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SECTION 1

PROGRAMME PLAN 2010-2013

Introduction

Origin

VANI was founded by a group of individuals who had dedicated themselves to the cause of voluntarism. They were convinced that voluntarism represented the power of sustainability and security of our new democratic nation and was a reminder of our ancient plural society. They believed that voluntarism was inherent in every individual and group struggling to bring a ray of hope to the deprived millions. VANI was born out of this conviction in 1988 as a national forum for the protection, enrichment and growth of voluntarism in India and as an entity, which would act as the promoter, protector and collective voice for the voluntary sector. In 1990, VANI became a registered society through the Societies Registration Act of 1860. Today VANI is the largest apex body of voluntary organisations with 19 network federations, 322 organisations and 42 individuals as its members. It has a strong base of 2500 voluntary organisations, spread out in almost all states of India. VANI has also become the coordinating agency for strengthening similar national networks in Asia. The partnership of such national networks is now spread in the countries of South Asia, South East Asia and Far East Asia.

About VANI

Over the past 21 years, VANI has strived to be a platform for national and global advocacy. VANI also facilitates state level advocacy on issues and policies confronting the development sector in India. VANI also plays the role of supporting coordination and action to support and promote voluntary action in the country. It has worked as a catalyst between central and state governments, bilateral and multilaterals on the one hand and the Indian voluntary sector on the other. It represents the sector's concerns and issues through advocacy, networking and sensitising the government, media, and public. Through the years, VANI has achieved recognition not only at the national level but also at the international level. VANI's opinions and views are valued and recognised by almost all stakeholders and its outreach is at the local, national and global level.

Objectives

- As a **platform**, it promotes voluntarism and creates space for voluntary action.
- As a **network**, it attempts to bring about a convergence of common sectoral issues and concerns for building a truly national agenda of voluntary action in the country. It also facilitates linkages of various efforts and initiatives of the voluntary sector in the country for a multiplier effect, to create and sustain the process of change in an organic manner.

- As an **apex body of voluntary organisations**, VANI works towards fostering value based voluntary action and long term sustainability among its members.

Vision

Works towards building a society where voluntarism and voluntary organisations play a dominant and constructive role in social cohesion, economic empowerment and nation building.

Mission

To act as a platform for research, advocacy, capacity building, sharing and learning on issues related to voluntarism and voluntary agencies.

Core Values

- **Justice and Equality** - VANI believes in equity and justice for every individual in society. This necessarily includes, gender, social, economical and physical marginalisation.
- **Participation, Accountability and Transparency** - VANI believes in promoting an accountable, transparent and participatory governance system among voluntary agencies.
- **Reciprocity and Mutual respect** - VANI believes in mutual respect and a relationship of equality among voluntary organisations and other partners in development.

Knowledge: VANI recognises knowledge as the key to social change and hence believes in creating, demystifying and disseminating knowledge to the voluntary sector and about the voluntary sector.

Identity

- VANI is a non government, not-for-profit, apex body of voluntary organisations, playing a proactive role in India's development process.
- VANI is India's premier voluntary sector association, and has members from almost all the states of India, including networks, research, grass roots implementing organisations and community based organisations.
- VANI catalyses change by working closely with government, donors and other stakeholders on policy issues, enhancing participation, accountability and transparency and expanding engagement opportunities for the voluntary sector through research, information dissemination, advocacy, public education and global linkages. It also provides a platform for sectoral consensus building and networking. Major emphasis is laid on projecting the positive contribution of voluntary organisations in socio-economic development and nation building.

SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities & Threats) Analysis of VANI

VANI's Strengths

- VANI is one of the few networks taking up the cause of the voluntary sector, which is common to all.
- VANI takes up the issues related to the very existence of the sector, like the registration system, financial regulations, space to participate, funding/ resource trends, human resource, internal governance, etc.
- VANI's views are well received and respected by the stakeholders as they are perceived as neutral, research based and represent the interest of voluntarism and society.
- Has a strong relationship with local, national and global fraternal organisations.
- Leading practitioners, policy makers and academicians of the voluntary sector are associated with VANI.
- Membership based, transparent network which values the principal of equity among members of different sizes, nature and location.
- Ability to generate momentum and mass while conducting research based advocacy campaigns, due to links with national and state level independent but similar networks.
- Extensive outreach with voluntary agencies, academic institutions, donors, media, private sector and government.
- Credibility with, capacity to convene and ability to catalyse diverse constituencies around emerging issues of common concern.
- Effective internal governance mechanisms and adequate financial, programmatic and monitoring systems.
- Systematic efforts have been made to link up with multiple stakeholders on issues of common concern.
- Recognised as the common voice of the sector by media, government and donors.
- Committed and competent staff in programme and support functions.
- Healthy and professional work culture.
- Strong and visionary leadership with diverse experiences through the Working Committees and the chief functionary.
- Strong and effective membership base in almost all states of India. VANI has an outreach to almost 2500 organisations through 332 members.
- Being located in the national capital, VANI has easy access to information and avenues where policy is made. VANI also provides support to its members, who are not in Delhi to address their collective issues.
- VANI has the basic infrastructure required to perform the role of a support and advocacy institution. This includes physical equipment like computers, etc along with a website and web based technology to share and gather information.
- Providing capacity building support to the voluntary organisations on issues like internal governance, financial mechanisms, urban and rural issues, social inclusiveness etc. VANI provides support to small and medium sized organisations by providing information,

opportunities for cross learnings through field visits and events like workshops, conventions and meetings.

Opportunities for Voluntary Organisations as assessed by VANI

- During the last few years, the trend of financial support to voluntary agencies has changed. The bilateral and flexible grant is disappearing and is being replaced by tenderisation of development. Voluntary organisations have to respond to tenders not only by the government, but also to many of the traditional funding support organisations. Eventually the voluntary organisations are today seen as efficient and cheap sub-contractors. This situation prompts an urgent need to take up the debate and reinforce the relationship of partnership in development.
- There is a growing need to address the issue of good governance of voluntary organisations, which enables them to raise the issue of good governance of public institutions. Complex and new terminologies and practices are being introduced, which require demystification and dissemination along with rationalisation. There is need to build the capacity of small and medium organisations to update their system of internal governance so that the whole sector moves at one pace.
- On February 9-10, 2010, VANI organised its 21st National Convention on the issue of “Partnership and Development”, where top leaders from the media, private sector and government interacted with almost 200 voluntary organisations. It was the house’s general consensus that holistic development was possible only if all of us work together. VANI intends to take this further by moving new players from charity, technical and philanthropy mode to partners in development. These will include CSR (corporate social responsibility), foundations, international NGOs, non profit ventures formed by celebrities, professionals and government, etc.
- The emergence of strong thematic networks requires a common thread to link them, in order to make the voluntary sector an influential player both nationally and globally.
- The absence of a resource centre (hub of information) and research based advocacy group/ institution to deal with the common issues of the sector as a whole, like governance, compliance, taxation, registration and financial practices.
- Desire of voluntary organisations to have state, national and global level networks to raise sectoral issues with the government, donors, and the media at local, state, national and global levels.
- Availability of new information technology to reach out to member and non-member organisations, to share information and organise the masses behind issues for advocacy.
- Various apprehensions and lack of information about the voluntary sector has led to a false image of the sector in society. This prompts us to take the sustained campaign of value addition and the sector’s important contribution to nation building, economic well being and social harmony. There is need to have an institution run such a campaign for public education.

Threats to the sector

- In the age of internal and external terrorism, more stringent rules and restrictions have been imposed on voluntary organisations.
- Voluntary organisations are seen as sub-contractors by the government and donors.
- The traditional space for participation on policy advocacy has been either captured by new players or is being closed.
- Shrinking of flexible grants forces voluntary agencies to go for consultancies and hence they do not have the resources to spend on institution building.
- Negative generalisation is affecting the sector by not only hurting its image but also demoralising people working in it.
- The traditional benefits are either taken away or are captured by financially rich institutions formed under the same laws as voluntary organisations. For example, the subsidised institutional land scheme is being captured by rich corporate hospitals and academic institutions. The deemed export scheme has been withdrawn. There is a proposal to tax voluntary organisations by citing the excuse of high financial transactions by such organisations. There is need to advocate the cause of the development voluntary organisation and demand differential treatment.

Overarching Strategies of VANI

1. Knowledge Building
2. Policy Advocacy
3. Convening and Strengthening Networks
4. Information Dissemination
5. Capacity Building
6. Synergy with Other Networks

Programmatic Framework

Programmatic streams for the next three years

- *Articulating the voice of the voluntary sector at the state, national and global level*
- *Strengthening the voluntary sector at the state and national level*

Objectives →	A. Articulating the voice of the voluntary sector through	B. Strengthening the voluntary sector by
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State Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation and monitoring of State Policy on voluntary sector • Articulating the concerns of the voluntary organisations in the formation, facilitation, monitoring and mid-course correction of 12th Five Year Plan • Articulating concerned challenges and opportunities faced by the voluntary sector specific to the state. • Dissemination and demystification of state, national and global policies, concerns and issues • Building partnerships among the government, media, private sector and political leadership • Creating synergy with existing networks on common issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building of voluntary organisations especially small and medium organisations in handholding and demystification of instruments of good governance and resource generation • Providing research back up and a platform for dialogue and negotiation with a variety of actors which influence the development sector • Facilitating research based advocacy on the issues specific to the state • Formation and strengthening state level network of voluntary organisations • Promoting and nurturing members
National Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting research based advocacy and platform building on development issues • Dissemination and demystification of regulatory mechanism on voluntary sector – setting up of citizen’s commissions, registration issues of voluntary organisations, FCRA, Direct Tax Code, etc. • Activation, implementation and monitoring of National Policy on Voluntary Sector • Articulating issues and challenges faced by civil society organisations on issues like – budget formation, formation of 12th Five Year Plan, Indian International Development Aid, FCRA, Income Tax etc. • Building partnership among the government, media, private sector and political leadership • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building linking networks at national level • Setting up an Information Resource Centre in VANI • Capacity building of voluntary organisations especially small and medium organisations in handholding and demystification of instruments of good governance and resource generation
Global Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building linkages with civil society organisations in major countries in Asia and also around the globe • Developing position papers on issues of global concern which will help civil society devise ways to participate in non-governmental global diplomacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating opportunities for learning and exchange among global platforms • Building, nurturing and strengthening national networks in Asia • Supporting and facilitating national networks of voluntary agencies in other countries • Sharing and learning latest trends and challenges facing the voluntary sector in

		global platforms •
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A. ARTICULATING VOICE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR THROUGH

This programmatic stream aims at articulating the voice of the voluntary sector on the concerning issues, through research, educational events and cross learnings. Under this Section, attempts will be made to work at the state, national and global level through forming and strengthening networks and linking with existing networks.

1. Strengthening National Policy on Voluntary Sector (NPVS) by formulation, facilitating and monitoring

NPVS was formulated and adopted by the Union Cabinet in 2007, and it still remains a dream. This document not only defines the relationship between the voluntary sector and government, but also reiterates the participation of both important stakeholders in national development. VANI would take up this activity at two levels, national and state level.

At the **national level**, VANI will work closely with the Planning Commission firstly to operationalise NPVS in various ministries and departments of the union government. This will include consultations with ministries, preparing a road map for each ministry for its implementation, educating voluntary organisations and the public about the importance of the document. Secondly, advocate with the union government to introduce NPVS as a Bill in the Parliament. The interventions in this category will include organising workshops, preparing documents specific to concerned ministries, developing education material for voluntary agencies, and preparing the Draft Bill.

The preparation of the 'State Policy for Voluntary Sector' is one of the desired goals visualised by the Government of India and the voluntary sector. Very few states have taken any step towards this end. VANI will further strengthen its state networks to take up the issue of preparing state policy. This will include interaction with the state government on one hand and educating and motivating voluntary agencies on the other. In the next three years, VANI will focus on critical states and facilitate the formation of voluntary policy. The interventions will include translation and dissemination of the National Policy in the state, formation of a committee to draft state policy, events to share and advocate with the government and public education.

Since 2007, VANI has already organised several state level consultations, so that it can promote civil society in several states to draft a state level policy on the voluntary sector.

These state level consultations on NPVS were aimed to take into account the need to operationalise the Policy, recognising the important role that the voluntary sector has to play in the implementation of this policy and affirming the growing need for collaboration with the voluntary sector by the government, as well as by the private sector, at the local, provincial and national levels. In 2007-2008 VANI organised consultations on NPVS in Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkand, West Bengal, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. In 2008-2009, consultations were organised in Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Manipur, Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Goa. In 2009-2010 follow up meetings were organised in Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, North East (Guwahati), Bihar, Chattisgarh and Gujarat. During these consultations 13 state level task groups were formed, which took on the responsibility of formulating/drafting the state policy on the voluntary sector. Each task group comprised of eight to nine prominent people from within the state.

VANI is now looking further by ensuring that by the end of three years at least 10 states would have their own state policy on the voluntary sector.

2. Strengthening state networks for articulating the concerns of the voluntary organisations for formation, facilitation, monitoring and mid-course correction of 12th Five Year Plan.

Five Year Plans are prepared by the Planning Commission of India, aiming to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting, as effectively as it may, a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of national life. In the following years, some of the Plans have been disrupted by conflict, drought, devaluation of the currency, recession and other issues. The 12th Five Year Plan is scheduled to be submitted in 2012, while the undergoing 11th Plan's (2007-2012) objectives are, meeting the needs of increasing the income and reducing poverty, more education opportunities for the masses with access to good health especially for women and children, a clear cut focus on infrastructure with due concern and efforts to retain a good environment.

In order to make the 12th Five Year Plan more inclusive of the concerns and suggestions of voluntary agencies representing marginalised communities, VANI will work in a two fold strategy. Through its state networks (as mentioned) VANI will organise studies and interactive events in various states. The findings and outcome of such state events and studies will be consolidated with the national study and event on the suggested targets and strategies for the 12th Plan. The objective of this intervention is to ensure equal involvement of the voluntary sector in drafting the 12th Five Year Plan, which would lead to the government and the voluntary sector getting more sensitised to the real development concerns of the country and devise ways to deal with them in partnership. It will also help in evaluating the progress of the 11th Five Year Plan with feedback from the grassroots.

3. Articulating concerned challenges and opportunities faced by the Voluntary sector

For the last few years three major changes have taken place, the exit of the flexible grant system, the voluntary sector's contribution being seen only in numbers, and shrinking space to participate and negotiate with donors and government. Due to the withering away of the flexible grant system, voluntary agencies have transformed into either sub-contractors or consultancy agencies. Since the task and objectives are pre-decided in this system, the voluntary sector is not able to work on a rights based approach. They are seen as cheap and efficient contractors for development projects, which have pre-decided activities and outcomes. The second challenge comes from calculating the impact of voluntary agencies in numbers, wherein only the input-output theory works. The calculation is simplified by money spent and the number of beneficiaries. In this process, the social contribution in the empowerment and mobilisation processes is neglected and not recognised. This has affected the perception of how voluntary agencies are seen by donors and the government in particular and public in general. There is need to highlight the social contribution of interventions run by voluntary agencies by documenting the experiences of large, small and medium size organisations engaged in either service delivery , capacity building or policy advocacy. The third challenge is not only the shrinking of traditional space of participation and negotiation with the donors and government, but also working for new spaces.

Recognising the fact that the situation in which voluntary agencies operate in India, the realities differ from state to state and also theme wise. VANI will work with its state networks to debate, discuss and strategise as per the requirement of each state. Similar efforts will be undertaken at the state level. This campaign will include research, documentations, interactions, media campaigns and books. The objective of this exercise is to educate the donors, government, media and public about the voluntary organisations and voluntarism in the country.

4. Research based advocacy on regulatory mechanism on voluntary sector – setting up of Citizen's Commission, (Registration and Financial Regulation)

For the last few years, the voluntary sector is witness to numerous experimentations on its regulatory system by the national and state governments. Voluntary organisations could be registered under the Societies Registration Act, Trust Act or Under Section 25 of the Companies Act. On one hand, there is a lot of variation in each state, and on the other, every one is registered as a not-for-profit organisation. There are government sponsored port trusts, corporate hospitals, private public schools and religious trusts, all registered under the same registration provisions. The high financial turn over entities, attract many strict tax regulations, which eventually make the running of the development organisation difficult. Similarly, the Trust Act of Gujarat demands part of the financial budget of the voluntary agency as the tax and Trust of Delhi is not even required to report anything. Similarly, there has been a change in the taxation laws governing voluntary agencies in the last few years. From 2007 the re-defining of 'charitable purpose' under Section 2(15) has started, which asks for income tax on services rendered by voluntary agencies. Under the proposed Direct

Taxes Code (2009), income tax at the rate of 15 percent has been proposed on voluntary agencies.

The liberalisation of the trade, industry and investment sector started in 1992, but the agriculture and voluntary sector is still under the clutches of vintage regulatory laws. The time has come wherein the voluntary sector should propose to the government the most feasible and effective law for its regulation, which not only differentially treats the development sector, but also provides space for its role in improving the quality of life of the marginalised. To take its mission and vision forward, VANI intends to constitute a 'Citizens Commission' of eminent persons from the media, government, and civil society to provide suggestions and inputs for policy change in the overall governance and regulation regime of the voluntary sector. The Commission will be provided with research and documentation support by the VANI secretariat. The Commission will study the existing laws in the country (at the national and state level), and the existing regulations abroad. Based on this the independent Commission will frame the governance policy for the voluntary sector in India, which will include registration, certification, taxation, and operating guidelines.

B. STRENGTHENING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Under this programmatic stream, VANI intends to strengthen the voluntary sector from within to face the challenges of changing times. Some of the challenges faced by the voluntary sector from within are; challenges of achieving their objective in financial constraints, demanding regulatory systems and opportunities to expand in new areas and linkages with new players within the sector. VANI will achieve this objective through research support, capacity building, platform building and disseminating the information.

1. Voluntary Organisations and Good Governance

VANI has been working on the issues related to activating and strengthening internal governance mechanisms of voluntary organisations, covering governing boards, statutory compliance and latest management techniques. There is a great demand for transparent and accountable governance systems within the voluntary agencies. VANI will not only disseminate and demystify the latest tools available for good institutional and project management, but will also conduct research and educational events at the state, national and international level. VANI will produce books, occasional papers and capacity building modules around this issue. VANI will primarily focus on small and medium sized organisations as they seldom get exposure to these concepts. Through its state and national network, VANI will create opportunities for cross learnings. It will build capacities of voluntary organisations on governance, statutory compliances, and new management tools.

2. Demystification and dissemination of state, national and international policy related to voluntary organisations

In this programme, VANI would be providing information about the latest policies, laws and practises to voluntary organisations. Many such changes do take place at the national level or at the global level, which are required to be followed by voluntary agencies. Unfortunately, information about such changes does not reach the grass roots level agencies. The recent examples of some changes are the visa requirements for international delegates, changes in the income tax laws, or applicability of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Lack of information eventually leads to harassment by the law enforcement agencies. VANI will provide this information through its local and national networks in workshops and also through its website and through regular communication. In the absence of such information, the voluntary sector is not able to articulate its opinion on such changes and most of the times they remain one sided.

3. Exploring the new thematic and programmatic areas for the voluntary sector

VANI plans to continue conducting research studies; developing base papers on the new thematic options and programmatic challenges faced by voluntary agencies. The topics covered would include CSR, public private partnership, disaster management, education, climate change, poverty eradication, etc. This strategy includes the critical and systematic study of issues, processes and institutions, which enable the voluntary sector and voluntarism to play a dominant and effective role in social and economic change. The knowledge creation strategy necessarily means building on the experiences and knowledge of the number of voluntary agencies working all over and uses this knowledge for the benefit of the marginalised community. VANI will not work on these thematic areas, but only provide base papers giving information about the current status, major actors, available options and probable supporters. Through this VANI intends to keep all the voluntary organisations updated on the latest developments, so that they can make informed choices.

4. Exploring partnership between voluntary sector and other stakeholders in development sector

In February 9-10, 2010, VANI organised its 21st National Convention on the theme of "Partners in Development" where more than 200 voluntary organisations interacted with top representatives from the media, private sector, government and political leadership. In today's world, development is like a complex puzzle where each partner has a piece of the puzzle. Unless every one works together, it will be difficult to achieve our goals. VANI will continue its attempts to bring diverse actors together for cross learnings, influence and collaborations. VANI will organise interactive events at the local, national and international levels with the media, government, private sector and political leadership. VANI will build on its ongoing relationship and goodwill to create an enabling environment to strengthen the voluntary sector and voluntarism.

5. Collectivisation of voluntary organisations at state, national and international level:

VANI is the only network of voluntary organisations which works on the issues concerning the very existence of this sector. We understand that to be effective in the development

scenario and also to become an important voice, there is need to further collectivise the sector. VANI has its associated networks in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. The informal networks are in Orissa, Rajasthan, Jharkand, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Karnataka, the north eastern states and Tamil Nadu. VANI will further strengthen this network and build new networks where they do not exist. VANI has members in almost all the states of India. The objective of this collectivisation is to share information, raise concerns and become an effective voice in negotiations with the government, donors and other important stakeholders. VANI organises national conventions to provide an opportunity to debate and discuss issues of common concern. VANI will start organising state conventions to discuss issues specific to that state. In 2009-2010 VANI organised such conventions in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, and Chattisgarh. The objective of this programmatic stream is to play the role of a convener and provide a network to act as a platform for voluntary organisations within and outside India. Within this framework, VANI will also work with existing networks created by organisations like CASA, ICCO, PRIA, OXFAM, DFID, Action Aid, CARE, and Christian Aid. In order to create synergy and a multiplying effect, VANI will work with members of these networks.

6. Promoting and nurturing membership

Being a membership based organisation, the soul of VANI lies with its members. Today VANI has 322 organisations as its members with an outreach to about 2500 organisations. VANI has members in almost all states of India. The membership of VANI gives weight and legitimacy to the advocacy of VANI; therefore, VANI will start a drive to further strengthen its membership base.

7. To be an information clearing house for voluntary organisations

Information is the key to the working of any institution today, but in this huge flow of information, there is need to have an information resource centre for the voluntary sector. There is need to collect the latest information from various stakeholders and disseminate the same to the voluntary organisations locally and globally. VANI will play the role of a storehouse and clearing house of information relevant to the sector. VANI will create an information bank of reports, publications and information from voluntary organisations on one hand and on the other collect information available in websites, journals and news papers. All this information will be abstracted and shared with voluntary organisations through its website, e-news letter and quarterly journals.

8. Strengthening linkages with civil society organisations in major countries in Asia and also around the globe

VANI's efforts have been ongoing to begin a process of working with national platforms in the Asian region. In developing this association, VANI involved national platforms in the region in various meetings in India on topics such as WTO, counter terrorism measures and

their effect on civil society organisations in Asia, to develop common understanding/positions on international development and non government diplomacy.

At present VANI is in touch with national platforms in Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, China, South Korea, Malaysia, Japan, East Timor, Thailand, Laos and Maldives, which will meet to strengthen linkages for their equal participation in regional and global non governmental diplomacy initiatives.

VANI also plans to develop position papers on issues of global concern, which will help civil society devise ways to participate in non governmental global diplomacy on these and other important issues like *development financing, climate change, regulation of agricultural markets, access to water and sanitation, conflicts prevention and resolution and fight against social exclusion and inequalities.*

The focus is to work on the projection of the voluntary sector by articulating an independent voice. VANI documents the concerns and experiences of voluntary organisations through research studies and conducts policy advocacy on the issues of the sector like financial and taxation policies, governance and registration policies, etc. The sector's image is distorted as the government only calculates its economic contribution and it is mostly seen as an efficient and economic sub-contractor. There is need to put forward to the world the important contribution made by the voluntary sector.

DELIVERABLES

- Meeting reports
- Articles/ Memorandums on policy changes
- Media coverage (Press Clippings)
- Appointments with concerned government officials
- Campaign reports
- Research papers
- Workshop reports
- Policy documents
- Increased and updated member base
- Regular publications and e-resources

MAJOR OUTCOMES

- Space for participation and discussion with the government.
- Strengthening of old and new networks at the state, national and global level.
- Developed partnerships with major stakeholders - government, media, private sector and political leadership.
- Reflection of concerns of the voluntary organisations in the formation, facilitation and monitoring and mid course correction of the 12th Five Year Plan.

- Developed linkages in Asian partners on issues of non governmental diplomacy.
- Increase and nurture active membership base in all the states.
- Dissemination of instruments of good governance.

SECTION 2

BACKGROUND

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Advocated for the simplification of Acts, Rules and Regulations pertaining to the voluntary sector

Society Registration Act

The society registration process falls under the prerogative of the respective states and they have different rules and regulations for the same. VANI decided to analyse all the State Acts and prepare a model Bill for Society Registration and Regulation that could be applied to all the states of India. After a series of consultations in different states, VANI developed a comprehensive Bill that proposed a simpler registration and reporting process. The document was handed over to state level networks, associations and federations to take up with their respective state governments.

Foreign Contribution Regulation Act

Immediately after the formation of the Janata Dal Government at the centre in 1989, VANI took up the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) issue with the new government and succeeded in initiating major changes in the FCRA rules in 1990. The major changes included amending the requisite bi-yearly reporting to a yearly exercise and converting the financial calendar from January-December to April-March of the following year. In 1993, VANI also succeeded in impressing upon the Union Government the need to simplify provisions of this Act.

The FCRA, 1976 was enacted to regulate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or hospitality with a view to ensuring that our parliamentary institutions, political associations, academic and other voluntary organisations, as well as individuals working in important areas of national life may function in a manner consistent with the values of a sovereign democratic republic. The Act was amended in 1984 to extend its provisions to cover second and subsequent recipients of foreign contributions and to the members of the higher judiciary, besides introducing the system of grant of registration to the associations receiving foreign contributions.

Significant developments, like a change in the internal security scenario in the country, the ever increasing influence of voluntary organisations, the spread of use of communication and information technology, a quantum jump in the amount of foreign contribution being received, and the resulting growth in the number of registered organisations, have taken place since the enactment of the Act in 1976 and its amendment in 1984. This, according to the government, has necessitated large scale changes in the existing Act.

In 1994, VANI succeeded in convincing the Government of India that FCRA and other Acts that govern the voluntary sector were obstacles in the functioning of the sector and therefore a comprehensive amendment was needed in all these Acts. The government committed that within three months the Planning Commission would come out with concrete suggestions for appropriate changes in various Acts including FCRA. When the Planning Commission failed to come up with suggestions, VANI constituted a task force of its own and recommended a number of changes in various laws, rules, regulations and formally submitted this report to the Prime Minister, Home Minister, Finance Minister and other concerned departments and ministries.

The Planning Commission intervened in the issue and as a result, The Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) set up a subcommittee to analyse FCRA and suggest appropriate changes. After a detailed analysis of FCRA, Foreign Exchange Maintenance Act (FEMA) and other Acts, the subcommittee found that the FEMA was already applicable to the voluntary sector and since the FCRA was in place, the sector was unable to use the simple provisions of FEMA. The subcommittee recommended repealing FCRA and adding and defining the word 'Contribution' in FEMA to make it Foreign Exchange and Contribution Management Act (FECMA). This recommendation was sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs by the Planning Commission and the ministry summarily rejected the recommendations of the subcommittee and the Planning Commission.

The Planning Commission again analysed all Acts, rules and regulations that governed the voluntary sector by setting up a task force, this task force also endorsed the recommendations of the CAPART subcommittee and argued that FCRA should be repealed. After sensing the mood of the Home Ministry, the task force suggested many amendments to simplify FCRA rules.

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Bill 2006

Cleared by the Union Cabinet in early November 2006, the FCR Bill prohibits the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions for “any activities detrimental to the national interest”, a vague standard all but inviting politicisation of such contributions. The Bill enlarges the categories of persons and organisations that are prohibited from receiving foreign contributions. It also imposes enhanced penalties for violations of its provisions while failing to provide for grievance redressal mechanisms. Under the guise of protecting India’s national interest, the Bill’s only accomplishment will be to empower the government to interfere in the inner workings of NGOs.

The Bill was brought in by the government to consolidate the law to regulate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions or foreign hospitality by certain individuals or

associations or companies and to prohibit the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions or foreign hospitality for any activities detrimental to the national interest and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The Bill also sought to repeal the present FCRA, 1976.

This Bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Home Affairs by the Rajya Sabha. The Standing Committee was chaired by Smt. Sushma Swaraj with several Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Members of Parliament (MPs) as its members. The Standing Committee went through the various representations as well as invited CSOs including VANI on several occasions, banks and other statutory bodies to depose before them. The committee gave its recommendation to Parliament and presented the same in the Rajya Sabha on 21st October 2008 and the Bill was supposed to be tabled for discussion in the next Parliament session post the General Elections 2009. However, it is still pending for discussion in Rajya Sabha.

Initiated debate on the Structural Adjustment Programme and promoting an Alternative National Budget

In 1992, when the Government of India (GoI) initiated the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), as per the International Monetary Fund and World Bank conditions to avail soft loans, the voluntary sector was confused and could not make a coherent response. VANI convened a national meeting in Tiruvananthapuram, Kerala to discuss the implications and develop a plan of action to address the SAP.

VANI initiated a programme to educate the voluntary sector on the probable impact of SAP. A series of meetings were held across the country and a number of booklets and brochures were published to disseminate the implications of SAP on different sectors and sections of society.

After due preparation and consensus within the sector, VANI embarked upon an advocacy trail to impress upon the GoI the ill effects of SAP. The GoI turned down all similar efforts and campaigns saying 'there is no alternative' (TINA) and hence the government was forced to implement the same.

VANI decided to break this myth of TINA and prepared an Alternative Union Budget and presented the same before the people prior to the presentation of the Union Budget of 1993. This became a major issue in the country as most of the opposition parties approached VANI to organise orientation programmes for their MPs before the budget session. Initiatives to meet MPs in small groups were undertaken and the budget session debates were based mostly on this alternative budget.

The achievement of this initiative could be judged by the statement made by the late Narasimha Rao, then Prime Minister of India. In his concluding speech of the session, he

said, "This session will be remembered forever because of the alternative budget prepared by VANI."

Faced the challenge of communalism, peace building and conflict resolution

The growing communalisation of Indian society in the late eighties culminated in the demolition of Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. Prior to this incident and during the communal riots in many parts of the country that followed the demolition, the voluntary sector, intelligentsia and all who believe in secularism and democracy were at a loss and could not forge a fitting response to the communal menace.

At a time when there was no strong opposition to the communal elements in the country, VANI decided to mobilise the voluntary sector to counter the communal and fundamentalist forces and to spread the message of communal harmony. A huge National Convention on Communal Harmony was organised in 1993 in Lucknow, where 2500 voluntary activists, political leaders, academics, artists, youth and women's organisations participated. The national convention resolved to initiate a systematic campaign against communalism and since then this became a major agenda of the voluntary sector. The genesis of the journal Communalism Combat could be traced to this session, where need for the same emerged and two of the participants volunteered to take up the cause. Many political parties, including the communists, participated in this session.

VANI is aware of the importance of citizen power in achieving a long term solution to conflict, since conflict manifests itself in different ways in our present society. It has been playing an active role in ensuring that the voluntary sector's perspective is taken into consideration when policies and laws are formed at the government level. The need for VANI to be a representative of all sections of the country increases manifold when talking about peace building, and conflict resolution. There are many times, when CSOs face the brunt of militants, extortionists, Naxalites and others, especially in those regions where security is a problem. In the past few years VANI has through several of its programmes both at the national and international level, tried to focus on building peace and resolving conflict and emphasising the role civil society can play in promoting the same.

Recast the sector to involve Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI)

Immediately after the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Indian Constitution, VANI initiated and organised a national convention to grasp the implication of these Acts in local self governance and the challenges before the voluntary sector. Until then, there was fear and distrust among the voluntary sector on the assignment of 29 types of activity in the Panchayat Raj Act (PRA) to the local bodies, as many in the sector felt that it would make them irrelevant in the developmental arena. After many discussions, PRA

emerged as an opportunity for the voluntary sector to take up the political role of empowering citizens, especially the marginalised sectors, and their local level institutions; and for the decentralisation of power which the sector had been campaigning for.

It was due to VANI's intervention and advocacy that the Gol set apart adequate funds for strengthening Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI). These funds were allocated to the state governments to initiate training programmes for the representatives of PRIs. CAPART developed a scheme for the empowerment of people's representatives and PRI functionaries. Eventually scores of voluntary organisations decided to work on this issue and it has become one of the major preoccupations of the sector.

Initiated human rights interventions

1993 was an important year in VANI's history as many of our sustained campaigns saw some results during the year. During the International Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, VANI was represented by a strong delegation. This delegation had a major impact on the conference discussions and they argued that all rights should be treated as human rights. The delegation's sustained campaign along with comrades from other countries saw success in the resolution and declaration of the Vienna Conference declaring all rights to be treated as human rights. Since then, the definition of human rights included women's rights, child rights, ethnic rights, economic rights and other mandatory civil and political rights. Before the Vienna Conference, we prepared a booklet that argued every right is a human right and all human rights organisations in this country were against it. This booklet became a rallying point for various organisations and found solidarity across the world. Following the Vienna Declaration and its plan of action, the National Human Rights Commission and its counter part at the state level were formed in India.

Raised income tax issues of the voluntary sector

Income Tax for the Voluntary Sector

In 1988, a Bill amending the Income Tax Act, which would have had serious consequences for the voluntary sector, was pending in parliament. VANI took up this issue and brought together the voluntary sector and evolved an action strategy to impress upon the Gol that it drops the proposed amendments. The campaign included writing letters to the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and bureaucrats and organising debates and discussions in political circles and the media. These efforts forced the Gol to withdraw the Amendment Bill from parliament. This was a major achievement for VANI's advocacy capabilities.

For the Income Tax and Society Acts, VANI set up task forces and suggested many changes in these laws. The important change suggested in the Income Tax Act was differentiating the definition of income between voluntary organisations and profit-oriented (business)

organisations. The task force that looked into society registration issues suggested that the development organisations should be distinguished from other organisations including religious, educational and other charitable institutions.

Pre-Budget Memorandum submitted to Ministry of Finance, Government of India

Since the past many years, VANI has been advocating for the simplification of tax laws for the voluntary sector, with the Gol. Every year before the budget session begins in parliament, VANI organises a consultation with representatives from NGOs, Chartered Accountants, finance specialists and other stakeholders to develop a pre-budget memorandum, which focuses on the issues of concern and the action taken by the Ministry of Finance on the memorandums submitted earlier. A number of inputs and views are shared at these consultations every year about the nature as well as interpretation of this amendment.

Redefinition of 'charitable purpose' in the Finance Bill 2009

The Finance Bill 2009 proposed an amendment to the definition of 'charitable purpose' under Section 2(15) of the Income Tax Act and consequently certain specific groups of voluntary organisations were not allowed to have any business activity whether incidental or otherwise, but later the Ministry came up with a draft Direct Tax Code Bill, which were more of a hindrance than the amendments done in the definition of charitable purposes.

After the analysis of this amendment, a number of inputs and views were shared to understand the nature as well as interpretation of this amendment. It was felt that the amendment in the definition of 'charitable purposes' in the Budget (2008) would impact the voluntary sector in more ways than one. Consequently, a memorandum for the Honourable Finance Minister and Chairman, CBDT was drafted to recommend doing away with the amendments. A delegation from VANI met with the Revenue Secretary in 2008 and submitted the same memorandum requesting support and cooperation in this matter.

VANI decided to continue its advocacy/information dissemination initiatives among member organisations on the issue. VANI as a national platform, requested all its members to send in letters / appeals to the Honourable Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh; UPA Chairperson, Ms. Sonia Gandhi and Mr. Rahul Gandhi to use their good offices to defer the implementation of this amendment to provide opportunity and time for the government to have some consultations with the voluntary sector on the rationales and consequences of the proposed amendment and gather as much support of the voluntary sector as possible.

Draft Direct Tax Code Bill

In its latest one sided experimentation with the voluntary sector, the Finance Ministry came out with the 'Direct Tax Code Bill', on August 12, 2009. The initial observation on these codes, applicable to all voluntary organisations of India, predicted a very gloomy future. On the one hand the government promised a decent life to common people and on the other, the country was going through a challenging phase due to financial recession and failure of crops, it was very unfortunate that those who were working hand in hand with the government to serve the marginalised and the poor were being targeted. The preliminary listing of the changes proposed in the new Direct Taxes Code 2009 appear to lead to several adverse implications for the voluntary sector and may perhaps undermine its financial sustainability and survival in the long run. Being an independent voice for the sector, VANI, decided to put forward its concern in front of the government, policy makers, media and public through a mass campaign with the maximum involvement of its members. It is being followed up on regular basis and is pending with the Finance Ministry.

Supported Planning Commission in developing and disseminating the National Policy on the Voluntary Sector

In 1994, because of VANI's intervention, a high level meeting with the Planning Commission was organised, where most of the senior ministers, including the Prime Minister, senior bureaucrats and members of the Commission, were present. After two days of intense discussions, a document called 'To Bring about Collaborative Relationship between Government and Voluntary Organisations' was adopted. Later the Prime Minister's Office adopted this document as the basic policy framework for the relationship between the government and voluntary organisations. VANI played a major role in drafting this document. The Union Planning Commission in 2003 brought out a Draft National Policy for the Voluntary Sector and VANI tried to evolve a response for the voluntary sector. Success came in the year 2007 when, the Union Cabinet formally approved the long awaited National Policy on the Voluntary Sector on May 17, 2007 and the year also marked the beginning of the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012), which promised to encourage partnerships between Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and government, particularly between CSOs and PRIs which also extend to joint implementation.

Drafted by the Planning Commission with the help of experts and NGOs, the NPVS, aims at creating an enabling environment for voluntary organisations and facilitating their partnership with the government. VANI has been closely associated with the framing of the policy, and feels proud of this accomplishment. It was indeed a landmark event in the history of the voluntary sector. For the first time, the GoI, through the policy, formally acknowledged the existence and the role of the voluntary sector.

As per the government, this policy is a commitment to encourage, enable and empower an independent, creative and effective voluntary sector, with diversity in form and function, so

that it can contribute to the social, cultural and economic advancement of the people of India. The government does acknowledge that the voluntary sector has contributed significantly to finding innovative solutions to poverty, deprivation, discrimination and exclusion, through means such as awareness raising, social mobilisation, service delivery, training, research, and advocacy. The voluntary sector has been serving as an effective non-political link between the people and the government. This policy recognises the importance of the role that the voluntary sector plays in various areas and affirms the growing need for collaboration with the voluntary sector by the government, as well as by the private sector, at the local, provincial and national levels.

Creating awareness about the policy and its salient features was the first step taken by VANI. Its dissemination amongst its stakeholders and later on discussing it through several and repeated consultations in different states made hundreds of organisations understand its real meaning. It was felt that it was important to convene consultations at the state level where this policy would be shared and debated by the representatives from the sector and an interface organised with the state government to ask them what they would do in response to the policy and whether they should also have a state level policy for the voluntary sector. Several state level task groups were formed, which took up the responsibility of formulating a draft state policy on the voluntary sector after assessing the local scenario.

Built the capacity of voluntary organisations

Since its inception, VANI has taken upon itself the task of building the capacity of voluntary organisations and setting an agenda for the voluntary sector. The capacity building initiatives involved organising discussions on emerging themes and agenda for the sector and training organisations to improve their governance and finance systems. The CSOs' declining image and credibility amongst the government and funding agencies led VANI to take steps in promoting good governance practices within the sector and following norms and guidelines set up by the government. Many years back VANI adopted a document called "Guiding Principles for the Voluntary Developmental Organisations" for enhancing the credibility of VANI members and its associates, they highlighted the positive and innovative work done by voluntary activists and helped in setting up the Credibility Alliance and coordinated its activities as a national facilitator. VANI at present is working on publishing a Resource Book on Good Governance in Civil Society Organisations in India.

Ensuring transparency accountability and democracy in voluntary organisations

In the late eighties, VANI took part in developing the document 'Non Governmental Organisations: Guidelines for Good Policy and Practices' prepared by the Commonwealth Foundation, which was adopted by heads of governments in Wellington, New Zealand. Since 1988, all VANI members have been following these guiding principles and it has become an important criterion for granting membership to new organisations.

In 1997, VANI adopted a document titled 'Guiding Principles for Voluntary Developmental Organisations'. This set of guidelines was the culmination of many previous attempts by both the government and voluntary organisations to make a code of conduct for the voluntary sector. In 2001, an independent process named Credibility Alliance was initiated to develop a set of norms for the voluntary sector. VANI was one of the prime movers and a core group member of this coalition.

A series of consultations about these norms were held across the country. It was then decided to have an independent organisation for facilitating the process of rating, validating and certifying voluntary organisations. This independent organisation would also embark on the capacity building of organisations that are not able to comply with the norms and help them reach an acceptable level of compliance. VANI coordinated this national process of evolving consensus for an independent organisation to ensure transparency, accountability and democratic practices in voluntary organisations. Now Credibility Alliance has emerged from VANI as an organisation of its own.

Became the voice of the Indian voluntary sector in global non governmental diplomacy initiatives

VANI's efforts have been ongoing to begin a process of working with national platforms in the Asian region. In developing this association, VANI involved national platforms in the region in various meetings in India such as WTO, Counter Terrorism Measures and their Effect on Civil Society Organisations in Asia, to develop common understanding/positions on international development and non-government diplomacy.

Following the association's initiatives, a formal meeting of various national platforms in the Asian region was held in Bangkok in 2008. It was attended by the representatives of the national platforms of ten countries and it was decided to formally begin the process of establishing an Asian Regional Coalition of National Platforms. The partnership involved developing country positions on specific issues, developing linkages among the members and linkages with other regional coalitions, working on non governmental diplomatic advocacy on issues of interest to the region, establishing the website for the regional coalition and developing a process of having a formal structure for decision making and taking forward the work of the coalition.

At present VANI is in touch with national platforms in Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, China, South Korea, Malaysia, Japan, East Timor, Thailand, Laos and Maldives, which will meet in yet another meeting to strengthen linkages for their equal participation in regional and global non governmental diplomacy initiatives.

Induction of quality members (networks/ federations, organisations, individuals/ activists)

In the early stages of its inception, VANI had 152 members and the number slowly kept increasing over the years since VANI kept promoting the induction of only quality and credible networks/organisations as its members. Today VANI has direct reach to 332 members and a base of 2500 organisations, many of them operating in several remote districts of the country.

KEY STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

The following key considerations emerge from the preceding analyses that have relevance to the future of VANI.

1. Voluntary organisations are playing a very important role in building a just and equitable society worldwide. There is need to reinforce this contribution in front of society, the government and other stakeholders. The sector's image is distorted as only economic contribution is mentioned and it is seen as an efficient and economic sub-contractor. There is need to make the world aware of the important contribution made by the voluntary sector.
2. There have been lots of changes with multiple reporting and statutory requirements for voluntary organisations. Due to perceived internal and external threats, many stringent laws have been imposed. The government is also coming up with proposals to tax the sector through, income tax, service tax and the prevention of money laundering rules, etc. Similarly, there is multiplicity and ambiguity in registration laws. There is a need to take up evidence based advocacy to streamline the governance regime of the sector.
3. Due to the emergence of new players, the development sector now includes a variety of players, which includes corporate philanthropy, religious charity, government sponsored people centric schemes, foundations etc. Similarly, the range, size and thematic areas of engagement of voluntary organisations vary from global to local. Almost all of them share the objective of a just and equitable world, but have weak interlinkages. There is tremendous opportunity to learn and share from each other.
4. The spaces and platforms for engagement with the government and donors are being redefined in this fast changing external environment. There is need to

create some new spaces and also reinforce and redefine the old spaces and platforms wherein engagement and dialogue can take place.

- 5.** Information is the key to the working of any institution today, but in this huge flow of information, there is need to have an information resource centre for the voluntary sector. There is need to collect the latest information from various stakeholders and disseminate the same to the voluntary organisations locally and globally.