National Consultation for Futuristic Collaboration for Collective Impact

New Delhi, March 02, 2022:
With an aim to develop new partnership standards framework as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during Covid 19 Response Sphere India (A National Coalition of Humanitarian, Development and Resilience Actors) and IICA (Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs, Ministry of Corporate Affairs) organised a National consultation various stakeholders and representatives from the Govt, Corporate, Civil Society, Academia, Youth and Media on 26th February 2022 at New Delhi as part of the Azaadi ka Swarn Mahotsav.

For the first time in the post-COVID 19 scenario over 30 experts from civil society, NGO, CSR, Government and media participated and deliberated on the structures and challenges for futuristic collaborations to nurture trust between partners while promoting accountability, improving performance and overall collective impact in humanitarian, development and resilience building works in India.

Shri Praveen Kumar DG & CEO IICA, while addressing the gathering as Chief Guest emphasised the need to inculcate training and capacity building also for enhancing the impact. Shri Kumar, a 1987 Batch IAS, and former Secretary, Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, congratulated the team on the progress made and expressed his willingness to support for a larger consultative process on the new Partnership Standards framework for ownership of stakeholders and developing effective collaborations in future.

Welcoming the speakers and participants Mr. Vikrant Mahajan, CEO Sphere India, explained how the good practice available in Corporate Sector for Project Management Standards by PMI and ISO Standards for CSR have been converged with global good practice on Core Humanitarian Standards and linked with technical standards like Sphere Standards to develop this new partnership standards framework.

Mr. Mahajan, who is an expert and a master trainer on both Corporate practices like Project Management Standards, Six Sigma quality processes and global standards like CHS and Sphere Standards, further shared how the new standards framework is going to address trust issues, concerns around performance, technical knowledge while keeping the focus on affected/ at risk vulnerable population, localisation and our development goals/targets at the centre and futuristic development that will usher in more effective collaborations between stakeholders, enhance collective impact and accountability to people and law of the land.

Several top experts and speakers like Dr. Garima Dadhich, IICA, Ms. Nidhi Pundhir, Director, HCL Foundation, Mr. Tom White, Chief of DRR, UNICEF India, Mr. Anshu Gupta, Director Goonj and Prof. Anil Kumar Gupta of NIDM shared their views in the plenary session.

Quoting, one of the sayings of Apple Company founder that "No great innovations can happen without Collaborations" Dr. Garima Dadhich, IICA explained how mostly the single firm single CSO kind of collaborations have been happening so far with CSR which is developing and growing over the time. "The partnership standards framework provides the tools to expand these collaborations to multi firm multi stakeholders which will certainly enhance the collective impact of our work. It's a very futuristic development," said Dr. Dadhich.

Ms. Nidhi Pundhir, Director, HCL Foundation said, "Stakeholders are equally responsible, should come together, share resources, bring resources, discuss and resolve challenges for collaborative partnerships."

Mr. Tom White, Chief of DRR, UNICEF India was of the view that "India has done well with the whole of society approach, but to make it better, we need to work together, the onus is on us, we need to share the responsibility."

Underlining, that Covid-19 has given us a chance to foster these partnerships and work in a better way, Mr. Anshu Gupta, Director Goonj said, "If we wear the lenses of the people we are working for, we'll deliver better and it is high time we now value people and purpose more than policies and focus on issues of people."

Prof. Anil Gupta of NIDM while complementing Sphere India and IICA for the big achievement on Partnership Standards, said, "Corporates still consider CSR investments as expenditures. Investing CSR for disaster preparedness and risk reduction can get return on investments by reduction in losses and create multiple business opportunities at the same time."

Major General Dilawar Singh, former DG, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangthan, (under the Government of India) emphasised on the need to develop leaders by putting correct actors with correct competencies thus giving a well structured background that the collaborative aspect needs and deserves, as part of overall objective.

Session on Impactful CSRs: Challenges and Suggestions for larger collaboration

Panel on Impactful CSR had an insightful discussion on how to develop and intercorporate resource-pooling mechanisms, the challenges and opportunities linked with it. Dr. Garima Dadhich IICA, moderated the session with Mr. Sandeep Kumar, Head CSR, Indo Count Industries Ltd, Ms. Damyanti Bhowmik, Senior Manager, CSR, Anand Automotive, Mr. Abhishek Kumar, Lead CSR, LG, Mr. Anurag Pratap, CSR Leader, Capgemini, Mr. Antony Nellissery, Chief, School Excellence, Bharti Foundation, Mr. Rahul Bansal, Partnerships Manager, UNICEF India, Mr. Ravi Raj Atrey, IICA and Dr. KK Upadhyay, Professor and Chairperson, BIMTECH shared their expert views on challenges and the way forward.

Emphasising on the need to develop an ecosystem that can train the next-generations for emerging issues, Mr. Sandeep Kumar, Head CSR, Indo Count Industries Ltd, said, "Witnessing corporates from the lenses of responsibility rather than a mandatory output shall be an ideal mechanism which will enable us to identify a single approach that can tackle 6-7 issues for which collaborations can work out altogether."

While supporting the idea of collaborations, Ms. Damyanti Bhowmik, Senior Manager, CSR, Anand Automotive, cautioned about the challenges saying, "Whenever we are entering into collaboration, there are bound to be challenges. However, it goes well, because a large number of people are coming together, based on their experiences and the inter-company pooling mechanism has worked well, and what has worked more is the kind of leadership."

Talking about varied behaviour change across the corporate and NGO sector and need to focus on such challenges comprehensively Mr. Abhishek Kumar, Lead CSR, LG, said, "Pool-funding can work well for smaller companies but companies with larger funds would not want to go with the pool funding mechanism."

Mr. Anurag Pratap opined that. "Networking basically implies knitting all the work we do collaboratively together."

Mr. Antony Nellissery, Chief, School Excellence, Bharti Foundation suggested that "Pooling mechanism in India needs to be redeveloped, aligning with government order and stakeholders, who are much more in public, and correlated with innovative mechanisms, with this we'll be able to move forward in a structured manner."

Mr. Rahul Bansal, Partnerships Manager, UNICEF India said that "The language that we speak can be understood only with people of our sector. There is a need for deliberating partnership between NGO-CSR so that we can learn what each of us do and comprehend each other's expectations."

Focussed on the common goal to bring people on atleast at a Minimum Standard, Mr. Ravi Raj Atrey, IICA said, "Putting passion into thought may become a major revolution under the collaboration model."

 Mr. Vikrant Mahajan, CEO Sphere India stated that the concept of collaborations is working successfully in many other countries. "We can learn from other countries and mostly from the developed world. Common-resource pool is complex, complicated and neither easy but not impossible. For this to work we must come together and find ways to go forward," said Mahajan.

Dr. KK Upadhyay, Professor and Chairperson, BIMTECH while recognising that the pooling of resources is going to be a very challenging task, said, "It has a potential which should be leveraged while addressing concerns step by step." He clarified that pooling resources / funds does not necessarily mean contributing funds in one account; it's a concept through which resources with different actors can be coordinated for achieving larger impact.

NIDM with Sphere India has released Sector Guidelines for Six important social sectors (for other sectors corresponding to each of SDG, it is under development), the implementation of it at state and district level opens the possibilities of identifying desired projects for emergency preparedness and response, Development with disaster risk reduction which can be implemented through collaborative partnerships of Govt, CSOs and CSRs while coordinating support from Project Management Units by IICA and Sphere India.

Panel on Role of NGO made deliberations on the trust deficit that the NGO sector faces, the need for collaborative mechanism, and a system to crack and enable smoother actions on changing context in India. Mr. Sarbjit Singh, DRR Specialist, UNICEF India moderated the session with Mr. Harsh Jaitli, Director VANI, Mr. Jayant Kumar, Chairperson, Credibility Alliance and Head of Program, CASA, Mr. N M Prusty, Mentor cum Director, CDD MASS, Mr. Jayakumar, Director, Strategic Alliances, World Vision India and Mr. Ramesh Reddy, Director, Mahitha were part of the expert panel.

Mr. Harsh Jaitli, Director VANI emphasised on the need to work together, be aggregators across networks and verticals. "All the collaborators NGO, CSR, Government, and Media etc should come together, learn from each other and develop a larger collaboration," Jaitli said.

Mr Jayant Kumar, Chairperson Credibility Alliance and Head of Program, CASA said, "There is a huge amount of diversity in the civil society/NGO sector. Whoever is working needs to take this diversity into account.No single entity is going to serve the diversity of this country. We must collaborate for a larger impact."

Mr. Sarbjit Singh Sahota, DRR Specialist, UNICEF India while moderating the session said, "We need to develop a system to crack and enable smoother actions on complex financial resources and to bridge the trust deficit we require more dialogue, more engagements and more collaboration. The partnership standards and the pool resource mechanism can be the way for it or something still better will evolve from the consultation."

Mr. N M Prusty, Mentor cum Director, CDD MASS said, that "Disaster Management suffers from a huge data gap, that needs to be focused and worked upon, which can foster strategic planning."

Mr. Jayakumar, Director, Strategic Alliances, World Vision India was of the view that "There is a lot of trust deficit the NGO sector, civil society faces. Therefore, there is a pressing need to demystify the bias and share the expertise across actors to bridge the knowledge gap and continue forward together."

Panel on the Role of Media made deliberations on the status of the communication systems and the need for collaboration among media and of media with other stakeholders for larger collective impact in the interest of affected and at risk populations we all aspire to serve. Mr. Onkareshwar Pandey, Editor in Chief, Indian Observer Post and founder, Commonwealth Thought Leaders Forum moderated the session with Mr. Prakash Nanda, Chairman, Editorial Board, EurAsian Times, Mr. Ajay Kaul, Editor In Chief, United News of India (UNI), Mr. Anant Bagaitkar, Chief of Bureau and Senior Editor SAKAL, Mr. Himanshu Shekhar, Senior Editor NDTV, Mr. Vinod Mishra, Consulting Editor, DD News, Mr. Roshan Gaur, Chief of Bureau, Rashtriya Sahara, and Mr. Deepak Parvatiyar- Editor & Chief Media Advisor- Indian Federation of United Nations Associations as distinguished speakers.

Mr. Vikrant Mahajan, CEO Sphere India welcoming media delegates provided the background of the session, sharing information about the Partnership Standards being developed by Sphere India and IICA for strengthening collaborations between CSRs, CSOs and Govt and Social Sector guidelines developed by Sphere India and NIDM to promote collaborations and technical ideas for development and reducing disasters at state and district level.

"These efforts needed to be strengthened by collaboration with the media also who have played a very important role during covid and other disasters and whose collaborative potential has not been fully harnessed yet. For media collaboration with other stakeholders, it is important to build collaboration within different media also for which similar guidelines be developed by the media fraternity for themselves," said Mr. Vikrant Mahajan.

Mr. Himanshu Shekhar, Senior Editor, NDTV underlined the importance and necessity to interact more and collaborate more for disaster reporting mechanisms and develop SOPs. "For information, the most credible source is the government according to the media. However, there are many agencies working in this field with which we can collaborate for quick authentic sources of information. A concentrated effort and robust guidelines for each stakeholder for disaster reporting is very essential, he said."

Talking about the disaster management reporting, Mr. Deepak Parvatiyar- Editor & Chief Media Advisor- Indian Federation of United Nations Associations said, "There are multiple bottlenecks media faces during the disaster related reporting. The major challenge is that Information does not come from the right channel and right time. We need to cover complex humanitarian situations involving law and order; ethnic and communal conflicts and similar tensions, where media can play a major role by building capacities explore collaborations with other stakeholders in the interest of humanity without further sensationalising the matters. Disaster management provisions have their own limitations. I hope there will be a better provision for early rehabilitation of victim which has multi-dimensional aspects from treatment, to care for the children of the deceased. The media can constructively highlight the issues concerning these victims."

Mr. Prakash Nanda, Chairman, Editorial Board, EurAsian Times lauded the Role of the media during the first lockdown and said, "Media is playing its role efficiently and positively despite the challenges it faces on the ground."

Talking about the positive impact of Swachhata Movement or Cleanliness drive in the small cities and the villages, Mr. Vinod Mishra, Consulting Editor, DD News said, that, "Disaster has a surprising element with it. Hence, we haven't focussed much on analysis & causes of disasters and how to prevent it; instead we focus on just response. In the times of disaster like COVID, the role of media and all the stakeholders increases. With technology and innovation, a system can be developed which can play an important role in any disaster management. Social media-inspired people to take positive initiatives, but it is critical to managing information to limit the spread of wrong/incomplete information as that would increase the challenge of disaster management."

Sharing his own experiences in covering international political events, and citing how an unverfied news could become disasterous, Mr. Ajay Kaul, Editor In Chief, United News of India (UNI) opined that the government agencies should take the media into confidence and share realtime information in the larger interest of the society and the nation and also to avoid unverified reporting during any disasters."

"saying how local bodies, local response systems play an immediate role during disaster response and how the media acts as a bridge between local people and the response system/government response systems, Mr. Roshan Gaur, Chief of Bureau, Rashtriya Sahara said, "Man-made disasters needed to be evidently covered, since it directly impacts our livelihoods. During disasters, the media makes coverage on the response requirement pointing out the gaps in resources in coordination with response bodies, such collaboration and structure needs to grow to fill in the resource gaps."

Mr. Onkareshwar Pandey, Editor in Chief, Indian Observer Post and founder, Commonwealth Thought Leaders Forum while moderating the session opined that "The Media shall provide impartial information and due coverage to all stakeholders while covering Disasters and post disaster humanitarian relief and response operations. He also emphasised on the need to provide special training to reporters for Disaster Reporting. Disaster Reporting is not a separate subject and hence we need to have impartial and factful reporting. He also suggested that humanitarian agencies should forge closer relations and greater collaboration with the media for better coverage of disasters."

Towards the end, expressing his gratitude to delegate speakers, Mr. Vikrant Mahajan shared that the session has far exceeded the expectations to see the consensus and thought framework evolving for next steps for media coordination guidelines. As suggested, let's expand the group and involve a larger media collective, maybe the Press Council of India for next deliberation and offered full support from Sphere India for the process ahead.

Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA) that works under the aegis of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs set up as the premier organization that aims at providing astute and credible intellectual leadership in corporate regulation, governance and running sustainable businesses. It is a think tank that curates a repository of data and knowledge for policy makers, regulators as well as other stakeholders working in the domain of corporate affairs. The IICA is involved in capacity building, research and advocacy and functions through various schools and centres. The School of Business Environment working in the domain of CSR and ESG is supporting this National Consultation as a Partner.

Sphere India is a National Coalition of Humanitarian, Development, and Resilience Actors in India. The strategic outreach of 155 full members includes key nodal organizations from UN, INGOs, National NGOs, CSR, Academic Institutions, Sector Networks, Expert Individuals, and State IAGs/Networks. The local outreach is evolving with 805 associate members as Sphere India Locally Empowered Organisations Network (LEON) and 1,80,000 community volunteers (CDRF -Community Disaster Response Force) mapped for varied capacities all over India. Sphere India facilitates multi-stakeholder coordination, knowledge & capacity sharing and collaborative advocacy for enhancing accountability to the affected and at-risk populations.