



Skilled futures: Best Practices in Capacity Building and Community Engagement

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Introduction to the Best Practices Series

NGOs often emerge as a response to community needs. They typically begin with a vision to be realised, and efforts are driven by passion and commitment. Program implementation and direction is ever-evolving as the NGO faces and works through ground realities.

It has been EdelGive's endeavour to support these visionaries and emerging NGOs and help them develop solid programs. EdelGive Foundation believes that 360-degree support is critical for these visions to translate into reality. It is thus committed to contributing towards the philanthropic ecosystem of donors, government, civil society, academia and researchers, media, and others. Besides providing funds to an NGO, EdelGive links NGOs to relevant and effective capacity building efforts, to aid its progress and growth.

This series of '**Documentation of Best Practices**' is born out of EdelGive's commitment to enhancing the knowledge and skills of its partners within this philanthropic ecosystem. The findings from this series will be used to aid capacity building of EdelGive partner NGOs (through cross learning); inform donors about existing best practices in the sector, thereby enabling them to optimise funding decisions, and to contribute to the existing knowledge on the development sector in India.

This series explains selected Best Practices that directly help NGOs scale, in size and reach. The papers are a mix of secondary research and interviews with representatives of NGOs which are recognised for being mature and effective players in the development sector. The Documentation of Best Practices series is a set of five papers:

- a. Paper 1: Best Practices for Building Strong Foundations
- b. Paper 2: Best Practices for Building Sustainability of NGOs for Social Impact
- c. Paper 3: Growing at Scale: Best Practices in Scalability
- d. Paper 4: Skilled Futures: Best Practices in Capacity Building and Community Engagement
- e. Paper 5: Convergence to a Coalition: Best Practices in Outreach and Advocacy

The Best Practices identified throughout the series are overarching practices that can be adopted and applied to achieve scale, reach and impact, by any NGO irrespective of sector focus. Each paper outlines a different set of Best Practices relevant to a broader goal. The figure below shows the methodology followed.



Figure 1: Mapping the Methodology



Skilled Futures: Best Practices in Capacity Building and Community Engagement

The term *community* refers to a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in specific geographical locations or settings. Participants differ in the emphasis they place on particular elements of the definition. The idea of a community is defined similarly but experienced differently by people with diverse backgrounds.¹ The existence of a community is characterised by the sharing of common interests that gives rise to the representation debate in civil society, regarding who defines or represents the community and makes decisions for them. Further, the terms ‘community’ and ‘stakeholder’ are often used interchangeably due to the overlap in their attributes. However, a community is a shared geographical location and a sense of identity characterised by interaction between its members, whereas stakeholders are those individuals/groups/authorities who possess the ability to make important decisions, including those that affect the community.²

There are various ways in which civil society engages with communities around the world. This engagement consists of values, strategies, and actions that support authentic partnerships, including mutual respect and inclusive participation, power-sharing and equity, and the needs and capacities of communities. One of the ways in which NGOs engage with communities is in the form of a community-partnered participatory program (CPPP). CPPP is defined as an equal partnership approach between the NGO and the community, wherein both parties play a balanced part in developing the program while building capacities for planning and implementation. CPPP typically consists of a series of activities such as:



Figure 1: Activities under Community-Partnered Participatory Program (CPPP)

Community participation not only promotes the sustainability of an intervention, but also affects the decisions and outcomes that influence it, since this encourages transparency and accountability of the implementing partner.⁴ Assessing and delving into the needs of the community through rigorous engagement not only helps in smooth and efficient program implementation, but also empowers communities to be actively invested in its outcomes. Research and policy work done through such engagement takes social determinants and physical infrastructures that shape lifestyles into consideration, and hence recommend coherent solutions.⁵

According to the **World Health Organization (WHO) Community Engagement Framework for Quality, People-Centred, and Resilient Health Services**, the context and culture of a community matters and are demonstrated in the interdependent and reciprocal relationships between service providers (NGOs) and users, their families, and communities. It has been observed that the actions of NGOs impact a community's understanding and their reactions, which can vary from distrust to outright rejection, making it important to substantially invest in the social and cultural dimensions of an intervention.⁶

¹MacQueen, K. M., McLellan, E., Metzger, D. S., Kegeles, S., Strauss, R. P., Scotti, R., ... & Trotter, R. T. (2001). What is community? An evidence-based definition for participatory public health. *American journal of public health*, 91(12), 1929-1938. ²alò, C., Mannarini, T., & Rochira, A. (2014). *Sense of Community and Community Participation: A Meta-Analytic Review*. *Social Indicators Research*, 117(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-013-0347-2> ³Jones, L., & Wells, K. (2007). Strategies for academic and clinician engagement in community-participatory partnered research. *Jama*, 297(4), 407-410. ⁴Rosato, M., Laverack, G., Grabman, L. H., Tripathy, P., Nair, N., Mwansambo, C., ... Costello, A. (2008). Community participation: Lessons for maternal, newborn, and child health. *The Lancet*, 372(9642), 962-971. [doi:10.1016/S0140-6736\(08\)61406-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(08)61406-3) ⁵Gore, D., & Kothari, A. (2012). Social determinants of health in Canada: Are healthy living initiatives there yet? A policy analysis. *International journal for equity in health*, 11(1), 41. ⁶World Health Organisation. (2017). *WHO community engagement framework for quality, people-centred and resilient health services*.

For the **Society for Nutrition, Education & Health Action (SNEHA)**, an NGO that was founded in the early 1990s, there exists a continuum of care while working with women and children in order to break the intergenerational cycle of poor health. The constant prevalence of gender-based violence throughout a child's and a woman's life makes SNEHA's work even more important by ensuring that there is continuous access to and awareness of the health services that communities, especially women and children, require in order to live a healthy and safe life. This has been achieved by creating enablers in the form of community workers and volunteers who are the first point of contact for community members, thus strengthening the bond between the community and the organisation.

Oxfam India is a movement of people working together to stop the rising inequality in the country by ensuring equitable distribution of wealth and resources to all since 2008. The Gender Justice vertical of Oxfam not only works on the external processes of empowerment but also has various activities for critical consciousness-raising within the organisation, wherein they brainstorm and reflect on their own realities and their relationship with power. In addition, Oxfam also has various employee benefit schemes and policies in place such as an Internal Complaints Committees, Maternity Benefit Leaves, and a Child Protection Policy.

Protection of Remote Agency and Guaranteed Action for Tribal Improvement (PRAGATI) was established in 1986 and it started working towards the support of tribal communities and vulnerable members of society. PRAGATI undertakes various activities such as constituting self-help groups of tribal women to activate leaders in a three-tier system of local governance. Their activities, which are mainly concentrated in tribal pockets, are based on issues pertaining to the environment, health, education, and livelihood. PRAGATI creates a value-based leadership by mobilising a decentralised management system that gives equal opportunity to all representatives to talk about their issues.

Magic Bus India works with more than 3.75 lakh children and 10,000 young people living in poverty across 22 states of India to move them out of poverty. Magic Bus uses a Childhood to Livelihood approach to help children and young people break out of the crushing cycle of poverty. The NGO works with government partners such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Lakshmi Bai National Institute of Physical Education (LNPE), Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, and Village Social Transformation Foundation (VSTF) to empower children and youth through various mediums. Thus, while it is important for NGOs to work in, with, and for communities, it is also critical to understand the contexts that the NGOs are working in. Organisations need to constantly strive to understand the sociological, unquantifiable phenomenon with respect to the socio-cultural realities of the community.

Based on the research done, this paper looks at four Best Practices that include the ways and means to engage with the communities to build their capacities:

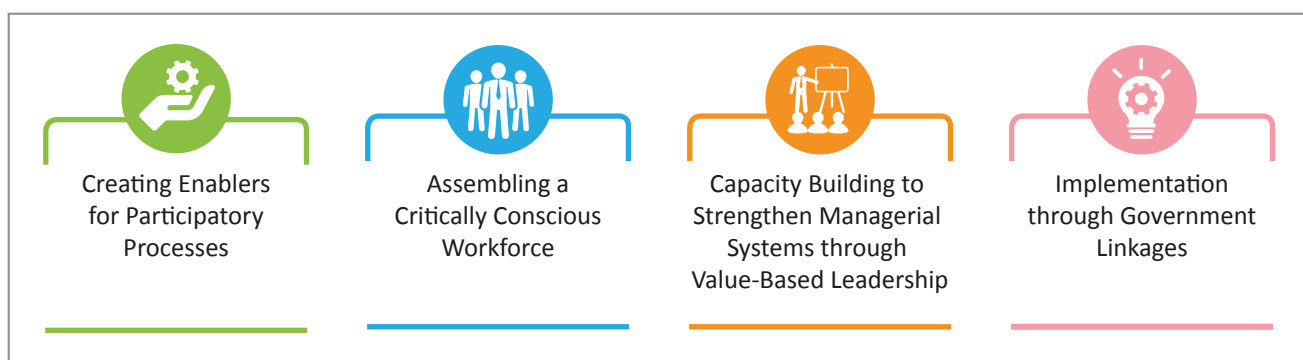


Figure 2: Best Practices in Community Engagement

To illustrate and explore these best practices in community engagement in India, key parameters were used to shortlist NGOs. These parameters are:

- Program reach (State-level or Pan-India): Profiling NGOs with a localised presence, state-level presence, or a pan-India presence.
- Maturity of NGO (Time since incorporation): NGOs that are at least a decade old to understand the nuances of community engagement and have synthesised their process backed by evidence.
- Focus area (Urban, rural, or both): To contrast best practices between NGOs with a rural focus and those with urban or both.
- Cross-sectoral nature of NGOs: NGOs that work in various thematic areas (example: health, livelihood, education, sanitation, women empowerment, media advocacy, among others).

⁶World Health Organisation. (2017). *WHO community engagement framework for quality, people-centred and resilient health services*.

Creating Enablers for Participatory Processes

“There are actually different age groups in Dharavi... some of them are retired, most of them are women, and women who have never gone out of their houses... some of them are college youth... it's a mixed group. Recently, we started engaging with men separately... because getting men to come for meetings and over and above volunteer?! Men in the slums where we are working are engaged throughout the day. They leave their houses early in the morning and come sometime in the evening. So we started Sunday as event days, and every month we have Sundays for the volunteers. So the engagement approach has changed suiting the needs of the people.”

*-Sushma Shende
(Program Director,
Child Health and
Nutrition, SNEHA),
when asked about
the identities of
volunteers working
with SNEHA*

What are Enablers for Participatory Processes?

- Participatory processes are those by which a community aims to reach a given socio-economic goal by consciously identifying its issues and drafting a course of action to resolve the same issues.⁷

How do these Enablers help in Community Engagement and Capacity Building?

- It is important for NGOs to make sure that community workers are aware of the prevailing attitudes, behaviours, and interactions occurring in their respective communities.
- In order to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, the rule of law, equity and inclusion, and empowerment, organisations working at the sub-national and community levels need to understand the interpersonal, professional, and community relationships, which are highly contextual and dynamic.
- Resources such as financial inputs and infrastructure also contribute to institutional resilience and performance when it comes to community engagement. These resources also include tools and methods for information-sharing which in turn result in enabling democratic and people-centric development processes that adhere to the principles of community work.
- The community workforce that plays a key role in issues of empowerment and engagement need to be prepared to engage with other professionals as well as local communities to build trust, which in turn will affect their consultation and coordination functions.⁸

Excerpts from the Case Study

SNEHA

What is SNEHA?

SNEHA is a non-profit organisation working since 1999, with women, children, and public health and safety systems. Their innovative work in urban informal settlements aims to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity, child malnutrition, and gender-based violence.

How does SNEHA engage with communities and build capacities by creating enablers for participatory processes?

- *By focusing on building partnerships and capacities of community leaders who are aware of community issues and power dynamics, thus enabling community-centric development*

Prevention of Violence against Women and Children

- As one of the first programs of SNEHA, the Centre for Violence against Women and Children (CVWC) was established in the low-income settlements of Dharavi. The program focused on building women's groups in the community who were given training and sensitised on issues of domestic violence. The group leaders known as '*Sanginis*,' are the first points of contact in case of crisis for women in the community. This model is aimed at enabling democratic and people-centric development processes that adhere to the principles of community work and are trained to identify and report gender-based violence.
- As part of a micro-planning exercise in Dharavi,⁹ this program seeks to engage young volunteers in the community, train them in understanding concepts and perspectives in gender, and carry out campaigns in the community.

⁷Chirenje, L. I., Giliba, R. A., & Musamba, E. B. (2013). Local communities' participation in decision-making processes through planning and budgeting in African countries. *Chinese Journal of Population Resources and Environment*, 11(1), 10-16. ⁸World Health Organisation. (2017). WHO community engagement framework for quality, people-centred and resilient health services. ⁹<http://snehamumbai.org/prevention-of-violence-against-women-and-children/>

EHSAAS

- The micro-planning exercise led to the conception of an adolescent and youth programme in SNEHA, that came to be known as *EHSAAS* (Empowerment, Health and Sexuality of Adolescents). Through collective education, young people learn alongside their parents in the process. Parents go through the same module as their children so that they as parents are able to support their children better, within the family and community. This being an extension of SNEHA's continuum of care model is embedded within the sociocultural ecosystem, i.e., the immediate environment of the adolescents that include parents, communities, health systems, and police systems.
- *EHSAAS* currently engages with 500 individual volunteers from Dharavi and Wadala and includes women, men, youth, and retired persons who are engaged in regular training sessions.

Child Health and Nutrition

- The *Child Health and Nutrition Program* (CHN), started in 2007-2008 with some day-care centres in Dharavi, acted as the first sites for community mobilisation processes, through conducting meetings with the community and delivering health education sessions.
- Mass level awareness in the community in the form of campaigns helped in prioritising childhood nutrition among parents.
- *Building resources that contribute to institutional resilience*
 - Having a physical presence in the community in the form of the CVWC gave them a regular space to conduct meetings.
 - The CVWC was set up in Sion Hospital in the community to be easily accessible to violence survivors, which also aided in being discreet yet effective as crisis centres. Being a part of the hospital reduced the initial hostility on part of the community and helped the organisation in gaining acceptance from the community. Collaborations and training with state institutions ensure visibility of the organisation on all fronts.
 - Providing legal aid and counselling services to victims and survivors helped in building trust in the community. For instance, the organisation provides legal advice and give referrals to survivors of domestic violence and also facilitate the process of filing cases against perpetrators.
- *Enabling democratic and people-centric development processes that adhere to the principles of community work*
 - Consent is taken from all participants of the programs, including volunteers.
 - Most programs have a process of ongoing participatory research that helps in monitoring and evaluation of programs.
 - A team of qualitative researchers are constantly on the field working with young people, parents, and community members. They gather evidence from the field and give quarterly feedback on the program, based on which these programs and their implementation processes are adjusted.

Challenges and Considerations

While engaging with the community, SNEHA faced the following challenges:

- There was a **mismatch of values between the community and the organisation** especially on culturally sensitive issues. For example, in the CHN program, SNEHA undertook various sessions based on the framework of appreciative enquiry to encourage young mothers to bring about a change in their value-based beliefs to work towards health- and nutrition-related needs of their children. The organisation first focussed on sensitisation and education of the community before involving them in such programs.
- The organisation **faced some resistance from the community**, especially while working on issues such as domestic violence, as it is considered to be alienating the woman from the family. In such a scenario, setting up base in a neutral territory such as the hospital and employing a public health perspective to deal with such issues can provide much-needed validity to the organisation without antagonising the community.

Assembling a Critically Conscious Workforce

“Oxfam India typically works with a ‘Gender at work’ Framework... which talks about the intersection of axes between individual and systemic, and informal and formal... so each forms a quadrant and each quadrant talks about working with individual consciousness-raising... and then community consciousness raising, then talking about access to resources individually and ensuring that the state provides conducive conditions for the people to function as ‘rights-bearing’ individuals...”

-Dr. Julie Thekkudan (Lead Specialist, Gender Justice, Oxfam India), when asked about the internal value framework of Oxfam India

What is a Critically Conscious Workforce (CCW)?

- Critical consciousness is a process that focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and exposure of social and political contradictions, which then induces acting against oppressive elements. A critically conscious workforce comprises of people who constantly develop insights about their work and question their location in order to communicate and perform issue-based work effectively.

How does a CCW contribute to effective Community Engagement?

- A CCW constantly evaluates both internal as well as external processes with respect to the issue being worked on and understands the difference between their own personal beliefs that intersect with the present issue.
- Such a workforce not only strives to build its own capabilities, but also enables capacity-building for their community by disseminating knowledge about various issues.
- A CCW also understands their own biases as a result of their social location such as caste, class, culture, sex, and other such institutionalised biases and rises above these to work collectively towards implementation of an issue-specific intervention.
- A CCW is also empowered in a way that they understand their own rights as employees of an organisation and the subsequent ethics and limitations (such as client confidentiality) entailed within that position.

Excerpts from the Case Study

Oxfam India

What is Oxfam India?

Oxfam India is a movement of people working together to stop the rising inequality in the country that keeps wealth concentrated in the hands of a few. A registered non-profit organisation, they work to ensure equitable distribution of wealth and resources to all since 2008.

How did Oxfam India engage with communities and build capacities by assembling a Critically Conscious Workforce?

- *By focusing on building and strengthening organisational capacities of partners*
 - Oxfam partners with grassroots organisations for implementing their programs by building their capacities and developing an understanding of issues of gender and violence, and the importance of a rights-based approach.
 - They help partner associations understand the mandatory requirements for an organisation that includes having a policy on sexual harassment and a functional Internal Complaints committee.
- By sharing its policies on disability inclusion, gender mainstreaming, child protection with their partner organisations, Oxfam has built capacities to understand these policies through periodic trainings.
- Oxfam follows a strict policy in community engagement, especially while engaging with children, and their partner organisations are made aware of the same. They also sensitise their partners on issues of consent from the community and its members including both children and parents.

- By working on developing internal processes that focus on integrating the core principles of the organisation with program design and implementation for both the parent organisation and partners
- The organisation uses a 'Gender at work' framework, which highlights the interrelationships between gender equality, organisational change, and institutions or the 'rules of the game' held in place by power dynamics within communities. Oxfam has transferred this understanding to all partner organisations.

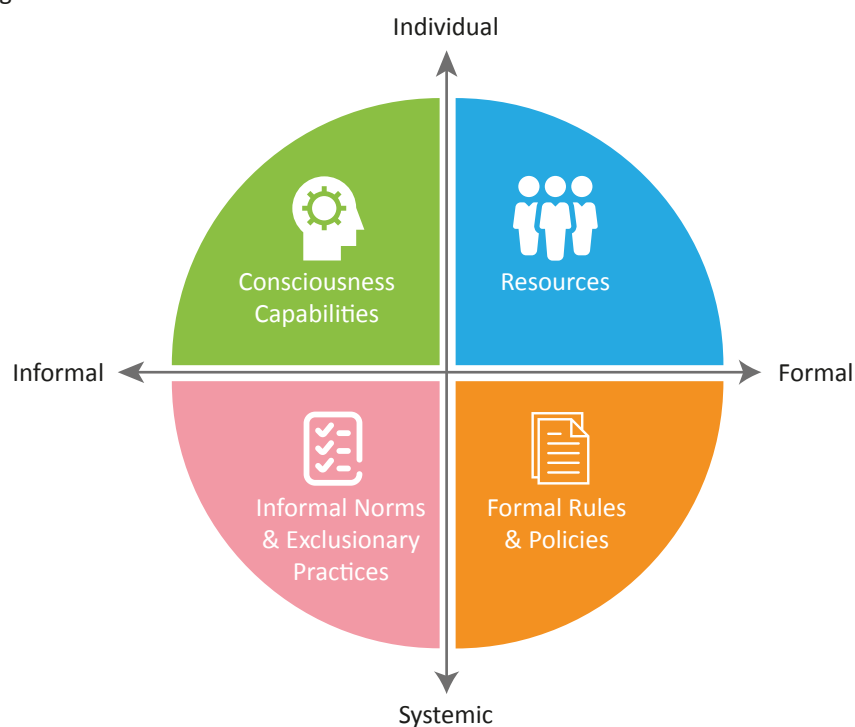


Figure 3: The Gender at Work Framework¹⁰

- Oxfam is focusing on integrating gender justice values in the design of all their programs. It has developed checklists, and ensures that both Oxfam staff and staff from partner organisations go through **courses, such as modules on gender rights, violence against women**, to understand gender and power.
- To limit the risk of a value mismatch with gender justice partners, Oxfam has invested in capacity building that is focused on concepts of power and power relations in both conceptual and operational terms, so that partners can question their own practices. As an organisation, Oxfam is cognizant of the fact that while understanding 'power' is central to their work with communities, it is far too easy to lose sight of how power operates within the organisation itself.
- Different partner organisations are at different stages of tackling internal power relations. For instance, if they are members of a network, it is not a 'single' organisation, and thus, decisions have to be discussed and arrived at through consensus. For those organisations that have not yet reached this stage, Oxfam trains them using some of its own tools such as democratic decision-making.

Challenges and Considerations

Oxfam faced the following challenges while building capacities of partner organisations.

- **Operational hierarchies** within the organisation can easily translate to **exploitative power relations** that will lead to a toxic work environment.
- Despite having all processes and systems in place, **organisational staff were unwilling** to come forward for grievance redressal owing to a fear of authority and/or a lifetime of socialisation.
- Community mobilisers were unable to address exploitative relations within their homes while fighting for the same for others, leading to a **crisis of self**.

¹⁰The Gender at Work Framework, Explained: The top two quadrants are related to the individual. On the right are changes in noticeable individual conditions, e.g., increased resources, voice, freedom from violence, access to health and education. On the left, individual consciousness and capability – knowledge, skills, political consciousness, and commitment to change toward equality. The bottom two clusters are related to the systemic. The cluster on the right refers to formal rules as laid down in constitutions, laws, and policies. The cluster on the left is the set of informal discriminatory norms and deep structures, including those that maintain inequality in everyday practices. (Source: <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>)

Strengthening Managerial Systems through Value-Based Leadership

“So we get their suggestions first...then we make our plan... then again we take this plan to the community... then some inputs have also come from our professional team...there are agreements and disagreements to our larger plan... the final plan is again shared with the community... this we found very successful... because the community gives its own input and in that way we see that the community participates more effectively in the implementation of the program...”

-Luna Panda (Program Coordinator, PRAGATI), when asked about the involvement of the community in the decision-making processes

What is Value-Based Leadership?

- Value-based leadership is a form of managerial supervision where internal capacities are built through shared assessment and analysis of the situation, context-specific approaches, shared agenda-setting and planning, and by defining roles and responsibilities.

How does Value-based Leadership strengthen Managerial Systems?

- Value-based leadership, with its emphasis on interpersonal communication and collaborative teams focused on adult-based and learner-centred training programmes and strategies, facilitates group processes (meetings and workshops) for decision-making and programming, and develops cultural competence.
- These capacities are developed by an enabling environment created through value-based leadership with a prepared workforce at all levels of the system, ready to consciously engage, align, and link their functions to a shared purpose and mission.
- Supporting reflective professionals capable of designing context-specific approaches, who can clearly define roles and responsibilities, plays an important part in networking.
- Helping community workers understand and take account of the local culture, perceptions, experiences, and expectations in their interactions with other members can uncover real reasons and concerns to build on the potential capabilities of each community as they evolve and adapt over time.

Excerpts from the Case Study

PRAGATI

What is PRAGATI?

PRAGATI is a voluntary organisation established on 26th January 1992, working to improve the quality of life of the rural poor in Koraput District of Odisha. PRAGATI was able to initiate numerous activities right from bringing the tribal women into self-help groups, to encouraging them to become active leaders in three tier system of local governance. Though the activities are more related to tribal and tribal pockets, PRAGATI equally concentrated on environment, health, education, livelihood and other development issues in the plain area of East Godavari District.

How does PRAGATI build capacities by Strengthening Managerial Systems through Value-Based Leadership?

- PRAGATI has put in place a robust mechanism at the management level involving senior management, organisational staff, and board members. Under this system, the decisions made or plans conceived are shared with the whole community.
- Meetings with leaders of community-based organisations and *Panchayat* representatives are held to receive feedback on the plan/decision and to incorporate suggestions received after brainstorming with the internal team of the organisation.
- NGOs must maintain a balance between the expectations of the community and the feasibility of implementing all community demands owing to financial pressures and lack of funds.
- When the community is involved in the decision-making process (as community as well as the staff), implementation of the program occurs smoothly owing to the active participation of the community.
- The organisation is comprised of a team at the senior management level as well as a cadre of community resource persons working at the village level.

⁷Chirenje, L. I., Giliba, R. A., & Musamba, E. B. (2013). Local communities' participation in decision-making processes through planning and budgeting in African countries. *Chinese Journal of Population Resources and Environment*, 11(1), 10-16. ⁸World Health Organisation. (2017). WHO community engagement framework for quality, people-centred and resilient health services. ⁹<http://snehamumbai.org/prevention-of-violence-against-women-and-children/>

- Through staff motivation programs, information on the organisation's internal goals, strategies, and future work is disseminated.
- Needs assessment for both staff and members of community-based organisations aid in building skills and strengthening their functions, and this is occasionally done by experts hired from outside so as to eliminate subjective bias.

Challenges and Considerations

- There is a possibility that the **community might feel disillusioned** with the organisation due to an inability to get desired results. Therefore, PRAGATI found it important to constantly communicate with the community, as mentioned in BP 1 to then understand and mitigate constraints accordingly.
- At times, organisational leadership at PRAGATI was unable to comprehend the depth of community issues owing to a **difference in personal contexts**.
- **Conflict between the organisation's ground level staff and community volunteers** led to an adverse impact on implementation of the program. This is why the organisation needed to conduct constant adult learning participatory activities with its internal staff for them to understand their location, the issues they are working on, and how to use their location to further the cause.

¹¹Cavaye, J. M., & Cavaye, J. (2000). *The role of government in community capacity building*. Brisbane: Department of Primary Industries.

Implementation through Government Linkages

“We link our communities to government schemes...for instance where there are [government] scholarships for young girls... we have staff who will research that option and then they will identify young girls who are able to apply for that option and help them to put documentation together... go with them to the local office... district office and apply for the scholarship...”

*-Ms. Havovi Wadia
(Director - Impact,
Magic Bus India),
when asked about the
relationship of Magic
Bus India with the
government*

What is Implementation through Government Linkages?

- Implementation through government linkages consists of capacity building with the support of state agencies. With communities that engage in various complex networks of interaction, including private enterprise, community groups, and individuals, as well as state agencies, it is the responsibility of the NGO to see the best possible fit within existing government policies, keeping in mind existing issues of the community.

How do Government Linkages help in community engagement and capacity building?

- NGOs play a facilitating role in developing the government's role beyond 'service delivery,' which entails creating a vehicle for concerns, building a more balanced spectrum of interaction with communities, developing local personal relationships, and melding top-down and bottom-up community involvement.
- NGOs also invest in building social capital by involving the local police, teacher, or health workers as the willingness of staff to work with the public, their commitment to the local community, their personal trust, and the reputation of their organisation all have a significant bearing on the community's willingness to work with government.
- Since the government and communities interact in many different ways ranging from independent government action to true community partnership, it is the responsibility of the NGOs working in the community to act as a balancing force between the two by facilitating joint decision-making, shared leadership, and common goals. This is generally driven by evidence of successful interventions that then act as substantiating factors for advocacy with the government.
- As communities operate in very uncertain environments, many issues remain ill-defined, emotional, and value-laden and can result in the framing of vague issues with respect to their operationalisation. This is where NGOs use their strengths of being familiar with the local context of the community that is used to build social capital, networks, and forward linkages with the local government.¹¹

Excerpts from the Case Study

Magic Bus, India

What is Magic Bus (MB)?

Magic Bus works with more than 3.75 lakh children and 10,000 young people living in poverty across 22 States of India to move them out of poverty. Initiated in 1999, Magic Bus uses a Childhood to Livelihood approach to help children and young people break out of the cycle of poverty.

How did Magic Bus engage with communities and build capacities through government linkages?

- *Adapting and implementing national policies*
 - MB links communities to government schemes. For instance, information on scholarship schemes for young girls are put together by the staff, who then identify eligible candidates and facilitate the entire process of applying for the scholarship, including all paperwork and documentation. In case of enrolment in educational courses, the organisation works with the local government to get exemptions and loans for payment of fees.
 - MB has partnerships with state and district-level governments, especially in Maharashtra, Mizoram, and Madhya Pradesh, which allows them to access schools for program delivery. MB partners with the Maharashtra Village Social Transformation Foundation (a Government of Maharashtra initiative) to work in select backward villages to ensure convergence of government services.

- In 2019, MB will be signing an agreement with three district collectors in Maharashtra to ensure optimal attainment of secondary education in the district.
- *Managing processes for implementation and evaluation*
 - MB has a separate vertical for M&E apart from program design and delivery.
 - Regular data collection on children's participation in the program and the quality of sessions delivered on the ground is conducted.
 - This feeds into the system of daily monitoring to check the status of sessions delivered against what was planned, which helps in assessing outputs on a national scale.
 - There is a separate system to keep a check on the quality of sessions delivered, and these processes feed into the program, which is then circulated among the program staff on a monthly basis.
 - All M&E processes are in-house and there are indicators for measuring both quantitative and qualitative parameters of the program.
 - There is an attempt to perform baseline, midline, and end line evaluations after every 18 months, but sometimes due to lack of funds, there is only a pre- and post-program evaluation. Data from these evaluations are used to keep the program on track and identify areas of challenge, facilitating government advocacy.
- *Capturing evidence for further improvement*
 - Hard outcomes are measured and captured as evidence, such as transition to secondary school, completion of secondary school, transition to work and first salary, delaying age at marriage, etc. that are reflective of qualitative outcomes such as exercising agency.
 - Established scales are used to measure life skills and its correlation to exercise of agency in education or employment.
 - Community tournaments and sports are significant as they bring girls to the forefront and highlight their skills, which contributes a change in perception of the community which might contribute to delaying the age of marriage for girls.

Challenges and Considerations

- As Magic Bus has learned, a broad or overly ambitious organisational agenda can create problems in consolidating the program, thus leading to issues in measuring impact and building lasting linkages.
- Working with groups that might not have identification papers can be a hindrance in linking them with government programs.
- Working with state institutions such as public schools requires partnerships with/permission from governments to be able to access their facilities for program delivery.



Key Lessons from Best Practices

Best Practice 1 Creating Enablers for Participatory Processes

- While engaging community volunteers/leaders in the social change process, the NGO needs to be mindful of their personal contexts and whether they are able to act as changemakers within their own families first. The organisation should focus on developing self-awareness and empower these leaders/volunteers to address issues at both the private and public fronts.
- The first point of engagement with the community should always be based on an expressed need of the community to avoid seeming like the organisation is pushing forward its own agenda.
- The organisation needs to be mindful of the socio-cultural environment of the community as well as the value system of the community volunteers/leaders/workers, and yet balance this with the larger objective of social justice in order to bring about social change.
- It will help if the NGO identifies key stakeholders of any program planned, and involve them in the change process for it to be successful.

Key Tips:

From SNEHA's experience, the following key tips can be used by other NGOs to create enablers for participatory processes.

- **Key Tip A: How to build trust in the community**
 - Before making forays into the community, the organisation must be prepared to deal with initial non-responsiveness on the part of the community and wait for an appropriate time to make the first intervention.
 - While working on long-term change and development, the organisation should always have arrangements to address immediate concerns; for instance, counselling services, legal aid, and a crisis centre for domestic violence survivors.
- **Key Tip B: How to consolidate community participation in programs of the organisation**
 - The organisation should try and build on the successes achieved with community participation in its previous programs.
 - In addition to being open to the possibility of developing new programs that can be off-shoots of an already successful program, new programs should focus on taking things forward with the relationships formed in previous ones.

Best Practice 2 Assembling a Critically Conscious Workforce

- The NGO needs to continuously refine its own systems and processes to ensure an egalitarian workspace.
- Not only can the organisation examine relations of power within itself, but also between the organisation and the community and with partners to ensure an anti-oppressive practice.
- It will be beneficial if the NGO conducts regular meetings with partners, the community, and staff at every level so that there is an open channel of communication to be able to address problematic issues.
- It will be useful for the NGO to encourage its staff and community mobilisers to be reflexive about their own biases and prejudices to maintain operational objectivity while implementing programs.

Key Tips:

From Oxfam's experience in engaging a critically conscious workforce, the following are a few key tips:

- **Key Tip A: How to build self-reflexive institutions**
 - The organisation should focus on incorporating processes and systems that ensure social parity and enable a creation of a non-discriminatory workspace.
 - NGOs should transfer these processes to community volunteers and partner organisations and set examples of entities that have successfully incorporated them in their daily practice as a form of positive reinforcement. This can act as an exit strategy as well wherein community volunteers and partner organisations learn to incorporate the intervention by themselves without any hand holding from the parent organisation. A safe space of mutual learning should be established where community volunteers and partner organisations can come to imbibe and understand the significance of these processes and systems.
- **Key Tip B: How to engage a critically conscious workforce**
 - The NGO can attempt to ensure that partners/community workers are aware of the basic principles of community work that address issues of consent, confidentiality, etc.
 - Continuous sensitisation of both the organisation's staff and community partners would ensure that both parties are on the same page with respect to the value framework.

Capacity Building to Strengthen Managerial Systems through Value-Based Leadership

Best Practice 3

- An open channel of communication between senior management and ground staff/community mobilisers would directly and positively affect program implementation.
- The NGO needs to effectively manage community expectations with its own scope of work in terms of feasibility so as to avoid the alienation of the community.
- By taking into confidence actors and stakeholders who might not be directly associated with the NGO, such as state actors, they can avoid the possibility of conflict.
- The organisation needs to incorporate the community in the planning phase to ensure effective cooperation during implementation.

Key Tips:

Building robust managerial systems in PRAGATI yields the following tips:

- **Key Tip A: How to strengthen managerial systems**
 - Regular meetings with the staff and community would aid in an in-depth understanding of community issues.
 - Capacity building and sensitisation of organisational leaders would help develop leadership with a holistic understanding of pertinent issues and subsequently aid in more effective interventions.
 - Effective division of roles and responsibilities across different levels would aid in better functioning of the organisation.
- **Key Tip B: How to ensure community participation in program implementation**
 - A participatory approach to incorporate the community's involvement is essential for effective implementation. For example, PRAGATI started with protection of village forests in the community to ensure participation, conservation, and regeneration through initiatives like seed-planting. They started at a small scale and then moved to village-level committees to Panchayat federations to now Block-level federations. This resulted in PRAGATI facilitating a district level federation in the year 2005.

Best Practice 4 Implementation through Government Linkages

- The NGO needs to build partnerships with government institutions to ensure efficient program implementation and ultimately improved community welfare.
- The organisation needs to be cognisant of all necessary steps required before program initiation to ensure smooth delivery. For instance, ensuring that all community members have formal documentation is essential for enabling access to government schemes.
- A holistic M&E system is possible only when all stakeholders are part of the process and this would aid in capturing evidence of impact, which would feed into the implementation process and in advocacy with the government.
- Capturing evidence of impact and outcomes that can be presented to funding organisations and the government would aid in future collaborations.

Key Tips:

Magic Bus's interaction and collaboration with government and community engagement programs led to the following tips:

- **Key Tip A: How to link the community to government programs?**
 - Helping the community get appropriate paperwork and formal identification documents is crucial for accessing benefits from public welfare programs.
 - Research on government schemes and identifying the eligible target groups would aid in focused facilitation of the linkage process.
 - Awareness programs in the community focused on dissemination of information, aids in opening up a vital channel of communication with the government.
- **Key Tip B: How to develop a holistic M&E system to further Government Linkages?**
 - Involvement of the community in the process of data collection for M&E would aid in a realistic assessment of the program.
 - Operationalising qualitative factors through easily observable outcomes/outputs would help in consolidating the M&E system.
 - A cyclical process of monitoring that feeds into program implementation would help in understanding program progress with respect to goals and adjust it accordingly based on community feedback.

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EdelGive Foundation is the philanthropic arm of the Edelweiss Group and was established in 2008. Since its inception, almost a decade ago, EdelGive is steadily evolving a philanthropic ecosystem in India. EdelGive works to develop a symbiotic relationship between the different members of the ecosystem viz. investors (donor corporate agencies, partner CSR agencies, and individual donors), investees (NGOs and other sub sets of the NGO sector), and collaborating partners like the government, like-minded agencies, capacity building organisations, and policy experts. EdelGive has fostered the growth of the synergies inherent to an ecosystem, to leverage gains over and beyond its investment, both financial and non-financial.

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