

NOTE ON 'NGO DATABASE' AND 'NATIONAL POLICY ON THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR'

With the passage of the National Policy on the Voluntary Sector, as approved by the Union Cabinet (available at the website of the Planning Commission: www.planningcommission.gov.in/data/ngo/npvol07.pdf), which *inter-alia* suggests the need for preparation & updating NGO databases (Para 6.5 of the Policy), it is imperative to carry forward this work expeditiously. To properly implement the Policy and to involve VOs / NGOs appropriately in development work, basic data on the voluntary sector is a pre-requisite, therefore, the NGO database work need to be taken up seriously at all the levels of State Governments / UT Administrations as well as in the Planning Commission. A brief and issues for comments on NGO database and National Policy on the Voluntary Sector are given below:

(I) NGO Database

Voluntary Action Cell of the Planning Commission has been engaged in the preparation of a comprehensive database on VOs/NGOs, with the help of NIC-YBU. The NGO database on the website of Planning Commission, at present, has information on about 16,500 NGOs, who have received funding from various Ministries and about 1,500 NGOs considered being good partners by various bilateral / multilateral organizations, State Governments and Central Government Departments. Information received from Departments / Ministries and State Governments on allocation and expenditure on schemes implemented through VOs / NGOs is also provided on the website. Some useful studies & publications on voluntary sector and other useful sites on voluntary sector have been provided on the website. Lists of NGOs blacklisted from time to time by different Departments have been hyperlinked on the icon 'NGOs' at the website of Planning Commission. In addition, presentations made by eminent voluntary sector representatives at Planning Commission, under the Civil Society Window series on about 25 topics, regarding alternative models for development, are also available on the NGO database website.

According to a study by PRIA-JHU conducted in 2002, there are about six lakh registered and about equal number of unregistered NGOs in the country. Number of VOs / NGOs and their contributions in various development related fields are increasing at a rapid pace. Keeping the above in view, the

information on the voluntary sector we have under the NGO database is inadequate. From time to time, information has been requested from the State Governments / UT Administrations about the outlay / expenditure on voluntary sector and details about VOs / NGOs funded in a particular year. To restart the process of NGO database building, updated formats (Annexure-I & II) have been sent on 16/06/08 to all the State Governments / UT Administrations (Copy enclosed as Annex).

On following issues comments are solicited:

1. How to ensure speedy **feed back** from all the State Governments / UT Administrations **on** information sought as per **Annexure-I & II**? How to collect data on registered VOs / NGOs getting funding from various government departments, preferably online, so that donors (government, private foundations as well as bilateral / multilateral organizations) and planners may have an idea on VOs working in a particular sector / geographic area?
2. **How to make the database more user-friendly** for stakeholders, particularly the Departments of all the State Governments / UT Administrations dealing with the voluntary sector?
3. Is it feasible to have **information on all un-registered and registered NGOs in the country**? This may be attempted by canvassing formats for registered (Annexure-III) and un-registered VOs (Annexure-IV) through District Collectors, advertisements in major newspapers as well as by putting these formats on the website of the Planning Commission.

(II) National Policy on the Voluntary Sector

The main objectives of the National Policy on the Voluntary Sector are to provide much needed legitimacy to the voluntary sector and at the same time make VOs more accountable. It also aims to identify systems by which the Government may work together with VOs, on the basis of the principles of mutual trust and respect. The current status on the following actionable points of the Policy, under three sub-heads may please be provided:

1. **Establishing an Enabling Environment for the Voluntary Sector**
 - 1.1 Take necessary steps to ensure accountability of VOs while safeguarding their autonomy (Para 4.1)
 - 1.2 Create an enabling environment conducive to the growth of voluntary sector (Para 4.2)

1.3 Introduce norms for filing basic documents in respect of VOs receiving funds from the Government agencies and place them in the public domain for increasing public oversight (Para 4.5)

1.4 Introduce pre-service and in-service training modules for government employees dealing with VOs/NGOs on constructive relations with the voluntary sector. There should be formal systems for registering complaints and for redressing grievances of VOs (Para 4.9)

2. Partnership in Development

2.1 State Governments should evolve multi- stakeholder partnership models for accelerated development, e.g. Involvement of VOs in Panchayat level meetings, for sharing information, responsibilities and thereby ensuring transparency (Para 5.1)

2.2 Ensure partnership with the voluntary sector by (i) consultation - through a formal process of interaction; (ii) strategic collaboration to tackle complex interventions and (iii) project funding through standard schemes. These should be given due attention in the Annual Plans of the State Governments (Para 5.3)

2.3 Set up Joint Consultative Forums (JCFs) having GO & VO representatives, to share ideas, views and information on development programs and to identify opportunities of working together (Para 5.4)

2.4 Identify national collaborative programmes to be implemented in partnership with reputed medium or large VOs with a proven track record. State Governments should ensure that such national collaborative programmes are given due importance in their Plan documents (Para 5.5)

2.5 Ensure proper accountability and monitoring of public funds distributed to VOs (Para 5.6)

2.6 Encourage various agencies, including those in the voluntary sector, to develop alternative accreditation methodologies (Para 5.6.2)

3. Strengthening the Voluntary Sector

3.1 Support and encourage existing, as well as new independent philanthropic institutions, corporate and private foundations to provide financial assistance to deserving VOs (Para 6.1)

3.2 Encourage VO networks & federations to facilitate discussion and consensus building on the issues of accountability to all stakeholders and transparency in functioning of VOs (Para 6.2)

3.3 Support organizations that train aspirants to enter the voluntary sector, as well as those already working in the sector and make available

physical facilities currently available with training institutes of State Governments, as a measure of such support (Para 6.3)

3.4 Encourage & recognize innovative & pioneering work of VOs (Para 6.4)

3.5 Prepare and update NGO databases (Para 6.5)

3.6 Websites of various State Governments should be re-designed to provide links to key documents, including those related to project funding schemes (Para 6.6)

3.7 Encourage involvement of volunteers in public services (Para 6.7).