

# **Knowledge Building on Community Based Organizations**

## **A PRADAN NRCRL and CInI Initiative**

### **Concept Note**

#### **I Learning Group on CBOs**

Community-based organizations, of various forms and kinds, have been promoted and nurtured during the last decade or so, predominantly by non-profit organizations. The nature of challenges and the complexity have led to an increased need to develop knowledge around the same. A learning engagement – through conceptualisation and reflection – has become necessary for taking the engagement with collectives to a higher level.

In this context the National Resource Centre for Livelihoods (NRCRL) set up by PRADAN under the AKF-EC supported SCALE programme and Sir Ratan Tata Trust initiated a Learning-Group on CBOs, consisting of experienced practitioners as well as expert resource persons, to understand common issues faced by CBO promoters and the knowledge gaps that exist.

#### **II First Meeting of the Learning Group**

The learning group had its first meeting on January 13, 2009. The participants in the meeting were:

1. Anirban Ghose, PRADAN
2. Anish Kumar, PRADAN
3. Apoorva Oza, AKRSP
4. Balakrishnan, SRTT
5. D. Narendranath, PRADAN
6. Deep Joshi
7. Ganesh Neelam, CInI
8. Girish Sihani, BAIF
9. Haritha Sharma, HIDF
10. K. V. Raju, IRMA
11. Krishnagopal, Access Livelihood Consulting
12. Narender Kande
13. Rama Reddy, CDF
14. Soumen Biswas, PRADAN
15. Stan Thekkekkara, ACCORD
16. Tushaar Shah
17. V. Vivekanandan, SIFFS
18. Vartika Jaini, SRTT

### **III Need to fill knowledge gaps by:**

1. Mapping the various forms of collectives existing, given that there is an entire range of CBOs that include different types of collectives
2. Understanding the design principles, processes and practices of CBO promotion and management for various kinds of collectives to make it viable, sustainable and replicable.

For those purpose is proposed to launch a joint research initiative on CBOs by the NRCRL and Cinl. It is envisaged that rather than conducting a survey-led extractive research a participatory learning methodology is to be adopted.

### **IV Suggested Research Framework**

#### A) Research Question

“What are the necessary and sufficient conditions that need to be created to facilitate emergence of member owned and governed “poor” people’s collectives in various livelihood sectors”

#### Objectives

1. To understand the generic principles and process steps toward pre-organisation, organisation, facilitation and institution building of people’s collectives
2. To understand the specific considerations while designing, promoting, nurturing and managing institutions in the specific context and with specific objectives

#### Research Process

##### *Setting off a learning process through participatory research*

The knowledge on the best ways of facilitating CBOs exist with a lot of practitioners in a much-dispersed manner. There is a scope to bring this dispersed knowledge together and take the practitioners through reflective learning processes that can lead to building knowledge as well as strengthen practice. A learning process primarily based on self reflection of practitioners, supplemented by external expert inputs can lead to creation of a body of knowledge that could be significantly useful to similarly placed practitioners and other stakeholders such as researchers, donors and the State. The State remains a major stakeholder with every development programme aimed at promoting a particular or other kind of CBOs.

The process would start with mapping of the various forms of community-based organizations existing in the livelihoods sectors identified. A sample of community-based organizations could be selected based on the objectives and contexts of the institution, so as to capture diversity of the institutions. The field researchers will be personnel of promoter organizations, directly working with CBOs selected for the study. The field researchers will work with the Master Researcher to learn, reflect and conceptualize based on their own experiences as an institution-builder of the CBO (Pukar, a non-governmental organization based out of Mumbai works on urban issues through such a methodology - <http://www.pukar.org.in>).

*The steering team and the master researcher could along with the researchers undertake a collective reflection of diverse experiences in multiple-contexts and varied objectives to address the research question, through a combinational analysis of commonness and differences of experiences.*

There is considerable work already done, and literature exists – in terms of empirical research evidence that need to inform further research. Prof Norman Uphoff's work on institutions around NRM, Prof Tushaar Shah's work on co-operatives, a study on sustainability of village institutions being done by AKRSP, works by many scholars on JFM and PIM, and MYRADA's documents on Self Help affinity Groups, Sadhan's and APMAS's literature on Federations are all available and need to be compiled in one place.

### **Expected Outcomes**

#### **A. Practitioners**

- i) Development of individual competencies in managing / nurturing CBOs (perspective, research and analytical skills and being reflective) through engagement as researchers on subjects of direct experience
- ii) Development of organizational competencies in promoting CBOs by developing organizational understanding of principles, mechanisms and processes in CBO promotion and management
- iii) To help advocate the nature of policy support and design of state programmes aimed at CBO promotion through development of "CBO development guidelines"
- iv) Development of manuals and internal capacity building modules within all organizations part of the research

The overall objective is that the lessons as and when they emerge are used to inform practice in the respective organisations. The objective is that by the time the research is over, a good practice document on the organisation is ready as a supplementary output.

#### **B. Academicians and Consultants**

Development of focused capacity building modules and learning events based on the framework developed for CBO personnel and development practitioners

### C. Donors

Clarity and common understanding on indicators and its parameters for review and impact assessment for support towards CBO. Even donors such as the AKF and the SRTT who have commitment in the subject of CBOs would be greatly benefited by such a pioneering research, and will be able to tailor-made their interventions according to the lessons drawn from the study.

### D. State

To redesign the guidelines of programmes aimed at enhancing livelihoods through community-based organizations. Excessive interference from the State led to the collapse of the co-operative movement and based on those experiences the new generation institutions such as Mutually Aided Co-operatives, and the producer Companies emerged. Yet is crucial to realise that the State resources could be creatively used for promotion of CBOs without diluting with the autonomy of these institutions. It is necessary to conceptualise and negotiate an appropriate role for the State in the emergence and strengthening of people's collectives.

Some of the issues that emerge here are:

- i) What are the ways and means for working towards economic empowerment for the "poorest of the poor"?*
- ii) What are the critical roles that need to be played by an external facilitator for undertaking intensive ground preparation for promoting a CBO of the poorest?*
- iii) How and what externalities influence and are influenced by these CBOs?*
- iv) Is CBO the most effective instrument for development at community level? Why and why not?*

### **V Operational Structure**

The proposed operational structure for the research project or stakeholder roles is:

Financial Support: Sir Ratan Tata Trust under the Roopantaran Initiative, and Aga Khan Foundation under the EC co-financed SCALE Programme.

#### Project Management:

Collectives for Integrated Livelihoods (CInI) along with the National Resource Centre for Rural Livelihoods-PRADAN would constitute the steering team. The role of the steering team would be in anchoring the research projects and to actively support organizations undertaking the same<sup>1</sup>.

For a field based organization like PRADAN, the knowledge would be of immense use in shaping the large number of CBOs already promoted and to be promoted in future; for CInI,

<sup>1</sup> If required other individuals will be roped in as and when required.

promoted by SRTT, it will provide immense learning for developing an expert base on the range and diversity of designing programme support for the future funding strategies of SRTT.

### Learning Group<sup>2</sup>:

The objectives of the Learning Group are:

1. Facilitating documentation of best practices on promoting community based organisations
2. Deliberations around the emerging issues and innovations around the same
3. Identifying areas where further developing in-depth understanding is required
4. Initiating research around issues and questions identified
5. Dissemination of the lessons learned; and adding to the positive cycle of deliberations and building knowledge

The Group will be convened primarily at the time of the research design and at the time of mid-term review.

The Learning Group<sup>3</sup> would be convened as per need, primarily at the time of the research design and during a mid term review, it will play a role of both seeding some of the study process within their institutions as well as a larger role of sector engagement. Some of the organisations in the learning group will act as active participants in the actual research project.

### Master Researcher

A master researcher will act as an advisor to the steering team and help the Steering Team in developing the research framework and also in analysis of the research outputs. It will help decode and sharpen the key research questions for facilitation.

### Process Facilitator:

The master researcher will bring in the academic rigour into the research. We will also bring in a process facilitator who can facilitate the reflective - learning process either in a group of participants or on one to one basis.

### Selection of the participant organisations:

The participants will be selected from key rural livelihood sectors as listed below after reconnoitre of organisations that have with time had a sufficient canvas of both successes and failures in establishing various types of CBOs. Their exemplary stature provides room for

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<sup>2</sup> A think-tank for the knowledge management process on CBOs.

<sup>3</sup>

the research to be grounded in the realm of “doing” in the existing socio-political environment.

Sectors: Micro-Finance, Fisheries, Poultry, sericulture, agro-horticulture, dairy, forest-based/NTFP, Irrigation, Identity/entitlements, State sanctioned NRM groups like JFM, PIA, CIG etc and many others.

Selection of the research participants:

There will be two participants from a organisation. One person would be the practitioner who has been involved in “day-to-day” issues of the CBO The other person would be from the training or documentation wing, which could help in the concurrent documentation of the processes followed in the organisation, with a view to creating the good practice document. To generate buy in from the organisation for sparing the time of two colleagues from the organisation it becomes important to take in to confidence the CEOs of the organisations and also establish a system of incentive both financial and non-financial with a project of this nature and design. The learning constituency will be the first level of drawing the research participants from and subsequently explored with others.

## Participatory Research frame work

As delineated in the concept note above the intent is to launch a participatory research with on-field practitioners from organisations who have had considerable experience in the field of promoting/ attempting to promote 'wealth creating, self governed' Community Based Organisations (CBOs).

The research design is as follows:

1. Research Question – “What are the necessary and sufficient conditions that need to be created to facilitate emergence of member owned and governed ‘poor’ people’s collectives in various livelihood sectors?”
2. Participants – One field executive each from organisations selected for their varied experiences in promoting CBOs from various livelihood sectors. One documenter in addition from each of the participating organisations
3. Research Structure – The participant-researchers to undertake a reflective process on their experiences on facilitating CBOs. In addition, they are also to undertake external studies to other CBOs that are running independently to generate learning. Dr Tushaar Shah to provide knowledge inputs and a framework on how to conduct the reflective processes and the external study. Naren and Tasneem to facilitate the meetings of the researcher group. Astad Pastakia to be drawn in as a resource person to document the experiences

The overall research framework:

### A. What is a CBO?

What is a CBO? Also, what is not a CBO needs to be defined and clarified by the research anchor (NRCRL, CInI), participants and by the heads of the organisations at the outset. This will help us articulate the boundaries of the research project as well as identify discriminating criteria and characteristics of an organization that will qualify to be called a CBO. Clarity about the purpose (s)—primary and adjunct as well as desired—need to be spelt out.

It has been observed that when CBOs are mentioned in various forums, different people actually mean and understand different things by the term CBO. First, a whole range of organisations starting with the informal Self-Help Group (SHG) in a village hamlet to a large size, formal and stringently regulated Producer Company, all fall under the common title of a CBO. Similarly, a village level social action group to a large scale marketing organisation also today are included as CBOs. In addition to the varieties in size and scope, legal form and the activity taken up, CBOs also represent a wide range when it comes to its management and governance structures. Then there are externally facilitated and promoted CBOs and self-born CBOs. Even in the externally promoted CBOs there would be those who have moved on and mutated and now no more dependent on the promoter and those who are still under the tutelage of the external facilitator and the hope is that it would gradually spin off. CBOs that operate autonomously independent of the promoter also may display a vastly different set of values, attitudes and processes, than those displayed by those still under the normative influence of the promoter.

This entails that all the stakeholders in the research, the heads of the organisations, the researchers, PRADAN and CInI would be better placed if they together are able to arrive at a shared and accepted understanding as to what they mean by the CBO. Also, what is not meant by the term CBO.

### B. The systems model

One of the ways to study and understand an organisation is to visualise an organization as a system (inputs-processes-outputs-environmental factors). And this can be used as a basis for the research design.

Inputs	<i>what goes into</i> the formation of a CBO?	the members, their aspirations, their existing psycho-social, economic, political, cultural situation, their existing skills and capabilities; existing livelihoods; inclusion-exclusion issues
Processes	<i>how</i> the CBO conducts itself internally, how the members relate to each other	Evolution of common vision, goals, and mission; leadership and influence; participation and communication; problem-solving and decision-making processes
Outputs	What are the products/services that a CBO is meant to provide?*	Institutional and financial sustainability of the CBO, livelihoods for the members; access to various rights and entitlements; enhancement of agency of members and relevant community
Environment	How does the CBO relate to and exchange energy with the world around?	linkages with the external stakeholders; influence on relevant policies; normative influence on the world around; relationship with facilitator(s); facilitating and hindering factors and forces

\*This may need to be in consonance with the purpose(s) that the CBO is meant to serve which validates the existence and meaning of the CBO to its members as well as the world around.

The research can be designed around understanding each of these

Subsequently, appropriate indicators can be developed around each of these parameters so as to assess the CBOs for their efficiency, effectiveness and impact

### C. The stages of evolution of a CBO

We will also need to have a framework for mapping the evolution of the CBO. The various stages can be tentatively delineated as:

1. Pre-formation
2. Formation
3. Growth
4. Stability
5. Development and diversification

Each researcher has to map her/his experience along these parameters and stage. Therefore the final mapping matrix will be:

	Inputs	Processes	Outputs	Environmental factors
Pre-formation				
Formation				
Growth				
Stability				
Development and diversification				

It is a pre-requisite that **all the stakeholders** involved in the study agree to this or an alternate formulation of the research and only then embark on the research project.