

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Title of Project	Community Led Development & Governance (Gram Niram Project)
Project location	Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh states, India.
Implementing Partner/s:	Caritas India
Program Duration	1/07/2017 – 30/06/2021
Total Program Budget	This can be the budget or costs over the life of the project)
Evaluator	Umpilika Sarma, external evaluator
Date of Evaluation	June 2020
Total local downstream partners and name	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CC, Jamshedpur 2. SMS 3. CCSSC, Ranchi 4. SVS 5. JVK, Hazaribagh 6. XISA, Raipur 7. SCD 8. GVK 9. AASHAA 10. VSSS 11. Deepti Foundation

PROJECT/PROGRAM/ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

Caritas Australia has been working in India for more than four decades in partnership with Caritas India and supports programs that help and build grassroots awareness and collectivisation on government endorsed rights and entitlements schemes. With an emphasis on working in partnership with government authorities, the current program focuses on two key states - Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.—Both states have sizeable Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste populations. Scheduled Tribes are indigenous people outside the Caste System, and Scheduled Castes are the ‘Untouchables’. They are amongst the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in India according to the UNDP and the Government of India reports. The Gram Nirman project is implemented by Caritas India and 11 grassroots local organisations in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, and focuses on empowering marginalised and vulnerable communities, especially the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, by minimising the

level of alienation and marginalisation and enhancing their collective actions towards enabling them to have better bargaining power with local governance systems. The project has three key outcomes:

Outcome 1. 137 tribal communities have improved access to various entitlements and manage local resources through village level institutions (Gram Sabhas) by 2020.

Outcome 2. 60% of marginalised families have increased their income by 20% through small and marginalised farmer's organisations, various adaptive initiatives (on farm and off farm & forest) and linkages by 2020.

Outcome 3. 70% of most marginalised sections are recognised and contribute in decision making processes in various platforms by 2020.

PURPOSE and METHODOLOGY OF EVALUATION

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the overall performance of the Gram Nirman project, what long-term changes have occurred as a result of the project, and the likely sustainability of these, with the view that findings and recommendations from the evaluation will be considered in any new design in order to improve the effectiveness of future iterations of the project. Specifically, the evaluation aimed to:

- Assess the extent to which the project achieved its intended outcomes and the changes brought about in the lives of those that the project sought to benefit, as well as the sustainability of these.
- Identify what worked well and not so well in the project context, the facilitating factors, and how these impacted the project's achievements.
- Highlight project strengths, challenges, lessons learned and provide recommendations that will assist Caritas Australia and Caritas India to improve future programming.

The evaluation was conducted by a team led by an external consultant using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Focus was given to using participatory and inclusive methods to evaluate the impacts on the lives of people that have occurred through the project. Primary data collection consisted of key informant interviews with project participants and external stakeholders, appreciative enquiry, focus group discussions, and observations. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 during the evaluation, the team was unable to conduct field work in Chhattisgarh. Instead, they visited 4 partner organisations and had deeper engagement with program teams at the organisation level, while also being able to interview 2 community leaders. In Jharkhand, the evaluation team conducted field work in 6 project sites, met with 3 partner organisations, and also conducted an all-partner consultation and validation workshop.

KEY FINDINGS

The evaluation found that the Gram Nirman project achieved its intended outcomes. Under Outcome 1, the project has empowered target communities, particularly most vulnerable and marginalised sections including women, people with disabilities, widows, elderly, & destitute, to participate in decision making platforms that has resulted in access to rights and entitlements from Government schemes. Project interventions resulted in an increase in the number of functional institutions at village level in both states, especially Gram Sabhas, self-help groups, forest right committees, and forest management committees. However, legal cells (one of the community-based organisations (CBOs) formed under the project, at the village cluster level) were found to be less functional, with the evaluation noting that some partners have some confusion on the concept and purpose of the legal

cell. It was reported that they are not very clear on the purpose of the legal cell since the traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution are still prevalent in the tribal communities.

Under Outcome 2, the project has helped improve and enhance the income of marginalised families through diversifying livelihood opportunities both on-farm and off-farm as well as non-timber forestproduct (NTFP) based initiatives. Self-help groups and farmers groups reported increased income by applying collective and individual farming practices promoted by the project. Community members reported to have spent the additional income they'd gained on their children's education, purchasing farming equipment, repairing the house, buying household amenities, investing in buying seeds, and saving in the bank. The evaluation observed a few examples where participants lost their livestock due to a sudden outbreak of livestock disease or lack of timely intervention. However, through the project intervention, community awareness has increased which has helped them to identify livestock diseases and management.

Under Outcome 3, the project has helped in collectivisation and promotion of collectivism, which in turn has paved ownership and accountability in functioning of CBOs and local governance and village-level institutions. The evaluation found numerous examples that the project has created opportunities and spaces and supported participants at the community level to discover their leadership potential and to build their self-confidence, enabling them to claim their rights and dignity. However, the evaluation found that the ability of these village-level institutions to engage with district/block-level administration was still often lacking, and that these institutions would benefit from further support to enhance their advocacy abilities.

Regarding project implementation, the evaluation found that the current project structure doesn't have any feedback mechanism to receive community complaints or feedback to improve the quality and delivery of project outcomes. However, it also found that timely implementation of planned activities by Gram Nirman partners and constant monitoring and robust reporting procedures have been the hallmarks of the project. The project was also found to have been able to bring change in a cost-efficient manner against the money invested, considering the huge social capital it has created, numbers of livelihood options it has generated, income community members have increased, and convergence and linkages with a vast number of Government welfare schemes and provisions were achieved.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation found that the project provided interesting elements which can be replicated, practiced or strengthened in community-based empowerment programs. These best practices need to continue and at the same time be adapted and reflected upon collectively. Three were specifically outlined in the report, firstly that the inclusive partnership between Caritas Australia and Caritas India has benefitted the program. Secondly, that establishment of traditional village-level markets managed by Gram Sabhas, an innovative idea, have proven to be quite beneficial for communities and their development. And thirdly, that undertaking joint mapping exercise of government line departments and duty bearers who were important to be able to approve and implement welfare schemes has helped the community to understand the process in detail and also provided information on the approval process and different stakeholders' roles and responsibilities. It also increased the accountability of duty bearers. The evaluation provided quite a number of recommendations. In terms of project approach and strategies, some key recommendations included to continue strengthening partners' capacity on the rights-based approach, and to consider further how to best go about engagement with administration and advocacy in the next phase, including what the nature of strategic engagement with state machinery should be and who should take lead in case of joint action (if any). Related, it is recommended that a thorough context and risk analysis of the present political

context at organisation and project level be done, including mapping out the challenges and risks involved and planning strategies accordingly. Village selection for the next phase can be also guided by this analysis. The evaluation team also found that there is immense possibility to strengthen Caritas India's process of accompaniment support to partner organisations. In the current structure there is some overlap and confusion between monitoring and accompaniment roles of the Caritas India teams, especially at state offices. In terms of maximising the impact of livelihood initiatives, the evaluation recommended that the project expand the model of collective income generating activities and livelihood practices and explore more on the viability of the available and mapped NTFPs in the villages in terms of marketing linkages, possible value addition and government support. Additionally, while partners have made efforts to converge with line departments to train the community leaders on basic livestock management and vaccination, the project should engage with district/state officials to institutionalise this process in order to strengthen and sustain local capacities and ensure credibility. It was also recommended that a dedicated thematic expert staff be considered to provide technical support and build capacity of the local partners and liaise with stakeholders at state level.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Forthcoming