

**A REPORT
ON
NATIONAL CONSULTATION 2015**



VOLUNTARY SECTOR : NEED FOR REGULATORY REFORMS

18-19, FEBRUARY 2015, VISHWA YUVAK KENDRA, NEW DELHI

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Voluntary Action Network India (VANI)

A Report on National Consultation 2015
Voluntary Sector: Need for Regulatory Reforms

Themes

Regulatory Environment - FCRA
Regulatory Environment - Income Tax
Registration Law
Internal Governance
Management (Self-Certification)

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Inauguration

Changing scenario of the voluntary sector

Background

Every sector goes through evolutionary stages with influx and retreat of factors changing attributes and qualities in relation to the external environment. The voluntary sector is one which can attest to the evolution that has transfigured its contours. The situation for the sector has drastically changed over the years, with governmental intrusion reaching heights in tandem with harassment and intimidation tactics employed to play on the insecurities of the sector. To address this undergoing change and search for viable solutions to help draw the roadmap for the future, the Annual National Consultation of VANI opened with the changing scenario of the voluntary sector as the first session of the two day meet.



On February 18-19, 2015, VANI organized its Annual National Consultation at Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi themed **“Voluntary Sector: Need for Regulatory Reforms”**. The welcome address was presented by Ms. Ratna Manjari, Programme Manager, VANI. Welcoming the various participants attending the consultation from across India, Ms. Manjari explained on the need for instituting regulatory reforms for the sector.

The necessity to attach importance to this topic was apparent from the current climate existing for voluntary sector by which many organizations were facing regulatory problems in their day to day operations. The purpose of this consultation was aimed to demystify the regulatory provisions existing for the voluntary sector by providing clarity on the most commonly asked questions. Also given that the time for renewal of the FCRA certificate for many organizations was an impending issue, the consultation presented the best opportunity to discuss and contemplate for a future strategy. Ms. Manjari then proceeded to brief the participants on the program design of the two day consultation followed by reciting a poem in Hindi, which was an analogy to the present situation of voluntary sector.



Thereafter the panelists were called to the podium to chair the discussion on the changing scenario of the voluntary sector.

Mr. Harsh Jaitli, CEO, VANI – Welcomed all the participants to the consultation by introducing the purpose of organizing such consultations annually. Each year different themes found their way in being the focal points of discussion of a national level and this year’s area of discussion was a crucial contemplation for the voluntary sector’s future. Since the past three years, multiple challenges had emerged with one of them being FCRA, by which the government was using it to curb the activities of voluntary organizations. On the



pretext of this act, the government liberally used it to strike fear among organizations mostly in dissuading them to carry out their activities. A synonymy could be observed between the Central Bureau of Investigation and the FCRA Act with the former working to create fear psychosis among government officials and politicians while the latter among voluntary organizations. Mr. Jaitli commented that it was uncanny to see that only the voluntary sector was targeted, especially with leaking of reports and selective targeting such as publishing lists of organizations, a trend absent from the corporate sector or any other sector as a

matter of fact. This growing commonality of selective targeting has become a trademark for the government to restrict organizations such as putting them in prior permission status or terming them as conduits for anti-development activities and even putting them in suspension mode. So much so that even foreign donors are also not spared from the clasp of scrutiny.

Informing organizations on prior approval status through government framed letters revealed a callous and lackadaisical attitude on their behalf. Also the renewal process coming up for organizations, has been a cause of concern, as many have expressed their apprehension in relation to the process of renewal rather than the renewal of their FCRA certificates. Foreign funding to India, amounted to a good 10000 crore, which included transfers to religious institutions, foundations etc. As observed appeals to the government have been made from time to time to make a separate account for foreign funding which will act as a midpoint for disbursement to organizations. Such a mechanism will ensure that foreign funding to organizations remains under the watchful eye of the government. The time had finally come when the voluntary sector demanded regulatory reforms considering that archaic legislations that were governing the sector today. VANI endeavors to provide a conducive working environment for voluntary organizations in the country and hence in its deliberations it has been vociferously demanding that regulatory reforms be brought in. The time had come when due acknowledgement to the sector had to be rendered. Mr Jaitli questioned the isolation of the sector, asking why the corporate sector or any other sector for that matter of sake, was given due hearing to present appeals on its enabling environment when the same was not available to the voluntary sector.

Dr. Jayant Kumar, Chairperson, VANI – Started by thanking Mr. Jaitli, the panelists and the participants attending the Annual National Consultation. The voluntary sector has been facing problems for some period of time, especially with regards to decline in finances for projects and programmes, intimidation of grass root activists and demonizing tactics employed by the government to harass organizations. Other issues of changes in Income Tax laws, renewal process of FCRA have as of yet remained points of confusion and distress for many in the sector. Emphasizing VANI's role in being the national platform for planning discussions on these issues in the past 2-3 years, Dr. Jayant Kumar said that practical difficulties for many grass root organizations had continued which required VANI to undertake an extensive campaign to highlight them and bring newer discourses and debates on the enabling environment for voluntary organizations. Dr. Jayant Kumar spoke of the changing scenario of the voluntary sector when compared to its status two-three years ago. It was difficult to arrive at the status when one had not studied the trends. Now was the time to reflect on the past trends that had been anticipated and have



transformed to factual realities currently confronting us. But the situation we face is in the form of implementation of those trends which had been theorized. Despite being associated with the sector for almost 25 years and participating in numerous debates on the status of the voluntary sector has become so difficult that challenges confronting us call for immediate attention. Citing examples of Greenpeace which was only organizing people to campaign against exploitation of forests and natural resources and the secret IB report implicating the sector as being roadblock in the development trajectory of the country, Dr. Kumar highlighted the government's negative attitude towards voluntary sector owing to its different interpretation of social service. He then focused on the prior permission component in which for each transfer of funds, permission was required by the government to validate it. Such a cumbersome process all depended on the discretion of the government and the bureaucracy. Such discretionary powers to the government spelled difficulty for organizations depending on foreign funding. It was an urgent need to have a session on the prior permission and discuss it in length. Also a new list of 88 organizations was ready to be released soon and its coverage and indictments was of yet unknown. We can observe it in our time that many organizations possessing an FCRA account are actually issued notices and in light of all these developments it was imperative to come up with responses from our side to counter such actions. We have been witnesses to the recent debates around the Land Acquisition Bill and other anti-people policies affecting the poor and downtrodden of this country. While these may be economically sound policies working for the benefit of the country in large but development cannot be achieved at the expense of the poor. It may come as no surprise that organizations working on rights based issues will be the first to be targeted in the sector. Similarly the donors funding these organizations will face the same treatment meted out on these organizations. This will then have cyclic effect as the organizations basing themselves on rights based issues will have to go back to being service delivery organizations. Another challenge presented by Dr. Kumar was the trust deficit between the government and voluntary sector organizations which had to be mended and rectified in the interests of both parties.

Dr. Kumar in his address said that VANI as a national platform had to focus on other aspects of the sector and move ahead from technical issues of FCRA, Income Tax, Self-Management standardizations, Internal Governance etc. However these are important issues which need clarification but VANI had to open interfaces with the government and speak on other issues such as those affecting the democratic rights of the people especially which are non-violent and non-anti-national protests in nature. Hence such continuous engagements with the government had to be taken up by VANI and look beyond the realm of what is currently doing and emerge as a leader and think tank of the voluntary sector. A hard fact also had to be swallowed was that the level of foreign funding in the next five years was about to come down enormously. This would have a direct bearing on the functioning of organizations and it would be necessary to find alternatives to funding. Foreign Funding diminishment may lead to finding CSR funding as a viable alternative but this engagement would take some time. However working without foreign funding required extensive brainstorming on finding other suitable models and one which that could well be welcomed is the human and social model which came directly out of the grassroots and established a direct linkage. In general there is a dis-connect between the larger organizations and the grassroot organizations which needs to be established again. Lastly we need to have a leadership program in which voluntary organizations can play a leading role in imparting education to the common people. Diversity of the sector has seen many organizations coming from all areas but we need to cull out those good organizations and portray them positively in leadership programs. Lastly Dr. Jayant Kumar spoke of VANI to take forward these debates and concretely come out with a future strategy.

Ms. Mini Bedi, Patron, Development Support Team – thanked Mr. Jaitli and Dr. Kumar for opening the session and welcomed the participants to the National Consultation. Speaking about her experience in the voluntary sector, Ms. Bedi said that over the years she learnt a lot from her employment at the Ministry at the Social Affairs and Ministry of Women and Child Development especially on how the government works on policies and how they formulate them. The interaction of these social ministries with the voluntary sector had lent her valuable experiences on how government-VO interaction takes place. Recalling her experiences regarding such interactions, Ms. Bedi mentioned that many organizations used to invite her and her team to inspect their work but at the end the result turned out to be quite different and unsatisfactory. Ms. Bedi also

spoke how the 'top down' model in our country was not working to the benefit of the people as the regional variations were large and diverse. As representatives of the sector it was necessary to conduct an internal self-assessment before accusing external agencies of working against the sector. It was necessary for organizations to rectify their content first and then proceed to examine themselves. Another challenge for organizations is to establish a working connectivity or a convergence, which required



- 1) Attending a common platform
- 2) Try to understand other organizations
- 3) Support , learn and share experiences

Dwelling on the situational analysis of organizations, Ms. Bedi said that many a times smaller organizations were often parochial in their perception i.e. they did not broaden their horizon and remained deep seated in their comfort zones. She urged organizations to exit this zone and engage with the external environment. The influence of the external environment was massive on every organization operating within the boundaries of this country. What kind of macro policies the government was bringing, what kind of economic

agenda the government had, all have their influences and impacts. It was necessary to reduce social action and link in the processes of the external environment. For example promoting SHG's or federations will not bear results if it is contrary to the policies of the Union or state governments. Building capacities was also a critical input in the development of the voluntary sector. Pressures on the voluntary sector mounted when the state exited areas of housing, school education, health etc. as the community looked up to the voluntary organizations to perform service deliveries. But the question arises is that how organizations could deliver when they are not capacitated? Especially when institutionalizing for organizations was neglected it was imperative to create some kind of capacity building program for organizations at the grassroots. Also when these same organizations went to ask for funding for organizations they were turned down not because they lacked goodwill but they lacked the capacities to be in synonymy with the outcome donors looked for. Hence what we saw was that the smaller segment NGO's got completely left out with respect to aid in comparison to the larger NGO's. Aid had to come without any strings attached as it was a critical input for development, therefore a proper support mechanism had to be established. She requested VANI to identify regional hubs which would be able to provide support to those organizations unaware of how to establish linkages with international donor agencies. Ms. Bedi also stressed the need to introduce a graduate level course on development management studies as the next level of reforms. If the youth had to be made aware of the virtues of social work it was necessary to educate them with proper training on this sector. These were the requisite next set of reforms for the voluntary sector. Ms. Bedi also said one related to the sector has to question oneself with regards to three questions

She requested VANI to identify regional hubs which would be able to provide support to those organizations unaware of how to establish linkages with international donor agencies.

- 1) What is it that we want to do?
- 2) Why is it that we want to do?
- 3) How are we going to achieve it?

If these three questions are not answered by an organization then it would be better to recast one's objectives or goals or even close their operations all together. She also said that FCRA as an issue for the voluntary sector was a much smaller issue when compared to the legal compliances of an organization. As registered charities of the country it was a requirement for organizations to follow practices of compliance and transparency. She also eulogized VANI for its resolve to work under pressure with minimum resources just to produce books on governance and transparency, which was commendable accomplishment placing a responsibility to organizations to follow and share them. Elaborating on VANI's role she said it had to become very active and vocal in the coming years, so much so that if an organization wanted to avail CSR funds or foreign funds it could do so without any hassles solely by the virtue of being a member of VANI which gave it a unique identity. Now the time had come for organizations to come around programs of the government and get itself involved with the community, as all these schemes in their implementation had a component of community mobilizations. Ending on a positive note for the future of the voluntary sector, Ms. Bedi thanked the participants for patiently listening to her.

Mr. P.V.Rajagopal, Patron, Ekta Parishad – started his address by commending the previous speakers for shaping the flow of the Consultation's debate by including external issues raised by Dr. Jayant Kumar and



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the internal issues by Ms. Mini Bedi. Expressing his gladness at being invited for the VANI meeting he said that VANI as a platform was unique as organizations from all over the country came in a show of solidarity and fraternity. He then recalled a street play enacted by him and his comrades during the emergency era, which was contemporaneous to the present relationship between the voluntary sector and the government. The government's deaf ear towards corporate loot was starkly visible while those fighting for the rights of the poor were being silenced and done away with. Mr. Rajagopal as the patron of Ekta Parishad also spoke of the recent movement that he was going to be spearheading along with social activist Anna Hazare against the land acquisition ordinances promulgated by the incumbent government. Speaking in relation to his movement, he spoke on how the government was using colonial methods to acquire land belonging to the tribals and farmers through manipulative methods as these depressed classes did not hold possession certificates of their land. As such there was a direct threat to the livelihood of the farmers

and adivasis as their sole source of livelihood were being in danger of confiscation. To secure the rights of the tribals and farmers, Mr. Rajagopal kept three demands which had to be met-

- 1) Implementation of Forest Rights Act
- 2) Revoking the ordinances
- 3) Passing the National Land Policy

He said that this year also marked 100 years of Mahatma Gandhi's return from South Africa to fight for the independence of India. However even after 100 years of his return there was the large glooming cloud of poverty, discrimination and marginalization present. Drawing parallels with Gandhiji's entire movement from his return to India and then starting his political movement, he said that the voluntary sector had to collectively work from 2017 onwards to safeguard the interests of the farmers and toilers of the land.

Similarly he also cited the examples of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King whose anniversaries were in 2018, for which the voluntary sector had to fight against the discriminatory practices against the tribals and dalits. Mr. Rajagopal firmly stated if things had to be changed in the country it was necessary to strengthen the fight of the voluntary sector now more than ever as it was a historically correct time. He said it was time to get the lowliest grassroot organizations back on their feet and connect them into the national discourse. Remembering the times when former Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru gave due respect to the civil society workers and social activists, he said that the same respect had vanished. Similarly Sh. Jaiprakash Narayan travelled all over India and visited organizations from the North to South, East and West, spending time with them and getting opinions from the people. Such was the value attached to social workers and activists back then who were now vilified by the police and the government. Speaking about his interactions with the government and other institutions, Mr. Rajagopal said if certification was accorded to commissions working in the sphere of khadi, handicrafts etc. why not a similar status was given to VANI for advocacy on behalf of the voluntary sector. In a nutshell Mr. Rajagopal stressed on regaining the lost glory of the voluntary sector. Although arduous and challenging it was, making it become a reality was not impossible. Seeing the present circumstances voluntary sector has been consistently demanding its credibility and respect. Allegations have been made on the voluntary sector for being naxalites, anti-nationals etc. which is why space for the voluntary sector was being slowly encroached by right wing groups entering from one side and left wing groups from the other. This called for the voluntary sector to legitimately demand its space which it had carved out for itself over years of struggle and challenges. To create this space again VANI had to be at the forefront, adroitly equipped to take back that space which had once been occupied by the voluntary sector. To achieve such a mammoth task support of the youth was required which had to be trained in every district of the country and educated on the aspects of voluntary action. There were two demands which were needed in the movements of the world one was non- violence, its theory and practice and the need to have an alternative and sustainable development model. VANI presented an opportunity for civil society to work together and contribute in its own way strengthening our sector and collectively contribute towards society.

Mr. Jagadananda, Member Secretary, CYSD –

expressed his delight to speak at this annual convention and thanked the speakers before him for giving a regenerated session. Reflecting on what Mr. Rajagopal had said earlier, he said that numerous push and pull factors were existing in the voluntary sector. He gave an example of how his organization Centre for Youth in Development and Skill (CYSD) was fighting a court case in the high court regarding a stalled installment of their organization. He recounted an instance of an organization in Odisha's most naxalite affected district working as the last



mile connector between the government and the tribals of Balangir, was actually being harassed by the state government. Similarly such actions performed by the government were universally seen across the country. He also mentioned how the Parliamentary Research Service (PRS) involved in framing ordinances, bills and other materials for the MPs in Parliament was virtually denied research on FCRA, an antithetical precedent to democratic practice. In his various experiences of visits to tribal villages of Odisha he had observed community mobilizations and innovations being fostered by people. Contribution emanated directly from the people who were involved in taking the rights discourse forward by being progenitors of their own destiny. Thus organizations derived their energy when they worked with communities and therefore all organizations were worthy of being appreciated for the monumental work they render. Albeit from the self-appreciation, organizations needed to install internal governance and compliance measures. It was necessary for organizations working on rights issues to diligently follow such codes since they were challenging the power centers. Mr. Jagadananda also spoke of the negativities prevailing in the sector especially the misuse

of trust by organizations. We had to agree that there are dubious organizations working to degrade the sector and only through installing accountability and transparency mechanisms can we weed them out. Also there are organisations which are actively engaged for years but they are totally unaware on what they are focusing on. Coming back to the purpose of the consultation, he said this annual meeting was a reflective strategy to chart a roadmap for the future of the sector. He said that it had to be taken into account that the agenda for the sector was becoming complex, numerous challenges had emerged which demanded real successive planning and investing in human resources and skills. Also there was a need to deliberate on bridging the generational gaps existing in the sector and think of accommodating the dynamic youth by recognizing their aspirational goals and aligning them with our objectives. The other issue which had to be in focus was accountability. He recalled that how in his usual inspections many organizations had invited him to perform a routine check on their organization but on performing his survey he was distressed to find that no substantial amount of work had been done which could hardly be termed social work. Hence he stressed that organizations had to document their work, prepare annual reports and publish them in the public domain as this was the primary criteria for accountability and transparency. Performance norms had to be drawn up for self-certification followed by their promotion. The next challenge he presented was finding a suitable leadership, which is proportionate to the sustainability of the sector. Finally the immediate task for the sector was to follow VANI's accountability standards and educate and practice on the resource toolkit provided by VANI. Closing his address he said that it was a moral obligation for organizations to be transparent and accountable as this was vital to ensure our future as necessary was it to self-reflect.

Ms. Nisha Agarwal, Oxfam – expressed her gratitude for being invited to the consultation as participating in this event was equivalent to getting a dose of energy and inspiration. Speaking on the changing external environment, Ms. Agarwal said it was important to place the discourse of inequality and poverty before us. Inequality had become one of the vogue debates in the current world view as it was recognized to be a destabilizing factor which held repercussions for economies. She quoted a statistic, that in the coming years; the one percent of the population of the world will hold the wealth of the 99 percent population. Why has this lopsided statistic



emerged? It is only because of the nexus between the political establishment and the corporates. We do not see sudden decline in poverty or closing of inequality gaps because the environment for the corporates is very comfortable and enables them to earn super profits and revenue. The government is bent on amending the environment, mining, land laws which in a nutshell means all those acts which provide ownership of natural resources are being revised. The prevailing rhetoric coming from the side of the government is that they are preparing the bedrock for making India an industrial nation for which the internal environment for the businesses had to be made conducive. This may sound appealing to a segment of population on the pretext of employment but does not hold true for the poor and the marginalized. She said that even after the LPG reforms of 1991, we could see that the growth rates touched double digits but little improvement was discernible in the lives of the poor. However do provide a business friendly environment but please bear in mind the poor, who are also, part of this society and had to be accommodated in this discourse of 'growth'. India aspired to be among those countries providing healthy business environment but when compared to our other rankings we were doing dismally bad on health, malnutrition, infant mortality, water and sanitation, housing and education etc. Investment had to be people-centric not business centric which created a shared prosperity. Also an important issue was the gender parity index, by which women still fared poorly in India. Hence such a narrative has to be introduced which has political overtones as it talks of economic power, gender power etc. Another challenge that has emerged is the question on funding to organizations. Speaking on how Oxfam functions with its partner organizations, Ms. Nisha said that the government had to think

logically and emphatically when they were examining foreign funding to voluntary organizations. For many years organizations have been trying to find domestic resources to carry out their work but it has been a futile exercise, leading them to depend on foreign funding. The government should understand this case when it seeks to crush organizations through FCRA or through other notorious measures. This was also a lesson for organizations to work with foreign funding or without it and focus on what they are doing. Organizations also had to understand that funding was only a stepping stone towards the actual work they had to do. Voluntary organizations were the change makers in society and one of their primary objectives was to be a platform for voicing the grievances of the people, mobilizing them and being their support. Voluntary organizations were innately molded to deliver on active citizenship and thus had to live by the philosophy that it does not matter if the government 'does something or not we had to be omnipresent for society'. Organizations also had to play another role that is creating awareness among metropolitan cities, youth and other stakeholders about the situation in the rural areas of the country and how voluntary organizations played a dynamic role in solving those problems. She also spoke on corporate social responsibility, on how in her trips to cities like Mumbai and Bangalore she tried to create awareness regarding the provisions of this act. Earlier CSR was thought by the companies only to discharge a certain amount towards social work, but now the thinking has changed with many of them realizing the necessity of this joint partnership with voluntary organizations. This was a door for opportunity for voluntary organizations as a liaison process had been initiated with regards to CSR. She also questioned the stances of the corporate world especially with regards to their demand of accountability from voluntary organizations. Was such demands witnessed when they contributed millions towards religious institutions or when they contributed it towards the Prime Minister's Fund? Then how can this be a basis for demand, although it is an integral component of our sector to be accountable. The sector had to bring a transformational shift in its perception towards the corporates. Many organizations desisted from working in collaboration with them but Ms. Agarwal appealed that organizations should view such engagements positively as corporates had influence over the government and over national policy. Speaking on FCRA, Ms. Agarwal said that in not any country was an act regulating foreign funding used as a regulative tool for the NGO sector. She said that the government should regulate the activities of the NGO's rather than the funding as that was more sensible. Why was it a point of concern with regards to sources of funding, if a law had to be made it should be built on regulating activities. Why it is foreign funding to NGO's was targeted when India was open to foreign currencies from around the world. Posing such questions Ms. Agarwal ended her talk by calling for solidarity in the sector especially in the case of Greenpeace and said admonished VANI to move to other areas of conventional debate and try to engage with the state in a more holistic manner by focusing on other aspects of the sector.

After the end of the session the floor was opened to questions, observations and suggestions.



Mr. G.D. Shahmir, Patron in chief, Jammu and Kashmir – observed that there was a crisis of solidarity in the sector. He appreciated the efforts of VANI in annually inviting participants to this consultation. He also remarked that for future purposes VANI should actively engage with media.

Mr. Pancheshwaram, Tamil Nadu – There was a problem of perception present in society. Many viewed organizations in the same light as that of naxalites. He said that the onus was on the organizations to clear their image countering such accusations.



Ms. Hemal Kamat, Concept Society, Madhya Pradesh – Observed that there was confusion in the sector regarding forming their reactions against the government. She said that the instances recounted by Ms. Nisha Agarwal were similar to what her organization has been facing. She also

said that the challenges enumerated by the panelists had to be seriously handled.

Mr. Kapil Padhe, Odisha – Thanked the panelists for highlighting the issues and asked VANI to take a leading role of aggressive advocacy and campaigning.



Retd. Major. Sandhu, CEO, Resource Alliance – India was abundant with financial resources but the direction to use them was missing. VANI should focus on networking resources to organizations. Indian voluntary organizations also have to document their works in order to earn their recognition.

Ms. Rituparna Mohanty, Odisha – There was a need to have a debate on government funds as a component of regulatory reforms.

Key highlights of the session

- ⇒ Alternative sources of funding had to be explored before foreign funding exhausts.
- ⇒ Trends anticipated in the past regarding foreign funding have now become the challenges confronting us.
- ⇒ Organizations needed to evolve out of their straightjacketed approach and aspire to link themselves with national discourses.
- ⇒ The lost prestige of the voluntary sector had to be established again.
- ⇒ VANI should be centrally located in its talks with the government as well as other institutions.
- ⇒ Accountability and Self-Certification had to be put as paramount priority.
- ⇒ Solidarity should be strengthened within the sector which would only enable VANI to do more.
- ⇒ Leadership for the sector has to emerge especially from the youth.
- ⇒ Laws should be enacted not to prevent foreign funding but to regulate the activities of organizations.
- ⇒ Voluntary organizations should place their objectives before funding.

Session I: Regulatory Environment - FCRA

Background

Government adopted the new Foreign Contributions Regulation Act in the year 2010, the rules of which were notified in the year 2011. The primary purpose of this enactment was to ensure that foreign contributions are utilized for bonafide activities without any compromise to the national security. However during the last few months, the voluntary sector has faced various challenges due to the implementation of the Act. On one hand the government cancelled the FCRA registrations of around 4036 organizations. While on the other hand, the incident of a leak of the intelligence bureau report which stated that concerted efforts have been taken by select foreign funded voluntary organizations to take down India's development came as a big blow to the entire sector. This issue was blown out of the proportion by media and the sector saw huge negative limelight.

This session in the national consultation was organized with an aim to focus on the regulatory reforms vis-à-vis the challenges faced by the sector in complying with the said Act. It also aimed to increase compliance with the law and develop a collective understanding of the voluntary organizations about the Act for supporting them in their larger goal of community development, holistic growth of the voluntary sector and effective partnerships.

Mr. Harsh Jaitli, CEO of VANI shared that the laws like income tax and FCRA ensure regulatory control of the sector. Citing example of the recent Intelligence Bureau report on foreign funded voluntary organizations, he shared that the laws are being used as a tool to silence the sector and violate the constitutional rights. He raised the concern that such secret reports are selectively leaked to the media and media uses them as a tool to scare and threaten the sector. He shared that the renewal of registration certificates of FCRA is due in 2016 and the process will begin this year but there have been no guidelines from the Ministry of Home Affairs on the procedures laid down for the renewal. There is no directive from the government on the online mode of renewal and the procedure for payment.

Sharing the role of VANI, he said that it will provide all kinds of support and guidance to the organizations who have complied with the rules, so that they do not face harassment of any kind during the renewal process. Mr. Harsh also warned the participating VO's to keep safe from the middle men/ dalals who have already started contacting some VO's for helping them in the FCRA renewal process. Sharing the future directions of VANI vis-a-vis the FCRA, he informed the participants that a detailed review of the Act and its rules will be undertaken as it completes five years.

Speakers for the session

Mr. Mahendra Singh Kanwar, Secretary, Himalayan Action Research Centre (HARC) shared that this is a biggest myth that an organization cannot survive without the foreign contribution. He stated that corporate social responsibility (CSR) provides a ray of hope to the sector. The need of hour for the sector is to learn the procedures, functioning and operation of companies for accessing the CSR funds. Mr. Kanwar also highlighted the need for strengthening the state chapters of VANI as the lack of resources has led to its collapse in the past. Strong state chapters will help VANI to build pressure on the government in policy advocacy.



He urged the participants to stop fearing FCRA and comply with the Act as per the rules. He shared that most of the organizations whose FCRA registration were cancelled by the MHA had themselves applied for the cancellation but other organizations interpreted it wrongly. Sharing that it is also the wrong interpretation of the Act and its rules by certain officials including some Chartered Accountants, lawyers etc. which leads to problems for the sector. He shared that there is lack of clarity in the FCRA rules whether the second bank account under FCRA can be opened and thus it can be interpreted differently by individuals. Sharing his experience with different interpretations, he said that once a case was filed against him and he had given a written application that his case should be heard in the Dehradun Court but the hearing took place in the Haldwani court. When he appealed and demanded a clarification, he was informed that he did not write "only" after the Dehradun court in his application. He thus felt that it is the interpretation of the law which causes most of the violations.





Mr. Kanwar raised that many foreign donors seek contribution from community in the projects for building their ownership and sustainability. However, as per the FCRA, 2010 the community contribution cannot be shown in the balance sheet. He thus felt that the organizations face a challenge on how to show the community contribution in their book of accounts. Emphasizing on these issues, he stated that to expect perfection in the law is not possible but there should be a continued process of dialogue with the stakeholders for regular assessment of the law and incorporating suggestions. He also suggested that there should be a list of do's and don'ts on the FCRA, which will guide

the sector. Sharing the challenges with the sector, he stated that most grassroots organizations have limited knowledge on the laws and taxations. He also added that in Dehradun there is shortage of CA's and most of them lack technical knowledge.

Mr. J.K Chattopadhyay, Ex-Deputy Secretary (FCRA), Ministry of Home Affairs clarified some of the clauses under the Act which he felt are misunderstood by the sector –

- The Act and rule clearly state that the foreign contribution should be received exclusively in a single bank account.
- In regards to the provision of operating multiple accounts in different project locations, he stated that as per the new Act, project utilization account (PUA) can be opened. However, there are two clauses to it–
 - Ministry of Home Affairs must be intimated about opening of PUA within 15 days of opening of such account.
 - Project utilization account will receive money only from the mother (main) FC account and from no other account.
- FC return demands for the amount of foreign contribution received and the amount utilized under various heads. The total cash received through various sources and utilized is maintained separately in the balance sheet for income tax purposes and it can as well include contribution from the community. He emphasized that FC records must be maintained separately by the organizations for filing FC returns.
- He shared that an administrative expense to a limit of 50 percent under the Act was also brought based on various studies. He shared that two kinds of expenses are incurred by the organization which account for administration expense – office establishment expense and project based administration expense. He shared that the records for office establishment expense up to 50 percent need to be maintained and if there is higher expenditure than 50 percent, a suitable justification must be given to the ministry. He stated that this is a kind of check system and does not mean that organizations cannot do expenditure higher than the limit, when genuinely required.
- FC money cannot be used for investment in mutual funds. But other sources of money (local) can be used in mutual funds.
- Mr. Chattopadhyay also informed the participants that MHA has produced a list of do's and don'ts regarding the FCRA. He said that on the MHA website, there is a charter of associations for organizations who have got prior permission and registration. It clearly states the dos and don'ts. There is another charter for associations which are applying for prior permission and registration and it also has the list of do's and don'ts for such organizations.
- He also clarified that the FCRA registration of 4036 organizations was cancelled because of the failure of post sent by MHA to file their annual returns. He informed that most of these posts returned due to their change in addresses which they had not reported to the MHA. About 250 organizations out of these

made an application that they had filed the return which was not updated by MHA and their registrations were validated and approved. Only around 400 organizations came up front with applications while the rest did not.

- He assured the participants if the organizations are complying with the rules, they do not need to worry.

Comments from the floor

1. Mr. Datta Patil, Executive Director of Yuva Rural Association stated that this Act aims to control the sector. He also questioned that the foreign funds to only the sector are curtailed while companies can easily access the foreign money through FDIs. He suggested that with collective efforts of the sector, FCRA law can be totally scrapped out.
2. Another participant raised a concern that his organization had applied for prior permission for receiving foreign money but they did not get any response from the MHA. He raised that the non-responsiveness and delay in response from MHA leads to cancellation of the projects and incurs a huge loss to the community and the organizations.
3. One of the participant asked three questions –
 - a) What is the need of this new amended FCRA Act?
 - b) Can FC amount be saved under fixed deposit?
 - c) There is a practice that online submission of annual return is filed along with the hard copy of the same. If only online return is filed will it not be successful?
4. A participant from Tamil Nadu stated that the laws as laid down by the government cannot be changed but it will be in benefit of the sector to abide by the law and regulations. He also felt that the discussions should lead to some concrete results and not remain confined to ideas.
 - a) Stating that most people in the sector have come by choice and not compulsion or monetary gains, he shared that in the recent times there is huge interference by officials of intelligence bureau in the work of the organizations, unnecessarily targeting them as criminals.
 - b) He shared the recent notice from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the FCRA registered organizations to incur expenditure above Rs. 20,000/- by cheque and drafts, and not by cash. He stated that such stringent laws and unrequired checks and balances are making donors skeptical in providing contributions to India VOs.
5. Mr. Dhaval Udani, Former CEO of Give India stated that banks have a very poor understanding of FCRA. He shared that banks consider any money in foreign currency as foreign money without any regard to the citizenship of the person. And the banks are asking for the passport copy of every single donation of the donor. According to the Charter of banks on the FCRA website, banks don't have an obligation and do not need to ask all these things. He asked that what can be done to stop banks from demanding such unnecessary clarifications as they receive money mostly from individual donors and providing passport copies of each of the individual donors is cumbersome.
6. One of the participants from Fatehpur district in Uttar Pradesh stated that intelligence bureau seeks report from them every month. Another participant also complained that the local police demands audit reports, stakeholder's information and various other reports from them.
7. Ms. Hemal Kamat from Indore, Madhya Pradesh stated that the FCRA renewal process is due in 2016 and MHA will provide fresh FCRA certificate of registration to the organisation within 90 days. She sought that would it be possible for MHA to give clearance to more than 20,000 organizations in 90

days and on what basis will this be done?

8. One of the participant stated that different sources of media like electronic, print can be used by the sector to generate knowledge on the FCRA especially during the renewal process.

Highlights of the Session

- ⇒ It was stated by Mr. Chattopadhyay that it is in benefit of the sector to understand the provisions of FCRA and complying with the same. He stated that VOs should follow the legal compliances and have all accounts related papers in place. He shared that the organizations must accept foreign contribution (FC) only after obtaining registration or prior permission from the government and the FC must be utilized only for the purpose for which it is received. He also suggested that prior to fund transfer or tendering advance the organizations must check the list of banned organizations.
- ⇒ In regards to filing of the online returns, the organizations must always file online returns as it comes in the MHA record and it can save itself from being a defaulter. However, as per the Act after filing online returns one has to submit the hard copy. While sending the hard copy, always take an acknowledgement receipt/ speed post receipt for records. Do not send the returns by courier service. In case of loss of password for filing the online return, an application through mail and in written must be given to MHA for new password.
- ⇒ Penalty for non - filing or delay in filing the annual returns is staggered like if the return is not filed for 90 days a certain amount of penalty is to be paid and the amount keeps increasing if there is a prolonged delay. In case of nil return, there is a very high penalty. Mr. Chattopadhyay suggested that all the representatives of the sector should file their petition in the court regarding the same, where they can expect to get some relief because in this case the punishment is more than the offence committed.
- ⇒ Fixed deposit with FC money is allowed but it cannot be invested in mutual funds.
- ⇒ The major problem with the sector is its lack of unity and diversity. Mr. Mahendra Singh shared that in Uttarakhand there are 40,000 voluntary organisations but most of these organizations comprise of temple samitis, mohalla samitis, religious groups etc. The registration law does not differentiate development organizations from such religious based organisations. He informed that once the state Government declared that 7000 crore has been received by the state voluntary organizations but it emerged that most of the money is going to religious based organizations in Haridwar and Rishikesh. He questioned that how are development organizations to be blamed for this if the registration law doesn't differentiate between the different forms of organizations. The state government also took it as an opportunity to generate revenue from the VOs and increased registration fee from 500Rs to 5000Rs.
- ⇒ Regarding the advisory from the MHA to FCRA registered organizations on limiting the cash transaction to Rs 20,000, beyond which payment should be done through cheque or demand draft, Mr. Chattopadhyay stated that it is an advisory and not a directive. So wherever there is a genuine difficulty, the cash transaction of more than Rs 20,000 can be done. It is a general advisory to Voluntary organisations for avoiding mis-utilisation of money because there is a tendency and incidences where Voluntary organizations use FC money for personal gains.

- ⇒ Regarding the FCRA renewal process, it was stated that the FCRA registered organizations which run multi-year projects should apply for renewal by 30th April, 2015. Most probably the process will be online but there is not much clarity on the same yet. It was suggested that organisations must keep following the MHA website as it will provide the details of the online process for renewal. It was suggested that MHA will most probably only check whether the voluntary organisation is defaulter or not and will verify the previous records (like regular filing of annual returns, complaints if any etc.). If the records are clear, the organization must not worry about the renewal process.
- ⇒ It was shared that banks do not have appropriate knowledge about the FCRA and unnecessarily harass the sector sometimes. It was shared that most of the violations and mis-guidance of the Act is done by either banks or the chartered accountants. Mr. Chattopadhyay suggested that a master circular has been circulated by RBI to all the banks for the FCRA and the concerned bank officials whoever demands unnecessary information should be directed to read that master circular. Inform them about the law if they are not aware.
- ⇒ The under-staffing of FCRA division of MHA was raised as the main reason for non-responsiveness or delay in responses from the ministry.
- ⇒ It was shared that intimating MHA about 50% change of board members is nowhere mentioned in the FCRA or FCRR but it has been given as a declaration by the organizations during the application. This change in application form (inclusion of this declaration) was introduced on 26th December, 1997. If an organization is registered before that date, then the declaration has not been given. However the organization should not worry about this as it helps MHA to update its records and is not a threat, as perceived by the sector.
- ⇒ The issue of political activities in the Act was also discussed by Mr. Chattopadhyay. He shared that the issue is debatable but one must abide by the law which states that organizations registered under FCRA cannot engage in political activities. This issue has been kept in high court by INSAF and they lost the case. They have now filed a PIL in the supreme court. We must wait for the Supreme Court judgement in this case as for many it is a grey area.
- ⇒ The harassment by police and intelligence bureau is illegal and against the law. The participants were suggested to file complaint regarding the same to the higher authorities at the state level as the law and order is a state subject.

Concluding the session Mr. Harsh Jaitli shared that there are ways to avoid any problem due to FCRA. He requested the participants to take precaution on the source of money by taking in writing from the donor that whether the money is foreign or local. If the source of money is foreign, maintain separate book of accounts as per the FCRA. And in case of forwarding the FC money, the donor organization must take in writing that whether the accepting organization is FCRA registered or has taken prior permission from MHA.

Session II: Regulatory Environment - Income Tax

Background

Income tax was introduced in the year 1861. During that time Income Tax was related to charitable purpose which was exempted from tax. Over the years the Income Tax underwent several changes to ensure such exemptions are not misused. There are several exemptions which are still entitled to the VOs but there has been a regulatory provision which has been incorporated in the act which needs to be followed for exemptions. It is often felt that the Income Tax simplifies the procedures for corporates and other tax payers but it reverses its approach towards VOs. The VOs are often targeted and subjected to harassment by the Income Tax department. This session gives a brief about some of the specific problematic laws under the Income Tax.

Mr Mathew Cherian, Chief Executive, Helpage India

– He chaired the session stating that due to various ambiguities in the Income Tax law the VOs are subjected to a lot of harassment from the government. They are reeling with the various notices from the income tax department. There are various notifications which are related to taxes and cancellation of the registration of the VOs as non-profit entities under the Income Tax Act. There is a need to get certain clarity on the various laws in the Income Tax.

Sudhir Chandra, Ex-Chair, Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) – He expressed there are lot of misconceptions regarding the VOs. It is alleged by many, that VOs are money making machines in the name of nonprofit organizations. Such is the irony surfacing regarding the voluntary sector. There is a certain perception, that opening of VOs will be an escape for not paying tax. Government views the voluntary sector with lot of skepticism and suspicion. He expressed that there are good and bad organizations in all sector. There is a need to look at the good work done by both the government and VOs. He further clarified the changes which have come in the Income Tax Law.

He explained about the GS 1 WPC 7797/2009 India, which was introduced in 2013. It talked about what is meant by charity according to the Income Tax. It can be observed that definition of charity has evolved over the years. The definition of charity initially meant giving everything away. Various VOs which claim to be involved in charitable work, the government is always suspicious about the money incurred by the VOs. Government is of the opinion that the money should be generated within the VOs for charity rather than taking assistance from external agencies. The Act says that if the VOs take money to do any charitable work then it can be termed as commercial activity. This is a wrong elucidation given by the government. The definition of charity is very narrow and needs to be broadened.

He stated section 2(15) of the Income Tax Act, defines the term charitable purpose as under: Relief of the poor, Education, Medical Relief, The advancement of any other object of general public utility, Preservation



The definition of charity initially meant giving everything away. Various VOs which claim to be involved in charitable work, the government is always suspicious about the money incurred by the VOs.

of Environment (Including Watershed, forests and wildlife), Preservation of monuments or places, Preservation of artistic or historic interest. There are numerous VOs which are doing varied and diverse work not cited in the given list of activities and thus won't be considered under charitable purposes. They face lot of problems due to this. He made a point by stressing that it is important to understand the nature of work done by VOs whether it falls in commercial activity or general public utility. These are two different aspects and should not be confused.



Sh. Deepak Bansal, Chartered Accountant, Subhash

Mittal & Associates – He shared his presentation on the Income Tax regulatory framework. Some of the key points from his presentation were-

- There are 5 sections, 11, 12, 12A, 12AA, 13 which are very relevant. Income is exempted under section 11 only if 12A registration is there with the VOs.
- Under section 11:
 - A VO should spend 85% in the year which it has received the income.
 - 85% of the income must be used by the VOs for the charitable purposes and if it has spent below 85% then the money would have to be accumulated. In ITR7 form, VO needs to disclose how much money it has accumulated for the next year.
- Donations are exempted under section 80G- If the donor gets any special benefit then they will be encouraged to make donations. In section 35AC – any donor giving an amount to any specific project to VOs/trusts which is notified by National Committee for economic and social welfare will be fully exempted.

NPOs subjected to IT scrutiny – It was explained what are the various hardships faced by the VOs in scrutiny.

- After the amendment of section 2(15), VOs have been questioned whether they are falling under general public utility or not. If the Income tax Act feels that the VOs are doing business then tax is levied on the chargeable income. Another issue Income Tax raises is the issue of cancellation of 12A registration if they feel that VOs are involved in commercial activities'. VOs which are falling under general public utility means they are not working in the areas of - medical, education, relief to the poor, environment preservation. So it is important under section 2(15) which category does VOs fall into.
- Since 2009-10, Income Tax Department is interpreting more and more nonprofit organization activities falling under business / professional. As a result taxability on particular income treated as business will lead to loss of section 12A registration.

However effectively in the year 15-16, a provision has been added which states that the registration will not be cancelled, if it can be proved that there was a reasonable cause for undertaking activities in the said manner.

Amendments in Finance Act 2014

- Organizations claiming benefit under section 11 not to claim benefit under section.10 for non-application.
- CSR expenditure not to get any specific deduction – Explanation added under section 37 (subsequent to several judicial pronouncements which have gone other way)
- Depreciation not to be treated as application, if expenditure on asset already treated as expenditure.



Sh. Sanjay Patra, Executive Director, FMSF – He explained the concept of income in the context of VOs. There are two types of income – one is grants which are mostly restricted. Second is regular donations – which are given to VOs. In grants VOs do not have any control on them. It cannot be used as per the desires of the VOs. It is more of a legal obligation. Concept of income under section 2, sub section 24 says that income of voluntary organizations includes voluntary contribution received by trusts wholly or partly for charitable purposes. He stressed, one of the contested issue is that will grants be considered as income or not, as Institute of chartered accountant has a guideline which says that grants should not be part of the income for charitable purposes. So VOs have to be cautious regarding what they define as their income.



He explained some of the changes Under 12 A - earlier the money of the VOs were carried forward up till 10 years but in 2001 it was reduced to 5 years. In 2002 inter charity donation out of accumulated funds were not allowed. In 2007-09 –there was another amendment on anonymous donation - taxable at maximum marginal rate if the amount exceeds five percent. This was applicable to the charitable organizations only. So slowly lots of privileges were being reduced.



He explained Section 10, 23 C – Initially there was no need to apply 75-80 percent income during the year but in 2001 this privilege was lost. Earlier the registration was available for three years and had to be applied for renewal. In 2006 there was no time limit for granting registration. Now within 12 months the registration has to be granted. Earlier there was no need of the audit but in 2006 audit became compulsory. Provision regarding anonymous donation wasn't there but it is applicable now. Practically section 10, 23 C privileges got diminished and it has become same as section 12 A.

Comments from the floor

- One of the participant shared that their organization was scrutinized as they come under the brackets of 10 lakhs

- Another participant raised -Can grants be called income
- How frequently the scrutiny is done of an organization
- Participant shared that the project grant should be used for the listed six activities mentioned as per the law. If the VOs use it for other activities which is not mentioned then it has to be approved by the funder. In such a situation why the organization should show as income as it is year mark funds which has been received. Can it be shown in received payment and not in income expense?

One of the panels made a comment saying there should be less of human intervention for more efficiency. There has now been online income tax filing for more transparency.

Sh. Goldsmith shared in North East region the exemption tax office is located in Kolkata, West Bengal State and the assessment office is in Siliguri so VOs have to travel long distance for their paper which is a form of harassment. What can be done in such cases?



The question was responded - In Guwahati the trust assessment office has been closed. All the files are now sent to Kolkata so due to this lot of VOs are facing major problems in going to Kolkata for getting regular assessment done. There is a need for local assessment to solve this issue.

Sh. Sudhir Chandra concluded the session by saying it is important to have clear Income Tax laws for the next 5 years as there has been lot of amendments in this act every now and then which creates lot of disarray and confusion. He was hopeful that in the coming years the Income Tax mechanism will become more broadened in its approach. Online income tax filing will lead to ease of paying taxes which will also ensure efficient governance.

Highlights of the session

- ⇒ The definition of charity is very narrow and needs to be broadened under section 2(15).
- ⇒ The Income Tax Act says that if the VOs take money to do any charitable work then it can be termed as commercial activity. This is a wrong elucidation given by the government.
- ⇒ It is important to understand the nature of work done by VOs whether it falls in commercial activity or general public utility. These are two different aspects and should not be confused.
- ⇒ Since 2009-10, Income Tax Department is interpreting more and more nonprofit organization activities falling under business / professional. As a result taxability on particular income treated as business will lead to loss of section 12A registration.
- ⇒ Changes Under 12 A - earlier the money of the VOs were carried forward up till ten years but in 2001 it was reduced to five years.
- ⇒ Practically section 10, 23 C privileges got diminished and it has become same as section 12 A.
- ⇒ In the coming years Income Tax filing will be made online leading to ease of paying taxes which will also ensure efficient governance.

Session III: Registration Law

Background

The voluntary sector faces a host of problems related to the registration laws governing the sector. The most widely used out of them, the Societies Registration Law, is antiquated, being over 150 years old and at cross purposes with the spirit of the sector, having been formulated with the intent of controlling the burgeoning social movements and associations post the 1857 revolt. Additionally, registration of societies is a state subject leading to numerous variations in the adoption of the law in different states. This lack of uniformity leads to discrimination and functional complications for voluntary organizations all over the country. Also, the composition of the voluntary sector as defined by the law is very problematic as small organizations working at the grassroots, religious organizations, private organizations such as the BCCI and government autonomous bodies such as the Sports Authority of India etc. all fall under the same umbrella. This session therefore, aimed at reviewing the registration laws and evaluating the problems faced by voluntary organizations.



The session was moderated by Mr. Harsh Jaitli and the panel was constituted by Mr. Sanjay Agarwal and Dr. Mazher Hussain.

Mr. Sanjay Agarwal, FCA, Account Aid India began his presentation by giving an overview of the various laws that voluntary organisations can register themselves under. He said that when the Societies Registration Act was introduced in 1860, registration was not compulsory. In its original form, the law was meant to provide organizations a legal identity and once the registration was completed, there was no mandate for re-registration. However, the government and banks introduced provisions which made it difficult to open bank accounts without registration, which made it a functional necessity.

Apart from the Societies Registration Act, organizations can also register under the Charitable Trusts Act. Under this law, it is possible to convert private property into a trust with charitable intent by registering with the court registrar. It is unregulated all over India except in Maharashtra and Gujarat where they have instituted a commissioner who regulates the sale of properties and in some instances, fund raising activities and areas of operation. Mr. Agarwal further explained that the trust form is not friendly to the common man as it was originally designed for wealthy families who had huge corpuses and were not dependent on public funding.

A third possibility is to register as a non-profit company meant for charitable purpose under the new Companies Act. According to Mr. Agarwal, this law is comparatively more efficient but there is a considerable lacuna about its functioning even among lawyers and chartered accountants in many areas.

He said that voluntary organisations function in a non-conducive environment where setting up of societies is very hard. Also, there is no overarching ministry which is concerned with voluntary affairs. The government had proposed the Multi-State Societies Registration bill in 2010 which is presently under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs but it has not been taken forward. Therefore, the voluntary sector faces a grave challenge when it comes to ensuring that the sector remains independent, transparent and efficient in this scenario.

Dr. Mazher Hussain, Executive Director, COVA said that the framework of laws in the country is such that when it comes to business, a facilitating environment is created but with regard to the voluntary sector, the emphasis is on regulation. He added that though the sector has seen its fair share of fly by night organizations and unscrupulous behaviour, the level of committed and honest people in the sector remains high and does not merit the level of antagonism meted out to it.

He also said that the entire framework of formulating laws for regulation or prevention instead of justice needs to be challenged as there are so many laws which are prohibitive or restrictive in nature that a lot of people inadvertently become outliers. Therefore, laws need to be evaluated based on their implications and potential for misuse.

Dr. Hussain further remarked that in today's day and age the best regulation is transparency. The emphasis for organizations in the sector should be to evolve mechanisms which lead to maximum transparency in an organization's functioning, especially with the use of technology. This would lead to little use for laws and consequently, harassment.

In conclusion, he reiterated that the voluntary sector faces two challenges; the first is to understand laws thoroughly so that it can function within their ambit and the second is to push for reforms in the law itself by understanding the philosophy behind them and identifying the underlying threat content. It is time to recognize that civil society is an integral pillar of society and push to create space for it to carry out its mandate.

Comments from the floor

- Participants sought clarifications about the various registration laws and about which law is the best for a voluntary organization to register under. There were also questions raised about various components of the Charitable Trusts Act such as the sale of properties and composition of the board.
- A suggestion was given to VANI to explore the possibility of collaboration with the newly formed NITI Aayog on the voluntary sector by an audience member.
- One of the participants remarked that there is widespread tendency to attach a negative connotation to the NGO word itself. This followed by a suggestion to identify voluntary organizations as societal transformers.

Highlights

- ⇒ The registration laws for the voluntary sector need to be urgently reformed because they have not been amended or changed to reflect the change in the nature and scope of the sector in India. The design of the Societies Registration Act especially, is unsuited to accommodate large organizations which handle large finances.
- ⇒ The law needs to be simplified to allow ease of formation and ensure that organizations registered in India are easily able to work pan-India and even in neighbouring countries or with international networks.
- ⇒ All and any regulation should be grade based where organizations are evaluated on factors such as scope of functioning, availability of financial and human resources. This will ensure that organizations are not unfairly branded together and are appropriately equipped to tackle various issues.
- ⇒ Voluntary organisations need to come together to define their identity properly and thereafter, work in collaboration to protect this identity.



The voluntary sector faces two challenges; the first is to understand laws thoroughly so that it can function within their ambit and the second is to push for reforms in the law itself by understanding the philosophy behind them.

Session IV: Internal Governance

Background

This session discussed various issues and challenges related to the internal governance of VOs. The importance of following the norms of governance, accountability and transparency at all levels of functioning and processes was reiterated. Accreditation/validation process is done by an independent third party through a systematic assessment process. This is done in order to certify the VOs that comply with the norms of governance. Good governance is related to the compliance of the organization with policies and norms of transparency, accountability and credibility, like the board rotation policy and human resource policy. Availability of proper documentation related to finance, auditing, annual report, etc., to the larger public is increasingly becoming necessary. Internal governance is important for the people associated with the organization, as well as for strengthening the voluntary sector.

Dr. Jayant Kumar, Chairperson, VANI – the chair of the session by recounting his personal experiences in this sector, emphasized upon the need for internal governance. He stated that many VOs lack proper procedure related to the decision-making process, as well as at the policy level (like gender and human resource policy). The trust deficit between public and VOs is vast, and he explained that funding opportunity is increasingly being linked to the issue of governance. Since the introduction of two percent CSR funding, corporate donors are looking for organizations that have a transparent system of functioning, which includes sharing of financial accounts on the website, meeting legal requirements and having clearly defined processes.

Even in the case of funding from the government, strong internal governance has become a prerequisite. Dr. Kumar also emphasized the importance of visibility of internal governance mechanisms. These mechanisms are to be visible and recognized by the staff and the public, which in turn will help in building up the work of the organization.

Mr. Gautam Vohra, Chairperson, Credibility Alliance – put forth that internal clarity and governance are necessary if VOs do not want government to increase imposition of new and stringent laws and norms. Information technology in this case becomes an important medium to achieve transparency, that is, by putting up documents and information on the website for public scrutiny.

He gave an example of efforts undertaken by Mr. Bunker Roy, who was appointed by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi to the Planning Commission to ensure internal governance for VOs. Mr. Roy recommended introduction of “code of conduct”, but this was vehemently opposed on the grounds of promoting excessive monitoring of the voluntary sector. Maybe at that time the understanding of the vast spread and inclusiveness of this sector had not been realized. Mr. Vohra continued to explain that there is a lack of clarity, even about the number of NGOs present in this country (with figures ranging from about a million to three million). He broadly classified these organizations into two categories, the ones working in the field of development and poverty, and the other being agitational NGOs, which are usually the targets of government’s backlash.

He further explained the efforts his organization, the Credibility Alliance has taken to promote good governance. The core areas they work towards are accreditation, capacity building, information sharing and networking. Accreditation is the process of certification that tries to ensure that the quality of the organization is maintained. He explained the three main types of certifications - minimum norms, desirable norms, and basic norms. He put forth that minimum norms are being followed by almost every organization. But many

organizations are lagging behind in the documentation of these norms. This includes availability of documents related to registration; the vision, aims and objectives; accountability and transparency; and operations.

He then went on to describe certification for the desirable norms, which includes aspects of good governance and public disclosure. This is particularly important for organizations registered under the Societies Act, 1860. It includes components like ensuring that at least two third members of the board are not related and the board rotation policy is followed. Certification of basic norms, which was recently introduced in 2012, is done free of cost over the internet.

To ensure accountability, salaries of the staff should be disclosed and the difference between the salary of the lower staff and higher staff should not be more than six times. Also, all the expenditure, national and international, should be declared.

Mr. Vohra listed five steps of accreditation system that are followed by the Credibility Alliance. First is filling up the standard accreditation form. Second is the desk review of the contents of the form. Third, assessor's visit to double check the contents filled up in the form by visiting the project sites, etc. Fourth, is sharing of the assessors report with the organization being assessed, and clarifying any anomalies that have emerged. Finally, the central accreditation committee comprising of well-known people from the public meet and study the report. They certify the organization on the basis of the compliance of the norms.

This accreditation process is valid for five years, and their fee depends upon the size of the organization, costing about 25,000 rupees for bigger organizations. Mr. Vohra then explained the benefits of getting accredited. It improves governance and operational process. Also, it enhances visibility, credibility, networking and prospects of donor assistance. And finally, it helps in the capacity building process of the organization.

Dr. Namrata Jaitli, Head- Programmes, CAF India – expressed that Mr. Vohra had covered a significant part of her presentation. But she raised few fundamental questions. Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) India also works on validation, similar to what Credibility Alliance calls accreditation. CAF India's focus is on validation for internal governance for Social Impact and Financial Sustainability. Validation is a tool to address issues of credibility, accountability, transparency and governance in NGOs.

Highlighting the role of validation, Dr. Jaitli added that it contributes to the creation of dependable NGOs, which in turn ensures significant social impact. This validation process stems from the expectation that NGOs need to be “high performing” and accountable. Especially, international and corporate donors have the prerequisite to work with credible organizations. Under the New Companies Act, 2013, there is an increase in opportunities for CSR supported development projects. In this scenario it is increasingly becoming important for organizations to become ‘visibly’ credible. This validation process will help in the creation of a mass of dependable NGOs that are credible, transparent and accountable, thus ensuring that the donor's money does not get wasted.

Dr. Jaitli added that CAF India's mission is to promote and support the cause of strategic giving in order to create an equitable and sustainable society. She mentioned that the validation process tries to systematically and impartially assess the credentials, track record and capacity of organizations so that the grants given by corporate donors are effectively utilized. These efforts to improve the governance, transparency and accountability are also being utilized for the purpose of capacity building, there by encouraging creation of partnership of NGOs with corporate and various other donors.

The speaker noted that the process of validation by CAF India is very similar to that of Credibility Alliance-registration of NGOs followed by review of documents, then site visit which involves interview of chief functionary, reassessment of documents and focus group discussions, followed by data analysis by the Validation and Finance team, report writing, and finally the issuance of certificate by development experts. She informed the audience that the validation process is of two types, basic and in-depth, which take 4 weeks and 3-6 months average time respectively. Since 2014, the process for basic validation costs Rs. 20,000 and is applicable for 3 years.

Dr. Jaitli categorized the key areas on which this validation process is based including basic profile of NGOs, legal status, service delivery, human resource management, governance, programme and financial management, networking and partnership, administration, profile, and image in virtual world. Moreover, out of the 360 NGOs that have been validated by CAF, majority of them are from the South and North of India. And even in these regions, NGOs based in metros/cities get validated due to support from corporate donors. She added that this process is still not NGO-driven. The speaker elaborated on the status of validation by stressing that a major hurdle is related to NGOs whose validation expires after 3yrs; convincing them to get it done again is a challenge.

Dr. Jaitli highlighted the benefit of this process for the donors. She said that the process leads to higher assurance for impact and gives more options for credible partnerships. But there are a number of challenges ahead. Some of the major challenges include the limited ability to reach out to NGOs in areas like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, which are not visible and beyond the reach of corporate donors. It is also difficult to educate donors and NGOs about this process. Another challenge is related to establishing a strategic collaboration between different agencies which provide validation/accreditation. The question of whose process is more valuable remains unanswered. Additionally, trying to ensure linkages between validation and funding opportunities continues to be a hurdle we are yet to fully address. Dr. Jaitli concluded that there is a need to enhance corporate engagement capacity and IT preparedness of NGOs to meet the demands of corporate. The need to demonstrate linkage between validation and social impact still remains. She added that validation ensures that no money goes into the wrong hands and she was glad that VANI brought this issue in the forefront.

Mr. Datta Patil, Executive Director, Yuva Rural Association – highlighted that there are many social, political and economic reforms simultaneously taking place in the voluntary sector. Internal reforms or governance is not purely internal, it is “external internal” for the organization. Governance of any organization is connected to its environment. He explained the different roles of actors in the organization, by using a popular Marathi saying according to which if any organisation is a “balak” or child then the whole society is its “malik” or owner, the board is its “palak” or custodian, and management is its “chalak” or managers. He mentioned that on the question of desirable norms, to be good and “look” good, certain principles are required. He pointed out that for this to happen governance is important. He questioned the audience regarding the most appropriate model for the voluntary sector, and emphasized the importance of the Mintzberg Model.

Mr. Patil made an analogy between the organizational structure and human body by using the Mintzberg Model. The circle on the top of the model is like a head, which Mintzberg calls governance. It is this “head's” responsibility to ensure the well-being of all the other parts of the body. It ensures that no part of the body is swollen up or out of order. This also implies that there is a tendency to remain good and healthy amongst the organizations. If the head becomes smaller than its usual, it will fail in fulfilling its responsibilities, in-turn reducing further in size. Likewise, the neck is the CEO, and is tasked with the responsibility to link the entire process. The core of the body is the middle level staff and management, while the base of this structure

includes the various stakeholders, issues and process. The balance of the body or organization is based upon governance.

He also highlighted that ideal organization model (IOM) organizations are made up of actors and factors, that is, the vision, mission and purpose of the organization interacts with strategies, values, and policies to have a larger impact on the society. Mr. Patil emphasized the need of governance to ensure transparency and accountability among all actors and factors.

The speaker also talked about the challenges which VOs face, including the lack of active governance. He added that many organizations didn't have people to fill in key positions, or were bound by time constraints. He also questioned the role of the board in contributing actively towards the organization's funds.

Mr. Patil pointed out the need to be careful about how organizations address the issue of gender sensitivity. He said that gender sensitivity in organizations should not be limited to the presence of women in the board. According to him, there needs to be a clear line of division between governance and management. Mr. Patil also spoke of the importance of having community representatives on the board to ensure better social impact.

Comments from the floor

- One of the participants highlighted the issue of documentation on behalf of grassroots organizations. Since the documents of these organizations are in Hindi or other regional languages, they are unable to meet the demands of corporate and international donors, as well as organizations providing accreditation which require documents to be in English language.
- Another participant mentioned the need to have a strategic collaboration either with government or other agencies to recognize and fund the accreditation process for smaller organizations.
- Lastly, a point regarding the limited reach of corporate and international donors to rural areas was raised as being a hindrance towards these organizations from getting funding.

Highlights of the session

- ⇒ The process of accreditation is increasingly being recognized as a prerequisite for funding by international and corporate donors. It is not a guaranteed or immediate process, but donors prefer organizations which have been certified by a third party organization.
- ⇒ The need for being “visibly” good is being recognized. By becoming more transparent and accountable, the VOs can prevent excessive imposition of laws and norms by the government.
- ⇒ Use of the internet, that is, putting up of documents on the website of the organization for the public is the easiest way towards achieving transparency.
- ⇒ The need to deliberate over the inability of smaller organizations to pay the accreditation fees was recognized.
- ⇒ There is a need to analyze the value addition of this accreditation process for organizations and the sector in totality.

Session V: Management (Self-Certification)

Background

This session focused on self-certification, which has become an important issue to the management of any organization in the voluntary sector. In an increasingly tough environment, where organizations are under constant scrutiny and face an ever shrinking pool of resources and space to function in, assertion of credibility in the form of self-certification has become vital to the survival and growth of an organization. Since self-certification is a continuous process, the session strived to highlight how organizations may embark on undertaking the work required to give them recognition.



The session was moderated by Mr. A.K. Goldsmith and the panelists included Mr. Manas Satpathy, Mr. Dhaval Udani and Maj Gen. Surat Sandhu.

Manas Satpathy, Executive Director, Pradan stressed that with the increasing prominence of the sector, the onus of ensuring accountability and transparency lies with organizations themselves if they really want to grow and serve the society. He also cautioned that self-certification is a journey and an organization cannot claim to have achieved complete transparency at any point as the external environment is constantly in flux, throwing up situations and challenges and the organization's systems and processes need to evolve in order to respond to them.



Mr. Satpathy also talked about the systems and processes adopted by Pradan in the arduous quest of self-certification. They recognize institutional stability and an open and transparent management as important pillars of self-certification and have therefore, worked on an organizational structure which reflects this, mainly through the governing board, an internal governance committee called the general council and sub-committees of the board such as the Finance and Audit Committee. While the governing board undertakes routine activities such as approving the annual plan and the budget of the organization, it also carries out a six monthly review to evaluate whether the organization is moving in the right direction, fulfilling its objectives and using its resources efficiently. The general council comprises of the staff and since they are the custodians of the organization, every employee has a voice in setting the path of the organization and reviewing and renewing its mission. He further elaborated that Pradan does not follow a top-down approach whereby the orders come from the management to be executed on the ground. Instead, every employee is a trustee and architect of engagement with the community and whoever is on the field determines what should be done for the community and prepares the blue-print of the plan, along with executing it. This decentralisation creates ownership and accountability.

According to Mr. Satpathy, the core philosophy of Pradan is that competent and concerned people are more critical to bring about change in the lives of communities than mere material resources. Therefore, the organization invests heavily in mobilizing educated youth and creating opportunities for them to engage with disempowered communities in rural areas and at the same time, it has put in place rigorous HR programmes to promote the idea that employees have the identity of owners of the organization, architects of its community outreach and impact and facilitators of change.

Further, Mr. Satpathy said accountability to the community is of prime importance. Therefore, all organizations should promote complete community participation, even involving them in preparation of proposals, mobilization of resources and monitoring and evaluation thereafter.

Lastly, he said that his organization adheres to a set of non-negotiable such as working with the disadvantaged and preserving the integrity of the organization and such non-negotiable go a long way in giving employee's direction and promoting confidence among all stakeholders.

Mr. Dhaval Udani, Former Chief Executive Officer, Give India

started his presentation by outlining the fund-raising process by the for-profit sector and proposing similar steps for voluntary organizations. Fund raising is an evolutionary process and voluntary organizations need to recognize that they have limited capacities and thus, should strategise their fund-raising. For this, they first need to outline their theory of change, that is, the change they want to bring about in society; then identify the programmes and policies that would best help them to achieve it and finally seek financial and physical support. At first, the support structure is constituted of people who already know the organization and its members and trust them. Thereafter, the donor circle expands as original donors pull in more donors which finally leads to a stage where the organization can approach external donors such as corporates and individual givers.

Fund raising is an evolutionary process and voluntary organizations need to recognize that they have limited capacities and thus, should strategise their fund-raising.

Therefore, these stages are not contingent upon time but on how expansive and/ or exhaustive an organization's programmes are and the amount of money required for running them and accreditation becomes a vital addition only at the last stage of fund-raising because an organization has to approach a third party for monetary support who is presumably unfamiliar with the organization and its work.

He also said that organizations often consider the cost of accreditation to be too high but they fail to realize that most accreditation processes are quite similar and once organizations invest resources such as time and effort spent on background work to get accredited, they set themselves up to benefit from the others. As a thumb rule, Mr. Udani suggested that organizations should be able to directly attribute ten times the funding to the cost of accreditation but if it does not bring in benefits in terms of funds, organizations must recognize a bigger benefit in the form of compliance.

Accreditation is certification that organizations are transparent and comply with certain norms which projects credibility and helps generate support from the community, government and others.

He also elaborated on some other forms of certification such as publicizing donations from established, big donors and involving the local media to highlight the work and impact of an organization. According to him, the most visible form of certification is support from volunteers. If people are willing to endorse the work done by an organization and spare their time and energy to work for it or donate their hard earned money to its cause, it is a testimony to the "goodness" of the organization.

Maj Gen Surat Sandhu, Chairperson, Resource Alliance commenced his presentation by relating that as a fundraiser his experience has been that there is no dearth of funds or of people who are willing to donate but voluntary organizations hesitate in publicizing their work and approaching donors. This is an impediment to multiplying the scale of the organization's work.



The voluntary sector, in recent years has overhauled its systems and many organizations have opened themselves up for outside scrutiny. In this scenario, Gen. Sandhu said, the NGO Awards conducted by his organization aim to advance the sector by promoting financial and organizational stability and strengthening community support for the civil society. The rigorous application process leads to self-evaluation where organizations realize their shortcomings and can accordingly undertake reforms.

He also said that while voluntary organizations are good at identifying problems and finding innovative solutions, they are not adept at identifying opportunities of engaging with corporates and the government to expand their work. For this purpose he added, organizations need to be proactive in being transparent and in hiring trained staff for fund-raising and outreach activities.

Gen. Sandhu concluded by saying that while in the present, organizations must pay special attention to the areas which deserve emphasis according to them, they should keep an eye on the future and constantly plan where they would like to see the organization and learn from the past so as to not repeat mistakes.

Comments from the floor

Following the presentations from all panelists, the floor was thrown open for questions and comments.

- One of the audience members questioned the process, utility and prevalence of gateway payments in the voluntary sector. Mr. Udani responded that a number of organizations use gateway payment to generate funds and it is an extremely valuable addition to any organization but the high cost acts as deterrence for small organizations. He suggested that organizations which cannot afford it have the option of getting associated with other organizations such as Give India to gain access to a gateway payment platform. Gen. Sandhu added that setting up a gateway payment portal is the slowest way of extending an organization's reach and it is an extremely professional activity in that it entails the art of converting an organization's message into money.
- Another participant pointed out the constraints faced by small organizations in following good practices of management such as a rotational policy for the governing board.

Mr. A.K. Goldsmith, Executive Secretary, Asian Rural Life Development Foundation thanked the panelists and closed the session.

Highlights of the session

- ⇒ Voluntary organizations are facing acute resource crunches and an increasingly adverse environment due to a severe negative perception of the sector. Smaller organizations in particular are finding it extremely difficult to sustain themselves in these unfavourable circumstances.

⇒ The sector has responded through self-reflection and making its own processes more transparent and developing norms which could help identify credible organizations. Self-certification leads to adherence to these norms. In addition, organizations can also get themselves accredited and advertise the same to reaffirm their credibility.

Many organizations have also used modern technology effectively in order to maintain transparency at all levels of the organization.

⇒ Organizations should strive for trust among board members, volunteers, donors and community stakeholders as they are the biggest assets of any organization. Staying true to the core values of an organization, and adopting a lateral, inclusive approach rather than a hierarchical, top-down organizational model also induces a sense of ownership leading to accountability and consequently, promoting transparency in the organization.

Closure

Mr Harsh Jaitli started off the last session by talking about the consolidation of the Annual National Consultation by giving the honours to Dr Jayant Kumar to present the way forward.

Dr Jayant Kumar – Noting that this session was the last and the crux of the two day Annual National Consultation, he explained to the participants that VANI works according to its mandate and appeals given to VANI will only be considered only on that basis keeping in mind the Working Board communications and the AGM which will enact these recommendations to be held later this year. VANI's interventions have taken shape over the last five years and such issues have occupied centrality in all debates of VANI. He also said that Self certification and validation processes had to be formulized which will then can be developed as a certification model for credible organizations. Inviting brainstorming of different opinions Dr. Kumar asked Mr. Jaitli to open the floor for suggestions.



Sh. Harsh Jaitli - Keeping in mind the different suggestions on FCRA, , taxation laws and regulative acts, workshops on skill development, capacity building clinics and other regional hubs and state chapters will be created in ensuring that organizations are fully made aware of legal and fiscal requirements etc. Though VANI will not be making any branch in its states but independent state chapters have been functioning and contributed to the strengthening the sector in establishing state networks. Another suggestion was to ascertain the government funding to projects handled by voluntary organizations on which the VANI staff is preparing documentations on case studies on disaster management and HIV AIDS related projects. Image building of social activists, code of conduct has to be worked upon which in the long run will contribute in highlighting the achievements of the sector. VANI will also create fact finding missions and FCRA cases will be prepared case to case followed by petitions and appeals to the government.

He stressed on the need to develop a parameter index for a member of good standing which will be then forwarded to CAF and Credibility Alliance. Mr Jaitli also thanked Mr Shahmir for efforts in collecting Rs. 6000 towards donation for VANI from the various participants attending the meeting. For future campaigns on FCRA donation money can be considered as an alternative. He then proceeded in opening the floor for the participants.

Comments from the floor

A participant agreed on the creation of other state chapters which will be beneficial for organizations.

A participant requested VANI to create model HR policies for organizations to which Mr Jaitli replied that VANI had already published such resource toolkits in both Hindi English language.



A participant from Orissa questioned how smaller organizations can be sustained when donor agencies are inaccessible to most of them.



Dr. Kumar replied that in the current environment Indian donor organizations have tried to help in whatever means possible however efforts have not been helpful and therefore it has been difficult to help them with providing financial support to them.

A participant raised the question regarding to membership and whether an organization not a member of VANI can be registered to engage with other platforms.

Dr Jayant Kumar - Registration is a requirement for all organizations to engage with VANI, however the mandate of VANI provides us to cater to all organizations irrespective of their membership criteria.

A participant from Tamil Nadu suggested VANI to evolve a media campaign.

Harsh Jaitli – EVANI newsletter documents significant information for the sector and is an important information bulletin for organizations across the country. It covers interviews from leaders of the sector, case to case studies of different organizations and provides news of contemporary nature relevant to organizations.



A suggestion was made by Dr Jayant Kumar that the E-VANI newsletter should be disseminated to journalists and government, making them aware of the sector's highlights.

A participant asked for a Certificate to be awarded by VANI to its members which will certify that they are VANI members.

A participant also asked VANI to impart organizations on press and communications handling which will be beneficial for organizations in engaging with their local media.

After the end of the session, Mr Chandrashekhar, a member of VANI shared his experience of working in the voluntary sector and invited the participants to visit his asharam in Telengana.

LIST OF RECENT VANI PUBLICATIONS

1. Civil Society Accountability Principles and Practice (India Toolkit) (English)
2. Enabling environment for Voluntary Organisations A Global Campaign (Book) (English)
3. Model Policies for International Good Governance in Voluntary Organizations (Hindi & English)
4. The Hand Book in Good Governance for the Voluntary Sector (English)
5. Status of the Voluntary Sector in India A Report (English)
6. Status of the Voluntary Sector in India (Primer) English & Hindi))
7. Civil Society Engagement in Aid Effectiveness Discourse (English)
8. Changing Dynamics Between VOs and Private Sector (English)
9. Involving Voluntary Organizations in Governments Plans and Projects (English)
10. India's Global Footprints (English)
11. Revisiting the National Policy on Voluntary Sector and Need for a National Policy on volunteering (English & Hindi)
12. Policy Brief No.1 (2014) Revising the National Policy on Voluntary Sector and Need for a National Policy on volunteering (English & Hindi)
13. Role and Contribution of Voluntary Organisations on Water & Sanitation (A Primer of the Study Report) English & Hindi
14. Contribution of CSR on Thematic Issues of Education, Health and Nutrition, and Water and Sanitation (A Primer of the Study Report) English & Hindi
15. Role and Contribution of Voluntary Organisations in Health & Nutrition (A Primer of the Study Report) English & Hindi
16. Contribution and Challenges of Voluntary Organisations Working with Tribals (A Primer of the Study Report) English & Hindi
17. Contribution and Challenges of Voluntary Organisations Working with Dalits (A Primer of the Study Report) English & Hindi
18. Contribution and Challenges of Voluntary Organisations Working with Minority (A Primer of the Study Report) English & Hindi
19. Contribution and Challenges of Voluntary Organisations Working with Women (A Primer of the Study Report) English & Hindi
20. Challenges of the Grassroot level Voluntary Organisations (A Primer of the Study Report) English & Hindi
21. India's Role in The G-20: A Civil Society Approach (English)
22. India's Development Assistance: Trends, Challenges and Implications for CSOs (English)
23. Enabling Environment of the Voluntary Sector in India (A Study Report) English
24. Policy Note on Reforms in the Voluntary Sector (English & Hindi)
25. Bringing People in from the Cold - Ensuring Inclusive Growth in India (English & Hindi)
26. Critical Review of Financial Inclusion - In G20 Countries with Focus on India (English & Hindi)
27. Sustainable Development in India - Review and Way Forward (English & Hindi)
28. Corruption and Governance in India - Current Status and Way Forward (English & Hindi)

About VANI

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

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

Objectives:

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

Areas of work

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

Engage with VANI

- To express solidarity with the voluntary sector,
- To initiate collectivisation of voluntary sector,
- To make the voice of the sector heard,
- To make voluntary sector visible,
- To help articulating the concerns of the voluntary sector,
- To change the status of voluntary sector,
- To work towards better enabling environment for voluntary sector,
- To provide leadership to the voluntary movement locally and globally,

VANI invites you to be part of the movement for betterment of marginalised, contribute for the equitable society and democratic governance through strengthening the voluntary movement in India.



VOICE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR
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