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Panchayat and Community Based Monitoring System in Sehore District Madhya Pradesh

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Acronyms

ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
BMO	Block Medical Officer
CBM	Community Based Monitoring
CBMS	Community Based Monitoring System
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMHO	Chief Medical and Health Officer
DEO	District Education Officer
DSO	District Planning and Statistics Officer
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
PHE	Public Health and Engineering
PRIs	*Panchayati Raj* Institutions
RTI	Right to Information
SCs	Scheduled Tribes
SHG	Self Help Group
SSA	*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*
VWSC	Village Water and Sanitation Committee
YG	Youth Group

Foreword

Youthspeak: Case Studies of Development in Practice is a recent UNICEF India initiative under the umbrella of the Knowledge Community on Children in India (KCCI). A partnership between UNICEF and the Government of India, the Knowledge Community on Children in India aims to fill knowledge gaps and promote information sharing on policies and programmes related to children in India. Under the aegis of this project, 105 young interns from 14 countries visited UNICEF and other projects focused on child rights and development. Their fresh perspectives, commitment and hard work are reflected in the case studies published by UNICEF under the Youthspeak series.

UNICEF recognises the potential and power of young people as drivers of change and future leadership across the globe. The KCCI Summer Internship Programme aims to develop a cadre of young research and development professionals with interest, commitment and skills relating to children's development in India. This series represents the first set of case studies undertaken by the pioneer batch of interns in 2005.

The case studies cover key sectors linked to children and development and address important policy issues for children in India. These include: primary education, reproductive and child health, HIV/AIDS, water and sanitation and child development and nutrition and child labour. Based on desk research and field work, these case studies tell the story of innovations in service delivery, what works, why, and under what conditions and put a human face to the successes and challenges of development in India.

UNICEF endeavours to continue this collaboration with young researchers so as to bring fresh perspectives and energy to development research and our ongoing efforts towards the upliftment of women and children in India.

Representative
UNICEF India

Executive Summary

The report examines the state of a community based monitoring initiative, implemented by an NGO, with the mission of strengthening local governance and increasing civic participation. It begins by outlining the history of the *Panchayati Raj*, and highlighting the importance of the 73rd Amendment. While focusing on the *Panchayati Raj* in Madhya Pradesh, the challenges facing local governance are unearthed and the need for a community based monitoring system becomes apparent. The community based monitoring system (CBMS) targets three key areas: the delivery of government services, the functioning of *Panchayats* and self monitoring.

Research was conducted in five villages in Sehore District, Madhya Pradesh. Qualitative data was collected through various methods, ranging from semi-structured interviews to focus group discussions with local stakeholders.

The Case Studies section presents a holistic picture of the CBMS at various stages of implementation. In particular, they document the unique intervention strategies undertaken by the NGO, and the results are synthesised and presented in the Major Findings section. These findings focus on attitudes of villagers towards participation, the issue of social inclusion, factors which inhibit the intervention's success, as well as those which advance it. Also highlighted are the resultant tangible impacts of the CBMS, thus far.

The section on Sustainability and Replicability of the CBMS deals separately with the three key areas of monitoring. The CBMS has effectively monitored the delivery of government services in the areas of education and health. Furthermore, this is a success that is highly sustainable and replicable. The other two areas of monitoring, *Panchayat* monitoring and self-monitoring, can only be evaluated on a case by case basis. Success in these areas depends heavily on the socio-cultural and economic dynamics of each village. Finally, recommendations are presented for further interventions.

Introduction

A major challenge facing India is the establishment of models of local self-governance. The dearth of effective self-governing institutions inhibits the delivery of government services, especially in rural areas which constitute roughly seventy per cent of the country's population. Past efforts to improve service delivery have affected legislation and reallocated resources, yet they have failed to yield results due to a lack of demand from the citizens. In order to change this, the government attempted to increase participation by strengthening the traditional system of local governance known as the *Panchayati Raj*. However, despite political and legislative efforts, participation at the village level has remained abysmally low. As a result of this, private organisations such as NGOs and international institutions have begun to assume the gigantic responsibility of creating models of local self- governance and encouraging civic participation at the village level. The Samarthan Centre for Development is one such NGO and it was through their work with villages in the Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh that a system of community based monitoring (CBM) emerged as a potential mechanism for the empowerment of local self governance.

CBM is an initiative which aims to increase awareness of various government programmes and schemes, train local leaders and increase civic participation through the monitoring of Government, *Panchayat* and community practices. This study examines the ways in which Samarthan's intervention has been successful in achieving these goals. To asses this, we have investigated the following key issues regarding the community based monitoring system (CBMS): levels of awareness and participation, the effectiveness and sustainability of the CBMS, facilitating factors for CBMS success and finally, the ways in which CBMS influences social inclusion.

The paper begins by outlining a brief history of the *Panchayati Raj* and the Community Based Monitoring System (CBMS). It discusses the State's response to the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution and illustrates how the CBMS evolved as a mechanism for increasing participation. Next is detailed the methodology of the field study, which was undertaken in select villages of Sehore District. With the help of case studies, we explore the challenges and the effectiveness of the CBMS initiative at various stages of implementation. In the Major Findings section, we highlight critical factors that play an important role in determining the success of the CBMS initiative. This is followed by a discussion of the sustainability and replicability of the CBMS. Finally, concluding observations are made along with recommendations.

History of the *Panchayati Raj* and Community Based Monitoring

The concept of village self-rule has been a system of governance instituted at different times and in different regions throughout India's history. In modern times, Mahatma Gandhi issued an impassioned plea for reviving the system of *Panchayati Raj*, in his influential text *Hindi Swaraj*. When the British Rule ended in 1947, India was left with a highly centralised bureaucratic system of government. After deliberating about the role to be played by *Panchayats*, the Constituent Assembly finally decided not to accord *Panchayats* with legal sanctity and they were mentioned only in the Directive Principles of State Policy. After independence, many expert committees were constituted with the intention of giving a fillip to local governance in India and minor changes were made accordingly. But these changes did not yield any significant result and it was constantly felt that village development could be achieved only by institutionalising the *Panchayati Raj* system. It was, therefore, felt imperative to amend the Constitution. After two subsequent failures in its passage, the 73rd Amendment was passed by the Indian Parliament in 1993.

Box 1 : 73rd Amendment

- Provided constitutional status to *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRIs).
- Mandated state governments to create legislation to divest power to PRIs.
- Fixed the tenure for elected PRI representatives. Composite elections should be held within six months of the dissolution of a *Panchayat*. Also, it provided for the formation of a State Election Commission to ensure free and fair elections.
- Reserved one third of the PRI representative positions for women, and mandated proportional representation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs/ST).
- In the 11th Schedule, states were encouraged to divest 29 activities to the PRIs.
- State Finance Commissions were mandated to facilitate financial resource mobilisation for PRIs.

Although the objective of the 73rd Amendment was to engender strong institutions of local government, it was initiated by the central government. This was needed because "institutional initiatives of the preceding decade had not delivered expected results" (Mahipal 2005: 67). Thus, the main problems have been two-fold; convincing governmental authorities at the state and local levels of the benefits of a strong *Panchayati Raj* system, and also training a cadre of citizens with the will and skills

necessary to engage in effective self-governance. Thus far, results have been mixed, and the main impediment to success has been resistance from local officials. From an organisational standpoint, the *Panchayats* are at the mercy of the state governments because they are the source of their mandate and funding (Sisodia 2005a). In many cases, administrators have simply ignored decisions taken by Panchayats, and failed to act on their recommendations (Sisodia 2005b). One scholar claims that Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) have not only "been indifferent to local governments, but at times they have also been hostile to these bodies" (Mathew 1995: 13).

Another barrier to effective local governance stems from the *Panchayats* themselves. The 73rd Amendment did not provide for any widespread training, and many *Panchayat* members lack any knowledge of governance. Therefore, *Panchayats* often shy away from development initiatives, and instead opt to invest in improving local infrastructure (Mathew 1995). Also, many *Panchayats* are dominated by entrenched local interest groups, despite reservations for SCs/STs and women. It has been documented that in some cases, males from a wide cross section of class and caste backgrounds have united to prevent women from influencing the *Panchayats* (Mathew 1999).

Nirmal Mukarji is a critic of the 73rd Amendment, and he argued that despite its objective of decentralising power, it imposed an arbitrary structure of governance from the macro-level. He claimed that by not allowing for the uniqueness of local histories and traditions to shape the structure of *Panchayats*, the law actually reified centralised governance (Mathew 1995). It now seems unfair to say that the 73rd Amendment has perpetuated macro-governance, but it is clear that the PRI has been more effective in some places than in others, perhaps due to unique local traditions and histories.

PRIs in Madhya Pradesh

Like many states in India, Madhya Pradesh has experienced mixed results since legally institutionalising a *Panchayati Raj* structure. Madhya Pradesh was created in 1956 by merging four existing territorial units, two of which had a long history of local governance (Mathew 1995). The Madhya Pradesh *Panchayati* Act was passed in 1962, and it created a three-tier system of Gram *Sabha* (Village), *Janpad* (Block) and *Zila* (District) *Panchayats*. However, the first *Panchayat* elections were not held until 1965, and George Mathew claims that the failure to hold elections sooner "reflected adversely on the political will of successive governments and elected representatives and on their ability to implement the *Panchayati Raj* Programme [sic]" (Mathew 1995: 121). In other words, it was argued that there was a disconnect between the law and its implementation, and Mathew went on to describe the government's approach as "lackadaisical" (Mathew

1995). Oftentimes, when authority was granted to the *Panchayats*, it was not done in the spirit of the law, and their power was limited. For example, *Zila Panchayats* were limited to supervising and advising and did not carry the mandate to implement or design initiatives (Mathew 1995). In 2000, a law was passed which linked participation in the PRI and compliance with the "two child norm" (Bandyopadhyay and Mukherjee 2004). This requirement was discriminatory against the poor because they are predisposed to higher birth rates, which would make their candidacy for the position of *Sarpanch* ineligible. Eventually, it was repealed, but this case shows that there are powerful interest groups opposed to actually decentralising government through the PRI.

Madhya Pradesh was the first state to update legislation in accordance with the 73rd Amendment (Mathew 1999). This act allowed for wider representation for SCs/STs, but it also ensured MP's and MLA's positions within the *Panchayat* structure at the *Janpad* and *Zila* levels (Mathew 1995). Similar pieces of legislation were passed in other states and one proponent of local governance has argued that "this will undermine the *Panchayats*" (Mathew 1995: 13). In the first election, 144,735 SC/ST representatives were elected, of which 48,993 were women. A total of 82,504 representatives from backward classes were elected, of which 28,735 were women (Mathew 1999). High voter turnout coupled with a level of inclusion of traditionally marginalised groups, shows that the *Panchayati Raj* system is potentially an effective vehicle of decentralisation, but the system faces many challenges. A comprehensive monitoring system can serve as a means of overcoming these challenges.

The community based monitoring system

The *Gram Sabha* is a platform meant to address everyone's concerns by providing a forum in which those issues can be voiced. In theory, the *Panchayat* is supposed to act in accordance with decisions taken at the *Gram Sabha*. The PRI does not, however, capacitate villagers to raise issues in the *Gram Sabha*, and as a result, they have not embraced the process. To rectify the problem of abysmally low participation, a system of community based monitoring was developed. CBMS is a concept, wherein members of a village form a committee which monitors the delivery of services by the government, the activities of the *Panchayat*, and also tries to bring about a change in the habits, behaviours and attitudes of the villagers. The system also strengthens the *Gram Sabha*, as it helps to develop an agenda for the meetings.

Furthermore, a community based system of monitoring is perceived to be the best mechanism to overcome the barriers to meaningful participation, as it mobilises the recipients of services provided by the state and *Panchayats*. By making the recipients of these services responsible for ensuring effective service delivery, the system can be

made more transparent, far-reaching and efficient. The role that has been envisaged for this system is two dimensional. First, it is expected that the CBMS will create greater awareness in order to generate a higher demand for government services and this will ensure their efficient delivery. The second aspect relates to self-monitoring, which encompasses the responsibilities that villagers are expected to fulfil and the habits, behaviours and attitudes they need to change in order to create an environment conducive to sustainable development.

Samarthan has attempted to facilitate the CBMS process at the village level by creating and supporting various community based initiatives. This NGO's work has focused primarily on increasing *Gram Sabha* participation and community awareness by monitoring *Panchayats* and community issues – for example, personal hygiene, sanitation, etc. Samarthan's approach includes village level training, *Panch/Sarpanch* networking and lastly, the use of cultural heritage along with technical media as mechanisms for information dissemination and educational awareness.

More specifically, Samarthan has targeted key Youth Groups (YGs) in various villages of Sehore to act as internal community based monitoring agents at the village level. In addition, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) have been formed. Members of these committees also form the bulk of the CBM committee. Initially comprised of YG members, CBM committees have grown to become more inclusive in nature and now comprise women, SCs and STs. After imparting training in leadership skills, Samarthan hopes to utilise these groups to generate awareness and mobilise villagers to participate in *Gram Sabhas*. The Sehore based YGs use street plays as one method to discuss issues such as immunisation, social exclusion, education and sanitation.

These are the main aspects of the implementation of a CBM initiative:
- Formation of different groups (SHGs, YGs, VWSCs), which will later take part in the monitoring process.
- Selection of the CBM Committee members which is done on voluntary basis, and approved by *Gram Sabha* participants.
- Dialogue with *Panchayat* and village level functionaries.
- Training of the CBM committee. Members receive this training at the district head office. Topics covered are wide-ranging, and include means of raising awareness, methods of monitoring, using the media and the Right to Information Act (RTI) as tools for monitoring.
- Creating monitoring charts. These charts are painted on the sides of buildings throughout the village and serve to record the delivery of state services such as Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) visits, *Anganwadi* (local crèche) functioning,

teacher absenteeism, and so on. They also serve to disseminate information regarding the activities of the monitoring committee, such as hygiene and water harvesting campaigns.

- Facilitating monitoring committee meetings and assisting in the updating of monitoring charts.
- Mounting pressure on village level functionaries and *Panchayats* to adhere to the decisions taken in the *Gram Sabha*, thus forcing them to give due cognisance to the villagers' wishes.
- Using the Right to Information Act, which is a potent tool for monitoring, to access information from the District Administration and *Panchayat*.

Box 2 : Right to Information Act (RTI)

The Right to Information Act was passed by the Central Government in order to increase transparency and accountability, thus ensuring good governance. It includes the following provisions:

- The Act grants citizens the right to inspect all government works, documents, records.
- It allows information seekers to take notes, extracts or certified copies of documents or records.
- In addition, one may also obtain certified samples of material.
- The information can be obtained in the form of printouts, diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts.

http://persmin.nic.in/RTI/WelcomeRTI.htm

Methodology

The study was conducted in villages of Sehore District, Madhya Pradesh.

Fig.1 : Map of Sehore District
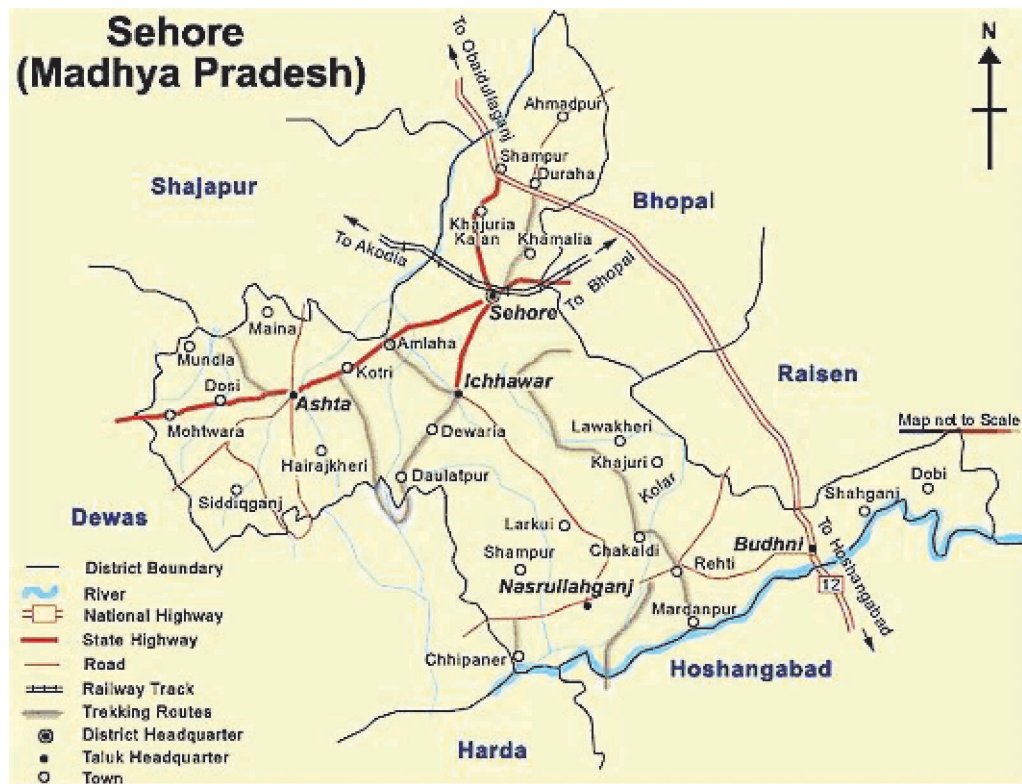
Research questions:

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of awareness that villagers have regarding the activities of their *Panchayat* and the community based monitoring (CBM) initiative within their villages?

2. What is the effectiveness of the CBMS in engendering good governance and in empowering local stakeholders? Do villagers attend the *Gram Sabha*? Do the issues raised at the *Gram Sabha* get implemented?

3. Who, if any, are left out of the CBMS process? Why?

4. What factors facilitate success in the CBM?

5. How can this be replicated on a larger scale?

The research team spent ten days in Sehore District visiting a total of 6 villages (Karadia Atah, Laundia, Manpura, Rajukhedi, Aamla and Bijlon). Village level research included a mixture of interview and observation methods. Approximately 300 villagers participated in un-structured interviews and three informal community meetings were added to gain a fuller picture of the CBMS initiative. These meetings included local leaders such as the *Sarpanch* (elected head of the *Panchayat*), community members and representatives from the host research institution, Samarthan. In addition to this, the observation of media strategies (billboards, pamphlets, newspaper clippings) as well as the presence of infrastructure such as drainage systems, hand pumps, schools and information centres provided meaningful units of analysis for the success of the CBMS initiative in the respective villages.

Primary research for the investigation was facilitated through the sponsorship of the host research institution, Samarthan Centre for Development Support. All village field work, focus groups and state administrative interviews were in part arranged with the help of the host institution. The selection of the villages was made with the objective of analysing the intervention at various stages.

Qualitative data for the study was collected using un-structured interviews, observation of focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with state administrators. Un-structured interviews with approximately 300 villagers focused on each villager's awareness of the CBMS initiative and participation in the CBMS process. The use of open-ended questions allowed respondents to speak freely about the issue at hand and provide information relating to the larger picture of village life and local governance.

The observation of three focus group discussions - a cross section of *Panchayat* members, YG members and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM), centred on the effectiveness of the CBMS initiative at the village level. These groups were asked questions about their successes and limitations and the respondents were further encouraged to substantiate their findings on the basis of some recent happenings. Information sharing about challenges facing the CBMS initiative and recommendations for CBMS success also surfaced during these meetings.

Semi-structured interviews with 8 state administrators (District Treasury Officer, Block Medical Officer, *Zila Panchayat* President, *Janpad Panchayat*, District Education Officer, District Statistics Officer and District Project Officer) added structural and policy dimensions to the research on the CBMS initiative. These officials were asked to respond to some of the structural challenges facing villagers in their struggle for access to resources and to comment on the ways in which their respective offices would aid in ensuring a successful CBMS initiative.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with a representative from Samarthan to further develop an understanding of the nature and scope of each CBMS intervention. Questions aimed at uncovering the preconditions for village intervention, the types of inputs required for intervention, the duration of the intervention and the probability of intervention sustainability and replicability.

The following review of stakeholders, community organisations, elected state and local officials clarifies the distinct functions of all those directly and tangentially tied to the CBMS initiative. The case study aims to incorporate as many views and perspectives on the CBMS initiative as possible in the hope of rendering a complete analysis of the CBMS process.

Table 1. Players and stakeholders

Players	Description and Role	Activities and Functions
Village Level		
Dwellers	Main actors in decision making process. Contribute to monitoring via *Gram Sabha* participation and interaction with CBM committee, SHGs and youth groups.	Engages in their own livelihood activities. Of late, have slowly started to realise the significance of their participation.
Panchayat	Local governing body elected by villagers. Its responsibilities include disbursing funds and directing development projects. Comprises *Panchayat* members (*Panches*) headed by a *Sarpanch*.	Convenes the *Gram Sabha*, and liases between villagers and block, district and state functionaries. Also identifies beneficiaries for various schemes and programmes of government.
Sarpanch	Elected leader of the Panchayat. Generally, he is the elder most and renowned person of village. Majority supports him on the basis of many social factors apart from his competence.	Prepares project proposals and allocates funds for development projects. Represents the *Panchayat* in dealings with state officials and functionaries.
Self Help Groups (SHGs)	Economic empowerment of women that works to create a separate space for female participation and solidarity.	Micro finance lending. Monitoring personal hygiene, sanitation and general health and education related issues.
Youth Groups (YGs)	Youth belonging to the age group of 18-30. Work to mobilise community awareness, garner community support around development issues. These youth group members are identified as potential future leaders.	Campaigning for health and education related issues. In charge of staffing information centre and disseminating information regarding the delivery of government services and the activities of the *Panchayat*.

Players	Description and Role	Activities and Functions
Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC)	Promote cleanliness and hygiene in order to solve the problems of water sanitation and water scarcity.	Collect funds for the installation of village water tanks and drainage systems.
Community Based Monitoring Committee (CBM)	Comprised of former youth group members, self help group members, village elders and other responsible community members. Monitors the delivery of government services and *Panchayat* activities. Aims at improving attitudes and behaviour to ensure sustainable development.	Maintain activities charts, social audits, file complaints against lax service providers, seek information under the RTI. Conduct educational awareness around the use of the RTI. Engender a culture of participation.
Children's Group - All Boys Group - All Girls Group	Aid the process of community based monitoring at the primary school level. These relatively younger people are likely to eventually form part of the youth group. The experiences gained help this lot in comprehending the issues at length.	Inculcate habits related to personal hygiene through cleanliness check-ups at the school. Monitor the use and maintenance of village hand pumps and other related affairs.
Block Level		
Janpad President	Highest elected representative at the block level. Responsible for decisions related to funding of *Panchayat* activities.	Responsible for maintaining a vigil over allocated funds and ensures implementation and monitoring.
Janpad CEO	An official appointed by the state that heads the team of various Extension Officers. Provides information required by *Janpad* president for decision making.	Report making, information dissemination, liaison with other departments to facilitate and resolve matters.
District Level		
Panchayat President	Highest elected functionary at the *Zila* level. Decides and directs the use of untied funds for village projects.	Primarily responsible for implementation and monitoring of approved funds and programmes.
District Officials - District Education Officer - Chief Health and Medical Officer - District Planning and Statistics Officer	These are appointed line officials who belong to respective government departments. These follow the guidelines and rules as mentioned in various policies and to an extent, follow a target based approach. The authority to make decisions with regard to their department still lie in their hands and it is more a matter of their personal opinion which makes or unmakes the happenings in their work and location jurisdiction.	Primarily responsible for implementing programmes ensuring delivery of services to the end user. Manpower management, training, reporting and periodic evaluation forms part of their duties. At times, surprise visits to the fields are done to ensure compliance. But the system does not provide for adequate room for feedback from beneficiaries.

Case Studies

The following case studies show the CBM initiative at various stages and levels of success. Samarthan undertook unique intervention strategies for each village, in an attempt to cater to local concerns and conditions. The case studies are presented in order of the degree of success that has been achieved, with Rajukhedi showing the best results.

Rajukhedi: a model intervention

Village profile

Rajukhedi is a small village about 6 Km from the Sehore District HQ of the Samarthan Centre for Development Support. It consists of about 88 households of which only 8 belong to the SC/ST/OBC groups. The rest of the households primarily belong primarily to the Mewada clan and most of the villagers are somehow related. Of the 666 people residing in the village, 311 are males, 287 females and 68 infants (0-5 years of age). The literate population consists of 172 females and 253 males.

Important issues

The issues concerning the village were those of availability of drinking water, sanitation (although this has been resolved to a large extent- about 80 per cent of the village is open-defecation free) and continuing education beyond the eighth standard, as there is no high school in the village or in the neighbouring ones. In the past (before the inception of the SHG, YG or CBM committee), the village suffered from a host of problems, for instance, teacher absenteeism, infrequent ANM visits, an inefficient postal delivery system, open defecation and most importantly, a lack of women's participation in the village decision making processes.

Intervention strategy

The NGO Samarthan began its intervention about four years ago. It began by setting up an SHG and a YG comprising of men between 18-30 years of age.

Box 3. Intervention strategy

- Community based groups formed during the last four years of intervention, were taken into the Community Monitoring committee with the approval of the *Gram Sabha*.
- Women did not come forward for the community monitoring committee, but as SHG members, they monitored these services on the institutional platform of the *Gram Sabha*.

The SHG deserves especial mention, as it has been instrumental in empowering women. The SHG has helped these women in gaining financial independence, which has given them not only a sense of security, but also a greater say in the decision making process both at home and at the village level. The SHG has also given them a platform where they can come together to discuss their problems and address issues concerning the village at large. Women belonging to the SHG now attend the *Gram Sabha* proceedings regularly and have become more aware about the activities of the *Panchayat*. It is also interesting to note that issues raised by women such as those of drinking water, health and education are different from the demands for infrastructure facilities put forth by the men of the village. Thus the SHG has, in many ways, enabled women to come forward and raise their concerns regarding village issues. The concept of monitoring is, therefore, not a new concept for women in this SHG. They recently led a cleanliness drive, wherein they swept the entire village and targeted the houses of the influential *Patels*. who were very complacent about the issue.

The YG is an equally important body, which has been involved in the process of monitoring for a long time. The YG in Rajukhedi has greatly contributed to the strengthening of the process of decision making and creating a sense of awareness in the village about the state of affairs of government service delivery and the activities of the *Panchayat*. Active members from this YG, along with other responsible members of the village, eventually comprised the monitoring committee. It was ensured that the monitoring committee was representative by choosing a member from each ward and including members of all castes. The monitoring committee was given sufficient training to enable it to carry out its monitoring activities. A major shortcoming of the Monitoring Committee however, is that it does not have any female members.

Box 4. CMC regularises village health and education services

Members of the committee lodged a complaint against the ANM because her visits were irregular and she did not cater to the needs of the entire village. After the complaint was lodged, the visits became more frequent and services were provided to all villagers. Teacher absenteeism was another problem faced by the village education system. In order to solve the problem, the monitoring committee put a lock on the school, which served to embarrass the teacher; this ensured that classes were held regularly. The committee has also used the media as an important tool for monitoring. Negligence of the postal delivery services in this area was reported to the press which, when published, alerted the authorities who immediately rectified the problem. The committee has also used the RTI Act to its advantage and sought important information regarding government schemes for the village as well as to monitor the activities of the *Panchayat*.

Another important observation was that both the monitoring committee and the SHG have their own buildings, which symbolise the strength and progress of both. The buildings have a powerful impact on the rest of the village in terms of generating awareness about the activities of the groups and in further influencing villagers, as it speaks volumes about their success.

Broad conclusions

Rajukhedi is an extremely successful case of the community based monitoring system. The level of awareness amongst the villagers is praiseworthy and almost everybody feels a sense of responsibility when it comes to monitoring the activities of the *Panchayat* and the services provided by the state. In fact, the success of the monitoring committee and the YG has highly motivated the younger generation and they have formed a children's monitoring committee which has been monitoring activities in the village school and has been playing an important role in changing the habits of students. For the younger generation, it is education that is the top priority and along with increasing the level of education in schools they want computer facilities and other vocational and training programmes.

Although women are not fairly represented on the monitoring committee (the same is true for children's monitoring groups) they have been exercising their rights in other ways. As members of the SHG, they have undertaken many campaigns for the benefit of the entire village and have also started attending the *Gram Sabhas* regularly. It can thus be said that women in the village are so far "separate but equal". They have contributed to the monitoring process in meaningful ways that have already been discussed. Facilitating factors that have contributed to the success of monitoring committees include:

- Homogeneity in terms of caste constitution.
- The fact that the monitoring process has also enjoyed the support of the *Panchayat* and thus there have been no conflicts on that front either. In fact, the *Panchayat* has been instrumental in helping the committee raise important issues at the block and district levels.
- Rajukedi is a small village and has enjoyed a long intervention. This has also contributed to its success.

The work done by the monitoring committee is nevertheless commendable. It serves as a model for the villages around it and many people from neighbouring villages have approached members of the monitoring committee to help them create a similar system. The active members of the committee have formed a group, which consists of a cross-section of youth groups from all villages, and this serves as a platform for them to

exchange information, seek advice, and impart training. This change in the attitude and mind-set of the villagers will ensure that the initiative is sustainable.

Box 5: Impacts of the CBMS

- A marked decrease in teacher absenteeism.
- Increased regularity in ANM's visits.
- Improvement in sanitation and hygienic behaviour.
- Positive alteration of the built infrastructure in some villages (a water tower in Manpura, centres for the YG and SHG in Rajukhedi).
- Successful interventions have resulted in increased participation in the *Gram Sabha*.
- Improvement of nutritional standards among children by monitoring the quality and regularity of mid-day meals.

Manpura: development *sans* participation

Profile

Manpura is a relatively small village with roughly sixty households. A recently built water tower dominates the centre of the village. Public notices concerning sanitation and water conservation are painted on the tower, and on various other walls throughout the village. Currently, however, the pump at the water tower is broken, so access to clean water was cited by most villagers as the main problem in Manpura. Other problems commonly cited included sanitation, poor roads and teacher absenteeism.

The intervention

Samarthan has been active in Manpura for almost two years, so a number of groups existed prior to the establishment of the CBM initiative. The sanitation committee, which is responsible for the construction of the water tower and gutters throughout the village, was extremely active. A YG which includes SCs/STs was previously active and there were also two SHGs.

General awareness about these groups and the CBM committee, among the villagers was high; however, willingness to participate was low. Also, in many cases, the villagers were aware of the existence of these groups, but did not know about the projects they were undertaking. There was also no coordination between these different groups, which led to a lack of awareness about each others' activities. Although most villagers agreed that monitoring groups could theoretically benefit the community, they were sceptical about the actual effectiveness of the CBM initiative.

Outcomes

Overall participation in civic activities has increased in Manpura as a result of the CBM initiative. The CBM has been effective in helping the villagers set the agenda for the *Gram Sabha*. The final decision however, still rests with the *Sarpanch*, which discourages many villagers because they feel that their input will not be taken seriously. This is especially the case with SC/ST residents and women. One woman claimed that she raised the issue of clean drinking water at the *Gram Sabha*, but her comment was ignored by the men because they considered collecting water as "women's work."

There are three female members in the *Panchayat*, but they do not attend meetings regularly. When asked about their participation, the *Sarpanch* claimed that their husbands took their viewpoints into account and related their views at the *Gram Sabha* meetings. This kind of atmosphere creates an environment in which women lose interest in participating in civic institutions.

Due to the construction of the water tower and painted signs instructing villagers on hygienic behaviour, most villagers were aware of Samarthan's activities, but we found that these activities must be accompanied by door-to-door awareness campaigns to have any real impact. Signs and pictures alone are not sufficient to spur behavioural change. However, there have been some improvements in hygienic behaviour, especially among children. Also, the village has become open-defecation free, which was made possible by the efforts of the VWSC.

The CBM committee has been successful in decreasing teacher absenteeism and in assuring regular visits from an ANM. It is difficult to quantify these successes, yet they should not be understated because they benefit all villagers.

Analysis

Manpura has been successful in confronting issues that benefit everyone and do not entail financial inputs, such as increasing the ANM's visits and decreasing teacher absenteeism. However, confronting infrastructure inequalities has been more difficult. Expensive projects such as building roads and bridges are hampered by a lack of transparency. The structure of governance is still hierarchical and the *Sarpanch* does not seem to be overly concerned with increasing participation among villagers. He said that "Nothing would have been possible without Samarthan," but it seemed that he was trying to appropriate Samarthan's success without fundamentally altering the nature of governance in Manpura. So despite numerous successes, the villagers have still not taken ownership of the CBM initiative and the village lacks a tradition of participation. Therefore, Samarthan's presence is still necessary, and efforts should be made to increase meaningful participation at the *Gram Sabha*.

The *Sarpanch* is a member of the CBM committee, which is a major barrier to transparency. This has been a barrier to the construction of a bridge, although the villagers are convinced about its utility and the funds are also available. An autonomous CBM committee could theoretically investigate the issues preventing the construction of this bridge, but since the *Sarpanch* is a member of the CBM committee, the issue is avoided.

Laundia: a case of mixed results

Laundia is comprised of approximately 120 households and an estimated 341 voters. It is situated 20 km. from the Sehore District HQ of the NGO Samarthan and 2 km. from the main road. There is no health care centre in the village and formal education is available only up to the fifth standard.

Important issues
Villagers identified the major obstacles to development as the following: access to clean drinking water, open defecation and lack of overall cleanliness. At one community meeting, a schoolteacher, along with other community members, described the problem of student absenteeism and believed that the UNICEF primary school initiative did very little or almost nothing in solving the problem of high attrition rates. Rather it simply emphasised the periodic submission of statistics Gender inequality is also apparent in the village of Laundia and many female SHG members eventually stopped actively participating, due to pressure from husbands and in-laws. It is also important to note the case of another women's SHG that hopes to open a dairy business. The group has already saved 2000-3000 rupees and are seeking a 30,000 rupee loan. Members of both of these groups said that their membership in an SHG has not led them to participate in the *Gram Sabha*.

Intervention strategy
Samarthan began its work in this village about 3 months ago conducting educational awareness and training programmes in the following areas: birth registration, teacher absenteeism and utilisation of the RTI Act.

As a result of such training, community members decided to exercise the RTI in order to gain knowledge about the high costs of laundry detergent in their village. They were able to uncover the root causes of cost inflation, while also learning about the detergent making process. After acquiring this information, the members of the community began laundry detergent production themselves and have been successful in producing it at a fraction of the market price.

Barometer for future success

Considering that the CBMS is a relatively new initiative in Laundia, there seem to be enough indicators for success to encourage Samarthan to continue its work there. The community's use of the RTI Act to help in the production of laundry detergent was an invaluable achievement for the villagers, because it not only sensitised them to the RTI process, but also offered them an alternative to high prices and capacitated them with key knowledge for production. Leadership also played an important role in the galvanisation of Laundia and the presence of an 'outsider' who also worked as a teacher in the primary school seemed to help create awareness about the needs of the community at large. The teacher was certainly the most vocal member at two community meetings and was very active in creating awareness at the school level, i.e., orchestrating rallies for school children. Also promising were the initial signs of female organisation, and five women who joined together to form an SHG certainly showed signs of promise for CBMS activity.

There are still challenges for the effectiveness of CBMS in Laundia, the most pressing being the embedding of *Panchayat* members in the CBM committee. This consolidation of power in the hands of a few members has created an all-powerful governing body that thinks little about the needs of marginalised populations and does even less to include them in the decision making process. In a similar vein, the majority of women interviewed (over 90%) felt that their attendance and contributions to the *Gram Sabha* had little to no impact on the decision making process within the village. Women's lack of education was compounded by the fact that girls do not have the opportunity to continue education because they are likely to be married at the age of 14-15 years. These societal expectations seem to be changing slowly, but remain a serious issue of concern, especially as there is no female representation at the *Panchayat* level.

It is important for Samarthan to continue its work in Laundia until the villagers claim ownership of the CBM initiative. The early successes of the RTI, formation of the SHG group and the installation of two community hand pumps have generated awareness regarding the importance of the CBMS initiative. Intervention should now focus on issues of social inclusion, female education and the creation of a CBMS committee constituting members separate from the *Panchayat*. Also suggested was the creation of ward (subdivision of a village) leadership that would work to ensure that educational outreach would touch all members of the village; this information dissemination would bear meaning for marginalised populations, especially, when given by an insider such as a ward leader.

Samarthan should continue to define its work around CBM as a monitoring committee that aims to ensure the delivery of services from the *Panchayat* and as a catalyst for

Gram Sabha participation. So far, the NGO's intervention has been successful in training villagers on the use of the RTI, the implementation of water sanitation schemes and also aiding in the formation of one women's SHG group. These are invaluable milestones because they work to facilitate overall transparency, inclusion and civic participation – key ingredients for the continued success of any CBMS process.

Bijlon: a conflict-ridden intervention

Village profile
Roughly 300 households comprise this village, 200 belong to the backward caste, 60 to the SCs and the remaining 40 are the upper castes. A female *Sarpanch* heads the *Panchayat*. The village dynamics are such that due to his new initiatives, the former *Sarpanch* was even assaulted.

Intervention strategy
A YG was formed about a month ago and only few youth have been involved, so far. Similarly a CBM Committee was formed about a month ago. Three well established SHGs also function at the village level. Two are comprised of women and one is all male. These SHGs, engaged in dairy cooperatives, have been unable to work with the other organisations on development related issues. SHGs raise concerns in the *Gram Sabha* proceedings, but they are ultimately unable to affect the decision making process. Samarthan hopes to incorporate marginalised villagers in the monitoring process through the use of the RTI Act and other trainings.

Major issues
Water presents the greatest challenge for the villagers, despite repeated attempts to dig tube wells. In one case, land that was allotted for a hand pump was eventually sold and the new owner dismantled the hand pump. Steps are being taken for the construction of a health centre and a *Panchayat* building. However, the likelihood of their success remains in the hands of the Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department officials who do not deem this a top priority. The female *Sarpanch* believed her gender worked to her disadvantage in her dealings with other functionaries.

When questioned about female participation, women felt they were included in the monitoring process to an extent and did participate in the *Gram Sabha*. The *Panchayat* boasts of six female members who are involved in information dissemination and network with women of other villages. However, as against the tall claims made by *Panchayat* members, villagers living on the outskirts of the community were unaware, uninvolved and apathetic toward the CBMS.

Road ahead

As the CBM Committee is quite new, it has been unable to incorporate all sections of the community. The lack of awareness was the most significant barrier to the success of the CBMS.

Also, there was a perception that certain interest groups dominated the monitoring process. The CBM committee members also displayed concern about the presence of *Panchayat* Representatives on the committee. Furthermore, a lack of coordination between committees has resulted in ineffective information dissemination. Although CBM efforts have catered to mainstream society thus far, the committee members remain steadfast in their dedication to include traditionally marginalised segments of society. Continuous training is essential for the sensitisation and mobilisation of the villagers.

Aamla: a new intervention

Box 6. Improvements in service delivery

Service delivery of village level functionaries like the ANM, the Teacher, the *Anganwadi* worker increased considerably in all the intervention villages.

Village profile

Around 125 households. The majority of the population is involved in agricultural labour and thus lack permanent income security. To an extent, this makes their outlook quite confined.
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Intervention strategy

The YG, comprised of young men, was constituted four months ago. Many of the YG members also participate in the CBM committee, which was created a month ago. There are no other civic organisations in the village. The intervention strategy takes these realities into account and hopes to make modest progress in youth mobilisation and community based monitoring.

Major issues

There is an overall apathy on the part of the villagers to participate in civic institutions. Even *Panchayat* members displayed a lack of involvement in performing their civic duties. For example, many of them refused to even attend *Panchayat* meetings. Female participation was non-existent and even the women *Panches* did not attend the Panchayat proceedings. On being asked about the reasons, there was no satisfactory reply. Poor infrastructure and water scarcity were noted priorities of the villagers.

Low participation can be explained by various socio-economic factors. Villagers have little understanding about the importance of their participation in the *Gram Sabha* and overall village decision making process. Village fragmentation has led to a lack of community solidarity and a situation in which individuals only participate in initiatives that benefit their own-groups. The fragmentation derails individual efforts to implement modest development projects.

Road ahead

In general, an apathetic, disinterested population will inhibit the success of any monitoring initiative. Samarthan's work, therefore, must focus on fostering a desire to participate in civic institutions. The formation of a YG and an SHG is the first step to creating an atmosphere of meaningful participation at the village level. The intervention should plan to be far reaching in scope and take into account deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms that prevent community involvement. Samarthan can also target pre-existing ward leadership as potential CBM committee members. Some *Patels,* or ward leaders have earned the trust of SC residents and would, therefore, be in a position to mobilise them for monitoring purposes. But in all such strategies, emphasis should be on involving women as the existing norm in the village completely endorses traditional male domination, when it comes to matters of governance of any sort.

Major Findings

The CBM initiative has effectively improved the delivery of government services. Even in villages, where the intervention did not seem sustainable and the villagers were reluctant to participate, the improvement of service delivery could be clearly observed. In practical terms, this means a decrease in teacher absenteeism and regular visits by ANMs, postal workers and agricultural extension officers. These successes were relatively easy for monitoring committees to achieve, because the delivery of these services is uncontroversial, since they do not involve financing and they benefit the entire village population.

In addition, we made significant findings in the area of villagers' attitudes towards participation and especially, women's participation. And lastly, we were able to determine a number of factors which, when present, facilitate the success of an intervention.

Fig. 2: CBMS target areas of monitoring and success level
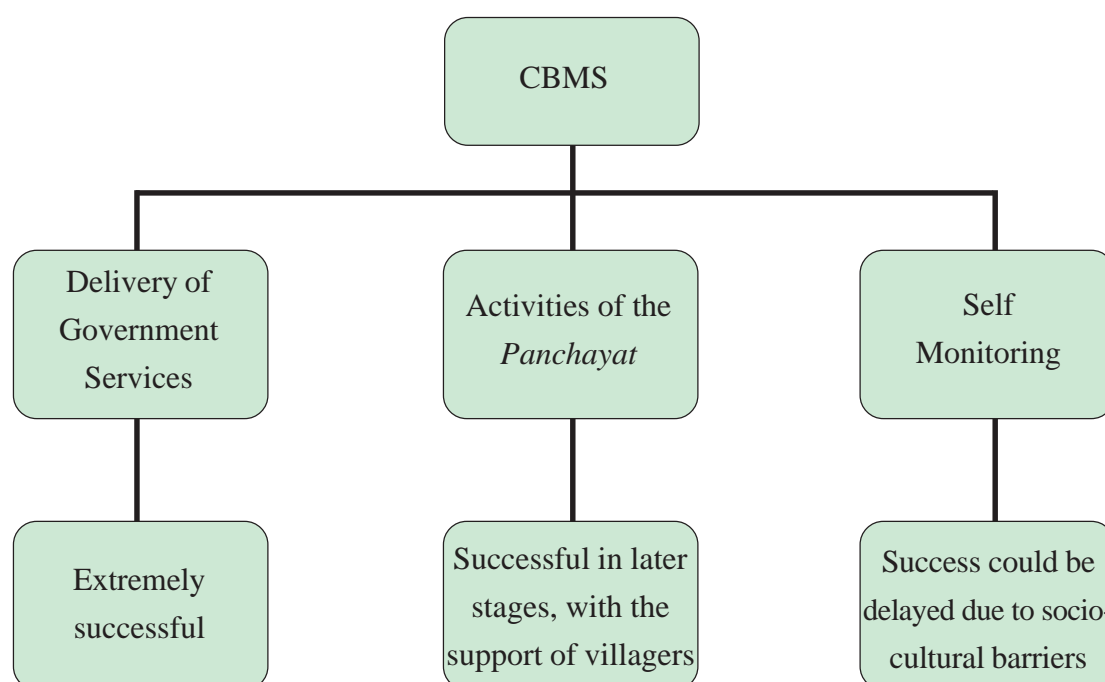
Attitudes towards participation

It was observed that the social and economic conditions of a village play an important role in determining the level of participation in the village decision making and monitoring processes. In villages that are extremely poor and rather backward, there is a general

apathy towards issues concerning the village. This was the case in Aamla. The economic condition of the households belonging to Aamla inhibits their participation, as they cannot find time to engage in any other activity besides earning their livelihood. This is also a major inhibiting factor for women as they are occupied with household chores for the entire day.

The social structure of the village also plays an important role, as it was observed that in villages where there is a substantial amount of diversity, there are inter-caste and inter-class conflicts, which breed a sense of disillusionment amongst those who are subject to various forms of discrimination and are inadequately represented in the village decision making process. In fact, a sense of disillusionment is prevalent in most villages, because past efforts to foment change have generally been unsuccessful. In Laundia, for instance, efforts to establish an SHG were discouraged by a lack of commitment on behalf of the members. In order to mobilise people, create acceptability and encourage participation for the monitoring initiative, the intervention must be sustained and prolonged, as is evident from Rajukhedi's example, where the intervention has lasted for four years.

During the initial stages of the initiative, there is bound to be some resistance from the *Panchayat* as its members may perceive the monitoring committee as a potential threat. In some places, like Manpura for instance, attempts have been made to resolve such conflicts by including the *Sarpanch* in the Monitoring Committee. This may, however, work against the committee in the long run, when the activities of the *Panchayat* have to be monitored.

It was observed that members of the YG were the main drivers of the monitoring system. Not only are they more open to new ideas and willing to challenge existing institutions, but they are also not easily fatigued. Their energy, enthusiasm, and foresight play an important role in making the monitoring process a huge success.

- Social structure of the village influences participation levels. Villages with caste conflicts are difficult to mobilise into a common community monitoring system.
- In the initial stages, it is better to take a neutral posture with the *Panchayats*. It is important that the *Panchayat* becomes a part of the community monitoring system. As the monitoring process advances, it will become possible to monitor the activities of the *Panchayat too*.
- Monitoring based groups, especially the youth groups can contribute hugely to the success of the community monitoring process.

Women's participation: an issue of concern

The success of a community based monitoring system (CBMS) will rest heavily on the extent to which it is able to incorporate all members of the village. Women's inclusion in the CBM process and village civic life at large, remains severely curtailed by socio-cultural and economic factors that continue to deny them the space and credibility for inclusion.

Women, responsible for the household, child rearing and agricultural labour, expressed the lack of time and energy to engage in civic activities. Because some of these women leave their homes as early as 8 am and do not return till late in the evening, they are unaware of many of the village activities and therefore, have little interest in participation.

This was reinforced by a pervasive apathy regarding the importance of women's participation in the *Gram Sabha*. One female villager noted, "Even if we participated, the situation would not change." The idea that women's voices are not validated by men in the village was explained by one woman who had attended the *Gram Sabha* and raised her concerns about the unavailability of clean drinking water. In response, the male leadership shrugged off the concern labelling it as "women's work." This example of gender inequality goes beyond basic participation equality and presents a more nuanced picture of continued inequality, i.e., even when women begin participating in the *Gram Sabha*, their concerns may become sidelined or deemed less important than those of their male counterparts.

Women described their husband's unwillingness to let them participate in civic activities and one woman told us of an incident of domestic abuse upon returning from the *Gram Sabha* meeting. When interviewed, a group of young girls (about 14 years old) said that they would not participate in such meetings, because they did not want to be known as, "girls who talk."

There are, however, isolated cases of female leadership and solidarity. Bijlon's female *Sarpanch* was successful in garnering the trust and respect of the female villagers. One Bijlon villager said, "With the change of the *Sarpanch* to a female, I feel more comfortable telling her things and expressing my views." Also the presence of all female SHGs in the villages of Laundia and Rajukhedi helped to create a space for female activity and solidarity. Although these groups experienced initial setbacks such as stolen money, resistance from husbands and the inability to open bank accounts, they have since worked together to function as microfinance institutions.

A final positive indicator for female participation lies with the youth interviewed in the study. Adolescent and teenage girls unanimously agreed that child marriage should be

prohibited and that girls should be afforded continued education. Furthermore, they believed that gender stereotypes would change in their lifetime and that they would enjoy educational and political participation.

Facilitating factors

Successful CBM interventions were marked by a variety of facilitating factors. The most significant being a YG. Secondly, a high level of homogeneity created preconditions for the smooth implementation of the CBMS initiative. Also, there seemed to be more willingness to participate in villages where the CBM committee enjoyed a certain level of autonomy. And lastly, it seemed that an honest and active *Sarpanch* could facilitate monitoring and accelerate the formation of an effective monitoring committee. The absence of any or all of these factors does not mean that the intervention is doomed to failure, but their presence makes success more likely.

The importance of youth

It is almost impossible to understate the importance of an enthusiastic and active YG in engendering an environment conducive to effective community based monitoring. The most active YG we encountered was in Rajukhedi, and it involved almost twenty youth. They had a charismatic leader who was responsible for mobilising the youth, and their early successes have had a snowballing effect. Notably, they have built a small centre that houses the activities of the youth group. The existence of a building has played an important role in inspiring youth in the village. They use the centre to store vegetables for market resale, issue library books to children in the village, and file the responses to their inquiries under the RTI. The youth in Rajukhedi have launched a number of initiatives, such as a hygiene programme aimed at the children in the village. They periodically visit the village school to cut the children's fingernails and discuss hygienic behaviour. It is difficult to quantify these types of projects, but their importance should not be understated. A number of youth in the village said that they admired the leader of the youth group and would like to join the group when they reach eligibility. Thus, the presence of an active YG encourages a culture of civic participation. Further studies may also reveal that youth are less likely to discriminate on the basis of caste or class. One the most active YG members in Manpura belongs to an SC family.

Homogeneity

Villages with a greater degree of homogeneity were better equipped to successfully implement a CBM programme. Samarthan's efforts have been most rewarding in Rajukhedi, and it is no coincidence that many of the villagers are related and of the same caste. There is a very small percentage of SC/ST residents, of whom about half participate in civic institutions. In Bijlon, we found a very different dynamic, where

roughly eighty per cent were OBCs, but they found it difficult to work together and they complained that members of the higher castes derailed their initiatives. The situation in Manpura seemed to be somewhere between these two extremes. The decision making process was still hierarchical and there was no culture of meaningful participation, yet some SCs/STs were participating in civic committees. Although we cannot say that homogeneity is a precursor to success, it did seem to be a contributing factor to success.

Autonomy of CBM committees

In numerous cases, we found that members of the *Panchayats* were also members of the CBM committee. We were told that this helps the two groups to liase, but it seemed to restrict participation. In Manpura, the *Sarpanch* is on the CBM committee and in Laundia the Deputy *Sarpanch* is a member of the committee. It was difficult to create a *new* atmosphere of monitoring and participation, where the same *old* powerbrokers were members of the CBM committee. This type of arrangement encouraged apathy amongst the villagers. One possible solution would be to institutionalise a regular interface between the *Panchayat* and the CBM committee, while also maintaining the autonomy of both groups.

We also found that an honest and active *Sarpanch* could facilitate effective monitoring by working with the monitoring committee. Rather than being a member of the committee, the *Sarpanch* should liase with the CBM committees. The *Sarpanch* can be instrumental in raising issues, and this can accelerate the improvement of service delivery at the village level, as s/he has links with officials at higher levels of government.

Structural barriers to participation

The functioning of the CBM is affected by many factors, directly or indirectly linked to the participation of different stakeholders. Certain issues cannot be raised despite a consensus at the village level because the final decision rests with higher authorities whose interests are in conflict with those of the villagers. Working within this hierarchical framework prevents villagers from making sweeping changes, and they are often forced to focus on short-term projects. Authorities also play an important role in the selection of schemes and projects. Demand driven initiatives are usually stalled by complex bureaucratic procedures. Although the CBMS have made some progress, this remains the pivotal barrier to success.

In many cases, even after obtaining information from RTI Act inquiries, villagers are ill-equipped to utilise it for the purpose of monitoring. Also, the process of information seeking can be time consuming and bewildering for the villagers.

Sustainability

In order to gauge the sustainability of the CBMS one has to identify the areas in which it has been successful and those where it has been unable to affect change. It was observed that the CBMS was extremely successful in rectifying problems of teacher-absenteeism and infrequent ANM visits. Therefore, the CBMS is a very effective mechanism by which villagers can monitor the delivery of government services. In villages where it has been implemented for quite some time, the CBMS has also been effective in monitoring the activities of the *Panchayat* and in monitoring the habits of the villagers.

Monitoring of the *Panchayat*, however, needs to be done at a later stage, as resistance from the *Panchayat* can crush the initiative during the stage of its infancy. Also, monitoring the activities of the *Panchayat* needs to be done in a tactful manner in order to avoid conflicts that could jeopardise the entire process. When questioned about the conflicts faced by the various monitoring committees during the initial stages after inception, the villagers almost always answered that it was the *Panchayat* that created the initial problems. In general, *Panchayats* initially view the creation of a CBM committee as a threat. Thus, it is only after the CBM initiative has gathered momentum and gained the support of the village that it can proceed to monitoring the activities of the *Panchayat* in an effective manner. However, even if the monitoring committee does not monitor the activities of the *Panchayat*, it can contribute to its effective functioning by investigating and raising issues for the village and thus creating an agenda for the *Gram Sabha*. Therefore, it can be safely said that the CBM initiative will serve to strengthen the decision making process and empower the members of the *Gram Sabha* to raise important issues.

Another sphere where the CBMS has been successful in some villages is that of monitoring and influencing villagers' habits. Many monitoring committees have taken up the responsibility of spreading awareness about personal hygiene and the importance of education and abolition of child marriage. Although success in these areas is not tangible or quantifiable, the change brought about in the habits and mind-set of the villagers is, perhaps, the most significant achievement of the process. A more proactive attitude of the villagers will ensure that development is a continuous process and will render the initiative sustainable. It is important to note, however, that the monitoring committee tends to ignore this aspect, as it is always easier to monitor the services of someone else as opposed to monitoring one's own habits. Despite this, we observed that in villages where the monitoring process had been going on for a longer period of time

– evidence of positive behaviour change, such as greater cleanliness, improved hygienic behaviour and a greater degree of awareness, was more prevalent than in villages where the monitoring committee was recently instituted.

Socio-cultural barriers

There are a number of social and cultural factors which can hinder the progress of a CBM committee. As discussed earlier, the social dynamics in a village play an extremely important role in determining the success of the CBMS initiative. Inter-caste conflicts can be an important inhibiting factor as the process becomes increasingly biased to cater to the requirements of the higher castes and the more influential sections of society. If inter-class rivalries also exist, then it is difficult to form a representative group and rival groups try to create obstacles for the monitoring committee. Cultural factors can also pose barriers to the monitoring process, especially when it comes to the self-monitoring aspect. Practices like child-marriage and habits such as open defecation are hard to change. However, although the socio-cultural norms and practices take a long time to change and could be barriers to the success of the CBM initiative, they are not insurmountable. With the right kind of intervention and strategies (for instance, emphasising education and using it as a tool to promote equity and good habits), and sustained efforts, such barriers can be overcome.

Economic and structural barriers

Economic and structural barriers pose a more serious threat to the CBM initiative because they are outside the purview of the monitoring committee. If the economic condition of the households of a village is poor, they will be engaged in earning their livelihood and it will be difficult for them to find the time to participate in the process of monitoring.

We perceive the structural barriers as the biggest obstacles to the success of the CBMS.

It was observed that when the monitoring process involved a higher official at the district level, it usually ended in a stalemate. Whether it is lodging a complaint against an official or seeking important records or information from higher departments under the RTI Act, the members of the monitoring committee usually find that their efforts are futile and their demands are evaded. Corruption, bureaucracy, evasiveness, a lack of transparency or sheer indifference on behalf of the block and district administrators ensures that the monitoring initiatives are unsuccessful. Interviews with the block and district officials revealed that they perceive absolutely no problem with the functioning of the health and education departments. The president of the *Zila Panchayat* (a woman belonging to an ST family) complained that the tied fund system had rendered her powerless when it came to allocating funds for projects proposed by the *Gram*

Panchayat. According to her, the system of a *Zila Sarkar*[1] was far more conducive to empowering the *Gram Panchayat* as it gave the *Zila Sarkar* power to allocate funds according to the needs of the villagers. The system already in place thus works against the motives of the monitoring committee and could be a serious road block not only to the CBM initiative, but may result in derailing the entire system of *Panchayati Raj*. These structural barriers can only be done away with at the policy level, and there is nothing much that the monitoring committee or the intervention strategy can do in this regard.

Another important aspect that needs to be discussed when addressing the issue of sustainability is the "cost-effectiveness" of the whole process. The costs entailed pertain to the initial training imparted to the committee members and once the process gains momentum, the costs involved are negligible. However, it is investment in terms of time and energy that is more important in this regard. In a village like Rajukhedi, where the intervention has been ongoing for a period of four years, members of the YG claimed that it would take at least three to four months more for the process to begin yielding results. An NGO can gradually start withdrawing support, once it feels that the committee is confident about handling the process alone. For instance, in Rajukhedi, the support has decreased to a large extent; the monitoring committee members only approach the NGO for advice regarding major bureaucratic hassles. Thus the intervention might have to be long, but intensive support only needs to be provided in the initial stages when the committee is putting the training into practice. In the initial stages, the NGO may have to help them develop an agenda and think of ways to monitor various services. The period of intervention will however, depend on the conditions of the village. For instance, in a village like Bijlon, where caste-conflict is prevalent, the intervention will need to be much longer and far more intensive.

Thus, the CBMS is extremely successful with reference to the monitoring of government services, and fairly successful as far as monitoring the activities of the *Panchayat* and changing habits is concerned. However, when monitoring enters the area of higher block and district officials it is likely to encounter defeat. Hence, we can conclude that the process is sustainable and cost-effective in the areas of monitoring the delivery of government services and the activities of the *Panchayat*, and changing habits and self-monitoring. In other areas, a change in policy will be required to aid the process and ensure that it is successful.

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[1] The *Zila Sarkar* system was instituted by the Congress Party, which was in power for ten years, before the present BJP government. It put the local MLA in charge of decision making at his/her district level.

Box 7: Measures to ensure sustainability

- Training regarding use of RTI: with the help of this, monitoring is possible by every individual, regardless of the existence of a monitoring committee.
- Involving successful committees in the training process.
- Education: Importance of hygiene, cleanliness, participation, and tolerance should be taught at school. This can be done by the Monitoring Committee if it can not be integrated with the school curriculum.
- Involving Block and District Administration: support can be sought from higher authorities in terms of training and other required inputs on a sustained basis. This will help reduce intervention by NGOs and may lead to institutionalisation of the CBMS.

Replicability

The existence of successful CBMS will encourage the replication of new initiatives. Villages which enjoy the benefits of a successful CBM initiative can theoretically send delegates to other villages to assist in the replication of the programme. This has already occurred informally in Rajukhedi, where residents of neighbouring villages periodically visit to ask for advice in forming monitoring committees and in filing RTI inquiries. Samarthan also sponsors events at their district office in Sehore, in which representatives from many villages attend training seminars and have the opportunity to share information and innovative strategies. As the programme matures, mechanisms for information sharing and facilitating training programmes involving villagers from effective CBM committees should be institutionalised. If executed properly, it appears that the programme could be replicated at an exponential rate, while Samarthan could consistently decrease its monetary inputs. Also, involving locals in the training process could increase the programme's sustainability by giving them a sense of ownership over the future of the programme.

As previously noted, CBM committees can improve the delivery of government services with relative ease. This has been possible because the delivery of these services is uncontroversial, they benefit everyone in the village, and they do not involve finances at the village level. Therefore, it seems possible to replicate these successes on a very large scale. Also, replication of these successful initiatives is dependent to a large extent on human capital. Representatives from Samarthan or from other villages where the programme has been successful can simply train villagers in monitoring the delivery of these services. In terms of a cost-benefit analysis, resources can most effectively be employed in monitoring government services.

We outlined a number of factors which facilitate the success of an intervention in the section on Major Findings. These included an active YG, a homogenous population and an autonomous CBM committee. Villages which meet any or all of these criteria could be targeted for interventions. Once the intervention has been fairly successful, participants from these villages may be able to help replicate further successful interventions in nearby villages, whose characteristics do not include the facilitating factors. Also, some villages have a history of cooperation and participation. That was the case in Rajukhedi, where the intervention has met with the most success. Even before Samarthan's involvement the villagers had worked together, with everyone contributing labour or money to construct a road running the length of the village. In villages, where a culture of participation existed before the intervention, the likelihood of success appears to be much higher.

By focusing on villages which exhibit the facilitating factors and also have a pre-existing culture of civic participation, successful interventions can be replicated with relative ease. To facilitate rapid replication, a strategy for institutionalised inter-village support, training and information sharing should be created.

Conclusion

The study provides a broad range of findings from which it is possible to draw conclusions and make recommendations for future CBMS initiatives. The major research questions guiding this study dealt with the issues of awareness, effectiveness of the CBMS, social inclusion in the monitoring process, factors which facilitate success and the possibility of replication on a large scale.

In the course of the study, we arrived at the conclusion that the level of villagers' awareness regarding the CBMS correlates highly with the duration of the intervention. For instance, in Rajukhedi where the intervention has been ongoing for four years, we found that there was an extremely high level of awareness. In Aamla, however, where the intervention is only two months old, only those directly involved in the initiative were aware of the CBMS. The level of awareness also depends on the methods used for information dissemination. We found that signs, billboards and charts are ineffective, unless accompanied by oral communication and door-to-door campaigns.

The second area of focus was the effectiveness of the CBMS initiative and it was found that this method was highly successful in monitoring and improving the delivery of government services. However the process was not as successful in monitoring the activities of the *Panchayat* or state officials and functionaries. Also unclear was the level of success achieved in the area of self-monitoring. As noted earlier in the report, there are pre-existing factors like a well established YG and SHG, a homogenous population and a supportive *Panchayat*, which can contribute to the success of an intervention.

Another important area of the study dealt with the issue of social inclusion. Although there are some encouraging signs, we found that traditionally marginalised sections of society are not meaningfully involved in the monitoring process. It was observed that due to societal norms, there was a lack of interest on the part of these groups to participate in the CBMS. The first step towards involving them in the monitoring process could be to form autonomous groups such as SHGs within which they feel uninhibited to articulate their concerns. The CBMS should be used as a mechanism of social inclusion by engendering a culture of participation.

Recommendations

Each village has a unique socio-cultural make-up and history, so it is impossible to create an intervention strategy applicable to every village. Certain steps can be taken, however, at the outset of an intervention, which will boost the chances of success. First, the youth should be mobilised. Successful CBM committees could be comprised of members of other committees such as YGs, SHGs and sanitation committees. Therefore, by forming these committees first, the villagers can lay the groundwork for an effective monitoring committee. As previously noted, the existence of an active YG cannot be understated, so creating such a group should be seen as the first step toward success. Secondly, an SHG should be formed and members should have an economic stake in the activities of the group to ensure their continued participation. By forming these two groups first, organisers would increase the participation of youth and women, and begin to engender a culture of participation among these traditionally sidelined segments of the population. It is important to consolidate gains at this level, instead of hastily forming a monitoring committee, because women and youth must gain confidence and experience in meaningful civic participation, before they can become effective monitors. Many women, for example, expressed the desire to join a women's organisation, but were more reserved when asked about participating in an organisation comprised of men and women.

After forming a YG and an SHG, organisers should determine the specific needs of the village and encourage the formation of other groups accordingly. Some groups which villagers had formed that were effectively participating in the monitoring process were parent-teacher associations, water conservation boards, and sanitation committees. Once a number of these groups are operating with a certain level of success, the monitoring initiative can be confidently launched. Again, programme managers should bear in mind the uniqueness of each village and maintain a critical flexibility throughout the intervention.

The responsibilities of monitoring should be shared by as many groups as possible, and involve a broad cross-section of villagers. Eventually the variety of committees should institutionalise a system by which they coordinate their activities. Also, a system of rotation on the monitoring committee should be established, which will increase transparency and prevent it from becoming a privileged position of power.

Once the monitoring committee is established, the intervention should be divided into various stages. The initial period should obviously be one of intensive training and should focus on monitoring the delivery of government services because, as has been discussed, these are the areas where the committee can achieve rapid successes. This

will ensure that the members involved in the process do not fall prey to participation fatigue. The NGO can help the monitoring committee prepare agendas for the *Gram Sabha*, so that the decision making process is strengthened and the committee can gradually move into the arena of monitoring the activities of the *Panchayat*. The process should simultaneously aim at changing the habits of the villagers and promoting better hygiene. Once the process gains momentum and gathers enough support, it can also target social norms and cultures that hinder development. Once the committee is able to handle these activities on its own, the NGO can start withdrawing support and can provide guidance when needed for overcoming bureaucratic hurdles.

The NGO should first target villages in which the facilitating factors are present. This will help create many successful models that can serve as examples for other villages. Also, monitoring committees that have been successful should be encouraged to play a greater role in motivating and guiding other committees. A platform should be institutionalised where these committees can interact and learn from each other's experiences.

Greater communication should be encouraged with higher district officials, as it was observed that many officials were not even aware about the existence of any such committee. One should be prepared for some resistance and a high level of indifference, but increased interaction could serve to initiate dialogue. Many officials claimed that such a process would be beneficial and would aid them in their activities. They also said that they were willing to support such a mechanism by way of training or any other required inputs. Although this may just be empty rhetoric on behalf of the state authorities, the communication gap between the higher authorities and bodies functioning at the grass-roots level should be bridged. It will take a long time, but such support can go a long way to making the process sustainable and helping in its institutionalisation. It will also pave the way for decreased involvement on the part of the NGO.

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Background Note on the Internship Programme

UNICEF India's Knowledge Community on Children in India (KCCI) initiative aims to enhance knowledge management and sharing on policies and programmes related to children in India. Conceived as part of the Knowledge Community on Children in India, the objectives of the 2005 Summer Internship Programme were to give young graduate students from across the world the opportunity to gain field level experience and exposure to the challenges and issues facing development work in India today.

UNICEF India hosted 100 young interns from India, Germany, Turkey, Japan, Korea, U.S., U.K., Australia, Canada, Taiwan, Israel, Netherlands, Sweden and Lebanon to participate in the 2005 Summer Internship Programme. Interns were grouped into teams of 4-5 and placed in 16 different research institutions across 12 states (Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Karnataka, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Kerala) studying field level interventions for children from 22 May-28 June 2005.

Under the supervision of partner research institutes, the interns conducted a combination of desk research and fieldwork, the end result of which were 26 case studies of UNICEF-assisted Government programmes and other interventions aimed at promoting the rights of children and their development. 20 of these are supplemented by short films capturing the reality of children and their families. The case studies cover key sectors linked to children and development in India, and address important policy issues for children in India. These include: primary education, child survival, incidence of malnutrition, elimination of child, labour and water and sanitation.

Another unique feature of this programme was the composition of the research teams comprising interns with mutli- disciplinary academic skills and multi-cultural backgrounds. Teams were encouraged to pool their skills and knowledge prior to the fieldwork period and to devise a work plan that allowed each team member an equal role in developing the case study. Group work and cooperation were key elements in the production of outputs, and all this is evident in the interesting and mutli-faceted narratives that these case studies are on development in India.

The 2005 Summer Internship Programme culminated in a final workshop at which all teams of interns presented their case studies and films to discuss the broader issues relating to improvements in service delivery, elimination of child labour, promoting child rights and decentralization and village planning. The 'Youthspeak: Case Studies of Development in Practice' series aims to disseminate these case studies to a wider audience and provide valuable contributions to KCCI's overall knowledge base.