

# SAMAGAM 2022

## Session 1: CSO Coalitions at work: Rationale, Experiences, and Challenges

### MODERATORS-

- **Mr. Ram Pappu, Programme Director, Mission Samriddhi**
- **Ms. Sharmishtha Khanapur, Director, Operations and Cluster Development Program, Mission Samriddhi**

### PANELLISTS-

- **Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran, Chairperson, Teesri Sarkar Abhiyan**
- **Mr. Sanjay Singh, National Convenor, Jal-Jan Jodo Abhiyan**
- **Ms Ashraf Patel, Co-founder, Pravah and ComMutiny**
- **Ms. Sonali Srivastava, Head, Anode Governance Lab and Foundation**
- **Mr. Ashish Shukla - Head of Partnerships, India Education Collective**
- **Mr. Sukanta Sarkar, Integrator, PRADAN**

The panellists in the session mentioned that some of the factors that contribute to a strong coalition are; shared vision, role clarity, agreement on the goal to be achieved, transparency in relationships, ownership/leadership in the process, participation of all stakeholders, alignment of long-term mission with the target, and institutionalisation of practices and processes.

There are several reasons that make a coalition unsuccessful including a clash of egos (“I know everything” attitude), lack of honest conversation on intention, motivation, and competencies, absence of focus on the larger picture (systemic thinking) rather than symptomatic interventions, lack of respect for the partners, unequal partnerships, poor leadership, identity crisis, poor coordination, limited space provided for idea generation by funding agencies (very particular demands by funding organisations), poor identification and recognition of primary and secondary partners.

The session also presented the audience with a few coalitions that have been running successfully for long. Some of them are Right to Food, Vikalp Sangam, Vikas Bazaar Foundation, etc. These coalitions can be used as case studies to understand the structures and what worked for them, though, at the same time it is important to appreciate that every coalition is different and necessary adaptation would have to be made according to the demands and needs of the program/theme/geography.

A detailed description of session 1 as discussed among the moderators and the panellists is given below:

**Mr. Ram Pappu** initiated the conversation by drawing from previous Samagams that collaborations build greater value than competition in the development sector. Only collaborations help to scale up pilots and new ideas. Partnerships are essentials as the magnitude of issues are far beyond the reach of individual actors and multiple Samagams have shown how winning coalitions can solve multiple issues. Some of the opening comments and questions that he raised to the panelists were: What problems can be solved together'? and the bigger question, 'how do we make it happen'? Or 'how do we make the collaborations work'?

- In the social sector, it is usually seen that people work because of their passion but the processes are not very strong. People get carried away by personalities rather than the actual process of functioning.
- Any coalition that has really provided lasting value? How have they managed to stay relevant to the cause? What is that single driving force that has retained and made them relevant?
- What better coalition in the world than nature. We can learn so much from nature.

**Ms. Sharmishtha Khanapur** continued on the opening comments, talking about the challenges in the socio-economic space, struggles of funding, and implementation of projects on the ground. She asked the panellists if collaborations are the answer to all the issues mentioned above.

- Why haven't coalitions always been the norm? Why is it that they haven't always been successful?  
Does anyone among the panellists think that collaborations are irrelevant, they are useless?  
Why have collaborations by and large not been a great success? What do you think has led to some of or many of them not been successful at the level expected from them?
- A great amount of learning and unlearning happens when you work with several partners.

**Mr. Sanjay Singh**

- He has been running a successful coalition, [Jal-Jan Jodo Abhiyan](#) for the last 10 years now.
- From his experience, he felt that one of the most important things for coalitions is having the same ideology, target, and mission. Equal participation and trust are also important.
- He is working in collaboration with more than 1600 partners with people, groups, Universities, and organisations from different sectors because they have a clear goal/mission. According to him, clarity of the purpose plays an equally important part.
- One of the reasons why coalitions are breaking in India is fund based coalitions. A funding agency comes, gives money for a mission, people/organisations are

active till funds come, some organisations which did get (or did not get?) the required funds will go against it and internal politics will start.

- In a broader sense, political parties are a coalition as well. People stay there without any benefit because of their ideology. They are dedicated to their parties, struggle for them. All the funding-based coalitions survive as long as there is a proper flow of funds.
- Only those coalitions move forward that are getting good results from their work.
- Every coalition has an age. It is not a permanent structure. It is important to accept that. Once the issue for which the coalition was formed, becomes weak, the coalition will also become weak.
- Coalitions “*ko sanstha ki bajae sangathan ke sahare aage le jaen*”.
- [Right to Food](#) was one such coalition which stayed relevant to the cause and provided a lasting value. The reason behind it was the passionate cause - hunger - being seen as a big problem in the country. The cause impacting a large section of the society. All the units in different states and districts worked together to solve the problem. The coalition ran for more than 10 years with all the vigour and passion.

#### **Ms. Sonali Srivastava**

- Role clarity sounds very mundane but is an important factor to have while working in partnerships. In a coalition, where there are multiple people working, it is important to understand and be clear about the role of an individual/organisation.
- Also, it is important to know whose vision is driving the entire collaboration.
- Collaborative vision is required but it is important to know whose vision is at the forefront of everything.

Example- she has worked with panchayats and the panchayat's vision is a priority there. So, it becomes important and necessary to collaborate with only those civil society organisations who also prioritise Panchayat's vision.

Alignment to the vision is important while working in collaboration.

- She thinks what could be achieved in a group/team/collective/coalition can never be achieved individually; however, the organisation/individual needs to be secure in their position, and be capable of delivering what they wish to achieve.
- Security and ego are the two sides of the same coin. One could be secure about their work but if it turns into ego, that will inhibit them from listening to and receiving from other partners.

Both are important, listening/receiving and standing up for what you believe in.

One needs to walk on the fine line between the two, that is, find a fine balance.

She has been a part of many coalitions like [Catalyst 2030](#), where the focus is on a continuous journey together rather than being goal driven all the time. They spend

time developing relationships with each other, investing in each other, so, when the time comes, the coalition comes together and gets the work done.

Achieving goal becomes easier because there is already an investment, there are relationships, and people understand each other.

- During Covid, so many organisations came together along with the government to work towards a clear-cut goal. The existing relationships helped at that time rather than coming together for the first time to work on a common mission.

### **Mr. Sukanta Sarkar**

- Two things are important to have successful collaborations. One is, a goal to be achieved which is beyond the individual capacities of the individual organisations and the other one is trust among different collaborators.

For example, in his grassroot experience with the panchayats and the education department, the teachers and the panchayats were always in animosity with each other but once they started understanding each other, they started pursuing the same the goal of bringing a higher quality of education in the panchayat.

- Facilitating the value of one among equals. There is hierarchy among CSOs as well. It is important to make everyone feel that they are contributing and growing. Everyone should have a voice, collaborations should help them learn, and make them feel equal.
- People who are in the decision-making position should be able to give some time and importance to the coalitions.
- [VB NET \(Vikas Bazaar Net\) foundation](#) is a coalition of around 25 CSOs in Jharkhand and which has been running for the last 15 to 17 years. It works for the livelihoods of rural and marginalised communities.

One of the reasons behind the success of this coalition was the same mission.

Everyone in the collective wished to contribute to the cause of food and hunger, thus helping drive the agenda. Many CSOs in the coalition also ended up gaining knowledge in the domain.

### **Dr. Chandrashekhar Pran**

- There should be an ‘agreement’ about the goal to be achieved. There should be transparency in the relationship of different collaborators. Better transparency will result in better communication and better trust between the stakeholders involved in the collaboration.
- The question of ownership should be dealt properly with the help of proper communication and participation at all levels. It (collaboration and communication) should be a continuous process.

- There should be an environment of acceptance of the viewpoint of others as well. We should be open to discussion and debates in the coalitions. We should not be rejecting diverse ideas.
- The desire/competition to put their banners/logos in front, taking the lead while others stay behind doesn't sit well in the longer run.
- If the leadership dissolves, it is tough for a coalition to survive.
- We can learn a lot from [Mission Samriddhi](#). They have joined hundreds of organisations together and the way they are growing together is an example of a winning coalition

#### **Ms. Ashraf Patel**

- She put forward the importance of structures in a collective.
- The focus should be on both the giant infrastructure as well as the micro structures within the collaboratives and follow the concept of seen, being, and doing.  
Seen- how all the partners in a collective are seen by each other and not only the facilitator or a governance group.  
Being- It is important to realise that a collective is an outcome itself, being 'of the collective' is an outcome and not only what we do, but the power (of love) is in the fact that we are organised.  
When 'seen and being' happens together, the doing becomes a lot easier.
- Having the same mission does not make working in coalitions a straightforward process. It is important to build an inclusive conversation and the biggest thing is how to decide things together when all the partners hold different views/opinions.
- You may have the same vision but how you translate it to decision making is important.
- She co-founded a coalition many years ago called 'Beyond Zebra'. It was about looking at things beyond black and white, one stop coalition that would provide life skills and social education.
- One thing that makes coalitions collapse is leadership and she (in her organisation) was very keen to share the leadership quickly even though they had incubated the idea first. In the hurry to rotate leadership, it just fizzled out.  
The leadership to begin with must take the organisation to a certain level before passing the baton to others.
- It is important to recognise the entire idea of primary and secondary membership. If it is an organisational coalition, mostly individuals in the coalition have a primary membership with their organisation. We should not over-burden them with too many responsibilities in the coalition.  
The fight of wanting the members to do more, asking them to give more time than they are capable of, will result in the collapse of the coalition.

- [Vikalp Sangam](#) is a collective of organisations which works on ‘alternatives’. It basically works on finding out the alternatives to the existing development paradigms-, finding ways to approach different problems other than the existing methods. Smaller collectives within the Vikalp Sangam collective discuss various alternatives in action and reflect, and then they come together to form a proper structure. Every dot in a design is important. Every individual/organisation in a collaboration is important.

**Mr. Ashish Shukla**

- Vision alignment is important. It is important to institutionalise our practices and processes. It is important to have proper succession planning even in coalitions, so if we do not institutionalise them, these coalitions/collectives will just become an event or an activity.  
It is necessary to find ways of going ahead with the individuality of each organisation without compromising the mission of the coalition. There should be regular conversations to refine the process.
- The implementation of programs should be based on system thinking rather than symptoms thinking.
- Coalitions are initiated because everyone has limited resources, everyone comes together with those limited resources to result in maximum impact.
- Flexibility is important in coalitions. Lack of systems thinking, not having the big picture results in everybody being pulled in different directions.
- He has seen many of their coalitions working in the long term because they have a fixed cause and goal to work toward.