

Mobilising Communities to Build Community Based Organisations



SOCIAL ACTION FOR COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVE LEARNING (SACAL)

Background and Overview

Trócaire has supported community mobilisation and institution building in Gajapati District, Odisha, India since 2009 through its partner organisation, SACAL. The work contributes to an important need in the district, as is evidenced from socio-economic underdevelopment in the tribal areas, despite the abundance of natural resources. This is due to high illiteracy levels, low education levels and lack of knowledge about government social security schemes and facilities. The Six-year community mobilisation programme aimed at building community based organisations CBOs towards increased participation in decision making around priority issues in the village and ensuring access to rights by monitoring different village level state service delivery groups.

The programme started in the 51 villages of five Gram Panchayats¹ of Mohana Block by partner organisation, SACAL. The core components of the programme were: building capacities, formation and strengthening of the CBOs² at village and Panchayat levels, increasing awareness of rights and entitlements and helping to shape the communities' perspective on village development. A community mobilisation approach was adopted to promote and protect

the rights and interests of vulnerable communities (tribals, dalits, elderly individuals, widows and persons with disabilities) through the integrated efforts of the different collectives. Village Development Committees (VDC) were



▲ Diagram 1: The diagram shows the scope of monitoring by the Village Development Committee of village level state service delivery groups

¹ A village-level statutory democratic institution of local self-government that has been given constitutional status under 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Indian Constitution.

² Village Development Committees and Panchayat Development Committees: People federations formed at two levels (Village and Panchayat) to enable community to assert their rights at large. These bodies are autonomous and not controlled by external agencies.

formed in all 51 villages. Furthermore to exert pressure at higher level, the VDCs were federated into four Panchayat Development Committees (PDC). Leadership development of committee members was a key component to promote the sustainability of these CBOs.

The VDCs and the PDCs are the sole bodies to choose and

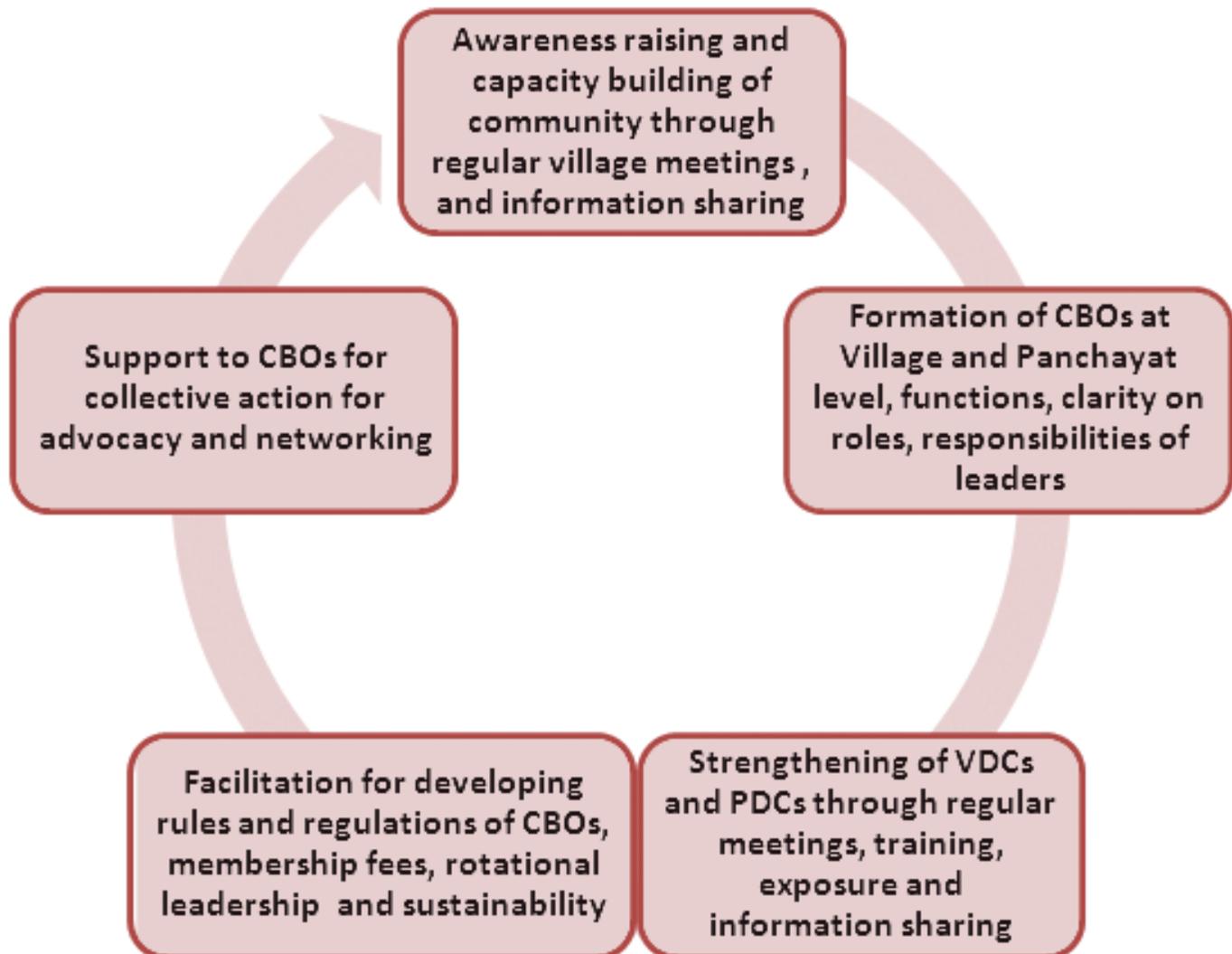
finalise beneficiaries for any village project or government support. Only a PDC can challenge the decision of the VDCs, in case of conflicts. Experience shows that such an arrangement greatly helps during emergencies and disasters, i.e. in the post cyclone Phailin situation, relief and rehabilitation works were planned, executed and monitored effectively by these bodies.

Table - 1: Structure and Roles of Community Based Organisations

		STRUCTURE	ROLES
POPULATION COVERING 2000-10000 VOTERS IN AREA	PANCHAYAT DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (PDC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Apex bodies at the Gram Panchayat level comprising two members from each VDC from the respective Gram Panchayat. ● General body is 16 to 40 members (50 % men and 50 % women) who elect their Secretary, President and Treasurer for a period of two years. ● Meets once a quarter. ● Have their own fund mobilisation strategy through collecting membership fees. ● 3 PDCs have their own office premises. They have their joint bank passbooks operated and maintained by the Secretary, President and Treasurer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support to the coordinates and monitors the Gram Panchayat level activities and support VDCs in their regular activities. ● Sometimes multiple PDCs in more than one Gram Panchayat work on a particular issue through demonstration, rallies and dialogues with government for any community development activity.
VILLAGE LEVEL	VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (VDC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Key institutions at hamlet or village level and comprise 7 to 15 representatives from 80 to 100 families depending on the size of the village and all the adult members in the village are members of the VDC general body (50 % men and 50 % women). Members are elected for a period of 2 years, with rotational leadership. ● President, Secretary and Treasurer are the three office bearers of a VDC, assisted by 2 to 5 members. Meets once a month. ● VDCs interact with all state service delivery bodies at village level. ● All the members of the general body contribute annual membership fees both in cash or kind, as fixed by the committee from time to time. ● During the monthly meetings, decisions are taken on the expenditure plan for the coming months and contingencies are approved in the meetings. The account books and other financial matters are discussed in the monthly VDC meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Each VDC develop their 5 year perspective plan on all fronts: health, education, water, infrastructure development, forest protection, agriculture, horticulture and other development issues critical to the village. ● The perspective plans help them monitor progress of activities, articulate their own needs and work towards a common goal. They present those plans at Palli and Gram Sabhas and get them incorporated into Gram Panchayat plans. ● VDC work toward collective village development activities. They extend support to the Sub-Committees in discharging their regular functions, assist them in accessing resources and help them achieve their objectives. Mostly their activities can be broadly headed into coordination, establishment of linkages and support.

Strategies used

The diagram below shows the five core strategies used within the programme.



Impact

Village level state service delivery groups functioning better:

According to the survey conducted by SACAL on the issue of grievances on land records, out of a total of 1357 families in the operational area, 428 are landless and 173 are homestead landless families. SACAL organised four workshops to facilitate the coordination process with government Revenue Inspectors to issue land titles. All 428 landless and 173 homestead landless families received their land records from the government revenue department as a result. In addition,

2856 of 4534 eligible families received land entitlements under the Forest Rights Act 2006³. 38 Self Help Groups developed their links with the Odisha Livelihood Mission for Income Generation Activities. 35 women became village health workers, in charge of child health care by government, teachers and other village level government workers.

Bankajhula village is four kilometres away from the Gram Panchayat headquarters of Chandiput. Buranala is a rivulet that separates the village from two others, Chatiapada and Kakrapalli. Inhabited by 43 families with a population of 768, the villagers had to cross

³ The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 popularly known as the Forest Rights Act 2006 is considered ground-breaking legislation that intends to recognise the rights of millions of tribals and other forest dwellers in different parts of India as it provides for the restitution of deprived forest rights across the country, including both individual rights to cultivated land in forestland and community rights over common property resources.

the rivulet to get to schools, college, the hospital, the market, Gram Panchayat office, the Block office and the bank. The local administration and government had not been responsive to people's demands, so the communities decided to take matters into their own hands. Initially the communities constructed a temporary stone crossing over the rivulet, which could only be used during winter and summer days. In the rainy season, they were unable to use the structure as it mostly remained submerged. The VDCs submitted a written request for the construction of a bridge over the rivulet to government departments at the Block development office and district collector office. The government built a temporary bridge but it washed away in 2013 during Cyclone Phailin. The VDCs again approached the authorities requesting the bridge be rebuilt but the government did not respond. The VDC decided to make a wooden bridge with some support from SACAL. The wooden bridge was constructed but unfortunately it faced the same problem. In the same year Cyclone Hudhud washed away the structure. Once again all the VDCs sat together along with the SACAL team to share their decision. This time also the village communities including women, adults and children came forward to contribute labour and materials for the construction of a wooden bridge. Within a few days, the stronger and more stable bridge was completed. It connects 14 villages to the outside world, facilitating their accessibility to education, health and market.

Pressure group created to ensure basic rights and entitlements of community:

Community level participation has increased in Palli Sabha and Gram Sabha. Communities are involved in preparation

and presentation of micro-plans of the village. Women participation has increased by 50% in the Palli Sabha and Gram Sabha meetings according to baseline information. Women are also playing a vital role in the anti liquor campaign and proper implementation of the government job scheme. In the 2012 election, 12 women members elected as Panchayat representatives out of 17 women running in Panchayat elections. VDC and PDC worked as a pressure group for addressing irregularities in teaching in primary schools successfully in coordination with the Block Education Officer. Out of the total 37 primary schools in the operational area, teaching is being imparted regularly in 28 schools. Village health workers are actively engaged in 36 out of 51 villages in the operational area.

Enhanced food security:

SACAL also carries out training and field demonstrations for CBO's members on System of Rice Intensification (SRI)⁴, the adverse effects of using chemical fertilisers, how to make and use organic manure and compost for better harvest. Trainings were conducted with marginalised farmers on improved and sustainable upland agriculture (millet cultivation), soil conservation, preparation and use of vermin compost, use of improved seeds, improved method of paddy cultivation, vegetables, pulses and oil seed cultivation for empowering marginalised farmers to play a vital role for restoring traditional agriculture.

- Organic System of Rice Intensification (SRI) is adopted by 628 farmers in 428 acres covering land in the 43 villages in Mohana Block, which has increased productivity and ensured food security.
- Sixty acres of millet was cultivated using the SRI method by 121 farmers in 41 villages with a 3-8 quintals increase in yield. 921 beneficiaries cultivated 715 acres of vegetables including 75 acres of land of mixed crops which obtained surplus income for 18,000-20,000 INR in a year.



⁴ The System of Rice Intensification (SRI) is a methodology aimed at increasing the yield of rice produced in farming and rice growing regions from world known about this. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/System_of_Rice_Intensification

- 5 villages switched to using the SRI method (millet and rice) and 42 villages growing off season vegetables organically over the past 4-5 years.
- 728 farmers of 16 villages are practicing using organic input (liquid manure and vermin compost) regularly. With the support of the government agriculture institution, 10 farmers

clubs successfully cultivated vegetables like tomato, brinjal, cauliflower, cabbage and beans on a total of 76 acres of land. Farmers sold the surplus produce in the market and could make an average profit 20,000 INR each in a year.

- 127 beneficiaries in 18 villages have cultivated potato on 42 acres of land and 118 beneficiaries have cultivated chilly on 19 acres of land.



In 2004, Kama Paika's husband died suddenly and she was left without any means to support herself and her 5 daughters. She thought her only options were to work as a wage labourer or forage for food in the forest. Though her family possessed one acre of agricultural land, farming was not considered a women's job in her society due to its demanding nature both physically and psychologically. In the same year SACAL had started an intervention in the Govindpur village and the VDC selected Kama Paika as one of the poorest of the poor beneficiaries and given support for vegetable cultivation. The VDC contributed seeds and labour to develop her land while SACAL provided training and exposure to develop her skills and expertise. She managed to obtain a house under the government housing scheme.

SACAL provided training and exposure to develop her skills and expertise

Gradually she became a member of a Self Help Group and received an internal group loan to undertake economic activity. In a year she started silk farming, making her a 20,000 INR profit. Another year she focused on brick making and received a profit of 60,000 INR. Gradually she repaid all her loans and started creating productive assets and became a skilled farmer. "I tried on various economic activities and underwent many financial strains. But I never lost hope nor my determination and that's the reason now I am economically independent and a self-sufficient woman who takes care of her daughters. All my daughters are going to school and I would never allow them to face the same struggle that I faced. At least I shall educate them so that they can earn their own livelihood.



▲ Small group discussion in the village

Challenges

Prioritising gender in the programme:

SACAL tried to work toward women empowerment through ensuring a 50% participation of women in VDCs and PDCs and in most villages women are one of the key office bearers in the VDC. This also ensures that they then are one of the representatives at the PDC. Women also participate in the Palli Sabha but their participation could be stronger. Despite the above, SACAL did not have a clear gender mainstreaming strategy and the focus of activities has mostly been practical rather than strategic towards changing the power dynamics in the household/village. This remains an ongoing challenge which needs to be addressed through training women on a variety of topics to help develop their knowledge, skills and leadership.

Staff Rotation:

There was a high turnover of staff within SACAL during the implementation period, mostly due to people leaving to take up government jobs, which provided weaker salaries, but security in the long term.

Hybrid seeds and subsidies in chemical farming promoted by government is a threat to organic agriculture promoted by the organisation:

Government in its attempt to increase production has come out with lots of subsidised schemes like hybrid maize, hybrid rice and Bt Cotton with subsidized chemical fertiliser. Many people opt for these subsidies rather than understanding the after-effect they may have on their lands. SACAL has been working to address these challenges by awareness generation on the adverse effects of chemical farming and also promoting conservation and multiplication of traditional varieties of seeds but it remains an ongoing challenge.

Climate change and natural disasters:

Natural disasters like Cyclones Phailin and Hudhud are now becoming recurrent due to climate change and small farmers are not able to deal with them. The Government does not have any disaster mitigation plan. Efforts are made to mobilise the communities for organic farming with traditional seeds which are more climate resilient but this is an ongoing challenge.

Lessons Learnt



- Nurturing and strengthening of community organisations is the most effective tool for holistic community development as the people are involved in the process of identification of needs and map their development plan. However, these community organisations need a lot of accompaniment and support and also need to have their own fundraising strategy for sustainability.
- Micro plans through participatory processes can ensure that women-specific needs are identified and presented at Palli Sabha and Gram Sabha.
- VDCs and PDCs should have a strategy to mediate in minor disputes. However, it is difficult for the community organisations to handle conflicts of a larger magnitude.



▲ Ushabati Paik, Andiragarh village—standing in her vegetable farm.

Conclusion

Community based organisations (CBOs) are key to social and economic developments and thus, sustainability of such organisations is critical to ensure holistic community development. SACAL has adopted a number of strategies to promote sustainability in the CBOs through mechanisms that enhance responsibility and accountability, such as ensuring every VDC has their own bank account and raises their own funds for operation, maintenance, unforeseen expenditure. They also ensured that Sub Committees were created to strengthen internal accountability. The effort invested in strengthening CBOs has yielded results in many villages and the convergence with government programmes has helped to bring a lot of change in the area.

Contributed by:



SOCIAL ACTION FOR COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVE LEARNING (SACAL)

Nilachal Nagar, 5th Lane, H. No. EL/21,
Berhampur, Ganjam-760010,
Tel. No. 09438770360, 09437018590(M)
Email ID: sacalodisha@gmail.com,
Website: www.sacalodisha.org

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Trócaire
Trócaire
working for a just world

Trócaire India Office
S-30, Phase-II, Maitri Vihar Road
Maitri Vihar, Bhubaneswar-751023

www.trocaire.org