SECTION 1: General Information

Name of organisation that received funds: Voluntary Action Network India (VANI)
Project title: Strengthening Civil Society in India and South Asia: Promoting Accountability and Building Positive Narrative
Funding period (start and end date): October 2019 – September 2020 (Report Preparation in October 2020)
Grant Amount: Euros 19,988

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SECTION 1: Narrative Reporting

1. Please provide an update on how project implementation has developed vis-à-vis the project plan:

The progress on project implementation has been going on as per schedule. However, the activities planned from February to May 2020 are likely to be impacted due to regulatory restrictions and on-going national lock-down due to growing incidence of Coronavirus cases in India. Though the 21-day lockdown formally ends on 14th April, but given the consistent rise in Coronavirus cases, weak health-care systems and limited social distancing practices amongst communities (due mass exodus of migrants and daily wage workers due to job loss following the lock-down) has increased the risk of further spread. The Government of India is reviewing the situation. While some of the states have announced a possibility of further extension of lockdown, a formal announcement from the Government is awaited.

Project Implementation until now
VANI had proposed to take forward the following larger objectives of the Global Standard in the second extension phase:

- Strengthen the CSOs capacity to engage with Global Standard
- Create a knowledge pool on Global Standard and Dynamic Accountability
- Promote the use of Global Standard
- Inspire and nurture Global Standard and Dynamic Accountability

Following are our activities undertaken in the past six months to meet the above objectives

A. VANI played a very active role promoting Global Standard and Dynamic Accountability practices amongst CSOs. Innovative collaterals were prepared and rolled out on social media as well as shared directly with Stakeholders via e-mails. The stakeholders include over 560 VANI's member Indian CSOs and estimated 8,000 others (including non-members, CSOs & networks in South Asia, members of AGNA, ADA and Forus).

1. Audio-visual clips for Youtube, Facebook & Twitter

   - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4mLwkvTsVg&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1yU5HwSsfW48GRzwYS3_Z8Xif6xMAGYn07F_rBjhEOq-Q2wOfk4dAs
   - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WteHBYPkoCA

2. VANI promoting Global Standards on Twitter

   VANI’s Journey with Global Standard and its relevance to Indian CSOs and those in South Asia.

   https://twitter.com/vani_info/status/1179626093524840448

3. Facebook Posts
Linking Facebook Posts to relevant contexts for better receptivity.

For example - Our Facebook Post linked 150th Birth Anniversary (2nd October 2019) celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi and message to be accountable and further creating a linkage of the message with Global Standard.

4. **E-Brochure** prepared on VANI and its work on accountability and association with Global Standard, **shared via e-mails** to over 560 member CSOs and about 2,500 non-member voluntary organisations and some CSOs in Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

5. **Factsheets on Global Standard for CSO Accountability on Facebook**
6. Global Standard on VANI's Website and on VANI's Strategic Plan

In November - December 2019, VANI revamped its website to make it look vibrant. Since promoting of Accountability and Transparency amongst Indian CSOs is the key focus area of VANI, information about Global Standard and write-up about our association with it since its conceptualisation has been added along with the link to Global Standard website.


Our recently revised Strategy Document 2019-2022, having reference to Global Standard was also added to the website and is available on the following link:

B. Advocacy with Government of India: VANI has been advocating with the Government of India for its endorsed regulatory framework for Indian CSOs. Recently, Mr. Harsh Jaitli, CEO, VANI was invited to be a member to an Advisory Cum Technical Committee for development of CSR Exchange portal, set up by Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India. Leveraging the opportunity, a note on reinforcing our demand resonating with Global Standard, was submitted to Secretary, Ministry of Corporate Affairs in March and April 2020.

C. Planning and Preparation for Training the Trainers

As part of the project implementation, VANI was to undertake strengthening of capacities of CSOs to engage with Global Standards through two Training of Trainers (ToT) from February to May 2020. During the last six months trainers have been identified and training material has been prepared (ppts on journey of two project partners –BCSDN, CCC and one case story from one of the partners from Accountable Now have been prepared so far). These along with the journey of VANI shall be used for ToTs. The physical ToTs stand suspended as of now due to the on-going restrictions due to Coronavirus. However, building of capacities of CSOs on accountability through Global Standards and the ways to do it, even in these trying times, is being undertaken through contextualised Social Media messaging.

Glimpse of the ongoing 12-day campaign is pasted below. For details visit of Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/TeamVANI/ Since the campaign is still underway,
analytics of the same will be shared upon completion of the campaign. Also, subsequent to the completion of campaign on Facebook and Twitter, a complete docket of creatives will be prepared and shared with various stakeholders via e-mail.

2. Please share your key successes, challenges and any unforeseen changes so far.

Successes

- Successful outreach through the Social Media Campaign during the Global Accountability Week. VANI’s social media posts received 2,306 likes and about 120 shares from followers in 10 countries including Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, United States of America, United Kingdom, Austria, Canada, France and India.

- Through the campaign we were able to promote Global Standards among not just in CSOs in India but in South Asian countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan as also networks including AGNA, Forus and ADA.

- VANI’s CEO, Mr. Harsh Jaitli was invited by Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India to be a Member of Advisory cum Technical Committee on development of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Exchange Portal which the Ministry has constituted in February 2020. VANI is leveraging the opportunity and has already initiated promoting Global Standard with concerned officials with the Ministry.

Unforeseen Challenges

Since the beginning of 2020, NGOs sector in India has been under immense pressure due to challenges emanating from different quarters.

Beginning with the enactment of Finance Bill 2020 which was announced in our Union Budget in February 2020. The amendments are likely to impact approximately 2.20 Lakh institutions exempted under the Income Tax Law of our country, as they shall now be required to file for a revalidation of their registration between June-August. 2020. Thereafter, a renewal of registration is required to be repeated after every five years. The move has not just increased the administrative obligations on NGOs but put their very existence at stake. As the financial implications by way of heavy penalties in case of non-renewal may be
way beyond the paying capacities of NGOs who already work on meagre resources.

The next blow to the sector came in March with the proposed amendments under the CSR Act stipulating CSR activities by companies in India to be undertaken by Companies themselves or through other Section 8 Companies or any entity established under an Act of Parliament or a State legislature (mainly autonomous bodies). The implementation of this would mean excluding registered charitable Trusts and Societies. Most of the NGOs in India are registered either as Societies or Trusts.

Incidence of Coronavirus infection in India, ever since its initial knock at our door in late January, has been rising. According to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare there have been 7,957 cases reported till date (13.04.2020) and 308 casualties. The country has been under restrictions based on advisories (directing stopping of all kinds of travel and suspension of activities involving gathering of people) since mid-February. This was followed by a Janta-Curfew (voluntary curfew) on 22nd March and a sudden and strict 21 day nation-wide lockdown since 24th March. All kinds of intra, inter-city and state movements are prohibited during the lockdown. Anticipating further deteriorating situation due to high population density and weak health infrastructure, stricter measures are being imposed prohibiting external movement (even for essential services) in identified hot-spots. As of now, the nation-wide lockdown is applicable till 14th April. However, our Central Government is closely monitoring and reviewing the situation along with the state governments to take a call on future course of action.

**Impact of the Challenges & Risk Mitigation Efforts for the GS Project**

As per proposed plan, VANI was to schedule two ToTs (one in North and other in East India) from February to May 2020, which have been impacted due to the sudden lock-down. Alternate solutions have been worked out by VANI to build the capacities of CSOs in the interim through innovative Social Media Campaign linking Accountability through Global Standards in the trying times of Covid-19. The idea is to reinforce the message of need for adhering to accountable practices in difficult circumstances. Subsequently, in the interest of time, VANI will co-ordinate with the identified trainers to prepare case studies (which were earlier to be done subsequent to ToTs).

VANI is continuously gauging the situation and would consider holding ToTs remotely, only as a last resort (as physical training is more effective than remote ones), in the event of further extension of prohibitive restrictions due to COVID-19 (beyond June). We are assuming that situation will improve, and we will be able
to complete the final activity i.e. Muti-stakeholder dialogue (to take place in August is unlikely to be impacted by Covid-19).

The above arrangement, as of now, would not require any re-adjustments to the approved budget. However, programmatic and/or budgetary modifications in the ToTs and subsequent activity, if required, will be informed as and when to the Centre and Global Standard Secretariat.

3. Do you have any suggestions or needs for further support and collaboration from or with the Centre and/or other Project Partners?

VANI would want to complete the project within the pre-defined timeline. However, given the uncertainties due to strict regulatory prohibitions due to increased incidence of COVID-19 (due to external factors beyond VANI’s control), consideration towards flexibility in extension in timeframe (by one or two months) for completion of activities, if possible, is requested.

4. Please share any further information you think would be of interest for the following up and implementing during the remaining project period:

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SECTION 2: Financial Reporting

Please fill in the template sent to you, if there are any changes from the proposal budget, please mark those clearly in the budget and provide a short explanation so it is easy to follow.