

Values First...Vision Foremost...

Introducing change process in

**Synodical Board of Social Services (SBSS)
Church of North India**

A case study led by

**Ms Uma Ramaswamy,
Development Consultant and Team Leader**
- who accompanied the change process

List of Abbreviations

AI	Appreciative Enquiry
BfW	Bread for the World
CA	Christian Aid
CBO	Community based Organization
CNI	Church of North India
CASA	Churches Auxiliary for Social Action
CFC	Collective Forms of Cooperation
CME	Church Mission Engagement
CNI-CSA	Church of North India Center for Social Action
CRM	Cost Reimbursement Model
DM	Disaster Mitigation
DBSS	Diocesan Board of Social Services
DPV	Dalit Vikas Parishad
EED	
FCFC	Forum of Collective Form of Cooperation
FMSF	Financial Management Service Foundation
GB	Governing Body
GF	Group Facilitator
ICCO	Inter Church Organization for Development Cooperation
KoG	Kingdom of God
MASS	Maanav Adhikar Sangharsh Samiti
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
LAN	Lobbying Advocacy and Networking
NGO	Non Government Organization
OD	Organizational Development
PARAM	Programme Activity Review and Accompaniment
PM	People's Movement
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PR	Programme Resource
PF	Programme Facilitation
PS	Programme Support
PFT	Programme Facilitation Team
PRT	Programme Resource Team
PESA	Panchayat in Extended Scheduled Area
PME	Planning Monitoring Evaluation
PRI	Panchayat Raj Institutions
RCSA	Resource Center for Social Action
RTI	Right to Information Act
SBSS	Synodical Board of Social Services
SEDP	Socio Economic Development Programme Extension under Scheduled Area
SHG	Self-Help Group
PO	Peoples' Organization
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme

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Executive Summary

New wineskin for new wine

CNI SBSS, as it celebrated its silver jubilee, realized that it had come to a point in its organizational history when it needed to take stock, reflect where it stood and make decisions where it planned to head in the future. An external revealed that the organisation had weakened due to a number of reasons. There was lack of trust between the participating partners and SBSS, and the hierarchical style of management did not foster an organizational climate and team functioning that could deliver effectively.

The Ecumenical Resource Sharing Partners engaged with SBSS on various findings and recommendations of the evaluation in individual one to one meetings, and the yearly round table meetings. With encouragement from the Ecumenical Resource Sharing Partners, the board of SBSS and the chief functionary decided to set in motion an exercise of Organizational Development hiring a development consultant. This process aimed at renewing the organization by revisiting its purpose and setting new goals for the future. The new leadership, a supportive board, a team of committed staff and the solidarity and consistent support from the ecumenical agencies set the climate for change and self-renewal of SBSS.

SBSS refocused on its mission and goals and adopted a rights based perspective to development in the changing context of economic growth, widening gap between haves and have-nots, and exclusion of specific communities in India. This required a thorough restructuring of the organization as well as streamlining its systems and processes. New energy was enthused, and space and opportunity provided for staff to grow, prove themselves and fit their roles into the new structure. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the leadership was to bring about transparency and accountability at various levels of functioning and build relationships within teams, and with the church, partners and communities.

The result of this process was phenomenal, with positive transformations taking place in various areas. The programmes became perspective driven with clear objectives and measurable targets. Importantly, there were visible impacts of its programmes on the most excluded and marginalized communities CNI-SBSS was able to progress towards becoming an alternate political force by catalyzing and fostering people's action at the grass roots, and gradually building into people's movements for justice. SBSS also started making its presence felt in the wider arena of civil society activism.

Thus a conscious effort was made to give new life and meaning to an organization which despite a glorious past and sound theological base, had somehow lost its way. This effort has culminated in both strengthening the organization, and giving it new

direction and needed tools to forge ahead. Above all, it has made the organization receptive and equipped for change...SBSS is now a 'Learning Organization'.

1.0 Introducing CNI SBSS

To remain relevant and contemporary in globalize modern India, the Synodical Board of Social Services (SBSS), the development and justice arm of Church of North India (CNI) went through planned organizational changes since 2004. SBSS collaborates with 24 Diocesan Board of Social Services (DBSS) which are spread across 12 states of northern India. With its head office in Delhi, SBSS has established four Resource Centers for Social Action (RCSAs) in Agra, Pune, Kolkata and Ranchi. While DBSSs implement development projects, the staffs of RCSAs give accompaniment services to the DBSSs.

SBSS is a major ministry of the Church, and its governing body is elected by the Synod, representatives of churches, and leaders of DBSSs. The DBSSs, in turn have their own governing bodies under the leadership of their respective Bishops. SBSS functions in solidarity with its partners (the DBSSs) what is popularly known as 'collective forms of cooperation.'

SBSS works for the rights of socially secluded and marginalized communities – Dalits, Adivasis, women and children. SBSS believes that congregations should be in the forefront to take forward the mission of God. SBSS visions that, 'where there is justice in land; in field and in forest, every living being will dance and sing'.

1 Contextual theology and development paradigm

Since its inception (1970), SBSS stood apart for its theological understanding of development.¹ While under the leadership of Bishop Gorai, the then Chairman of CNI, SBSS adopted the Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4:16-19), and it was in the year 2001 that SBSS adopted the path breaking agenda of 'Building Communities of Resistance and Hope.'²

2 The rationale for change

By March 2003, SBSS had completed 25 years and celebrated its silver jubilee, having completed a commissioned major study of its journey. However, several factors began to erode its organizational functioning and credibility. While the contextual theology of SBSS was quite ahead of its times, its practice fell far short of its mission.

¹ Charismatic leaders such as Bishop George Ninan and Bishop Chandulal played a crucial role in expanding the horizons of SBSS.

² During 2001-2004, SBSS adopted a rights-based approach. SBSS operational areas included 2500 communities in 24 dioceses. This period also witnessed the growth of people's struggles to access what are called gairan and gouthan lands in parts of Maharashtra, promotion of women's federation in the north eastern India and greater participation of women in local governance.

Hierarchical ways of functioning crept in – creating mutual distrust in partnerships. ‘SBSS began to be known for what it should not be.’

3. Shortcomings and challenges

SBSS lacked a well-knit organizational structure with clear-cut functional streams. It lacked effective systems to coordinate the smooth and effective functioning of the 24 DBSSs.. SBSS also lacked database and effective systems of communication for planning development projects and programmes. More importantly, programmes themselves had no clear focus.

Although the 24 DBSSs were working under one organizational umbrella, each DBSS went its own separate way, without any coordination and shared purpose. The majority of their interventions were unconnected events, with fragmented outcomes. With a few exceptions, most of their interventions were welfare/service-oriented and lacked a rights base, creating dependency, instead of empowerment.

Each DBSS received a fixed six-monthly grant irrespective of performance and impact. Funds were under-utilized, and there was no scope for transfer of funds for optimal utilization. These practices were not benefiting the communities.

Not all funds to DBSSs came through SBSS. A few DBSSs entered into bipartite and tripartite funding arrangements with their funders. This brought its own complexities to SBSS partnerships, diluting the mandated role of SBSS. Additionally, SBSS had its differences with the CNI Synod, especially with respect to few of the Synod office bearers on the SBSS Board taking managerial instead of strategic roles. This affected the day to day organisational functioning of SBSS. Cumulatively, this began to erode the effective functioning of SBSS and its credibility.

SBSS role with majority of DBSSs regressed into being mere monitors. The DBSSs felt that SBSS, especially the four zonal offices were policing them rather than providing supportive services. In turn, a few DBSSs claimed greater autonomy and began to view SBSS’s survival as dependent on them. With all this, the four zonal offices relapsed into routine roles, termed by many as that of ‘post-offices’ - frustrating and deskilling the staff. Even within the staff of SBSS, hierarchical functioning styles frustrated the staff, in particular the younger staff. The motivation and the morale of the staff became low.

As ecumenical organizations under the leadership of Bishops, the DBSSs were battling with reporting to the Bishops and Diocese and meeting increasing demands of work from SBSS. The DBSSs had the mandate of motivating and capacitating the congregations and their leadership to advocate and involve themselves on rights-based interventions. While there are instances of congregational leadership participating and being in the forefront of social action, the majority found it difficult and even threatening to adopt this path. Many felt that their calling was to serve God only. Nor did they understand that ‘rights-based’ approach was within contextual theology and

they could get involved. At the same time, SBSS-DBSSs were being questioned on their limited impacts on the field.

To sum up, SBSS was being weighed down by an organizational crisis. It required a great deal of persuasion and negotiation with church leaders and the governing body to make them realize that this crisis was deeply affecting the purpose and core values of CNI-SBSS.

4 The change process

The Trigger and Creating a Climate for Change

The external evaluation of SBSS in 2003 was quite critical of the many shortcomings of SBSS and strongly recommended course corrections and an organizational development process for the renewal of SBSS. While the findings of the evaluation were aimed at constructive course corrections, SBSS feared that funding partners might withdraw their support.³

What merits attention is the instrumental role that was played by the Consortium of Funding Partners (consisting of Christian Aid, EED, ICCO and Bread for the World), the ecumenical donors in facilitating organizational change that was being recommended.⁴ At one level, they brought pressure and set the stage by supporting an interim phase of fifteen months for organizational change through a mutually agreed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). At another level, their role during the change process was proactive with periodic consultations to keep themselves informed, and along with SBSS identified and sensitively challenged issues that required deeper focus for change. They motivated SBSS to address both programmatic and governance issues for sustainable change process.

As a first step, the outgoing Board recruited Dr. Shailendra Awale, a medical doctor with development background as the Chief Coordinator to steward the organization towards renewal. Dr. Shailendra was doubly challenged as he was entering a new and complex organization which was in the midst of numerous organizational lows. The position of Chief Coordinator was not sufficiently empowered too. Bishop P.S.P Raju, a Board member in the earlier governing body and the present Chairman of SBSS took a step forward to advocate for the Chief Coordinator to be made the ex-officio Secretary of the governing body - a position that gives him requisite power to run the organization with certain autonomy. As an ex-officio secretary, the Chief Coordinator

³ *One of the partners withdrew their support, much to the disappointment of the new leadership. SBSS felt that they should have been given time to prove their potential to change.*

⁴ *Initially, one of the companions during her first visit maintained that in view of the disturbed organisational climate, SBSS is not ready for change – a point that was belied by positive changes that began to happen later.*

is represented in other Ministries of the Synod which widens his circle of influence.⁵ Two development professionals were invited to accompany the OD process. Consciously, the accompaniers played dual roles- the role of mirroring the organizational processes and when called upon, to be experts. The entire OD process was internally driven and helped in owning the change process by the staff.

6. What has changed?

“We received your newsletter and found the difference. SBSS has changed; articulating, defining, community aspirations differently” said J John a development activist from Orissa.

Today, in 2007, the SBSS is a transformed, vibrant rights-based ecumenical development organization and exhibits elements of a model. To begin with, the front face of SBSS has changed with the renovation of the central office in Delhi with user-friendly technologies and open spaces for collegiality. While it is not easy to detail the changes that have happened, we may speak of a few trends – indicative of the paradigm shift that is happening.

Without any hesitation he further asked “would it be possible to send your team to Sidharth Village. We would like to adopt accountability processes within us...”

Relating with Communities and Partners with a difference

Reflections

‘Please hold, let me tell you’ said Philip Peacock to Chief Coordinator. He is a seminary teacher/activist from Kolkatta and former DBSS board member. He added that “we found the difference not in just office interior which is very moving and reminiscent of our people but SBSS now talks differently. I had been on the board of DBSS for long time and have had interactions with SBSS staff for many years. We used to talk about budget, finance, expenditures and so on and so forth. Now SBSS talks about people, their priority, programs, rights that are articulated from the perspectives of the poor... I congratulate all of you”

‘First of all, we see a major shift in the way we (SBSS) relate with our communities and partners. We no longer talk about funds but about programmes with our partners, which is making a difference. Our work culture is now open, transparent and we have begun to make best use of technologies’ (Dr. Shailendra Awale, the Chief Coordinator)

‘SBSS is now speaking a language that is more relevant to society. Earlier, we were merely mouthing ideologies and could barely articulate the rights language. We now speak and practice. Our vision, mission, systems and programmes together have

⁵ This idea was advocated by one of the accompaniers during her presentation in the Board meeting.

helped us to make better sense to people. We now see a synthesis.’ (Moni Byapari, Coordinator, Programme Resource & Group Facilitator, PME and Policy Campaign)

Development interventions are perspectives based and supported by systems

At DBSSs level, a major change in programme planning, based on better understanding of grassroots issues is witnessed. The participation of people in planning has vastly improved. Interventions are moving away from one-off events and are now better interlinked and process oriented.

Funds are now released to DBSSs on the basis of expenditure incurred (Cost-Reimbursement Model) which has helped in better utilisation of funds. SBSS is now able to reallocate funds, based on people’s needs and performance levels. To enhance effective and accountable partnerships, SBSS now has common finance management procedures, which is supported by finance manuals. There are positive shifts in fund management.

A significant change is the way SBSS and DBSSs now relate with each other. By taking on the role of accompaniers, close monitoring of DBSSs which was disapproved earlier is now accepted . Accompanying visits are planned and undertaken by teams. Altogether, there is less monitoring and most of the DBSSs feel that they have freedom in their interventions.

“Now we are online; connected truly; funds are coming in time there is no delay. SBSS team travel with us” says Ajay Singh Coordinator, DBSS Patna

“We are Jan sangathan - a people’s movement. We are now able to plan what people want from rights perspectives. From community based organisations today we have evolved as People’s organisations. We are not afraid of government authority. We are taking Jun Sunwai, public hearing on development issues and gram sabha fearlessly. We have a major say in planning” claims Chakla Dhar, Swaraj Jan Sangthan in Tezpur....

Reflections

‘Our working process has changed distinctly. The old fashion was to have just programme activities without visible impacts. We have learnt to focus more on issue-based interventions and the new systems such as database and PARAM (Programme Activity Review and Accompaniment) have enabled this. Recently, we involved the Adivasis (tribal) students to help us post cards to the Prime Minister on PESA (Tribal Policy on Self-Rule) with great success. This also helped the Adivasi students to win all the seats in their union elections. Over these years, my perspectives have sharpened and I have greater clarity.’ (Ajay Singh, Program Coordinator DBSS, Patna)

‘SBSS has given us flexibility and freedom to work on issues that are contextual. Our work on PRI was not budgeted and yet SBSS gave us the freedom and support to work

on Gram Sabha, which has now become central to our work. I have matured too. Because of the work we have done in Assam, I am now recognized by the district administration as the prominent leader of Assam for my contribution to communal harmony.’ Rev. Pradeep Kawa (Programme Coordinator, DBSS North East India)

‘The Church is the basis for mission engagement. Church, as we know is traditional. But what makes me happy is that at the local level, the church is taking interest in social action. SBSS is mobilizing local churches.’ (Bishop P.C. Singh, Bishop of Jabalpur)

‘SBSS has given DBSSs a great deal of autonomy which allows us to intervene according to the local context and emerging situations. With SBSS, we are working as co-partners. The new systems such as CRM have begun to reduce the burden of written reports. There is now a visible shift in SBSS accompaniment services which is more in the nature of support rather than close monitoring.’ (Daniel B. Das, Coordinator SEDP, Amritsar DBSS)

‘Due to our transparent ways of functioning SBSS’s acceptance levels with DBSSs have increased. I have been here for 2 years and I am happy to say that SBSS gives opportunities to explore new ideas.’ (Amen Xavier Kaushal, Programme Associate, RCSA Barrackpore)

‘Because of our new planning process, every new plan is built on the previous plan. I can now see importance of the process in planning.’ (Amos Deep, Finance Associate, Team leader, RCSA Barrackpore)

Resurgence of people’s action at the grassroots

Within SBSS, there is greater understanding of the path to transformation – social mobilization to formation of community based organizations (CBOs) and progressing towards formation of people’s organizations and people’s movements. This understanding has also matured from learning obtained from earlier models.

New grassroots initiatives in tribal pockets of Jharkhand, North Eastern India have begun to grow. Some of the earlier movements for land rights in Maharashtra are being consolidated. There is greater advocacy work through Right to Information (RTI) Act and other poverty alleviation programmes such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) etc.

The church-mission engagement of SBSS which aims at the deeper involvement of the congregations and their leadership has begun to show results. At the congregation level, there is greater involvement of church leaders.

Reflections

'I would say that we have moved from service-centered activities to rights-based programmes. We have now, young and energetic staff. SBSS is also working effectively in dioceses – involving the congregations. The congregations have begun to own the programmes much more. In my own diocese, the congregations are saying that programmes are their own. Earlier, they used to view these programmes as those of Synod's.' (*Bishop Purely Lyngdoh, Deputy Moderator, Bishop of North Eastern India and former Chairman of SBSS*)

'We see several shifts. The Church Mission Engagement model of capacitating 10 leaders in each of the pastorates is motivating church leaders to go to the field. The new systems such as the cash-flow, CRM and PARAM have made us plan better, bring synergies between various interventions and be more transparent. Getting grassroots people from different DBSSs (Jan Sanghatan) have been very effective.' (*Bharati Charan, Coordinator, Nagpur DBSS*)

Getting Connected To Wider Civil Society Activism

SBSS is now increasingly linked to wider civil society. A recent initiative of SBSS (October, 2007) is their collaboration with Janadesh (organized by the well-known Ekta Parishad), which organized a massive tribal (25,000) march from Gwalior to the capital of India to claim tribal rights over land. This tribal march has set off several positive outcomes.

A few of the SBSS staff have begun to take on expert roles as development professionals – evaluating other development programmes, giving training to other NGOs and being invited as visiting faculty to management institutes.

SBSS has recently completed a study on 'Normative Framework for Transparent Functioning of Collective Forms of Cooperation (CFC)'. This study profiled the models of 11 Collective Forms of Cooperation. This study is being viewed by partners for sharing in wider fora and would be eventually published.

The rights-based paradigm of SBSS has not only widened its ecumenical base but also enhanced its secular orientation.

"Our community structure is transformed. We are now issue based PO covering larger area; and making impacts at the political door. Now our advocacy unit is very inclusive involving many professionals. We are making the right noise at the right time, even as funds are available at the right time" says Daniel Das, Coordinator, SEDP Amritsar...

Relating With Consortium of Partners – With a Difference

While historically, SBSS has had a strong relationship with some of its funding partners, the organizational change process brought a difference to this relationship. There is now a closer interface between the SBSS staff members and funding partners. The staff members now have opportunities to participate and contribute to all consultations with partners – a practice which was unheard of in the history of the organization. This has changed perceptions of both the SBSS staff and funding partners of each other.

On one hand, funding partners were keen to raise accountability standards and demanded a clearer understanding of impacts at the grass roots. On the other hand, a development agency like SBSS had to recognize changes in the global and country context and realign itself to be relevant and responsive to the changing context. Christian Aid, with its country office in India, closely engaged with SBSS in the process of change through interaction with field staff during field visits; through one to one dialogues with the Chief Coordinator and interactions with SBSS HQ staff..

The many documents that SBSS produced – PME (planning, monitoring and evaluation) reports, learning appraisal, systems appraisal etc. provided better understanding and insights to funding partners of not only grassroots processes but the challenges that SBSS continues to contend with.

At the invitation of Christian Aid, Dr. Shailendra Awale visited many churches and supporters of Christian Aid in England. In his interactions, he updated them about Christian Aid's work with Dalits and excluded communities in India and also informed them that their contributions, however small, made a major impact on the lives of poor in India. His visit also provided numerous insights to SBSS about Christian Aid's history, its ecumenical orientation and unique ways of raising funds.

7. Factors that have made the change possible?

Several factors and processes led to this, popularly termed as the 'turn around' of SBSS.

The trigger change process: Role of ERSA

The change process of CNI-SBSS clearly brought out the role played by the ecumenical resource sharing agencies (ERSA)⁶ in the organizational development/restructuring process. One of the important contributions of the ERSA was to relate with SBSS like an 'insider' i.e. at no point in time, the demands of ERSA compelled SBSS to feel the change process is entirely the responsibility of SBSS. On the other hand it was a process where different stakeholders complimented new initiatives appropriately. Thus the role of ERSA and its relationship with SBSS is value driven and based on partnership perspectives and definitely not administered through hire and fire method.

The evaluation of SBSS, which took place on the eve of its silver jubilee year, demanded decisive corrective measures. SBSS did not hesitate to take those measures, but it had to do it with the support of its stakeholders. ERSA took this historical moment in SBSS's organizational history as an opportunity to strengthen and renew a partner who was in cross roads, facing a crisis. It was felt that time had come to trigger change in SBSS, amend irrelevant practices and transform key features into effective development strategies.. At two levels, ERSA played their part, namely i) perspective and ii) process.

At the perspective level, the ERSA asked SBSS to reconsider and revamp its programmes on capacity building; management of programmes through continuous monitoring and evaluation for measuring impact, and perspective building- all of which drive the organisational functions. It was important to counter the increasing challenges of globalisation. As a result, SBSS moved from general intervention to issue-based ones, ably supported by the ERSA. Discussions on such perspectives between ERSA and SBSS were based on certain approaches and conduct. They are:

- Opening up communication channel and free flow of information and sharing kept ERSA and SBSS informed on the change process. Regular feedback helped SBSS to check whether it was on the right track.
- Continuous observation of change; frank and open enquiry on certain steps and processes by ERSA which would otherwise lead to lack of clarity and misconception

⁶ Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst e.V. (EED) Christian Aid and Bread for the World are the Ecumenical Resource Sharing Agencies which share their resources with SBSS. ICCO withdrew from the consortium.

- Constant emphasis on having the importance of database and developing appropriate accountability measures and mechanisms.
- Identifying accompaniers to the change process. It not only identified the accompaniers but made necessary budgetary provisions for this process.
- Supporting, creating space and allowing SBSS the freedom to design apt strategies to work with communities.
- Facilitating linkages with other platforms, networks and ongoing development discourse.
- Taking efforts to support SBSS to each other within the consortium. Especially, it motivated ICCO to support the preparatory phase.
- Emphasized the need to prepare its strategic plan through a participatory planning process
- Categorically informed SBSS about the need to have a professional who has a broad understanding of development issues and skills to manage an organisation like SBSS. Having expressed the desirable qualities of the leader, ERSA visited SBSS often to meet the head of the organisation and reorient him in necessary ways.
- Never failed to convey that SBSS needed to take responsibility and own consequences, if despite efforts it failed to bring about change.

This was a kind of development cooperation, where each stakeholder took responsibility for change and yet shared in the processes.

Leadership

The facilitative style of leadership of the Chief Coordinator has encouraged the staff to learn, self-define their roles and perform. He made himself accessible to the staff, created many opportunities for the staff to prove their potential. He believed that 'ordinary individuals have the potential to bring change.' The Chief Coordinator made special efforts to bring interconnectedness, team spirit, analytical orientation among the staff, provoking them to be on the learning path.

To prepare the staff for the change and grow within the organization, the Chief Coordinator encouraged the staff go through behavioral science labs to be analytically reflective and process oriented. This enabled and prepared staff to journey with certain sensitivity in the change process. These staff members captured opportunities to learn and capacitate themselves and are now the front-runners of the organization.

All through the change process, the Chief Coordinator maintained that he was both a 'subject and object'. 'At no point of time was he defensive and was open to suggestions', commented one of the funders.

What stands out is the role and contribution made by a small group of committed staff to journey with the Chief Coordinator to translate the organizational vision. The

Chief Coordinator has made conscious efforts to bring women into decision-making positions, especially in the second line of leadership. Similar efforts were made to have women representatives on the governing body too. More importantly, women were made to feel secure in their place of work or while traveling – which has received much appreciation.

Reflections

‘Our programmes are planned as per perspectives that SBSS speaks for. The staffs have a lot of freedom at work which is because of the change in leadership. Our Chief Coordinator is facilitative and not threatening. Changes are more visible within SBSS and have to transcend to partners. I have changed too. I am more accepting of my colleagues – a quality I have learnt from my leader.’ (*John S. Kumar, Group Facilitator Development Communication*)

‘He never said ‘no’ to me. I might have made mistakes, but I was never questioned nor discouraged. His leadership was suggestive, often innovative and altogether facilitative. For the new structures and systems that we were positioning, this way of functioning was needed. (*Lolati, Former Group Facilitator, RCSA, Ranchi*)

‘I have gone through a couple of trainings - behavioural science human lab and team management. In all my service, I have never been sent on training which I appreciate.’ (*Deepshika Khan, Office Manager, Head Office*)

Developing Rights-based Perspectives

The biggest challenge for SBSS is developing a rights-based perspective with its partners. SBSS went through several internal dialogues and consultations to build consensus on shared perspectives. Manthan (Churning) – A major gathering of SBSS and its partners held in 2004 was one such. This was a major event, which brought clarity on strategic interventions on land-rights, livelihood and food security and identity and exclusion. Experts were invited to give their inputs for enhancing SBSS’s perspectives. SBSS developed a three-phased ten-year perspective plan. Subsequently, a three-year strategic plan was evolved. Both the perspective plan and strategic action plan were ratified by the Synod in October, 2005.

The perspective plan emphasizes that all development interventions have to be rights-based, process-oriented and be rooted in values of people’s participation, mutual sharing, accountability, transparency and commitment. Every plan should be built on the previous plans and adopt the four ‘A’ approach of analysis, assistance, action and advocacy. This should eventually lead to mobilization, movement building and an alternative political force.

‘I see transfer of knowledge, especially on rights issues. The rights-based understanding has increased within SBSS. What was local to the DBSSs in Maharashtra which promoted people’s movements and rights-based issues has spread across to other

regions too. People are now talking about rights (adhikar). What is heartening is that few staffs are ready to take up challenges and are in confrontation mode.’ (Mervin Mackwan, Group Facilitator, Land rights and People’s Organizations)

“We were just self help groups collecting and distributing our small money. Now we talk about big issues. We take a political stand on issues. Party leaders think twice before they talk with us” says Moni Gogoi of PNJSS

“We are now more focused on issues. Most of the DBSSs are action-oriented. People are now more oriented towards rallies and dharnas. In my role, I have challenged myself by taking more assignments to bring about impacts. My changed attitudes helped me in my work. The positive response from my Chief Coordinator helped.” (Deepak Singh, Group Facilitator and Team Leader, RCSA, Agra)

Restructuring SBSS

A major exercise that SBSS undertook was to restructure the organization to make it non-hierarchical, team-oriented and well coordinated. From the very beginning, the Chief Coordinator allowed the staff to self-define their roles, encouraged them to take on multiple roles and multi-task themselves. During the entire change process, the staff mandated to work in teams, capacitate themselves on the job and be leaders in their positions. Today, this exercise has paid rich dividends.

SBSS experimented with several organizational arrangements before it put together the present structure. The present structure has three functional streams – Programme Resource Team (PRT), which brings expertise for accompanying the DBSSs, Programme Facilitation Team (PFT), which takes on the role of monitoring DBSSs and Programme Support which gives administrative and financial support.

SBSS has also transformed the former zones into Regional Centers for Social Action in 2005. Each of the four RCSAs give special focus which include livelihood and food security (Agra), land rights and Dalit studies (Pune), action research on livelihood and food security (Kolkata) and indigenous rights and tribal concerns (Ranchi). The purpose of these CNI-RCSAs is to emerge as resource centers for DBSSs and for the universe of Church of North India. Gender, policy and campaign, Advocacy and Networking (LAN) and Church Mission Engagement (CME) have been integrated as crosscutting themes.

Reflections

‘There is a diminished sense of hierarchy in the organization. There is also greater scope for individual growth. Our accompaniment model has altered too. Now teams instead of individuals facilitate DBSSs. We are still a growing organization. As a resource organization, SBSS will have to go beyond the boundaries of DBSSs.’ (*Bibhu Dutta Sabu: Coordinator, Facilitation Team*)

'The staffs have learnt, and some are eager to undertake more than one role. Though a finance person, I am also taking roles in programme administration. Similarly, programme persons are expected to know basic things about finance. I have gone beyond finance because of the opportunities given to me, I know myself better.'
(Bidyut Ranjan Sagar (Group Facilitator, Finance, RCSA Agra)

'Although there is competition and we want to excel individually, when tasks are given, we work as a team. Earlier, I was holding a senior position. Because of the organizational restructuring, I am no longer in that position. But I have learnt to be a part of the process and I have learnt to appreciate the work of others.'
(Rev. Mrs Manoj Manjari Nanda, Associate Coordinator, Church Mission Engagement, RCSA Agra)

'What has made me happy is that I am able to stay in my state – Jharkhand, and do meaningful work. I worked in northeast where I saw our tribals from Jharkhand domiciled there. I have learned a lot.'
(Sudeep Sanchit Tigga, Programme Associate, Acting Team Leader, RCSA Ranchi)

'As a facilitator, my accompanying visits to the DBSSs are planned and have become purposeful. A unique shift that I notice is the issue-based interventions we are now making.'
(Ashanand Tandy, Programme Associate, RCSA Barrackpore)

Streamlining Systems

What strikes the eye most are the many systems that SBSS has developed to promote accountability and transparency. While initially, SBSS, continued with its mandatory reports from partners, it began to introduce new systems of communication through e-mail at the central, regional and DBSS level. Use of computers has been a useful addition to the work culture of SBSS.

Promoting Transparency and Accountability

One of the important achievements of SBSS is to set up systems that promote transparent and accountable ways of functioning. Three of these systems are worth mentioning

The first set is the interlinked systems of the cost-reimbursement model (CRM) and cash-flows. The CRM gives DBSSs seed money that amounts to two month's average cost for the programme, two month's staff salary and administrative costs, based on the 6-month cash flow submitted by the DBSSs. The DBSSs cash flows are prepared on a monthly basis for a period of 6 months by DBSSs with the accompaniment of SBSS. Cash flow details programme activities with justifications and is submitted to SBSS through RCSAs. Cash flows are shared with the community.

'Financial management is now much more decentralized. There is collective effort in financial management. Earlier it was just one man. Finance staff and I are given opportunities to participate in all activities, even at the field level. I have more

responsibilities. The most striking change is that SBSS now has a call and definite goal.’ (Santosh George, Finance Manager, Head Office)

Programme Activity Review and Accompaniment (PARAM)

PARAM is a web-based (PME) system which mandates the DBSSs to share all their activities before the 10th of every month. For SBSS and RCSAs, PARAM is a monitoring tool for reporting and planning. For SBSS itself, PARAM offers a direct line of communication with DBSSs. PARAM is still evolving and could emerge as a model.

Creating Database for Planning and Monitoring

It was only in 2006 that SBSS realized the importance of creating an extensive and dynamic database. Database exercise proved to be an effective entry point to come closer to people and update the existing data. The database exercise has had several outcomes – sharpened the analytical skills of the staff, brought out new issues for interventions, advocacy work and above all for effective planning and monitoring impacts.

Reflection

‘The database exercise was strenuous but it brought us closer to people. We have also become much more process-oriented. All this has increased community participation.’

‘We now have many systems which were not there earlier. We are also making good use of new technologies. We have to bring similar changes in DBSSs, which will bring synergies between SBSS and DBSSs. I have changed too. I have gained confidence and now relate more confidently with my colleagues.’ (*Elizabeth Martin, Programme Associate, PARAM*)

Conclusion: Making SBSS - A Learning Organization

A constant reminder by the Chief Coordinator to his staff has been, - ‘To bring change, we have to be vulnerable and critique ourselves.’ Since 2004, SBSS has conducted one learning appraisal exercise and one systems appraisal for organizational learning. There are staff appraisals on the lines of appreciative Inquiry (AI) which puts the staff in an open culture of learning; encourages them to reflect, and puts them on the path of enhancing their skills. SBSS conducts regular annual accompaniers' meet of the staff, which provides platforms to assess individual performance, share diocesan concerns and understand better collective forms of cooperation that SBSS engages in.

SBSS continues to have its share of challenges that stem from rigidities of old mindsets and residues of earlier structures in some packets of the organization. The leadership has dealt with dissonance and conflict contextually. There have been instances where SBSS had to discontinue partners' programmes due to poor performance but renewed them once the partners came back on track – which was not the practice in the past.

Nevertheless, the major challenge of the SBSS and its leadership, as Dr. Shailendra observes, 'We have to sustain the change that has been achieved to move ahead. As we move forward, we want to be a resource for contextual theology to respond to global challenges. Our dream is to make the people's movement within the church.'

Reflection

'I am very excited. I never thought that we would do all this. If we put all the pieces together, I see that we have gone beyond our expectations and hope. There is still a lot of work with DBSSs.. Systems and processes have to be fine tuned further to ensure a sustained change. If the committed staffs are sufficiently challenged, they can take the process forward. The change process has come to a meaningful conclusion. (*Shailendra Awale, Chief Coordinator, SBSS*)

**And our journey continues.....changing destinations to milestones....
To His Glory and services of His creation**