

Planning Process at Rajasthan DBSS

March 30-31, 2008 at Diocese Centre, Ajmer, Rajasthan.

Participating DBSS Team : Nitin Nath (DBSS Coordinator), Babulal Pargi, Prakash Dodiya, Shashikant Joshua, Raphael Martin, Sunil Walter, Mrs Pramila Dodiya, and Mrs Beena Chauhan.

Facilitating SBSS Team : Mervin, Bidyut and Vikram

Day 1

As it was premeditated, the DBSS Coordinator began the planning process for next three years' phase with his earlier experience of participation in Agra DBSS' process. While explaining the process, he encouraged his team to introspect and check whether the dream of building people's organisations (PO) they had seen together two and half years back has come true? He also asked them to review - to what extent they have succeeded in making optimum utilisation of available resources to meet the set objectives stated in Strategic Action Plan?

The staffs then shared about their work and experiences they had while accompanying the communities listing out the achievements/ accomplishments and also the obstacles and hurdles they faced. At the same time all these things were synthesised on a chart paper as listed below:

- Women Empowerment through CBOs
- SHG facilitation
- BPL Enrolment, Dharna at SDM's office, Action against corruption
- Aided people to access employment in watershed works
- Rally – Kissan Mazdur Sangathan
- Wages issue through Magra Dalit Adhikar Sangh
- Awareness on RTI, PDS, PRI, NREGA
- Setting up an Information Centre
- Struggle for basic amenities like water and electricity
- Widow pension
- Closure of liquor den

All these activities were then asked to categorise under the four 'A' approaches viz. Analysis, Assistance, Advocacy and Action relating with the issue of Livelihood and Food Security and with the goal they had set for achievement during the first phase.

The discussions taking retrospective review concluded that:

- The Rajasthan DBSS has been working in the two districts (Ajmer and Baanswada) out of total 32 districts in the state. The villages covered in the DBSS' list are 45 in 14 *GramPanchayats* falling in five different *PanchayatSamities*/ blocks. The reference communities belong to scheduled and other backward castes (SC & OBCs) comprising of marginal farmers and landless labourers.

- While analyzing the DBSS' initiatives taken in the first phase, the initial period of first six months utilized in building a conceptual clarity on the issues of livelihood and food security. Data on BPL, existing TPDS and Social Security Scheme was collected. In Second Phase, DBSS concentrated on non-BPL families and unorganized labourers while in third phase, activities were conducted for marginal farmers and BPL card holders. In the fourth and fifth phase, they worked on minimum wages, RTI and NREGA.
- The critical analysis made by the DBSS team came up with the following findings that showed them the mirror and the course for correction:
 - This whole process was carried without proper orientation and perspective on the issue of livelihood was not to be found.
 - The DataBase does not have enough information on natural resources (Land, Forest and Water) and human resources (different trade-skills people possess which can be used as the means of livelihood in the reference area). The outcome of the resource-management study was supposed to help in upgrading the available data on issue of livelihood but did not happen. It was expected to have list of people directly benefited by the programmes like soil and water conservation, social forestry, hi-tech agri-training and like wise... There is no visibility of to what extent people have access and control over their livelihood means through the available resources.
 - All the listed activities tested with RBA framework emerged as mere situation analysis and assistance. The Data should have been analyzed for the future planning and building campaigns.
 - Each of the activities carried out appeared to be an isolated event.
 - Even the goal is too vague to understand and achieve. The DBSS team voiced that they should have set target number of families under particular constituency. The alternative livelihood mentioned in the goal has to be understood and internalized in the local context. It was agreed to reconstruct the goal considering all these factors.

The facilitators motivated the DBSS team to introspect themselves as where they're now? Where they were supposed to be? They warned them not be satisfied with the present achievement but to see challenges and chances in moving forward towards larger goal. The facilitators also assured them the required support from SBSS and asked them to share their problems that they saw as obstacles in their path. This opened up the staffs enabling them to express frankly what they felt...

- Not happy with the present structure, communication gap, lack of coordination, nobody's aware who's doing what?
- Problem in linking issues in the framework
- Interventions not focused, clear or precise
- No follow-up of the activities and programmes.
- Missed opportunities to attend workshops/ trainings and networking with other CSOs
- Processes like DataBase wasn't fully understood but it was done as a task.

The facilitators after hearing the grievances encouraged them to overcome all the hurdles coming together as a team to accomplish the set goals and objectives with clarity in their Vision and Mission.

Day 2

Next day the DBSS and SBSS teams visited Gaderi Village in Shrinagar Panchayat of Ajmer District. The process was conducted by the DBSS team in question-answer session. The entire community depends on agriculture, in lean season they indulge into small entrepreneurship like Papad making, packaging detergents, bangle decorations, kashida embroidery, etc. They also work on construction sites. At this moment the DBSS realized the means of alternative livelihood (they were stuck in previous day's session on this topic.)

The community in Gaderi Village was found to be well-aware of the resources they had/ lacked. Water availability is scarce, soil is not fit for normal cultivation, the water they get is salty (saline)... Considering all these limitations, the villagers took an initiative to get the water and soil tests done to see what kind of cultivation they could have in their lands. With the inferences drawn, they are now planning to cultivate medicinal and bio-diesel yielding plants like *ratanjoat* and *gamwaarpaata*.

The community also shared how they booked a tractor, *gheraoed* BDO and stopped the transfer of the teacher who really took efforts to educate the children. The village head *mukhia* had also fought against the system for regular water supply.

This visit was quite motivating showing the possibilities of strengthening this sensitized community further to build up a movement on the issue.

Second visit was in Ashapura area where the picture was total contrast! As soon as the DBSS team finished briefing about planning and asked what they could do, certain group consisting of 2-3 women who were quite vocal started listing out their demands like provide us with sewing/ embroidery machine and so on. They even grumbled about the changed approach as in RBA they hardly received anything from DBSS. The situation seemed to be out of control in this chaos and even the community enablers who were with this community couldn't bring it under control. But then one of the senior DBSS staff intervened and narrated an incidence from his field as how the local women succeeded in their struggle with the help of RTI. This changed the tone, as the chaos subdued and community accepted that they could also take their issues further and try to find a way out of their problems.

Taking up a cue from this, the team advised the group of women to visit *Udyog Kendra* at the district level and work towards a project that would help the group members to earn and support their families.

From the previous day's discussions and these community interfaces, both the teams had additional learning. Though this was not an evaluation, the staffs voiced that they should have evaluated their own work so that they could have had accomplished at least a strong base to work on. In Community Interface, they also realized that team visits than the solitary ones would help in working with conviction.

In feedback session, when the SBSS team asked the DBSS Staffs what they felt about the entire process they said that in the beginning they felt as if they are presenting the reports but now while concluding they realized that they actually were identifying the issues ensuring people's participation. They also got to know why they were off-track and despite of all activities why they couldn't achieve their goal?

While concluding both the teams reflected upon the sharing they had and decided to take the process further from where they're stuck.

- Area Coverage : Field-areas will be reconstructed and consolidated to strengthen and compliment the vision and mission of the organisation. Work in Ashapura could be withdrawn, focusing there more on CME. New district - Baanswaara is also considered too start with CME with respect to the available resources.
- CBO-PO-PM Path : Restructuring the present CBOs – SHGs (forming our own instead of facilitating the govt.established ones), Gramin Adhikar Manches, Gramin Adhikar Mazdur Sangathans, etc on priority basis.
- Issues : To be identified as per need of the communities that could result into movement building.
- Taking up Advocacy issues rather than just playing the role of facilitator to the families in accessing the government schemes. Networking with other like-minded organizations beyond the reference areas.
- Concentrating on mainstreaming the gender. Taking up gender analysis and gender sensitivity involving men too. Efforts towards Mahila Adhikar Manch.
- Active involvement of the congregations through CME signifying the role of the Church as agent for social change.

The DBSS team plans to take up this planning process to the other areas involving their reference communities making planning more participatory and people-oriented.

- Mervin, Bidyut and *Vikram*.