



Souvenir to commemorate Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav

*Documenting the CSOs journey of 75 years since
independence*

on the theme

**Contribution of the Indian CSOs to the
Socio-Economic Development of India**

Voluntary Action Network India (VANI)

DECEMBER 2022

Contribution of the Indian CSOs to the Socio-Economic Development of India

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FOREWORD

We at VANI thought it appropriate to document and share the contribution of the Indian voluntary sector in the nation building and deepening democracy. This document is not only a collection of the empowering stories of the poor and vulnerable section but also of social transformation. It cuts across all sections of life at different times. This is a testimony of the contribution of the sector in independent India.

VANI has released a series of videos of interviews of prominent CSO leaders discussing the challenges of CSOs. Further online monthly lecture series are arranged of eminent personalities from different sectors like from academia, CSR, media and government, to have their view point and opinion on the CSOs of India and their contribution of 75 years.

I hope the live stories in this document will motivate in building and continue the interventions of the voluntary sector in India.

Binoy Acharya
Chairman

**VANI Souvenir commemorating
Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav**

Contents

**Theme: Contribution of the Indian CSOs to the
Socio-Economic Development of India**

FORWORD -Binoy Acharya - (ii)

1. INTRODUCTION

CSOs and 75 Years of their Contribution for Nation Building
Harsh Jaitli - 1

2. HEALTH CARE OF THE POOR

Boat Clinics of the Brahmaputra: "When Innovations Became
Necessity for Health Delivery in Remote Locations"
Bhaswati Goswami & Sanjoy Hazarika- 14

3. CHILD EDUCATION & PROTECTION

Protecting and Nurturing Childhood in India, the Role of CSOs
Amod Kanth - 24

Child Education - Bridging the gap
Puja Marwaha - 39

4. GENDER AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Venturing Into Male Dominated Occupations to Break
Stereotypes for Empowerment: Role of CSOs
Meenu Vadera - 46

AROGYA SWARAJ: Women Take Control of Their Bodies and Of Their Lives

Mirai Chatterjee -

57

5. DISABILITY CARE

One Step at a Time- Disability Rights Movement's Contribution to India's Development Journey

Nidhi Ashok Goyal -

70

6. ENVIRONMENT & BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

The Future of Seed: How 3 decades of Navdanya's work has contributed to seed freedom, Food Sovereignty and protection of Biodiversity

Vandana Shiva -

74

7. GOVERNANCE AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizens' Agenda 2050 for Rebuilding a New India

Ashok Khosla, Vijay Mahajan, & Rajesh Tandon -

89

8. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE CSOs

Taking Everyone Together: Collaborations and Partnerships within the Voluntary Sector

Jayant Kumar-

102

9. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Role CSOs have played in disaster management

Shabeen Ara -109

THE CONTRIBUTORS -

123

INTRODUCTION

CSOs AND 75 YEARS OF THEIR CONTRIBUTION FOR NATION BUILDING

HARSH JAITLEI
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, VANI

Mahatma Gandhi identified the root of India's problem as the poverty of the rural masses and held that the only way to bring the nation to prosperity was to develop the villages' self-reliance based on locally available resources. He also believed that voluntary action, decentralized to gram panchayats (village councils), was the ideal way to stimulate India's development.

History of CSO Activity in India

India has a long history of civil society based on the concepts of daana (giving) and seva (service). Voluntary organizations were voluntary in spirit and without profit-making objectives were active in cultural promotion, education, health, and natural disaster relief as early as the medieval era. They multiplied during British rule, working to improve social welfare and literacy and pursuing relief projects. During the second half of the 19th century, nationalist consciousness spread across India and self-help emerged as the primary focus of socio-political movements. Numerous organizations were established during this period, including the Friend-in-Need Society (1858), Prathana Samaj (1864), Satya Shodhan Samaj

Undeniably from the late 1970s, the struggle for gender justice, the anti-caste movement, the movement for protection of civil liberties the movement for a sound environment, the struggle against mega development projects that have displaced thousands of poor tribals and hill dwellers, the campaigns for the right to food, to work, to information, for shelter, for primary education, and for health have mobilised in civil society. These movements have, on the one hand, brought people together across social and class divides.

(1873), Arya Samaj (1875), the National Council for Women in India (1875), and the Indian National Conference (1887).

The Societies Registration Act (SRA) was approved in 1860 to confirm the legal status of the growing body of nongovernment organizations (NGOs). The SRA continues to be relevant legislation for NGOs in India, although most state governments have enacted amendments to the original version.

Christian missionaries active in India at this time directed their efforts toward reducing poverty and constructing hospitals, schools, roads, and other infrastructure. Meanwhile, NGOs focused their efforts on education, health, relief, and social

foundation for secular voluntary action in India was laid with the Servants of India, a secular NGO, was established in 1905.

Mahatma Gandhi's return to India in 1916 shifted the focus of development activities to economic self-sufficiency. His Swadeshi movement, which advocated economic self-sufficiency through small-scale local production, swept through the country. Mahatma Gandhi identified the root of India's problem as the poverty of the rural masses and held that the only way to bring the nation to prosperity was to develop the villages' self-reliance based on locally available resources. He also believed that voluntary action, decentralized to gram panchayats (village councils), was the ideal way to stimulate India's development. Mahatma Gandhi reinvigorated civil society in India by stressing that political freedom must be accompanied by social responsibility.

After independence as the leaders of the freedom struggle took over the reins of state power, organisations in civil society more or less retreated from engaging with the state. Since the leadership was widely seen as legitimate, civil society organisations simply did not feel the need to politicise the people, make them conscious of their rights as citizens, or create a civic community in which the newly independent citizens of India could engage with each other, and with the state. The situation was dramatically transformed barely two and a half decades after independence.

Not unexpectedly, civil society organisations in India took root to confront violations of democratic rights, as well as to fill in the development deficit of the state. Social activism at the grassroots, prompted some scholars to acclaim the 'non-party political process', and see it as an alternative to the state. By the late 1980s, one of India's most respected scholars Rajni Kothari, was to hail these new arenas of counteraction, countervailing tendencies, and counter-cultural movements (Kothari 1988).

Undeniably from the late 1970s, the struggle for gender justice, the anti-caste movement, the movement for protection of civil liberties (**Peoples Union for Civil Liberties** and **Peoples Union for Democratic Rights**) the movement for a sound environment (the **Chipko movement**), the struggle against mega development projects that have displaced thousands of poor tribals and hill dwellers (the **Narmada Bachao Andolan**), the campaigns for the right to food, to work, to information, for shelter, for primary education, and for health have mobilised in civil society. These movements have, on the one hand, brought people together across social and class divides, and on the other confronted state policies. By the year 2000, it was estimated that grass roots groups, social movements, non-party political formations, and social action groups numbered almost 20-30,000.

The shift gained official recognition in the Seventh Five-Year plan [1985-1990], and the Government has since then sanctioned considerable funds for service delivery. A 2004 study calculated that the total number of non-profit organisations in India is more than 1.2 million and that 20 million people work for these organisations either in a voluntary capacity or for a salary (PRIA 2003).

The Professionalisation of Civil Society

Increasingly however, civil societies across the world have come to be dominated by highly professional non-governmental organisations. The entry of professionalised non-governmental organisations into civil society has brought a qualitatively different way of doing things: campaigns rather than social movements, lobbying government officials rather than politicising the people, reliance on networks rather than civic activism, and a high degree of reliance on the media and the judiciary rather than direct action. This has been the exact nature of, four campaigns in the country that since the advent of the twenty first century have focussed on the right to food, the right to employment, the right to information, and the right to education. Their efforts have borne notable results in the form of specific policies, and the grant of social rights. (Chandhoke, 2007).

Civil Society Groups and Movements in India

The legitimacy of civil society groups and movements is based on their pursuit of rights for people. India has a history of an active engagement of civil society groups and movements with the state. The major movements' post-independence are conflict over environment and ecology, women's movements and social concerns, and Dalit movements.

Environmental and ecological movements

Some of the forest-based movements, Anti-dam movements and movements caused due to the environmental pollution. **Chipko Movement** is considered the origin of modern environmentalism and environmental movements in India. Chipko movement, launched to protect the Himalayan forests in the early 1970s. Peoples' main demand in these protests was that the benefits of the forest, especially the right to fodder, should go to local people. **Appiko Movement** in the villages of Western Ghats, in the Uttara Kannada region of Karnataka was caused due to commercial felling of trees for timber extraction. Women and youth of the region decided to launch a movement. **Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)** is the most important case study in terms of maturation of environmental movement and

dynamics related to politics of development. Narmada river project encompassing three major states of western India Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. No other development project in India has brought into focus the intensity of magnitude of eco-development problems to such a level of informed debate, political mobilisation and grass root activism as this project.

Urban-Based Environmental Movements

In the recent past environmental pollution caused due the industrialisation has become the focus of collective action by the civil society organisations, NGOs, concerned individuals, especially lawyers, scientists, environmentalists and social activists. They sought the intervention of the judiciary and drew the attention of the state for showing concern to the pollution caused by the process of modernisation. However, the main focus of the collective action against pollution has been in the urban areas. Certain tragedies like gas leakage in Bhopal based Union Carbide MNC, Charnobyl in former Soviet Union where thousands of people were killed created worries among the people on the negative effect of the industrialisation. Though the 1990s have seen increased concern about the environmental pollution, awareness about the disastrous impact of the environmental pollution.

Women's Movement in Contemporary India

The genesis of the new women's liberation movement lay in the radicalization of Indian politics in the late sixties. The rebellious mood of the youth, poor peasants, marginal farmers, educated dalit and tribal men and women, industrial working classes found its expression in the formation of innumerable special interest groups addressing themselves to the needs and demands of the local masses. In Maharashtra, women activists and women intellectuals involved in progressive movements took initiatives in forming a united front called **Anti-price rise Women's Committee** and organised direct action against the culprits who created man-made scarcity of essential goods. Thousands of poor and lower middle class women joined the struggle under the leadership of seasoned and able women from the left and socialist background. **Mrinal Gore, Ahalya Ranganekar, Manju Gandhi** and **Tara Reddy** made their special mark in the eyes of the masses as a result of their unique ability to reach out to women of different class backgrounds.

Around the same time, a conference of **Women's Liberation Movement Coordination Committee** was organised in Pune. The **Stree Mukti Sangathana** in Bombay and **Progressive Organisation of Women** in Hyderabad were formed in 1974. In Delhi, new leadership among women evolved from the radical students' movement and the democratic rights movement. The UN Declaration of 1975 as an International Women's Year boosted the womens' movements. **Political-Social-Economic Agenda of the Women's Rights Movement is an important milestone.** The nationwide anti-

rape campaign in 1980 resulted in the emergence and proliferation of autonomous women's organisations in several cities and towns of India. These groups such as **Forum Against Oppression of Women** (Mumbai), **Saheli** (Delhi), **Stree Shakti Sangathan** (Hyderabad), **Vimochana** (Bangalore) managed to get tremendous publicity. **Fight against Unjust Family Laws** provided support to women facing problems concerning marriage, divorce, maintenance, alimony, property rights, custody of child/children and guardianship rights, the activists realised that the existing personal laws and most of the customary laws were discriminating against women. Several women's groups (**Saheli**, Delhi, **Vimochana**, Bangalore and the **Forum against Oppression of Women**, Mumbai) and human rights lawyers' team (The Lawyers Collective, Mumbai and **Indian Social Institute**, Delhi) have prepared drafts containing the technical detail of gender just and secular family laws.

Legislative Reforms during last 30 years, concerning violence against women and girls have come into existence. India was the first to enact the Family Courts Act (1984). Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (DV) Act (2005) was enacted due to pressure exercised by the women's movement to safeguard interests of survivors of domestic violence.

In Andhra Pradesh, the anti-arrack movement was strong in 1992 to 1993 and it spread into other states at different levels. More than 40,000 women uniting and blocking the arrack auction in Andhra was a historic chapter in the Indian women's movement. In Maharashtra, the elected women representatives in local self-government institutions, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have forced the state government to declare their block/village/taluk 'alcohol free zone' if 50% of women in the area give their vote against sale and distribution of alcohol. Women's Movement and the Development Agenda in the 1990s, demanded its legitimate place within the mainstream with its own agenda of empowerment of women with partnership with men.

Dalit Movement

Last few decades have seen a spate of Dalit movement in various parts of the country. This is reflected in their social, cultural and political activities at various levels, i.e., state, local and all India. A large number of social and cultural organisations of Dalits, their political parties and leaders have emerged in various parts of the country. Dalit movement in the post - Independence period in India can be divided into three phases, i.e., phase I (1950s - 1960s), phase II (1970s -1980s); and phase III (1990s onwards). There has been a common feature of Dalit politics throughout the post - Independence period, especially from the 1960s onwards, e.g., to strive to have a party of their own or a party led by the Dalits. The **Dalit Panther Movement** is an educated group of Dalits - young Dalit writers and poets, in two major cities of Maharashtra set up an organisation known as Dalit Panther in 1972. Influenced by Amedkarism, Marxism and "Negro literature", they aimed at rejecting the caste system, which according to them was based on the Brahminical Hinduism. Spreading their ideas through the media and communication

network, through the discussions and debate in the public space, i.e., offices, houses, tea shops, public libraries, Dalit writers and poets provided the critique of the Hindu caste system and exploitative economic system.

Promotion of Inclusive Education by the Civil Society

In the early days of Independent India the Civil Society realized that hierarchies of caste, economic status, gender relations, cultural diversity as well as the uneven economic development that characterise Indian society is deeply influencing access to education and participation of children in school. The, girls belonging to Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe communities among the rural and urban poor and the disadvantaged sections of religious and other ethnic minorities were educationally most vulnerable.

CSOs of Independent India with a determination of an inclusive society ensured that they will play an important role for an education system that is truly inclusive bringing under its umbrella the tribal and rural poor, the backward minority groups and the mentally and physically challenged children, all of whom had been neglected for too long. They decided and put in efforts towards necessary prerequisite for building an education for a composite culture to ensure that all our children not only have access to education, but are also given equal educational opportunities as well as education of acceptable quality.

Interventions by CSOs

Civil Society rose to the occasion and started intervention programmes for awareness generation among parents and community especially among women and girls.

The intervention programmes of the CSOs aimed at women's empowerment which primarily sought to bring about changes in women's perception about themselves and that of society in regard to women's traditional roles.

First and foremost they were made aware of why do we need to promote literacy/education among girls?

- Literacy amongst women exposes them to a range of information, new ways of thinking and perspectives.
- It enhances the quality of life which they lead and improves their self-image.
- Education of women leads to better hygiene, improved nutrition practices, greater effectiveness in caring for family health and seeking timely medical intervention.

- . This results not only in better health status for the woman herself, her family but also improves maternal competence, and lowers infant mortality.
- . She becomes a more productive worker both at home and outside, leading the way to her equality and empowerment.

Education of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the two most disadvantaged sections of the Indian society needing special attention.

Some of these organizations started residential schools but the effectiveness or impact of such schools is debatable. Another strategy adopted by a set of NGOs was to set up alternative schools which provide the education that they consider appropriate for the targeted tribal group. These schools implemented innovative experiments.

CSOs in the field of Disability & Special School

A number of Non-profit organisations work in the field of Disability and Inclusive Development. Their Mission is to promote the rights and interests of the disadvantaged, particularly those with disabilities, in partnership with all stakeholders - children, their families, community and the government, by building knowledge and capacities on inclusive practices and policies; and creating opportunities for meaningful participation.

CSOs organise Research and Training programmes for enhancing operational learning by bridging the gap between intent and practice for the inclusion of PWDs.

Skill Development and Training programmes are organised to support young adults with disabilities with skill development and life skills opportunities.

Community Based programmes facilitates community participation to provide a barrier free and inclusive environment for Persons with Disabilities.

CSOs have developed "Disability Resource Manuals" that can be used as training material for Anganwadi workers, regular teachers and parents for spreading awareness and for the right information related to all disabilities and associated challenges.

Civil Society Organisations and Health Care

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has noted that the involvement of civil society has profoundly affected not only the concepts underpinning public health, but the formulation and implementation of public health programmes and policies as well.

Manoj Sharma and Gayatri Bhatia (1996), outline in their paper what they term the 'Voluntary Community Health Movement in India'. In identifying key categories of voluntary health initiatives in India, the authors provide a context where two major groups, the Gandhians and the Christian missionaries pioneered voluntary work in health. Of course, the Gandhian movement did not see health as an isolated phenomenon, instead focusing on overall development. With the three wars in the two decades of the 1960s and the 1970s, and concurrently a reduction in foreign aid meant that several home-grown initiatives emerged that sought to meet the needs of poor, especially with regards to improved health outcomes. The spirit of voluntarism at that juncture did not wholly rely on a medical worldview, instead grew out of a social and political phenomenon where young, recently graduated doctors wanted 'to change the world'. In this light, the authors mention three such initiatives in community health:

First, those that focused on 'alternative appropriate technology' such as the **Comprehensive Rural Health Project (CRHP)** at Jamkhed (Maharashtra), the **Integrated Rural Health Project at Pachod** (Maharashtra), and the **Child in Need institute** at (West Bengal).

The other group is termed as 'coordinating, networking and coalition building organisations' which included the **Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI)**, **Catholic Hospital Association of India (CHAI)** and the **Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI)**.

And, the third group had groups involved in 'lobbying, issue raising, and advocacy' such as **Medico Friends Circle (MFC)**, **Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP)**, **All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN)**, **All Indian People's Science Network (AIPSN)** and **Lok Swasthya Parampara Samvardhan Samiti (LSPSS)**.

Sharma and Bhatia elaborate further on the strengths of the voluntary sector in health in India. They identify, for example, their campaigning in adverse situations and becoming leading voices in the public discourse, especially, in the case of the Bhopal disaster (industrial genocide in Bhopal caused by a toxic leak from a Union Carbide factory that killed about 3,000 people in 1984) and justice to the victims as well as a pro-people drug policy.

Second, some remarkable results achieved by the sector in many areas where the government has not been able to intervene. For example the "**Lok Biradari Prakalp** - an organization working with a tribal community of Madia Gonds in Hemalkasa in the district of Gadchiroli (Maharashtra), had achieved an infant mortality rate of less than 50 per 1000, in 1990, which was almost half as compared to national figures".

Third, with the influence of liberation theology, social activist and rural development as guiding principles has ensured that these initiatives rely "on accepting that people have the potential, focusing on the reality of experiences rather than mere knowledge, respecting the views of the community, and working from the mutually shared ground rather than imposing theoretical ideas onto the

community". Their focus on participatory training and research, like the case of **VHAI**, according to Bhatia, show promising results through a personalised approach and non-bureaucratic structure with flexible operations which make them more acceptable options as opposed to the state in many instances.

When outlining weaknesses, the authors feel an inherent dependence on external assistance is a significant barrier, where many of these agencies function under donor-driven agendas. And, conversely, the authors feel that those organisations that work in smaller setups with motivated selfless staff have limited resources, and are unable to support their activities, quite often. Further, they feel that a lack of coordination among these organisations leads to misallocation of resources and in many cases "**duplication of efforts**". In outlining one major lacuna, at the time, the authors felt that many of these organisations failed to generate epidemiological data about the communities they work with, lacking any baseline data to compare and evaluate results and outcomes of their work. Other features the authors highlight include "crises driven management, lack of professional and systematic approach, and highly exploitative structure arising out of 'tight manning' and limited resources".

Civil Society and Livelihoods for the Marginalised

A livelihood is much more than employment. A person's livelihood refers to the means of securing the necessities of life -food, water, shelter, and clothing. Livelihood is defined as a set of activities, involving capacity to acquire above necessities, working either individually or as a group by using endowments (both human and material) for meeting the requirements of the self and his/her household, on a sustainable basis with dignity.

Civil Society, has been attempting to assist people whose means of making a living is threatened, damaged, or destroyed. Few examples can be discussed here.

PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action), developed a small-scale technology for rearing poultry and is helping tribal groups take up such production. **Seri-2000** with the support from **Silk Development and Cooperation (SDC)** helped silk farmers to improve their rearing processes. Producers were helped to get a better market price for their produce. Example, **SIFFS** (South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies) facilitates marketing of the fish caught by its members.

The inputs that were focused on during intervention strategies:

a) Technology: Some interventions in livelihoods have evolved around technological intervention. South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) has introduced motorized boats using a simple technology to help the fishermen.

b) Training: Training inputs have been an integral part of most interventions in livelihoods. The NGO **MYRADA** had given significant skill building to rural girls to take up the contract for watchstrap manufacturing of Titan, while promoting project MEADOW which aims at ensuring better livelihood through engagement of rural women.

c) Marketing: **Janarth**, extended market support services to the producers.

d) Asserting Rights: **The National Alliance of Street Vendors** lobbied for the rights of street vendors and worked with national, state and local governments. Similarly, **SEWA** focused on ensuring that the beedi roller got what law entitled them to.

e) Policy Advocacy: Livelihood choices are often enabled or restricted by the policy environment. **SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association)** made significant dent in the policy environment, which earlier never recognized unorganized workforce as labour.

f) Building Local Interdependent Economy: Interventions designed to strengthen an interdependent local economy, where a large proportion of the inputs required for an activity are procured locally, and value addition of the products is also done at the local level, have been tried by some agencies, as in the case of **DHRUVA-BAIF (Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation)**.

g) Credit: **BASIX (Bhartiya Samruddhi Investments and Consulting Services)**, a rural livelihoods promotion institution working in many states in India, extends micro-credit services for a variety of rural activities including farming, animal husbandry, cottage industries, trade and services.

h) Infrastructure: Some interventions also provide infrastructure, such as developing milk-chilling centres, various food processing units etc. Infrastructure such as creating milk chilling centres or building a road is often beyond the capacity of CSOs. However, there are several examples of CSO interventions in creating small or micro infrastructures like grading and sorting platform or creating a common work place for community. The case on DHRUVA may be referred, which created community has owned processing unit.

i) Institution building: In some cases, the organization promoting or supporting livelihoods has focused only on building producer organizations. The **Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP)** in Gujarat has been involved in organizing communities into various peoples' institutions such as **Water Users' Association**, Mahila Vikas Mandal while developing watershed in this area.

Shrinking Space for Civil Society in India Today

Civil society legitimacy and its right to operate has never gone unchallenged. And, it is usually the illiberal actions of state and non-state actors to curb civic activism that puts liberal democracies in danger.

Civil society legitimacy and its right to operate has never gone unchallenged. Since the turn of the century, democratic governments in India have increasingly adopted restrictive frameworks and arbitrary methods of

suppressing civic space. Political space for civil society operations is therefore highly volatile, and constricted. Although not unique, the situation in India embodies a new wave of contestations in state-civil society relations.

In the world's largest democracy, we are witnessing a shrinking welfare state and increasing constraints on civic space. Moreover, the government is blocking funding to NGOs, claiming they are anti-national and anti-developmental. Depoliticised and adaptive NGOs are therefore emerging alongside burgeoning poverty, and citizens dependent upon charitable organisations for their survival.

Although not unique, the situation in India embodies a new wave of contestations in state-civil society relations. In India human rights defenders and civil society activists are facing increasing levels of repression, laws are systematically used against critics, and there are ongoing restrictions on public gatherings and internet freedom.

According to APC's Asia regional policy coordinator, Gayatri Khandhadai, "What India is witnessing today did not happen overnight, but it has been building up as a result of the systematic erosion of state institutions, along with coordinated hate campaigns and targeting of religious minorities, progressive voices and political activists, offline and online," she stated, also stressing the role of media. "It is not only the attacks on the independence of media that must worry us. It is the active co-option and peddling of hate narratives that certain media groups engage in that has led us to where we are."

"Given the size and global role of India, the decline in the quality of its civic space must be of particular concern," CIVICUS said. It said that the country's rating has been downgraded".

"The Indian government has continued to use the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act to restrict and bar foreign funding or to investigate critical CSOs such as Lawyers Collective, a CSO co-founded by human rights defenders and lawyers Indira Jaising and Anand Grover."

On the government's "hostile" attitude towards human rights NGOs, the media said that the "draconian Foreign Contributions Regulation Act" has been used to stop foreign funding and investigate organisations that are critical of the government.

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2. HEALTH CARE OF THE POOR

**BOAT CLINICS OF THE BRAHMAPUTRA:
WHEN INNOVATIONS BECAME NECESSITY FOR
HEALTH DELIVERY IN REMOTE LOCATIONS**

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&

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Rural health care is one of the biggest challenges facing the country. With more than 70 percent population living in rural areas and low level of health facilities, mortality rates due to diseases are on a high. . Lack of quality infrastructure, dearth of qualified medical functionaries, and non-access to basic medicines and medical facilities hinders medical help reaching the poor.

Introduction

Health care is a fundamental right of every human being. About 43 percent of the world's population[1] lives in rural areas often with poor access to healthcare because of accessibility issues and availability of standard healthcare systems. Moreover there has always been an inverse distribution of healthcare services to rural population when compared to the urban population. Rural health care is one of the biggest challenges facing the country. With

Several grassroots organizations began working with the state government and district administrations in the health sector and related fields to ease the huge burden on the system and seeking more effective ways of reaching unreached and vulnerable groups. In a number of these cases, innovative technology, based on inclusive planning and discussions with local communities, helped develop unique ideas and innovations to bridge gaps in rural healthcare in remote and difficult locations.

more than 70 percent population living in rural areas[2] and low level of health facilities, mortality rates due to diseases are on a high. To control the spread of diseases and reduce mortality rates, special attention needs to be given to health care in rural areas. Key challenges in this sector include low quality of care, poor accountability, lack of awareness, and limited access to facilities.

Lack of quality infrastructure, dearth of qualified medical functionaries, and non-access to basic medicines and medical facilities hinders medical help reaching the poor. About 75% of health infrastructure, medical man power and other health resources are concentrated in urban areas where 27% of the population lives.

Contagious[3], infectious and waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, amoebiasis, typhoid, infectious hepatitis, worm infestations, measles, malaria, tuberculosis, whooping cough, respiratory infections, pneumonia and reproductive tract infections dominate the morbidity pattern, especially in rural areas. Non-communicable diseases such as cancer, blindness, mental illness, hypertension, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, accidents and injuries are also on the rise.

Despite several growth orientated policies adopted by the government, the widening economic, regional and gender disparities pose continuing challenges. Therefore, prioritizing rural health is imperative and will be a dire necessity for the future. There is a growing need to create rural communities which are healthy and at par with healthcare facilities in urban areas as also new practices and procedures to ensure that quality and timely healthcare reaches the deprived.

India's healthcare delivery system comprises three tiers[4]: Community Health Centre (CHCs), Primary Health Centre (PHCs) and Sub-Centres. Sub-Centres with one Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and one Multi-Purpose Worker (MPW) is the basic health care providing institution in the rural areas and supposed to be at each village (for every 5000 population in plain areas and for every 3000 population in hilly/tribal/desert areas.) The PHC is the second tier of rural health care unit set up by state governments for populations between 20,000 (hills) to 30,000 (plains). It acts as a referral unit for six sub-centres and is under direct control of a medical officer. A doctor is supported by 14 paramedical and other staff. Finally, CHCs are set up at the third tier to cover a population between 80,000 (hills) to 1,20,000 (plains) with four specialist doctors (viz., Surgeon, Physician, Gynecologist, and Pediatrician) and 21 paramedical and other staff. A typical CHC should have 30 indoor beds with Operation Theatre, X-ray, Labour Room, and Laboratory facilities. A CHC is a referral centre for four PHCs within its jurisdiction.

The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is often regarded as a barometer for overall welfare of a community or country. In 2015, the world began working toward a new global development agenda, seeking to achieve, by 2030, new targets set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Under the SDG, the world has committed to trying to bring MMR to 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030 and reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 deaths per 1,000 live births the under-five mortality rate to 25 deaths per 1,000 live births.

In the last decade, India's IMR has shown significant improvement, falling from 47 in 2010 to 28 in 2020, bringing it close to the global IMR of 27. India's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) has improved to 103 in 2017-19, from 113 in 2016-18[5]. However, despite a country-wide improvement, the ratios in some states have remained above 150, much higher than the SDG target. Uttar Pradesh's MMR in 2017-19 was 167, compared to 197 in 2016-18; Assam's MMR dropped from 215 to 205; and Madhya Pradesh's MMR has fallen from 173 to 163. According to data released by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, Assam's IMR is 36 deaths per thousand live births.

Since the focus of this essay is Assam, it will review data and develop narrative relating to issues there. Details released by RGI also shows that the state's IMR is 36 deaths per 1,000 live births. After the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), now NHM was launched[6], the health infrastructure as well as the health conditions of rural people of Assam improved. Yet, many gaps and challenges remained.

Difficult conditions such as the above, representing enduring problems which have stubbornly resisted change, lend themselves to creative thinking and unique interventions. Several grassroots organizations began working with the state government and district administrations in the health sector and related fields to ease the huge burden on the system and seeking more effective ways of reaching unreached and vulnerable groups. In a number of these cases, innovative technology, based on inclusive planning and discussions with local communities, helped develop unique ideas and innovations to bridge gaps in rural healthcare in remote and difficult locations.

One such innovative idea of reaching the unreached poor on the river islands of Assam is the Boat Clinic programme, which started initially in 2005 in one district, with one boat and a tiny team. Today, it has grown to reach lakhs of vulnerable persons in 13 districts.

C-NES and the Boat Clinics of Assam

Nearly 10 % of Assam's population or 30 lakh (three million) persons live in villages in the flood plains of the Brahmaputra, on a unique geographical feature of the river - about 2500 river islands which have been created by the power of erosion as soil, rocks and silt have been carried and deposited by water over millennia. The islands are popularly known as chars or saporis. These islands were, for the most, barring large ones like Majuli, remote, isolated and inhabited by marginalized communities with limited access to health, education,

clean drinking water, electricity and roads. They suffered the disadvantage of poor connectivity with the rest of the state and as a result, were not able to access many essential services like health and education and had few livelihood options.

Till today, these island dwellers have had a precarious life. Battered by recurrent floods and bank erosion, they have an impermanent existence. Grinding poverty and poor socio-economic indicators characterize these areas. The literacy rate here was only 19.31%[7] as against mainland Assam's 73.18%. There is less than one school for a population of 1,000. It is a vicious cycle of an insular existence, poverty and illiteracy. The total fertility rate was 4.56[8] among the surveyed households, much higher than the state average which was 2.4. Nearly 91 percent of the households did not have access to clean water. Only 1.4 percent of households had a sanitary toilet. Today with intervention of the government, the population living the islands are also included in numerous developmental schemes, benefits and services.

The Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (C-NES) has been implementing the Boat Clinic programme through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) with the National Health Mission (NHM), Government of Assam since 2008.

The origins

The Boat Clinics have their origins in a winter evening. During the course of making a documentary film on the entire length of the Brahmaputra, the filmmaker, Jahnu Barua, and Sanjoy Hazarika, the founder of C-NES were traveling by to Majuli, globally the largest river island, in the heart of the river. This large land mass[9] created by soil deposits over centuries, lies in the heart of the river. En route they heard the tragic story of a young woman from the Mishing (an ethnic tribe in Assam) community who had died in childbirth on that ferry earlier that day as the family could not take her to the nearest mainland hospital on time due to lack of connectivity. This tragedy was the turning point.

The key to making a difference was health access, especially on the islands. People here suffered from a double whammy: geographical and social exclusion. Health services were critical - but the service needed to go to people not the other way around. The main reason for the young woman's death in Majuli was

that she had not been able to access the service on time. The need was to take service to the people instead of them coming to mainland hospitals undertaking such physical hardships

"We needed to develop a concept using the boat and river itself, the only mode of transport to take services to people's doorstep, bridging the gap in reaching the unreachable island settlers", said Hazarika. And what better way, he thought, than by boat, one of the oldest form of public transport in the region, to get services to people.

C-NES' unique health clinic story began with a single boat, a prototype called Akha (Asha) or Hope also called "A Ship of Hope in a valley of flood" in Dibrugarh district in 2005; Akha received the World Bank's India Development Market Place Award for the year 2004 for unique innovations for transforming the lives of rural communities. Competing with 1,500 other entries, the idea won one of the awards - enough to build the first vessel.

Akha was built with a combination of inputs from MIT's design cell, local boat builders and river surveyors and launched in 2005, based in Dibrugarh, Upper Assam, the state's tea capital. The team had little money, a temporary crew and a couple of researchers. Today, there are 15 boat clinics, of which nine were built from C-NES' own resources or funds it had raised. State, national and international and visitors and media are plenty - including the World Bank and UNICEF, diplomats, international media such as the BBC, and 'national' and regional media.

Starting small in Dibrugarh, in partnership with the district administration, following a similar strategy, it later expanded its services to Dhemaji and Tinsukia districts. UNICEF then came into the picture to build capacity and training. The National Health Mission (NHM), Government of Assam, then proposed a collaboration seeing this as a major opportunity to give sustained health care to those millions who have been beyond 'normal' reach.

In addition, the project also provides training and awareness on family planning, other aspects of health including the crucial sphere of sanitation. Schools were established in Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur districts, supported by UNICEF for children of the islands who have either never been to school or dropped out.

The widely acclaimed Brahmaputa Community Radio Station (BCRS) part of C-NES has been established at Dibrugarh by a highly energetic and talented, largely self-taught team. Located on the banks of the river, at Maijan Ghat, BCRS targets audiences which include tea garden workers, home makers, students, farmers and shopkeepers as well as inhabitants of the islands with regular programmes. These audio programmes are interactive involving local communities, bringing expertise and scholars in simple language to station's listeners. A wide range of subjects are covered, from health, education,

nutrition, sanitation to interviews with community leaders. Cultural programmes, quiz and music contests light up the lives of participants and listeners.

The partnership between NHM and C-NES helps primary health care services to the marginalized and vulnerable communities living in the islands of the Brahmaputra in 13 districts of Assam. The districts are- Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Sonitpur, Morigaon, Kamrup(rural), Nalbari, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Goalpara and Dhubri. Barpeta and Dhubri districts have two units of the clinics each to cater to a large population. Considered as one of the flagship programmes of the Govt. of Assam, the Boat Clinics provides primary health care services to 421 villages with a total population of approximately 2.5 lakhs. These clinics have been acclaimed nationally as well as internationally for their innovativeness, effectiveness and outreach.

In each of the 15 boat clinic units there is a 15- member team on board. These include a District Program Officer (DPO), two Medical Officers (MO) which include an Ayurvedic Medical Officer, a laboratory technician, a pharmacist, two Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) nurses, and three community workers who work in collaboration with Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) in the field. A boat master or pilot who helps navigate the vessels through challenging conditions of high flood, storms, tricky speeding currents as well as low water and shoals and a "driver, who is located in the engine room. A cook and helper make up the rest of the mobile unit.

Delivering Results

A series of camps to deliver these services are organized by developing monthly work plans for each district to cover the islands in association with NHM, the Joint Directors of Health as well as C-NES' teams of District Programme Officers (DPOs) and Community Workers(CW); the former are the organizing core of the outreach. The teams make about 20 trips per month to selected islands to conduct camps. The camps are announced through ASHAs, village heads and local residents by the DPOs and CWs to ensure extensive participation.

The boat clinics provide services which were been developed under a Memorandum of Agreement with the National Health Mission (NHM), which is fully funding the project, barring the cost of nine boats, which are being financed by private donations and grants. The well-known economic columnist and philanthropist, Swaminathan S Aiyar and his wife Shahnaz have funded five boats. Oil India Ltd. and Numaligarh Refinery Limited have donated three boats. One boat was from World Bank. The remaining vessels in other districts are hired. They are designed and equipped to conduct basic health care services either on the boat or on the riverbank in the char/sapori villages with space for an out-patient department (OPD), a laboratory, pharmacy, cabins for medical staff, kitchen, toilets and crew quarters, equipped with generators, water tanks and powered by 120 hp engines.

C-NES has designed and built the boats at different sites in Assam with local boat builders and materials. All safety aspects have been assessed. Equipped with critical manpower and support staff to run OPD, laboratories and pharmacies on board, the boat clinics visit different island villages as per a predetermined schedule and stay stationed there for a few days to render health services. While anchored, people from nearby areas visit the clinic. The staff share information with the community on preventive and promotive aspects of healthcare and provide curative support to patients, when required.

Information about a subsequent visit is shared with residents before the clinic moves to the next location.

The work of the Boat Clinics has led to remarkable results: On an average 18,000 - 20,000 people are treated every month in the districts, individuals who were earlier beyond the reach of government programmes because no doctors or paramedics would go on a regular basis. The only time, villagers say, they would see a doctor on site was during an emergency like a major flood. Otherwise they had to travel long distances at great cost and risk to get treated. Today, the services come virtually to their doorstep, courtesy a network of dedicated and extremely hard working team of medical personnel and organizers who function under arduous conditions: bad weather, a challenging river and the difficulties of social and geographical exclusion. It has not been easy - but it is now an established programme that has not only found acceptance but extensive support.

They brave the floods during the monsoons when the river is swollen and high, and storms lash the valley, as well as during the dry season when the river is smaller and shallower with many channels the team have to walk several kilometers every time they need to set up camp. Villages receive health care at the doorstep with women and children getting priority under national programmes and then come the general checkups. Family planning counseling is conducted regularly with street plays, talks and films. As a result staff report seeing that most difficult of social phenomena - behavioral change with women from the minority community, risking the wrath of husbands and in-laws, coming for contraception, family spacing and a healthier life.

C-NES' Managing Trustee and writer, Sanjoy Hazarika, who conceptualized the program says that the outreach's impact was beyond his expectations. "We are delivering not just health care but enabling people to access their basic right to a better quality of life" he says.

The main focus of the initiative - in partnership with National Health Mission (NHM) - has been on women and children as Assam has one of the highest MMR in the country with an equally high IMR. The good news is that MMR in Assam showed the most improved decline across states. In 2005 when the programme began it was 480, the worst in the country. It has now dropped to 205[10].

T Significant efforts by the state government in the health field aided by organizations like C-NES has led to this improvement. Along with women and children, the focus is also on sustained healthcare to vulnerable adult groups, most of whom receiving sustained healthcare treatments for the first time in their lives.

Innovation and technology has gone hand in hand in empowering the clinics to serve people better. In 2017, the Jorhat boat clinic was installed with a Godrej Surechill refrigerator with support from the SELCO Foundation, to provide a reliable solution for storage of vaccines/medicines required for an extended journey. The results were encouraging, enabling longer journeys and greater coverage per trip. In one ideal trip, the boat would leave Jorhat and travel for a minimum of seven days, setting up medical camps on the various islands before returning. Jorhat Boat Clinic is probably the first in the country to be installed with solar power to run the entire medical and diagnostic equipment's including a dental setup and a 50 ltr solar refrigerator to store vaccines. The boat now also has power supply available to cater to the entire lighting requirement 24x7. Post this success, in 2018 another boat, the Tinsukia Boat Clinic, was equipped with Godrej Solar Ice Lined Refrigerator (ILR). The Bongaigaon and Jorhat Boat Clinic Unit has a dental unit provided by Mahindra & Mahindra Financial Services Ltd. A Solar ILR was provided by UNICEF and the Assam Government each for the Goalpara and Bongaigaon Boats.

COVID-19: The- Boat Clinics on the Front Lines

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the team continued on the frontlines, risking everything to go to the villages during floods and the dry season, wearing PPEs and masks. In the initial stage, members shared important information with communities about COVID-19 focusing on hand washing, physical distancing, cough etiquette, hygiene etc. If anyone from outside came to the village, local health authorities were requested to advise them of quarantine guidelines.

In addition to counseling, the teams recorded in-migrants from the lockdown and reported their presence to authorities, ensured they were well taken care of and quarantined. Not less than 12 Boat Clinic frontline workers were infected as a result of outreach work. The Boat Clinics, till date, have been at the forefront of vaccinating the drop outs in all island villages. From June 2021 to July 2022, 840 RT-PCR, 8600 RAT tests were conducted by the Boat Clinic teams out of which 105 tested positive and 80,044 COVID vaccines administered. If informed about emergencies, Boat Clinics also arrange transportation for patients to the district hospitals for critical care services.

If informed about emergencies, Boat Clinics also arrange transportation for patients to the district hospitals for critical care services.

An incident is worth recounting here.

In the initial phase of the nationwide lockdown, one of the teams received an emergency call to head to a small island. A country boat was bringing a 19-year-old heavily pregnant tribal woman from an island called Mesaki. Their original destination had been the nearest mainland hospital but roads were closed due to the nationwide lockdown. Her husband was far away in Chennai. The woman had started labour on the boat itself and the family were relieved to catch the sight of the Doctor's Boat, as it is known there, with professionals aboard. The timing was providential. The young woman medical officer efficiently examined the patient, calmed her parents' fears and made a quick decision; the delivery had to be then and there on the country boat. The surface was cleaned, necessary hygiene precautions taken, a clean sheet provided, an umbrella gave protection from the sun while a group of women sat around providing privacy. Exactly 26 minutes later, at 12.26 pm, a healthy three kg boy was born much to the delight of the family.

A decade back, the same boat clinic, manned by a different medical team was moving home, dusk was not far away when the team noticed a couple waving to them from an island they passed by. They slowed, stopped and anchored. The young couple was desperate because their daughter had an episode of acute respiratory distress. A little more delay and she would have gone. But the doctors had the medicines on the vessel, SB Shahnaz, and got to work; administered the drugs and the child started breathing easily. The colour returned to her face and her parents signed with relief, smiles returning to their harried faces. The doctors left a supply of medicines for the child and continued their journey.

In these districts, the boat clinics are reaching the poor and marginalized with sustained health care for the first time in their lives. Many have not seen a doctor, a stethoscope or a syringe ever. At one such camp an elated health team was informed by villagers that the first child in their village whose mother was under the team's supervision for her prenatal checkups was named "Doctor"- a good reflection of how much the teams have managed to penetrate and make their presence felt and appreciated. Besides medical services, the psychological aid the program has brought to these scattered communities is adding to their overall wellbeing. Problems of alcoholism, depression and hopelessness abound in the islands - losing whatever little owned, year after year to the river.

There is no denying that the success of the outreach programme has been dependent on partnership with government. It was clear that to be sustainable, truly effective and reach the last mile, a small NGO could not do it; the biggest stakeholder, the Government, would need to be deeply involved. The partnership with the Assam government and of NHM over the past nearly 15 years has been successful - covering all costs of nearly 200 staff including doctors, nurses, pharmacists and lab technicians. Each boat clinic is a self-contained floating dispensary. The many NHM and Government of Assam initiatives taken together have seen Assam's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) fall dramatically from 492 per 100,000 births to 205 in the past of 15 years or so, the best performance to date in the country. It is still one of the highest but there has been a vast improvement.

The role of the voluntary sector is significant as we have seen. Dr. Poonam Muttreja, the head of the Population Foundation of India, put it well recently: "In India, the spirit of voluntarism, rooted in the tradition of daan, seva, charity and service in all its major religions has been central to the Indian ethos for centuries. But this took on fresh meaning after independence as NGOs forged new ground and helped national priorities to be met and got India going, enabling several government programmes to be implemented more effectively[11]."

Many like C-NES responded to that call. There are many examples of civil society groups across the country playing a role in taking critical services to the poor, marginalized and the vulnerable in partnership with the government. Collaboration and mutual respect is the key. The Indian Government has showcased the success as an example of best practices at work.

Madhyam

The boat clinics were envisaged as a madhyam - a platform for taking not just health care but skills and other services to the island population who are hardy and adaptable. These include sharing knowledge about better nutrition (there is a high incidence of anemia), including introducing the moringa plant, seeds of which were donated by a philanthropist in Bangalore, and installing solar powered units at PHC centers, schools and Anganwadi centres in Majuli. It has also introduced a solar powered unit that helps the traditional potters of Majuli who never used the potter's wheel to reduce drudgery and improve health, outputs and incomes. For the need is to go beyond just health and make the outreach programme become one with a more holistic development approach- to touch all aspects of the islanders lives.

From Sadiya to Dhubri, children, women, and the elderly crowd the boat clinics with health queries and for general checkups. Laboratories which include semi auto-analyzers and Pharmacies in the boats become functional as soon as the health camps start. Nurses take position in a separate enclosure near the checkup booth that caters to children and women for immunizations, ante natal care (ANC) and post natal care (PNC). Diarrhea, dysentery, ear and skin infections (both caused by prolonged exposure to river water, especially among children who are not in school), anemia and fever are common ailments. Most are preventable- the health team gives them a lesson or two on maintaining personal hygiene.

There has been a distinct change in attitude, with increasing numbers of young mothers with babies clinging to their backs coming to the immunization centers. Continuous visits and interactions by the health team with residents have created this transformation. Gone are the days when the very idea of an immunization team coming to their homes was met with suspicion. There are examples of women asking for family planning because they did not want more children since this could pose a danger to their health. At the close of camps, Medical Officers conduct an interactive session where they speak of the need for family planning, the importance of women's health and that of spacing children. Their audiences listen with rapt interest. Referral cases are recorded and advice given.

And as the Boat Clinics leave, children of the islands run along the riverbanks, waving to the vessels till they are specks on the horizon.

Notes:

1 an estimated 3.4 billion of 7.9 billion in 2021
<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/WLD/world/rural-population>

2 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/About-70-per-cent-Indians-live-in-rural-areas-Census-report/article13744351>.

3 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12047509/>

4 <https://nhm.gov.in/images/pdf/guidelines/iphs/iphs-revised-guidlines-2012/sub-centers.pdf>

5 Special bulletin on MMR released by the Registrar General of India March 14, 2022

6 NRHM was launched nationally in 2005 and the NHM, which subsumed the NRHM and the National Urban Health Mission, in 2013

7 Socio-economic survey in 2002-2004 conducted by Govt of Assam's Char Development Board

8 Total fertility level per woman in the childbearing age.

9 <https://assam.gov.in/about-us/400>

10 Special bulletin on MMR released by the Registrar General of India March 14, 2022

11 <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/we-must-let-millions-flowers-bloom>

3. CHILD EDUCATION & PROTECTION

PROTECTING AND NURTURING CHILDHOOD IN INDIA: THE ROLE OF CSOS

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GENERAL SECRETARY, PRAYAS JAC SOCIETY

Within India's evolving legal system concerning children, like the juvenile justice laws, the government and voluntary organizations dealing with the children have been using a variety of expressions to define these most disadvantaged children as deprived children in need of care & protection, vulnerable children, children in difficult circumstances, or children at risk.

As India completes 75 years of Independence and 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', it is an opportune time to examine the status of 472 million children under the age of 18 years, comprising 39 percent of the country's total population[1] and to also examine the past achievements, identification of the gaps, lacuna in the systems, and our aspirations for the achievement of the universally accepted children-related SDG goals by 2030 and while we observe the centenary celebrations of our Independence in 2047 fulfilling the basic needs and rights of our children. Although, the Constitution of India does not define the

In India's development process, particularly in the social sector concerning the children, the role of voluntary organisations and the social workers connected to them is of paramount importance. In fact, none of the laws, policies, schemes and programs which directly serve the deprived and marginalised children can be implemented without the active participation of the civil society or community-based organizations from the grassroots to the national level policy formulations.

child except in terms of their right to education and protection against hazardous labour etc. upto 14 years, it accords a special status to children by ensuring their security and also by safeguarding the entitlements of 'those of tender age'. Recognising in all our national policies, international commitments and the laws concerning the children upto eighteen years that they are our 'supreme assets' and the future of any country, we seriously believe that they need special care and protection because of their tender age, their developing physical and mental faculties.

Situation of the Indian Children and Treatment towards Them

Children in India, for thousands of years, have been taught to respect the elders and gurus (teachers) while accepting the religious practices and cultural values of their ancestors. Traditionally, far more resilient Indian children in joint or extended families, unlike their western counterparts in nuclear or linear families, have different characteristics. In fact, the borrowed stigmatised legal expressions like, 'juvenile' when translated into Hindi and vernacular languages as 'innocent' expressions like, 'Balak' or 'Balika', 'Kishor' or 'Kishori' etc give a different image of childhood. It was only during the twentieth century that the concepts of Children rights emerged as children were only the recipients of welfare measures and the separate treatment of the child as victim or offender in crime, or as neglected or in need of care and protection emerged in the legal domain. The atrocities towards children took the worst turn during British rule as they continued to be oppressed in all possible forms. In a country inhabited by multicultural population problems are also as diverse and unique in nature.

Getting into the actual matrix of the factors directly influencing the lives of the children, one may witness that a growing number of children are constantly exposed to dangers that have a direct bearing on the growth and development of the children. The poor for instance who cannot feed the child could simply be forced to sell the child for petty benefits. Clear gender discrimination is apparent in every stratum of the society, where a girl child may be killed much before she is born. Ethnic clashes in certain parts of the country may leave many children orphaned and without any support they may have to fend for themselves. Similarly, children of criminals are left without any support when they go to jail. If all these children facing some kind of difficulty are lucky enough to escape the police they may be kidnapped and forced to work for long hours with very little or no pay. Chances are extremely high that these children may never get any education. These innocent children who lack experience, exposure and improper care and guidance are always exposed to exploitation and may fall easy victims to several crimes perpetrated against them. Crimes against these children may involve physical and mental violence such as child abuse, forced labour and child prostitution, to name a few.

The National Study on Child Sexual Abuse, as the Indian Chapter of the Global Violence Against Children was conducted by Prayas JAC Society in 2005-2007 on behalf of the Ministry of Women & Child Development (MWCD-GOI) partly supported by the UNICEF and Save the Children. Through this largest-ever study on the children carried out in 13 States & UTs covering nearly 17500 respondents, it clearly emerged that all forms of child abuse, ie, physical, emotional, sexual, economic, besides the 'neglect' and girl child abuse, were rampant in India. The children of all ages and types-from streets to schools and from homes to institutions are subjected to abuse- accounting for over 75% in physical, emotional etc and over 52% from mild to severest forms of sexual abuse-boys and girls alike. The national study found that the age of maximum abuse was between 9 to 12 years and the abuse gained momentum at the age of 10 and peaked between 12 to 15 years. It was also observed that the children between the 5-12 years age group are most at risk of abuse and exploitation.

The National Study on Child Abuse 2007, later on, became the basis of "Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) Act, 2012", a comprehensive legislation which came into force on 14th November 2012, to deal with offences against child sexual abuse including child pornography. The effects of the Child Sexual Abuse can be profound and life altering for the victims and may result into major public health problem impairing mental and physical health and welfare of the children. Being a gender-neutral legislation, the POCSO Act 2012 sets the age of consent 18 years for both boys and girls and clearly states that, irrespective of the consent, engaging in sexual act before or after marriage with or between the minors under the prescribed age is prohibited and such consummations amounts to sexual assault.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in the year 2018 has approved a scheme, namely, "Cyber Crime Prevention against Women & Children (CCPWC)", under which online portal Cyber Crime reporting portal, (www.cybercrime.gov.in) has been launched to enable public to reports pertaining to child pornography, child sexual abuse, marital rape, gang rape imageries or sexually explicit content. It is also pertinent to mention that the changes brought forth by Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 introduced more sexual offences like voyeurism, sexual harassment, and stalking.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) did not report the 'Crimes against Children' under a separate head until 1994. It is also notable that the age of juvenile as per JJ Act 1986 at the time was 16 years for boys and 18 years for girls[2].

	Total Cognizable Crimes in the Year	Total Crimes Against Children	Total Crimes by Children
2021	6,096,310	149,404	31,170
1994	5,500,000	5,821	14,523[3]
Increase	596,310	143,583	16,647
Percentage Increase	10.842%	2466.63%	114.625%

In the year 1994 there were 5,821 incidents reported as crime against children which increased to 33,098 in the year 2011, that witnessed exponential increase ever since. Crime against children has increased manifolds, this is also because of enactment of special laws eg. J. J. Act, 2000 and POCSO Act, 2012/2021.

As per NCRB, Report 2021, 1,49.404 crimes against children were reported as against 1,28,531 cases in 2020, showing an increase of 16.2 percent and at the same time population growth is 1.3 billion in comparison with the 2011 census. In percentage terms, major crime heads under 'Crime Against Children' during 2020 were kidnapping and abduction (45 percent) and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (38.1 percent) including child rape. The crime rate registered per lakh children population is 33.6 in 2021 in comparison with 28.9 in 2020. Despite multiple legislation in place, India continues to be one of the leading countries in generating Child Sexual Abuse Material with 11.7% (19, 87,430 reports) of its share in global reports in 2019 (**National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, (NCMEC).**

Profiling and Mapping the Indian Children at Risk

Within India's evolving legal system concerning children, like the juvenile justice laws, the government and voluntary organizations dealing with the children have been using a variety of expressions to define these most disadvantaged children as deprived children in need of care & protection, vulnerable children, children in difficult circumstances, or children at risk. While these classifications can be arrived at for different purposes and situations, the worthwhile proposition would be to focus on the categories of the disadvantaged children who could be put under the category of children at risk. These children facing universal risk of disease, disability, malnutrition, illiteracy and drudgery and in need for special attention could be broadly classified into the following categories for common understanding:

1. Street, homeless and orphan Children
2. Child Labour or working children
3. Children in brothel, sex Work and unconscionable gains
4. Abandoned or Runaway Children

5. Children in Conflict with law
6. Children in Need of Care and Protection
7. Children in drug addiction and abuse
8. Children orphaned due to Covid-19 or pandemic situations
9. Children affected by natural calamities
10. Children affected by War/Conflict/Civil Strifes
11. Children on railways, transit and transports
12. Children of Primitive Tribal Vulnerable Group
13. Mentally and physically challenged children

Most of these children are prone to attacks, injuries, abduction, trafficking, intimidation, abuse and other forms of exploitation which also hinders their education beyond measurable indicators including disappearance of children from schools/communities etc. The traffickers masquerading as contractors take them to the neighbouring states as Child Labour or trafficked for exploitative purposes. The exclusion of children from the education system increases their vulnerability of getting enmeshed in the conflict zone[6].

The LANCET in its report on 24th February 2022 estimated that nearly 19 lakh children have lost their primary caregivers due to COVID-19 in India, whereas, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) in its report submitted to Hon'ble Supreme Court based on 'Bal Swaraj COVID Care portal' stated that 1,47,492 children have lost their parents since April 1,2020.

Unfortunately, within the borrowed adversarial legal system concerning the children in India the child was looked upon as a wrong-doer and not someone to be protected and nurtured. The Apprenticeship Act 1850 was the first child centric legislation which initiated differential treatment of children by providing some skill development of children below the age of 15 years as apprentices instead of sending them to jail. It was followed by the Reformatory Schools Act 1898, which for the first time separated the children from adults in the criminal justice system and emphasized sending the children to special schools instead of jail. The Children Act 1920 extended the segregation of children accused of committing offences at the adjudication stage by establishing separate children courts. The Madras Children Act, 1920 was the first Children Act to be enacted followed by the Bengal Children Act 1922 and Bombay Children Act 1924 respectively. More States followed suit with the passage of Delhi Children Act, 1941, the Mysore Children Act, 1943, the Travancore Children Act, 1945, the Cochin Children Act, 1946 and the East Punjab Children Act 1949.

India's Independence ushered in a new era for the realization of human rights including the child rights, but the 'child rights' in its broader and practical sense has been evolving ever since. The advent of constitutional rights, five-year plans, national policies and programmes, designated government bodies and an active judiciary facilitated rapid advances in this regard. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India also delivered landmark judgements for child protection, which prompted uniform legislation across India, namely, Vishal Jeet vs Union of India[7] on child prostitution, M.C Mehta vs State of Tamil Nadu[8] and Bandhua Mukti Morcha vs Union of India[9] on child labour

, Sakshi v. Union of India[10] on child abuse, etc. By the 1980s the different States had enacted separate legislations for children with varying positions on important provisions such as the definitions of children led the Supreme Court in a petition (writ of habeas corpus) filed by Sheela Barse in 1983 led to have a uniform legislation for the whole country. Pursuant to this direction, passed the first uniform legislation for the children applicable to the whole of India, namely, the Juvenile Justice Act, 1986 which made it clear that keeping girl below the age of 18 years and boys below the age of 16 years at Police Station/Jail as illegal across the country[11].

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 replaced and repealed the JJ Act 1986 as it was felt that it is essential to adopt the uniform cut off age of 18 years for both boys and girls in conformity with the definition of 'child' in the CRC. Over the years until now when the basic law for children of all possible types who are in need of care and protection (CNCp) and in conflict with law (CCiL) happens to be substantially amended and re-enacted Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 provides the framework and the anchor sheet for the fulfilment of the basic needs and rights of the children. The objectives and expressions like, 'development and social integration', child friendly approaches and the universally accepted basic principles of their treatment have been added.

The Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Amendment Act 2021 notified on 7 August 2021 which came into effect from 1 September 2022, aimed to facilitate a coordinated and effective response of district administration at the level of District Magistrate (DM), being the highest administrative officer of the district to address all issues related to child protection being the grievance redressal authority. The affected child or anyone on behalf of the child are fully authorised to file a complaint before the DM to seek cognizance of the given complaint. The Amendment also empowered DM to issue Adoption Orders within the jurisdiction of his/her district. Considering the past record of multiple and pressing preoccupations of the DM it is being felt whether justice will be done to the children or this law to protect and nurture the CNCp and other victims of crimes shall remain unimplemented.

In the same process the amendment in Section 26 which categorises serious offences i.e., offences with imprisonment for a term of three years and above, but not more than seven years as non-cognizable offence (Such Offences include

sale and procurement of children, exploitation of child employees, employment of children for child begging, giving intoxicating liquor or narcotic drugs to a child) and Section 86 (2) of the Act “which states that offence under this Act is punishable with imprisonment for for a term of three years and above, but not more than seven years, then such offences shall be non-cognizable and non-bailable” attracts severe criticism from various child right activists, organisations and the State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCRs) led by Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) These amendments will make reporting and action on the crimes/cases against children to the Police infructuous since the offences have been made non-cognizable, hence the police cannot register FIR and the investigation can commence only on the basis of a complaint filed before the concerned Magistrate. With a plethora of laws being enacted concerning the children we are ahead of most of the countries, but the problem lies in their implementation along with the concomitant policies, schemes etc.

The National Education Policy 2020[1] refers to nearly 32 million out-of-school children estimated by the 75th household survey conducted by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in 2017-18, who are described as the “Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Group (SEDG)” under NEP-2020. While recently participating virtually in the Global Meet on Child Labour organised by Unicef and ILO out of 160 million child labour globally the India’s share of child labour is conjectured to be nearly 30-35 million- a fact articulated before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the National Policy on Child Labour. All these categories of marginalised and deprived children in exploitative and disadvantageous situations are urgently required to be mapped and taken care of.

The first ever National Family Health Survey (NFHS) in 1992-93 found that nearly half of the children are stunted and underweight. It presented a dismal picture of child nutrition in India and remains one of the major public health challenges of the 21st century. Though, India has been trying to combat the problem of child and maternal nutrition since decades through concerted programs, namely, Integrated Child Development Scheme in 1975, the National Nutrition Policy in 1993[13], Mid-Day Meal Scheme for school going children in 1995, National Food Security Act-2013 and Poshan Abhiyan in 2018. COVID-19 has further aggravated the momentum of the nutrition program and accentuated the need of multi-sectoral convergence among national policies for addressing the nutritional needs in society.

Although some dramatic changes have taken place in the Human Development Indicators (HDIs) since Independence, like Infant Mortality Rate being 145.6/1000 live child births in 1947[14] to improve to 28.771/1000 in 2021, [15] India still has an alarming burden of child malnutrition etc. Malnutrition was found to be the leading risk factor for death of children under the age of five in India (Lancet, 2019). In 2018, 34.7 percent of children under five were

stunted, 17.3 percent were wasted and 33.4 percent were underweight (MOHFW et.al, 2019). Anaemia prevalence was also high, at 53 per cent among all women of reproductive age, and 54 per cent among girls aged 15-19 years (Anaemia Mukta Bharat Portal). While these indicators have improved from earlier years, they remain a cause for concern. Further, it has been predicted that India will fail to meet targets for improvements in nutrition indicators set under POSHAN Abhiyan (National Nutrition Mission) for 2022, and WHO-UNICEF targets for 2030.

The 'Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan (Prime Minister Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition) 2.0[1]', launched from August 1st 2022 seemed to be a concerted and holistic program in mission mode to maximize nutritional outcomes and to achieve the overall goal of POSHAN Abhiyan, launched by the Prime Minister on the occasion of the International Women's Day on 8th March 2018 from Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan is a right step to promote holistic development of children under six years of age through improved Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) by focusing on cognitive, emotional, social and intellectual development of the child to integrate all pre-schoolers in the age group of 5-6 in Grade I as envisaged under the National Education Policy 2020.

The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) of the government which serves over 30 million children in the age group of 3-6 years through 13,99, 697 Anganwadi Centres. The current Anganwadi Service Scheme is one of the largest and unique programs for Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) reflecting firm testament of the country's commitment to its children. It is to be appreciated that nearly 64 million children in the age group of 6 months to six years benefit from dry rations or hot cooked meals under supplementary nutrition program under Anganwadi Services and 115.9 million school children in classes I -VIII benefit from one hot cooked meal a day under Mid-Day Meal (MDM).

Missing/Lost & Found, Trafficked Children

Missing children are at the highest risk of child trafficking. Separated from their family, they are easy targets for harm, abuse/exploitation, and can become victims of child labour, prostitution, begging, illegal adoption, forced marriages, and other crimes. In a study related to human trafficking in the Indian context it was noted that "younger children are high in demand for trafficking and fall prey to exploitation more because of their malleability, as they can be easily overpowered and dominated using force and threats" (World Bank 2020: 33). The Crime in India reported that a total of 77,535 children (17,977 male, 59,544 female and 14 transgender) were missing in 2021. The number of children missing has increased by 30.8% in 2021 from 59,262 children

missing during 2020. During the year 2021, a total of 76,827 children (17,845 male, 58,980 female and 2 transgender) were recovered/traced. What about others?

Child Care Institution (CCIs) for Children in Crisis: Necessity or Last Resort

Considering the fact that there could be vaguely estimated 20 million children without family support or ostensible means of subsistence, the continuous debate between the Institutional and Non-institutional care is meaningless since for these children the CCIs become the 'first resort' out of sheer necessity instead of being the 'last'. It was found that a large number of children of single parents was residing in the CCIs/ Homes; the others included orphans, abandoned, surrendered, sexually abused, victims of child pornography and child marriage, trafficked, homeless, mentally challenged children, etc. Both the above reports reflect the sorry state of affairs on condition of the marginalized, vulnerable, destitute, trafficked, run-away/missing/lost and found children. The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) in its Three Year Action Agenda (2017-2020) [17] acknowledges the non availability of credible data as the major obstacle in designing and implementing robust policy interventions. Reiterating the objectives of National Plan of Action 2016[18] emphasized on active engagement of stakeholders coupled with a comprehensive knowledge base with adequate resources and political will to address the needs of the children which are multisectoral and interconnected.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) conducted social audit of Child Care Institutions in pursuance of the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the matter of exploitation of Children in Orphanages in "State of Tamil Nadu vs UOI & Ors" and also in context of sexual exploitation of girls reported from child care institutions in Deoria (Uttar Pradesh) and Muzzaffarpur in Bihar in 2018. The social audit was carried out in 7,163 childcare institutions, which houses 2.56 lakh children across the country. It found that nearly 2, 764 institutions, accounting for 39 percent of these homes, do not have adequate measures to prevent any form of physical, emotional abuse of children that results in mental or physical trauma. The Ministry of Women & Child Development (MWCD) in its report released on 6th September, 2018 titled, "Analysing Data of Mapping and Review Exercise of Child Care Institutions under the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act 2015 and other Homes". It has reviewed 9589 CCIs/Homes (registered/unregistered); 91 per cent of which are run by non-government organizations, and only 9 per cent are government supported. Thirty two per cent of CCI/Homes were registered under the JJ Act whereas 33% did not have any legal status; rest of the CCI/Homes were either registered under other Act/Scheme or had applied for registration under JJ Act.

Voluntary Organizations and social workers in Protecting & Nurturing Children

In India's development process, particularly in the social sector concerning the children, the role of voluntary organisations and the social workers connected to them is of paramount importance. In fact, none of the laws, policies, schemes and programs which directly serve the deprived and marginalised children can be implemented without the active participation of the civil society or community-based organizations from the grassroots to the national level policy formulations. Voluntary Action Network India (VANI), in its recently published 'Study Report on National Policy on Voluntary Sector has observed, "In a country like India, the voluntary sector bridges the gap between the government and the population of the country. It identifies the needs of the community and provides its support and services, even in the most untouched and marginalized areas, where the government is not able to reach".

In the common parlance, volunteerism and NGOs are talked about as being two facets of a similar kind of activities - the first being in the nature of a spirit and the second being organizational. Volunteerism is considered to be a doctrine in which the free will of an individual to act is a dominant factor. A voluntary organization may be considered to be a conglomeration of volunteers joining hands with shared values of common concern for specific goals. The *raison d'être* of a voluntary organisation is based on the principle interests of a group constituting the organization. Legally speaking, the voluntary organisations may be formed in India as legal entities through the oldest and the most prevalent Societies Registration Act of 1860 besides the Indian Trusts Act 1882, the Companies Act 2013 etc-the total number of such organisations being 3.2 million, as per a reckoning made under a Supreme Court direction. In fact, the maximum number of such organisations are created to serve the children or the common objectives including the children.

Over the past several decades since Independence amongst the social sectors of India, namely children, women, disabled-called specially-abled, elderly, sick with all types of diseases including the socially-outcasted like leprosy and terminally ailing, numerous religious and secular organisations have worked with sincerity and services. The children have been the target of many of them, the best known among them was the Missionary of Charity set up by the global icon and Nobel Peace Laureate Mother Teresa. The Child Rights activist Kailash Satyarthi was also globally acknowledged through the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 due to his work for the children in crisis-the BBA (Bachpan Bachao Andolan), Global March against Child Labour etc.

During the past four decades or so, hugely commendable services have been rendered for child protection and nurturing by organizations like CINI Asha, Save the Children, Butterflies, Prayas JAC Society, Rainbow Homes, World Vision, Pratham, Prajwala, Bachpan Bachao Andolan, Delhi Council of Child Welfare, West Bengal Council of Child Welfare, Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission, Akshay Patra, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, OJU Welfare Association, Catholic Relief Service, Indian Institute of Social Development, Parivar, Magic Bus India Foundation, Sanlaap, Apne Aap, Jaluguti Agrabami Mahila Samiti, National Institute of Rural Development (NIRDESH), Aashrey Adhikar Abhiyan, Railway Children, Prerna, Aarambh, Hamari Muskan, Humsafar Trust, Naz Foundation, Care India, Caritas India, Centre for Equity Studies, Childhood Enhancement Through Training and Action (CHETNA), CHILDLINE INDIA FOUNDATION, HAQ, Catholic Relief Services, Deepalaya, Indian Alliance for Child Rights (IACR), Plan India, Rahi, Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses, (SPYM), Udayan Care, STOP Trafficking and Oppression of Women & Children, Chhotay Taray Foundation, Dr A.V. Balika Memorial Trust, ECHO etc.

Entirely run by voluntary organisations, CHILDLINE-1098 the emergency helpline number functioning since 1998, conceptualised at TISS and launched at Prayas Jahangirpuri as the national project for children by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (earlier a Department of Ministry of Social Justice) expanded to 602 cities/districts across 35 States/UTs, through a network of 1074 intervention units including Child Help Desks at 144 Railway Stations and 11 Bus Terminals covering 81 percent of the country in terms of district coverage. It answered 50 lakh calls and provided emergency assistance to over 3.95 lakh children during the period of COVID-19 (2020-21); in normal times the network gets about 75 to 80 lakh calls and serves over 4 lakh children in crisis. These organizations along with thousands of other children related organizations are working putting relentless efforts in reaching out the 'unreachable and invisible children' along with the government/state government through various national level welfare schemes and policies, children related legislations in partnership with various stakeholders ensuring holistic services to the children so that their childhood may not get lost.

With the introduction of the planning in the year 1951 and with the launching of the community development programs, the voluntary organizations redefined their role in nation building, particularly in the process of rural transformation and development. In successive Five Year Plans until the 12th FYP 2012-17 the role of voluntary organisations with major emphasis on children has been expanding while being coordinated by the Voluntary Action Cell (VAC) within the Planning Commission-now taken over by the NITI Aayog and partly by the CSOs Standing Committee.

The dimensions of the problems in India, like the country itself, are mind boggling. The situation becomes all the more critical for a nation caught-up between the growth, buoyancy and the rising expectations on the one hand, and the relative deprivation of the majority,

widespread despondency on the other. The span of 75 years of our Independence has proved most inadequate for us in tackling the problems of India i.e., fulfilling the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing and basic amenities of life; quality growth in education, health and other such human resource related infrastructure.

The joint efforts made by the voluntary organisations during COVID-19 pandemic reflected the immense faith of the Government in reaching out to 92,000 NGOs through NITI Aayog which was activated by the members like Prayas connected the NITI CSOs Standing Committee and the national networks like the VANI. The number of children needing care and protection, however, became huge and constantly increased with the aggravated poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, migration coupled with the adverse impact of COVID-19. It devastated the lives of children beyond imagination as 1.5 billion children had been out of school-leading to an education crisis, 370 million children missed out on free school meals, 6.7 million children suffered from wasting due to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. The pandemic has triggered a massive increase in cases of abuse and violence faced by children in India coupled with job losses, uncertainty over lives and livelihoods has created adverse impact on impoverished families and their children, which may push many more vulnerable children into child labour situations and at the same time exposed gaps in India's Child Protection Services and has demonstrated an urgent need for a collaborative approach of voluntary organizations and government.

In absolute numbers poverty has compounded manifolds, a large section of our population the children being the worst sufferers, over 30% still below or at bare subsistence levels, whatever be the measurement or considerations to ascertain the 176 million people being below the poverty line in the last count. For them, each day being a fresh struggle for existence, the enormous and unparalleled human potential of India mostly remains untapped. The government 'for the people, by the people and of the people' has not really lived up to their expectations. The gap between 'haves' and 'have-nots' has been widening exponentially, the have-nots numerically increasing in geometrical proportions. In the wake of the much publicized and widely acclaimed globalization, privatization and liberalization, there is a strong, well-orchestrated, demand for the Government to withdraw even from some of the constitutional obligations of a welfare state. The participation of the voluntary organizations in the flag-ship programmes of the govt. in the core areas of the social sector, again the children being the most pressing 'since they can't wait', is of paramount importance. The voluntary organizations are indeed required to be converted into effective partners in the process of development and the socio-economic transformation of the country. Their strength was reflected in their cohesive engagement with the pandemic work because of their keen understanding of community level issues and contexts.

My own three and half decade experience in the Government, as a police officer and a civil servant, doesn't provide me many reasons to claim that 'service' has been the spirit or the purpose of its existence, except in its title. Had it not been for the chance creation of Prayas JAC Society and my own foray into the social sector nearly thirty four years back, I wouldn't have realized that the social sector or the voluntary action should be treated as a part and parcel of any democratic governance. Even for the police, let alone other segments of the government more directly involved into service delivery, the people and their felt-needs are the starting points of any action, reactive or proactive in character.

Prayas JAC Society which was set up in 1988/89 through Delhi Police to protect and to provide basic care to the homeless or lost and found children whom we came across on Delhi streets, for them there being practically no facilities available. Set-up as a Society to support Delhi police and soon joined by the Delhi School of Social Work (DU) and Shramik Vidyapeeth (converted Jan Shikshan Sansthan-now operating in over 300 districts under the Ministry of education, Skills & Entrepreneurship, GOI), this voluntary organization has travelled a long way to now operate in ten states and Union territories of the country accessing nearly 40,000 marginalized children, youth and women-mostly below or in the proximity of poverty line. This community and need--based organization has been growing in response to the multiple situations of intense poverty, crisis and disasters, served by 635 professionals in Delhi, Gujarat, Assam, Bihar, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Arunachal, Haryana, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Kashmir. Besides serving the children under extremely difficult circumstances under multiple programs, it serves the marginalized youth and women through skill development, economic empowerment, SHG-Microfinance, Health Care etc. while participating in the social sector programs of the government as a reliable and dependable partner.

Though, the Government has reposed immense faith in civil society organizations abilities but it also has to create an enabling environment to enforce institutional, legal, political and administrative conditions and practices that are in place underpin the existence and effectiveness of civil society in enforcing the child protection matrix. The State should put in place robust legislative and administrative frameworks to promote and protect the rights of the children.

The importance of creating an enabling environment within which civil society can operate freely has been emphasised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In General Comment No. 5, the Committee states: "The State needs to work closely with NGOs in the widest sense, while respecting their autonomy...NGOs played a crucial part in the drafting of the Convention and their involvement in the process of implementation is vital....The Committee welcomes the development of NGO coalitions and alliances committed to promoting, protecting and monitoring children's human rights and urges Governments to give them non-directive support and to develop positive formal as well as informal relationships with them"[19]

Preventive and day-to-day operational activities undertaken by voluntary organizations in the field of child protection services under the recently re-incarnated 'Mission Vatsalya', 'Mission Poshan' etc. along with the government have to be strengthened by ensuring the implementation of children related legislation. Child Protection areas being largely interlinked, institutional and non-institutional collaboration and systematic convergence, multi-pronged processes by police, Non-Governmental Organizations to further strengthened to ensure compliance of Hon'ble Supreme Court and High Court Guidelines, Advisories from Ministry of Home Affairs, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), CHILDLINE-1098 (National emergency Helpline for distressed children) in letter and spirit around critical issues such as child abuse, child labour, child marriage, child trafficking, out of school children, trafficked children and missing children.

The 'Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' alongside @75, embodies a powerful commitment to "Leave No One Behind", ensuring a life of dignity for all coupled with a vision of realizing the rights of every child, especially the most disadvantaged and invisible. It is structured around five dimensions of children's rights, namely, Survive+thrive, Learning, Protection, Environment and Fair Chance aligned to 44 child-related SDG indicators. Child (upto 18 years) care, protection, nurturing and development to make them fulfill their basic needs and rights and to achieve their full potential in terms of our commitments and policies is one of the greatest challenges for the Indian state and society.

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CHILD EDUCATION - BRIDGING THE GAP

PUJA MARWAHA
CEO, CRY - CHILD RIGHTS AND YOU

One March morning, when she was preparing for the annual exam, suddenly it struck! COVID-19 shut down schools across India, pushing multitudes of students away from education. For Sobhagya, a girl of Class six at a remote village in Odisha, that was the end of it.

The last time 11-year-old Sobhagya from Kalahandi in Odisha attended school was almost two years ago. One March morning, when she was preparing for the annual exam, suddenly it struck! COVID-19 shut down schools across India, pushing multitudes of students away from education. For Sobhagya, a girl of Class six at a remote village in Odisha, that was the end of it. Not only that, Sobhagya's father lost his job during the lockdown months and over the past two years and more, their family struggled to make ends meet. There was no question for Sobhagya to continue with her studies - having a spare mobile phone with internet access for the girl's education was a distant dream.

And, as months passed on, we discovered that the experimental baby steps had gradually shaped up into a streamlined initiative which we adorably called "the bridge school initiative". Two years on, now bridge schools are running in full swing at 433 villages in 48 districts of 15 states, reaching 26,718 children studying between classes 6th to 12th

As a result, she was gradually pushed to household chores and responsibilities, with no time and inclination for studies. And yes, it was almost the same story with millions like her - all away from schools, lessons and regular studies. Many of them were pushed to household works, many others to more severe kind of commercial engagements. Many were even married off - that, for the families crumbling under huge financial stress, at least ensured one less mouth to feed!

When schools shut the doors for children

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a huge toll on humanity, and over the last two years we've witnessed its effects at multiple levels. An underprepared public healthcare system buckling under the severe pressure of ever-increasing number of patients, countless deaths happening around, unprecedented spectacles of mass migration of poor wage-earners unfolding in front of our eyes with tell-tale images of migrant workers improvising wooden carts and pulling their ailing mothers, pregnant wives and infants in their arduous journey, or that of an exhausted woman dragging her suitcase on a highway, while her five year old son, exhausted and dehydrated, sleeps half-dangling on the suitcase.

But, while we were thoroughly overwhelmed with the numbing spectacles of a disaster, we've failed to see children as COVID's unseen victims. As the fact remains, the pandemic has left a huge trail of long-term effects on children, especially the ones living under the shadows of multidimensional poverty and vulnerability. And if I am asked to single out one area where the scar remains most visible, it's surely the huge loss of education that they have suffered from - a scar that will take long to be healed.

During the past two years we have seen how a huge digital divide has been created - even though online education has gained popularity at certain urban pockets and students from a sound economic background have been benefitted, the benefit didn't reach the children of poorer and under-served communities.

As online education gained its ground, a debate raged on how far this mode of delivering lessons could work, especially in a country like India, where a vast section of children didn't have smart phones or even the access to internet. With a large chunk of our work in the remote villages, we know how difficult it is to keep yourself connected to the rest of the world through internet network, even if you have a good quality smart phone. And, also, how many of the extremely poor families can really afford to buy a smart phone only to make sure that their children can access education? Even if they can afford, the child in the family is perhaps the last one to use it for her studies. In such a scenario, the question that tormented us was if we were anywhere near of having a proper infra-structure to reach out to the last mile child?

This reminds me of a long discussion that I had with the eminent journalist P. Sainath sometime back. While talking about the impact of the pandemic on education, he evaluated the role and significance of the emerging 'ed-tech' in bridging children's education amid the lockdown. A staunch exponent of the idea of social justice, he felt that the key to transform the current scenario was only by adopting the framework of justice, be it in terms of nutrition and health, or education.

Sainath also emphasized that the crisis has highlighted the areas that we need to work, and things that we have not invested in. Drawing on the context of transformative change through the frameworks of justice, he reiterated that just like food justice could have helped in ensuring food for all, similar models could be applied to obtain justice for education - to bridge the digital divide so that all children had equal and equitable learning opportunities during and post the lockdown months.

Global statistics show that schools were shut in 191 countries, which meant that roughly 1.5 billion children and 63 million school teachers were out of classrooms. In India, tens of thousands of children have been out of schools due to the lockdown. Around 19 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, schools for nearly 77 million students in six countries continued to be almost completely closed. An updated data analysis by UNICEF reveals this stark ground reality. In total, an estimated 131 million students in 11 countries have missed more than three-quarters of their in-person learning.

In the Indian context, closure of nearly 1.5 million schools due to the pandemic and the resultant lockdowns has impacted close to 247 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in India (UNICEF data). The pandemic has pretty much kept children out of school for the last 16 months thus creating all kinds of hurdles in their aspirations to complete their school education. Experience tells us that when children are out of school, they are highly susceptible to economic exploitation, sexual abuse, physical violence, trafficking, early marriage, etc. Primary data collected by CRY from a sample of households in its operational areas in 18 states shows us that last year alone there has been substantial increase in child labour.

Also, this long gap from school has meant that children lost touch with their school subjects and the habit/routine of structured learning. The implications on children became more obvious when schools reopened eventually - there were drop-outs, and learning gaps and a broader disassociation from studies.

Going back to school: The first few steps

The moment the pandemic struck and the schools were closed, CRY, along with its partner organisations across 18 states, started exploring alternatives so that the children did not lose touch with education. With more than forty years of experiential learning gathered from the ground, we realized that it was necessary for children to get back to lessons in a structured setting to make up for the crucial learning loss they had incurred and also boost their confidence. Over the past one year and a few months, we have taken up several interventions aimed at just that.

And, as months passed on, we discovered that the experimental baby steps had gradually shaped up into a streamlined initiative which we adorably called

“the bridge school initiative”. Two years on, now bridge schools are running in full swing at 433 villages in 48 districts of 15 states, reaching 26,718 children studying between classes 6th to 12th.

What are bridge schools?

Well, let's think of a school where the primary responsibilities of the teachers are two-fold - one, they teach children as per their syllabi in all major subjects like Maths, Science and Languages; and two - they keep watchful eyes on the level of preparedness of students so that they are ready to go back to school when they are re-enrolled. In these schools, majority of the students are the ones who have been dropped out at some points in their education, and the teachers carefully monitor their progress with the subjects, and try to enhance their ability to interact in the classrooms.

This March, as the schools were set to reopen, all bridge schools geared up to make the children ready to join in, and some tools were discussed with them to cope with classwork and homework. And when it finally happened, we were super-excited to see that close to 80 per cent of children regularly attending bridge centres smoothly made it back to schools, with almost no learning gaps.

Building an environment of joyful learning in the classrooms has been the other important deliverable in our bridge schools. For example, in Jharkhand, our bridge school teachers were using different experiments with local resources and making children understand the concepts of science and mathematics in a systemic and lucid manner. In some places, small libraries were set up within the bridge course centres, where children were encouraged to read curriculum-based reference books as well as fiction. In Bihar, considering the monsoon, bridge teachers engaged children in plantations and water conservational activities. Children enjoyed participating in these kinds of activities.

At all the centres, children practiced drawing, art and craft, essay writing, story-writing, story-telling, folk song practice, puzzles and reasoning, elocution, general knowledge and dance along with their studies. These sessions helped immensely in sharpening their cognitive abilities and also helped them enjoy the sessions.

Summer-camps/mini-camps were held across Bihar and Manipur. In Manipur, mini-summer camps were conducted - there were interactions on topics like Social Duties of Students, Self-Hygiene and sessions on child psychology by expert psychologists, doctors, social workers, teachers, etc. The main objective was to build life-skills through fun and recreation. In Bihar, summer camps were held regularly over the past few months. The best part: around 35-40% of children (out of total enrolled under bridge course programme) showed marked progress in the studied subjects.

Bridge centre teachers visited homes to follow up and map reasons for children who had fallen behind, were irregular in class or had dropped out. They also kept a tab on vulnerable children at the risk of being pushed into labour, or child-marriages, etc. In the centres in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the teachers worked to bring back drop-out children into the mainstream.

A case study from Odisha...

At this point, let me take you back to the story of Sobhagya - the little girl whom we started this article with. In September last year, discussions began on the opening of a study centre at Betrajpali village, in Kalahandi, where Sobhagya lives, with the support of CRY. The first thing that Jyoti, a local teacher, did was to do enroll the students of the village in her centre. She visited them regularly, spoke to the parents and convinced them about the need to send their children to the activity centre. Jyoti also started maintaining an attendance sheet of the children who were attending the classes in her centre.

Sobhagya was one of them. On her first day at the centre, the Class VI student was a nervous wreck, having completely disengaged herself from studies over the past two years. But Jyoti mentored her carefully over the past two months, helping her overcome her learning deficiencies, specifically in subjects like Maths, and boosting her sagging self-confidence. Sobhagya has managed to tide over her hesitancy and is ready to go back to class, as and when her school reopens. Her parents were grateful to Jyoti for helping their daughter to tide over her learning deficiencies and also boosting her confidence.

Jyoti was one of the 20 teachers imparting lessons to 2670 students across 45 centres spread across the operational areas of CRY in Odisha. The centres were running successfully when it came to regular attendance of the children. Very few children had access to private tuitions, and it was only government schools that provided education services to the children in the community. Since the schools had been closed for a long time, it was evident by direct interaction with children that most of the children had unlearned or forgotten basic concepts, skills, knowledge especially in language and mathematical ability. Most of the centres were running in existing schools or community centres like Mandap (A place for the community to assemble for meeting/discussions etc).

The children generally sat in the floor as groups - formed as per their class/standard. All children have received textbooks from schools and they carry with them to the centre.

For fourteen-year-old Kajal from Kushaania village, going to the forests everyday for livestock grazing had become a way of life during lockdown. In September last year, she started attending classes at her village centre. Her teacher Umesh helped her get back to routine lessons in Maths and languages so

that when school eventually resumed, the Class VII student did not fall behind too much.

The rays of hope that keep us moving

With life limping back to normal and schools having reopened across the length and breadth, Sobhagya and millions of others have, yet again, gone through a huge transition. From home confinement and complete delineation from studies to classroom lessons, exams, assignments, homework and more, tiding over this phase was not an easy task, especially for young children. That they are doing well, adapting to change and beginning to dream, again, is testimony to the fact that planned and intervention, based on effective utilization of available resources, works wonders. The process may be long-drawn, but the outcome is cherished.

"I am enjoying my classes. And, I am not scared of studies anymore," says Sobhagya, as she heads off to school with a smile. Her parents thank us for the 'magical' change in their daughter. And, emboldened and encouraged by the impact of bridge school programme, we re-affirm our commitment to reach the last-mile child, in every which way, more so in times of hardships and adversity.

The 'gap' can definitely be bridged and how!

4. GENDER AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

VENTURING INTO MALE DOMINATED OCCUPATIONS TO BREAK STEREOTYPES FOR EMPOWERMENT: ROLE OF CSOS

MEENU VADERA
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While individual women have ventured into male dominated occupations - often under distressing circumstances - organised efforts to support this by civil society has been relatively recent.

I begin my narrative with the stories of Sapna and Radhika. Their difficult circumstances are similar to millions of women in this country. The stories bring out significant learning, especially why it is important for women to venture into male-dominated occupations (alternatively called non-traditional livelihoods), the many barriers to the same and how this entry can be supported in the current contexts in India. The paper explores the role of CSOs in enabling women to break through into this new work.

While individual women have ventured into male dominated occupations - often under distressing circumstances - organised efforts to support this by civil society has been relatively recent.

Over the last couple of decades and more, civil society organisations have been engaging with men through projects, programmes, trainings, campaigns, in order to help them redefine 'dominant and often toxic notions of masculinity' and explore how patriarchy has impacted their lives. In the process these interventions have led to a greater understanding on part of men in their role to advance gender equality.

Income generation programmes of Government and CSOs have largely focused on the 'family' as a unit, and adapt themselves to the existing social structures thus limiting the choices available to women. The transformative work of bringing women into the workforce in non-traditional occupations is recent and poorly documented to date.

This paper attempts to draw out some core themes and trends emerging from work across many CSOs but is limited in scope because little systematic research exists.

Illustrative experiences from a few CSOs will be used to ground the major points that have been identified as emerging from this wide-ranging and complex work though I do not specify their names. The work undertaken by CSOs is vast, and naming a few would be a disservice to the hard work of many others.

Sapna's Story- Dreams do come true...

Sapna came to know about 'Women With Wheels' programme of Azad from her younger sister Vandana who had also trained at Azad and worked as a Chauffeur. Sapna was married with a 9-year-old daughter. Since the beginning of her marriage, her in-laws pressurised her for dowry. Her husband was an alcoholic and would abuse her mentally and physically. Sapna had studied till Class 8 and recognises the importance of education to move ahead in life. "My husband was never supportive of me. I wanted to get educated but he would make fun of me by saying, "do you want to become a collector by getting educated?" Sapna was blamed by her in-laws for provoking her husband to hit her. "My father was also an alcoholic, so my mother would also be stressed and I could not even share this with my mother," she says. But one day, when her husband tried to abuse her daughter, she decided to walk out with her daughter and has been living with her mother and brothers for the last 3 years.

Sapna got enrolled in the Women with Wheels training program. "Earlier, I was confined to the home by my in-laws. I had to follow the purdah system and rarely went out," Sapna shares. But, after receiving her training, Sapna got the confidence to step out of her home without hesitation. "Earlier, I was scared of talking to people. But today, I can talk openly even with strangers. The training sessions on communication, self-defence, GPS navigation and legal rights at Azad have been the source of my confidence," she says. "I am aware of my rights and know how to answer back if someone tries to harass me," Sapna adds.

Sapna, along with 2 of her fellow trainees were selected for a job as a Waste Management Truck Driver in Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). "Receiving the joining letter was one of the happiest days of my life. It felt like the months of hard work had finally paid off," she exclaims.

"When we started work at MCD, many men would say in jest that the women would crash the trucks. But we gave them an answer by showing them that we can drive heavy vehicles with ease," she proudly shares. Sapna has observed a positive change in the attitude of her family and neighbours. "When I tell people that I am working in MCD, they get very impressed which makes me feel very proud," she says. Sapna also managed to successfully get divorced from her husband after a protracted legal process. "My mother differentiates between her sons and daughters. She and my brothers are still not supportive of me and my work. They want me and my daughter to leave their house and return to my ex-husband's home. But I am resolved to live separately with my daughter rather than returning to that house," Sapna shares. "Most importantly, I am resolved to give my daughter the life she deserves, through this job," Sapna says as she shares her hopes for the future.

Story of Radhika.....

Radhika hails from Alleppy district in Kerala and was born in a Dalit labourer family. She was eldest to 7 younger siblings. She lost her father at the young age of 9 or 10. She studied upto class XII, but couldn't continue despite being good at studies because she needed to help her mother. She worked in paddy fields and became a farm labourer. She was married to a daily wage labourer, and her husband died leaving her with two children to look after.

Then Radhika heard about Archana Women Centre (AWC) and approached them for help. At AWC, first they received 'social training' where the focus is on understanding oneself better. Radhika's decision to learn masonry was not supported by her in-laws. However, she enrolled to learn masonry and became very good at her job. She and her group of women began constructing first smaller structures and then progressed to build villas and houses.

Currently, Radhika also travels to Tamil Nadu and other states for construction work. She is associated with a civil engineer and takes up contracts for houses through him. Apart from that she also takes on government contracts. Additionally, she trains other women as masons as well. Radhika is able to earn same as what a male mason makes, and with 20-22 days of work a month, she is well able to look after her family. When she had gotten married, Radhika used to live in a thatched hut. Today, she lives in a big house, a house constructed by her own self. Radhika understands that education is the most important investment one can make in life. She has supported her children to study. Her daughter is pursuing B.Sc and her son is in class XII. Radhika has now emerged as a leader in her community, where other women often approach her to help with violence they face at home or to take her support to negotiate with their families.

Needless to state, Sapna, from Delhi and Radhika, from Kerala - and the millions of women like them- might have had very different life trajectories had they not come across a civil society organisation that stood by them, understood their struggles and facilitated them to empower themselves or become empowered. Stories like these can be found in

all parts of the country. In a deeply unequal and divided society on lines of gender, caste, class, religion, ability, sexuality and other factors, civil society organisations have stood in solidarity with some of the most marginalised communities, groups and persons. They have supported them, enabled them and in doing so, demonstrated that “another world is possible”.

Civil society contributions in enabling women to empower themselves and claim spaces in male dominated occupations come in many organisational forms, approaches and ideologies.

Before exploring these in more detail, let us pause to take a look at the external context. The struggles of Sapna and Radhika are not isolated incidents by any stretch of the imagination, rather they reflect the growing gender inequalities in India, and their stories underline the critical reality that women’s empowerment cannot be complete unless there is a significant shift in the social and cultural gendered norms that stifle any opportunity of meaningful change in their lives.

CSOs, with their proximity to the marginalised women, have had to provide this support, even if it has meant ‘subsidising the State’. In a deeply patriarchal society, women are let down by their families as well as the State. Civil society organisations have also attempted to inform policy making and implementation by the State, based on their learning from the ground. The challenge, though, is huge in this very discriminatory context. The civil society needs to build on its many achievements, but this is also a moment to pause and reflect. Is this work enough or what kind of partnerships or interventions will be required to make a substantive change into the lives of millions of marginalised women? It is now well known that with women’s equal participation in the labour force, India could expand its GDP to several trillion. As the experience of civil society shows, that this is not a challenge that can be addressed with ‘technocratic’ or ‘bureaucratic’ solutions alone. It requires a change in deeply held beliefs and values, change in individual mind sets, in institutional mechanisms and in the systems and structures of society.

Understanding the larger current context

The stories of Sapna and Radhika are truly remarkable, given the prevailing context in India.

India became the fifth largest world economy in 2019 but it ranks among the five worst performing countries on “economic participation and opportunity” (World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2020). A major driver of inequitable participation has been the decline in the female labour force participation rate (LFPR), which was 37% in 2006, 18% in 2019 and 9% in 2020. The figures are truly astonishing and compare badly to the percentage for men, which in 2020 was 67%. This happened paradoxically at a time when the Indian e

economy expanded by over 25%. Regardless of the specific axis of discrimination - age, caste, location, education or wealth, religion - gender gaps remain substantial across all intersectionalities for urban employment numbers. 90% of the working women in India are engaged within the informal sector, earning very little, and working in harsh, unsafe and unprotected conditions. The latest figures indicate an increase in the numbers of women in the workforce, but a closer reading of the data highlights the extreme economic distress that is pushing more women into the lowest paying jobs.

The declining numbers of women in the formal workforce are also reflective of women's unequal access to resources and opportunities. Deep-seated gender inequalities such as restrictions on mobility and early marriage; a high incidence of violence at home and the burden of unpaid care work on women are all significant barriers to getting "decent work"[1].

To elaborate, one in four girls in India gets married or is in a union before the age of 18; UNICEF[2] reports that India accounts for one third of global child marriages. National data suggests that more than 80% of women require permission to leave their homes alone as public spaces are considered unsafe. This myth helps to relegate women to private spaces, i.e., homes, which have proven to be equally unsafe. In India every third woman faces some form of domestic violence, and 52% of women and 42% of men believe it is justified for a husband to hit his wife.

Unpaid care work forms the backbone of any economy, yet it goes unrecognised as work. Women are automatically expected to stay in the private sphere, look after the home, bear children and care for the family. Ninety two percent of the women between the ages of 15 and 59 years participate in unpaid domestic activities daily versus only 29% of men. The average Indian woman spends a little over four hours every day on unpaid care work, almost 10 times the 25 minutes that the average man does. They lack the time for education, skills training and participation outside the home. The violence of forced unpaid care work by women goes unnoticed, unheard, and is still not a concern to the policy makers. "Men are taught to earn money and women must earn love. Earning love, of course, being a far more laborious and risky vocation".[3]

The reproduction of the structural divide between women as caregivers and men as providers accounts in large part for women being unable to access the resources, services, information, for entry to the job market this impacts on their fundamental right to equal opportunity to work. The lack of access to skills and education keeps 90% of women in the economy in the informal sector, in unskilled and vulnerable jobs, without contracts (71% of women in urban areas and 58% in rural areas had no written job contract) or social security.

The Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown tipped the scales further for women as they grapple with the three-fold burden of loss in income from work, increased care and domestic work and an escalation of domestic violence. Globally, one in five women have reported loss of livelihoods. With the informal sector impacted and in the absence of relevant skills or resources, women are less likely to recover their employment relative to men in India.

Covid-19 has not only increased the existing forms of structural violence (such as domestic violence, or the violence of unpaid care work) against women, but added new forms, like the digital gender-gap. In 2020, only 25 percent of the total adult female population in India owned a smartphone, versus 41 percent of adult men. This further impacts their access to skills and decent jobs.

What is the role that Civil Society Organisations have played?

For the longest time it was assumed that benefits of growth will trickle down to the poor. However, the evidence shows that the reality is that the benefits of growth remained caught between the walls of privilege dictated by class, caste, gender and other axis of discrimination. The green revolution and the white revolution, while contributing towards the nation's growth, did not lead to women's economic empowerment. In the first thirty decades or more since independence, the beneficiary within the development discourse has always been a 'family'. Gender inequalities were not recognized as a structural factor in impacting access to and control over knowledge and resources, within the home or society at large. The programmes of Government such as DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) and TRYSEM (Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment) adapted themselves to the existing social contours and none of them challenged the existing gendered norms.

The questioning of these dominant mainstream discourses has always come from civil society and the feminist movement. Their close proximity to the marginalised communities, their ability to question the status quo and the passion to dream the "impossible" has enabled the civil society to develop and demonstrate innovative approaches that work. They have undertaken research that highlights the challenges as well as offered solutions to way forward. They have engaged with the Government for policy making and effective implementation to ensure that the policies are informed by the lived realities of marginalised populations. Their learning from implementation has made them effective and useful to the populations they are meant to serve.

This section definitely is not an exhaustive account of the work being done by different CSOs, but draws out key trends that are illustrative of the wide range of work across geography, trade, and rural - urban areas to highlight the diversity and

creativity of CSO contribution. Here the focus is on bringing women into non-traditional livelihoods, this discourse and approach is relatively recent. The Non-Traditional Livelihood Network of India defines NTL as "livelihood practices that help women break stereotypes and challenge the gender division of labor emerging from the intersections of gender, caste, class, religion, sexual orientation, disability and other marginalities and oppressive structures, with a dynamic context of space and time. NTLs increase the set of viable livelihood choices available to women and give them access and control over skills, technology, market, mobility and resources. They create economic stability along with psychological, social and political empowerment".

Women have ventured into traditionally male dominated spaces for various reasons from the spectrum of distress response for survival to fulfilling their own passions. The Shramshakti Report, under the leadership of Magsaysay Award winner and ex Rajya Sabha Member Ela Bhatt, identified in 1987 women's involvement in traditionally male activities like transplanting, harvesting and threshing paddy, treading pulses and breaking stones. More recently in 2019, the story of KC Rekha made news across country as being the first licensed fisherwoman. It is considered inauspicious for women to go out to the sea for fishing amongst traditional fishing communities. In another sector, in May 2021, 83 women were inducted as Jawans for the first time in the Indian Army, the Jawans were taken in the Corps of Military Police.

Regardless of the reason behind venturing into "male dominated" or 'non-traditional occupations', this has resulted in women breaking the glass ceiling or more aptly a 'concrete ceiling' that the society has instituted in the world of women and work. This process has also been aided by the gains made within the education sector that have encouraged girls to study longer, take on the STEM[1] subjects, and prioritize academic achievement over traditional pressures to marry early. The male dominated occupations or the non-traditional occupations for women are attractive because they offer relatively better remuneration, an opportunity to gain freedom from gendered social norms and expand the choices of work available to women.

The civil society with its ear to the ground, has built on these seeds of change, offering new and innovative possibilities of bringing transformative change in the lives of the people.

I. CSO Contributions - by innovating and making change happen in the lives of women

Civil society organisations across the country, in urban and rural contexts, have contributed through their innovative practice in several ways demonstrating that they can facilitate women's entry into male dominated occupations.

a) The civil society organisations have helped in expanding the livelihood choices with remunerative incomes available to women by showing the viability of women as professionals in a wide range of non-traditional livelihoods. Sapna or Radhika had not dreamt of the possibility of working as a driver or a mason. These occupations are not available to most marginalised women given the highly segregated job market. Like Sapna and Radhika there are now thousands of women across the country working as masons, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, drivers and technicians. Transwomen have claimed spaces to establish collectives, gained entry into government services, started enterprises of their own, are running farming and milk cooperatives.

The new pathways to male dominated occupations or non-traditional livelihoods demonstrated by civil society are gaining momentum as they also offer "remunerative incomes" to women. It is important to note that, Sapna and Radhika were able to win over their families, because they were able to earn 'remunerative incomes'.

While there are many programmes and interventions, by Government and CSOs that aim to increase incomes and get women into the workforce, majority of them continue to operate within a gendered understanding of work that women can do or should do. These traditional occupations often offer only a marginal increase in money they earn and therefore do not enable them to move out of poverty or take difficult decisions of choosing lives free from violence. Such work opportunities can only help one to subsist. They do not help women to take strong empowering decisions and gain control over their lives or bodies.

This is where "Non-Traditional Livelihoods" play an important role. Most skilled jobs available to women from poor families, with low social capital and lower levels of education - such as carpenters, electricians, masons, drivers, technicians or others, are dominated with male presence. Yet, these offer incomes that are remunerative, that have a potential career growth. With her first salary itself, Sapna is able to earn as much as what her husband was earning when they lived together. Radhika became the main bread winner in her family and has been able to ensure inter-generational change by supporting her daughter and son to study further.

b) Another important contribution of the civil society has been in connecting the dots. In highlighting, for example, how violence against women impacts every sphere of their life. Violence against women is a pandemic that has

existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to do so globally. 1 in 3 women globally have suffered some form of physical violence in their lives. Yet, when programmes are designed for education, health, livelihoods or any form of intervention with women, this dark reality is overlooked, not accounted for, not planned for, even taken for granted. On the other hand, violence against women (90% of reported violence cases are from amongst intimate relationships, or within families and close community) is used as an excuse and sometimes a tool to not allow women to choose occupations they could or would like to take; to prevent the women from competing fair and square in the market with men, and to largely stay confined within their homes. The violence need not always be physical. Discrimination and violence have been normalised and legitimised in Indian culture by preparing girls from a young age to accept marriage as their destiny, keeping them from aspiring for anything other than how to serve the in-laws and fulfil their conjugal responsibilities. Very often women learn to love the man they marry, even making excuses for his abusive and non-supportive behaviour.

Many civil society organisations understand this reality and therefore have worked in a more integrated manner to facilitate women's entry into the world of non-traditional livelihoods such that these can become empowering experiences. They have provided the required skills along with awareness, knowledge and confidence for them to understand the inequalities in the society, to realise that abuse and discrimination are not their destiny, and to learn about choices they can exercise for freedom from the same. The civil society has repeatedly demonstrated that Skills are important, but not a sufficient input and a skills++ approach will have to be adopted to ensure that millions of marginalised women can actually negotiate the extremely complex web of gendered social and cultural norms, norms that serve to maintain a 'status-quo' thereby denying them opportunities to acquire skills education that could facilitate their entry into the world of work. Both Sapna and Radhika, might have not been able to make the gains that they have done, if they had also not been trained in alternative ways of understanding their world and in reclaiming their sense of agency.

They have connected the dots between gender-based violence and discrimination to women's access to work, between access to higher levels of education and transitioning from school to work, between well-lit roads and women's mobility to women's ability to sustain in paid work and so on, thereby pointing out the limitations of working in silos of SDG goals and government departments.

It is then a combination of being able to earn a remunerative salary with social benefits and an awareness of her rightful place in this world along with the knowledge of redressal options that exist, that then result in effective empowerment.

By working with the MCD as a driver, Sapna has not just given herself and her children a whole new set of choices in life that she earlier did not have, she also makes a claim to the

public spaces and “occupations” that have been considered as ‘masculine’. In going ahead with her divorce, she questions the ‘normalisation of violence against women’.

c) They have demonstrated that by engaging with men, possible solutions to the challenge of unpaid care work are possible, for example, by questioning notions of ‘heteronormative masculinity’ and offering alternative role models.

Unpaid care work has been an area consistently highlighted by civil society organisations. To make visible the work that women do, to recognize it as “labour” has been the contribution of civil society and the women’s movement. Over the last couple of decades and more, civil society organisations have been engaging with men through projects, programmes, trainings, campaigns, in order to help them redefine ‘dominant and often toxic notions of masculinity’ and explore how patriarchy has impacted their lives. In the process these interventions have led to a greater understanding on part of men in their role to advance gender equality. They have done this through participation in unpaid care work at home, by supporting women from their families and communities to make independent choices, ensuring registration of land or family assets in the names of women, and calling out violent behavior amongst their communities.

It is now well documented that unpaid care work is one of the key reasons for keeping women out of the work force. Making available skills or education will have only a limited impact, unless women are freed from this ‘modern slavery’. There is an increased recognition of these factors, but it will take far more work and concerted action by CSOs, State, Industry and media for this to lead to any systemic change.

d) The Civil society Organisations have redefined the work with adolescent girls at an early age to enable them to aspire for careers and professions that have been hitherto out of their reach.

CSOs have worked and continue to support adolescent girls, helping them question their notions of work that women can do or cannot. They have supported them to complete their schooling, gain a deeper understanding of social and cultural norms that impact their lives and question the same. Intensive support in the form of mentoring, career counselling and coaching has been made available so young girls from marginalised communities can aspire to lives where they have autonomy on their bodies, work and lives. Extensive evidence exists that indicates where adolescent girls have been provided with this support, they have been able to push their age of marriage, study further and aspire for careers that they earlier could not have even dreamt of.

e) The civil society organisations have made accessible government schemes, citizenship and identity documents that form the basis for any engagement in skilled work.

The struggle to enter the work force begins by assertion of one's identity. For millions of women and trans-persons, this alone has been a key hurdle. Marginalised women have often lacked a birth certificate, a school leaving certificate, a pan card to open a bank account. Often the names have not matched across these documents and in many cases husbands or their families have either destroyed those or denied them access to the same. These details become critical to find employment or decent work. Getting a driving license alone requires a birth proof, identity document and proof of residence. For trans-persons, the struggle has been even more difficult. It was only in 2020, that they have even been legally recognized. Stigma and discrimination against them continues to deny them opportunities to study, to acquire skills and to enter the world of work. Civil society organisations have worked tirelessly to bring state and its benefits closer to the people by educating them about their rights, by enabling them to access their entitlements, by interpreting policy and law for them to secure their lives and in numerous other ways.

II. CSO Contribution: Undertaking evidence-based research, building knowledge on what works and challenges that require to be addressed

One of the critical contributions of civil society, has been documenting the reality on the ground, bringing it to the attention of policy makers and building new knowledge based on innovations that the members of CSOs undertake on the ground. These contributions cover a vast spectrum, as getting women into paid work (or 'decent work' as defined by ILO) is not a simple linear equation of making available skills or jobs.

The Shramshakti report sounded a warning bell way back in 1978 by highlighting the plight of women workers in the informal sector and over the years much has been written about it. Despite, their best efforts however, India continues to be failing its women in the work force. The challenge lies in the fact that any real change will require a complex response that is cross sectoral and pitched at multiple levels.

Organisations committed to research on women's rights issues and on gender equality have been continuously documenting the challenges faced by women in the work force and have questioned and critiqued the emerging business models (more recently, the gig economy) in terms of how gender sensitive the same are. They have highlighted the situation of women in informal sector, critically offered perspectives on gender sensitive budgeting, held state to account for discrimination on property rights. These are all important contributions that inform the struggle for women to claim their spaces in non-traditional occupations.

Civil society has contributed towards analyzing national/state/sectoral budgets from a gender perspective. Specifically, studies have been undertaken that highlights, defines and identifies non-traditional livelihoods for women by looking into ongoing initiatives in NTL for women in the country, underscoring sectors/industries where women may be (newly) skilled and productively engaged. The reports also identify issues that hold women back and look into the possibilities for financing a gender-just framework for skills development and decent work. More recently, civil society members have attempted to inform Niti Aayog of the rationale and 'how-to' engage with civil society such that women may be encouraged and facilitated to take on non-traditional livelihoods in greater numbers.

Much of the work undertaken by civil society is informed by the perspectives and lived realities of women's lives. Mobility, and safe mobility at that, is a critical concern for women that impacts their choice of work, their ability to take control over their lives and dictates their expression of leisure. Civil society organisations have repeatedly raised the issue of how public spaces are defined and controlled by male presence. They have undertaken numerous safety audits of public spaces highlighting challenges of mobility for women that impact their ability to choose skill trainings or work outside the home.

Civil society organisations have participated actively in policy making at local, state and national levels - in some cases successfully. Take for example the Vishakha guidelines that then went on to inform the Act on Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Work Places. Or for example the collective effort of civil society in Mumbai to inform the development of Mumbai District Plan such that it includes the gender-based planning approach and include the gender perspective at all levels of the plan. Urban planning and design have been traditionally (and continues to be true largely) undertaken keeping in mind the needs of a man. Height, distance, space and form have been designed assuming the users to largely be male. These biases work quietly and insidiously to marginalise and invisibilise women, to deny them an equal terrain to compete for work. Nothing exemplifies it more than the fact that till very recently, women had to qualify against a very 'male' criterion of height to qualify for the job of bus driver. Hundreds of brave and courageous women drivers who have fought against several odds, empowered themselves to believe that they can be safe drivers of public transport and aspired to become 'gate-breakers' in this domain were rejected because they did not fulfill the criterion of height. The seat of the bus driver, which could have easily been made more adjustable and adaptable for various genders and heights has remained a devil of detail, governed by very 'male dominated' understanding of the role. Civil society efforts have now pushed for a revised criterion and small gains have been made. For the first time in the history of Delhi Transport Corporation, women will be seen driving buses in Delhi. These contributions are significant and important for women to be able to claim their spaces in public and especially male dominated occupations.

Safe and well-lit roads, safe and hygienic washrooms, working women hostels, safe shelters for women survivors of violence, full-time creches for children (even young school going and adolescent children), an accessible and gender sensitive police and justice system, work spaces safe from sexual and physical harassment - these are essential pre-requisites if women are expected to empower themselves and enter non-traditional livelihood spaces to earn remunerative incomes.

Women's movement in India has contributed significantly to global civil society movements on women's rights. It actively participated highlighting the constraints women face in the world of work through the various UN Conferences - Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). Beijing Declaration raised several pertinent suggestions regarding women and work - ranging from demanding changes in the market, terms of employment, discrimination at work place, to changes within the homes, the issue of unremunerative work that remains not recognized, not valued and of no concern to policy makers.

Conclusion

To conclude then, the contribution of the civil society over the last 75 years of independence has been immense in its scope and depth. The civil society effort has evolved over the decades in response to the learnings emerging from the experience on the ground and the changing external socio-political context. In enabling women occupy non-traditional livelihoods or male dominated occupations, it has underlined the critical need to build approaches that break a false dichotomy between 'the private world' and the 'the public world'. Looked at from this lens then, women's empowerment cannot be substantive unless economic empowerment is accompanied by personal and social empowerment.

The challenges posed by increasing social and economic inequalities within nations and amongst them, within communities and amongst them, the threat to natural resources and climate demand that civil society collaborations become stronger, amongst themselves and with the State and market. That there be a mutual dialogue, holding each other accountable to ensure that we are able to build a world on principles of equality, justice and freedom for all.

Notes:

1. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent work as "productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity". In general, work is considered as decent when: it pays a fair income. it guarantees a secure form of employment and safe working conditions.

2. Ending Child Marriage, A profile of progress in India, Feb. 2019

3. Shrayana Bhattacharya, Desperately Seeking Sharukh, pp 79

4. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, commonly referred to as STEM

**AROGYA SWARAJ:
WOMEN TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR BODIES AND OF THEIR LIVES**

MIRAI CHATTERJEE
DIRECTOR, SEWA SOCIAL SECURITY TEAM

Our members had identified health as a priority from the very beginning of SEWA. "Our health is our only wealth," they explained. "Our bodies are our only assets. If we are healthy, we can work and earn and feed our children. If we or our family members fall sick, then we cannot work and have to spend on medical care.

As we celebrate 75 years of our independence and remember all those whose sacrifices led to our freedom, Gandhiji and his extraordinary leadership comes to mind. Not only was he a seeker of Truth, a firm believer in Non-violence (Ahimsa), deeply committed to Sarvadharam or equal respect for all faiths and Swadeshi or building local livelihoods, but also he believed in the people of our country, especially its women, to lead us to a more inclusive India. If we are to attain Swaraj in the true sense of the word, not only ridding ourselves of the colonial masters, then we have much more to do. He has inspired us at SEWA to take forward the unfinished business of our freedom movement,

Further, they suggested that we provide simple, life-saving and preventive health information to them, enabling them to stay healthy and save their precious daily earnings. Thus, our first health activities were developed —"Know Your Body" sessions with our members, explaining human physiology, and what we could do at low cost or no cost to remain well and fit. The idea was to reduce our dependency on doctors and others, and take charge of our own health.

the 'doosri azadi' or Second Freedom, freedom from hunger, poverty, injustice and exploitation.

Gandhiji's Truth, and its embodiment in the lives of our people, particularly the working poor, began to reveal itself to me when I joined SEWA. Slowly, I began to see how relevant and contemporary his message is.

A deep and abiding faith in the wisdom and abilities of our people, particularly the poor, working women of our country, is at the root of all action at SEWA. Their hopes, dreams and priorities provide us with direction and ideas for action.

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This attempt at self-help and self-care resonates with Gandhiji's Hind Swaraj, written over a hundred years ago. In fact, he sharply criticizes the medical profession calling it "parasitical"[1] along with the profession of law. He continues: "Doctors have almost unhinged us. Sometimes I think [1] M.K.Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, Chapter 12, p.50, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad - 14, November 2009

quacks are better than highly qualified doctors[2].He explains that diseases arise "surely by our negligence and indulgence"[3] He concludes his chapter on doctors by saying: "The populace, in its credulity and in the hope of ridding itself of some disease, allows itself to be cheated. Are not quacks then, whom we know, better than the doctors who put on an air of humaneness?"[4]

I read this piece almost twenty-five years after we began our health work at SEWA. With the solid experience of organizing women into their own union, and then forming our own bank, setting up our own health cooperative, Lok Swasthya, did not require much of a leap of faith. But evidently, the registrar of cooperatives, government of Gujarat, familiar with other SEWA-promoted cooperatives, found this one a stretch! It took us two years to convince him that local women health workers are not "quacks", that we women wanted to take charge of our own health, and that this could lead to a vibrant and viable cooperative!

The cooperative itself came together due to the efforts of our SEWA sisters, local health workers and dais, or traditional midwives. The lives and struggles of some of these women are shared here.

Shardaben Becomes the "Doctor" of Shankarbhuvan

Shardaben Becomes the "Doctor" of Shankarbhuvan Shardaben was inconsolable when we met her. Her baby daughter had been taken from her by her husband, who accused her of witchcraft and divorced her. It was easy to see that this charge was both untrue and unfair. Shardaben was from a family of junksmiths and lived in Shankarbhuvan, a sprawling neighbourhood on a garbage dump by the River Sabarmati. She and her family were from the Vaghri community, known for their business acumen and traditionally, vendors and small traders. Her family collected scrap iron, furniture and other used goods from middle class neighbourhoods and sold them in the Sunday market. Shardaben helped to sort the goods and prepare them for sale. She also sewed old, jute cement sacks, and later plastic ones, for re-sale.

Life was not easy in her family of eight. Her schooling stopped after Class 4 and she was married soon after, by the age of fourteen. Her first marriage ended early, and soon she was re-married. She had participated in some of SEWA's early "Know Your Body" sessions and tailoring classes. She was lively and always eager to learn, her mother told us.

But when we met her, she had no will to live. SEWA sisters sat patiently with her and consoled her. Slowly, she came around. She agreed to be one of SEWA's first Community Health Workers or Arogya Sevikas. She agreed to learn how to be healthy and serve others in her community with her new skills.

Over two years, Shardaben rebuilt her life and that of others. She became confident with her new health knowledge and skills, refused an offer for a third marriage, and took her elder sister, Mangiben, in hand.

Mangiben had four children already and was suffering from tuberculosis (TB). Her husband refused to use contraceptives, nor allowed her to do so. He threatened to abandon her and their young children, if she so much as considered family planning. Shardaben coaxed her sister to take the free medicines from the government dispensary to cure her TB. She also convinced her to use contraceptives. Mangiben now found the strength to stand up to her husband and his threats. She began sending her children to school and improving her home from her earnings as a fruit vendor.

Shardaben not only took charge of her own life but that of others around her. She understood that "Swaraj" means control over one's own life and body, even before she had heard of Gandhiji!

Chanchiben Takes Charge

Chanchiben's life followed a similar trajectory as Shardaben's. She is from Vicchhiya village of Ahmedabad district. Physically-challenged and poor, she is also from the Dalit community. When SEWA organizers identified her for the health education sessions in her village, people laughed: "What will such a girl do? She is useless!"

When she was chosen by the village women for training as a health worker, some of the village leaders (all men) were outraged. We will not accept medicines and health services from such a woman!" they fumed.

Today, Chanchiben is a leader. She was asked to stand for election to the village panchayat. She serves 5 villages, bringing life-saving health information and low cost medicines, even Ayurvedic ones, to her village community. The same upper castes who shunned her once, now invite her in to their homes, offer her tea and readily take her health services! She was invited as a speaker in Mumbai at the International Presidents' Organisation, an association of corporate leaders. She spoke movingly, but with quiet confidence:

"I was born with this physical deformity. I was considered useless by my community. Only SEWA welcomed me with open arms. I learned that I too could contribute to society. There was hope even for me. Once I joined SEWA, my world changed forever. Being with my sisters opened my eyes, I saw the world, so much to do, so much to learn. I moved from being in despair to full of hope. I owe everything to SEWA. And to my cooperative, Lok Swasthya. I was surprised to be elected to the Board and served for 6 years. My whole life has changed...there is no going back!"

Ayeshaben Transforms Herself

Ayeshaben had a hard life. She was abandoned by her mother who eloped. Her aunt raised her but was poor. She was married off young to a man who was a compulsive gambler. All she earned from sewing garments went in his gambling. They could not make ends meet. Then she came to SEWA—after the communal riots of 1985. It changed her life. She joined as a health worker in her Bapunagar area. She had dreamed of being a doctor and loved to learn about how to stay healthy.

She began serving others. She quickly developed as a strong health worker and leader. People came to her for all kinds of advice in her area. She saved from her earnings as a health worker, took a loan and bought a house in her own name. After many trials and tribulations, she left her husband...he was unable to change his gambling ways. She raised her two sons single-handedly.

During the communal violence in Ahmedabad in 2002, she provided health care in the relief camps. She also helped SEWA's team survey affected families and disburse insurance claims—thereby handing over money to women in their time of distress.

She also began actively enrolling women and their families in VimoSEWA, SEWA's Insurance Cooperative. She encouraged 200 women to take shares in the newly-formed cooperative. All of them were SEWA members and poor, working women like herself. She assists in helping them access cashless services from nearby hospitals, so that women don't have to go to the money-lender or pawn their

jewellery, when they are sick. She was elected to the Board of Directors of the Lok Swasthya health cooperative, and is its Secretary. Thus, Ayeshaben has strengthened herself, her family and the two cooperatives she is active in: VimoSEWA and Lok Swasthya. She has transformed her life and is contributing to the growth of her union SEWA, and the cooperative it has promoted.

Shardaben, Chanchiben and Ayeshaben all took charge of their own lives and those of others. They practiced what they learned in the service of others like themselves. The new knowledge and skills learned brought new confidence and hope. Knowledge was indeed power for them!

In addition, they found strength in solidarity—they all became active union organizers. Their health work helped to swell the rank of our union membership. They found health services to be an effective entry-point to the SEWA family. They enthusiastically opened bank accounts of their former patients, helped to start up child care centres in their areas, and checked up on the children regularly and later, enrolled women and their families in VimoSEWA, SEWA's insurance cooperative. By working together and for their communities, slowly these women overcame caste barriers. They forged Hindu-Muslim unity through constructive action. Fighting caste barriers and Hindu-Muslim unity are two of the major issues Gandhiji worked for all his life.

All three women were also active promoters of the Lok Swasthya cooperative, accompanying SEWA organizers to the registrar's office and helping to convince him that they could indeed run their own health cooperative. In 1990, they registered India's first health cooperative run, owned and used by themselves!

They also reduced their dependency on doctors, promoted healthy living and habits. They encouraged their neighbours and others to complete their full course of medicines when sick, and accompanied them to the hospitals when required. They learned to navigate the systems and procedures in these hospitals, speak with doctors without fear or hesitation, and challenge those who obstructed women's attempts to access services. They forged new links with doctors, public and private, municipal authorities and others. They truly became the health workers of their own communities and beyond.

In 1990, these three women and 50 others in their cooperative, Lok Swasthya, took a bold step. They had been observing how the prohibitive cost of medicines were driving women into debt or forcing them to reduce the required doses and courses of their treatment. From the share capital that they themselves had put together—Rs 100 per share—they invested Rs 70,000 to buy low cost, generic medicines in bulk. These were then sold to SEWA members and others at a rate considerably cheaper than that of the open market. This was the beginning of our venture into running low cost pharmacies.

Within a year, the fledgling pharmacy, was making a small profit. Each health worker got a dividend on her share. Then Lok Swasthya was invited to run a similar outlet for low cost medicines by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in one of their hospitals. The hospital authorities provided the seed money as a "no interest" loan. Run round the clock and staffed by women only, this outlet broke even within six months. The team stood firm in the face of attempts by local chemists to intimidate them and force closure of the shop.

After a year, we were asked to start another such venture in a municipal hospital in Ayesha's neighbourhood. The women unanimously agreed that the cooperative take this on too. Within a year, we returned the seed money to the hospital. The low cost medicine outlets began to generate surplus for the cooperative. It not only became financially viable, allaying the fears of the cooperative registrar, but also the same department has been consistently giving us an "A" grade for the past thirty years!

Shardaben, Chanchiben, Ayeshaben and other health workers and midwives were not content. Observing that the price of allopathic medicines was ever increasing, they hit upon a new venture—manufacturing Ayurvedic medicines themselves. For some years, they had been suggesting that women reclaim their traditions and use herbs and methods known to them, rather than the pills and potions available in the market. They also had been advising women to use Ayurvedic medicines and local herbal remedies, as these 'green medicines' had less side effects and were environment-friendly.

From the profits of the now chain of three medicine shops in Ahmedabad city, the cooperative invested in factory space and machinery to prepare Ayurvedic medicines. We got a licence from the Food and Drug Commissioner and took a loan to defray some of the start-up costs. We now have a Good Manufacturing Practice certification which adds to our credibility as ethical producers.

Our health workers like Chanchiben became enthusiastic salespersons of our own brand of Ayurvedic medicines called Lok Swasthya. They began to earn from a percentage of the sales. Chanchiben recruited other women in her village to sell the medicines. Savitaben, a dai (midwife) and respected leader of her village, now earns Rs 2000 a month just from the sale of Ayurvedic medicines. And it brings much-needed, low cost medicines, and with no side effects, to her village community.

In "Hind Swaraj", Gandhiji decried the use of "preparations", medicines that are "worth a few pence" but cost "shillings"[5]. He suggested control over the self and over "indulgence"[6]. Shardaben, Chanchiben and Ayeshaben and their now 1500 sisters in Lok Swasthya are following Gandhiji's advice. Taking control over their own lives, advising others against "negligence and indulgence"[7], reducing dependency on doctors and learning to be healthy has been the cornerstone of their health action over almost three decades.

They are moving towards Swaraj through Arogya Swaraj—"self-rule" over their most precious asset, their own health.

VimoSEWA: Solidarity and Support in Times of Crisis

When women were striving for Arogya Swaraj and for financial services through SEWA Bank, they often spoke of the high costs of medical expenditure and how it was a drain on their savings. They explained that one illness experienced by a

woman or her family member plunged her deeper into poverty because she had to use up her savings, borrow to cover the escalating costs of care, mortgage, pawn or sell her assets like jewellery, land and machines. In SEWA Bank, we noticed several depositors struggling to save, taking loans to develop their businesses and paying back the loan installments regularly. They were just about solvent when a crisis hit. Sickness was top of the list. But death of a spouse or an accident, and even natural and human-made disasters resulted in economic setbacks, and worse—indebtedness, and falling deeper into the poverty-vulnerability and debt trap.

Risk mitigation through insurance offered a way out. In SEWA Bank we had been pooling our savings. In our health cooperative we had been taking charge of our own health and that of our communities. Now we would pool our risks and stand by each other in times of crisis. What better way of sharing our individual risk burdens!

In 1992, a sea of hands went straight up when Elaben asked women if they were ready to start up their own insurance at SEWA Bank's annual general meeting. And thus a new effort of solidarity and self-help, and collective care, was born. It was called VimoSEWA or SEWA Insurance.

After almost twenty years of ensuring that insurance reached the poor, VimoSEWA registered itself as a national cooperative in 2009, with share-holders from five states. The 5000 share-holders are all women workers of the informal economy, and their own membership-based organizations like SEWA Bank and Lok Swasthya SEWA Cooperative. It is the first of its kind in India, and the SEWA movement's first national cooperative.

VimoSEWA has an elected board of women workers from different states and representing their membership-based organizations. Experienced insurance professionals work shoulder-to-shoulder with grass-root insurance promoters to manage the cooperative and ensure its viability. More than 110,000 women have insured themselves and their families with VimoSEWA, and there is a demand for more products and services. Over the past thirty years of VimoSEWA, 10 lakh policies and Rs 26 Crores by way of claims has reached women and their families, thereby offering some financial and social protection.

Insurance as a risk protection strategy has taken root firmly, as far as women are concerned. Now unions, cooperatives and NGOs from all over India are eager to avail of VimoSEWA's services.

VimoSEWA is still not a full-fledged insurer, the main barrier being the Rs 100 Crore capital requirement for a licence. However, recently its board voted for converting it into an insurer. Plans are underway to work with government to reduce the capital requirement or else raise the capital required. For the share-holders and board members, no barrier is insurmountable!

VimoSEWA's progress has been possible through the dedicated efforts of its team of local insurance promoters (Vimo aagewans) and its professional staff. It was the Vimo aagewans like Kamlaben, Ashaben and Husnaben who pushed us to develop VimoSEWA as a cooperative.

Kamlaben Offers Risk Protection through VimoSEWA

Kamlaben Parmar is from Gomtipur. She was selling saris for a living. She says: "I thought if I can sell saris, then why not insurance? I liked the idea of us women supporting each other during crisis. It is like being in a family. I was already part of the SEWA family."

Kamlaben went door-to-door explaining about insurance. She is articulate and has good marketing skills. She has insured more than 1000 families, bringing much-needed security and protection to vulnerable, working class communities. She is also making a living from selling insurance. "I earn at least Rs 5000 per month...much more than I would selling saris!" she laughs. "And I have the satisfaction of ensuring that people are risk-free. This SEWA and VimoSEWA have transformed my life!"

Kamlaben made sure that 300 women in her area took shares in the new VimoSEWA cooperative. Kamlaben herself was a promoter of the cooperative. Not only has she benefitted from VimoSEWA - it is her daily bread, but also, she has provided much-needed risk protection to hundreds of poor families. Now she is working hard to collect more premium, build up her organization and develop it into a national-level insurer. She is convinced that being an insurer is the only way to viability of VimoSEWA!

Husnaben Insures Her Neighbours

Husnaben lives in Juhapura, a large Muslim neighbourhood in Ahmedabad. She is a garment worker and single mother. Her husband left her to fend for their two children. She heard about VimoSEWA during the communal violence of 2002. "I saw how women benefitted from VimoSEWA. So I enrolled myself and my children. We have full coverage: for health insurance and also life, accident and asset insurance. I spoke to the VimoSEWA team leader, Diptiben, a garment worker like myself. I asked if I could sell insurance policies to other women workers. And that is how I became a Vimo aagewan!"

Husnaben is fearless and entrepreneurial. Initially, some community elders objected to her selling insurance. They told her it was against their religion. She countered: "How can the Almighty be against insurance by, for and with poor women? We are all sharing our joys and sorrows, supporting each other through insurance. This is God's work! "

Husnaben was the key note speaker at VimoSEWA cooperative's inaugural meeting. Addressing more than 2000 women for the first time, and leaders of the insurance industry, she confessed she was a little intimidated. When she spoke of her trials and tribulations, and of her deep commitment to bettering the lot of other poor women like herself, not an eye was dry! The audience appreciated her courage and perseverance with a thunderous applause. Her children were present to witness her first public speech.

"They told me: 'Ammi, we had no idea you could speak so much and so well! ' I felt then that all my struggles were not in vain!" Husnaben explained.

Ashaben, our Ace Aagewan

Ashaben Ajmeri lives in the Shahpur area of Ahmedabad city. She sewed garments for a living and barely made two ends meet. "I wanted to be a doctor. But I am from a poor family and we could not afford my school fees. So I could not go beyond the 10th standard," Ashaben explains. "Besides, in our Muslim community, girls are not educated beyond school. But I always wanted to do something with my life, to be somebody!"

She heard of SEWA through her cousin who had an account in SEWA Bank. "One day I accompanied her to SEWA Bank. Not only did I also open my bank account, but also, then and there I decided I wanted to work in SEWA. I then heard about VimoSEWA and took up the challenge of selling insurance. I took training and became a Vimo aagewan. I enjoyed my work and began to earn from it. Today I earn Rs 7000 per month from selling insurance. I am VimoSEWA's top performer," she says proudly. "And most of all, I have the satisfaction of helping others to face the many crises in their lives."

Ashaben was unanimously elected to the first board of VimoSEWA. She is an active board member, pushing for better services and new products.

"I will serve women like myself and also ensure that my children live their dreams. I did not become a doctor, but I am working for people and for change in my own way."

Varshaben Insures Her Village

Varshaben is a small farmer. Her family owns land in Navapura village of Ahmedabad district. She is a midwife and health worker. She is active in Lok Swasthya, SEWA's health cooperative. She enjoys people's trust and has been organizing them to ensure that they get work and timely payments under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee programme. While at the worksite for this programme, she spoke to people about VimoSEWA. From their wages, 200 women paid premium to her, insuring themselves and their families.

Some of the insured women obtained their claims, for hospitalization for malaria, diarrhea and gynecological complaints. One person from her village was injured in an accident and got reimbursed for expenses incurred. Varshaben attended to the claims-servicing herself and enrolled more people in VimoSEWA.

Along with Ashaben, she was elected unanimously to the Board of VimoSEWA, bringing her valuable experiences and insights to the meetings. Now her neighbours want her to stand for election to the local village council, the panchayat. Meanwhile, she is a member of her Village Health and Sanitation Committee which has decided that eradicating malnutrition from the village, and keeping the village clean and mosquito-free, are top priorities. Varshaben has organized people to remove their own garbage and place it in a common dump outside the village. Now she is mobilizing people to contribute foodgrains from the harvest to take care of the malnourished children and women of her village.

"If we don't do this, who will? We must start with ourselves. I started as a health worker and now I am a Vimo aagevan also! But I take up whatever issues are considered important by people in my village. I do what I can."

Of Machines and Missing Girls

In the course of our health and organising work, we have come across many instances of gross discrimination of women and girls. Once in Vichchiya village, a baby girl was very sick. Her young mother, Jackyben, was only 17. She had administered opium to her little one, so that she would sleep while she went out and worked on her farm. There was no child care centre in her village. The baby developed respiratory problems and turned blue. We knew that unless we acted at once, she would not survive. The young mother was very distressed and asked us to do whatever we could to save her child. Her mother-in-law, however, said: "Why bother? She is only a girl child. They are more trouble than anything else. Taking her for treatment means incurring expenses. Better to leave her to her fate!"

We were in a quandary: should we act to save the baby or defer to the mother-in-law's wishes. One look at the distraught young mother, and we had no doubt about our course of action. We took the baby to Ahmedabad, and after a few hours at the hospital, she returned home safe and sound. Jackyben could not hold back her tears. Nor could her mother-in-law. The village people were relieved and happy. An important lesson was learned: every child is equally important; we must do all we can for their well-being.

But change is slow. And with unexpected twists and turns. One such is the widespread use of pre-natal sex determination tests, followed almost always by selective abortion of the female foetus. Universal son preference and low value of women and girls in our society results in demand for such tests.

It all began with the educated, urban middle class, using technology—first amniocentesis then ultrasound machines—to determine their baby's gender. Now it has spread like a scourge in many communities, and across class and class lines.

We came across sex determination in the course of our grassroots health work. We noticed that many more boys were being born than girls, in both urban and rural areas. Some of our health workers found that women were going in for these tests. We decided to undertake a campaign about valuing our girls. We also began monitoring clinics in our areas of work, and sharing information with the government authorities who were taking action against clinics providing pre-natal sex determination. In one case, we spoke to an erring doctor who promised that he would stop doing the tests, and he did. These are small steps forward. The larger issue is of changing hearts and minds, of valuing our girls, giving them equal opportunities and an equal share in family property and income.

Gandhiji had little faith in machines, and in Hind Swaraj has warned against their dehumanizing effects. He also had a deep faith in the women of our country, urging them to join the freedom movement and initiatives for constructive action. For the first time in our country's history, women responded with courage and without fear. They struggled shoulder-to-shoulder and on equal terms, encouraged by Gandhiji's call to action.

At SEWA too, we see that women have no hesitation to act and to lead their communities, whether in the economic or social aspects of their lives. Once they build sisterhood and solidarity through their own membership-based organizations, they act decisively and fearlessly. They are ready to swim against the tide—whether against their men-folk or prevailing public opinion. They have taken up issues of discrimination against girls and women, taking small and big steps forward, towards the doosri azadi and swaraj for all.

Arogya Swaraj and Sarva Dharam

Gandhiji often spoke of the four pillars of Swaraj: Removal of Untouchability, Hindu-Muslim Unity, Swadeshi (promotion of local employment and the local economy), and Non-Violence. The latter was more than the absence of violence. Rather it is promotion of peace and harmony, self-reliance and swaraj for all.

SEWA's social security initiatives slowly, and often imperceptibly, contributed to all the four pillars of Swaraj. By bringing women and their families together and working for the well-being of all, caste, religious and other barriers began to disappear. Women identified themselves as workers first, and then as a health worker, midwife or Vimo aagewan. As sisters engaged in a common struggle for justice and equality, and towards the "Second Freedom (Doosri Azaadi)" from poverty, they chartered their course together. They understood, better than most, that our futures are all linked, like the warp and weft of an intricate tapestry, the special 'fabric' that is India.

Working on health, insurance and related issues, they strengthened the local economy—whether by ensuring livelihood through government programmes or their own Ayurvedic medicines. And as health workers and Vimo aagewans, they have been promoting peace and the well-being of all, through taking care of our own bodies and reducing our collective exposure to risks.

With deep insight and commitment to their communities, women like Shardaben, Ayeshaben, Kamlaben and Husnaben, have understood that there will be no Swaraj without Arogya Swaraj. And that attaining Swaraj is our common endeavour, to be achieved peacefully, and together.

Notes:

1.M.K.Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, Chapter 12, p.50, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad - 14, November 2009

2. Op cit, p.51

3. Op cit, p.51

4. Op cit, p.52

5. Op cit, p.52

6. Op cit, p. 51

7. Op cit, p.51

5. DISABILITY CARE

ONE STEP AT A TIME- DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

NIDHI ASHOK GOYAL

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RISING FLAME

It is hard to pinpoint a point in time where rights became real, and asks were honoured by state. But it was in late 1980s and early 1990s that fruits of a movement, a young and committed movement led by civil society, were seen.

Introduction

1 billion persons globally live with a disability, and according to the last census in India, 26.8 million of those live in India. But where did the journey of the recognition of the identity, the visibility of this large minority, and acceptance of their rights commence? It is hard to pinpoint a point in time where rights became real, and asks were honoured by state. But it was in late 1980s and early 1990s that fruits of a movement, a young and committed movement led by civil society, were seen.

Nothing about without us was the mantra embodied by the civil society working on rights of persons with disabilities, a civil society that was largely self-led and supported strongly with empathetic allies. It is important to note just some of the many milestones in the disability rights movement in India that were influenced and made possible through civil society work and subsequent civil society- government

Persons with disabilities were committed to be equal partners and thus there were reminders given to the government of its obligations to have meaningful participation and ensuring that this new disability law was in line with UN CRPD and was leaps ahead of the PWD act in creating enabling environment, access and participation for persons with disabilities.

collaborations and judiciary cognizance.

Disability as a Right, the Disability Laws

After UN declared 1980s as the decade of persons with disabilities, disability rights actors strengthened their resolve and brought collective efforts to work with the government to identify and recognise persons with disabilities as a minority group and pass a law that protects persons with disabilities from discrimination -as promised by the constitution for all citizens- and to provide the basic rights of education and employment. This was followed by public sector changes and had sown the seeds of inclusion for a group who till then was quite neglected and forgotten.

In 2006 came along the path altering instrument - The United Nations Convention on

Rights of Persons with Disabilities- that gave both a hope and an anchor to disability rights leaders and actors in India and many countries in the world. Once the government ratified the convention, Indian civil society took it upon them to work alongside the government and remind them of their global commitment.

A draft bill was proposed by the committee appointed by the government- a committee headed by nondisabled expert. This was also further altered by the government and the process and draft invited serious discontent from the community. Persons with disabilities were committed to be equal partners and thus there were reminders given to the government of its obligations to have meaningful participation and ensuring that this new disability law was in line with UN CRPD and was leaps ahead of the PWD act in creating enabling environment, access and participation for persons with disabilities. To ensure that the law was not just about protection but about empowering, civil society succeeded in influencing the government to set up a standing committee. A nationwide consultation by this committee saw enthusiastic response of persons with disabilities across geographies, socio economic class, castes and religions, and of course across all genders. Finally the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 was passed which worked on the principles of disability justice as per the UNCRPD.

Influencing Global Agendas

Disability is not a homogenous group and access needs are varied and diverse. Reform was brought in Indian law and global policies by the print disabled community. Earlier each time a student or anyone who was print disabled made reading material accessible to them by converting them into electronic formats, or any organisation who did so, could not legally share this with their print disabled friend or peer or fellow student due to the copyright law. The organisations scanning books were not allowed to store them even to share with the other print disabled community members they catered to. To provide equal access to reading material to print disabled communities (blind and low vision individuals , persons who are dyslexic, those with locomotor disabilities that made holding and using physical books challenging etc.) and to increase efficiency and reach of organisations supporting the said individuals, activists and advocates ensured the amendment of the Copyright law in 2012. This success in India was instrumental in bringing about global change- the negotiation and signing of the subsequent Marakesh treaty.

Making Change Happen

There are multiple examples of disability rights groups standing strong, upholding commitments and also educating the public, systems and processes, law and policy makers to act and change. The journey of accessible elections

that commenced in 2005 steadily bore fruits and in 2019 we saw accessible and inclusive election processes resulting in participation of over 6 million disabled voters; The Right to education act amended to include children with disabilities in the disadvantaged section of children after the civil society representations; Criminal Law Amendments ensured that for the first time ever women with disabilities and their specific needs to navigate the justice system were included in a criminal law. Many more such advances towards building an inclusive, just and equitable society are an outcome of a vibrant and participatory self-led disability civil society. Because we recognise that the cost of exclusion, which is estimated to be up to 7% of GDP, will be a heavy price for a developing economy.

We have journeyed a long road and there have been express ways and U- turns, but through this uphill road and rough terrains, persons with disabilities, organisations working on rights of persons with disabilities have stood strong as leaders, as experts and most importantly as collaborators for other movements and civil societies, governments and also holding the justice systems accountable where needed, to honour India's commitment of leaving no one behind.

6. ENVIRONMENT & BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

**THE FUTURE OF SEED: HOW 3 DECADES OF NAVDANYA'S WORK HAS
CONTRIBUTED TO SEED FREEDOM, FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND PROTECTION OF
BIODIVERSITY**

VANDANA SHIVA
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST & AUTHOR

Azadi ke Bija (Seed Freedom) is the very basis of our food freedom. We renew our commitment to Bija Swaraj and Anna Swaraj during Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsava.

Over the past four and a half decades of my service to the Earth, my intellectual journey to transcend the mechanical mind, my engagement in creating living economies based on non-violence and real creativity, living democracies based on real freedom, and living cultures based on love and compassion, I have always turned to our struggle for freedom from the British Empire, and to Gandhi's teachings for inspiration to act in times of hopelessness, to open spaces when all spaces are shrinking, to cultivate compassion and solidarity in times of greed, fear and hate, to reclaim our power when we are being told power is the monopoly of those who derive fake power from money, and money alone .

While the times have changed, the patterns of colonisation stay the same, based on violence, destruction of people's

In response to the passage of Seed Act and growing farmers suicide, Navdanya undertook Seed Pilgrimages (Bija Yatras) to stop farmers suicides and create an agriculture of hope using heritage seeds and farmers agro ecological knowledge.

freedoms and economies, taking what is not yours, collecting unjust rents, creating constructs of divide and rule, and supremacy. And the patterns of liberation and freedom are perennial. And these contours of freedom shape the path for the Resurgence of the Real.

Satyagraha is the deepest practice of democracy -the moral duty to not cooperate with unjust and brute law and exploitative and undemocratic processes. This is the first step in breaking free of an enslaving, colonising system. "Satyagraha"-the force of truth- is Gandhi's word for noncooperation with systems, structures, laws, paradigms, policies that destroy the earth and rob us of our humanity and our freedoms, that crush our potential for compassion and sharing, that atrophy our hearts, our minds ,our hands.

Swaraj, self organisation, self-rule, self-governance, autopoiesis is the basis of real freedom in nature and society, beginning at the smallest level, emerging at higher levels. Resistance by itself does not create freedom from oppression. We need to also sow the seeds of real freedom in our imagination, in our daily lives, through our everyday actions, and our diverse and multiple relationships.

Swadeshi is self-making, based on local resources, indigenous knowledge, and community. It allows the expression of our fullest creativity as human beings and as Earth Citizens. In Swadeshi we are co-creative with nature's intelligence, creativity, and regenerative potential, and the creativity and intelligence of our fellow human beings. As co creativity with nature, it combines production with conservation. It is not extractive , polluting , degrading to the planet and to human communities. It is the foundation of sustainability. It is the core of economic democracy. It is the source of Real Wealth, of wellbeing and happiness for all.

Real freedom and Real Wealth creation call for the practice of Satyagraha, Swaraj, and Swadeshi in integrity and integration. Resistance without another imagination rooted in the real combined with constructive action, will not create another world. Sowing the seeds of freedom is not imaginary, it is a real act, an act in which we become one with the Earth, and one in our hands, hearts and heads. The violent dictatorships of today divide. They divide us from the Earth, and our capacity to create with the Earth, so we are compelled to buy what we need as junk commodities -our food and clothing, our knowledge and information, our friendships and "happiness". They divide us from each other. They divide us from ourselves, crippling our capacities to think free, be free, live free, our capacity to create and produce. Oneness is our being, our source of power .Our power to resist, nonviolently. Our power to co-create, nonviolently.

Bija Swaraj, Anna Swaraj: Freedom in times of Corporate Globalisation, Azadi in times of Seed Dictatorship

Swaraj _Sowing The Seeds of Freedom, The Seeds of Diversity

When I started Navdanya in 1987, I took inspiration from Gandhi's Spinning Wheel. For me the Seed is today's Spinning wheel. The British Empire was based on land grab and colonising of entire continents, on people grab as slaves to produce cotton and indigo, to then capture the textile markets of the world. The contemporary Empire of the 1 % is based on grabbing seeds and lifeforms, patenting them and forcing GMOs on people .The Charkha was an advanced instrument of freedom, not a "primitive "Technology". Farmers' varieties and open pollinated varieties are not "primitive". They are extremely sophisticated when measured in terms of ecological resilience, democratic freedom, and nutrition and health.

As Nicholas Care writes in the Glass Cage "We assume that anyone who rejects a new tool in favour of an old one is guilty of nostalgia, of making choices sentimentally rather than rationally. But the real sentimental fallacy is the assumption that the new thing is always better suited to our purposes than the old thing. That's the view of a child, naive, pliable. What makes one tool superior to another has nothing to do with how new it is. What matters is how it enlarges us or diminishes us, how it shapes our experience of nature and culture and one another ".

Mahatma Gandhi's spinning wheel and Gandhi's ghani (the indigenous cold press oil mill) are both symbols of swadeshi as economic freedom and economic democracy.

Gandhi inspired everyone in India to start spinning their own cloth in order to break free from the imperial control over the textile industry, which enslaved our farmers to grow cotton and indigo for the mills of Lancashire and Manchester, and dumped industrial clothing on India, destroying the livelihoods of our spinners and weavers. The spinning wheel and khadi became our symbols of freedom.

Gandhi promoted the ghani to create employment for the farmer and processor and to produce healthy, safe and nutritious edible oils for society. What the spinning wheel is to "kapda", the economy of clothing and textiles, the "ghani" is to "roti", the economy of food.

The chains of unfreedom are today globally integrated. They control every dimension of our lives through an integrated control system designed by the mechanical mind and the money machine.

The seeds of freedom are in our minds and inner hands. Swaraj, as self organised freedom, begins deep within each of us.

The Erosion of Democracy and the Rise of the Politics of Fear and Hate
Under corporate influence, governments increasingly act on behalf of corporations extinguishing a democracy "of the people, by the people, for the people". Political power is reflecting the top 1% of the economic pyramid, crushing the 99% and with them the Earth and her species. Our challenge is how to shift the dominant political system away from the exploitative and non-sustainable economic model. The state is mutating into a corporate entity leaving the people of the world and the planet to suffer the consequences of Climate Change with no penalties for the corporations that have brought us to the crises.

Across the countries of the South, this transformation has occurred under the aegis of "Structural Adjustment" and "Trade Liberalisation", while in Europe it goes by the name of "Austerity". It is a one way extraction of power from

the people, increasingly leaving them powerless, unable to protect their land, lives, and livelihoods. It is a system that creates economic insecurity and makes "fear" of the "other" the primary political currency for electoral gains.

Thinking and acting as one humanity is now an economic and political imperative to transcend the separations, divisions, and conflicts on which the dominant paradigm is based.

3 decades of Bija Swaraj-Sowing the Seeds of Seed Freedom

Seed is the future

It holds within itself millennia of past evolution and the potential for evolving for millions of years in the future.

Seed is not just the source of life. It is the very foundation of our being. For millions of years seed has evolved freely, to give us the diversity and richness of life on the planet. For thousands of years farmers, especially women, have evolved and bred seed freely in partnership with each other and with nature to further increase the diversity of that which nature gave us and adapt it to the needs of different cultures. Biodiversity and cultural diversity have mutually shaped one another.

Seeds are the first link in the food chain and the repository of life's future evolution. As such, it is our inherent duty and responsibility to protect them and to pass them on to future generations. The growing of seed and the free exchange of seed among farmers has been the basis to maintaining biodiversity and our food security.

Today, the freedom of nature and culture to evolve is under violent and direct threat.

The threat to seed freedom impacts the very fabric of human life and the life of the planet.

In the last few decades there has been an attempt to close the future evolution of seed by creating sterile, terminator seeds that are sterile and do not give seed, as well as by imposing patents on seed.

A patent is an exclusive right to own, make, sell, produce, and use a patented product.

A patent on seed means that seed, a living organism, is defined as a manufacture, invented by a corporation. For me this is unscientific because seeds are self-organised, self-evolving, self-renewing, self-multiplying living systems. A seed is not a machine.

A patent on seed is also unjust and unethical.

A patent on seed implies that a farmer saving seed is an "intellectual property thief". But it means more. A system in which seed has become a corporate monopoly, a system in which a few companies control the seed supply is in effect a system of slavery for farmers. Where the freedom of seed disappears, the freedom of farmers disappears. This is why we started Navdanya .Navdanya means nine seeds which symbolises the richness of biodiversity. It also means the new gift which for us is the gift of seed as a commons and a source of life. Since 1987 we have worked for the defense of Seed Sovereignty and Seed Freedom (Bija Swaraj)

Movements like Navdanya have created the possibilities of a continuation of the future of seed in its diversity, renewability, integrity and freedom through shaping laws that defend the integrity of seed and farmers rights, based on ethics, ecology, diversity and creating movements that protect the freedom of the seed to continue to evolve in the future, and the freedom of farmers to save and exchange seed. We have done this in the context of closure of the future being designed by 3 coporate giants which sell chemicals and GMO seeds adapted to those chemicals, primarily to patent seeds and collect royalties for seeds from farmers in the form of a Bija Lagaan .The three giants are Monsanto -Bayer, Dow- Dupont, and Syngenta Chem China.

In 1987 I was invited to a meeting where the corporations were present had said they would control all seeds ,through GMOs , Patents , and Global Free Trade Agreements like GATT, and every farmer would have to buy seeds from them in every season .

That is when I committed myself to protect our seed diversity and farmer's rights to save, breed, and exchange seed freely, in the context of the emerging threats of the TRIPS Agreement (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) which opened the door to the introduction of GMOS, patents on seed and the collection of royalties. A Monsanto representative later stated "In drafting these agreements we were the patient, diagnostician, physician all in one". Corporations defined a problem - and for them the problem was farmers saving seed. So they offered a solution, and the solution was the introduction of patents and intellectual property rights on seed, making it illegal for farmers to save their seed.

Since 1991, when the Dunkel Draft Text of the WTO agreement were leaked Navdanya organised awareness campaigns and rallies to alert farmers across the country about the emerging seed monopoly through patents. Navdanya spearheaded the movement to protect the farmers' rights to biodiversity, rights of seed saving and seed exchange. We have been organizing several seminars, yatras, signature campaigns to create awareness amongst the farmers and also to sensitize the policy makers and politicians of the country to defend seed freedom.

The corporate assault on Seed Freedom

A reductionist, mechanistic science and a legal framework for privatizing seed and knowledge of the seed reinforce each other to destroy diversity, deny farmers innovation and breeding, enclose the biological and intellectual commons, and create seed monopolies. Seed as a common good became a commodity of private seed companies, traded on the open market.

Farmer's varieties have been called "land races", as if women and farmers had no role in breeding, they have been called "primitive" cultivars. They have been reduced to a "genetic mine" to be stolen, extracted and patented. Not only is the negation of farmers' breeding unfair and unjust to farmers, it is unfair and unjust to society as a whole.

Industrial breeding has been based on strategies to sell more chemicals, produce more commodities and make more profits.

The High Yielding Varieties (HYV) of the Green Revolution were in reality High Response Varieties, bred to respond to chemicals. Hybrids are designed to force the farmer to the market every season, since they do not breed true. "Yield", focusing on the weight of a single commodity is an inappropriate measure. Commodities do not feed people - they go to producing bio-fuel and animal feed. Quantity empty of quality, and weight empty of nutrition does not provide nourishment. Beginning with the false assumption that farmers' varieties are "empty", industrial corporate breeding gives us seeds and crops that are not only nutritionally empty, but loaded with toxins.

The rendering invisible of the diversity that seeds farmers have bred began with the so called 'Green Revolution' The Green Revolution narrowed the genetic base of agriculture, encouraging monocultures of rice, wheat and corn. Varieties bred for response to chemicals were declared Miracle Seeds and High Yielding Varieties (HYVs).

Industrial breeding has used different technological tools to consolidate control over the seed - from so called HYVs, to hybrids, genetically engineered seeds, "terminator seeds", and now synthetic biology. The tools might change, but the quest to control life and society does not.

What I have called the "Monoculture of the Mind" cuts across all generations of technologies to control the seed.

- While farmers breed for diversity, corporations breed for uniformity.
- While farmers breed for resilience, corporations breed vulnerability.
- While farmers breed for taste, quality and nutrition, industry breeds for industrial processing and long distance transport in a globalized food system.

- While farmers share their seeds, corporations define seed saving and sharing as an intellectual property crime.

Monoculture of industrial crops and monocultures of industrial junk food reinforce each other, wasting the land, wasting food, and wasting our health.

The privileging of uniformity over diversity, of the quantity over quality of nutrition, has degraded our diets and displaced the rich biodiversity of our food and crops. It is based on a false creation boundary which excludes both nature's and farmers' intelligence and creativity. It has created a legal boundary to disenfranchise farmers of their seed freedom and seed sovereignty, and impose unjust seed laws to establish corporate monopoly on seed.

Whether it be breeders rights imposed through UPOV 91, or Patents on Seed, or Seed Laws that require compulsory registration and licensing, an arsenal of legal instruments are being invented and imposed undemocratically to criminalize farmers seed breeding, seed saving and seed sharing.

Every seed is an embodiment of millennia of nature's evolution and centuries of farmers' breeding. It is the distilled expression of the intelligence of the earth and intelligence of farming communities. Farmers have bred seeds for diversity, resilience, taste, nutrition, health, and adaption to local agroecosystems. Industrial breeding treats nature's contributions and farmers' contributions as nothing.

Just as the jurisprudence of *Terre Nullius* defined the land as empty, and allowed the takeover of territories by the European colonies, the jurisprudence of intellectual property rights related to life forms is in fact a jurisprudence of *Bio Nullius* - life empty of intelligence. The Earth is defined as dead matter, so it cannot create. And farmers have empty heads so cannot breed.

The Green Revolution was an exemplar of the deliberate destruction of diversity. The new biotechnologies, are repeating and deepening these tendencies, rather than reversing them. Further, the new technologies in combination with patent monopolies being pushed through intellectual property rights regimes in GATT/WTO and other trade platforms are threatening to transform the diversity of life forms into mere raw material for industrial production, and limitless profits. They are simultaneously threatening the regenerative freedom of diverse species, and the free and sustainable economy of small peasants and producers which is based on nature's diversity and its utilization.

The seed, for example, reproduces itself and multiples. Farmers use seed both as grain as well as for the next year's crop. Seed is free, both in the ecological sense of reproducing itself, as well as in the economic sense of reproducing the farmers livelihood.

This seed freedom is however a major obstacle for seed corporations. If the market for seed has to be created, the seed has to be transformed materially, so that reproducibility is blocked and its status has to be changed legally, so that instead of being the common property of farming communities, it becomes the patented private property of Seed Corporations. Over the last 30 years Navdanya has both protected and conserved seeds and biodiversity as part of Bija Swaraj. We have also resisted laws that threaten our seed freedom. And I have personally had a role in shaping laws that recognise farmers breeding and do not allow patents on seeds.

The TRIPS Agreement and Patent Monopolies

We are all members of the earth family, a steward in the web of life. Yet corporations who claim legal personhood, are now claiming the role of creator. They have declared seed to be their "invention", hence their patented property. A patent is an exclusive right granted for an "invention", which allows the patent holder to exclude everyone else from, making, selling, distributing and using the patented product. With patents on seed, this implies that the farmers' right to save and share seed is now in effect defined as "theft", an "intellectual property crime".

The door to patents on seed and patents on life was opened by genetic engineering. By adding one new gene to the cell of a plant, corporations claimed they had invented and created the seed, the plant, and all future seeds which have now become their property. In other words GMO meant God Move Over.

In defining seed as their creation and invention, corporations like Monsanto shaped the Global Intellectual Property and Patent Laws so that they could prevent farmers from seed saving and sharing. This is how the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) Agreement of the World Trade Organization was born. Article 27.3(b) of the TRIPs Agreement states: "Parties may exclude from patentability plants and animals other than micro-organisms, and essentially biological processes for the production of plants or animals other than non-biological and micro- biological processes. However, parties shall provide for the protection of plant varieties either by patents or by an effective sui generis system or by any combination thereof." Again, this protection on plant varieties is precisely what prohibits the free exchange of seeds between farmers, threatening their subsistence and ability to save and exchange seeds amongst one another.

The TRIPS clause on patents on life was due for a mandatory review in 1999. India in its submission had stated "Clearly, there is a case for re-examining the need to grant patents on lifeforms anywhere in the world. Until such systems are in place, it may be advisable to:- (a) exclude patents on all lifeforms;"

The African group too stated "The African Group maintains its reservations about patenting any life forms as explained on previous occasions by the Group and several other delegations. In this regard, the Group proposes that Article 27.3(b) be revised to prohibit patents on plants, animals, micro-organisms, essentially biological processes for the production of plants or animals, and non-biological and microbiological processes for the production of plants or animals. For plant varieties to be protected under the TRIPS Agreement, the protection must clearly, and not just implicitly or by way of exception, strike a good balance with the interests of the community as a whole and protect farmers' rights and traditional knowledge, and ensure the preservation of biological diversity."

This mandatory review has been subverted by corporations using some governments within the WTO: this long overdue review must be taken up to reverse Patents on life and Patents on Seed.

Life forms, plants and seeds are all evolving, self-organized, sovereign beings. They have intrinsic worth, value and standing. Owning life by claiming it to be a corporate invention is ethically and legally wrong. Patents on seeds are legally wrong because seeds are not an invention. Patents on seeds are ethically wrong because seeds are life forms, they are our kin members of our earth family.

The world view of Bio Nullius - empty life - unleashes violence and injustice to the earth, to farmers, and to all citizens. The violence of the Earth is rooted in both the denial of the creativity and the rights of the Earth, women and farmers as well as in the displacement of diversity.

Defending farmers rights and the integrity of the Seed in Law

Through our movements in India we have ensured that our laws recognize farmers' rights and the fact that biological processes are not inventions. Because of our work with seeds, farmers' rights and intellectual property rights, I was appointed to the expert group to draft the Plant Variety and farmers Rights Act. The Act has a clause on farmers Rights which states that 39. (1) *Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, - (iv) a farmer shall be deemed to be entitled to save, use, sow, resow, exchange, share or sell his farm produce including seed of a variety protected under this Act in the same manner as he was entitled before the coming into force of this Act.*

To counter the globalized IPR system to be implemented at the national level, Navdanya conceptualized the idea of Common Property Rights in Knowledge as early as in 1993. RFSTE/ Navdanya drafted model laws, which were then used and further developed by the Third World Network and the Organization of African Unity for creating sui generis options based on community rights.

The work of Navdanya and the National working group on Patent law also had an impact on the amendments made in our Patent laws following the coming into force of the WTO agreements.

The 1970 Patent Act of India excluded patents in agriculture, and product patents in medicine. The Act had to be amended when India signed the WTO agreements, including the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement of WTO. However, because of strong movements, clauses like 3 on "What are not inventions" were strengthened. Article 3(d) excludes as inventions "the mere discovery of any new property or new use for a known substance"

Article 3(j) excludes from patentability "plants and animals in whole or in any part thereof other than micro-organisms but including seeds, varieties, and species, and essentially biological processes for production or propagation of plants and animals".

On 5th July, Hon Justice Prabha Sridevi, Chair of the Intellectual Property Appellate Board of India, and Hon Shri DPS Parmar, technical member, dismissed Monsanto's appeal against the rejection of their patent application to the Patent office for "Methods of Enhancing Stress Tolerance in plants and methods thereof." The title of the patent was later amended to "A method of producing a transgenic plant, with increasing heat tolerance, salt tolerance or drought tolerance".

The patent office refused to grant the patent as it was found that the application lacked an inventive step the patent office found that it is not patentable under 3(j) as claims also include essential biological process of regeneration and selection, which includes growing of plant in specific stress condition.

Monsanto tried to create an irrelevant and false opposition of natural production of plants versus production based on human intervention. This is false because farmers' breeding and conventional breeding also involves substantial human intervention. The patent office and the appellate board correctly rejected this argument, and stressed Monsanto's application was not an invention but "based on many generic steps that are essentially biological, taken in sequence, still essentially biological".

This decision will have far reaching impact on India's biodiversity, farmers' rights and food security.

Seeds of Hope

Monsanto's patent application was for climate resilient traits of cold tolerance, salt tolerance and drought tolerance that our farmers have evolved over millennia, through applying their knowledge of breeding. Climate resilient traits will become increasingly important in times of climate instability.

Along coastal areas, farmers have evolved flood tolerant and salt tolerant varieties of rice such as "Bhundi", "Kalambank", "Lunabakada", "Sankarchin", "Nalidhulia", "Ravana", "Seulapuni", "Dhosarakhuda".

Crops such as millets have been evolved for drought tolerance, and provide food security in water scarce regions, and water scarce years.

Corporations like Monsanto have taken 1500 patents on Climate Resilient crops. Navdanya/Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, have published the list in its report, "Biopiracy of Climate Resilient Crops: Gene Giants Steal Farmers Innovation".

Navdanya decided to save these vanishing rice diversities of Odisha through a system of germ-plasm-conservation employing both in situ and ex situ methods and at the same time carry out experiments on their sustainability in varied eco-climatic conditions in view of rapid climate change and yield potentials under various soil amendments. Their behaviours and responses are being recorded. This came handy while selecting the seeds of specific rice diversities for empowering the local communities in rehabilitating agriculture in disaster areas like Erasama in Odisha after the Orissa super cyclone in 2000, Nagapattinam in Tamilnadu after the Boxing Day tsunami in 2005 and Nandigram in Bengal in 2007.

Navdanya has also given hope to the victims of tsunami. The tsunami waves affected the agricultural lands of the farmers due to intrusion of seawater and deposition of sea land. More than 5203.73 hectare of agricultural land in Nagapattinam was affected by the tsunami. The Navdanya team conducted a study in the affected villages to facilitate the agriculture recovery. The team, distributed 3 saline resistant varieties of paddy, which included Bhundi, Kalambank and Lunabakada, to the farmers of the worse affected areas. These varieties of native saline resistant kharif paddy seeds were collected from Navdanya farmers in Orissa amounting to a total of 100 quintals.

Navdanya Odisha as of now maintains 4 seed banks, 3 village level and 1 central level, where seeds of diverse rice varieties are conserved and renewed every year. Climate resilience factor is given importance in the village level seed banks when all available rice land races are conserved in the central seed bank. Navdanya also encourages individual cultivators to save, exchange and increase diversities in his/ her own fields. The village level seed banks are located in different and varied eco-climatic zones, like salt prone, flood prone and drought prone areas. The central seed bank has 700 rice varieties in its accession out of which 119 varieties are climate resilient. 33 of these are salt and flood tolerant including 1 aromatic variety, 47 are flood tolerant and 39 are drought tolerant including 3 aromatic and 2 therapeutic rice varieties. The rest 581 varieties belong to the general category. There are 56 aromatic rice varieties of which 2 have unique and diverse aroma, 1 smelling like fried green gram and the other, like cumin seed not available anywhere in the world. The therapeutic rices are used in old age tissue rejuvenation.

Diversity, Seed Exchange and Yield Potentials

Seed exchange has been the back bone of paddy cultivation until the green revolution. Native paddy plants have diverse basal sheath colours, with about 9 shades of 5 colours, ranging from green, yellow, purple, and violet to black. Reappearance of wild variety is an inherent character of paddy cultivation. Cultivators, hence, replace the variety with a different basal sheath colour next season just to be able to distinguish the weeds which are then manually removed. All the green revolution varieties have the same basal sheath colour, making it difficult to distinguish the wild weed which is never removed. A particular variety cultivated in a given field for more than 3 years lose yield, hence, is replaced. This replacement used to be procured through seed exchange, a part of the barter system that was in place till a few decades ago. Thus the cultivators used to gain twice, a new variety and an ensured more yield as the new variety always yielded more. The green revolution proponents do not contribute to this gospel truth. It has been further found out that seeds exchanged over a long distance for growing in the same type of micro-climate not only yielded much more but often even changed its potentials. Two examples will suffice to put all doubts at rest.

1. Udasiali, an indigenous photosensitive kharif paddy variety transported over 500 kilometers from Balasore to Erasama in Jagatsingpur as part of post 1999 super cyclone disaster agricultural rehabilitation yielded at par in rabi.
2. Three select Odisha salt tolerant paddy varieties transported over a distance of over 1500 kilometers from Balasore to Nagapattinam in Tamilnadu under the 'seeds of hope' programme following 2004 tsunami yielded three times more and far better than any known high yielders. The same varieties behaved even better when cultivated in Indonesia, another 1000 or more kilometers away, in 2006 by Professor Friedhelm Goltenboth of Hohenheim University, Germany.

Nearly 400000 farmers in India have committed suicide in India since 1995. Most of these suicides are in the cotton belt. Monsanto now controls 95% of the cotton seed supply through its GMO Bt cotton, and the associated Intellectual property claims. While Monsanto does not have a patent on the Bt cotton, it collects "technology fees" as a royalty payment. Costs of cotton seed jumped 70000% with the introduction of Bt cotton. During 2004, the farmer had to pay Rs 1,600 for a single 450 gm packet of Bt cotton seeds which included a technology fee component of Rs 725.

In defining seed as their creation and invention, corporations like Monsanto shaped the Global Intellectual Property and Patent Laws so that they could prevent farmers from seed saving and sharing and force them into dependence on their patented GMO seeds. This is how the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) Agreement of the World Trade Organization was born.

In response to the passage of Seed Act and growing farmers suicide, Navdanya undertook Seed Pilgrimages (Bija Yatras) to stop farmers suicides and create an agriculture of hope using heritage seeds and farmers agro ecological knowledge. Hence, the Bija Yatra 2006-2007 was launched on 9th of May to mark 150 years of our struggle for freedom by building a movement to stop the genocide of our farmers and reclaim our food sovereignty. The Yatra started from sevagram, District Wardha in Maharashtra. The Yatra was concluded on 26th May in Bangalore, Karnataka. The yatra covered Amravati, Yavatmal, Nagpur and vidarbha region of Maharashtra, Adilabad, Warangal, Karimnagar and Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, and Bidar, Gulbarga, Raichur, Hosepet, Chitradurg and Bangalore in Karnataka. These are the regions where farmers have become locked into dependence on corporate seeds supply for growing cash crops integrated to world markets, which is leading to a collapse in farm prices due to 400 billion dollars subsidies in rich countries.

The Yatra was jointly organized by Vidharbha Organic Farmers Association, Maharashtra Organic framers Association, Andhra Pradesh Ryotu Sangham, MAR, All India Kisan Sabha, Karnataka Ryota Rajya Sangh, Bharat Krishak Samaj, Navdanya and other activists and organizations.

Navdanya spearheaded the movement in the three suicide belts of the country, namely, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka by burning the Bt. seeds in Amravati to reiterate its pledge to protect the farmer's rights of seed saving and seed sharing. The yatra, which was flagged off on May 9, 2006 from Sevagram in Vidarbha, Maharashtra focused on the seed rights, seed conservation and sustainable agriculture. Awareness was also created through the medium of music and street play to convey the message of organic agriculture, resistance to corporate monopoly of seeds, and the harms of monocropping and benefits of multi cropping systems.

Navdanya also organized a public hearing on the issue of farmers' suicide in Bhatinda, Punjab. The DiwanHall of Gurudwara Haaji Rattan was over flowing with the sea of widows and family members of suicide victims.

Apart from providing guidance and help to the farmers for the revival of agriculture, Navdanya, under the "Asha ke Beej" (Seeds of Hope) program, distributed the indigenous variety of seeds to the farmers and encouraged them to shift to organic and sustainable agriculture. More than 6000 farmers were distributed indigenous seeds. Various posters conveying messages on Bt. cotton failure, farmers' suicides, and sustainable agriculture were distributed among the farmer communities.

As a part of the yatra, over 250 village communities were covered and more than 5000 farmers have affirmed their rights to biodiversity by taking a pledge to conserve rejuvenate and protect their biodiversity. The awareness campaign reached areas of farmer's suicide and distributed indigenous seeds by

covering around 75 villages in Maharashtra, 85 villages in Andhra Pradesh and 90 villages were covered in Karnataka.

The College of Agriculture in Bijapur, Karnataka gave its full support to our endeavour in promoting awareness on the native seeds and it organized an interactive session between the Navdanya team and the professors and students of the college. The students promised to support the cause by sensitizing people.

More than 10,000 people were reached through the yatra and more than 10 million populations were covered in Karnataka alone through electronic media.

The Bija Yatra created awareness among farmers on GMO's, corporate farming and seed monopolies. The yatris had burnt Bt. Cotton throughout the journey of hope to encourage farmers to boycott Bt. Cotton, give up seeds of suicides and seeds of slavery, and adopt seeds of life and seeds of freedom and hope. A truck full of seeds traveled with the Bija Yatra and there was a hunger for seeds among farmers whose seed supply has been destroyed by the seed monopolies of Monsanto and its Indian subsidiary/licensees.

Navdanya also organized a Bija Rally in the regions of Uttar Pradesh October 2006 with a reach of more than 10,000 farmers. In each village, farmers signed the copy of the memorandum for cancellation of seed Act 2004 and discussed drawbacks of the seed act, patent laws and privatization of water. During the yatra 200kg of wheat variety 308 was distributed to farmers.

Navdanya has set up 15 community seed banks in 17 states of India in the last 25 years. Many seed banks are now running independently. Since the first seed banks were created in the Garhwal Himalayas of Uttar Pradesh, the Deccan in Karnataka, and the Western Ghats, also in Karnataka, Navdanya has started new seed banks in Ladakh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Navdanya's partners in this work include Bija Bachao Andolan in Northern Uttar Pradesh now Uttarakhand; Green Foundation, Navdarshanam, and Centre for Tropical Ecosystems, in Karnataka; Rishi Valley in Andhra Pradesh; Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems in Tamil Nadu; Vrihi in West Bengal; Vidharbha Organic Farming Association, and Vidharbha, Prakruti Paramparika Bihana Sangarakhna Abhijan in Orissa; Kisan Samvardhan Kendra in Madhya Pradesh; Kisan Vigyan Kendra in Uttar Pradesh; Manvi, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage in Kerala; Hazaribagh, in Jharkhand;

Navdanya has also established conservation and training center at village Ramgarh / Sheeshambara in Doon Valley, in Bulandshahar in west U.P. and Balasore in Orissa. More than 4000 rice varieties have been collected, saved and conserved. Hundreds of varieties of crops such as millets, pseudo-cereals and pulses have been conserved and promoted which were pushed out by the green revolution and growing monocultures. Azadi ke Bija (Seed Freedom) is the very basis of our food freedom. We renew our commitment to Bija Swaraj and Anna Swaraj during Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsava.

7. GOVERNANCE AND CITIZENSHIP

**CITIZENS' AGENDA 2050 FOR REBUILDING A NEW
INDIA**

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The pandemic and the lockdown have laid bare the inadequacy of the predominantly state-led model of development with state controlling the commanding heights, in the name of providing welfare to the poor, practiced from 1951 to 1991; as well of the primarily market-led model of development as growth first, equity later and environment sustainability last, practiced from 1991 to 2019. Thus neither the Sarkar as the dominant organising force, nor the Bazaar as the growth vector, has led to Sarvodaya, leave alone Antyodaya - it is time for Samaj to step in as the third pillar. Our key argument is that the current problems are so complex that their resolution requires a tri-sector collaboration.

Building a New India after 2050 is the short name we give to the most urgent task of our time. It is 70 years after the formal adoption of the Constitution and its underlying vision, based on the values stated in the preamble - Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity - to be achieved through a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. It is clearly

New mind-sets and attitudes, required are:

- i. "Putting the Liberty and Dignity of the Individual First"- 'Swaraj';**
- ii. "Putting Politics into Civic Action and vice versa"- 'Satyagraha';**
- iii. "Putting the Last First"- 'Antyodaya';**
- iv. "Putting the Local at the Top in Decision-making"- 'Gram Swaraj';**
- v. "Putting Human and Natural capital at no less a level than financial and physical capital"
- 'Buniyadi Taleem, Aparigraha'....**

time to evaluate whether these aspirations expressed in the preamble of the nation's Constitution have been met and, if they have not been realised significantly, to design a future that will be able to help the country achieve them.

It is no one's case that India has made no progress over these decades.

On the contrary, there are manifestly many more citizens of our country who live longer, healthier, better educated and more productive lives than ever before. More than doubling of the life expectancy from 32 to 69 years is just one outstanding example.

We can be proud that some among our fellow citizens are capable of competing in the spheres of business, finance, science, medicine, engineering, information technology and many other domains, even some sports, with the very best in the world. And we have built up an enviable infrastructure, production capacity, institutional framework and economy.

At the same time, we continue to have more hungry, undernourished and mal-nourished, frequently sick, illiterate, jobless, poor and marginalised people than any other country in the world. The opening resolve of the Constitution does not seem to have adequately transformed the lives of these huge numbers of our fellow citizens. They got left out of the mainstream economy and survive beyond the edges of regular society, continuing basically to be "sub-citizens. The first job of all of us, those in politics and Government, those in industry and business, and those in civil society institutions, including the academia and the media, is to bring these several hundred millions of people up to full citizenship, with decent lives and livelihoods for themselves and a better life for their children.

The country adopted a socialist mixed economy model in its first four decades, and moved to a "liberalised, privatised and globalised" model after 1991. Both delivered many good things for part of the citizenry, but neither could address pervasive poverty and massive destruction of the environment and depletion of natural resources, as also the community social capital that existed before these models were implemented. The evident structural flaws in the nation's economic systems and governance institutions that Covid-19 exposed should make it hard for anyone to justify going back to Business as Before. The pandemic presents us with a rare opportunity to embrace development pathways that are more suited to fulfilling India's founding vision, duly contemporised and updated.

The Gap between the Vision and the Prevailing Situation

The pandemic and the lockdown have laid bare the inadequacy of the predominantly state-led model of development with state controlling the commanding heights, in the name of providing welfare to the poor, practiced from 1951 to 1991; as well of the

primarily market-led model of development as growth first, equity later and environment sustainability last, practiced from 1991 to 2019. Thus neither the Sarkar as the dominant organising force, nor the Bazaar as the growth vector, has led to Sarvodaya, leave alone Antyodaya - it is time for Samaj to step in as the third pillar. Our key argument is that the current problems are so complex that their resolution requires a tri-sector collaboration.

The intent of the Constitution and its subsequent articulation in policies and laws was to bring about a fundamental socio-economic transformation in India by an act of political empowerment through universal adult franchise. But the Constitution put the State at the helm of the transformational role and gave little scope for individuals, or associations of individuals, to participate in realising the vision of India embodied in the Constitution. Indeed, even local governments were, for a long time, marginal and largely dysfunctional.

For much of India's first half century, governance was almost entirely top-down - decisions and money flowed mainly from the Centre to the State and from the State to the District. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution created, in 1993, local bodies capable of responding to the aspirations of local communities, though they are still to come of age.

The reforms of 1991 lifted the place of private market institutions in the economy, ceding several roles of the State to market institutions through liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. In the process, the ambitious, hungry for growth private corporate sector adopted a number of practices which harmed several segments of society, such as tribals, whose habitats were taken over for mining, industrial or infrastructure purposes, while the tribals were displaced without any recompense for their habitat or livelihoods. Workers lost in terms of wage share of value added, most of which went to service capital. Technological changes enabled companies to displace labour, break up unions and avoid social security benefits. Many industries also harmed the environment through untreated pollution, and many others exploited consumers through monopolistic practices. In 28 years since reforms, the private corporate sector and market institutions became dominant in national affairs.

In contrast, the place of civil society institutions was steadily diminished. Though the right to association was enshrined as a Fundamental Right under Article 19 (c) of the Constitution, in practice it was increasingly curtailed by a succession of laws. The registration law is from the colonial-era, enacted to keep the voices and actions of the people under check. To this, successive Indian governments added further control through Income Tax and Foreign Contribution laws. We need a radical review of these laws to ensure Civil Society Institutions can play a coequal role in nation building and socio-economic progress.

Let us rebuild India based on the founding vision, the experience gained so far, the people's contemporary realities, and the unfolding opportunities and threats. There is now an emerging consensus that people and planet, citizens and ecology need to become co-drivers of progress. These are BIG issues involving BIG conflicting demands among BIG players and interests. They will require BIG compromises and trade-offs. And these in turn will necessarily need new mindsets and attitudes, listed below:

i. **"Putting the Liberty and Dignity of the Individual First"**- irrespective of caste, creed, religion, ethnic, gender, financial or other status as a non-negotiable element of the social compact. In current idiom: "Fundamental Rights". In the Mahatma's language: "Swaraj".

ii. **"Putting Politics into Civic Action and vice versa"**- Politics is not party or electoral affairs but influencing the political economy of our nation to ensure equity, fairness and justice for all segments of society. In current idiom: "Active Citizenship". In the Mahatma's language: "Satyagraha".

iii. **"Putting the Last First"** We need to rededicate our commitment to creating such a society through focussed attention and affirmative action to ensure that SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities, and within these, the poor, the women, the aged and the youth are our prime focus. In current idiom: "Inclusion". In the Mahatma's language: "Antyodaya".

iv. **"Putting the Local at the Top in Decision-making"** through commitment to building up small and community-based economies. Likewise, the principle of subsidiarity - that problems should be solved at as local a level as appropriate, rather than centralising authority and resources. In current terminology: "Subsidiarity, Bottom-Up". In the Mahatma's words: "Gram Swaraj". Local skills and ability to do things will have to be valued more as we build local economies.

v. **"Putting the Future at par with the Present"** to ensure that the nation's enormous endowments - people, institutions, natural resources and cultural heritage -- are enhanced rather than destroyed, and the assets we leave as our legacy for our children is at least as good as the inheritance we got from our parents. In current idiom: "Sustainability or Resilience". In the Mahatma's language: "Trusteeship".

vi. **"Putting Human and Natural capital at no less a level than financial and physical capital"** in our development choices and investments so that we evolve a sane and resilient pathway to a better future for ALL. In current idiom: "People-centric, Eco-friendly Solutions". In the Mahatma's language: "Buniyadi Taleem, Aparigraha".

vii. **"Putting Need above Greed"**, to ensure that the demands placed by people on other people and by people on nature do not destroy society or ecology. In current idiom: "Conservation of Resources". Paraphrasing the Mahatma: "Asteya, Aswada".

viii. **"Putting Responsibilities on a par with Rights"**. Long denied our rights, the Constitution emphasised these, putting responsibilities in the form of "Fundamental Duties" in Article 51-A only under the 42nd Amendment in 1976. In current idiom: "Social Responsibility, Duty". In the Mahatma's language: "Dharma".

ix. **"Putting Technology at the Service of All People"**, not just the rich. In current idiom: "Innovation for the Masses, Appropriate Technology". The Mahatma exemplified this with 'Khadi and Gramodyog' (village industries).

x. **"Putting Resolution of Internal Conflicts and Conflict with Our Neighbours on Top Priority"** and redeploying the enormous amount spent on defence and internal security to address the problems of livelihoods and the environment. In the Mahatma's words "Ahimsa".

xi. **"Putting Global Alliances into Play When Appropriate"** - for example in problems of cross-border trafficking, refugees, climate change, and lately, pandemics.

Challenges in Realising These Values and Principles

The above vision of the future faces some critical challenges. We summarise these and suggest how they could be addressed through new institutional frameworks that bring together a mix of policies, laws and regulations, norms, and the means to enforce them.

i. **Difficulty in Switching to Sustainable Lifestyles:** Current life-styles have become unsustainable. The system of production and consumption of goods and services has now to be altered dramatically to re-direct policies and investments towards sustainable economic activity. New societal consensus around values of conserving our ecological resources and operational norms (such as Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) to practice them would need to be built. India's youth can be valuable allies for this.

ii. **Dependence on and Subservience to the State:** A vast majority of us have become dependent on the government for subsidies, and have also become subservient in face of pervasive state control. We have lost faith in our individual and collective capacity to drive change. Horizontal relationships amongst people and their local associations have been displaced by vertical relationship of each individual vis-a-vis the state. This is not right, as citizens have rights and obligations towards each other first. The values of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and sustainability have to be first protected and promoted by and amongst citizens!

Change will entail re-constructing the notion of active citizenship and a sense of community amongst us, especially with those who have been marginalised through caste, religion, gender, region, language and age.

iii. Attitude of Controlling rather than Enabling: Inherited from colonial attitudes and policies, most of the interactions between governments and the people, and particularly people's organisations, is based on prohibitions and penalties for transgressing them, rather than rewards for innovation and performance. Instead government should be responsible for enabling businesses, civil society organisations and community associations to take collaborative initiatives and pursue innovative solutions.

iv. Inadequacy of Local Institutions and Civil Society Institutions (CSIs): Indigenous local institutions based on family, tribe, caste and religion have declined in importance, even as these cleavages are being used for political mobilisation. Newer local institutions have not emerged or matured to serve the range of human needs across all segments. For example, Gram Sabhas, Zilla Parishads and Municipalities, are still used as the last link in the patronage distribution chain, rather than as the first rung in the ladder of representation and empowerment. The same is true for Cooperatives, school management and town vendor committees. Outside the state system, CSIs are often inadequate in building the capacity of local institutions, or playing a significant watchdog or alternative building role as they often lack the resources and talent required to do so.

v. Attitude of State and Market Institutions towards CSIs: Today, a majority of CSIs, including the most iconic ones, feel significant antagonism from government towards their work and under constant threat of ever-new legal or regulatory measures and cumbersome, never-ending procedures designed to prevent them from doing anything useful. Likewise, market institutions see them as anti-growth irritants or at best low-cost service providers for tasks dealing with poor communities. The need to rebuild post Covid is the apt moment for engaging assertively and meaningfully with State and Market Institutions. This will have to be done at different levels of political leaders and officials, on the one hand, and regulators, financial sector players, large corporates and their associations nationally and internationally, on the other.

Civil Society Institutions to Lead the Citizens' Agenda 2050

How tenuous is the social contract and the Constitutional promises, became evident in the Covid crisis, but it was eroding over decades earlier. Institutions established to realise the constitutional vision have not proved to be robust. Thus we urgently need to fix the institutional mechanisms that will ensure realisation of the values in the Constitution. Who will lead this process? CSIs are uniquely qualified to do so. We should not forget that the independence movement was an aggregation of local civil society efforts.

Like elected leaders, but unlike administrators and businesspersons, we have our ears closest to the people and their problems. CSIs have been the pioneers who, in the face of considerable resistance, have got the BIG issues onto the political agenda and into government policy: human rights, community development, poverty alleviation, gender empowerment, local self-government, appropriate technology, the right to education, the right to information, employment guarantee, environmental protection, financial inclusion, and so on. None of these were addressed by market institutions, and the State took these up after decades of grassroots work and advocacy by CSIs. And the best of CSIs have remained independent of both the state and the market institutions, and even held them to account.

Civil society normally includes citizens' associations, often registered as non-political, non-profit organisations. But we need to conceive Civil Society more broadly today. CSIs comprise a wider spectrum of institutions that are concerned with "social purpose" and "the causes of the less powerful". Merely being non-profit does not qualify an entity to be a CSI, if it is just a service provider to a government or a CSR program. On the other hand, in our definition of CSIs, we would like to include:

- Social movements, set up for a particular cause or for a broader purpose, for advocating, lobbying, influencing discourses and policies in the interest of a better future for all.

- Those entities whose output is more in the intellectual realm and innovation domain: the Think Tanks, research institutions, innovation labs and others with data, analysis and advocacy capability who can build knowledge to support sustainable development initiatives.

- The free-thinking academic institutions for critical thinking and enabling discourse and dissemination on alternative solution to socio-economic problems

- The independent media, of which some are left from the older ones and many new ones have emerged, particularly on digital platforms

Cooperatives—producers, agricultural, consumers, credit, etc. - who provide democratic economic models for small producers and consumers to coalesce together with shared aims and interests.

- Labour unions, workers associations, farmers' organisations, self-help group federations, street vendors' groups, resident welfare associations, and professional associations.

- Philanthropies, which generally use profits made by business and Social Enterprises, who address social issues employing business-like methods and are structured as for-profit entities, are possible allies or affiliates of CSIs.

- International alliances on various themes where issues need such collaborative action.

Addressing the challenges outlined in the previous section need to be the foremost tasks for the CSI community. The wider coalition of institutions listed above and the networks of such associations should have a leading role to play in rebuilding the new India. This partly stems out of the fact that they are neither driven by the power motive of state institutions, nor the profit motive of market institutions. CSIs work towards a positive normative vision: that of widespread, equitable social welfare, which is in sustainable harmony with nature and based on participatory democracy, accountable institutions and individual liberty.

For all of the above to be possible, CSIs, their networks and coalitions need to enhance various capacities - Intellectual, Organisational and Material - and need to also hold themselves more accountable to each other and to "We the People". These capacities can only be strengthened, and the role of civil society can only be played effectively, if an enabling eco-system of regulations, policies and investments is put in place, which derives its inspiration from recognising the unique and critical roles of CSIs in rebuilding new India.

While we may continue to protect our current space by ensuring that the existing regulatory framework does not become even more restrictive, we should aim for CSIs' role to be formally supported by appropriate measures by governments and by the sector itself. Thus an enabling legislative framework is urgently needed, to replace the current regulatory framework. The characteristics and provisions of such a framework should at least be:

i. Enacting legislation that both enables and specifies expectations and regulations for the sector to be able to maximise the positive and constructive contribution it can make to society; and while doing so, resisting any regressive attempts at enhancing State control. One way to achieve this is to establish transparent criteria for approvals, with time limits and written explanations for rejections

ii. Establishing formal and informal mechanisms for effective, constructive and value-adding partnerships among the major sectors, i.e., government, business and civil society. This will enable addressing today's complex problems, which are beyond the capacity of just the state or market institutions to address and require the community connect and innovative approaches that CSIs can bring

iii. Creating a one-window Ombudsperson for ensuring that conflicts among the different sectors can be resolved expeditiously and rationally. The present situation where the government is both the perpetrator, the prosecutor and the judge cannot be accepted.

vi. Helping strengthen the Sector's mechanisms and capacity for self-regulation to ensure integrity, transparency, and accountability. The CSI sector has been increasingly vulnerable to the actions of many of its members which cause disrepute and take away trust from the sector as whole.

v.Setting up mechanisms to ensure that the most valuable and result producing CSIs have a reasonably secure access to funds to ensure their resilience and continuity of operations, even at times of economic uncertainty. The income-generating activities of CSIs should be protected from taxation or adverse action, as long as the net income is demonstrably used for social causes and public purpose;

vi.Encouraging the youth, particularly those with University or professional education to work for at least a few years, in CSIs to ensure that they get a good understanding of the people's problems, and can carry this empathy with them in any sector they later work in - government, corporate or civil society.

vii.Eventually, to constitutionally acknowledge CSIs as key actors in nation-building and social and economic progress. The article 19 -1(c) already states the right of citizens to form associations is a fundamental right. This can be strengthened by inserting a new Part IX-C by amending the Constitution, as was done for Panchayats when the 73rd Amendment inserted Part IX, for Municipalities when the 74th Amendment inserted Part IX-A, and for Cooperatives when the 97th Amendment inserted Part IX-B.

The Citizens' Agenda 2050

Now we move to answering the question - how do we bring about the desired changes in the institutional mechanisms so that the founding vision of India can be realised. How would this structural, systemic and transformational change come about? And who will mobilise for it? This is a generational task and will take several decades. Yet we have to begin acting NOW. So laid out below is the agenda for action at three time horizons - three months, three years and three decades.

1.1 Three Months' Agenda (October- December 2022)

- a.Establish a core group to work on developing the Agenda2050 and acting on it.
- b.Establish a working group on immediate "defence of the sector" issues, such as the proposed changes in Income Tax, Foreign Contribution and CSR related regulations.
- c.Establish a broad alliance of civil society actors, far beyond the NGO fraternity, to include:
 - people's movements
 - faith-based groups
 - trade unions
 - cooperatives
 - producers' organisations
 - trade and industry associations
 - professional associations
 - free-thinking academia

- independent media
- artists' and cultural groups
- other forms of citizen's associations

For this, we will have to reach out to leading individuals and bridgehead/nodal organisations among each of these groups. In the process, the Agenda2050 may have to be modified.

d. Issue this Agenda2050 document in various languages to trigger wider discussion both at the level of values, principles and vision on the one hand, and strategy, structure, financing and the organisational mechanisms.

e. Seek commitments of time, funds, infrastructure and moral support from a wide range of individuals and organisations towards realising the Agenda2050

f. Set up multiple nodes, each capable of independent existence (with a mission, programs, funding, staff, etc.) and independent action, but working in a coordinated manner. In this sense, we mimic the structure of the Internet, where each node is self-sufficient in itself but enormously multiplies its efficacy by being interconnected. Even if one node stops functioning, the internet continues to work, because of multiple ways of interconnectivity. This is a radically different structure than the hierarchical Sun-surrounded-by planets-surrounded-by-moons structure often followed so far.

1.2 Three Year Agenda (2023-2025)

a. Accepting the Gandhian precept "Be the change you want to see", the core group members commit themselves to live by the values that we espouse including moving to lower consumption lifestyles, engaging in non-party political action when necessary, collaborating with state and market institutions while sticking to our principles, etc.

b. Establish a ground level dialogue with leaders of widespread peoples' structures such as Self-Help Groups, Farmers' Producer Organisations, Handloom and Handicraft Associations, Construction Workers Informal Unions, Vendors and Hawkers Unions, ASHA and Anganwadi workers' unions, Teachers' Associations. Etc. to understand what their issues are and what solutions do they suggest for better functioning of the institutions they work with.

c. Establish a high level dialogue with Industry, Business and Financial Sector leaders to both impress upon them the need for inclusive, responsible and sustainable corporate behaviour and to hear their side of issues in terms of what comes in the way of their wealth generating instincts. Establish a joint front for policy advocacy with the government, which is both pro-growth and pro-dignified employment. As a part of this activity, establish norms for CSR funding so that it becomes truly more developmental for the country.

d. Mobilise local community and outside financial resources, to ensure independence of CSIs and citizen groups from state and market institutions. One way to enforce this is to limit the expenditure of the organisation to no more than a one to one match of resources so mobilised with resources from state and market institutions.

e. Establish Citizens' Action for Collaborative Transformation - Citizens ACT Forums - for each and every Constitutional, Statutory or otherwise significant Institution. Each Citizens ACT Forum would have members who are independent and have expertise in those respective areas. They would analyse institutional outcomes and establish a dialogue with the respective institutions to provide feedback and suggestions for improvement. As many of the transformations will need changes in citizens' behaviours (such as paying taxes, changing consumption patterns, and accepting diversity of views and lifestyles), the Forums mobilise wider public support. The Citizens ACT Forums would not hesitate from calling out regressive or dysfunctional steps by the State or Market institutions or indeed by CSIs. Thus they would act as countervailing forces to each other while collaborating with each other.

f. Mobilise and train a large number of volunteers and workers, especially from among the Youth and Women, as well as the disadvantaged segments - Dalits, Tribals, Minorities, the Disabled and the Elderly. Instead of an hierarchal cadre, a set of intersecting circles would be established, with individuals opting for multiple memberships.

1.3 Three Decade Agenda (2026-2050)

Establishing new values and principles is a long term agenda, sometimes requiring a whole generation. This kind of transformation can only be brought about through the leadership of CSIs, working in collaboration with the State and Market institutions. "We the People" will need to be mobilised to begin to develop a consensus on emerging principles and priorities outlined in previous sections. That discourse needs fertile ground of 'civic space'....for conversations, dialogues, debates, confrontations, conscientization, all following the value premises and principles mentioned earlier. It is unlikely that either the State or the corporate sector will kindle or promote this discourse. Thus the lead will have to be taken by CSIs undertaking the following transformational tasks

- Inculcating these values in the younger generation through formal and informal education and activities like sports, community service and local problem solving.

.Public education and capacity building of the masses, to ensure that local institutions- self-help groups, school management committees, rogi kalyan samitis, town vending committees, farmers' groups, artisans guilds, gram sabhas, resident welfare associations, etc., all work effectively. These are the building blocks of democracy as well as a functioning institutional framework.

·Supporting institutional development and reform as needed, including evangelising behavioural change among citizens - from simple things like segregating recyclable and compostable solid waste at source, to paying utility bills and taxes. Similarly, community action to promote local problem solving will be encouraged, from taking care of the disabled and the elderly in small localities, to cooperating with the police in crime prevention, to tree planting and water harvesting.

·Playing a watchdog role, all the way from monitoring the performance of civic services, schools, hospitals to monitoring whether elected representatives are trying to fulfil pre-election promises, and otherwise playing their role effectively. Putting politics into civic action will be practiced here, holding regular dialogues with various political party representatives and letting them know the pulse of the people.

·Calling out any violations of fundamental rights and constitutional guarantees, particularly when those effect the liberty and dignity of the individual. This would be done at increasing level of intensity in ever growing circles of concern, if necessary eventually to seek alliances at the regional, national and international levels.

·Constantly examining whether society is progressing along a path which is based on the values of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and sustainability, and taking corrective action through citizen participation when we diverge significantly.

We invite you join us in this purposeful journey so that a new India is built by 2050.

8. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE CSOs

TAKING EVERYONE TOGETHER: COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS WITHIN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

JAYANT KUMAR
HEAD OF PROGRAMME, CASA

Govt., CSOs, CSRs, individuals and networks, forums who are working in different ways to achieve the same goals but there is a lack of partnership and collaboration for collective action to produce the timely results with efficient use of resources. This is the need of hour when all these stakeholders need to understand the importance of collaborative action and partnership as this can go a long way in creating a strong and better community.

Collaborations and Partnerships: An Inclusive Process

Voluntary sector in India has a long history and it is deep rooted in its culture of philanthropy that has been done in an unorganized way before the colonial period but initiated in a more organized way after independence of India.

Voluntary Sector in India is also impacted by the freedom movement, where nonviolent way of raising voices of people and citizens of India was practiced by Mahatma Gandhi during the colonial period and even used in post-independence period by Sarvodaya leaders and Samajvadi leaders like Jai Prakash Narayan. During the Colonial period voluntary sector was also established as more organized sector, where Society Registration Act 1860 was introduced as a legal tool for registration.

Development Intervention in Joint Collaboration; Collective Action and Collaboration on critical issues; Joint need Assessment in crisis and Response in Disaster; Addressing Environmental and Climate change related concerns; Working together on cross-cutting issues under SDGs; Advice services on Government Schemes and other areas; Social Policies and Action; Support activities; Strategic activities; Evolving collaboration; Local Resource Mobilization.

When India adopted the constitution in 1950, a larger scope for voluntarism was provided with basic values and ethics of voluntarism in its fundamental rights, duties and directive principles of the state along with different schedules for wellbeing of tribes and marginalized sections, where the role of state citizens and different agencies including voluntary sector emerged with an equal importance. Many voluntary organization in India emerged with their extensive coverage and reach to the rural poor with a wider canvas of relief in chaos and disasters to socio-economic development of poor and marginalized communities in India. Gradually, these interventions shifted towards collaborations and partnership in different sectors like-

humanitarian aid in disaster, livelihood, food security, non-formal education, strengthening PRIs and social action etc. Voluntary sector in India has always been rooted with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and People's Organizations (POs) for collective action at local/macro level which collaborated with different stakeholder at meso and macro level that included state agencies and other networks/ forums for collective action and collaboration in different sectors.

Gradually, collaboration and partnerships between different organizations took a vast array of forms, from quasi-mergers to shared sets of principles and focused on a range of areas, from frontline operation to high level strategy. Collaborations between two or more organizations included significant joint commitment of resources or simply be based on the premise of simple information sharing or support in the field of social action.

Importance and Need

In India, voluntary sector has organized itself and matured enough but still it's not significantly shifted towards a holistic approach of inclusiveness where this is integrated with cross-cutting areas of partnership and collaboration which can take collective action and produce results together e.g. working on SDGs need a greater collaboration and synergy in action among different sectors like-poverty eradication, nutrition, health & sanitation, gender, environment & climate change, livelihood and food security etc. Further, there are different stakeholders' like- Govt., CSOs, CSRs, individuals and networks, forums who are working in different ways to achieve the same goals but there is a lack of partnership and collaboration for collective action to produce the timely results with efficient use of resources. This is the need of hour when all these stakeholders need to understand the importance of collaborative action and partnership as this can go a long way in creating a strong and better community. In addition to pushing your mission forward, partnership and collaboration can provide stability (financial and non-financial) while achieving shared goals.[1] Further, Partnership can enable an organization to:

- Better services for target groups: One of the major advantages of collaboration and partnership amongst CSOs or other related stakeholders is delivery of better services to the reference communities. The synergy created has significant positive impact.
- Promoting equality and diversity: Partnerships and collaborations promote equality and strengthen diversity. It strengthens developing uniformity of purpose and goal.
- Increased resources for collective action and collaboration: Resource crunch is an important element. Collaborations not only increase resources but also multiply the value of resources.

- Better planning for current interventions and future: Availability of increased resources aids better planning for immediate and future.
- Fulfillment of government and public expectations both: Collaborations add value and thus the quality created fulfills government and public expectation.
- Maximize cost savings: It is a tool for maximizing cost saving.
- Better programs: Collaborative action promotes quality programmes
- Improved efficiency: Maximizing resource use also maximizes efficiency.
- Enhanced services: Increased reach provides enhanced services.
- Promote inclusivity: Collaborations bring diverse stakeholders together and act, thus promoting inclusivity.
- Increased credibility: Resource optimization, maximum savings, increased reach, better efficiency promotes credibility.
- Promoting transformative leadership and development: Managing challenges are difficult. It provides opportunity for promoting transformative leadership and development.

In today's context of reducing space and declining resources along with hostile environment, partnerships and collaborations created distinct advantages. The CSOs are able to minimize resources, multiply manpower, increase reach and thereby sustain resources. In this scenario partnerships and collaborations become a strategic tool to fight the context.

Areas and Elements of Working Together

India being a large and diversified country represents wider area of working for Voluntary sector in different eco systems and sub-eco systems with multiple issues and problems around. Sometimes these problems and issues are so complex and challenging in nature that needs a greater collaboration and partnerships in different areas to address these complexities and challenges in long run. There are few areas and elements of working together narrated below that need a greater attention: Development Intervention in Joint Collaboration; Collective Action and Collaboration on critical issues; Joint need Assessment in crisis and Response in Disaster; Addressing Environmental and Climate change related concerns; Working together on cross-cutting issues under SDGs; Advice services on Government Schemes and other areas; Social Policies and Action; Support activities; Strategic activities; Evolving collaboration; Local Resource Mobilization.

Current Context and Challenges faced by Voluntary Sector

Voluntary Sector in India is passing through a transitional phase, where credibility of the organizations is questioned in many ways that what kind of work they are involved in and how they are relevant to current context of economic growth oriented model of the development. One side it's true that Indian Economy is a fast growing economy among developing nations and trickle-down effect of the same must bring change in the life of most poor and

marginalized communities but in last two decades things have progressed slowly and status of the poor and marginalized communities has not changed much. There are empirical evidences available which proves that agriculture sector was not able to produce good result and a large chunk of farmers have been marginalized and even migrated to other livelihood options or allied activities like animal husbandry. Further, forest dwelling communities have been provided land rights under FRA but in absence of developing the same it's unutilized and income from forest produces has also decreased due to lack of access to market and other support required. Though, other marginalized sections in the society have increased their access to Government entitlements like MNREGA, Food and Social Security schemes but needs to be more inclusive in nature where aged, single women and people with disabilities could get an extensive support for their survival. Pandemic like COVID-19 has further deteriorated the economic status of poor, where many people had to migrate forcefully and struggling to overcome the social and economic distress they have faced during last two years of the pandemic. Climate change is going to be another big risk to the food and livelihood security of the people, when thousands of people are assumed to be climate refugees with increasing phenomenon of extreme weather events in different eco-systems in Indian continent. In this whole context where marginalized communities require an extensive support of handholding, guiding and capacitation through active role of voluntary sector in collaboration and participation of Government, CSR and other resources it seems that if not taken care of than this could lose its relevance in near future or merely work as a service provider. Shrinking space and diminishing resources clubbed with stringent amendments in laws governing CSOs and heavy compliance requirements have almost driven the CSOs to wall. Survival is only possible when we partner and collaborate strategically. This is one of the key strategies CSOs need to adapt to survive the onslaught. The Indian voluntary sector is emerging to be a credible force in catalyzing the nation's social and economic growth, particularly for the masses at the 'bottom of the economic pyramid'. The potential for this is well apparent from the experience of other developed and developing economies. If India is to achieve, as is predicted, the living standards of the developed world by 2050, then the NGO sector would need to play a critical role, and must grow at a pace much higher than that required of the overall Indian economy[2]. In spite of this, the present day NGOs are facing lot of problems and following challenges those needs to be addressed not only for the survival of the sector but continuing their valuable support to people in need and distress:

• **Identity and Credibility of the Voluntary Sector:** The voluntary sector is undergoing a very difficult situation apart from shrinking space, shrinking resource base and changes in the laws and rules. There is a huge amount of trust deficit amongst the state, general population and civil society. This is a great concern and needs to be addressed comprehensively. Working in collaboration and partnership is one way to address this challenge.

- Collaborative Partnership and Networking for Collective Action: A large number of issues need to be addressed at a different level than micro level. This requires collective action by different stakeholders. Collaborative partnership and networking leads to strong collective action and better results and impact.
 - Restricted funding and Resource Crunch: As stated earlier, the resource crunch and restricted funding have significantly impacted the work of NGOs. Collaborative and partnership approach provides an opportunity to maximize resources and increase its reach.
 - Governance and Strategic Planning: There is a huge problem in governance in large number of organizations. This particular area needs to be strengthened with lot of inputs and exposure. Strategic planning process also needs to be reinforced in organizations which will eliminate adverse reaction.
 - Communication and Best Practices: Organizations generally lack a communication strategy. They are also not able to document best practices and derive learning.
 - Regular Development V/s. Transformative Approach: The structural issue in the society can be addressed through transformative approach. Large number of civil society organizations do not address the structural causes of poverty but undertake normal economic and social development work. The transformative approach needs to be strengthened.
 - Multi-stakeholder Partnership and Relations: It is the demand of the current situation that like-minded stakeholders come together and act. This is possible only when a good functional relationship is developed amongst the stakeholders.
 - Shrinking Space and Opportunities: As has been said earlier, shrinking space needs multi-pronged approach and innovative action. Collaborations and partnerships are one of them apart from localization.
 - Innovations and Technological Advancements: Use of technology has created new members in implementing and managing programmes as well as communicating with each other. This area should be utilized to the maximum.
 - Managing Compliances V/s Flexibility: Managing compliance these days is very essential and under no circumstances an organization should miss out on this aspect.
 - Expertise/Specializations and Professionalism: The need of civil society organization is to marry expertise, professionalism, specialization with values and commitment. This is necessary as taking managerial approach cannot solve societal problems alone.
- Understanding the process of getting enrolled as a social enterprise and the benefit of getting listed under social stock exchange to address the fund crunch issue.

Way Forward

Voluntary Sector needs to fine-tune it-self with current context and challenges which are institutional and operational both in nature. There is a greater need for voluntary sector to reinforce its credibility to adopt various measures essential for a larger accountability, transparency and a strong governance mechanism. In this regard, the National Policy for Voluntary Sector has also broadly focused on recommendations that has the following focus:

- Harmonizing the regulatory framework for the Voluntary Sector
- Strengthening partnership between the government and the Voluntary Sector
- Promoting accountability and transparency within the VOs
- Establishing a National Accreditation Council for the Voluntary Sector[1]

There is larger scope for the voluntary sector in promoting Collaborative Partnership and Networking for Collective Action, where likeminded Organizations, Govt. and CSRs need to come closer for identification of issues for collaboration and partnership in various sectors, where working on SDGs could be a common agenda and likewise other cross-cutting sectors could be identified. Further, funding to voluntary sector no more remained an internal issue for India but globally the focus has been shifted to other regions with a perception that Indian economy is growing fast and they can cater their developmental needs their own, though realities may be different and shocking in nature, while pandemic like Covid19 has reversed the economies and crisis of Climate Change has posed new threats for survival of poor and marginalized in India. In this context of funding crisis, there is a need to focus on promoting local resources at community level as well as attracting the other funding resources through collaborative efforts that could be innovative and based on sharing of resources for common cause.

Voluntary sector in India need to redefine and strengthen its Governance structure that is more democratic in nature and promotes leadership from communities that takes over the lead role in collective action and collaboration at local level. There is also a greater need to improve the communication that not only improves the identity of the organization but creates the opportunity to share best practices as a learning and sharing platform among the different stakeholders. Further, the whole sector need to come out with result oriented development process to a transformative development process, where it transform the systems and structures of the society with values and ethics that upholds the dignity and justice for the poor and marginalized people along with promoting elements of sustainability in development process.

There is no other way than strengthening various compliances as this is also important for larger transparency and accountability in the sector with enjoying provided flexibility under law at the local level with larger focus to professionalism at various levels that needs sectoral expertise and specialization in various sectors. Thus partnership and collaborations are a critical need for CSOs in today's context.

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9. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

CSO ROLE IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT: FROM RELIEF TO RECOVERY

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In India since Independence Civil Society Organisations' (CSOs) participation forms a vital part of a disaster management strategy. This becomes clear from the multifarious functions that the CSOs have performed before, during and after the various disasters that India has faced. Characteristics unique to these Indian CSOs success are their quick response time and the close links that they share with the community make them the most suitable agencies for specific activities related to disaster management.

Natural disasters, which are often sudden and intense, result in considerable destruction, injuries and deaths, disrupting normal life as well as the process of development. Increasing population and various other socio-economic factors have forced people to live in vulnerable areas. Natural disasters are perceived to be on the increase in their magnitude, frequency, and economic impact, its unique geo-climatic conditions make the Indian region particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. Floods and high winds account for around 60 percent of all disasters. About 54 percent of the sub-continent's landmass is vulnerable to earthquakes, while about 4 crore hectares, that is about 12 percent of the country is vulnerable to periodic floods. The total expenditure on relief and reconstruction in Gujarat

Coordination during any relief response plays a crucial role in ensuring that it is effective. In order to avoid duplication, relief organisations should exchange information among themselves regarding items being distributed and areas of coverage. It is heartening to see that people all over India and the world respond so quickly and send whatever they could, but often the intended beneficiaries have no use for what is being sent. Relief items should meet the needs of the people they are intended for, and they should be culturally appropriate.

alone after the severe earthquake of January 2001 has been about Rs.1 1,500 crore in that year, just to quote an example. New disaster threats have also developed such as the Tsunami disaster of December 2004, which was an unprecedented natural disaster. The Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are the most effective means of achieving an efficient communication link between the disaster management agencies and the affected community. There are different types of CSOs working at the national, local, as well as the grass roots levels. In typical disaster situations, they are of help in preparedness, relief and rescue, rehabilitation and reconstruction, and also in monitoring and feedback. If the

potential of CSOs is utilised in the right earnest, they could act as the key to a successful and participatory approach to disaster management.

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Characteristics unique to these Indian CSOs success are their quick response time and the close links that they share with the community make them the most suitable agencies for specific activities related to disaster management.

In the 75 years since Independence it has been realized that the CSOs are the key players in relief and rescue, rehabilitation and reconstruction, when disaster strikes.

The Civil Society sector and the vital Community-Based Organization (CBOs) that operate at grass roots level, have an edge over governmental agencies invoking community involvement. This is due to their proximity with the community, and the flexibility in their procedural matters.

Further, CSOs, due to their proximity to the people, society, environment etc. are in a better position to take effective steps for proper monitoring of various parameters of success. CSOs are essentially non-profit and non-partisan organizations.

Large scale Civil Society Organizations have played a very useful and commendable role in disaster management for the various disasters India has faced. They offered immediate available communications within the disaster affected community, technical services, manpower, and financial support to categorize organizations by their operating behaviour and fields of expertise. CSOs with large resources have international support and have responded quickly with large amounts of supplies and services.

Registered local organizations have addressed local issues related to rescue, relief and rehabilitation of children, women and the disabled.

Some Deadliest Natural Disasters India Has Faced - Role CSOs Have Played

India has faced six deadliest natural disasters after Independence. Civil Society Organisations have accomplished the work in partnership with the national and local governments and support of the International Organisations.

1. Kashmir Floods disaster, 2014
2. Uttarakhand Flash Floods, 2013
3. The Indian Ocean Tsunami 2004
4. Gujarat Earthquake, 2001

KASHMIR FLOODS DISASTER, 2014

In September 2014, Jammu and Kashmir was under the siege of disastrous floods across many of its districts due to torrential rainfall. Thousands of villages across the state had been hit by the disaster and its after effects devastated the citizens of Jammu and Kashmir. By 24 September 2014, nearly 277 people in India had died due to the floods.

The Jammu and Kashmir state and adjoining areas received heavy rainfall from 2 September 2014, during the last stage of the monsoon in India. This triggered flooding and landslides in India. According to the Home Ministry of India, several thousand villages across the state had been hit and 390 villages had been completely submerged. In actual figures 2600 villages were reported to be affected in Jammu and Kashmir, out of which 390 villages in Kashmir were completely submerged. Landslides triggered by heavy rainfall had damaged roads, dozens of bridges, buildings and crops. Vehicular traffic had been stopped.

Rescue Operations

Indian Army said that the rescue efforts of the Army would not have been possible without the assistance and efforts of the local youth. The total of about 200,000 people were rescued, including 87,000 from Srinagar city. Under these circumstances Civil Society Organisations rose to the occasion to provide relief and rehabilitation to the affected population.

Relief

ActionAid India (AAI) carried out a rapid assessment to assess the severity of damage caused and to find out the prevailing needs of the people affected. In collaboration with the allies - **Human Welfare Foundation and Jammu and Kashmir Yateem Trust**, the team visited most of the affected villages in the six severely affected districts. It was found that the flood had damaged shelters, standing crops, trees and livestock, and it had also caused huge loss of lives (according to the State Government data, 284 people lost their lives in the floods). The immediate needs of the people according to the rapid assessment included:

- . Food/Ration
- . Non-food items (hygiene kits, blankets, bedding, foam mats etc.)
- . Sanitation assistance- community toilets in selected areas
- . Health care assistance
- . Education support and child recreational facilities
- . Psychosocial care
- . Livelihood restoration assistance
- . Shelters assistance

They distributed dry rations, blankets, beddings, hygiene kits etc. to the affected families. More than 3,500 people across 40 villages were provided with medical care during this phase. In the second phase of response, they reached out to nearly 1700 more families spread across 20 villages in Baramulla district. As part of relief distribution, they provided ration kits, hygiene kits, solar lanterns, beddings (quilts, mattresses and warmer covers), blankets and kangris (pot with hot embers to keep warm).

India Development Relief Fund (IDRF) partnered with NGO Sewa Bharti Jammu and Kashmir to implement a disaster response project for the affected communities. The IDRF funded disaster response project for affected communities included both short and long-term relief measures. Along with distribution of food and pherans (traditional woolen gowns)—to keep people warm through the winters.

Rehabilitation & Reconstruction

National Organisations and local civil society implemented disaster response projects for the affected communities, irrespective of caste or religion. The funds for disaster response project for affected communities included both short and long-term relief measures.

Sewa Bharti Jammu and Kashmir realized that self-reliance was the only way to somewhat stabilize the lives of the affected people. So in this regard, sent financial grants to distribute mobile stalls including the goods for selling, so that the affected people could start earning their livelihood and bring their lives back on track.

AAI and Allies rolled out “cash for work” programme, providing 40 days of wage employment to over 1,000 families in 31 villages across Anantnag, Kulgam and Pulwama districts. Each family generated an income of around Rs. 9,000 during this phase.

It also helped them augment their coping capacity and resilience to deal with mental stress that they had been going through. In the third phase of the response that started in January 2015.

AAI built ‘Play and Learning Centers’ for children in 10 affected areas of Pulwama. Over 750 children benefitted from the centres which were aimed at

engaging children in recreational activities that could help them cope with the trauma they experienced during the disaster. They also provided heat-convectors and blankets to some hospitals.

CSO's like **CHINAR Kashmir** provided home repair and rebuilding assistance. The task was so huge according to them that it will take years if not decades for it to be completed. Through the GHAR program they helped such people by rebuilding or repairing their homes and providing them a safe and dignified living space.

Bhoomika Trust took steps in order to help support, encourage the normalization process after the disaster. In order to achieve this, 900 cooking utensils kits were packed for affected families in December 2014 with the help of volunteers in Chennai and distributed to affected families in J & K.

Many CSOs from all over the country was on the ground immediately after the disaster and focused on emergency rescue and distribution of humanitarian supplies including food, powered milk, biscuits, water, chlorine tablets, ORS packets, school bags, stationeries etc. to children and families.

Smile Foundation, a national level development organization, was on the ground immediately after the disaster and has completed its first phase of operations, which were focused on emergency rescue and distribution of humanitarian supplies including food, powered milk, biscuits, water, chlorine tablets, ORS packets, school bags, stationeries etc. to children and families. Villages Malke Chak, Surya Chak in Jammu and Lasjan, Soitang, Shahgund, Gulshan Muhallah, Gondi boon and Kaniyari in Kashmir regions in J&K were covered.

Comprehensive healthcare to the flood victims was also provided. As most of the people have lost their belongings, the organisation is equipping them with bare minimum woollen and blankets for the winters. The number of hospitals affected in the floods was huge, causing a severe healthcare crisis. Moreover, sand depositions, inundation of water into the shelters, and accumulation of filth everywhere has left the valley a breed ground of diseases for the survivors. To address the healthcare needs of the people, Health Camps were being organized across the affected villages. As a response to the damaged healthcare facilities in the state, Civil Society rganisations were deploying mobile hospital units in the affected villages, besides conducting regular health camps, until the said facilities were restored.

In addition to healthcare, education of the children had come to halt with the destruction of schools. Support to camp schools was extended till the educational infrastructure of the valley was reinstated. In the third phase of the response that started in January 2015, built 'Play and Learning Centers' for children in 10 affected areas of Pulwama. Over 750 children benefitted from the centres which were aimed at engaging children in recreational activities that could help them cope with the trauma they experienced during the disaster. They also provided heat-convectors and blankets to some hospitals.

Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS Kashmir) implemented one of the biggest disaster response projects carried out in recent times in Kashmir following the massive floods in September 2014. They reached out to 17,000 families in three districts of Kashmir - Srinagar, Bandipora and Baramulla. The project started in September 2014 and culminated in May 2016.

During the course of the project, IGSSS undertook various activities and adopted various processes to address the needs of flood affected population.

Preparing for Response, Response Strategy, Identification and Orientation of Volunteers, Household Listing, Allotment and Distribution of Family Cards, Livelihood Approaches.

SARA, a CSO working on suicide prevention, has been commended by State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) for its role in the flood relief and rehabilitation work after devastating floods of September 2014.

Under its initiative, the J&K Flood Relief Mission in the past six months has distributed blankets, dry ration, clothing, medicines, books and other items among flood victims across J&K with the help of the police and through self-organised relief distribution camps.

Monitoring and Feedback

In order to ensure high levels of accountability and transparency standards as well as to implement programmes in collaboration with community, Action Aid India constituted Village Level Committees (VLC) for Relief and Rehabilitation in each village of intervention with representation from the Panchayat, Auqaf Committee, Masjid Committee, teachers, anganwadi workers, affected people – including both women and men. The VLCs were overall responsible for the entire relief distribution in their village as well as recommended the list of families to be covered under the relief programme. Each VLC maintained a register to keep record of minutes and other processes or actions.

UTTARAKHAND FLASH FLOODS, 2013

In June 2013, a mid-day cloudburst centered on the North Indian state of Uttarakhand caused devastating floods and landslides, becoming the country's worst natural disaster. The rainfall received that month was far greater than the rainfall the state usually received. Debris blocked the rivers, causing major overflow. The main day of the flood was 16 June 2013.

Over 89% of the casualties occurred in Uttarakhand. As of 16 July 2013, according to figures provided by the Government of Uttarakhand, more than 5,700 people were "presumed dead." This total included 934 local residents. Destruction of bridges and roads left about 300,000 pilgrims and tourists trapped in the valleys leading to three of the four Hindu Chota Char Dham pilgrimage sites.

Rescue

The Indian Air Force, the Indian Army, and paramilitary troops evacuated more than 110,000 people from the flood-ravaged area.

Relief

In view of the scale of the disaster, SEEDS India immediately deployed a response team to assist affected families. Civil society organisations and the government were supplying food items and dry rations. Common shelter places were also being identified.

With roads washed away, transportation was an issue and access restricted. Relief items often had to be taken to the distribution sites by headload. Despite these challenges, the distribution was done in an accountable and coordinated manner.

Since a majority of school buildings in these areas were also affected, continuing education was another priority. Schools were provided with tents to function temporarily.

The Indian Red Cross responded to the Uttarakhand disaster by mobilising the National disaster response team (NDRT), Regional disaster response team (RDRT) and National disaster watsan response team (NDWRT) members who were alerted for possible deployment. The National headquarters despatched a team to Uttarakhand for carrying out assessment of the needs of the community in coordination with the officials of the Uttarakhand state Red Cross branch and to follow it with the organisation of relief work.

The team deployed at Dehradun established contact with FMRs and Patwaris in these affected Districts and the FMRs prepared lists of people who were stranded in their region. The list had details about the place they were stranded in, the contact person they wanted to inform their whereabouts, a message they wished to convey, phone number etc. Around 50 such messages were delivered about these stranded people to their families that were waiting for information about

their loved ones. A tracing request from Tamil Nadu was received regarding a group of pilgrims, their location was found out and medical assistance was organised for them. A meeting was held in state branch where around 30 volunteers participated who committed their time for relief operation activities. The NDRT team reached Uttarkashi on 21st June 2013 and met the 30 FMRs working since the day of disaster.

Rehabilitation & Reconstruction

Schools of all types (private, government and trust-run) had been badly impacted, with some completely washed away. They emerged as the focal point for restoration. Over the course of the programme, CSOs rebuilt schools and one community centre.

After the terrible natural disaster of June 2013 in some of the districts of Uttarakhand, **AID (Association for Indias Development)** had supported three NGOs in that region, **Himalayan Environmental Studies and Conservation Organization (HESCO)**, and **SEWA Bharat, Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram (SBMA)**, Uttarkashi to work there for the disaster relief.

Before illustrating an action plan for rehabilitation project for Uttarakhand, CSOs decided it was good to do a listing out of places which needs to cover for the project.

Monitoring and Feedback

The CSOs conducted Daily review meetings to assess the relief work, for day to day need assessment and monitor the whole situation.

Further this can be said proudly that during this Uttarakhand Flash Floods, 2013, Civil Society Organisations with their developed expertise in Disaster Management have been able to provide relief to a large number of victims and in a coordinated manner.

THE INDIAN OCEAN TSUNAMI 2004

In the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, a series of massive tsunami waves grew up to 30 m (100 ft) high heading inland. Communities along the surrounding coasts of the Indian Ocean were devastated.

The tsunami reached the states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu along the southeastern coastline of the Indian mainland about 2 hours after the earthquake. At the same time, it arrived in the state of Kerala, on the southwestern coast. There were two to five tsunamis that coincided with the local high tide in some areas.

Relief

The Indian YMCA rose to the occasion in providing immediate help to the victims of the selected worst affected areas of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Andhra Pradesh.

High level teams visited most of the affected areas in a bid to assess the quantum of the disaster and express their solidarity with the suffering people.

National CSOs ensured effective networking with local CSOs, service organizations, governmental agencies and district administration. To facilitate effective co-ordination and monitoring, Co-ordination committees were also formed in view of the magnitude of the work and the need for long-term strategy for rehabilitation of the affected people.

The Indian YMCA first response was to distribute essential food parcels, clothes and medical aid to the stranded and those who are in the relief camps.

Ongoing needs assessment took place at various levels to determine further response in all of the affected areas.

The initial important area of work undertaken was to help in the removal of debris and deceased. Teams of volunteers actively involved in retrieving bodies and dead livestock from drains, debris, mud and water traps where they had been left by the waves.

YMCA volunteers were actively involved in:

1. Identifying the dead and participation in the disposal/burial of the deceased
2. Vacating people from the affected areas and setting up of the relief camps
3. Vacating hospital patients and inmates of other social institutions to safer places
4. Providing food for scavengers/volunteers/hospital staff
5. Coordinating the work of the voluntary organizations
6. Collection of information/conduct of survey on affected areas

Work also included the provision of medical aid, as well as helping people deal with the psychological trauma of what has happened. Helped in organizing relief camps in the affected areas. Counseling of the affected- traumatic people, particularly women and children was done. Supply of medicines as per the need of the relief camps.

YMCA Information cum Relief centers were in most of the relief camps and affected areas, which were managed by volunteers.

Smile Foundation reacted immediately to the emergency situation, joining forces with the government and local agencies for relief operations in and around Chennai. A need assessment survey was conducted and subsequently items of immediate need including vessels, utensils and ready-to-eat food items were distributed to the victims living in shelter homes.

As soon as the rescue and immediate relief phases of the project were over, Smile Foundation, realizing the need for rehabilitation of the victims, adopted a sustainable approach focused on education for children, vocational and disaster management training for youth and support for the disabled.

Many children had discontinued education after the disaster - some had lost their parents, others could not afford school; school buildings were destroyed, while some had lost their books, uniforms and other essential materials. The educational intervention was aimed at putting these children back on the track by facilitating their primary and higher education, counselling them, reconstructing school buildings and distributing teaching learning material, uniforms, shoes and bags in the villages Muttukadu Kuppam, Pattinapakkam Srinivasapuram, Thiruvannamiyur Kuppam and Kottivakkam Kuppam.

Smile Foundation joined hands with the Indian Social Service Institute (ISSI), a local NGO based at Thiruvarangulam District, Tamil Nadu, to conduct a Vocational Skill and Disaster Management Training Programme with the aim to promote alternative employment opportunities and develop disaster management skills among the youth of tsunami affected villages.

Realizing the vulnerable situation of the specially abled, Smile Foundation partnered with Ajay Memorial Foundation (AMF), a local NGO in Chennai, to provide Aids and Appliances to those specially abled, mainly in Thiruvallur, Nagercoil and Chennai, who had lost their aids in the Tsunami catastrophe, after identifying the beneficiaries & ascertaining the type of appliances required by them. Tricycles, wheel chairs, Bilateral PP Hip Knee Ankle foot orthoses with shoes, crutches, Above Elbow Prosthesis, Bilateral PTB Prosthesis and CTEV boots, were some of the aids distributed.

Civil Society was struggling to respond to the tragedy in an effective manner and needed the assistance of international service partners in many ways. People in the area had lost everything and CSOs needed to assist them so that they can rebuild their livelihoods and homes that were devastated by the tsunami.

Besides helping in rescue operations, NGOs also set up vocational training centres such as HOPE Foundation, set up in collaboration with US-based Manpower. They also helped set up the Centre of HOPE in Nagapattinam, which ran two schools and microfinance programmes in the area. The HOPE foundation claims the initiative is one of the largest in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami.

The vocational programme has a 15-year sustainability plan, with significant investment in infrastructure such as buildings, computers and equipment. It aims to train 10,000 students during the first 10 years.

While the **Society for Community Organisation and People's Education, Tiruchi**, conducted training programmes for carpentry, CARE India enabled the construction of 20 model individual 'Ecosan' toilets.

The **M S Swaminathan Research Foundation** established a knowledge resource centre in Akkaraipettai village in Nagapattinam.

The **Tata Relief Committee** is engaged in providing information to fishermen and farmers on microenterprises, the availability of fish and fish-processing.

SOS Children's Villages, an NGO, provided emergency relief to families affected by the tsunami. SOS Social Centre offers a comprehensive package of services for families.

Volunteers from social welfare organisations in Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat set up community kitchens for the displaced. Several other entities, such as the Rotary and Lions clubs and Seva Bharathi, helped organise mass cremations after the tsunami.

GUJARAT EARTH QUAKE-2001

The 2001 Gujarat earthquake, also known as the Bhuj earthquake, occurred on 26 January, India's 52nd Republic Day, at 08:46 am IST. The epicentre was about 9 km south-southwest of the village of Chobari in Bhachau Taluka of Kutch District of Gujarat, India.

The death toll in the Kutch region was 12,300. Bhuj, which was situated only 20 km away from the epicentre, was devastated. Considerable damage also occurred in Bhachau and Anjar with hundreds of villages flattened in Taluka of Anjar, Bhuj and Bhachau. Over one million structures were damaged or destroyed, including many historic buildings and tourist attractions. In Ahmedabad, Gujarat's commercial capital with a population of approximately 7 million (according to data in 2018), as many as 50 multi-storey buildings collapsed and several hundred people were killed. Total property damage was estimated at \$7.5 billion. In Kutch, the earthquake destroyed about 60% of food and water supplies and around 258,000 houses, 90% of the district's housing stock. The biggest setback was the total demolition of the Bhuj Civil hospital.

Kutch Reconstruction

The rehabilitation of craftsmen was facilitated by several CSOs as well as by **Khamir** [Center for Kutch Heritage Arts, Music, Information and Resources]. Shelter technologies have worked. **Setu's** [an organisation that acts as a bridge between the people, CSOs, the government, donors and experts in a cluster of villages] experiment to set up a small facilitation centre for coordination of villages has worked. Rehabilitation has been good, by and large.

Hunnar Shaala of the Shelter Division [the crafts department of a Gujarat-based NGO involved in teaching victims affordable and environment-friendly technology to build cheap homes].

It's been 16 years since the Bhuj earthquake wiped out lives, livelihoods and villages. A journey through the region now reveals how it has found new life through crafts, and how tradition has become its route to modernity

When a natural calamity destroys lives and livelihoods, assets and resources, human capital and wealth, the survivors and state stare at a difficult question: What should be restored and what should be allowed to pass? Kutch in Gujarat faced this question after 26 January 2001. Kutch lives by its crafts and textiles, and with its diverse yet syncretic religious communities. A drought-prone region dotted with Jain temples, shrines and mosques, bounded by the sea on one side, and sharing the White Rann with Sindh in Pakistan on the other, it is a land where pastoral Maldharis are craftsmen by day and Sufi singers by night.

The earthquake became the trigger to value what was intrinsically local and unique. As co-founder and president of Khamir, a Civil Society Organization that sustains the value chain of Kutchi crafts and their creators, says, "The earthquake triggered the reconciliation of nature with culture that had already begun, it forced communities to reflect urgently on their situation, it articulated directions for community and crafts empowerment, brought a surge of collective energy to disparate movements preceding it." No one had anticipated the digital revolution or the economic boom that added to the motivation of rebuilding Kutch.

Qasab, an artisanal embroidery brand that grew out of the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, a trust and society, says, "The earthquake gave an exponential push to the work of arts and crafts organizations which had been working in the region. It brought aid and the attention of the world to Kutch, raising funds as well as awareness for local arts. Government awards, income-generation programmes, crafts enterprises, design boutiques, tourism—all these surged after the earthquake.

Twenty-two-year-old Zakiya, a newly-married, pretty and cheerful young woman, is one of Kutch's few female Bandhini designers. She was 6 at the time of the earthquake. Dressed in fancy clothes for her school's Republic Day parade in her hometown of Mundra, where she lived in a 66-member joint family of batik block printers, she was eating breakfast when the earth began to convulse violently. She believes that even if it didn't leave physical scars, the earthquake left many Kutchis more possessive of what defined them.

Zakiya used to be envious that all final Bandhini products—her favourite local technique, one she would watch artisans working on—were credited to men even though women helped dye the fabric. So she decided to find a way to enrol

with Frater at Somaiya Kala Vidya. Soon after her design course, she launched her label Bairaj—which means the rule of women, the same year—in 2013. Not only did she meet her husband Adil Khatri, 23, also a Bandhini artisan, during the course, but she and Adil—whose label, also launched in 2013, is called Nilak—are now busy creating collections from their Bhuj home. Zakiya's design signature combines variant patterns of small and big dots of Bandhini—all painstakingly hand-done; a bulk of her work is in natural dyes. Her clientele, she says, is in cities, outside Kutch. Zakiya pulls out the sketches that helped her visualize her future. In five years, she dreams of showing in Santa Fe, in the US, and having a website of her own. In 10 years, she wants a store that stocks traditional, modern and fusion wear in Bandhini.

Dhamadka, the village with a huge concentration of Ajrakh printers that shares handblock printing traditions with artisans across the border with Pakistan, was devastated by the earthquake. That was when Ismail Mohammad Khatri, now a household name in the rebuilding narrative of Kutch, urged a section of the artisan community to resettle some distance away. They set up a village and named it Ajrakhpur, which then rose to prominence.

A 20-minute drive from Bhuj, Ajrakhpur that is today a shopping stopover for foreign tourists, a production and design centre and a symbol of successful resettlement in the wake of a natural disaster (Ismail bhai was awarded an honorary doctorate in 2003 by the UK's De Montfort University and a Unesco seal of excellence in 2006).

In appearance, it is a cement and brick resettlement colony, with most structures unpainted, dusty and grey. Homes are lined up on one side; on the other side are working sheds with groups of Ajrakh printers—both labourers and artisans. There are central dyeing vats where workers dressed in silicone suits (to stave off dye stains) pulse fabric into red-black-green or pink chemical, but industrially safe, dyes. Multi-metres of dyed fabric can be seen drying on the ground everywhere. It is the industrial face of a crafts village, a case study in itself.

Ajrakhpur is also the address of 21-year-old Aslam, a light-eyed, boyish-looking, impeccably behaved artisan in messy clothes stained with dye and a skull cap. He is one of the star students from the 2016 batch of the Somaiya Kala Vidya (SKV) of Adipur, run by Judy Frater. Aslam was five years old when the earthquake struck—today he understands that the path his life has taken is the design of destiny. His workshed has three rows of tables where Ajrakh printing is done by young men. Two rows are “jobs” that Aslam has taken on to keep up a steady flow of income. One row, he says, is for “my next collection”. Last season, Aslam made saris printed in dull blues, moss greens and midnight blacks—inspired from the colour gradation of sand in the evening on the salt marsh of the White Desert. Indian fashion's matriarch Ritu Kumar loved his work. The search for an identity coupled with opportunity is flammable. Aslam is wrapped in its flames. “After training under Judyben, I began to enjoy what I was doing anyway since childhood—printing Ajrakh. Till then, it was a mechanical

response, I had no clue what it was all about, except that it had to be done for my livelihood. Now I enjoy it and want to carve my own identity, open my own store. I want to be someone," he says. A few of his striking saris have just been picked up by a fashion store in Mumbai.

CONCLUSION

Coordination during any relief response plays a crucial role in ensuring that it is effective. In order to avoid duplication, relief organisations should exchange information among themselves regarding items being distributed and areas of coverage. It is heartening to see that people all over India and the world respond so quickly and send whatever they could, but often the intended beneficiaries have no use for what is being sent. Relief items should meet the needs of the people they are intended for, and they should be culturally appropriate. For example in Gujarat, this was not always the case. Savlon disinfectant, for example, was distributed as part of hygiene kits. But many women had no idea what it was supposed to be used for, and assumed it was hair oil.

The choice of relief items depends on proposals designed by the CSO headquarters. In theory, feedback from staff based in the field is supposed to be incorporated into these proposals. But in reality, this does not seem to be happening. Field workers are also the ones who bear the brunt of people's anger when irrelevant relief material is doled out. Relief workers stationed in the field simply have no idea what material is going to be sent to them, and at what time. Many relief workers had to visit the same village numerous times in order to distribute the various relief items that arrived at different times. This leads to a staggered relief response, which is time-consuming and costly. If the feedback of the people working in the area is taken into account, money would not be wasted on items that are not necessary.

THE CONTRIBUTORS



Amod K. Kanth

Amod K. Kanth, one of India's leading social activists and Social Development experts, had an illustrious and simultaneous career as an IPS officer and as the (founder) General Secretary (GS) Prayas JAC Society, Chairman Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) and Domestic Workers Sector Skill Council (DWSSC). Presently, he is serving as the GS national level NGO Prayas JAC, Jt. Member Coordinator CSOs Standing Committee-the apex body of CSOs within NITI Aayog, besides being the Chairperson of Jan Shikshan Sansthan, (Ministry Skill Development & Entrepreneurship-GOI) Delhi & Ramgarh (Jharkhand).

Mr. Kanth is one of the rare recipients of the President's Police Medal for Meritorious Service, Distinguished Service, Gallantry besides several national and international recognitions for his work with children. During his career, he handled complex law and order situations with utmost sensitivity, sagacity and bravery. He led nationally and internationally acclaimed investigations like the assassination cases of Rajiv Gandhi, Lalit Maken, Arjun Das and the well-known Hawala and Bank scam cases. His commitment to the cause of Justice can also be traced to the defining role he played in tackling the escape of Charles Sobhraj from Tihar jail and ensuring the high-profile culprits in the Jessica Lal Murder case. He is considered to be one of the leading voices for changes in India's police reforms, criminal justice and juvenile justice systems-his well-known deep association with the evolution of the Juvenile Justice System since the formulation of the Juvenile Justice Act, 1986.



Dr. Ashok Khosla

Ashok Khosla chairs the Boards of the forty-year-old Development Alternatives Group. Headquartered in New Delhi and set up in 1983, the DA Group was among the first civil society organizations to address the issues of sustainable development as a systemic whole. It also pioneered the concept of social enterprise, creating business-like approaches for eradicating poverty and conserving the natural resource base.

Concurrently, he was Co-Chair of the UN's International Resource Panel, from 2008 to 2016; and a member of the China Council for International Environment and Development from 2011 to 2016. He was President of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 2008-12; and President of the Club of Rome, 2005-12. Currently, he is Chair of the global Hydropower Sustainability Council.

Before his present position, Ashok served as Director, Infoterra, the first global environmental information system, in UNEP, Nairobi (1976-82) and as the founding Director of the Office of Environmental Planning and Coordination in the Government of India, New Delhi (1971-76).

In India, he has served on the National Security Advisory Board, the National Environment Board, and the Science Advisory Council to the Cabinet and on the boards of many official, NGO, and academic bodies and currently chairs the Board of the Centre for Environmental Education.

He has a BA in Natural Sciences from Cambridge University (1962), a PhD in Experimental Physics from Harvard University (1970) and an Hon LLD from Simon Fraser University, Canada.



Bhaswati K Goswami

Bhaswati Khaund Goswami did her masters in Ancient Indian History from Delhi University, and works as Communications Officer in the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (C-NES) since 2008 till date. She is a member of the Programme Management Unit (PMU) of the organization and contributes in taking crucial decisions on behalf of C-NES. She is in charge of editing all reports, press releases from the organization and manages the organization's website and social media handles of C-NES. She edits the Northeast File- a C-NES publication- a compilation of newspaper clippings and articles from across the region on a range of issues including the environment, security, governance, ethnicity, business & economy. She has co-authored a book, "Hope Floats- Boat Clinics of the Brahmaputra" with Sanjoy Hazarika, Managing Trustee C-NES. She looks after the internship programme of the organization. She liaises with corporates in fund raising and support for the organization.



Harsh Jaitli

Mr. Harsh Jaitli is the Chief Executive Officer of Voluntary Action Network India (VANI). He has done M.Phil in International Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi and has been working in the development sector for almost three decades. Before VANI he was working as Director in Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA). Mr. Jaitli has worked on the themes like environment, health, local governance, Right to Information, organizational development etc. He has also worked on institutional strengthening in the field of information resource management, financial management and project cycle management. He has done extensive work on occupational and environmental health related issues of industrial workers and neighborhood communities. He was also involved in policy analysis and developing comprehensive planning of industrial belts.

Mr. Harsh Jaitli is ADA Steering Committee Member and also board member of Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC). He is member of NGO Cell created by NITI Ayog and member of Sub-committee on Enabling Environment. He is also member of committee formed to design CSO portal for Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

He was member of expert committee formed by Government of India to develop National Voluntary Guidelines for ethical business behavior. He was Vice-Chair of Forus, and Member of Policy Development Forum of European Commission.



Dr. Jayant Kumar

Dr. Jayant Kumar, Head of Programme of CASA, has completed 3.6 decades of professional experience in CASA. His professional expertise includes, Institutional and organizational development (ID & OD) expert in the context of development organisations, project management and administration, project planning & formulation, pre-funding appraisals, result-based monitoring, Inter-sectoral coordination, liaison with multi-lateral and bilateral donors and governments human potential development (Participatory Training) at conceptual (perspective building) and skills level, facilitating and coordinating networks, forums and coalitions for advocacy and stakeholder dialogues, campaign planning and organizing, leadership, team building and team maintenance, financial management and fund raising.

Some of Key Evaluations and Review conducted by Jayant Kumar are, Evaluated the coastal Andhra Pradesh development programme supported by ODA, UK/CA, London/Bfwd, Germany along with Dr. Mark Robinson, ODI, and others. Evaluated Phase I and pre-funding review of Phase II of the Rajasthan Development Programme in Southern Rajasthan alongwith Mr. Herluf Madsen, DCA Representative from Denmark, Ms. Leana Paulson, Cowi Consult, Denmark, Dr. M. Seetharam, UNICEF, Orissa, Dr. K.K. Jacob, Ex-Principal, Udaipur School of Social Work, Udaipur. Evaluated Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church (GELC) work in Gumla supported by Norwegian agencies. Evaluation team member of "Restoring Lost Childhood" Programme of CASA focusing on child related issues in Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu supported by DCA and back funded by Danida.

He has many publications to his credit.



Meenu Vadera

Meenu is a feminist social entrepreneur working in India to enable resource poor women empower themselves and access livelihoods with dignity by becoming professional chauffeurs. 'Women on Wheels' is an innovative strategic intervention that disrupts gender relations within homes, in communities and in the market place by supporting women to claim remunerative, skill based and non-traditional spaces in the transport industry. Meenu has worked – nationally and internationally over the last thirty years on a range of issues concerning women's rights. A Masters in Social Development and Public Policy from London School of Economics, she has also published articles that spring from her learning in working directly with communities of women.

She is Founder of Sakha Consulting Wings Private limited and Founder and Chief Mentor of Azad Foundation. Azad and Sakha have received several awards and recognitions since their inception in 2008. A TedXYouth speaker, Meenu has been listed amongst the "influential women who change the world", in 2019. She has as well received several awards and recognitions.



Mirai Chatterjee

Director, SEWA Social Security & Chairperson, SEWA Cooperative Federation, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA).

For the past 30 years Mirai has been at the forefront of improving the health and financial security of millions of women working in India's informal sector. She is currently Director of SEWA's Social Security team including health care, child care and insurance. She is also the Chairperson of the SEWA Cooperative Federation of 110 informal women workers' cooperatives. She was the General Secretary of SEWA after its Founder, Ela Bhatt. Mirai is a senior leader of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a national union that has organised 2.1 million informal women workers in India obtain work and income security, financial services, organize child care, primary health care, housing with water and sanitation and insurance, among many other activities and support services. She joined SEWA in 1984.

Mirai serves as Chairperson of the global informal workers and policy-makers network, WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising), and on the Boards of several organizations, including the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship. She was advisor to the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector and is in the Advisory Group on Community Action of the National Health Mission. She was also a Commissioner in the World Health Organization's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health. In addition, she was a member of the High-Level Expert Group on Universal Health Coverage set up by the Planning Commission of India in 2010. She is a former member of the National Advisory Council (NAC), appointed by the Prime Minister of India in 2010. She was conferred the Global Achievement award by the School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University. Mirai holds a Bachelor in History and Science from Harvard University and a Master's in Health Sciences from Johns Hopkins University.



Nidhi Ashok Goyal

Nidhi Ashok Goyal is the founder and executive director of the leading non-profit organisation Rising Flame, working for leadership and rights of persons with disabilities in India. She has been working on disability rights and gender justice for the past 12 years at the national, regional, and global levels-through research, writing, advocacy and art.

She has been appointed on core group of persons with disabilities by national human rights commission India, is on the diversity and inclusion task force of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, is the governing body member of ADD India, and sits on the advisory board of Voice- a grant making project by the Dutch ministry. She has led multistakeholder and cross movement work, influenced policies and systems, authored ground breaking research, all with a vision to foster inclusion of women and youth with disabilities within India and globally. She has steered a leading global women's rights organisation – AWID- as the youngest and first ever disabled president, and made huge strides in inclusion as the former global advisor to UN Women's Executive Director. Her leadership and work have been appreciated and awarded by the government of India, National Association for the Blind, ABP News and Sur Optimist Mumbai amongst others.



Puja Marwaha

Chief Executive – Child Rights and You, believes that children are the very foundation of every nation's growth and development aspirations. It was this belief that fuelled her passion for children's rights and inspired her to become a full-fledged part of the social sector in 1994.

After a liberal arts and Human Resources development education, Puja Marwaha made the transition from the corporate to the social sector early in her career. Having worked earlier with various corporate organisations, she joined CRY in 1994 to set up the organization's Human Resources function.

For the past 25 years, Puja has helped build an organizational framework for CRY that best captures the essence of justice and equity. Her work is focused on creation of an organizational character that attempts to foster a passion for children, a high degree of individual accountability to children and a belief in every person's potential to bring change for children. She currently also serves on the board for VANI – Voluntary Action Network India – in an endeavour to strengthen public mobilization for social causes.



Dr Rajesh Tandon

Dr. Rajesh Tandon is an internationally acclaimed leader and practitioner of participatory research and development. He founded Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), a global educational centre for participatory research and training. He is also Co-Chair of the prestigious UNESCO Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, since 2012. An electronics engineer from IIT (Kanpur), and MBA from IIM (Calcutta) and PhD in Organisational Behaviour from Case Western Reserve University, USA, Dr. Tandon left his teaching career to promote inclusive development in the country.

A renowned authority on participatory research, he has championed the cause of building organisations and capacities of the marginalised through their knowledge, learning and empowerment. He has advocated for the capacity building of civil society organisations in the global South, in particular as Chairperson, International Forum on Capacity Building of Southern NGOs. As Convener of the Task Force of the Millennium Project of The Commonwealth Foundation he has pioneered global research on civil society and as Chair, Participation Sub-Group, NGO Working Group of the World Bank championed the inclusion and participation of civil society in multilateral institutions. He was catalytic in promoting a role for civil society in the World Declaration of Education for All, Jomtien, 1992. He has been a Founding Director of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Founder-Chairperson of FIM-Forum for Democratic Governance, and of VANI (Voluntary Action Network India).



Sanjoy Hazarika

Sanjoy Hazarika, founded C-NES in 2000 and is its Managing Trustee, is a prominent commentator, writer and scholar. He is human rights activist, scholar, author, journalist and filmmaker.

Some of his recent books published are: Strangers of The Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast; Strangers No More: New Narratives from India's Northeast; Rites of Passage: Border Corssisngs, Imagined Homelands, India's East and Bangladesh; Writing on the Wall: Reflections on the North-east...and there are many more.

Sanjoy Hazarika is honorary research professor at CPR and holds the Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew Chair at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, where he also directs the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research. He has been a member of various academic organisations and official committees, including the Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee to Review AFSPA, the Society of Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, and the North East India Studies Programme at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Hazarika has also worked as a newspaper correspondent, columnist, and documentary filmmaker.



Dr. Shabeen Ara

Dr. Shabeen Ara is a Sociologist with 30+ years of experience in the development sector. She has a Ph.D. in Sociology. Her first job was in HelpAge India as Head R&D. She has been associated with various CSOs like PRIA, XIDAS, Indian Social Institute and Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. She was also teaching at Dr. D.Y. Patil Deemed University, Pune. Presently she is Consultant- Research at VANI.

Some of her favourite assignments are: Associate Editor, Social Action, A Quarterly Review of Social Trends of Indian Social Institute, New Delhi; Founder Editor of Research & Development Journal for HelpAge India, New Delhi; Associate Editor, Vikas Vani Journal of Xavier Institute of Management (XIMJ), Jabalpur; Coordinated, designed and developed distance & online courses for the senior development professionals for PRIA International Academy, New Delhi; Edited 76 books of MBA Distance Learning, Dr. D Y Patil (Deemed to be) University, Pune. At VANI she is coordinating the activities of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav.



Dr. Vandana Shiva

Dr. Vandana Shiva is an Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, ecofeminist and anti-globalisation author. Based in Delhi, Shiva has written more than 20 books. She is often referred to as "Gandhi of grain" for her activism associated with the anti-GMO movement.

Vandana Shiva is one of Navdanya's founders, and outspoken members. Navdanya is an Indian-based non-governmental organisation which promotes biodiversity conservation, biodiversity, organic farming, the rights of farmers, and the process of seed saving.



Vijay Mahajan

Vijay Mahajan is an internationally known Indian rural development professional, social entrepreneur and a policy analyst. He is the founder of reputed organizations such as Pradan NGO and the Basix Social Enterprise Group. He has also served on the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India Rangarajan Committee on Financial Inclusion and the Raghuram Rajan Committee on Financial Sector Reforms. He has published over 20 papers in prestigious Indian and international journals, contributed chapters in 15 academic books and has authored over 70 papers/articles in the area of rural development, livelihood promotion and employment, microfinance, financial inclusion, social innovations and entrepreneurship. He is an alumnus of Indian Institute of Management – Ahmedabad and Indian Institute of Technology – Delhi, and was mid-career Fellow at the Princeton University, USA.



About Voluntary Action Network India (VANI)

VANI is a national platform of voluntary organizations of India, which was formed in 1988. Currently, it has a strong network base of over 620 direct and outreach to over 15,000 organizations, spread across 24 states and one Union Territory. VANI is widely known for its evidence-based advocacy for an enabling environment and efforts in collectivizing the voluntary sector for its sustainable development. Through its network, VANI disseminates pertinent information around policies, legislation, taxation, sustainable development, concerning the sector to its members as well as non-members in an effective and timely manner. VANI builds the capacities of Voluntary Organisations on issues of critical importance including improved governance and effective leadership, legal compliances, accountability, transparency, strategic resource mobilization and Financial Management, for internal system strengthening and resilience building. Through stakeholder dialogues, VANI builds both intra and inter-sectoral convergences, thereby bringing government, corporate, civil society, donors on a common platform for cohesive and effective action. Through its created specialized forums a) Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Leaders; b) Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) Chartered Accountants and Legal experts, VANI is able to steer inter and intra peer learning on issues of common interest. VANI encourages partnerships for national-level policy reforms on the basis of the evidence-based narrative. VANI plays a pivotal role in establishing the global footprints of Indian voluntary organizations on the global development discourse. It is a member of various international networks like FORUS, CIVICUS, Affiliation Group of National Associations (AGNA), Asian Development Alliance (ADA), Asia Democracy Network. It has partnered with Accountable Now, International Civil Society Centre and eight accountability initiatives across the world to draft Global Standard for CSO Accountability and is presently engaged in encouraging voluntary organizations across India and South Asia to adhere to accountability and transparency standards for enhanced credibility. VANI has played an extensive role in drawing the attention of Civil Society and encouraging its enhanced role play on several international development agendas and partnerships including SDGs, BRICS, BBIN, BIMSTECH, Blue Economy and their social implications.

www.vaniindia.org