



Collaborating for Impact

Indo-German CSO cooperation and German Corporate CSR in India



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Collaborating for impact: Indo-German CSO Cooperation and German Corporate CSR in India

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Executive Summary

India and Germany share a longstanding history of development cooperation, encompassing areas such as industrial technology, agricultural growth, and socio-economic advancement. Bilateral initiatives, particularly those conducted under the Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSDP), have steadily strengthened Indo-German relations over the years. Notably, the year 2026 marks the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two nations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) serve as both agents of development and diplomacy, and as primary stakeholders in advancing strategic partnerships. However, CSOs currently face emerging trends and challenges, including narrowing operational space and diminishing or restricted donor support, which put their continued existence at risk. Globally, the dynamic regulatory, operational, and resource environments pose ongoing challenges for CSOs striving to persist and deliver meaningful impact.

This status paper examines the evolving collaboration between Indian and German CSOs, as well as the CSR strategies of German corporations operating in India. It assesses progress, core strengths, opportunities, and obstacles, highlighting the importance of Indo-German engagement in promoting common goals, values, and synergies. The analysis is based on focused desk research and aims to foster trust and reinforce Indo-German cooperation. Furthermore, the paper explores mechanisms to enhance mutual understanding and coordination between German corporations and Indo-German civil society actors. Recommendations are provided to better align these partnerships with the overarching objective of fostering, enduring collaboration, and amplifying the collective impact of Indo-German development cooperation through civil society organisations and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

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Harshvrat Jaitli

Chief Executive Officer - VANI

List of Acronyms

BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
FCRA	Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GSDP	Green and Sustainable Development Partnership
IGCC	Indo-German Chamber of Commerce

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Introduction

India and Germany have built a longstanding partnership based on shared global climate and sustainability goals. Both countries have partnered in trade, science, education, and climate, dedicated to bringing solutions to the development issues of the time. The Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSDP) is the flagship framework through which both nations address global challenges and acknowledge their responsibility to achieve the UN 2030 Agenda. Currently, various [Indo-German cooperation projects](#) are underway supporting India's transformation towards greener and sustainable economic model to cope with challenges posed by climate change. For a direct and measurable improvement in economic relations, there has been a notable increase in cross-border investments by business cooperation, with enterprises from both countries expanding their presence and activities in each other's markets.

All partnerships between the two countries involve multiple stakeholders, including the public and private sectors, civil society organisations, and research institutes. Despite persistent development challenges, geopolitical tensions, and complex compliance requirements, these partnerships remain strong. However, the increasing restrictions on working of CSOs in India is a concerning issue. The frequent amendments in compliance requirements, such as the FCRA and tax regulation demands, have created funding and administrative challenges for Indian CSOs serving as implementing partners in foreign- and domestically funded projects. As pivotal ground-level actors in development initiatives, CSOs face challenges that ripple across all stakeholders and affect their partnerships.

This status paper is therefore timely and necessary. It consists of two parts: First, it reviews the Indo-German CSO partnerships their contributions, identifies key opportunities and challenges that Indian partners of German CSOs face. Then, in the second part, it further examines Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) partnerships undertaken by German companies in India with the support of Indian CSO partners. This part offers insights into their operations, impacts, and the barriers CSOs encounter in accessing these domestically funded projects. Both partnerships are significant for larger bilateral partnerships. The paper concludes with recommendations on how VANI, as a national civil society platform and CSOs themselves, can enhance their capacity, develop resilience, and foster an enabling environment.

Part 1: Analysis of Indo-German Collaboration among CSOs in India

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in addressing development challenges in India. They facilitate the delivery of technical support to the grassroots level and bring local perspectives to broader public discourse. Civil society initiatives also support bilateral partnerships between India and Germany, contributing to the effective implementation of joint projects. Despite these contributions, CSOs encounter significant challenges due to regulatory hurdles. Restrictions on civic space have limited the autonomous role of CSOs and have further impacted these partnerships.

Germany has also expressed concern regarding India's declining position in democracy indices and the [increasing restrictions on CSOs](#), which affect German organizations and their partners. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the evolving environment and develop innovative strategies for organizational sustainability while upholding core objectives. This part of the paper explores the working of Indo-German bilateral partnerships, the role of German CSOs in India and challenges that affect them and their partners.

1.1 How do Indo-German bilateral partnership's function?

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development ([BMZ](#)), a branch of the German Government, is responsible for formulating guidelines and objectives, planning, and implementation of German development policy. BMZ collaborates with international communities in developing countries and emerging economies to enhance living conditions. For project implementation, the ministry commissions specific organisations, which have three primary responsibilities:

- Renders financial and technical cooperation.
- Provide support from the German experts and development workers.
- Offers training for managers and technical experts in partner countries.

For the implementation of its projects, the BMZ relies on the following organisations: KfW Bankengruppe, a German state-owned promotional and development bank, responsible for financial cooperation with German partner countries. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Germany's primary federal development agency,

provides technical cooperation for the projects.¹ Apart from these, there are [specialized implementing organisations](#) of Technical Cooperation, such as the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR) or the National Metrology Institute (PTB).

1.2 BMZ partnerships in India

India is designated as one of BMZ's "global partners" and has played a significant role in shaping Indo-German development cooperation. BMZ offers model solutions and capacity-building support, enabling India to develop and expand its own initiatives and reform programs. The Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSDP), a central strategic initiative, aligns with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. It is financed by KfW and implemented by GIZ.² Most of BMZ's support to India is focused on the following priority areas:

- Renewable energy and energy efficiency
- Sustainable urban development and green urban mobility
- Climate resilience, agroecology, environmental and resource protection

GIZ, as the implementing agency, employs a multi-stakeholder approach designed to expand engagement beyond governmental actors to include local non-governmental organisations, research institutions, community-based organisations, and women's groups. While the primary focus of Indo-German relations remains government-to-government development cooperation, civil society plays a significant role in implementation, advocacy, fostering people-to-people connections, and promoting inclusive approaches.

1.3 German CSOs in India

In addition to bilateral partnerships, several German CSOs operate in India. The relationship between Indo-German CSOs have grown over many decades. BMZ funds and supports German CSOs for development projects in partner countries, including India. Specifically, implementing

¹ European Evaluation Society. (n.d.). Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). <https://europeanevaluation.org/federal-ministry-for-economic-cooperation-and-development-bmz/>

² Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2024, September 3). India. <https://www.bmz.de/en/countries/india>

organisations such as [Engagement Global](#) provide information and advice on foreign projects funded by the BMZ. These CSOs work with local partners in India to advance BMZ's objectives, focusing on sustainable development and environmental issues. Key focus areas of German CSOs in India (areas often intersect across organisations; each with one representative example):

1. Just energy transition and Climate Action - [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#)- Promote discourses and socio-economic analyses on areas such as energy transition, sustainable urbanisation, and digital economy through the lens of climate justice and the future of work.
2. Sustainable Development and Green Food Systems - [Welthungerhilfe](#) - Fighting hunger and poverty with sustainable agriculture, developing a resilient food system aiming for nutrition security. Put a special focus on gender equality by mainstreaming and institutionalising gender-responsive action.
3. Inclusive Development and Gender Equality - [Heinrich Böll Stiftung](#) - Key focus areas are ecology and sustainability, democracy and human rights, with a particular emphasis on gender democracy, meaning social emancipation and equal rights for women, men, and cultural and ethnic minorities.
4. Social justice and Labour Rights - [Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung](#) - Works with civil society actors on issues related to rural development, workers' rights, and social transformation.
5. Vocational Training and Education - [Terre des Hommes Germany](#) - Programme in India focuses on equal educational and development opportunities for children, youth, and their communities, regardless of their religion, gender, or race.

There are various mechanisms through which these German CSOs operate:

- Non-funding activities, such as policy briefs, position papers, dialogues, and policy research and analysis, are conducted independently or in collaboration with Indian partners. For example, [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung \(FES\) India](#) organised a dialogue series, the “[Voices of the Impact Economy](#)”.
- By providing consultancy/service such as capacity building, training, scholarships, and knowledge exchange. [Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung \(HSF\) India](#), for instance, organises the Indo-European Summer Academy and parliamentary exchange visits. They also provide scholarships to master's and doctoral students.

- By partnerships with FCRA-registered CSOs, providing them with technical support or grants directly to implement the projects on the ground.
- By working directly with government or technical channels, CSOs here act as partners in large bilateral programmes.

1.4 Challenges in implementation

Compliance requirements for CSOs in India have grown more complex as authorities impose FCRA requirements and income tax obligations. These requirements in turn affects the partnership of Indo-German CSOs. The [Foreign Contribution \(Regulation\) Act](#) governs the use of foreign contributions, including grants and donations, and prohibits their utilisation for any activity harming the national interest. As of today, about [22,501 FCRA licenses](#) of CSOs have been cancelled.

The [2020 FCRA amendment](#) halted the activities of many CSOs by imposing regulatory compliance requirements.³ For example, the substitution in section 7 of FCRA in the Amendment Bill 2020 prohibits any registered and granted organisation from transferring the foreign contributions received to another organisation. Smaller organisations have mainly relied on the sub-granted money due to a lack of direct accessibility to international donors.⁴ Now, larger CSOs can no longer transfer foreign contributions to smaller community-based partners, cutting off vital support to grassroots initiatives.

Another example is the [amendment to section 16](#) of the FCRA, which provides the Central Government with the power to make an enquiry before the FCRA certificate is renewed. There are significant concerns regarding the implementation of this provision, as it may result in the refusal to renew an organisation's registration, thereby restricting access to foreign funds and limiting operational capacity.⁵

³ International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. (2021, July 13). India's 2020 FCRA amendments: Impact on association. <https://www.icnl.org/post/analysis/indias-2020-fcra-amendments-impact-on-association>

⁴ Alliance Magazine. (2020, September 29). FCRA Bill's impact on civil society in India. Alliance Magazine. <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/fcra-bills-impact-on-civil-society-in-india/>

⁵ International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. (2021, July 13). India's 2020 FCRA amendments: Impact on association. <https://www.icnl.org/post/analysis/indias-2020-fcra-amendments-impact-on-association>

The recent [2026 FCRA amendment](#) has made compliance more stringent and increased government control over assets created with foreign funds by CSOs whose FCRA registration has been suspended, cancelled, or not renewed.

Further, compliance with Income Tax Act sections 12A and 80G is essential for CSOs. Recent [amendments to Income Tax sections 12A and 80G](#) require CSOs to renew their registration every five years. The renewal period may be five or ten years, depending on the total income of the CSO in the previous two years. [Section 12A](#) provides tax exemption on organizational income, while [Section 80G](#) enables donors to claim tax deductions on donations made to CSOs. Both registrations are crucial for compliance with laws, such as those related to CSR. Failure to register can result in significant financial consequences and damage the organization's credibility with donors.⁶

These regulatory changes have limited the reach of German CSOs operating in India, as seized funds disrupt grassroots connections and prevent funds from supporting intended purposes. It further affects the nature of work of German CSOs and their engagement in India. BMZ, also note in its publication [“The Federal Development Ministry’s Cooperation with Civil Society - Assuming international responsibility in a spirit of solidarity,”](#) that the space for civil society in the Global South is shrinking. Further, the Civicus monitor currently rates [India as “repressed”](#) due to increased restrictions on civil society and media. In this context, it is essential to develop strategies to improve the enabling environment and strengthen support systems for CSOs.

Constraints on accessing foreign funding have led CSOs to seek support from domestic donors increasingly. In this context, CSR initiatives have become a significant source of funding for NGOs. Data from the National CSR portal shows that CSR spending increased from [₹24,834 crore in FY 2014-15](#) to over [₹34,909 crore in FY 2023-24](#). While CSR in India was initially regarded as a philanthropic activity, it is now evolving into a strategic commitment for corporations. Building on this trend, the following section examines the functioning and challenges of corporate-CSO partnerships.

⁶ Agrawal, P. (2025, August 20). How Indian nonprofits can stay tax compliant. India Development Review <https://idronline.org/article/philanthropy-csr/how-indian-nonprofits-can-stay-tax-compliant/>

Part 2: The CSR initiatives of German enterprises in India

Germany is India's [largest European trading partner](#). Bilateral trade between the countries continues to expand, driven by substantial direct investments and increased Indo-German collaboration, including joint ventures. Further, the growth of renewable energy in India presents significant investment opportunities for companies. To strengthen these economic relations, the German government and organizations such as the Indo-German Chamber of Commerce play a crucial role in addressing structural challenges that impede German companies from entering the Indian market.⁷

Compliance with social and environmental standards is essential for every responsible business. In this context, CSR initiatives are particularly relevant, as CSR is mandatory in India for companies exceeding specified thresholds. Companies frequently collaborate with local CSOs to address socio-economic and ethical issues through their CSR activities. This section examines the regulatory framework for CSR in India and assesses the engagement of German enterprises in CSR initiatives. It also identifies the challenges faced by corporations and their Indian implementing partners (CSOs) in operationalizing CSR.

2.1 CSR Rule in India

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was introduced in India through [Section 135](#) of the [Companies Act, 2013](#), making India the first country to mandate CSR for companies meeting specific thresholds (net worth of ₹500 crore or more, turnover of ₹1,000 crore or more, or net profit of ₹5 crore or more). This provision aims to promote balanced economic growth by encouraging companies to contribute to nation-building beyond profit generation. Companies can fulfil their CSR obligations by undertaking activities listed in [Schedule 7](#) of the Act, which focuses on social, environmental, and community development. Companies can take activities under the following spheres for their CSR projects -

1. Promoting health care by eradicating poverty, hunger, and malnutrition.
2. Improvement in education and provision of vocational training.

⁷ Federal Foreign Office. (2024, October). Focus on India. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2680288/8909ac2c501ab85d55defff7d1b8b75d/241016-fokus-indien-data.pdf>

3. Improving gender equality.
4. Safeguard environmental sustainability by protecting flora and fauna, as well as conserving natural resources.
5. Protective of the National heritage art and culture.
6. Measures to benefit the armed forces veterans.
7. Providing training to enhance the rural sports paralympics.
8. Contribute to any central government fund set up for socio-economic development.
9. Contribute to research and development projects funded by the central and state governments and the public sector.
10. Contribute to publicly funded universities.
11. Contribute to rural development projects.
12. Contribute to slum area development (areas declared slum by the central government or any state government).
13. Contribute to disaster management activities.

If the company cannot spend the mandatory 2% of its net average profit, the unspent amount must be transferred to a specified fund within six months.

2.2 IGCC and CSR projects of German enterprises in India

Indo-German industries have collaborated for decades, with significant expansion in recent years across sectors such as automobile, machinery, engineering, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and speciality materials. In response to these deepening industrial ties, the [Indo-German Chamber of Commerce \(IGCC\)](#), also known as AHK Indien, was established in 1956 to promote Indo-German relations. Since its inception, IGCC has represented German industry and its economic interests in India. It has supported the international growth of both German and Indian businesses and helped German enterprises meet CSR requirements. Many CSR initiatives by German companies align with bilateral commitments and India's net-zero goal.

IGCC plays a key role in connecting CSR and sustainability, supporting the Green and Sustainability Development Partnership. Through its [Sustain Markets initiative](#), IGCC helps businesses adopt sustainable practices by offering training, workshops, responsible sourcing, and other resources that promote responsible business conduct. Companies often link with a diverse range of partners to implement their CSR projects. Several companies in India are transitioning their CSR strategies from compliance-oriented mandates to investments prioritizing social impact.

European firms operating in India have also emerged as pivotal actors in advancing social innovation initiatives. Over the past seven years, these companies have allocated **€618 million to CSR activities**, constituting 45% of the aggregate CSR expenditure by multinational corporations. CSOs are the most common and dominant type of partner responsible for project implementation, community outreach, and monitoring and evaluation of CSR initiatives.

German companies are emerging as key agents in India's development narrative. They are working through a sustainable and inclusive approach within several interconnected themes for **CSR projects** in India. Key focus areas of CSR initiatives of German companies operating in India (areas often intersect across companies; each with one representative example) are:

1. Prioritizing education and skill development through vocational training, digital literacy, and scholarships. - **Bosch** – Bosch runs the **BRIDGE program** which is a job-oriented vocational training program for under-privileged youth aged 18-25 who have dropped out of formal education.
2. Focus on the environment and sustainability by emphasising green initiatives, the circular economy, and resource conservation. – **Siemens - Project Asha's** interventions in watershed development give villages year-round irrigation and livelihoods, raising incomes. It integrates sustainability through simple technologies such as water and renewable energy solutions, and community development initiatives.
3. Aims to improve health and community development by supporting health accessibility, sanitation, and community livelihood. – **Bayer** – Bayer focuses on health accessibility for rural communities through **telemedicine solutions**.
4. Promote gender-inclusive programs through gender mainstreaming and a focus on the gendered perspective of sustainable development. - **BASF India - Women in Refinish** is a CSR initiative aiming to empower women from underprivileged backgrounds by providing them with the skills and opportunities to pursue careers in the refinish coatings profession. Promote diversity and inclusion in the chemical industry

2.3 Challenges in Implementing Corporate Social Responsibility Projects

CSOs in India face both systemic and operational barriers to accessing and partnering on CSR projects. Companies report persistent concerns about a lack of transparency among implementing partners, including insufficient disclosure of program information, audit issues, and fund utilisation.⁸ These factors undermine trust-building between companies and local partners. Furthermore, the limited presence of well-organised CSOs in rural and remote areas hampers the scaling and scope of CSR initiatives. There is also a lack of awareness and information regarding CSR, as well as inadequate communication between companies and grassroots communities.⁹

Although 89% of NGOs possess the mandatory CSR 1 registration, 80% lack opportunities to connect with corporate networks. While CSR initiatives present valuable partnership prospects, limited accessibility excludes many CSOs due to insufficient resource mobilisation capabilities. CSR funding is also disproportionately allocated, with the most industrialized region hosting most corporations, receiving the largest share. 61% of total CSR expenditure (₹21,213 crore) was allocated in just 10 states in FY 2023-24. Maharashtra securing the highest allocation over the past 10 years, with Gujarat and Karnataka alternating in second place. This difference can be noted due to companies' preferences for CSR activities in areas closer to their manufacturing facilities.

In contrast, regions such as Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland, Daman and Diu, and many others have consistently received minimal CSR funding. This disparity makes it more challenging for CSOs operating in these states to transition from foreign contributions to CSR funding. Simultaneously, it also highlights the need for CSR companies to address the needs of these marginalized and lesser developed regions. The following section presents the survey data from VANI, which assesses the existing CSO ecosystem.

⁸ Gupta, S. (2023, p. 9). Corporate social responsibility: Issues and challenges in India.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Shikha-Gupta-51/publication/372420180_Corporate_Social_Responsibility_Issues_and_Challenges_in_India/links/64b66ed48de7ed28baaa8061/Corporate-Social-Responsibility-Issues-and-Challenges-in-India.pdf

⁹ Kumar, A. (2019). Examining problems and difficulties in corporate social responsibility implementation. *Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices*, 4(8), 33–39.

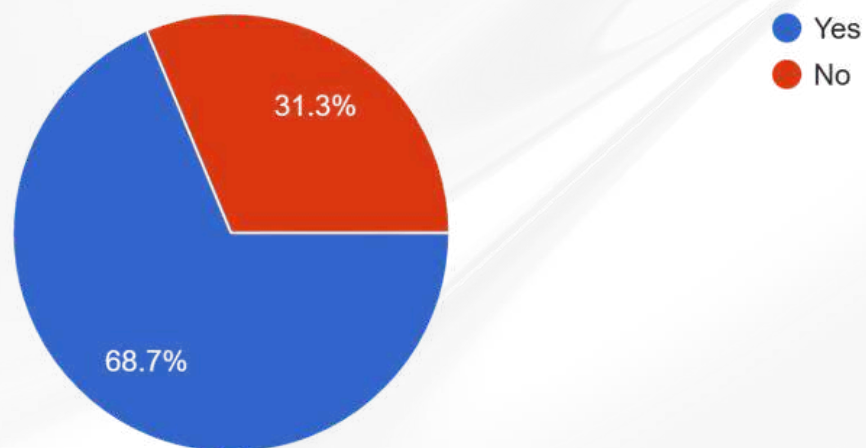
<http://publications.anveshanaindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EXAMINING-PROBLEMS-AND-DIFFICULTIES-IN--SOCIAL-RESPONSIBILITY-IMPLEMENTATION.pdf>

Insights from VANI's Survey: Navigating Challenges in Foreign Funding and CSR for NGOs

Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) conducted an online survey in February 2026 to analyse and strengthen the support ecosystem for CSOs in India. Approximately 100 participants (members and part of VANI network) took part and shared their insights on the existing support structures, challenges, and capacity needs. The survey reveals persistent, multi-layered challenges that CSOs face in securing funding and sustaining operations.

Does your organisation have FCRA license?

99 responses



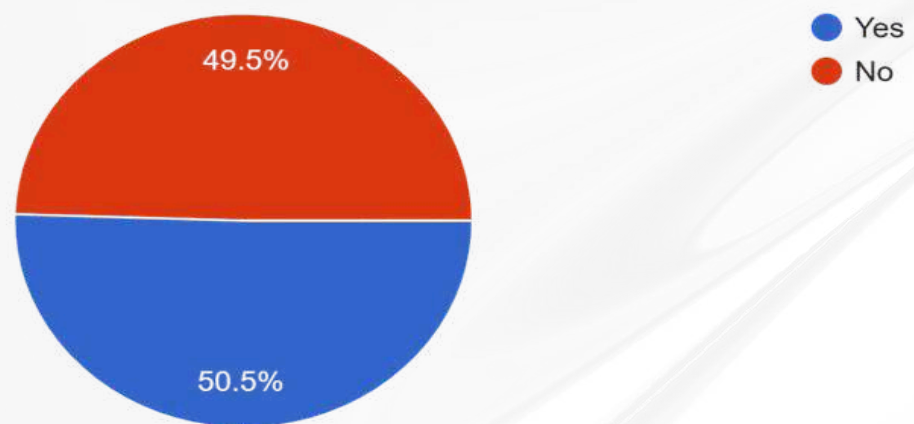
About 68.7% of participants hold an FCRA license. They receive funding from several countries, including Germany, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Among the total respondents, 19 experienced cancellations or non-renewals of FCRA licenses. Renewal of applications was denied for late submission, misalignment of objectives and activities, and missing name board/signage at the registered premises.

Some respondents also reported that they have not received any foreign contributions during the valid FCRA registration period. Indicating that obtaining a certificate does not automatically translate into receiving funding. Many organisations continue to struggle to secure foreign contributions even after holding a valid license.

In addition to foreign contributions, about 50.5% of respondents receive domestic funding from CSR initiatives. Several companies fund them, including Nokia, Tata Trust, Reliance Foundation, HDFC, Siemens, and many others. The areas they work in are diverse, such as green energy, water security, SRH and emotional health, child protection, gender equality, and environmental programs.

Do you receive domestic funding from CSR initiatives?

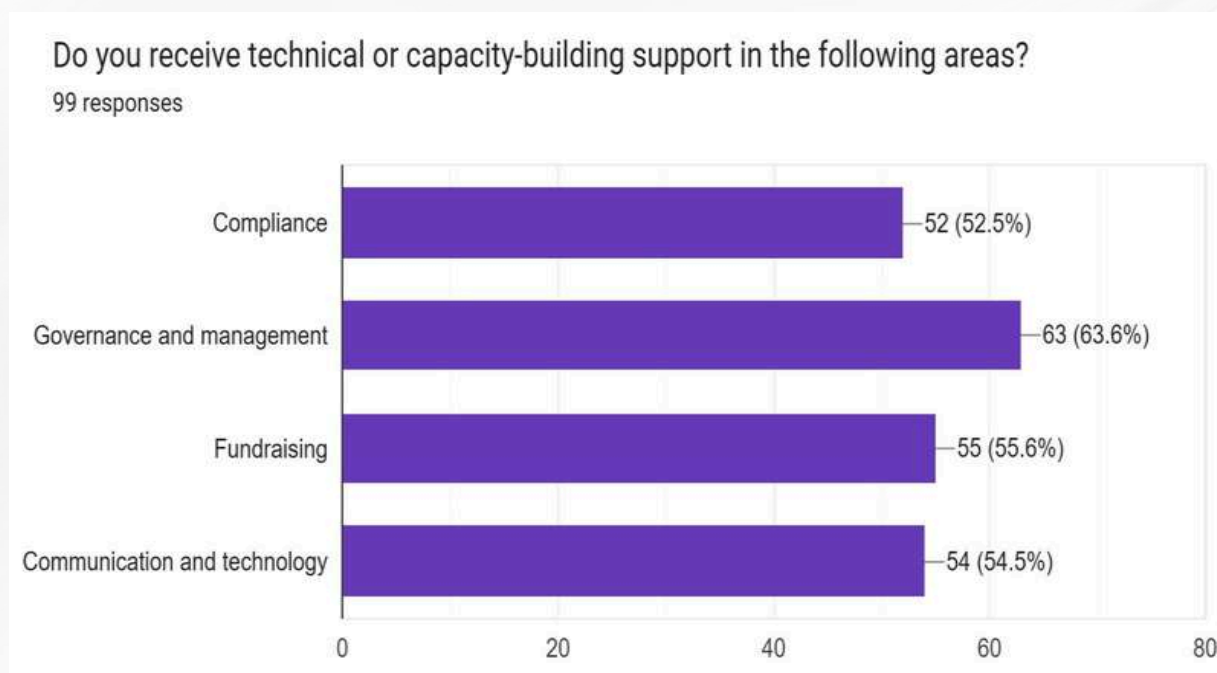
99 responses



When asked about their experience obtaining funds, one of the respondents reported that grassroots CSOs are caught in a cycle in which access to funding, whether CSR or foreign sources, depends heavily on existing financial strength and administrative capacity. Smaller, grassroots CSOs are frequently overlooked in favour of larger, more established organisations. These larger organisations often have dedicated grant-writing, compliance, and donor-relations teams. Reiterate that preparing detailed proposals, fulfilling stringent reporting requirements, and navigating complex compliance frameworks require significant time and resources.

CSOs face additional challenges beyond funding and administration. Unpredictable donor interests and shifting priorities disrupt long-term planning and sustainability. Frequent changes in government policies, delays in the disbursement of funds, and demands for high-impact results within short timeframes complicate operations.

About 54.5% of respondents receive support to build stronger communication and technology capabilities, and 52.5% receive compliance support. Approximately half of the respondents still struggle to access capacity-building opportunities, to raise funds, and to invest in technology or professional development. Due to limited unrestricted funding, grassroots CSOs expressed difficulty navigating compliance requirements, including registration and reporting obligations. Regulating compliance is challenging, it is especially pronounced for organisations in remote or marginalised areas. Limited connectivity and networking access hinder partnership development and visibility.



Despite these challenges, CSOs remain strongly committed to their missions. One of the respondents reported the need to adapt, gain new skills, and establish credibility through measurable results while contending with shifting donor priorities and complex regulatory environments. The lack of effective platforms for transparent donor engagement, combined with unpredictable funding streams, further complicates these issues. These experiences emphasised the urgent need for a more supportive ecosystem for civil society organisations. There is a clear need for intermediary bodies like VANI to bridge the gap between grassroots CSOs and larger institutional frameworks.

Recommendations from VANI

As an active development partner, VANI seeks to strengthen civil society's resilience. Leveraging its extensive CSO network, VANI can address challenges including lack of visibility, capacity and frequent amendments through the following interventions:

- **Bridge-building**

VANI can serve as a bridge between German companies, German CSOs, and Indian CSOs to promote mutual understanding of operational practices. Enhanced communication among these stakeholders may generate new opportunities for collaboration and cooperation.

- **Capacity building**

To strengthen accountability standards and enhance organisational capacity, capacity-building workshops on compliance, reporting, and legal frameworks can be conducted. These can also address legal queries and introduce innovative funding mechanisms such as the social stock exchange.

- **Local resource centre**

A local resource centre can be established to provide grassroots organisations with information in regional languages, including details on regulatory frameworks, ongoing capacity-building programmes, and support for resolving related issues.

- **Digital empowerment**

In this age of digitalisation, training on using new technical tools can significantly improve the efficiency and engagement of grassroots organisations. Training can be offered on accessible tools to help grassroots CSOs with limited resources, strengthen funding and develop compelling proposals.

- **Tutorial briefs, periodic journals, and newsletters**

Regular monthly write-ups and videos, such as tutorial briefs, periodic journals, and newsletters, can be disseminated in a way that reaches most CSOs, especially at the grassroots level.

- **Structured dialogues**

Dialogues which provide a platform for multiple stakeholder perspectives should be conducted regularly. These forums facilitate the sharing of experiences, developing trust, and deepening understanding in a dynamic context.

- **Visibility**

Enhancing the visibility of CSOs via the strategic construction of positive narratives serves to build public trust while providing an evidentiary record of civil society's contributions and impacts.

- **Internal changes**

Organisations can improve accountability from within by becoming more conscious and alert about compliance, submitting timely reports, and managing donors more systematically. In the face of an evolving environment, organisations should not restrict themselves to fixed strategies and approaches. Greater flexibility and openness to learning will help them adapt more quickly and effectively.

We encourage German companies and German CSOs operating in India to make strategic, long-term investments in grassroot Indian CSOs. By prioritising such partnerships, stakeholders can amplify the reach and relevance of development interventions while leveraging local expertise for greater impact. Empowering Indian CSOs will foster resilient communities, build trust, and establish sustainable pathways for social and economic advancement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the collaboration between Indo-German civil society organizations and German corporate CSR initiatives has demonstrated significant potential for driving inclusive and sustainable development. This partnership not only aligns with the development priorities of both nations but also fosters cross-cultural exchange and problem-solving approaches. By empowering grassroots Indian CSOs and investing in capacity-building, these collaborations ensure that local needs are met with contextually relevant solutions. However, to maximize the impact and scalability of such partnerships, there is a pressing need for reforms that simplify compliance and enhance transparency.

Findings from VANI's survey underscore that grassroots CSOs, despite their deep community ties and commitment, remain systematically underserved in both foreign funding and CSR ecosystems. Key barriers include frequent amendments in regulatory compliances, geographic disparities in CSR allocation, and limited access to corporate networks. As a national civil society platform, VANI is well-positioned to serve as a bridge linking Indian CSOs with German partners, providing compliance support, and amplifying the voices of those often excluded from formal development processes. Creating an enabling environment will encourage greater corporate engagement and facilitate more meaningful cooperation.

Furthermore, shifting from short-term, project-based engagements to long-term, strategic investments will help address systemic challenges and ensure that development gains are resilient and far-reaching. Looking ahead, it is essential for all stakeholders, governments, corporates, and CSOs to deepen their commitment to this shared vision. The path forward requires sustained, strategic engagement from all stakeholders, including German government agencies, CSOs, and corporates, as well as Indian civil society, regulatory bodies, and government counterparts. By deepening trust, aligning priorities, Indo-German cooperation can progress beyond transactional engagement toward a transformative development partnership. By utilizing collective strengths and developing an inclusive ecosystem, Indo-German partnerships can continue with impactful development, inspiring similar models globally.

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