

17th Praxis Voices for Margins Webinar

Resourcing Grassroots Works, Runaway Donors and Community Based Organisation

Panelists:

Karunanidhi: An HIV+ survivor hails from Namakkal, he has an experience of working with the HIV affected and infected persons and children for more than 2 decades. He is the board member of Tamil Nadu HIV positive network TNNP+ and the founding member of the Vulnerable Community Development Trust (VCDT). VCDT as a CBO specifically focuses on vulnerable communities and children infected and affected with HIV by providing them counseling, consultation, training, and being the voice for the people living in the HIV community in Namakkal district of Tamil Nadu.

Laila: Hails from Warangal, Telangana and she is also the president of Telangana Hijra Transgender Samiti which is a Telangana wide network of Hijras & Transpersons. As the president of Modern Awareness Society (MAS) since 2004, the CBO and has been working with HIV+ persons, transpersons, and sex workers for their rights, health credential, and social entitlements in the Warangal district.

Bimala Bardhan: Secretary cum Director of Community Movement for Education (COME) is a south Odisha based NGO formed in the year 2007. She has over 20 years of experience in the development sector for the socio-economic and political empowerment of tribals and dalits, who have been the most marginalized communities in the country in terms of socio-cultural, political and economic aspects.

Azhar Ali is an MSW and dreams of society which provides support to socially excluded communities to the best of capabilities, post his Masters in Social Work. He decided to join Nav Bhartiya Nari Vikash Samiti to mainstreaming issues and challenges at the community level. He has been volunteering continuously for their rights and issues in and around Ballia for Muslim especially women and has worked with WHO, UNICEF, PACS-DFID, Action Aid, IGSSS, Oxfam, and also govt. agencies.

Khemlal Khatterjee from Chhattisgarh has volunteered to participate in the webinar. He is a member of SAANS Chhattisgarh. He is a survivor of child bonded labor. His family used to work in bricklins and after his father's death, he was forced to work there for 10 years. After struggles, he came back to Chhattisgarh and is now completing his education in Master in Social Work. His dream is to run an NGO and work for the rights of labor trafficking victims and migrant workers.

Lalita Dhanwate is from the Wadar DNT community from Navi Mumbai. She is one of the founder members of Vaijra Mahila Bahu Udeshiya Samajik Sangathan (VMBUSS). Her desire to learn and educate was not encouraged her childhood and hence she has a keen interest in girls' education. They are running four education centers attended by 800 children which focuses on health, gender violence, and livelihood with around 3000 women.

Pratima Kumari, a Dalit woman from Bihar, endured 10 years of suffering due to early marriage and early pregnancy resulting in a condition called Recto-Vaginal Fistula. She worked on a diverse range of gender issues and she is also known as 'football didi'. She started her journey towards ending these issues with sports to bring girls out of closed doors, experience moments of freedom as individuals, engage and converse as a collective and gradually get emboldened to speak up on issues of gender, sexuality and health concerns. She formed the Gaurav Gramin Mahila Vikas Manch (GGMVM) – a community level organization dedicated to ensuring freedom, dignity and rights of the disadvantaged sections. It prioritizes education, health, skill development, livelihood and leadership

of adolescents, youth and women; and works with girls and women in the marginalised communities as its focus constituencies.

Ingrid Srinath is the Director of the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy at Ashoka University. She has been a passionate advocate for human rights, social justice and civil society for the past 19 years. A graduate of the Indian Institute of Management, Kolkata, Ingrid transitioned from her 12-year career in advertising to the nonprofit sector in 1998 with CRY (Child Rights and You), where she was CEO from 2004-08.

Harsh Jaitli is the Chief Executive officer of Voluntary Action Network India (VANI). VANI is an apex body of Indian voluntary organisation. VANI worked towards strengthening the voluntary sector in India. For almost two decades, Harsh has been active in capacity building and research-based advocacy efforts on issues like the environment, health, local governance, and organisational development.

Mr. Tom, Praxis, Moderator: Welcomes everyone to the 17th webinar, organised by Praxis where they try to bring out the voices of margins through discussions and dialogue. Praxis as an organisation have always been tried to make the unheard voices of different communities heard through conferences, seminars previously and now webinars. These voices are brought out to understand them and bear upon the policies and discussions and dialogues that happened around this country. This initiative is taken to listen to the voices from the margins during the lockdown caused through the pandemic. Over the last 16 editions we have been able to bring out various voices ranging from the migrant workers to sex workers, denotified tribes, garment sector workers, entertainment sector workers, student community, people from the North-East, LGBTQI++, adolescent girls, victims of child trafficking, app based workers as in Ola, Uber drivers and Swiggy or Zomato with which we understand their troubles in the time of complete lockdown. This series of webinars, twice a week have been possible for the participants and their constant request to keep this up and many of them also have amplified the issues of margins through their social media accounts and other platforms which make a huge difference as the number multiplies in terms of audience through which more solutions can be found. This 17th edition Resourcing Grassroots Works, Runaway Donors and Community Based Organisation are brought together by Praxis, PIC, National Alliance Group for De-notified Tribes, and Solidarity Foundation. We have a range of panellists in this 17th edition of representatives of those frontline organisations and a few support organisations. When we talk about the community based organisations, I think, there are two diverge ends of the spectrum of how they are perceived, particularly by the donors. There are those who rooted in the traditional 'user group', who are seen as cheaper service delivering communities by World Bank etc to deliver the service at low cost. The other end is Community led organisations that are not in the in delivery of services but challenging the structure of the service and equality. And, to me they are like the 73rd or 74th amendment to NGO sector. These are embodying the principle of subsidiarity of decision making in both rural and urban areas. Since past several years, Praxis has been engaging with many such community led organisations in a range from capacity building to making these organisations to come together and so on and so forth. The first foray in such engagements with community led organisations was back a decade or so in PAX programme in Bihar and Jharkhand. Subsequently, we have tried bringing them together in the state level of community based organisations with BMGF. Though unfortunately due to differences in ideological perceptions with the BMGF it could not go well, but there were still lots of engagements with community based organisations. Recently also we have been working with community led organisations from North India, and partly Southern part of India through various programmes. Today we would try to focus how these organisations were

created and left without given a chance to stand in their feet. A quick study have shown how it 5 millions of people are affected or impacted by these community led organisations.

Pradeep, PiC/Praxis: Since a proper introduction is given by Tom, I will quickly go to the study findings. These are the organisations that in last week we could reach out to find out how they are placed, the status of relief and how they are financially capacitated. We reached out to 82 organisations, working in 13 states and they employ 8346 people who work in 9394 villages and they have supported 52 lakh community members through direct relief and many times they are also helped to get connected with the appropriate authority or organisations. In that way I would say that they are the backbone of this development sector. The big highlight is that 83 percent of these organisations are in fear of the survival for coming six months due to the present condition. Now, if we look at these organisations, we would see that most of them are from Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh and our selection of these organisations were based on the category of working with marginalised communities, Dalits, Adivasi and minorities, DNT communities and differently abled people. many of them are also the community led organisations, in that sense, some of them are CBOs and some of them are network of the organisations and that gives it a mix of both to the grassroots level organisations. In terms of supporting relief, almost every organisation now is trying to do something or the other and they are using their existing resources of the organisation and we tried to know what pitch they had till March and what do they have currently. We found out that 52 percent of the organisations have applied for relief through proposals and various means and 28 percent did not get any fund from anybody for the relief work. Of the 59 organisations who got fund, 49 percent got relief fund through intermediary donor NGOs and 20 percent from CSR and 41 percent from largely the individual volunteers and donors etc. and 4 percent from the Govt. last section which we asked of the sustainability, we see that almost 48 percent of them have gone for pay-cuts already. 83 percent have reported uncertainty and only one organisation had reported some sort of sustainability that they have for the next three years. It is obvious that this is not a sample of bigger universe, these are the organisations that we have worked very closely with and taken support in times.

Karunanithi: Hails from Namakkal and I have been working with HIV positive network in Namakkal from 1999 to 2007. From 2007 to 2013 I had worked with Tami Nadu Network for HIV positive persons. through my Vulnerable community development trust, a CBO that has been working for the children who are affected and infected HIV. I have been an HIV Positive for the past 27 years and started this network to reduce the stigma and discrimination in the community. Earlier we had a lot of support to give care and support for treatment, create job opportunities, and make people socially responsible. We had agencies to help us like CBC, US aid Funds with that we started HIV positive network in all districts. Nearly we reached 50,000 HIV Positive persons in Tamil Nadu. With nearly two lakh ten thousand HIV Positive persons in Tamil Nadu one lakh nineteen thousand male take ART medication. During the time of my work, I had a kidney stone and the private hospitals were not ready to treat me because they have to change the whole equipment that's in place as I am an HIV+ person. I managed to get admitted to a hospital in Coimbatore, the kit required for the treatment just costed Rs.300 but the hospital charged me one lakh ten thousand as they had to change the whole equipment. I paid this huge amount just to remove 11mm stone in my kidney. The stigma around HIV+ persons still prevails in private hospitals as we don't have any support.

From 1999 to 2010 we had a lot of support from the donors for the HIV community, reduced the stigma by training a positive speaker to speak in schools, colleges, and also among the health care workers. After 2010 the donors do not consider HIV as a major issue but now the HIV cases are high, the positive children face many issues as they don't get Higher education and nutritious food. The

number of infected and affected children has also been consistently increasing. We did a program from 2008 to 2013 in Krishnagiri district with 330 infected children and 2040 affected children from which there were nearly 900 children that were orphans. These children were not able to access education as there was no support they had to start working. The children were not able to enter college due to lack of support, after 12th they start working in hotels, mechanic shops, etc. For this cause, we started identifying their relatives and gave them training on how to handle these children and also helped them to continue their education. We are also able to extend our support to the education department and also to the district administration to provide education to those 900 children who can access education and proper nutritious food. In Tamil Nadu from the HIV infected and affected population, there are nearly 13,000 HIV positive children and 30 % widows from the whole population. Those windows don't have any income and access to their husband's property and they don't get any work during the lockdown.

Now the funders and donors are not considering HIV as an issue. The donors have other options to provide funding to a big organization that works in multiple areas. But the community-based organization working for HIV have no options as funding is the only form of support. The Donors don't even consider us and with this, the HIV Positive persons are also getting high. In Salem and Namakkal approximately 100 positive cases have been registered every month. With the reduction in donor support, the stigma has increased. The CBO require support from donors as they are working directly with the HIV infected and affected persons.

Laila: hails from Warangal, Telangana and she is also the president of Modern Awareness Society (MAS). The CBO was registered in 2004 and has been working with HIV+ persons, trans-persons, and sex workers for their rights, health credential, and social entitlements in the Warangal district. Previously before COVID-19 through our CBO we have been working on two projects mainly Vihaan and Crisis Management. Through Vihaan we have been focusing only on trans-persons in the community directly and we have also been working on advocacy and crisis management. Through MAS we have been working with 7600+ LGBTQ community registered organizations. After COVI 19 we faced huge struggle as most of them are trans-women in our organization summing up to 1600 individuals were most of them were dependent on begging in trains for their livelihood. With the sudden announcement of the lockdown, it has been more than two months now and our members have not been able to go for collecting money as there are no trains, or buses or stops functioning. We have been promptly following all the lockdown protocols that have been announced by the government. But we are also struggling with hunger and as everyone is well aware the recognition for trans-persons is very less. The stigma and discrimination is high for us during this time and there is no support extended from the society or the government. Initially, after the lockdown, we had approached many persons and individual donors but we did not receive much support from anyone. Personally, as community leaders, we initiated relief support for our members by putting together some money personally. We were able to provide free provisions and support for 600 trans-persons with this. With a proposal sent to solidarity foundation, we received Rs. 70000 initially to support positive trans-persons directly with rice, groceries, and other requirements. Further, we were also given Rs.50000 for supporting trans-persons where we supported them based on their need requirement. Gunjan organisation from Delhi connected with us through the Telangana Hijra Transgender Samiti and supported nearly 600 members with rice and groceries. Other than this we have not received any support from the donors or other individuals. With all the stigma present around trans-persons in the community, there was a question of who would support them. With this, I was able to support around 1700 trans-persons in the community individually. We have also extended our support to nearly 70 disabled persons and 170 destitute and nearly 280 families in the community. We have been requesting the government and donors for their support for trans-

persons during the lockdown. With this, the Telangana state government was able to extend support to a few trans-persons if not for all. But with all this support we have been able to reach up to 2700 families by extending groceries, rice, or need-based support for them. With the support from individual donors, we were able to support them more than once or twice but the state of trans-persons in the society is not stable. We were only able to support their hunger temporarily but there are more issues beyond this. They require more support with paying their rents, covering medical expenses, partner violence, and supporting families that are dependent on them. Even though we have approached the donors we haven't received fundings from any organisation. The reasons might be because our CBO focuses and works only for trans persons and we also have issues in approaching the donors for funding. As we are at the district level we were also unable to approach bigger organisations or any funding. The challenges that we face only are increasing with the transport being stopped we were even unable to support the Siva Shakthi groups with their needs. We have been only supporting a few that we could reach and we are unable to reach more members. Many trans-persons also had faced violence and we were unable to offer support to them. Most trans-persons having dependent families also approached us to support them and we have been unable to address all this due to the lack of funding. With all the increasing number of lockdowns, even though there might be more the daily labour will also start working, farmers will and job-based workers would also start. But this isn't the same for trans-persons as we cannot function normally again as we cannot go to trains or shops anymore to collect money for the next 5 to 6 months. The state of trans persons would become more worse as we would be struggling with hunger, lack of income, a job, and lack of livelihood. Even before COVID 19, the recognition for trans-persons in Telangana state was much less and this now has only increased it and only with the support from the donors, we might be able to survive this.

Vimala Bardhan, Rayagada Odisha: We are community Based Organisation and specially we are from Dalit community. We are the newcomers working in the field area, where we were born and brought up. Though we have the dedication to work but it is getting difficult to continue. Many issues are there. Since we are grassroot level Organisation, we are not recognised by other donors. This is a big issue. Older and elder organisation are given the first priority to implement government programme. In that too we are ignored by the government. Because to give the CSR project or any other project we need to show more transaction. But we are unable to qualify for this criteria. Another thing is some organisations don't include the Dalit, the Adivasi. These are big issues, specially during the COVID 19, we are interested to work with the people, but we are not able to support the needy. COVID 19 has affected badly CBO's like us. We don't have continued projects for our livelihood as well as community development. We have network partners in the district level from Oxfam, but they too are facing same problems. We don't have any fund to work with the community. We were supposed to get from state government network, Central government project on education but due to lockdown, we are not able to get it. We have also tried to get another project of education from Europe. Because of COVID 19 that also hasn't reached us. So, there are big challenges and troubles for CBO's and community development. Because of this the organisation is not able to sustain and implement our target strategies.

Azhar Ali: I am going to share my experience and challenges we felt since the lockdown and till today. Initially we were not sure how to deal with. The biggest challenge is that our organisation works with Muslim community and the religion related stigma and the fake news that was spread made it difficult. We started sending letters to some of the INGOs as the problem of starvation started emerging. In 3 blocks we have almost 15000 families, but we were able to reach out to around 400 families only as we have limited resources. So, we continued with whatever we had. We even asked other external organisations to maybe just provide us with relief materials which we could further distribute. Ramadan also started so we were working out how to work out further. The

organisations with which we had linkage did not collaborate with us. Some said they had limited CSR fund. The INGOs with which we were linked also did not help us. SIDBI reached out to us to support some families in Lucknow with which we reached out to 500 families. We could not do much in Baliya. We did not start with fund raising as we have not much idea about it. We received helps from networks with which we were able to distribute ration for 20 families. The fake news and rumours that were spread related to Muslims spreading COVID was one of the major challenges. Other challenges involve lack of conveyance, people not having job options. During March we are at the closing session, so we utilised whatever money was left with us. Now the challenges that remain in front of us includes of how to keep our staff going, how to help our community. We did not receive help from the government.

Khemlal Khatterjee: I am from Chhattisgarh. Many small collectives have been clubbed together to form this. We have many challenges. we are working with the labours. Many workers are coming back here who are put into the quarantine centres and there they are not provided with basic facilities- proper food and care at the centres. Our collective is Saans. Through this we are providing essential information to the workers. Due to the lockdown we are not able to help people with relief in other villages.

Lalita Dhanwate: In 2012 we began Vaijra Mahila Bahu Udeshiya Samajik Sangathan (VMBUSS). We work on issues of malnutrition, education and with pregnant women and violence. All this with de-notified communities. Since the lockdown, access has been tough. Despite living in a city, we feel like the communities were living in a jungle - given the lack of access to rations. We have tried to link some 1600 families with a month of dry rations - even though we work with 3000. Govt insist on online registration which is a big challenge for this community. We have also supported people to return home (the migrants). The organisations funding issues and proposal are sought in English which is a big challenge for us. We have had no commitments for funding so far in this context. We can't let go of this community because we have been working with them for 8 years but we don't know how to afford to continue support, this community is already stigmatised by the criminal tribe tag and we are worried if we stop work with them, they will slip back to a level which will be tough to recover from. We are ourselves from the same community and cannot afford to personally contribute so we are unsure what the future holds.

Pratima Kumari: This has been the struggling times for us, especially very stressful times during COVID 19. Everyone knows what govt is doing so won't talk about much. My focus area is gender and violence. There have been cases of gender-based violence. The violence has increased this is sexual violence. Many instances of gender-based violence in Musahari tola (dalit) tola. Here, the atmosphere is stressful and we are struggling. The govt has made the structure like that people are not able to speak. From two months, I am very disturbed hearing a spike in cases of domestic violence. I feel like involving some organisation to work on this. Presently the focus of the organisation has shifted to relief works and the focus on women and children and gender-based violence is lost. The organisations are also struggling a lot in the shortage of funds. Still due to financial constraints, organisations are trying to work on the issue of gender-based violence.

Ingrid Srinath: I want to point few points from what has been said today and also from our own work and research we have been doing with NGO's. one of the hallmarks of this crisis has been civil society's success in bringing marginalised communities' voices to the attention of the media, of the philanthropy, of other parts of the civil society. This is the first time seeing that transgender communities, sex workers, the disabled, the elderly, women victims of violence actually get mentioned in the context of disaster response. Civil society has been successful though obviously not completely successful. Second thing is that we have seen unprecedented response in the form of philanthropy. Though thousands of crores have been collected by Prime Minister's PM Cares fund. But even outside PM cares we have seen organised philanthropy, CSR's, citizen groups, middle class, high network peoples, everybody has responded in some form or the other. Online given has risen by 180 %. Raise in Fund has raised 200 crores. Philanthropy from ordinary Indians across the board. This was concerned with short-term direct relief in the form of food, ration, PPE's, but less support for long term. So, all these CBO's we listened to, talked about violence against women, the cause of the elderly, the cause of the disabled is being heard now but are finding it difficult to evoke support that they need. There is more consciousness in philanthropy thinking more deeply whom they work with, what issues they focus on and how they provide support. From the philanthropist we are hearing that they understand that it is the CBO's that provide best channels for support. They understand building community resilience is the most important defence we can actually have in crisis of all kinds. They understand it is not only important to fund programmes but building those institutions so that they can respond whenever necessary. So, there is some shift. The third point is about future scenarios. Your data and our data show the same thing. The future of funding appears extremely bleak. We are estimating 50% drop in CSR funding. 25-30% drop in individual funding. Core programmes will have difficulty finding support and this is not true for grassroots organisations but also larger organisations in the country are struggling for funding their core programmes. A rough estimate we had done 2 million staff members who might find themselves unemployed by the end of this year. The total paid employment in the sector to be at least 7 million. the risk right now is that up to 2 million will lose their jobs. We are looking at a catastrophe in the non-profit sector, if we don't organise or respond quickly. The good thing is that there is a small window open to discuss solutions normally considered not feasible politically. That is in the area of public health, but also in the area of labour rights, social protection there is openness in discourse right now to promote solutions to things that we had been seeing but were considered to be unfeasible or politically too radical. Now being open to consider everything from Universal Basic Income to Universal health care to other forms of social protection. The last point is that we are paying as a sector a huge price for not having a well-developed eco-system. Looking at what is happening in other countries. In the US, government is giving employment in NGO's, in Canada it is 350 million Canadian dollars. This kind of response in countries where it is least expected, like Russia and China that hardly have a reputation for being pro-civil society. They are providing support like income support, tax incentives and other kind of support that we are not seeing because we do not have an organised coherent voice when it comes to policy making. So we need to urgently address this gap. We need much better networks of grassroots groups across issues o be able to channel that voice to the powers that be even if are able to come over this crisis without losing all the progress we have made over the last few decades.

Harsh: COVID has exposed the hidden vulnerabilities of the system. From past two decades. the working pattern - regulations- about foreign funding and Income Tax was imposed. Till date whenever there is any national crisis be it manmade or natural it is seen the grass root level organisations respond to it. Organisations have dealt with the disasters within the limited resource constraint. As these organisations see it and know what it is at the grass root level. The faults in the system have been in present but during COVID it is now becoming visible. system of funding is also difficult. Those who need money are not receiving it. There are a lot of gaps and is coming at the front when it comes to funding. We are talking about these gaps today during crisis but when we get

through this, we will forget about it and remain silent. This time I would request everyone here to not remain silent and share and talk about how these organisations functioned during such situation. Looks like we are living the dreams of govt. we should not forget our problems and challenges. Sometimes we get busy in our work and we don't keep in contact with each other. This pandemic has brought in an opportunity where people have now started interacting. Participation in meetings and webinars have increased due to the technology. It is good if we continue to share our problems and thoughts.

Tom, Concluding Remarks: We have heard a range of issues from both CBO's and organisations that have been working with them. On the one hand, lack of capacity, inability to be able to write proposals, and on the other hand the shifting canvas of donors lack of capacity. CSO are mentioned in FCRA but literally they are slaughtering us as service delivery agents, to remain enslaved.

Comments:

Indu: We need to question the entire PM Cares fund generation because it is private fund generation not for the country. This was one major drive by the PM that sucked away all the funds. The entire country is suffering, and the PM takes away all the funds. It is criminal. There was brutality unleashed by police. Couldn't police work without sticks? Seeing dark side of our democracy. Agree with Harsh and Ingrid. People came out but union government was entirely missing from any efforts. We need to ask the PM why he did what he did.

Questions & Answers

Opportunities for grassroots organisations to come together

Question (Jophin Mathai): There seems to be a window open for the politicisation of social impact related work. But civil society is composed of different orgs with different degrees of politicisation. How can a service delivery approach be pushed back under these circumstances?

Answer (Ingrid): The development that happened just at the beginning of the crisis, the judgement that INSAF was able to win for clearly specifying that political speech of NGO's is not a violation of FCRA or any other laws. Need for advocacy redefine activities of a political nature. So clearly it is political but not partisan, perfectly legal and therefore meriting funding for instance from CSR. It is a quick win we need to go for right away.

Question (Manish): Is there any suggestion to get more organised?

Answer (Harsh): Two points- PM cares Just before COVID 19, the Govt of India came with the regulation that the CSR funds cannot be received by NGOs. Surprisingly PM cares was set up under A Trust. In the context of service delivery, we shouldn't the lose the sight related to public service delivery.

Question (Azhar): How to strengthen grassroots organisations instead of big organisations?

Answer (Harsh): This is a long-term question, not new. Transferring of information to grassroots groups, how to give information about their legal compliance. Second is, bringing them all together. Regional network in the states.

Abhishek (question): What are strategies we are going to adapt in such kind of situations?

Answer: (Tom): By networking, joint effort, connecting well

(Ingrid): To add to this we need to have better data. If we can have data how much employment CBO'S provide and their outreach. We can make better case with data. In the absence of data funding is becoming a club. Your chances of getting fund depends on who you know.