

THE FOREIGN HAND: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON FCRA AMENDMENTS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Role of NGOs, SHGs, Donors & Charities, and Institutional & other Stakeholders in Development Process

[Amendments to the FCRA](#), drafted without consultation with stakeholders and [passed with limited discussion in Parliament](#), further clip the wings of India's battered civil society. New regulations put onerous conditions on civil society organisations, and educational and research institutions that have partnerships, including of a financial nature, with foreign entities. Passions overwhelm rationality in conversations on foreign influences, and it could well be true that a portion of such foreign assistance may be reaching the wrong hands. In Parliament, the BJP alleged that foreign money was being used for religious conversions. In 2017, the government barred American Christian charity, [Compassion International](#), accusing it of supporting conversions. The debate on religious propagation and conversions must be delinked from the question of foreign funding. There are adequate laws against conversion by inducement, and the right or wrong of it cannot be decided against the touchstone of the source of funds, native or foreign. Some of the restrictions appear well meaning, but could impact NGOs besides showing up India to be overregulated.

The [International Commission of Jurists has said the new law was incompatible with international obligations](#) and India's own constitutional provisions on rights. Seamless sharing of ideas and resources across national boundaries is essential to the functioning of a global community, and should not be discouraged unless there is reason to believe the funds are being used to aid illegal activities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often cited the ancient Indian ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* as the framework for its global engagement. The pandemic has only underscored the importance of this approach. As a growing economy, India under Mr. Modi has been proactive in seeking global capital and technology. The aversion appears to be towards select categories of global ideas and ideals — environmentalism, human rights and civil liberties. Organisations working in these fields have often had their patriotism being called into question. To be fair, this approach predates the current government, and it was during the UPA that an official report even quantified the GDP losses allegedly caused by environmental NGOs, insinuating a foreign conspiracy against India. Such paranoia does not go well with India's legitimate ambitions to be a global player. The BJP and the Congress are well aware of the limits of the national-foreign binary. In 2017, both joined hands to legislate an escape route after receiving funds from foreign entities in violation of FCRA provisions. Thousands of NGOs serve extremely disadvantaged sections, at times filling in for the state, at others, supplementing it. A presumption of guilt against them all, followed by control, amounts to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The world is poorer when new barriers are raised.

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