SUMMARY NOTE

The Future of Governance Forum 7 Oct - 8 Oct

PANEL ON GRANTMAKING AS AN ENABLER OF CITIZEN-STATE ENGAGEMENT

Panelists
Bharath Visweswariah, Omidyar Network India
Sandhya Venkateswaran, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Zulfiquar Haider, Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives

Moderator
Avani Kapur, Accountability Initiative, Centre for Policy Research

About the Panel

This session discussed how grantmaking can be effective in enhancing the engagement between citizen/civic organisations and the government machinery. The measures discussed were:

- *Collaboration between diverse institutions;*
- *Capacity building through collaboration;*
- *Sustainable funding with inclusive participation among diverse communities.*

The Future of Governance forum was curated by the Accountability Initiative at the Centre for Policy Research, and co-hosted with Arthan from 7 October-8 October 2020.

Ensuring diversity of engagement

Mr. Haider underscored the importance of reaching out to diverse communities. For the most marginalised, under-representation creates a roadblock in claiming entitlements from the government. CSOs can help by collectivising their voice. He went on to note that several CSOs engaging with marginalised communities will have representatives from these communities only as frontline workers, and not in middle or upper-management. Consequently, the Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives is trying to identify community-led CSOs, building their capacity to voice their claims to entitlements.

Capacity building

A common theme throughout the discussion was the importance of capacity building for CSOs, especially at the last mile. Avenues for capacity building need to explored at all levels in CSOs, including the last mile workers. It is a complex challenge that requires a wider ecosystem involving collaborations across CSOs and local universities.

Ms. Venkateswaran noted that collaboration across different CSOs can help build their capacities. CSOs are a diverse group and forming collaborations with CSOs working on the ground can help build their capacity, although practically this can prove difficult. She also suggested that grantmakers ensure capacity building of the frontline workers by incorporating this into funding proposals.

Mr. Haider agreed that capacity building was an urgent challenge. Often, capacity building initiatives are introduced for middle and upper management amongst the CSOs and on-the-ground workers miss out on these opportunities. He envisioned a wider ecosystem that works

on capacity building issues, and includes CSOs, universities, and the government.

Mr. Visweswariah emphasised the need to sensitise domestic funders on the importance of capacity building of local communities.

Role of technology

Technology can be an effective tool for facilitating citizen-government engagement. At the same time, we need to be mindful of the digital divide and think of ways to overcome it.
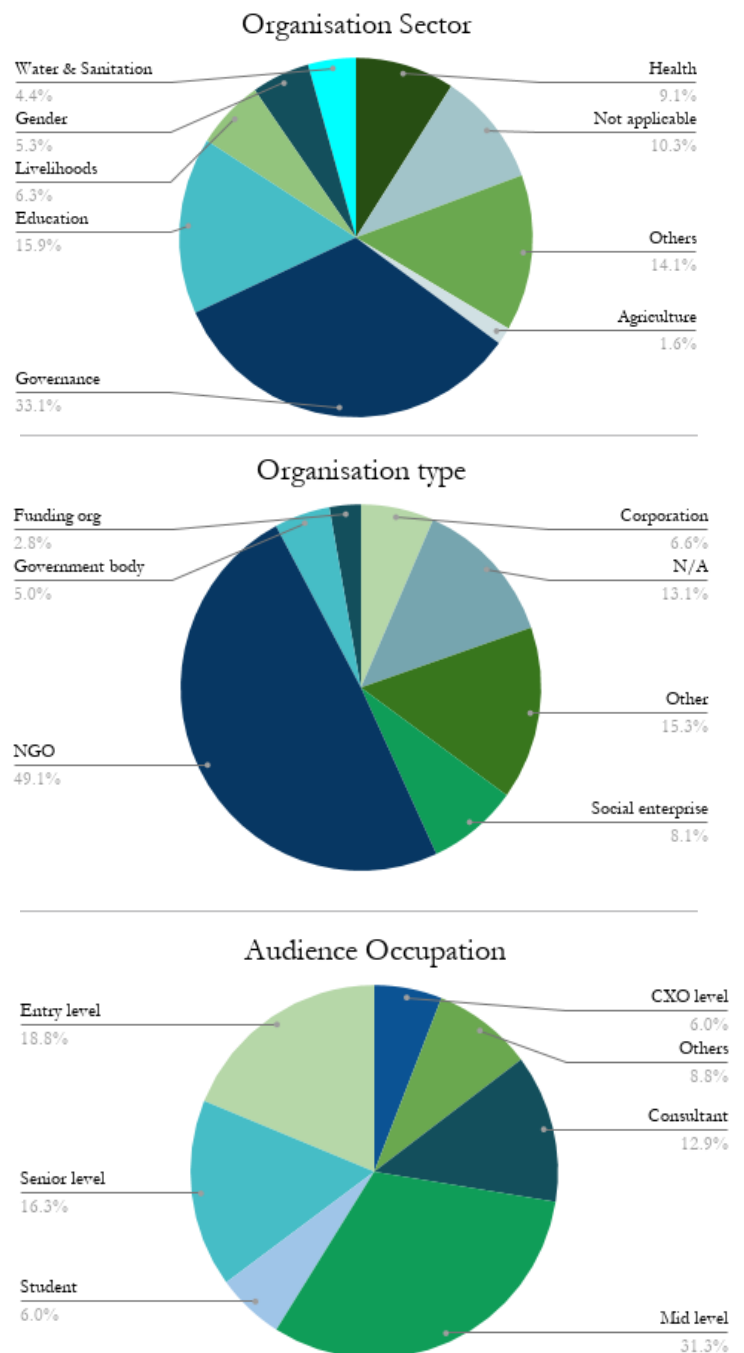
Mr. Visweswariah recognised the crucial role technology can play in facilitating citizen engagement. He gave the example of platforms such as Haqdarshak and eGov Foundation, that inform citizens of their entitlements, and facilitate grievance redressal. However, he also highlighted that there is a digital divide in the country. If tech-mediated citizen engagement is pushed, it can overlook a large share of the population. To bridge the digital divide, CSOs, elected officials, and the offline architecture can help aggregate the voice of those who do not have access to digital platforms.

Sustaining efforts and collaborations

The crucial question with regard to CSOs and their work is how effort and collaborations can be made sustainable in the long run. Mr. Visweswariah acknowledged sustainability as a complex problem. Alternative funding models should be looked at, such as crowdsourcing, which are also a way of engaging citizens. Both Ms. Venkateswaran and Mr. Haider agreed that funding mechanisms and methods need to be diversified.

Ms. Venkateswaran also suggested that, instead of focussing on sustaining collaborations, emphasis should be on sustaining efforts and processes. To do that, analyses should be done of how different partnerships are working by breaking them down into smaller pieces of tasks and processes. A transition can then be made to

Who the audience were:

Organisation Sector

Water & Sanitation 4.4%
Gender 5.3%
Livelihoods 6.3%
Education 15.9%
Governance 33.1%
Health 9.1%
Not applicable 10.3%
Others 14.1%
Agriculture 1.6%

Organisation type

Funding org 2.8%
Government body 5.0%
NGO 49.1%
Corporation 6.6%
N/A 13.1%
Other 15.3%
Social enterprise 8.1%

Audience Occupation

Entry level 18.8%
Senior level 16.3%
Student 6.0%
CXO level 6.0%
Others 8.8%
Consultant 12.9%
Mid level 31.3%

better suited work, to better suited partnerships. Moreover, informed decisions can be taken on which part of the work can be scaled up or improved.

This is a summary of the panel discussion, and has been paraphrased.