

REACH India: Capacity Building Approach



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Among the unique features of the REACH India project has been the selection of NGOs, monitoring, sharing of good practices, exchange of technical know-how and financial practices that have been undertaken by Capacity Building Grantees. These NGOs who are fairly large, well-established and competent were selected by REACH India to play the role of a mother NGO by providing support to smaller NGOs to reach out to large numbers of at-risk children.

The rationale was that many of the at-risk children lived in deeply isolated pockets of rural and urban India. It was often difficult for large, established NGOs to reach out to these children as the local communities, for various reasons, were unable to educate their children. It was not so easy for these agencies to influence opinion in these pockets and gain the confidence of these vulnerable communities. Local talent had to be tapped, people whom these communities could accept as their own. So, it was essential to develop the capacities of smaller NGOs working in these areas to reach out to these vulnerable children.

The Capacity Building NGOs strengthened the core competencies of smaller NGOs by focusing on organizational development, quality education, monitoring and evaluation, and financial administration. The Capacity Building NGOs were directly responsible to REACH India and implemented the programme with five or six partner NGOs known as sub-grantees.

No better way of learning than teaching

This has been a unique experiment and a win-win situation for both partners. For the Capacity Building Grantees, it was an excellent opportunity to monitor and manage smaller NGOs and reach out to various difficult-to-reach sections of society by using the goodwill of these small NGOs. It was also a unique opportunity for learning through role reversal from having an implementing role to that of a donor and monitor. For many of them, it was also a chance to learn from some innovative field practices of the smaller NGOs and adapt them into their own implementation process.

For the sub-grantees, many of them operating from the remotest and most difficult areas, it has been a great opportunity to work on a structured programme with a donor agency. It gave them the opportunity to engage systematically with educational issues and develop their programmatic, financial and technical capabilities with guidance from the mother NGOs. Moreover, by working on a well-defined programme, these NGOs, by networking constantly with key stakeholders in their area, such as the district education authorities, local self governments, community groups and school teachers, have been able to enhance their own reputation and also raise awareness on issues pertaining to education.

The REACH India approach to 'Capacity Building' gave birth to a variety of approaches through which the capacities of smaller NGOs could be built. The most notable were:

- The Cascading Approach – adopted by Deepalaya and Prayas Juvenile Aid Centre Society in Delhi; Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra in Jharkhand; Cini-ASHA and City Level Programme Of Action For Street And Working Children in Kolkata, and Akshara Foundation and Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement in Karnataka
- The Demonstration Approach adopted by Digdarshika Institute of Rehabilitation and Research and Naandi Foundation in Chhattisgarh
- The Apprentice Approach adopted by Vikramshila Education Resource Society in Kolkata

The Cascading Approach

The objectives of this approach were to help develop sustainable organizations, create standardization, and yet leave space for innovations. The strengths were the creation of a wide network, and the network could then utilize the strengths of all the sub-grantee organizations, as well as the individual linkages with government. The large network would also be able to create pressure on policy makers.

Of the ten Capacity Building Organizations, seven adopted this approach. For Deepalaya, the largest operational NGO in Delhi which has directly reached out to more than 50,000 children, capacity building was a different act. The status of being recognized as a 'Resource' NGO was a challenging and learning experience. The organization with its vast and varied experience decided to deliberately opt for the role of a capacity building grantee when funds from REACH India came its way.

Deepalaya adopted a systematic and transparent process to shortlist 11 NGOs which worked in remote areas for the benefit of at-risk children. Out of these eleven, six were selected for implementing the programme.

One of the major tasks was to build the overall capacity and capabilities of these NGOs in running the project in an efficient and 'professional' manner. A series of training and capacity building programmes were undertaken to achieve this objective. The process which began with workshops in October 2005 with 'Basics of Pedagogy' was continuous, ending only in July 2007. In all, 42 capacity building workshops with an array of interesting and strategic topics were conducted for the benefit of 1,292 personnel from these selected NGOs. Some of the topics that were covered in these training sessions included minimum level of learning and class management, quality education, logical framework approach, principals of learning and lesson design, curriculum development, resource mobilization and financial management among others.

As the capacity building process was continuing at one end, Deepalaya conducted a series of exposure visits for the DRIP partners to learn and imbibe from first hand experiences. Groups consisting of programme coordinators and teachers of these selected NGO were taken to visit the Model Nursery School of NCERT at the IIT campus and to Kathashala at Tuglakabadh in Delhi in August 2005. This was followed by an exposure visit to Bodh Shiksha Sansthan, Jaipur in October, 2005.

The Demonstration Approach

Here, the approach is showing by doing. The Capacity Building NGO first implements the project, and the partner observes, but does not participate. In the next stage both the Capacity Building NGOs and the partners implement. Next, the partners act and the Capacity Building NGO observes. Finally, the Capacity Building NGO withdraws and the sub-grantees continue. Generally, the approach makes it more contextual, the Capacity Building NGO is actually on-site where the sub-grantee is implementing and hence understands the issues better. The human resource development is more intensive. There is constant learning, continued technical support and concurrent feedback.

The Digdarshika Institute of Rehabilitation and Research established in the year 1989 in Bhopal, is an NGO specializing in disabilities and mental health. With the assistance of REACH India, the organization is supporting five NGOs working on inclusive education and reaching out to 3,000 children with disabilities in the geographical regions of Raipur, Bilaspur, Jagdalpur, Bishrampur and Korba of Chhattisgarh.

The basic idea behind identifying and working with different grass root NGOs for the project 'TEAM' (Training and Education for Access to the Mainstream) was to reach out to as many as possible vulnerable children who were living in remote and tribal areas of Chhattisgarh. The mandate of Digdarshika under the REACH India project was to build the capacities of these NGOs and work on a specific and sustained intervention with clear deliverables for the benefit of the disabled children.

A structured project implementation plan in a three-phased manner was chalked out for reaching the project goal of 'TEAM'. The first phase was aimed at building the vision and work culture of the organization through a demonstration approach designed by Digdarshika. Under this phase the selected NGOs were sensitized to the particular intervention and were shown how the programme should be implemented by Digdarshika experts. This was followed by encouraging the NGOs to start work on the intervention along with Digdarshika volunteers with proper handholding. The third phase included handing over the ownership of the intervention to the NGO with Digdarshika taking over the role of an observer. This three-phase intervention was a continuous process evolving from one intervention to another as the project progressed.

At the beginning of the project, frequent meetings were held with the NGOs and the areas of intervention identified. The project area was comprised of a total of 800 villages in five districts. This was followed by Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA) in the selected villages for identifying disabled children. A total of 10,000 children were thus identified as per the exercise which continued for an average of two days in a particular village. Apart from identifying children with various disabilities, various other data including the number of children attending school, the parents' occupation, the number of teachers in the village, etc. were also collected.

This was followed by a proper screening and assessment process, involving officials and doctors and psychologists from the District Rehabilitation Centers under the Department Of Social Welfare, Government of Chhattisgarh, district hospitals and Digdarshika, wherein the actual children who fell within the parameters of the disabled and in the age group of six to fourteen were identified for the project. These children were then issued certificates and other aids and appliances meant for the disabled under various schemes by the government.

The basic idea behind the identification of these children was to educate them and mainstream the ones who can go to school. Many among the identified 3,000 primary school age children had never been to school, while even some of the enrolled disabled children did not attend school on a regular basis and were on the verge of discontinuing their studies.

As a part of developing awareness and sensitizing the various stakeholders, a number of advocacy activities were initiated. These included street plays, film shows and focused group discussions with the panchayat members. Awareness materials in the form of posters and banners, audio music CDs, were distributed in the project areas to build awareness about the project before the real interventions started.

The Apprentice Approach

As the name implies, in this approach, the Capacity Building NGO treats the sub-grantee as an apprentice and provides holistic learning from grass roots issues to macro issues. It includes working closely together to identify stakeholders, involving community, assessment of issues and resources in the specific area to identify strengths, helping NGOs build a rapport with the government, identifying donors and creating a resource consortium. The ultimate goal is that the Capacity Building NGO moves out as a central agency and leaves equally equipped, empowered NGOs in a network to influence government.

Vikramshila is an NGO working on elementary educational interventions and capacity building activities since its inception in 1989. Under the REACH India

project, five grass root level NGOs were selected as sub-grantees to implement the project to reach out to more than 7,000 vulnerable children in Kolkata.

Four of the five sub-grantee partners who were selected for the project had never been in a donor-grantee relationship. These organizations were new, recently registered and had been working with small individual donations from friends and family. One of these NGOs did not even have an office in its name. This meant that Vikramshila had to guide, provide support and literally hold their hands at every juncture of the programme.

Vikramshila helped these organizations with almost every activity right from finding an office, getting FCRA clearance, recruiting staff, finding space for their centres to developing curriculum and related books for use. Vikramshila had to be very flexible in its approach to meet the timeliness and programme requirements of each partner.

One of the underlying philosophies of Vikramshila's project design was to develop a flat project structure where every one was an equal partner. Vikramshila had to work towards creating a foundation for a learning mindset across levels in all the partner organizations to create a knowledge network.

A great deal of emphasis was placed on sharing of experiences which led to organizational learning and development of various modules for implementing the project. Under the apprentice approach, Vikramshila was there to help these organizations at every level and at every point, from networking to running of the programmes and inculcating values and a professional approach in running a structured programme.

Conclusion

The capacity building approach has provided both the Capacity Building NGOs and the sub-grantees a learning experience in providing and receiving mentoring. The Capacity Building NGOs have moved out in a new direction and the sub-grantees have been provided with an invaluable experience in helping them to move ahead to the next stage in the development of their capacities. This approach has also paved the way to the sustainability of these interventions and the cascading effect will allow a greater number of children to be provided with learning opportunities.