

Excerpts from the book.



Leadership & Governance

Initiating a Discourse for
Civil Society Organizations

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Contribution: `100

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Ladyfingers Co.*

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Preface

The trigger for the present paper comes from the deliberations of the three-day National Colloquium organized by HIDF (Bangalore) and EDI (Ahmedabad) on ‘Leadership and Governance in Civil Society’ in Ahmedabad from 22 to 24 July 2014. The Colloquium brought together notable leaders from civil society, select faculty from management institutes and, above all, the vibrant student community of EDI. The deliberations of the colloquium placed the engagements of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in a critical perspective for reflections and forward-looking paths.¹

To place the insights of the colloquium in ongoing debates in civil society, we have to draw salient trends from secondary sources to enrich the document in its articulation.

This document is divided into five chapters. The first chapter dwells on the role of CSOs and their contribution to the rights discourse. For illustration, we brought the contexts of Dalit and women’s engagements

as special social categories that journeyed with the rights framework with great conviction and aspirations for a just social order.

The second and third chapters touch upon India's changing development context and the continuing shackles of deficit of the marginalized and excluded amidst growing prosperity of some sections of society. Very consciously, we dwelt on the informal sector of India, albeit briefly, to highlight the enormity of issues that an entire range of workers are contending with and looking for solutions. We argue that solutions to the informal economies require innovative collaborations between the state, unions and CSOs.

The CSOs are challenged by internal challenges which many have kept in the backburner. The fourth chapter looks at issues of internal governance of CSOs. The fifth chapter presents a few forward-looking paths for reflection.

It must be said that this document has not tried to be exhaustive in its coverage of sectors, themes and illustrations. Rather, it underscores a reflective process on a few select themes in leadership and governance.

While writing a paper of this kind, the usual question that is asked is 'who is your audience?' Our primary audience is of course the participants who attended the colloquium. In the iteration and reiteration of issues that we deliberated upon, we believe that it would provoke those interested to build on our reasoning.

1 We place our thanks to all participants of the Colloquium – experts who made presentations, faculty and students of EDI who were most active in contributing and documenting the proceedings and HIDEF staff and Board members who were present. Special thanks go to Mr. Gagan Sethi, the Director of the Colloquium for the many roles he played – as an ideator, facilitator and most of all cohering the proceedings.

Chapter One

Challenges, Contradictions and Opportunities

Embedding Rights Discourse

Since the onset of liberalisation in the nineties, civil society organisations have been the strident face of Indian democracy. Their lasting contribution has been creating spaces where the marginalised and discriminated found

their voices. The voices that have pleaded, protested and asserted found opportunities to shift from welfare to rights. The development discourse is now firmly embedded in justice and the major stakeholders to this discourse are civil society organisations.

Illustrative of the movements that have positioned in the rights discourse are those of Dalits and women. The Dalit movement which now has global visibility and recognition exemplifies the human rights activism of its leadership and democratic spaces it has created through its local, national and international institutions. Accounting for nearly 16.48 per cent of India's population, with two-thirds of its workforce in primary or agricultural sector of the economy, continuing to live in segregated sections of rural India and subjected to numerous forms of discrimination of even the upwardly mobile, Dalits have been powerfully using human rights reasoning in all of their advocacy work. The turning point in Dalit human rights discourse took a turn at the Durban Conference in 2001, when a leading NGO campaign called National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)² lobbied to equate caste discrimination with racial discrimination and succeeded in getting the United Nations Human Rights Commission to make a reference to 'work and descent'. The Dalit women too have been contexting their situation along the lines of caste, class and gender. The 'historicity' of Dalits with a collective past of subjugation, violence and discrimination has indeed given them a socio-political identity. The last three decades of Dalit civil society activism has been combining identity and representative politics to make a meaning of all their mobilization that is developmental, political, and social.

Dalit Activism

While the learnings of Dalit activism are many, the following stand out as most prominent:

- The social mobility of Dalits is seen in education, particularly in higher education that allows them to enter mainstream occupations. A large number of rural youth have taken to vocational and skill training to compete in markets.
- For the Dalits, majority of whom are landless, land is not just an asset but a means to secure dignified livelihoods. The Dalit movement across several states have accessed Bhoodan, Panchami and Maharwarta land. But the struggle to access and acquire land has been most arduous. Studies point to a general trend that wherever land is distributed, possession has eluded; where possession of land occurs, no legal titles are given; and where pattas have been issued, no mutation process has happened.³

- A heartening trend in the last decade is the collaborative campaigns of Dalits and Tribals to demand their right to land.⁴

2In 2001, around 180 Dalit delegates from India attended United Nation's 'World Conference against Racism' – to connect caste and race and classify caste as race. This was seriously opposed by the government of India. This conference represented a transformation in the global approach to racism in human rights discourse. The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) which started as a campaign led by leading Dalit activists at this time is now a vibrant national level forum with its state branches (www.ncdhr.org.in). The NCDHR is also connected to a network called "International Dalit Solidarity Network" formed in March 2000; For a detailed analysis of Durban Conference, See, Dag Erik Berg, 2007, Sovereignties, the World Conference against Racism 2001 and the Formation of a Dalit Human Rights Campaign, Centre d'études et de recherches.

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What you have lost others have gained. Your humiliations are a matter of pride with others. You are made to suffer wants, privations and humiliations not because it was pre-ordained by the sins committed in your previous birth, but because of the overpowering tyranny and treachery of those who are above you. You have no lands because others have usurped them; you have no posts because others have monopolized them. Do not believe in fate; believe in your strength.

– **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

- Despite enabling legislations, Dalits continue to bear the brunt of caste-based discrimination. Atrocities on Dalits and Dalit women in some parts of India have increased. In some states, there has been much violence on educated youth by

³ We The National Alliance for Dalit Land Rights (NADLR) was formed in Jan 2013 to campaign for land rights. See, www.actionaid.org

⁴In 2013, the NADLR has joined Ekta Parishad, a well-known CSO that has been giving strong focus to the land rights of tribals to launch a major campaign with a resolve to make as many as 2.5 million landless Dalits file land claims

intermediate castes. If deployed effectively, the Schedule Castes/Schedule Tribes (SC/ST) Prevention of Atrocities (POA) Act of 1989 with its stringent penalties would have gone a long way in arresting atrocities on Dalits.⁵ Wherever CSOs have invoked this law, atrocities and violence on

Dalits were curtailed. But this law continues to be the most underutilised for various reasons, the most important being the vested interests of the dominant culture.

- Dalit women (49.96 per cent of the 200 million Dalit population, 16.3 of the total Indian female population) have formed the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) and have come forward with their feminist discourse and are critical of the lack of integration of their issues in women's movement and even within their Dalit movement. However, women leaders, especially at the national level continue to be limited in numbers. Interestingly, in recent years, Dalit women have also been claiming their rights to land in all their campaigns.⁶
- For the Dalits, celebrating their culture and common past has been a powerful route to create a socio-political agency.

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We were all born voiceless. The question to ask oneself is – how, when and where did I find my voice? When I saw my mother being humiliated, I found my voice to protest. When teachers ill-treat, you protest. The value of how to protest finds our voice. Giving people voice works two ways. When you are helping people unshackle, you are also unshackling yourself. We should 'create conditions' where people's voice finds expression.

“Mahatma Gandhi focused on the voice of conscious. B.R. Ambedkar advocated organised voice that is supported by

⁵Dalit cases are generally registered under Indian Penal Code instead of Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989. A large number of cases of atrocities also go unregistered mainly because of vested interests and reluctance of police to register cases.

⁶25,00,000 Dalit women filed claims in 300 districts on 14th April, 2013.
www.actionaid.org

law. Gautama Buddha preached non-verbal voice of love and compassion.

“Today, 7500 students have graduated in our Dalit Kendra. When a few boys began to harass girls in their hostels, one fine morning they went on a rampage and destroyed their motor vehicles. Voice without volume makes no sense. Everybody’s voice has some value. We have to have organised voice. Over the years, we have moved from pleading to protest through our voices. The culture of voice has changed. We also have to discover new voices.”

– **Martin Macwan** started Navsarjan Trust in 1989. Dalit Shakti Kendra is a vocational education programme of Navsarjan Trust. In 2000, the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights honoured Martin Macwan with the Human Rights Award for his work in leading the Dalit rights movement.

“

Asked, about his vision of post 2015 Millennium Goals, Martin’s response is poignant, “A stronger civil society representing the marginalised in leadership role that does not represent identity politics; that does not rely only on the state for development, can play critical role in addressing the challenges we face.”

– **See, Shaping Our Shared Future Beyond 2015: Perspectives from the Global South**, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, 2012, National Secretariat, New Delhi.

“

We give voice to people, we give them their voice, but sometimes in the process we lose our voice. And then we need to regain our voice to help people get their voice.”

– Among his many development engagements, **Gagan Sethi** has been closely working with Martin Macwan on Dalit issues.

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In India, a Dalit-centric policy framework to the MDGs is a pre-requisite... In the setting up of the post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) a particular focus should be on addressing particular forms of discrimination, termed Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) in the UN context, which affects over 300 million people around the world. In India, 160 millions of Dalits (Scheduled Castes) are excluded by this type of discrimination, which is distinct from racial discrimination. The number increases to 260 million Dalits in Asia... From the Dalit perspective, information needs to be more disaggregated in order to take the story beyond national averages and to ensure Dalits requests are adequately captured

in national and MDG statistics. What is essential as well is a robust framework that makes it possible to measure social exclusion in general and, in particular, violations of the principle of non-discrimination....”

– **N Paul Diwaker** is a Dalit rights activist and general secretary of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR). See *Shaping Our Shared Future Beyond 2015: Perspectives from the Global South*, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, 2012, National Secretariat, New Delhi.

“

When you first try to give spaces for voices of the disempowered, division happens. This is what happened in a drought and saline-prone village Bhal in Gujarat in 1981. When we went from UTTHAN to this village and asked the villagers what they want, men wanted employment but women wanted water. Women also wanted decentralized water so that they have access. They wanted ponds as a long-term solution. All this divided the society. Money lenders, traders and even the government opposed it. For women it is difficult to voice. They also lose their voice due to oppression and violence in their internal environment i.e. within community and external environments. That’s when they realized that there was a need to break the shackle of power of moneylenders and others who were opposing. Women got empowered and once money lenders came – a forty and odd women gathered and beat them up.

“Spaces for voices exist. All we need to do is listen to people’s voices, allow them to articulate, develop analogies and build

capacities. We then can create spaces where people can access justice. Today Bhal is a model village for women's empowerment. In 1994, UTTHAN moved out of Bhal.”

– **Nafisa Barot** is the Executive Director of UTTHAN. UTTHAN works in four districts, Bhavnagar, Amreli, Panchmahal and Dahod on management of water resources with focus on women.

Women's Agency⁷

Special mention must be made of women's activism, especially the vibrant autonomous women's movement of the past and successive women's collectives and networks led by informed feminist leadership. Amongst others, women's activism demonstrates:

- Although women form the world's largest section of the poor, their multiple economic pursuits have stayed households' poverty. A lot of women's productive work in rural India continues to be unpaid and has yet to receive policy recognition.⁸
- Women are most credit-worthy which is best demonstrated by the vibrant micro-credit movement of SHGs. The innumerable SHGs in rural India have become the development face of India.
- Women have been playing a central role in the protection of natural resources and ecology.
- Women's issues are societal issues and can no longer be wished away by men, masculine societal institutions and

7 *Agency refers to women's account of their capacity for individualized choice and action.*

⁸*In the totality of work that women do – paid or unpaid, productive or care, the time factor analysis has opened up a new way of analyzing the totality of work in terms of dividing economies as formal and informal and most importantly the unequal gender distribution of labour and its impact on women's poverty. It is this debate on totality of productive and care work of men and women that has influenced an expanded definition of informal economy which now includes the self-employed in informal enterprises (i.e., small and unregulated) as well as the wage employed in informal jobs (i.e., unregulated and unprotected) in both urban and*

Chapter Two

At Crossroads and Challenged

Changing Contexts of Development

India is going through dramatic social churn which is most pronounced in citizens' perceptions and aspirations. The emergence of India as a global player and the material upsurge in some segments of the economy has created deep pockets of economic and social privilege. Yet, inequalities have only grown and vulnerabilities of the poor increased, 'Between 2005 and 2012, India lifted 137 million people out of poverty and reduced the poverty headcount (at the national poverty line) to 22 per cent of the population. The pace of poverty reduction has been accelerating over the years, and a much larger fraction of the decline is taking place in low-income states. On the other hand,

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inequality continues to rise – albeit at a decelerating rate – and more than half of India's population remains vulnerable, living between one and two poverty lines... Many of India's newly non-poor remain vulnerable and minor shocks could easily push them below the poverty line. Three out of every five Indians are not poor but live dangerously close to poverty (between one and two poverty lines). Considering that the current poverty line is equivalent to US\$1.17 in PPP terms, individuals living below a threshold of two poverty lines remain precariously vulnerable to shocks which could push them into poverty.'¹⁷

While economic divides have sharpened and consumerism has grown, India continues to contend with steep fiscal deficit and inflationary trends. The present government's thrust on economic growth that is 'inclusive' has yet to unfold to see how best it combines issues of development with justice. 'More governance and less government' has become the political slogan. Going by the few decisions that the present government has already made, indications are that new institutions with a thrust on governance will emerge.

Even as India's growth is to be welcomed, India is also contending with informal economies where 93 per cent of its work force is found. While informal economies of developing countries has been the subject of much scholarly debate, what calls for reiteration is that it is India's working poor and disadvantaged that have populated this sector.¹⁸ One-third of the sector, women,

work in informal economies (largely in home-based work and self-employment) with unequal wages, uncertain employment, poor standards in working conditions and subjected to many

17 *The World Bank Group, October, 2013, India Development Update, Economic Policy and Poverty Team, South Asia Region.*

18 *Thanks to the advocacy work of alternate unionism, the term informal economies has been broadened to include, ‘...self-employed in informal enterprises (i.e., small and unregulated) as well as the wage employed in informal jobs (i.e., unregulated and unprotected) in both urban and rural areas ...So defined, informal labour markets encompass rural self-employment, both agricultural and non-agricultural; urban self-employment in manufacturing, trade, and services; and various forms of informal wage employment (including day labourers in construction and agriculture, industrial outworkers, and more.’ (Chen, Martha Alter, 2010, Informality, Poverty, and Gender: An Economic Rights Approach, Chapter in Freedom from Poverty: Economic Perspectives*

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vulnerabilities at work places. While on the one hand, women’s poverty stems out of their low-end and low-skilled participation in informal economies, on the other their contribution to GDP is considerable. If women’s unpaid productive work is also added to the GDP, their contribution would be a lot more. Martha Chen argues: ‘the contribution of women in the informal sector to total GDP is greater than their share of employment in the informal sector... Global competitiveness and labour costs are forcing employers to seek women for their low wages and flexible work arrangements. Women, as many argue, are handicapped because of their low-competency profile in terms of their education, skills and knowledge to compete in the market. This is further compounded by their time-poverty on account of their multiple roles and responsibilities. This is the gender conundrum that requires continuous knowledge building for analysis and policy.’¹⁹

Being outside the purview of labour legislation, social security continues to evade several categories of the informal workforce. Since 2001, ILO has been affirming social security as a basic human right and mooted the concept of the universal social protection floor. Anchored in social justice, the social protection floor advocates for universal right of every one to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being. No one should live below a certain income level and everyone should at least have access to basic social services. The social protection floor underscores decent work agenda to combat poverty, deprivation and inequality.²⁰ It is only after years of advocacy work by unions (SEWA being in the forefront) that led to one ILO convention (1996) for home-based workers. Recently, civil society organisations have taken issues of domestic workers to ILO.

Edited by Bard Andriassen, Arjun K. Sengupta, and Stephen P. Marks. Oxford University Press. This expanded definition was endorsed by the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2002 and the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 2003.

19 Martha Chen, 2010.

20 In November 2011, an advisory group, chaired by UN Women Director and former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, and convened by the ILO and the World Health Organisation, launched a report entitled Social protection floor for a fair and inclusive globalisation. (the Bachelet Report)



Chapter Four

Setting Standards for Accountability

Accountable and transparent ways of functioning go beyond monies. The CSOs are accountable to many stakeholders – foremost to their constituents and to the state which is closely looking at their governance; funding partners, especially those that bring public funds from international communities and other alliance partners. Self-regulation to maintain high standards of accountability and transparency has become the foremost prerequisite. How do CSOs ensure that they lead by their practice? While the discourse on setting up accountable governance of CSOs is vast and varied, it is pertinent to spell out the broad issues that will challenge the CSOs in the coming years.

There is already some discussion about rating CSOs. While some of micro-finance institutions have been rated by CRISIL and a few

other rating agencies, this trend could well extend to those that are funded by international funders and even government. Those CSOs that are seeking funds could also want to be rated.

1) Fiscal Discipline and Transparency

On many fronts, CSOs are being challenged to demonstrate their integrity. Regulatory laws have become more restrictive. The newly amended FCRA (which came into force in 2011) asks CSOs to renew their registration every five years. Also, an organisation receiving more than one crore as foreign money is expected to share information through its website. Under the Act, negligence of this can lead to complications and even cancellation of the registration. Besides,

an organisation can be declared to be of political nature if it has objectives of political nature or comments upon or participates in any political activity. Actions like ‘bandh’ or ‘hartal’, etc., are considered to be of political nature. The law also strictly mentions that the administrative expenditure of an organisation must not exceed 50 per cent of the total utilisation. Thus, the registration of the CSOs can be cancelled due to non-compliance with the FCRA law or doing something which is against so called ‘national interest’... The provision of saving has been taken away along with facility to account on accrual basis. The definition of charitable activities is as confused as it was earlier, the business like activities unilaterally defined by assessing officer can take away the tax exemptions.³⁵

2) Leadership for Transformative Change

While civil society organisations have given scope for different variants of leadership to emerge, there is now a vibrant discourse on what type of leadership sustains and needs nurturing? There is a proliferation of workshops, capacity building programmes, and coaching on leadership. More and more, leadership debates are veering around collaborative and capacity building leadership. Although the term feminist leadership evokes mixed responses for

35 *Debika Goswami, Rajesh Tandon, Kaustubh K Bandyopadhyay, 2012, Civil Society in Changing India: Emerging Roles, Relationships and Strategies, PRIA, New Delhi.*

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want of proper understanding, the value of this variant has gained considerable significance, even in the corporate world.

CSOs have a rich history of leadership that displays charisma, mission-driven, ideology-bound, family-led, tradition-bound orientations, to mention a few variants. But the problematique with the majority of CSOs is the absence of their second line which has left a huge vacuum. Consequently, several potential aspirants either move on to new pastures or get deskilled, lacking in their motivation. Those who fund the CSOs have been raising the issue of second level leadership in all their partner interactions and evaluations. The response to this critical issue has been mixed – being defensive, politically correct or one of despair.

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One must go beyond being achievement driven and be influence and extension driven to build institutions. The best way to become leaders is to make others leaders. Vision, and mission are two central pillars of any organization. One must allow people to grow, allow them

to move on to other pastures if they have aspirations (which is happening increasingly) and create institutions that are open, collaborative, instill trust, proact, be autonomous, be confronting and authentic.”

– **Prof. TV Rao** held eminent positions in Management Institutions and is currently Chairman of TVRLS, Ahmedabad and an Adjunct Professor at IIMA.

However, in the last two decades, there have been cases of planned leadership transition which are being viewed as desirable. Leadership transition has not been easy and case studies of such transition have lessons to learn.

“*Leadership transition is a psychological process. Smooth transition of leadership rests on the following:*

- 1. Intra-organisational systems must strengthen and mature;*
- 2. Robust governance;*
- 3. Internal systems of the organization should not be personalized. There should be open access;*
- 4. For every beginning, there should be a process that should end;*
- 5. Pre-transition workshops should be conducted for making decision-making process;*
- 6. Giving importance to diversities to strengthen systems for smooth transition.”*

– Findings of a Study on Leadership Transition, *Haritha Sharma* and *Susan Loucks*, HIDEF.

Making a Difference: Feminist Leadership

The discourse on women breaking the glass-ceiling to hold leadership positions has grown. While there are many women-headed organisations, they continue to be few in numbers. There is a powerful argument that future leadership is feminine. Defined variously, the feminine leadership is not about women’s leadership but all who practice inclusive feminine values of nurturing, holding and collaborating to better institutional performance. Not all these feminine values are practised in organisations that are headed by women or in women’s collectives. We had instances of women leaders taking aggressive and masculine stances and of women who have demonstrated how effective ‘feminine’ qualities can be in leadership building. Arguably, women’s movement and feminist discourse have offered different styles of leadership which include individualistic styles of functioning and collective leadership. Therefore, what makes up feminine leadership? The CSOs who are in the business of development and justice need to unpack feminist leadership.

“

What does feminist leadership display? A study of 20 prominent women leaders across the world identified the following common elements (practices, attributes, values) that have contributed to their success: ³⁶

- *Placing change strategies that place changes in gender power relations at the centre;*
- *A transformative agenda that connects gender power to social change;*
- *Agility and resilience;*
- *Mission of gender equality is infused in every job, activity and every location;*
- *Requires risk-taking because of pressure from all quarters and risk of penalization;*
- *Ability to influence agendas even without formal power or authority to do so;*
- *Women looked at themselves not individualistically but as people at vanguard of broad processes of change;*
- *Feminist leaders are often uncomfortable with their own power;*
- *Emphasise the value of collective and multi-layered leadership;*
- *Leads through consultation, participation and consensus building;*
- *Feminist leadership is about relationship-building;*
- *They bring the feminine universe of nurturing and relationship skills;*
- *They are concerned with empowerment and transformation of men;*
- *They are introspective and critical about their own leadership;*
- *They create innovative organizational structures and governance practices.”*

While in many quarters, discourse on feminist leadership continues to dwell on women’s leadership, it has taken on

³⁶ Srilatha Batliwala and Aruna Rao, *Women, Leadership and Social Change, Report of a Sounding Study Conducted for the Ford Foundation, Unpublished, July, 2002. Quoted in Srilatha Batliwala, Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation, July, 2010, CREA, New Delhi.*

domain of women. Men too have deployed their ‘feminine’ to imbue qualities of inclusiveness, collaboration, being flexible in their leadership roles. Although women have not consciously made inroads to bring transformative changes in men’s leadership styles, men have begun to see the importance of feminist leadership.

The findings of a series of studies by Mckinsey & Company on gender diversity in the corporate world across different countries affirm that women in leadership have shined on five of nine leadership behaviours. However, ‘The results showed that women were dominant (in particular) in three areas: people development, setting expectations and rewards and acting as role models. Hence women’s and men’s leadership behaviors tend to bring about improvement on different dimensions of organizational health.’

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Human and Institutional Development Forum (HIDF)

Founded in March 2000, HID Forum works towards developing and strengthening Human and Institutional Development capacities in

individuals and organisations who work towards empowering disadvantaged communities.

The key strategies of HIDF are

- a) Facilitating Organisational change through accompaniment
- b) Building competencies of individuals in their role as change agents and
- c) Research, knowledge building and dissemination.

The Forum conducts, among others, a certificate programme on organisational change facilitation, Group Relations Conferences to enhance the awareness on unconscious processes, initiatives to strengthen people centered advocacy and colloquiums as platforms for building new perspectives.

