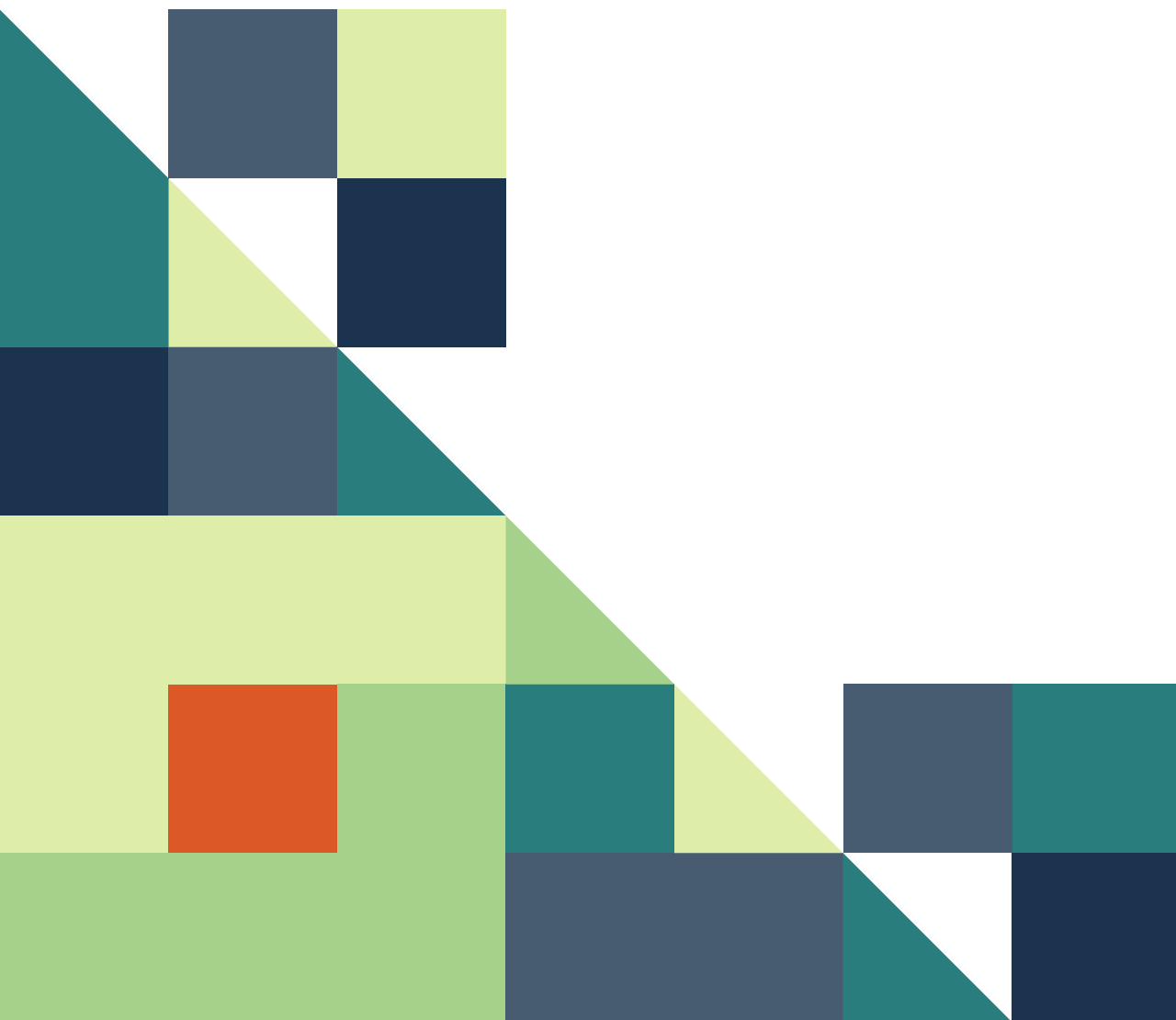


COLLABORATIONS

in the Indian Civil Society Sector



Collaborations in the Indian Civil Society Sector

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FOREWORD



India is the world's largest democracy and the second most populous country of the world. Home to diversified groups of people and communities, India's civil society is looked upon by many as the voice of the people. With the mission to usher social transformation and social development, Indian civil society has time and again stood up for the rights of the people and came forward when the lives and wellbeing of common people are threatened. Their contribution towards nation building since the independence speaks volumes about their resilience and selflessness. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck India, the unified strength displayed by the common people and the Civil society sector of India ushered large scale relief work which the government couldn't have done in isolation. While the sector itself faced a lot of issues, they didn't cease to selflessly help those in need.

In the contemporary times, the Civil Society Sector of India is facing new set of dilemmas which not only threaten it's existence but also obstruct the overall development of the country. With the changing narrative of common people towards the sector and it's work and the increasing speculations of the government, it is crucial for Civil Society sector to come together and voice it's own narrative. Indian CSOs need to stand with solidarity in the face of adversity in order to reimpose their strength as the voice of the common people and take up collective endeavors to create large scale impact. Subsequently, with increasing stringent rules and regulations, the sector is facing resource crunch and funding restrictions. Such a situation demands CSOs to look within themselves, get rid of binding structures and create new innovative frameworks that aid the financial viability and sustainability of the civil society sector.

VANI as the voice of the Indian Civil Society sector and a congregator for collectivizing the sector, brings together various Indian CSOs to have dialogue on issues that obstruct social development and at the same time urges for a need for unification to tackle them. In this context, the study aims to encourage Indian CSOs to collaborate both within the sector and outside of it in order to not only attain financial sustainability but also to bring about large scale social development.

I would like to acknowledge and extend my gratitude to IM Swedish Development Partner for sponsoring this project and Ms Samiksha Gosain, Communications intern, for drafting and editing this document.

Harsh Jaitli
Chief Executive Officer

CHAPTER 1

What is collaboration and what it means for the Voluntary Sector

Often referred to as the “Social basis of Democracy”, the Civil Society sector of India stands to keep humans at the center of development. Autonomous and voluntarily organized, it is observed as a set of “diverse non-governmental institutions strong enough to compliment the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating atomizing the rest of society”¹. Civil society sector upholds the interest of individuals while simultaneously ensuring the state’s accountability to it’s citizens. In a country like India, wherein the aftereffects of the British Raj are felt to this day, independence managed to seep in the western values of liberalism, individualism and constitutionalism in order to aid India’s formation as a welfare state. Running on principles of economic growth as well as social justice, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have a long history of fighting for the rights of the common people and eradicating the vices that lengthen the rich and poor divide. One of the major responsibilities of CSOs is provision of services to the underprivileged. Built on the foundations of accountability, access and quality, the nature of the services CSOs provide is distinctive. It ranges from monetary aid to relief work, community development, employment generation, law and advocacy, health and nutrition and sustainable development.

With India emerging as one of the fastest growing economies of the world, India’s Civil Society sector makes a significant contribution to the country’s growth through individual and collective initiatives which encourage common public good. History is witness to the fact that collective endeavors always bring success. In order to create large scale impactful change, collaboration and partnership is vital for the Civil Society sector. As rightly said by Helen Keller, “Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much”. The spirit of collaboration rests on the idea of ‘we’ overpowering the idea of ‘I’ and consequently, in its essence, ushers individuals to work together for a greater good of all. According to the Cambridge dictionary, Collaboration is the act of working together with other people or organizations to create or achieve something². By collaborating and forging partnerships, people contribute to inclusivity and development. By way of bringing people together for a common goal and joining forces for a common purpose, the outcome of their collective efforts ensures democratic governance and social empowerment in the country. It also paves way for innovative solutions to social issues. Collaboration is the key to create great impact, no matter the scale of the partnership formed.

An example of which is the collective power of ‘Joining Forces’ which has accelerated development of children since 2017. The collaboration of six child-focused agencies- ChildFund Alliance, Save the Children International, Plan International, SOS Children’s Villages

1 Ernest Geller on the theme of civil society as a buffer between the state and the individual. He stresses the need for this society to be fluid and homogenous at its core.

2 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/collaboration>

International, Terre des Hommes International Federation and World Vision International, has done exemplary work to uphold and secure child rights and end violence against them. As one of the most vulnerable minorities, children face the wrath of violence, hunger, poverty, exploitation and lack of education. Using frameworks such as the Convention of the Rights of a Child and opportunities provided by Sustainable Development Goals, Joining Forces act as agents of change who use a right based approach to ensure that children are supported and their needs are addressed. In their project ‘Joining Forces for Africa- Protecting Children from Violence during Covid-19 crisis and beyond’, Joining forces works with families, communities and institutions to raise awareness and protect children. In implementation till 05/08/2023, the project uses innovative policies and strategies to implement different models and methodologies according to the needs of specific areas. Working across Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Mali and Senegal, the project is established upon the collective aim of the collaboration i.e. to keep children at the center and leave no child behind.

The use of collaborative systems is widely talked about on the global scale, for instance in the **CATALYST 2030**. Catalyst 2030 is a global movement of social change innovators which comprises NGOs, social entrepreneurs, intermediaries, funders and other social change innovators, collaborating to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Through its report “CATALYSING CHANGE: Catalytic networks and catalyzing collaborations towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals³”, it aims to show that “global and inclusive collaborative action is not only possible but deeply needed in our fractured and

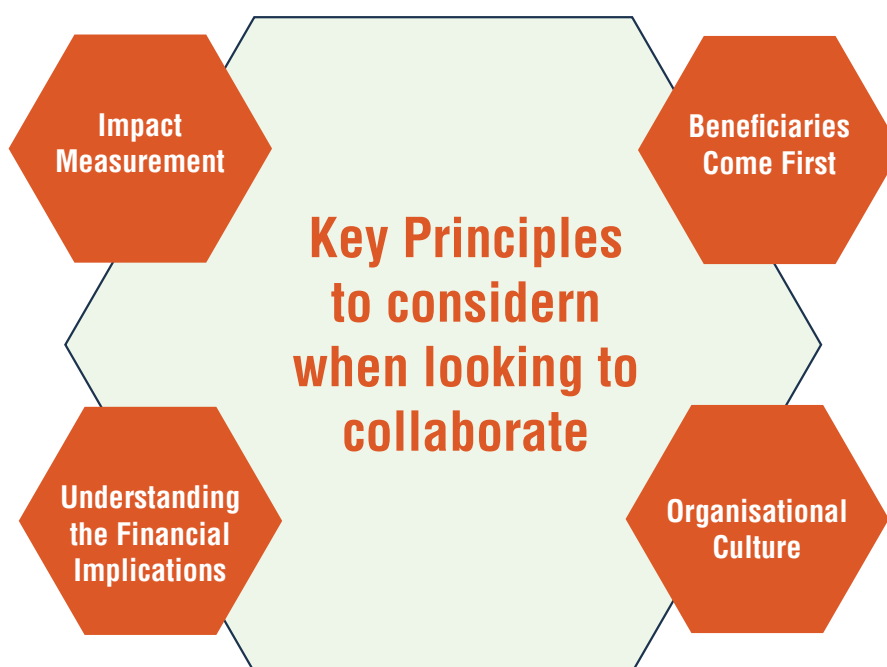
3 <https://catalyst2030.net/wp-content/uploads/Catalyst-2030-brochure-7-May-2022.pdf>

divided world”. The report argues in favor of the concept of **catalytic networks** and depicts a deeply inclusivist approach to network building. Clearly defined, a catalytic network is an interconnected group of people accelerating transformation. Building on the tenets of organizing collectively for change, it urges that growing networking results in stronger foundations for systematic change. (This report will be extensively discussing this in next chapter while addressing global collaborations). Therefore, it is evident that collaborative efforts are a widely appreciated phenomenon to usher change and development throughout the world.

According to Arghyam Founder-Chairperson, Rohini Nilekani, “The key benefits of a collaborative are to mitigate individual risk, be greater than the sum of its individual parts, and to enable ideas and missions to scale⁴.” Collaboration, if done right, leads to growth of an organization in terms of helping the beneficiaries, income generation and impact creation. A fruitful collaboration between CSOs can produce unique services that attracts donors and funders. Having the potential to diversify and increase the Civil society sector’s collective impact, collaboration enables CSOs to tackle interlinked issues. Nothing exists in isolation and therefore solutions to social problems are also multifaceted and cannot always be provided by one entity. For example, a family facing intergenerational unemployment would experience lack of better livelihood opportunities, homelessness, lack of equal access to healthcare opportunities etc. Problems such as this cannot be solved in isolation, it is important for CSOs to come together in order to successfully address integrated social issues. In the given example, a CSO working to mitigate issues of homelessness could collaborate with another CSO that works for rehabilitation and capacity building. Providing CSOs an avenue for growth, collaborations reduce fragmentation within the sector and allow interventions to reach larger groups. The two major incentives for CSOs to collaborate are- **Increased Funding and Increased Social Impact**. Ideally CSOs would want to go for opportunities where there’s high impact and high funding, however in the real world it’s not easy to get such opportunities. Therefore, there are some aspects which CSOs can consider while choosing a good collaboration opportunity for themselves and deliver better outcomes. This includes-

- keeping a clear focus on the best possible outcome for beneficiaries
- recognizing organizations that work towards creating a social impact similar to their organization
- understanding pricing issues and financial implications
- collaborating with other organizations whose values align with the values of their organization
- recognizing the organizational culture of other organizations so that in future this wouldn’t be an area of conflict.

4 <https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/Images/articles/philanthropic-collaboratives-in-india/philanthropic-collaboratives-in-india.pdf>



Collaborating comes with its own sets of Risks and Challenges. Being a largely tricky avenue to navigate, unsuccessful collaborations can lead to poor quality work, damage to organization's reputation, high financial cost and loss of relationships and assets. Along with that, other potential downsides include high cost and draining of resources, poor quality of work which tarnishes all the organizations' reputations and internal conflict. One of the major challenges that the voluntary sector faces is lack of funding and time for leadership development in the sector. Apart from that, increase demand in services, cuts in funding, decreasing trust and lack of support, put CSOs under pressure.

With the advent of various rules and regulations and the changing attitude of the common people towards CSOs, Indian CSOs have a distinctive set of problems to deal with. In the contemporary space, CSOs not only share a contentious relationship with the government but also within the sector they lack human resources and unification. In such a situation, collectivization is an imperative need. In a country which is one of the largest democracies of the world, Indian Civil society sector emerges as a rejuvenating voice of the people which not only aids the government in social transformation but also holds them to account wherever necessary. Therefore, it is important for civil society organizations to have solidarity and keep aside personal gains. The crucial call is for the sector to look within itself and identify areas of improvement so that they don't stray from the path of common public good and continue to work for one large cause- social transformation and development of the people. Change begins at home and for that reason to empower the people of the country at large, CSOs need to empower the people of the sector both within and amongst organizations. The sector can challenge the authorities only when they build their credibility and to do so unification and solidarity come foremost.

In Bridgespan Group's study - 'Philanthropic Collaboratives in India: The Power of Many'⁵, the authors Pritha Venkatachalam and Kashyap Shah build on The Bridgespan Group's 2018 investigation of eight bold philanthropic initiatives in India—which found that collaboration is a key catalyst for driving social impact. According to the report, a **philanthropic collaborative** can be defined as —an entity that pursues a shared vision and strategy for achieving social impact, using common resources and prearranged governance mechanisms. In the report, they presented three key lessons that collaborators can keep in mind. They call it the “**3Cs**”. (more on philanthropic collaboratives will be dealt with in chapter 3).

It takes
Commitment
to collaborate

- choosing partners dedicated to a common cause
- high trust culture gives partners confidence to share decision making and cede control when necessary
- less internal differences

Clarity
(and communication)
can streamline
collective action

- roles and responsibilities of partners to be clearly defined
- regular, consistent and transparent discourse on who does what
- progress tracking
- dashboards to track accountability

Be prepared to
course correct

- holding regular review meetings, using metrics to reassess critical assumptions and revisiting some foundational assumptions that has started to look shaky
- asking few key members to remain onboard
- finding right anchor funder

Despite the risks and challenges, Collaboration can be transformative for the voluntary sector. As said by Ajay Piramal, Founder of Piramal Foundation - “Collaboration requires long term commitment. The Problems we face will not be solved in one or two years”⁶.

There are two levels at which collaborations work- **External and Internal**. External collaboration entails collaboration with Foreign Funders, Global Partnerships, Cross sectoral partnership (with Media, Academic institutions, Health institutions etc), Research Organizations, Government, Philanthropist Funders (Individuals, Philanthropic Institutions and Corporate) etc. Internal collaborations refer to collaborations in the sector; Intra sectoral collaboration exists when various CSOs with unique deliverables come together. Another aspect of internal collaborations is Intra – Organizational collaboration which entails the partnership which is formed within various departments of an organization. The next chapter will extensively deal with the different types of collaborations.

⁵ <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/philanthropy/philanthropic-collaboratives-in-india>

⁶ <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/philanthropy/philanthropic-collaboratives-in-india>

ChildFund India



Working in 85 districts across 15 states, Child Fund India (CFI) is a child-focused development organization which aims to reach to children from most marginalized communities through their programs. CFI works on its aim with the support from community leaders, local administrators and organizations and the government. Through holistic and sustainable interventions based on health, nutrition, education, livelihood, gender and child protection, CFI reaches to 4 million children and families annually. To ensure the sustainability of their

programs, CFI closely works with communities and other stakeholders.

One of the key missions of CFI is to **Connect** with like minded organizations, governments and individuals to drive long lasting positive impact in the lives of children and their communities⁷. Partnership is essential to CFI's working, therefore, as an organization they have nurtured their relations with government, media, funding agencies, corporates, national and international corporations and organizations and academic institutes. Since their inception, they have maintained an exceptional community presence and have accelerated direct implementation of their projects in India which ensure that children are able to grow in an environment that fosters their holistic development.

Some of their partners are Macmillan Education, Fluor Cares, Ambedkar University Delhi, Project Hope, Tata Trusts, The Hans Foundation, Microsoft, ONGC and HSBC.

*Information derived from the public domain

Therefore, Collaborations in the Indian Civil society sector have the power to remodel the sector- to make it better to be able to help the beneficiaries with complex problems and by allowing the sector to grow so that the reach increases. There are many benefits to collaboration along with the risks and challenges it is posed with. However, if collaboration is pursued in order to bring about sustainable long-term change, keeping in mind the 3Cs, it is more likely flourish.

⁷ Information derived from <https://childfundindia.org/our-story/>

CHAPTER 2

Different types of Collaborations

In a developing country like India, The Civil Society Sector aims to promote, protect and strengthen human rights and advocate for policies that aid inclusivity and development. In the contemporary times, the civil society sector has realized the power of working together for change and therefore they usher a more structured coalition instead of working in isolation. To effect social change, CSOs are increasingly partnering with each other as well as government and corporates. Collective impact is being valued and recognized globally as an effective way to transform society. Navigating collaborations isn't easy, however there are some pre requisites which usher a good collaboration. In order to collaborate successfully, it's essential for both the sides to know their individual areas of strength and weaknesses and to recognize other organizations who complement those strengths. Creating collaborations requires an alignment of core values and approaches, this is more a matter of ideology than process. In terms of goal setting, it is best to have specific goals rather than having one macro cause. A successful collaboration must be founded on familiarity and trust, which transcends just work. Trust is paramount when dealing with external challenges and conflicts.

Rapid Community Response to COVID 19



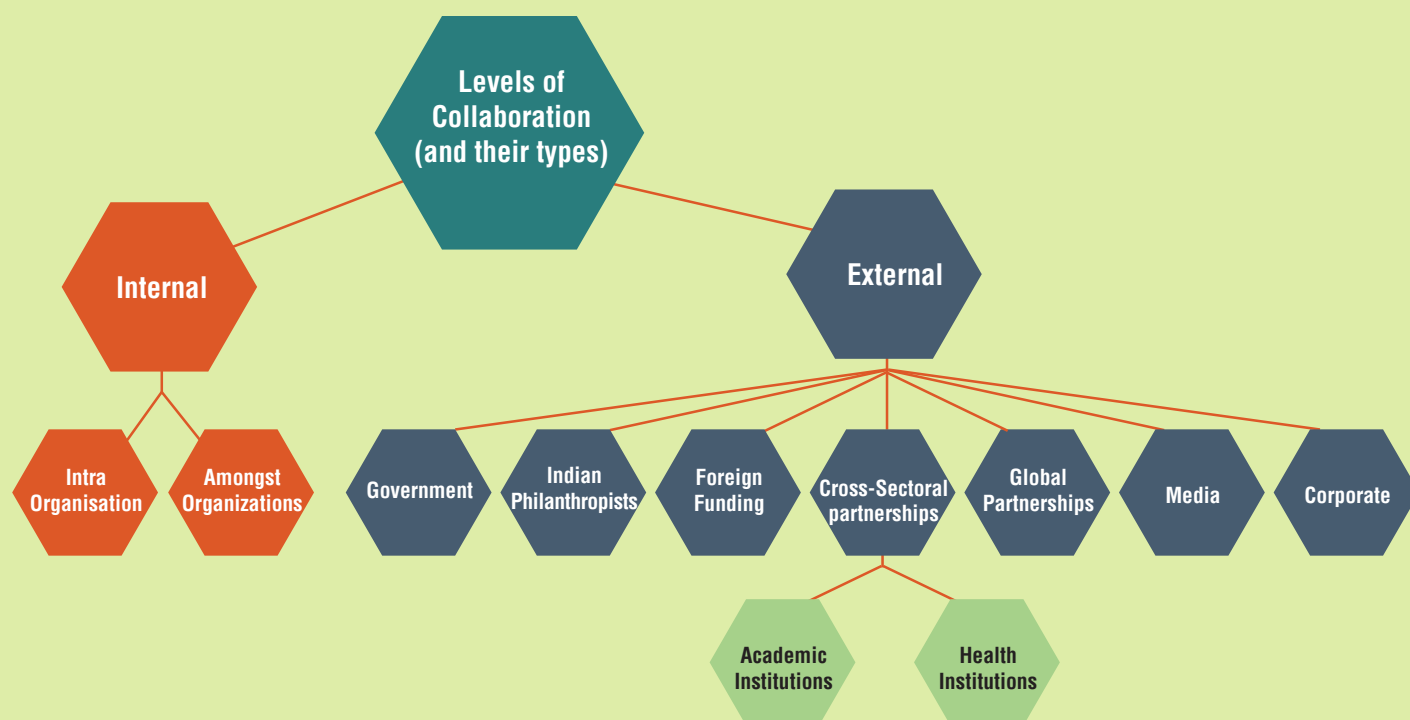
Working on the tenets of inclusivity and solidarity, RCRC is a coalition of CSOs in India with a combined reach of 16 million people and presence in 110 districts⁸. BY building an unique collaborative of CSOs which partners with other stakeholders such as state and national government, RCRC provides a voice to its members and impacts the lives of the beneficiaries that these CSOs serve. Additionally, RCRC demonstrates the power of collaborations to produce large scale changes. By providing a participative and quick response action research infrastructure, RCRC's members and partners succeed due to their data driven, collaborative action.

Working for the betterment of rural people and migrant labor, RCRC publishes surveys, creates awareness and bring about rapid relief action.

Their partners are Arghyam, Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives and Omidyar Network India. Some of their members are Mirantar Trust, Keystone foundation, Jan swasthyaSahyog and National Institute of women, child and youth development.

*Information derived from the public domain

Collaboration is an essential prerequisite to achieve impactful and sustainable result. Collaboration provides avenue for catalytic networks to create innovation and strengthen the sector's resilience. It happens largely at two levels- **Internal and External**.



Internal Collaborations

In the Indian civil society sector, Internal collaborations consist of Inter-organization collaborations and Intra-organization collaborations. Inter-organization Collaborations stand for collaboration within the sector. It flourishes between two or more organizations which either have the **same thematic area of work but are separate entities** or two or more organizations which have **different thematic areas of work but they complement each other's strengths**. Interlinkages in developmental issues isn't a new phenomenon, therefore, for organizations which have the common goal of transforming the lives of underprivileged, coming together is an avenue that will bring greater change. For example, Organization A works on providing access to employment opportunities for migrant laborers and Organization B works on skill development. A collaboration between organization A and B will be fruitful not only for the beneficiaries but also for the organizations themselves. Together, they can acquire larger contracts and operate at scale while also build their capacity, be efficient and reduce costs.

WADA NA TODO ABHIYAN



Formed by CSOs in 2004, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA) is a campaign which works to hold the Indian government accountable to its national and international commitments. It has over 3000 partners across India which include NGOs, Local networks, Forums, and nearly every other form of CSO⁹. As a national civil society platform,

WNTA aims to 'monitor governance accountability to eliminate poverty and social exclusion in India'.

As a national partner of the Global call for Action Against Poverty and other global SDG platforms, WNTA has three central pillars to its work, which are:

- a) bringing out a review report of the union government on their performance annually, based on their electoral promises and constitutional mandates;
- b) bringing out an annual review report of the SDG (previously MDG) progress in the country and
- c) articulating people's demands and aspirations, to the political parties, before elections, through 'People's Manifesto'.

A key objective of WNTA is to ensure the concerns and aspirations of the socially excluded communities and making sure that they are heard and mainstreamed across government policies, programs and development goals.

*Information derived from the public domain

Subsequently, strengthening the human resources of an organization is as important to bring about effective organizational outcomes. Identifying the contemporary public demands and the resource crunch in the sector, organizational staff working in CSOs require a stronger share of synergies, resources and expertise as their solidarity and resilience to work for the greater cause is time and again tested. Intra-organizational collaborations uplifts the values and beliefs of an organization by creating an ecosystem that guides strong leadership, accepts and gives space to alternate perspectives, holds people accountable and takes into account the views of people from different levels of the organization. Working as a glue that holds organizations together, intra-organizational collaboration helps in achieving shared goals, disseminating knowledge, building ecosystems that nurture learning and most importantly building a unified sector.



VANI as a network of Indian CSOs acts as the voice of the civil society sector. It provides a platform to CSOs to come together and have dialogue on pertinent issues, creating a space which allows free speech in order to discuss and brainstorm innovative solutions. VANI accelerates convergence of common sectoral issues and ushers unification in the sector. Various civil society organizations network at VANI meetings and stress upon the need for a coalition. Understanding the importance of solidarity in the contemporary times, the leadership of VANI has been hailed as a driving force of change and knowledge creation. Since its inception, VANI has provided the platform for CSOs to meet and collaborate for a common cause. Building upon the foundations of inclusivity and equality, VANI's members consist of an array of grassroot level organizations as well as large scale organizations. Reinforcing time and again the need for inter organizational collaboration, VANI's effort to bring together organizations throughout the country is the reason why it is widely trusted.

External Collaborations

Individually we cannot achieve long term and large scale goals. Especially when it comes to issues such as poverty, climate change, ending violence etc. These interconnected issues are deeply etched in the functioning of the society therefore it is important for CSOs to branch out and collaborate with entities from outside the sector.

1. Collaboration with the Government

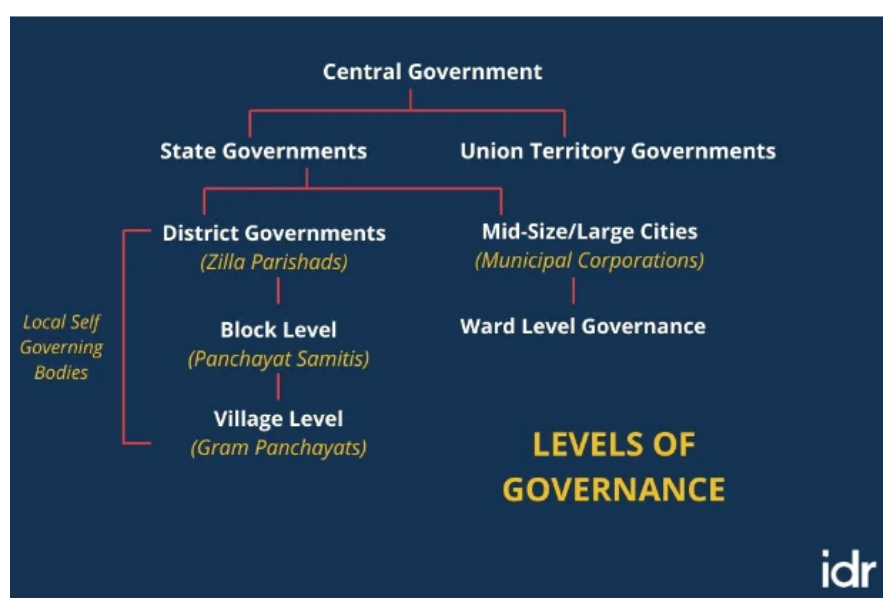
“At the external level, various different types of collaborations happen. Coming together as a collaborative lent significant weight and credibility when approaching the government, and resulted in policy recommendations that were inclusive, comprehensive, and had buy-in from several stakeholders in the sector”

BAIN & COMPANY's Case Study on National Faecal Sludge and Septage Management Alliance

CSOs in India share a rather complex relationship with the Government. While on one hand, partnership with the government doesn't come easy because of complex application process, delayed timelines and uncertain agreements, on the other hand, government bodies acknowledge CSOs' efforts to aid social development. Although challenging, collaborating with the government is extremely rewarding for CSOs. In the area of funding, government has a good amount of grants available for the Indian CSOs. However, due to lack of awareness on the same, CSOs are unable to identify and reap benefits of the same. On the scaling and outreach front, partnering with the government would enable CSOs to reap benefits of the financial and human resources available to the government.

Population Foundation of India's (PFI) collaboration with the government provides a good case in this arena. Founded in 1970 under the leadership of JRD Tata and Dr Bharat Ram, PFI is a national non-government organization. It addresses population issues and promotes

policies, strategies and practices that are gender sensitive, in order to enable better decision making in the areas of health, development, fertility and general well-being. PFI collaborates with Government (both at national and state levels) and NGOs in order to bring sustainable policy level changes. PFI did exemplary work during the Covid-19 pandemic by spreading awareness and engaging in disseminating knowledge about behavioral changes to ensure physical distancing, vaccination, quarantine requirements and hygiene routines. Their national level campaign with the Government of India and Facebook strived to counter misinformation about the spread of Covid -19. PFI also acted as an information hub on MyGov platforms in which they created content for various government platforms. Subsequently, they collaborated with film director Feroz Abbas Khan and developed short animation films according to the mandate of the Stigma & Discrimination Campaign under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Through PFI's example it is clear that a CSO and Government collaboration is a beneficial area for both parties to achieve a greater cause and therefore, CSOs must not avert from it due to restriction and fears.



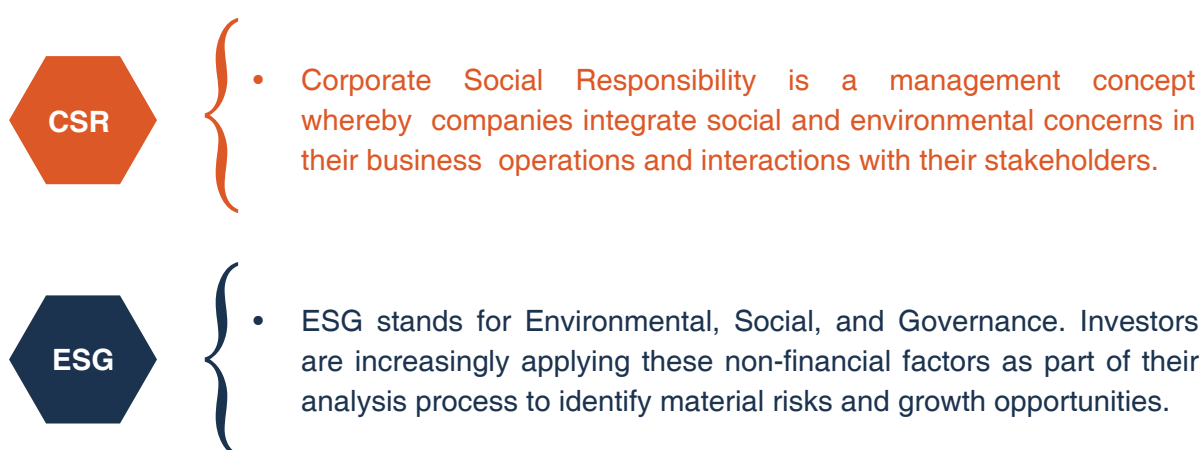
Source: Leadership for Equality¹⁰

To foster equitable and beneficial relationship with the government, CSOs must educate themselves on the flow of information across the different levels of governance. Being aware of the working of the government can enable CSOs to plan better proposals and identify hurdles. After educating oneself, it is important for CSOs to identify which level of Government they want to collaborate with. This can be done by choosing on the basis of the kind of beneficiaries that body works with and the capacity they hold to allow interventions. It is also important to design proposals and programs that are similar to that of government. This only leads to confusion and creates further fragmentation. It is better to craft solutions that complement the work of government. For example, The State Council of Education Research and Training bears the responsibility of training teachers in government schools. Going to them with a module which also aims to train teachers is futile. To tackle such an intervention, CSOs could choose another path and instead work on programs that stand up for the rights of teachers.

Approaching the government officials strategically and engaging with them empathetically is a must. Overburdened with administrative work, government officials may or may not be able to effectively help the CSOs asking them for help.

One major concern for CSOs is the attitude Government has towards them. Stringent rules and regulations negatively impact CSOs and hold them back. In a space where domestic dissent is shrinking, incoherent legal frameworks and regulations that are applied without due progress are making it difficult for CSOs to work effectively. One such intervention being The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 (FCRA)¹¹ policy which has tightened rules for organizations seeking foreign funding. Enforced by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the FCRA rules state that any organization seeking registration under the FCRA must have operated for at least three years and spent a minimum amount of Rs 15 lakh on its core activities for the benefit of society during the last three financial years. Any organization seeking prior permission to receive a specific amount from a particular donor for carrying out specific activities or projects shall submit a detailed commitment letter indicating the amount of foreign contribution and the purpose for which it is proposed. Despite these issues, one issue that is heavier and anxiety inducing is the renewal of FCRA. According to data from the Ministry of Home Affairs, during the last five years i.e. 2017 to 2021 FCRA registration certificates of 1898 NGOs/Associations registered under 'social' category have been cancelled¹². The scrutiny by MHA officials has taken an even worse course as they require more documentary requirements such as affidavits of all directors and key functionaries. Halt in FCRA renewals impacts a CSO's ability to deliver services and manage organizational cost. In order to tackle this adversity, CSOs can form a network wherein member organizations can help each other compile and submit information as well as help organizations seek legal remedy for immediate action. They can also collaborate with other stakeholders like Cas who can aid them with their knowledge and expertise.

2. Collaboration with the Corporate



Collaborating with Corporate is another avenue CSO can explore. A self-regulating business model, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) engages companies to operate in ways that enhance the society by way of volunteering towards a better society and cleaner environment.

¹¹ https://fcraonline.nic.in/home/PDF_Doc/FC-RegulationAct-2010-C.pdf

¹² <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2022-pdfs/RS09022022/854.pdf>

It is broken into four categories- environmental impacts, ethical responsibility, philanthropic endeavors, and financial responsibilities¹³. CSR funding in India falls under India's Companies Act 2013 and lists 11 areas (under schedule VII of Section 135) where a company can fulfil its philanthropic endeavors. Under a company's philanthropic responsibility, the company is liable to donate money from company earnings to local causes that aid social transformation and development. By studying the companies needs and areas of work, CSOs should adapt and give proposals.

Another avenue that CSOs can explore is that of ESG¹⁴ funds. ESGs are a set of corporate guidelines which set standards that socially conscious investors utilize in screening potential investments based on the company's behavioral practices. Therefore, the new companies and start-ups are looking for CSOs with similar vision in order to present their best front.

With the increase in demand for funds, CSOs must evolve with the changing times. At every stage, they must reassess their vision and passion in order to recapture the true essence of social transformation and to do so it is very important to understand the mind of the donor. Co-constructing frameworks for the betterment of the beneficiaries needs to happen on the basis of the commonality of thought of both CSOs and Corporate donors. CSOs need to work on building their brand in order to sell their idea better to the donors and they can do so by enhancing their portfolio of work and using tools to increase visibility of their organizations. Impressing your partner is crucial to sustain sustainable partnerships and hence it is crucial that CSOs are aware of their partners' needs. Evolving with time and embracing changing partnerships in the civil society sector enables CSOs to build the sustainability and financial viability of the sector.

3. Collaboration with Indian Philanthropists

Indian Philanthropy, as a funding source, is a good avenue for CSOs to explore as unlike CSR or foreign funding it is neither highly regulated nor demanding. Bridgespan Group's study - 'Philanthropic Collaboratives in India: The Power of Many'¹⁵ describes a philanthropic collaborative (PC) as an entity co-created by three or more independent actors—including at least one philanthropist or philanthropy. A Philanthropic Collaborative act to achieve at least of these three goals – scaling solutions, building or strengthening a field and building a case for promising innovations. The role of Indian philanthropists is diversified. They not only work in areas of public policy information, dissemination of knowledge, mobilizing funding and conducting research and development but also facilitate implementation and implement programs¹⁶.

In India, Philanthropic collaboratives have a distinctive design wherein it consists of multiple stakeholders and not just funders. Joining a PC can be beneficial for CSOs as it can help them expand their influence and impact, help divide cost of operations and enable effective

13 <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/types-of-corporate-social-responsibility>

14 Environmental, social and governance

15 <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/philanthropy/philanthropic-collaboratives-in-india>

16 <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/philanthropy/philanthropic-collaboratives-in-india>

implementation of the stakeholders' vision. Besides sharing funds and knowledge of expertise, philanthropic collaboration is a great way to mitigate risks. Indian philanthropists contribute to 60% of the total private funding¹⁷ to the social sector, estimated at INR 43,000 crore. Indian PC have a history of bringing successful systematic change as it brings a network of actors that works towards a common vision. CSOs alone, no matter how effective or large cannot achieve impact on a large scale. Therefore, instead of working in isolation, collaborating with stakeholders that can provide philanthropic funding is a great avenue to explore.



An example of a successful philanthropic collaboration is 10 to19 Dasra Adolescents Collaborative. With the vision to transform the lives of adolescents in India (which amount to 243 million according to the UNICEF), the 10to19 Dasra Adolescents Collaborative (DAC) was launched with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2017. The collaborative unifies stakeholders across sectors- including universities, government agencies, Nonprofit organizations and technical experts- to ensure the education, health and empowerment of adolescents. This collaborative has successfully polled more than 10,000 adolescents across 7 states in India, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, to evaluate their need for, awareness of and access to adolescent-focused health services. For it's various nonprofit partners in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Assam, it has managed to channel INR 6 crore to implement programmes.

4. Collaboration with Academic Institutions

Developmental challenges in India are interlinked and therefore difficult to deal with in isolation. Areas such as environment, healthcare and poverty require coordinated actions by multiple CSOs working in different areas of expertise. For example, to tackle the problem of Domestic violence, CSOs working on the issues of gender need to collaborate with CSOs working in the health sector, education sector, skill building groups etc.

Academic institutions recognize the need for collective endeavor. They develop the skills of thousands of people which in turn help others. Organizations such as School for Social Entrepreneurs “equip people to transform their communities and improve the lives of others”¹⁸. Built on the tenets of inclusion, equality and justice, SSE’s mission is to empower people to reach their full potential in order to aid social development. Similarly, entity such as Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy at Ashoka University is an example of an academic institution that enables philanthropy and social impact in India. Three main avenues of CSIP’s work are-

- ❖ Disseminating knowledge about India’s social impact ecosystem. CSIP creates and curates accessible data and research that informs strategy and action
- ❖ Creating an avenue for networking for the civil society by providing platforms that facilitate building sector vision, voice, and norms.
- ❖ And, Building leadership in the sector.

17 <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/philanthropy/philanthropic-collaboratives-in-india>

18 <https://www.the-sse.org/about-school-for-social-entrepreneurs/>

CSIP's vision is to build a robust and resilient philanthropic and social impact sector which is recognized for its "contribution to India's economic, social, political and culture vitality"¹⁹.

In the Education sector, collaborations such as National Coalition for Education (NCE) highlight the importance of education to bring about change. NCE is a conglomeration of networks working on the Right to Education. NCE's network comprises of more than 400 CSOs from 25 states along with big federations and organizations working in the areas of education. Along with its state partners (OXFAM, Save the Children, NERSWN, ShishuSarothe, SEEDS, Sustainability Foundation, TISS Mumbai and National Law University Bangalore), NCE organized consultations with various states of India on the National Education Policy which they collated and further sent to MHRD.

5. Collaboration with Media

CSOs' uncertain relationship with Media has been an area of concern. However, a collaboration between the two is needed as both bring unique deliverables to the table. Media has always had a suspicious look towards CSOs' work, and made CSOs pass through scrutinization. The reach of CSOs with the media has never been up to the mark. The support voluntary sector should've gotten from media is not enough. This separation could be blamed on CSOs not having adequate media strategy as well. CSOs and the Media contribute simultaneously to the upliftment of humanity. In the current political scenario and rigid policy estrangement, Media and CSOs both face a threat to their voice and existence. Convergence of Media and CSOs is imperative as it can bring beneficial results. Media can aid CSOs in amplifying the voice of the voluntary sector and simultaneously, CSOs can stand up for the rights of journalism and fight against fake news. During the COVID 19 pandemic, the partnership of local media and grassroots level CSOs resulted in rapid relief work, better awareness creation and knowledge dissemination.

NDTV's Special Projects division is one of India's leading organizers of social and event based programming. In their partnership with Dettol, NDTV launched 'Dettol-NDTV Banega Swasth India' campaign wherein they spread awareness about critical health issues being faced by the people of the country. In their coronavirus special, they helped in knowledge dissemination and myth busting surrounding the virus and vaccines. They also launched fundraisers. NDTV also collaborated with Google on a campaign called 'Vaccinate India'. NDTV also collaborated with CSOs. For instance, under the 'India's Helping Hands' campaign, NDTV collaborated with WhatsApp and ChildFund India to set up child friendly covid centers and accelerate vaccination drives in the grassroots districts of rural India. NDTV also collaborated with HelpAge India and launched the 'Save our Seniors' campaign to raise funds for senior citizens, especially those above 80 years of age.

Therefore, despite the history and outlook of media towards CSOs, a collaborative effort should be ushered for the betterment of the citizens of India.

¹⁹ Read more at <https://csip.ashoka.edu.in/vision/>

CHAPTER 3

Collaborations, Covid 19 Pandemic and Indian CSOs

The Covid-19 pandemic shook the world from its core. Globally, as of November 21 2022, there have been around six hundred thirty-four million confirmed cases of COVID 19, including around 6 million deaths, reported WHO²⁰. Bringing with itself large scale devastation and loss of lives, the Covid-19 pandemic changed the world. India itself has witnessed around forty-four million cases and five hundred thousand reported deaths²¹.

While the first wave in India was dealt with stringent country wide lockdowns which were ill planned and badly executed, internally it pushed 23 crore²² Indians into poverty. Not only did the health sector face the brunt of the devastating effects of the lockdowns, the country saw a largescale ruin of human capital. Several people lost their loved ones and means to livelihood. One of the most vulnerable groups among the populace, the daily wagers were the worst sufferers of this lockdown. Another problem that India faced during the first wave was the mystification and demystification of shared information on Covid 19. The lack of trustable information being shared on social platforms and questionable reporting by established news networks about the origin and nature of the virus have left the citizens questioning the integrity of the virus, how it spreads and whether there's effective treatment for it.. This was a great challenge to be dealt with as it heavily affected the flow of the virus. While the first wave presented a new set of problems to be dealt with, the second wave presented its own set of issues. One of which was the state's urge to successfully carry out the vaccination drive. Media and Digital forms of information dissemination played a crucial role in carrying out this task. Out of it came the need to better monitor information dissemination and the quality of news being spread. It also brought forth the need to have gorging networks that are built on trust and solidarity. Both the waves presented new challenges and avenues to explore in order to help people better.

As new set of problems emerged, so did collaborations to tackle those. People came together to help migrant workers in various ways be it in forms of food campaign, transportation services or job creation. Various networks were formed on social media to help those in need and provide relief work wherever and whenever necessary. The pandemic emerged as a new insight into the power of collaboratives and joint efforts as it showed human solidarity in a new light. Various individuals and organizations worked selflessly to provide services and raise funds. At the frontline of battling the chaos in India, were the Indian CSOs. Not only were they alleviating stress, providing critical healthcare and livelihood support but also emerged as the *messiah* for the most marginalized groups.

20 World Health Organization. Information taken from <https://covid19.who.int/>

21 Information taken from <https://covid19.who.int/region/searo/country/in>

22 Information available at <https://theprint.in/opinion/5-lessons-from-indias-first-wave-that-can-protect-livelihoods-in-the-second-wave/661017/>

Members of Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD) worked in close cooperation with the local government to flatten the Covid-19 curve. By engaging with the Gram panchayats, they organized mass awareness drives, tracked migrants and helped in distribution of materials. Their innovative method of drone-based sanitization undertaken in Bhubaneswar and Calicut is one of its kind. Uplifting the principle of welfare for all, the Sikh community did exemplary work during the pandemic. Their collaborative endeavor to provide langar services to underprivileged groups and migrants continued to happen all throughout the pandemic. The HemKunt Foundation provided thousands of oxygen cylinders - free of cost- to Covid patients. Other organizations such as Khalsa Aid carried out relief work to bridge gaps in medical supplies.

Working selflessly towards social mobilization of the marginalized, Indian CSOs have time and again proved their resilience towards the ultimate cause of social development.

“Voluntary Organizations (VOs) that were working extensively on diverse causes for decades, emerged as soldiers in this fight against the deadly virus. They helped mobilize as well as respond to the situation. They have been working individually and in partnership with other VOs, government, and companies to provide relief to the affected and vulnerable communities of the society. They have also been at the forefront for mobilizing resources to aid COVID-19 mitigation related activities”²³

*Voluntary Action Network India (VANI),
Compendium of COVID-19 Related Success Stories from the Voluntary Sector of India*

CSOs have played a significant role in dealing with the difficulties of COVID-19 by engaging with State Level governments and reaching out to people with materials of immediate use like food materials, rations, masks, sanitizers, and other essentials required to sustain in lockdown. CSOs also secured the safety and hygiene of the community and the health care professionals by distributing soaps, sanitizers, masks, and PPE. A member organization of VANI, GOONJ worked extensively during the covid 19 pandemic. As part of their Rahat Covid work, GOONJ collaborated with 700 partner organizations in 30 states and union territories to provide ration and essentials along with daily means to the citizens. Along with that, they made and distributed 2+ million face masks, 35000+ health worker kits and 100000+ family medicine kits.

“With more people being pushed into poverty, there is now a hierarchy in marginalization. People who were already vulnerable to COVID-19 – such as those with leprosy, HIV or disabilities, transgender people, and sex workers – have become almost invisible now. The pandemic has brought out the stark differences in the breadth and depth of vulnerability that people are facing today. We must remember that for many of these communities, there is an even greater need now for certain essentials.”²⁴

Anshu Gupta, Founder Goonj, Gramswabhimaan

²³ https://www.vaniindia.org/uploads/resources/Compendium_of_COVID-19_Success_Stories-Report.pdf

²⁴ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nw9dA6rEQAPrwzUCoRekTqy70nNVEeMx/view>

Uplifting the values of collaboration, GOONJ's admirable work during the pandemic shows how important networking and forging partnerships is to deal with large scale crisis. CSOs also collaborated with the government to provide access to testing centers, information dissemination on the topics of COVID appropriate behavior, creating awareness and arranging health check up camps and essential supplies to migrants and other vulnerable communities. Due to the extensive loss of livelihood and distress migration, the CSOs now included migrant issues and employment generation for them as a key concern. By rethinking the beneficiary model for employment generation schemes like MNREGA, the employment security of migrants and daily wage workers is now considerable concern.

As everything else, the sector too evolved with the changes, in the sense that it dealt with the changing set of problems which demanded different course of action and therefore, constant adaptation. The role of media increased and digitization as tool enabled widespread awareness and proactive action in emergency. Since the world shifted from traditional modes to that of digital, CSOs also redeveloped their strategies from a digital lens. Accelerating digital adaptability and developing a digital strategy became an imperative. To expand their reach, CSOs also shifted to digital sphere to not only give voice to the stories of the sector but also to engage in fundraising activities. Tools such as social media marketing, online engagements and brand building came into use and the CSOs were able to reach a larger audience and bring greater impact. As voice of the voluntary sector, VANI published a study report on the same called '**DIGITAL ADAPTABILITY QUOTIENT DURING COVID 19** stories of Innovation from Indian CSOs'²⁵. The report is based on the study carried out as a part of initiative of VANI to understand how the sector became digitally resilient during the COVID19 pandemic.

VANI, during the first phase, played an exemplary role in helping CSOs adapt to the rapid digitization. Through modules and workshops, VANI communicated with other CSOs and helped them digitize and switch to the new way of working. VANI subsequently came up with newsletters showcasing the story of the sector and giving voice to the sector. Their 'Digital Wall of Deceased Frontline Workers' pays homage to the various CSO members who lost their lives during the pandemic. As the voice of the sector, VANI's efforts helped to not only build intra organizational strength but also provided visibility to the efforts the Civil society sector.

❖ *Challenges faced by Civil Society Organizations during and post the Covid-19 pandemic*

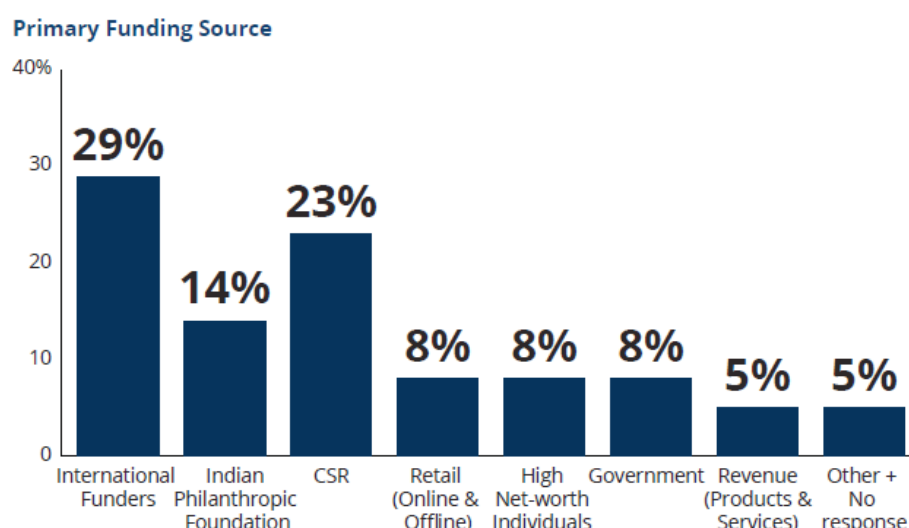
While the sector did exemplary work, it didn't come without its own set of challenges. The crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic negatively impacted the many years of work done by the CSOs. Disrupted program activities, lack of stable funding resources and ineffective resource mobilization were one of the major challenges faced by CSOs.

25 Available at https://www.vaniindia.org/uploads/resources/Digital_Adaptability_Quotient_of_VO_during_COVID-19-%20Final.pdf

Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy at Ashoka university undertook research wherein they conducted an online survey of 312 NPOs, interviews with 52 NPOs and 10 funders and ecosystem organizations from India. Aiming to better understand how the Covid19 pandemic impacted NPOs, they shared their findings in the snapshot report titled '**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON INDIA'S NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS²⁶**'. According to their findings, 63% of NPOs reported that their regular programs were negatively impacted by the pandemic; 55% reported suspension of few events, programs and activities; 7% reported complete suspension of all program related activities. Unstable funding was a substantial challenge and a serious concern along with the difficulties faced while switching to digital modes. Small budget NPOs didn't have a digital strategy in place and their staff wasn't well equipped with technology either.

Different types of CSOs faced their own sets of distinct problems. CSOs had to switch to Covid relief work which meant that the diversion of funds would impact their regular programs. Likewise, for CSOs working on health, the burden was too heavy to bear. All the attention was shifted to covid relief work and other health issues didn't get the resource allocation they should've got. Along with all this, within the organization itself too the staff was exhausted and burnout due to inadequate funding, salary cut offs, layoffs, limited staff and extensive work load. In the avenue of Funding, smaller CSOs are more vulnerable. Relying on volunteer networks, they managed to fundraise through online networks. CSOs working in sectors other than healthcare observed decline in funding. Internally, in the organizations, cross cutting measures such as reducing overheads, deferring salary increments, postponing events, salary cut offs for staff and senior leadership, office shut downs and pausing hiring, were a cause of concern.

Insight into Funding structure and Donor Behavior:



Source: *The impact of Covid 19 on India's Nonprofit Organizations, A snapshot report. June 2021. CSIP, Ashoka University.*

CSOs faced a lot of challenges when it came to funding. There were several issues, but some key ones are- funders diverting funds to Covid 19 relief work, not communicating or responding, deferring payments and not allowing flexible allocation of funds. According to CSIP's report, 'NPOs dependent on CSR and Indian Philanthropic funding sources were marginally worse off than those dependent primarily on international funding'²⁷. Organizations observed that funders had little to no interest in covering organizational developmental costs which heavily impacted the organization's ability to work on ground.

As well as making direct contributions to national and state relief funds, **CSR** organization collaborated with their CSO partners to supplement the government's relief efforts. However, limitations existed because of their areas of focus are pre-decided through pre-determined CSR mandates (healthcare, education, skill development, rural development). As opposed to CSR funders, **International Funders** paid more focus on investing in capacity building of organizations. They aided funding to build digital capacities to reach beneficiary groups and expressed more interest in fostering sustainable partnerships that bring systematic change. They asked grantees to focus more on 'relief efforts' and enabled them relief specific grants over the existing ones. **Indian foundations and Philanthropists** on the other hand focused on non-mainstream areas such as migrant worker distress, gender inequalities and impact on the environment. They funded projects that provided socio economic support to the beneficiaries.

The Covid 19 pandemic brought to the forefront the imperative role of CSOs and the importance of the voluntary sector. Funders recognized that CSOs were the main intermediaries between the government and other organizations when it came to mobilizing resources and creating channels of communication. Uplifting the values of solidarity and collaboration, CSOs were on the forefront for organizing common pool of resources for other CSOs. Funders now began to pay attention to other critical areas that came forwards during the pandemic. Some of which are lack of digital infrastructure in remote locations, trafficking and gender based violence and access to timely and affordable healthcare²⁸.

Recovery post pandemic and the surge of blended models:

It is crucial that CSOs recognize the need for collaborating and working for the betterment of the sector as a whole. Self-sustainability emerged as a crucial avenue to work upon, considering the sector faced funding difficulties. Organizing different CSOs and fostering partnership during the pandemic to mobilize resource and carry out tasks should be continued as such networks not only provide support but also foster space for greater impact. Having an emergency corpus for the organization will act as a safety net when crisis strikes. As the pandemic taught us the value of digitization and innovation, it is important for the CSOs to invest in these sectors. Blended models of working can be improved upon. CSOs should invest in their staff's capacity building and invest in tech savvy infrastructure and modules.

27 The impact of Covid 19 on India's Nonprofit Organizations, A snapshot report. June 2021. CSIP, Ashoka University.

28 The impact of Covid 19 on India's Nonprofit Organizations, A snapshot report. June 2021. CSIP, Ashoka University.

CHAPTER 4

Hybridity and Digitization: Emerging Avenues to Explore

“When digital transformation is done right, it’s like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, but when done wrong, all you have is a really fast caterpillar.”

George Westerman

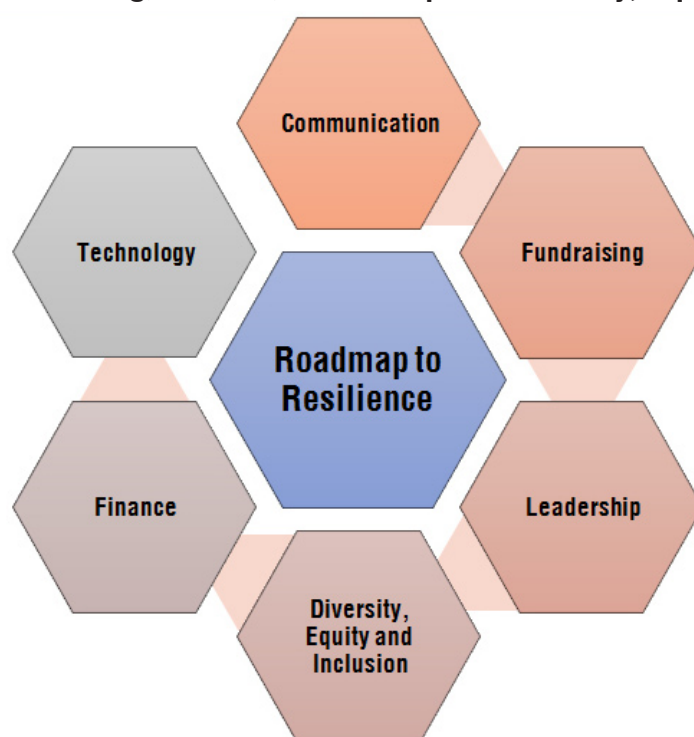
With the advent of Covid19 pandemic, digital transformation and innovation became an imperative to include in an organization’s working. While CSOs always believed that field operations are irreplaceable by something like technology, the pandemic ushered an urgent shift to digital platforms. Organizations working in the healthcare sector shifted to telemedicine and telepsychiatry services to help their beneficiaries seek help from doctors and professionals. Similarly, organizations working in the education sector prerecorded classes and made online modules to help children access education. E commerce platforms served as a great gateway for many organizations to practice self-sustainability as they sold the products made by their beneficiary groups on these sites and accumulated funds.

In the arena of communications, good storytelling is crucial to strengthen an organization’s face.

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp helped many CSOs to have dialogues, advertise their work, amplify the voice of the sector and ultimately, aid positive storytelling. CSOs faced a great challenge when constructing new delivery models due to the limited digital capacity both in the organizations and among the beneficiary communities they work with. Even then they came up with innovative ways of working and reaching beneficiaries using first an online and then hybrid mode. The hybrid or the blended mode emerged as a result of limited digital infrastructure and digital literacy and the core nature of CSOs work being on the grassroot level. Despite the challenges, CSOs have started investing in their digital capabilities and making a separate fund base for IT related work. The trend of publishing e-newsletters and reports is one that’s here to stay. One of the key elements of digitization is that it helps even grassroot level organizations reach funders and audience globally. It aids their visibility and therefore gives them recognition. Digitization, if done right, can aid the sector in many ways. Not only will it help disseminate the sector’s story through the voices of the people and organizations working in the sector itself, it will also gradually provide a space where CSOs can practice their right to speech and freedom.

Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) developed a volume of survey-based reports on the impact of Covid19 on the international charity and donor sector. In their eighth volume titled **‘LESSONS IN DISASTER PHILANTHROPY’**, it highlighted the change in fundraising post Covid19 pandemic. Due to the global economy taking a hit, several donors reduced their fundings. In Indian landscape, the major reason why donors couldn’t fund was due to their decreased capacity to give.

To move forward, it is imperative to adapt and implement lessons learnt. In their survey, CAF observed that “50% of survey respondents shared that in comparison with the first year of the pandemic (March 2020–March 2021), their preparedness to respond to disaster or crisis has increased based on the lessons that they learned”²⁹. Resilience building emerged as a key area of concern as it is crucial for organizations to prepare before a disaster and have in place a robust Risk mitigation strategy. According to CAF, to effectively survive disruptions in operations and finances, an organization must work on six thematic areas. These are- **Technology, Communication, Fundraising, Finance, Leadership** and **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**.



Technology and Communications are emerging avenues for exploration in the Indian Civil Society Sector. Digitization of online functions allows organizations to fundraise through digital technology, formulating digital strategies, enhancing their online programs and providing better service to their beneficiaries. Digitization also accompanies a Hybridity in the Funding sector. With CSOs now being able to connect to foreign funders directly and showcasing their work to Indian funders as well, their funding opportunities increased and they don't have to be bound by regulations. Online fund-raising platforms emerged as a great help to CSOs. It helped them advertise their services better to the funders. With the rise of Philanthropic collaboratives, CSOs aren't heavily dependent on foreign fundings. The focus has shifted from traditional source of funding to a more interconnected and cross sectoral approach.

The sector realized that having heavy expectations on a particular avenue, for example traditional ones such as CSR and Government, is fruitless. It is crucial to be self-sustaining and explore various avenues so that the voluntary sector isn't dependent on a single external source for its survival. Social enterprising as an avenue emerged too. Social Enterprise can be defined as “a business with specific social objectives that serve its primary purpose.

²⁹ Information available at <https://cafamerica.org/volume8/?page=12>.

Social enterprises seek to maximize profits while maximizing benefits to society and the environment, and the profits are principally used to fund social programs”³⁰. Depending on selling services and goods, a Social enterprise pursues opportunities that generate revenues. These revenues further fund the enterprise’s social causes.

Therefore, no matter how adversely Covid-19 affected the communities and CSOs, it is important to learn our lessons from it and adapt to the contemporary times. With Digitization seeping into all aspects of our life, having digital strategies and building digital capacities of both organizational staff and beneficiaries is important. The changing fundraising structure too opens new avenues for CSOs to spread open their wings and not be bound by stringent rules and regulations uplifted by traditional donors.

Recommendations

- ❖ CSOs should explore different collaboration avenues and come together in order to mitigate impactful change.
- ❖ CSOs must be aware and constantly educate themselves about the grants and policies of government. This will enable them to not lag behind.
- ❖ CSOs must work to strengthen their relationship with Media. They should also engage more on their social media platforms so as to bring transparency about their work.
- ❖ CSOs should have a robust digital strategy and must allocate funds towards their organization's digital infrastructure
- ❖ Lastly, helping and fostering networks with Grassroot level organizations is a must. CSOs should aim to help their own inter sectoral partners. At the end of the day, CSOs must stand as an united body that ushers social transformation and development in the country.

About Voluntary Action Network India (VANI)

VANI is a national network of Indian Voluntary Development Organisations (VDOs). Currently VANI has 624 members with an outreach to around 10,000 VDOs across India. The membership of VANI ranges from grass roots to the national organizations. The members work on a range of priority development issues of the government including education, health, nutrition, integrated child development, livelihood, skill development, environment, natural resource management, climate change, water and sanitation, emergency response and preparedness, agriculture, poverty and so on, in some of the most remote areas of the country. In the year 2017-18 our network collectively reached out to over 32 million people belonging to vulnerable and marginalized groups including children, disabled people, women, elderly, farmers, dalit, tribals, disaster survivors, unemployed, youth, LGBT, sex workers etc. VANI through its efforts and strategies aims to build a strong civil society sector not only at national but regional and local level as well.

VANI was set up with the mission to promote voluntarism, create space for the sector by fostering value based voluntary action. VANI's interventions are focused to strengthen the external and internal enabling environment. To ensure the external enabling environment, VANI conducts evidence-based advocacy which includes regulatory frameworks and resource generation. In order to achieve this VANI works with the government, private sector, bilateral, multilaterals and other stakeholders. For strengthening the internal enabling environment, VANI works towards building resilience and promoting accountability, transparency and compliance through the interactive educational events and information dissemination. VANI strives to become a resource centre by conducting evidence-based research; publishing studies, articles and reports not only at state level but national and global level as well.



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(An Apex Body of Voluntary Organisations)

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