

Programme Area Summary

Country: India

Programme Area: Participation and Governance 2005-2009

What is the aim of the programme area?

To enable poor and disadvantaged women and men to access their rights and participate in government and civil society decision-making structures and processes that affect their lives.

Why is VSO working in that particular Programme Area and region?

VSO India believes that:

- the promotion of participation and good governance is fundamental to a rights-based approach
- lack of participation and poor governance is an underlying cause of poverty and disadvantage
- women and men have a right and a responsibility to be involved in decision making processes which affect their lives.

The programme focuses on the states of West Bengal and Orissa, which have high incidences of poverty and where the state governments have a track record of pro-poor policy reform; Chhattisgarh and Jharkand which are fairly new states, with a low human development index and weak NGO and CSO infrastructure in need of support; and Delhi which is the seat of government and headquarters of most national organisations for networking and advocacy.

Key beneficiaries and partners:

The programme is committed to building the capacity of poor and disadvantaged people (especially women, disabled people, and people living with HIV and AIDS) and their organisations, to:

- advocate for their rights
- influence policies in favour of their situation

This is achieved through working with organisations at grass roots, state and national levels.

- VSO India works with organisations like Samarthan to strengthen the PRI system, Credibility Alliance to promote the practice of good governance, and Pravah to promote active citizenship.
- CSOs and NGOs that advocate for the rights of disadvantaged people
- CSOs and NGOs that promote good governance and active citizenship

Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes

- To build the capacity of organisations working to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions (local bodies of self-governance with autonomous and integrated development responsibility) to function as effective structures inclusive of all groups of the communities that they represent, especially women, disabled people, and people living with HIV and AIDS.
- To promote the practice of good governance within Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) for greater participation and representation of their constituents, especially women, disabled people, and people living with HIV and AIDS.
- To raise awareness of current and key development issues among civil society, and promote understanding and action in the context of rights and responsibilities

The participation and governance programme area is a natural thread that links to VSO India's two other programme areas of Disability and HIV and AIDS. The cross-cutting themes are gender and advocacy, which give the programme a platform to promote and influence development that is inclusive of disadvantaged groups.

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Current programme activities

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

- VSO India strives to promote the inclusion of disabled people and people living with HIV and AIDS in the development process, and works to increase civil society organisations' understanding of disability and HIV and AIDS.
- To aid this process, volunteers with experience of research, advocacy, policy development and legal expertise, organisational development, information technology, communication, and management information systems are placed with over 15 NGOs and NGO networks to build their capacity to advocate for the rights of the disadvantaged people and improve the quality of their work.

Workshops and Conferences

- Sensitisation and awareness-building workshops and discussions are ongoing, as are other development initiatives that address disability and HIV and AIDS concerns.

Advocacy and Global Education

- The programme works with all partners to increase awareness of and effectively address gender inequities by ensuring women's participation in identifying and prioritising problems in programme design and implementation. Monitoring and evaluation systems are designed to aggregate data by gender to measure impact and identify further action.

Other partnership activity

- The programme uses participatory approaches to involve partners and stakeholders in shaping the programme and volunteer placements.
- All partner organisations are encouraged to include the rights and needs of disabled people and people living with HIV and AIDS in their mainstream development programmes.
- These initiatives ensure a multi-sectoral approach as well as broaden the base of women and men, communities and systems that are sensitive to disability and HIV and AIDS and its implications.

What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

Governance is not what governments do ...[it] is about the processes and systems of decision making which mobilise and utilise public resources for the common and public good ...[for good governance] the processes and the systems have to be accountable to the clients, customers and citizens¹.

VSO India chose to engage in this programme area to promote and advocate for the inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged people – including women, disabled people and people living with HIV and AIDS – in mainstream development: to ensure that their voices are heard in decision making processes that concern and affect them; and to enable them participate directly in the process of governance to gain more control over their own lives.

¹ Rajesh Tandon (2002), Citizen Participation and Democratic Governance in India