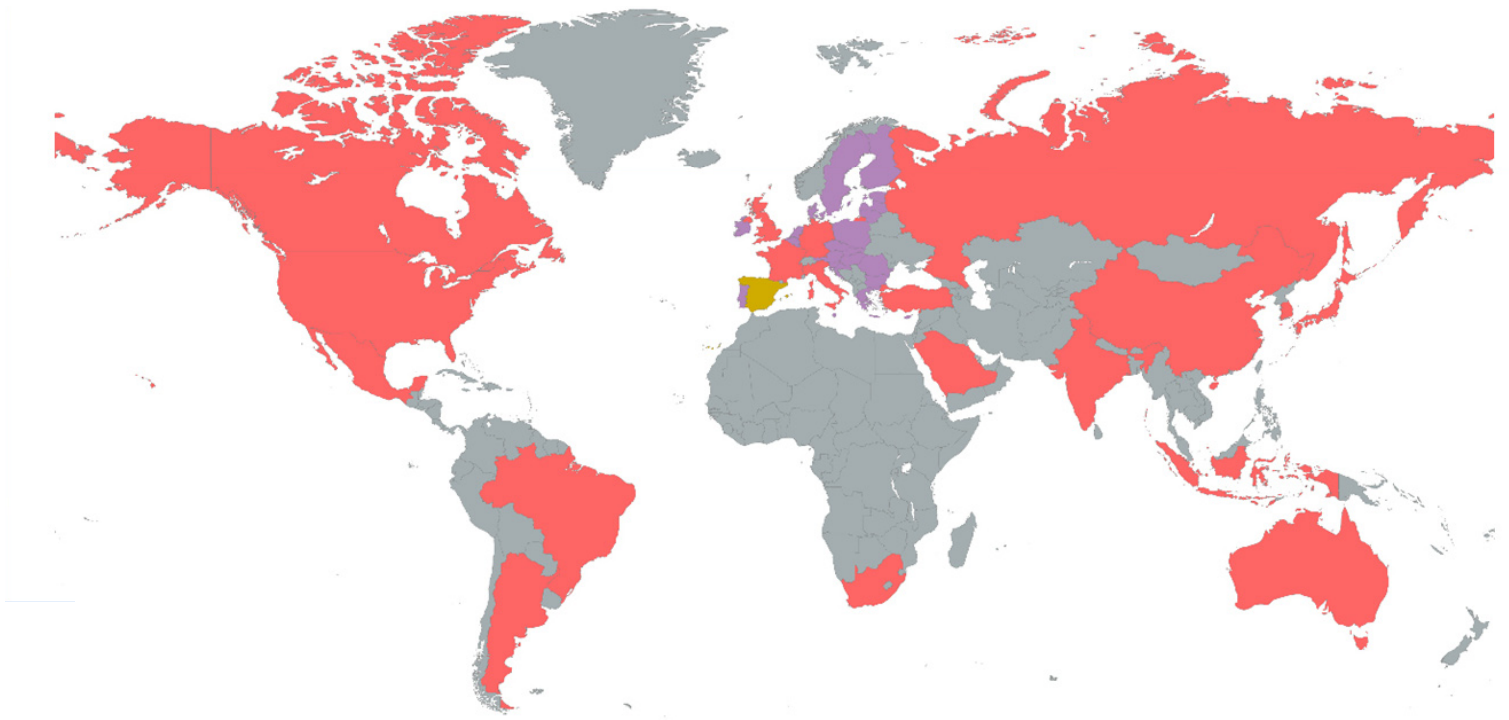


Policy paper on Indian civil society's key asks in G20 Presidency Agenda



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
INDIA

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Abbreviations

G20- Group of 20

SDGs- Sustainable development Goals

CSO- Civil Society Organization

UAE- United Arab Emirates

BRICS- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

IMF- International Monetary Fund

WTO- World Trade Organization

WHO- World Health Organization

IBSA- India, Brazil and South Africa

GDP- Gross Domestic Product

NCSPA- The National Coalition for Strengthening SCs and STs (PoA) Act

NCRB- National Crime Records Bureau

SC- Scheduled Caste

C20- Civil 20

UHC- Universal Health Coverage

NEP- National Education Policy

SMSA- Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan

BE- Budget Estimate

RE- Revised Estimate

IPCC- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

MHA- Ministry of Home Affairs

FCRA- Foreign Contribution Regulation Act

GHG- Greenhouse Gas Emission



India's G20 presidency in 2023

The G20 is a premier forum for global economic cooperation, including both advanced and emerging economies. The G20 does not have a fixed secretariat. Every year, the G20 presidency rotates amongst the member countries and the secretariat is appointed from the host country. In 2023, India will take charge of the G20 presidentship, after the handover from the previous chair, Indonesia. It will be first time, that India will host the G20. The G20 agenda will be decided, a Leader's Summit will be organized, multiple ministerial meetings will take place over the year, including the government and the civil society.

A wide range of efforts, discussions and activities are involved in leading the G20, to enable the members to coordinate policy decisions on areas of maximum priority. The growing influence of the Global South, including India, illustrates the shift in power and in governing international cooperation and strengthening multilateralism. India has made its mark as one of the promising nations in the global economy, with its human assets and focus on entrepreneurship. India has therefore, grabbed a critical role in global governance and active engagement in the G20 forum.

Since its inception, India has been an active member of the G20 in both the Sherpa and the Finance tracks. Its significant contribution in inclusive development, South-South and North- South cooperation, SDGs and financial stability, is in alignment with the national agendas as well as the global priorities. This leadership opportunity comes at a time, when the world is transitioning. While the pandemic effects are weaning off, regional tensions are on a rise. This can be well illustrated by the Ukraine-Russia conflict and the India- China border dispute.

Background

The G20 comprises of 19 advanced and developing economies of the world i.e., US, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, China, Germany, Britain, India, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Italy, France, Russia, in addition to the European Union. The G20 accounts for nearly two- thirds of the global population, and about 85% of the global GDP. The G20 was set up initially, with only seven member countries, representing G7, to address the financial crisis, that the world went through in 1997-1998. The finance ministers and Central Bank governors met annually to discuss economic growth, international trade and regulation of the international market. Progressively, the forum has begun to discuss major development problems that the world is experiencing and provide probable solutions to tackle them. Every year, as the presidency of the G20 changes, a new and revised agenda is prepared, reflecting the key priority areas for cooperation.

To deliberate on these priority areas, the G20 functions via two channels, namely the financial track and the Sherpa track. The financial track, is regulated and governed by the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors of all member countries of the G20 and tackles specifically the issues related to international finance and global economy. Meanwhile, the Sherpa track discusses about issues other than finance and for documenting the processes and recommendations of the G20, to be shared at the final Summit. Since the Sherpa is basically responsible for facilitating and monitoring the whole process of the G20 in the host country, he's she is designated by the government/ higher authorities, and is part of all high-level meetings and communication.

Since the presidency of the G20 changes every year and is taken over by another member of the group, therefore, every year the 'Troika',

consisting of the previous current and next chair of the G20, is responsible to maintain continuity from the previous year's agenda, and ensure relance to all the member countries.

Significance of G20 for India

Time is passing surprisingly quickly. India assumes G20 presidency in less than two months, in November 2022. This will be first time that India will be hosting the G20. The year-long presidency will be handed over to Brazil in November 2023, concluded with the final G20 Summit. Following a series of more than 200 meetings with a huge number of ministers, higher authorities, diplomats, entrepreneurs, CSOs, working groups and engagement groups, India will host the G20 leaders' summit in New Delhi on September 9 and 10 in 2023 under its Presidency.

The meetings will take place all over India and are planned to begin in December 2022. To showcase international cooperation, India plans to invite weaker economies such as Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain and UAE as guest countries.

In the past as well, India has been hosted to many large international events and conferences, like the Third India- Africa Forum Summit in 2015 and the Civil BRICS in 2016. Nonetheless, hosting an event like G20 which bears such gravitas. It serves as a steering committee for all the economic agendas world over. It is responsible in a certain sense for shaping the decisions related to the world economy and the other pressing issues affecting the G20 nations and it involves a year-long process of research, discussions, deliberations, and summits that are added up into one single document in the end of the year.

However, it is imperative that India maintains the dignity of the G20 forum, without over or underestimating the group's significance in policy shaping. The influence of this compelling forum carries intangible weight on the political and economic front. The fact that prestigious international organizations such as the World Bank, IMF, WTO, WHO, apart from others, are associated with the G20 platform, makes it a highly influential body in itself.

Addressing the financial challenges and providing probable solutions for recovery, was a major achievement of the G20. The first decade of the forum proved to be quite substantial. However, the latter half of the G20

has been quite a challenge for the forum to prove its worth and remain relevant, in the midst of all the geopolitical disputes between major powers. As a result, leading the G20 at such a juncture, will be a cumbersome task for India.

The geoeconomics is being highly influenced by the geopolitics. The Ukraine- Russia war, Indo-China tensions, rift between the US and Russia and the power war between US and China, are all dominating the global economy at this given point. The Indian secretariat, therefore needs to carefully plan their strategy and start now. They have a heavy responsibility to safeguard the prestige of the multilateral platform in front of the whole world.

The G20, however provides India with a golden opportunity to create a brand for itself and showcase its recent achievements and milestones in front of the whole world. India's effective strategy to combat COVID-19, both in India and globally, with its vaccine and medical aid, was one of the major achievements in the recent past. Other than this, India has demonstrated some path breaking work in promoting digitization, switching to renewable sources of energy by the time, counter climate change, pushing self-reliance with respect to domestic manufacturing and setting up a new face of entrepreneurship in in the country. Since, just one year is not enough to tackle all development problems worldwide, India can definitely use this time to market its achievements and their processes, for the other countries to adopt the same. Just like India went through a great deal of infrastructural transformation at the time of the Commonwealth Games, it can again utilize this opportunity to being about infrastructural changes in the country, especially when the meetings under the G20 platform will be held at multiple locations, across its length and breadth.

In addition, a remarkable important point to be noted is that, four emerging economies will be hosting the G20 in the coming years, consecutively one after the other, namely Indonesia, India, Brazil and South Africa. This is an amazing opportunity for the developing countries to show solidarity and commitment towards the priorities of the less powerful democracies. This gives them a chance to strengthen the stance of the southern countries.

As a matter of fact, India, Brazil and South Africa, that are together called the IBSA, can use this chance to develop a strategy to assert the interests of the Global South, which they are unable to do in the BRICS, due to the involvement of China and Russia. They can, in fact, reinvigorate their partnership, while hosting the G20 presidency.

Most importantly, being the host of such an illustrious platform, the responsibility of taking into account a broader perspective of the G20 agenda, and making the whole process inclusive, is bestowed upon India. India must be able to look after the interests of all members of the forum including the ones that are underrepresented otherwise.

India can yield a comprehensive G20 strategy by synergizing the above opportunities. It will ensure a holistic approach for the Indian presidency in 2023. Whatever, the strategy might be, it should definitely present viewpoints of its friends, rivals and enemies and develop a plan which is favourable for all. ⁽¹⁾

India's Current Socio- Economic Challenges

Despite fairing high on the economic growth scale of the world, through sustained international and domestic development policies, India still continues to struggle deal with many developmental problems that have incessantly been interfering with the overall progress of the country. Entering the 75th year of India's independence from the British rule, India has grown inch by inch, implementing laws and policies responsible for its slow but steady progress, making its headway into the list of one of the dominant economies of the world. However, everything done does not meet the demand for tackling the developmental problems hampering India's aspiration of being counted as a developed country.

According to statistics, a whopping 44.81 million males and even more 52,89 million females fall under the poverty line.⁽²⁾ The current population of India is estimated to be 1.41 billion. ⁽³⁾ India ranks number one in the country-wise cumulative deaths due to COVID-19 till 2022.⁽⁴⁾ Apart from the individual burdens that the pandemic has caused, it has also resulted in a major threat to the economy as well. As per the official data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, the Indian economy contracted by 7.3% in the April-June quarter of 2021. This is the worst decline ever observed since the ministry had started compiling GDP stats quarterly in 1996. The surveys conducted by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy showed a steep rise in unemployment rates,

in the range of 7.9% to 12% during the April-June quarter of 2021.⁽⁵⁾ More than 6% of this population lack access to safe water and about 15% of India's population practices open defecation. A lack of household water connections and toilets contributes largely to water-borne illnesses, stunting, and death.⁽⁶⁾

By the middle of the century, around 3.5 crore people in India could face annual coastal flooding, with 4.5 to 5 crores at risk by the end of the century if emissions are high. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, India is economically harmed the most by climate change, with every tonne of carbon dioxide emitted globally costing the country around \$86. To put this in context, the world emitted 36.4 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide in 2021. From economic shocks and affected human survivability, to impacted food production and shortage of other vital resources, the nation is staring at a broad spectrum of disastrous consequences as a result of climate change.⁽⁷⁾

India is also home to the largest number of illiterate people in the world. Over 25% of the total population of India is still uneducated.⁽⁸⁾ India fares at the 85th rank, out of 180 countries included, in the Corruption Perceptions Index, given by Transparency International.⁽⁹⁾ NCSPA believes that despite explicit constitutional provisions and guidelines, the suffering of Dalits and Adivasi communities across India remains the worst. This community is not only the victim of this scourge caste system but also faces institutional discrimination and social exclusion. The report by NCRB revealed that atrocities or crimes against Scheduled Castes (SCs) have increased by 1.2% in 2021.⁽¹⁰⁾

India ranks as low as 132 out of 191 countries, in the Human Development Index, 2022.⁽¹¹⁾ This gives an outline of the sad state of affairs, that still envelop India and are a barrier to the aspired growth of the country.

Therefore, it has become imperative for India to take on strong policy measures for repairing the cracks in the road to its overall development. The upcoming G20 presidency in 2023, provides ample opportunity to India for assessing its current situation and provide practical solutions for these issues.

Civil Society Perspective towards Indian Presidency Agenda

One of the engagement groups of the G20 is the Civil 20 (C20). This gives a platform to the global civil society to come together to discuss major issues that are aligned with the G20 agenda, set by the host country and provide recommendations from the ground, for an inclusive and successful G20 process. The G20 has slowly recognized the importance of engaging with the civil society and including them in the whole process, and has therefore given them the space to get involved in the global discussions for policy change.

Including the C20 in the G20 process, ensures alignment with the international law and good practices while decision-making. Therefore, the civil society in India is extremely enthusiastic about the opportunity, the G20 brings to them in 2023. The key recommendations with a civil society perspective, present an overall picture of the current scenario of the Indian development, and highlight the gaps that require urgent attention and solutions. The policy initiatives, forwarded by India, being a developing nation, might add up as a template for the other under-represented and weaker economies in the world. The civil society in India, has already been voicing these concerns at individual levels, in their fight towards overcoming the developmental barriers in the country. However, to be included as priority areas in the G20 agenda in 2023, will be of vital importance.

1. Health for all - India completed 75 years of its independence. The difference between the health scenario of India in 1947 and that in 2022 is a clear-cut reminder of how a developing country should evolve and emerge. From launching nation-wide initiatives to increase access to health services to containing some of the deadliest diseases of history, India has really struggled to reach this point. Some of the most noteworthy achievements of the country in the healthcare domain have been:

- India was declared Polio free in 2014.
- India has shown significant improvement in controlling the cases of Malaria.
- India has successfully tackled diseases like smallpox, leprosy, etc.

However, there is still a long way to go. There are many loopholes in the health sector in India that need to be addressed and must be taken up under the G20 agenda.

- According to the Economic Survey, the increase in budget allocation, within the health sector itself, has been less than expected, in 2021-2022. With an allocation of 37,000 crore, the National Health Mission received an increase of 7% over last year's expenditure. However, the need to galvanise the slow-paced urban health mission and strengthen rural primary healthcare across the country calls for higher allocations. ⁽¹²⁾

Policy Recommendation: Therefore, investing in primary health care infrastructure and systems must be a priority.

- One of the SDSs, that contributes to the attainment of other SDGs as well, is that of achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). It helps achieving progress towards SDGs on poverty, education, hunger, gender equality, access to clean water, employment and growth, tackling inequality and reducing the impact of climate change. According to the WHO, one of the key strategies to achieve UHC is through innovation in financing for health. According to a study, in India, financial risk protection was only 17.9 per cent and prevention and treatment coverage for selected health conditions was 83.5 per cent. ⁽¹³⁾

Policy Recommendation: Hence, India needs to focus more on access to primary healthcare services through increased and innovative financial risk protection and health insurances.

- Another challenge, that India has been facing with respect to the struggling healthcare system, which was highlighted during the pandemic, is the shortage of trained and efficient medical personnel, including doctors, nurses, primary healthcare workers and paramedics. India reported a mere 0.9 physicians for every 1000 patients in 2019. ⁽¹⁴⁾ The WHO recommends an average of 2.5 doctors per 1,000 people.

Policy Recommendation: Therefore, investing more in providing better and affordable medical education in India, remains a priority.

2. Economic Security for all–

- As of May 2022, the unemployment rate in India was recorded at nearly seven percent, a decrease from the previous month. While the unemployment rate had significantly declined over the course of 2021 since having peaked in April 2020, the breakout of new coronavirus variants coupled with recurring lockdowns resulted in a fluctuating trend of unemployment gripping the nation.⁽¹⁵⁾ As a result, facilitating access to decent jobs for all and ensuring the minimum basic financial security for all Indians, is important.
- A large focus of India, in the recent years has been on self- reliance. A major step towards achieving this, while ensuring employment generation in the country, is promoting entrepreneurship and start-ups. *This will also facilitate the long-deserved growth, prosperity and wellbeing that can act as a path for recovery for the rest of the world and also serve their interests collectively.* Hence, multisectoral collaboration is the need of the hour, at both central and state levels.

Policy Recommendations: Improving the business climate, less regulation, lower taxes, and scaling up investments in physical and human infrastructure are factors that can drive entrepreneurship.

3. Quality Education for all - COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on school education. It has affected a large number of children across states, class, caste, gender and region. The shutting down of schools and the decision of shifting traditional classrooms to digital platforms is not only increasing learning inequality among children, but also pushing a large number of children out of school due to the digital divide. The role of the budget in the current situation as well as beyond the pandemic is very crucial to ensure inclusive education for all.

- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, a nationally accepted policy document on making quality education accessible to all, has reiterated the need for an increased budgetary provision for the education sector to a minimum of 6 per cent of India's GDP.

However, in 2021-22, the budgetary allocation for education spending, by the Union government and the states combined, was far less at 3.1 per cent of the country's GDP. A large gap between the 6 per cent target and actual status of investment has remained for many decades now.⁽¹⁶⁾

- In August 2021, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) received a go ahead for the next five years with a total budget of 2,94,283 crore starting from FY 2021-22. Financial outlay under the scheme has increased in FY 2022-23, with an emphasis on supplementary education through digital media in various regional languages. Government of India allocated 37,383 crore Budget Estimates (BEs) to the scheme – a 20 per cent increase over the previous year's BEs, and 25 per cent higher than the Revised Estimates (REs). The last two years however, have seen a decrease in the quantum of funds approved for most states. Seventeen out of 19 states analysed in a study by Centre for Policy Research, witnessed a decrease in budgets between FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21. Budgets further declined in FY 2021-22 for 14 states.⁽¹⁷⁾ Digital education plays a vital role in reviving the education system of India but its real potential was highlighted at the time of the pandemic when schools and colleges had been shut down and online was the only option left for the students to get education.

As a result, providing equal access to digital connectivity for everyone, in order to ensure equitable access to education, becomes critical. In addition, progressively increasing education financing at all levels also became imperative.

Policy Recommendations: Budgetary interventions should be made to identify out of school children in the country due to the pandemic. The budget for mainstreaming out-of-school children under SSA needs to be increased for the next few years, to reverse the impact of loss of education, they have experienced.

-The overall budget allocated to the scheme needs a substantial raise in order to compensate for the existing dearth of resources under the scheme.

4. Infrastructural Development through Sustainable Means-

If India aspires to become one of the developed nations in the future, climate- proofing the economy through building a resilient and sustainable infrastructure must be a priority.

Human induced climate- change is one of the greatest challenges that the world is facing. In 2021, approximately a third of the total population in India lived in cities. The trend showed an increase of urbanization by almost 4 percent in the last decade, meaning people have moved away from rural areas to find work and make a living in the cities.⁽¹⁸⁾ According to the World Urbanisation Prospects (the 1996 Revision), the urban population in the year 2025 will rise to 42.5 per cent (566 million).⁽¹⁹⁾

The alarming increase in episodes of extreme weather changes, environmental disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, cyclones, forest fires, floods, etc., are a result of climate change, which is taking place at an astonishing pace.⁽²⁰⁾ This is due to the unprecedented rise in GHG emissions as a result of the increasing use of fossil fuels. To tackle the GHG emissions and restrict them to a level, where the climate changes can be reversed, the existing infrastructure needs to be made resilient and sustainable.

Policy Recommendation: Therefore, investing in green infrastructure must be a priority in the G20 agenda during the Indian presidency.

5. Addressing Climate Change and Natural disasters-

Global temperatures have risen by about 1.1°C from 1901 to 2020. Besides, climate change also refers to increasing sea levels, changes in expected weather conditions, and much more.⁽²¹⁾ The basic needs of human kind, water, food, energy, ecosystems, wildlife, amongst others are also being negatively impacted due to climate change. As per the IPCC report, 2022, “human-induced climate change is causing dangerous and widespread disruption in nature and is affecting the lives and livelihoods of billions of people, despite efforts to reduce the risks.”⁽²²⁾

Policy Recommendations: India must focus on policy measures to reducing the aggregate GHG emission.

- Investment must be made to look for sustainable fossil fuel alternatives.
- Focus on reducing carbon emissions by a significant margin and make the country carbon neutral.
- The Indian presidency must also promote international cooperation on disaster preparedness and managing post-disaster situations.

6. Anti-corruption measures-

- It is vital to maintain a strong stance against corrupt practices while emerging from the impact of COVID-19. Traditional anti-corruption policies have proven to be ineffective in unprecedented situations such as the pandemic. Anti-corruption policies need to be resilient and holistic to be able to remain worthwhile even in such times.

Policy Recommendations: There is a need to look at mechanisms to improve transparency and accountability within its systems and processes.

-The government systems must be user- friendly, citizen-centric, transparent, free flowing and updated regularly.

-Different stakeholders including the state and central governments, the private sector, academia, civil society and media must work in synergy to promote and practice this kind of good governance.

-Decentralizing the governance approach of India, to ensure reduction in corruption instances might be helpful, especially in the times such as a pandemic. Delegating local authorities to make decisions helps break the monopoly and making decisions that are more people- centric.

7. Close the Gender Gap-

According to the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report of 2021, the gender gap in India has widened to 62.5%. We can't help but hold the pandemic responsible for this decline to a certain extent. This owes to underrepresentation of women in politics, decreased labour force participation rate, poor healthcare facilities for women, unequal wages, wide gap in the male to female literacy ratio and much more. The report also states that India stumbled to the 140th position amongst 156 participating countries worldwide in 2021. Statistics also showcased that India fared the worst in political empowerment with a mere 9.1%. With respect to health dimension, India was one of the worst performers in 2021. The gender pay gap also increased by 3% from 2020.⁽²³⁾

- Despite India, actively introducing multiple schemes to close the gender gap in all these spheres, but there is a need to ensure successful implementation of the existing schemes. Regular monitoring of the impact created is required to make amendments, if necessary.
- Mainstream gender perspective within the education system and workplaces in India, to help promote participation of more women in leadership roles.
- Encourage public-private partnerships and recognise businesses that develop an ecosystem where women entrepreneurs can thrive.
- Women-centric policies could include re-joining work schemes, flexible work hours, menstrual leaves, equal wages, hybrid working models, and so on.

8. Promote an Enabling Environment for CSOs

Civil society in India is noted for its vibrancy, novelty and evidence-based advocacy. Since independence, the civils society has played a vital role in tackling developmental problems in India and nation-building. It has supported the government initiatives by taking them to the remotest parts of the country, where the government has limited access. The CSOs in India not only fill the gaps in

the government's initiatives and services, but also contribute significantly to the country's overall GDP. The sector provides employment opportunities to millions and has been exponentially expanding day by day. However, the exact expanse of the sector has not been measured correctly till date.

The role of the government is to regulate and not restrict the civil society space. As per the MHA, assets belonging to organizations whose foreign funding has been cancelled, will be taken over by the Principal Secretary of the concerned state government. Furthermore, online mechanisms to monitor the actions of foreign funded CSOs has been developed. Sadly, many organizations were also closely watched, their FCRA licences were suspended and raids were conducted in their premises.

While all this amounts to control, harassment and mistrust, which is not what the government should do, they should support the civil society, for working towards a better society and providing better living conditions to the citizens of India. They must collaborate with the civil society, as they did during COVID-19, and help foster an enabling environment for the CSOs to function. At the end, both the sectors have a common goal of nation building.

There have been reforms in the corporate laws to make them simpler, entrepreneurship has been highly supported and boosted to promote "ease of doing business", but the civil society has not seen any such simplification in the laws regulating it. Business start-ups are supported with many benefits, but the new CSOs have to face many obstacles in the beginning under the regulatory framework.⁽²⁴⁾

In addition, the laws governing the sector, for example the ones for registration of a CSO, have become archaic. They have not been amended since ages. As a result, they lack clarity, have different regulatory compliances for different CSOs in different states in India, and therefore, lead to a non- uniformity and lack of set standards for governance of the voluntary sector in India.

The G20 must therefore, focus on policy changes to create an enabling environment for the civil society sector. Streamlining registration laws in India, clearly differentiating between the types of institutions, including schools, colleges, hospitals, development organizations, think tanks, religious bodies and the like, is a necessity. Forming a higher authority to look after FCRA related grievances, should be considered. Devising mechanisms to promote collaboration between the government and the civil society must be focused on, based on a mutual respect and a shared vision.

Conclusion

Learning from past experiences of the G20 summits, the Indian civil society has high hopes from the Indian government as well, that they will work on these issues and consider them as priority areas, while setting up the G20 agenda for next year. It is also considered important that the government works in collaboration with the civil society and includes it in decision making processes, rather than being restrictive, for the presidency to be successful. It should ensure an equilibrium while partnering with the corporate sector, civil society and others, for working towards a common agenda. The above-mentioned key points are all based on challenges that fall in the way of India becoming a developed nation and must be packaged for the upcoming G20 presidency. The Indian civil society has an encyclopaedia of experiences and examples from the ground, that must influence the policy formulation next year. India, being a democratic country, and one that has grown immensely over the last few years in its efforts to transition into a developed nation, the civil society is hopeful, that the provided recommendations will be taken up and provided with ample focus. The Indian Civil Society looks forward to a constructive G20 presidency and one that yields maximum results in favour of the citizens of India.

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VOICE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

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About VANI

As a platform, it promotes voluntarism and creates space for voluntary action. As a network, it attempts to bring about a convergence of common sectoral issues and concerns for building a truly national agenda of voluntary action in the country. It also facilitates linkages of various efforts and initiatives of the voluntary sector.