

INDIA

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS



Building the Organizational Capacity of Civil Society Networks in Two States of India: A Process Summary

The Government of India recognizes family planning (FP) as an important means to promote reproductive health, reduce high maternal and child mortality, and provide couples the choice to plan their families. The thrust on FP has brought notable gains: the number of births per woman dropped significantly from 3.4 in 1992/93 to 2.2 in 2015/16, with 24 states attaining a replacement-level fertility rate of around 2.1. India does, however, continue to report a huge unmet need for FP services, with the modern contraceptive usage rate stagnant at about 48 percent over the past decade. Improving the provision and uptake of FP services has, thus, emerged as a key priority for the government. In 2012, India joined the global Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) initiative, and committed itself to providing 48 million additional women and girls access to contraceptives by 2020.

As community-based agents of change, civil society organizations (CSOs) have an important role in enhancing the uptake and quality of FP services as well as improving the voice and participation of women and other marginalized groups. Recognizing CSOs' vital role, India's FP2020 commitments state the need to engage CSOs in the national FP program.

Improvement of Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health Outcomes is the Overarching Goal of the HFG Project in India.

India is home to about 1.5 million CSOs, a sizeable number of which work in FP and maternal and child health. Rooted within the communities they operate in, CSOs hold the potential to transform the FP landscape by working on the ground in remote rural areas to enhance demand for FP services and improve transparency and accountability of health care. The potential of many of the CSOs is, however, stymied by limited funding opportunities and weak organizational capacity to sustain their programs. There is an urgent need to build the leadership, management, and fundraising capacity of small grassroots CSOs to enhance their organizational effectiveness and sustainability.

The USAID-supported Health Finance and Governance (HFG) project recently completed a successful intervention to strengthen the organizational capacity of a major CSO network in India. The project offered 26 CSO network partners from the states of Jharkhand and Rajasthan sustained technical assistance and capacity-building support over the course of a year. This document summarizes the intervention's aim, process, and emerging impact.

Building the Organizational Capacity of CSOs: A Summary of the Intervention

HFG/India's intervention to build the organizational capacity of CSOs was guided by the twin objectives of improving FP uptake and enhancing the voice and participation of women for accountable, transparent service delivery. Based on a structured plan, sustained capacity-building support—training, mentoring, and hand holding—was provided to 26 CSOs working on FP, maternal and child health, and social accountability issues in the states of Jharkhand and Rajasthan. The capacity-building process is described below, step-by-step, from the identification of the CSO network to partner with to the post-intervention follow-up support and the early, but promising, results the initiative is already showing.

● Partnership with a Prominent CSO Network in India

Identification of and partnership with a programmatically aligned CSO coalition in the country formed the first major step. USAID and HFG jointly identified several potential CSO networks. The key criteria for partner selection were: presence among underserved or vulnerable populations; focus on reproductive, maternal, and child health service delivery; and financial self-sufficiency. Following protracted negotiations with potential partners, the White Ribbon Alliance India (WRAI) network was selected for HFG's capacity-building support to the network's CSOs. WRAI has a prominent countrywide network of 1,800 grassroots CSOs engaged in FP advocacy and committed to innovative ideas for capacity building.

HFG and WRAI jointly identified the major areas for the CSO capacity-building work. They also developed an activity work plan and scope of work for two HFG experts who would facilitate the activity at the state level. The two parties formalized their plans in a collaborative agreement.

● Selection of CSOs for Capacity-building Support

WRAI has a strong network of grassroots CSOs working across India to advance women's health and rights. Following discussions between USAID, WRAI, and HFG, the state of Jharkhand in eastern India and Rajasthan in northwestern India were selected for HFG's technical assistance to CSOs. WRAI has a strong presence in both states, with 58 member CSOs in Jharkhand and 20 in Rajasthan. Although many of these CSOs expressed a willingness to participate in the capacity-building activity, discussion with WRAI state chapters and consideration of project resources and timelines reduced the number of CSOs to be supported in the two states to 26.

One important consideration for CSO selection was ensuring that all the areas of the two states get covered. Additional benchmarks were applied for selection: having registration and other legal requirements in place; having enough organizational capacity to absorb the training inputs;

working on reproductive and maternal health issues for at least two years; and being a member of WRAI for at least two years. Based on these criteria, the 26 CSOs were selected, 15 from Jharkhand and 11 from Rajasthan. The CSOs ranged widely in size, from Rajasthan's Society for Public Education Cultural Training & Rural Action (SPECTRA) with health-related operations limited to five blocks of one district to Jharkhand's Ekjut with a pan-state reach, covering a population of about 33 million (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Jharkhand - CSOs Provided Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Support

JHARKHAND

| CSO Name, Area(s) of Operation | Population Covered* |
|---|---------------------|
| Catholic Health Association - Bihar Jharkhand Andaman (CHABIJAN) <i>Districts: Ranchi, Khunti, Gumla, Simdega, Ramgarh</i> | 751,000 |
| Chetna <i>District: Ranchi</i> | 236,000 |
| Chetna Vikas <i>Districts: Deoghar, Dumka</i> | 94,500 |
| Ekjut <i>All districts of the state</i> | 33 million |
| Gram Jyoti <i>Districts: Deoghar, Dumka, Pakur, Sahebganj</i> | 500,000 |
| Jago Foundation <i>District: Giridih</i> | 138,755 |
| Jan Sarokar <i>Districts: Giridih, Palamu, Bokaro</i> | 200,000 |
| Lok Kalyan Seva Kendra (LKSK) <i>District: Pakur</i> | 110,000 |
| Lok Prerna Kendra <i>District: Chatra</i> | 24,750 |
| Network for Enterprise Enhancement and Development Support (NEEDS) <i>Districts: Deoghar, Pakur, Jamtara</i> | 350,000 |
| Pragati Luyadih <i>District: Saraikela Kharsawan</i> | 18,970 |
| Programme for Rural Employment Education Among Rural Neighbours Association (PRERNA) <i>Districts: Palamu, Latehar</i> | 12,000 |
| Rural People's Awareness & Youth Action India (RUPAYANI) <i>Districts: Bokaro, Dhanbad, Ramgarh</i> | 300,000 |
| Samarpan <i>District: Koderma</i> | 10,175 |
| Srijan Foundation <i>Districts: Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Gumla, Simdega, Giridih, West Singhbhum</i> | 100,000 |

*The estimates of population reached by the CSOs' health-related activities provided by CSOs.

Table 2. Rajasthan - CSOs Provided Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Support

RAJASTHAN

| CSO Name, Area(s) of Operation | Population Covered* |
|---|---------------------|
| Centre for Health, Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA)# 17 districts of Rajasthan and 13 districts of Gujarat | 2.35 million |
| Center for Rural Prosperity and Research (CRPR) Districts: Tonk, Ajmer | 50,000 |
| Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS) Districts: Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Barmer | 1.5 million |
| Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Lapodia (GVNML) District: Jaipur | 4.2 million |
| Gramrajya Vikas Evam Prashikshan Sansthan (GVPS) Districts: Karauli, Jhalawar, Bundi | 30,000 |
| Jatan Sansthan Districts: Rajsamand, Udaipur | 421,000 |
| Navachar Sansthan Districts: Chittorgarh, Pratapgarh | 100,000 |
| Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan (RSKS) District: Ajmer | 11,000 |
| Society for Public Education Cultural Training & Rural Action (SPECTRA) District: Alwar | 30,000 |
| Shikshit Rojgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti (SRKPS) Districts: Jhunjunu, Jaipur, Kota, Jhalawar | 3.6 million |
| Shrushti Seva Samiti Districts: Udaipur, Rajsamand, Chittorgarh, Pratapgarh, Sirohi, Dungarpur, Pali | 100,000 |

#CHETNA is a large non-governmental organization working in Rajasthan and Gujarat through its CSO partners. It also serves as the Rajasthan State Secretariat for WRAI.

*The estimates of population reached by the CSOs' health-related activities provided by CSOs.

Organizational Capacity Assessment to Ascertain Training Needs

Designing an effective capacity-building plan for the CSOs required identification of the major capacity gaps inhibiting their organizational robustness and sustainability. To do this, HFG adapted an organizational capacity assessment (OCA) tool from the USAID Learning Lab and used it to ascertain each CSO's organizational strengths and challenges. It also developed a checklist to guide the assessment process through all six operational domains: governance, administration, human resources (HR), financial management, organizational

management, and program management. The OCA aimed to inform the design of a responsive training curriculum to bridge the identified capacity gaps.

HFG introduced the OCA tool to the CSOs at one-day sensitization workshops conducted separately for each state at the beginning of the activity. It assured the CSOs that the OCA was neither a fault-finding exercise nor linked to any funding opportunities; rather, it aimed to strengthen their existing professional capacities. After a review of the tool, participants discussed it, and their suggestions and comments were incorporated into the tool.

With project timelines and resources in mind, HFG and WRAI pared the number of CSOs selected for the OCA to 12, six from each state. In doing this, they made sure that the selected CSOs represented all regions of the two states and that the selected CSOs were at different levels of operation, including the large CSOs covering more than four districts, the medium ones that operate in two to four districts, and the smaller ones, with operations in a single district.

The assessment team conducted the OCA in two-day field visits to each CSO. On the first day of the visit, the team held detailed discussions with the CSO's management board members (secretary or president), executive director, program head, and finance head. They also met with the finance team at CSOs with an organizational structure that included one. On the second day, they visited the CSO's field office(s) and areas of operation, and held discussions with field staff and community members. The collected data and observations made during the discussions were recorded in the OCA tool. Besides the 12 CSOs where the OCA was conducted, the OCA tool was sent for self-assessment to the remaining 14 CSOs that had been part of the capacity-building workshops.



OCA underway at Srijan Foundation's office in Kuju village, Jharkhand



Interaction with the community in Jharkhand's Jadakarani village, the catchment area of Srijan Foundation

The assessment provided valuable insights into the CSOs' strengths and weaknesses. While issues varied by organization, a consistent, and positive, finding was that most CSOs had the needed registrations in place and had done their statutory filings. Most were found to be working in collaboration with community-based organizations, Panchayats, self-help groups, and frontline health workers. Importantly, CSO staff were found to have a good rapport with concerned government departments, credibility in the community, and an excellent grasp of local issues and challenges, particularly those pertaining to FP, maternal and child health, and malnutrition.

Crucially, the OCA also revealed several organizational weaknesses, with strategic and operational planning neither formalized nor consistent at most CSOs. Administrative systems and policies were not strong across CSOs, and most lacked written policies and procedures. The other major gaps revealed by the OCA were: weak management systems; lack of dedicated accounts staff and poor knowledge of financial management and legal aspects; lack of manuals on HR and finance; an outdated vision and mission that did not match current priorities and activities; poor documentation and knowledge management; limited networking exposure with funding agencies; and absence of a fundraising and communications strategy.

The OCA pointed to several capacity-building needs, key of which were:

- Assistance in developing robust administrative, finance, and HR management manuals
- Support in building stronger management systems and capacity for networking with funding agencies
- Training for stronger communications and knowledge management
- Professional skills training for finance teams

Findings and insights from the OCA helped guide the mentoring support and training curriculum and plan that was subsequently developed and executed by HFG to strengthen the CSOs' organizational capacity and financial sustainability.

● Designing a Training Curriculum to Bridge the Identified Capacity Gaps

Formal training formed an important, though not the only, component of the technical assistance provided to CSOs to improve their organizational capacity, management systems, and fundraising capacity. The rigorous OCA exercise helped build a clear understanding of where the CSOs' major knowledge and skills gaps lay, and regional training workshops were planned to directly address the gaps. To execute the plan, HFG hired a specialized CSO training agency, Aaroh, to design, develop, and deliver training to the 26 supported CSOs.

The development of the training plan, training content, and resource kit material was an intensive process. Before the process started, HFG assessment team met with Aaroh several times to impart to the agency a thorough understanding of the trainees (the CSOs), particularly their different learning needs, organizational apparatus, and expectations from the training. This effort was crucial to ensure that a uniform training content and structure would speak to and address the needs of a diverse group of CSOs.

Working closely with HFG, Aaroh finalized the plan for a five-day training workshop. They also developed a training agenda, detailed session plan, and content for nine technical sessions on key organizational development themes (see Figure 1). In line with HFG's global quality assurance system, the training design, format, and technical content was vetted by HFG/India project staff and then by quality assurance advisors at project headquarters in the United States. Following multiple rounds of feedback and iteration, the content for the participant manual, facilitator's guide, and PowerPoint presentations was finalized. HFG hired a professional translator to translate the material from English to Hindi. All training content and the resource kit material were produced in both languages. Hard copies of the materials were printed for distribution along with soft copies.

Figure 1. Key Areas of Capacity-building Support to CSOs



● Training Workshop to Build Knowledge and Skills in Key Areas

The CSOs received the training in two five-day workshops, one in each state. The Jharkhand workshop was held in two parts: one on July 11–12 and the other on July 19–21. The training team rigorously collected and deliberated on the learning and feedback from this workshop to further refine the training content and delivery mechanism for the second, Rajasthan, workshop, held on September 4–8.

The training, done in Hindi and English, included knowledge sharing, skill building, and practice sessions on a broad range of organizational development themes, including leadership, financial management, HR management, strategic planning, fundraising, and communications. An interactive training format was used, with regular energizers, group practice sessions, and report-outs by participants. Allowing participants to freely share and discuss their ideas and experiences gave them a good understanding of how the lessons learned from the training could be applied at their organizations.

Eighty-one participants attended the training, 45 from Jharkhand and 36 from Rajasthan. Senior functionaries from each participating CSO, including its program head, chairperson/ secretary, and finance department head, attended. The training workshop ended with each CSO formulating an action plan on the corrective activities it planned to implement in the short term (100 days). These action plans formed the basis of the follow-up hand-holding support HFG lent the CSOs to realize their improvement plans.

Great enthusiasm and resolve to implement the learning was visible among the training participants, who saw in it tremendous value for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of their organizations and work (see testimonials on last page). The WRAI state leadership in both Jharkhand and Rajasthan was also deeply appreciative of the initiative.

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Sanjay Kumar Paul, Jharkhand State Head for WRAI, considered the training workshop *“the beginning of next steps, not only for the trained organizations but also for the state... The trained CSOs could emerge as champions for stronger service delivery and community empowerment in the state.”*

Smita Bajpai, Rajasthan State Head for WRAI and Project Director at CHETNA, complimented *“the immensely useful training, facilitating open exchange of experiences, expertise, and knowledge... The training not only enriched every participant but also set the tone for more such collaborative learning and growth going forward.”*



A training session underway (Jharkhand)



Discussion on communication and messaging (Rajasthan)



Role play on leadership styles (Jharkhand)



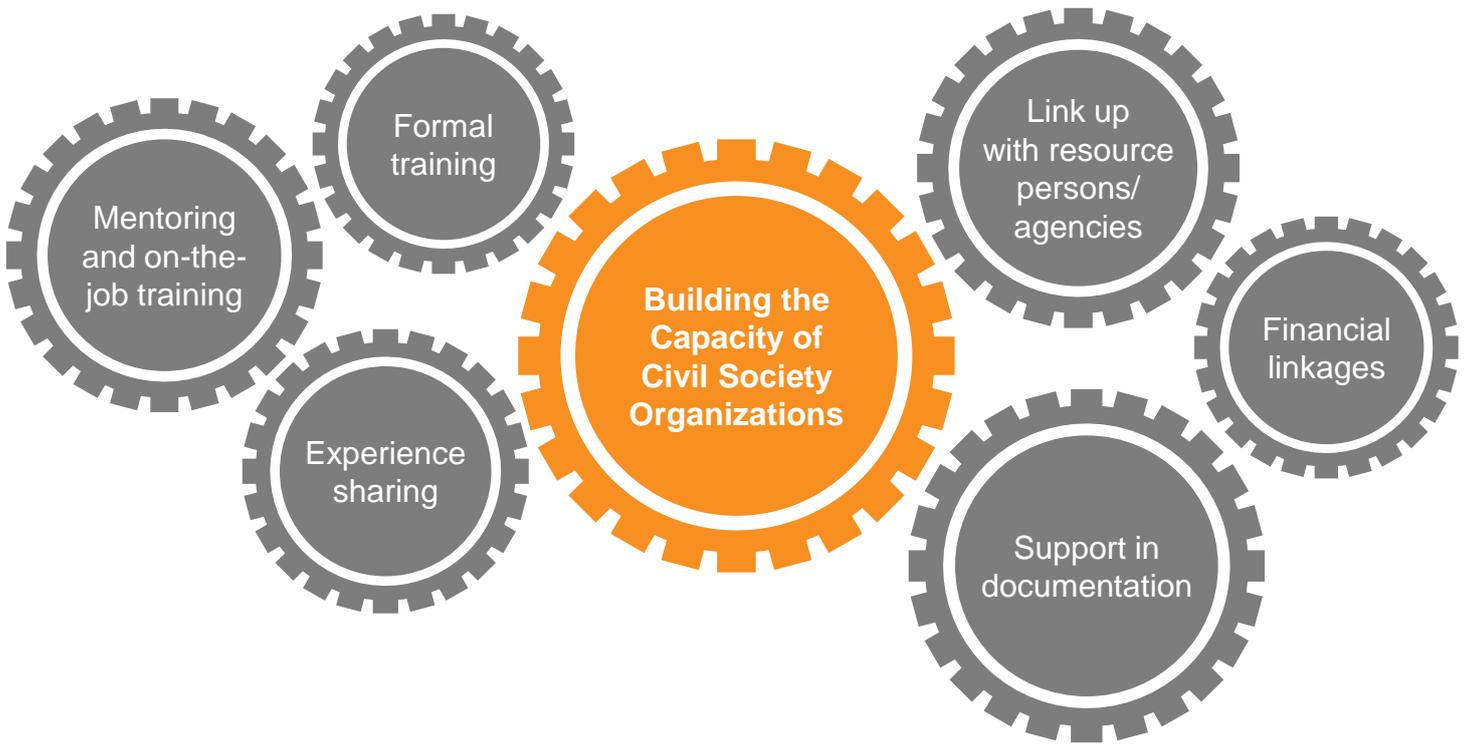
A group practice session (Jharkhand)



Group work on strategic planning (Rajasthan)

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Figure 2. Major Constituents of HFG's Capacity Building Support to CSOs



● Mentoring Support and Linkages with Funding Sources

On-the-job mentoring and hand holding were crucial components of the capacity building (see Figure 2), aiming to build within the CSO leadership and staff the practical skills and knowledge required to both undertake their day-to-day operations more effectively and strengthen institutional and financial management capacity. The process of mentoring started immediately after the completion of the OCA, which provided extensive insight into the required areas and levels of support. The HFG team provided sustained mentoring to all the CSOs, working closely with them to plug gaps and address weaknesses. The support was provided on a continuous basis, in person during field visits, over the telephone, and through e-mails.

The mentoring and hand holding covered a lot of ground: redefining the CSOs' mission and vision statements to align with existing activities; drafting terms of reference for board members; creating a system for filing and documentation; preparing budgets and strategic plans; and facilitating linkages with training institutes and professionals for expertise and volunteers. Another major activity was helping the CSOs put in place written policies, procedures, and reporting formats. HFG provided the CSOs with templates and guidelines for HR and finance manuals, website, annual report, and brochures, along with technical support to create these documents.

Ensuring the financial sustainability of CSOs working on the ground to promote FP and maternal and child health was a major objective of the capacity building. To this end, HFG

assisted the CSOs in analyzing the current and potential funding sources, current and future staffing requirements, and opportunities for and risks to sustainability. The CSOs were also provided support to initiate and sustain effective collaborations with corporations and leverage corporate social responsibility (CSR) and philanthropy funds.

HFG helped initiate the CSO network's linkages with potential funding sources in both the states. In Jharkhand, HFG opened a channel between the WRAI state chapter and the Confederation of Indian Industry state council to pave the way for future collaborations. The project also approached the major corporations operating in the region to explore CSR funding for the CSOs working in and around their industrial belts. Seven corporates showed keen interest in joining hands with WRAI Jharkhand to support the local CSOs' operations on the ground. Four of them (Tata Motors, Tata Powers, Tata Steel, and Larsen & Turbo) have asked WRAI to submit proposals.

Similarly, in Rajasthan, HFG networked extensively to link the CSOs with potential CSR funding. The project held several discussions with Save the Children Fund (SCF) and Deutsche Bank, which showed keen interest in forging long-term partnerships to support project activities. HFG organized their meetings with the WRAI state secretariat to discuss possibilities for partnership.

These initiatives have, thus, shown promise and brought the CSO network to the negotiating table with potential funding partners to explore opportunities for collaboration.

Emerging Results and the Way Forward

The guiding aim of HFG's capacity-building intervention was to equip CSOs working at the grassroots level with the practical skills and knowledge needed to more effectively carry out their work. HFG adopted a structured, outcome-focused approach to ensure the learning was put into practice. At the end of the training workshop, each participating CSO was asked to prepare an action plan representing the steps it intended to take within the next 100 days to address identified gaps in leadership, management, operational, and financial domains. Based on what was feasible and relevant for them, the CSOs prepared their plans, clearly outlining the concrete actions they intended to take and the technical support they further required from HFG to successfully realize the plan.

Besides defining the contours of HFG's follow-up hand-holding support, the action plans also served as an early measure of how effectively the learning was being translated into tangible action at the organizational level. To ascertain the CSOs' early progress, HFG conducted a second-round OCA. Six of the 12 CSOs in the first round were selected for the second round. The selection of six CSOs was purposive in nature, based on the CSOs' absorptive capacity for implementing the learning and demonstration of a more structured, proactive approach toward executing the action plan. The second OCA used the same checklist as the first, to give a clear understanding of the changes initiated after the training and mentoring support.

Findings of the second OCA indicated positive, though preliminary, changes in the CSOs' way of working. Guided by their own action plans, the CSOs had initiated several changes in their organizational processes and functioning. The Gramrajya Vikas Evam Prashikshan Sansthan (GVPS) in Rajasthan had, for example, gone from a two-page financial guideline to a full-fledged financial policy manual that more comprehensively addressed its growing organizational needs. Similar efforts to put in place robust, updated HR and finance manuals, guidelines, and policies were visible at other CSOs as well. In Jharkhand, the Network for Enterprise Enhancement and Development Support (NEEDS) had revised its five-year strategic plan, developed an anti-fraud policy, conducted gender training for its staff, and developed two in-house gender experts.

Another major area of change initiation was the organizational governance domain. The CSOs had begun documenting the roles and responsibilities of their governing board and, importantly, putting definitive effort toward drawing a succession plan for their organizations. Armed with knowledge and skills on fundraising, the CSOs had also begun to devote greater attention to writing new proposals. Navachar Sansthan in Rajasthan was focusing on systematic resource mobilization and had already submitted five new proposals. Designing of new brochures and annual reports and updating of website were among the other improvements CSOs had initiated. Increased confidence in and commitment to organizational effectiveness and sustainability was common across the supported CSOs,

many of which sent updates to HFG on the improvements they had been able to initiate or accomplish.

Sustaining the CSOs' enthusiasm and commitment to organizational development, a gradual process, requires that they continue to receive guidance and support beyond HFG's time-bound intervention. Completed over a short period of less than a year, the entire exercise was intensive in nature, providing the CSOs exposure to a wide range of themes. However, for many of the CSOs, several operating at a very basic level, there remains a strong need for more in-depth and frequent training and instruction, particularly on financial management, fundraising, and regulatory compliance.

Going forward, WRAI must explore more such partnerships to bolster the technical skills and know-how of its CSO network. The network must also effectively leverage the interest and commitment HFG has triggered among potential corporate donors. Given the pivotal role CSOs will play in enabling India to realize its FP2020 goals, multiple stakeholders, be they technical assistance agencies, professional associations, or corporate funders, must come forward to strengthen their organizational core and secure their financial sustainability.



Policies being reviewed at Shikshit Rojgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti office, Jhunjunu, Rajasthan



Staff at Lok Kalyan Seva Kendra, Pakur, Jharkhand, updating documents



OCA underway at Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Lapodia, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Testimonials

मन्जिले भी ज़िद्दी हैं, रास्ते भी ज़िद्दी हैं
देखते हैं कल क्या हो, हौसले भी ज़िद्दी हैं

(The destination is unyielding, the path is also unrelenting. But let us see what happens tomorrow, as my resolve is stubborn too.)

"I composed these lines after the training workshop. My organization works on a range of issues related to women's empowerment, be it in education, livelihood, or health. I am optimistic this training will help us address the rigidity we feel in several spheres of our functioning and accelerate our progress."



Pradeep Pundhir
SPECTRA, Rajasthan

"Jharkhand is a tribal majority, heavily-forested state. We have unique challenges, be they in the area of health, education, or poverty. This support has strengthened the base, the capacity of grassroots organizations that work with marginalized communities."



Shanti Kindo
Child Labour Commission,
Jharkhand

"The emerging operating environment and changes in regulatory framework demand that we understand and successfully adapt to the change. The mentoring and capacity-building support has equipped us with knowledge and skills to ensure our legal compliance and organizational sustainability."



Kumar Ranjan
Chetna Vikas, Jharkhand

"Funding agencies generally provide support to their partner CSO for capacity building, mostly on the specific subject related to their project or program. It is very rare to receive training on organizational development, covering all the major components. I appreciate this initiative... it should be repeated in future."



Rajdeep Singh
Jatan Sansthan, Rajasthan

"We are a very small organization working on creation of occupational opportunities for marginalized women and building awareness on family planning and health issues. Being a small organization with limited in-house capacity, we had been relying on outside agencies for planning and managing our budgets and expenditures. The training and support have helped build our own capacity to effectively manage our financial resources"



Elizabeth Toppo
Chetna, Jharkhand

"I have been working in the social sector since 1994. The last such training I received was in around 1998. So, in the last 15 years or more, this is the first training I have received on matters that relate to organizational strength and development. The training was comprehensive and has covered aspects that will provide us direction, bring rigor to work, and ensure our sustainability."



Bhanwar Lal Sain
Center for Rural Prosperity
and Research, Rajasthan

"I have filled almost two notebooks jotting down key points at the training workshop. I will be going back to my organization with a lot of new learning and ideas. This knowledge will definitely help my organization move forward and strengthen its activities toward promotion of health, community voice, and accountability. I am convinced that if we can address the core issues that weaken our organizations and their work in the community, we will be taking the first steps toward creating a new India."



Laxman Singh
Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal
Lapodia, Rajasthan

"The capacity-building support has been able to address the concerns and expectations of a varied set of CSOs in the state. My NGO works on a range of family planning and maternal and child health aspects. One big learning for me is how to do outcome-based planning so that we are able to analytically and effectively look at our organizational goals and activities from different angles."



Manohar Kumar
Jan Sarokar, Jharkhand

The Health Finance and Governance (HFG) project works with partner countries to increase their domestic resources for health, manage those precious resources more effectively, and make wise purchasing decisions. Designed to fundamentally strengthen health systems, the HFG project improves health outcomes in partner countries by expanding people's access to health care, especially to priority health services. The HFG project is a five-year (2012-2017), \$209 million global project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development under Cooperative Agreement No: AID-OAA-A-12-00080.

The HFG project is led by Abt Associates in collaboration with Avenir Health, Broad Branch Associates, Development Alternatives Inc., Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Results for Development Institute, RTI International, Training Resources Group, Inc. For more information visit www.hfgproject.org

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