



Addressing the Challenges of Civil Society Organizations in Political Awareness Creation

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Abstract: *This paper discusses the roles and responsibilities of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in creation of political awareness and focuses on addressing challenges faced by them. The CSOs have become a powerful player in India's democratic landscape transforming from simple charitable groups into becoming influential players in policy making across India with their number growing above 3.3.million. The CSOs have become politically dynamic as they are represented in Government policy making Committees and policy negotiation councils. The CSOs have great responsibility in creating political awareness shaping public opinion on critical political issues. Knowing that constructive engagement between citizens and government is an essential ingredient of representative democracy, involvement of CSOs has become a primary way of achieving participatory development in India. CSOs have influenced citizens to get political awareness, to understand their political rights , political entitlements , political responsibilities through articulating their political concerns. The CSOs act as facilitators, mediators, protectors and advocates for citizen's interests because a robust civil society is necessary for a strong democracy. But CSOs face challenges of poor staffing and personnel, financial constraints, poor understanding of government policy strategies and poor diversification etc. Above all the CSOs in India are very small and majority of them are rural based and they work in isolated and fragmented manner. Hence, establishing appropriate communication between them offers operational impediments. There is a need for intense and continuous capacity building of CSOs to constantly work in efficient and influential manner leading to the promotion of democratic principles and public friendly governance leading to national development.*

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Introduction- CSOs India is a vibrant network of organizations, movements and individuals who work on a wide range of issues including social, political and economic. They work on strengthening democracy, protecting the human rights, advocacy for women empowerment and working for the rights of the vulnerable and marginalised sections of the society. They are non state non profit and voluntary organizations formed by like minded people. They work separately from the state and they have no commercial ventures to support. They represent a wide range of interest in the society and there are community based organizations, philanthropic organizations, religious organizations etc. These CSOs also known as NGOs and civil society forums are active in advocacy of human rights creation of political awareness about child rights , women rights , elderly citizen rights.

Modus operandi of CSOs - The CSOs can involve public through functioning with different approaches which can include

1.	Convening Public Conferences and Workshops,
2.	Creating Educational Resources,
3.	Disseminating Reports , Studies and Publications,
4.	Holding Public Meetings,
5.	Issuing Press Releases,
6.	Making Written Or Oral Submission to Parliamentary Committees,
7.	Media Briefings,
8.	Organising Public Events,
9.	Social Media Content Creation,
10.	Working with Media,

Chief functions of the CSOs – The functions of CSOs are diverse. They question challenging government policies on political issues, holding government authorities responsible for their lacuna in policy implementation. These CSOs cover social , religious , political and economic issues by launching campaigns and through organizing public awareness programs. Their functions cover following

1. Advocating Social and political justice
2. Proposing Participatory governance

3. Safeguarding political rights of the Marginal sections
4. Environmental and heritage protection
5. Public services and accountability
6. Legal and policy challenges in political setting

Besides, CSOs support public in finding the gaps in government policy making and hold the government responsible for fixing the lacuna.

Statistical data - There are 3.3. million CSOs in India, Majority of them are rural based and are small. It is estimated that there is one CSO for every 400 people in India, The majority of the CSOs in India are classified as following

Type of the CSO	% to the total number
Religious oriented & sect based	25%
Community social service oriented	21%
Education service oriented	20%
Others including environmental , economic , ecology	34 %

Source: CSO– Ministry Of Statistics and Program Implementation , Government Of India ,2023

The legal and regulatory framework on CSOs - the following regulations regulate the working of CSOs in India.

1. Society's Act of 1860
2. Public Trust Act of 1892
3. Companies Act of 1956
4. Income Tax Act of 1961
5. Foreign Contribution Registration FCRA Act of 1976

The role of CSOs in creation of political awareness

1. **Promotion of democratic norms** - CSOs foster democratic environment and promote active civic engagement. They make citizens become aware of the political developments and make them understand the role of government. They raise voices of dissent if the policies get in the way of human rights.
2. **Supporting Marginalised communities** – CSOs serve as a voice for underrepresented groups bringing in their needs and demands to public attention.

They also demand government to make policy to reduce the societal discrimination. The rights of Dalits, Scheduled castes and communities have been upheld by the CSOs.

3. **Mobilising public support** - CSOs are ahead in mobilising public support and they organize campaigns protest marches rallies to raise public awareness and build pressure for policy makers They also ensure accountability in making the government understand fill the gaps in policy decisions
4. **Offering political education to public**- CSOs often conduct legal literacy camps and orientation training session to inform public especially the marginalised sections about their rights responsibilities and government working procedure. Civil society groups , political parties , trade unions and other organizations launched a **My Vote My Rights** campaign to oppose the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls citing concerns about the deletion of voters names particularly women, dalits, Muslims and migrant labourers.
5. **Monitoring elections**- CSOs are active in monitoring election process in India They eye on voter list preparation, train public in voting system, support them with awareness creation on voting rights.

Challenges faced by the CSOs in creation of political awareness:

1. CSOs face challenges of poor staff and personnel. There are 5 million paid employees in CSOs across India, while 73.4% of the them have only one staff or no paid staff.
2. CSOs face financial constraints, it is also estimated that CSOs have a 80 INR million turnover but most of the CSOs do not audit their finances regularly.
3. Most of the CSOs do not have any political vision but simply act as rivals of chosen political parties. The poor understanding of government policy strategies impede them to channel their dissent systematically. Sometimes they fight with political parties publicly without knowing the hidden agenda of the Political players.
4. Majority of the CSOs are weak in communication approach and their feeble dissent is really heard by the authorities and public.
5. Above all the CSOs in India are very small, fragmented and disjointed , majority of them are rural based and they work in isolated manner. Hence, their communication gap is a big hurdle . As there is no common communication network between CSOs

working for the same identical objectives, the goals and modus operandi of each CSO differs which weakens its functional procedures.

Initiatives needed for Strengthening CSOs-

1. **Need for continuous capacity building** -There is a need for intense and continuous capacity building of CSOs so that they remain constantly efficient and influential in the promotion of democratic ideals , seeking good governance leading to national development.
2. **Need for Institutional strengthening** -Institutional capacity strengthening refers to reinforcing required organizational systems within CSOs to boost their working. It can include linking corporate governance, public awareness boards , political governance , NGO management and human resource management training.
3. **Need for strengthening operational level working-** -At the operational level the CSOs needs to be broad based. They have to become strengthened at institutional level too. The needs and demands of each CSO are different. The CSOs need to become strong in their working and operational approaches.
4. **Need for diversification-** The same thematic areas including democracy, corruption, freedom of speech , drug traffic, human trafficking, poverty, security, human rights, and social justice. There is a need for CSOs to diversify into meeting different types of approach such as advocacy, empowerment awareness, public involvement and dissemination of political information.
5. **Need for fund mobilization-** CSOs face significant challenges in political awareness creation including funding constraints and dependency on donors restrictive regulatory environments and government's micro monitoring.
6. **Need for transparency-** They also face the challenge of political polarization and a shrinking civic space. Other challenges include a lack of internal governance and transparency limited collaboration among CSOs and struggles with measuring and communicating impact effectively.

Conclusion- The fact that government alone cannot reach out to the masses and deliver welfare measures has elevated the role of CSOs further. They have become all the more inevitable in democratic set up as constructive engagement between citizens and government is an essential ingredient of representative democracy. But addressing the challenges which

impede complete involvement of CSOs in achieving participatory development needs to be prioritised.

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