

**Findings of THE RESEARCH FOR
Volunteer Services Overseas - India
On
NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING**

SUMMARY

The vision of VSO is world without poverty in which people work together to fulfill their potential. VSO achieves this through its volunteering programme. VSO has the distinctive competence in working with (its) partners to bring together people from different cultures and backgrounds, enabling them to share skills and learning to build a fairer world. The Global Strategy of VSO looks at National Volunteering as vital to operationalize its strategy. National Volunteering will include any volunteering that takes place within the country by nationals whether at a national or local community level.

One of the objectives in the governance programme of VSO in India is to promote national volunteering for active citizenship in the country. In partnerships with a few national and state level organisation VSO India had initiated pilots in National Volunteering.

Voluntarism as a means to operationalize the development approach as outlined above is not as effective and motivated at present as it was in the past in India when active engagement of people, often at personal discomfort and risks were present in different times. Therefore, a research was conducted to identify the role of VSO in the process of developing a national volunteering framework, as it is very crucial to promote greater awareness among civil society on their rights and responsibilities towards active citizenship.

The key questions which the research explored was whether there was scope for national volunteering which will encourage, enable and feed the process of active citizenship?

The methodology of this study was based on the principles of Participatory Research During this study, discussions in focus groups, dialogues, and activities that facilitated sharing in multi-cultural groups and diverse interest groups were conducted. Methods supporting consultative processes in different combination were used to corroborate and add to the desk research for secondary and documentary data.

The study found that despite the many worthwhile initiatives in the country, the majority of women and men have uneven access to the benefits of development due to poorly performing public services, exclusion from and inability of ordinary women and men to participate in decision making processes, and pervasive corruption and apathy at all

levels of government and administration. Marginalised communities lack a credible voice in the decision making structures and processes, thus remaining out of the social, political, economic processes of society. These communities who are beyond the margins of the development and political process, are a major section of Indian society constituting around 60-70% of the population who face discrimination owing to age, sex, caste status, religious background, abilities, class hierarchy, rural urban dichotomy, industrialization and urbanization and subsequent displacement and so on. A more unequal situation shows up when these parameters of exclusion are made to intersect with those affected by disabilities and those infected and affected by HIV AIDS.

However, the study also found that there is immense potential for synergies between provisions in the Right to Information Act, Voluntary Sector Policy and the Youth Act, and Urban Local Bodies/Panchayati Raj Institutions through the 73rd and 74th Amendments. The result would contribute to the achieving of the national development objectives put forward in the 11th National Five Year plan that exhorts participation for good governance, i.e. active citizenship. All the above initiatives and provisions together open many windows of opportunity for active citizenship towards accessing rights and discharging duties effectively

The various discussions made clear in a nutshell that volunteering is an attitude, a disposition to contribute and is undertaken by choice and free will. Volunteering is undertaken for the benefit of the wider community beyond the volunteer's immediate family or friends. The volunteer's motivation will not be for financial gain¹ but modest expectations of contributing to development and the individual's personal development and any payment should facilitate the functioning of the volunteer rather than be a salary.

This report informed the preparation of the strategy for National Volunteering by VSO India which is in an accompanying document.

¹ Explored with volunteers and receiving organizations.