THE CHALLENGES FOR CAPACITY BUILDING: SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS IN SOUTH ASIA

Report of the Third Workshop of South Asian Support Organisations
Dhaka, Bangladesh
May 11 - 13, 1999

Workshop organised by PRIP Trust, Bangladesh IFCB and PRIA
PREFACE

PRIA began a process of exploring the support functions for the voluntary development sector in South Asia at the beginning of 1990. The first workshop on Support Organisations (SOS) was jointly convened by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India; the Institute for Development Research (IDR), Boston and the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reforms (ANGOC), Philippines in March 1990 in New Delhi. The results of this workshop led to the initiation of a series of in-country initiatives in South Asia to build the capacity of support organisations. The Support Organisations Initiative was born as a result of this workshop. The discussions are summarised in a report titled “Strengthening the Grassroots: Nature and Role of Support Organisations”

The second workshop was convened in Kathmandu in May 1994 to take stock of the work done and the processes supported in strengthening civil society. This was hosted by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India and the Institute for Development Research (IDR), Boston. New roles and challenges for Support Organisations (SOS) were identified. The plans for further co-operation and networking were developed. The report titled “Strengthening Civil Society: Contributions of Support Organisations” highlights the discussions held there.

The third workshop titled “The Challenges for Capacity Building: Support Organisations in South Asia” coming after a decade of the first initiative, therefore, served the purpose of focusing on the challenges of capacity building for a diversity of civil society actors in South Asia. About 45 delegates (leaders and key managers) of SOS engaged in capacity building of civil society actors in South Asia, participated in the three day workshop. This was jointly organised by Participatory Rural Initiatives Programmes (PRIP), Bangladesh; the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India; the Institute for Development Research (IDR), Boston and the International Forum on Capacity Building.

What follows is a brief summary of the discussions and deliberations over the three days workshop, highlighting the emerging need for capacity building in the context of addressing the changing environment.

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Society for Participatory Research in Asia

March, 2000
New Delhi
1 CONTEXT

The last two decades have seen a dramatic increase in the visibility as well as the contributions of civil society institutions, especially of voluntary development organisations, in many countries of the world. This growth has largely been the result of their growing support to the development processes of these countries. They have also been effective critiques of existing policies and programmes on development, based on their own experiences at the grassroots, of national governments as well as international bodies such as the World Bank and the UN systems.

However, this growing visibility and recognition also created a number of challenges for voluntary development organisations. A major challenge was in building capacities and skills to manage and organise the ever increasing demand on their programmes. The second challenge lay in the need for building more effective institutions. The third challenge was the increasing demand on the voluntary sector to collaborate with the government. With the increased visibility of civil society organisations came the subcontracting by the government, to perform certain tasks that the government deemed as important for civil society organisations to perform. This continues to be a challenge faced by SOs even today.

As a response to these challenges, and to deal with the complexities, a new kind of voluntary organisation began to evolve during the early 1980s. While these organisations existed even earlier, their role and function evolved a definitive meaning during that period. These organisations primarily focused on strengthening the capacities of the sector. They did not necessarily work at the grassroots level, implementing developmental projects, but provided support to other field level organisations in a variety of ways - through research, training, documentation, advocacy, networking, etc.

While the motivation of these organisations, termed as Support Organisations, was similar to those of the implementing organisations, their functions and activities were primarily aimed at supporting, strengthening and consolidating the initiatives of grassroots groups. Initially, Support Organisations were viewed with suspicion and scepticism. Support functions during that period were given a low priority. In fact, the concept of a support organisation was not even acknowledged by the international development fraternity. Some felt that these organisations were too far removed from direct work at field level with the people and therefore were not in touch with the realities and issues. Others felt that these organisations would take
undue advantage of opportunities to represent field-based groups and take on advocacy roles on behalf of other organisations. In the meanwhile, Support Organisations themselves were trying to evolve greater clarity about their role and function, as well as their relations with other actors in the development sector.

Support organisations have evolved into institutions whose multiple functions are aimed mainly at assisting and supporting the initiatives of grassroots organisations and their constituencies through training, research, documentation, advocacy, networking, etc. Support Organisations initiatives have focused on building the professional capacities of individual organisations and on creating inter-organisational collaborations for more effective action. Thus, Support Organisations are not merely service providers, they are partners in the broader movement of social change.

It was in late 1980 that the support organisations in South and South East Asia articulated the need to define and identify their very existence. The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) began a process of exploring the meaning of support functions for voluntary development actors in the beginning of 1990. The first workshop on Support Organisations, entitled “Strengthening the Grassroots: Nature and Role of Support Organisations” was held in New Delhi in March 1990. The workshop was jointly organised by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) India, the Institute for Development Research (IDR), Boston and Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC), Philippines and invited support organisations from South and East Asia. The discussions deliberated on the meaning of support organisations and the kind of support they provide to grassroots organisations. The results of this workshop led to a series of in-country initiatives in South Asia to build the capacities of support organisations. The second workshop titled, “Strengthening Civil Society: Contributions of Support Organisations” was convened in Kathmandu in May 1994 in collaboration with PRIA, PRIP and IDR. This workshop aimed to take stock of the work done since 1990 and the processes supported to strengthen the civil society. New roles and challenges for support organisations were identified and plans for further cooperation and networking developed.

The third workshop of support organisations, entitled, “Challenges of Capacity Building”, was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in May 1999. The event was convened jointly by PRIA, PRIP and the International Forum on Capacity Building (IFCB). The deliberations included the roles and functions of support organisations and the challenges faced by them in the rapidly changing global, social, political and
economic context. At the end of the three
days, the participants unanimously agreed
to form the SAARC Forum of Support
Organisations. It was felt that the support
organisations in South Asia have
functioned as a loose network and the
process of formalising this network needs
to be initiated.

This report attempts to sum up the
discussions of the deliberations over three
days which focused on the challenges faced
by support organisations in terms of their
identity, sustainability, impact, quality and
the capacity to deliver.

PURPOSES OF THE WORKSHOP

(a) To review the experiences and trends
in the evolution of SOs over the past
five years;

(b) To identify and plan for acting on
emerging challenges for capacity
building of civil society actors in South
Asia;

(c) To share lessons of innovative
exemplars in capacity building; and

(d) To evolve processes and mechanisms
for deeper co-operation and
networking among SOs in South Asia.

2 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

The evolution of Support
Organisations is to be seen from the
perspective of a continuous process of
transformation and diversification of the
development sector and the responsive
nature of Support Organisations to this
continuous change. Support Organisations
provide information, training, research
and advocacy support to national and
regional level organisations, such as
community groups, co-operatives, non
government development organisations,
social movements, etc. It has become
increasingly apparent that Support
Organisations are potentially important
actors in constructive and sustainable
development processes, complementing
and supplementing the contributions of
government development actors. In recent
times, an international dialogue has been
initiated on the formation, concept and
increasing importance of support
organisations.

The decade has witnessed the growth of
the role of Support Organisations, their
functioning and their response to address
social change, in the light of changing socio-
political and economic scenario. The ten
years of Support Organisations Initiative
can be divided into three phases of growth,
defined by the three workshops

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<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Formation Phase</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>1990</td>
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<tr>
<td>Construction Phase</td>
<td>Kathmandu</td>
<td>1994</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consolidation Phase</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>1999</td>
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FORMATION PHASE

The early 90s saw the formation of the Support Organisations Initiative and the beginning of the search for their role and identity. This could be termed as the phase of formation. The Support Organisations reviewed the trends, functions and challenges in the light of the evolution of voluntary organisations in South Asia and the response nature of Support Organisations to the changing socio-political and economic scenario. The Support Organisations were defined as "organisations that do not necessarily work at the grassroots level alone, directly with the poor and the marginalised. These organisations support other grassroots NGOs in a variety of ways - through research, training, documentation, advocacy, networking etc." (Strengthening Grassroots: Nature and Role of Support Organisations PRIA/IDR, 1990).

Noticably, the representation at this meeting had a large number of organisations that were involved in support functions as well as in implementing field-based programmes. The underlying belief was that Support Organisations are a part of the broader movement of voluntary development NGOs in a given context, country or region; they have a world view of their own; they have a vision of a new society and they share some of the philosophical and ideological underpinnings which guide the voluntary development NGO movement in many of the countries and the region. Their philosophical principles and futuristic aspirations are the same as those to whom they provide this support. They provide certain types of support services on a professional and competent basis that does not necessarily imply commercialisation of their perspective and approach.

CONSTRUCTION PHASE

The second phase is the phase of construction of Support Organisations. It was evident that in these intervening four years the visibility of Support Organisations had increased and many organisations had emerged which played the role of Support Organisations. The demands on them had become much greater, highlighting the fact that their role was now being seen as relevant to the voluntary development sector. It appeared that the emphasis was on networking, increasing interface with the government and acceptance of small grants to support the demands for Support Organisations services among implementing NGOs. These were mere aspirations in 1990. The intervening years saw the Support Organisations work towards making this possible. By 1994,
Support Organisations were talking about cross sectoral linkages and dialogues; building innovative strategies on complex issues of partnership and alliance building; engaging in policy research and advocacy. (Strengthening Civil Society: Contributions of Support Organisations, PRIA/ -- 1994) 

CONSOLIDATION PHASE

This phase can be termed as the phase of consolidation. The activities undertaken by Support Organisations were articulated in Dhaka. The Support Organisations have discovered that they are less ambivalent than they were in 1990, about their work and identity. From grass-roots training, Support Organisations have now moved towards addressing the challenge of enabling and enhancing the environment. They realised that providing capacity building and training to development organisations was not enough to ensure their sustainability and impact the lives of others with whom they work. They have realised the need to engage donors and Northern NGOs in this debate. They have established themselves as organisations with capacities to dialogue with the government and donor agencies to seek support for their work. Understandably, Support Organisations face significant challenges in fulfilling this mandate. A need was expressed to enhance the capacities of Support Organisations to enable them to deal with future challenges and address the issue of scaling up of impacts effectively. Today, Support Organisations play a vital role in supporting civil society and in engaging with the government and the market. They are visible at local, national, regional as well as global level. (The Challenges for Capacity Building, PRIA/ PRIP, 1999) 

The types of support functions provided by Support Organisations, as identified in the 1990, 1994 and 1999 workshops are presented below. The chart attempts to outline the growth in the functions of Support Organisations to date.

The demands on SOs became greater, highlighting the fact that their role was now seen as relevant to the development sector. SOs talked about cross sectoral linkages and dialogues. They realised the need to become actively involved in building new perspectives and innovative strategies on complex issues like partnerships and alliance building. This was a role less understood in 1990, and in the 1994 workshop, participants not only recognised the need to acknowledge those roles and functions, but also tried to define their own capacity building needs to play such roles.

While bridging and networking was identified in 1990, by the 1994 workshop this concept had matured further and a critical analysis of social trends, developing...
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>1999</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Dissemination</td>
<td>• Information sharing &amp; Dissemination</td>
<td>• Disseminating relevant information to grassroots constituencies</td>
<td>• New information technology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Sharing success/failures/policies etc. with grassroots organisations not having access to information</td>
<td>• Journals, newsletters, periodicals, etc.</td>
<td>• Grassroot organisations, media, academics, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research and Evaluation</td>
<td>• Critical analysis of issues and concerns</td>
<td>• Enrich the knowledge base of the NGO community</td>
<td>• Research on &quot;cutting edge issues&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Evaluation of grassroots experiences</td>
<td>• Macro level policy research to influence broader policy agendas</td>
<td>• Share findings with different stakeholders</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Strengthen capacities for reflection and analysis on an ongoing basis</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Impact on policy</td>
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<td>Knowledge and skills development</td>
<td>• Emphasis on individuals in an organisation</td>
<td>• More specific and advanced training</td>
<td>• Continued to look at specific skills development and training</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Training in designing, preparing, conducting of interventions, ToT</td>
<td>• Leadership development</td>
<td>• Organisational development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Organisational capacity building began to be looked at</td>
<td>• Management training</td>
<td>• Human resource management</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Planning, monitoring, and evaluation</td>
<td>• Strategic planning and monitoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Conducting this through &quot;hand holding&quot; process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sectoral Linkages</td>
<td>• Technical assistance/support while dealing with complex problems</td>
<td>• Sectoral linkages beyond just providing technical assistance</td>
<td>• Specialised support in thematic and sectoral areas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Mainly sectoral assistance in the field of health, gender, income, generation, rural technology, reforestation, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>• Understand its emerging importance</td>
<td>• Realised the value addition for networking</td>
<td>• Continued to be an important platform to meet and plan for effective action</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Facilitated many other support functions, e.g., information sharing, need identification.</td>
<td>• Generic networks formed - to meet and plan for effective action</td>
<td>• Generic networks continued to be important</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Thematic and sectoral networks-women’s network, health network, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Working on common sectoral/thematic concerns</td>
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<td>Activity</td>
<td>1990</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to Resources</td>
<td>• Not considered to be a high priority.</td>
<td>• Continued to assist NGOs and CBOs financially.</td>
<td>• Continued to build capacities of grassroots organisations to ensure accessibility to funders</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Roles to help grassroots organisations develop proposals and other documents needed to get funding</td>
<td>• Grants to their partner NGOs to implement planned activities.</td>
<td>• Played an increasingly prominent role in liaising between different grant making organisations</td>
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<td>• Donor agencies started to look at Support Organisations for assistance in carrying out their donor functions.</td>
<td>• Dealing about funding requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Advocacy</td>
<td>• Advocacy role on behalf of specific sector e.g. health, literacy, livelihoods</td>
<td>• Advocating policies</td>
<td>• Prominent role.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Guaranteeing wider spaces for NGO activities</td>
<td>• Critical engagement with the govt.</td>
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<td>• Pro active role in strengthening capacities of grassroots and voluntary development organisations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure participation and effective functioning.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Local self governance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perspective Building</td>
<td>• Questions and debate on constituency / accountability etc.</td>
<td>• From 'welfare' to 'development'</td>
<td>• Definitive perspective framework is evolved</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Creating alternative paradigms of participation</td>
<td>• Participation and collaboration among different sectors</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Debate on: Catalytic role, doing influencing, scaling up</td>
<td>• People centred development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter sectoral</td>
<td>• Networking among thematic sectors</td>
<td>• Linkages beyond NGO sector - academic, media, trade unions</td>
<td>• Worked towards strengthening capacities of organisations to build linkages, corporate social responsibility, government, media, academy, local self governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linkage Building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased Visibility</td>
<td>• Limited visibility</td>
<td>• Functions getting clearer both in the view of the organisations as well as their partners</td>
<td>• Linkages expanded to go beyond the local to include national, regional and international.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Visibility and recognition of their work</td>
<td>• Clear sense of identity and role</td>
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innovative strategies to engage in policy research and advocacy were the new emerging functions of Support Organisations. The workshop in Dhaka brought together organisations which have played implementing as well as support functions. By the end of the decade, the Support Organisations articulated that the functions played by them in dialoguing with the government had gained importance. Advocacy and policy influencing are two roles being played by them on an ongoing basis. They have also been active agents in supporting networks and alliances across the sectors. They articulated the increased demands made on them and the need to enhance their capacities to address these demands effectively.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

The debate and dialogue on the role of Support Organisations in South Asia grew to involve other international players. As the interaction increased with others playing similar roles, a number of organisations in South and East Africa have joined hands with Support Organisations in South Asia in an attempt to bring Support Organisations across regions together. This dialogue generated in the intervening years, gave a further impetus to the role and functioning of Support Organisations. This concept was discussed during the CIVICUS Founding Conference in 1995 at Mexico City. Subsequently a planning meeting was held in Zimbabwe in 1997, where the roles and functions of Support Organisations were discussed in the international context. The second CIVICUS World Assembly, held in Budapest in 1997, looked at capacity building workshops and innovations in capacity building. A need to involve donors and Northern NGOs in this ongoing debate was expressed in 1996. The Support Organisations realised that the relations between donors and NGOs in relation to capacity building needs to be addressed in the light of emerging needs and issues of capacity building. There was a feeling that the voluntary development organisations have grown and hence their capacity building needs have also changed from mere project based short term support to more long term capacity building inputs. (Politics of Capacity Building, PRIA, 1998).

Support Organisations realised that they can serve as bridges between the concerns and resources of donors and NGOs, both in the North and the South. They have been at the base of consultations and surveys that resulted in the formation of the International Forum on Capacity Building in 1998.

Capacity building has emerged as one of the major priorities indicated by the Support Organisations during the
consultations in 1996 - 97. The International Forum on Capacity Building (IFCB) is the culmination of a two year long process of consultations and surveys carried out not only by NGOs in the Southern region (Africa, Latin America and Asia Pacific) but also Northern NGOs (in Canada, Europe and North America) and donors (multilateral, bilateral and foundations). The preliminary findings were shared at a conference in Washington in 1997 where the participants included representatives from the North as well as the South. Further surveys and consultations were held through 1997 and the results of the findings were shared at a seminar titled "Southern NGOs Capacity Building - Issues and Priorities", in Brussels in May 1998. About 150 participants from Southern NGOs, Northern NGOs and donor constituencies attended this Founding Conference. The debate and deliberations highlighted the priorities for capacity building as follows:

- Leadership Development
- Policy Advocacy
- Building Coalitions, Alliances, Networks, North-South partnerships and intersectoral partnerships
- Financial Sustainability
- Information Technology

It was agreed to map capacity building resources in each of the regions (Asia Pacific, Latin America and Africa), to document innovative exemplars of building coalitions, alliances and networks and to carry out multistakeholder dialogues in an attempt to influence policies and programmes of Northern NGOs and donor agencies. Support Organisations continue to play a key role in the activities of IFCB. (Southern NGOs Capacity Building - Issues and Priorities)³

What was happening in the international arena had an impact on the ongoing debate and discussion on Support Organisations in South Asia, as many active Support Organisations from South Asia were involved in these initiatives and played an active role in the debates and discussions.

3 PRESENT PATTERN

The third workshop of Support Organisations entitled "The Challenges for Capacity Building", constituted representatives from Support Organisations from South Asia. The participants shared their experiences as Support Organisations and raised issues and concerns in dealing with the increasing demands being made on them to provide support to grassroots and voluntary development organisations. The participants present in Dhaka have been involved in the Support Organisations Initiative since its inception in 1990. Thus,
this workshop provided an opportunity to share the growth and formation of a definite identity since its inception in the early 90s.

What follows is a description of the functioning of Support Organisations and the various types of functions they perform during the course of their work.

FORMS OF SUPPORT

The participants were unanimous in their understanding of the fact that Support Organisations grew by providing support to grassroots and voluntary development organisations. The form of support extended by them aims at strengthening the sector to effectively address the changing socio-political scenario. There are three distinct forms of support that are extended:

a) **Direct Work with Grassroots**: Support Organisations provide capacity building inputs and interventions to strengthen the functioning of grassroots organisations in the context of their work. Training and workshops related to programme planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, participatory training, strategic planning workshops etc. are conducted to strengthen grassroots and voluntary development organisations. These training are either announced by the support organisations or carried out on the basis of need evinced by the civil society organisations. These capacity building and training inputs are either sectoral or thematic. For example, the training provided to grassroots organisations to work with local self governance units, like the Panchayats. Self-help group facilitation is also provided by some of the members of the Network of Collaborating Regional Support Organisations in India.

b) **Educational Support**: One of the roles played increasingly by Support Organisations is in the area of creating an enabling environment that is open and conducive to suggestions of social change. This means working with the government on one hand and working with donor agencies to bring in the agenda of voluntary development organisations on the other.

Educational support also includes the perspective and capacity building of other stakeholders. The role of the International Forum on Capacity Building in sensitising and attempting at creating an environment whereby the attention of Northern NGOs, multilateral, bilateral and foundations is drawn towards understanding the meaning and emerging needs of capacity building from a Southern NGOs' perspective. Various Support Organisations undertake perspective building efforts through participatory training, participatory monitoring and
Organisations role in providing linkages with the corporate sector, which has gained importance since the mid 90s. Support is extended to provide a frame of reference to initiate and continue dialogue with them and enable partnership among different stakeholders.

**TYPES OF SUPPORT**

The participants shared their views on the types of support services provided by them. Based on past experience, the participants felt that while the priority, emphasis and history of support activities may vary in different countries of South Asia, there are some basic services that are provided by them. These have grown over the years and there was a general consensus among the participants that Support Organisations provide certain types of support on a professional and competent basis. In an attempt to strengthen the base of civil society, Support Organisations provided three types of distinct yet inter-related support:

a) **Intellectual Support:** The intervention aims at enabling civil society organisations to think for themselves and take appropriate action to address the rapidly changing environment. Support Organisations have initiated and participated in campaigns like the right to information, gender sensitisation efforts, empowerment of local self-governance units etc. For instance, Aurat Foundation, Pakistan
has undertaken a series of campaigns for gender sensitisation in the community. This is done through posters, street theatre, newsletter etc. They have also attempted to influence government policies through their interventions. To strengthen the effectiveness of the work being done by voluntary development organisations, perspective building on issues of participatory development and gender are also being undertaken by Support Organisations. This also includes capacity building and training programmes on inter sectoral linkages, organisational development etc.

b) **Institutional Support**: Support Organisations play a critical role in strengthening the grassroots organisations capacities to work efficiently through capacity building initiatives. The institutional base of organisations is strengthened through training in human resource development, strategic planning, organisational development, maintenance of external relations etc. PRIP, Bangladesh, has played the role of a support organisation for a number of grassroots organisations through conducting systematic capacity building training workshops in human resource development, networking, institutional management, strengthening their capacity to work efficiently and effectively in their respective areas.

c) **Material Support**: An ongoing concern in South Asia is related to resource mobilisation. Support Organisations have provided assistance to grassroots organisations in developing strategies for resource mobilisation, accessing small grants, financial management, building linkages with donors, local resource mobilisation through dialogue with the private sector and the government. This is done through training on project proposal writing, making budgets, monitoring programmes and financial management. Support Organisations are at a vantage point and act as a reference point for donor agencies and their endorsement, by undertaking reviews of programmes for voluntary development organisations which enables them to access funds. Support Organisations hence, have the added responsibility, to ensure that the funds are utilised properly and the necessary capacity building and training provided to the civil society organisations to perform their role effectively. PRIA and the NCRSOs undertake the MIND Fellowship programme. It is a collaborative effort with a donor agency providing the necessary financial support and the Support Organisations providing the necessary capacity building and training inputs to catalyse new initiatives in development programmes. The MIND Fellowship is
for a two year period, after which the grassroots and voluntary development organisations are linked with donors and are made self-reliant.

4 PRESENT SCENARIO

NATURE OF SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

Over the years, Support Organisations have provided support to develop capacities of organisations towards creating an enabling environment for civil society at individual, organisational and sectoral levels. The key changes in our external environment in the decade have presented the Support Organisations with new opportunities and threats. Changes in civil society policy influencing agenda, increased interest in the area of private sector and social responsibility, shifting funding environments, new technologies - all this and more, present the development sector with new challenges. In turn, the scenario requires Support Organisations within this sector to re-examine their roles and ways of working in response to these challenges. Thus, one of the important functions of Support Organisations is in the area of capacity building in order to be able to address these challenges effectively and efficiently. There is an increasing pressure on Support Organisations to play the role of a 'leader' in the development sector. The Support Organisations are continuously expected to meet the demands being made on them to provide capacity building and training inputs to civil society organisations. This requires a fresh look at the capacities of these organisations to provide the kind of support that they are expected to provide. In fact, the participants present in Dhaka expressed concern about capacity building.

What follows is a summary of the discussion and understanding of the functions of Support Organisations. It is essential to note that it is not necessary that all Support Organisations play all the functions identified. Their value addition is in supporting the civil society organisations that engage in these activities and assist in building their capacities. The roles played by Support Organisations are at three levels and the functions played by them can be studied at these distinct and interrelated levels.

a) Individual Level: Support Organisations provide support to individuals in grassroots organisations and voluntary development organisations. The assumption is that the individuals, when appropriately and technically trained, will have the capacity to translate it into programme/project management. This has been an important function played by Support Organisations since the beginning and has gained importance in the light of the changing socio-political context of the region.
• **Support to Leadership Development**: Building and nurturing of leadership in civil society organisations is a crucial task performed by Support Organisations. This is done through human resource development and training, including training of trainers. The focus of the Support Organisations is on developing leadership among women and the disadvantaged sections of society. While this was considered one of the main functions in the initial years, today the concept of developing leadership has been expanded to include second line leadership within grassroots and voluntary development organisations. This could be done through organising consultations, team building activities, workshops etc.

• **Support to Developing Technical Skills**: Support Organisations have continued to enhance the capacities of grassroots organisations by sponsoring and conducting more specialised and advanced training along the areas of gender, health, education, natural resource management and cross sectoral linkages. At the individual level, this is done through the training of individuals to increase their competencies. Support Organisations provide training in planning, implementation, monitoring and report writing of programmes and other sector specific training.

• **Support to Developing Managerial Skills**: One of the roles played by Support Organisations is in the area of developing management capacities of individuals in grassroots organisations. Strengthening capacities in evaluation, financial management, systems development, human resource management is undertaken by Support Organisations. For example, PRIP, Bangladesh, has been effective in providing human resource development and management training to a number of voluntary development organisations in the country, thereby increasing their management capacities.

b) **Institutional Level**: Support Organisations play an increasingly important role in strengthening institutional capacities of grassroots and voluntary development organisations. This function was articulated in the 90s and has since been recognised as an essential role being played by them to promote development processes and interventions which are self sustaining in the long run. Thus, Support Organisations provide capacity building and training related to organisational structures, institutionalisation and other aspects of organisational identity.
• **Support to Build Programme Effectiveness:** Support organisations provide training inputs to grassroots and voluntary development organisations in micro planning, programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The Network of Collaborating Regional Support Organisations and PRIA, India have conducted training of grassroots organisations in micro planning enabling them to undertake detailed programme planning towards empowering local self governance units. This necessitates building capacities of those organisations to not only plan but also to assess the effectiveness of their programmes in the community.

• **Support to Build Organisational Effectiveness:** As voluntary development organisations are involved in a rapidly changing political and economic environment, they need different types of support. Support Organisations have started providing this by helping these organisations to look at their institutional development role. Workshops on organisational development and institutional development are conducted by Support Organisations to enable them to systematically undertake organisational review, change and development. It also enhances the organisations ability to develop long term strategy as well as skills in participatory evaluation. The Support Organisations also work towards enhancing the functioning of grassroots organisations by helping them to develop financial management systems and human resource development systems. One of the key aspects of efficient utilisation of resources and effectiveness in ensuring the impact of its work are building and maintaining appropriate systems and procedures within the voluntary development organisations and requires capacity building inputs.

• **Support towards Resource Mobilisation:** Since the mid 90's, the Support Organisations role in accessing resources has been accepted and acknowledged by grassroots organisations as well as the donors. They are in a position to relate with and influence donors. With this growing recognition, donors are increasingly using Support Organisations' as intermediary channels for gaining access to voluntary development organisations. This implies that voluntary development organisations capacities to access resources through linkages to donors should be enhanced. Support Organisations also play an important role in enabling access of small grants to civil society organisations, which may not have
direct access to funds to implement their activities.

c) **Sectoral Level**: The role identified in the early 90s of providing support in thematic and sectoral areas, took a definitive shape by the end of the decade. In the intervening years, Support Organisations provided inputs to grassroots and voluntary development organisations in developing their capacities to work in their chosen thematic/sectoral area. Support Organisations can be considered as unique civil society organisations since they act as **bridges between sectors**. The different functions they perform puts them in a favourable position for engaging the state and the market in civil society issues. They also provide linkages within the sector.

- **Support to Policy Advocacy**: A critical role being played by Support Organisations is in the area of influencing policy and advocacy with the government and other agencies. The gradual shift in this can be seen from the 90s. At the beginning of the decade, Support Organisations were not comfortable in dealing with the government directly. With the increased visibility and recognition of their role in civil society, the government and the Support Organisations entered into a new phase, marked by interface with each other.

By the end of the decade, the Support Organisations are confident of their role in the area of dialogue with the government and other agencies and the strength of a collective voice to influence policy makers. **They also support other grassroots and voluntary development organisations who wish to engage with the government, by building their capacities.**

*Advocacy activities demand competencies in policy research, access to and influence on decision makers, ability to educate and influence public opinion etc.* Support Organisations realise that these capacities may not be present in grassroots and voluntary development organisations. Thus, they have extended their support by assisting in organising campaigns, initiating public dialogue, providing linkages and fora for dialogue between organisations and government and other agencies. For example, in India, Support Organisations play a crucial role in micro level policy research. Their skills in advocacy have grown.
over the years and today is one of the most important support functions played by Support Organisations.

- **Support to Information Dissemination:** Support Organisations have continued their efforts in wide spread information sharing and dissemination. They have acknowledged the importance of this role since the 90s and have contributed to this function effectively. Support Organisations undertake an information sharing and dissemination role regularly to collect and distribute information about success and failures, opportunities and threats, programmes and schemes, legislations and policies that have a bearing on voluntary development organisations work. This is done at local, national, regional as well as international level. This support role is important since many grassroots organisations lack a regular inflow of information regarding the issues they work on and learn from others’ experiences. It also highlights the role played by information in raising citizens’ awareness and thereby involving them in civil society.

Support Organisations document and analyse these experiences and publish and disseminate the same. This has been a function performed by them since its very inception. By the end of the decade, this role has been enhanced. They have started forming information resource centres, which play a crucial role in accessing, storing and disseminating information to grassroots organisations. Support Organisations assist them in accessing information relevant to their work. New information technology is also being used by Support Organisations effectively, to access and disseminate relevant information. They provide linkages through the web to other organisations in the international sector who are working on similar issues. Thus, they provide/create an international perspective on issues. The effective use of popular theatre and media is also an important function being played by Support Organisations. For example, Aurat Foundation, Pakistan, shared its experiences in information dissemination undertaken at different levels. They have set up about 1000 Information Network Centres throughout the country, which serve as a focal point to enable the women to share information and experiences. Radio Network Centres facilitate access to radio programmes on reproductive and primary health care. Publications play an important role in information dissemination. Aurat Foundation publishes monthly newsletters, which contain relevant information for the women on gender issues, legal issues.
work being done by voluntary development organisations etc.

- **Linkage Building**: One of the basic purposes served by Support Organisations since the 90s, is to provide a forum for voluntary development organisations to come together and interact with one another. Networks or coordinating bodies provide structures that facilitate discussion, enable shared understanding of development issues and develop co-ordinated strategies for resolving these issues. Support Organisations and shared interest associations, also offer a way to influence different constituencies which may be difficult for a single organisation to do on its own.

Support Organisations play a role in bringing together like-minded individuals/organisations and form networks, alliances and coalitions. Cross sectoral linkages, North-South collaborations, partnership with private sectors and the government enhance the work of the organisations and enable them to establish linkages with different actors. Thus, the most prominent role played by Support Organisations is intersectional in nature. They nurture the possibility for intersectoral activity, articulating civil society issues to other sectors and bringing diverse parties into shared dialogue and collaborative action. The Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB) is an example of a national Support Organisation that has recently brought together many of the largest NGOs, to develop shared perspectives and analyses on development issues in Bangladesh. As a consequence, member organisations have undertaken an experiment with alliances to support federations of landless people’s organisations in order to build local political influence. (Strengthening the Grassroots: Nature and Role of Support Organisations)

The participants in Dhaka felt that the role of the Support Organisations today increasingly cuts across the individual, organisation and sector. Their role in providing support at local, national, regional and international level has been acknowledged.

*There are some roles that are played by the Support Organisations that go beyond the individual, organisational and sectoral.*

- **Generating New Knowledge**: In the course of their work, Support Organisations are afforded opportunities to undertake close scrutiny of the most pressing issues as well as access to data that enables them to update existing and develop new services. Support Organisations as change agents undertake research, information collection, needs assessment and issues identification.
By documenting and disseminating promising and innovative solutions to developmental problems, Support Organisations move the process forward for resolving underlying inequities in the world.

Support Organisations have undertaken state of the art research on cutting edge development issues. For example, PRIA has recently undertaken a research on civil society and governance. This research explores the evolution of civil society organisations and the impact they have made on the lives of people. Detailed case study documentation highlights the lessons learnt in this study. Support Organisations also undertake programme evaluations and policy research, which play a vital role in informing the voluntary development organisations about their role and impact on society.

- Support in Perspective Building: Support Organisations in South Asia have played a critical role in helping organisations to articulate shared perspectives. A shared vision and mission also facilitates the functioning of Support Organisations. They help in bringing in new perspectives to the existing problems and issues. Support Organisations have catalysed and facilitated intellectual engagement around complex issues for voluntary development organisations in South Asia. The changing national and international scenario has thrown up new questions about established approaches, frameworks and ideologies, necessitating clarity of perspectives among the grassroots and voluntary development organisations.

- Support in Local Governance: This is a relatively new area of support as identified in the Dhaka workshop. Governance issues were not raised in the early years of Support Organisation formation. In South Asia, they have started playing a significant role by interfacing with government departments, local governance bodies, people’s organisations, women and the disadvantaged sections of society. In 1990, working with the government was thought to be a taboo. 1994 saw a change in initiating the process of dialogue with the government. The sea change is seen in 1999, where Support Organisations interface with the government in creating an enabling environment in society. The participants shared their experiences where they had become active agents for policy changes and advocacy. Initiation of and participation in various campaigns like right to information, processes to strengthen
local self governance bodies (Panchayati Raj Institutions) and municipal bodies are important aspects of this role of Support Organisations. They also play an active role in ensuring participation of hitherto excluded groups, like women and the marginalised sections of the society in governance.

5 CHALLENGES

From the presentations made, and the discussions held, it is apparent that the demands being made on Support Organisations is growing at a fast pace, almost in keeping with the ever changing socio-political and economic context of South Asia. The emerging need is to define the goals and outcomes and identify where these activities are leading to. In this context, it becomes imperative to identify and verbalise the challenges faced by the Support Organisations in their functioning. Support Organisations are being called upon to play more demanding roles, to participate in policy advocacy and governance issues and play crucial roles in building inter-sectoral linkages. The decade has witnessed the growth of Support Organisations with a definite identity, purpose and functioning. The new functions as well as the expansion of earlier identified functions, obviously create new challenges for Support Organisations. The participants shared their concerns about the future challenges faced by them in the new millennium, in the light of demands being made on them, not only by the grassroots organisations but also by the government, donor agencies, academia etc.

Some of the overarching concerns expressed by the participants was in the context of identity. This has a direct effect on the impact of Support Organisations in the civil society. The work being done by Support Organisations has continued to be challenging and therefore, demanding a certain quality as well as enhancement of capacities to deliver their support functions effectively. The ultimate issue is that of sustainability. It is essential that Support Organisations become sustainable not only in terms of finances, but also in terms of programme and organisation.

The participants discussed some of the challenges being faced by them in small groups. Discussion in the plenary generated consensus in certain basic areas of concern for analysis and reflection.

Some of the challenges identified by the participants and ways forward suggested by them were:

1. Identity of Support Organisations: A question that has been asked since the initiation of the concept of Support Organisations’ initiative relates to its identity. One of the questions raised by the participants related to an
understanding of whether they are support organisations or implementing organisations? The dual role being played by Support Organisations needs to be understood by not only themselves, but also by those they work with. The 90s was a period when Support Organisations were not understood by the civil society organisations. Gradually, their work gained acceptance, and today, Support Organisations are recognised and accepted for the work they are doing. However, the need to define their identity continues to challenge them. The increased acceptance by grassroots organisations since the 90s was clearly articulated by the representatives present in Dhaka. The grassroots organisations have been largely convinced of the value of resources and services provided by the Support Organisations. Often, implementing organisations act as Support Organisations by repeating their experiences and learning from them. The participants in Dhaka debated upon the need to define their identity as Support Organisations and to make the distinction between "Support Organisation" and "Support Functions" of "Implementing Organisations". There was consensus in the understanding that Support Organisations play a critical role in civil society action and once this is recognised and accepted, their function will be value added. Many of the implementing organisations provide support to others in the areas in which they have developed innovative programmes or models or framework, e.g., livelihoods, adult education etc. The participants felt that once they have come to this understanding of their role, some of the confusion about their identity can be resolved.

Another question related to identity is the perception of the donors. The question raised was how do the donors perceive them? The participants felt that at times the donors are not clear about the roles played by Support Organisations. While today, Support Organisations are used as a link between grassroots organisations and donors, there is a need to be critical while playing this role. Support Organisations should not be looked at as channels of funding for grassroots organisations or as being co-opted by the donors. Support Organisations also feel the need to enter into a dialogue with the donor agencies, encouraging them to look at long term capacity building and training funding instead of project tied funding. Support Organisations have reached a vantage point of being able to initiate this dialogue and negotiate terms and conditions of funding.

Some participants expressed concern at the continuous demands made on them, in fulfilling the expectations of being seen as leaders and experts on all the subjects/issues. There is a need to define themselves to avoid
confusion in the roles they play. The process of defining Support organisations is very complex since they inevitably work with different constituencies: the grassroots organisations they support; the government; donors that fund their activities; the market sector whose support they are trying to enlist; other Support Organisations which work with grassroots organisations. Thus, they are often required to represent the sector as a whole to the government, market and the donors. This requires the ability to define their work in a way that is understood by all. This is a challenge that needs to be addressed. Terms and concepts like advocacy, participation, community building organisations, partnership, empowerment, etc. are not easily understood by all actors of civil society, government or the market. The participants felt that once the Support Organisations are able to define themselves in simple, jargon-free language, they would be better understood by others in the sector they work with and work for.

The participants, however, felt that they were clearer about their roles today than they were in the beginning of the decade. The confusion in identity and response of the grassroots organisations they support, has been dealt with in some measure in the intervening years.

2. **Measuring Impact of Support Organisations**: Some of the questions that Support Organisations have asked since the 1990s, revolve around the issue of the value addition of their existence; do they make an impact on livelihoods/poverty, are they one more layer of intermediaries, what are the tools/methods that they need to use. This is a critical yet underdeveloped area that needs to be focused upon.

The participants felt that they need to be relevant in the societal context in which they function. Support Organisations are the **causal link between intervention and change**. A question that the Support Organisations have struggled with, is the issue of the value addition of their existence. In the early 90s, the concept of support was barely understood and recognised. The challenge faced by Support Organisations is to respond efficiently to the continuously increasing demands made on them by the changing socio-political and economic environment they work in. While a niche exists for Support Organisations in providing assistance to grassroots and voluntary development organisations they seek to support, there is a constant need to assess the impact they are making on those they aim to support.

Ways forward suggested by the participants in Dhaka included development of tools and assessment indicators, to evaluate the long-term impact of Support Organisations. They agreed that support should be provided selectively and should be very
specialised. Needs should be assessed and context developed which would guide the Support Organisations’ in their journey “from where to what”. This would also avoid confusion as regards their identity and the specific role they play in civil society. There is a need to constantly assess the impact of their intervention on the people they work with. Training or support functions undertaken, make an impact on the grassroots organisations and thereby a difference in the lives of the poor and the marginalised.

3. Quality of Support Organisations: In the changing socio-political and economic context, there is a need to look at the quality of support services provided by the Support Organisations. The challenges identified by the participants related to the attitude of providers and receivers of capacity building, the agenda that is followed by them, the methods and techniques used by them.

Past experiences have revealed that capacity building inputs given, are more demand driven than need based. The Support Organisations need to be conscious that they serve the agenda of the grassroots organisations they support. This should be carefully understood and not confused with the agenda of other stakeholders, like the government or the donor agencies.

To be able to effectively address the issue of quality, the Support Organisations must assess the needs of civil society organisations, monitor the process and undertake research and evaluation of the intervention strategies undertaken by them. The capacity building interventions should be related to the field and the experiences of civil society organisations.

The challenge is to be able to develop a high quality of capacity building interventions and support systems, both technical and professional. Support Organisations today, deal with vast resources and thus need to develop financial and accounting systems that are foolproof. Transparency in their accounts and high quality of personnel management systems will be value added for their impact.

The Support Organisations need to monitor their own support activities. There is a fear of getting submerged in dealing with diverse demands and not being able to maintain a high quality of work that they have done in the past. An ideal situation suggested by the participants is where the Support Organisations would have a quality benchmarking (like ISO2000) and create a forum called South Asia Support Organisations’ Quality Control Council.

4. Capacity of Support Organisations: It was felt that capacity building should be viewed as a continuous process and
should be seen as client centric, capable of translating field experiences into training and being innovative in nature to be able to continuously address the challenges of change.

If the Support Organisations want to meet the challenge of adding value to what others are doing and continue to be relevant, they need to address the question of assessing their own capacities and look at ways of upgrading them. The questions raised in this regard were those related to innovations in capacity building, low investment in research and development etc.

There is a constant need for innovations and creativity in existing methods of capacity building of Support Organisations. Time and again it has been felt, that the traditional training methodology needs to be changed as per the particular context in which it is being used.

The participants felt that there has been a low investment in research and development by Support Organisations. Support Organisations are at an advantageous position and thus can undertake assessment and scrutiny of issues and have access to data that enables them to update existing services and develop new ones. Thus, they continue to be relevant to the grassroots organisations they seek to support.

Some participants expressed that the lack of field level experience makes it difficult for Support Organisations to address issues and concerns of the development sector. There was a feeling of being removed from reality. Capacity building will be meaningful only if it is relevant to the local context and needs and only then can Support Organisations have legitimacy as agents of change in the eyes of civil society organisations.

It was also felt that the compensation/remuneration systems do not attract professional staff. There is a need to look for highly trained human resources, particularly for those involved in rapid growth and complex activities. Support Organisations need personnel that have multiple capacities - training, documentation, research, technical assistance etc. Thus, the staff must be trained to be able to deal with their functions effectively.

Various ways were suggested by the participants to deal with these issues of capacities. Developing long term strategic goals and a clear vision for those engaging in support functions is essential for Support Organisations to be relevant and effective.

The acquisition of adequate human resources whose capacities then can be regularly enhanced, is another way to deal with the growing concern about capacities to deliver. There is a need to
have staff which is multiskilled yet specialists in their field.

5. **Sustainability of Support Organisations**: The question of sustainability is an ongoing issue with Support Organisations. Issues related to this are the relationship with providers of resources; is demand/supply driven; the impact of declining resources etc. Sustainability is viewed in relation to finances, organisation or programmes which may be inter-related as far as Support Organisations are concerned.

While the donors look at only financial sustainability, there is a need to enforce the importance of organisation and programmes also. There is a need to arrive at a balance between the donors and our own agendas. The fact that there is a demand for the kind of work Support Organisations perform is very clear. However, more often than not, the 'buyers' (grassroots organisations) do not have adequate purchasing power to 'buy' the services. The bigger NGOs who may have the finances, prefer to get technical assistance from partners in the North. Support Organisations provide services and not a product. Thus, it is imperative that Support Organisations continue to improve the quality of their work, make people aware of their work, create a demand for their services. An attempt has to be made for donor education so that they would provide financial resources to purchase Support Organisations' services.

Sustainability is also dependent on credibility, commitment of staff, systems of operation and should be focused on quality and demand. There is a need to study the environment within which Support Organisations function. They play the unique role of a bridge between the civil society organisations, state, market and provides inter-sectoral linkages. "Social Sustainability" in this sense of multi-constituency support is the key to their functioning. Their role in bringing together and interacting with a varied range of actors/players is crucial. It works under a constrained legal and policy environment to engage the wider publics in civil society and citizenship debates and discussions.

Thus, not unreasonably, Support Organisations face significant challenges in fulfilling their ambitious mandate. These challenges, as identified by the participants, deal with the concerns of Support Organisations in being able to continuously play a significant role in providing support to grassroots and voluntary development organisations. They have grown since the 90s from an informal group struggling for identity, to a well-established and recognised identity.
However, the increasing demands made on them create challenges that need to be addressed effectively. Support Organisations must be able to evolve - as organisations and as institutions - as the environment in which they operate changes. They also play a significant role in facilitating intersectoral relationships that demands that they continually strive to upgrade their skills and quality of services that they provide to the organisations they work with.

6 WAYS FORWARD

DEFINITION

The debate on the definition of Support Organisations has been on going since the 90s. The beginning of the decade defined Support Organisations as not necessarily working at the grassroots level, but providing support to grassroots organisations through research, training, documentation etc. The Support Organisations are not mere service providers, but should be considered as partners in the broader movement of social change. They provide support services on a professional and competent basis. They are not a means to an end. They are on the cutting edge of development, and hence have to be a step ahead in their capacities to deal with future challenges. The participants in this workshop defined Support Organisations as:

Intermediary formations with overall purpose to strengthen capacities of grassroots to promote local empowerment while enabling and strengthening base organisations and intermediaries; enabling access to knowledge, capacities, resources and linkages and advocacy playing an role.

New Functions Identified

The decade of 90 has seen the emergence and growth of the Support Organisations' initiative. Today, Support Organisations play the role of a catalyst by responding to the needs of the current socio-political and cultural context. While acceptability and legitimacy, especially with the government agencies, was a concern in 1990, the Support Organisations were talking about cross-sectoral linkages by 1994. The end of the decade, saw the Support Organisations articulate their ability to collaborate with the government as well as other agencies. Their credibility had been established and they felt confident about the impact they were making in the functioning of grassroots and voluntary development organisations. The participants in Dhaka agreed that the various functions played and provided by Support Organisations are at multiple levels and are multifaceted in nature. Their work is complex, and they face a continuous challenge to redefine themselves, build their capacities to deal with the ever changing and increasing
demands on their functioning and reinvent themselves to deal with the changing world.

Thus, the future of Support Organisations lays emphasis on

- **Increasing concern with strengthening civil society**: One of the important contributions of Support Organisations in the last ten years, has been to help build relations with the various actors in civil society. They have played and continue to play, an important role in bringing together like-minded civil society organisations, including activist organisations, community based organisations, consumer groups, academia etc. on a common platform around issues of common concern - human rights, democracy, peace, right to information etc.

- **Emphasis on local self governance**: The changing context of the countries in South Asia have necessitated empowerment of local self governance units in each of these countries. This is a universally expressed need for the future of Support Organisations articulated in the mid 90s. Since then, they have worked towards strengthening the capacities of grassroots and voluntary development organisations to work in this area. The experiences over the years have increased the demands on Support Organisations by the end of the 90s. The participants felt that the extent of support expected from Support Organisations and its impact is at two levels: one is working with grassroots organisations who in turn will empower the local self governance units; and two directly with the government influencing their policy to create a conducive environment for the effective functioning of these units. The Network of Collaborating Regional Support Organisations have consciously worked towards collaborating with the government through its various intervention programmes like organising gram panchayat and gram sabha, micro planning, resource mobilisation and accountability. The training of the smallest bodies of self governance along with working closely with the government, has been a successful experience of NCRSOs and a lot can be learnt from this effort.

- **Concern with inter-sectoral relations**: As said earlier, Support Organisations have a special niche since they act as bridges between the different sectors. (Development Bridging Organisations and Strategic Management for Social Change, L.D.Brown). The different functions they play, puts them in a favourable position for engaging the state as well as the market in civil society issues. Over the years, this role of Support Organisations has gained prominence. Initially, this role was understood as providing networking
among civil society organisations only. Experience in the field revealed that Support Organisations have the ability to draw upon their contacts and thereby build intersectoral connections/relations. Intersectoral relations have contributed immensely to the building of common perspectives and joint programmes among voluntary development organisations.

The functions identified by the Support Organisations are based on their experiences and have direct bearing on their growth over the years. The Support Organisations have emerged as an entity by themselves and today are recognised for their interventions within the development sector. Many organisations have used innovative approaches to fulfil their role as Support Organisations. The innovative approaches highlight the expansion in the sphere of work of Support Organisations and their entry into broader issues of contemporary relevance.

The participants in Dhaka felt that the Support Organisations have gone through a systematic learning process over a period of time, which should be shared through documentation of innovative exemplars. The International Forum on Capacity Building shared this as one of the main priority areas. It is recognised that sharing and learning from experience is a useful exercise. The framework prepared by the Forum was shared among the participants and a number of innovative cases that could be documented, published and disseminated from the point of view of learning, were identified. It is interesting to note that the Support Organisations present have agreed to undertake at least one case per country which they would study and document.

The Support Organisations Initiative has functioned as a loose network and the participants expressed a need to initiate a process of formalising this relationship and the SAARC Forum of Support Organisations was launched on May 13, 1999. There was an expression of commonality of purpose, clearly indicating the need for the Forum. The socio-political and economic conditions have resulted in support organisations performing more challenging and pro-active roles than they have done in the past. The Forum of Support Organisations needs to engage in a democratic struggle to change the existing power relations in the favour of the marginalised, women, children and the disadvantaged sections of society.

**PRINCIPLE**

The Forum will function on the following principles, as agreed upon by the participants:

- It will build on existing resources and initiatives
- It will add value to the existing initiatives rather than duplicating the efforts. As a principle, the Forum will not attempt to undertake activities that
others in the region could do.

- It will have a core focus - it will be a collective voice of South Asian development support organisations, to address the challenges in the current social, political and economic context.
- It will be iterative and inclusive

PURPOSE

The overall purpose of the Forum is to provide a platform for support organisations in South Asia to come together as a collective body. The Forum will address the issue of marginalisation, poverty alleviation, human rights and local self governance. It will be catalytic in nature, responding to the needs of its member support organisations.

The Forum will

- provide mutual support in strengthening capacity building initiatives
- enable systems of sharing experiences and learning from each other
- influence regional policies by acting as pressure groups
- be a collective voice of support organisations at the South Asian level

PROGRAMMES

While the Forum will have a common theme, each country would undertake issues relevant to its own peculiar socio-political context. There was consensus on addressing the issue of local self governance and capacity building as the first priority at SAARC level.

The following programmes were identified as priority

1. Information Dissemination: This would be done through the use of information technology. A regional website will be set up and its information can be downloaded, printed and disseminated. Information could also be shared through a biennial newsletter printed and disseminated by the regional secretariat. The local newsletters will also have a column on the Forum of support organisations and will be used as a vehicle for sharing information. It will also promote further linkages with the International Forum on Capacity Building of Southern NGOs (IFCB).

2. Database and Resource Mapping: A database of support organisations on who is doing what in the region will be created. Simultaneously, a mapping exercise on existing capacities - both human and financial - will be undertaken. The International Forum on Capacity Building is conducting a survey on Providers of Capacity Building. The Forum will use the information. Documentation of innovative exemplars will provide an understanding of the functioning of support organisations, the processes
involved and the success indicators for replication in other parts of the region.

3. **Exchange Programmes**: Sharing of experiences of support organisations will provide an opportunity to learn mutually. This would be done through exchange visits, collaborative studies and exposure visits.

4. **Joint Programmes**: The support organisations will undertake collaborative capacity building and organise workshops along common themes identified. Resources, both human and material, will be exchanged to facilitate these programmes. There is also a need to address the capacity building of support organisations to enable them to deal with challenges as well as scaling up of existing capacities.

5. **SAARC Voice**: The Forum will enable linkages with and strengthen the work on sectoral/thematic issues, bringing the collective voice of South Asian citizens to SAARC. Some of the issues identified are - drug trafficking, trafficking of women and children, HIV/AIDS.

Some of the priority areas identified for support organisations attention in the future are:

- Local self governance
- Fundamentalism
- Globalisation
- Organisational Development/Institutional Development
- Advocacy
- Capacity Building of support organisations, including leadership development
- Impact assessment and upgrading of skills
MECHANISM

The Forum will have national focal points to facilitate the process. In addition, the Forum will encourage thematic nodes which will work on issue specific themes. The national focal points will work with the regional secretariat. The location of the regional secretariat will be rotational, each term lasting for two years.

The interim national and regional focal points are:

Bangladesh: Aroma Dutta
PRIP Trust
House # 59 A, Satmasjid Road, Dhanamondi RA
Dhaka
Tel.: 880 2 819111
Fax: 880 2 816429
Email: prip@bd.drik.net

Nepal: Saloni Singh
NGO Federation
PO Box 7768, Kalikastan,
Dilli Bazaar
Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel./ Fax: 977 1 248459

Sri Lanka: Udan Fernando
PALTRA
240/1 1/1, High Level Road
Colombo 6, Sri Lanka

Pakistan: Ali Akbar
Strengthening Participatory Organisation
House No. 9
Street No. 89 G 6/3
Islamabad, Pakistan
Tel.: 92 51 820983/
820426
Fax: 92 51 273527

India: Binoy Acharya
UNNATI
G I 200 Azad Society
Ahmedabad 380015, India
Tel.: 91 79 6746145
Fax: 91 79 6743752

Regional Secretariat: PRIA
42, Tughlakabad Institutional Area
New Delhi 110062, India
Tel.: 91 11 6081908/
6089559
Fax: 91 11 6080183
Email: info@pria.org
NEXT STEPS

The next steps envisaged are:
1. For the initiative to be inclusive, the national focal points will share information about the Forum with other organisations in their country/region.
2. The national focal points will discuss the future programme with the regional secretariat.
3. The national focal points will be finalised.

The Forum invites the participation of all support organisations in the region, in order to create a collective South Asian voice, to impact and change the existing scenario.

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THE CHALLENGES FOR CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS IN SOUTH ASIA