



## Why the State and CSOs must work together

1. Never has the importance of collaboration between the government and grassroots Civil Society Organisations (CSO) been more apparent than in the past two years.
2. The government announced the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana — a ₹1.6 lakh crore Covid relief package — and the State and CSOs worked together to help the rural poor, who were reeling under the loss of livelihoods.
3. CSOs knew that to make communities resilient, community institutions such as women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) must be strengthened. But the bigger lesson we learnt at the time was this: Collaboration between CSOs was transformative.

## The Rapid Rural Community Response to Covid-19 (RCRC)

1. Soon after the lockdown was announced, a national coalition of seven CSOs was formed. Called the Rapid Rural Community Response to Covid-19 (RCRC).
2. One of the first things RCRC did was to organise interactions between members of SHGs and FPOs with senior government officials.
3. This direct interaction with officials resulted in greater engagement with central schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), PM Jan Dhan Yojana and PM Kisan Samman Yojana at a time of unprecedented crisis.
4. Member-CSOs in four states — Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat — participated in a year-long campaign making telephone calls as Nagarik mitras (citizen friends) which resulted in a larger uptake of government schemes such as widow and old-age pensions among the rural population.

## Citizen help centres

1. In Jharkhand, over 5,200 families were able to enrol for pension, gram panchayats issued 20,172 new job cards under MGNREGS, a government scheme that guarantees 100 days of employment and earnings, as local CSOs established help desks to correct the information asymmetry and improve villagers' access to the scheme.

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2. This is a good example of how the government can use the coalition's nagarik soochna kendras (citizen help centres) and nagarik mitra innovations to scale up awareness and outreach of schemes.
3. RCRC also ensured that grassroots CSOs' perspectives became known to the government.

Experience has taught us that collaboration between the government and CSOs holds huge potential for improving the welfare of poor people, especially for last-mile coverage. Coalitions such as RCRC addressed the challenges thrown up by the pandemic, and the ensuing lockdown because they pooled expertise, effort and resources. This is a win-win situation.

## Revisiting India's federalist ethos

1. The model of federalism in vogue today, in its current form, is a cause and consequence of the excessive concentration of power in the Central government.
2. This comes at the cost of denying States their rightful place in the scheme of things as envisioned in the Constitution of India.

### Federal concerns of states:

1. This change is located in the context of the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET), the dissolution of the Planning Commission and the status of the National Development Council.
2. The conduct of revenue sharing between the Centre and certain States has been less than satisfactory, out of line with Finance Commission recommendations, and it has effectively cut off funding for policy implementation, which is the lifeblood of State administration.
3. In recent times the opposition has also flagged an alarming tendency for Governors of their respective States to break with hallowed constitutional tradition.
4. This is taking the form of Governors getting involved in the minutiae of administration — normally considered the sole domain of the State executive



— or holding up specific processes involving their office in a manner that tips political circumstances against the State government in question.

5. Another instance of the Governor stepping beyond the routine constitutional duties is the inordinate delay by Raj Bhavan in Chennai in sending the Tamil Nadu NEET Bill for presidential assent.

## Recommendations of Sarkaria Commission

Justice R. S. Sarkaria headed a three member commission, instituted in 1983 which gave 247 recommendations for betterment of centre – state relations, of which important few are listed below: -

- i. Advocacy of strong centre
- ii. Establishment of Inter – State Council
- iii. National Development Council
- iv. Zonal Councils
- v. Careful use of President's rule in states
- vi. Appointment of Governors
- vii. Appointment of High Court Judges
- viii. All India Services
- ix. Emphasis on local / regional languages
- x. Planning Commission : A fair play of states
- xi. Balanced Distribution of Powers
- xii. Deployment of Armed Forces