

# **National Consultation on the Role of Civil Society in the Eleventh Five Year Plan**

## **KEY PROPOSALS**

**Date: 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> December 2008**

**Venue: India International Centre, New Delhi**

## **Background**

The Planning Commission has recently taken the initiative to bring together a large number of civil society organizations to contribute to the development of the Eleventh Five Year Plan. Regional and thematic consultations were held across the country to review and provide inputs to the Approach Papers of the Eleventh Five Year Plan, aimed at reaching and engaging civil society organizations across the board in the formation of the Plan document.

The above mentioned processes have also been seen as an entry point to explore the sustained engagement of the voluntary sector in taking the National Development Goals to the masses, and providing ongoing feedback on how the programs and objectives of the Plan are being achieved on the ground.

It is towards this objective of exploring the institutional mechanisms for participation of civil society across the different stages of the planning, implementation and evaluation of the Five Year Plan that the national consultation on the '**Role of Civil Society in the Eleventh Five Year Plan**' was proposed. The consultation was jointly organized by the Centre for Budget & Governance Accountability (CBGA), National Social Watch Coalition (NSWC) and Wada Na Todo Abhiyan with the support and endorsement of the Planning Commission of India. Support to the consultation was also provided by Action Aid India, CASA, National Foundation of India and Water Aid.

## **Proposals for Engagement with the Planning Commission**

The national consultation brought together more than 250 civil society representatives from nineteen states to interact with representative of the Planning Commission, other National Commissions and Ministries for the identification of possible avenues for sustained collaboration on key themes of the national development agenda. The key recommendations that have emerged as a result of this interaction are:

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### **1. Creating Operational Mechanisms for the National Voluntary Sector Policy**

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The National Voluntary Sector Policy is the result of close to two decades of discussion on the relevance of civil society engagement in the processes of planning and governance in India. The identification of the Planning Commission of India as the nodal agency for interaction between Voluntary Organizations and the government in 2000, and the subsequent adoption of the National Voluntary Sector Policy (NVSP) by government in 2007 are significant first steps taken to recognize the role of civil society and provide formal spaces for their engagement and contribution to the governance process.

There is a need to facilitate an agreement on the operational mechanisms of the NSVP between civil society representatives and relevant Union Ministries, National

Commissions at the national level, and achieve the same at the state level with the participation of State Planning Boards, relevant State Departments and the District Planning Committee / district level line departments.

Towards this objective, the creation of a national taskforce on the implementation of the NVSP could be considered, which would comprise of Members of the Planning Commission, key Ministries and civil society representatives. The Taskforce would be responsible to outline the proposed mechanisms and processes for the integration of the NVSP, which would serve as an input for further attention to the implementation of the National Voluntary Sector Policy in the Twelfth Five Year Plan.

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## **2. Integrating the Instruments of Partnership proposed in the NVSP**

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The 'National Policy on the Voluntary Sector' recognizes three instruments of partnership with civil society, namely (i) consultation (ii) strategic collaboration and (iii) project funding. The Planning Commission must undertake to identify how the three instruments of partnership become an integral component of the all national, state and local interventions of government. The steps that need to be taken towards this objective include:

*(i) Consultation:*

Civil Society representation must be integrated in the policy making bodies and delegations of the government. This includes the participation of the voluntary sector in national level consultations, think-tanks and forums, as well as in bilateral or international missions related to the United Nations, International Financial Institutions or Bi-lateral and Multi-lateral Forums. This would allow the expertise of the sector to be utilized while also enabling a closer understanding of and engagement with the challenges and issues being faced by the government within the voluntary sector.

In addition to consultations towards the Approach Development of the Five Year Plan, civil society must also be actively engaged to provide inputs into the Annual Plan meetings held with state governments and formally involved in the Mid-term Review of the Five Year Plan.

*(ii) Strategic Collaboration:*

All national programs and policies must incorporate the three instruments of partnership with civil society identified by the National Voluntary Sector Policy. An important strategy in this regard would be to create institutional measures for the direct participation of communities in planning, monitoring and evaluating government programs on the ground. Adequate resources must be allocated (and utilized) within all programs for popular education on entitlements and for the development of innovations. Institutional mechanisms such as Social Justice Committees created at the level of the

Gram Panchayat or Municipal Council are required to strengthen the engagement of socially excluded groups in government programs.

The Planning Commission can also play a strategic role in facilitating multi-sectoral dialogues on national development priorities, thereby enabling an interaction and debate between civil society, the government and the private sector.

*(iii) Project Funding*

The concept of Project Funding needs to be expanded to look comprehensively at the need for 'Sector Funding'. The government contributes only 28% of the civil society related investment in India, as opposed to the global standard of 40% funding for civil society being provided by the public sector. Increased public sector investment for voluntary action and a funding approach that prioritizes the development of the voluntary sector as whole would contribute significantly to building a vibrant culture of civic engagement and public participation in the country and must be seriously considered by the Planning Commission.

Provisions for civil society collaboration must be integrated in all major programs and guide State Governments to set aside similar provisions as part of their Plan fund. The Planning Commission must also create a 'Civil Society Sector Support Fund' that is allocated through a mechanism independent of the line Ministries.

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### **3. Strengthening Civil Society Collaboration Mechanisms within the Planning Commission**

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As the nodal agency for collaboration between civil society and government at the national level, the Planning Commission must invest in strengthening its internal mechanisms for ongoing and substantive interaction with civil society across thematic areas of the Five Year Plan. Suggested mechanisms to enable this objective are:

- a) The Five Year Plan document must include a separate chapter on the Civil Society & the Voluntary Sector, thereby providing a vision and directions for the engagement of civil society in the context of the term and objectives of the Plan
- b) A Steering Committee on the Voluntary Sector must be created to function on par with other groups created by the Planning Commission to review and provide inputs to various sections of the Five Year Plan, as well as compile the above mentioned section on Civil Society & the Voluntary Sector as recommended above. The Steering Committee must also comprise of members of Civil Society
- c) The existing Voluntary Action Cell within the Planning Commission must be upgraded to function as an full fledged unit, thereby providing the mandate and resources required for sustained interaction with civil society across thematic areas

of the Plan, as well as in utilizing civil society expertise to address new and complex social issues and crises that may emerge during the period of the Plan.

- d) The ongoing process of creating a Single Window for Civil Society to deal with all procedural aspects at the national, state and district levels is welcome. Further efforts to simplify laws and rules governing voluntary organizations need to be taken by the Planning Commission to make them less complex and restrictive, and conducive to increased participation of Voluntary Organizations in development programs.

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#### **4. Recommendations on Thematic Areas of the Eleventh Five Year**

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##### ***Health, Education, Basic Services & Housing***

- Public awareness of entitlements under the flagship programs for Education and Health needs to be strengthened and is comparatively much lower than, for instance, the awareness of entitlements on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).
- In addition to the Right to Education Bill, a National Health Bill must also be discussed and developed in the period of the Eleventh Five Year Plan. The introduction of a Common School System within the period of the Eleventh Five Year Plan must be prioritized.
- Processes and mechanisms for community monitoring of Health and Education program as well as local level public health and education systems need to be outlined more clearly and actively put into place. This may include processes such as Social Audits and Activity Mapping as well as the creation of institutional mechanisms for oversight such as the NREGA Council and Land Reforms Council which have active civil society representation.
- In the areas of health, education and basic services, the government response seems to heavily favour the privatization of systems. Instead the overwhelming need is to focus on increasing investment in public systems and strengthen the mechanisms for regulation of private sector intervention in these sectors. The legitimacy of traditional health systems must also be emphasized.
- There is a need for an alternate vision on the housing agenda with the emphasis on people-driven housing rather than project driven housing solutions. The government must prioritize the availability of land for social housing and strengthen public housing agencies in a far more vigorous way than at present.

##### ***Livelihood, Agriculture, Food & Social Security, Environment***

- The monitoring of programs by the government must not be restricted to a financial audit but also involve the Social, Gender and Structural Audit of its interventions.

- The concept of Public-Private Partnerships must be redefined to prioritize the engagement of Labour Co-operatives and community groups in the implementation of programs.
- Eligibility barriers such as in relation to volume of business or years of operation, which currently prevent civil society organizations from taking up development works and programs must also be reviewed.
- Steps to make Agriculture a viable livelihood option for young people must be explored. The government must work to support farmers to deal with the adverse impacts of climate change, and restrict the conversion of land available for food production to other purposes.
- An Environmental Impact Assessment of all infrastructure development and tourism projects must be made mandatory. Local communities must be taken into confidence and formally involved in the process for the sanctioning of these projects.
- Land acquisition must be recognized as a critical issue by the government and special attention must be paid to ensure that the process of transfers or lease of land for corporate interest is undertaken with utmost transparency and due involvement of local communities. Land-for-land must be the core principle of any resettlement and rehabilitation intervention.

### ***Social Justice & Marginalized Groups***

- Civil society representation in government bodies must necessarily include the participation of representatives from socially excluded groups including (and not limited to) Dalits, Adivasis, Women, Denotified & Nomadic Tribes, Minorities and People with Disabilities.
- The vision of Inclusive Growth should be understood to mean the involvement of socially excluded communities in the design and implementation of the Plan, and not merely as welfare agents. The formulation of programs for socially excluded groups at the level of the Planning Commission and Ministries is meaningless if there is no scope for the direct participation of these communities and the integration of members from socially excluded groups in the Planning Commission itself as well as in its functional groups and deliberations must be made mandatory.
- Specific programs and institutions addressing the disaggregated needs of socially excluded groups must be put into place. The creation of a separate Ministry for Women & Child Development and institution of the National Commission on Nomadic, Semi-Nomadic and Denotified Tribes are positive steps in this direction. However other initiatives such as the creation of a separate Department for Disability at the national and state levels are pending.

- There must be greater public and political engagement with initiatives such as the Prime Minister's Fifteen Point Program for Minorities. Monitoring mechanisms to track its implementation and outcomes across Ministries need to be set into place. Greater information sharing and broader civil society engagement with the activities of the Ministry of Minority Affairs is also required.
- The Eleventh Five Year Plan takes a progressive stand on the integration of women's and children's agenda across sectors and provides due recognition to newer and more complex issues. However, a corresponding emphasis is required in the allocation of resources. More than 97% of the resources available to the Ministry of Women & Child Development is invested in Child Development, indicating a need for separate resource allocation for women. As a result, important initiatives such as the Muslim Women's Leadership Scheme and the National Taskforce on Violence against Women in Zones of Conflict remain feeble and invisible to the public. On the other hand, even resources that have been set aside for initiatives such as the recent Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) remain unutilized.
- The engagement of related systems and institutions in implementing initiatives related to socially excluded groups must be emphasized. For instance the involvement of the police system in implementing the Domestic Violence Act, or the engagement of Local Self Governments in integrating Gender & Child Budgeting and Gender & Child Based Plans must also be pursued.
- Other social groups such as Youth, Migrant Populations and People Living with HIV-AIDS are under-represented in the Eleventh Five Year Plan. Separate attention to their needs and priorities must be provided in the Mid-Term Appraisal of the Plan.
- A separate mechanism for regular reporting to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights must be created, on par with the existing reporting mechanisms for CEDAW (UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women).

*The detailed report of the consultation is available on [www.wadanatodo.net/reports](http://www.wadanatodo.net/reports).*

*For further information on this consultation and to get involved with follow up activities, please reach us at: 011-46082371 to 74 or write to [info@wadanatodo.net](mailto:info@wadanatodo.net)*