

Part - I : Report on the event

2nd Peer Review Workshop, Uttar Pradesh

Venue: Neda Gram, Lucknow

15th -17th March 2004

Part 1 - Report on the workshop

Supported by - Management Consultants - (Development Alternatives & Pricewaterhouse Coopers)

Coordinating agency - PANI

Facilitation assistance – PROACT, SSRO - UP

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1 Background

1.1 Broad Perspective about Peer Review Process

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) launched the Poorest Areas Civil Society Programme (PACS) in India to help Country's Civil Society Organizations engaged in service delivery and working for the entitlements of the deprived so that they are able to realize their objective without any financial hindrance and in the process help India to halve country's poor population by the year 2015. It seeks to realize entitlement as outcomes of its endeavour in the five areas viz., civil rights, political rights, economic entitlements, social entitlements and cultural entitlements.

The strategy for the programme envisaged five critical thematic areas where interventions would result in the achievement of the programme goals. Since empowerment is the basic objective of the PACS programme, all these thematic areas have been so chosen that each of them can be pursued independent of the state help, nevertheless, it also enjoins as part of its strategy to ensure convergence with the government programmes to strengthen the intervention.

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The ultimate target for the PACS programme is, of course, the poor people in the poorest districts of the country, with a particular focus on women.

1.2 PACS peer group review process

Holding peer group review workshops twice a year has been envisaged mainly to bring all the PACS partners together for collective sharing of democratic learning through exchange of

Within CSO, the DFID's targeted partners are:

- (a) NGOs;
- (b) Cooperative
- (c) Academic Institutions Movements (e.g. women or dalits) and
- (d) Trade Unions etc.

However, in the case of UP, the partnering institutions have so far been the NGOs.

information and experiences.

- The workshop has been conceived as a platform for various PACS partners to interact and learn from each other's project and progress as also to sharpen their own perspective on the development issues of the specific region through an interactive process.
- It also aims at assessing and reviewing effectiveness of the existing programme-governance and management systems in providing clear and strategic directions to the programme.
- The ultimate objective is to develop a framework of ownership of the programme among the partner organization so that good practices and learning from the programme may be sustained even after the withdrawal of the DFID assistance.

1.3 Rationale behind the peer group review process

The process provides support to the partners by initiating the process of institutionalization of learning in the organizations involved, developing requisite information system so that information flows become more regular and effective and also identifying capacity building needs of the partner organizations. The process enables PACS programme to get closer to the field and greater inputs to the overall programme becomes possible. This makes possible forging stronger linkages between PACS and partner CSO and as a result better management of the programme can be ensured.

While approval and desk appraisal of such programmes in their own-segmented framework is one aspect, peer review of such programmes enable the altitudinal development in their respective thematic areas. While evolving a document on the peer group review process it was realized that most of the people, CSO partners as well as others, relate purpose of this process as something that would –

- a) contribute to the PACS programme in terms of *integrating new concepts, modalities and mechanisms*. It would also be able to generate a range of learning for all and be relevantly integrated with the project cycles of CSOS that share such concerns;
- b) be widely acceptable by the CSO partners because of it's peer group nature, therefore, facilitate integration and application of programme and peer group learnings;
- c) open up possibilities of improved linkages with resource organisation within governments purview and beyond it.
- d) Since most of the PACS CSOS have thematic exposure on their thematic issues, the peer group review workshop can help in arriving on an understanding on a consensus on thematic priorities.

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The main idea of the peer group review process is to facilitate a common understanding of functional mandates and priorities and in exploring possibilities of tangibly achieving thematic outcomes as benefit of realization of entitlements.

1.4 Context of first (previous) peer group review

The last workshop on peer group review was held on 6th and 7th August 2003 in Lucknow, UP, and was an initial attempt in establishing an effective mechanism for transparency and synergy building among the PACS partners. Select participating CSOS, gave detailed accounts of their activities and achievements during the workshop. However the inputs and feedbacks extended by the participants were not summarized and presented during the workshop and indeed the purpose of peer group review remained demanding. The three areas in which the participants were to focus upon were on Women Empowerment, Panchayati Raj and Dalits and Marginalised groups. There were five groups that presented SWOT analysis of the identified issues. The raised issues for concern were -

- Infrastructure Strengthening PRI with emphasis on budget allocation and implementation plans with positive effect on migration, transparency and controlling corruption.
- Women Empowerment
- Policy Advocacy
- Need for separate policy for Budelkhand Region for upliftment of the dalits and adivasis of this area. The analysis however could not provide a direction for the future. It was more of an effort to orient and appraise the team leaders and create a flow of significant exchange of views between the partners.
- Capacity Building on programme management, programme delivery, and organisational development.
- Linkages with stakeholders.

2 Framework of the present event/ workshop

The 3-day Peer Group Review Workshop held in Lucknow from 15th to 17th March 2004 in Neda Gram was organized by PANI and consisted of all PACS CSOs and their partners. The workshop had an innovative substance attached to it. It emphasized on the learnings from cross visits conducted by the CSOs. This helped in identifying appropriate capacity building measures, review of potential risks in the project implementation, convergence with the government programmes and identifying common issues for undertaking advocacy at the state level for the rights and entitlements of the poor.

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The significant component and focus of the 2nd Peer Review workshop was sharing of the learnings from the experiences of the partners and the strong need of advocacy planning at the state and national level. It was decided by the CC to impart a structure to the peer group review process. The peer group should ideally be able to share, analyse, react and evolve a common consensus on different thematic issues and provide a structure for strong and effective policy advocacy at the state level. The entire process was made to be broad-based, imaginative, vibrant and encompassed views of the representing members. The crux lay in making it a vital tool for project implementation.

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- Rendering an independent and unbiased perspective;
- Checking progress following self assessments;
- Sharing experiences and good practices relating to work;
- Providing support and mentoring; and
- Facilitating improved institutional performance.

The present event emphasized on the learnings of the cross visits of their PACS partners and structuring subsequent developments on the basis of their understanding derived from the day-wise happenings. Evolving and adopting policy advocacy as a tool for mainstreaming the concerned issues was another important aspect of their framework. The key issues covered under the perspective of the present workshop are given in Annexure 1.

The Strategy of the programme envisaged five critical thematic areas namely women empowerment, improved Local Self governance in rural and urban areas, social cohesion, policy advocacy, and self help to meet poor people's basic needs. Since empowerment is the basic objective of the PACS programme, all these thematic areas have been so chosen that each of them can be pursued independent of the state help, nevertheless it also enjoins as apart of its strategy to ensure convergence with the government programme to strengthen the intervention. The PACS programme is being implemented in the state by 23 projects in 18 poorest districts. To take stock of the progress of project implementation a review of activity is undertaken every six months. This workshop sought to capture the emerging trends in relation to overall development.

The originally perceived objectives of the event were -

- Sensitize the PACS CSO partners to the possibilities of convergence of government- led sectoral interventions that are aligned with PACS themes;

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- Sensitize PACS partners to critical success factors - especially project management issues- in social sector projects which are right based in nature
- Bring about an interface with the best project management practices and organizations responsible for this
- Explore potentialities of access to project management resources from the management consultant and derive upon broad principles of SS;
- Evolve and recommend a framework for standard practices for project *vis-à-vis* Organizational management in future that is potential to form a part of SS;

However, later it was observed that it is more important to take issues le capacity building and a state level framework of advocacy

3 Process, approach and methodology of the workshop

The Coordination Committee suggested that the local PACS partners in the interest of sustainability should eventually own the peer group review process. Accordingly it was decided that the coordination committee comprising representatives from partner organizations met four times to impart a structure to the process. The agreement for the engagement of the SSRO indicates facilitation of peer review as a major responsibility of the SSRO.

The workshop covered technical sessions everyday providing wide opportunities to all participants like

- ◆ Panel members
- ◆ Resource persons
- ◆ Representatives of CSO partners to

Deliberate, debate and make suggestions for future reference

3.1 Broad scheme of the workshop

- *Timing and duration* : In view of large number of projects and corresponding number of CSOs involved in implementation, three days were required. Each day the session started at 9 am except the first day when it started late by 30 minutes. The first day proceedings concluded at 6.30 pm followed by a cultural programme organised by the PANI project team. The second day witnessed prolonged discussions which concluded at 8 pm and a small skit thereafter. The third day the entire session and the workshop got over by 5.30pm.
- *Venue and logistics* : In consideration of centrality of location, transport facilities and logistics convenience, Lucknow was selected as the best choice center for the workshop. NEDA Gram was selected for holding the peer review workshop. The auditorium on the first day and the conference hall on the subsequent two days were used for the purpose. Arrangements for foods and refreshments as well as the lodging for the participants were done at NEDA gram which facilitated the overall purpose of meeting the targeted goal each day.
- *Participants* : The CSO partners remained the main participants apart from representation of other civil society organizations like the media and few key resource

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agencies. Even the government officials were intimated to come esp. from departments and sectors that align with PACS themes. Besides representation of the MC, SSROs and few external experts was perceived and accomplished. Proper arrangements of computerized presentation, documentation and recording were assured by the host organization. Moreover a small working group was formed for facilitating organization of the event and carry out required arrangements. Members of the PROACT coordinated in the process. On the first day of the workshop, registration of all the participants was activated and a learning kit plus a bag was provided to all the members. PANI, the coordinating agency facilitated the provision of the both.

The role of moderation in the 2nd peer review workshop was encapsulating as it allowed various features of itself to get reflected in the process. The working style of each active session was specific and least deviating. Each day the moderator started with a specified scheme that was planned and intimated to all participants, which would be carried out through the day.

- *Moderation style* : The role of moderation in the 2nd peer review workshop was encapsulating as it allowed various features of itself to get reflected in the process. The working style of each active session was specific and least deviating. Each day the moderator started with a specified scheme that was planned and intimated to all participants, which would be carried out through the day. The technical plan needed expertise to properly manage the workshop deliberations entailing engrossing exercises for all three days. Facilitation of the session was important for the message to be effectively conveyed to the participants. Moderation process involved -
 - briefing about the topic to all the participants;
 - neutrality aspect adding objectivity to the discussion;
 - observing the undercurrents and reacting with wisdom;
 - keeping the direction within control;
 - giving everyone a chance;
 - keeping track of time frame;
 - enabling participation of all for exchange of views;
 - create linkages;
 - formation of groups for group tasks; and
 - summing up the findings.

Further, the efforts of feedback panel session on the first day, presentations by the teams on the second and third day and group tasks on the second day contributed in facilitating the whole event in achieving its objectives. Open sessions on the last two days enabled every participating member to throw his/ her idea in the forum.

- *Planning, designing and management of the event* : Since the proposed workshop design makes a departure from the previous workshop, planning of a different nature was adopted. The SSRO was responsible for evolving the entire design and curriculum of the event. Its role was also to facilitate the proceedings of the cross visits and coordinate all visits. The

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coordination committee, in its fifth meeting at Lucknow, deliberated upon the need to underline the status of CSO projects during the peer group review workshop. It was decided that the presentation would be made region wise. The committee indicated that CSO-groups, constituted region-wise, would cover project areas spread in various regions for projects spanned beyond 9 months.

Because of higher concentration of CSOs in Central UP, the region was divided into two groups. In reference to carrying out these cross visits, the coordination committee guided that these visits should not be taken as formal review or any form of evaluation of CSO projects, rather be seen as opportunities for learning and bringing forth realistic issues that concern the poor the most and need strengthening within the premise of PACS. Other broad norm of the committee were –

- a) CSO projects with more than nine months' experience in implementation would involve in cross visits;
 - b) A set of competent representatives one from each CSO group members (lead CSO only) would carry out cross visits, who would contribute in (i) Participatory review process, (ii) evolving a common and acceptable framework for presentation and (iii) represent the group presentation during the peer review workshop;
 - c) The CSO groups would conclude each of their presentations and extend these to the SSRO by March 10, 2004; the presentations would be reviewed by the coordination committee together with the state anchor from the MC and the SSRO, before finalization;
 - d) For the time being, one CSO in each group has to take responsibility of expenses towards carrying out these cross visits, which shall be reimbursed on the last day of the workshop;
- *Management aspect* : Once the SSRO telephonically informed all the participating CSOs regarding the cross visits and rationale behind these, the group coordinators were intimated to initiate planning of the cross visits. The group coordinators at the outset evolved a plan for cross visits, mutually acceptable to all CSO-group members. The coordinators would help all CSO representatives to assemble in one common area from where the cross visits has to commence. The group coordinator evolved route plan and sequence of the cross visits to various CSOs projects.

The group coordinators facilitated group functions viz. rapporteuring, framing of the presentation, evolve talking points, collect text and visual data and finally prepared a draft presentation latest by March 10, 2004 by delegating various roles to group members. The coordinator also looked after all logistics arrangements and intimate each of the CSOs about dates of cross visits to respective CSOs. Coordination with SSRO-UP also needed for any support and query.

4 Key areas covered

4.1 Cross visits

The cross visits learning prior to the workshop were arranged with a deliberate attempt to gather basic information. It formed the basis of the workshop and marked a significant departure from the earlier one. The cross visits learning constituted the indicative format for their presentation on -

- Poverty situations of the region *vis-à-vis* key vulnerabilities in development process;
- Socio-political and cultural aspects that relate to PACS interventions;
- Demography and economic status;
- Best practices – organizational culture, management practices
- Key Issues-regional/ specific issue for advocacy, issues that need supports like convergence, linkage development, coordination, interfacing and networking;
- Seeking integration of new/ innovative project components.
- Concerns and challenges relating to themes, programmes, administration and issues related to project implementation.

The findings of the cross visits formed the coordination basis of understanding of PACS interventions related -

- Concentration of projects and CSOs
- Most common thematic areas
- Project spans and nature of key activities
- Major highlights in progress accomplishment (esp. in context of realization of entitlements)

4.2 Clarifying peer group concerns

- Role of resource organizations (RO)

At the state level, aggregation of projects is available with SSRO. The macro analysis of the project such as thematic and project intensity etc is perceived by the SSRO. This is integrated well with peer review in the interest of better and more effective program implementation. The PDRO role is related to project development process at the time of conduction of monitoring studies.

- Capacity Building

Capacity building being central to PACS program, peer review group is able to facilitate identification of specific capacity building needs and suggesting provision of necessary inputs.

- Emerging role of PACS in -
 - Strengthening peoples participation in very different and backward areas

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- Competence in implementing large scale rural interventions;
 - Concertedly engaged across regions and civil societies on strengthening PRI;
 - Support in conducting baseline household surveys in accessible and represented villages;
 - Extensively disseminated information by setting up PICs, awareness camps;
 - Formed and used SHGs for economic empowerment and as a collective bargaining forum;
 - Activated gram sabhas, regularized meetings;
 - Facilitate training program on PRI, leadership for SHGs and elected poor and women;
 - Extend training to elected members, record maintenance;
 - Facilitate participation of dalits and tribals in local planning, implementation on food security- monitoring PDS etc.
 - Form village level CBOs initiated discourses on regeneration of natural resources, safe drinking water etc.
- Convergence with Government/ Interfacing with other Donors

Not a highlighting point of this workshop, however, the perceptions of government, judiciary and media play crucial role in the success and impact of the programme. Through the peer group review forum overt linkages can be established with the government officials who can deeply influence the efficacy of the program in state. Even stakeholders like SSRO and PDRO, having wider and holistic perspective get connected at closer proximity with all the CSOs.

- Programme overview at state/ national level

The SSROs presentation on the second day highlighted the programme overview and the SSROs objective of ensuring that the implementation and management of the project design is as per the required outputs and outcomes and is progressing as per the work plan to achieve the goals.

The content of the review of the programme was divided into four parts and shown through slide, graph and photographs. The first part covered the manifestation of poverty and showed hunger, situation of the poor, inability to read and write and not being able to go to school and total powerlessness as severe and crucial symptoms of poverty. In PACS context these issues can be seen as practicing empowerment through -

- Access to information;
- Inclusion and participation;
- Accountability; and
- Local organizational capacity;

The figures shown stated that at the state level, out of seventy districts, PACS has covered twenty districts out of which 90% are backward areas. This was presented through graphs

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and emphasized on the key factor in poverty being lack of public inertia with the consequence that UP ranks very low in the chart of development.

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The thematic concentration of PACS in UP lie in areas likes 'responsive LSG' and 'women empowerment' and 54% of the interventions are based on these. The growing CSO capacities demonstrate interest in improving areas like -

- Project management
- Project implementation
- Documentation and recording

The effectiveness of the participation of the following were reiterated in the final part -

- The role of SHGs as a strong citizen's forums to influence local level social, political and developmental scenario.
- The orientation of PRIs in negotiating and influencing local level social, political and developmental situation.
- The image of CSOs getting boost with scientific application of developing insights, acquiring skills and observing discipline in each of the interventions.

- Advocacy as an issue

The main objectives of advocacy in the peer group review workshop was -

- Sharing, learning and exchanging experiences among PACS partners so as to enable them to form a democratic opinion of their targeted goal and strengthening PACS platform;
- Strengthen project implementation - the credibility and accountability of the programme depends upon the thorough understanding by the people involved in it. Once the knowledge of the cause is secured, the implementation of the project becomes easier to handle. Advocacy, here plays an important role in delivering the message across;
- Identifying appropriate needs of CSOs in the area of capacity building and evolving action plans to develop acceptable processes.
- Strengthen convergence with government programmes and specify areas for intervention.
- Identify common issues for advocacy - for rights and entitlements of the poor and develop a statewide advocacy on rights and entitlements of the poor through an effective PRI
- Areas for intervention poorer or the non-performing districts of Bundelkhand, Eastern and Central regions of UP.

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The main role of Advocacy is to -

- Strengthen local-self governance decentralization, community-centered planning and accountability to *gram sabhas*;
- Enhance influence of *adivasis*, women and *dalits* in LSG- SHGs as a tool
- Support struggles of *dalits*, *adivasis* and poor in procuring their rights, land entitlements and accurate notification.
- Advocate region specific policy and prioritization - Bundelkhand

How Interventions Strengthening Advocacy

- Local action
- Policy advocacy on marginalisation of rural poor through base line surveys, participation/intervention processes (Malahar community for instance)
- Strengthening people's collectives-SHG, Vikas tolis etc
- Enhancing the participation of rural poor in governance by regularizing Gram Sabha meetings, BPL list etc.
- Empowering the poor with information-PIC, Information Resource Bank - Panchayat pitara,
- Village community teams-health camps, life skills for young people.
- Local Development planning- in community sharing local development onus with GP, vikas tolis to monitor PDS and other government programme.

Future issues for Advocacy

- Women empowerment - effective implementation of women related program, girl child education as a mandatory state obligation;
- Panchayati Raj - decentralized planning process, encourage new leadership
- Dalit and marginalized groups-review the schedule list (SC/ ST), transparency in BPL list formation and rehabilitation of the displaced.

The three points that emerged from the peer review workshop are -

- Recognition of immediate goals
- Recognition of intermediary goals and
- Recognition of long term processes

5 Major accomplishments

The peer review workshop attained its objectives, besides registering few major accomplishments.

5.1 It helped ***commencing a process of cross learning*** amongst the PACS CSO partners, as a pre-condition to peer group review on a half-yearly basis. This opens up future possibilities of accessing,

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The peer review workshop attained its objectives; viz. ***commencing a process of cross learning*** amongst the PACS CSO partners, as a pre-condition to peer group review on a half-yearly basis. This opens up future possibilities of accessing, imbibing and exchanging experiential learning in to PACS project activities.

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imbibing and exchanging experiential learning in to PACS project activities. Starting from minute project management standards to organizational best practices, the PACS partner CSOs would now be wide open to huge prospects of programmatic, need-based and relevant scopes of learning.

- 5.2** The second day of the workshop, the peer group review considered two extremely critical issues _ capacity building and advocacy. The day-long session _in different thematic and issue-specific working groups helped emerging **PACS CSO partners' perception and priorities on Capacity building and advocacy.** The PACS programme at the state level now has a clearly delineated set of issues and methodology on advocacy to be undertaken at state and local levels, with varied approaches _ mass mobilization to drawing media attention.
- 5.3** Finally, for the first time, the peer group discussed and carried out a **review of programmatic attainments at national and state levels.** The CSO partners recognized their strengths and areas that needed future attention through overview presentations. Also, the event discussed **new strategies and innovations** that came to existence as a result of second annual evaluation of PACS programme.