LAW FOR ALL
FOSTERING JUSTICE INNOVATIONS

Mapping Changemaking
in Law and Justice in India

Trends and Insights from the 2021 Baseline Impact Study

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Contents

Preface

This report on Ashoka's Law for All (LFA) focuses on contemporary changemakers in India who have identified gaps in the law and justice system and have proposed and are pursuing solutions to address the resulting problems. Some of the problems, like forced marriage, are historical. Others, like lack of digital access, are more recent. One of the study's most important findings is that, regardless of the roots of a particular problem, this generation of Indian young changemakers is stepping up to meet these challenges.

Ashoka was founded 45 years ago and initially launched in India with the objective of unveiling a long practised yet unrecognized field of human endeavour – Social Entrepreneurship – as the first step in our longer-term goal of a world where Everyone can be a Changemaker for the good of all. Today Ashoka's network encompasses 4,000 plus Fellows and a growing number of Ashoka Young Changemakers, as well as institutions, public and private, that have adopted and incorporated Changemaking as core to their missions. This report points to key thematic "pain points" in the pursuit of Law for All and profiles initiatives underway by social entrepreneurs, both young and old(er). It is a beginning, just as our first elections of Indian social entrepreneurs were to our Ashoka Fellowship nearly a half century ago. I have been with Ashoka in one capacity or another since it was founded. The rate of change in the world has accelerated during this period. At the same time, thankfully, so has the dedication of India's social entrepreneurs!

Conrad W. "Bill" Carter
Ashoka Diamond Leader, Africa & LGM

Acknowledgements

Overview

For the last 40 years, Ashoka Innovators for the Public has pioneered the field of social entrepreneurship, a field that heralded the imperative to drive social change, with lasting transformational benefits to society.

This field curated a stream of social entrepreneurs with an innate ability and determination to recognise and act on opportunities posed as challenges, and innovating solutions to address those challenges in society. The driving force behind Ashoka has been the idea that there is no more powerful force for societal transformation than systems changing ideas in the hands of a citizen with an activated agency.

Ashoka
Changemakers
across 40 years

95
countries.

4000
social
entrepreneurs

Since the 1980s, Ashoka has identified and supported more than 4000 extraordinary social entrepreneurs as Ashoka fellows across the globe in more than 95 countries. Through the work of leading social entrepreneurs that Ashoka supports by providing resources and network opportunities, Ashoka has thus far witnessed systems change and mindset shift at play in many communities around the world, besides noting emergent positive patterns and trends around social development. With lessons and insights learned in this process of establishing and nurturing the social entrepreneurship field, Ashoka has now shifted its focus to 'Everyone a Changemaker (EACH) vision, a firm belief that everyone can create positive change, and everyone needs to become a changemaker in order to thrive and transform communities.

The Law for All Initiative at Ashoka (LFA) was established to search, select, and support both established and young social entrepreneurs innovating to make the legal system more accessible, inclusive, and equitable in India. LFA is equipping such social entrepreneurs in the law and justice sector with resources and networks. These entrepreneurs, also known as changemakers are making systemic changes in society with the ambition 'Everyone a changemaker' and enabling long-term mindset shifts.

The idea of "access to justice" which is deeply embedded in the Indian constitutional vision and forms the bedrock of India's rule of law, is not often seen to translate well to the ground reality. Leading practitioners in the law and justice sector are moving the needle across sectors towards this equitable access to justice and putting constitution's preamble values in practice.

At the Law For All Initiative, we conducted an impact study to understand the status quo, and the mechanisms through which these leading practitioners are bringing about systems change in society.

We carried out two surveys in 2021, one to capture trends and learnings from organisations moving the needle towards equitable access to justice, and second to understand the ways young changemakers are making positive transformative changes in the justice space. We received responses from 32 such organisations and 58 young leaders to our surveys, and conducted 8 in-depth interviews, representing different focus areas in the law and justice space, across more than 11 states in India. We found that key to these structural systemic interventions towards the realisation of a just society are themes like the drive to make a change for good, advancing legal literacy, building with the community, purposeful collaborations, unlocking the value of data, and the power of young changemakers.

This report is not a mere presentation of these changemakers' impact, but a scope into their collected insights from the field and their vision for the roadmap to social justice. We bring these collective narratives of stories of change and impact with the hope to serve as a springboard for 'everyone a changemaker' movement towards access to justice.

About Us and Our Collaborators

The Law for All Initiative is a unique programme at Ashoka that equips leading and emerging social entrepreneurs in the field of law and justice through the Everyone A Changemaker ™ journey. By studying the status quo of this field, mapping social innovations, collaborating with key stakeholders, we are enabling the creation of a supportive ecosystem for the changemakers.

The Initiative is further established by its three building blocks - a collective of leading social entrepreneurs, critical sector catalysts and influencers, and a growing movement of young changemakers. It searches, selects, and supports young and established social entrepreneurs making the legal system more accessible, inclusive, and equitable. Social entrepreneurs and changemakers are equipped with resources and networks to emphasize the importance of collaborating with different sectoral stakeholders. The ecosystem thus created, equipped with powerful ideas such as the collaborative resolution of disputes, open access to law and justice data, well-being in criminal justice systems, and community justice solutions, can achieve widespread and irreversible impact.

AGAMI is a movement of people and ideas intent on transforming the experience of justice in India by telling a different story, surfacing innovation, connecting actors and opportunities, and unleashing a new kind of collective leadership in the field. **www.agami.in**

COMMUTINY: Commutiny is a youth collective, working extensively with adolescents and young people across different thematic areas. More about Commutiny's work at: **www.commutiny.in**.

DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION (DEF): Digital Empowerment Foundation is a non-profit organisation that aims to bridge the digital divide among urban and rural communities by empowering people digitally. More about Digital Empowerment Foundation work at: **www.defindia.org.**

INTERNET FREEDOM FOUNDATION (IFF): Internet Freedom Foundation is an NGO that conducts advocacy on digital rights and liberties. More about Internet Freedom Foundation's work at **www.internetfreedom.in.**

PROTSAHAN: Protsahan is an NGO, working to empower young girls from difficult backgrounds of poverty, violence, and abuse to access quality education, healthcare, and gender justice. More about Protsahan's work at **www.protsahan.co.in**

PROJECT SECOND CHANCE: Project Second Chance aims to reform, rehabilitate and reintegrate at-risk youth between the age of 18-21 years through impact-oriented interventions. More about Project Second Chance's work at **www.projectsecondchance.in.**

PRISON AID + ACTION RESEARCH: PAAR (Prison Aid+Action Research), a non-partisan research and advocacy organisation, working on the rights of prisoners, prison reforms, and establishing open prisons. More about PAAR's work at **www.paar.org.in.**

REAPBENEFIT: ReapBenefit is a non-profit organisation that strives to tackle and solve local environmental and civic problems through youth leadership. More about ReapBenefit's work at **www.reapbenefit.org.**

YOUTHKIAAWAAZ (YKA): Youth Ki Awaaz is a user-generated Indian youth media platform focused on social justice issues. More about YKA's work at **www.youthkiawaaz.com**

ASHOKA YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS: Ashoka Young Changemakers (AYCs) is a global network of powerful young people who are

Why did we conduct this study?

"Without sanctity of life and liberty, the distinction between a lawless society and one governed by laws would cease to have any meaning"[1]

HON. JUSTICE H.R. KHANNA

The law and justice machinery exists to grease the wheels of justice delivery, and social development. However, increasing instances have indicated that this machinery has not played its part adequately in protection of rights of people, ensuring access to justice and extenuating burgeoning marginalisation in society. Although the law governs our daily lives, we as citizens, mostly have an unclear understanding of the law.

In times fuelled by rapid advancements, political and economic shifts, rampant digitization, we see humanity making strides in many areas, however these advancements also have also ironically cast a light the growing systemic inequities and injustices.

There are multiple levels of impact for every decision taken, from climate change to digital education, inequities in access often affect people who need these advancements the most and the brunt of impact they face is also disproportionately higher.

To add to these existing difficulties, the data around law and justice today is quite scattered which in turn makes it hard to take decisions and to understand the real challenges.

At the Law for All Initiative, we believe that one of the emerging solutions to address this is through inspired leadership mobilising their communities towards more just transitions--advancing the world towards more justice changemakers and less justice seekers. This study is our attempt to understand the current landscape of this movement: how the agencies that believe in this vision are working towards their goals and what learnings could emerge from their collective stories of change and impact.

1. Additional District Magistrate v. S.S Shukla (1976) AIR 1207, 1976 SCR 172

32 organisations across 11 states in India responded to the survey and 58 young changemakers responded to the youth survey.

34.4% Female
65.6% Male

TOP FOCUS AREAS

FOR ORGANISATIONS

56%
Law and Legal reform

38%
Rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups

31%
Women empowerment

YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS

48%
Participation and Awareness

47%
Youth Empowerment

47%
Rights of marginalised communities

TOP TARGET POPULATIONS

66%
Women

59%
Youth
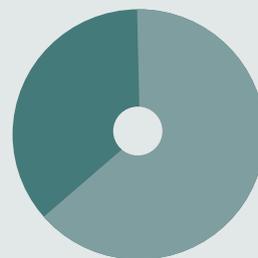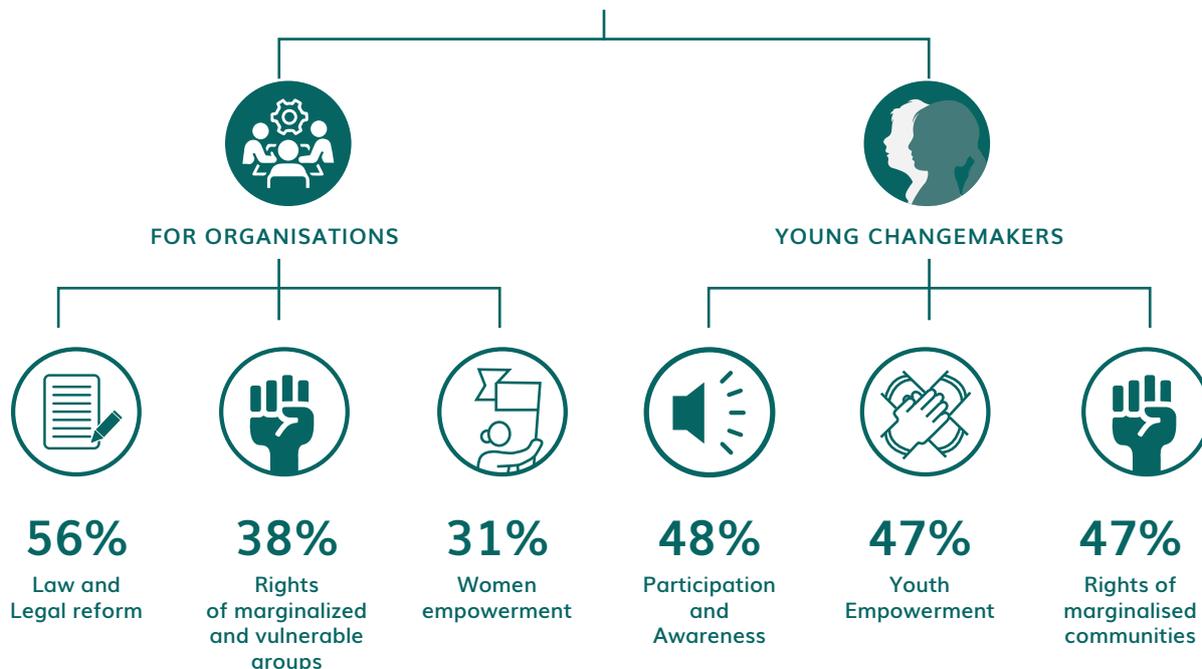
53%
Businesses
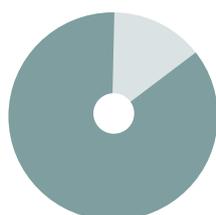
87% of the organisations indicated influencing laws and policies
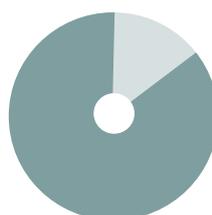
88% of organisations indicated that their initiatives are geared towards mindset shifts in society

In line with this study's objectives, we launched two surveys to understand the law and justice ecosystem-level impact and mindset shifts through social innovations. The first survey was for organisations making strides towards positive transformations in justice space and the second was for the young leaders innovating the justice space. The findings of these surveys elaborate on the status quo and pave the way for identifying the trends and future directions.

This study also builds on our 'Social Innovation Mapping' report that lays down the law and justice landscape of India, identifying emerging systems changing social innovations, and the key changemakers in the field.

Throughout our surveys and interviews, we noticed some recurring themes among the organisations and individuals we spoke with. We will address each of these themes in the subsequent sections, along with unique narratives of changemaking in the law and justice space. Our abiding hope is that the study will help build a shared narrative of the work accomplished by the pioneer changemakers in the legal and justice sector, and build a stronger, sustainable, and far-reaching movement.

Top Right: Photo Courtesy of Osama Manzar, Digital Empowerment Foundation
Bottom Left: Photo Courtesy of Antaraa Vasudev, Civis
Bottom Right: Photo Courtesy of Vibha Nadig, OutLawed

Unpacking Changemaking in Law

Social entrepreneurs and leaders see changing contexts not as challenges but as opportunities to produce innovative solutions to address emergent social problems, the process also known as 'Changemaking'.

'Change is the only constant,' a Greek adage as old as time, is relevant now more than ever. The implications of contemporary and monumental shifts, from climate change to the age of digital to the changes in the global order, invariably affect all our daily lives.

With the advent of the social entrepreneurship field in the 1980s came concepts like 'social innovations', 'changemaking', and 'Everyone a Changemaker' (EACH) movement. Ashoka pioneered in establishing these into the public narrative. EACH is now core to Ashoka's work.

We went into this study asking ourselves, Does everybody want to be a changemaker? Do they have the same definition of changemaking in their respective lines of work?

In our surveys, we found that more than 90% of organisations indicated changemaking as the core driver of their work, or as a significant aspect of their work. While for the youth, 62% of the respondents underscored a similar significant relevance of changemaking in their work. In the youth survey, we also observed that while 36% of young leaders already identify themselves as changemakers, 60% are trying to be changemakers.
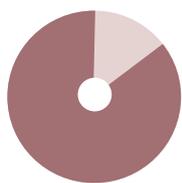
90%
of organisations where changemaking is the core driver

We further conducted interviews with leaders in the field to delve into this trend and more importantly, to understand if all the leaders viewed changemaking the same way as the existing definitions and if elements of changemaking find their direct translation and applicability in the law and justice space too.

We found that for most of our interviewees, changemaking in law meant making the legal language accessible, paving the way for legal empowerment. For some, changemaking in law resonated with advancement, incremental

74%

of the leaders
indicated lack
of funds

45%

of the leaders
indicated lack
of time.

change, and keeping the target communities at the centre.

Albeit, the road to changemaking in law is hard. In our surveys, we found young leaders indicating lack of funds (74%) and lack of time (45%) as major barriers to their initiative. In our interviews, we found change leaders listing different kinds of barriers, from loopholes in the legal system, reception of initiatives, to the sustainability of their initiatives and projects and evaluation metrics (or lack thereof) for their interventions.

For Paramita Banerjee who founded Discovering Inner Knowledge & Sexual Health Awareness (DIKSHA), a non-profit organisation that has been empowering children and adolescents in red-light districts in Kolkata since 2002, barriers are bipartite. Firstly, the laws around child rights and women's rights are deemed and treated as 'soft-laws', eliciting a lack of urgency and inaction from the law-enforcement systems. For instance, families facilitating underage marriage rarely get convicted by courts. Likewise, domestic violence cases meet a similar fate. These laws remain soft laws more so because of the social realities as well: for example, if the father of a minor bride is put behind bars, the whole family loses their breadwinner. Second, these laws need to adapt to the changing social contexts. Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) is one such example. It is a brilliant law but needs constant revisions to adapt to social nuances, changing contexts (like barriers in conducting proper investigation for POCSO cases, timeline for trials, no provisions for consensual sex under the age of 18), as the conviction rates stand less than 30% under the act [National Crime Records Bureau, Crime in India 2020].

For Ritvik Lukose, Founder of Vahura, a leading legal search and consulting firm in India, a major bottleneck in the legal sector is the asymmetry in the number of experienced lawyers, and merit-based access to the best opportunities available.

For the two young changemakers we interviewed, Priyaswara Bharti and Vibha Nadig, sustained interest in their initiatives from team members and target communities, lack of trust, and funding from the sector, are some of the hurdles they continuously face on account of being young.

Hence, changemaking is an ever-evolving process to address multiple questions, including responding to the need of the hour, managing funding at every step, identifying resources, mitigating issues such as sustained motivation for volunteers, and even simple but often forgotten acts of self-care.

CASE STUDY 1: *Too young to wed, Too young to work :* The fight for child rights and youth empowerment in Bihar

PRIYASWARA
Founder,
Bihar Youth for Child Rights

Priyaswara grew up in a village in Bihar, where girls and boys her age were brainwashed into believing that social constructs of child marriage and child labour were established for the welfare of children—new family, extra income, stability. Are these practices right? Never questioned, just accepted. It was only after her move from Gopalganj district to Patna city in in Bihar, did Priyaswara realise that children too had rights, and what were accepted as norms in smaller districts in Bihar, were indeed violations. This coupled with a workshop on translating child rights into simple applicable terms by UNICEF gradually shifted her beliefs. She resolved to challenge these practices that continually violate the rights of children in her community and to teach other young girls what she had just learned, and this started her changemaking journey.

Priyaswara set up Bihar Youth for Child Rights (BYCR) at the age of 13, raising awareness on child rights, translating child protection laws into easier, and accessible formats. Since then, BYCR has branched out to other focus areas like women empowerment, youth empowerment, participatory governance, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. They have thus far conducted workshops and exhibitions on menstrual hygiene and reproductive health and

rights across 13 universities and 4 districts in Patna, reaching 500+ girls and women. Through their initiatives and awareness-raising, BYCR also challenges old patriarchal practices young girls face at home. These include being asked to serve food to the men in the house, cleaning the houses, and being allowed to pursue only certain professions. BYCR now sees a mindset shift in the communities they interact with, and in the new people that join them. Besides these workstreams, they also help local community health centres in their COVID-19 vaccination drives, along with fact-checking misinformation in these communities.

"अगर किसी को पता होगा कि बाल मज़दूरी गलत है,
तभी तो वह बाल मज़दूरी छोड़ कर पढ़ेगा"

Translation from Hindi: Only when the unaware youth is made aware of the fact that child labour is wrong, will they leave child labour to focus on education.

PRIYASWARA BHARTI, FOUNDER, BYCR

CASE STUDY 2: Breaking the cycle of forced intergenerational sex trade with youth as agents of change in West Bengal

PARAMITA BANERJEE
Founder, DIKSHA

In the mid-1980s, Paramita Banerjee found her changemaking spark with a vision to challenge paradigms that deny agency to the youth wanting to change their environments, specifically to the youth and children who grow up in red-light districts.

Paramita started with volunteering at organisations devoted to protecting the welfare of sex workers in the red light districts of Kolkata, a city that is home to 50,000 sex workers, the largest among all Asian cities. Paramita believed the forced brothel-based sex trade was the epitome of patriarchal society-induced exploitation and discrimination.

Young girls born in brothels would be taken away from the red-light districts to be put in shelter homes and brought back to the red-light districts when they turned 16*. Shortly after their return, they would be married off by their mothers or would elope themselves with their partners in hopes of a better life. However, within a year or two, these young girls would be sold off into the sex

* the definition of 'children'/'minors'/'juveniles before the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 was until 16 and not 18

trade somewhere else in the country by their supposed husbands or partners or be forced to return and join the trade because of severe domestic violence faced mostly because they come from red-light districts, setting off a vicious loop of the intergenerational sex trade.The notion that women have a choice does not stand in these areas, due to entrenched systemic inequities like lack of access to education, training and other means of livelihood, perpetuated by the system over generations on.

Over the years of her work in red light districts, Paramita noticed a stark abberration that while numerous interventions were being undertaken by civil societies, NGOs, government agencies, these interventions had very little or no engagement with young boys living in these areas, and alarmingly, very little engagement with the families of sex workers and sex workers themselves. Children born in these red-light districts, would be subjected to skewed gender dynamics, stigma, and discrimination, resulting in school dropouts and internalised shame. And young boys would grow up with no role models and end up peddling drugs or succumbing to other forms of juvenile delinquency. A question from a 15-year-old, at a workshop on sexual and reproductive health that Paramita was conducting, changed her whole perspective: Why can't boys say no to underage marriage? Why are boys left out of sexual and reproductive health and rights workshops? This led Paramita to develop co-ed workshops, sensitising young boys and girls alike. DIKSHA was borne out of 16 such adolescents in one of Paramita's workshops, from the Kalighat red-light district that wanted to establish a programme specifically for adolescents, and that is why Paramita calls herself the incidental 17th co-founder.

"Why can't boys say no to underage marriage? Why are boys left out of sexual and reproductive health and rights workshops? This led Paramita to develop co-ed workshops, sensitising young boys and girls alike"

PARAMITA BANERJEE, FOUNDER, DIKSHA

One of the many ways DIKSHA ensures safeguarding of the rights of children is through sustained capacity building exercises, to the effect that now the young people associated can now state the applicability of POCSO Act, 2012 and report its violations to the concerned state authorities.

Paramita stipulates that children in red-light districts face up to 1,50,000 cases of abuse in different forms, including child sexual abuse, DIKSHA is able to

reduce these incidences to half in a year as reported by children themselves. 100% of the incidences of child sexual abuse that are reported receive immediate attention and intervention in a couple of years. Roughly, more than 300 children are directly involved in DIKSHA's initiatives and interventions every year, and the young people that attend workshops and participate in initiatives carries out by DIKSHA remain associated as volunteers. These young people are DIKSHA's main strength.

>300
children are directly involved in DIKSHA's initiatives every year

Through the sustained work of the youth in DIKSHA, ward 83 in Kalighat, Kolkata is now termed as a child-safe ward, with no instances of minors engaged in sex work or dependent on the sex trade economy.

In addition to this, Paramita has also developed a manual for the Directorate of Child Rights and Trafficking that is used across all districts by groups of young trainers.

"In direct action areas, systems change happens through enabling young people. All we do is just give them a little nudge to start thinking that they don't have to live the life given to them. And that they can write their own life script."

PARAMITA BANERJEE, FOUNDER, DIKSHA

Top: Photo Courtesy of Paramita Banerjee, DIKSHA

Building with the Community

'Nothing about us, without us' (from Latin "*Nihil de Nobis, sine Nobis*"), an ignited vision popular in the disability rights sector, that shifts the power back to the target communities, this vision activates agencies of the ones affected to make the decisions for themselves rather than depending on governance structures that claim to be of the people, for the people, by the people, but are not 'with' the people.

Workstreams that build through the lens of the target population encourage field research that builds empathy for people, along with discovering the unmet needs of marginalised populations. This ultimately leads to the creation of 'real' solutions for the target populations they serve.

In our surveys, we found some evidence of organisations and young leaders running programs that put the onus on the afflicted and the marginalised groups that they work with.

59%

said that they surveyed organisations activate communities agency so communities can lead the required action

75% of the organisations surveyed reported that they involve target communities in capacity-building exercises, to develop skills and competencies enabling them to exercise control over their own lives, and to contribute to inclusive community development. 59% said that they help activate communities' agencies so the communities themselves can independently lead action on issues in their spaces. 34% of the surveyed organisations indicated involving the target population to plan organisations' initiatives that concern them during planning stages. In the youth survey, we found more than 50% of the young leaders surveyed involved their team members and communities in their initiatives' design and planning stage.

CASE STUDY 3: Rights and Representation: Queering participatory governance

**ANTARAA
VASUDEV**
Founder, Civis

Civis, a non-profit organisation, founded by Antaraa Vasudev, works around the pre-legislative consultative process. They provide the public with summaries of draft laws so they can understand the issues and laws' applicability, to further ask questions, debate policies, and provide feedback on legislation. Since 2018, Civis, has published 250 consultations and mobilised 20,061 responses by engaging with 16,699 citizens

In 2019, the Transgender Persons Protection of Rights Act was passed, which was deemed regressive by the transgender community. Some regressive provisions in the Act included 'every trans person requires a certificate of identity to access a variety of social welfare programmes, 'every trans person must now submit to a certification process involving a government official and doctor to indicate their sexual identity', among many others. This Act appeared to be in contravention with prior progressive supreme court judgments[1] and legislation, that affirmed the applicability of the fundamental rights under the Constitution of India and granted them the right to self-identify, along with reservations in academic institutions and employment opportunities.

[1] National Legal Service Authority v. Union of India (2014) AIR 2014 SC 1863

In May 2020, when a set of draft rules came out operationalising this act, it became difficult for the transgender communities to come together and protest these rules due to the onslaught of COVID-19.

Civis helped with advocacy in various ways. First, it simplified the legal language. Second, it reached out to partners across sectors and gave the transgender communities a platform to voice their concerns and submit their feedback. This community engagement surfaced crucial points that the Act had missed. For instance, the forms had 'surname' as a mandatory field, which many members of the transgender community struggle with after being abandoned and disowned from their homes.

After gathering feedback, Civis acted quickly, submitting it to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. More than 52% of the suggestions were accepted and were transformed into the law. Through this collective effort and community participation, more members of the transgender community are now able to access their entitlements easily. Civis is currently working to achieve a similar outcome for other open consultations.

"There is a lot more being done for the (transgender) community, but that wouldn't have happened had the community itself not been consulted or come to the forefront."

ANTARAA VASUDEV, FOUNDER, CIVIS

Antaraa's tryst with the law, policy, and active citizenry started at the age of eight, with writing a letter to the President of India on the plight of street dogs around her house. Serendipitously, the letter found its way from the panwala (betel vendor) to the dhobi (launderer) to the Indian President, who ultimately wrote back to her. 'The government listens to people' thought translated into the inception of her participatory-governance model-based organisation, Civis.

Catalysing Collaborations

As most societal issues don't exist in a vacuum but arise from an interplay of various actors and environmental conditions, solutions built in isolation usually fall short of optimum efficacy.

Collaborations among diverse stakeholders are increasingly being seen to decentralise working models weaving local leadership in the federated organisational structures. We see these collaborations facilitating tacit knowledge transfers, tackling resource constraints, and more importantly, expanding the reach of the programmes.

To create large, sustainable, and replicable impact, organisations are increasingly seeking 'unlikely allies'. These go beyond the usual allies such as the government, philanthropic foundations, and welfare organisations. Large corporations, in fact, now see the value in collaborating with social enterprises, not merely as a part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) but also as an untapped opportunity to innovate and deliver more technology-based and research-driven solutions that serve the populations that need these innovations the most.

88%
surveyed organisations seek collaborators who also believe in changemaking

Also, with solidarity from organisations across sectors, there is more legitimacy to the engagement and more impetus to movements.

In our surveys, 88% of the organisations indicated that they seek collaborators who also believe in changemaking. The nature of such collaborations was largely indicated as long-term (75%) and democratic (97%).

However, in our interviews with leading changemakers, we found collaborations were more organic, which have often led them to discover their 'unlikely allies'. For young changemakers, these collaborations took mentorship roles, and as networking opportunities to gain recognition, trust, and footing in the field.

> ". . . although the legal education system in India was producing lawyers, many qualified lawyers weren't finding employment after graduation."

RITVIK LUKOSE, FOUNDER, VAHURA

CASE STUDY 4: Networks of Knowledge and Influence: Advocacy strategies for 'just' policies

RITVIK LUKOSE
Founder,
Vahura

Ritvik Lukose co-founded Vahura, with the aspiration to create a more merit driven and professional system of accessing career opportunities for lawyers. He found that although the legal education system in India was producing quality lawyers, the best opportunities were going to people who had access to privilege networks or were from elite law schools. Ritvik's organization, Vahura helps solve this asymmetry by connecting lawyers (mid-to-senior level) on the basis of their experience and merit, with their network of legal firms and companies.

Vahura provides consulting services, and also helps oragnisations build their teams and strategise mergers. Through these workstreams, they have created a network of influential members. Vahura leverages this network of influential members who are strategically positioned to lobby for laws and policies.

This network can then challenge outdated processes and usher in new changes at legal firms by setting examples, best practices and community of practice.

One such example is ReLawnch, an initiative at Vahura that provides mentorship and advisory for women re-entering workforce, and creates a system of best practices encouraging women representation at executive and directorial positions.

In addition to these initiatives, Vahura also collaborates with law schools to conduct educational webinars that sensitise students on these themes.

> "Catalyst 2030 has given DIKSHA a chance to represent extremely grassroots voices at very important global platforms"
>
> **PARAMITA BANERJEE, FOUNDER, DIKSHA**

CASE STUDY 5: Collaborations that reinforce beliefs and offer emergent avenues to explore

PARAMITA BANERJEE
Founder,
DIKSHA

Paramita shares that she, along with her team, has been able to forge strong, long-term partnerships both in India and abroad. The Ashoka network itself has been one such collaborative alignment that has helped her find like-minded individuals and organisations working in connected areas. Being an Ashoka Fellow, she has found value in collaborations across various Ashoka teams as well. For Paramita, an alignment of worldview and political affinity is crucial, having found its strength in community-led change, she found over time, such like-minded collaborations provide an internal platform and a new generation of collaborators. Catalyst 2030, a global movement of social entrepreneurs and social innovators from all sectors who share the common goal of creating innovative, people-centric approaches to attain the SDGs by 2030, has been one such arena for her and with that, the areas of work also have evolved. With the COVID-19 pandemic, they found a more immediate need to align with stakeholders engaged in other areas such as livelihoods and mental health as well.

Accountability comes from asking questions but also providing information proactively that belongs to the citizens.

MAJA DARUWALA
Chief Editor, India Justice Report (IJR)
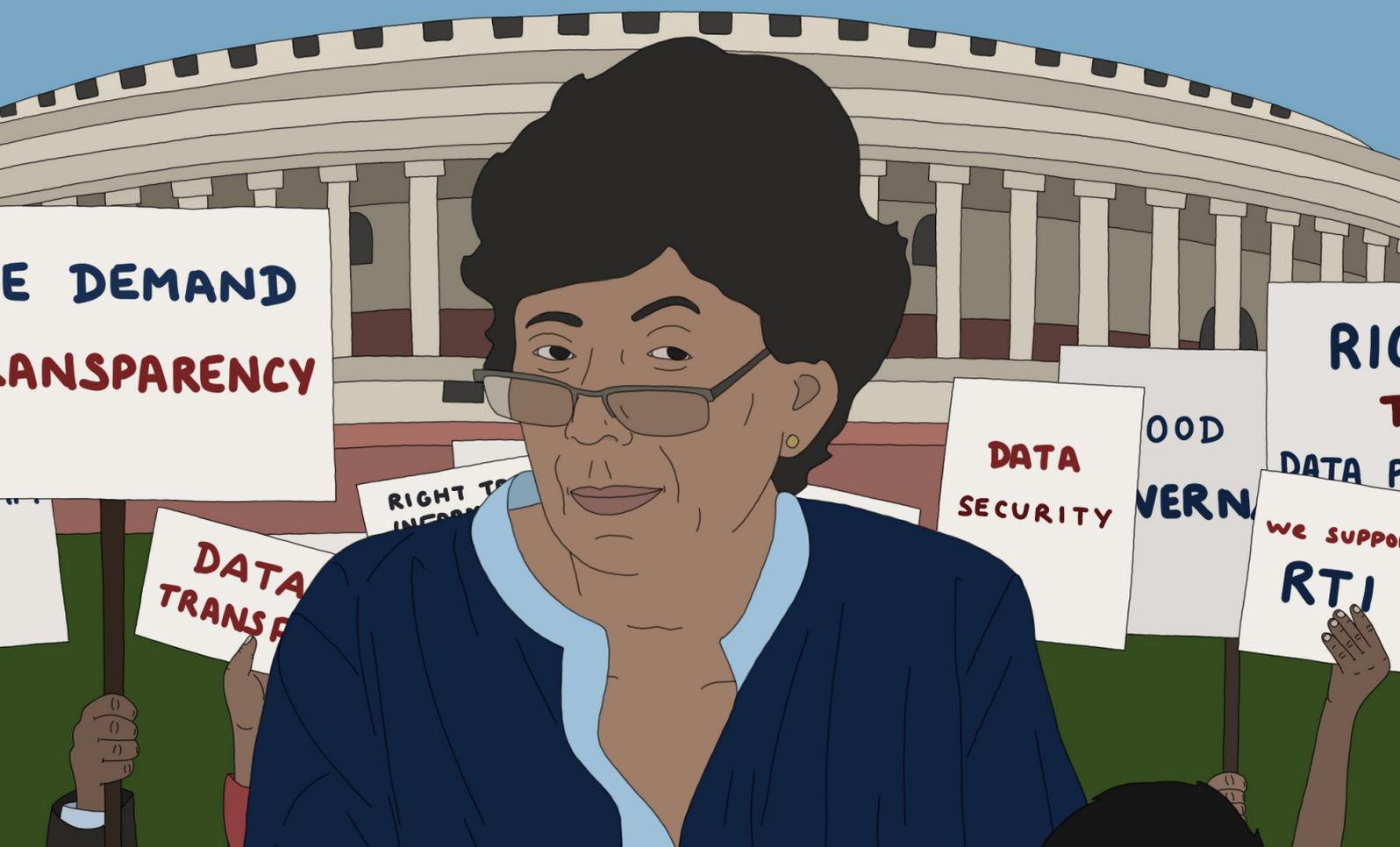
Data for Justice

We live in a digital economy driven by data, with rampant data collection and digitization of processes. Since the dawn of the digital age, we have seen processes around us change at lightning speeds, rendering non-digital modes obsolete.

In the recent years of the 'open data' boom, formerly siloed state-held databases are now publicly accessible. Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy, 2012, the Right to Information Act, 2005, and open data systems have paved the way for more accountable governance structures and systems to develop better metrics, risk mitigation techniques, and ways to address root causes of problems rather than symptoms. Through the use, reuse, and distribution of public datasets, governments can also promote citizen-centric innovations and services.

These open government data practices harbingered by the RTI (2005), are also of immense use to the government too, as they ease the process of finding and locating information, standardize information gathering and processing. Further, citizen interaction with the data can help detection of aberrations (obsolete or inaccurate datasets) which might have been unnoticed by governmental agencies.

However, the practice of open government data is not sufficient, divulging information in accessible and usable formats is of paramount importance. As it is only then the citizens, civil society organisations (CSOs), and most importantly marginalized groups can actively engage with these public datasets and localize them to come up with strategies to solve the social issues that scourge their communities.

Also, the information requested through RTIs should be dispensed in a timely manner for the relevant urgent action to take place. Performance of information commissioners indicate that as of 2021, 2,56,000 appeals were pending in 26 information commissions [Research by Satark Nagrik Sanghatan]. Moreover, the information should be disclosed proactively by the state and not in a perfunctionary manner, as guaranteed by section 4 of the Act which states:" It shall be a constant endeavour of every public authority to take steps [...]to provide as much information Suo motu to the public at regular intervals through various means of communications, including Internet, so that the public have minimum resort to the use of this Act to obtain information". It has been brough to light by several activists, CSOs, and communities at large, that the transparency guaranteed by the act should also find its conversion into accountability.

CASE STUDY 6: **Public Secrets: Data is the cornerstone for democracy and development**

MAJA DARUWALA
Chief Editor, India Justice Report (IJR)

Maja Daruwala has devoted more than 40 years of her career to human rights, social justice, and issues relating to civil liberties. She is currently the Senior Advisor for the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), where she previously served as the Director for twenty years until 2016. While heading the CHRI, she was one of the champions advocating for the enactment of the Right to Information Act (RTIA), 2005, the Act that shifted the governance gears from monarchical, guarded, and inaccessible systems to democratic, transparent, and accessible systems; the act that instils true essence of democracy in the society. Once the Act was enacted, she pushed for its implementation through capacity building and training exercises for civil society organisations, duty holders, along with monitoring of the act's implementation until RTIA started being used in common parlance.

Through the sustained and laborious efforts of civil societies, advocates, and activists, roughly 13 lakhs (1.3 million) RTIs are filed each year now (as per Central Information Commission Annual Report 2020-2021), and around 3.2 crores (32 million) Indians have filed RTIs since the act's inception. RTIA came in the light of an exposed glaring gap in the Indian Constitution, fundamental rights like the right to speech and expression (Article 19.1.(a)), tie up closely with the right to know. In the 1950 judgement by Supreme Court in the case of Romesh Thappar v the State of Madras , it was brought to attention that the freedom of discussion should be included in the Article 19 (1) (a) of the constitutition, and that freedom of the press be a facet of the freedom of discussion so the citizens can be effectively informed to form their own views and communicate them freely, outlining the principle, 'the right to know'. Since then, there had been an aspiration to get 'right to information' on the statute books, which took form into a long and an arduous fight until the enactment of the RTIA. RTIA is an enactment that realises fundamental rights than a statutory device for administrative efficiency and a check against rampant corruption and the lack of transparency.

On why the right to know belongs to the people, Maja Daruwala makes the point that "It is a fundamental right essential to democratic function. Denial is a violation[..]. It is no favour for public servants and authorities to put information into the public domain. Too much accretion of power must be ameliorated, and that is through statutory right to information. It is your right to know because

2 Romesh Thappar vs The State Of Madras 1950 AIR 124, 1950 SCR 594

the information is collected for a public purpose, by public servants, with public money, and is collected from the public. There is no question of keeping that information away from the public. The only thing that must be protected is individual privacy, and information shown to be demonstrably necessary to keep away, for which there must be strong justification and exceptions to openness must be kept to a very narrow band. Jurisdictions that have done this have prospered and their democracies have deepened in a very meaningful way."

Maja is also one of the leading conceptualisers behind the India Justice Report (IJR), which ranks individual Indian states in relation to their capacity to deliver access to justice. The first of its kind, this report underscores the multifaceted utility of data, paving the road for effective and inclusive governance structures. It ranks 18 large and mid-sized, and 7 small states according to their capacity to deliver justice to all. It brings together all in one place government's own data to assess the budgets, infrastructure, human resources, workload, diversity and 5-year trends of police, prisons, judiciary, and legal aid in each state, against its own declared standards. On what real impact is, Maja Daruwala says 'Localisation of data and models is the real impact—if after reading the India Justice Report which maps the justice system and ranks each state, the duty holder tweaks policies or takes even a few practical measures to improve it; or the researcher or active citizen says let me map out the capacity of the justice system in my district or begins to question why there is no properly functioning legal aid clinic in my district—that is the real impact'.

Inclusive data collection systems-the path bearers for inclusive and accountable governance

Data which is central to all monitoring and evaluation processes can help develop better metrics if collected properly and in an inclusive manner. It can also create ways for practitioners to treat problems from a systemic lens. Inclusive data collection systems that disaggregate data by sex, disability, socio-economic status shed light on the ground reality and the extent of marginalisation. These processes and exercises also help inform policies and laws that reflect the needs of marginalised communities and reveal the existing gaps in these communities.

Advanced humanitarian technology tools that are collecting data in a safe and secure manner, are addressing some of the most pressing humanitarian, health, and climate issues around the world. One such magnificent success

story of humanitarian technology tool is of Open Data Kit, an app that helped eradicate polio in Africa, by collecting more than 500 million data points for disease surveillance and routine immunization. This herculean feat was also strengthened by other revolutionary technological innovations like geographic information system (GIS) technology, Auto Visual Acute Flaccid Paralysis Detection and Reporting (AVADAR), e-surveillance, digital elevation modelling, electronic tracking of vaccination campaign quality (eLQAS).

CSOs and NGOs, have also continued to make sense of the public datasets, in targeted sectors like health, education, budgets, election, criminal justice, prison reforms, to inform communities better. They adopt different ways to access the available government data: some collect themselves with government's help (Akshara Foundation, Plan India, National Confederation of Dalit, and Adivasis Organisation), some file RTIs to procure relevant data (Asian Centre for Human Rights, Prison Action+ Aid Research), some work with the government agencies, and some collect data de novo, or through crowdsourcing or outsourcing big data analysis (Operation Red Alert).

CSOs also hold the power of decentralizing public datasets to uncover trends on local social issues. For instance, Nikita Sonovane's organisation Criminal Justice and Police Accountability Project (CPAP) examines the unwarranted police's targeting of denotified tribal communities or Vimukta communities, and other marginalized communities by looking into histories of FIRs and arrest data from 10 districts of Madhya Pradesh. These studies and documentation by CPAP ensure that there are public records on the systemic inequities faced by marginalized communities, perpetuated by the criminal justice system. Prison Action + Aid Research (PAAR) by Smita Chakraburtty is another such endeavour of using public datasets to inform just and humane policies and trigger action from governmental authorities. PAAR studies prison manuals, government notifications, court judgements alongwith filing RTIs to learn more about specific judgements, to advocate for open prisons, and to curate material for training personnel from correction facilities and judicial system.

72%

surveyed organisations embed impact assessment in the design of their initiatives

Data thus collected via public datasets or through an organisation's own endeavours can inform strategies that are effective and inclusive, and those strategies can also be assessed through data collection and analysis, also called impact assessment or monitoring and evaluation. In our surveys, we found that 69% of the participating organisations collect data and assess impact through monitoring and evaluation frameworks, or population surveys. Furthermore, 72% of the organisations embed impact assessment in the design of their initiatives. Of the young changemakers surveyed, 66% measure the effectiveness of their initiatives and 94% collect feedback from their target population, either always or occasionally. These trends present the potential to embed inclusivity in the existing organisational mechanisms, if not already embedded.

CASE STUDY 7: Leave no one behind: A large question mark on the democratic promise of digitalisation

The policies should reflect the ground realities, scientifically thought of and measured.

APAR GUPTA
Founder,
Internet
Freedom
Foundation

India is a populous nation and is home to nearly 140 crore (1.4 billion) people. 905 million people out of the total sum reside in rural areas. 65.4% of this rural India does not have an internet subscription, as per the Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicator Report 2020, and World Bank Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database. Moreover, the digital literacy rate in rural India stands at 25% [Niti Aayog, 2021].

In light of this inaccessibility to digital services, Apar Gupta from IFF talked about fallacies of the policies of the Indian government to facilitate vaccination drives for individuals aged 18-44, through a single online portal called CoWIN. This portal had no disability-friendly features, and the language was primarily English. In addition to this lack of accessible features, the CoWIN website had no privacy policy in place despite it collecting a wide range of personal data. While it was stated that the Data Privacy Policy of the National Health Mission would govern CoWIN, its applicability was not specifically defined. In the

absence of internet services and knowledge of the portal's functionality amidst rural India, this population continued to bear the brunt of discrimination. Also, during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, Aarogya Setu, a contact tracing app was made mandatory by the government as a precondition to gatherings and human mobility. For migrant labourers in India who move to urban areas for better work opportunities, this provision left them stranded primarily due to the assumption that every Indian has access to a smartphone. On average, a smartphone costs more than a month's salary for many workers. Millions of migrant workers were stranded without the app, without transport, without income, with food shortages, and an uncertain future.

"Internet is not unique in terms of it not being there, and most of it falls around an economic access which manifests itself through that kind of social discrimination, which has historically been based on caste and gender."
APAR GUPTA, FOUNDER, INTERNET FREEDOM FOUNDATION

It was then that IFF along with 50 other organisations across sectors, and around 100 other prominent leaders wrote to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) highlighting these very grave violations. Subsequently, downloading the Aarogya Setu app provision became voluntary.

Reflecting on cross-cutting approaches, intersectionality, and the needed solidarity among organisations across sectors, Apar told us that while thinking of access to technology and the internet, it becomes imperative to put historical inequities, gender lens, disability, and caste lens into perspective. Even within marginalised communities, the experience of marginalisation is not homogenous, so access to technology and the internet should therefore be considered keeping in mind existing issues around livelihoods, right to speech, and expression.
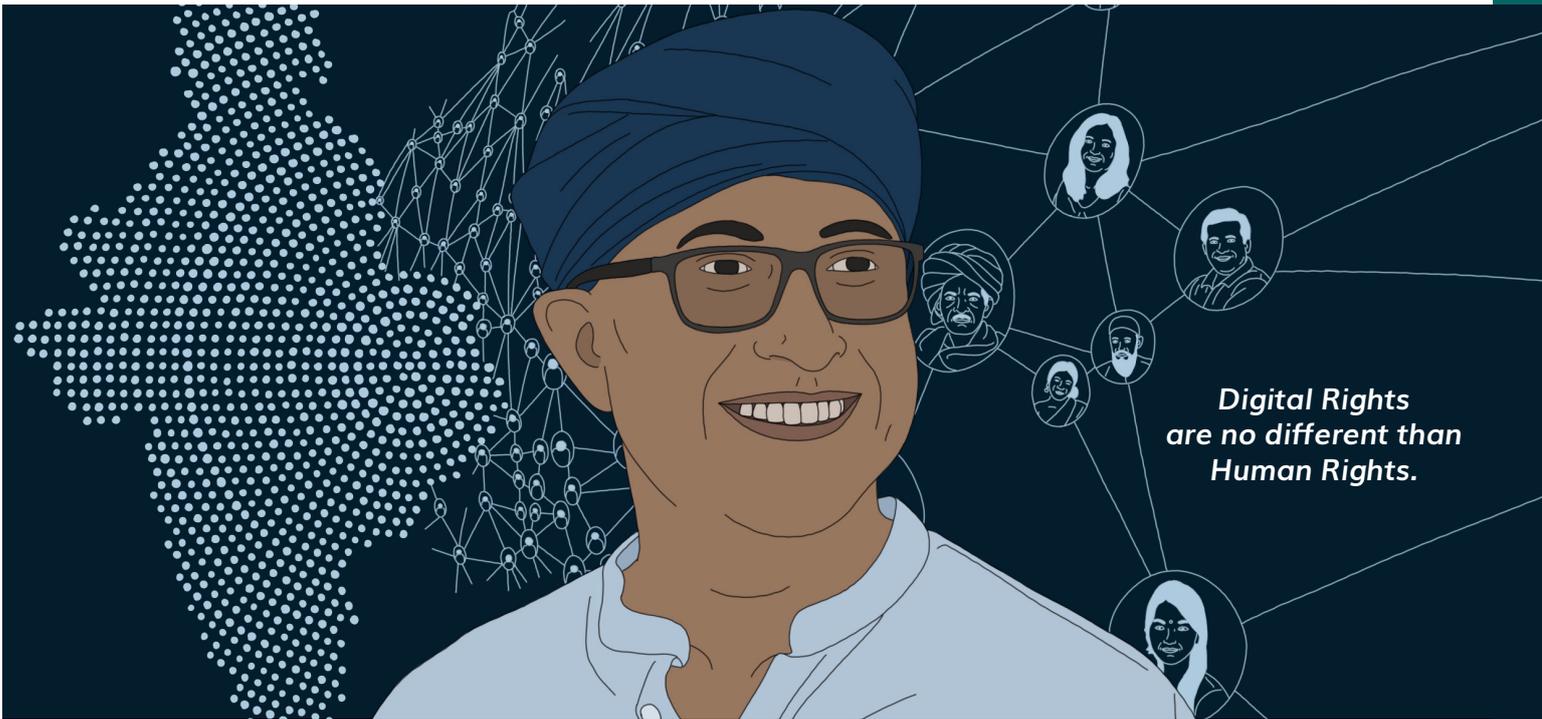
*Digital Rights
are no different than
Human Rights.*

**OSAMA
MANZAR**
Founder, Digital
Empowerment
Foundation

Osama Manzar, from Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) (a non-profit organisation that seeks to help people learn how to use digital tools and the Internet to achieve greater socio-economic equality), also underlined the very same thought, that digital rights serve as the gateway to human rights. Access to information is entwined with exercising fundamental rights like the right to food and shelter.

Further, he highlights that the discourse surrounding digital rights predominantly revolves around a top-down approach with lawmakers and bureaucrats, who are not cognizant of the ground realities. As a result, there is disconnect among stakeholders, and communities which exacerbates issues, instead of solving them. This is precisely why a bottoms-up approach, which aims to empower the voice of the community is better equipped at solving relevant digital issues.

"Digital rights are no different than other development issues that we are currently facing. In fact, a proper framework of integration between these issues would not only make it exponentially faster to solve, but also provide stability in the long run. Because in any case, we are not envisaging a life without digital infrastructure, it is merely a matter of how, when, and contextually how relevant."
OSAMA MANZAR FOUNDER, DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=345n4HNPfnM.

READ MORE: "The Internet Is A Right, Not A Technology". Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashoka/2022/01/19/the-internet-is-a-right-not-a technology/?sh=760786111d34

RIGHTS
56

Justice
202

LEGAL
LITERACY
100

LEGAL AID

ACCESS
TO LEGAL
SYSTEMS
13

ROAD TO
LEGAL JUSTICE

CONSTI-
TUTION
20

Demystifying Legal Literacy

Article 39 (A) of the Indian Constitution ensures equal justice and free legal aid, outlining that the states should ensure legal systems that promote justice, free legal aid by suitable legislation or schemes[..] but what good is the law when most of the population isn't even aware that they're entitled to free legal aid?

Legal awareness and legal literacy in India are largely remedial rather than preventative. Laws are instituted to regulate society, but we are only made aware of them in the aftermath of an offence. It is reported that about 70% of the people living in rural areas are not literate (National Sample Survey, 2014) and the percentage of people that are not aware of the rights guaranteed by the law is significantly greater. A staggering 76.1% of prison inmates in India are undertrials, not convicted of their alleged crimes (National Crime Records Bureau, 2020). Out of these undertrials, more than 70% come from marginalised communities (Prison Statistics Report, 2019).

The need for legal literacy took its roots in around 1952 when legal aid schemes were discussed by the government, legal aid boards and law departments in state governments, and finally in 1960 legal aid schemes were introduced. In 1980, under the chairmanship of former Supreme Court judge, Hon. Mr. Justice P.N. Bhagwati (Retd.), Committee for Implementing Legal Aid Schemes was constituted. Further, in 1995, the Legal Services Authorities Act (1995) was passed, after which the apex body National Legal Service Authorities was established, with the power of laying down most effective policies and draft rules to make legal services accessible under the Legal Services Authorities Act (1995), and to disburse funds to State governments to implement legal aid schemes and initiatives.

Subsequently in 2005, National Legal Literacy Mission was launched by former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh for the legal empowerment of all, with the mission that when citizens, specifically marginalized and vulnerable citizens recognize and understand the law, they can challenge the injustices faced. However, this mission was not effectively sustained post five years, and we still grapple with the mammoth task of legal empowerment of all, legal literacy remains mystified at large.

We found the same urgency around legal empowerment and legal literacy in our interviews as well, an under-tapped area where the leaders see changemaking in law to be.

CASE STUDY 8: Hocus Pocus: Laws with their invisibility cloaks on

Leading practitioners that we interviewed, across the board, underlined the importance of legal literacy, legal empowerment as the blueprint for advancements towards equitable access to justice.

Maja Daruwala asserted that knowing you are equal and that you have rights is still not widely known even after 70 years. This is a deliberate omission. It must be remedied. Constitutional literacy is essential, but it is not enough. You need the legal machinery to be at your doorstep and the ability to reach it without negative consequences. Legal empowerment is the ability to demand justice and get it. Legal literacy is the first step that creates agency in citizens to transform their situations. Access to inexpensive, local, timely justice delivery mechanisms creates the empowerment that can become the gamechanger we need now more than ever. It changes the power dynamics between governor and governed in favour of the ordinary citizens, simply through the ability to demand the application of the rule of law. Knowing the law – the rules of the game, also creates a common language of expectation between different groups and that builds trust and creates a level playing field for conflict resolution outside of the vocabulary of violence.

In a similar vein, for Paramita Banerjee, (Founder, DIKSHA), the idea of changemaking was also synonymous with making the legal language accessible and understanding social nuances while implementing laws protecting the rights of children. Antaraa Vasudev underscored the importance of knowing the law and its applicability. Her organisation Civis partners with GramVaani, a social-tech company that creates participatory media platforms, to recite and translate laws in local languages that migrant labourers can understand easily.

We also found a similar school of thought in the young leaders interviewed. Vibha Nadig, an undergraduate law student with access to legal education, finds the legal language dense. She elaborates, how not just the letter and intent of the law but also thinking through the language of communication, and formats of it all—are where the major work lies. Through her projects, Project Safe School, and Project Jagriti, she aims to translate laws on sexual harassment, labour laws, and cyber laws in an accessible format for the youth, while raising awareness around these laws. Priyaswara Bharti on the other hand translated child protection laws for the children and youth in Bihar, along with conducting workshops to raise awareness.

Powering changemaking using social media

Scrolling through social media has now become a part of our daily routines, transforming these platforms into primary outlets to spread awareness, mobilise people and to potentially find collaborators in the social sector. Significantly, social media has become a significant medium of youth organising across the world.

71% young leaders use social media to engage volunteers for their initiatives

74% use social media to raise awareness about their initiatives

Before the advent of social media, conventional media channels and government agencies were gatekeepers of news, and other pertinent information. The wave of social media has disrupted this paradigm and has ushered in a more robust, transparent, and open line of communication and also information dissemination. Inshorts, now a popular news app extensively used by youth, started as a Facebook page that produced short 60-words summaries with infographics and pictures of the most relevant news items of the day. This format struck a chord with the youth who didn't have a lot of time to look through the entire news articles to learn concise information about happenings around the world. Currently, Inshorts has over 10 million app downloads.

Increasingly, social media channels are also being used for advocacy campaigns to generate mass awareness and trigger proactive action from relevant stakeholders. In India, various campaigns took off with effective use of hashtag and smart social media strategies, one such example that generated immense traction was #selfiewithdaughter started by Sunil Jagran against sex selection and female foeticide; and twitteratis, including celebrities, prominent world leaders across the world flooded media with selfies with their daughters to raise social awareness.

Robust civic engagement also found its haven in social media, where the citizens could interact with government agencies and policies set forth, to dissent, to appreciate or to cogently discuss. Twitter Seva Service, a customized live grievance redressal solution launched by the government of India processes large volumes of tweets converts them to tickets and assigns them to relevant authorities for fast resolution. As these conversations are transparent and for everyone to see, anybody can benefit from the responses received from the authorities on common issues. This service was very effective during the COVID-19 pandemic, wherein it gave citizens of India a platform to raise health-issues directly to the Ministry of Health, @Covid19Seva. Account @ Covid19Seva, and hashtag #IndiaFightsCorona became popular and of immense use when it came to sharing important guidelines for prevention, helplines information, and resolving common queries. Also, to encourage youth to vote in elections, Election Commission of India partnered with Meta to remind youth who recently turned 18 to register to vote. The reminders were sent in English and 12 Indian languages on the users' birthday with a registration link to National Voters' Service Portal.

Another example of social media proving to be a potent force in fostering civic engagement, is @ipaidabribe, started by Janagraha, a non-profit organisation in Bangalore to report instances of corruption. Their social media campaigns bring like-minded youth for a collective action, promoting public debate on corruption.

These online models are further effective in scaling impact at multiple levels. A conduit to more vigorous youth engagement in community issues, social media is weaving youth development, community development, and social change. Given the dynamic and digital world, young people live in, the methods of changemaking are also taking on a dynamic and digital shape.

In our surveys and interviews, we found social media to be the most influential means to promote youth participation in governance and societal integration.

CASE STUDY 9: Change just got social: Perspectives from two young leaders

VIBHA NADIG
Founder,
OutLawed

PRIYASWARA
Founder,
Bihar Youth for
Child Rights

Both the young leaders we interviewed stressed the importance of social media in their endeavours. Vibha Nadig's non-profit organization Outlawed India aims to bolster citizen engagement with the law through grassroots-level. They make the dense legal language intelligible by conducting workshops to raise awareness among Anganwadi workers, factory workers and children at risk. Their projects are run in partnership with schools and state governments to cogently raises awareness around child rights, labour laws, laws against sexual harassment and cyber bullying. OutLawed India started with a call on social media, which helped individuals like herself with a shared vision, to come together to demystify the legal field. They currently share two posts a week on Instagram: a legal update, and another explaining a concept of law. Instagram has been one of the key channels for changemaking for Vibha's organisation.

On the other hand, Priyaswara records documentary films to raise awareness around child rights. She uses the hashtag #Films4SocialChange to promote these films on social media. She also uses social media for a wider reach, hoping some girl or boy sitting miles away can resonate with the documentaries and be made aware of their rights. This documentary flair started through Phulkari, a government initiative in Bihar, that teaches young kids extra-curricular activities like dancing, filmmaking at a cost of rupees 10 per year. She uses platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp to build networks for her initiatives, to update communities on the progress of these initiatives, and to maintain a continuous line of communication with the target populations across geographies.

Top: Photo Courtesy of Osama Manzar, Digital Empowerment Foundation

Looking Ahead

The overarching theme that all the changemakers we interviewed outlined is that the first step to solving a social issue is to understand the system the issue sits in.

Their initiatives work on a) addressing the root causes instead of just mitigating the symptoms of the issues, this approach is taken by building with the community, legally empowering marginalised communities by making the legal language accessible and using data systems to serve as tools for accountable governance and inclusive impact assessment; b) understanding how different parts of the system interact rather than focusing on the individual parts through activating agencies of citizens and catalysing large-scale change through strategic collaborations.

We also noticed that the changemakers are not only impacting law and justice systems through a range of social innovations, but they are also gradually setting positive changes in mindsets in motion in their respective communities through participatory processes.

Based on the learnings across this impact study, to enable a discernible shift, we aspire to build a publicly accessible and open-source dashboard. This will help the users to know the law and justice landscape of India. It would also provide a space for a knowledge hub to access sectoral resources and relevant literature. Finally, and most critically, this resource will help users measure their impact and find relevant metrics to indicate the progress of their work.

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FOSTERING JUSTICE INNOVATIONS

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