

Community Service Providers: Social Capital of the Community

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Having lived through the same micro- and macro-adversities of a community and having successfully dealt with hardship, CSPs, who understand the local dialect and share the same culture, have a better understanding of the voice of the poor, enjoy a better level of trust and have greater psycho-social linkages with the people

Bhuvneshwar Singh of Charkatand village in Poraiyahat block of Godda district is well-known in the area. There was a time when he was just one among the millions of migrant workers, who was compelled to break the geographical barriers and step out in search of greener pastures. This 40-year-old, 8th class-pass farmer, from one of the most underdeveloped districts of an impoverished state, is a marginal agriculture farmer in a family of seven, comprising his wife, four daughters and a son.

When his father died in 1984, he had to drop out of school and start working at the tender age of 12. His sole asset of 1.5 acres of rain-fed land left him despondent. To supplement his income, he went to the nearby district town of Banka, in the bordering state of Bihar, and tried working with a village doctor. Unable to make a decent living with his earnings, he migrated farther to Delhi and began to work as casual labour. However, the harshness of the metropolitan lifestyle compelled him to return to his village.

In 2009, he attended an SHG Cluster meeting in his village out of curiosity and was deeply influenced by the process, the content, the approach and the larger objectives of SHGs. Pleased with his interest, the Cluster members selected him as the Community Service Provider (CSP) for the area. He was sent for training programmes related to community based organizations (CBOs), especially SHGs, Clusters and the agriculture promotion in the area.

Devoting himself to the cause of social mobilization and livelihoods promotion, Bhuvneshwar Singh received training from PRADAN and, in turn, conducted various training programmes in agriculture, horticulture, measurement and calculation of land and water structures to SHGs and Clusters. Leading from the front, he began following strong agriculture input management practices on his 1.5 acres of land. Starting his interventions in the *kharif* season in 2009 with SRI paddy, he bagged the first prize in SRI Paddy in 2012 under the NABARD SRI project. Soon, he became famous, and joined the league of progressive farmers. He undertook various crop demonstrations in selected vegetables and *rabi* intervention with chili. The community has great trust and confidence in his abilities and has appointed him the accountant for the Special SGSY project work, to handle accounts worth Rs 24 lakhs, in his village.

Demonstrating with lived experience, trying out new technologies with steadfast commitment and influencing others have been the hallmark of his work ethic. His year-round involvement includes nurturing and providing support to 219 SHG members, and arranging livelihoods training and follow-up with 153 families. He supports the group by standardizing the accounts, reminding the group members about loan and interest repayment on time and helping them access various entitlements, for example, the mid-day meal for children, etc. He provides livelihood services ranging from paddy to cash crops cultivation to horticulture intervention, and facilitates the *tola sabha* in creating land and water infrastructure mandated under the Special SGSY project.

Due to his relentless services, around 70 per cent of the SHG members in this Cluster have moved from single cropping to double cropping and are now experiencing increased productivity in both food grain and cash crops. In 2013, summer cash crops such as water melon have created ripple effects in the surrounding villages. For instance, Charkatand village is steadily progressing to the three-cropping system. Coupled with infrastructure creation for better water management, it is expected that agriculture will become a meaningful engagement in the future. The selection of land and conducting seed-to-seed treatment, introducing improved practices in nursery raising, transplantation, and weed and disease management are the critical areas of his engagement. Communities are recognizing his services and demanding more intensive support from him. To reach all the families with such intensity may require another CSP in the Cluster.

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He receives an average remuneration of approximately Rs 2,650 per month for working with around 150 livelihood families. The estimated average income of families from cash-crop cultivation—a combination of crops such as radish, brinjal, bitter gourd, bottle gourd and water melon—is in the range of Rs 5,000–15,000.

The above story is only one of the many transformations being brought about by around 100 such barefoot, frontline social warriors, or CSPs, who are meaningfully engaged in changing the lives of the poor.

Numerous rural development programmes and schemes have been introduced in the country, which, although beautifully designed, have failed miserably in attaining the intended objectives. The terms such as 'reaching the last person', 'last mile delivery' and 'inclusive growth' are usually just platitudes. In fact, such schemes have failed at the last node of the development cycle, that is, when delivering the services to the 'last person'. Issues of ability, willingness, empathy, engagement, understanding and resources affect the quality of service delivery.

This is the stage at which the CSP becomes very important. She/he has a connect with the recipients of the service and, therefore, plays a decisive role in ensuring the effectiveness of the programme.

The project, therefore, realized the need to build a strong network of CSPs, who are selected by the community from among themselves. These workers are more likely to establish strong chords with the local community as compared to external facilitators. CSPs are selected and hosted by the target community and, hence, are more accountable

to the community. CSPs have a key role to play in the existing area of work of PRADAN.

BACKGROUND

The concept of a CSP was seeded in the PRADAN Godda team in 2000 with the onset of the *tasar* activity. After half a decade, in 2005–06, the team began broadening its livelihoods portfolio and smaller interventions in *kharif* agriculture. CSPs were deeply involved in diversifying as well as scaling-up of livelihoods by engaging with the community for livelihoods planning, crop identification, water budgeting and planning. During the years that followed, CSPs worked on improving the quality of SHGs, ensuring the increase in household-level food security through improvement in *kharif* production. Productivity enhancement and crop stabilization remained central to its work.

However, soon after the Special SGSY project commenced in 2009, the focus shifted to the promotion of the integrated natural resource-based multiple livelihood activities. Community mobilization became focus of CSPs, leading to enhancement in skills, knowledge and communication as well as engagement with people.

THE NEED FOR CSP

CSPs are skilled men and women, who understand the local dialect and language, share the same culture and have experienced similar ordeals in overcoming poverty and destitution. They understand the community and have a strong belief in the innate potential of the people. Having lived through the same micro- and macro-adversities and having successfully dealt with hardship, they have the requisite empathy to support others. These

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men and women have a better understanding of the voice of the poor, enjoy a better level of trust and have greater psychosocial linkages with the people.

CSPs are easily available and accessible to the community and are able to engage with the local youth and harness their

energy for the betterment of society. From the programme perspective, the presence of CSPs ensures cost effective and reliable extension services.

SELECTION OF CSPs

The selection of CSPs and Community Resource Persons (CRPs) is the responsibility of the community with which they work. PRADAN's role is limited to facilitation during the selection process. CSPs are based in SHGs and Clusters (comprising 10 to 15 women SHGs with 150–200 families). These CSPs are identified and selected by the community after which PRADAN equips them with the desired set of skills and knowledge, to fulfill the specific tasks required of them. Their skills and knowledge get further refined and enhanced over time, through a series of theoretical and practical training programmes and exposure visits.

GROOMING PROCESS OF CSPs

PRADAN, Godda, engaged in the grooming process of the local youth intensively and eventually built a long-lasting social capital for the area. In the initial stage, PRADAN professionals held orientation programmes for CSPs on select activities such as agriculture, horticulture, poultry and *tasar*; interacted with them; and monitored their engagement and progress through various appraisal programmes, field visits and observations,

in addition to holding regular fortnightly reviews and monitoring training programmes at the block level. Specific modules have been designed around the technical and social dimensions of related activities.

Some important training programmes conducted for CSPs are as follows:

Theme: Social Mobilization

- ♦ Orientation on the formation and functioning of institutions of the poor—SHGs, Clusters and Federation
- ♦ Training of Trainers (ToT) on SHG promotion, facilitation and communication skills, and motivational training
- ♦ On-the-job training by attaching CSPs with PRADAN professionals, to observe the various stages of SHG promotion and nurturing. Further, they are involved in credit appraisal and bank linkage programmes for SHGs
- ♦ Gender sensitization and issues related to patriarchy, power dynamics and solutions, to address the need of women and men in society
- ♦ Holistic village development through in-house training programmes. As a result, CSPs strengthen the village development committees and facilitate meetings by bringing up people's agenda even in non-Special SGSY intervention villages.

Theme: Livelihoods Augmentation

- ♦ ToT on the basics of agriculture (soil types, moisture, nutrients in soil, etc.), integrated disease and pest management
- ♦ Intense year-long, in-house and on-field training, focusing on *kharif*, *rabi* and summer crops, and agriculture planning

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- ♦ Training in agriculture input management, to ensure quality and timely supply

- ♦ Exposure trips to various organizations, agricultural institutions (such as the Krishi Vikas Kendra) and PRADAN's

other intervention areas for first-hand technical orientation on various aspects of agricultural operation, poultry rearing, horticulture, goat rearing activity, etc.

- ♦ ToT on livelihoods planning for the various seasons of land-holding
- ♦ In-house training on broiler farming under the umbrella of producer institution regarding technical, social, book-keeping, MIS and marketing aspects.

The above training programmes, meetings and exposure visits have resulted in significant technical skill enhancement of CSPs, which, in the process, has created new livelihood opportunities and vision for the community as well as for CSPs.

ROLE/ENGAGEMENT OF CSPs

CSPs are engaged in many transactional tasks. At present, the nearly 100 CSPs/CRPs in the Godda team are engaged round the year in promoting SHGs, Clusters, Federations, Producers Institutes and other agricultural and allied livelihoods promotion activities. Moreover, some resource persons are also involved in organizing training programmes, conducting livelihood planning, undertaking various tasks in tasar cultivation and providing technical support in horticulture and micro-enterprise promotion. They provide every essential service at the doorstep.

CSPs are involved in several programmes:

- ♦ Organizing community meetings for SHG promotion and nurturing, etc.

- ♦ Book-keeping and MIS flow of CBOs
- ♦ Bank account opening and credit linkage of SHGs
- ♦ INRM-based land and water structure layout and measurement
- ♦ Account and bills settlements of the respective *tola sabha*
- ♦ Data collection and format filling, as required
- ♦ Arrangement of the raw inputs of agriculture operation
- ♦ Organizing training programmes and exposure visits for various activities
- ♦ Resolving village-level issues
- ♦ Acting as a conduit between PRADAN and other community institutions.

CSPs, who do transformational work, are engaged in the following:

- ♦ Conducting theoretical and practical training programmes on the technical aspects of livelihoods promotions (agriculture, broiler farming, *tasar* rearing and grainage, goat rearing, vermi-compost, etc.).
- ♦ Acting as resource persons during the exposure visits of outsiders to the area.
- ♦ Sensitizing and mobilizing local stakeholders such as PRIs, banks and block line departments.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNING

Each social and economic intervention requires its own set of specialized skills and functional attributes. Hence, different sets of CSPs are required for activities such as social mobilization, pre- and post-cocoon operations, agriculture, horticulture, poultry and goat rearing. For example, in *tasar*, both for the pre- and post-cocoon operations,

CSPs with different skill sets are required. In poultry rearing activity, CSPs act as para-vets and hence should be technically well-equipped to handle issues regarding production as well as the social aspects. To promote CBOs, CSPs need good articulation, communication and problem-solving skills. Moreover, s/he should have adequate knowledge in book-keeping and record maintenance. Similarly, for agriculture and horticulture promotion, CSPs should be technically proficient. Some people who are good at community mobilization processes and functions but not so proficient in agriculture activity are engaged accordingly. However, due to the paucity of resource persons at the community level, these people too are considered fit for agriculture and have been appropriately trained. Finding educated and willing persons with a spirit of volunteerism is a difficult task. Further, creating these CSPs is highly process-driven and thus resource and time consuming. Moreover, for the CSPs to sustain beyond the confines of projects, the community should be able to fully pay for the services, which till date seems a distant dream.

IMPACT

Impact in Social Mobilization

Through this intensive special project, about 350 SHGs (about 5,000 families) have been promoted. Without such a local pool, it would have been too difficult to reach out to 5,000 poor families within such a short time span. Their key involvement in the different stages of SHGs, Clusters and Federation building, will ensure further strengthening of such institutions and help them sustain on their own.

Impact on Agriculture

Farmers from the SHGs are directly benefitted by the improved agriculture practices. The CSPs contribute immensely to spreading the

best practices through meetings, training programmes, crop demonstrations, experience sharing and exposure. With this, the input suppliers get the latest information and are experiencing increased sales and improved incomes. CSPs help farmers select the right variety of seeds and fertilizers after taking into consideration the soil and other agronomical conditions. At present, there are more than 5,500 satisfied farmers are making regular use of the agronomical services of CSPs.

Tarachandra Singh

Tarachandra Singh is one such youth from the Durgapur hamlet of Chunakothi village in Pathargama block. After completing his matriculation, he began maintaining SHG accounts and attending the awareness training programmes in the village. Impressed by his commitment and work, the Cluster engaged him as a CSP in 2008. He began to contribute to the promotion and strengthening of CBOs and later got involved in agricultural promotion. After the Special SGSY work started in 2009–10 in his village, he was able to reach out with improved agriculture operations to 165 families and promoted about 32 SHGs in the *panchayat*-level Cluster.

He facilitated the implementation of INRM-based activities worth Rs 42 lakhs within a two-year time span. Several water structures in the area now have ensured round-the-year agri-operations. The development of 10 ha of mango orchard on barren land, 42 in-situ seepage tanks, 7 ha of water availing source through farm ponds, 4 ha of land husbandry, 2 dug-wells for perennial source of water, 11 vermi-compost tanks, 36 small-holder poultry shed construction, one sorting and grading centre, and one cold storage construction have made him a people's hero and a community mobilizer-cum-agriculture consultant in the

district. The above livelihood endowments will probably fetch an additional annual income of Rs 8,000–15,000 per family per annum within two seasons. He now enjoys a high level of trust, respect and admiration of the villagers. He is also the preferred community level trainer and facilitator.

Impact on other livelihoods

There are about 250 small-holder poultry farmers, who are getting rigorous help from poultry CSPs whereas 200 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) and families belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (STs) are dependent on goat rearing with the regular help of CSPs cum para-vets. In the *tola sabha*—a hamlet-level community institution of both men and women, promoted during the implementation of the Special SGSY project—CSPs are providing support in organizing training programmes, maintaining accounts, settling bills, building the vision building, etc., making possible without any hesitation, thereby, the hassle-free implementation of high-budget projects.

COMMUNITY PERCEPTION OF CSPs

Due to the regular visits and interaction with the community, the *panchayat*, the banks and the line departments, CSPs have been successful in building their own identity and image in the area. They are now treated as practitioners and specialists in a particular domain. The basic values displayed by CSPs are:

- ◆ Being punctual during community related meetings
- ◆ Having an unflinching belief in truth and honesty even in the face of adversity
- ◆ Raising a voice against inauthentic subjects and corruption matters

CSP PRAMILA DEVI

Pramila Devi is a calm and composed person from the Pasai SHG Cluster of Poraiyahat block. As a CSP, she specializes in SHG promotion, bank credit linkages and conflict resolution. Her family of six other members, including her husband, three daughters and two sons, make its living from 120 decimals of cultivable farm lands in which they use improved agriculture practices. She joined the SHG in 1996 and shortly thereafter went on to look after three SHGs in her village. She led her group members to resolve a very old land dispute in her village. Under the Special SGSY programme, she promoted another five SHGs and facilitated the establishment of a paddy husking mill for regular income, to sustain the SHG. She purchased a four wheeler (TATA Magic) with a loan from the SHG. She is a popular trainer in the area and has been facilitating the organization of block-level SHG *mahadhiveshans*. Under the Special SGSY programme, she has supported the community in the implementation of the project work in her village in the INRM structure creation. So far, she has promoted as many as 32 SHGs, covering 465 households.

- ◆ Having high respect for the community
- ◆ Exhibiting a strong work ethic in their verbal communication, time management and adherence to commitment
- ◆ Delivering even under pressure

The community has developed trust and belief in the skills and services of the CSPs. It does not hesitate to seek the help of CSPs even on

day-to-day issues, including personal matters. Around 12 CSPs have now been elected in PRIs as *mukhias* or ward members, or are working as government extension workers such as *angandwadi sevikas/sahayikas* and health *sahayikas*. Leveraging on their experience, dedication and outreach, even government institutions and line departments are hiring their services for imparting training and conducting surveys.