Voluntary Action,  
Civil Society  
and the  
State  

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Mosaic Books  
New Delhi
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Preface

This book is about voluntary action in India. It has been prepared to describe and analyse the history, evolution and challenges facing voluntary association and civil society in India today. It aims at providing an insight into the dynamics of the relationship between voluntary action and the government. The book also identifies and elaborates upon the emerging requirements of capacity building of voluntary organisations in India. Leaders of voluntary organisations, donors, government officials and policy makers, academics and students will, therefore, find this book of interest.

Voluntary action has been a part of my upbringing. I grew up in a family which was actively engaged in the freedom struggle. Various members of my family were active in a number of social organisations—in neighbourhood Ramlila committees, youth sports associations, orphanages and destitute homes. My parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts were all very active in these formations. As a child and young adult, I did not pay much attention to them. It was in my student days that I got involved in student politics and the students union. After higher studies abroad, I returned to India during the “emergency” and decided to explore the nature of rural
India. I decided to immerse myself in the rural realities of India during that period in order to understand the complexities of development interventions.

This was my first encounter with the contemporary world of voluntary action. I worked with Seva Mandir (a voluntary organisation based in Udaipur district of southern Rajasthan) and in its field office for over a year. My exposure to tribal areas and the nature of actions needed there in this period was a great learning experience. Not only did I come to understand some of the ground realities of rural poverty and deprivation, but I also understood how a voluntary organisation and its field workers can attempt to address these issues in the face of such odds. Thus, in a way, this work reflects my own journey, my own thinking and experiences of voluntary action over the past twenty-five years.

When the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) began to function twenty years ago, it decided to make support of grassroot voluntary organisations the prime focus of its work. It decided not to directly create new development programmes at the grassroots level, but to strengthen those already working in the field. PRIA’s perspective on participatory research mandated it to strengthen the grassroot voluntary organisations by enabling them to focus on problems of social mobilisation and conscientisation. Thus community empowerment and organisation of the poor became the prime focus of PRIA’s support to grassroot voluntary action.

Over the years, we in PRIA closely observed a wide range of voluntary activists, social movements and voluntary organisations. We worked with them on issues of deforestation, land ownership and alienation, displacement, occupational health, environmental degradation, livelihood and income generation, literacy and nonformal education, etc. PRIA contributed towards strengthening the capacity of their staff
and institutional mechanisms through training workshops, field visits, on-site consultation, etc.

PRIA also carried out a number of studies to document its own experiences and those of others involved in voluntary action. In this process, our understanding about independent, autonomous and social change oriented voluntary action improved a great deal. It was in this context that the relationship of voluntary action with the state and its machinery became both a daily reality for PRIA as well as a matter of concern and action. As our understanding about the Indian reality deepened, we began to understand the dynamics of voluntary action in different regions of the world. Through the network of participatory research, through the International Council for Adult Education, the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education and a myriad other thematic networks and associations, PRIA began to understand the patterns of voluntary action and their relationship with the state in different contexts. We found that the historical roots and contemporary realities of voluntary action in India were quite complex and enriching. Many members of voluntary organisations from South Asia, South-east Asia, Africa and Latin America attended PRIA’s workshops and training programmes and shared their experiences as well.

Towards the end of the 1980s when dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union began to happen, PRIA could see that the theme of citizen participation was indeed at the core of the new assertion of civil society. PRIA’s experiences, studies, and practical insights gained by working on issues of strengthening civil society became the basis for a wide range of documentation, studies and training programmes.

As PRIA completes twenty years of existence, several practitioners and researchers associated with its work in India and elsewhere felt that a document which captures my own think-
ing and practical experiences needed to be compiled. This volume therefore, has to be seen as a journey over the past twenty-five years that I have undertaken, both as a student of voluntary action as well as its ardent supporter and practitioner. PRIA’s own history of the past twenty years could well be seen in the theme of this volume because this is what PRIA has stood for and worked towards in every way.

This volume, therefore, also represents the evolution, historically and contextually, of the ideas and perspectives that I have been working with and that PRIA has been able to share and deepen. Essentially, this is a volume focusing on voluntary action, civil society and the state in the Indian context. However, the context of South Asia as a whole is nowhere different from India’s and there are many parallels that can be drawn. Many readers, practitioners and researchers throughout the world may find that a number of these issues are also reflected in their own particular contexts. It is with the continued commitment that PRIA makes to work on these issues in the next twenty-five years that I humbly bring this volume to our readers, practitioners, researchers and policy makers concerned with this theme.

Rajesh Tandon
January 2002
Origins and Growth of Voluntary Action in India

ROOTS

The roots of voluntary action in India go back in history. Many religious persuasions have been born in India; many others have been nurtured and supported on Indian soil throughout history. One precept which is common to all major religions is that people should work for the well-being of others. All religious scriptures provide guidelines, prescriptions and suggestions for followers to contribute to the well-being of society (Dadrawala, 1991).

Hinduism is the dominant religion in India, practised by over 80 per cent of the population. The Hindu concept of Dharma which entails a code of moral and social behaviour, including concern for all other human beings, is one of the most important pillars of Hindu philosophy. There are also several other religions followed by smaller but significant numbers of people; some like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are indigenous and offshoots of Hinduism, while others like Islam and Christianity came from outside. Whatever their religious practice, in every one of them contribution to society is
mandatory for their followers. The concept of dana (voluntary giving) has been the cornerstone of the spirit of voluntarism in India.

“A noteworthy feature of all major religions has been the emphasis they placed on charity and sharing wealth with others, especially the poor. In Hinduism, serving the poor is considered equivalent to serving God (Narayan Sewa). Contrary to popular opinion, Hinduism does not have a disdain for worldly pursuits and creating wealth. It is against excessive consumption and attachment to things worldly. In the Bhagawat Gita, which presents the essence of Hindu philosophy, Lord Krishna asks his followers to shun, not right action, but attachment to the fruits of action. In other words, while action is necessary and even liberating, attachment to the fruits of action is enslaving. From this it follows that it is not the creation of wealth (of course by right means) that is to be shunned, but its excessive accumulation and its use for over-indulgence. Wealth is believed to have three ends: accumulation, consumption and charity. Of these, charity is considered the best use of wealth followed by consumption and accumulation. Other religions too place an equal emphasis on charity. Helping the needy is generally viewed as the supreme duty of the individual. Buddhism prescribes an elaborate code of conduct for its followers based on the principle of the golden mean—avoiding all extremes. Like Hinduism, it does not frown on creation of wealth but on excessive consumption, arguing for moderation in all activities. It makes alms-giving obligatory for all its followers. As an organised religion, it used the institution of the Sangha to provide service to the poor. In Islam, charity took the obligatory form of Zakat enjoined upon all Muslims. In order to discharge their Zakat obligations, all Muslims are required to earmark a part of their income to help the poor and the needy” (PRIA, 2001b: 22).
Helping the poor and the needy, providing for the well-being of others, making contributions to society, are values deeply ingrained among people belonging to diverse religions and backgrounds in India. Thus, individual giving and individual acts of service to the needy have, historically, been the main forms of voluntarism in India. These individual initiatives to help the needy thus became the bedrock of voluntary action in India. Institutionalised voluntary action at that time existed mainly within the domain of religious institutions: *ashrams* and *maths* among Hindus, *waqfs* and *khanqahs* among Muslims, and *gurudwaras* and *deras* among Sikhs. Throughout the ancient and medieval periods, voluntary action—whether individually inspired or collectively supported—found its natural expression through religious institutions in India. Thus, the origins of voluntary action in India go back in history. The form may change over time, but the pursuit of voluntary action has continued uninterrupted.

**REFORM**

In recent Indian history, the most significant and contemporarily relevant form of voluntary action evolved during the 18th and 19th centuries. This period was marked by several stirrings for social reform as, under British colonial rule, the influence of modern Western thought began to spread. Ideas of liberty, fraternity and freedom began to influence Indian scholars, thinkers and reformers. It was in this period, therefore, that several initiatives for social reform were born.

The reform movement found its most articulate and inspiring leadership in Raja Rammohan Roy in the early 19th century. His work in Bengal influenced voluntary work in other regions of the country. Raja Rammohan Roy founded the Brahma Samaj in 1828 with the clear aim of bringing about social, political and economic change in India. As a
modern form of voluntary action, it inspired a large number of educated and concerned Indians to work towards eradication of various social evils then prevalent in India, like child marriage and sati.

"The spirit of reform beginning with the efforts of Raja Rammohan Roy in Bengal embraced almost the whole of India. Apart from the Brahma Samaj, which had branches in several parts of the country, the Paramhansa Mandal and the Prarthana Samaj in western India and the Arya Samaj in north India were some of the other important movements among the Hindus. The Prarthana Samaj (prayer society) as an important offshoot of the Brahma Samaj of Rammohan Roy was started under the leadership of Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade in Bombay in 1867. It was also greatly influenced by the well known contemporary social reformer, Keshab Chandra Sen. The organisation had four avowed objectives: to oppose the caste system, to encourage widow remarriage, to encourage female education, and to abolish child marriage.

With almost similar objectives, the Dev Samaj was established in Punjab in 1887 by Dev Atma" (PRIA, 2001b: 6).

The influence of the reform movement spread. In the north, the Ahmediya movement in Aligarh, the Kayastha Sangh in UP, and the Sarin Sabha in Punjab are further illustrations of similar efforts to gather people to collectively address social reforms. In Maharashtra, under the leadership of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, the Satya Shodhak Samaj was founded in 1873. Equality of gender and education for dalits (untouchables) was the hallmark of Mahatma Phule's work. While religious inspiration continued to guide the bulk of the social reform movement, its essential inspiration was humanist, modified in the context of influences coming from the Christian missionaries and Western thought.

"In the 1880s, the Arya Samaj made spectacular advances, particularly in north India under the leadership of Swami
Dayanand Saraswati. It achieved great success perhaps because of its very ambiguity, for it combined sharp criticism of many existing Hindu practices (idolatry and polytheism, child-marriage, the taboos on widow remarriage and foreign travel, Brahmin dominance and the multiplicity of castes based on birth alone) with an extremely aggressive assertion of the superiority of purified Hinduism based on Vedic infallibility over all other faiths—Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. The Arya Samaj soon overshadowed other streams in the contest for the loyalties of reform-minded educated young men of northern India” (PRIA, 2001b:7).

Another interesting feature of this period was the rise of literary associations as well as indigenous newspapers and periodicals. Literary institutions like the Royal Asiatic Society and the Gyan Prakash Sabha were formed around the 1830s. Periodicals like Darpan (1832), Digdarshan (1840), Prabhakar (1841), Dnyanoday (1842) and Dnyanapraakash (1849) were established in Maharashtra. In Bengal, Samachar Darpan, Sambad Pravakar, Tattwabodhini Patrika emerged around the same time. These periodicals supported the social reform movement and the ideas of freedom, dignity and liberty it enshrined. They also served to bring together people with common objectives, ideas and pursuits, transcending physical and cultural distances during a period of limited communication facilities in India. By the turn of the 20th century, a large number of social reform institutions had been established in different parts of the country.

“Voluntary samitis (associations) and organisations proliferated in Swadeshi Movement Bengal in bewildering number and variety. They organised efforts to promote self-help in economic and social life, and the development of samitis with a wide range of activities. In 1905 the three leading organisations in the field were the British Indian Association, the Bengal Landholders’ Association, and the Indian Associa-
tion. District Associations were set up in many districts of West Bengal, which called for self-help and sustained social and political work through village associations. They promoted swadeshi industries and agriculture, national education, arbitration courts, cooperative banks, community grain stores and sanitation measures in the villages” (PRIA, 2001b:12).

These were the vehicles for systematising and collectivising voluntary action primarily aimed at reforming the Indian society. Their establishment became so widespread that, to provide a basis for legal registration and incorporation of such voluntary associations, the British Indian Government enacted the Societies Registration Act, 1860. This significant piece of legislation has governed the incorporation of voluntary organisations in India since then.

FREEDOM STRUGGLE

The first half of the 20th century was marked by a major shift in the manner in which voluntary action operated in India. While several forms of nationalist struggle had evolved in the late 19th century with the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and other such organisations, it was only in the early 20th century that voluntary action received a new thrust. As social reform movements began to gather steam in the late 19th century, several leaders began to develop systematic and nationalist critiques of British colonial rule. Dadabhai Naoroji, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and R.C. Dutt were the pioneers. The Indian National Congress became a platform for articulation of these critiques. In 1905, a mass-based movement against British rule, the ‘Swadeshi Movement’ was launched in Bengal to protest the decision to partition the then Bengal Presidency. This led to an enormous nationalist upsurge. Voluntary action attained
a new dimension of collective effort aimed at overthrowing British rule.

Mahatma Gandhi’s entry into the Indian freedom movement during the second decade of the 20th century transformed the nature of this voluntary action in a significant way. He established the Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmedabad in 1916, launched the Champaran Satyagrah in 1917, and the Ahmedabad mill strike in 1918. His signal contribution towards mobilisation of rural masses and the peasantry alongside the industrial working class was at the core of the mass-based voluntary action he launched against British colonial rule. In the early 1920s, he emphasised the need for sustained constructive work, thus combining political resistance to British rule with direct social service. Elements of constructive social work included education, sanitation, protection and promotion of khadi and village industries to help local handicrafts and artisans, and the fight against untouchability, illiteracy and consumption of liquor. People were mobilised in their thousands under Gandhi’s inspiring leadership to dedicate themselves to constructive social work in different parts of the country. This was a new form of voluntary action, which combined political struggle for independence with direct constructive work among deprived and poor communities in rural and urban areas.

When Gandhi moved his ashram to Sevagram in Wardha, he began to focus on ‘Basic Education’ (Nayi Talim). In response to his call, a number of voluntary workers dedicated themselves to the promotion of literacy and basic education in different parts of the country.

“Gandhi introduced a ‘constructive programme’ to make villages self-sufficient by encouraging people to use the spinning wheel (charkha), hand-woven cloth (khadi), and village industries (gramodyog). During the freedom struggle, dedicated workers undertook Gandhi’s constructive programme in the
villages. Besides rural development, Gandhi called upon volunteers to participate in India’s independence movement” (Sen, 2000: 59).

Another interesting feature of this period was the dynamism and vibrancy of women’s leadership in voluntary action. Mahatma Gandhi’s call for constructive work inspired a number of women leaders to organise women’s groups and associations in different regions of the country. Dr Annie Besant organised such a women’s association in Madras in 1917 which became a model for others.

Social reform aimed at improving the status of women was added to the agenda of voluntary action in this period through campaigns in Bihar in 1928 against the purdah system and demanding the raising of the minimum age of marriage of girls to 16. This was a significant development, an advance on the earlier period, which transformed the nature of voluntary action in modern India: the mass involvement of rural and urban poor in voluntary action was an important aspect; the linkage between political action and constructive social work was another significant dimension; the enhanced role and leadership of women was a third significant feature of the advances achieved in this period of voluntary action.

NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

Immediately after independence was established, attention was focused on national reconstruction, and economic development became a major concern of the government. The Constitution which was adopted in 1951 provided wide scope for the government to function in welfare areas. Most leading activists of the freedom movement joined the government in various capacities and began to work towards the establishment of a new social, economic and political order in the country. As a result, the '50s saw a decline in the fervour for
voluntary action. Some Gandhian voluntary associations like the Gandhi ashrams and Sarvoday samitis continued their activities; many others were taken over by the state either directly or through funding and control over the appointment and functioning of their governing bodies. In the '50s the government set-up the Khadi and Village Industries Corporation (KVIC) and the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) to fund the activities of voluntary associations.

However, while social reform activities continued through the new institutions, and while several rural development institutions and schools of social work were established in the early years of independence, to assist the continuation of the pre-independence forms of voluntary action, the state also set-about to create, fund and control a large number of organisations in the fields of the performing arts, culture, music and literature. Whatever the original intentions concerning their 'autonomy', these institutions began to slowly but surely evolve as para-state institutions as the spirit of voluntarism declined. Likewise, the cooperative movement was governmentised through systematic financing and control over these independent voluntary associations.

By the late '60s, the model of development adopted by the new nation-state began to show signs of malfunctioning. Large sections of the population remained poor; a new class of government servants and government institutions came into being; the bulk of the rural, tribal and dalit populations failed to garner any benefits from the government's development and welfare programmes and policies.

This failure of the government and government-sponsored programmes to achieve their proposed objectives, especially in relation to the poorest of the poor, provoked stirrings of protest against state policies and mass movements championing the cause of the downtrodden became widespread. The most extreme and militant of these protest movements of that
period came to be called the Naxalite movement. The response to the call by Jayaprakash Narayan in 1974 for ‘total revolution’ evoked an even wider response and led to a significant shift in the age distribution of members of organisations undertaking voluntary action. It mobilised mainly youth and students throughout the country to move beyond dependence on government machinery to initiate reform and to directly participate with the masses in the reconstruction of society. The declaration of a national emergency by Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1975 and the subsequent authoritarian policies and actions of the state contributed to a weakening of this promising transformation in the spirit and nature of voluntary action in independent India.

DEVELOPMENT

The post-emergency period could be seen as a new phase of voluntary action in contemporary India—a phase in which development becomes the prime thrust of voluntary associations. This was inspired by an increasing distrust in the capacity and intentions of the nation-state and its agencies to address the real problems of poverty, marginalisation and exclusion in Indian society. This led to a number of new voluntary associations being founded by a new generation of young people who came from educated sections of Indian society. They began to focus on issues of bonded labour, environmental degradation, deforestation, appropriate agricultural technology, literacy, and primary health care. Practically every aspect of human endeavour which was hitherto seen as the exclusive domain of the government and its programmes, now began to be an arena of voluntary action. The bulk of this voluntary action was focused on helping the rural poor, the tribals and women; some of these activities also spread to urban slums. Issues of housing, human rights, pollution, drink-
ing water and sanitation also became the focus of initiatives by new voluntary associations founded in this period. It also witnessed a new wave of people's movements on issues of environment like the Chipko and anti-dam movements, on rights of women and dalits and minorities.

During the Emergency, Parliament enacted the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 1976, (FCRA) for implementation by the Central Ministry of Internal Security. This Act continues to be one of the key problematiques in the relationship between voluntary associations and the state in India. In the early 1980s, the government devised a process of systematic intimidation and harassment of Gandhian voluntary associations which were seen to be supporting the ideas of Jayaprakash Narayan and other opposition leaders of this period. A commission of inquiry, the Kudal Commission, was appointed to particularly focus on the activities of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Gandhi Peace Foundation and the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development. Even during the course of its investigations, this commission did considerable harm to the autonomous and independent status of voluntary associations.

In the 1980s, new institutions for regulating government funding for voluntary associations were established. The Council for Peoples Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), for example was founded in the mid 1980s to channelise funds for rural development and for appropriate technology. In the implementation of various government development schemes and programmes at national and state levels, voluntary associations began to be actively associated on the basis of financial grants to bodies active in the field of rural development—women and children welfare, drinking water supply, adult literacy and environmental issues.
It is in this period that new forms of voluntary association also came into being, though the dominant Society Registration Act of 1860 continued to be the main instrument for incorporation and registration (PRIA, 1987). With the appearance of these new forms of association, this phase of voluntary action began to demonstrate significant advances in capacity and contribution of voluntary associations on a wide variety of development issues. At the same time, individual, informal, community-based voluntary action continued to flourish as disenchantedness with the state system of welfare and development began to grow throughout the country. This was also a period when international development organisations (various bilateral and multilateral institutions) began to acknowledge the contribution of voluntary organisations in bringing about sustainable development of communities and societies. This global trend also influenced national policies and programmes, on the one hand, as well as created opportunities for voluntary associations to interact with similar institutions from other parts of the world on the other. This period thus witnessed growing international linkages, exchange of experiences and information and solidarity action by Indian voluntary associations with their counterparts in other regions of the world.

This account of the development of voluntary action in India highlights the changing pattern of voluntary action in India as well as its current form. The overarching purpose of voluntary action is promotion of public good. This common public good is promoted through individual as well as collective action. Voluntary means of one's own choice, self-chosen, self-determined. Voluntary action is, therefore, self-initiated action to promote some aspect of common public good. This could be the well-being of the community, protection of forests or water harvesting or looking after the animals. Thus the scope of voluntary action is determined by the par-
ticular public good that is immediately sought. As is evident, during this period of history, various priorities in the defini-
tion of public good were adopted. The roots of voluntary action in India lie, we saw, in religious inspiration and thereby the definition of public good in our period partook of the spiritual throughout. The focus of public good was on social reform in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the early part of the 20th century, political struggle became the primary public good in the form of independence from colonial rule. National re-
construction was the primary focus of public good in inde-
pendent India. After the period of Emergency, a broader, much more diverse and heterogeneous notion of human development, societal development, became the prime focus of public good. As can be seen during this period the manner of expression of voluntary action also changed. Before the en-
actment of the Society Registration Act of 1860, most of it was spontaneous, informal and based on traditional religious and cultural institutions. More formal organisations have come into being in recent years. There is a rich and varied mosaic of formations for voluntary action in India today.
Various phrases are used to describe voluntary initiatives in India today, e.g. 'voluntary action', 'voluntary organisations', 'voluntary associations', and 'voluntary initiatives'. Predominantly, this usage implies grassroots-level initiatives. It includes community-based organisations (CBOs) and people's organisations (POs) which may be very micro and local in their actions. It also connotes selfless service and social mobilisation of the marginalised and exploited sections of society. It also includes individual initiatives which may not mature into organised entities. These still constitute a significant part of the overall pattern as they have done throughout Indian history. A major source of this terminology derives from the patterns of voluntary service inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. His call for constructive social work, as a part of the struggle for national independence was a major catalyst promoting and shaping patterns of voluntary action in India, particularly in the early years of the 20th century.

The term 'non-governmental organisation' (NGO) has also gained currency in recent decades and captures a wide variety of initiatives with varied objectives and structures. This terminology came into vogue in the early 1950s in the United
Nations system. As an inter-governmental body, the UN could relate to voluntary action only as a ‘non-governmental organisation’ (NGO). ‘Social movements’, ‘people’s organisations’ and ‘grassroots citizens’ initiatives’ are other ways of describing some among this vast array of voluntary initiatives. The term ‘non-profit organisation’ (NPO), popular in the USA and (increasingly) internationally, is not yet widely used in India, but is beginning to gain currency. ‘NPO’ implies a non-market institution which runs on a no-profit basis, as opposed to a business which aims at profit-making. India also saw the growth of co-operatives and trade unions in the 19th century and these have by now served their members and the public good for more than a century.

Indian society today displays a paradoxical mosaic of contradictions. It exists simultaneously in the 21st century and the 17th century (Tandon, 1993). This contradictory nature of Indian society is also reflected in the co-habitation of a wide array of voluntary initiatives. Traditional associations co-exist with modern associations. Among the traditional bodies are caste, ethnic and tribal associations, existing even today for a wide array of social and cultural purposes. Co-existing with these, are many modern associations which sprang up under colonial rule in the 20th century. These include professional associations of lawyers, doctors, engineers, nurses, etc.; also welfare organisations which provide services to the needy and the poor. Besides, public advocacy, research and support organisations exist in their myriad forms and manifestations in India today. There is today virtually no field of human endeavour in which associational activity is not present.

In this rather bewildering and confusing array of voluntary initiatives and organisations, it is rather difficult to neatly delineate and classify different types of forms that voluntary action take on in India today. Yet some sort of framework is essential. Based on PRIA’s studies and direct action, one such
typology focuses on the nature of origin of each voluntary activity.

ORIGIN

The experience of voluntary development organisations and other non-governmental organisations in India has become so diverse and multifaceted that there is need to systematise and classify this vast range of data. In some ways, the label ‘non-governmental organisations (NGO)’ is a negative, non-explanatory one. Under this label, private-sector institutions and a host of other formations are being included. In PRIA’s experience, the use of the term ‘voluntary development organisation’ tends to connote the intended category of formations somewhat better; though there is considerable debate about the meaning of the word ‘voluntary’ or ‘voluntarism’ also in the contemporary context. It has nothing to do with being honorary, which may have been at its historical roots; it has to do more with a combination of self-initiative and social commitment.

Any attempt to build a typology of voluntary organisations must start by specifying what kinds of organisations this typology is all about. What this typology excludes are local, hamlet, village or slum-based formations. These have been variously called Youth Clubs, Mahila Mandalas (Women’s Groups), or self-help groups. Also excluded are what can broadly be called people’s movements or struggles. These are workers’ movements, tribals’ movements, women’s movements, peace movements, human rights movements, etc. as they are spontaneous, informal and coalitions of several individuals and organisations, some of which are temporary and some more long-term. Many government agencies and departments and parastatal institutions and autonomous bodies are extensively engaged in development activities as autonomous entities le-
gally similar to voluntary organisations. Therefore, also excluded are such entities as Tribal and Women Development Corporations, Welfare Boards, etc. Many NGOs acting as funding agencies of national and international origin are also excluded from the scope of this typology (like CARE and Oxfam). Religious institutions set up to promote particular religious beliefs and practices are also excluded. Similarly, trusts set up by business houses with a view to transfer funds are not included. Consultancy firms working for profit; development research institutions (like the A.N. Sinha Institute or Tata Energy Research Institute) are also not included in the scope of this typology.

Which then are the organisations included in the scope of this typology? Development-oriented voluntary organisations are its focus. These are non-profit institutions. Many of them are registered under the Societies or the Trust Act, though a large number remain formally unregistered. The origin of a collective form of voluntary action depends on two main aspects: first is the inspiration and motivation of the founders; second is the rationale for collective voluntary effort. Thus the social origin of the founders becomes a significant basis of classifying different types of voluntary actions.

INSPIRATION

One of the most important sources of differentiation in voluntary organisations is the nature of the inspiration of the founder(s). This inspiration provides the philosophical perspective as well as an analytical framework for viewing the social reality and defining actions to serve the public good. The inspiration comes from various sources—it may be philosophical, intellectual, religious, or ideological. Different sources of inspirations have quite different implications for the manner in which these organisations get established and the man-
ner in which they function. Some of the common types of inspiration prevalent in India are described here.

Religious inspiration is the most dominant and widespread source of origin of many voluntary organisations in India. Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and their myriad contemporary manifestations provide the source of inspiration to many voluntary organisations. Historically, the Christian Church has been a major source of inspiration and the teachings of Christ have inspired generations of missionaries to serve the poor and the needy. Among contemporary configuration of voluntary organisations, a large number and the individuals serving them continue to be inspired by Christian thought. One of the most interesting illustrations of the Christian example inspiring a non-Christian religious group is the Ramakrishna Mission and its various development initiatives throughout the country. A contemporary example is its Lok Shiksha Parishad—a voluntary development organisation.

Another significant source of inspiration has been the teachings and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. The experience of the freedom struggle and Gandhi's call for constructive social work to help the rural masses achieve their own economic, social and moral regeneration, is still a source of inspiration. Gandhian-inspired voluntary organisations practice norms of austerity and simplicity in the conduct of their work. The main focus of such organisations has been village reconstruction, through revival of traditional handicraft industries and creation of pride in swadeshi.

Another active source of inspiration is what could be called the socialist school. Apt examples are the leadership of Purushottam Das Tandon, Ram Manohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan and the waves of voluntary organisations which emerged out of the political struggles and student movements they led. The Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, an out-
SEWAPURI

Sewapuri is the name of a place in the district of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, which today represents the history of a unique institution inspired by Gandhian philosophy of constructive social work. The first organisation set up here was a Gandhi Ashram on 15 November 1946. Inspired by the call of Mahatma Gandhi to work in rural areas, several activists of the freedom struggle settled in Sewapuri and initiated the work of the Ashram. In the initial years, it focused on khadi and village industries, health and nature cure, agriculture and livestock. Also addressed were eradication of leprosy, provision of sanitary facilities and promotion of basic education.

In 1956, another organisation was formed in Sewapuri: the Saghan Kshetra Vikas Samiti, which was primarily engaged in training of artisans and promotion of agro-industry in rural areas. Employment generation became the main focus in this programme. Over the years, the experience gained at Sewapuri has contributed to the evolution of several principles guiding voluntary action inspired by the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. Non-violence and local self-reliance are the basic themes. Staying aloof from village conflicts and politics, distancing from political groups, and non-interference in government functioning and programmes also evolved as guiding principles in the activities of Gandhian voluntary agencies in Sewapuri.

—Adapted from PRIA, 1991: 35

come of the J.P. movement in Bihar and other parts of north India during the mid-70s is a typical example. Likewise, the teachings of Mahatma Phule and Dr B.R. Ambedkar in Maharashtra provided a significant inspiration to several
generations of dalit voluntary organisations. A related source of inspiration are the Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives. Several leftists, though inspired by this perspective abandoned political activity for a variety of reasons and set up voluntary organisations. Even some ultra-leftists, like those involved in the Naxalite struggle in the 1960s, changed their course and set up voluntary organisations, particularly in Bihar and West Bengal. Within the Church, the Marxist perspective among some clergy and a debate on liberation theology also inspired several voluntary development organisations, particularly in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

RATIONALE

The second parameter could be termed the rationale for initiating voluntary action—a sort of world-view which provides the underlying assumption on the basis of which voluntary initiatives are considered necessary. It is an assertion of belief and social commitment by those launching such initiatives by the founder’s on what needs to be done in society if an appropriate change is to occur. Four distinct types of rationale emerge among organised Indian voluntary initiatives today.

One rationale is that people need help—particularly the poor, the downtrodden, the weak. They need material assistance and resources; they need the assistance of knowledge and skills; they continue to be poor because they have not had help. The types of help or assistance they require could be perpetual or temporary. Most voluntary organisations providing relief and rehabilitation during times of disaster (droughts, cyclone, floods, earthquakes, etc.), operate on this basis and tend to treat members of the community as incapable of helping themselves; as resourceless. Relief activities include supply of skills and resources, provision of assistance-based ser-
LOK SHIKSHA PARISHAD

The Lok Shiksha Parishad was founded by the Ramakrishna Mission. The Ramakrishna Mission itself was founded in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda, the chief disciple of Ramakrishna, known as Paramhans. His preachings in 19th century Bengal provided a rallying point for social reform movements at that time.

The Ramakrishna movement was centred on the concept that service to a man is service to God. Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission with the objective of preparing young persons to dedicate themselves to this ideal. Building of skills in different trades, along with fostering appropriate values and ethics, were the strategies used.

In the early years, the Ramakrishna Mission engaged in charity, relief, rehabilitation, serving the poor and the needy. In 1956–57, the Mission shifted its headquarters to a rural area just outside Calcutta and created a separate wing for integrated rural development which came to be known as the Lok Shiksha Parishad. This Parishad has been promoting a variety of integrated development efforts in rural areas around issues of health, education, economic activities, etc.

Most of the leadership of the Parishad comes from those trained by the Mission and therefore are inspired by the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. Orientation towards the philosophy of the Mission is also provided to all those who work in the Parishad. Thus, selection of senior leaders, perpetuation of certain values and culture, the motivation and commitment of its key staff continue to be based on the inspiration provided by the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda as interpreted on the basis of the preachings of Ramakrishna Paramhans.

—Adapted from PRIA, 1991: 36
vices like mid-day meals, food kitchens, clothing, shelter, medicines, etc.

Another rationale is based on a world-view which could be described as developmentalist. It stresses that people and communities ‘could do it on their own’ but require ‘our’ support in the form of programmes, resources, ideas and skills. Many service delivery and development programmes related to health, education, agriculture, irrigation, forestry, income generation, appropriate technology, etc. fall into this category.

A third rationale is based on the theme of empowerment. It holds that the poor need to get organised and collectively struggle to secure their entitlements and rights. The focus of voluntary intervention, therefore, is on the conscientisation and organisation of the poor, tribals, dalits, landless, women etc. in bodies that can unite and lead the masses in struggles to win their rights—literally empowering them in the struggle for acquisition of assets, wages, implementation of certain progressive legislations, education etc.

A more recent rationale is based on the realisation of the need for mobilising support to and influence in favour of social reform in general at various social and political levels not just for individual struggles of the poor and their organisations. Struggle is needed also at the level of those influencing policies; at the level of ideas; at the local, district, state, national and international levels. This perspective assumes that, with growing internationalisation of our societies and economies, forces of oppression and marginalisation operate from different levels and need to be countered and confronted at all those levels. Support and influence thus take different forms at different levels. It is here that institutions engaged in advocacy, research, networking, documentation, training, federating, etc. come into the picture. These have been described as Support Organisations which provide higher-order support to ongoing efforts at the grassroots level. “This does not mean
that support organisations do not offer specific services of practical importance. They are meant to provide certain types of support services on a professional basis. This professionalisation of the support function need not necessarily imply commercialisation of their perspective and approach. This distinction is critical in understanding the nature of support organisations.” (PRIA, 1990: 5).

As has been demonstrated in practice and some earlier studies, this typology succeeds in accommodating a wide variety of programmes and activities that voluntary organisations undertake. More than that, it classifies them under their basic underlying world-view or rationale. Thus, we find that one health programme carried out with the first rationale of ‘help’ tends to provide medicines and treatment, while another programme carried out with the rationale of ‘development’ tends to educate people and solve other non-health related problems in an integrated manner. Therefore, these distinctions are important not only in their indication of underlying beliefs but also the outcome as reflected in the manner in which programmes and activities are carried out by such voluntary organisations.

While these classifications present pure types, it is important to recognise that many hybrids exist in reality. Clearly, these different types of voluntary organisations came about on the basis of the historical context of their origins. The origins of the founding leaders and processes are significantly influenced by their nature of inspiration and the world-view they adopted.

FUNCTION

A second approach to the classification of contemporary voluntary organisations is by examining the functions they serve.¹
SERVICE PROVIDERS

Welfare-oriented, service-providing voluntary organisations catering to needs of poor and marginalised communities obviously fall into this category. They are prompted by the belief that the provision of such services must lead to lasting improvements in the lives of the poor. Hence their stress on services in areas of health and education; in health through clinics, hospitals and health education; in education, through schools, colleges, training programmes, non-formal education, literacy schools, etc. Many such organisations also have active programmes in the fields of drinking water and sanitation, agriculture and irrigation, reforestation, non-conventional sources of energy, appropriate technology, and other development programmes.

Characteristic of the services provided by such bodies is the high level of individual sacrifice, high efficiency at low cost; extreme commitment and dedication. These services are flexible, responsive to the needs of the community, locally grounded and relevant and aimed at providing the means of meeting the basic minimum needs of that community. Often, such service-oriented voluntary organisations operate in areas where government programmes and services are non-existent (as in remote rural and tribal areas).

A related category is welfare-oriented work that arises in situations requiring relief and rehabilitation, such as work with refugees, or in situations of great crises and disasters like cyclones, famines, wars, etc. The contribution of such service- and welfare-oriented voluntary organisations has been significant in India and has a wide relevance and outreach even today. Meeting basic needs and the welfare of the people is the main objective in such emergency situations.
DEVELOPMENT PROMOTERS

The second type of voluntary organisations is constituted of those which are development oriented. They have now begun to address a wide variety of development concerns—drinking water, agriculture, forestry, economic activities, literacy, non-formal education, etc. Their number has grown considerably in India in recent years. They have contributed towards the development of many innovative approaches to strengthening the socio-economic status of the poor and deprived. Their approaches to planning and interventions in socio-economic programming etc. have been very innovative, flexible and impactful. As a result, the ideas and strategies derived from the work of such voluntary organisations have been utilised in national policies and programmes. The classic case is, of course, the community health and primary health care orientation imparted to the entire system of national health care. The experiences of such voluntary organisations became the basis for the formulation of national policies and programmes. Similarly, the work of many voluntary organisations in the areas of literacy and adult, non-formal education has become a model for many national campaigns and other national programmes, like the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP), the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), etc.

Many of such voluntary organisations start with a development intervention, and then build strategies for organisation and empowerment of the people. Some others seem to start by bringing people together on issues of common concern, conscientising and empowering them through a process of reflection and struggle and then building on development interventions and initiatives for their regeneration and sustenance. Thus social mobilisation, community organisation, and development promotion become integral parts of grassroots work by such voluntary organisations.
SUPPORT PROVIDERS

A recent category of voluntary organisations provides a variety of support functions to different grassroots voluntary organisations, mostly of the two types mentioned above. The nature of the support function varies depending on whether it is related to a single sector (like health or education or forestry) or general administrative/organisational support. The support institutions provide inputs that strengthen the capacities of grassroots voluntary organisations to function more effectively and impactfully. Their function, therefore, has included training, evaluation and programme planning. Many large voluntary organisations in some of the countries of South Asia (like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) have developed their own support units within the ambit of their own organisations. In India, where many of the voluntary organisations are small in size at the grassroots level, separate institutions fulfilling these functions have emerged.

Some support functions include support in mobilising financial resources, others provide support in research and information sharing. In recent years, support to engage in policy advocacy has also been a function of some voluntary organisations.

UMBRELLA OR NETWORK

Recent decades have seen the rise of networks of voluntary organisations and umbrella or federation types of voluntary organisations. The networks are more informal, have a limited purpose and, therefore, time-bound associations of voluntary organisations coming together to work on a common issue or concern (like tropical forest protection, drug abuse, women’s rights, occupational health, etc.). Umbrella associations or federations are more formal bodies linking voluntary
organisations together. In India, many such networks and umbrellas are operating at state and national levels. The main reason for their emergence and continuance is the need for bringing together experiences in different micro settings to bear when considering and addressing an issue that requires collective strength, advocacy and a wide perspective. Thus many umbrella organisations have begun to play an important role in raising issues to the level of national and international policy debates and thus contribute towards changing the frameworks and strategies of development based on the experiences of grassroots voluntary organisations operating in local settings.

**SCALE**

While the previous two criteria for classification of voluntary associations are derived from the rationale guiding their programmes and activities, the dimension of scale adds a new perspective for classification based on the manner in which these associations structure themselves and function over a period of time. A very interesting phenomenon in the Indian context is that a vast majority of voluntary associations start small. Most of them work in local settings, among a group of deprived and marginalised communities. Initial work is in one hamlet or slum. As the work of the organisation begins to demonstrate some positive results, both push and pull factors operate. On the one hand, the demand from the community begins to grow. The same community group expects other types of support. As many voluntary organisations have discovered, initial conscientisation and organisation of a community group results in demands for bringing in socio-economic development programmes for the welfare of families of that community. Similarly, the spread effect begins to operate and other community groups begin to demand that the
voluntary association works with them as well. On the other side, many donors (including government agencies) encourage successful though small voluntary associations to expand their outreach and coverage in order to address larger numbers of families and communities. Thus, inherent in the very success of a micro effort by a voluntary organisation are the seeds of its growth, expansion and scaling-up. This could well be called the life-cycle of voluntary organisations over a period of a decade or so. There thus appears to be an inherent tendency for successful voluntary organisations to expand their programmes over larger and larger areas and numbers of community groups. As a result, their internal structure becomes more defined and formalised and the percentage of staff engaged on a full-time basis begins to increase. Voluntary organisations thus go through an interesting period of growth and expansion, once they begin to be successful in a particular locality.

However, in the Indian context, the bulk of the voluntary organisations are small and operate predominantly in distant rural and backward areas. The small size of these organisations is reflected in their use of volunteers and part-timers rather than full-time, professionally qualified staff. It is also reflected in the very limited scope of their coverage—a few households in a small community in a village or a slum. The resources of most such organisations are those which have been mobilised locally, often from the families and friends of the founding team itself. Only occasionally do they receive project funds from an outside agency or a philanthropic grant; sometimes an individual may be able to obtain a time-bound fellowship or some other form of personal income while the work of the organisation continues to depend on contributions raised from the community and sympathisers.

In another category are medium-size voluntary organisations, largely those which graduate from the previous category as
part of their life-cycle and cover a broader arena of several villages in a block (or two) or several slum pockets in a town. They, typically, have up to ten full-time staff, many of whom are community-based animators or organisers who have been drawn from the community itself and provided with the necessary orientation and skills. They operate on small ongoing projects with budgets based on funding from government agencies or a programme with occasional support from international NGOs or solidarity groups. In the present context, their annual budget may be up to Rs 500,000 a year.

The next category could be termed big voluntary organisations in the Indian context. They, typically, have full-time staff with varying capacities and competencies numbering thirty to fifty and their annual project funds could range up to Rs 5,000,000 per annum. Their activities usually range over several districts or towns, operating regular programmes in various areas of development. Most of them will depend on some international funding for a part of their annual budget.

The last category could be termed 'large-size organisations'. These are relatively few in India, perhaps no more than two hundred. They would have full-time staff strength of a hundred or more and a budget above Rs 5,000,000 per annum, drawn from project grants from a variety of national and international sources. They operate in several districts of one or more states and have a substantial cadre of local animators and organisers as well as professionally educated and trained staff.

It is hard to estimate the number of voluntary organisations in India today. The nature of their legal incorporation makes no distinction between those which are religious institutions, those which are educational institutions (like colleges or schools) or health-care institutions like hospitals, and those which are
community-based youth clubs or social associations. As of 1999, the provisions of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act are applicable to nearly twenty thousand voluntary organisations. About half of these (say ten thousand) would, on a rough estimate, be organisations engaged in some form of social development work. These will be predominantly in the large and the big categories.

It is estimated that nearly one million active voluntary organisations operate in the country today. However, they vary greatly in the manner in which they define their purposes and elaborate their activities, and in the nature of their resource base. This excludes a wide array of professional associations, trade unions, cooperatives, art and culture groups which are predominantly membership-based and funded through the contributions of their members. However, it is important to recognise that, for a country of the size of India, large voluntary organisations are comparatively much fewer than in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh or Sri Lanka. Large voluntary organisations in Bangladesh, for example, would have several thousand full-time staff on a regular basis with budgets ranging up to several million dollars per annum.

The most important issue in scale is to understand how the structure and functioning of a voluntary organisation gets affected by its size. The larger the organisation, the more formal are its ways of functioning. Smaller organisations are more flexible and unstructured in functioning. Thus different ideologies, different functions and different scales of voluntary organisations could combine to generate a wide spectrum of organisational types in the Indian context.

Hence, the terrain of contemporary voluntary action in the Indian society is extremely diverse and heterogeneous. It includes the small and the large, Gandhians and radicals, new professionals and social workers. As a result, the field of voluntary action in India is rich, varied and often internally
conflictful and contested. But it can be safely argued that voluntary action addresses every aspect of human endeavour in the Indian context. It is organised in myriad different forms that will match any found anywhere in the world at any period. Traditional religious associations and welfare service providers co-exist with highly sophisticated research organisations addressing issues of biotechnology. This is a great strength for the Indian voluntary sector, as also a major challenge that it faces today.

NOTES

1. This section is based on PRIA, 1989, NGO–Government Relations: A Source of Life or A Kiss of Death.
The concept of civil society has yet to gain general currency in India. Its beginnings can be traced to the 1990s, largely influenced by its international manifestation in the post-Soviet Union political context (Tandon, 1991). Some critiques of the concept have emerged which suggest that ‘civil society’ is seen more as an externally imposed framework than a home-grown one (Acharya, 1997). This is particularly relevant in the Indian situation where voluntary associations and voluntary initiatives are seen as indigenous creations, concepts and practices. In recent years, there have been attempts to describe as well as explain the relevance of the concept of civil society in the Indian context. The framework of the trinity—state, market and civil society—has also been used to explain the institutional space, which is neither captured by the state nor the market. A relevant definition in the Indian context would, however, be that civil society comprises individual and collective initiatives for common public good. This definition covers both informal individual initiatives as well as those of more formally structured organisations. It also accommodates a wide array of objectives since ‘public good’ can be interpreted in different ways by different groups and initiatives. This is con-
There is now, therefore, a contentious debate on this concept [civil society] which is yet to be seen as describing a sectoral identity of voluntary initiatives in the country. The debate centres around the notion of civil society and its relevance in traditional and modern Indian context, on the one hand, as well as its operational manifestation, on the other. Some would consider civil society as a space while others would look at it as an organised effort. Some would include more developmental and philanthropic connotations of civil society while others would give it a more political meaning. In some recent studies, the elaboration of this concept has helped to provide a more comprehensive meaning to the phrase 'civil society', its linkages to the concept of the citizen and citizenship as well as its roots in the primary initiatives of ordinary people beyond the domains of the family (Tandon, 1999). This has established a foundation for the concept in the Indian context (Mahajan, 1999). However, in the absence of a singular identity, civil society is yet to embrace the totality of the meaning of voluntary initiatives in the country. Likewise, the voluntary community is yet to embrace the concept of civil society. Obviously, its growing usage by international organisations and the donor community is likely to make it more current; however, its meaning and its manifestation has to gain roots in the Indian soil before it can legitimately describe the sector in India. (PRIA, 2000: 5).

sistent with the meaning and purposes that voluntary action has historically implied in India.

**MEANING**

Independent India adopted a modern democratic constitution. The British parliamentary system was adopted and
imposed on the Indian society. This system had grown to maturity in a situation of rapily growing urbanisation in 19th century Britain; it was not a natural growth on the Indian soil.

Such non-indigenous state systems maintained their dominance and hegemony in most countries of the South during the post World War II decades. The new global consensus on private enterprise as the basis for rapid economic development is shifting the balance in favour of the market. Private, for-profit, economic and business activity is being seen as the primary engine of economic development. This duality of the state and the market is an inadequate representation of social reality in any given context and has to be enlarged to include civil society. What are these three pillars of the Trinity? How do we understand them separately and together?

According to Tandon and Brown (1994)

Civil Society in our framework includes the web of associations, social norms and practices that comprise social activity different from activities of the institutions of the state (such as political parties, government agencies or norms about voting) or the institutions of the market (such as corporations, stock markets or expectations about the honoring of contracts). Strengthening civil society requires improving intellectual, material and organisational bases of the actors of the civil society.

It is clear from the above that civil society is not a homogenous construct. A variety of actors comprise of civil society: associations, voluntary agencies, non-governmental organisations, people’s movements, citizens groups, consumer associations, small producers’ associations and cooperatives, women’s organisations, indigenous people’s associations etc. etc. These diverse actors in the Indian context comprise both indigenous and modern forms of association.
Civil society actors, with their myriad forms of associations of citizens and their organisations, are, therefore, distinct from political parties and their front organisations, government agencies, military and law-and-order machinery, judiciary etc. The institutions of the market (comprising national and multi-national corporations, financial institutions and their interlocking arrangements) are distinct from both the actors of civil society and agencies of the state.

It is possible, therefore, to argue that each of these three sectors has a unique character in a given context. In different regions and countries of the world, due to different historical processes and contexts, different elements of the three sectors have acquired salience and importance. The concept of the nation-state gained support essentially after World War II in many countries of the South. The state-led model of development was given primacy and hence the description of the state as the first sector of society. On the other hand, in many countries of the North, the market is the primary agency of economic development and was termed the second sector of society. The concept of the Trinity emerged only over the past few years, overcoming the polarity of the state and the market. Civil society, therefore, has been called the third sector.

However, in a given context, the contribution of each of these three sectors in the socio-economic development of a given society varies a great deal. In some cases, the state is so dominant that it absorbs both the market and the civil society. For example, in a country like India, on gaining Independence, the state took over the functions of both the civil society and the market. In some other situations, the market dominates both the state and the civil society and becomes the key player. However, such domination does not promote sustainable development. A balance between these three sectors is necessary for a sustainable and just socio-economic development and democratic governance. The state, the market and
the civil society need to interact in a manner that is mutually accountable, supportive and synergistic.

THE FIRST SECTOR

The first question we must examine is whether the State, in its modern conceptualization, is really prime, the first in importance. Historically, since the Second World War, a modern concept of nation-state has been imposed on many newly independent countries of the South. Trying to overcome the heritage of the colonial rule, these countries embraced a concept of State which was alien to their social, cultural and political milieu (Rothchild and Chazan, 1988). As the dominant actor, such states regulate not only macro national and international relations but also determine the manner in which relationships across families, communities and institutions are managed. This tends to create the impression that the State is the primary actor in contemporary societies. However, the reality on the ground is not necessarily so.

Despite assertions of the powerful and ever-expanding State in India, the reality on the ground is quite different. Large sections of people and many segments of society continue to remain outside the purview of the Indian State. Its policies, agencies and agents have lost legitimacy with large sections of society. Pervasive black market economics and subsistence survival economies are just two examples of such disengagement from the State. Ordinary citizens have become disenchanted and excluded by the manner in which the Indian state has captured all public resources (Commonwealth Foundation, 1999) under the rubric, Public Sector. Thus, everything, outside the state is the private sector—the for-profit private sector, the second sector; still excluding the civil society—the third sector.
A second difficulty arises in characterising the business or the corporate world, or the market economy, as the second sector in the society. First of all, many countries in the South, and increasingly countries in the North too, have widespread informal economies which are not hooked to the formal national or international economy. The substantial presence of self-employed individual and family economic enterprises and activities, which can hardly be construed as corporations, or, for that matter, conceptualised as sharing the same dynamics, culture and perspective as modern business. Are they included in the market? Despite the neat economic theories and models, the market economy of many countries (like India) continues to show many distortions and imperfections. This generates the problematique of equating economic development with performance of the market. So, it is difficult to call the “market sector” the second sector. Not only is it problematic to call the State the first sector, and business as the second, but it is also inadequate to imply “residual” or “left-over” (whatever is not State and not business) as the third sector of civil society, voluntary organisations, citizen associations, and neighbourhood and community organisations.

In the historical sense, civil society is the first sector; it came before the nation-state and modern business. It is also a public sector, not a private one, as civil society addresses issues in the public domain, for common public good.

It is interesting to note that over the last fifty years most theorising and conceptualisations in political science, political economy and sociology have focused on definitions, re-definitions and re-formulations of the State on the question of governance. This governance has been equated with the functioning of governments. Very little thinking has been done on the question of civil society (Bratton, 1991). This is symptomatic of the growing dominance of the State in defining the paradigms of development and the frameworks of relationships in contemporary societies.
Yet, prior to the colonial rule, centuries of culture and communities continued to exist and flourish in different parts of the world without the modern concept of State. What provided the basis for the evolution of science, technology, culture, art, music, education, etc. in these communities? It was the result of the actions and actors in civil society.

References to and discussions concerning the construct of Civil Society have varied in the literature on the theory of politics and governance (Bratton, 1991). Historically, civil society was seen as the arena for organising governance and material activities, as well as intellectual, moral and cultural aspects of communities. However, with the appearance of the modern State (in whatever form) in the contemporary context, it is difficult to understand civil society without a simultaneous reference to the State. Bratton (1991) describes the State–Civil Society dynamic in the contemporary context as a Ying–Yang metaphor. Viewed in this way, and following the Gramscian perspective, the state can be seen to represent the “politics of domination”, as civil society represents the “politics of consent”. Thus, the state and civil society are both simultaneously needed to complete the process of governance of society. The state represents the structures of governance and civil society creates the value and normative framework for governance.

THE INDIAN MOSAIC

The spread of discourse on civil society is less than a decade old. In many quarters, civil society is equated with its voluntary organisations; it is automatically assumed that it is constituted of all its voluntary associations collectively. Further, there has also been a tendency to imply that only formal institutions can constitute a civil society. This, indeed, has not been the case in India, despite the fact that a large part of civil society in
India continues to be expressed in the form of informal citizen actions.

It is, therefore, useful to examine the wide range of formations that may constitute the mosaic of civil society. The classification below is an attempt to describe the broad spectrum of civil society formations in the Indian context today.

COMMUNITY-BASED ASSOCIATIONS

In the rural and tribal areas, local associations have existed throughout history and have played various roles in relation to governance of local natural resources and regulation of social relations of families and communities. In certain parts of the country (like North-East India), tribal community councils continue to exist even today as local self-governance mechanisms. Likewise, caste associations are also prevalent on the lines of those which came into existence in the 19th century, inspired by the reform movement. However, the bulk of these indigenous formations have become 'induced' and dependent formations as a consequence of the development strategy adopted since independence. Various developmental programmes and agencies went about setting up youth groups and women's groups (Mahila Mandals) as instruments for programme implementation at the grassroots level, without any reference to the existing indigenous formations.

MASS ORGANISATIONS

India has a rich mosaic of mass organisations—of peasants, of landless labourers, of forest workers, for example. These organisations have been successful in projecting the specific demands of various sections of the people and claiming their rights within the framework of a democratic state.
Another type of mass organisation needs mention here: the trade unions. India’s trade unions history stretches over a century. There have been some very strong and effective unions, the majority linked with political parties and, therefore, operating within the margins of the state. It is only in recent years that some independent trade unions have begun to operate on a wide scale. Special mention in this regard must be made of attempts by workers’ organisations to take over the control and management of their own productive enterprises (e.g. of Kamani Tubes Ltd., Mumbai) and a recent initiative to form a nation-wide federation of organisations of informal sector workers called the National Centre for Labour.

All major political parties organise unions of students, peasants, women, etc. as a sub-set of the political party system which operates within the framework of the state.

**RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS**

As mentioned earlier, all religions in India emphasised the need for selflessly helping the needy. This is manifested in practice in religious charity and social giving manifested in the fields of education, healthcare, feeding the poor, helping destitutes, etc. Many religious organisations have functioned in such fields over long periods and continue to serve the needs of the poor today. However, in recent years, some religious organisations have acquired parochial and fundamentalist edges which have become sources of conflict within contemporary civil society.

**VOLUNTARY DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS**

As discussed earlier, the scope of contemporary voluntary organisations engaged in social development and poverty al-
leviation issues is enormous and widespread. Grassroots-level mobilisation and conscientisation; building people’s movements and organisations; implementing development programmes and poverty alleviation strategies; advocacy of and monitoring of state policy; undertaking research, documentation, training and other forms of support; networking and federating—these are some of the diverse types of activities undertaken by voluntary organisations in India today. Theirs is a major and clearly audible voice in the fields of social development and poverty elimination.

However, in recent years, with increased availability of government and international funding, several problematic trends have also emerged. Firstly, many voluntary organisations have been exclusively dependent on state funding and, as a result, have almost begun to behave like government organisations. Secondly, fake and self-seeking organisations have emerged which, when they come to the attention of government and the media bring discredit to the totality of the voluntary movement.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Contemporary social movements focus on a vast range of issues that affect people. The strategy of development adopted by the state since independence has resulted in displacement of vast numbers of poor people and very extensive ecological degradation. This has prompted movements like those against the building of the Narmada Dam, the Tehri Dam, mining in Rajasthan, a hydro-electric project in Kerala, military bases in Orissa and Tamil Nadu, and the introduction of prawn cultivation in coastal Andhra Pradesh. Struggles over control of the resources of national parks and sanctuaries (like the Rajaji National Park in the North) are among the more visible recent examples of such social movements.
Over the past twenty years, women’s movements have made significant contributions towards improvements in the status of women. A special mention needs to be made of campaigns concerning women’s education, health and population control. For their socio-economic development, some organisations have pressed for the establishment of separate institutions for extending loans on easy terms to women and their organisations.

The promotion of narrow regional and linguistic interests have also been the basis for organising social movements in the recent years. This inevitably causes conflict and tension within civil society. The resurgence of the dalit movement has found expression in organisations articulating the rights, concerns and claims of the dalit (socio-economically oppressed) communities. In the past decade issues like defence of human rights, abolition of child labour, suppressing female infanticide, and ensuring freedom of information have also been the rallying themes of social movements in India.

CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY

The record of private business in India contributing to the promotion of social well-being is a fairly long one. Several Indian industrialists supported the freedom movement, specially the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi. Corporate philanthropy for social and economic well-being has continued in independent India, though in limited geographical and programmatic areas. Several private business houses and industry associations are currently active in the field.

CONSUMER GROUPS

As is the case with the private market institutions, the consumer movement has, in the past, been rather weak in India.
It is only in the past few years that effective organisations of consumer groups have been formed in various parts of the country. However, the movement is still limited in its capacities and outreach, and is predominantly restricted to the larger urban centres.

CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

India has had a long tradition of folk culture as a vehicle for strengthening social cohesion. Even today, various cultural media are being used as means of strengthening people’s learning, capacities and organisations and as instruments of mobilisation of people for social action. In the film and music industry of India there have been many initiatives to set up autonomous cultural formations as constituents of civil society. Special mention must be made of SAHMAT, a cultural formation addressing the issues of secularism and democracy.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Learning from the British, India has had a long history of professional associations which bring together journalists, lawyers, engineers, architects, doctors, teachers etc. etc. Hundreds of such associations exist today; some have also been closely affiliated with political parties and benefitted from the largesse of the state.

Special reference is necessary to such associations and clubs like Rotary, Lions, etc., which serve the purpose of bringing individual professional and business people together in socio-cultural formations. These associations also undertake programmes for socio-economic development.
ECONOMIC ASSOCIATIONS

With its long history of cooperatives as independent initiatives of small producers and consumers, India today faces the ironical situation of having this potential economic actor of civil society becoming an appendage of the state. Through legislation, political control and funding, the state has reduced the entire cooperative movement to total dependence and subservience. However, special attention must be drawn to the new opportunities of setting up truly autonomous cooperatives offered by the recent legislation in this behalf in Andhra Pradesh. In this regard, the work of such groups as the Cooperative Development Foundation needs to be highlighted.

OTHERS

Many analysts hold that both the media and academia are parts of civil society. The bulk of the electronic media have, for many years since independence, continued to be under the tight control of the state. The new electronic open airwaves have created some possibility of autonomous media intervention in civil society. Likewise, most daily newspapers have been affiliated with various business interests. Several magazines and the Indian-language press have, however, taken some independent initiatives. Most of the initiatives in academia have been dependent on state funding and patronage. However, many academic institutions and associations have taken a fairly active and autonomous position on problems facing Indian society.

Thus civil society, as a new constituent, can gain roots in India if it is seen as a continuation of the tradition of voluntary action. In this sense, it can embrace all those formations and
initiatives which contribute to the realisation of public good and operate within the constitutional framework.

A new phenomenon in recent years is the emergence of global civil society. To quote a recent study:

The same processes that globalize problems also globalize their possible solutions. Global civil society is a new concept. Will it be capable of generating the energy and resources needed to cope with global problems and concerns? Recent history gives us reasons for hope. And hope can also be strengthened by inspired, principled human action (de Oliveira and Tandon, 1994: 5).

NOTES

1. This section draws on a previous paper by the author entitled “Civil Society in India Today” presented and published in Proceedings of First Asia Pacific Civil Society Forum, Korea, 1995.
Emerging Challenges

In recent years, debates on voluntary organisations and their relevance have focused on the authenticity and credibility of voluntary action in the contemporary context. From time to time, the media report on "misuse" of funds, foreign or Indian, by voluntary organisations. Recently a controversy arose over newspaper reports that CAPART (Council for Advancement of Peoples Action and Rural Technology, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India) had "blacklisted" nearly 500 voluntary agencies for misuse of funds CAPART had allotted to them. Questions concerning the authenticity of such bodies and their accountability dominated the public debate that followed.

Today’s challenges to the relevance of voluntary action arise out of the complex global, regional and national contexts. To overcome them, these contexts and their implications need to be studied and analysed in depth and their implications for current and emerging roles for voluntary action must be identified. This chapter attempts to paint a broad picture of global and national trends and then analyse the emerging trends within the voluntary sector in that context.
GLOBAL CONTEXT

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the global context has dramatically changed. We are now living in a unipolar world which has lost its previous bi-polar characteristics. The end of the Cold War, the disappearance of the Soviet Union and Eastern Block and the resultant global political arrangements throughout the world are all too visible. There have been significant shifts in international relations in recent years. The USA and its allies in Western Europe have established their hegemony, not only in the military and strategic sense, but also in the sense of their ideology and form of governance.

1. There is a visible victory for capitalism and the free market as the dominant form of economic organisation of society. This seems to be the only form which at this stage of history is offering any hope of improvement in the economic standards of people throughout the world. Many countries of the South are also, therefore, moving towards free market economies and private entrepreneurship as the motive force for economic development.

2. Similarly, liberal democracy, based on universal franchise and multi-party elections, has also emerged as the singular, most desirable form of governance. Many countries of the South currently under dictatorships (single-party or military) are moving towards the adoption of a multi-party, pluralistic form of democratic political systems; whether parliamentary or presidential.

3. There is growing attempt to create regional blocs, primarily based on the principle of economic co-operation. ‘Fortress Europe’ and regionalisation of the European Community has already progressed a great deal. NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Alliance, is now spreading beyond the boundaries of Mexico to the South, to include Chile and countries of Central America in the ambit of Canada, the USA and
Mexico. Similar attempts are being made in Asia to bring together Japan, Taiwan, Korea and China, along with the newly industrialising countries of South-East Asia (like Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia) into a single orbit. APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Council) is already planning a free-trade zone with its fastest growing economies and biggest market potential in the world.

4. There has also been a significant restructuring of the United Nations system in recent years. We have seen that the UN no longer enjoys the kind of global relevance that it had a few years ago, when the Group of Seventy-seven (G-77) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) had ensured that the positions, opinions and needs of the developing countries of the South were heeded and addressed by the UN system. In the restructured United Nations, the Security Council has become the most dominant organ of governance of global relations and its utilisation in the Gulf War could be seen as the harbinger of things to come. With the USA and other rich countries trying to undermine the multilateral nature of the UN system, there is a growing fear that it may not survive in its current form beyond the next decade.

5. In terms of managing international economic relations, WTO and the World Bank/IMF have begun to play much more important roles than ever before, with the slogan of promoting the ‘free market economy’ in all the countries of the world. Growing private foreign investment in countries of the South is being encouraged. Many more countries are following an export-led model of growth and are facing growing indebtedness. WTO is the mentor of the new trade regime, which is being unjustly used to promote the trade interests of the already powerful countries rather than those of the developing ones.

6. There is a clear trend towards “restructuring” of the bilateral aid system as it had evolved after the Second World
War. There is growing "aid fatigue", leading to donor countries significantly reducing the levels of their overseas aid; their citizens are showing diminishing support for it. Slowly but surely, aid policies are getting closely allied with trade policies. In the post-cold-war scenario, global relations need no longer be maintained for political purposes and can now be pursued primarily to advance economic interests. Thus bilateral aid is, in the future, going increasingly to be used to serve the interests of the trading partners in the global trade regime.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Several important trends in the national context also need to be understood. Some of these are reflections of the larger global context, but some are quite unique to our own setting.

1. The rise of fundamentalism based on caste, language, and now religion has communalised and destroyed the very fabric of our society. Division and fragmentation has gone down to the village level. However, it is interesting to note that this parochial communalism has been nurtured by all political parties since independence in pursuit of the politics of vote-banks. What has shocked us most is the pervasive violence that has emerged in association with the forces of communalism and fundamentalism.

Also most visible in recent months is the close nexus between politics, violence and crime. The fact that the political apparatus had become so entrenched in the underworld and the black economy has only recently begun to hit our collective conscience. As a result, the political system has lost its legitimacy and capacity to govern in a meaningful way.

2. There have, of course, been some steps taken over the last decade to reorganise the Indian economy. Faced with the changing global scenario and the growing economic crisis within the country, there is need for significant and serious
restructuring of the economy and polity. However, the current model of restructuring to globalise, privatise and liberalise Indian economy under the Structural Adjustment Programme meets only part of the demands of the larger manifesto of the World Bank/IMF. While this may result in increased economic development for the 'upper' half of the Indian society, it is clear that this is not likely to provide any solution to the problem of continued poverty and misery of the 'bottom' half. The two 'halves' of Indian economy are now operating almost in mutual exclusion: the modern economy of India, and the subsistence economy of Bharat!

3. Even such attempts at economic restructuring as are being implemented seem to have been undertaken half-heartedly since national policy-makers are unable to find a way to reduce the expenditure on the state itself and its machinery. At the core of effective restructuring is the redefinition of the nature of the state and its role in contemporary economic development. The disappearance of 'state socialism' from much of the globe in recent years has posed significant intellectual and practical questions for the continued predominance of the corrupt, inefficient and crumbling Indian state and its apparatus, which is consuming a lion's share of all economic resources at this juncture. Our attempt to liberalise and build a modern industrial economy has not been initiated with any real effort to shatter the shackles with which the Indian state and its burgeoning bureaucracy have bound the poor and those who work among them.

4. The new constitutional amendments (73 and 74) are intended to create mechanisms of local self-governance and devolution of power in the rural and urban areas of the country. Yet, there is a general lack of enthusiasm among entrenched politicians and officials to let go of their power and control over resources. Unless they do so, or are made to do so, devolution may not work at all. However, a new generation of
elected representatives in panchayats and municipalities are pressing for steps to make devolution functional and authentic.

EMERGING TRENDS

In the above outlined national and global context, what new trends are emerging in the field of voluntary action?

1. An oft-repeated phrase these days when discussing the Indian social scene is the *mushrooming of voluntary organisations*. As the metaphor chosen indicates, what is the implied is not a healthy, positive evolution or growth in number, kind and spread; but is a hurried, haphazard formation, a quick emergence of a large number of voluntary organisations without any careful analysis of their intended missions, purposes or roles. Many organisations suddenly emerge and continue to operate without really taking root, in a local context, without examining the kind of needs that exist in that area, without elaborating what they hope to accomplish. This trend is worrisome; it can undermine the credibility of existing organisations as well as the better-run newly emerging ones. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the origins of this trend.

The "mushrooming" trend is not uniformly seen throughout the country; there are regional variations in spite of the fact that the factors promoting the proliferation are uniformly present all over the country. One of causes of the proliferation of voluntary organisations is the increased availability of funds both from government and foreign sources. Ever since the formation of CAPART, two states, UP and Bihar, have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of voluntary organisations set up, it would seem, essentially to solicit and secure grants, to siphon off funds available from CAPART. Similarly, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the late '70s and early '80s and Orissa in the mid '80s also experienced a mushrooming of voluntary organisations, in these cases on
the basis of foreign funding (PRIA, 1991). Foreign donors' preference for making grants in these parts of the country and the easy and extensive availability of funds for them fed this sudden profusion. This is not to imply that all these mushrooming voluntary organisations were fake or that those who set them up are using them as sources of personal income or diverting the funds received to some purpose other than that professed. All that is being stressed is that most of them were set up without sufficient thought or planning, without application, without assessing the mission, purpose, strategy and approach. It is almost as if setting up voluntary organisations had become a fashionable fad.

2. A second worrisome trend is the use of voluntary organisations for purposes other than their social change rationale. What is happening in certain parts of the country is that such voluntary organisations set up with a view to pursue a social commitment are becoming shops for commerce. Voluntary organisations have been used for business, as a cover for business; they can also be used for providing employment opportunities. It is, therefore, not surprising to find a very large number of voluntary organisations in certain parts of the country, like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu where educated, unemployed youth abound as 'activists'. With the availability of funds and unlimited demand for people to undertake development work in the country, these institutions become employment-generation opportunities.

Some other business or commercial motivations are much more dangerous. Many organisations have been set up to pursue the personal well-being of their founder(s). Family business and family voluntary organisations share similar characteristics in many respects. In some cases, they have been set up as a cover to acquire government funds under government schemes. Programme administrators tend to give preferences to voluntary organisations registered as societies or trusts when
awarding contracts for such developmental activities as digging wells, drilling for drinking water and irrigation, plantation of trees, etc. Many contractors and business houses are using 'voluntary' forms of organisations to get to government funds while continuing to play their rôles of middlemen and petty contractors.

Also alarming practice is that of political parties setting up voluntary organisations. Historically, many voluntary organisations were part of the freedom struggle; and social action for constructive work and political action for liberation were seen as two sides of the same coin. Many Gandhian-inspired voluntary organisations continued to maintain close links with political parties and leadership even after independence was achieved. However, the current trend is for political parties to set up voluntary organisations in certain geographical areas with a view to get close to certain populations (like the BJP and RSS setting up voluntary organisations in the tribal belts of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal). They are also set up by all Indian political parties to acquire government grants which would provide party workers serving the organisation a source of support both from the grants and payment for special projects undertaken on contract or otherwise.

In recent years, voluntary organisations set by ex-government officials are also mushrooming. After retirement (or early retirement in these days of VRS), these ex-officials set up voluntary organisations to continue their own preferred projects and activities.

3. Another cause for worry in recent years is the emergence of certain corrupt practices among voluntary organisations. Many forms are visible. The first is, of course, paper organisations, fake organisations, set up primarily to receive a one-time grant from some government department or foreign agency and siphon off the funds for personal use. A sec-
ond is declining standards of personal integrity of activists. Senior leaders are being accused in several instances of not maintaining high standards of personal integrity. A third trend, is the visible use of the forces of casteism, communalism and favouritism within the voluntary organisations. These are, again, part of the larger societal forces and trends but they become critical since voluntary organisations are social change organisations based on certain values and social commitment. Hence, the expectations from such organisations and their leadership is of a high normative and moral order.

There are also those who have used the voluntary organisation form to either attract resources or to provide a cover for other, unwholesome, activities. Thus the debate on what constitutes an authentic and genuine voluntary organisation has become all the more confused and muddy. Form of Registration as a Society or a Trust is no longer an adequate criterion for defining an authentic voluntary organisation.

4. Growing dependence on government funds and programmes among many voluntary organisations is another cause for concern. In the mid-eighties, as the government began to allocate additional funds to implement its programmes through voluntary organisations, many more voluntary organisations throughout the country had begun to utilise these funds. Slowly but surely, those voluntary agencies which depend solely on government funds acquire the character of extensions of the state and its apparatus in their own functioning and priorities. Project-tied funds have become the mainstay of most voluntary organisations. As solidarity support from individual countries from the North declines, most voluntary organisations are forced to access project funds of international donor agencies. Official Development Assistance (ODA), through bilateral and multilateral channels is now passing to Indian voluntary agencies through Northern NGOs or government development programmes. As a result of this grow-
ing dependence on external funds, many voluntary agencies have become virtually a part of the global development aid regime.

5. The new generation of youth during the last decade, though inspired by the same commitment to social change, are no longer entering the voluntary field at the same rate as their predecessors did towards the end of the 1970s. As a result, most people who have joined voluntary organisations in the period of their economic growth have done so primarily for a job as employees for something meaningful to do. The growth in office size, complexity and diversity in funding of voluntary organisations in the past decade has also implied their need to recruit a large number of such people at fairly short notice, thereby ensuring that the basic motivation of those working in these organisations is essentially for something meaningful and gainful to do in order to earn an income or a salary. Social change commitment has been de-emphasised.

New donor regimes demand more sophisticated granting and reporting procedures. This has resulted in recruitment of professionally trained staff who lack the perspective, though they have the competencies.

KEY CHALLENGES

It is obvious that the coming decade will be qualitatively and substantively different for voluntary organisations than in the immediately earlier decades. Very few voluntary organisations are likely to be taking notice of these changes in a systematic manner even though they may be experiencing them incrementally on a daily basis. These key challenges focus on what voluntary organisations themselves can do in the near future.
Clarity of Role in Society

In recent years, the debate on the role of voluntary organisations in Indian society has revolved around many issues. There is need, therefore, to re-examine this debate and to re-articulate the roles of voluntary organisations in a society like India’s. It is unlikely that a single role or a single set of roles can be superior or most desirable. What is important to understand is what different roles can be assumed in what context. What contributions can they make and what inter-linkages exist across different roles of voluntary organisations? The kinds of false contradictions that need to be overcome are as mentioned below:

One particular point of view is that the role of voluntary organisations is located essentially in local settings. They should work at the grassroots, with villagers, the poor, women, tribals, landless slum-dwellers, street children, etc. This is an attempt to localise the work of voluntary organisations. What about the forces of oppression and control which emanate from national or international levels? Mere localised action of voluntary organisations will reduce the likelihood of their potential being used for contributing towards social transformation. They must work also at the regional, national and international levels. The same form and mechanism will not be effective at all levels. One form is effective at the local level, another at the national or international level. So the challenge is not to work at the local or national level. The challenge is to continue to work at the local level with a national framework and vice-versa. Think locally, act globally; think globally, act locally; think and act locally and globally (GLOCALY).

Another debate ensues concerning the merits of experimentation at the grassroots level as against advocacy for policy change. Some voluntary organisations believe that their role is to promote the actual implementation of the desired innovations, even at the level of experimentation; to initiate new ideas and
models, testing them by practical implementation at the grassroots. Others work at the level of advocacy, influencing policy-makers, decision-makers at the state, national and international levels. Both types of organisation are needed. Advocacy cannot sustain itself without being rooted in local experimentation and innovation; experimentation cannot survive long if it does not influence the policy frameworks at the national and global levels—their activities are complementary.

Another issue is that between *activism and professionalism*. Activists are criticised as being just implementers (as against innovators) who have, over the years, on the basis of sheer experience and dedication, worked with the people. Perhaps they have not been that efficient, perhaps they are not even that cost-effective, perhaps they are not able to plan, monitor and manage their work. Professionals, on the other hand, come with competence in a particular professional area, formal specialist education, familiarity with models and frameworks, and the sense of confidence that these endowments tend to create. Associated with this is training in the use of management tools and techniques. However, the latter are seen as being insensitive (unrooted), lacking the experience and humility essential for the pursuit of this kind of social intervention. Again, a false dichotomy! Who is a professional? A professional is one who is wholly committed to the job. A professional is not so by nature of formal education and degree. Many engineers, doctors, lawyers and scientists can be extremely unprofessional in the manner in which they work. Yet, many activists, without formal education and degrees, are extremely professional in the manner in which they carry out their work with local communities. Both perspectives and capacities are needed to support each other. The challenge is how do we make our activists more competent, and how do we make our professionally trained youngsters more sensitive to the grass-root realities?
In defining the role of voluntary action, there are differences between the advocates of developmental action and those of political action. Interestingly enough, as has been mentioned earlier, this dichotomy did not exist before independence. In fact, all social action and constructive work was closely linked to political action for freedom. The dichotomy has evolved, sharpened and engulfed voluntary organisations only over the last 50 years. Many in voluntary organisations believe in developmental action. Many others decline to support such interventions because they are not political. In an unjust, unequal society like India where a small elite controls a large percentage of national resources, any developmental intervention has political potential. Hence, de-linking the two is a strategy that will reduce the effectiveness of developmental intervention. The challenge for voluntary organisations is to be able to combine their developmental interventions with political struggle; that the act of ‘rebuilding’ has to be based on a framework of struggle and organisation. Struggle and reconstruction are mutually supportive.

In this context, the debate on the large and small, centre or periphery, can also be mentioned. Some argue that small is beautiful and large is ugly. Some realise that large is needed to make a dent in an enormous problem, and is also possible, feasible and desirable; while small may be marginal and ineffective. Some argue that metropolitan, city-based urban voluntary organisations are dominating the rural, small, poor voluntary organisations. Some argue the opposite. In the vast chain of struggles for social transformation, all are needed—organisers and activists, researchers and documentalists, networkers and advocates, educationists and a vast array of people with diverse locations, contributions and expertise—all committed to bringing about social transformation. Unless voluntary organisations in India recognise this and gear themselves up to accept and play multiple roles in the years to come, they will find themselves marginalised and constrained.
Discussions among development practitioners and organisations are plagued with jargon, metaconcepts, posers, beliefs and fashions. The content of development debate requires critical analysis and understanding if the danger of work being paralysed by confusion and doubts is to be eliminated. For example, the debate between technical and social approaches to development; economic self-sufficiency of target population vs their empowerment; theory vs practice, and the whole dilemma of when to withdraw from one's area of work, has led to confusions concerning the role and work of voluntary bodies in society. It is a pity that often senior activists also fall prey to the temptation to indulge in an excessive use of jargon and highly technical concepts and are unable to clarify their propositions and proposals for the benefit of fresh young entrants into the field and give them the benefit of their experienced guidance.

Many past development models and approaches were put forward in excessively technical terms. It was then said that availability of technology, infrastructure, techniques, skills and resources would bring about development and improve the lives of the people. Experience of the ’50s and ’60s has proved otherwise, as much of the technical assistance and inputs were cornered by the rural-urban élites and the rich. As a consequence, most voluntary initiatives moved over to adopting social approaches to development; educational and organisational efforts were given importance. However, experience has shown that after an initial round of social approach, conscientisation and organisation-building, there arises a need to incorporate technical inputs and approaches in development efforts. Access to technology, infrastructure, technique, credit and other resources is also essential for the poor in order to improve their socio-economic situation. Mere awareness or organisation is not sufficient, though necessary.

A related issue has been that programmes which focus on economic improvement and conservation alone, do not, in
fact, contribute towards goals of empowerment. Experience, however, shows that the collective organisation of the poor and awareness-building should go hand-in-hand with efforts for economic improvement in income-generation. Both are essential, both are necessary and one is not superior to the other in any sense of the word. In fact, most programmes which have had a continued viability, those in which the poor have been able to begin to stand on their own feet, have had integrated economic efforts along with empowerment.

After the '50s and '60s, when most development programmes were planned from the top down and the blueprints were distributed to the field for blind implementation, there has been a trend towards activists and catalyst organisations being exhorted to only respond to local requests. It is proposed that all programmes and initiatives should build on what people really expressly need and want and that people should be encouraged to articulate those needs, design their programmes and implement them themselves. The role of voluntary organisations is limited to responding to the requests the people make. It is interesting that in debate this principle has been stretched to the point where any effort at initiating issues is seen as contrary to this principle. Thus a false contradiction between initiating and responding is posed. Any initiative by the development promoting group is bad, all responding is good, is the slogan.

Actual practice has shown that, in reality, for a development promoting group which has been working with the local population, it is not only desirable but also necessary to initiate. The poor and the oppressed are not always able to articulate precisely what they need. They have also been part of a system of hegemonic control under which their minds have been manipulated by the dominant culture and ideology. If they were able to initiate on their own, there would have been no need for any intermediary catalytic organisations in
the first place. A development-promoting group that has been in ongoing contact with the local population must anticipate, identify and initiate issues and programmes. But this initiative should be carried out in a manner that does not become something dumped, imposed or bulldozed on to them. All development-promoting organisations which believe in people's participation, empowerment and initiative must also take a lot of initiative on their own and there is nothing wrong in taking those initiatives, provided they are rooted in the experiences of the local people and are carried out in a manner that they can choose or reject as the initiative moves forward.

Another very interesting debate is that on the role of *insiders versus outsiders* in voluntary organisations. It is being said that an insider is desirable and the outsider is peripheral. Who is an insider? This question is very rarely articulated, but it is generally held that an insider is a person who comes from the same class and geographical location as the group of the poor and the oppressed with whom the voluntary organisation is working. An outsider is one who does not. So, generally, activists who come from lower-middle-class or middle-class backgrounds, who are somewhat educated in semi-urban and urban centres and who are from locations other than the one in which they are working, are considered outsiders. On a purely conceptual level, this is a false contradiction. I am an insider in the country as well as in the world. How can geographical location define me in this way? The second issue is the issue of class. It is unfortunate that this debate has led to the creation of a guilt complex in those who come from the lower-middle-class and the middle-class and who have chosen to work with the poor and the oppressed. If one looks at the history of political movements, political parties, trade union organisations, and a variety of other such efforts, historically, even in a country like India, one finds that most activists and organisers have come from class backgrounds other than the
very poor and the very oppressed and they never faced any problem nor suffered any guilt complex.

It is a very peculiar situation. Many of the activists have made a commitment to the cause of the poor, have committed their own efforts, competence, and initiatives to support and strengthen the struggle of the poor, so that a more socially, economically just and egalitarian society could be created. They should not be asked to "declass" themselves and pretend they are one among the poor and the oppressed. In reality, it has been seen again and again that declassing is a myth, that mere change of clothes, food habits and living conditions do not alter the basic personality that has been created through years of nurture and experience. In fact, outsiders from the class, from the location of the community being served, bring in important resources, information, knowledge, skills and ideas that can contribute to the organisation and strengthening of the struggles of the poor and the oppressed. They, the 'outsiders', have a role to play in supporting those struggles. Therefore, to feel guilty about playing this role is to be confused about one's priorities and the direction of one's efforts. In fact, if outsiders are marginalised and are not allowed to play roles that they are best capable of playing, people's movements and struggles suffer. Any suggestion that outsiders be isolated from people's struggles is, therefore, a dangerous one and should be rejected outright as it tends to create divisions. The important thing is to determine who can best play what kinds of roles.

A very common question being asked repeatedly in the last decade among grassroots groups and voluntary organisations is when they are withdrawing from an area in which they have been working: Have or have we not created dependence on our organisation? It is assumed that if you have been working for more than three to five years in an area, you should no longer be needed by the community unless you have failed to
create among the local activists the confidence that they can
manage for themselves, that you are perpetuating your role
and are basically maintaining yourself and your job without
sufficient reason. Writers on development ask this question,
donors ask this question and now, of course, the bureaucrats
ask this question. Because it signifies levels of self-sufficiency
and self-reliance and independence of the local people. This
dependence–independence dilemma creates confusion in the
minds of the activists who are considering withdrawal of sup-
port machinery they had initiated three, five or seven years
earlier. When one begins an educational and organisational
effort with the very poor and the oppressed, with the tribals,
the landless, with women, with construction workers, that
process is of a long duration. The people have been oppressed
for decades and centuries; and if the forces that have made
them so continue to exist, how can the work of facilitators,
organisers, and educators suddenly be considered over. In fact,
forces of oppression and exploitation are intensifying and
centralising day-by-day.

Under such circumstances to expect activists to leave an
area of activity three to five years after its initiation and go to
other areas is to ensure that this task of mobilisation and
organisation–building will be left unfinished. It will have a
destabilising effect, rather than of creating local self-reliance
and independence. If one examines the practice in actual real-
ity, one will hardly ever encounter an example of a clear break.
Activists and voluntary organisations, non-governmental
organisations which work with the poor and the oppressed,
have, over the years changed their roles. They may have been
more active in programme planning and implementation in
the beginning, but gradually, as people in the community ac-
quire confidence and competence to to take over those roles,
the activists and organisations begin to play the roles of pro-
viding linkages, information-sharing, providing access, etc.
Therefore, while the roles may shift over a period of time, the question to pose is: Have the forces of exploitation and oppression withdrawn or weakened sufficiently to justify our withdrawal also?

There is the long-standing "forced" contradiction between theory and practice. It is alleged that those involved in grassroots practice are not theoretical enough. On the other hand, grassroots activists allege that those who are involved in research and documentation, study and analysis (and writing) are not rooted in reality as they are not practitioners. In reality, practice in the field begins to generate its own principles and theories. Many may not be in a position to articulate it, but all have a theory which has arisen out of their practice. The theory that is not rooted in practice and a practice that does not generate theory is irrelevant in any transformation. It is not desirable or conceivable that some people only think and some people only act. In fact, this is not even possible. It is important to combine action with theory building, use theory to inform action and build a dynamic interplay between practice and theory. Unfortunately, many activists have begun to develop an anti-intellectual attitude where anything which is theoretical or conceptual is abhorred and considered irrelevant. This seems to be a reaction to some of the so-called ivory-tower theorising which tended to undermine the importance of practice and negate the experiences of practitioners and activists.

LARGER SOCIETAL FORCES

Voluntary organisations in India need to come to terms with the existence and contribution of larger societal forces. These forces are active not only in the national but also in the international context.
Many leaders of voluntary organisations have not developed sufficient understanding of the character of the State, the nature of formal politics in parliamentary democracy, and the roles and styles of functioning of political parties in the contemporary society. Without going in depth into these aspects, future contributions of voluntary organisations may remain limited.

A related issue is the question of wider engagement on issues of society. Many voluntary organisations are unable to understand, debate or critique the larger issues of industrial development policies, questions of international trade, licensing and patent policies, the impact of macro politics on local development, etc. Similarly, engagement with other agents of social transformation in society is limited. Alliance with political parties, with trade unions, with teachers’ organisations, with the students’ movement etc., are rare. There is a need to re-engage voluntary organizations with such other institutions, mechanisms and forces in society.

The third aspect of this is the question of taking positions and doing something on emerging societal concerns. In the contemporary context, the issue of secularism and communalism is a critical one. Yet, many voluntary organisations find themselves unable to come together and do something positive about it. Unless mechanisms and ways by which voluntary organizations can engage themselves in dealing with emerging societal issues like communalism are found, they will be limiting their future potential and contributions in the coming period.

Many now working in voluntary organisations came into this field at a period when the pre-eminence of the government in development programmes was already established. Many leaders of voluntary organisations continued to believe in the importance of the government fulfilling its role as defined in the Constitution. They, therefore, worked on
organising the demand and pressing for a more efficient, equi-
table and just action on the part of the government in pro-
viding services, welfare, relief and developmental opportuni-
ties for the poor and the deprived. But the experience of the
last five decades has clearly demonstrated that this was wishful
thinking; that the same state and its mechanisms have, in fact,
led to further distortion and inequalities and has captured most
of the resources for its own benefit and consumption, as ex-
emplified in the growing proportions of non-plan expendi-
ture in all central and state, government budgets. The state, in
its drive to establish its hegemony, has destroyed many tradi-
tional institutions of civil society and captured all public re-
sources. It has led to a self-serving scenario shaping the func-
tioning of public agencies.

Even now, in the face of changing global and national con-
texts, many leaders of voluntary organisations continue to wish
for an “improvement” in the functioning of the state appar-
tus. It is clear that emotional infatuation among many of us
for ‘State Socialism’ has persisted, even though objective real-
ity on the ground has demonstrated its growing irrelevance. It
is here, therefore, that alternative and fresh thinking is needed
on the part of voluntary organisations to devise autonomous
and independent ways of addressing the problems of health,
education, welfare, poverty, shelter, etc. of our masses, in-
stead of continuing to expect and demand “better” perform-
ance from the government and its agencies. This is perhaps
the most critical challenge facing voluntary organisations in
this country at this juncture.

In our specific Indian context, the recent constitutional
amendments (Panchayati Raj) create another opportunity to
help strengthen institutions of local self-governance. With man-
datory reservations of one-third of the seats for women and
other weaker sections of society in panchayats and
nagarapalikas, voluntary organisations can perhaps play a role
in the orientation of panchayat leaders and in assisting them in micro-planning at the local level. However, this may require a greater recognition of the importance of rebuilding local institutions of self-governance, and a willingness on the part of voluntary agencies to immerse themselves in this task directly.

BUILDING THE CIVIL SOCIETY

The foremost challenge before voluntary organisations at this moment is to articulate, define and project the importance of civil society vis-à-vis the State and the Market. Historically, in our country, the state and its attendant agencies were seen as the primary vehicle of all kinds of socio-economic development. Alongwith that, the free market was also encouraged, but to a limited extent. In the current context of the global trends mentioned earlier, the market is being pushed forward as the "magic wand" which will solve all economic ills of our societies. However, neither the state-led model of development nor the market-led model will be adequate. What is important is to strengthen the first leg of this trinity called the 'Civil Society'—the associations of people, families and communities which are independent and autonomous of the government on the one hand, and economic enterprise, on the other.

It is important that the government as well as the institutions operating in the market become accountable to the people as represented in their collective organisations of the civil society. Thus consumers' associations, people's organisations, social movements, village formations, youth groups, women's groups, ecology organisations, human rights groups, have to be seen as part of a single mosaic of voluntary action. This is the mosaic of civil society which now needs to be strengthened.
It has become increasingly evident that the decade of the '80s was one of building a distinctive and separate identity of voluntary organisations, individually and sectorally. In fact, it was a period when relationships with other sectors of society like trade unions, political parties, academia, social movements, as well as relationships with the government and its agencies were largely ignored, if not rejected outright. With the growing need to use resources more efficiently, with the recognition that the central problems of our society cannot be solved unilaterally by any single sector and with the increasing appreciation of the contributions of voluntary organisations by other sectors of Indian society, it has now become imperative that we work towards building alliances and partnerships beyond our immediate territory, terrain or sector.

This challenge of working in partnership with a wide range of civil society actors is being understood more clearly at this juncture; but there are still serious impediments to the operationalisation of these partnerships because of the baggage of the past and the hostilities of the previous period. It is important that ways and means are found by the leadership of voluntary organisations to work towards building such partnerships in order to address the "almost insolvable" problems that our society is facing today.

SUSTAINABILITY

It is clear that the expansion phase of the 1980s is now slowing down. Not only are additional resources no longer available but there are also significant shifts in the manner of allocation of those resources. So the challenge of sustainability is not merely of material sustainability, of how voluntary organisations will generate their own resources in the coming period, but it is also a challenge of ensuring intellectual and institutional sustainability. Very few attempts have been made
to create alternative ways of financing the activities and programmes of voluntary organisations. While certain organisations may have found individual solutions, there is obviously an absence of a collective or sectoral thinking and strategising in this regard. There is a clear need to explore ways of mobilising support from within the society, particularly from among its middle sections. However, at this juncture, this kind of support cannot be mobilised on a long-term basis without simultaneously engaging in ongoing and sustained public education among this section about the contributions and importance of voluntary organisations and the civil society. This requires recognition of the role of the middle class as an integral part of India’s reality today, a recognition that many leaders of voluntary organisations would rather avoid.

However, the wider experience does not support the above contention, as indicated below:

The overall political and regulatory climate in which civil society organisations seek to mobilize and use resources is often not as supportive as the demands being placed on the sector require. In many cases, it is hostile to such efforts by CSOs [Civil Society Organisations], thus undermining their contributions to national development. (Schearer, 1997: 17)

NOTES

Voluntary Action and the State

CONTEXT

The South Asia region is characterised by the varied forms of State it has evolved since the end of World War II. While India and Sri Lanka have had a parliamentary form of democracy since the early '50s, Pakistan and, later, Bangladesh have had long periods of military dictatorship; Nepal and Bhutan remained traditional monarchies. The last decade has witnessed a transition in this regard with the reassertion of democracy in Bangladesh and Nepal. Thus South Asian countries provide a diversity of forms of governance over the past five decades.

The second important dimension of the character of the state in South Asia has been its dominant interventionist role in promoting development, particularly in India and Sri Lanka. The state took upon itself a pre-eminent and monopolistic stance in defining what constituted 'development', 'public good' and 'national interest'. It took upon itself the sole prerogative and the power to control resources, ideas and programmes of development. Thus, in countries like India, there emerged elaborate development delivery agencies and
planning mechanisms in all sectors of human endeavour. This state-led model of development became so pronounced in India that every aspect of human life was controlled or influenced by the agenda set by the state and its agencies. The most critical issue in this regard was the definition of public good and national interest and elaboration of the concepts and programmes of development itself. The state and its operators, in particular its political leadership and its bureaucracy, continued to define their own hegemony over developmental perspectives and programmes and began to feel threatened if alternative ideas were proposed, or a critique of the dominant development paradigm was expressed.

STATE ROLES

Any discussion of relations between voluntary organisations and the state needs to be based on a thorough understanding of the nature of India's voluntary organisations on the one hand, and the character of the Indian state, on the other. The Indian state has performed several key roles in relation to voluntary organisations since independence.

Regulator

One of the functions of the state in a modern society is to regulate the social, political and economic spaces. The state enacts a variety of regulatory mechanisms through its organs and agencies as well as through laws and legislations.

Three types of legislation directly affect voluntary organisations in India today. The first relates registration or incorporation. The most common form of registration is as a society or a trust, both under laws enacted under British rule. The Society Act has since been modified and amended by several state governments. In some fundamental ways, incorporation or registration provides a legal identity to voluntary
organisations and, therefore, limits the liability of its promoters and founders. But it also entails "playing by the rules of the game" as established by the state, with each successive amendment to the Society Registration Act in different states of the country attempting to further tighten the state's grip on the voluntary organisations by giving unilateral and inordinate powers to the agents of the state to intervene, regulate and check the activities of voluntary organisations registered under the Society Registration Act of those states (PRIA, 1991).

The second set of legislation that affect voluntary organisations are related to finance. Two specific laws become relevant here. One is the Income Tax Act, 1961, which has always treated the activities of voluntary organisations as being at par with that of business trusts running charitable hospitals, dispensaries, educational institutions, etc. In fact, the Income Tax Act gives special concessions to boarding schools, public schools, hospitals and dispensaries, but not to voluntary organisations engaged in either non-formal adult education or primary health care. Thus, every year, voluntary organisations must justify their non-profit status in the eyes of the Income Tax Department. Over the years, various amendments to the Income Tax Act have been made with a view to further tightening state control over voluntary organisations, and to create conditions under which the economic viability or autonomy of voluntary organisations is undermined. For example, the current provisions of the Income Tax Act make it impossible for voluntary organisations to carry out any activity to raise resources on their own because surplus generated through such activities would be liable to tax.

The second law concerning the finances of voluntary organisations is the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, which was enacted in 1976 during the Emergency. It aimed at regulating the flow of foreign grants and contributions to all kinds of voluntary organisations and was located in the Min-
istry of Internal Security and Home Affairs where those responsible for its implementation treat it as a problem of law and order, and not as a matter related to developmental social change.

In a dramatic amendment to the Act through an ordinance, first in late 1984 and subsequently by enactment of legislation in January 1985, the Government of India restricted the receipt and utilisation of foreign contribution by voluntary development organisations. The amended Act required old organisations to seek registration with the Ministry of Internal Security and to provide statements of receipt and utilisation with audited statements of accounts. The practice over the years became such that the Ministry of Internal Security refused to grant fresh registrations to voluntary organisations and even tightened the restrictions on them to applications for prior permission to receive foreign contributions. Also, the provisions concerning cancellation of registration numbers and inquiries under the Act were used selectively by the Ministry of Internal Security to intimidate and obstruct the work of voluntary organisations on such nebulous grounds as “threat to national security” or “public interest”. Currently, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act and the concerned Ministry implementing it continue to be objects of fear for the vast majority of Indian voluntary organisations.

The Act has been further amended since then with a view to further tightening it in an attempt to limit the space and narrow the work of voluntary organisations. In an overall sense, over the last twenty years, the state has been tightening its grip as a regulator and using its powers more often than not for limiting the space, work and the activities of those types of voluntary organisations which go beyond mere provision of help and charity and the welfare of the poor.

It is ironic that, “In some sense[s], the experience of those managing such [voluntary] organisations today suggests that
the legal framework is much more restricting for non-profit sector organisations than for for-profit organisations. The liberalisation of [the] economy and reforms in the 1990s have created greater space, flexibility and ease of operation for for-profit organisations, but very little has changed for non-profit organisations.” (PRIA, 2001a: 40)

Funder

Historically, a very unique role the State has played in India is that of funder of voluntary organisations. Right after independence, the then Congress government began to utilise its access to vast resources to provide land, facilities, infrastructure and funds to a large number of Gandhian organisations to enable them to continue their work as voluntary organisations. In fact, several institutions have been set up by the government over the last fifty years to find ways to promote funding of voluntary organisations. One of the earliest to be set up was the *Khadi and Village Industries Corporation (KVIC)*—a unique institution set up to finance activities of organisations engaged in promoting khadi and village industries for the economic upliftment of the poor, as well as to provide marketing channels and retail outlets for their products.

The *Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB)*, and its counterparts in the various states, are another set of unique institutions set up in the late ’50s to provide assistance to organisations engaged in social welfare work, particularly the welfare of the poor, the destitute and the weak, with a focus on women. Subsequently, a large number of departments and ministries of the national and state governments began to evolve schemes for funding voluntary organisations. The ones most commonly aided have been in adult education, literacy, health care and, in recent years, in environment protection and social forestry. The *National Wasteland Development Board* was set up to sup-
port, among others, voluntary organisations in their effort to "green the wastelands" of India.

More than three decades ago, an institution called PADI (People’s Action Development India) was set up with a view to channelise resources from outside the country to rural development organisations; but, in its original form, it was not very active and effective. In 1986, the Council for Advancement of Peoples’ Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) was set up as an autonomous institution (incidentally registered under the Society Act) to finance voluntary organisations under various schemes and programmes. It is also interesting to note that CAPART could be used by voluntary organisations to organise and conscientise the poor.

Over the years, many voluntary organisations have utilised government funds and many continue to do so. A large number of them have depended totally on grants from the state. In many ways, the work of these voluntary organisations has been guided by the nature of the relationship between them and the state as a funder (one of a recipient to a donor). Clearly, in such a relationship, the recipient has weaker powers, control and autonomy with respect to the donor. Many consequences flow from this relationship. Firstly, most funding from the state is available for specific schemes and programmes, largely conceptualised and designed by the state itself. Voluntary organisations have to fit their proposals into those schemes and programmes, if they want those resources. Thus, voluntary organisations, over a period of time, become mere implementers of the ideas, concepts and programmes created by the state. This has a subsidiary effect because it defines a narrow space for voluntary organisations by providing funds for pre-designated schemes and programmes, mostly in the areas of welfare and development. Thus the work of voluntary organisations as a legitimate part of society is narrowly confined and defined. Another consequence of this has been
increasing dependence of certain organisations on funds from the state. As such state mechanisms and institutions become increasingly bureaucratised and corrupt, and those voluntary organisations dependent on state funding have to face this increasing bureaucratisation and corruption within such state institutions and mechanisms. As a dependent recipient from the state donor, such voluntary organisations also experience the tension of attempting to work with bureaucratic and corrupt institutions in order to continue receiving the grants from the state. Various attempts have been made to modify these schemes, euphemistically called “grant-in-aid”. The overall experience seems to indicate that availability of resources from the state for work of voluntary organisations is unique and useful, on the one hand, but has limiting, controlling and dependence-creating effects, on the other. In situations where such voluntary organisations have raised their voice against corruption and inefficiency of state agencies or officials, government funding has stopped midstream—what can be called the “crisis of the second installment”. The overall impact of this has been a carrot-and-stick approach, under which funds are given to those who do not rock the boat or are willing to fit their work and activities within the programmes and schemes of the state and its bureaucrats. Funds have been stopped for those who tried to challenge the state, its strategies or programmes, its agents and representatives, through their own work. It seems that increasing bureaucratisation and control over mechanisms of funding has considerably undermined their autonomous functioning and, therefore, those voluntary organisations in a recipient–donor relationship with the state often find themselves in an uneasy situation.

Development Actor

The third dimension of this relationship has to be understood in the context of the state as a significant and dominant actor in the development arena. As a socialist welfare state defined
through the constitution right from independence, various
government schemes, departments and agencies have been
started with a view to promote development. In virtually ev-
er area of development—health, education, provision of
drinking water, sanitation, agriculture, rural development,
forestry, environment, family planning—the government’s
own departments, programmes and schemes are most domi-
nant and active. As a result, the space for voluntary organisations
in the development arena has been increasingly shrinking. A
consequence of this has been the use of development models
and frameworks promoted by the state which are implemented
through its own programmes, departments and schemes. Over
the years, the state has established hegemony over such mod-
els of development and such frameworks. It, therefore, pre-
fers that all other actors in the arena accept this. Voluntary
organisations engaged in help, charity, welfare and narrow
developmental activities have no difficulty in continuing to
operate within the ambit of the state’s hegemonic role. How-
ever, others who question the policies and programmes of the
state, who promote new solutions and innovations which chal-
lenge the models of the state, which examine the consequences
of following the state models in the form of continuing pov-
erty and marginalisation and use their findings to influence
public opinion, find that the state as the dominant develop-
ment actor comes into conflict with them. In such situations
of conflict and confrontation, a variety of mechanisms are used
by the state to sustain and perpetuate its hegemony over de-
velopment models and frameworks. Regulatory mechanisms
are one such weapon but perhaps more crucial and powerful
is the use of the funding mechanism. By limiting availability
of funds to its own programmes and schemes, by providing
funds only to certain types of voluntary organisations, by cre-
ating fund-related dependence on itself among large sections
of voluntary organisations, the state maintains its hegemony.
Repression, intimidation, harassment, rejection and
delegitimisation of those who question this hegemony of the state as a development actor is a natural consequence very frequently encountered by ‘offending’ bodies.

Another serious consequence of this hegemony has been that the State has been trying to monopolise all resources, internal and external. Thus all bilateral funds from countries of the North, all funds from the multilateral institutions of the UN system must be approved, controlled and regulated and primarily used by the state and its agents in the promotion of state organised or approved development activities. In fact, there is a continuous effort within this framework to establish the supreme role of the state as a development actor and appropriate to itself all resources, internal as well as external. Several moves in recent years have been made by the state and its agents to even capture all external funds coming from non-government sources from the North. Under the guise of regulating their disbursal to “well-meaning” voluntary organisations, the combination of the state as a funder and the state as a development actor has proved to be so powerful in the Indian context that many voluntary organisations find themselves dependent and incapacitated to challenge the frameworks and models of development promoted by the state and thus the hegemony of the state continues.

RELATIONSHIPS

As a consequence of the development roles assumed by the state during the past five decades, there have been some significant consequences for the structure and quality of relationships that have emerged between voluntary action and the state in India.
DEPENDENCY

The most common, the predominant form of relationship between governments, central and state, and voluntary organisations is that of dependent-client. This dependency/clientism arises in situations where voluntary organisations are either implementing development programmes prepared by the state and its agencies, or receiving funds from the state, or both. It is a dependency of ideas, money, resources. An analysis of the experience in many other countries of the South seems to indicate that funding by the government is largely available only for the development programmes and strategies prepared by the government itself. This dependency/clientism was most common and widespread among those voluntary organisations which are providing social services or are engaged in welfare work. These are also the ones which are the largest recipients of government funding.

ADVERSARIAL

A second type of relationship between a voluntary organisation and government could be characterised as adversarial, where the two are perpetually locked in conflicts. This is common among voluntary organisations which challenge the policies of the state, its development frameworks and paradigms. The same is true of voluntary organisations which directly support people’s organisations and social movements. It is a relationship in which the government perceives voluntary organisations as opponents per se raising issues and concerns and operating in ways and adopting means which challenge the policies of the government, its programmes and strategies, the assumptions underlying its frameworks and models, and the practices of its representatives and agents. In situations in which government officials were identified as segments of the vested
interests exploiting, marginalising and harassing the poor, the action of voluntary organisations obviously contributes towards the empowerment of the poor vis-à-vis their oppressors. Building peoples' organisations, strengthening social movements and challenging vested interests is not always welcomed by higher government authorities, rather it is perceived as an attack on the officers of the government, its structures and apparatus. In other situations, where the voluntary organisations are working to check authoritarianism, to promote participatory democracy, to win for the people a greater access to information and a greater voice in the planning and control by the people of the development process, their work is seen as hostile to the very structures and the styles of functioning of the government and its departments—a questioning of the bureaucratic, unilateral, secretive and centralised style of functioning. In many specific situations, the actions of voluntary organisations arise out of the mis-governance and malfunctioning of the government agencies and programmes. Thus we have a built-in conflict of interest whenever the government functioning and/or political leaders are criticised and challenged.

CO-OPERATION

In the third type of relationship, the emphasis is on a healthy co-operation between voluntary organisations and the government authorities and machinery; differences are discussed and understood by the parties; common areas of action on policy and programme aspects are identified in which voluntary organisations and government can work together. Issues of health, education, micro-finance, environment, drinking water, housing etc. are common areas for such co-operation. Issues of macro-economic policy, natural resource management, rights over funds, human rights, land reforms etc. are
perpetually contested arenas in the Indian context. In recent years, voluntary organisations and government have co-operated at the national level to deal with the positions and arguments of the countries of the north concerning WTO, structural adjustment policies urged by the World Bank/IMF, and bio-diversity treaties.

EMERGING AMBIGUITIES

In view of this range of roles, functions and relationships, several dilemmas and tensions arise in the interaction between voluntary organisations and the state. These cannot be wished away; they cannot be resolved on a ‘once and for all’ basis; their recurrence is inevitable, as would be the case in any active relationship. Voluntary organisations have to find ways to work through them in specific situations.

VOLUNTARISM vs PRIVATISATION

One growing trend in recent years is the promotion of voluntary organisations under the guise of promoting privatisation of social services for the amelioration of conditions of the poor in the rural hinterlands and urban slums. The “structural adjustment policies” of the World Bank/IMF are encouraging many governments to withdraw from provision of social services in health, education, drinking water, etc. The private sector is encouraged to play the role of service provision as well as generation of income for the poor and the deprived. It is within this context that a question haunts one: is not increased support for voluntary service organisations from multilateral, international and governmental sources likely to push them, the service organisations, into supporting the trend towards privatisation of services? It is important to ensure that voluntary organisations play only a supportive role and do not
themselves become the providers, taking on the responsibilities of the state in this behalf. Voluntary organisations must, of course, provide necessary services in critical situations, when it is crucial that they do so, but they must guard against displacing the official delivery mechanisms altogether thereby absolving the state of its responsibility of performing its moral and constitutional duty in this regard. Many voluntary organisations find themselves increasingly playing the role of provider of basic services for the poor. This is particularly so in the case of organisations working in tribal and dalit communities, for which the government has failed in its duty to provide basic education and primary health care. A judicious choice has to be made and delicate balances have to be maintained when addressing the problems of such situations.

**CO-OPERATION vs SUB-CONTRACTING**

Increasingly, governments are calling upon voluntary organisations in many countries of the South to get involved in the promotion of development programmes, largely those designed by the State itself. Even where some of these programmes appear to be based on voluntary-organisation-recommended development principles and assumptions, many voluntary organisations are finding that their co-operation with the State, in a large measure, becomes undertaking a subcontract for fulfilling of development targets and completion of programmes. The nature of the relationship becomes one of the contractor and the sub-contractor, where the voluntary organisations receive a certain payment for fulfilling certain targets prescribed by the state within a given development framework. It is, therefore, important to examine each specific case of co-operation and the extent to which the terms of that co-operation are reducing the role of voluntary organisations to mere commercial implementers of a
programme and achievers of targets for and on behalf of the government. This has been particularly so in health and family welfare programmes throughout the world and is increasingly being seen in relation to literacy and education.

Yet, in many situations in India, voluntary organisations are nevertheless willing to take part in government development programmes. An important consideration is that taking over implementation of a programme ensures that resources available for that programme are utilised effectively and that its fruit reach the intended beneficiaries. By gaining access to such programmes, voluntary organisations also get opportunities to influence the nature of the programmes themselves.

DISAGREEMENT vs OPPOSITION

The work of voluntary organisations throws up experiences, ideas and perspectives which are based on realities in micro settings at the grassroots level. This evokes diverse opinions, approaches and analyses, many a times in opposition to the perspectives and analyses of the government, its officials and agencies. This sort of disagreement also occurs between voluntary organisations and political parties as the analyses and perspectives of the two often differ on many issues and occasions. These disagreements should not be seen as political opposition in a narrow sense of the term. Disagreement is not necessarily unhealthy in such situations. Development and social transformation are complex phenomena and no simple or single solution is available for all of the problems they throw up in any given setting. Therefore, the availability of a multiplicity of views, experiences and analyses can only be healthy in seeking to resolve some of these developmental knots.

However, differences and disagreements are generally viewed as deliberate antagonism and opposition by governments, its officials and agencies, parties and their politbureaus.
This attitude tends to provoke responses from the governments and political parties that tend to discourage the expression of differences and delegitimise those engaged in such expression. It is important to distinguish between differences and disagreements on the one hand, and deliberate opposition, on the other.

This is the most important issue affecting the state-voluntary agency relationship, the issue of co-existence with mutual respect, dignity and autonomy. The state, its agencies and officials are relatively much more powerful in relation to individual voluntary organisations and groups of voluntary organisations in many countries of the South. This is certainly the case in India. They are much more resourceful, much better informed and much better equipped to deal with resourceless, mostly uninformed and ill-equipped voluntary organisations. Yet, on many occasions, the relationship demands co-operation and co-existence. The challenge is, how can this co-operation occur without undermining the autonomy and independence of the voluntary organisations. The dilemma is that the latter require resources and capacities, which the state and its agencies have, can offer and should offer. How can the provision of resources and capacities from the state and its agencies to the voluntary organisations be done in a manner that does not undermine the autonomy and independence of the latter, but, in fact, contributes towards strengthening them?

**QUESTIONING vs WEAKENING**

A major role of voluntary organisations has been to critique and question the policies, programmes and strategies of the government. This critique has been raised through direct lobbying and personal advocacy, through publications, debates and discourses, workshops, seminars and training programmes,
through the mobilisation and empowerment of the people themselves, through the networks and federations etc. This is necessary, healthy and crucial.

Yet in situations where the state is withering away, or the state is weakening as a consequence of international forces, continued and indiscriminate questioning may further support the forces that weaken or strangulate the state. This has become particularly relevant in the context of the international scenario that has been adopted in recent years. Voluntary organisations may occasionally co-operate with the state to challenge and oppose more powerful international forces affecting the country, the government and the people. This has often been the case in India. However the Indian government has resisted questioning by voluntary organisations in international fora. Whenever voluntary organisations have challenged the position of the Government of India in UN conferences and commissions (like at Beijing, Copenhagen, Vienna, Cairo and Istanbul), government officials and political leaders have criticised such voluntary organisations. A recent case in point is the issue of caste (dalits) in the Durban Conference on Xenophobia.

Thus, support to voluntary organisations by government policies and funds has been an important part of the growth and vibrancy of voluntary organisations in India. Voluntary organisations have had the capacity and freedom to question and challenge the government. The principle of peaceful co-existence with dignity despite disagreements needs to be the operating credo of this relationship.

NOTES

1. This section is based on Voluntary Development Organisations in India: A Study of History, Roles and Future Challenges, PRIA, 1991.
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Civil Society and the State

HEGEMONY

The dynamics of the relationship between civil society and the state are complex, they are also ever-changing. A comparative study of this interaction under the colonial administration and the post-colonial experience under a modern nation state in India is of particular interest.

Since independence, the state in India has been playing an increasingly dominant role in shaping virtually every aspect of the life of families and individuals. The state adopted macro-economic policies; it determined the contours of law and order; it increasingly took over education and healthcare; it focused on issues of agricultural development; it undertook measures aimed at industrial development. In such a situation, the state progressively took over economic, political, cultural and social functions which were till then undertaken within civil society. It began to regulate markets, fix prices and costs; it began to define incomes; it began to provide employment and jobs; it regulated currencies, money supply, capital etc.; it even took over functions in the areas of art, music and literature; it took over education; it took over healthcare; it thus
began to play increasingly overpowering and overarching roles in contemporary Indian society.

This ubiquitous dominance of the state has significantly stripped the material base of civil society. It has not only taken over all land, forests and water bodies as state property, it has also facilitated the growth of concentration of ownership and control over the material base in a few private hands. Just as the state has destroyed the material base of civil society, it has also delegitimised its institutional base. Further, it has continuously attempted to appropriate the ideological base of civil society. As an “alien”, its public functions in many countries of the South (India in particular) did not strike roots in the moral and ideological base of civil society, but remained cut off or disconnected from it. The Gramscian notion of “hegemony” is historically rooted in civil society. Yet, the state and the ruling elite in India tried to control the intellectual base of civil society, along with its material base, in order to perpetuate their hegemony over civil society. In some capitalist societies, such ideological hegemony of the state and the ruling order is attempted to be strengthened through manipulation of educational and cultural values by the private media. The single party Marxist states attempted this through public institutions and propaganda. The countries of the South (like India) seem to be using a combination of both state control over TV/radio and privatised education, for example. It is this process which constricts citizenship and restricts the participation of people in the governance of their communities and lives. The state and its ruling elite become supreme; civil society becomes subservient to the state and its ruling elite.

CONSEQUENCES

Several consequences follow when such hegemony of the state is established. The first consequence is the dismantling of civil
society. Historically rooted associations, neighbourhood organisations, citizens’ initiatives, voluntary organisations, all disappear systematically. They are viewed as obstacles to progress, or even enemies of the state, and are slowly replaced by various agencies and departments of the state professedly to perform similar functions.

The expansion of colonial rule in countries like India was resisted by associations of civil society, be they tribal organisations or citizens’ groups. Such formations were, therefore, regarded as enemies of the colonial state. At the end of colonial rule, the form of governance established before independence was retained in countries like India. More importantly, the attitudes and perspectives which informed governance during colonial rule continued to define the practice of governance in the newly independent countries of the South. Agencies of governance continued to view institutions of civil society as obstacles to (at best) or enemies of (at worst) the state and its institutions. In remote rural and tribal locations, where the power of the state could not reach the grassroots, associational life of the communities continued to survive and thrive, as can be seen in many countries of the south, as in tribal, rural, and remote mountain regions of India. This dismantling of the institutions of civil society thus becomes the hallmark of the establishment and dominance of the state.

The second consequence was de-legitimisation or de-recognition of old institutions of civil society, which had once played similar functions to those now being performed by the agencies of the state. The state in seeking its own legitimisation did not tolerate any other form or basis of legitimisation in society. Traditional education practices, historically-rooted healthcare practices within communities, institutions of local self-governance, etc. were de-legitimised and de-recognised, as the State and its agencies began to take over those functions. Undermining their material base and taking over their
“jurisdiction” were the two dominant strategies by which the state induced this de-legitimisation. In the face of popular resistance to such attempts at de-legitimisation of local institutions, the state attempted to play similar roles under the guise of “voluntary” organisations. Thus in a country like India, many state-sponsored voluntary organisations—GONGOos or Government NGOs—emerged in the place of the delegitimised and de-recognised traditional institutions of civil society performing similar functions in the community (PRIA, 1989).

A third consequence was to “homogenise” policies, programmes, perspectives and solutions. While institutions of civil society responded to the unique social, cultural, political, economic, geographical and ecological milieu of their communities, the state, out of necessity, began to create uniform policies, structures, practices, approaches, officials etc. This uniformity resulting from a desire for universalisation led to homogenisation of models, approaches, practices, structures and programmes.

One of the major consequences of this homogenisation has been the de-recognition, de-legitimisation and dismantling of social diversity and pluralism of our societies. Bio-diversity is essential to the survival of life on this planet; social diversity and pluralism are critical elements in the survival of vibrant societies and communities of human beings (Brown, 1991). Homogenisation of educational approaches, homogenisation of economic models, homogenisation of dress, language, music, etc., lead to a steady decline of social diversity. This has significantly undermined the capacities of communities and societies to deal with diverse situations and contexts, including natural calamities.

A fourth consequence is that ordinary citizens begin to be viewed as, and become, mere “consumers”. Instead of continuing their role as citizens, with engagement in governance
and community life, being actors in and producers of culture, economy and society, people became mere "consumers" of culture, products and policies. The active citizen was socialised into a passive consumer and lost the civic and political role of citizenship. The state bureaucracy treats citizens as clients passively receiving development produced by the state. The citizen becomes a "beneficiary" of government policies and programmes. Even in democratic states, the citizen is reduced to being a mere voter.

A NEW DIALECTIC

Recent events worldwide are reflections of the pressures building up towards the realisation of the urgent need to renegotiate the balance of relationships between the state and civil society. In various studies of democracy across the world, it has been documented again and again, that the greatest threat to democratic functioning has been the dominance of the state over the institutions of civil society (Diamond et al., 1989). Wherever democracy has been threatened or derailed, wherever fascist and authoritarian tendencies (including military dictatorship) have taken over, it has been a consequence of the supremacy and hegemony of the state over civil society and the dismantling of the institutions of civil society built over history. Seen in this context, therefore, the relationship between the state and civil society needs to be reformulated. In a sense, this is the issue of reformulating the relationship between the state and the citizens—a new social contract.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The state and its agencies, institutions and structures need to be accountable to its citizens. This has several implications.
Accountability implies rootedness of the state, its institutions and practices, in the culture, morality, values and norms of its citizens. Alien forms of state apparatus and practices, policies and programmes result in weakening these roots. Alien models of governance ensure continued absence of accountability. Civil society can play a watchdog role in ensuring such accountability. The capabilities of civil society, its institutions and actors, need to match the requirements of governance if that rootedness and accountability has to be ensured.

The second dimension of this accountability is the mechanisms of critiquing, questioning, debating; rejecting and accepting policies, programmes, approaches and decisions of the state, its agencies, agents, and officials. Citizens are supreme, not the state. Thus any rules, policies and procedures that the state constructs need to be examined by its citizens. Civil society can help to develop informed citizen opinion and a public judgement on these issues. It needs to have the right and access to information; the process of formulating those policies, laws, rules and procedures needs to be open, transparent and public; and mechanisms for arriving at public judgement need to be consensually validated.

MEDIATION

It is important to recognise that the state represents a country’s macro, aggregated, cumulated formations and structures. As a result, state policies, agencies and officials operate at a level far more macro than the level of the family. The relation between the state, its agencies and officials, and the family, therefore, needs to be mediated in a manner that maintains the balance between the state and civil society. The contemporary reality is that the state is so powerful, so controlling, so mighty in relation to an individual family that it can do anything it likes and get away with it. For equitable power bal-
ancing between the family and the state, civil society requires appropriate, mediating institutions. This is the role of voluntary associations in a democracy. They can approach and influence elected representatives as well as public institutions and officials on an ongoing basis (de Tocqueville, 1996). Studies have indicated that neighbourhood associations, churches, and voluntary organisations of various descriptions have indeed performed this function (Berger and Neuhaus, 1977). It is in this way that state power which tends to be totalitarian and coercive can be moderated by the mediation of institutions of civil society. Voluntary organisations and community associations thus become the institutions of civil society, ensuring this mediation between the family and the state; and ensuring the maintainance of a balance of power between the totalitarian tendencies of state power and the countervailing liberalising tendencies of civil society.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE

When discussing the subject of a balanced relationship between the state and civil society, it is necessary first to redefine the meaning of public and private. Current conceptualisations equate “private” with what goes on within a family (more so within a nuclear family) and “public” with what concerns the government, leaving no space for “civil society”. The space is either private (for the family) or public (for the government), hence the need to reformulate our understanding in this behalf.

First, it is important to recognise that everything that is private is not necessarily left to the whims and fancies of individual families. Private opinions become the basis for evolving a public position. The question of privacy is a relative issue within the broader framework of a community. The norms, practices, values and preferences of civil society pro-
vide the backdrop against which privacy and the private arena within the family are defined. Similarly, everything that is of public interest, everything that is of interest beyond the private, everything that concerns the public arena and public good, does not automatically become a concern for the state or its agencies. In fact, civil society itself is a public formulation. Before the rise of the modern state, institutions of civil society governed the "public arena".

So, everything that is of public interest, everything that requires public concern, everything that requires public intervention need not be defined, controlled or monopolised by the state or its agencies (Berger and Neuhaus, 1977). By recognising that "public" concerns are a legitimate arena for civil society, the state can create enabling mechanisms and conditions for civil society to "manage" public affairs within communities. This would ensure pluralism. It would also ensure particular responses to particular needs and situations (as opposed to uniform and homogenous strategies to meet diverse conditions and situations). This would ensure that local needs, aspirations, requirements and conditions could influence local solutions, approaches and practices. This is the meaning of pluralism; this is the meaning of particular and specific response as opposed to uniform or homogenous strategy. This is the essential meaning of democracy.

Democratic functioning of society requires institutions of civil society which are capable of governing public concerns, without dependence on, or abdication to, the state and its agencies. It is in this sense that the state needs to "pull back". It does not mean that the state's provision of services in health, education, etc. should be dismantled, it only means that the state's responsibility for the provision of these services needs to be redefined. The state's responsibility is not necessarily to render these services on its own, but to foster conditions and mechanisms that are conducive to enabling the institutions of civil society to meet the specific needs of their communities.
The state becomes more of an enabler, and less of a provider. The institutions of civil society are strengthened to ensure provision of services. This does not imply mere decentralisation, because decentralisation per se may imply that institutions of the government and the state will continue to play a totalitarian role at the local level also. This implies the need for a redefinition of the “public”—all that is public need not be the exclusive preserve of the government. In fact, it is civil society which should be primarily responsible for governing public arenas, with the state playing an enabling and supporting role. It is in this sense that voluntary institutions, neighbourhood groups and citizen initiatives need to strengthen the capacity of civil society to govern the public arena.

In a recent study in Commonwealth countries, it was found that at the core of this new consensus is both a strong state and a strong civil society. Citizens want and expect efficient and effective performance from their governments. They also want public institutions to provide, or provide for, the essential services that assure the economic, social and physical security of all the citizens, not just some of them. Citizens want state institutions and political leaders in Commonwealth countries to formulate, promote and implement policies and laws that assure human rights and social justice, again for all citizens. And citizens want governments to play the role of sensitive facilitators of both citizen action and citizen participation. To quote:

These are tall expectations: a strong state that performs multiple roles—of provider, facilitator and promoter; of a state that is neither a dominating, totalitarian, hegemonic and centralised one, nor a laissez-faire, shrunken animal cowering before the forces of globalisation and abdicating responsibility to a capricious and uncontrolled market. A strong state is a good provider, a determined promoter,
and a thoughtful and sensitive facilitator. These are the roles the state must march into, not retreat from. (Commonwealth Foundation, 1999: 75)

IMPLICATIONS FOR STATE FUNCTIONING

The above redefinition entails several implications for the manner in which the state must function in the 21st century. Some of these implications are briefly discussed here.

LEADERSHIP WITH VISION

Leadership implies the ability to define an inspiring vision. A leader focuses on caring while the manager on making progress. This ability assumes analytical capacity for establishing clear policies. Leadership includes the capacity to build a national consensus and broad social coalitions for the realisation of a shared strategic policy goal.

The state, being the only entity that can claim to represent all of society, cannot shirk its responsibility to lead. Whether or not its legitimacy stands in question, or it fails to exercise right leadership is beside the point. It is incumbent upon the state to show the way out of the deepening crisis that threatens human survival today.

The lack of vision of many political leaders today does not imply that state leadership should be given up for lost. Fresh vision and ideas can come from any conceivable source. A new generation of civil society leaders have emerged in the past decade and have continued to make a profound impact on official thinking. Their ideas and visions can be coalesced into new societal visions.

Leadership performance standards should focus on the delivery of promises of progress toward a socially and environ-
mentally responsible development. The promises are many and come in the form of commitments made in recent UN summits. Translation of these promises down the line has been progressing faster in some countries and grinding on very slowly in others. At any rate, the demand on leadership is to make sure that promises are squared with action.

Performance standards must be informed by new leadership ethics. Corruption runs deep throughout the Indian state system and its effects are so extensive as to render efforts to curb it a quixotic exercise, resulting in ever more pervasive cynicism. Ethical and time-honoured standards of public service need to be reinforced in public leadership. Public leadership has lost its credibility as it has lost its high moral ground.

The most crucial actions are in the domain of state institutions. Citizens’ dreams of a good society in the next millennium will be realised only if Commonwealth governments act in responsive ways. Decisive and effective state actions are essential to realise citizens’ dreams of a good society. To initiate and sustain them, leaders in the countries of the Commonwealth must act with courage. (Commonwealth Foundation, 1999: 85)

CITIZENS AT THE CENTRE

Sovereignty resides in the people. So simple, so profound, and yet this principle continues to be honoured more in the breach than in the observance. The state that is now so alienated from the people has been paving the way for a new type of alienation. Instead of bridging the state—citizens gap, governments are giving the corporate elite all the privileges of privatised governance and marginalising ordinary citizens.

Restoration of citizens’ sovereignty is the goal. These efforts proceed with or without the assistance of the govern-
ment. It would be sad, indeed, if the government does not as yet realise this. People are organising and mobilising to defend and advance their basic rights and interests with the resources at their disposal. Some would engage the government in ways that redefine human development priorities. Others just choose to ignore the government and take matters in their own hands. In any case, the new wave cannot be reversed by state repression. Governments will do well to recognise and support this trend.

Preparing the playing field in favour of the citizen is what the state should be doing. Current reform efforts are not only falling miserably short of what is needed but, what is even worse, these tend to favour the big money interests more than the ordinary citizens. Citizens’ sovereignty means that people have the necessary resources and power to be able to make their own decisions within the bounds of civil society, as well as to compel governments and corporations to be accountable to the people. Government is in the best position to make this happen. An honest review of policy and legislation, of every plan, programme and project, and institutional capacity is in order. The exercise should be oriented to a sustainable development vision and the need to level the playing field in favour of citizens.

In the formulation of policies and programmes, in evolving solutions to problems and devising strategies for a good society, governments need to reach out to their citizens. Strategies, systems and structures to share information, open public arenas for consultation, and enable citizens to participate need to be put in place. Processes and systems of accountability of public leaders and officials need to be strengthened to eradicate corruption. (Commonwealth Foundation, 1999: 86)
Laws and procedures that inhibit citizens from organising, sharing, caring, expressing opinions, and mobilising resources and support for their efforts need to be urgently and systematically abolished. Above all, political leaders and public officials need to demonstrate tolerance of dissent. Citizen’s voices may be appreciative or critical, informed or ignorant, narrow or holistic, precise or vague. These voices will be shared only if they are heard—and certainly only when citizens feel assured that disagreement is not treated as a sin. (Commonwealth Foundation, 1999: 87)

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Good governance has acquired prominence in the development debate precisely because of the growing mistrust of government. Official pronouncements around this issue are getting more frequent in the light of declining development funds and creeping donor fatigue. Everyone seems to be in agreement that without good governance very little progress can be made in world development.

Governance, in the World Bank definition, is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development. This definition is broad enough to cover the capacity of public sector management, the rules and institutions that create a predictable and transparent framework for the conduct of public and private business, and accountability for economic and financial performance.

Governance is deemed good if it can demonstrate honesty, efficiency, and effectiveness. Honesty is usually given the highest value. A clear indication of this is the prominence being given to the issue of corruption. Corruption in the government is not just a persistent disease, it has been increasing and is once again becoming a central issue in discussions on gov-
ernance. The essential features of good governance—accountability, transparency, predictability, and citizens' participation—may not guarantee an end to corruption but they can provide a basis for effectively dealing with it. Accountability has to do with the capacity of citizens to hold public officials responsible for government behaviour and responsive to the needs of citizens. It also entails establishing of criteria to measure official performance and mechanisms to ensure compliance with performance standards.

Transparency comprises not only public access to information but also clarity of government rules, regulations and decisions. Citizens' right to information must be backed by legal enforceability and sanctions. Predictability involves ensuring that there are unambiguous laws, regulations and policies governing social life; in other words, a rule of law and, not of individuals. It also assumes fairness and consistency in the application of all regulatory instruments, ensuring that no one is above the law.

There is hardly anything new about the issues surrounding governance. Citizens' demand for accountability, transparency and predictability and for the participation of the public in ensuring good governance has been a long-standing one. Some governments have been responding positively, others just continue to govern badly. Civil society in India has consistently posed this issue for the government to address. In spite of this, mal-governance in India has reached such unbearable levels that ordinary citizens are increasingly seeking ways for taking matters into their own hands.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY**

*Conceptual*

The reformulation of the citizen–state relationship involves giving priority to steps for strengthening civil society. Voluntary
organisations are one set of institutions within civil society and are, therefore, part of the public domain of governance by civil society. This implies that voluntary organisations need to be seen as public institutions, of civil society, engaged in the process of promoting public good through strengthening citizens’ relationships vis-à-vis the State.

This conceptualisation then challenges the growing trend of equating voluntary organisations with the private sector. It questions the American label of voluntary organisations as PVOs (“Private Voluntary Organisations”). It further challenges the restrictive economic notion of voluntary organisations as exemplified by labels like “non-profit”. It explodes the myth of moral superiority of the state over voluntary organisations as represented in the public–private dichotomy of governmental and non-governmental. It opens up the question of political and ideological dimensions of NGOs, and not merely their techno-managerial capabilities.

Strategic

Strengthening civil society in a contemporary context implies strengthening its material, institutional and ideological bases. It further implies new approaches to governance and politics. It implies strengthening “citizenship”. Development voluntary organisations can play strategic roles in this context through their programmes and activities. They can (as many do already) address the issue of recovering the material base of civil society through greater access to and control over resources by the local communities and people’s organisations. They can facilitate the process of generating informed public judgement and building a body of active citizenry. Interventions aimed at strengthening the capacity of institutions of civil society to critique the existing development paradigm and to evolve an alternative people-centred, community-based, citizen-governed development paradigm can be useful in this
regard. Facilitating increased citizen access to and engagement with public policy issues can help to alter the practice of governance.

Intermediary organisations can contribute a great deal by working to facilitate and enable citizens' actions. NGOs, trade unions, religious organisations, the media and academics—all can become effective enablers, if they redefine their own roles. In doing so, such intermediary enablers must acknowledge the centrality of citizen’s actions in realising their dreams of a good society. (Commonwealth Foundation, 1999: 89)

The role of voluntary organisations in strengthening citizens' capacity to regain and retain hegemony over the state and commercial private enterprise is another critical strategic function. Challenging the continuous attempts to control the minds of people, expanding and systematising popular knowledge, expanding social control over education and science, strengthening mechanisms for democratisation of knowledge, promoting philosophical and normative debates around issues of public concern, encouraging civic articulation of parameters of governance, facilitating promotion of ideas related to social distribution of power and accountability of the state to its citizens are some of the strategic roles that development voluntary organisations can play in support of strengthening the ideological base of civil society. Civil society needs to be enabled to articulate its framework and values of unity within diversity. Voluntary organisations can strengthen the practice of citizenship by encouraging the people to view themselves as producers of culture, ideas and values.

Another strategic consideration in this context is the need for strengthening international linkages across civil society—a global civil society. This becomes particularly important in the light of growing international connectedness between
private capital (as clearly represented by multinationals) and state apparatus (as in many regional and global structures of inter-governmental institutions). In the contemporary context, the issue of governance and hegemony has international dimensions as well. The challenge to the power of multinational corporations and the new world “disorder” necessitates strengthening international linkages across civil societies. Development voluntary organisations, through their existing networks and associations, may now be strategically positioned to facilitate those linkages.

Institutional

Strengthening the institutional base of civil society requires simultaneous emphasis on material and ideological bases. The capacities for engaging in various programmes and activities suggested in the previous section need to be institutionalised in voluntary organisations and other formations of civil society (PRIA, 1990). Instead of getting bogged down with the “supposedly” temporary and transitory nature of their existence, development voluntary organisations need to strengthen their institutional capacities to perform the strategic roles described above.

This raises the question about the need for elaborating mechanisms for ensuring accountability of voluntary organisations to society. It necessitates shifting the current focus on accountability to governmental and donor mechanisms to accountability to mechanisms governed by civil society. It opens up issues related to the material base of voluntary organisations themselves. Strategies to strengthen the presently fragile and weak material base of most voluntary organisations need to be evolved within this framework.
IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT FINANCING

In recent years, governments find their development and welfare roles getting restricted, and their national budgets perpetually in deficit through steadily increasing "non-plan" (non-developmental) expenditure, leaving ever diminishing funds for financing development. This is the new challenge. The Official Development Assistance (ODA) is declining and countries like India are expected to generate internal resources. Increased Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is available only for enterprises in areas like mining, infrastructure, engineering, telecommunications and Information Technology (IT)—the major sectors of modern economy. They have no concern for the basic needs of the poor. Even concessional international loans like those under International Development Assistance (IDA) are being increasingly restricted for India. In this situation, it is useful to examine the problem of financing development and the role of the ODA in supporting voluntary organisations in India. (See Chart on p. 104.)

RESOURCE FLOWS

In this context it is useful to examine the manner in which resource flows have been designed to occur between northern countries and southern countries over the past five decades. The accompanying figure outlines five prominent channels through which development assistance and resources are routed from a country in the north to a country in the south.

Channel 1 is the traditional, most pervasive, channel of resource flow between North and South adopted for official government-to-government development assistance. Over the last five decades, Channel 2 has also been an important player. It conveys the resources generated from people and
NORTH–SOUTH RESOURCE FLOWS

1. Official Development Assistance (ODA): This is the traditional aid, the most widespread form of N–S assistance in which resources flow from a Northern government to a Southern government.

2. NNGO–SNGO: Flow from Northern NGOs of resources raised from the public of a Northern country to Southern NGOs.

3. ODA–NGO: Flow when a component of bilateral aid earmarked for Southern NGOs is channeled through a Southern country government.

4. ODA–NNGO: Flow when a portion of ODA earmarked for a Northern country's NGOs is to be sent direct to a Southern country's NGOs.

5. ODA–SNGO: Flow when a portion of bilateral aid is directly routed to a Southern country's NGOs by a Northern country government.
communities in a northern country (by a Northern NGO) to NGOs of a southern country.

Channel 3 is essentially a part of bilateral ODA which the government of a Northern country provides to the government of a Southern country with the provision that certain funds for certain activities are earmarked for use through the recipient government, by voluntary organisations of the Southern country. This model has been particularly prevalent in India over the last ten years, where in many ODA-supported development programmes in different sectors, the Government of India has received bilateral assistance in which certain funds are specifically earmarked for the support of Indian voluntary organisations participating in the development schemes and programmes being assisted. These funds, as just mentioned, are specifically linked to a particular development project or scheme which the Government of India is implementing with the help of ODA. For example, a component of the scheme or programme is implemented by NGOs and certain funds made available in the ODA are provided to them by the Government of India.

Channel 4 has also emerged in recent years: the government of a Northern country provides a part of its ODA to Northern NGOs of that country which they in turn allot to NGOs of southern countries. For example, the Dutch government has given a portion of its ODA to Dutch NGOs (like CORDAID) which in turn finances the programmes of Southern NGOs (like PRIA in India).

Another innovation is shown in Channel 5 where the government of a Northern country directly funds NGOs of a Southern country through a portion of bilateral ODA. This has been taking place, for example, in Bangladesh where an NGO, Proshika, has received Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) ODA funds directly. However, this
channel has remained inaccessible to voluntary organisations in India due to the restrictive practices of the government.

FINANCING CIVIL SOCIETY

Most discussion on the comparative merits and demerits of the voluntary organisations of the South vis-à-vis those of the North has been in relation to the context of a development programme or project. It has been argued that voluntary organisations in a Southern country are more committed, purposive, efficient, cost-effective, innovative, close to the community and demonstrate effective utilisation of development assistance. Their comparative drawbacks, it has been argued, are their limited scale, limited capacity, weak infrastructure and limited spread of development programmes and initiatives. The reference for comparison in the South is the government.

The purpose of ODA should be broader than merely accomplishing limited development targets and completing narrowly defined development programmes. ODA should attempt to strengthen the role of civil society organisations with a view to generate the kind of balance between the State, the Market and the Civil Society that is necessary and healthy for the development of any society. Viewed in this broad perspective, ODA must address itself to strengthening the intellectual, material and institutional capacity of civil society actors in countries of the South. Specific and detailed analysis of the situation of civil society in the particular country targeted for ODA and the potential for its strengthening must precede any financing. This will entail supporting not only development programmes of civil society organisations and voluntary organisations, but also investing over a long-term in their institutional, intellectual and material capacity building, human resource development and institutional development as well.
This perspective is, currently, not very widely held in most countries of the Asian region. A few small efforts have been made like the initiative of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the Philippines a few years ago. But it is important that this be implemented as a policy and that ODA officials are encouraged and oriented to implement this policy of long-term capacity-building and institutional strengthening of civil society actors and voluntary development agencies. This is not different from the way ODA approached the issue of strengthening of government agencies and institutions in the previous decades. Therefore, a similar perspective and commitment needs to be made towards strengthening of institutional capacity, the material base and the intellectual autonomy of civil society actors in countries of the South. This implies that ODA must not operate only in a limited project or programme mode, but also earmark a set of resources for long-term strengthening of civil society actors and voluntary development organisations. This approach has in the past resulted in certain conflicts with government agencies and officials in countries of the South. In some of them, where the state has been the dominant and hegemonic actor in the field of development over the last five decades, there has been only a slow and grudging acceptance of the contributions of voluntary organisations in promoting a healthy and sustainable social development. This issue is linked with the broader theme of democracy and governance as an integral part of the development of countries of the South. Many political regimes, government agencies and officials, therefore, grudge the diversion of any ODA which they "legitimately" proclaim to be entirely and exclusively for use by the apparatus of the state. This is certainly the situation in India.

This is where a clear political choice has to be made by countries of the North and those who make policy decisions about their ODA. Obviously, support to civil society actors
and voluntary organisations of the South is not the only issue on which they have had to take a stand. In the past, they have taken similar policy decisions on issues concerning community participation, ecological sustainability and gender sensitivity. Increasingly, there exist a number of individual actors within the government and political system of many countries of the South who are willing to work together with autonomous and independent voluntary organisations without demanding their intellectual, political and material subservience.

There is also a need to recognise that autonomous actors agree as well as disagree with one another on specific policies, programmes and approaches; that independent judgement and autonomous points-of-view are not destructive of society but are, in fact, very healthy and promote widespread accountability and diversity. Pluralistic perspectives, approaches, institutions and points-of-view are integral to healthy and democratic societal development. This is the point-of-view that policy makers of ODA need to emphasise in their dialogue with their counterpart government officials and policy makers in the countries of the South.

It is not so important what proportion of ODA financing goes to voluntary organisations. What is of concern is the attitude of the government agencies to this. Those working within government as well as those working outside it agree that the government, its agencies and officials are generally the sole and exclusive players in determining what is “public good”, how to approach it and what resources to apply to various programmes and plans. This needs to be changed. The transformation will require both time and effort, as well as patient dialogue and an ongoing process of education. A new generation of government officials and policy-makers could be specifically targeted with a view to broaden their perspective on the possibility of multiple approaches and actors in
promoting development. Policy-makers in ODA need to contribute to such a long-term educational process of the actors within governments, if a healthy relationship between civil society and the state has to be evolved.

PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Questions and doubts have been raised about the performance, accountability and capacity of voluntary organisations in the South (Edwards and Hume, 1995). While many of these questions are relevant, they need to be addressed analytically and in appropriate individual contexts. Simplistic generalisations on the basis of superficial evidence does not go well with an analytical and long-term vision of healthy, balanced development. It is obvious that the larger dynamics and culture of a society is bound to affect the working of its voluntary and other civil society organisations. It is also to be expected that homogeneity, consensus and co-operation are unlikely to be found among all the diverse actors of civil society and voluntary agencies in any given country or region. The question is one of finding ways and mechanisms to make appropriate choices. The mechanisms for making those choices have to be situated within the perspective of the types of roles that ODA can play in supporting the growth and development of civil society actors. For example, larger, well-staffed and well-organised voluntary organisations are needed if large-scale development projects have to be undertaken. The contribution of an organisation like BRAC in Bangladesh in promoting basic education of the rural poor, in particular girls, by running nearly 30,000 schools has to be acknowledged. If that is the case, then the institutional infrastructure, staffing and available resources of BRAC must measure up to the gigantic task they have undertaken. The question is not whether they are
big or small, whether they have infrastructure or not, the question really is whether, considering that the goals they have set for themselves are so ambitious, they could provide the level of material and human support which is essential if the project is to be designed and implemented in a purposive and cost-effective manner.

In many countries of the South, such capacity in voluntary organisations is thin. This of course, implies that ODA participation with voluntary organisations around large-scale development projects would require a substantial component of capacity building, infrastructure creation and institutional strengthening. This also implies the need for a carefully designed strategy to assist medium-size voluntary organisations to scale-up their operations over a period of time. Much of the present strategy only relies on making large amounts of funds available to a voluntary agency, which overnight attempts to operate on a large canvas without the needed preparatory process, time and resources to build its staff and institutional capacity.

There is a valuable role that small groups and associations play in mobilising local communities, in raising local issues and in promoting indigenous participation. The bulk of ODA support to such organisations currently comes from either Channel 2 or Channel 4, more through the former. Whatever ODA is involved, either through Channel 3, 4 or 5, that happens with already scaled-up or scaling-up voluntary development organisations working on a large canvas. Therefore, ODA policy-makers need to find a way to create consortium funds which could be utilised to support small groups and voluntary associations in countries of the South. This is where support to Northern NGOs in their own country could also be designed in a manner that they have the capacity to continue to support the work of such small associations and groups in countries of the South.
Likewise, there is a need to consider the use of ODA to support other kinds of mechanisms which are already operating within civil society. For one, a certain amount of ODA support is crucial to those support organisations in countries of the South which engage in the practice of building the capacity of local groups and voluntary agencies. National government resources, even through bilateral ODA, are rarely available for this purpose; and support organisations in countries of the South are exclusively dependent on foundation funds or Northern NGOs’ resources under Channel 2.

The process of identifying these partners can, therefore, be designed to serve these three distinctive categories. For the large-scale development programming, it is possible to identify existing medium- to large-scale voluntary organisations within each Southern country. What is also needed is to find a way to examine the requirements of capacity building as they collaborate with ODA to implement a large-scale programme.

For ‘the second category’, it is important to approach existing networks or federations of voluntary organisations which have emerged in many Asian countries over the past decades. In countries like India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, several such networks are operating quite effectively. Networks could be an excellent source of information and linkage with small groups or those medium-size voluntary agencies which could be involved in ODA for upscaling their development contribution.

But many network organisations and federations are currently facing scarcity of resources. National resources, primarily through governments, are rarely available to support networks and associations. Membership resources are rather weak in many countries of Asia since members themselves depend on external assistance to a large extent. It is conceivable that ODA policy could find a way to support, over a long-term,
functioning of independent national, regional and sub-regional networks, with a view to strengthen their functioning and roles vis-à-vis the state as well as ODA agencies. A case in point is Voluntary Action Network, India (VANI) which has successfully functioned over the last thirteen years and engaged in effective dialogue with the Government of India around policies and also with international donors operating in India. But even an association like VANI, operating under limited resources in a short-term funding perspective, is unable to build its long-term capacity and mechanisms at this juncture.

NOTES

1. This section draws on a previous article by the author entitled, "Civil Society, the State and the Role of NGOs", in Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Region, CIVICUS, Washington D.C., 1994.
7

Strengthening the Voluntary Sector

The formation of the Indian nation state fifty years ago could not, by itself, have led to the strengthening of the roots of civil society. While dramatic changes are taking place in the society, among the people, in their culture, practices and perspectives, these are not being reflected in the plans and programmes of the state. The link between civil society and the state, occasionally provided by the rise of social movements, has not been strengthened. Voluntary initiatives, independent organisations working at the grassroots, working towards education and organisation of the poor, promoting innovation and experimentation of a variety of types, providing services concerning health, education, agriculture, sanitation, water etc., engaging in alternative research, documentation, analysis and policy advocacy, provide the basis for strengthening the democratic traditions of a pluralistic society. The monolithic requirements of the state, the unquestioned loyalty that it demands and its bureaucratic corrupting influences can be countered only by strengthening the capacities and opportunities for sustained individual and collective voluntary initiatives
and institutions outside the framework of the state which represent the creativity and the initiative of ordinary citizens.

It is in this context that strengthening the sector of independent and voluntary initiatives in the country becomes a vital requirement. Support for individuals and institutions engaged in innovative, creative, alternative, citizen-based, citizen-controlled initiatives has now acquired a significant criticality. Unless these individuals and institutions are supported and strengthened, it will be difficult for them to sustain their activities over long periods. The experience is that many such initiatives last for just a decade or less. Their institutional mechanisms and frameworks, their leadership and its continuity, their infrastructure and funding mechanisms continue to function at a low level that does not enable them to maintain a longevity either beyond that of the founder or that of an immediate project. Hence the problem of maintaining the sustainability of such initiatives in their specific cultural milieus, remains a critical issue.

ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES

Since independence Indian voluntary organisations have been evolving distinctive identities and are coming to be recognised as constituting an important sector of Indian society—in some ways as a new force to be reckoned with. There is greater awareness than ever that their contribution in developing new thinking and processes of development has, indeed, been both unique and creative. At the same time, in recent years, the task of managing these non-governmental, non-commercial organisations has become an increasingly complex one.

For these reasons, voluntary organisations need to look closely at some organisational issues as they prepare to initiate the next phase of their development and growth. The need for directing maximum organisational energy to the priority
tasks of high social relevance; and the routinisation of low priority day-to-day maintenance functions, these are two vital issues calling for close attention. The latter, routinisation, calls for a close examination of structures, systems and procedures so as to adapt/modify them in a manner that ensures that a minimum amount of time, cost and energy are utilised on these functions which, though routine, are essential for the smooth running of the organisation.

It is in this context that many feel the need to look seriously and deliberately at organisational issues to ensure that the structures, systems and procedures that evolve are not only consistent with, but also tend to heighten, the values of voluntarism and participation, and set them on firm footing.

Several issues emerge in this regard, which are elaborated below.

ORGANISATIONAL PURPOSE AND MISSION

Voluntary Development Organisations (VDOs) are usually set up to pursue a social commitment, to work in society to bring about desirable changes. All voluntary organisations, social action groups, and people’s movements have a definite mission for which the organisation is created. This mission is a broad statement of concerns in social terms and provides the social relevance of the existence of these organisations. For example, an organisation working for the improvement of the health status of poor tribal families reflects the mission of serving the people through health. Broadly speaking, most such organisations like to define their missions in terms of social transformation and social change. Of course, the specific transformations aimed at vary across organisations. The important point is that this socially defined mission provides the basis for defining organisational purposes and goals. Pursuit of those goals is intended to lead to the accomplishment of that mis-
sion. Clarification of the vision and mission of social change organisations is the key to clarifying their structure and processes.

The second dimension in understanding such an organisation is to examine the appropriateness of its strategy—with respect to the constituencies with which it works and the nature of its relationship with these constituencies. The choice of its strategy, or a set of strategies, determines the nature of the programmes and activities that the voluntary organisation plans to undertake. The structure of a voluntary organisation also emerges from the nature of the programmes and activities it plans to undertake.

In this broad framework, several issues of concern emerge with respect to voluntary organisations in India. The first set of issues relates to the choice of the strategy itself. It has become increasingly clear that forces other than the requirements of the vision and mission sometimes tend to determine the strategy of a voluntary organisation. Some of these forces emanate from the donors and funders.

The second implication of this is in terms of issues related to the core values of an organisation. Social change organisations have certain core values which determine the manner in which they function and the way they structure themselves. However, the most difficult aspect in this regard for voluntary organisations in India has been a continued debate and confusion regarding the necessity, or otherwise, of any organisational structure at all. Since many people founded voluntary organisations as reactions against government institutions which are highly structured and bureaucratised, there is an inherent and distinct dislike for anything which has a ‘structure’. Yet, growing size and requirements of the task demand a minimum appropriate structure. In the absence of an evolution of such an appropriate structure, the overall effectiveness of voluntary organisations gets compromised.
MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

Given the socially relevant and defined missions of such organisations, it is important to understand what kind of management philosophy they pursue. For example, many of them adopt a statement of mission or the philosophy and nature of the work they do, but they have very little to say about the philosophy by which they manage their own organisations. In the case of organisations which have been functioning for several years, a definitely distinctive management philosophy emerges which guides daily practice and becomes the basis for day-to-day management practices within the organisation. These are a set of principles and beliefs which guide day-to-day decision-making. This philosophy influences the recruitment policy of the organisation, the allocation of tasks within it, the salary structure, and all other aspects of management policy and style. Clear articulation of management philosophy is an important step in ensuring that members of the organisation, as well as those outside it, are able to comprehend it. This will certainly assist in orienting new entrants to the organisation who may not have been involved in the early stages of the development and formulation of the management philosophy.

LEADERSHIP

The issues of leadership are central to the functioning of voluntary organisations. This is so for several reasons. As social change organisations, they are set up by a person or a group of persons with a definite vision. In some ways, creating a social change organisation requires a social entrepreneur—a person imbued with a certain vision and having the capacity of an entrepreneur to translate that vision in the form of an organisation. Thus, from the very beginning, voluntary de-
velopment organisations become leader-centric. By and large, all such leaders are charismatic, visionary persons who bring energy and commitment into the organisation. They provide the motivating force in the early years of the organisation. They are able to work with the people at the base as well as in other constituencies because of their sense of commitment and zeal.

However, such leader-centric voluntary organisations face certain problems. The first relates to the tendency of such leadership, as the community-centred activities of the organisation get into stride, to increasingly get personally drawn into such “outdoor” field activities and neglect their organisational managerial responsibilities concerning the organisation itself. As founder(s) of social change organisations, these leaders want personally to participate directly in doing what the organisation has been set up to do; they would much rather work direct with tribals, women, the poor, than sit in an office planning and organising. To work for the community is what they want to do, that is what they are capable of doing best, that is what they set up this organisation for. However, like all organisations, social change organisations also require constant exercise of the leadership role within the organisation and their leaders must devote attention and effort to tackling issues affecting the organisation per se. This is something most founder-leaders find extremely difficult to do. They would much rather look outside than inside their organisation. Time and attention devoted to intra-organisation work are seen as diverting energies from the basic task at hand.

The second issue facing these leaders is the matter of succession, of ensuring continuity, in the absence of the capacity to create new generations with the ability to provide leadership. Such organisations become leader-dependent and find it difficult to create spaces and opportunities for new sets of people to exercise leadership inside and outside the organisation.
As a consequence of these shortcomings, many voluntary organisations face serious organisational problems: personal conflicts within the organisation; tensions on questions of structure, roles and responsibilities. More often than not, decentralisation of decision-making and delegation of responsibilities are not being institutionalised. People leave, organisations split, organisational cultures are reduced to shambles. Such developments in a voluntary organisation are sure signs that its organisational strengthening and building measures have been neglected.

PROFESSIONALISM

A significant trend of the recent decades in many voluntary organisations in India has been the increasing demand for professionalism. This demand has come from several quarters. First of all, a stress on providing high quality and efficient work comes from funders and donors. It is not possible any longer to just keep on working at the same pace, level and capacity as was possible earlier. The second source of pressure comes from the complexity of emerging new issues—environment, forestry, economic activity, appropriate technology, on the one hand; and documentation, training and research, on the other. All these demand the induction of people with professional capacities in these areas of social work. A third source of pressure is from a new set of voluntary organisations emerging with professional leadership at the very outset. Founders of such organisations are engineers, doctors, scientists, managers, accountants, foresters, veterinarians, agriculturists, etc.

This trend towards professionalism has led to some positive and some negative consequences for voluntary organisations. One of the positive consequences has been the bringing in of a large number of young people trained in pro-
that needs to be built with the Home Ministry regulating foreign contributions. In managing such organisations, it seems that understanding the complexity of environments and the diversity of their various parts is crucial; and a deliberate effort has to be made to evolve a posture and relationship of the organisation with those different sections. Unless an organisation is able to manage its environment effectively and actively, it will always be at the mercy of forces from outside. The relationship and postures created and sustained with different segments of the environment also need to be consistent with the overall organisational philosophy and values. A commercial organisation will build relationships with regulatory agencies in one way; voluntary organisations may not be able to afford, both financially and ethically, to build the relationship in the same way. What are the alternatives? In managing such organisations, managing the environment is perhaps one of the most crucial tasks, which so far seems to have been ignored.

WHAT IS CAPACITY?

In the light of the above organisational challenges, what is meant by "capacity"? Capacity is a multi-dimensional and complex attribute. In a simple sense, it covers the totality of an organised effort of voluntary organisation to fulfil its mission. As there are diverse purposes, missions and rationales for starting up and continuation of different voluntary organisations, universal prescriptions of desirable capacity are not relevant. The important thing is to look at capacity in relation to the mission and purpose of a voluntary organisation. Three types of capacity can be examined in relation to voluntary organisations.
Intellectual

This is the intellectual and analytical ability of a voluntary organisation. Clarification of its perspective, its vision of a desirable society, its moral and ethical base, its analysis of the given social reality—all these constitute components of such capacity. Systematising its own experience and drawing lessons from it, monitoring its activities and reviewing its purpose in the light of the changes taking place in the wider society, and learning from its ongoing activities become important elements of this capacity.

Institutional

Institutional capacity involves the internal and external relationships and linkages. The primary arena for examining the meaning of this capacity of local voluntary organisations is the web of relationships in its immediate social context. The capacity of a voluntary organisation to manage its internal systems and procedures is crucial to achieve its mission and purposes.

Material

The material resource base is an increasingly important element of capacity as far as voluntary organisations are concerned. This includes physical infrastructure, assets and resources.

WHAT IS CAPACITY BUILDING?

The term ‘building’ has acquired a distorted connotation, implying that something has to be initiated from scratch. But there is hardly any situation where it has to begin from scratch. So capacity building actually means building on the existing capacities. This approach implies that capacity formation is a gradual and cumulative process. Therefore, interventions aimed
at building the capacity of a voluntary organisation are expected to result in improved effectiveness in pursuit of its purposes and mission. In this sense, capacity for continuous organisational learning, reflection and systematisation, is the basis on which new capacity building occurs. It means, building of capacity without rush, without the hurried immediate pressures of task completion. Thus capacity building of a voluntary organisation acquires a purposive and systematic nature; it implies especially designed, planned and structured interventions carried out by the voluntary organisation with the assistance of others.

However, capacity building of voluntary organisations has some serious problems and deficiencies as demonstrated both by Indian and global experience. Some of the key deficiencies are:

- Capacity building has been driven largely by the concerns of northern donors to ensure better efficiency and reporting of use of funds provided for specific projects. Thus the focus of much of capacity building has been on improving the financial management and reporting system of voluntary organisations.
- Capacity building is, in some cases, linked only to a specific project in order to improve the performance of that project alone. No effort is made to institutionalise capacity building beyond the requirements of that project.
- Short-term orientation to capacity building is linked to immediate and measurable targets that can be reported to the donors. Long-term cumulative processes of learning are ignored.
- Capacity building focuses predominantly on technical training of individuals working in different roles on a funded sectoral project. Locating new technology in the existing culture and context of a voluntary organisation is not even attempted.
- Training is the dominant method of enhancing the capacity of an individual equipped to play a project-specific role; hardly any attention is given to organisational systems, culture or institutional linkages.
- Most capacity-building exercises rely on training by external (in many cases, expatriate) experts who apply knowledge and experience gained in one context to another. Building local support mechanisms for ongoing capacity building are largely ignored.

DESIRABLE PRINCIPLES

Based on the above, the following desirable principles emerge:

*Capacity building is a continuous and ongoing process*

This view implies that capacity formation in a voluntary organisation is an ongoing and long-term process. Thus the meaning of capacity may change as purposes undergo re-statement and re-articulation; at different stages in the life of a voluntary organisation, different types of capacity may become important.

*Capacity formation is a self-reflecting and evolutionary learning process*

The formation of the capacity of a voluntary organisation is an evolutionary process, similar to learning at the level of an individual. People learn through life itself, through their struggle to survive and deal with their environment. A lot of this learning is evolutionary, continuous and does not depend on external inducements. Likewise, formation of capacity of a voluntary organisation is the process of organisational learning through which a collective actor learns as it begins to undertake activities in pursuit of its mission and purpose.
KEY ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITIES

The following components of capacity are relevant in the context of voluntary organisations in India today.

1. Programme/Project Management Capacity

Every development actor and grassroots organisation is set-up to offer certain services to its members or to the larger society. Historically, these activities have fallen into distinct projects and programmes. This capacity implies ability to plan, implement and monitor specific projects and programmes of a development organisation. Organisations which believe in the philosophy of people-centred development need to have the capacity for participatory planning, implementation and monitoring as a part of their project management capacity. Development organisations which have, for some time, been receiving assistance in the context of development programmes in a region or country formally build up this capacity over time. Civic groups or community-based organisations not used to implementing projects initially find it difficult to do so.

2. Human Resource Development Capacity

All development organisations pride themselves on the competence and commitment of their human resources. In fact, they tend to distinguish themselves from other types of organisations on the basis of their commitment, sensitivity and competence of their personnel. This capacity includes ability to recruit new and appropriate human resources. Induction and orientation to roles for different people in the organisation is important. Sustained orientation and motivation of human resources is an integral part of this capacity. Continuous performance appraisal and improvement, appropriate systems of compensation and reward, regular assessment of developmental needs and provisions for meeting them, team building, and an
enabling culture are some other important components of this capacity. In today’s changing context, many voluntary organisations are experiencing high turnover of staff, demands for greater remuneration, and problems of indiscipline among the staff. Under such circumstances, this capacity acquires a great deal of criticality and requires efforts to build it systematically.

3. Systems Capacity

One of the key aspects of efficient utilisation of resources and effectiveness in ensuring the impact of its work are building and maintenance of appropriate systems and procedures within a voluntary organisation. Systems of financial management and maintaining accounts are basic to this capacity; so are personnel management systems and those related to fulfilling legal/statutory requirements. Decision-making systems related to projects and programmes also constitute an important part of this capacity. Systems for planning and monitoring projects and programmes are needed. Use of new information technology in various systems is an emerging issue. Historically, voluntary organisations have been less inclined to build their own systems as their preferred mode of operation was based on flexibility, responsiveness and creativity. However, there has been an increasing realisation that basic systems need to improve even for flexibility, responsiveness and creativity to be exercised. This is one of the weak areas of many voluntary organisations.

4. Material Physical Capacity

Physical infrastructure is an important component of capacity. Infrastructure includes assets like buildings, training centres, project centres, extension centres; it also includes vehicles, agricultural or related machinery, office equipment etc. While many voluntary organisations acquire physical assets,
their regular maintenance, efficient utilisation and periodic renewal is not always well planned and implemented. “Many Southern voluntary organisations have become dependent on external sources of funding. Mobilisation of financial resources for long-term sustainability of a voluntary organisation has become a crucial element of the capacity. Capacity to build and enhance local, indigenous and autonomous sources of material and financial support is crucial for long-term sustainability and autonomous functioning of a voluntary organisation.”

5. Information Capacity

Accessing, recording and utilising appropriate information for decision-making in programmes and other aspects of the functioning of a development organisation is an important component of capacity. Many voluntary organisations have excellent capacity for generating information and using it responsively and appropriately for decision-making. Yet, documentation of information and an appropriate system of storage and retrieval is rather weak in many development organisations. With the growing significance of new information technology, use of computerised information access, storage and dissemination acquires greater focus as part of this capacity. In this context, the reaserach and documentation capacity of voluntary organisations has, therefore, acquired a new level of importance.

6. Relational Capacity

As a development actor, building relationships with others locally, regionally, nationally and even globally, becomes important for effective functioning and sustainable impact. Many voluntary organisations build alliances and partnerships with others to undertake joint actions. Many are part of networks to share information, experiences and ideas. Many Southern
voluntary organisations are today being called upon to play regional and global roles, for which building of regional networks and global alliances are necessary.

Many voluntary organisations work actively with government departments and agencies to improve their linkages locally as well as to influence their policies and programmes. *Advocacy capacity* is the key to multiplying the impact of a development actor. Systematic building of this capacity is, however, seldom undertaken by development actors.

7. *Strategic Capacity*

Development actors need to think in long-term strategic parameters to articulate their vision and to sharpen their impact. The strategic capacity of voluntary organisations includes effective governance skills, visionary leadership, and the ability to restructure its positions and roles in response to emerging trends and changes. Essentially, this capacity has historically been located in the founder-leadership of voluntary organisations. As a part of institutional capacity, it has only been recognised as being important in its own right in recent years. However, in periods of dramatic changes, like the present, strategic capacity is the key to the long-term viability and sustained impact of a development actor.

8. *Renewal Capacity*

Finally, an important component of the capacity of development actors is the ability to review their functions periodically. Organisational learning, review, change and development, internal and external restructuring, reformulation of mission and strategy, revitalisation of culture and reorientation of leadership are some of the elements of this renewal capacity. So far, among Indian voluntary organisations, this capacity has rarely been exercised in a systematic and sustained manner, and feebly whenever it has been.
SECTORAL CAPACITY

While much of the attention in capacity building of voluntary organisations has focused on individuals and institutions, it has become crucial to strengthen the capacity of the sector as a whole. Very little attention has been paid to this issue and very few interventions are designed to address this need. In a recent study, Tandon and Brown (1994) identified several key interventions needed for strengthening the capacity of this sector of civil society as a whole:

"Create forums for identifying shared issues and building shared perspectives"

"The diversity and complexity of civil society can make it extremely difficult for its members to identify the issues on which they have shared interests and to develop a common perspective on the work of the sector.

"During the last decade, associations and networks have emerged to enable wider sharing of information and building a common understanding. Interventions aimed at creation and strengthening of such sectoral forums, networks or associations can be critical for enhancing the impact of civil society.

"Promote mechanisms to represent key sectoral issues"

"Building coalitions within the civil society depends on the developments of norms and mechanisms for handling differences. A coalition experience can strengthen or weaken those institutional bases for the future, depending on the extent to which the experience builds norms of reciprocity, tolerance, and social trust.

"Build systems to develop sector human resources"

"More directly strengthening the institutional base for human resource development may be possible through the provision
of training and research support to the sector. Creating indigenous support institutions to respond to these needs can have effects well beyond solving the immediate problems of human resources, since the educational process can involve considerable impacts on intellectual perspectives as well as material and organisational capacities.”

**ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**

Capacity building for voluntary organisations also includes promoting an environment for capacity utilisation and retention. In the absence of a supportive legal and policy environment, voluntary organisations may find their existing capacity being depleted or restricted. Effective utilisation of existing capacity of voluntary organisations in India is inhibited by government’s bureaucratic rules and procedures, political harassment, intimidation and constant threats from such quarters as Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA). Use of new capacity is further restricted when the “right to information” is denied.

Another major impediment to capacity utilisation and strengthening of voluntary organisations is donor policies and practices. A recent analysis by the International Forum on Capacity Building (IFCB) identified a set of such constraints:

The *drive to professionalise project management* has resulted in the often indiscriminate use of “for-profit” private consultants, consulting firms and audit firms.

*Different capacity building priorities among donors and their various choices of capacity building provider* result in confusion and conflict among SNGOs (voluntary organisations in southern countries). Donors have recently shown interest in coordinating at the country level around a specific SNGO programme.
Focusing on project related capacity building has created big gaps between “haves” and “have-nots” in capacity among SNGOs. Donors are realising that a sectoral focus to capacity building for SNGOs through multi-stakeholder processes might be more appropriate.

**Constraints for SNGO capacity building.** Most donors note two recurrent constraints: the host country government’s usually unhelpful attitude towards SNGOs and the bureaucratic imperatives of their organisations which require both results (which are hard to measure in capacity building) and quick compliance with the bureaucratic systems (proposals, disbursements, reports, evaluations).”


Supportive government policy and legislation and enabling donor practices are the key to capacity building for voluntary organisations in general, and in India in particular.
Emerging Priorities in Capacity Building

The previous chapter dealt with a number of aspects of capacity building for voluntary organisations. This chapter focuses on three key themes of capacity building for voluntary organisations. "Networking", "policy advocacy" and "organisational development" are the contemporary buzzwords in discussions on capacity building in India where the present and emerging context makes it essential for voluntary organisations to give priority to building their capacities in these three areas.

First, and this is an urgent imperative, voluntary organisations in India need to work together with other formations within civil society. Second, major long-term improvements in Indian society require sustained and rigorous institutional and policy reforms for good governance from the point-of-view of the poor and the marginalised. Policy advocacy is the key to upscaling the impact of voluntary organisations in today's context. Third, the changing context demands organisational renewal. In fact the previous two capacities can only be enhanced when voluntary organisations undergo rigorous and on-going organisational development.
In this chapter, the basic meaning and requirements of networking, policy advocacy, and organisational development are outlined. Indiscriminate use of these terms has led to some confusion concerning their implication. The elucidation and elaboration of these three areas of capacity building will, it is hoped, assist Indian voluntary organisations in making informed choices in future.

NETWORKING

A network comprises individuals, groups and organisations, created essentially to share information and to communicate with each other in a horizontal, non-hierarchical manner. This simple and straightforward usage of “network” as implying a mechanism of communication actually gets more complicated and elaborate in practice.

Citizen’s associations, neighbourhood groups, voluntary organisations, women’s organisations, people’s movements, all represent the wide range of actors of civil society. This diversity of purpose and origin also exists within voluntary organisations and NGOs. It is this enormous diversity within the sectors of the civil society which calls for an innovative approach to facilitating communication among them, should it be necessary to work together. This is the rationale for the widespread use of networks for communication across various actors of civil society. When individuals, groups or organisations want to communicate with each other without surrendering their autonomy, without becoming full-time employees or members or subordinates of a larger entity while pursuing some common development agenda, these linkages assist in communicating, sharing information, and finding out about each other. This is the rationale for the creation and sustenance of a network.
Many individuals interested in similar pursuits are “locked” in institutions of the state and the market and find it difficult to get involved in areas of their interest. As citizens, they are part of civil society, and have commitment and capacity to work towards a common development agenda. When their institutional affiliations make it difficult for them to relate with others outside their own institutions, networks can facilitate linkage-building. Such networking provides alternative space for communication, involvement and action.

What then are the purposes of networking, of building and of sustaining a network? Four distinct purposes are identified here. The first purpose is mobilising energy and resources within the civil society. New ideas, designs and perspectives get elaborated through new ways of relating with each other. The “cutting edge” issues in development get facilitated and communicated in a more informal and non-hierarchical manner, since new ideas entail a critique of and departure from the established modes of functioning.

The second purpose of a network is to communicate among actors of civil society. A top-down, hierarchical, procedurally rigid organisational form tends to inhibit free flow of experiences and ideas. A network, as a form, provides for such a flow between individuals and groups. Communication in a network can be initiated by anyone and received by anyone. Internet, the new electronic communication innovation, is in fact a classic example of this. Those who have something to share, put it out on the Internet. Those who are interested to receive it, can do so. Thus, communication is the most crucial purpose of any network.

The third purpose of networking is to promote linkage building among the actors of civil society. Bringing together like-minded individuals, groups and institutions around a shared development agenda can be facilitated through networking. The purpose is not to co-ordinate activities of those individuals
or groups, but to facilitate more systematic communication, sharing of information, experience and ideas. A network tends to seek out individuals and groups working in diverse, unknown settings and link them with each other.

Lastly, networks can influence public policy. Set up such that there is shared analysis and vision among various actors of the civil society, a network becomes an instrument to influence public policy. In the contemporary context, a public policy may be made by a local, regional or national government, or a bilateral or a multilateral agency or other actors (like MNCs) at the national or global level.

On all issues of public policy that are important to voluntary action, Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) has been able to effectively network with other actors of civil society, even if they are not its members. For resisting religious communalism, VANI was able to link up with media, trade union organisations, women’s groups, academia, student movements and other socio-political formations.

The form a network adopts depends a great deal on its rationale and purposes. In practice, two types of forms have evolved. One common form is being loosely organised. This is a common description for many networks among activists, practitioners, development actors, etc. In this form, linkages across individuals, groups and organisations of civil society are informal; association with each other within the network essentially depends on the motivation, energy and initiative of each individual member; there are no formal membership criteria, forms or procedures for joining in or opting out.

Another form that some networks take is similar to that of an association. Associations have more formal relations among individuals, groups and member organisations. The definition of membership in terms of criteria, procedure for joining or remaining outside, the rights and privileges, duties and re-
sponsibilities of members are clearly and formally defined in an association.

There are several generic problematiques that the experience of networking has thrown up. The first problematique revolves around the theme of "participation vs. responsibility". As the process of building linkages in a network proceeds, individuals, groups and organisations of civil society do gain some value by association and participation. But this participation is often limited to seeking other's experiences and ideas, but not sharing one's own. In this context participation may be a one-way process where individuals within the network gain from others, but do not contribute. Thus energy and resources needed to sustain the network by a two-way process of involvement and contribution may not materialise.

The second problematique relates to "coordination vs. control". The purpose of coordination in a network is to ensure the promotion of communication across linkages. The idea of coordination is not to control the activities of those who are part of the network. By definition, those who associate with the network remain autonomous. There is a very fine line between coordination and control.

The third problematique relates to the linkage between "the person and the institution". As has been mentioned earlier, networks of civil society have enormous potential to enlist individuals, even if they operate in rather stifling and restricting institutional frameworks. A network is able to mobilise individual interest, commitment and resources around issues being addressed by the network. Yet, at the same time, resources for continuing and ongoing communication may require institutional support. Many networks try to balance between involvement of the individual and their institutions.

The fourth problematique is "information vs. action". It is clear that information is to be shared in order to promote some further action. There is a larger purpose behind sharing
of information, as defined by the network. There is an important distinction between solidarity action and programmatic action. While the former is easy to respond to by many members of the network, the latter requires commitment of institutions to undertake follow-up programmes. As a result, programmatic action in a network occurs more unevenly than solidarity action.

The last problematique is "process vs. structure". As discussed earlier, networking is a process, an activity. It is a verb, communicating a dynamic process. It is sharing experiences and disseminating ideas. Yet, all the processes (like building relationships, linkages, sharing information, communicating) have to be situated within a minimal structure, which becomes necessary for the continuity and accomplishment of the purposes of the network. This is a challenge because the essential processual nature of a network has to be maintained so that the structure does not curtail the evolution of those processes. Many a time, networks require material resources, funds for communication and linkage-building. This requirement of material resources necessitates a minimal formal structure. Hence, there are pressures towards institutionalisation of many networks. But these have to be critically assessed in the light of the requirements.

POLICY ADVOCACY

Was this phrase "policy advocacy" or "voluntary action advocacy" existent at the time Raja Rammohan Roy took the initiative to pursue social reform; or even at the time of Mahatma Gandhi's struggle through which significant changes were brought about? Advocacy in India has such historical roots and is not something which has been just discovered. As citizen's action to influence policies that affect their lives, advocacy has a long history; perhaps as long as citizenship itself.
The Bonded Labour Abolition Act was promulgated during the Emergency declared by Mrs Indira Gandhi to release and rehabilitate bonded labour in response to social action. The 1977 Primary Health Care Policy of the Government of India was largely fashioned after the work of a large number of voluntary organisations. Likewise, the National Adult Education Programme (1978) was actually crafted by a group of adult-educators active in voluntary organisations. This is to put into perspective that, while the phrase, “policy advocacy”, may be recent, the practice has been a reality for a long time. And, as a consequence of the work of voluntary organisations, many a time indirectly, there have been significant policy changes in the course of our history.

Having recognised this, one could mention a number of other issues around which an impact on public policy has occurred as a consequence of the work of voluntary organisations. If one looks at the issues of women’s rights, environment, children’s rights, the advocacy of voluntary organisations has, directly or indirectly, led to policy articulation. Policy advocacy is defined as being broader-based than lobbying and as a process, as opposed to an event. Therefore, the practice of advocacy primarily involves informing, influencing, altering, modifying, implementing, discarding, and resisting or encouraging public policy. Without reference to public policy, the use of the term advocacy is very generic and not at all meaningful. It should not be understood to include organising, awareness raising, conscientising, skill building. It must specifically focus on a question of public policy. There may be different ways of influencing public policy, which may include the involvement of people themselves, the use of the media, academic research, etc., but by using the term without a focus on public policy, the implications of the word advocacy get diluted.

Many people think that influencing public policy is not a suitable area of work for voluntary organisations; some others
think that that is the only area in which they can contribute. If we view influencing public policy as the primary aim of advocacy action, then the apparent contradiction between grassroots action and advocacy does not exist. It is on the basis of the cumulative experience of working at the grassroots that a voluntary organisation can actually come up with interesting, insightful, relevant, appropriate suggestions for the content of the public policy itself. The experience of people working in the areas of health care, bondage, literacy, was the basis of their ability to bring in the substantive focus in the policies they were influencing. It is the work at the grassroots that becomes the basis of generating ideas which may provide the substance of a particular public policy.

Yet, this is not to say that influencing public policy can only happen if you have worked at the grassroots. There are numerous examples of influencing public policy which are very much in the favour of the poor by those who never had any direct work at the grassroots level. The question is not whether one can lead to the other—it inevitably does. Those who were engaged in the work of primary health care or literacy in the 1950s or 1960s were not doing that work because they wanted to influence policy in the 1970s. They were doing that work because it was important to them. But when favourable circumstances matured, when the situation was ripe for change, their known experience in relevant fields constituted an important basis for formulating new policies on health care, adult education, etc.

In recent years, much of the policy advocacy has been focused on rejecting or resisting negative public policy formulations; it has been successful in stopping implementation of some policies that seemed anti-poor. But those who are in the business of influencing public policy may also have to take upon themselves the task of formulating or providing positive content to policy proposals. This latter task may entail “dirtying ones hands”, sitting in the same room with those who
ultimately write that policy. Merely resisting anti-poor public policy does not necessarily lead to desirable public policies in favour of the poor.

It is important to recognise the national and global dimension in public policy formulation today. Throughout the period of post World War II, the concept of development itself, the concept of development aid, the concept of development planning, etc. have been taken over from the countries of the North. Despite our pretensions to formulating national policies autonomously, a number of them are influenced by global forces and agendas. By the late 1970s, many a world conference influenced our own public policies. The Alma Ata Conference on Primary Health Care, the FAO Conference on Integrated Rural Development, the Women’s Decade meetings (Mexico, Nairobi, Beijing), the Environment discussions (Rio), the Human Rights Conference (Vienna), are clear examples. The global dimension in development policy formulation has, in the last couple of years, existed as long as development has been on the agenda. It is only in the economic liberalisation trends that we may be seeing something more visibly. Therefore, there is a need to at least take a global view in public policy influencing, even if we are operating at a micro or a local level.

For voluntary organisations to pursue policy advocacy rigorously, several capacities need to be developed. The first set of concerns relate to conceptual stagnation. Many voluntary organisations in India abhor those who move in the “corridors of power”—a phrase we use in great distaste; “those who dirty themselves by shaking hands with politicians/bureaucrats”. In fact, a vibrant democracy is one where all interests are organised to lobby for themselves. The tragedy of India’s democracy is that certain interests are not well organised and have not done the lobbying they should. In our form of governance, “representative democracy”, lobbying is a necessity—demanding accountability from those who are “public repre-
sentatives”, be they politicians or bureaucrats. Therefore, policy formulation, policy change, policy altering, influencing public policy in this form of governance is essentially going to be an incremental process, not a dramatic revolutionary transformation. Incremental changes in public policy will therefore naturally require a long-term, sustained lobbying effort which carries with it the concerns and the interests of diverse sections of the poor.

Another consideration is partnership, which includes networking, coalition-building, extending hands of solidarity to each other. Included in this are opportunities of building partnerships with media, academia and with other sectors (including the corporate). The experience of networking and coalition-building even within the fold of voluntary organisations in independent India has been rather frustrating, painful and difficult. Networking, coalition-building, and partnership are critical elements of our strategy to influence public policy.

Another consideration is capacity for policy advocacy. Many voluntary organisations lack capacity in even comprehending how policy is formulated in this country, leave alone its global dimensions. Documenting and systematising grassroots experience is necessary to focus on policy changes.

Experience shows that a combination of a number of approaches (media, legal, research) needs to be adopted in a strategic way that results in influencing public policy. Therefore, the question is one of building a capacity with such a combination and how to effectively use such a combination.

ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT

Building the capacity of voluntary organisations to manage their functioning and activities effectively and efficiently began to gain some attention only a decade ago and it is only
over the past five years or so that institutional strengthening (IS), institutional development (ID) and organisation development (OD) of voluntary organisations has begun to be discussed and practised.

With the increasing experience in resolving real-life organisational problems in industry and government, the concept of OD began to get defined and redefined. As the understanding about the nature and functioning of complex organisations grew, the scope and depth of OD and its interventions also expanded. While many different definitions and frameworks have been adopted, certain key elements of OD have emerged from this wide range of approaches and methodologies. It is these key elements—change, effectiveness, values, common understanding, and learning from experience—that are discussed below.

1. Planned Change

Organisations change over time. Pressures for change generate both from within the organisation, and from outside. OD implies proactive, anticipatory, planned change in some (or all) aspects of the functioning of an organisation, as opposed to *ad hoc*, haphazard, reactive change. In this sense, OD implies forward-looking and future-oriented planned effort for change.

2. Improved Effectiveness

The purpose of OD is to improve the long-term effectiveness of the organisation. Short-term profit, efficiency in input-output, and growth are also part of the goals of OD. Improving the health of an organisation and increasing its capacity to engage in planned change and ongoing self-renewal is part of this purpose of improving effectiveness. Gaining new technology, new products, new services, new markets, new clients, on the one hand, and improving employee morale and
productivity, reducing costs, enhancing quality, increasing competitiveness etc. on the other, are all part of the framework of improving effectiveness.

3. Preferred Values

The practice of OD has emphasised the espousal of certain preferred values in relation to individuals, organisations and society. It stresses the value of increasing individual autonomy, choice, creativity and respect as a necessary ingredient of improved organisational effectiveness. In this effort, it draws on the support of academic studies of motivation and human need, social relations and group dynamics.

4. System-wide Understanding

OD emphasises the need for deeper understanding of the underlying causes of visible symptoms of problems faced by organisations. Therefore, OD starts with a diagnosis which aims to improve a comprehensive, system-wide understanding of the organisation. This process of diagnosis, therefore, makes OD a data-based strategy of change. It bases its interventions for organisational improvement on the analysis generated from a systematic system-wide organisational diagnosis. For this diagnosis to be carried out, OD requires an explicit framework of understanding of an organisation. A variety of frameworks of organisation have been developed over the years in the now well-established management discipline of organisational behaviour. A clear and explicitly articulated framework describing what an organisation is, how it functions, what outputs are produced by what inputs and intervening variables etc. is, therefore, necessary.

5. Learning Process

Changes and improvements in organisations are brought about in a variety of ways. Large organisations typically use power
and coercion, through executive orders and decrees, to effect desired changes. An OD process of bringing about change in an organisation, however, adopts an action-research approach. Inquiry, learning, experimentation, education and persuasion are preferred modes of bringing about organisational change. The processes of undertaking OD is, therefore, designed in a way that the organisation, its leadership and members actively participate in the diagnosis of the deficiency sought to be removed as well as planning and implementing the changes identified as being necessary to bring about the improvements desired. This process ensures that change in an organisation is "owned" by it and has a greater possibility of being sustainable. It also involves the organisation's leadership and members undergoing a learning-relearning process in the collective effort to appreciate the need for and direction of change required to improve the organisation's effectiveness.

The above key elements of OD are the foundation of any planned organisation improvement effort. As can be seen from this, the practice and theory of OD emerged in a particular historical context from the experiences of certain types of organisations. Typically, these organisations were profit-making, large commercial and industrial organisations: factories, mines, offices. Sometimes, they included large government agencies, departments or public corporations. These organisations were large, complex bureaucracies with well-defined hierarchies, roles, rules, systems and procedures. They operated in situations where the supply of raw materials, technology of production and sale of outputs was reasonably stable and certain. In the case of large government agencies or corporations these operated in monopoly situations with an unrestricted flow of resource inputs.

Many of these organisations (for profit corporations or government agencies) were designed and operated on the basis of
the theory and principles developed during the 19th century industrial revolution period in Europe. These principles of scientific management, efficiency through assembly line, bureaucracy as a non-feudal form of organisation, were evolved in the period of industrial revolution, to create possibilities of managing efficiently and objectively large production and service enterprises. The rise of organised labour and the increasing relevance of human motivation gave rise to theories and practices of human relations as an approach to effective management of an enterprise. It is, therefore, significant that the practice of OD emphasised human values, organisational democracy, open and participative management and learning orientation. Since “business as usual” was no longer possible, OD interventions aimed to build the capacities of such organisations to deal proactively with anticipated future trends.

What is the relevance of OD in voluntary organisations? While no universal prescription is possible in such a situation, certain typical pressures for change operate on many voluntary organisations. Some of them are discussed below.

(a) Voluntary organisations are mission-oriented. Typically, the mission of a voluntary organisation advocates desirable social change in the community or society. Such a desirable change may imply changes in education, health, employment, etc. As social change organisations, voluntary organisations intend to impact on their external constituencies. As voluntary organisations succeed in bringing about that desired change, they typically redefine their mission. Success in achieving its mission results in social change, which, in turn, puts pressure on the voluntary organisation to change, to identify and undertake fresh objectives. Failure in achieving its mission also puts pressure on an organisation to redefine its strategy or mission. As social-change-oriented organisations, NGOs live on and promote change. Hence change is the very rationale of NGO existence and effectiveness. OD, as a planned
intervention for change, is necessary for NGO renewal and revitalisation, and for their continued relevance.

(b) Development, non-profit voluntary organisations frequently rely on external resources to conduct their activities. These resources are typically mobilised from national and international donors. Major changes and shifts in policies and programmes of resource providers and donors have occurred over the past five decades as new lessons are derived from field experiences. Obviously, shifts in donor policies and priorities can significantly affect the functioning of a voluntary organisation, thereby necessitating organisational change.

(c) A voluntary organisation, typically, starts small, in scope, coverage and resources. As it succeeds in its mission, it grows. Methods of organisational functioning which are appropriate for a small, informal group are not appropriate for a large voluntary organisation. Pressures for change are inherent in growth, which itself is change.

(d) NGOs are typically set up by committed, idealistic, visionary persons who want to make an impact on society. In some important ways these persons are social entrepreneurs as they take initiatives and risks to stake their values, capacities, reputation and resources in setting up and nurturing voluntary organisations. In such a situation, issues of transition in leadership, building leadership at the level of management, strengthening institutional mechanisms of governance and systematising functioning beyond the personal style and idiosyncrasies of the founder-leader gain significance.

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These external and internal pressures for change generate requirements for restructuring of voluntary organisations as organisational entities. Voluntary organisations respond to these
pressures for change in a variety of ways. Most tend to “swim with the tide”. They deal with these pressures as and when the waves come, allowing them to determine their direction. Or they respond to such pressures for change by ignoring them and continuing with “business as usual”. Only in a few cases do voluntary organisations recognise the need to change themselves. Even in such a situation, an organisation tends to look for quick-fix solutions. This approach to organisational change discourages systematic diagnosis and the development of a long-term perspective on organisational renewal. Such a short-term focus had been encouraged in the 1970s and 1980s by thinkers, donors and ideologues who typically viewed voluntary organisations as temporary instruments to solve a limited problem. Such a narrow conception of voluntary organisation roles relegated them to “gap filling” functions, i.e., meeting needs arising out of failures of the government or the market. This conception assumed that voluntary organisations had no role whatsoever in the event of efficient functioning of government and market agencies. As a result, long-term organisational capacity-building, institutional strengthening and organisational development were never valued or supported by voluntary organisation leaders, their donors and evaluators. However, with the advent of fresh thinking on the development trinity (state–market–civil society), there is growing recognition of the significance and long-term role of civil society organisations in ensuring democratic and equitable development. This recognition has highlighted the existing reality of the weak institutional capacity of voluntary organisations. OD is being viewed as a possible intervention to build such capacity.

NOTES

1. This section draws upon an earlier paper by the author entitled, “Networks as Mechanisms of Communication Within and Influence of Civil Society” (1995).
Bibliography


Other Titles of Interest

Participatory Research
Revisiting the Roots
ISBN: 81-901297-3-2

Rajesh Tandon (Ed.)

The aim of the book is to critically assess early conceptualisation of the philosophy and methodology of Participatory Research (PR) and revisit its relevance to the current development and political context. The book presents both the theoretical innovations in PR, as well as some case studies where the concept has been put into practice. The book also contains an annotated bibliography.

Over the past years, many academic institutions and programs have attempted to prepare their students and faculty to learn the philosophical and methodological aspects of PR. Although the acceptance and use of PR has increased over time, new materials on the subject are still largely not accessible to students and practitioners alike.

PR tools have gained immense popularity, especially among practitioners. However, it is imperative to provide sound theoretical backup, without which knowledge of tools is not only incomplete, it also runs the risk of misuse in the field. The information provided in this book will hold particular relevance for students of development studies, sociology, and social work and for development practitioners and policy makers wanting to include PR components/principles in policies and projects.

Development Aid Today

ISBN: 81-85399-30-1

Abhijit Dasgupta and Georg Lechner (Eds.)

This book provides a scholarly exchange of views on the vexing question of development aid. It brings together the pro- and the anti-views, and the views of those who choose the middle ground.

This book would be valuable all those involved with the giving or receiving of aid, in its various forms.