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## UNIT 9 ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN POLICY-MAKING

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### 9.0 LEARNING OUTCOME

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After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the importance of civil society organisations in the policy process;
- Discuss the typology of civil society organisations with special reference to India;
- Bring out the contribution of civil society organisations to policy-making;
- Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of civil society organisations; and
- Suggest remedial measures for cooperative and harmonious relationship between the government and civil society organisations.

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### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

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In previous Units, we have described the role of IGRs, Planning Commission, National Development Council, Prime Minister's Office, and Cabinet Secretariat in policy-making. It is quite apparent that there are certain issues and processes, which are still not covered by the policy network of the government. The policy system is incomplete without consideration of the need for, and contribution of civil society groups that work for the welfare and sustenance of the interests of marginalised strata of society,

The role of civil society in welfare and development can be traced from the pre-independence era to the present day. During the national movement itself, India's civil society began to emerge. This process was aided by the mobilising efforts associated with the pre-independence elections to legislative councils. The Constitution of India outlined the functions of its political institutions, including the division of powers between the central and provincial tiers of its federal system. The Constitution contained the usual liberal protections that make civil society possible, that is, freedom of speech, assembly, and so forth. The civil society was also shaped by other legal provisions, like the 'reservation' of about one-fifth of parliamentary constituencies for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In the last few decades, the role of civil society has increased substantially in the field of policy-making.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan emphasises the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as integral partners in development. These organisations include voluntary organisations, corporate bodies, cooperatives and trusts, which are actively involved in economic and social development. The basic strengths of this sector is being utilised in the policy process, namely their advocacy skills, organisational skills and above all, closeness to the people. CSOs are considered the *sine qua non* of efficiency, and effectiveness and 'legitimacy' of the government in a democracy.

This Unit highlights the role and functions of CSOs in development planning and policy-making. As the Tenth Five-Year Plan stresses on the role of these organisations as effective partners in development, it is imperative to discuss the constraints, which affect the development of government - civil society relationship. An attempt has been made to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of civil society organisations and suggest methods to improve their functioning in the policy process in this Unit.

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## 9.2 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN INDIA

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We have a long history and tradition of civil society engagement in political and social welfare activism. The voluntary movements grew with the emergence of various religious groups and social reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ram Krishna Mission, etc. It is to be noted that Mahatma Gandhi's movement for national independence was rooted in the ideal of social reconstruction, self-help and development of poor and untouchables through voluntary effort. He gave a new dimension to 'voluntary effort' in India. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), such as, the All India Spinners Association (1925), and All India Village Industries Association (1934) were active during the freedom struggle. Even Christian missionaries extended relief and rehabilitation services; and for this they adopted education and health care activities, besides provision of relief and rehabilitation. The occurrence of frequent floods, droughts, famines or other natural calamities during the 1950s and 1960s prompted massive voluntary action. Under the influence of the Sarvodaya Movement, youth movements, etc. a fillip was given to voluntary efforts. The changing socio-economic milieu has persuaded the Indian NGOs to extend their arenas of action.

The realisation of development goals, such as, alleviation of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, inequality, ignorance, environmental degradation and strengthening of national integration, depend upon the active participation of people through public-private partnerships. Here lies the importance of civil society actors, that is, "members of the community" who are committed (without profit for themselves) to remove the root causes of problems. They try to improve the quality of life, especially of the poor, oppressed, or marginalised strata. They also take up developmental tasks on their own, and thereby make important contributions to development planning and government programmes. The CSOs have also emerged as an important instrument of 'decentralisation' and 'de-bureaucratisation' in India. Other popular terms used to describe civil society organisations in

India are, 'civic institutions', 'social movements', 'non-profit organisations', 'voluntary organisations', 'independent advocacy groups', and 'Non-Governmental Organisations' (NGOs). The NGOs constitute a major part of CSOs, and hence it is important to discuss the role of these organisations. In the broadest view, the NGOs are described as the third sector involved in development, in India (vis-a-vis the first is the Public Sector, and the second is the Private Sector). According to the World Bank, "NGOs include charitable and religious associations that mobilise private funds for development, distribute food and family planning services and promote community organisation. They also include independent cooperatives, community associations, water user societies, women's groups and pastoral associations. Citizen groups that raise awareness and influence policy are also NGOs". Due to the changing needs and policies they have diversified their activities and became more professional in policy-making. As a result, the process of networking with other organisations in the same or similar area is also seen among the NGOs.

NGOs have a legal status in India, since they register themselves under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. The large number of NGOs are registered with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 1976. The government has been planning to enhance the participation of the voluntary sector in development. Therefore, (in March 2000) to provide a single window on policy matters regarding the voluntary sector, the Union Government declared the Planning Commission as the nodal agency to promote the Government-Voluntary Organisations Interface. As per a report of the Planning Commission, there are a total of 16,430 (upto June 2005) voluntary organisations in India, of which 6,541 operate in rural development, 2,074 in human resource development, 2,944 in social justice and empowerment, 1,343 in health and family welfare, 649 in environment and forests, 853 in culture, youth affairs and sports, 137 in labour, 19 in non-conventional energy sources, 325 in textiles, 50 in science and technology, 20 in agriculture, 88 in road transport and highways, 12 in statistics and programme implementation, 509 in tribal affairs, 62 in small scale industries, 9 in communications and information technology, 795 in States/Union Territories, and 367 in National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

The civil society groups are active participants in planning, and implementation of government policies and programmes. A highly articulate civil society with crosscutting, overlapping memberships of groups, of/and social mobility is the presupposition of/for stable democratic polity, and a guarantee for equality and justice. They serve as watch-dogs of government programmes, and also as 'policy advocates', applying their grass-roots knowledge of development to government priorities and programmes. Such a perspective assumes that indigenous civil society organisations can influence and contribute to government policies and priorities. In the globalisation scenario, civil society organisations operate at the local, regional, national and international levels. Now, we will explain various types of CSOs in India.

### 9.2.1 Civil Society Organisations: Typology

A noticeable feature of the term civil society is its supposed inter-changeability or synonymity with NGOs. Among the civil society organisations, NGOs constitute a major part, hence their types and organisation needs to be studied. The CSOs are identified and classified on the basis of their work, according to the level at which they operate, and according to the approach which they undertake to fulfil their goals.

#### i) On the basis of their work

- *Service-oriented organisations* provide services in the areas of health, education, family planning etc. The programmed details are designed by the CSOs, and local citizens are expected to participate actively in implementation.

- **Charity-oriented organisations** are directed towards meeting the basic needs of the poor or vulnerable sections of society by providing clothes, food, medicine, temporary shelter, housing etc. These types of CSOs are very useful and undertake relief activities during disasters, such as, flood, earthquake, tsunami and cyclone.

**Empowerment-oriented organisations** aim to develop an understanding among the underprivileged sections of society about the socio-economic or political factors, which affect their development; and help to strengthen their own potential power. In this regard, they act as facilitators and encourage maximum involvement of the local citizens in collective concerns.

- **Participation-oriented organisations** often have a participatory orientation, for example cooperatives. In the community development project, participation begins with the need identification and continues during the planning and implementation stages.

Civil society organisations concentrate mostly in the metropolis, and some of them are working in tribal areas. These organisations can be divided into the following categories:

- Techno-Managerial Voluntary Agencies accelerate the groups of rural development through modern management techniques and technology.
- Reformist Voluntary Agencies advocate changes in the social and economic relationships in the society within the existing political framework.
- Radical Voluntary Agencies organise and try to empower the exploited, and mobilise them against the exploiters.

#### ii) **On the basis of Level of Operation**

- **Community based civil society organisations** include women's organisations, youth organisations, religious or educational organisations.
- **State/City level organisations** like Chambers of Commerce and Industry, ethnic or educational groups, which are involved in specific activities to help the poor.
- **National level organisations**, such as, the Red Cross assist local branches in disaster management, epidemics, etc.
- **International level organisations** like OXFAM and CARE are involved in funding the local NGOs to implement the development project themselves.

### 9.2.2 Civil Society Organisations: Role and Functions

Civil Society Organisations are expected to play an important role in all conceivable aspects of development as a planner and implementer of development programmes; mobiliser of local resources and initiatives; catalyst, enabler and innovator; builder of self-reliant sustainable society; mediator of people and government; facilitator; supporter and partner of government programmes; agent of demystifying technology and disseminating information; factor of transformation, conscientisation and improvement of the poor; and facilitator of development education, training and technical assistance. Specific roles performed by the civil society organisations are as follows:

#### i) **Supporting the Government plans/projects**

CSOs help in selecting the suitable locations for innovative government projects, and specify the strengths and weaknesses. In this regard, they suggest ways to overcome the shortcomings that government may face at the time of implementation. Thus, CSOs contribute at the time of planning itself. They act more quickly than a government bureaucracy due to the flexible and democratic nature of their organisations. They support and demonstrate the results of pilot projects very effectively and facilitate clear communication between citizens and the government.

### ii) Facilitating Communication in the **Planning** Process

In policy-making, especially at the field level, they have a good feel of the community response and basic needs of the citizens. To win the confidence of the people (community) they use interpersonal methods of communication. They provide information to the public agencies about the lives, attitudes, culture and capabilities of people in their area. In the context of policy-making, they facilitate communication at both levels, **upward** (from citizens to the government) and **downwards** (from government to citizens). In upward communication, they inform the government about the requirements, orientations and abilities of local people; and provide feedback for modifying or changing the existing programmes in consonance with the basic needs of the area. Downward communication entails creating awareness among people (local) about the government plans, functions, and available resources. They work in strategic ways, share information, and develop networking between the other organisations involved in their field.

### iii) Mobilising Local Resources and Initiatives for proper Planning

The civil society actors play a crucial role in development especially through mobilising local resources and initiatives. Their efforts can be seen during the post-disaster phase, especially in planning for rehabilitation and reconstruction. To uplift the vulnerable people they plan and develop land, building materials supply centres, and community-based economic enterprises; construct houses; and provide infrastructure. In addition, they plan, operate and maintain drinking water supply, public toilets and solid waste collection services. In certain cases, NGOs become spokespersons for the poor or underprivileged sections of society in safeguarding their interests and protecting their rights by influencing government agencies.

### iv) Advocacy for underprivileged sections

Civil society actors prepare and empower the disadvantaged sections of people to overcome psychological inhibitions and to raise their voice against atrocities and injustice. This is basically an advocacy role. They act as 'Ombudsman' for the affected people, and attempt to influence government policies and programmes on behalf of the underprivileged sections of society. To influence the officials or non-officials concerned they make representations, arrange demonstrations, provide focus in the media about cases of the affected citizens so as to bring changes in policy and practice. They also help the government in monitoring and evaluation of government policies and programmes.

### v) **Monitoring** and Evaluation of Government Policies

The CSOs conduct innovative research and activities in the field of planning for policy-making and implementation of development programmes, which is documented and shared with the government and public. These efforts in monitoring and sharing of results contribute to the effective functioning of the bureaucracy and political leadership, and encourage people's participation in the policy-making process; thus, they keep a check on policy process. Some NGOs provide technical assistance, and training for monitoring and evaluation.

### vi) Facilitating **Development**, Education, Training and Technical Assistance

The civil society actors develop programmes, with the help of experts, to provide technical assistance and training capabilities. They also provide training for volunteers and personnel of other NGOs.

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## 9.3 GOVERNMENT- CIVIL SOCIETY INTERFACE

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CSOs have undergone various changes in their role, that is, from charity, relief, and welfare to development and empowerment. The change in the role of CSOs as a partner with government in

development and the policy-making process is helpful in planned development. Partnerships between CSOs and government agencies have contributed to greater effectiveness in the implementation of welfare and development programmes.

The Union Government recognised the crucial role of NGOs in development during the Sixth Five-Year Plan. Since then more emphasis has been laid on the promotion of the NGOs in order to secure people's participation in various development programmes. The creation of the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), in 1986, is an example of this strategy. The Seventh Five-Year Plan emphasised the need to involve voluntary agencies in various development programmes, especially in the planning and implementation of rural development programmes.

The NGOs and movements, which started for the purpose of protection of environment, such as, the 'Chipko Andolan' led by Sunder Lal Bahuguna and Narmada Valley Protection Movement, led by Medha Patkar have been quite successful in bringing to the attention of the government the problems of infringement of the rights of the affected people. The upsurge in civil society movements has resulted in bringing about alterations in policy decisions. For example, most of the movements opposing indiscriminate logging for commercial purposes came together to oppose the Draft Forest Bill of 1982, forcing the government to reconsider its decision and not to bring the Bill in its original form to Parliament for its approval. The incorporation of the public demands in policy was reflected in the National Forest Policy, 1988 and the circular on Joint Forest Management, 1990 that moved away from focusing on the commercial value of forests towards recognising the need for conservation of forests. Incidentally, the government also recognised the value of participation of CSOs in forest management. Thus, the environmental movements have been greatly strengthened by the able assistance of 'environmental NGOs'. A large number of NGOs are devoted to environmental protection in India. The India office of international NGOs like WWF-India are involved in research relating to environmental protection and sustainable development. In addition, Indian groups, namely, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), The Energy Resources Institute (TERI) and The Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) have been contributing to national level policy-making. At the grass-roots level, Tarun Bharat Sangh and Tawa Matsa Sangh, spread out across the country, have been contributing to efforts in strengthening environmental initiatives at the local level.

After the Bhopal Gas Disaster (1984), many NGOs have been instrumental in persuading the government to accept some of the proposals for minimum compensation and relief measures for the victims of the tragedy. The NGOs petitioned the Government of India and the World Bank to work out alternative designs, and to reassess the impact of the Narmada Valley Project. Due to their efforts and pressure, the World Bank was persuaded to send its team for reassessment of the Narmada Valley Project.

The local level NGOs have been involved in organising women to form associations, taking up self-help programmes, devising strategies for changing the existing social structures, and raising the status of women as equal partners in development with men. For example, the All India Women's Conference, Bhartiya Gramin National Memorial Trust, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), etc. have been working incessantly for the upliftment of women. They have influenced the enactment of a number of new statutes concerning women and in bringing about amendments to the existing laws relating to women and their rights, such as, the Anti-dowry Act, raising of minimum age for marriages of girls, Anti-Sati Act, the suppression of Immoral Traffic (among women) Act, etc. They have been instrumental, in ensuring a number of facilities and enhancing opportunities for educational and health benefits; preventing discrimination against women; establishment of women's banks, cooperatives; arranging training programmes for women entrepreneurs and skilled workers; and in securing equal pay for equal work in a number of

establishments, A visible impact on various policy issues can be seen due to cooperatives and federations like the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).

In addition to a description of the role of well-known voluntary organisations, we will discuss briefly the cases pertaining to the civil society interventions and contribution in the area of public policy. Table 9.1 depicts key information about the cases of pavement dwellers in Mumbai, tribals in Gujarat, decentralisation of power in Bangalore, and the more recent example of Bhagidari scheme in Delhi.

Table 9.1: Role of Civil Society in Policy-Making

Issues	Civil Society Organisations	Strategies used by the CSOs	Outcome as an impact on policy
1. Housing rights for pavement dwellers in Mumbai.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres</li> <li>● National Slum Dwellers Federation</li> <li>● Mahila Milan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Put pressure on the government agency 'through dialogue, documentation, meetings, and dharna.</li> <li>● Empower marginalised people to deal with the government agencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recognition of the pavement dwellers in the planning process of the State Government.</li> <li>● Inclusion in policy.</li> </ul>
2. Priorities, resource allocation for tribals in Gujarat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● DISHA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Analysis of the state level budget to bring out the gaps between the pro-poor (especially tribal) policies and resource allocation</li> <li>● Sharing of information with citizens, media and other civil society organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a Widening of discussions in state legislative assembly on budget issues</li> <li>● Improved (budgetary) planning by the government, whereby the gap between budgeting and sectoral planning is bridged.</li> </ul>
3. Decentralisation of power and peoples' participation in policy formulation in Bangalore.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CIVIC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Debates, and discussions to persuade and pressurise the government to pass effective legislation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Legislation passed, incorporated the provisions for decentralisation of power in Bangalore.</li> </ul>
4. Peoples' participation in the policy process in Delhi.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Residents Welfare Associations</li> <li>● Trade/Merchant Welfare Associations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussion in workshops with officials to prepare a Report on selected issues for policy-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inclusion of the decisions of CSOs in the policy-making.</li> </ul>

Source: Rajesh Tandon and Ranjita Mohanty

### 9.3.1 Pavement Dwellers in Mumbai

The case of pavement dwellers in Mumbai highlights the fact that previous government policies recognised slum-dwellers but never acknowledged the presence or the right (citizenship) of pavement dwellers. However, the issue of right to live as legitimate citizens of the city of Mumbai is central to the well-being of pavement dwellers.

The important issue for the pavement dwellers is shelter. As their hutments are not located in the government maps, they are, therefore, deprived of entitlement benefits, and are not legally recognised. They do not find a place in the entitlement network for basic facilities, such as, electricity, drinking water, ration card and banking. In such conditions, the pavement dwellers are subjected to daily indignities and harassment, which gets magnified when their houses are often declared as illegal encroachments on the government land and the Municipal Corporation demolishes them.

The state does not recognise them as part of the city's population and treats their helplessness as encroachment on government and public land. The pavement dwellers could draw the attention of the government at the time of elections, and next time when their houses are demolished. They occupy the scarce urban space, which is demarcated as government land, and there continuously growing population poses difficulty and challenge for the city people and the government. As a result, the municipal corporation authorities demolish their houses. In this condition, the only possible option for them is to begin life on another pavement and live there until the government recognise their presence again by demolishing their houses.

#### Civil Society Interventions and Government Policy

The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) has addressed the case of pavement dwellers in Mumbai. It was set up in 1984 to support women pavement dwellers in their own empowerment. In this case, Mahila Milan (MM) is an outcome of the interventions of SPARC, which is an association of women pavement dwellers. It is a membership association of self-help variety, primarily engaged in savings and credit for access to housing and livelihood on the pavements of Mumbai. During the short span, the SPARC started working with National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF). The NSDF as an association represented the aspirations and interests of slum dwellers in different parts of the country. The primary civil society actors involved in the case of pavement dwellers in Mumbai is a coalition of SPARC, Mahila Milan, and the NSDF. The SPARC played the role of initial empowerment of Mahila Milan both in building their awareness as well as in enabling them to engage with the Municipal Corporation and other government agencies in Mumbai. The SPARC used their research strategy to prove that public agencies are not meeting the basic needs. Identification of the needs and priorities of pavement dwellers in Mumbai added further strength to this coalition in influencing the government policy through a variety of public education campaigns in the media. They pressurised the government and the municipal authorities through demonstrations and 'dharnas' (public protests), and sustained meetings and dialogues structured to articulate the interests and needs of pavement dwellers in the city of Mumbai. As a result, one of the major outcomes of this sustained endeavour was the recognition of the genuine pavement dwellers in concern of the formal policies of urban development and rehabilitation of the poor in Mumbai.

In 1985, when SPARC initiated its efforts, the attitude of the government agencies was apathetic and largely hostile towards the pavement dwellers, which is evident from the act of demolition of their hutments. Even in this case, the Supreme Court judgement recognised the problems faced by the pavement dwellers, but did not declare the demolition unreasonable, unfair and or unjust (up to 1995).



However, SPARC has been mobilising the pavement dwellers with the support of MM and NSDF. Therefore, the recognition of pavement dwellers in the policy process was the outcome of a continuous process of interaction and negotiation with the State Government. During this period there were phases of indifference, hostility and instances of cooperation as well. In this slow process, the SPARC has successfully acquired government land and begun construction of houses to rehabilitate 7,000 families. Their success lies in the strength and agenda of civil society actors to foster sustainable changes in policy decisions. Thus, interventions by civil society organisations have influenced policy makers to provide shelter to the pavement dwellers. The civil society interventions also highlight the need for involving all the stakeholders—including the affected people—in public policy process, especially on welfare and socio-economic development. (Tandon and Ranjita, 2000)

### 9.3.2 Tribals in Gujarat

The case of budget analysis in Gujarat State reveals the gap between the state's policies towards the poor, especially the tribals. The study highlights that budgets are formulated at the provincial and national level by the Finance Ministry. In this process, before the budget is passed it is placed in the respective provincial legislature and Central Parliament for debate and comments. In case of tribals, besides the discrepancy in the budgetary allocation made towards the development of poorer sections and the tribals, citizens were not involved in the process at any stage. The entire policy process is left to the experts and the final budget is passed after it is debated in the legislative assembly at the provincial level or in parliament at the national level. There is, thus, no mechanism through which the tribals could make the state accountable to make suitable allocation of resources for their development. In this case, DISHA (CSO) has contributed significantly.

#### Civil Society Intervention and Government Policy

The alternative budget analysis, prepared especially to set priorities for resource allocation for tribals in Gujarat, has improved the budgetary planning. This strategy has contributed in bridging the gap between budgeting and sectoral planning, and created closer link between government policy objectives and budgetary allocations in the sectors, such as, forestry, education, health, agriculture, water, labour, and infrastructure development. "The debate on budget now goes beyond mere numbers and trends and covers many policy and developmental issues for the welfare of citizens." (Tandon and Ranjita, *op. cit.*)

### 9.3.3 Implementation of Decentralisation of Power in Bangalore

The state bureaucracy in Karnataka resisted to pass the state legislation pertaining to devolution in urban governance. In addition, efforts were made to dilute the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment's mandatory provisions into options that the state legislator would decide upon. (Tandon and Ranjita, *Ibid.*)

#### Civil Society Intervention and Government Policy

In this situation CIVIC, which is an intermediary association engaged in research and advocacy took up the case of enactment of state legislation pertaining to the 74<sup>th</sup> amendment. The CIVIC has followed its usual procedure of organising meetings and holding seminars, both in Bangalore as well as in moffusil towns of Karnataka to make the citizens aware of the provisions of 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Along with experts' opinion submitted as recommendations to the state, the CIVIC also provided testimony from citizens concerned. The effect of CIVIC's intervention was ".... incorporation of the provision for formation of ward committees and their citizen oriented functions in the legislation relating to 74<sup>th</sup> amendment. The Karnataka Nagarpalika Act was passed in 1996

and since then, CIVIC has been working towards making the ward committees operational. The fact that CIVIC is there to monitor the operationalisation of the Nagar Palika Act and that monitoring the formation of ward committees and its operation is also an agenda of CIVIC.....” (Tandon and Ranjita, op. cit.)

### 9.3.4 Delhi Government: Bhagidari

With the objective of good governance, based on the active participation of citizens and cutting all the bureaucratic barriers, the Delhi government initiated the concept of *Bhagidari*, in January 2000, that is, citizen-government partnership. 'Bhagidari' is a means for facilitating citywide changes; utilising processes and principles of multi stakeholders, that is, collaboration between citizen groups, NGOs, and government. It aims to develop joint ownership by the citizens and government of the change process, through peoples' participation in governance. The Bhagidari scheme basically involves:

- Discussion on problems and basic issues, thus arriving at solutions on the basis of consensus;
- Implementation of solutions; and
- Monitoring of the implementation process.

#### Governance by Partnership

Success stories reveal nominations of 500 water wardens and 1,500 assistant water wardens, citizen groups, the launch of old age pensions and smart card schemes for senior citizens, and the appointment of social welfare committees in 600 government aided schools. The citizen-government partnership scheme, very sedately dubbed 'bhagidari, bagged the UN Public Service Award for its attempt at involving the common man in the decision-making process (Hindustan Times, 23 July, 2005). The positive changes brought about by the Bhagidari scheme have also been recognised by the United Nations. According to the ACCORD survey, Delhites expressed their satisfaction about Bhadigari scheme. The level of satisfaction has moved up from 33 per cent in the first phase (January 2000 to June 2001) to 55 per cent in the second phase (July 2001-October 2002) and further up in the third phase. The Bhagidari system is entirely voluntary in nature. In 1998, there were a small number of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) willing to be part of this scheme. By the end of 2005 more than 1,100 citizen groups were involved in civic issues, such as, water, electricity, cleanliness. The solution; of problems are mooted and implemented through collaborative effort. In this context, the following campaigns need special mention:

- 'Clean Yamuna'
- 'No crackers on Diwali'
- 'Say No to Plastic Bags'

These campaigns got publicity and success due to proper planning by joint efforts. Co-operative efforts at the planning stage resulted in community participation, and acceptance with regard to matters like meter reading, water bill collections and payment, switching on /off of street lights, tenant verification for security, rain water harvesting in school compounds and local areas, door-to-door collection of garbage by volunteers, and decrease in power pilferage. In addition, large-scale demolition and sealing drives were the greatest examples of the power the RWAs have begun to wield. Issues, such as, illegal constructions and commercial misuse were first brought to the notice of the Delhi government by citizens' protests and Public Interest Litigations (PILs) filed by the RWAs. Their widespread demonstrations jolted the government bodies to serious attention. Demonstrations and sealings rocked the entire Delhi. In this context, the government had barely managed to get a one-year moratorium on these drives from the Supreme Court, when another PIL and more aggressive demonstrations showed that the residents' groups pursue the matter till

end. Thus, finally it was decided by the Supreme Court, ".... only some parts of the anti-demolition Bill would be implemented. It was also proposed that any civic development activity henceforth would be carried out after RWA consultation". Now, RWAs are consulted on almost every issue and they have almost become unofficial governing bodies in their own rights. (Chowdhury, August 2006)

Following steps are involved in the policy process of the Bhagidari Scheme:

At the *first* stage, the government organise workshops for representatives of citizen groups (RWAs and MTAs) to discuss selected issues with officials of the departments concerned. The departments or autonomous bodies included the Delhi Jal Board, Delhi Vidyut Board, (subsequently unbundled into five companies as part of power sector reforms), the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Department of Environment and Forests, Delhi Police, New Delhi Municipal Council, Sales Tax Department, Weights and Measures Department and Industries Department. Each group discusses and builds consensus on solutions to issue-based problems. In this policy process, each stakeholder's commitment to his/her role and responsibilities is essential for successful outcomes.

### **Bhagidari Scheme: Administrative and Financial Arrangements**

The Delhi government provides administrative support to this programme. A separate cell, viz, the Bhagidari Cell was created in the Chief Minister's Office and the General Administration Department was designated as the nodal department. There is no separate provision for funding the Bhagidari scheme.

### **Bhagidari Scheme: Critical Analysis and Remedial Measures for Development**

The scheme is an excellent idea towards better governance, but is criticised for lack of a statutory base. Bhagidari has given a platform to a large number of RWAs who want to influence the decision-making process in matters that concern them. However, there are no funds, except for rainwater harvesting and for publication of newsletters by RWAs/MTAs (Rs. 500-2000 each) on the Bhagidari scheme. The Scheme attempts to involve only selected citizens who form the RWA/MTA. In this regard, an area-based approach is perhaps required for involving more citizens from each area. RWAs/MTAs also complain about lack of effective follow-up in implementation. It is necessary to tap the expertise of the private sector for specified works, such as, opening up schools and garbage collection. Involvement of junior and middle level officials should be encouraged as they matter in service delivery; such involvement also makes them more accountable. Despite a few shortcomings, the Bhagidari scheme is a worthy model for replication elsewhere.

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## **9.4 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS: CHALLENGES**

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Neera Chandhoke observes that it is not enough that there be a civil society, or even a civil society which is independent of the state. In her words, "Civil Society is not an institution, it is rather a process whereby the inhabitants of the sphere constantly monitor both the state and the monopoly of power in civil society. Democratic movements have to constantly widen the spaces from where undemocratic practices can be criticised, and for this purpose they have to exercise both vigilance and criticality . . . . . In the process civil society constantly reinvents itself, constantly discovers new projects, discusses new enemies, and makes new friends. . . . And this is important, for civil society as an essential pre-condition for democracy? (Neera Chandhoke, 2003).

It is argued, and rightly so, that policy-making and implementation of development plans could get a boost through active civil society organisations performing their role effectively and in collaboration with the government. In this context, certain constraints acting as bottlenecks in the relationship between the Government and the CSOs have been identified, which are mentioned below:

### 9.4.1 Barriers in the Government - Civil Society Partnership

- Paternalistic attitude of some government officials, and dependence of CSOs on government aid restrict the degree of the civil society actors' participation in programme/project design. In addition, major emphasis and concentration of government only on those selected programmes, just because aid and assistance is available for them, lose their (CSOs) innovative and enterprising character.
- Government grants make it incumbent on the NGOs to evolve, and adhere to, organisational rules and procedures. At the same time, the requirements of organisational compliance introduce elements of bureaucratisation and formalisation that are less responsive to the needs of people. Thus, they become top-down, non-participatory and dependent on external and governmental support.
- Bureaucratisation brings hierarchy, thus decision-making tends to be more centralised, which, in turn, destroys the cooperative and collegiate nature of civil society.
- In cases where NGOs combine development concerns with political and religious objectives, politicians develop vested interest in and use them for their political gain instead of allowing them to serve the people. In a political environment, NGOs often fail to contribute or influence the policy or programmes in an objective manner.
- The work of some NGOs may not be as effective as claimed in their reports due to lack of capacity in the management of the professional skills of their staff, or due to lack of accountability of NGOs to the people at the grassroots.
- Many NGO-sponsored projects may have limited self-sustainability as they are not designed with sufficient concern for sustainability.
- Restricted ways of approach to a problem or area and territorial possessiveness of an NGO may also reduce cooperation between various agencies.
- Unwillingness of civil society actors to engage in a genuine dialogue with government officials may generate suspicion among civil servants, thereby limiting the organisation's access to government resources.
- The government's passive attitude to fulfil its commitment to improve services, eradicate discrimination and poverty, shortage of competent staff at local level, corruption, non-transparency, and nepotism may lead to confrontation between the government and civil society organisations.
- Pressure on successful civil society organisations from major donors to receive more funds, and too much dependence of NGOs on foreign donors may adversely affect their performance. There may be problems between the government and civil society organisations due to the suspicion that civil society actors are 'guided by a foreign hand'.
- The involvement of civil society actors in politics leads to close affiliation with politicians, which may undermine their autonomy. In such cases, they cannot freely criticise the government for wrong policies.

The government has various instruments, for good or ill, to influence civil society actors. The nature of response about the degree of control over them may be non-interventionist, or inviting partnership, co-option or active encouragement in achieving development goals: In this context, for improving the relationship between the government and civil society organisations in the field of development and nation-building, certain remedial measures should be adopted to enable proper identification of problem areas and adoption of appropriate strategies for resolving them. The focus should be on building a cooperative relationship between the government and civil society organisations for development of the country. The following section presents a check-list of some remedial measures.

## 9.4.2 Remedial Measures

### i) Promoting Good Governance

Formulation of policies that encourage a healthy civil society, and public accountability of government institutions will result in joint efforts for effective policy-making. For this purpose, review the working of the 'Mother NGO' concept, and based on that, consider alternative modalities of funding NGOs in order to enhance transparency and accountability in their functioning. Even to ensure that funds from public/private/external sources have reached the NGOs, appropriate policies and instruments have to be evolved. Such measures will help to develop CSOs confidence in governance.

### ii) Policy-Making Process

Develop core competencies and professionalism in civil society organisations for their effective contribution to policy-making. Proper provisions for providing information to civil society organisations, such as, timely dissemination of information to their constituents, advance intimation to leaders (CSOs) to cooperate with official agencies, bodies, etc. would help to improve the involvement of NGOs in planning and policy-making. In this sphere, it is necessary to build appropriate databases; carry out research and documentations and disseminate innovative development models.

Special efforts should be made at the grassroots level to develop and promote a symbiosis between CSOs and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Hence, they can complement each other and avoid conflict. Suitable representation should be provided to the actors of CSOs in the planning committees of the PRIs to enable them to be active partners in policy-making. Similarly, enthusiasm should be generated among the political leaders and administrators to accept the CSOs as joint partners in development planning.

### iii) Regulations

Design regulations to help the civil society organisations in developing sound management practices, and eliminating restrictive laws and procedures. Thus, broaden the base and scope of voluntarism by encouraging its growth in states and regions where they are weak.

### iv) Effective Policy/Programme Implementation

NGOs are expected to provide a supplementary or complementary role to government in the effective implementation of policies. Sometimes, the NGOs could perform better than the government because of their involvement, informal approach and proximity to the local people.

### v) Government Support

The government provides funds, projects, and training opportunities to provide encouragement to the civil society actors; and to develop their skills and contribute to development. While doing this, their autonomy and independence should be safeguarded.

### vi) Avoidance of Bias

Civil Society actors should be motivated and encouraged to reduce sectoral gaps and avoid activities of religious or ethnic bias. A high degree of professionalism among NGO personnel can prevent such bias. Training programmes too should make a special focus on this.

### vii) Ensuring Accountability

When legal restrictions are minimal the CSOs are tempted to indulge in unhealthy and corrupt

activities. In this context, as an example, it is to be noted that recently the Centre has blacklisted 69 (NGOs) in Tripura. (Ali, March 2006). To overcome such a possibility, it is necessary to enforce procedures of accountability of civil society actors with regard to accountability to: i) the members; ii) the government; and iii) society in general.

However, while finalising the schemes for civil society organisations, following considerations have to be kept in mind:

- Long-term support at least for a period of five years may be desirable.
- Fast-tracking of proposals from established NGOs should be adopted.
- Involvement of nodal agencies is a useful instrument for providing better coordination, and technical and managerial support to field level CSOs.

Programmes/schemes should be maximally flexible, which encourage innovative, need-based, demand-driven and location-specific projects with budgetary/task norms serving as guidelines.

- Sustainability of projects should be built into the government schemes.
- Monitoring and evaluation should be part of the project design with earmarking of funds.
- Adopt a simplified proforma for applications from NGOs for seeking grant-in-aid.

Thus, an enabling environment will generate greater involvement in the civil society actors, and to become active partners with the government in the planning and policy process.

### Recent Development

The national policy (2006) on voluntary organisations has proposed tax rebates. According to the draft policy worked out by the Planning Commission. Tax incentives play a positive role in the process. As stocks and shares have become a significant form of wealth, therefore in order to encourage transfer of shares and stock options to voluntary organisations, the government will offer tax rebates for this form of donation. This can be a significant source of funds for NGOs and enables them to become fiscally independent. In this context, to ensure that incentives are not misused the Commission has proposed the introduction of more stringent administrative and penal procedures (Sinha, May, 2006). The proposal of the Planning Commission awaits approval of the Union Government.

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## 9.5 CONCLUSION

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The complex nature of India's civil society organisations has spurred debates about its regional variations, relations with the state, and capacity to improve governance. The Tenth Five-Year Plan emphasises the vital and decisive role of the civil society organisations in bringing about planned development along with public and private partners. The Indian civil society organisations challenge conventional analytical categories separating modern and traditional identities.

This Unit has presented the idea that the government should accommodate and accept civil society organisations as legitimate and dynamic institutions. The government can utilise the services of CSOs through their active participation and cooperation in planning, policy-making, implementation of programmes, monitoring, and evaluation of plans and programmes. The NGOs have been trying to sensitise, **organise**, and mobilise people at local, national and international levels. Their **impact** can be seen in bringing the attention of the government to various issues of development, such as, peoples' participation, equity, gender, empowerment, health, removal of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and sustenance of goal fulfilment. The government should appreciate the role of civil society organisations in providing better delivery facilities, cost effectiveness, field testing facilities for new technologies, training inputs, **feedback**, etc. In some cases, the foreign

links of some NGOs and their hidden goals are suspected. A few organisations are accused of adopting corrupt practices and are blacklisted. However, it is necessary that the civil society actors should rise above such unwelcome practices, and protect their autonomy and independence from the possibility of bureaucratic control.

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## 9.6 KEY CONCEPTS

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- Bhagidari** : It means 'collaborative partnership' between citizens and administration in policy-making and for the effective delivery of services. In practice, Bhagidari is about understanding each other's constraints, appreciating the other side's strengths and then arriving at solutions to problems through consensus. Bhagidari scheme pioneered by the Delhi government, envisages collaboration between citizens and the city administration for the improvement of civic services.
- DISHA** : It is a non-governmental organisation, which is working among the tribals and forest workers. It matches the Tribal Sub-Plan with financial allocations made in the budget, analyses the discrepancies and then takes the action.
- SPARC** : It is an intermediary civil society for the promotion of Area Resource Centres in the Mumbai. The SPARC has addressed the case of pavement dwellers. It was set up in 1984 to support women pavement dwellers, especially in their own empowerment.

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## 9.8 ACTIVITIES

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- 1) Identify and select a civil society organisation in India, and highlight its contribution to public policy-making.
- 2) Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of civil society organisations in India. What measures would you suggest for improving the role of civil society organisations in policy-making?
- 3) What are the implications when civil society organisations function within the terrain charted out by the government? Explain.
- 4) Visit an area where development is affected due to corrupt officials and non-officials. Based on your observations, outline the constraints that affect the civil society's capacity to curb corruption.