



Improving Access to Information on Public Schemes in Backward Districts in India



Strengthening inclusive civic leadership for social accountability and effective service delivery of public programmes in Rajasthan and Gujarat, India

Public schemes play an important role in poverty reduction, reducing inequalities and promoting inclusive growth. Rural poor households will be able to gain substantially both socially and economically, if they are able to access the benefits of public schemes. On the one hand this is dependent on effective implementation of these schemes by a responsive and accountable delivery mechanism. On the other hand this is enabled through demand raised by an aware citizen. Human development indicators are determined by the access to primary health care, primary education, social protection and gender equity enjoyed by the citizens of a country. Higher human development enables the citizens to fulfil their aspirations for greater political participation leading to creation of an improved human development index and social capital.

The three broad areas of primary health care, primary education and social protection and social security cover the basic needs of poor households. Following a life cycle approach these schemes are designed to benefit the child prior to its birth by focusing on the health of the girl child, adolescents, pregnant women, newly born, persons with disabilities, single women, destitute children, elderly and persons belonging to schedule caste and

scheduled tribe. These schemes play a pivotal role in providing a safety net for poor families. The World Social Protection Report 2014/15 published by the International Labour Organisation claims that only 27 per cent of the world's population enjoy access to social protection and social security programme/schemes. The persistent low coverage is as a result of low access to information on the schemes, long process in collecting documents for proving eligibility – differences in the de facto and de jure processes, low allocation of funds for social sector, and low motivation of staff engaged in service delivery.

This project on 'Strengthening inclusive civic leadership for social accountability and effective service delivery of public programmes' in Rajasthan and Gujarat is initiated with support from the European Union from 2014 - 2018.



Overall Objective

The overall objective of the project is poverty reduction through improved access to public services and institutionalisation of inclusive service delivery practices.

Focus Areas

Primary Health Care

Primary Education

Social Security and Social Protection

Outcome

It is aimed that poor people and others in general will receive three times benefits from the public programmes in terms of quantity and quality compared to the present level of access. The baseline study not only looked at the extent of benefits received but difficulties in accessing these benefits.

Coverage

The project is being implemented in two blocks each in Barmer district of Rajasthan and Sabarkantha district of Gujarat. In each of the blocks, 15 panchayats are covered reaching out to a total of 60 panchayats in both the States. In Rajasthan the panchayats are predominantly inhabited by the dalit communities and in Gujarat the population cover is mainly tribal based.

Project Strategies

Delivery of public programmes can be made effective by making the transaction process clear to people, improving pro-active disclosure about the programmes related information, promoting people's participation by engaging the people's committees associated with the programmes and use of public grievance redressal system. The project has following set of activities:

Dissemination of Information on Public Programmes

Four block/ taluka level Information Resource Centre (IRCs) have been set up. It has information on the delivery process of all schemes, basic material like government resolutions, forms, guidelines, manuals and the know how of making applications under various schemes. It provides hand holding support to the beneficiaries in making applications and registering grievances and of reaching out to the community on a day to day basis.



Inclusive Civic Leadership for Social Accountability

Community members interested in working for their community as volunteers are identified and trained as citizen leaders from each of the panchayats. Regular capacity building inputs are being provided to select citizen leaders from dalit community, tribals, and persons with disabilities with a special focus on women. This cadre of citizens work along with the elected representatives and government line departments for effective delivery of services at the individual level as well as community level. Citizen leaders also mobilise the community for participation in the gram sabha, flag of issues and demand quality and timely delivery of services at panchayat/village level. Right to information camps are put up at the community level to generate demand and accountability.

Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions and Mandatory and Optional Committees

The elected representatives are encouraged to practice participatory planning, budgeting, preparation of and implementation of village development plans in convergence with various government schemes to reach the last mile particularly the vulnerable sections of the population. For each of the services provided at the

panchayat/village level there are mandatory and optional committees to enable the PRIs to function effectively – social justice committees, school management committees, village health sanitation and nutrition committees, water committees, matru mandal, PDS committees and Rogi Kalyan Samities (PHC level). Association of these samities are being formed and they are encouraged to perform their role in accessing public schemes for the most vulnerable.



Citizen Engagement in Improving Public Services

In every six month interval, on a campaign mode community members are mobilised to assess the effectiveness of public programmes and take up action to improve service delivery. Services and service providing institutions like anganwadis, primary health care centres, primary schools, fair price shops, MGNREGA and social security schemes are revisited and assessed on people's access, regularity and delivery of quality services. Based on the findings or situation citizen leaders and active members of the community are encouraged to take up local action, register grievances online, interface and dialogue with service providers, initiate dialogue with line departments and file RTI applications. At the end of each round a report is generated. After several rounds it will be evident if the situation is changing and what makes it work. This study also helps to analyse the priorities of the community and the schemes that require more attention.

Facilitating Pro-Active Disclosure

At the panchayat and service providing institutions like schools, PHCs, anganwadis, FPSs, MGNREGA worksites, service providers are encouraged to practice pro-active disclosure as mentioned under the Right to Information Act, 2005. Formats for wall

writings have been developed on name and contact details of Public Information Officer and Appellate Authority, service providers and committees, beneficiary lists, lists of quantity, quality and price of services offered, annual budget and expenditure, etc. This is being implemented with the strategic involvement of citizen leaders.

A state level study of various websites of different government departments has been conducted with the support of the Information Commission in Gujarat and the findings have been shared for wider implementation. A similar study is being conducted in Rajasthan.



Tracking Implementation of Schemes

The process of accessing various schemes and its implementation is tracked beneficiary wise. This information is used to identify bottlenecks and suggest to district and State level authorities for reform in programmes implementation mechanism. Networking and regular meetings and dialogue is held with various government line departments to work out meaningful processes of implementation.

IEC Materials and Documenting Experiences

Popular and user friendly material on various schemes is prepared with particular emphasis on the eligibility criteria, documents required in the application and the amount of benefit in monetary terms for the individual/family. From time to time leaflets of individual schemes are also published that has elaborated the process after experience of accessing a scheme. The learning derived on accessing schemes, success stories, policy level changes made in reforming governance mechanism, debates around implementing public schemes, strategies for poverty alleviation are compiled and published in a quarterly/four monthly bulletin 'Vichar' in Gujarati and Hindi languages. This is widely circulated among stakeholders – citizen leaders, PRI representatives, government line

departments at the block/talukas, district and State levels, educational institutions and universities for wider learning.

Collaborations with Civil Society Organisations

Networking and collaborations are being established with other civil society organisations on issues of entitlements and social accountability. Citizen leaders and staff have been participating in various State and national level campaigns like right to food, demand for universal pension, javabdehi yatra and mobilisation on the question of quality primary education in Rajasthan and for the passage of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill.

(The project budget is 800,000 Euro for five years duration. Out of this 80,000 euro is own contribution of Unnati. The project coordinator for Gujarat is Ms. Deepa Sonpal and for Rajasthan, Ms. Swapni Shah)



Key Achievements

Information about public schemes disseminated to 11,635 households covering 64 panchayats.

214 Citizen Leaders initiated about 1000 information disclosure and accountability actions.

More than half of gram panchayats practiced participatory planning and social audits for MGNREGA.

Half of the gram panchayats have practiced pro-active information disclosure with 14 types of information disclosures introduced.

Template was provided to various government departments for pro-active disclosure in both the States.

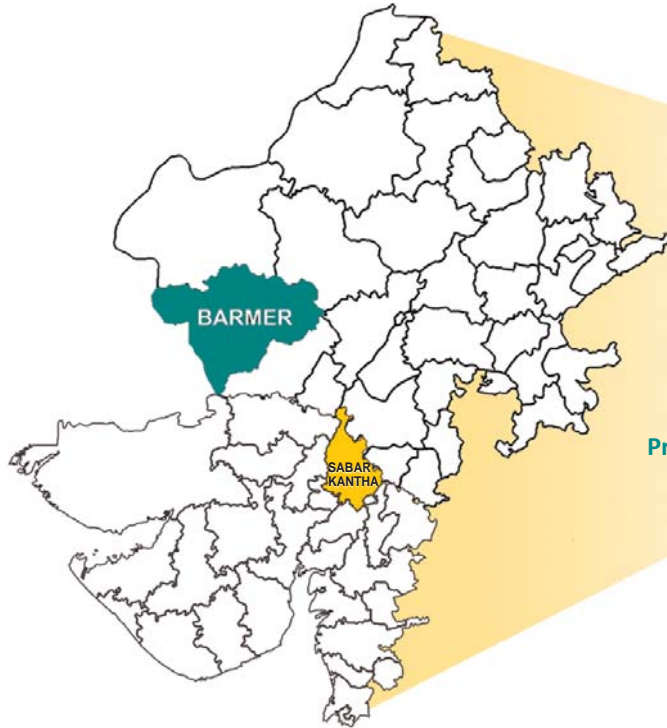
1908 anganwadi workers in Sabarkantha district were trained on early identification of disability in collaboration with EU partner GLRA / BPA.

Interacted with the Rural Development Dept. and district level authorities in both the States for preparing village development plans (VDPs).

In collaboration with GLRA eight EU project partners were oriented on mainstreaming disability.

A protocol note was developed for issuing disability certificate for persons with disabilities in Gujarat. Subsequently a government resolution (GR) was issued by the department of Health and Family Welfare, GoG.





Map Showing Project Locations



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