



Consultation Report

December 2017

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Stakeholder Group: NGOs

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I. Introduction

The National CSR Foundation held 5 consultative meetings with NGO representatives from 20 to 23 November 2017. The main objective of the meetings was to gather and exchange views and opinions on the Foundation's strategic role and direction.

The meetings with NGOs are part of broad consultations being undertaken with stakeholders across the public and private sectors and civil society. The Foundation is seeking to explore and take into account different perspectives through face-to-face meetings, focus groups and online consultations to help inform its future strategies. The process of consultation will also help to build constructive dialogue and relationships with stakeholders.

Participants from 150 NGOs attended the consultative meetings. A summary report of the consultation is presented here.

II. Themes of Discussion

The discussion was structured as follows.

1. National Role of the Foundation

- What should be the role and contribution of the Foundation at the national level?
- Are the proposed vision, mission and goals of the Foundation appropriate?
- The Foundation's approach towards NGOs, the private sector and Government
- Expectations and perceptions

2. NGO Registration

- Views on the eligibility criteria and process for registration of NGOs with the Foundation.
- One of the objects of the Foundation is to establish and update a register of NGOs. What types of information would be useful to include on the register?
- How can the register be updated? What would be the relevant principles for reviewing and renewing the registration of NGOs?
- Opinion on a classification of NGOs? On which basis can NGOs be classified?

3. NGO Funding

- Suggestions for an appropriate funding framework for NGOs with reference to:
 - Funding needs of NGOs
 - Projects based funding v. operational grants
 - Calls for projects, whether thematic or general
 - Funding windows, single or multiple and timeframes
 - Application and approval process
 - Project assessment criteria
 - Contract agreement
 - Monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment

4. Capacity Building of NGOs

- Needs of NGOs in terms of information, guidance and capacity building?
- How can the Foundation help to build the capacity of NGOs?
- Promoting a culture of performance, accountability, monitoring and evaluation among NGOs?
- Views on self-assessment tools as a way of analysing and strengthening capacity, performance, service delivery and governance of NGOs

5. Stakeholder Relationships

- Views on how to foster positive stakeholder relationships through:
 - Communication with stakeholders
 - Helpdesk
 - Publications: information, guidance, knowledge sharing, analysis and research
 - Information Technology: website, social media
 - Platform/forum for dialogue, collaboration and exchange of ideas
 - Events and activities
 - Networking among NGOs

6. Advancing National Priorities and SDGs

- How can NGO projects be made more impactful in addressing national priority issues and advancing SDGs?
- Views on:
 - The possibility of replicable and scalable projects
 - Collaboration between NGOs
 - Multi-stakeholder collaborative partnerships involving NGOs, Government and private sector

III. Consultation Summary

1. National Role of the Foundation

a. Role and contribution of the Foundation

- Participants expect the Foundation to play a leading role at the national level in helping to address pressing social problems, improve the wellbeing of the poor and vulnerable groups and bring a positive change in society.
- They see a wider role of the Foundation which extends beyond that of mere allocation of CSR funds to NGOs.
- Participants expect the Foundation to provide a platform for NGOs to exchange experiences and practices, to network and collaborate.
- Participants stressed that the Foundation should have a strong advocacy role supported by research. There is a need to inform Government on evidence-based policies and actions that can effectively tackle socioeconomic issues as well as promote the development of the NGO sector.
- According to participants, the Foundation can be a trigger for change in the NGO sector by promoting the professionalisation of NGOs.
- The Foundation should act as a liaison between NGOs and Government helping to bring at the forefront the practical difficulties and constraints faced by NGOs in delivering their services and/or implementing projects.
- The Foundation should, in addition, advise the relevant authorities on appropriate measures for facilitating the activities and projects of NGOs to the benefit of vulnerable groups.
- Participants laid strong emphasis on the importance of research. They were of the view that the Foundation should collaborate with academia to undertake and disseminate research and knowledge, for instance, on the nature and extent of social problems and thus inform evidence-based programmes and projects.
- Participants also shared the opinion that the Foundation can facilitate access of NGOs to other sources of funds by acting as an interface between NGOs and other funders particularly the private sector.

b. Vision, mission and goals of the Foundation

- Participants generally found the proposed vision, mission and goals of the Foundation appropriate.
- They recognised that the Foundation, by working together with its stakeholders and in particular NGOs, can address a number of social issues and enhance social inclusion and equity.
- Participants proposed that advocacy be included in the strategic goals of the Foundation.
- The need to monitor, measure and report tangible progress made toward the proposed goals was underlined.

c. Approach towards NGOs, the private sector and Government

- Participants are generally agreeable to the Foundation's proposed partnership model for supporting NGOs which involves funding, monitoring and evaluation, guidance and mentoring, networking, capacity building and learning.
- Participants pointed out that the Foundation should examine and understand the needs of different types of NGOs, in terms of funding, capacity building and networking, and tailor its funding and other types of support provided to NGOs.
- The issue of funding being allocated for a maximum period of 12 months raised concerns about the sustainability and impact of NGO projects and actions. There were numerous calls from participants to find an appropriate mechanism for supporting projects over longer time periods, e.g. 2-3 years, in line with the spirit of sustainable partnership as articulated by the proposed mission of the Foundation.
- Participants were favourable to the setting up an effective framework for coordination of NGO funding both with the public sector and the private sector.
- They also suggested that the Foundation should devise a platform for helping private foundations and companies channel their CSR funds towards NGOs in need of funding.
- Participants stressed that collaboration and coordination with ministries and other Government departments are necessary.

d. Expectations and perceptions

- There is a need for a stable policy environment. Participants called for consistency in CSR policy decisions. They pointed out that frequent policy reversals tend to have a negative impact on their ability to carry out their activities effectively.
- Many participants claimed that despite initial apprehensions, their perception of the Foundation had changed. They now have a generally positive image of the Foundation. In particular, they appreciate the open, transparent, professional and participatory approach adopted.
- Participants expressed the view that it is necessary for the Foundation to function autonomously and free from Government and/or political interference.
- Going forward, participants expect the Foundation to fully conform to principles of good governance.
- They expect Council to act in full independence and for adequate systems to be put in place to avoid any conflict of interest of Council members.
- Participants stressed the need for accountability and transparency in the management and allocation of funds and notably in the assessment of project proposals.
- Participants would like to see the Foundation give more visibility to its actions and those of NGOs.

2. NGO Registration

- Participants were generally agreeable to the eligibility criteria for registration although some participants called upon the Foundation to consider reviewing the criteria to enable organisations with less than 2 years of existence to be registered.
- Participants agreed that there is a need for periodic review of registration. There should be a comprehensive policy for registration and deregistration. The Foundation should monitor NGOs on its register.
- Participants suggested that NGOs registered with the Foundation should be given a registration certificate.

- Some participants proposed that a unique NGO identification number be used , e.g. the registration number from the Registration of Associations could be appropriate.
- Some participants noted that sociocultural organisations were registered with the Foundation. In their opinion, this issue required careful attention.
- Participants were unanimously in favour of the classification of NGOs and expect the Foundation to come up with an appropriate framework for classification.
- Some factors that could be considered for classification are, for example, the type of NGO (service providers, project-based), areas of intervention and expertise, specific problems and SDGs addressed, size of NGO etc.
- The main areas of intervention of NGOs could be matched to the relevant SDGs as a way of indicating the areas of intervention, expertise and problems addressed by each NGO.

3. NGO Funding

- Many participants voiced out concerns about their difficult financial situation and the lack of funding to sustain their operations.
- Participants emphasised the funding needs of different types of NGOs and proposed that the Foundation tailor its approach to funding NGOs accordingly.
- Project-based funding may not suit all types of NGOs. For example, operational grants should be considered for service providing NGOs.
- Participants raised the question of how NGOs that have ongoing activities should apply for funds each year. They would in effect be submitting the same project proposal when responding to call for projects.
- As NGOs professionalise, they are required to recruit qualified staff. This has implications on their costs of human resources and thus increasing their funding needs.
- Some NGOs may need funding for renovation of their premises in order to comply with the building standards and regulations set by different ministries. This should be taken into consideration by the Foundation.

- Participants proposed that funds for capital investment be considered on a case to case basis.
- The ceiling for maximum funding (currently Rs 3 million) could be raised.
- The application window for funds should be open for a longer time period and a help desk put in place to help NGOs through the application process.
- There is a need to consider the language barrier for NGOs when responding to call for project proposals.
- Some participants would prefer calls for projects to remain generic rather than thematic.
- The Foundation should encourage clustering, collaboration and joint project proposals from NGOs.
- Disbursement of funds should be timely corresponding to the requirements of NGOs.
- The Foundation should have a clear policy and mechanism for dealing with cases of misuse of funds and bad governance.
- The Foundation should clearly communicate the reasons for not approving particular projects of NGOs.
- The Foundation should consider building capacity of NGOs whose projects are rejected.
- An appeal mechanism could be proposed for rejected projects.
- NGOs should be made aware of the monitoring and reporting system.
- Since in many cases, funds from the Foundation alone are not sufficient to fully sustain the actions of NGOs, they need to seek funds from sources, particularly in the private sector. Participants suggested an appropriate platform could be created to guide companies in channelling funds to NGOs in need of funding.
- The Foundation should promote social entrepreneurship as a way of empowering NGOs to generate revenue and be at least partly self-sustaining, thereby reducing their dependence on funding.

4. Capacity Building

- Participants agreed that there is a need for specialised capacity building for NGOs. Many organisations lack the necessary competence and expertise. They would welcome relevant support and training to help build their capacity.
- Some of specific needs of NGOs identified by participants include project writing, project management, financial management, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, and good governance practices.
- It was proposed that the Training Needs Analysis conducted by DCP in 2013 be refreshed.
- Participants were of the view that the Foundation should not duplicate training provided by other institutions to NGOs. It would be more effective to collaborate.
- Participants were favourable to the development of appropriate tools to assess and strengthen NGO capacity, performance, service delivery and governance.

5. Stakeholder Relationships

- Participants were generally satisfied with the customer service provided to NGOs that had applied for funds in the first call for projects.
- Participants proposed that the Foundation provide an institutionalised platform for dialogue and networking between all stakeholders.
- Participants expressed the view that the Foundation could engage with stakeholders through the development of high quality, insightful publications and other types of contents including multimedia.
- The website and social media should be used as effective online communication platforms with stakeholders.

6. Advancing National Priorities

- Participants were favourable to the idea of working together among NGOs and in multi-stakeholder collaborative partnerships to help implement projects of larger scale with the potential of having bigger impact.
- Some participants remarked that while they would like to collaborate with other NGOs and stakeholders, they should be able to take decisions regarding their organisation independently.
- Best practices, success stories should be identified and replicated on a national scale.
- An advisory committee and/or thematic working groups composed of stakeholder representatives could be set up to discuss specific issues/ideas/strategies/solutions in a holistic manner under each priority area.

IV. Way Forward

- This Consultation Report will be shared with all participants of the consultative meetings and NGOs registered with the National CSR Foundation.
- It will be made public and published on the Foundation's website.
- Concurrently, the Foundation will continue its consultation via its online platform, meetings and focus group discussions to gather specific inputs from stakeholders.
- The results of the consultation process will feed into the strategic plan and in the elaboration of key actions to be implemented.
- The Foundation will hold a workshop for stakeholders to validate the strategic plan 2017-2019.