

Indian Civil Society's Key asks for Indian Presidency of BRICS

A POLICY DOCUMENT





Indian Civil Society's Key asks for Indian Presidency of BRICS

A POLICY DOCUMENT



CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction..... | 6 |
| Role of Indian Civil Society in India's development..... | 7 |
| COVID-19 relief | 8 |
| CIVIL BRICS as a forum for civil society interaction in development cooperation | 8 |
| Linking India's BRICS presidency agenda to development demands of Civil Society | 9 |
| Reform of the Multilateral System | 9 |
| Civil Society Key Ask: Inclusive participation in policy decisions at local and global levels | 10 |
| At the global level | 10 |
| Using Digital and Technological Solutions for the achievement of SDGs..... | 11 |
| Drawbacks of increasing reliance on digital technology for social good | 12 |
| Civil Society key Asks for digital technology usage in SDGs . | 13 |
| Enhancing People to People exchanges..... | 16 |
| Concluding recommendations for national development | 17 |



INTRODUCTION

BRICS as a multilateral has assumed a significant position in the various multilateral paradigms for economic and developmental cooperation. As a basket of emerging economies that are poised to overtake G7 countries in terms of their average GDP it is heavily influential in strategic trajectories of global policy making. To enhance their political agenda, the grouping incorporates experience of G20's industrious use of engagement groups and built their own sub-thematic groupings for policy cohesion and effectiveness. One such grouping which has received traction in recent years is the Civil BRICS forum-a coalition of civil society organizations¹ that rotates with the presidency used for shaping and contouring development demands for BRICS countries to look upon. In recent time, the CIVIL BRICS forum is being actively pursued by civil society groups, social development workers and development professionals to shed light on the socio-economic gaps which require focused attention in terms of financing, policy safeguards and citizen participation. Considerable effort has been put by civil society groups to make the CIVIL BRICS forum an exchange and partnership platform to discuss and strengthen civil society participation and institutionalization². As India holds onto the presidency of this multilateral, civil society is geared up to provide suggestions for strengthening decisions for the national and sub-national contexts. In 2016, the CIVIL BRICS was a watershed moment for civil society from the five countries, as Indian government welcomed participation and listened to the suggestions of civil society groups. However, the bulk of the suggestions were not accepted in the CIVIL BRICS leader's statement but galvanized civil society interest and ensured votaries for local voices to be heard. The same spirit ensues in 2021 as BRICS is being hosted in India. The hopes are pinned with India's democratic framework which among other BRICS nations can be vouchsafed for ensuring discussion and integration of social development aspects in the multilateral's agenda.

1 Poskitt, A.; Shankland, A. and Taela, K. (2016) Civil Society from the BRICS: Emerging Roles in the New International Development Landscape, IDS Evidence Report 173, Brighton: IDS

2 PRIA (2013). India's Global Development Presence and Engagement of Indian Civil Society. from : http://www.pria.org/docs/Indias_Global_Development_Presence_and_Engagement_of_Indian_Civil_Society.pdf

As with all multilaterals and engagement groups experience there is an expectation that development goals are not only limited to agenda rhetoric but are resolved locally and sub-nationally through clearly delineated policy instruments. With a ravaging COVID-19 which has brought all forms of social-development to a halt, civil society expectation with the Indian government increases manifold and begs its decision-makers to create timebound goals adopted in its presidency by linking them with longstanding development deliverables. Secondly, there is a need to adopt an institutional partnership with civil society at every level of governance, bolster participatory policy-making and financial support and independence to voluntary organizations for effective development. Therefore, this policy document examines the goals adopted by Indian presidency of CIVIL BRICS namely- *development finance, global public goods, pandemic response and partnership with civil society* and underscores development demands of civil society. The document is prepared by VANI, which has gathered demands over its years of consultations with voluntary organizations, civil society networks and grassroots social movements.

Role of Indian Civil Society in India's development

Over the span of 70 years the Voluntary Sector has been a silent contributor in uplifting the socio-economic landscape of India via interventions that address fractures in pace of development. Simultaneously it has been a facilitator for providing the voice to common citizens that face inaccessibility in influencing decision-making bodies. Motivated to promote welfare, Voluntary Organizations have engineered 'social change' prototypes and approaches that led to positive impact at the most micro levels of society. This has conferred the sector to be a repository of knowledge on human affairs and its various development facets. Evident evolution of these Voluntary Sector solutions is observed in their co-opting by Government into plans and policies such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Right to Information, Right to Education, MNREGA and the Swach Bharat Abhiyan. Voluntary Organizations have been leading decisive interventions which have been commended for their social innovation, ingenuity and imagination³. The net effect of their interventions has been significant in impacting the lives of people and producing transformative change which is both recognizable at the individual and collective level. In recognition of their efforts, millions of Indians repose their trust and faith in CSOs by allowing them to act as their representatives in negotiating with governing bodies. Collectively the Indian voluntary sector has been tackling various socio-development challenges such as eradicating poverty, narrowing inequality gaps, inclusive growth, balancing gender and voicing the voiceless⁴. Through their consistent interface at the grassroots level, CSOs gather real-time data which they are utilizing for advocacy with various power structures. Based on this, CSOs have been creating innovative social models and cross-disciplinary paradigms that have produced progressive alterations in the prevalent status-quo.

³ The Role of CSOs in 2050 and Beyond, Contribution from UNESCO's Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030 to UNESCO's Futures of Education Initiative March 2021

⁴ AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON THE ROLE OF NGOs IN THE POVERTY REDUCTION OF INDIA Dr. R. Uma Devi, Assistant Professor, PG Department of Commerce, Dr. S. R. K. Govt. Arts College, Pondicherry University, Yanam, India.



COVID-19 relief

Indian civil society organizations are actively responding to the COVID-19 pandemic drawn into action because of two factors- providing healthcare facilities, associated paraphernalia such as masks, sanitizers and being frontline respondents in supporting poor population affected by the lockdown⁵. The lockdown imposed by the government to slow the infection spread quickly in creating economic challenges for daily breadwinners and labor classes due to temporary suspension of factory work. This

caused en-masse migration of factory workers, daily breadwinners to go back on foot to their villages because public transportation was closed for duration of the lockdown. Many civil society organizations have undertaken extensive meal distribution, ration facilitation, shelter provision in cities and major highways of the country⁶. During the ravaging second wave, many organizations functioned to provide relief despite limited financial and human resources. In line of duty the sector has lost 120 civil society workers and activists⁷.

CIVIL BRICS as a forum for civil society interaction in development cooperation

Like all other multilateral groupings, BRICS has provided a unique space for civil society organizations and voluntary organizations to make representation on social issues and provide recommendations for robust development policy making⁸. Indian Development Cooperation had for long not taken into consideration Civil Society inputs in its planning and policy. This was addressed by establishment of the Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC) which bridged this knowledge deficit by providing an equitable Civil Society representation in developing cooperation strategies with the Indian Government. The 2016 experience where curtain raiser ceremonies for CIVIL BRICS was hosted paved a historic moment for facilitating civil society exchange and participation with government. Indeed, this has continued with full vigor into 2021 and witnessed mobilization the sector's participation in various events of CIVILBRICS. As the voluntary sector, we appeal the BRICS nations to give full weightage to this forum because it is-

- 1) *A voice for the global south*- to assert its position in the growth and development landscape and is an embodiment of the principles of south-south cooperation that prioritize people to people relationships along with trade, investment, commerce, and technology exchange⁹.
- 2) *An engagement platform for marginalized* - Despite achieving rapid economic transformation member countries such as Brazil, India, China and South Africa have a significant poor population¹⁰. Many of them are served by the efforts of civil society

5 Weaker and poorer, NGOs still the best bet in delivering Covid-19 relief https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/weaker-and-poorer-ngos-still-the-best-bet-in-delivering-covid-19-relief-120042800370_1.html

6 Coronavirus in India: In 13 states, NGOs fed more people than govt did during lockdown <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/in-13-states-ngos-fed-more-people-than-govt-during-coronavirus-lockdown-1665111-2020-04-09>

7 Data collected by VANI

8 <http://civilbrics.ru/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Concept2020eng.pdf>

9 John L, Engaging BRICS Challenges and Opportunities for Civil Society, Oxfam India Working Papers Series, 2012

10 Technology, Poverty and Education within BRICS Context, KunofiwaTsurai, Bester Chimbo, International Journal of Economics and Business Administration Volume VIII, Issue 4, 2020

organizations through multiple relief measures. By participating in the BRICS Civil Forum these organizations are in fact representing these marginalized constituencies

- 3) *A consortium for cross civil society exchange-* Sharing of civil society experience helps fostering innovative development schemes which are ably used by civil society organizations to aid their relief activities. As such, the forum assists innovative thinking and churning which is also shared with policy makers and Sherpas.
- 4) *A forum for promoting implementation of SDGs and development financing-* The sustainable development goals are key instrumentalities for achieving development priorities for all signatory countries. The CIVIL BRICS has consistently underlined for greater cooperation in achievement of SDGs and continues to remind the commitments of BRICS countries to lay increased focus and linkage to their priorities. Additionally, the New Development Bank established by BRICS is tasked with development financing which is an important area for policy overlap with civil society.
- 5) *A space for participation in times of emergency responses-* The recent COVID-19 experience, sensitized governments across the world to be more receptive to civil society organizations for the arduous relief work in mitigating the pandemic. As such, engagement groups under multilateral groupings like BRICS will be important for evolving immediate emergency responses and soliciting partnership and experiences for better policy coordination.

Linking India's BRICS presidency agenda to development demands of Civil Society

The Indian presidency of BRICS has clearly defined its focus this year of BRICS reflected in the theme of BRICS@15: Intra BRICS Cooperation for Continuity, Consolidation and Consensus placing before various common challenges and areas of cooperation that will help in bolstering BRICS philosophy in the coming years.¹¹ The agenda points which are relevant for civil society are outlined below-

Reform of the Multilateral System

India for many years has been seeking a reform in the global multilateral system such as UNSC, WTO, World Bank/International Monetary Fund, World Health Organization (WHO) and other international forums. Most of these forums have been perceived to be oriented to the global north and have not provided a balanced representation to global south. Importantly it was noted that *the form of the multilateral system should be based on inclusive consultation and collaboration for the benefit of all while respecting sovereign independence, equality, mutual legitimate interests and concerns to make themultilateral organizations more*¹². As noted India along with other BRICS countries is demanding more inclusion in decision-making of global governance. However, civil society seeks the same form of inclusion in policy-making and delivery of schemes and programs of the government.

11 Inaugural Address at BRICS Civil Forum 2021 by Secretary (CPV&OIA) and BRICS Sherpa https://www.mea.gov.in/SpeechesStatements.htm?dtl/33808/Inaugural_Address_at_BRICS_Civil_Forum_2021_by_Secretary_CPVOIA_and_BRICS_Sherpa

12 <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/india-china-other-brics-nations-make-a-joint-push-for-reform-of-multilateral-system-992751.html>

Civil Society Key Ask: Inclusive participation in policy decisions at local and global levels

Indian civil society organizations are involved in a variety of development relief activities and have exemplary excellence in managing and mitigating socio-economic challenges. Working in tandem with the government and sometimes in cooperation, many of these organizations have helped evolve sub-national policies which have aided government efforts in their schemes and flagship programs. For example, civil society organizations have developed effective projects for boosting agricultural productivity, increasing farmers income of harvesting certain crops, developing solar pumps and panels for electrifying villages, giving livelihood employment to rural and urban women, providing sustainable housing, developing water surplus regions from water-scarce areas, developing capacities of citizens in governance for panchayats (village councils) and municipalities, providing subsidized education to children, providing primary healthcare services, support to disabled persons, providing sports facilities and youth development etc.

Based on their range of work and experience, civil society organizations do not have a mechanism to interact with decision-makers at the national and sub-national levels. The lack of any council on development or a committee for flagship program with civil society representation has been counterproductive for many schemes and programs. Because they are based at the grassroots civil society organizations also have the experience of delivery schemes at the ground level. For example, the recent fallout of COVID-19 saw organizations delivering food, essentials and medicines to those where the government could not reach. Similar experiences are with programs carried out by state governments where they rely on the services of civil society. As such, civil society is calibrated by learnings and experiences which can be used in policy designing. As such civil society is proposing the following to Indian presidency of the BRICS in implementing these action points at the national and sub-national level-

- a) Institute inclusive platforms/committees for civil society representation on development¹³: Seeing that this will help governance and provide critical inputs and assessments for policy, government action on schemes- a default institutional forum is required where all types of civil society organizations can be represented
- b) Provide financial support in implementation of projects- Civil society organizations are astute managerial entities which have expertise in social development. With financial constraints blocking their growth, it is only pertinent that government helps and supports civil society organizations through government grants and funds which will help in timely delivery of schemes.
- c) Provide for an enabling environment for civil society organizations- Government needs to provide for a conducive regulatory regime for civil society which will help them focus on their primary activities rather than be burdened by regulatory compliances and monitoring.

At the global level

India's strategic development cooperation is weaved with its foreign policy objectives that has been boosted by remarkable economic growth responsible for making it an important global force wielding political influence. This is significant as evidenced by India hosting the BRICS (2021) G20 (2023) and leading several global initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance. Additionally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stressed the need for the global world to move towards shared prosperity and address common challenges. This directs towards

¹³ Improving Global Governance Through Engagement With Civil Society, The case of BRICS, Oxfam Briefing Note, March 2016

evolving a global governance framework where concrete solutions to common identified social development challenges are devised extending from grassroots to the international level. Civil society is participating at various forums in an effort to achieve inclusive representation at multilateral forums. For example, Indian civil society has been actively part of Civil 20 (C20) and Civil BRICS on global discussions on poverty, financing, development policies etc. It is only befitting that when India seeks an active place in global polity based upon its call for increased multilateral representation for which there has to be space and opportunities provided for civil society organizations to participate in these global governance regimes.

Using Digital and Technological Solutions for the achievement of SDGs

BRICS countries under the presidency of India have underlined the importance of digital and technological solutions for achieving SDGs. India is looking towards harnessing digital knowledge for creating platforms that will help plug in supply chain deficits in healthcare systems¹⁴ and other disciplines. India adopted the sustainable development goals fervently and has been coming out with their baseline index report every year to measure progress on indicators. According to the report Digital with Purpose: Delivering a Smarter 2030 “digital technologies



can be leading contributors to positive societal value, but this will only become a reality if the focus of technological development and deployment is framed by a clear commitment to the SDGs. If the ICT sector can demonstrate to the world that it is moving the dial on progress towards the 2030 Agenda and assumes responsibility to address and prevent negative outcomes that result, the world will substantially benefit and the sector will be assured of long term success¹⁵.

There is a move by most countries to use digital technologies for harnessing SDGs to their fruition, however, there is a need for making digital technologies to become more accessible to beneficiaries by increasing mobile telephony. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are essential in monitoring progress on SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 9: Infrastructure, Industrialization and Innovation. The role of digital infrastructure, technology and innovation for the achievement of the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific is crucial and instrumental in making progress towards SDGs. To enable and to manage the progress through the real-time tracking, the massive amounts of data needed to be collected and processed. This processing, in turn, create new demands on digital communications infrastructure. Gigabit networks ensure infrastructure connectivity, characterized by higher speed, lower latency than ever before, which is a critical link between Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI)¹⁶.

Additionally, digital technologies can be used for monitoring data on indicators and providing real time feedback to governments and aid in achieving SDG 17's technology transfer regime.

14 High Performance Computing (HPC) and Information Communication Technologies (ICT) discussed at BRICS Working Group Meeting Posted On: 30 MAY 2021 9:56AM by PIB Delhi <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1722819>

15 <https://gesi.org/platforms/digital-with-a-purpose-delivering-a-smarter2030>

16 <http://sdghelpdesk.unescap.org/knowledge-hub/thematic-area/digital-technologies-for-sdgs/>

Drawbacks of increasing reliance on digital technology for social good

- While the Indian government is setting an ambitious target of linking SDGs -only 23.8% of households across the country had access to the internet. Additionally, there is a wide divide in access between urban and rural households. Of the 66% of India's population that resides in rural communities, only 14.9% have internet access compared to 42% of urban households¹⁷.
- In the 2018 report, Household Social Consumption on Education in India, it was noted that only 20% of the population can access the internet. Inequality in accessing and using the internet also exists in terms of age, location, gender, caste and language, among other factors¹⁸.
- Incidentally, with increase digitization there was a proportionate increase in fake news. survey found that around 30% of Indians used WhatsApp for COVID-19 information, and just about as many fact-checked less than 50% of messages before forwarding them. 13% of respondents even said that they never fact-checked messages before forwarding on WhatsApp. According to the report, a minority of users were responsible for the bulk of forwarding, however. Only 14% forwarded three or more messages a day, and only 5% forwarded nine or more¹⁹.
- Increased digitization has also spelt out sundry problems in digital transactions with nearly half of the Indian consumers are more concerned about digital payments fraud now than when the novel coronavirus first emerged, according to a study by a UK-based market research firm YouGov and NASDAQ-listed ACI Worldwide²⁰.
- Increasingly the government of India has sought to provide Direct beneficiary transfers to eligible beneficiaries under the JAM Trinity scheme²¹. A survey conducted by Indus Action assessed beneficiaries' access to ration, healthcare, employment status and government schemes. Only about 59% of the 2,233 women eligible for Jan Dhan reported that they had received the benefit. While 34% said they did not receive the transfer, 7% said they did not know if they received the benefit²².
- The surge in e-learning due to covid related lockdown and restrictions was also seen on children who could not attend schools. Over 75% children reported a host of challenges in accessing online classes due to poor or no internet connection, unaffordable data packs, slow internet speeds etc²³.

17 Digital Divide in India ,<https://www.borgenmagazine.com/digital-divide-in-india/>

18 The digital divide in India: How access to technology and reliable information affects India's response to the pandemic <https://www.apc.org/en/node/37367>

19 The Impact of Social Media on Panic During the COVID-19 Pandemic Journal of Medical Internet Research

20 <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/alert-digital-payments-fraud-shoots-up-as-consumers-prefer-upi-cards-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-cases-rise-this-much-in-a-month/1968230/>

21 JAM (short for Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) trinity refers to the government of India initiative to link Jan Dhan accounts, mobile numbers and Aadhaar cards of Indians to plug the leakages of government subsidies.

22 <https://www.indiaspend.com/40-of-jan-dhan-account-holders-could-not-access-govts-covid-19-relief-survey/>

23 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/over-75-children-report-challenges-to-access-education-digitally-survey/articleshow/82050164.cms>

Civil Society key Asks for digital technology usage in SDGs

According to the United Nations *“technologies can help make our world fairer, more peaceful, and more just. Digital advances can support and accelerate achievement of each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals – from ending extreme poverty to reducing maternal and infant mortality, promoting sustainable farming and decent work, and achieving universal literacy. But technologies can also threaten privacy, erode security and fuel inequality. They have implications for human rights and human agency.”*²⁴



Direct correlation to increasing development: According to “Digital with Purpose: Delivering a SMARTer 2030,” a new report by the Global Enabling Sustainability Initiative (GeSI) and Deloitte. The report identifies and quantifies how technologies can help governments, businesses, and philanthropic organizations accelerate their efforts to achieve each of the 17 SDGs. Its analysis of a broad range of SDG targets, including 20 particular targets and 25 associated indicators, finds that further deployment of existing digital technologies will, on average, help accelerate progress toward the SDGs by 22% and mitigate downward trends by 23%²⁵.

Civil society in India is listing a few recommendations should be implemented at the national and sub-national level for improving digitization in the country-

- **Increasing mobile telephony and digital access-** Aligned to Digital India, civil society seeks rigorous investment in digital infrastructure which will increase usage and permeation of telecommunications across the country. For this, it is essential to increase public-private-partnerships and reduce taxation on telecommunications sector²⁶. However, there is a direct correlation between increased digitization and surveillance of citizens²⁷
- **Easing delivery of public goods and smoothening e-governance-** A critical function of digitization has been delivery of public services and goods to citizens via user interface applications. However, there have been problems which need to be addressed in providing seamless services to citizens. Undertaking thorough mapping of populations according to vulnerability indexes and parameters can be helpful in delivering public goods directly to these populations²⁸.
- **Closing the gap on digital illiteracy-** India is a large country with approximately 70% of the populace living in rural areas. Illiteracy is about 30% of the population (Census: 2011) and even it is higher in case of rural area and less developed states such as Bihar, Orissa and UP among others. Secondly, the dominance of English on internet is main constraint as in the case of India more than 80% percent of the population does not speak English (Census: 2011). Due to such overwhelming dominance of English over computers and internet are inaccessible in Indian villages. Thirdly, administrative culture is not conducive for such measures. The figures indicate that

24 <https://www.un.org/en/un75/impact-digital-technologies>

25 <https://deloitte.wsj.com/cio/2019/09/23/digital-tech-critical-to-u-n-sustainable-development-goals/>

26 Dua, Bindu, Digital India-Challenges and Suggestions, Mier College of Education, 2018

27 Hagen J, Lysne, O, Protecting the digitized society—the challenge of balancing surveillance and privacy, Cyber Defense Review, Vol. 1, No. 1 (SPRING 2016), pp. 75-90

28 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/still-many-challenges-in-ensuring-dbt-benefits-reach-women-niti-aayog-advisor/articleshow/65581981.cms?from=mdr>

significant digital divide is prevailing between rich and poor areas in the country²⁹. For this it is recommended that government adopts partnership model with civil society organizations that are working on digital literacy to help rural population get acquainted with using ICTs.

- **Securing privacy and mitigating cyber-crime**-The government and system integrators should ensure application of state-of-the-art security protocols (e.g. 256-bit AES encryption, etc.). Relevant privacy policies should be instituted by the government so that the information is not misused by people who have access to it³⁰. While India has adopted strict laws for curbing cyber crimes by learning from other countries³¹ there is a need to develop partnership with civil society organizations³² which are working in preventing cyber crimes and frauds. Many civil society organizations³³ are now working in capacity building of citizens to detect cyber frauds and crimes.
- **Using civil society expertise for AI-programmed development schemes**- Rapid strides in the field of Artificial Intelligence can be helpful for informing development policies based on decision-based behavioral patterns of citizens calibrated by experience and anticipations which can be beneficial for developing SDG policies at the national and state levels³⁴. A number of sectors in which technological innovations using AI are currently demonstrating great prospects for improving development outcomes. In healthcare AI is helping to survey populations and generate predictions based on health data, and is providing expertise to health workers and clinicians to diagnose and treat illnesses. In agriculture, AI is helping farmers to better understand critical conditions such as soil quality, climate and crop health in order to increase productivity and respond to risks that might compromise their harvests. In the education sector, AI is playing an important role in three key areas: learner-facing technologies (such as personalized delivery models and adaptive learning platforms), teacher-facing technologies (including automated assessment tools) and sector-level analyses (for instance, using data from across schools to predict school inspection performance)³⁵. With civil society organizations working with multitude data-sets can input their findings collected from beneficiaries for designing development programs and schemes. This will save cost, investment and time. Effectively it will help targeting specific constituencies and plug the leakages³⁶.
- **Using blockchains to curb corruption**- Blockchain has the potential to be a game changer in anti-corruption efforts. Whether it is successful or not largely depends on contextual elements – infrastructures, legal systems, social or political settings – rather

29 Beniwal, V.S., Sikka, Kapil, E-Governance in India: Challenges and Prospects, International Journal of Computer and Communication, 2017

30 E-governance and Digital India Empowering Indian Citizens Through Technology, ASSOCHAM, 2015

31 Securing the Nation's Cyber Space, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC), 2017, <https://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/publications/2017/securing-the-nations-cyberspace.pdf>

32 <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2018/May/taking-action-where-we-can-to-stop-cybercrime.html>

33 <https://yourstory.com/socialstory/2020/07/social-media-awareness-cybercrime-bullying/amp>

34 Ricardo Vinuesa, Hossein Azizpour, Iolanda Leite, Madeline Balaam, Virginia Dignum, Sami Domisch, Anna Felländer, Simone Daniela Langhans, Max Tegmark & Francesco Fuso Nerini, The role of artificial intelligence in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, Nature Communications, 2020

35 The International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA). (2019). Artificial intelligence in International Development. A discussion paper.

36 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/civil-society-charities-artificial-intelligence/>

than on the technology itself³⁷. At its core, the problem blockchain seeks to address is to ensure the security and integrity of information at a time when there is increasing concerns about data privacy and declining trust in government. It is a technology that allows one to record assets, transfer value, and track transactions in a decentralized manner, ensuring the transparency, integrity, and traceability of data without a central authority to authenticate the information. It is essentially a system to encrypt information and a shared database. It is based on a consensus mechanism amongst trusted parties to certify the information and validate transactions. Blockchain has two distinctive features that make it a potent tool against corruption. First, it provides an unprecedented level of security of the information and the integrity of records it manages, guaranteeing their authenticity. It eliminates opportunities for falsification and the risks associated with having a single point of failure in the management of data. It also helps overcome the data silos in traditional bureaucracies in which public entities are reluctant to share information among themselves³⁸. A prime example of using blockchain technology for curbing corruption is the state of Andhra Pradesh that removes duplications, secures private data when registering assets of citizens. Such technologies could be used in public delivery systems especially in providing direct transfer benefits to vulnerable sections of society³⁹. Open and transparent, digital monitoring systems can also help in reducing corruption in infrastructure projects and be effective in delivering projects on time⁴⁰.

- ***Creating a digital dashboard for SDG data-scaping with civil society sector-*** There is a growing minefield of data on beneficiaries and communities that needs to be integrated in the SDG schemes implemented by the Indian government. As such, civil society inclusion in SDG implementation is critical because they bring to the table numerous challenges and solutions that can be used for policy and tracking progress on indicators⁴¹. There are established agencies and institutes that are compiling data from civil society and governments to create data visualizations for monitoring SDGs at the country and global level⁴². The government is already in the process of creating a dashboards for different uses. One such dashboard is the National CSR Exchange portal, which is a real-time interface website using various features such as heat map, project collaboration, learning exchange and data tracking for achieving CSR spending for development goals. Such dashboards and portals should be explored where civil society can also effectively participate. The data from these dashboards will be helpful for framing VNR reports.
- ***Using digital technologies to achieve universal health and education-*** Digital technology is essential in realizing many development goals but on priority is the attainment of universal health coverage and ensuring universalization of education. For health, the development of digital health tools is a powerful enabler that can be used to address the growing demands of NCDs on health services to achieve universal

37 <https://www.u4.no/publications/are-blockchain-technologies-efficient-in-combatting-corruption>

38 https://ssir.org/articles/entry/will_blockchain_disrupt_government_corruption

39 <https://qz.com/india/1325423/indias-andhra-state-is-using-blockchain-to-build-capital-amaravati/>

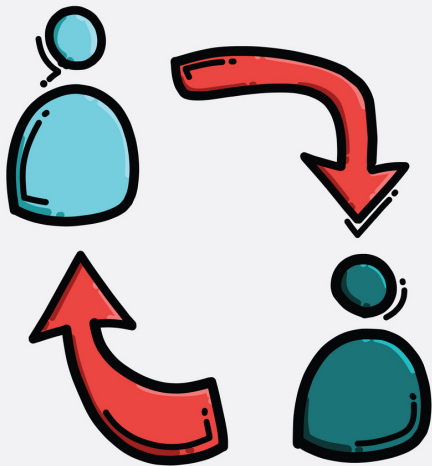
40 Kahn, Theodore; Baron, Alejandro; Vieyra, Juan Cruz, Digital Technologies for Transparency in Public Investment: New Tools to Empower Citizens and Governments, IDB, 2018

41 https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/319308/6-Not-without-us-civil-society-role-implementing-SDGs.pdf

42 <https://www.data4sdgs.org/resources/2030watch-civil-society-monitoring-sdgs-country-level-0>

health coverage. Civil society organisations have important contributions to make in the development and implementation of national digital health strategies⁴³. These can be through selection of specific CSOs to deliver vaccines and medicines and registration of vulnerable populations under medical schemes of government. In the field of education, CSOs can be used in enrolling students by using digital applications and also facilitate education for those who are not able to attend schools.

Enhancing People to People exchanges



Civil Society of India urges Indian government to increase the scope and bandwidth of people to people exchange for the mutual benefit of BRICS countries. There are certain areas for development where civil society exchange and cross-learnings can be increased.

- ***Involving Indian civil society organizations in development projects of BRICS-*** In line with development cooperation principles, civil society should be solicited in development projects in BRICS countries and provided the opportunity to engage with civil society organizations of the project destination countries. Many National NGOs and other CSOs play an important role in stimulating public debate on development co-operation. They often educate youth and other sections of society on cooperation and development issues. NGOs and CSOs also advocate for more and better development cooperation, and hold governments to account on their development commitments. Most OECD countries and their Development Assistance Committee peer reviews recommend active engagement with civil society to raise public awareness and secure political support for development⁴⁴.

Benefits of CSO involvement in development cooperation

Drawing on their practices in India, many Indian CSOs have extended solidarity and support to other developing countries, providing knowledge, technology, and skills support to promote sustainable and inclusive development; their partners include local communities, CSOs, and sub-national and national governments. The methodologies developed under similar contexts of poverty, exclusion, and inequality have, with local adaptations, proven relevant in other developing countries. Barring a handful of cases, these initiatives have drawn their support and financing chiefly from international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from developing countries, along with bilateral donors from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, the United Nations (UN), and other multilateral agencies⁴⁵.

- ***Exchange in education-*** From the vantage point of policy makers cooperation in education between India and BRICS countries can be achieved through facilitating exchange in higher education⁴⁶. However, facilitating education in development studies and socio-economic cooperation can be beneficial for informing younger generation on challenges confronting

43 <https://ncdalliance.org/news-events/news/realising-the-promise-of-digital-health-for-ncds-and-uhc-what-is-the-opportunity-for-civil-society>

44 How DAC Members Work With Civil Society Organisations: An Overview, 2011

45 Bandyopadhyay, Kaustuv Kanti, CSOs in Indian Development Cooperation: Towards an Enabling Environment, PRIA, 2017

46 Varghese, N.V BRICS and International Collaborations in Higher Education in India, 2015, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281806512_BRICS_and_International_Collaborations_in_Higher_Education_in_India

BRICS nations. As a civil society recommendation-we feel that an ideal education system would be to organize student visits to CSOs of each other's countries and provide in-depth incubation courses which will help them get acquainted with development issues from the ground level. Both academia and civil society play a critical role in organizing and disseminating knowledge on development challenges and offer solutions that can be used for policy making at the global and national levels⁴⁷.

- ***Exchange in youth programs in partnership with civil society-*** BRICS engagement forums has laid critical emphasis on increasing youth to youth connect. As a civil society recommendation, we feel that it is important to develop cross-cultural learnings and country visits⁴⁸. Facilitating charity tournaments with youth, steered by civil society groups can raise awareness on various health and development issues. Many civil society organizations are based in promoting sports and can be partners in organizing events and tournaments at different locations of India.

Concluding recommendations for national development⁴⁹⁵⁰

- As the civil society of India, we call upon the government of India to implement SDGs backed by proper financing and in partnership with civil society, private sector and academia through an institutional platform at the national and sub-national levels.
- We urge, the government of India to increase financing of development programs which are critical in uplifting people out of poverty, provide adequate healthcare facilities by increasing GDP to health ratio. This is in light of the recent COVID-19 surge for which we call upon the government to conduct a thorough mapping analysis of health gaps with civil society organizations.
- Similar increase in education by providing free, socially inclusive and universal education to all children till the age of 12 years.
- Increasing progressive taxation to fund social development schemes which help in achieving many targets and indicators of SDGs and make way for fiscal justice.
- Provide gendered focus and nuancing in national various schemes and programs which will help millions of women who are crippled under the burdens of gender discrimination
- Promote livelihoods for women and vulnerable communities like Dalits, tribals through targeted initiatives
- Promote traditional systems of livelihoods, medicines and our rich heritage sciences with civil society collaboration at the national and global levels

⁴⁷ Tandon, Rajesh, Civil engagement in Higher Education and its role in human and social development, 2008/01/01

⁴⁸ Tom Dwyer (University of Campinas, Brazil) ,Mikhail K Gorshkov (Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia),Ishwar Modi (University of Rajasthan, India),Chunling Li (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China) and Mokong Simon Mapadimeng (University of Limpopo, South Africa), Handbook of the Sociology of Youth in BRICS Countries

⁴⁹ INDIA & G20 Analyzing Development Dimensions of Policy Priorities, VANI, <https://www.vaniindia.org/admin-latest/images/India%20and%20G20%20Analyzing%20Development%20Policy%20Priorities.pdf>

⁵⁰ <https://rightsinddevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Policy-Recommendations-for-the-Civil-BRICS-BRICS-Summit-2016-ECSN-BRICSAM-Oxfam-India-WNTA-PBI.pdf>

- Promote initiatives for green infrastructure and economy in order to combat climate change
- To include people's representation, civil society representation when framing trade and investment policies
- To institute FPIC consultations when operationalizing large scale infrastructure projects with community groups, forest dwellers, civil society organizations etc.
- Provide for an enabling environment for civil society organizations by relaxing regulatory regime



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
INDIA



VANI

Celebrating 30 Years

VOICE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

www.vaniindia.org

About VANI

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.