of dabbling in petty political activities. This blatant hypocrisy exuded by political parties is veritably anti-national and anti-development. The contribution of civil society and voluntary organizations in nation development are verifiable in the annals of history. It cannot remain in oblivion that most political parties utilize these funds for their luxury; au contraire civil society groups deploy funds for selfless social work. It is true that many organizations are frequent misusers of such funds but this monolith perception cannot be imposed on the whole sector. The voluntary sector has

always been flexible and has never made a hullabaloo against any regulation or imposition, although when the question comes to their existence, dissent is natural. A noticeable worry ascertained in the attitude of the government is the arbitrary usage of the act in delaying and revoking licenses to voluntary organizations. The civil society can only mark their protest but apart from dissent there are no alternatives.

What to do?

Civil society and voluntary organization should coalesce and collectively file petitions to the government inducing them to understand the hardships faced by the sector. Our faith in the democratic system should not waiver as exemplified by the commendable act of the judiciary which has taken note of the misuse of foreign funds. For building a robust image and restoring its sincerity, voluntary sector should expend in public relations. One should invoke clarity in not thinking that the government harbors an 'anti-NGO' attitude. Instances can be cited principally the recent projects after the imposition of FCRA 2010, the government made sure that civil society groups form the broader role in assisting them for rural and urban schemes ranging from poverty alleviation, education, disaster rehabilitation, health, participatory government institutions, governance and sanitation. The practical knowledge and experience, voluntary organizations have cultivated cannot be brushed under the carpet overnight. The government needs deployment and delegation of voluntary organizations for rendering their projects successful. The only contestation with the government is the double standards adopted in FCRA with the manipulative maneuvering employed by political parties not to evade its provisions. The voluntary sector has always emphasized that it would only lead to the sector's strengthening if 'positive' regulation weeds out those dubious organizations that have tarnished the image of the sector. Uniformity in approaching these two subjects of funding to political parties and voluntary organizations cannot be seen in a comparative analysis. However for the sake of our democratic tradition, the Delhi High Court's ruling can be breather for the voluntary sector which has been at the receiving end for so long especially when the political parties have come under fire for violation.



Organisational Profile: Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental organisation, mandated to ensure the practical realisation of human rights in the Commonwealth.

CHRI was **founded** in 1987 in London by Commonwealth professional associations to promote human rights in the Commonwealth. CHRI moved its Headquarters from London to New Delhi in 1993. It was a conscious decision to be based in the developing 'South'. CHRI has grown and is now a family of offices in Delhi, London and Accra. The office in Accra, Ghana coordinates work in Africa and a small office in London acts as a liaison office. Programs are implemented collaboratively. Each office is registered as a separate legal entity under the laws of the country in which it is located.

CHRI's **objectives** are to promote awareness of, and adherence to, the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other international human rights instruments, as well as in-country laws and policies that support human rights and good governance within member states. To achieve this goal, CHRI set out to build a strong NGO based in the global South that would do specialist work, garner best practice from all over and particularly promote South-South learning and capacity building.

For its **governance**, CHRI has an International Advisory Commission made up of eminent people from across the Commonwealth. It sets the policy directions for all the offices. Each office has its own Executive Committee that oversees the day-to-day implementation of program directions. For cohesion, the Chairs of the Executive Committees also sit on the International Advisory Commission. The Executive Director is the CEO in charge of all the offices and programs.

CHRI is **accredited** to the Commonwealth; has special consultative status at the Economic and Social Council of the UN and observer status at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACPHR).

Vision and Focus Areas

CHRI envisions a world where every person's right to fair, accountable, transparent and participatory governance is guaranteed.

CHRI is a multi-issue organisation that makes strategic interventions to bring about systemic changes that will improve human rights and governance. It also has areas of concentration, namely Access to Justice, particularly police reforms, and Access to Information, in which it has developed years of focused expertise and reputation. CHRI's approach throughout is to act as a catalyst for activity around its priority concerns.

CHRI's strategic areas of intervention arise out of, and are informed by, a realisation that, with very few exceptions, in the Commonwealth jurisdictions there is little information about rights or governance and little effective redress available for violation. Most Commonwealth countries remain mired in poverty, suffer from poor governance and are at best imperfect democracies. Seen from a rights perspective the root causes of the population's poverty, social conflict and dissatisfaction with government under-performance can be traced to lack of knowledge of rights and duties, powerlessness to ensure accountability, and inability to take an informed part in governance. Yet the Commonwealth also holds some of the best practices in governance, rights adherence and justice delivery.

CHRI's focus on **Access to Justice and Access to Information** arises out of the belief that it is the prime responsibility of the state to assure its citizens' safety and



security and access to justice. Where failures occur, individuals and systems must be brought to account, and systemic change instituted to prevent reoccurrence.

CHRI's Access to Justice Program currently focuses on:

police reform and prison reform.

CHRI strongly promotes people's right to access information (RTI) as a key measure underpinning robust democracy, rapid development, good governance and the effective realisation of human rights. Openness increases accountability and transparency, promotes consultation, allows informed choices and reduces corruption. Activities that have been important for CHRI include extensive research and publications, engaging policy-makers, like parliamentarians, lawyers, media, civil society - building capacity, and larger public education, analysing draft RTI bills, creating alliances with other organisations to campaign for access to information legislation in tune with international best practise, and auditing the implementation of legislation.

Programme Focus and Activities

Strategic Initiatives:

CHRI believes that "The Commonwealth must be about human rights or it is about nothing at all". It monitors member states' compliance with human rights obligations, brings out periodic reports, makes submissions to various forums and advocates by itself, and with partners for full compliance with human rights commitments, where found wanting. CHRI strategically engages with regional and international bodies including the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, the UN, and the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights. Some ongoing initiatives include: Monitoring Commonwealth mechanisms and member countries from a human rights lens; Reviewing Commonwealth countries' human rights promises at the UN Human Rights Council and engaging with its Universal Periodic Review; Advocating for the protection of human rights defenders and civil society space; Monitoring the performance of National Human Rights Institutions in the Commonwealth while advocating for their strengthening; Advocating for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) rights in Commonwealth countries; and

Monitoring specific country situations of concern.

Reports to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting:

CHRI produces a biennial report before each Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) which focuses in-depth on one particular issue; a way to look at the Commonwealth through a human rights lens. The reports are closely linked to CHRI's on-going work. Reports since 2001 have focused on: a human rights approach to Poverty, Right to Information, Police Accountability, Anti-terror Legislation, Human Rights Defenders, the relationship between National Human Rights Institutions and Civil Society, and most recently on a Commonwealth Commissioner for Human Rights. These research reports have informed CHRI's advocacy and programme work, and helped CHRI connect with people and organisations working on the same issues in several Commonwealth countries.

Access to Information:

CHRI catalyses civil society and governments to take action, acts as a hub of technical expertise in support of strong legislation, and assists partners with implementation of good practice. CHRI works collaboratively with local groups and officials, building government and civil society capacity as well as advocating with policy-makers. CHRI is recognised as a resource in South Asia, and runs the South Asia Right to Information Advocates Network (SARTIAN). It has played a significant role in ensuring strong Access to Information legislation in several South Asian countries, built capacity on the supply and demand side, and monitors implementation keenly. It provides legal drafting support and inputs in Africa; organises learning programmes in India for practitioners from South Asian and African countries; and works with international, regional and national organisations to catalyse interest in access legislation.

In India, the programme graduated from its earlier objectives of training government officers to implement the law and building capacity of large networked civil society groups, to engaging more in the next higher set of activities such as deepening and expanding the regime



of transparency through strategic litigation, defending the access law from roll back and providing analytical research on jurisprudential developments around the RTI Act for the use of RTI practitioners. CHRI constantly monitors developments, and regularly brings out e-mail alerts and rapid studies, which have become a much-appreciated source providing timely information and analysis for the RTI fraternity, including activists and journalists.

Access to Justice:

Police Reforms: In too many countries the police are seen as oppressive instruments of state rather than as protectors of citizens' rights, leading to widespread rights violations and denial of justice. CHRI focuses on reforming policing through attention to internal systems and external oversight: policing can become democratic only when seen as a "service" that protects civil liberties and human rights, rather than a "force" subservient to the regime in power. The programme currently focuses on South Asia and East Africa. CHRI helped found the Usalama Reforms Forum in East Africa; serves as secretariat for NIPSA (Network for Improved Policing in South Asia), and runs the website www.nipsa.in. Our regional reports on the status of policing have been well received.

In India, CHRI's programme aims at mobilising public support for police reform, as well as strengthening accountability and oversight mechanisms. One of its most popular publications is a colourful booklet *101 things you wanted to know about the police but were too afraid to ask: "A children's book for adults to learn from."* The simple language and vibrant cartoons make it accessible to a large number of people whose rights are violated by police forces around the world. It is wildly popular, and has been translated into several languages in India and adapted and translated with partners in other countries including, Bangla (Bangladesh), Urdu (Pakistan), Dhivehi (Maldives), Swahili (Tanzania). CHRI also has a set of pamphlets on Know your Rights

In the run up to the elections in India, at the Centre and in select states, CHRI sends submissions to the Manifesto Committees of several political parties, requesting the

inclusion of police reforms (towards democratic, accountable policing), writes articles in newspapers, campaigns through its facebook page FixPolicingNow, and will use new tools and strategies to build public understanding and demand for better policing. A campaign in Maharashtra with partner Police Reforms Watch to demand better policing is gaining momentum.

Prison Reforms: CHRI works from the perspective that the issue of overstays and overcrowding is intimately connected to the way the judiciary, police, prosecution and public defender system works; the impact of the cascading dysfunction within the system falls on prisoners. A major focus is on highlighting the failures of the legal system, and engaging in interventions to ease this. Another area of concentration is aimed at reviving the prison oversight systems that have completely failed.

CHRI has worked with judges, lawyers, prison administrations, human rights commissions and lay visitors using a variety of methods. These included: reporting on prison conditions in various states; training the bar, bench and even convicts to help provide prisoners with legal aid; creating a computer application for inclusion into prison and court management software that will automatically tell authorities when a prisoner becomes eligible for release on bail as per the new amendments to the law; partnering with law schools to build legal clinics to service prisons; working with colleagues across the border to improve official coordination so that foreign prisoners could be released and repatriated; litigating against long incarcerations; persuading official administrations to ensure prison visiting systems were reinstated, legal aid made accessible, and administrative oversight strengthened; and pushing the media to change the public's view of prisoners from presumed guilt and suspicion to empathy.

Publications

All CHRI's publications can be found on its website www.humanrightsinitiative.org. Copies can be obtained by writing to info@humanrightsinitiative.org, giving full postal address.



Leaders Speak: Bharat Bhushan (PANI)

Interview with Bharat Bhushan, Chief Functionary of People's Action for National Integration, gave us a brief insight into his organization working at the grassroots level and the thematic areas covered by it.

How and why did you join the voluntary sector?

Apparently I am from the fourth generation of my family to be involved in voluntarism. My great grandfather was a freedom fighter and my grandfather was a co-founder of Gandhi Ashram in Eastern UP. Both my parents were also active community level volunteers inspired by the Gandhian thought and had commenced their volunteer activity in 1949 where they worked with the tribals of Bihar and Orissa in the field of education and development. Inspired by their commitment to work for the downtrodden I ventured into this sector in 1986 where I formed a loose grouping of local volunteers in my village of Faizabad district with our focus on women and children's health which was primarily a response to the utter neglect they were facing by the bureaucracy. But with progress we felt it was necessary to cover other areas where government inefficiency was visible. By this time we decided to register our organization by the name of People's Action for National Integration (PANI) in 1989 and covered other thematic areas like Health, Sanitation, Education and Livelihood. After which we decided to integrate them under the rubric of a Rights Based approach where we empowered local citizens through Local samitis and sanghs to demand for their legitimate rights from the government in the areas crucial for holistic development of an individual. This endeavor has resulted in PANI covering at least 600 panchayats and 16 districts with 200 employees.

How is PANI structured in its organizational capacity?

We have a policy where we ensure that the volunteers working with us are parochial, as they would be more efficient in empathizing with the locals of a community. Most of them are deeply involved with the community and are not professional in their approach. For example



the level of English education in Eastern UP is dismal and the lack of computer related knowledge has been a barrier for many youngsters, this is where our volunteers play a role in facilitating to fill in those lacunae. Our grassroots level volunteers or Community Level Workers (CLW) are governed by supervisors who are professional social workers situated at district levels monitoring their activities. Hence one finds a clear distinction of the application of voluntarism and professionalism at two different levels in our organization as being partisan towards one approach would not be pragmatic. Also the organizational structure of PANI rests on decentralization as we believe that voluntarism cannot be successful unless we emulate a model excluded of centrality in our organization. Our district officers are involved in making the required linkages with the Panchayats and recruiting CLW's.

As PANI's thrust is on areas concerned with grassroots rights based approaches and advocacy, has any governmental barriers impeded your work?

Yes we have had some troubles but since we are



structured in a decentralized fashion and present at the grassroots, our biggest advocates are the people whom we serve as they have seldom stepped into resolving issues where PANI faced a governmental backlash. So much so that matters are taken into hand by communities without me (chief functionary) coming into a direct interface with officials. So one can ascertain the level democracy and decentralization we have in our organization. Also PANI shares a great relation with the state government and has collaborated and assisted them in non-financial projects. Our smaller units involved at the grassroots have facilitated the government in implementation of schemes like MNREGA, RTE and NRHM.

As a volunteer involved in social work for many years what future do you see for the sector?

I think voluntarism should be recognized by the government as a domain of work with committed

activists trying to fill in the shoes where government has remained absent. If you look at our history, voluntarism has been the cornerstone of our civilization. Right from gurukuls operated by Sadhus and Rishis to the activities of Gandhiji, one can even say that our freedom struggle was an act of voluntarism. A separate ministry should be accorded to this sector and study the benefits given to society by volunteers involved in development work. Also there should be a realization by the state to assess its failures in light of its intrusion into every aspect of social life which has been since the inception of the five year plans. However governmental intervention maybe important, the failures outweigh the achievements and it is here where voluntary organizations have immensely contributed by being the bridge. As an optimist I see the future of the voluntary sector coming to be more realizable and positive and anticipate a change in perception of the government.

BRLF- Governmental project to partner with voluntary organizations

In a move which will benefit the voluntary sector in India, the government has bought forward a new initiative which aims to have voluntary organizations as complementary agents in assisting developmental activities. The progress of development taken place in India has been uneven, leading to the exclusion of numerous communities from the purview of reaping the harvests of growth. Rural households have been consistently oblivious from development story, leading to their existence at the fringes of modern India. Evolving an arena to provide a facilitative action oriented mechanism for their empowerment; the Bharat Rural Livelihood Foundation is a proposed project which would act as an autonomous intermediary in dispensing projects for the rural poor in collaboration with the civil society groups so as to provide relief and development. The unique methodology utilized in the project will involve civil society being a legitimate partner in developing innovative procedures, focusing on specific areas where there is urgency for rejuvenated ideas to be applied for. Certain select areas are demarcated for the first phase of implementation of BRLF commencing with tribals/adivasis as the initial target group. BRLF which will be constituted under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 will provide the financial resources to voluntary organizations for operationalizing their varied capacities so as to provide the propulsion for their innovation skill development and discretionary implementation. BRLF also ventures to support at least 1000 VO professionals, aiming to assist the human resource department of the voluntary organizations for large scale deployment. An initial investment of Rs. 500 crore is earmarked against the corpus of the society for disposal. With a three tier partnership, BRLF will be partnering with the government on one hand and civil society/philanthropies on the other. This collaboration will be a valuable experience for voluntary organizations to invest themselves in as it will provide a spectrum of opportunities to learn, nurture and develop for the future.



News Snippet

Civil Society delegates boycott ASEAN meeting

In what can be perceived as an attempt to truncate the voice of the civil society, the recent meeting scheduled between the ASEAN and the ASEAN Civil Society in Naypyidaw saw the latter's delegates stage a boycott to mark their protest citing unwarranted intervention on behalf of three South East Asian countries.

Apparently the meet was initiated by the ASEAN Civil Society/ ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) which is a collective platform within the ASEAN representing the civil society of Southeast Asia. Three Members of the ASEAN Civil Society/ASEAN People's Forum from Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore were rejected to be the nominees in the interface as they were not the intended choice to represent the delegation by their respective governments. In a show of solidarity with the rejected delegates, a domino effect was witnessed when the remaining seven delegates also decided not to participate in the meet.

Issuing a statement, ASEAN Civil Society steering committee noted, "We reluctantly withdraw from this meeting due to the discretionary approach adopted by three governments to nominate delegates who are not part of the civil society in those countries."

The chosen delegate from Burma, Dr. May Shi Sho of the Karen Development Network was accepted by the Burmese authorities, although Naypyidaw and other governments have attempted to name their own delegates who have close ties with the state.

This is not first time when ASEAN Civil Society/ ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) have marked their protest. In 2009 the ASEAN summit in Hua Hin, Thailand witnessed a similar spectacle where five countries rejected their delegates.

The antagonism prevalent among these countries has been consistent, with countries like Cambodia and Burma appearing hostile towards the ASEAN Civil Society/ ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF).

"It is deplorable to hear that the Cambodian government has rejected the nominees. This is a blatant erosion of the selection process " said Thida Khus, the executive director of Silaka, a Cambodian NGO and the ASEAN Civil Society/ ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) appointed delegate to attend the meet.

She also remarked the apparent conflict that arises in consensus formation between ASEAN Civil Society/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) and the state governments.

In response to such interference adopted by member states, the ASEAN Civil Society/ ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) has stipulated certain benchmarks for the member states to adhere to in order to proceed with the talks.

"The reason we have committed to these principles is because we believe the ASEAN Civil Society/ ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) to be an independent platform which excludes any governmental intervention," said Corrina Lopa, member of the ASEAN Civil Society/ ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) steering committee.



From the World - Civil Society in Russia

The latest issue of the conservative journal 'Foreign Policy' promptly carried an article on the state of the civil society in Russia and how it was under the firing line by the Putin administration which appeared to be placing regressive laws in place, garroting the numerically minute sector. After the fall of the Soviet Union, democracy has not fully blossomed in Russia. The apathy towards civil society, remnant of the soviet past is endemic to government institutions who view voluntary organizations as foreign liaison's polluting the Russian culture and society. A glance at the past actions of the state clamping down civil society organizations reveals the ubiquitous intolerance which usually manifests itself in forceful suppression.

The ferocity with which the Putin administration has displayed itself renders many commentators to draw a harrowing reminiscent comparison to an extant Josef Stalin regime.

The advocacy of civil society in Russia has seen it upfront on a variety of issues plaguing Russian society. Whether be it grassroots or advocating rights for the marginalized (be it minorities, gender or LGBT), Russian civil society's enthusiastic participation has always heralded the causes which often remain in oblivion to mainstream Russian society. An intrinsic attribute of these civil society organizations have nurtured pretty lately has been dissent, more perceptible after the alleged election rigging manufactured by Putin. Since then the wrath of the state has only accentuated, with the challenge to conformity viewed with displeasure and vendetta sought to dismantle the whole structure of civil society. In tandem the trust deficit between Russia and the USA has augmented in modifying the administration's view of civil society as agents of the United States, plotting to deride the Russian state and instill 'American values'.

The dictums ratified by the state to reign in civil society organizations is in unison with the hegemony the Russian state seeks to establish over autonomous bodies. The subsuming of various media houses under state control is an example of the discretionary executive power exercised arbitrarily. By employing threatening overtones towards civil society and autonomous bodies, the government seeks to quash any independent free thinking and critical debates,



which undermine the authority of the Putin and his party. Instances of repression and suppression illuminate the manipulated vilification carried out secretly by the administration in KGBesque style. But dismissing Russia's political system as authoritarian is not completely justified. Judgments passed by the courts have seen numerous NGO's win litigations against the state where they were accused of collaborating with foreign countries. The judiciary's independent stand is worth an applause noting the prejudice civil society is battling. But such acts on behalf of the government have not deterred the NGO's to reconfigure themselves for holding demonstrations and strategizing tactics to take on the state administration, a subtle reminder of the David vs Goliath exemplar.

While civil society continues to occupy a microcosmic democratic space in Russia, the officialdom has ventured as far as to choke their existence by restricting funding from outside. The strategy- by replacing itself as the main donor, the government seeks to impose its authority on these civil society organizations and influence their functioning.

However the fortified stand exemplified by the Russian civil society is commendable, even with the harsh treatment meted out by the administration, the resolve to stay put is a precedent epitomizing the thirst for reform.



News you can use

New draft law for NGOs in Pakistan

<http://pda.net.pk/new-draft-law-for-ngos-drops-a-cat-among-pigeons/>

Donations to AAP from abroad didn't violate law: Centre

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Donations-to-AAP-from-abroad-didnt-violate-law-Centre/articleshow/34793530.cms>

NGO Bailancho Saad demands a system in place to look after destitute women in the state of Goa

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/Govt-should-provide-for-destitute-women-in-state/articleshow/33923481.cms>

Does climate change aggravate gender inequalities? Empirical assessment from South India

<http://www.eldis.org/go/topics/resource-guides/climate-change&id=68347&type=Document#.U4gRMnKSzEk>

Russia: "Foreign Agents" Law Hits Hundreds of NGOs:

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/29/russia-foreign-agents-law-hits-hundreds-ngos-updated-may-29-2014>

UAE NGO to help improve education in India

http://zeenews.india.com/news/world/uae-ngo-to-help-improve-education-in-india_931789.html

HC seeks report on facilities at schools for special kids

<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/hc-seeks-report-on-facilities-at-schools-for-special-kids/>

Foreign Funded NGO's under IB scanner

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/Mysterious-NGOs-Under-MHA-Radar/2014/05/25/article2243524.ece>

<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/foreignaided-ngos-are-actively-stalling-development-ib-tells-pmo-in-a-report/1258034>

<http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/how-india-treats-its-ngos/>

VANI Activities: April 2014 - May 2014

April 20-21, Bangkok, Thailand, ADN regional Strategic Advocacy Planning meeting

IFP Council Meeting on 19 – 22 May 2013 at London, UK

Action 2015 Asia- Asia CSO Strategy Meeting on, "Mobilisation planning for 2015" from May 25 and 26, 2014, Bangkok

Forthcoming Events

Discussion on enabling environment for voluntary sector on 3rd June at VANI Office

Discussion on New Government and Future of Voluntary Organisations on 10 June 2014 at IIC

CIVICUS National Consultation on 25 June 2014