Reforming Local Governance for Responsive and Effective Service Deliveries in Selected Blocks of Rajasthan

Supported by: DASRA/APPI

Place: Hotel Rara Avis, Banswara, Banswara District, Rajasthan

Date: 3rd & 4th August, 2017
Context

PRIA (Society of Participatory Research in Asia) has been working on the field of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) in 3 blocks over the past 6 months. This is a multilevel project which has inputs from staff at the national, state, district and block level. These blocks where the work is being implemented are: Govindgarh in Jaipur district; and Banswara and Talwara in Banswara district of Rajasthan. Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative and Dara are PRIA’s partners in this work. These locations were chosen on the basis of poor maternal and child health indicators as well as the history of past PRIA interventions. There was also an insufficient engagement local institution of like the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and civil society groups that could make a difference. PRIA’s intervention on maternal and child health (MCH) is through building capacities of the capabilities of local communities to engage with MCH through the facilitation of PRIs.

The work being on the demand side of the issues of MCH has met with a number of challenges particularly with building an environment which enables local communities to address MCH issues. It was noticed that there was a certain gap that was emerging in the understanding of the program by the PRIA staff and animators who were implementing it. This led to a sporadic and episodic engagement that was oriented towards the fulfilment of tasks. This can be traced to an inability to understand the role of individual activities within the larger aims of the project.

The participants came from diverse backgrounds and experiences from those the field of education, work in public health awareness, strengthening PRIs, informal labour market etc. Many did not have experience of dealing with Government officials and publically elected officials at different levels. There was also the need to build confidence of participants in public speaking to fulfil their role in the field.

There was a need for a program build a minimum common understanding of the work that is being done. The workshop was also an assessment of the quality of engagement of all the participants involved in the work of the projects.

Objectives

i) To develop a minimum common understanding of the work of the project.

ii) To understand the need for team work and the interpersonal skills required for it.

iii) To understand how the each participant’s role was in the aims and objectives of the project.

iv) To use both a formal and informal setting to dissolve hierarchical barriers that is present due to roles and responsibilities.

v) To understand the personal and professional challenges that field animators and program staff face every day in their line of work.
Process

i) The modules focussed on introducing the participants to the background of the location, aims of project were effective in building a basic understanding while at the same time not diverting the attention of any participants.

ii) An interesting point that emerged from the introductory session on Banswara is that it is a location blessed with sufficient natural resources and is frequented by the affluent due to some ancient temples being located in it. The neglect of public health in Banswara emerges in a different context as a result. It is not paucity in local resources that have caused it to lag behind but rather structural neglect.

Day 1 - Group Discussion on Aims and Outcomes of the Project

iii) Sessions on Maternal health were handled very competently but perhaps a need for more interaction between participants and facilitator.

iv) The sessions on community mobilization and volunteerism were insightful in briefing participants about its potential and how it could be of use in the project.

v) Some of the animators among the participants showed great potential for work in the future and were keeping themselves engaged with all the sessions, asking frequent questions and participating in the activities.

vi) While some of the other participants were quiet in the beginning of the sessions. This was because they were new recruits and were taking time to adjust to the environment of the workshop.

vii) The effect of a lifetime of conditioning of an education system focussed only on rote learning was evident among some of the participants. To make the switch from the default mode of being force fed knowledge to one of experiential
learning that requires reflection of actions and thoughts was challenging for all involved.

**Day 2 - Group discussion on Volunteers Engagement and Cooperation with the government- Group Discussion**

viii) The picture from the side of the program side presents challenges which need to be overcome. There is a need for greater sharing of knowledge and information between them. The lack of sharing affects the kind of bottom up demand which can facilitate need awareness and efforts to fill gaps from the State Office in Jaipur and the Delhi Head Office.

ix) The logistical efforts in organizing the workshop were efficiently done and the program as well as arrangements for food and shelter went ahead as planned.

**Lessons**

i) Old habits of constantly looking for guidance from the Rajasthan State Office and Delhi Head Office have lessened. An organic group up generation of ideas is beginning to take place.

ii) The personal and professional growth of some of the animators has been impressive and humbling. With more encouragement and mentorship they can truly become the ambassadors of PRIA’s work and philosophy.

iii) In the days ahead it will be important to identify and categorize animators into those with potential and those with out and focus all our efforts on the former.

iv) Related to the above if these animators grow as we expect, we can think of making them take up larger responsibilities through greater roles in future.

v) Field animators have derived a positive identity from their work and this is reflected in their stature among their peers and in their families.

vi) The session on the basic of MCH was effective and this base will be built on in future programs.
vii) The free flow of greetings and photos once the sessions ended was testament to the breaking of barriers between participants. As can be clearly seen in the photo below.

viii) Many of the participants stayed up till late at night with their newly found friends. At some level, the workshop aim of creating a shared experience and environment had succeeded. At the end of the program the scores of photographs taken by the participants were a testament to their desire to have a record of what happened there.

ix) The interactions between staff and animators in the informal spaces between the sessions and afterwards resulted in regional barriers dissolving and participants being ready to listen. This helped build up a team spirit dissolving and participants being ready to listen. This helped build up a team spirit and feeling.

x) A cultural program was organized on the night of 3rd of August, 2017 where all members of the program sang and danced. The dancing programs were a revelation in one respect as the tribal influences on the aesthetics of song and dance were clearly visible.

In terms of feedback, Neharika Chaubisa a field animator from Banswara confessed later that, “This was the first time I had volunteered to dance in a program. In school I never participated in any such event, and I thought if not now than when would I again get such an opportunity?” The value and worth of the work to their identity and life came out quite strongly.

Day 1: Cultural Event - Group Dance

xi) At the end of the program, one of the animators Seema Sharma from Govindgarh, Jaipur when asked what she wanted to do with her life in the days ahead said that after leaving the confines of Jaipur district for the first time in her life, “I have realized how big the world is and I’m thinking very hard of what my role in it should be”. This is itself is notable as previously she was thinking of becoming a teacher and was now striving for something
Follow Up

i) Changes in policy of reporting by allowing the Jaipur state office to take charge and the making PRIA staff responsible for specific tasks in multiple locations will make a difference in improving quality of the work.

ii) The success of this event has led to the planning of a series of similar events to be conducted periodically in order to build on the gains made at this event.

iii) This will focus on building technical capabilities such as those dealing with taboos around MCH as well as a through grounding on soft skills such a public speaking, writing reports, writing skills, computer skills etc. In addition a thorough briefing on the Panchayati Raj system and how it forms the governance systems in the locations where they work.

iv) Building up all members of the PRIA team in Rajasthan to become leaders of their work who have it in them to come up with ideas and take initiatives to take the work forward from the ground up.

v) Close cross-monitoring of all locations and regular feedback from the ground is essential in the days ahead.