Samagam 2022

Session III: How convergence of government departments is helping to deliver greater impact for the development rupee

Moderator: Mr. Neeraj Trivedi, Head, Strategic Initiatives, Pratham Education Foundation

Panellists:

1) Mr. Nagendranath Sinha, IAS, Secretary Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India
2) Ms. Sufiyah Faruqui, IAS, MGNREGS Commisioner, Govt. of MP
3) Ms. Nancy Sahay, IAS, Deputy Commissioner, Hazaribagh, Govt. of Jharkhand.

The session mainly focused on sharing experiences of leaders who are working in government, both at state and national level. The participants agreed that with the pandemic impacting achievement of SDGs, development stakeholders came together for a common purpose with better exchange of information, learnings, initiatives, scheme implementation, coordination to ensure that the communities weren't affected due to inter department deficiencies.

The major discussion points of the session were:

- How is convergence seen by the panellists?
- In the last three decades, how has the narrative of convergence evolved and what are the factors to be relooked at?
- What are the systematic barriers to convergence?
- How development initiatives can be aligned better for reducing inefficiencies?

Mr. N. N. Sinha emphasised that convergence signifies many things in different contexts and can be in several forms viz. technical, financial, operational, etc. In Government, at the ministry level, traditionally and predominantly programmatic convergence has been the most important one. He shared examples of projects like Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana and Shyamaprasad Mukherjee Rurban Mission Project where there is no specific fund allocation but the projects intend to build ADARSH GRAM through convergence. Non-government-government convergence, especially in NRLM, has proved to be very beneficial as far as skill and capacity building is concerned. For him projects are like vision statements with a particular theme where different departments and stakeholders work in partnership to convert the vision into reality. If projects have specific goals then project outcomes will be delivered and if roles of departments and partners are well articulated then convergence and partnerships start evolving.

The initiatives like Rapid Rural Community Response (RCRC) are prominent in the country with the network being the face of CSOs that is collaborating with government departments. MoRD is always keen to enhance partnership in inter-ministerial, inter departmental, government & non- government sectors, government private and Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI). He reflected upon the needs of reducing the burden of expectations from the community especially women farmers, skill building of community in different aspects, creating market linkages, sustainable asset creation and integrated farming cluster project approach for diversified livelihoods. He specifically mentioned the scope for partnering with various private value chain players.

Ms. Sufiya Faruqui mentioned convergence has a broader context, and can be of four types:

- ➢ **Convergence of funds:** This has been the primary format of convergence which is vital even today. The motive behind is optimum utilization of funds from various schemes.
- ➢ **Convergence of departments:** There are schemes which are grounded with the help of convergence. An experience was shared which related to COVID-19 when people were returning to their respective homes, and the government focussed on creating meaningful and sustainable assets. Various departments collaborated for developing *Gaushala* as a diversified livelihood model and a large section of women (mainly from SHGs) are running that initiative. "We looked at *Gaushala* as a mode and converged agricultural interventions like organic farming and intercropping through agriculture department, whereas creation of assets, plantation, horticulture, medicinal plants were implemented through MGNREGS." Government has certain limitations to implement programs directly with the community and it is important for CSOs to be the part of the process.
- ➢ **Beneficiary convergence:** Unskilled wage earners can be developed through skill building programs involving different departments, for enhancing the job profiles of the communities.
- ➢ **Convergence of knowledge partners and civil society organizations with the government:** In order to implement schemes on a large scale across the states, convergence of knowledge partners and CSOs is essential with NRLM staff to fill up the gap of government staff shortage for market linkages and training and capacity building and infrastructure creation.

Ms. Nancy Sahay pointed out that where resources are limited to run schemes at scale and deliver a large number of outputs, the need for convergence is largely felt. Convergence as a primary factor is mainly based on two aspects-

- ➢ Financial resources
- ➢ Human resources

Districts mostly focus on convergence areas where the human and financial resources are limited, so as to utilize the resources optimally and ensure large number of beneficiaries are benefitted. She shared her experience of working as the CEO of Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) where convergence helped gain output and impact in a span of just ten months. She worked with different CSOs around knowledge and skill building, and technical aspects of different livelihood models which helped her appreciate convergence better. Be it physical, institutional, social or economic convergence – all these helps strengthen the rural livelihoods resource base. This kind of convergence is effective for community to build awareness, understand social issues and prepare robust plan of livelihoods. In case of project *Garima* the focus was on witch-hunt survivors who were counselled by the Central Institute of Psychiatry (Ranchi based) for 'normalizing' their lives. Kitchen garden initiatives were taken up through MGNREGS and NRLM which created a positive impact in society. She also acknowledged SHGs and health departments for their joint efforts to work on awareness generation, and vaccination related to the Covid-19 protocols. And mentioned that various flagship programmes initiated by government have been effective because of working in convergence mode.

Neeraj asked Mr. N. N. Sinha about the evolution of convergence over the last three decades and what has contributed to successful convergence in inter-department collaborations? And what all are the factors that one needs to remain cautious about while working on convergence?

Mr. Sinha responded saying, earlier it was considered that government can introduce schemes and implement all the on-ground interventions without involving NGOs. In fact, inter- departmental and inter-ministerial collaborations and discussions related to implementation of schemes were not much prevalent, which often led to duplication of work, or in certain cases even left out the primary beneficiaries from accessing their entitlements. But with time, the appreciation of inter-departmental collaboration to avoid duplication has grown inside the government machinery. The focus of the State has shifted to create a system of inter-departmental convergence with a platform approach. If SHGs are taken as a platform for community development programmes, then the SHG members will have financial inclusion and livelihoods enhancement simultaneously, fulfilling the objectives of better health, nutrition, gender equality and so on. IT based databases have made it easier for data exchange among departments, which has been a very important aspect for collaboration and rationale establishment. On the other hand, in recent times, the outcome focussed frameworks like Village Poverty Development Plan, Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), and localisation of SDGs have also been found to encourage inter-departmental convergence.

Regarding pitfalls, unrealistic expectations on NGOs remain as one of the foremost challenges. There are certain limitations under which NGOs do their work and we need to be cognizant of those. Secondly having clearly articulated goals, at an early stage of the partnership, and role clarity are helpful steps to avoid conflict and mistrust among collaborators. Coupled with these, a certain sense of mutual respect must prevail in between government and NGO partners and also among the various government departments to help the partnership thrive.

Neeraj asked Ms. Faruqui about the initiatives that have been taken for improving coordination in state and central government especially in terms of MGNREGS so that there are no procedural delays, maleficence in terms of work allocation, and payments? Also, how technology can play a role for information exchange and alignment of efforts in case of MGNREGS?

Ms. Faruqui mentioned that since, MGNREGS has a vast MIS database, the same was helpful in gathering records of migrants during COVID-19, and generate works as per demand. With the increased work demand and immediate employment generation, focus was to generate opportunities around tangible, substantial and permanent infrastructure creation. Along with uploading photographs and geo-tagging them, a few collaborative projects were initiated by the Government of India with GIZ, a German organisation, with one of these focused on composite farming. This was initially grounded in two pilot districts, but was quickly replicated in all the districts of MP and in total 297 projects were created through MGNREGS. To monitor the implementation, mobile phone-based video conferencing was chosen as an effective medium. The other successful initiative with GIZ, during COVID-19 was Geographic Information System (GIS) based planning on Ground Water Resource Management Plan. The technology helped in preparing maps from Google Earth. Trainings were imparted to engineers on e- Saksham portal (a digital learning platform) where skills were developed for map preparation and monitoring the ground water management. Today, they are able to operate this model in 84 blocks. The GIS based technology helped in analysing all kinds of spatial and non-spatial data, identifying proper sites and saturating the area sufficiently.

Government of India had launched app-based monitoring which ensures transparency in work like monitoring the number of wage workers in the scheme, maintenance of real and regular attendance, geo-tagged photographs, transition of work in Muster Roll, false reporting in Muster Roll, etc. This app is called National Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS). Such technology aims at bridging gaps in compliance reports, bringing transparency, and ensuring proper implementation and monitoring of schemes.

Neeraj asked Ms. Sahay whether the role that District Magistrates, District Collectors, Development Commissioners perform at the district and sub-district levels, is often not only that of overall supervision of all departments but are also about coordination across departments. What are the barriers faced in district, block, gram panchayats for coordination within departments and what initiatives can be taken at the DM level, and what systemic measures are possible to address these?

Ms. Sahay shared that government departments have certain barriers vis-a-vis the implementation of the schemes and reaching the last mile. The human resources in the departments have different degrees of skills, strengths and capabilities. Because of this we face challenges in bringing similar output or impact. Trust and communication, essentially required to maintain coordination among officers and departments, have remained as a visible lacuna. Floating priorities also remain a

persistent problem in the administration which happens due to inaccurate information flow from state to the districts and further to the local administrative bodies.

To overcome such barriers, good leadership initiatives by senior officers at districts, sub-divisions or blocks levels, in terms of setting the right priorities and clarifying doubts of staff, are essential. Making an inclusive and motivational work environment by appreciating efforts of good performers and creating enabling measures for the non-performers would create an effective working structure for district and sub-divisional officers.