

Press Release

**Civil Society Leader Perceptions and Experiences during COVID 19[[1]](#footnote-1)**

*Rapid Survey of Civil Society Organisations (May 3rd to May 10th, 2020)*

**SUMMARY:**

A survey of nearly 70 civil society leaders, conducted between 3rd to 10th May 2020 points to the urgent need for greater coordination between government(s) and civil society. Conducted to gauge their experiences and perceptions about their on-going work to combat the Covid 19 crisis, the survey includes leaders from organisations of varying sizes and working in diverse geographies across India. In reaction to the results, Professors Madhukar Shukla and MS Sriram -- two highly engaged researcher scholars of civil society -- emphasize ways for civil society to reconfigure it’s strategies and practices in these unprecedented times. Drawing on these we would like to call for moving away from transaction-based models to trust based one, which would provide greater autonomy and freedom to responsive to those working on the ground.

The full report is available on the following site:

<https://sites.google.com/iima.ac.in/rterc/research?authuser=0>

**KEY INSIGHTS/FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY:**

* **Communities have not been able to access their entitlements and not all know what precautions to take:** More than 40% found that most households in the communities they are serving are not being able to access their entitlements and more than 20% found that communities were not aware of precautions required. It is even higher among smaller organisations
* **Organisations have not been able to partner with the government productively:** Almost half the leaders did not find relevant government functionaries they need to work with on the ground, to be accessible. More than two-thirds felt that those making policies were not very receptive to their inputs. Accessibility to government officials was even lower for those working in only rural areas and for smaller organisations.

Responses of only around 10% of organisations indicate that they’re involved in efforts directly with the government and more than 40% said coordinating with the government for their work was one of the biggest challenges they were facing.

* **Government notifications and directives have been confusing/difficult to understand:** Almost half the leaders have had difficulty navigating through government directives relevant for their work
* **Mobilising financial resources for relief efforts is taking up all their time:** Mobilising financial resources was found to be the most time-consuming activity and one the biggest challenges that almost 60% of organisations reported to be facing. A significant share of these finances required might be for the independent relief efforts (without any help from the government) that half the organisations reported as taking up most of their time.
* **Leaders worry about donors deprioritising other on-going long-term efforts:** Several leaders shared their anxieties about critical areas of interventions such as malnutrition, education, domestic violence, child abuse, and women’s rights issues being side-lined or at least deprioritised (by the government and donors). This, many felt, would undermine years of collective efforts and progress. Over a quarter reported that re-planning their activities, and coordination and communication with funders was taking up most of their time.

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (MADE BY LEADERS):**

* **Funding organisations**
  + More flexibility with deadlines, reporting standards and data requirements owing to the unprecedented challenges being faced by organisations currently
  + Guard against deprioritising other critical areas of intervention
* **For Government’s at different levels**
  + Involving local stakeholders such as local governments and community organisations to manage smaller geographies (like wards or zones in urban areas)
  + Extending financial and food related support to the affected (especially migrants and daily wagers) through universalisation of PDS, financial relief to small traders and farmers
  + Providing immediate employment to those in rural areas through MNREGA
  + Need for the government to consult local stakeholders such as civil society organisations and unions before planning lockdowns, and making notifications and rules easily available and accessible

1. The report was prepared by Prof. Ankur Sarin along with a team of researchers associated with IIM Ahmedabad- Bianca Shah, Ishu Gupta, Karan Singhal and Shraddha Upadhyay. They are grateful to Priyanka Sahoo for assisting with data analysis and visualization. They would also like to extend their gratitude to more than 65 leaders from civil society organisations for their time and providing their expertise to inform this study, and Prof. Madhukar Shukla and Prof, M.S. Sriram for their extremely valuable inputs. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)