

## **MILE STONES – COHESION FOUNDATION TRUST (Prepared in 2006)**

Germination of Idea in August 1996 by Tarun Das, Ms Pavitar Kapoor and Rajesh Kapoor to set up an entity for supporting other Organizations in various sectors and later on having its own implementation Units around the year 2001.

Named it as COHESION – An acronym for Consultants in Human Resources Empowerment & Support in Organizing around Natural Resources. Subsequently, only Acronym was retained

Shared this idea with Dr Parthasarthy, Ms Usha Jumani, Ms Shilpa Vasavada, Dr Uma Jain, Nabarun Sen Gupta, and Manoj Mishra etc., who welcomed the idea.

### **Goal of the Organisation in 1996**

To contribute to the holistic development endeavors in the areas of natural resources (NR) and human resources (HR) management in India, focusing mainly on disadvantaged sections from caste, gender and class perspectives.

### **Focus Areas in 1996:**

- Cohesion believes in providing holistic support to the NGOs and other development organisations in carrying out various interventions (NRM, HRM).
- Capacity building of different stakeholders in general as well as in Participatory Methodologies, Institutional Development aspects and Gender Analysis.
- Cohesion also tries to reach to as many actors in the development sectors as possible by identifying the suitable project personnel and training them to meet the expectations of the development and cooperative sectors.
- Covering sectors like Natural Resource Development, Savings and Credit, livelihoods and other facets of Rural Development, *Health (especially Reproductive & Sexual Health), and Urban Poverty Alleviation and Infrastructure Development. (Sectors in italics added in 1997 end).*
- Implementing projects of various scales in an effective manner after about five years.

Submitted proposal, as an Association of Professionals, in August 1996, to act as Gujarat State Monitoring & Evaluation Agency for the World Bank funded Women Empowerment Project. However, Project got delayed, though the Gujarat Women Economic Development Corporation wishing to engage Cohesion as the Training Agency.

COHESION initiated activities in April 1998 with Process Documentation Research work and acting as Training Agency in Sexual Health and Women Empowerment related interventions. These support functions were taken up as a strategic move to transfer the grass-root level learning acquired by the professionals, to other organizations. This developed Cohesion's competency to work in different situations and areas.

**Our associates (Institutional – international and national):**

Because of limited resources and limitations for an Organization to sustain all types of expertise internally, Cohesion believes in working with others. COHESION successfully developed linkages with other institutions and individuals so as to complement strengths of each other. Some of our national level associates were Institute of Economic Growth, UNNATI, AKRSP, Friends for World Women Bank, Sadguru, SAHAJ, Mudra Communications, and The Learning Circle etc. Regarding international associations, we also associated with PEM Consult of Denmark for natural & human resources development projects.

In 1999, started IT Division, which was later developed as an independent institution – Cohesion Institute of Information Technology.

In the year 2000-01, we created implementation units, to act as a learning unit for further transfer of experience to other areas. The organization was formally registered in March 2001 under Bombay Public Trust Act.

In the years 2001 and 2002, pro-actively participated in meetings/programmes of different networks, e.g. Janpath, Abhiyan, Citizen Initiative, VIRDA etc.

In the year 2002, after completion of one year as a legal entity, Cohesion felt the need for carrying out organizational review on a participatory basis. This intervention was facilitated by an experienced OD Consultant, having experience in developmental organizations as well as in corporate sector.

The following interventions were planned:

1. Team building
2. Envisioning exercise

Team building exercise was initiated in February 2002, involving the entire team and has become an annual feature since then. The programmes for the first two years were facilitated by Mr. Arvind Chittewale and being carried out internally there after.

In the envisioning exercise, carried out in October 2002, mission and vision for the organizations were relooked and redefined.

• **The major strength emerged were as follows:**

1. Freedom
2. Scope for innovations
3. Flexibility
4. Ability to take complex and large projects
5. Strong and sensitive leadership
6. Participatory decision making.
7. Professionalism

8. Experience of different projects.
  9. Competent team
- **Opportunities:**
    1. Positive image established for the organization.
    2. Positive environment for NGOs to take up projects in Gujarat.
    3. Different networks inviting organization to get associated actively with them.
    4. Funding agencies giving opportunity to younger organizations.
  - **Concerns**
    1. Weakness in Systems & Procedures (Design & Implementation)
    2. Weakness in Documentation & Reporting (Guidelines & Action)
    3. Lack of Coordination & Shared / Collective Responsibility
    4. Work Load & Time Management (Delegation / Sharing / Skill sets / Planning)
    5. Insufficient Regulation
    6. Low levels of Experience Sharing / Internal Learning
    7. Unclear Organisational Structure & lack of role clarity, responsibility & authority.

The participants shared values being practiced by the organization. The following values were agreed:

1. Accountability
2. Mutual trust
3. Sensitivity
4. Equity
5. Transparency
6. Openness
7. Professionalism
8. Participation / Team Work

Then there was discussion on mission statement and after long deliberation the participants agreed on following statement:

**Cohesion is committed to sustainable socio-economic development of vulnerable sections with a special focus on women in under serviced areas through direct action and providing support services for social processes to the development sector guided by accountability and transparency.**

The proposed mission statement was then taken up with Trustees, after taking inputs from two OD experts, and the same was finalized as follows:

**Mission: ‘Cohesion, guided by transparency and accountability, is committed to sustainable socio-economic development of the vulnerable in under-serviced areas with special focus on women.’**

The consultant then facilitated defining vision for the organization. Vision was understood as a 'picture of success' painted by the organization that motivates people within and outside the organization to work / contribute / join hands for a cause.

Also a shared vision was agreed to be more convincing than a single leader’s vision.

The participants were comfortable in giving vision a pictorial form as a first step. They drew a common picture, based on a lot of deliberation on how they view organization after 20 years. Later on the vision statement was prepared based on this picture and inputs from OD consultants and its Board.

**Vision: ‘An organization committed to striving for a world in which people and the natural environment are in harmony with each other, a world in which people, men and women, are in harmony with each other, a world in which all have enough to meet their genuine emotional and physical needs, and a world in which the diversity of humankind is celebrated.’**

**Strengthening organisational functioning** – an internal exercise, involving senior team members, was carried out in March 2003 (facilitators too internal). Following two broad categories were defined, based on the issues raised by the participants:

a) Management & Systems (M&S) and b) Policy (Strategy) & Growth (P&G).

The participants then prioritised the solution sets and planned the implementation of the prioritized solution sets. A permanent structure was evolved in form of core team, which will be responsible for doing it. The participants then identified criteria for being in the core team and selected a core team on participatory basis. The core team then held its meeting on the solution sets and presented to the entire team of Cohesion next day the implementation plan with names of persons responsible. The Core team has been functioning since then and takes all major decisions on operational issues.

### **The Birth of a Core Team:**

#### **Need Felt:-**

- increasing volume of work
- professional approach and management of the work.
- envisioning organizational growth

#### **Recommendations given:-**

- Revising and devising the management systems
- Redefining approach and vision
- HRD to given priority for capacity and competence building
- Effective and efficient work approach by clarity in roles, responsibility and performance management

#### **OUTCOMES:**

- New Organizational Structure

- Redefined Approach & Focus
- Human Resource Management System
- Effective Planning, Implementing, Monitoring and Evaluation System

A woman HR officer in place since April 2003 – a rare position in NGOs. She was to look into OD and HRD aspects excluding recruitment, transfers and other routine administrative works.

A draft HR policy, systems and a detailed manual was put for testing in August 2003 and finalized after six months, based on inputs from the team and two external HR experts. The manual has since been internalized.

The organization gives significant emphasis on capacity building of its human resources. Different means, such as external training programmes, internal trainings, workshops, demonstration and feedback exercises are used. Different leading resource institutions in India, such as IITs, Institute of Rural Management, Entrepreneurship Development Institute etc are used.

Regular reflection in the organization.

Very less iteration rate, as compared to the general trend in the NGO sector.

**Funding Agencies:**

CARE India	UNDP*	W & C Dept.	
Concern Worldwide	MoRD	SHN	
Oxfam GB	PMNRF	SCUK	
WASMO	AIF	NABARD	IWMI/SRTT

**Partners and Associates:**

JANPATH	UNNATI	Janvikas
Abhiyan	AKRSP	ICECD
SAVE	EDI	

\* - Through Janvikas and Abhiyan

**Advisory Board** constituted in August 2003.

**Direct Implementation initiated for:**

Kutch and Rajkot districts: April 2001  
 Patan: March 2002  
 Banskantha: October 2005  
 Navsari: February 2006

**Different networks, e.g. Abhiyan and Sajjata Sangh invited Cohesion to be member**

**Prepared draft Strategy Document in March 2006 defining following Sectoral Priorities -**

***Social sector priorities:***

- Water & sanitation
- Education for the Disadvantaged.
- Health – physical, mental, psychological, reproductive and sexual.
- Social securities.
- Disaster preparedness and management.
- Decentralized governance

***Economic sector priorities:***

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

**Geographical priorities –**

**For implementation:**

The under serviced areas in the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan

**For support functions:**

Besides above areas, the states of Orissa, Chattisgarh, Bihar and Jharkhand.

The Advisory Board discussed this document and suggested organizational review.

**An organizational review has been initiated since June 2006** with the support of HIDRC, Janvikas. The major outcomes of the processes carried out so far are as follows:

**LIFE CYCLE OF THE ORGANIZATION**

Cohesion has passed through infancy and Go Go stages and now entering adolescent stage

**ORGANIZATIONAL DIAGNOSIS**

Focus areas of Cohesion:

- Farm based Livelihood
- Social Issues of women (property Rights, Violence against women, Water & Sanitation)

Supporting areas:

- Non- Farm based Livelihoods

- Disaster Management
- Education for marginalized sections
- Reproductive & Child Health

## **POINTS FOR FURTHER DELIBERATIONS**

To develop clarity on the following aspects before moving further on defining strategic decisions:

1. The next three years are for building the identity of the Organization. What are the necessary processes Cohesion needs to place for building the identity of the Organization?
2. Will the Organization intend to give more focus on ‘Knowledge Building’ or ‘Scaled up implementation’?
3. There appears to be very healthy internal processes. What are the quality assurance mechanisms in these processes?
4. There is a great degree of organizational integrity i.e. it does what it says. How Cohesion intends to sustain and build on it?
5. To which aspect will Cohesion like to give more importance - empowerment, entitlement (rights based) or governance paradigm?
6. What are the core competencies of the Organization?
7. What mechanisms do we wish to adopt for ensuring synergy between individuals’ aspirations and organizational strategy for increased ownership?
8. What is our external environment?
9. What should be the guiding principles which enable taking a decision on programme opportunities? What should be the non-negotiable points in principles, issues, processes etc?
10. ‘Farm based livelihoods’ and “Social issues of women’ are two very different focus areas. How will Cohesion integrate these two to avoid confusion at the field team level?
- 11 It appears that Cohesion wishes to contribute to the development of practical solutions at grass-root level on poverty debate in a holistic manner i.e. addressing economic, social, and political poverty. What are the views on this?
12. As a part of ‘Future Search Processes’ (a sort of visioning process), there is a need to deliberate on following:
  - a) What CFT will like to be known as?
  - b) Defining what it means to be a CFT person i.e. team member?