TECHNICAL MEETING AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION ON

Global Research Translation Awards:

Sustainable Food Systems

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Chirag is a Gbobal Challenge initiative to address food and nutrition security alongside gender equality in the states of Odisha and Bihar through systemic and sustainable up-scaling of small scale innovation on the ground. The objective of this collaborative process is to address food and nutrition insecurity in India, a problem facing a vast majority of women and children especially of rural and indigenous communities. This will be achieved by working with communities especially women's groups, youth groups and students to generate and share knowledge on sustainable food systems. In particular, the focus will be on production choices, technologies, diets and consumption practices and their relationship to health and nutrition outcomes. Content will be generated using a range of tools and strategies. This project will inform and will be shared at scale through an interactive, audio community media platform; supplemented by a mobile app for smart-phone users, to provide 24-hrs real-time response to community needs. Sustainability will be ensured through capacity building of educational institutions, government functionaries and wider public at multiple scales - local, regional, national and international.

The stakeholder consultation launching the project was divided into 4 sessions:

- Introduction and context setting on sustainable food systems in India
- Community led creative practice –Information and Communication and Education (ICE) for effective response, transparency and accountability
- Virtual centre and digital platform
- Political will for policy impact

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT SETTING ON SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN INDIA

Focus of CHIRAG

The project on "SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS" has been titled as **"CHIRAG: Creative Hub for Innovation & Reciprocal Research & Action for Gender Equality"**, to capture its key conceptual and theoretical underpinnings. Grounded in the commitment to the coproduction of knowledge / up-scaling of local innovations as the pathway to sustainable food systems, we firmly believe in the equitable sharing and exchange of data and knowledge. While research often gathers data from rural communities, to be analysed by experts and used in decision-making at the policy level, this analysis and understanding is rarely shared and discussed with communities and community-level workers to collaboratively shape strategies on the ground. Drawing on our ongoing research as part of the 'Transforming India's Green Revolution by Research and Empowerment for Sustainable food Supplies' (TIGR2ESS) project, we hope to build channels for knowledge production and exchange from grassroots communities upwards, scaling out to blocks and districts, in order to ensure "SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS". CHIRAG is the lamp we hope will kick-start this process in selected communities in Eastern India.

The main objectives of CHIRAG are to –

- Build a proof of concept for up-scaling community-led knowledge and innovation.
- Ensure gender sensitive and reciprocal knowledge production and exchange
- Conduct evidence-based advocacy to ensure political uptake and institutional acceptance

The 4 Cs that will be followed in CHIRAG include:

- Community led platform for knowledge generation and exchange using the 'Interactive voice response system' technology

- Creative Practice hub – video podcasts, creative writing, theatrical performances, photographic exhibitions and understanding the symbolisms of local festivals.
- Curriculum development for school, university and frontline workers.
- Constituency-level round tables to bring together and influence MPs, MLAs, policy makers & stakeholders from health, education, agriculture and local government ministries.

This is an exciting moment to be engaging in this venture as food and nutrition security is also a key priority of the Government of India, which has taken a number of steps to counter malnutrition such as the *Poshan Abhiyan,* National Health Mission, amongst others. We hope to learn from a number of grassroots innovations from different parts of the world.

Responses from Key Stakeholders

DR.PURVI MEHTA, Head of BMGF Asia region, raised some important issues. First, she highlighted that advocacy discussions usually lack pragmatism, as they rarely bring grassroots voices to the table. Second, agriculture continues to be seen from a production centric lens, and not from a nutrition and health perspective. Markets and prices remain important in shaping farmers' decisions, and these need to be properly understood if production and consumption patterns are to shift.

> "In our discussion about nutrition diversification in agriculture, let's keep the consumer in mind always. The shift should not be a trade off on the income of farmers"

DR. ARABINDA PADHEE, Country Director, ICRISAT India Office noted that climate change and nutrition are the two key challenges faced by Indian agriculture today, with implications for yields, incomes, water and soil, pointed to the potential role of smart foods to sustainable food systems. The idea behind smart foods is to empower farmers, increase incomes & resilience and provide nutritious and safe food for all, through improved links between scientific research and delivery systems. He also noted that while the government had taken several steps, it is important for innovations to be demand-driven, and inclusive of women and youth. The methods to be adopted should be participatory with a well-designed communication and capacity building approach followed by monitoring/evaluation and policy support.

DR. URVASHI KAUSHIK, Social Policy Specialist at Unicef Bihar Office, noted that as per the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS), Bihar is one of the most backward states. Though a lot of interventions have been carried out including increase in the number of Anganwadi centres; it needs to be seen how effectively they work on ground. She emphasized the need for a gender responsive approach in programme implementation on the ground. While the social media is important, other platforms for awareness generation and knowledge sharing are also required, in addition to financial investments.

> "Not just access but also affordability of diversified diet which costs significantly higher for households should be highlighted"

Discussion

1. The CNNS Report has underscored the urgency of the nutritional problem in India. 50% of women continue to be anaemic due to a variety of reasons. Wasting amongst young children has increased and there is a stark lack of dietary diversity along with adequate diets.

2. The problem needs to be addressed from different dimensions. First, it is important to have a look at affordability of diversified diets. In today's scenario, while rice is cheap and inexpensive, including fruits and vegetables, or proteins make diets too expensive for the majority of people.

3. We need to take an ecosystem approach to food systems, rather than focusing only on cultivated crops. Water availability and management is critical to sustainable food systems. At the same time, we also need to pay attention to the kind of labour intensity required for different crops. Are certain choices shaped by the fact that only women, already with heavy work burdens, are available for cultivation in the rural communities, while their men have migrated, or children are at school? Linked to this is also the availability of market linkages, for both the sale and purchase of diversified foods.

4. The Swabhiman project in Odisha in collaboration with Odisha Livelihood Mission is working through women's collectives and nutri-gardens to increase dietary diversity. But, the whole effort loses its relevance, when the food cannot be transferred from farm to plates, due to the absence of suitable institutional mechanisms.

5. Packaged food consumption is on the rise in urban slum communities, especially amongst the youth, in particular young men. Rs. 20 – Rs. 25 is spent every day on packaged foods. Healthy food options need to be made inspirational, and also locally available. SHGs and other marketing groups can be trained in its marketing and production.

6. Getting into the politics of policy advocacy can be challenging. Thus, community mobilization needs to be strengthened so that people themselves are empowered to change the system.

7. Curriculum development should not stop at the University level, but go further to focus on the frontline workers, so that they can translate the technical difficulties into real time information and knowledge to be used on the ground. It was clarified that these are indeed one of the key focus groups for CHIRAG.

8. It is crucial to ensure reciprocal knowledge exchange where experts learn from the community and vice versa. This should then be followed by collective action and not just participatory action. We need to review the literature to understand existing knowledge on the various components of sustainable food systems including costs, type of food, time, spending patterns and others. While rice and wheat are politically important crops in our country; millets and nutritional foods are orphaned crops. Science should offer level playing fields to crops like millets and nutritional foods too in terms of the potential for price and policy support.

The key for agricultural policies should be simultaneous attention to productivity, markets and nutrition. This is because farmers' decisions are led not just by productivity, but equally the possibility of earning incomes to meet other essential needs and aspirations. Nutrition security needs to be brought into this equation.

SESSION 2: COMMUNITY LED CREATIVE PRACTICE – ICE FOR EFFECTIVE RESPONSE, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

DR. NIVEDITA NARAIN, Integrator PRADAN

FOCUS FOR CHIRAG

CHIRAG will be a project focusing on the specifics than on a range of general things with the universe of work being South Bihar and Odisha. Broadly the focus will be on generating knowledge action through creative practice and community based digital portal. The goal will be to create a supporting eco-system with community based organizations, NGOs and governments to ensure that the work progresses as per plan. The virtual platform would aim at creating a reciprocal and dialogic information flow with the community, making opportunity for co-creation of knowledge.

The strategies for the project are as follows;

1st phase: 1) Need analysis, concept seeding and co-creation of strategies.

2) Capacity building

3) Folk artists strategies

2nd phase: 1) Content generation

2) Process support and editing

3) Innovative field activities

3rd phase: 1) Digital portal launch

2) Exchange across stakeholders

3) Exhibition and sharing of impact

Responses from Key Stakeholders

MR. AVIJIT CHOUDHURY, Integrator, PRADAN**,** stated that **in** today's era we look more at carbohydrate security rather than food security. Though Income has gone up, nutritious crop has grown up, the process of farm to food hasn't improved much. Low income groups are cast-off for more inspirational goods like bicycles, etc.

The 2 main areas we need to look at include shifting from agriculture to nutrition and system interface. In reference to the content for training and capacity building, we should look at an innovative pedagogy where the creative narrative of people is taken into consideration. Ex. a protagonist should be identified and the whole story of food and nutrition security should revolve around that. Some of the institutions in the community should also imbibe this lesson. Change leaders should be created in the community and there should be an interface between the micro modules. A life cycle approach along with an experimental learning methodology should be the way forward. Thus, the best way forward is to develop appropriate content, acceptance of the content followed by having a mechanism for continued engagement.

DR. VANDANA PRASAD, National convenor and technical advisor to PHRN shared that it is important to have qualitative aspects to the research / activity project that we undertake. The progress should move from analysis to action. It should be kept into mind that we don't romanticize community. If the community knew everything then there wouldn't have been a need for external intervention. Food systems are the basic concept that we should emphasize upon. This includes farm focus, forest to food, gender, labour, children, malnutrition amongst a few. Health is also something that is in critical gap in nutrition. In the recent CNNS report, some of the major concepts that are looked at include:

> "Health is a critical gap in nutrition and these two needs to be brought together"

1. Intersectionality
2. Enough of basics to fill up
3. Middle level systems need to be strengthened and the whole burden should not be on the frontline workers.
4 The paradoxes in food systems have to be acknowledged so that they can be checked. The report also mentions that obesity and anaemia is on a rise.

MR. DIGVIJAY SINGH, Project Design Officer, Governance systems strengthening, UNDP**,** drew examples from a public hearing organized in 2011 where people from all categories in a village had come. This is when the principles of social accountability were laid down and action regarding the same started. Conducting social audit may not be a difficult exercise but, the aftermath of it may be troublesome for some those who raise their concerns. They may be harassed and intimated at a later stage. The 5s of social audit -Principles of social accountability:

- *Jaankari*(Information). Data is a more nuanced concept of information
- *Sunwai*(to be heard)
- *Karwai*(grievance redressal)
- *Suraksha* (Security and protection)
- *Bhagidaari*(participation)

Jantamanch (social audit unit) is happening in Rajasthan and we have found it useful. We have to institutionalise the process of being heard. The *Jan soochna* portal in Rajasthan is the largest disclosure of a government. We must try to not get lost in the jargon of digitization .There should be a simple platform which everyone can understand and is accessible by everyone. Can CHIRAG be that? It is vital to institutionalize the system of being heard so that whenever people want to raise their voices, they have the convenience to do so. A *Jan Soochna* portal along with a *Janata* information portal has recently been launched in Rajasthan. Wall painting is still one of the most effective ways of communication in places like Rajasthan. Grievance redressal mechanism has to be accessible and user friendly.

DISCUSSION

- It is important to keep in mind and see how communities work and how we work with communities.
- How do we identify the recipients in a community as there are a number of stakeholders. The process includes
- Mapping out who all will the recipients of this information be?
- How the knowledge will be organized for these beneficiaries?
- Knowledge creation.
- It is important that we look at the concern of food and nutrition security as a programme rather than a project to maintain consistency and sustainability.
- When we talk of food production, we should look at in totality including its quality, processing, quantity, etc. Ex. Side effects of contaminated oil on health, importance of fermented, boiled and steamed food.
- It needs to be debated whether commercial and nutritional plantation can go hand in hand? What happens when government used tribal hinterland for commercial plantation?
- An exercise needs to be undertaken wherein a list of programmes that are nutrition sensitive or talks of nutrition is listed and its status in terms of implementation, finances, etc. is reviewed.
- Politics should be looked at as a key to balance economy and welfare programs of government, etc. Politics should be used as a challenge to improve a welfare programme.
- Right to food also mentions that social audit should be conducted.
- Intersectionality in such programmes is important and we should look at it from a vulnerability lens.
- There is a policy space for millets and we should further explore on how we can use it effectively.
- There should be a larger role for women in the production space and they should be given due recognition.

SESSION 3: VIRTUAL CENTRE AND DIGITAL PLATFORM

SAYONEE CHATTERJEE, Director for Content Operation, Gram Vaani,

Focus on CHIRG

One of the four Cs of CHIRAG is to create acommunity led platform for knowledge generation and exchange using the 'Interactive voice response system' technology. Mobile Vaani, which is such an interactive voice response platform, will facilitate the discourse of co-creating knowledge by participation from stakeholders across the spectrum. Through the Mobile Vaani platform, studio generated episodes and audio content will be created and shared with the community, in turn encouraging them to participate and record their own experiences and take on selected themes and topics related to sustainable food systems and practices. By the virtue of being interactive, the audio-platform can be utilized by all the stakeholders including experts, community members, youth leaders, to highlight their queries, concerns, and traditional practices, responses to questions, thereby encouraging exchange of knowledge, peer-learning and discussions.

Responses from Key Stakeholders

MS. SHARMILA SHARMA of Gurgaon Ki Awaaz, shared her experiences of working with the community through an audio based interactive platform. Gurgaon Ki Awaaz, a community radio station that operates from Gurgaon, caters to the diverse population of migrant and industrial workers from across the country, through programmes ranging from popular folk songs to serious discussions on sexual and reproductive health related issues.

Ms. Sharmila specially mentioned about two specific programmes, the first being a part of the initiative known as Chahat Chowk and the second, where the local residents and workers act as vigilant to report various concerns that affects their everyday life pertaining to condition of roads, electric-supply, etc. and how the Government machinery is involved in addressing the issues. While sharing her experience of developing the programmes for Chahat Chowk through CLP (Community Learning Programme), she reiterated the importance of community participation in discussing issues pertaining to their daily lives. With participation from the community stakeholders a message matrix is developed and later aired on the platform with their consent. In this programme adolescent girls came out with health problems they never spoke about earlier in open and in turn encouraged other listeners to share their own experiences. Since the platform also provides an opportunity to be on air through live programmes, more and more listeners contribute and interact with experts and break shackles of inhibition.

DR. IMRAN AMIN, Associate Professor, Ambedkar University, expressed the importance of an immersion-based understanding while working with the community. However, he reiterated, that the issue of language is one of the basic challenges that comes up during an immersion programme.

He also shared that when we look at food security, there are numerous varieties of rice but, we concentrate on only 2. To maintain the food-security we should look at the diversity and build upon it. The other aspects that need to be looked at while discussing food security include – food sovereignty, food cultures, food processing, and community-based seed banks amongst others. Various modes of communication can be used to pass on the message of food security amongst the communities including wall paintings and folk dance. But while developing that strategy an important aspect that needs to be looked at is that the information and behaviour should go alongside. For example, the information that cigarette smoking is bad for health is disseminated but, we still find them in smoking counters.

DR. HEENA BIJLI, Director, School of Continuing Education, shared that IGNOU has a digital depository of e-based information on E-GYANKOSH available on IGNOU website. IGNOU also has a School of Continuing Education that has nutrition and extension programmes. The programs include Certificate in Food and Nutrition (ODL), Certificate in Nutrition & Child Care (ODL), Diploma in Nutrition & Health Education (ODL), M.Sc in Food and Nutrition (ODL, Ph.D. in Food and Nutrition (Regular – F2F), Ph.D. in Community Resource Management & Extension (Regular – F2F).The proposed Instructional Design / Digital Platforms for Community Nutrition programmes can be utilized to promote Food Security include MOOCs, ODL mode, etc.

 Discussion

- As we talk of manufacturing of consent, there should also be manufacturing of dissent.
- In the IEC / Communication strategy, it is very important to keep 'contextualization' into consideration.
- The heterogeneity of the food systems / food cultures etc. should be taken into consideration.
- AUD can help us with the content required to set up the digital platform.
- While the knowledge can be contextual, it is important to take language into consideration as well.
- We need to understand the 'language' of the community as well as work on our approach on how we talk to the community and how we understand their feedback.

SESSION 4: POLITICAL WILL FOR POLICY IMPACT

DR. SURAJ KUMAR, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences

Focus on Chirag

Political will is triggered by three variables – relevance, salience and intensity of public opinion – the third one is most important for translating evidence-based research into action through advocacy (refer attached presentation)Improving food security is a bigger concern than creating a $5 million economy, but, the political corridors prefers the latter and most of the actions are directed towards that. In India, we have many interventions that are excellent as standalone

entities, but, as soon as it is tried to be scaled up or replicated, it fails to have an impact on the ground. In India, if a public policy intervention is doing well, it is loaded with so many inputs and additions, that its original content is lost. Ex. *Antyodaya* in Rajasthan, Kudumbashree in Kerala. It is very important to leverage political will for the implementation of any policy programme or policy input.

Responses from key stakeholders

MS. YAMINI AIYAR, President & CEO, Centre for Policy Research (CPR) stated that Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi is often asked the question of impact as they are a qualitative think tank. We all believe in social change and we all are working towards it in our own ways, thus, the impact for each of the stakeholders is different. But, we usually have an inflated sense of policy change. The process of determining impact is also a political process. We oversimplify impact as we are only looking for tangible results. Tangible is important in some ways so that we can keep our ecosystem alive. The concept of "think-tanks" is changing to "do-tanks" now. Many progressive policies being made today were actually made outside of the "traditional policy spheres" – ex. Advocacy by activists, etc. Real policy is consensus building. It comprises of –

- Expertise and involvement of multiple stakeholders.
- Building consensus
- Building compromise

Today, we have lot of expertise in policy making but, very little politics in policy making. The process of generating impact on the ground is equally important like the will to create something good. Some of the important considerations that need to be taken into consideration include –

- Providing high quality research / impact studies
- The expert should take the larger ecosystem into consideration while giving inputs / expertise.
- The messiness of what takes in implementing a policy on ground should also be taken into consideration.

MS. RANU BHOGAL, Director Policy Research and Campaigns, A lot of emphasis was given on community mobilization by OXFAM earlier. There are as many as 65 schemes on nutrition in Odisha. Thus, it is important to develop a matrix to understand what these schemes offer and what results are they producing, etc. At this stage, we have a number of policies on food and nutrition and a lot of advocacy has taken place. It is important today to focus more on its implementation. Public engagement being the core – we need to look at how convergence and collaboration can be emphasized upon for effective implementation of policies. Political will for implementation of a policy is usually built when the subject has relevance, salience and during intensity of opinion.

MS. RUCHI GUPTA, In Charge NSUI began with stating that in North India, we have development of politics whereas, in South India, we have politics of development. Social media has a large role to play in the construction of truth / evidence as well as political will. We need to democratize political will where, the political leaders use their role in not only generating political will but, also during implementation of policies. We need to effectively use MP / MLAs for various policy level works, but, their efficiency cannot be evaluated merely by the MP / MLA Lad funds. It needs to be looked at on a larger scale. The party worker at the ground also has politics and that is called as the "politics of reality" Political will and its implementation need to be looked at together. Eg; In Rajasthan, there is the political will to implement the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* but, the collector issued notice saying that if people do not have / use toilets then, their PDS would be terminated. This harsh bureaucratic action is detrimental to the whole concept of the policy in consideration. Community mobilization is an important aspect of political will / policy implementation. It is very important to involve the youth in community participation. Youth are mostly disciplined to study, get jobs, etc. but, their involvement in communities, politics is vital. Public funding of politics should be discussed and implemented in India for greater accountability and transparency. In politics – that too on mass scale – one cannot have at each point people who care completely "woke" – temper principle with pragmatism.

Discussions

- Transformative politics taking place where people are expected to talk and think in a particular manner or else they are branded as anti-nationals
- The biggest policy problem is the implementation of policy.
- It is important to humanize the organizational challenges of a political party