

Resourcing Grassroots Work: Runaway Donors and Struggling Community Based Organisations



Even as Corporates and Donor agencies make funds available for COVID relief in India, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) working on the ground struggle to find funding to address the needs of the most marginalised.



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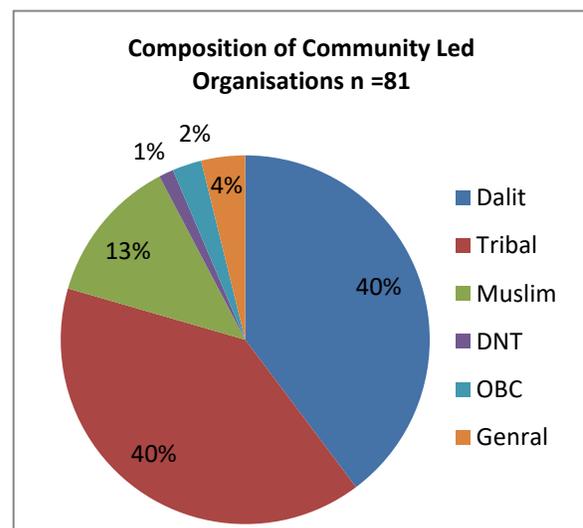
1. Background

Community-based organisations (CBOs) are the backbone of the social development sector. Whether it is a large scale development project supported by the government or non-government donors or the social movements and campaigns which require mass mobilisation on the ground, the real work is done by thousands of grassroots organisations who have built a volunteer base in villages and slums across the nation. These are the organisations, which also provide universities, research organisations and think tanks with crucial information from the ground, based on which thousands of journal papers are published. These are the organisations that also support a number of media channels and newspapers with facts to counter innumerable fake news. These are the organisations that provide the concepts of social marketing and social entrepreneurship with practical forms, for a lot of those successes depend on how these actionists of the ground provided the much-needed activity support. CBOs are largely unorganised and often termed as ‘volunteers’, assuming that they are to support others, rather than get supported. But, like with any other industry, CBOs are at one extreme of the value chain of these sectors and are unfortunately, bearing the burden of sustainability of the development sector and the Covid-19 circumstances poses the threat of breaking this backbone of so many sectors.

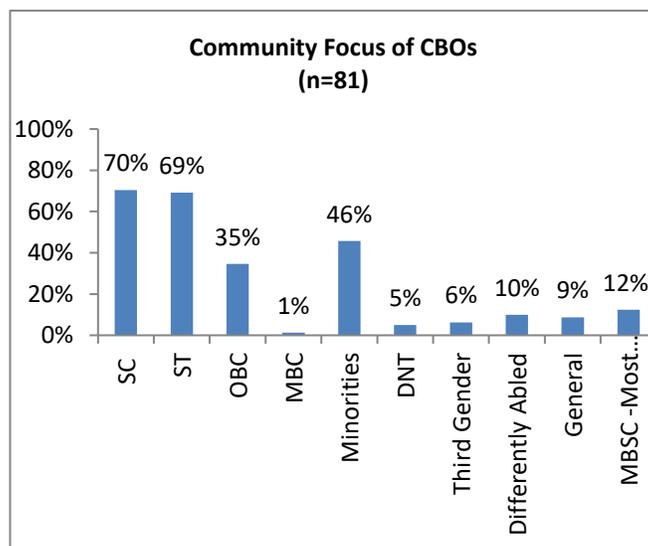
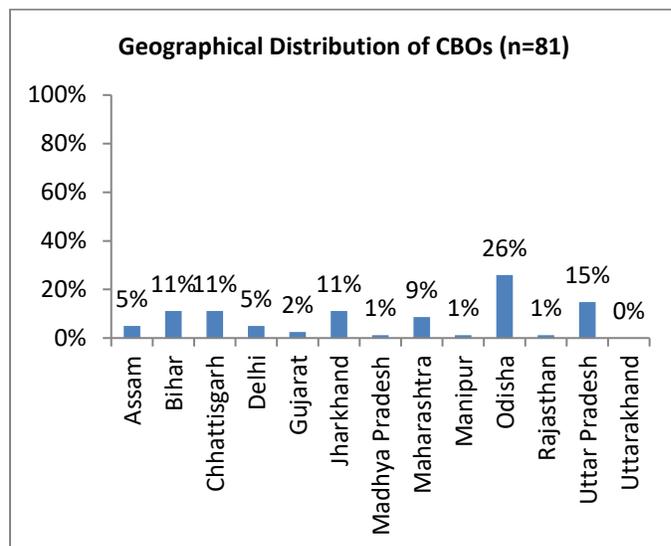
A number of organisations which have been able to organise relief support to thousands and thousands of families know that their efforts became possible because of the presence of these grass root organisations, which probably remain unnamed, and often under-resourced. In order to delve a bit deeper into understanding their realities, Partners in Change and Praxis organised a dipstick study with CBOs. The objective was to understand what exactly these organisations were doing as part of Covid relief and how they were raising resources for the same. Further, an attempt was made to understand their challenges and their perceptions on organisational sustainability. The sample was selected through a convenience sampling, largely organisations that Praxis and PiC had been associated with through various networks and capacity building programmes. The information was collected through telephonic conversations with senior members of these organisations and subsequently analysed.

2. Study Sample Profile

The sample is biased in favour of the Leave No One Behind communities namely dalit, adivasis, women, LGBT, denotified tribes (DNT) and unorganised workers’ groups. All these organisations however are registered as trusts or societies. The team of four researchers reached out to 81 CBOs working in 13



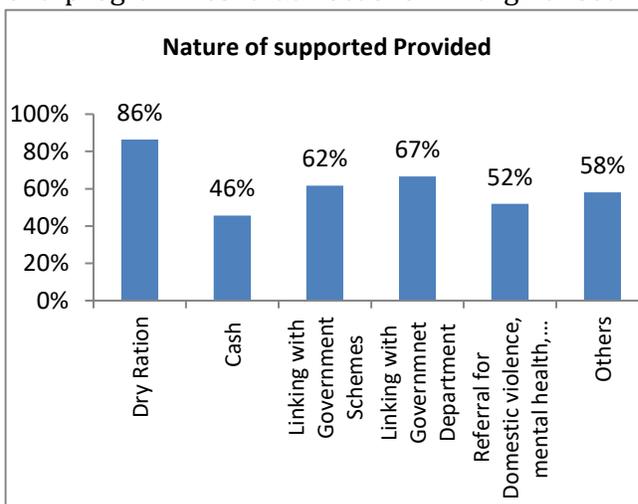
states. Among these organisations, more than 80 % are led by Tribal and Dalit leaders whereas another 13% are led by minorities, especially Muslims. More than 20% of the CBOs are led by women leaders. These CBOs together employ 8346 persons and have additional volunteers; they have a geographical footprint in 9,394 Villages in approximately 94 districts. Of these, 29 districts are among those that NitiAayog has identified as priority districts.



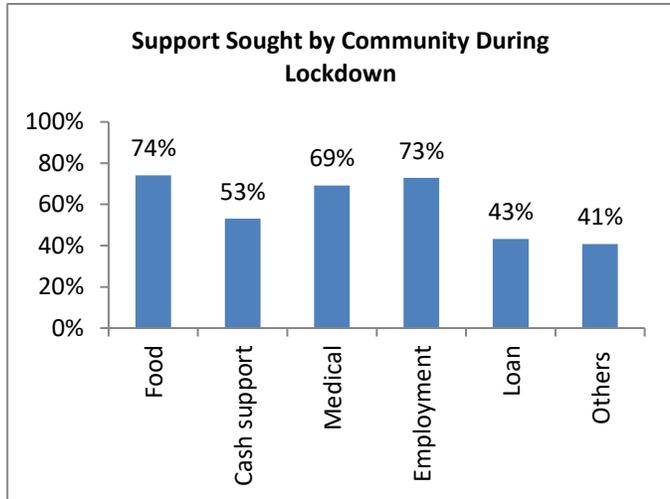
3. Covid Relief Support and Overall Challenges

LNOB Communities: These 81 CBOs are currently providing support to around 52-lakh community members through direct relief or connecting them to appropriate authorities and organisations pan India. These CBOs implement programmes that focus on marginalised sections of society and 70% are engaged with Schedule Caste, 69 % with schedule tribe and around 46% with Minorities.

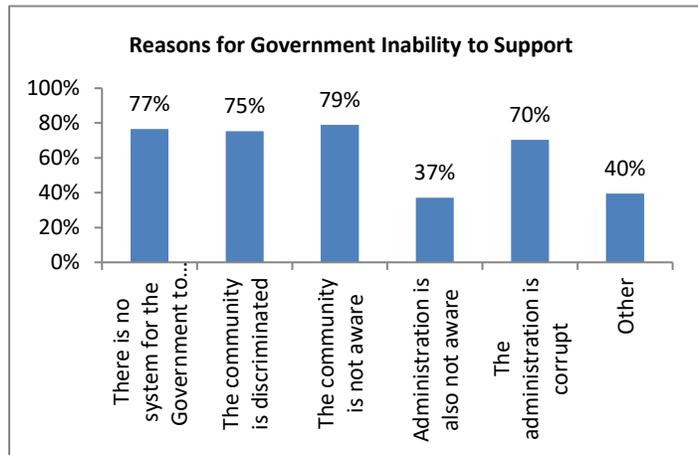
Provisions: During these grave times more than 86% of these organisations have provided dry rations and 67% have supported in creating linkages with government schemes related to PDS, Jan Dhan and others. 46% CBOs have also supported their community members with minimal cash transfer directly from individual donors to those who most needed it.



Community Priorities: 73% CBOs stated that a number of community members are approaching them for their support in accessing employment opportunities. Provision of dry rations (74%) and medical support (69%) are other two important needs of communities. A large number of villages are showing increase in indebtedness, with more than 43% organisations indicating that communities need access to loans, mostly to repay old loans. 40% CBOs also indicated other needs from communities such as dealing with domestic violence, abuse and issues related to depression, trauma and mental health.

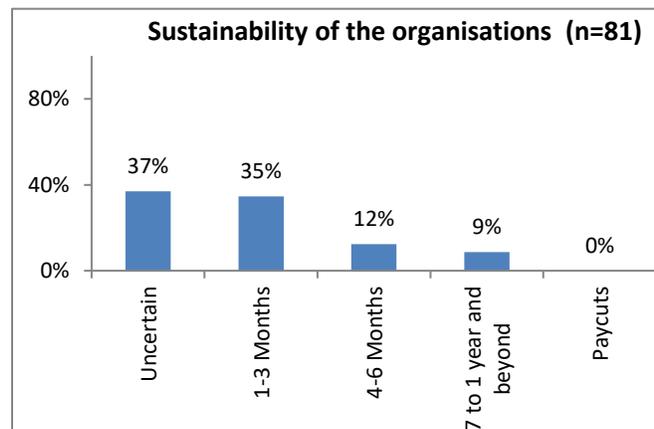
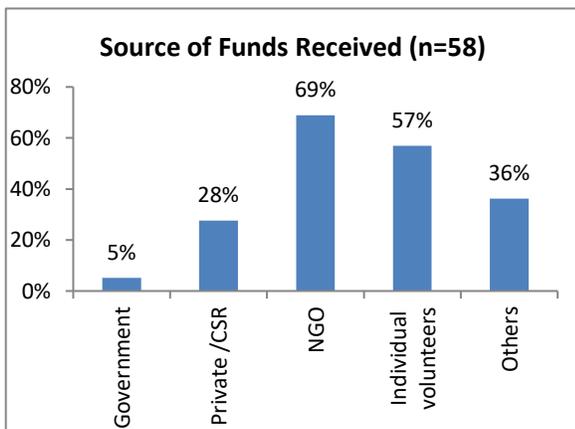


Government systems: Further, the Government mechanisms are also very stressed. The inability of the government system to provide support to the communities is being widely reported. Out of 81 organisations, 79% organisations shared that community is not aware about the mechanisms/schemes present. 77% organisations felt that there are no systems present for the government to reach the community.



Accessing Resources: Among these, 58 organisations were able to access funds for relief. Among these 69% received funds from other NGOs, 28% from CSR. 57% of these CBOs are also accessing individual donors. These organisations are important channels for routing relief.

Sustaining organisation: The challenge is that the relief funding rarely has any salary component for the CBO staff. And often it becomes challenging for the CBOs to seek funding for their own salaries, for this seems to be looked down upon by donors at large.



The result is that these organisations and their leaders are worried about sustaining their organisations. Almost 83% of the organisations have reported uncertainty beyond a period of 6 months and only 1 organisation has reported some sustainability owing to a long-term project, which is operational for 3 years. Most of the programme funding is now being diverted towards relief work including from the donors side, because they are directly supporting the Government under the PMCARES fund. It is estimated that around 9677 crores (\$1.27 billion) has been collected till May 2020 out of which 5369 crores are donations contributed by private sector under CSR¹.

These community led organisations have always taken a lead in working during emergencies like this and the government and wider civil society have conveniently ignored them as they do not have an organised voice or demand. The biggest issue at the present times seems to be the lack of funds to work on some of their core programmes, like for instance disability, gender justice or child rights; where the deep chasm will be visible and evident at a later stage and will be more challenging to work on.

4. Voices from CBOs

In a webinar organised on 3 June 2020 to create a platform for the CBOs to speak directly to donors and other like-minded organisations, some key issues were raised. These have been detailed below.

4.1 Karunanidhi

An HIV+ survivor, he hails from Namakkal, and has the experience of working with the HIV affected and infected persons and children for more than two 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 counselling, consultation, training, and being the voice for the people living in the HIV community in Namakkal district of Tamil Nadu.

“I have been HIV+ for the past 27 years and started this network to reduce the stigma and discrimination in the community. Earlier from 1999 to 2000, we had agencies to help us like CBC and US Aid and with that we started an HIV+ persons’ network in all districts. After 2010 the donors do not consider HIV as a major issue despite HIV cases being high in number – especially among children. We ran a programme from 2008 to 2013 in Krishnagiri district with 330 infected children and 2040 affected children of which there were nearly 900 orphans. These children were not able to access education and since there was no support they had to 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. Those widows

¹India Spend – <https://www.indiaspend.com/pm-cares-received-at-least-1-27-bn-in-donations-enough-to-fund-over-21-5-mn-covid-19-tests/>

don't have any income or 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 and have other options to provide funding to a big organisation that works in multiple areas. But for the community-based organisations working for HIV there are no options because funding is the only form of support. Given the lac of funding, cases are on the rise and 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 requires support from donors as they are working directly with the HIV infected and affected persons.”

4.1 Laila

A transgender activist, 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 credentials and social entitlements in 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 on trans-persons in the community directly and we have also been working on advocacy and crisis management. We have been working with 7600+ LGBTQ community registered organisations. After Covid-19 we faced huge struggles as most of the 1600 trans women associated with our organisation 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 functioning. We have been promptly following all the lockdown protocols that have been announced by the government. But we are also facing a severe hunger crisis owing to the lack of recognition of trans-persons.

Initially, after the lockdown, we had approached many persons and individual donors but we did not receive much support form, anyone. Personally, as community leaders, we initiated relief support for our members by putting together some of our own savings. We were also 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. The Telangana state government was able to extend support to a few trans-persons if not for all. We were only able to support their hunger by providing groceries 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 funding form any organisation. With lifting of lockdown gradually, the daily labour, farmers and job-based persons will start working, but this isn't the same for trans-persons. 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 deteriorate, as this will be clubbed with hunger, lack of income, a job, and lack of livelihood. Even before COVID 19, the recognition for trans-persons in Telangana state was very limited. Only with the support from the donors, we might be able to survive this.”

4.3 Bimala Bardhan

Secretary cum Director of Community Movement for Education (COME) in a south Odisha based NGO formed in the year 2007, Bimala 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 marginalised communities in the country in terms of socio-cultural, political and economic aspects.

“We are a Community Based Organisation from the Dalit community and are newcomers in the field. Though we have the dedication to work it is getting difficult to continue. Since we are a grassroots level organisation, we are not recognised by other donors. Older organisations are given the first priority to implement government programmes. We are ignored by the government and to get the CSR projects or any other projects we need to show more transactions, which we don't have because of lack of projects. Another thing is, some organisations don't include Dalits and the Adivasis as their focus or priority. During COVID-19, we are interested to work with them but we are not able to support the needy. COVID-19 has badly affected 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 funds to work with the community. 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.”

4.4 Azhar Ali

Azhar dreams of society, which provides support to socially, excluded communities to the best of its capabilities. He decided to join Nav Bhartiya Nari Vikash Samiti to support mainstreaming issues and challenges at the community level. He has been volunteering continuously for the 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 Government agencies.

“Initially we were not sure how to deal with the lockdown. The biggest challenge is that our organisation works with the Muslim community and the religion related stigma and the fake news that was spread has made it very 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. The organisations with which we had linkages, did not collaborate with us. Some said they had limited CSR funds. The INGOs with whom 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 a very limited idea of how to go about it, Fake news and rumours that were spread related to Muslims spreading COVID was one of the major challenges. Other challenges involve lack of conveyance costs being met and people not having job options. During the month of March, we were at the financial year-end so we utilised whatever money was left with us. Now the challenges that remain include how to keep our staff going and how to help our community. We did not receive help from the government either.”

4.5 Khemlal Khatterjee

A member of SAANS Chhattisgarh, Khemlal is a survivor of child bonded labour. His family used to work in brick-kilns and after his father's death, he was forced to work there for 10 years.

Years later he returned to Chhattisgarh and is now completing his education – a Masters degree in Social Work. His dream is to run an NGO and work for the rights of labour trafficking victims and migrant workers.

“I am from Chattisgarh. Many small collectives have been clubbed together to form this SAANS network. We have many challenges. We are working with labour and many workers are coming back here who are put into the quarantine centres and are not provided with basic facilities-proper food and care at the centres. Our collective is providing essential information to the workers. Due to the lockdown and funding crunch we are not able to help people with relief in other villages.”

4.6 Lalita Dhanwate

Lalita is from the Wadar denotified tribe and lives in Navi Mumbai. She is one of the founder members of Vajra Mahila Bahu Udeshiya Samajik Sangathan (VMBUSS). Her desire to study was not encouraged and hence she has a keen interest in girls' education. They are running four education centres attended by 800 children and their focus is on health, gender violence, and livelihood with around 3000 women.

“In 2012, we began Vajra Mahila Bahu Udeshiya Samajik Sangathan (VMBUSS). We work on the issues of malnutrition, education and with pregnant women and violence against women from 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's supply of dry rations - even though we work with 3000. Government insists on online registration, which is a big challenge for this community. We have also supported people to return home (the migrants). The organisation faces funding issues as proposals 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 eight 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 that 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.

4.7 Pratima Kumari

A Dalit woman from Bihar, Pratima endured 10 years of suffering due to an early marriage and early pregnancy resulting in a condition called Recto-Vaginal Fistula. She has worked on a diverse range of gender issues and she is also known as 'football didi'. She started her journey towards ending these issues of early marriage with sports, to bring girls out from behind 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 organisation that prioritises 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.

“This has been an absolutely difficult time of immense struggles for us and very stressful. My focus area is gender and violence. The violence has increased and this is sexual violence. Many

instances of gender-based violence in Musharitolas (dalit) have been seen. We are struggling. From the past two months, there is a spike in cases of domestic violence. Presently the focus of the organisation has shifted to relief works and the focus on women and children and gender-based violence is lost in this. The organisations are also struggling a lot due to the shortage of funds and finding it difficult to work on the issue of gender-based violence.

5. Civil Society Voices

Ingrid Srinath, Director, the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy at Ashoka University shared the following takeaways:

- 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.
- We have seen unprecedented philanthropy and there is more consciousness. Philanthropists thinking more deeply about whom they work with, what issues they focus on and how they provide support. From the philanthropist, we are acknowledging that they understand that it is the CBOs that provide the best channels for support. They understand that 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 future of funding is extremely bleak and data shows the same thing. We are estimating 50% drop in CSR funding and 25-30% drop in individual funding. Core programmes will have difficulty finding support and this is true not only for grassroots organisations but also larger organisations in the country who are struggling to fund their core programmes. In rough estimate done 2 million staff members might find themselves unemployed by the end of this year. The total paid employment in the sector to be at least 7 million. We have to discuss solutions that are normally considered not feasible politically. That is not only in the area of public health, but also in the area of labour rights, social protection. The discourse is now open to consider everything from Universal Basic Income to Universal health care to other forms of social protection.
- 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 to those in NGOs, in Canada it is 350 million Canadian dollars. This kind of response is also 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 kinds 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 to 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.
- Need for advocacy to redefine activities of a political nature. To strengthen the grassroots organisations, we need to have better data. If we can have data how much employment CBO's provided and their outreach, we can make a better case with data. In

the absence of data, funding is becoming a club where your chances of getting funds depend on who you know.

Harsh Jaitli, Chief Executive officer of Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) shared that COVID has exposed the hidden vulnerabilities of the system. For the past two decades, the regulations about foreign funding and Income Tax have been imposed. Till date, whenever there is any national crisis be it manmade or natural it is the grassroots level organisations that are the first to respond to it. Organisations have dealt with disasters within their limited resources as they see the reality daily and know what is at the grass root level. Moreover, the faults in the system have been present but during COVID it is now becoming visible. The system of funding is difficult and those who need money are not receiving it. There are a lot of gaps emerging when it comes to funding. We are talking about these gaps today during the crisis but when we get through this, we should not forget it and remain silent. The question is how these organisations functioned during such a situation and the challenges they faced.

To strengthen a grassroots organisation, which is the long-term question, it is important to ensure transferring of information to grassroots groups. More specifically, they need to be given information about their legal compliance and to strengthen them they need to come together, beginning with regional networks in the states.

Way forward:

SDG's vision of Leave No One Behind will be achievable only if the grassroot community-based organisations, especially those led by excluded communities are not left behind in these time of resource constraints. They are excluded from the decision-making systems around funding of the development sector. The need is to facilitate them with platforms where they could amplify their voices and allow them to register their presence to various organisations, networks and campaigns. They are needed if the state has to be made accountable.

Based on a Study by Sanjay Kumar Bharati, Anil Jha, Mayank Sinha, and Deepti Menon and **Inputs** from Aqsa Agha, Jhumki Dutta, Stanley Jospeh, Moulasha Kader, Dheeraj and Pradeep Narayanan,

Annexure

Partner Organisation

- 1 Rachana Manch
- 2 Jan Vikas Parishad Evam Anushandhan Sansthan
- 3 Dalit Association for Social and Human Rights Awareness (DASHRA)
- 4 Jai Rohidas Mahila Kalyan Samiti
- 5 Lok astha sewa sansthan
- 6 Disha Samaj Sewi Sanstha
- 7 Gayan Sagar
- 8 Panah Ashram
- 9 Gaurav Gramin Mahila Vikas Manch
- 10 Jan Jagran Samiti
- 11 Janhit Chhattisgarh Vikas Samiti
- 12 MADAD
- 13 Lok Prerna Kendra
- 14 Lahanti FRA
- 15 Vikas Foundation
- 16 Dalit Vikas Abhiyan Samiti Education
- 17 Jharkhand Vikas Parisad
- 18 Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Jharkhand Dalit Vikas Samiti
- 19 Srijan Mahila Vikas Manch
- 20 Vahid Foundation edu
- 21 Majdoor Kisan Vikas Sansthan
- 22 Dalit Mukti Mission
- 23 Ideal Youth Health and Welfare Society
- 24 Deep Jyoti Kalyan Sanstahn
- 25 Youth Unite for Voluntery Action -YUVA
- 26 Nai Umang Nai Soch society
- 27 New Culture Group
- 28 Jan Jagriti Manch
- 29 Bachpan Bachav Badhna Batchit (4B Foundation
- 30 Lok Manch Vikas Samiti
- 31 LEDS
- 32 PRDTI
- 33 Jan Vikas Sansthan
- 34 Pratinidhi
- 35 Buniyad Jan Jagriti evam Vikas Sansthan
- 36 Warsi Seva Sadan
- 37 Bheema Foundation
- 38 Multi Art Association
- 39 Samudaik Kalyan Evam Vikash Sansthan
- 40 Samaj Seva Sansthan
- 41 Jan Gramin Vikas Sansthan
- 42 Prayas Jan Utthan Samiti
- 43 Dalit Adivasi Manch (Sajag)
- 44 Nav Bhartiya Nari Vikas Samiti

- 45 Tarun Chetna
- 46 SOCIAL ACTION FOR ADAVNCEMENT OF LIFE (SAFAL)
- 47 Social Action For Rural & Urban Development Society
- 48 Masum
- 49 Satpura Human welfare foundation
- 50 Chitij Samajik Sangathan
- 51 Action For Women and Rural Development
- 52 Sandeh - Social Action for National Development in Education Society of Human
- 53 Janvadi Gram Vikas Partishtan
- 54 VASTAV
- 55 DREAM-India
- 56 INDIRA WOMEN ORGANISATION FOR VOLUNTARY ACTION
- 57 Adivasi Najeean Gathan Navjoti Agua(ANGNA)
- 58 Adivasi Development Trust
- 59 Rourkela Social Service Society
- 60 Samajik Sewa Sadan
- 61 Samagra Vikash
- 62 UPAYA
- 63 Gangpur charitable Trust
- 64 Adivasi Society For Helping Attitude
- 65 Developing Adivasi Youth Association
- 66 Getsemani Garden Society
- 67 SANJEEVAN
- 68 ANCHALIKA SEVA SAMITI
- 69 Naya Jeevan Gyan Prachar Sewa Samiti
- 70 VAJRA Mahila Multipurpose Trust
- 71 Adivasi Vikas Samanway Samiti
- 72 COME - Community Movement for Education
- 73 New Hope India
- 74 Samajik Seva Sadan
- 75 Adivasi Sarvangin Vikas Sangh
- 76 Banaskantha Jila Dalit Sangathan
- 77 Sanatan Unnayan Sanstha
- 78 Manav Kalyan
- 79 Jeevan Shiksha
- 80 SocioEconomic Develp Org.
- 81 Indigenous Women and Children Foundation