

Concept paper

cohesion's role as an implementing organization

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1 Introduction

Cohesion has completed, in March 2006, five years as a registered organization, though it has been in existence for eight years as a support organization. Cohesion started its implementation work since 2001. The areas identified were among the most disadvantaged talukas in Gujarat – e.g. Rapar in Kutch, Maliya in Rajkot and Santhalpur in Patan district. Moreover, there had hardly been NGOs working in these areas, mainly because these were quite far off from the district head quarters.

The focus then was on rehabilitation of the earthquake affected communities. However, there was a clarity that the interventions and strategies would be such that those lead to taking up of long term developmental issues in future. The projects were funded by a variety of external resources viz. INGOs, Govt agencies and several other institutes. Although the project design was largely donor oriented but the approach and implementation strategy was based on our own understanding and experience of various sectors.

1.1 Sectoral Priorities

Economic sector priorities

- Farm based livelihoods options
- Non-farm based livelihoods options
- Micro-finance and micro-credit

Social sector priorities

- Water & sanitation
- Education & other child rights related issues, especially of girl child
- Health – physical, mental, psychological, reproductive and sexual
- Social securities
- Disaster preparedness and management
- Decentralized governance

There are certain cross cutting themes, observed in all strategic interventions to ensure sustainable development and social justice. The approach is community based and bottom-up to ensure the needs and issues faced by communities get represented and addressed by programs.

Strengthening people's institutions and prioritizing women's' role in decision-making ensure processes that help in mainstreaming gender. On the other hand most vulnerable communities are identified at micro planning stage to empower them and help secure proper position in community-based institutions.

Our field work and community mobilization skills have been appreciated and it is evident from the fact that we have got an opportunity to work with very competitive INGOs.

Presently, cohesion is working in 33 villages in 4 talukas of Navsari district, 24 villages in 2 talukas of Patan district, 20 villages in 2 talukas of Banaskantha district, 75 villages in 2 talukas of Kutch district and 60 villages in 5 talukas of Rajkot district.

1.2 The approach

Cohesion makes endeavors to follow the steps given below for all its implementation projects:

- Undertake baseline study (not necessarily very scientific) and carry out micro planning at cluster level.
- Prioritize vulnerable groups and identify specific needs related to the specific theme.
- Organize communities and build capacity to plan and execute activities.
- Undertake interventions in different thematic areas.
- Promote networking interaction with other NGOs, CBOs, Govt and academic institutions.
- Conduct studies, assessment of status in programme areas, reviewing related government Policies and schemes.
- Establish market linkages between village communities/groups/associations and markets for sustainable livelihoods.
- Monitor and map impact of the intervention on reducing vulnerabilities & restoring livelihood/ income and social securities.

2 Achievements so far

We have undertaken number of projects focusing on our various priorities as mentioned above. [Annexure I](#) gives a brief on various projects we have done so far and other relevant details including budget.

2.1 Impact of the projects

1. Drinking Water security
 - Individual assets for vulnerable sections
 - Common asset in villages which had severe water shortage problem
 - Time spent for fetching water reduced
 - Water availability ensured during water scarce months of summer.
2. People's institution created, especially women's
 - Different types of institutions like Pani Samiti, MVMs, VDC etc. formed for sustainable management of assets created.
 - Social capital increased due to institutions.
 - Village level Leadership among vulnerable and women emerged
 - Active Participation of women in mainstream decision making system is increased
3. People not only get/participate for materialistic benefits but also participate and own the processes and outcomes. (Examples of pani samiti, VDC, MVM)
4. Food security increased for some period of the year because of following activities

- soil and water conservation activities
 - Irrigation facilities
 - Individual livelihood activities
 - Indirect impact from saving in expenses
 - Due to increase in resources
5. In some of the villages, migration reduced due to organizations endeavor
- Due to generation of new resources at village level
 - Availability of short term employment due to implementation of physical activities.
6. Exploitation of money lenders reduced
- Due to saving – credit activity, exploitation reduced
7. Awareness increased. (Rights, agriculture, safe drinking water, education, etc)
8. Increase in income

3 Gaps identified

3.1 Need to be more effective

Cohesion can make implementation work more effectively if following activities are avoided

- Infrastructure projects: 2 such projects have been implemented so far.
 - 1) Community Managed Water Resource Management: School Sanitation & RRWHS
 - 2) Making compound walls in ICDS.

Team felt that in such projects the processes get ignored and the fast pace of the project to achieve end result become more important.

- Non farm activities which generate very low income: Activities targeting individual beneficiaries like goat rearing and tailoring should not be done as they have a very limited impact. Also these activities encourage other villagers to demand for such benefits even if they are in a position to afford it themselves.
- Formation of Pani Samitis under Group Water Supply Schemes – The Gujarat Government has recently taken initiative of forming Pani Samities in their Group Water Supply Schemes. Cohesion being partner of Water & Sanitation Management Organization (WASMO) in Navsari and Rajkot districts, was requested to take up this activity, where the role is just to form the Pani Samities. Formation of such groups is not in conformity with our strategy and way of functioning because when we form any institution, we commit a long-term support. The group is supported till it becomes self sufficient. Secondly the villages are far off from our operational area, leading to use of lot of our resources in this activity. We, therefore, have decided not to take up such activities in future and have already refused when requested for Patan district.
- Avoiding implementation projects of shorter duration: The Annexure 1 indicates that there are 5 projects which have time period of 6 or less than 6 months duration. Our experience of such projects indicates that some processes have either to be squeezed

or not to be taken up at all to accomplish such time frames. As we believe in carrying out certain non-negotiable processes, we have decided not to take up such projects in future.

- Prioritizing geographical areas: We have identified areas in the existing districts, where we shall continue our commitment for long term development. **There are certain talukas in Rajkot district, where we will withdraw after completing the commitments for Swajaldhara Project.** The Talukas to be dropped are Vankaner, Padhadri and Tankara, except that we shall continue providing support to the Women's Federation in Tankara taluka.

3.2 Different approach

What will we do differently? – This aspect has been debated internally and following are the responses:

- Collaboration with PRI aiming to
 - Make PRI accountable to Gramsabha.
 - Increase participation of women and vulnerable in PRI body and Gramsabha.
- Definition of vulnerability should be clearly understood with emphasis on factors causing vulnerability and not categorizing vulnerable as a separate group.
- We should first identify the disadvantaged areas and then design the projects based on the felt needs in that area.
- Village Development Committees and Pani Samitis should continue functioning even after the project completion – These institutions should not be just for the implementation of some projects but should get mainstreamed so as to take up the issues beyond the project period.
- We should work more pro-actively with the Government, especially related to developing models and policy influencing.

4 Focus areas for future

4.1 People institutions

4.2 Livelihoods

Develop cohesion team's understanding on livelihood in each level.

- Decide geographical area and extent of coverage for livelihood interventions.
- To get idea about scope/potential for livelihood interventions
- Fund raising efforts (with Govt and other funding agencies)
- Analyze budget, impact from livelihood perspective
- Develop livelihood related process and impact indicators.
- Encourage CBOs to take up more livelihood related activities.
- External environment assessment for Farm Based livelihood

5 People Institutions

5.1 Why does Cohesion believe in promoting village institutions?

Cohesion's mission statement is: "*Cohesion, guided by transparency and accountability, is committed to sustainable socio-economic development of the vulnerable in under-serviced areas with a special focus on women*".

People's participation is a predetermined factor for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. CFT believes that strengthening the productive capacity of human and natural resources on which community depend for their livelihood will lead to reduction of poverty. Participatory approach questions the dominant structure of power and asks for redistribution of resources and community control over these resources instead of control of few. CFT accepts that participation should aim at empowerment of community, wherein the process would lead to enhancing ability of individuals to decide and take control over matters affecting their own lives.

Community participation helps them to organize and resolve problems themselves with a little support from the external forces. This approach enhances community's competence and awareness about the issues they face on day to day basis and the resources they need to tackle these issues one by one.

It is a fact that one of the main causes of the voice of vulnerable not being heard in the mainstream decision making is that they are not organized hence have no voice or space for collective action. For this the organization of poor/vulnerable sections of society becomes pertinent. Organizing vulnerable is also a strategy for empowering them. With this understanding CFT believes in promoting Village institutions while undertaking any project for intervention in its programme areas.

The VIs promoted by CFT started with activities related to Natural Resource development including, Agriculture development, Micro Savings and other non farm based livelihood options. These activities, however, acted as a means for participation of vulnerable community and not as a goal by itself, while moving towards empowerment. This process enabled involving these groups in decision processes affecting their own lives and also making the dominant section more sensitive towards the needs of vulnerable. There are instances, especially in Patan district, where MVMs have been formed with an empowerment perspective and not as a vehicle for implementing some interventions.

5.2 Why does CFT believe in organizing women only initially?

Even among the poorer households, women are the most affected lot. They comprise a sizable section of the poor, unemployed and the economically and socially disadvantaged groups in our society. Women of economically poor class combined with social disadvantage are victims of multiple inequities: class, caste, gender, religion.. . Since CFT's focus is on vulnerable sections of the society, women of this category becomes the target group. If men from these sections are also organised, then the hierarchy within the

household in terms of gender will still exist. Hence, in order to give negotiating power and collective strength to this section of the society, CFT believes in organising only the women initially. When organised in a group women will become more confident and will be able to articulate their skills required in exercising their choices in addition to increasing their own employment potentials and income through savings.

5.3 Village Institutions so far: a glance at evolution of VIs in CFT:

Started in difficult circumstances of earthquake, the organization underwent many experiences and learning while working closely with community. The village institution strategy is hence, still in its evolution though it has definitely shown a direction ahead. Following are the experiences of the major forms of VIs promoted by CFT so far:

1. *Existing formal/Informal groups:* There were some informal /formal institutions already existing in the villages. i.e. Bhajan mandals, Yuvak mandals, Primary agriculture societies and Panchayats. However, objectives of these organizations were different. Also, in all these institutions the representation of women is insignificant. Hence, there was a need to promote organizations at village level which were value based.
2. *Form of VDC and Gram Sabha:* CFT initiated its project intervention with a representative form of organization- village Development Committee (VDC) with its accountability to the Gram Sabha. VDC had a ratio of 60-40 for men-women. Gram Sabhas were held in public places, which were attended by both men and women. Morbi had the maximum projects being implemented with the VDC structure.

Since the interventions were after earthquake, with short-term projects coming in, it was slightly an efficiency approach where VDCs were more involved in the project implementation only. Under the circumstances, the structure was appropriate, but was not appropriate for long term because:

- Sustainability of the VDC was a question, since the structure is project based, and not issue based.
- Maintenance of the assets created by utilizing the funds available with the VDC became a question with project ending and VDC not remaining as functional.
- In a short while, accountability mechanism of the VDC with the gram Sabhas could not be established.
- While women were active in the Mahila Mandals in the same village, in the presence of men in VDC or in Gram Sabhas, they would not participate in some cases. Hence, a separate mechanism needed to be established initially for them to raise their voices.
- Though the target families were from vulnerable section, the decision making body of the VDC comprised also of dominant people of the village.

3. *Form of Mahila Vikas Mandal (MVMs)s:* MVMs were promoted in all villages, with some villages having even multiple women's groups. This gave a social space to women and increased their confidence. Mahila Mandals are issue based, and women started the collective actions to solve the matters related to their lives. They were involved in activities like Natural Resources, handicrafts, social issues, etc. The experiences are as follows:

- Women became more confident and active.
- The attitude of men folk started changing towards women and their capability.
- Exposure and training brought their leadership qualities into limelight.
- Links could not be established in some cases between the VDC and MVMs in the same village, where NR based projects were implemented by the VDC. In these cases, MVMs got marginalized and left with only collective action and savings and credit activity.

5.4 Overall strategy of CFT for Village Institutions

On reflection of the above experiences following strategy for Village Institutions has been proposed in CFT:

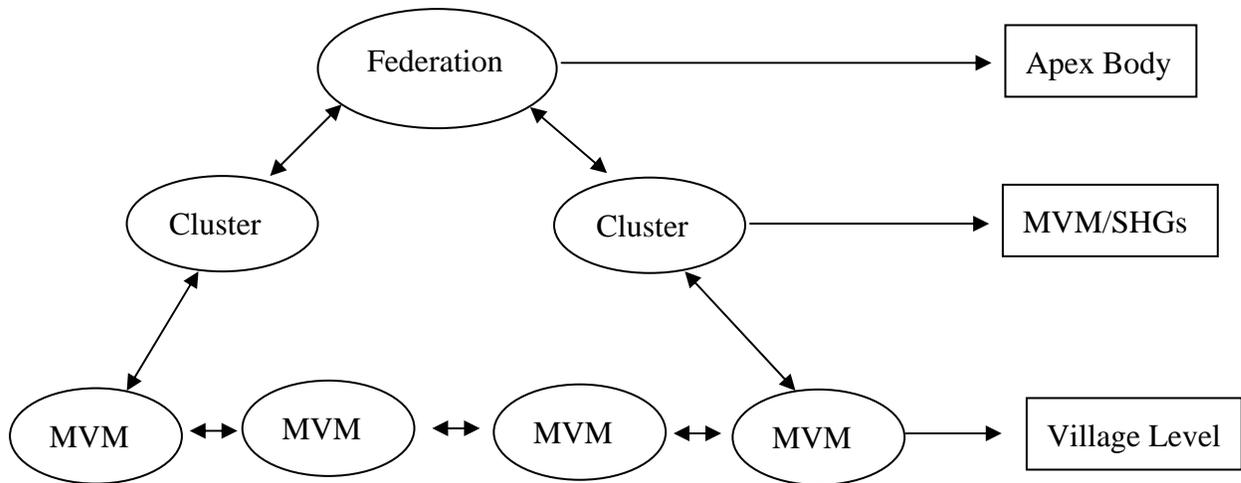
5.4.1 Target group

- CFT will organise only vulnerable section of society with class/caste/gender equity perspective.
- CFT will not work with individual persons but will organise vulnerables in a group, thus, promoting their village level organisations.
- Since women are the most vulnerable as they face not only gender but caste, class, religion and ethnicity based discrimination, CFT will organize women initially, of all class, but particularly of poor economic class. Where human resources of the organization are scarce, focus will be to organize women of only economically poor community in the area.
- Though CFT will organise only women, it will evolve strategies by which it will take male members of the village into confidence.

5.4.2 Three tier structure of VIs:

Based on the past experience, CFT proposes a three tier structure of village institutions.

- At the village level, there will be village level Institutions, promoted of socio-economic vulnerable sections with an empowerment approach. This would provide them with a platform where they could voice their opinions/ concerns about the issues related to village development and influence the decisions to be taken.
- Beyond the village level, CFT will federate the VIs to make them self reliant and self regulated. An apex body of VIs will provide them a forum where policy decisions can be taken and various developmental issues can be entertained.
- CFT, thus, proposes three tier structure for federating the village institutions.



5.5 Strategy at village level

Form of Village Institution

- On the basis of the past experience related to accountability and sustainability of CBO at village level, the form of VI accepted by CFT is membership based organizations and not a representative form of VI.
- The VIs promoted by CFT would be issue based, and not project based.

Nomenclature of Village Institution

- Women's organizations promoted by CFT will be called as Mahila Vikas Mandal, since they aim at around development of women.

Size of Village institution

- At village level, there will be 15 to 20 members in a group. Keeping in mind the banking requirements for an informal nature of group, the maximum size of the group will be 20 members only.
- Whenever there are more than 20 vulnerable families in a village, CFT would promote more than one MVMs in a village.

Structure of Village Institutions

- Each MVM will have an Executive committee. The Executive Committee comprises of President, Treasurer and three/four other (executive) members. .
- Secretary will be accountable to the MVM and will not be a member of executive committee.
- There is a provision of rotational leadership also.
- Small teams/committees will be promoted to implement various activities undertaken by the group.

Activities/Interventions:

- One of the common activities of the MVM will be savings and credit. This activity will be carried out at the MVM level only and all decisions pertaining to this activity will be taken during regular meetings. Savings and credit activity is a strategy for entry point in the mandla, a reason to meet at regular intervals a also a strategy for economic empowerment for the group members.

- All developmental interventions - be it of CFT or otherwise, will be implemented through MVMs only.(On-farm, Off-farm, Non-farm). There will be no activity which will be going directly to the beneficiaries.
- In large villages (area or population wise) where even multiple MVMs do not represent the full village population, committee will be promoted by taking representatives of MVMs along with representatvies(women) from other caste and class who have been left out OR by involving those men in the committee who support and accept women leadership . Selection of these men/women will be done by the MVM members only.
- Such a committee promoted for any particular activity will be accountable to the MVM. Committee promoted is not a hierarchy within the group nor is it promoted to have a short cut to decisions related to the intervention.
- All key decisions for the intervention will be taken by the larger body of the group as a whole, while only day to day decisions for execution will be taken by the committee.
- There may be different committees among the MVMs depending on the nature of the intervention. Since all NR based interventinos are interrelated, there will be only one committee for this. Small teams or sub committees will be promoted as and when required, for other related activities.
- The same team/committee may not be given responsibility for a new activity. New members can be added or old members can be removed from the team as per the need. This is to avoid concentration of power among few group members.
- After the work is completed, the MVM will call for a Gram Sabha and encourage social audit on the matter. MVM may appoint the team/committee responsible for presenting reports of work done and expenses incurred.

6 Livelihoods

We believe that to influence change in the livelihoods of people and prepare them to cope disasters, community based resource base, especially natural and human resources, regimes should be improved and strengthened. In addition to this institutional linkages should be strengthened and considerable lobbying need to be done to influence state and other partners. Strong and sustained village institutions could maintain the health of natural resources, besides arranging access to other resources and hence secured livelihood for poor.

The goal of our livelihood interventions is to execute livelihood based coping strategies to reduce vulnerability of people, especially in disaster prone regions. The objective is to increase the income and food security of vulnerable communities through complementary farm and non farm based livelihood options We strive to adopt livelihood-based approaches that essentially comprises of livelihood restoration strategies i.e., resources conservation, enhancement and empowerment of local people in its management as intervention objective.

- Livelihood-based restoration: the program focuses on activities such as conservation, development and management of resources

- Empowerment: the program facilitates social and other processes to empower poor.

6.1 Program Strategy

Initially one village cluster is adopted on pilot basis where the interventions are carried out for 3 years. The program strategies will be based on tackling priority issues in defined cluster of villages. Within the cluster of village, livelihoods based perspectives will be adopted to the extent feasible. This could be around water resources, land resources or livestock or agriculture/non-agriculture based livelihoods. Working with collaborative partnership arrangements, the project will focus on physical interventions, capacity building, documentation, action and research, advocacy.

- Designing micro-plans to improve productivity of the resources and restore livelihoods of dependant population
- To create/ generate new livelihood opportunities with in the given situation
- Address issues- with in the cluster
- Capacity Building, thematic action research and documentation, advocacy.
- Working in partnership with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Leveraging other programs

6.2 Priority Issues

Based on our interventions and experience thereof, following priority physical interventions have emerged:

Water - Drinking water and supplementary irrigation

Priority: Drinking water, revival of traditional water conservation and use practices, creation of new water resources and advocacy for water rights and management

Project Focus: Institutional development, Gender Mainstreaming, Rights, Advocacy

Dryland farming and diversification

Priority: Agricultural diversification; income diversification from agriculture; Better land management techniques (in situ soil & water conservation and efficient water use

Project Focus: Institutional development, Gender, Research & Advocacy

Livestock and dairy based input services and linkages

Priority: Exploring alternative livestock management practices in agro-pastoral context, evolving institutional base and enhancing productivity and market linkages

Project Focus: Institutional development, Rights, Gender, Advocacy

Non farm livelihoods - Embroidery and Crafts

Priority: Exploring such options at community and individual levels for vulnerable sections and facilitate establishment of backward and forward linkages of the community with finance institutions, technical institutions, market etc

Project Focus: Institutional development, Gender Mainstreaming, Rights, Advocacy

Microfinance

Priority: Reduce through different products of micro finance the household vulnerability; support household enterprise and promoting this as a mean of women empowerment.

Project Focus: Institutional development, Gender Mainstreaming, Rights, Advocacy

6.3 Program Approach

- Undertake baseline study and begin with microplanning at cluster level
- Prioritize vulnerable groups and identify specific needs related to livelihoods
- Organise communities and build capacity to plan and execute activities
- Undertake physical interventions in land, water, agriculture and on/off farm activities for livelihood restoration of vulnerable communities
- Promote networking interaction with MORD, DRDA/ Collector/WASMO/GWSSB etc., and among village institutions
- Conduct studies, assessment of water supply status in project villages, reviewing government schemes, status of Narmada water pipeline; Review of Gujarat State water Policy
- Prepare concept note on Water-Futuristic Perspectives, Sustainable Technologies and Management alternatives.
- Establish market linkages between village communities/groups/associations and markets for sustainable livelihoods
- Monitor and map impact of the intervention on reducing vulnerabilities & restoring livelihood/ income

6.4 Approach and Crosscutting themes in Livelihood Strategic Interventions

COHESION works primarily through village institutions. The approaches are participatory, gender sensitive and equity oriented. This cross cutting themes is observed in all strategic interventions to ensure sustainable development and social justice. The approach is community based and bottom-up to ensure the needs and issues faced by communities get represented and addressed by programs.

Strengthening village institutions and prioritising women's' role in decision-making will ensure processes that help in mainstreaming gender. On the other hand most vulnerable communities are identified at micro planning stage to empower them and help secure proper position in community-based institutions.

The following elements are part of community based resource management approaches:

- Participation
- Gender mainstreaming
- Evolving inter institutional linkages
- Decentralisation of resources
- Local capacity building
- Development of special groups around resource management interventions
- Bottom-up planning and design