

PACS Project for Networking, Advocacy and Capacity Building of Voluntary Organizations in Six States of India

Background

The project 'Building Networks of Voluntary Organizations for Promotion of Civil Society Actions in Selective States of India Under Poorest Area' was initiated by VANI on April 2005 with the support of Development Alternatives PriceWaterhouseCoopers in six states: Bihar, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Programme aims at building state level networks to strengthen civil society in six poorest states of India. The programme has successfully completed one year and it has been full of experiences and learnings. The strategy of VANI was to attach the state coordinators with nodal agencies in each state to provide supportive supervision and guidance. The nodal agencies identified are:

- Centre for Communication Resource Development (CENCORD) in Bihar;
- Lok Jagrati Kendra in Jharkhand;
- Samrthan in Madhya Pradesh; (New independent office)
- PRIA in Chattisgarh ;
- NCAS in Maharashtra;
- UPVAN in Uttar Pradesh.

In Uttar Pradesh, the strategy of VANI was to partner with an already existing network UPVAN (Uttar Pradesh Voluntary Action Network) to compliment the ongoing activities through financial and human resource support .VANI already has state co-ordinators for state specific operations connected with state level networking. The team working in the six states is as follows:

1. Mr. Ajay Gupta, State Co-ordinator
2. Mr. Basil Xess, State Co-ordinator
3. Mr. Nilesh Munje, State Co-ordinator
4. Mr. Rajesh Kumar, State Co-ordinator
5. Mr. Umakant Khaire , State Co-ordinator
6. Mr. Anurag Mishra, State Co-ordinator

The above team is supervised by a National Coordinator, Ms. Savita Sharma who reports to CEO.

Capacity building initiatives for State co-ordinators

a) Orientation on Programme

The state co-ordinators were recruited in the respective states and provided with orientation in VANI Office. During the orientation they went through the proposal and discussed it with CEO, VANI and national co-ordinator. The orientation programme provided them a clear picture on the project objectives, activities and strategies.

b) Training/orientation on networking

The orientation programme was held on 5th -6th May, 2005 at Sahbhagi Shikhsa Kendra Lucknow. In the orientation programme the state co-ordinators of all states including national co-ordinator participated. There were two objectives; first, to know the strategy of network and second, how the state specific issues can get focused in the process of networking. The programme was purely based on participatory approach. The following were the main topics of the programme:

- Why network
- Forms of Network
- How to initiate Network
- Limitations
 - Process
 - Objective
 - Arrangements
- Who are the stakeholders? Management of stakeholders \ Who should lead -LEADERSHIP
- Sustainability of Network
- Organizational Changes

This particular orientation programme provided the state co-ordinators a learning experience.

c) Participation in workshops and training organised by PACS organisations

The state co-ordinators also participated in workshops and training as which were organised by state PACS organisations and DA at state chapter and national level.

d) Meetings of PACS project team

i). Meeting of PACS project team was also organised on 5th September 2005 at VANI secretariat New Delhi. The purpose was to review the progress of PACS project, understand the limitations of state co-ordinators if any, to prepare action plan for the next quarter. Action points decided in the meeting were as follows;

- All the state co-ordinators will prepare a process documentation of their respective states on the network building
- The work on state news magazine will be expedited and efforts will be made to bring a newsmagazine at the end of October 2005

ii). ii).In addition, another two meetings of state coordinators were also organised on 28 February, 06 & 1 March, 06 respectively. These two meetings were organised at VANI, Delhi to sensitise and make state coordinators aware about national issues being perused by VANI and to take theses issues to CSOs in their respective states. Both the meeting were used to discuss state specific agenda and future course of action specially state programme implementation plans along with Macro PIP to be sent both to working committee of VANI and also PACS. These meetings proved fruitful in identifying major issues to be addressed in respective states under PACS operation and cross learning to be revived by each state coordinator.

Objectives of the programme

The following are the main objective of the Programme;

1. Strengthening state level networking process in the PACS states
2. Creation of enabling environment for the voluntary sector in India ,and
3. Enhancing public image for voluntary development organisations

1. Strengthening state level networking process in the PACS states

VANI is gaining visibility in state level networking and advocacy initiatives through partner organizations. VANI has identified issues such as Right to Information Act, National Rural Guarantee Scheme, state level networking, state policy for voluntary sector, good governance and Foreign Contribution Management Control Bill with highest priority and also developed strategic plan to address the issues. Following the strategic plan VANI organized a series of workshops and consultative meetings in respective states .The following are some of initiatives undertaken by VANI at state level:

A) Initial consultations with PACS project partners and strategic organisations:

In order to identify the issues affecting the civil society at large and the voluntary sector in particular initial consultations with PACS partners were organised in all the states. In the beginning one-to-one meetings were organised by VANI with as many voluntary organisations and individuals as possible. The purpose of these interactions was to understand the social and political environment in the respective states to facilitate the envisaged process of networking. Another purpose was to identify common state specific issues around which the networking process could be initiated .The processes of consultative meetings in respective states have been different as per the situation prevalent in respective states.

The following points reflect the process and issues identified during the consultative meetings:

- a) Jharkhand, One to one meetings were organised with VANI and PACS partner organizations to explore the need for such a network in Jharkhand. Later on, a series of consultative meetings were conducted on regular basis to find out the scope the scope of the network in the sate and common issues confronting voluntary action. The following issues were identified:
 - i). Notification issued by Bihar government on societies registrations and Jharkhand government's format for Societies Registration. Last June, the Government of Bihar published a notification in the local news papers which stated that voluntary organisations registered in Patna but now working in Jharkhand will lose their registration from 30 September 2005
 - ii). FCMC Bill and
 - iii). Image building and recognition of voluntary sector in Jharkhand.

b) Uttar Pradesh, VANI made successful efforts to collaborate with UPVAN a broad based state level network of voluntary organisations in UP with a focus on promoting the collective voice of civil society to impact the lives of the poor and marginalized people in the state. Networking is one of the activities of UPVAN for enhancing the identity, strengthening the cause and safeguarding the interest of the voluntary action groups in the state of UP. The issues identified are;

- FCMC,
- Poverty consultation and Panchayat elections;
- Right to information;
- Good governance;
- National Rural Guarantee Scheme were identified.
- Analysis of state policy for mid day meal in primary schools.

c) Madhya Pradesh, in the state, from the very beginning, emphasis has been on the formation of network. Initially personal contacts were made with organisations; afterwards a meeting was organised in which around 46 organisations participated and felt a crucial need of having a state level network of voluntary organizations. During the second consultative meeting decisions regarding the constitution of a small working committee and name of network were made. Followed a number of the consultative meetings with the working committee, the by-laws and name of network 'MADHYAVAN' were adopted. It was unanimously decided to take the 'Wada Na Todo Campaign through MPVAN' as a strategy to sustain the network. Following are the main issues identified to be addressed through MADHYAVAN;

- Strengthening local self governance for attaining development goals in MP and
- FCMC BILL

d) Maharashtra: VANI held consultative meetings with organizations of diverse identities and interest groups to discuss the possibility of facilitating a formation of state level network in Maharashtra and also to identify common issues affecting civil society organizations and people in general. These consultative meeting provided an opportunity to directly interact with voluntary organizations in their own working environment. Some of the prominent which were part of these consultations were NCAS, AFARM, YUVA, CYDA SPARCH, Slum Rehabilitation Society, RSCD and Green Earth. The issues emerged out of these consultative meetings can be broadly divided into two categories, Internal

issues of VOs and external issues. Internal issues were those of credibility, accountability, transparency, code of conduct, ethical issues etc which shapes the overall image of voluntary sector. Their was near consensus that VOs need to seriously introspect on internal issues & work collectively to improve the overall functioning and image of Voluntary sector.

The external issues which have the potential of hampering the progress made by VOs in evolving the larger development framework stressing on Community participation, Sustainability, Innovations etc for pro-poor development were discussed at length. One such issue was change in priority/policy of donor agencies. Donor agencies are slowly withdrawing form state due to change in their own priorities/policies. The other issue is the one which threatens the very existence of VOs is the proposed amendment to Bombay Public Trust Act. This amendment will allow state to appoint its official as "trustee(s)" for state VOs. This is seen as a covert move of state government to "control" VOs and curtail their freedom to advocate people centred development. During the reporting period, we have been engaged in exciting views on state level network with voluntary organisations. Some of the issues emerged during these interactions are worth mentioning:

- Such as Right to Information, Maharashtra EGS & NREGAS;
 - Proposed amendments to Bombay Public Trust Act ;
 - State's attitude towards voluntary sector;
 - Withdrawal of donor agencies' support from the state as they consider Maharashtra as ' developed state';
 - Unexpected potential of public private partnership in social development issues ;
 - Promoting voluntarism among the youth; and
 - Poor image of voluntary sector, promoting transparency and accountability issues within civil society organizations.
- e) Bihar. Initially the challenge was how to access the organizations in Bihar. Keeping this in mind consultative meetings with the VANI members in Bihar were organized. Since they were already members of VANI they could give some valuable suggestions as to how to proceed for forming a state level network. In addition, efforts were also made to meet all the prominent organizations already known to VANI members. Major issues identified during the meetings were:

- Issue of the Bihar State Aids Control Society demanding Rs. 1,00000 In lieu of granting the projects;
- FCMC Bill ;

- formation of inter-network platform of the networks of the state;
 - revival of ABVA ; and
 - good governance among CSOs .
- f) Chhattisgarh: In order to understand the status of network and CSOs in the state, VANI conducted a series of consultative meetings and carried out a short study to assess the importance of existing networks in the state and previous activities done in this regard. VANI -CG has identified six zones on geographical basis to facilitate the social issues coming up at the district and zonal level. Zonal level meetings are being conducted on a regular basis, resulting in a common action plan with the following points:
- Establishment of steering committee at zonal level;
 - Sensitising the media with regard to the contribution and issues of CSOs ;
 - Establishing a broad based network in the state so as to facilitate the communication with zonal steering committee;
 - Need for sincere efforts for the successful implementation of National Rural Employment Guaranty Act by holding discussions with different voluntary organizations of the state ; and
 - Good governance among CSOs

B) Formalization of networks in PACS States other than Uttar Pradesh :

Network building in Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar has been completed. In case of UP, efforts have been made to make the existing network (UPVAN) broad based and inclusive. Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh are well on their way to establishing state networks.

In Maharashtra, issue based sub-groups have been instituted and consultations on planning future strategies to address the issues have begun to take place. The formalization of network is under process. As far as current situation of networking in the state is concerned, there are good number of networks operating in Maharashtra which can be broadly categorised into issue-based network, regional network and donor-driven network. These networks are working within their own framework .Also there are sizeable number of loose networks and forums working on one issue or the other. But there seems to be absence of a broad based network with an objective to work on issues affecting people and voluntary sector in a holistic manner and sustained basis.

People (individual & organisations) believe that “state level network” needs to be institutionalised so that it becomes sustainable and grows into a pressure lobby for pushing social change. Also said network should lead to a collective body and entity, owned and sustained by its members, and be able to address the local development issues.

The voluntary organisations in state see VANI as a very credible organisation which possesses both expertise and experience in networking.

- a) *Madhya Pradesh:* Working with its partner organisation, Samarthan, VANI constituted a small working committee to work on network objectives, structure, rules and regulations. The draft document was circulated among NGO and PACS partners. During 12-13 September, VANI facilitated a workshop and meeting to form a local network, Madhya Pradesh Voluntary Action Network for registration. The draft guiding principles for the network was presented for the network to the representatives of approximately 40 civil society organisations. The group then decided on certain non-negotiable principles that the network shall abide by MPVAN was ready for registration. With respect to the state level networking process, it is envisaged that network should be engaged in different issues to be able to perform and also to assert its visibility among its members and other stakeholder. It was proposed to initiate Wada Na Todo Campaign. MPVAN and UNDP agreed to provide the funds for the campaign. The network has grown in strength over the period and has been successful in creating its identity at state level in government /media and civil society. *The details of Network are given in Annexure No. 1.*
- b) *Chattisgarh:* Meeting with NGOs in the state have been held to find out common issues and identify organisations that could initiate the process of building the network. Chattisgarh being a new state is confronted with many development issues. In Chattisgarh various NGOs and CSOs have welcomed the idea of promoting a state level network.
- c) *Bihar:* ABVA has been revived successfully and is known to be a broad based network of the voluntary organisations in the state. *For more details kindly refer to the case study 'NGO networking: processes, lessons and future challenges. In addition, the details of Network are given in Annexure No. 2.*

d) *Jharkhand*: All the formalities such as name, membership criteria, membership fee, opening bank account, registration, formation of steering committee and future direction of network have been completed. There has been a consensus on the name of network which is JVAN (Jharkhand Voluntary Action Network). The process of networking in Jharkhand has followed a short study on existing networks in Jharkhand initially. The study reveals that there are different types of issue based networks existing in Jharkhand. Most of them exist due to funds for specific issues. The objective of the study was to find out reasons for success and failure of networking so that we can derive some of the learnings in the context of initiation of a broad based networking process in the state. The state network in Jharkhand is expected to be put in place soon.

NGO networking: processes, lessons and future challenges

The background of networking in Bihar has hardly been promising. Reasons might have been many but prominent among them are the internal dynamics of the organisations and the issue of leadership. Moreover it seems the size of these networks formed so far were also prohibitively large.

Loopholes in the Formation Process

The question that arises out of this scenario is that why the political dynamics took over the network to the extent that it paralyzes the very functioning of the entire network? On the basis of interaction with the organisations we observed that all of these former networks were formed in a one-day workshop. The drawback of these workshops was that no screening process could be held for such a huge number of organisations and that too on such a short notice. This resulted in a gathering of all shades of organisations including those who were only interested in taking the leadership in order to have a say in the voluntary sector.

These very organisations were to arrive in the workshop with all of their followers. They also managed to come to an understanding with other organisations of same nature and get the posts fixed for them respectively. The result was that the combined strength of the followers swelled to be significant enough to be noticed by the crowd. No secret voting was involved in the selection process of the office bearers. During the process of selection of the office bearers, these supporters raised their voice in unison so that these pre-decided members could get their choicest post. This way the very process of the formation of the network proved fruitful for the unscrupulous organisations to have control of the network. Despite these obstacles Bihar do have some small but homogeneous networks, in small towns or districts. Some of these networks are based on geographical proximity, and some cater to the need of funding organisations.

In the course of interaction with different organisations it became obvious that almost all the organisations feel the need for such broad based network at the state level, but the initiative for the formation of the same is missing.

The most important factor affecting the formation of network in this state is the lack of trust among the organisations, which in turn give rise to the scramble for leadership. However, they were of the opinion that the acceptance of VANI among the organisations creates a healthy environment for the forthcoming network. We can also observe that all these organisations have formed one or the other network at their own level which makes the point obvious that they do have faith in the strength and utility of network.

Present Scenario

For our own convenience we can divide this organisation into three categories: *VANI members*, ABHA members and others. All these categories have their own thinking and their own respective concerns about

the impact of the network on the future of the organisations. VANI members were concerned about the indifference of VANI in the past; they accepted that the situation has lately improved. Overall they were positive about this new endeavour of the formation of a state level network and have expressed their support whatsoever is required in this process.

The ABHA members were also positive about the formation of the network but it was noticeable that barring one or two, no one was very keen to revive ABHA at its dormant stage. They have certain reservations about the conduct of some of the present office bearers. They also expressed their doubt on the intentions as well as personal integrity of these office bearers. Besides they also expressed their concern on the attempt of some members to dominate the board in collusion with these office bearers, there was a hint of the play of caste factor in this overall dynamics.

The ABHA members seemed to be more positive about the prospect of formation of a new network, which they emphasized to be more participatory, transparent and functional. They also showed their keenness in participating in the forthcoming meeting of VANI for the formation of the prospective network. Those who are not members of any of this network took a precautionary measure by adopting a wait and watch policy and until now are keeping a safe distance. They supported the idea of the formation of the network but seemed to be apprehensive regarding the impartiality in the network.

Strategies followed:

Initially the strategy adopted was to have a personal interaction with almost all the well known organizational heads, in order to know the reality and their perception of the network at the state level. In the follow up of this process we organized a workshop in which the idea of the formation of this network was floated.

The actual strategy of the formation of the network was adopted there only. After the workshop the real scenario was more visible and it was much easier for us to understand how to proceed

Lesson learnt, We should start with a meeting of a very small number of organisations, at the most 20 organisations, carefully selected with a thorough screening process to get only the scrupulous organisations. In that meeting the shape of the prospective network including the criterion for the selection of the member organisation should be decided.

The formation of a network of fair and credible organisations in the inception would naturally provide a reasonable and genuine nature and character to the network. This character would be easy to carry forward and this would provide the much-needed stability to the ensuing network.

2 Creation of enabling environment for the voluntary sector in India and enhancing public image for voluntary development organisations:

2.1 Thematic workshops on issues:

Thematic workshops on 'challenges to development and voluntarism' were held in all the six states. These workshops proved helpful in developing strategies to address the challenges and issues. Following workshops were organised:

a) GO-NGO Collaboration Initiatives:

(i) GO-NGO Relationship: Present Perspective and Future Prospects' Concentrating its efforts towards working with

and strengthening an already existing state level network, VANI and UPVAN have recently organized a one day state level workshop on 'GO-NGO Relationship: Present Perspective and Future Prospects on 30 March, 2006 in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh in which 169 representatives from government, civil society organizations and media participated. The workshop came up with following outcomes as future strategies:

- Stakeholders should come together to have an understanding of their views and modalities ;
- Greater credibility in voluntary sector needs to be improved through transparency and accountability; and
- Planners in government need to be more sensitive towards the critical role of VO in field operation.

(ii)Drafting the policy for training Panchayat representatives:

After the conclusion of Panchayat elections in state of Uttar Pradesh it was decided that sincere efforts should be made to train the newly elected panchayat representatives to make the Panchayat much more meaningful. Representatives from VANI, UPVAN as well as SAHBHAGI participated in the workshop on 17 September 2005 to finalise the issue of training for the Panchayat representatives. It was proposed by all that a concrete work plan for training the representatives should be drafted out and the same should be submitted to the ministry as well as other funding agencies to get their view on the same. It was agreed upon that the role of CSOs will be crucial in imparting training to the Panchayat representative. Some of the important decisions that were taken up are as:

- Appointment of nodal agency for the training of Panchayat representatives. Names of SAHBHAGI and SIRD were proposed for the same as the two agencies were well equipped for providing training in the above matter.
- Training to all the Panchayat representatives to be completed by May 2006, which will help in better functioning of Panchayat.
- The training should also be imparted at Panchayat as well as cluster level.
- In house training should be imparted at block level with sufficient availability of infrastructure and resource material.

- Separate facility of in house training should be made available for the women representatives at the Panchayat level.
- Use of print as well as electronic media should be made to make the training effective.
- It was also decided that a three-member team would make a visit to UNDP office at Delhi for requesting them to check the utilisation of fund allocated under the training programme.
- It was also proposed that a delegation would also meet the representatives of state government to built pressure for timely training of the Panchayat representatives.

(iii) 'Development of Bihar: Roles, Responsibilities and strategy for the Voluntary sector': A one day state level workshop was organized by VANI in association with ABVA in Patna on 20 February 2006 on 'Development of Bihar: Roles and Responsibilities and Strategy for the Voluntary Sector' where more then 245 participants from different fields participated. This was the first time that three networks of Bihar i.e. ABVA, CNRI and BVHA came together on the same platform in an effort to work in close coordination from now onwards so as to achieve a real impact at the state level. The workshop proved helpful in finding out the following future area network:

- co-operation between NGOs and the government;
- Formation of a joint form of all the networks at the state level to make their presence felt; and
- Ensure transparency among the organisations to make them more accountable.

(iv)'Strengthening Local Self-Governance for Attaining Development Goals in MP': MADHYAVAN along with Samarthan and Srijan Lokhit Samiti organised a state level workshop on 'Strengthening Local Self Governance for Attaining Development Goals in MP'on 20-21 December 2005. Approximately 300 hundred participants including, senior government officials of state, political leaders, media persons, organisations like UNICEF DFID and PACS and representatives of PRI's to share their experiences in delivery of basic development goals and bottlenecks faced by them to achieve these goals .

(b) Good Governance:

Right to Information Act, 2005: The thematic workshop on Right to Information Act 2005 was organised on 26 of November at the state centre Ranchi. In the workshop a total of 132 heads of organizations including government officials, bureaucrats and media persons participated .The objective of the particular workshop was to bring a clear understanding on the act and practical implementation of this act at grassroots level. The workshop came up with the following suggestions:

- Read, study and understand the act and identify areas of follow-up;
- Make simplified materials of the act in the form of pamphlets, booklets, wall painting etc;
- Setting up of an information centre for information collection and sharing;
- Strengthening and sensitising Mahila Mandal, Youth and Citizen leaders for RITA;
- Core team of NGOs to interest with district block information
- Focus of practice and not much on theory;
- Strengthening of NGOs own internal management;
- Collaboration with government ;and
- Motivation and capacity building of NGOs state dept/dist/block level officials.

Strengthening gram sabha –demand for information should arise from the ground level .In this context a village information centre should be created

Right to information and NREGA For Women Development in Today's Era: A one day workshop on 'Right to information Act 2005 and National Employment Guaranty Act, 2005 was organised on 27 March 2006 in *Jamshedpur* to celebrate Women' s Day .Approximately 100 participants from 22 social organisations of east and west Singhbhum and Saraikela district of Jharkhand participated. The outcome of workshop was as follows:

- To use Right to Information Act as a tool to facilitate transparency, to ensure accountability and prevent corruption; and
- To raise awareness among mass on NREGA .

Right to Information Act and National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005: A one day workshop was organized on 20 March, 2006 at Simdega by VANI Jharkhand and Simdega Vikash Manch. In the workshop a total number of 350 participants from village level institutions, college student's

academicians, NGOs and media persons participated .The workshop started with following objectives:

- To develop an understanding about the RIA and NREGA and its various provisions;
- To discuss the role of civil society organisations to operationalise the Act;
- To know about the government's initiatives and plan of operation of the Act;
- To discuss and decide how to collaborate towards implementation of the Act; and
- Decide the Action area of the civil society organisations.

Right to Information Act and National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005: A one day workshop on RIA and NREGA was held on 29th March 2006 at Jan Vikash Kendra, Hajaribagh in Jharkhand .A total number of 59 participants from different field participated in the workshop. The main objective of the workshop was to bring clear understanding among NGOs heads so that same may be percolated at ground/village level in their respective project area.

MADHYAVAN, the state level network developed by VANI in MP, organized workshop on 'Right to Information' on 23 March,2006 in Bhopal in which 70 delegates including NGOs, media and government participated and they decided to:

- Join hands with 'Wada Na Todo Campaign',
- Address the issue of Right to Information
- Encourage the CSOs to join the network
- Use VANI website to disseminate information about the network

c) Foreign Contribution and Management Control Bill:

Bihar Government's Notification on Societies Registration and Foreign Contribution and Management Control Bill: VANI and voluntary organizations of Jharkhand organised one day state level workshop on Bihar Government 's Notification on Societies Registration and Foreign Contribution and Management Bill at Ranchi on 12 of August, 2005.The objectives of workshop were: to bring all voluntary organizations of Jharkhand under one umbrella to protest against the notification of Bihar Government and to make them aware of FCMC Bill 2005 and raise collective voice to make affirmative change on the bill which would be favourable for the voluntary organizations .A total of 110 participants including media persons participated in the meeting .The following strategies were developed during the workshop:

- Decided to submit the memorandum to Chief Minister, Chief Secretary and IG, Registration;
- Decided to meet chief minister, Jharkhand;
- Decided to file writ against the decision if decision not taken.

A state level workshop of CSOs in Uttar Pradesh in context to FCMC bill 2005 --- A state level workshop on the FCMC bill was organized on 1st September at Gandhi Bhawan premises to discuss on various issues of the bill, which will affect the working of organization. In all about 60 participants from different civil society agencies including representatives of VOs, media, academia and donor agencies participated in the workshop and express their views on the same. In the concluding session. The workshop came up with following points in the context of Uttar Pradesh:

- The voluntary sector should draft an alternate bill in context to FCMC, to be sent to Government;
- To create awareness among the representatives of Voluntary sector through district level workshops and seminar;
- Advocate the issue with the help of print and electronic media;
- The people's representatives should be made aware about the bills through email to gain confidence and to initiate a process of dialogue among them; and
- It was also decided that a mass awareness campaign should be initiated across all the states in the country on same dates, which will definitely build pressure on the policy makers.

The workshop concluded with a consensus to spread awareness among the VOs and other such agencies at respective district as well as grass root level for getting favourable changes in the bill.

FCMC Bill: VANI organized a workshop on 'FCMC Bill' on 5TH December 2005 in Raipur in which approximately hundred participants representing civil society organizations from all districts of Chattisgarh participated .All the participants unanimously rejected bill and extended their support to VANI on this issue

(d)Task force for drafting state level policy for the voluntary sector:

The steering committees including policy analyst, social activist have been formed in all the states. The members of steering committee have not only supported in identification of issues

but also in the development of the strategies to address the issues.

2.2 Advocacy with state departments on issues of state acts and policies and regular dialogue with political parties, leaders and executives in power:

i) Jharkhand; BIHAR GOVERNMENT'S NOTIFICATION ON SOCIETYREGISTRATION (Ref. No. B.S. 3-101551/2000-350 Patna dated: 06.05.2005)

Process Followed: On this issue already Jharkhand Swekshik Manch (JSM) formed by PACS partners was working before our launching in the state. Voluntary organisations of Jharkhand came under one umbrella to fight against the decisions taken by the Society Registration Department .The organizations filed a writ in this regard and following the same two hearings have taken place in High Court .Now situation has come that Bihar Registration office and Jharkhand office are throwing ball on each other. Both are blaming to each other on the notification issues in different newspapers. In the month of October and November a decision was taken that all organizations must submit their by-laws, memorandum of association, registration number. etc.

State initiatives: We had meeting with the existing VANI members and strategic organizations in Social Development Centre (SDC) in the month of July 2005. The members took a decision that we shall not work parallel to JSM but we will support JSM's initiative on this issue.

Second step was to attend the meeting organized by JSM and other organizations on the same same issue and tried to know the ground reality and progress of JSM. After discussion with the members and suggestion of JSM we members of the organizations thrice met IG Registration Mr, K. Vidyasagar and invited him to attend the State level workshop at SDC. The IG Registration gave his consent to attend the workshop. We also met personally with Mr. Yusuf Khan and Mr. Dilip Toppo (Secretary of Government, Registration)

On 12th August 2005 we organized State level workshop in which representatives of Mr. K Vidyasagar Mr. Dilip Toppo and Mr. Yusuf Khan attended the workshop and clarified the issue. After workshop we including Mr. Pooran Pandey, CEO – VANI, Delhi submitted the memorandum to Mr. K. Vidyasagar.

Later on JSM again organized meeting and took a decision to file the case against Jharkhand Government. On this case a total of

two hearings took place. JSM requested to all Voluntary organizations for financial help. We had meeting and we decided to help JSM finally.

OUTCOME OF OUR INITIATIVES

- All Voluntary organizations directly or indirectly supported our initiatives and participated in the meeting and workshop;
- Mr. K. Vidyasagar accepted our memorandum;
- Extension of time for re-registration in Jharkhand till 18th November 2005;
- Format developed by Registration Department taking into account of our inputs; and
- Legal entity of the organizations will remain as it is in the state.

Recent Development: Prabhat Khabhar, May 26, 2006

The Registration Department, Jharkhand Government has again extended the time for re-registration till July 17, 2006. Kindly visit www.jharkhandgov.in

ii) Bihar: ABVA took the issue of Bihar state AIDS Control Society demanding Rs. 1,00,000 as bank guarantee in lieu of granting the projects .It raised the issue on how the voluntary sector or non-profit organisations can provide a bank guarantee of the said amount. This would a trend for other funding organizations that can be detrimental to growth of the voluntary sector .Keeping these issues in mind, a committee was formed to take some remedial action on this issue. The committee organised a meeting on the issue and decided to submit a formal letter to be sent to the concerned government department and relevant ministries. The network in association with other civil society organisations submitted the letter to special secretary of Bihar government, secretary Health and deputy project director of Bihar State AIDS Control Society, Patna .

OUTCOME OF OUR INITIATIVES:

Following the resolution of ABVA on opposing the scheme, a letter was sent from ABVA citing the drawbacks and problems in the demand of this one lakh Rs. As guarantee. In the follow up of this letter the WDC(Women Development Corporation) has not only withdrawn the demand of one lakh bank guarantee but has also returned the lakhs of rupees drawn earlier for the

scheme .WDC is a corporation and funds come from the world Bank .This comes under Ministry of Social welfare.

iii) Meeting with political leaders in Chhattisgarh: VANI organized a meeting on 22nd Feb, 2006 with senior Congress MALA, MR. Ramchandra Singdev on role and contribution of voluntary organizations and need for user-friendly government policies for the voluntary sector in the state.

2.3 Linkages with the media:

Involving and sensitising media has been part and parcel of the strategies developed to address the state issues in all states under PACS. As a result, media has proved a strong tool to create better understanding and image of voluntary sector in the society. In every state, sufficient number of media persons has been identified who are sensitive on the issues and have better position to raise the voices of civil society. So far state media has effectively covered the issues raised by VANI at state level .*For more detail kindly refer to the press clippings (Annexure No.2.).*

For instance, in Jharkhand effective linkages have been established with media including Hindustan, Hindustan Times, Prabhat Khabar, Dainik Jagran and Ranchi Express. They are usually invited to participate in the meetings and workshops as well as requested then to highlight the event in their respective Newspaper.

2.4. Organised a National Level Convention of voluntary agencies to demonstrate collective strength and dialogue with other section of the society:

We made sincere efforts to organise a national level workshop. But due to initial stage in the respective states more time and energy were required at state level. By this year, as we would have completed the initial phase of situation analysis and issue identification. On the basis of the outcome, we would address the issues at national level. In addition, we have effectively addressed some of national issues such as FCMC , review of 11th five year plan, quantification of NGOs contribution to GDP ,capacity building for VOs in country and national policy for CSOs.

2.5 Establishing strong communication linkages and information dissemination packages using software technology:

Publication of Newsletter – The first volume of newsletter - **VANI, Jharkhand** was published in the second week of January. This particular newsletter covered the period of April until December 2006. A total of 500 copies of newsletter were published in the first volume and were circulated among academic institutions, voluntary sector and social activists. The second volume of the newsletter is also ready. We have also received feedback from many people about the news magazine. Every one has appreciated the newsletter as it has proved helpful and useful for them. *For more detail kindly refer to the press clippings (Annexure No.3.).*

Bihar, with the discussion and with the consent of all members present in the meeting of steering committee, the name of the newsletter was kept '*ABVA Sanvad*' for smooth functioning of the publication of the newsletter the editorial board has been set up. The frequency of the newspaper has been scheduled to be on quarterly basis. The contents of the newsletter were decided to be the experiences and the information different scheme available to the VOs by the government and other agencies.

UP: During the period two issues of UPVAN News Bulletin in English were published with particular reference of VANI desk under PACS programme. Hindi news bulletins of 'UPVAN Ki Baatein' in Hindi, a bi-monthly publication has also covered the news from VANI in separate columns.

MP: Hindi news letter '*MDHYAVAN*' focusing on networking has already been published and circulated widely among all stakeholders of voluntary sector. The frequency of the newspaper has been scheduled to be on quarterly basis.

The newsletters of Chattisgarh and Maharashtra are under development and will soon be printed.

Information centre and data bank-Every state under PACS has been acting as an information centre on state specific issue and had been catering questions and queries of local CSOs involved in various development activities. VANI has identified partner organizations to locate state coordinators with these organization and also supporting state coordinators in having state specific policies /government orders/ circulars /notification/newspapers carrying important information for voluntary sector. Each office has built not only a good collection of data bank and various state polices but also developed a comprehensive list of voluntary agencies with their strengths and activities that they have already been performing in states. This also helps each state office to act

as an effective facilitator providing important information to all stakeholders of the sector and also facilitate networking among other voluntary organizations with diversified interests and activities .We also plan to digitise these resources and make them available to every state as early as they are ready. VANI Delhi in due course of time will also provide linkages to the website to these states .VANI has given a separate space for PACS in its website which has information on each state.

2.6 Issues addressed at national level

FCRA/ proposed FCMC bill

FCRA was enacted in the year 1976 to regulate the acceptance and utilization of foreign funds in the country for developmental, academic and religious activities. FCRA is parked at the Ministry of Home Affairs, which executes matters relating to receipt, monitoring and utilization of foreign funds received by duly registered entities. It is a well-established fact that the original premise of FCRA was to restrict the possibility of foreign funding to political parties in India. Successive governments continued with the legislation which impinges on the political and civil liberty of civil society organizations (CSOs). As a part of liberalization policy introduced in 1991, the Government of India brought Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) replacing Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) in 1999. This replacement heralded a new era of progress and prosperity for the country as a regulatory mechanism was changed to maintenance mechanism for the benefit of the corporate sector. However, in July 2005 MHA brought out the Foreign Contribution Management and Control (FCMC) bill 2005 to replace FCRA. The proposed bill is more stringent in nature. Consequently, VANI in association with Voluntary Organizations has analyzed the proposed bill and found the following provisions of the proposed Bill as affecting the sector adversely:

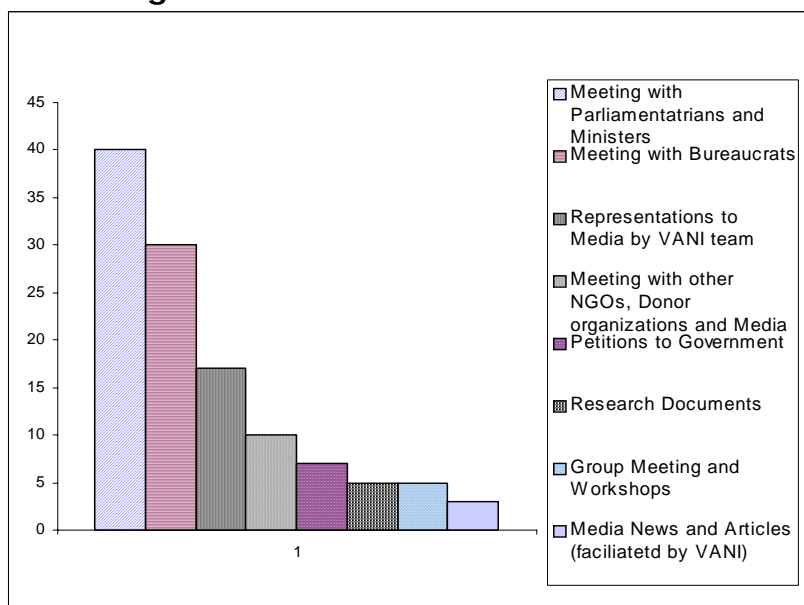
- Already registered organizations who currently have approval to receive foreign funds would need to re-register within two years instead of automatically keeping on receiving funds;
- NGOs would need to obtain a renewal certificate every five years;
- The proposed bill has provisions like suspension and cancellation of registration certificate and the offense committed would be criminal and not of civil in nature as in the case of FEMA ;
- Also restricts association not to exceed 30% of the total contribution on administrative expenses;

VANI 's Response to FCRA/proposed FCMC bill

VANI has been advocating and pressing the government for a better FCRA regime for the voluntary sector. In order to address the issue, VANI organized group and individual meetings with various stakeholders and represented the same through the media. Some of the activities undertaken during April 2005 to March 2006 are as follows:

- On May 17th 2005 VANI held a meeting of CSO experts to review FCRA and made recommendations to Ministry of Home Affairs. From July 2005 VANI started advocating for a better regime in FCRA regime and convincing the government that the proposed FCMC bill is not warranted as FCRA is already there. Our position has been that voluntary sector is not against the law but what it wants is user-friendly and transparent conditions for smooth functioning of the voluntary sector. The strategy adopted is to sensitize media, politicians, and bureaucrats against the proposed bill. VANI also held regional/state level consultations in Chattisgarsh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Trichy, Gujarat, Goa, Maharashtra on FCMC. VANI also brought out the appeal and submitted petitions to the Government.
- On 18th July 2005, VANI organized meeting on the strategies for FCMC campaign at VANI Secretariat
- As part of the campaign to generate awareness of and collective voice against FCMC Bill, a group of chartered accountants, advocates and heads of voluntary organizations met at PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) House in new Delhi on 17th December 2005. The group discussed provisions of the bill and its implications and submitted a joint petition before various concerned departments and ministries of the government.
- VANI also used its contacts with bureaucrats, politicians, and media and inter governmental organizations to influence the government on the issue of foreign contribution bill.

Figure 1. Activities Related to FCMC



VANI's representation to the Reserve Bank of India over its categorizing of NGOs in high risk customer category

On February 21st 2005, RBI released a circular on 'Know Your Customer' '(KYC) Guidelines and Categorizing NGOs in High Risk Customer Category. Providing its comments on the circular, VANI petitioned before the RBI to delete NGOs out from the list of high risk customers through a subsequent notice in order to facilitate a smoother mechanism for opening bank accounts by NGOs, especially at grassroots, besides improving the image of NGOs in the eyes of banks and local public, caused due to the circular. Followed by VANI's efforts, RBI has since written back to VANI explaining the issue and assuring VANI that the circular is just an advisory and will not impact voluntary sector.

VANI's petition on sector specific legislations and norms

On May 17th 2005 VANI facilitated a meet of CSO experts to review the accounting standards brought out by the Institute of Chartered Accountants and some provisions of the Income Tax Act which affects NGOs. In addition, VANI in collaboration with ICAI has planned to organize workshops and training for the capacity building of civil society organizations in respect of legal framework and financial management. There are various specific and critical issues which are in urgent need, of being addressed. FCMC, Tax related acts, various registration acts, promoting governance and simplification of existing rules and laws are some significant issues for which VANI plans to work with ICAI.

National Policy on Voluntary Sector

Since its inception VANI has been demanding a policy document on the voluntary sector in India. After prolonged advocacy, the Planning Commission of India constituted a pool of experts to work on the draft policy in 2005. The Commission assigned VANI to chair the expert group on capacity building & training and governance. The expert group has worked on the draft policy and recently submitted it to the Planning Commission. The Policy is currently at an advanced stage of discussion within the Planning Commission and it is hoped that the national policy for voluntary sector should become a reality soon. The policy has been cleared by IPC and is at advanced stages of its submission before the Cabinet for its approval. The national policy on voluntary sector will be a landmark event in the history of voluntary sector and a feather in the cap of VANI.

Bilateral and Multi Lateral Aid policy

VANI continues to represent voluntary sector on the issue of bilateral and multi lateral aid policy. On December 24 2004, Chair and CEO of VANI met with Dr. Rakesh Mohan, the then Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), on the issue.

CEO, VANI also petitioned before Mr. Ashok Chawla, Additional Secretary, DEA, Government of India to simplify the procedure of direct bi-lateral funding given to the CSOs directly on March 29 & 31, 2006. A formal representation on the issue has been submitted and VANI has been assured of a positive outcome on the issue soon.

VANI also participated in a high level consultation on aid harmonization in Paris. Dr. Yogesh Kumar, VANI working committee member, attended the meet where he presented efforts of VANI in relief and rehabilitation of tsunami hit areas.

VANI also participated in the World Social Forum took place from January 24th to 29th, 2006 at Mali in South Africa on the invitation of Coordination Sud. Mr. Sharad Joshi Secretary of Cecoedecon participated actively in various consultations and conferences organized by civil society organizations.

GO-NGO Collaboration Initiatives

VANI has made following efforts to establish an adequate relationship between government and non- government organizations;

- It initiated the process of establishing a GO-NGO Co-ordination Committee at the national level at planning

commission and subsequently at state levels for better coordination when disasters break out. VANI in consultation with voluntary sector and other stakeholders has been able to convince the Planning Commission to have a national level GO-NGO coordination committee to monitor and interface with state governments in times of disasters. VANI is now planning to take this matter with the state governments and request them to follow the same model for effective and better co-ordination between the state and the central ministries during the times of disasters.

- On 28th November 2005, VANI hosted a meeting of core group members of Sphere India, a consortium of NGOs involved in Disaster Management Bill. VANI has also been part of Sphere India's core group that is currently developing mechanisms to improve NGO-coordination in disaster management
- On 9th January 2006, a meeting was organized to facilitate GO-NGO co-ordination for Jammu & Kashmir earthquake relief and rehabilitation work under the chairpersonship of Dr. Syeda Hameed Member, Planning Commission. VANI's role as a facilitator has been appreciated by Planning Commission in this regard.
- VANI due to its stature and being the apex national association was also invited by the Ministry of Finance, government of India to participate in the half day consultation on issue of food subsidy and the role of the civil society organizations in improving efficiency and delivery mechanisms in institutions such as Food Corporation of India (FCI) using the governance model as followed by voluntary sector on 20th May 2005

Good Governance

Internal Governance

VANI made special efforts to keep intact its internal governance system through the following means:

- **Comprehensive and composite website:** To facilitate speedy information dissemination, VANI launched its website in March 2005. Apart from publishing various news and events which affect voluntary organizations, the website provides details of VANI member as well. The website of VANI since its uploading since March 2005 has received 16000 hits and is a sought after information bank for all stakeholders of voluntary sector.

- **Civil Society Voices:** Since March 2005, VANI has been publishing quarterly news magazine which covers a wide range of issues in each volume. The magazine has gained a status of sorts as it carries besides news, events, articles and write ups a host of useful information such as government circulars, advisories and information that voluntary sector can use to their advantage. The magazine currently has a readership base of 10,000.
- **Annual Report.** VANI has been publishing its annual report every year. The annual report for 2004-2005 has also been published and already distributed to various stakeholders. VANI prints a bi-lingual annual report for better access and utility by its grass root members. A copy of the same is also available on our website for public access.
- **Annual General Body Meeting.** As a part of better governance and proper system, VANI organizes every year its AGM. The 16th Annual General Body meeting was held in March 2005 in Bhopal and the 17th Annual General Body Meeting is due to take place soon in New Delhi.
- **Working Committee and Sub-Committees.** In order to facilitate speedy disbursement of various issues, VANI has constituted various sub committees on different issues. The working committee meets at regular intervals to guide the secretariat on various issues.

Promoting Good Governance among CSOs

VANI continues to be vigilant about making good governance a prime agenda amongst NGOs. To promote good governance and better practices, VANI has successfully been promoting the ideals of good governance and financial reporting amongst the CSOs in a variety of ways including the following during the period under review:

- VANI has been committed to promote good governance among the voluntary organizations in India. In this regard VANI organized a two daylong workshop on 'Meeting the Challenges in Developing Approaches and Alliance to Improve CSO Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability' in association with Action Aid International and Social Watch India in July 05.
- VANI and COVA organized a half day meeting on 17th October 2005 to discuss the current situation in affected areas in the state of Jammu and Kashmir ; assess emerging

needs for relief and rehabilitation ; identify roles that civil society can play at this juncture and evolve a mechanism for coordination with the state government.

- On 23rd January 2006 UNDP, UNV and VANI organized a forum to discuss the UN Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts. A proposal to gather reliable data on the contribution of non-profit institutions in the economy has been presented to Indian NGO and Government officials. The forum was attended by officials from the Planning Commission, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Indian NGOs, UNV, UNDP and (JHU) .So far 19 countries have committed to implementing the UN NPI Handbook. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India has set up a Task Force to undertake the exercise to quantify the contribution of CSOs in national gross national product with VANI on its Task Force as its Member. This is an important development as the exercise when complete will give create credibility for the voluntary sector in terms of its contribution to the economy. .
- VANI has also established linkages with ICAI in order to build the capacity of civil society organizations to meet the new demands for compliance by various Government Departments / Ministries and Statutory Agencies. It has developed a concept note including current status of NGOs in respect of legal framework and accounting standards and financial reporting, improvements required on part of NGOs and on the part of government also.
- VANI also organized a one day workshop on creating conducive environment for youth voluntarism on 12April 2005.The three major themes identified during the workshop included improving the image of voluntarism, creating challenging opportunities for voluntarism inculcating value-based actions.
- VANI organized a two days workshop on Good Governance on 10th & 11th March 2006 in association with Mass Education, Kolkatta and Voluntary Services Overseas, which was attended by CSOs in large numbers from states of Orissa, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and West Bengal. There was a demand from CSOs in the region that VANI should organize more such workshops to sensitize and educate CSOs in good governance and practices.
- VANI organized a two day workshop on Good Governance on 7^h & 8^h March 2006 in association with CASA and National

Foundation for India. Some 40 senior CSOs representatives attended the workshop and media gave a good coverage of the event. North East region it is felt needs more of such interface with the CSOs to sensitise them on the issues of good governance.

3. **Over all analysis:**

The reporting year was a year to initiate the networking processes in the respective states and was filled with experiences and learnings. Following the PIP during the reporting period, VANI focused more on the expanding and strengthening its networking initiatives at state and the specific issues impacting the civil society organizations. Keeping in mind the demands of changing political environment, VANI has adopted multiple strategies to address some critical issues such as state networking, national policy for voluntary sector, handbook on NPI statistics, establishment of GO-NGO Co-ordination Committee, the proposed FCMC, simplification of bilateral aid policy and promotion of good governance practices among CSOs. VANI due to its efforts achieved tangible results which are all set to give a more meaningful focus to the voluntary sector in India and will also improve its image.

Networking initiatives:

Based on the progress made so far in the respective states we can say that different strategies have been followed in different states and each of the states has generated different experiences. As far as network building is concerned in Bihar ABVA has been revived while in UP efforts have been made to make UPVAN broad based and inclusive. In Jharkhand and Chattisgarh, the CSOs have felt the need of state level network and welcomed the idea of building and promoting state level network. In MP, a different strategy to sustain the network was adopted i.e. through Vada Na Todo Campaign'.

Advocacy Initiatives:

Some noteworthy achievements with regard to specific advocacy issues that we achieved during the period under review include the following:

- FCMC advocacy launched by VANI got due support from all the stakeholders: parliamentarians, media, and other eminent persons in the sector. So far, the bill has not yet been tabled in last two sessions of parliament and the government is learnt to review the proposed bill.

- One of the significant achievements of VANI's efforts in the reporting period is the drafting of Voluntary Sector Policy. It is noteworthy that voluntary sector people wrote the policy on voluntary sector under aegis of Planning Commission. VANI's effort in convincing the Planning Commission in involving the voluntary sector for such an exercise yielded the results and policy on voluntary sector is at advanced stages of clearances. This event is a perfect case of GO-NGO partnership in shaping the policy for voluntary sector.
- Well researched documents were prepared on FCRA/FCMC & foreign contribution laws in commonwealth countries by VANI Team and were circulated amongst all the stakeholders to educate them and to generate awareness about the bill especially among grassroots NGOs.
- To facilitate speedy information dissemination VANI successfully launched its PACS' website and published state level newsletter which have been appreciated widely.
- Due to VANI's continued effort, DEA issued a circular on its position on bi-lateral aid policy.

4. Problems encountered

The following constraints are worth mentioning that VANI experienced during the reporting year:

a) Networking Process:

- Initially the state co-ordinators in UP, MP and Bihar faced identity crisis and problems in maintaining their identity as VANI's employees, they were rather seen as partner organisations staff. With passage of time and good work done by them over a year. This problem has been shorted out. There is a very high level of acceptance both of VANI -coordinators and overall activities that state network have envisaged.
- To address the broad based issues it is a challenge to bring all the stakeholders to a common consensus.
- Establishing linkages at various levels of networking especially at national and state level is one of challenges for VANI. Dynamics and politics hamper the development of network. For instance some of the national networks are apathetic towards other networks.

- Impacting participation of other networks and organizations due to their varied needs and interests.

b) Advocacy issues:

- Lack of consensus among civil society organizations on the policy issues. As a result, more interface and consensus building efforts needed.
- Lack of documentation of best practices and successful stories in advocacy and policy analysis. As a result, showcasing of the sector becomes a little difficult.
- Lack of awareness about financial reporting and good governance among the grass root CSOs, necessitating a through capacity building on issues such as good governance and financial reporting and most importantly adherence to legal framework and accounting norms.
- Benign neglect of CSOs by the government and lack of GO-NGO co-ordination and partnership at state levels
- Lack of adherence to compliance norms is a major challenge to address. This necessitates building capacities of NGOs to be able to meet such legal requirements.
- Resistance among government officials in simplifying rules, regulations and procedures for CSOs
- No single window grievance redressal systems for CSOs within government administration.
- Introduction of FCMC Bill by Ministry of Home Affairs without any consultation with civil society organisations.