

Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation (BRLF)

A Concept Note

1. Background

Over the last two decades, India has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world and an extremely attractive destination for Foreign Direct Investment. Even at a time of world-wide recession, the Indian economy has shown remarkable resilience.

The difficulty has been that not every Indian has been included in this amazing story of success. Among those who have most acutely felt a sense of exclusion and alienation are the Adivasis, who perform poorly on every indicator of well-being, whether it be poverty, health or education. What is worse, given the specific demography of Adivasi India, the pockets of Adivasi concentration have witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in Maoist militancy in recent years. This is especially true of what may be broadly described as the **Central Indian Adivasi belt**.

It is now widely agreed that this region has suffered not only from a development deficit but also from a governance deficit. Urgent efforts are needed to strengthen institutions of participatory governance, even while improving systems of implementation in these areas. Without such a change, all the massive resources being allocated for programmes of social inclusion will not translate into enduring outcomes on the ground. The challenge is also to transform systems of administration and levels of awareness at the grass-roots to ensure that well-meaning pieces of legislation have the requisite impact on the ground.

It has also become clear over the last two decades that some of the best work in terms of innovations in improving livelihoods and creating awareness in these regions have come from civil society initiatives. The difficulty here has been that such initiatives have tended to remain confined to “oases of excellence”. Great work is done but it does not go beyond small pockets of impact and influence. The voluntary sector has tended to be wary of seeking out partnerships with either Gram Panchayats or the district/state administration. On the other side, governments have tended to view civil society action with a modicum of suspicion. In the absence of

government support, many civil society activists have faced terrible intimidation from local vested interests, at times leading to catastrophic consequences. In general, the scope of civil society action has tended to remain confined to small areas, in the absence of wider state support.

It is clear that one of the most powerful ways through which the commitment of the state to inclusive growth can be translated into tangible outcomes on the ground, is to foster powerful partnerships between civil society and the state.

2. BRLF: Thematic Areas of Support

The Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation (BRLF) has been set up to foster and facilitate civil society action in partnership with government for transforming the livelihoods and lives of people in areas such as the Central Indian Adivasi belt, which would be the initial geography of focus of the Foundation. The aim is to **support grassroots level action towards empowerment of people, particularly the Adivasis and scaling up of approaches that are innovative** both in terms of programme content and strategy. Innovation can be in myriad directions – technology, social mobilisational approaches, local institution building, architecture of partnerships, management techniques etc. Strategically, a common feature will be that each project supported by BRLF will attempt to leverage the vast resources being made available by both banks and government for a large number of programmes, such as MGNREGA, NRLM, IWMP, BRGF, IAP, RKVY, RADP, NHM, IAY, NRDWP, TSC etc. The idea is to provide support through the BRLF to projects that largely seek to **leverage government programmes and funding** already available on the ground. Indeed, the BRLF will not only facilitate the possibilities of such leverage by its NGO partners, it will also aim to provide the necessary legitimation that such partners require in the often contentious ground realities that they face in these regions.

Initial BRLF support will be provided to civil society partners as “trigger funding”, i.e., to develop proposals that reflect this partnership with State Governments/ PRIs/ banks. BRLF will assist its civil society partners in ensuring that the design of their proposals incorporates a collaborative

mode of functioning with Governments/ PRIs/ banks. It will facilitate the strengthening of such partnerships, which will be an essential element of the final proposal submitted to BRLF for support for a period of 3-5 years.

The thematic content of work to be supported will include (though not necessarily limited to):

- Watershed Management
- Common Pool Resource Management, including groundwater management, forest management and participatory irrigation management
- Sustainable Livelihoods including improved agriculture, dairying, fisheries, forestry etc
- Value-addition to agricultural products, non-timber forest produce etc
- Skill Development
- Integrated Habitat Improvement, including housing, drinking water, sanitation, solid and liquid waste management etc
- Food and Nutrition Security
- Local Institution Building and Strengthening of Adivasi Leadership, especially women, in PRIs, SHGs, JFMCs, community-based organisations, formal and informal producer groups, etc
- Capacity Building of stakeholders, government and PRI functionaries
- Social Mobilisation and Awareness Generation around Entitlements and Development Programmes
- Development of a Pool of Professional Human Resources that could be deployed in these regions
- Documentation and Research

Projects that visualise **convergence** across these thematic areas are more likely to be supported by BRLF.

3. Regions to be Covered

The initial focus of the BRLF will be on the Central Indian Adivasi belt, centred on sub-districts with more than 20% Adivasi population in around 1000 sub-districts across about 190 districts in the States of Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana,

Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat. The initial focus is on sub-districts because Adivasis in India (outside of the North-East) tend to be concentrated in sub-districts rather than districts. In order that the development and governance process becomes truly inclusive and its benefits reach the Adivasi people, a focus on sub-districts is essential. Several evaluations have shown that programmes such as BRGF and IAP that have thus far focused on districts could become much more effective if they were to be centred on sub-districts. The work of BRLF and its partners would be a live demonstration of this.

Over time, BRLF may choose to expand its operations to other similar geographies.

4. Governance

The Union Cabinet in its meeting held on 3rd September 2013 decided to set up an independent society to upscale civil society action in partnership with Government. The BRLF is an autonomous body, registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 on the 10th of December 2013. Its General Body and Executive Committee include representatives of central and state governments, eminent persons from academia, civil society and the corporate sector with demonstrated experience, understanding and commitment to the issues of concern to BRLF, financial institutions, public sector undertakings, philanthropic foundations, academic institutions and institutions representing industry.

5. Human Resources

The BRLF has, as its Chief Executive, a competent professional with requisite understanding and experience relevant to BRLF. High quality professionals have been hired from the open market, as part of the core management team, with regional and thematic responsibilities. All professionals are selected through a transparent and competitive search process from the open market.

6. Nature of Partnerships with Civil Society

Learning from both the rich positive and negative experiences of partnerships with civil society in the past, impeccable standards of transparency, efficiency, mutual accountability, mutual respect and credibility will be adopted by the BRLF in forging partnerships with civil society organisations. It will be clearly understood that grant-making is a privilege, an opportunity to make a difference that emanates from the grantee for the donor. At the same time, it will be equally understood that the ultimate accountability of both donor and grantee is towards the people in whose name the grant is made and justified. Hence, the highest benchmarks of performance and accountability will need to be adopted by both BRLF and its partners so that the goal towards which we are all working is realised.

7. Role of State Governments

The role of concerned State Governments is crucial to the success of BRLF-supported projects. The State Governments of the region are represented on the GB of the Foundation. Their participation in the Foundation entails constructive support to and facilitation of the proposals being designed by civil society organizations based on partnerships with State Governments and ensuring both coordination support and smooth flow of funds to the designated programmes.

8. Funding

Beginning with an initial amount of Rs. 200 crore, the Government of India will provide a Corpus of Rs. 500 crore in 2 tranches over the next 3 years to BRLF, against achievement of well-defined milestones. Funds would also be sourced from concerned State Governments and philanthropic foundations in India and abroad. The Foundation could also mobilise contributions from high net worth individuals and the Indian diaspora. Support from BRLF will over time be primarily drawn from the returns earned on the Corpus Fund of the Foundation.

As mentioned above, BRLF would support proposals which seek to leverage programme funds through existing government programmes and banks. BRLF funds would be mainly used for:

- human resource and systems costs to implement specific projects;
- long-term institution building support;
- gap funding for programme costs;
- capacity building support;
- risk funds/bridge finance to catalyse value chain/livelihood finance for the region.

Even though its own support will not primarily include programme funding, BRLF would have an important role in catalysing and ensuring availability of programme funds for the projects to be supported by it.

9. Transparency and Accountability

To set the highest standards of transparency and accountability, the BRLF will do full disclosure of its accounts and activities by placing both its annual reports and audited accounts on its website. The Foundation will also pro-actively and voluntarily make all relevant information available under the Right to Information Act, 2005. The BRLF will also make itself subject to Audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) of India.

10. Expected Outcomes

For the People

- sustainable livelihoods with dignity
- enhanced access to and control over resources
- enhanced carrying capacity of resources
- responsive, accountable, transparent administrative and self-governance institutions
- improved performance of government programmes
- increased access and influence over product and service markets
- enhanced mobility and access to information
- creation of a strong and vibrant service demand system and service standards
- new opportunities for the youth

For the State

- reduction in gap between outlays and outcomes
- more inclusive growth
- better quality of implementation of government programmes
- reduced leakages
- stronger democratic institutions of governance at the grass-roots in terms of capacities, systems and processes
- establishing peace in strife-torn pockets

For Private Sector Philanthropy

- greater efficacy of CSR initiatives thanks to innovative programs to invest CSR funds
- a larger leverage for their investments thanks to convergence with resources from government programmes and financial institutions
- larger outreach through partnerships with credible civil society organisations

For Civil Society

- adequate and timely support for innovations and scale-up
- streamlined systems for leveraging funds from government and banks
- enduring partnerships with the State and market institutions
- legitimate space to engage with the local administration and facilitate access of to rights and entitlements of the community
- a strengthened civil society movement in these areas
- greater availability of professional human resources