

## A Crucial Component of Any Community-Level Program's Success Depends on The Community Participation and Community Developer's (CD) Role in India

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### ABSTRACT

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Community development entails inclusive change-making actions that include an appraisal of the community's social, economic, and political status. It is built on a number of principles including engagement, dialogue, problem identification, finding the best solution within society, and capacity building for empowerment and consciousness rising. The impact of many central and state governments, panchayath, and NGO projects and schemes is transforming Indian villages. Agrarian areas, which are the main focus of development, are undergoing significant changes as a result of government initiatives like land reform, electrification, irrigation, public distribution system, rural infrastructure, commercialization and monetization of various sectors of economic life, and unification of the nation through the development of communication means. Eighteen percent of the GDP is attributable to agriculture and allied sector, while 46 percent of Indians are directly employed in the agriculture sector. India won't advance until its villages are improved. In order for Indian communities to grow, social or community workers must take a significant part in that process. Based on my own experience working on numerous rural development projects in Indian villages, the development approaches is to include communities in helping to promote and provide local programs.

**Keywords:** *Community-Level Program, Community Development, Community Developer's, Social Workers, Social Work, Inclusive Society, Village Economy.*



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### INTRODUCTION

Since community work aims to remove deeply ingrained injustices and disadvantages, it is not a process that happens quickly. It is understood that depending on the community engaged, that

it takes varying lengths of time to achieve tangible results. Although different organizations and groups employ different definitions of community development/community work, they typically share a few key components. It took five years to

transform Sadivayail, a tribal hamlet, into an Organic Certified Village during my community involvement program at Amrita SeRve.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to better the lives of communities in rural India, exploratory research methodology has been utilized to examine the role of social workers or community developers. The study analyses the new wave of social/public service that is affecting the lives of India's poorer sections based on personal experience working in various Indian states.

### **Background**

#### *Community Developer's (CD)/Social Workers Role*

Community developers are specialists who work to improve people's and communities' overall well-being by assisting with basic and complicated requirements. CD works with a variety of communities, with a special emphasis on those that are vulnerable, oppressed, or living in poverty. CDs have been educated and taught to address social issues and hurdles, collaborate with government agencies, and promote general well-being. Food security, basic education, poverty, unemployment, discrimination and lack of housing, water sanitation, women empowerment, equality, caste barriers, and household problems are a few of these issues (Brackmann, 2015).

### **Types of Communities**

Geographic communities share a physical space that is physically divided by roads, rivers, and mountains and falls under one panchayath, block, or village. The locality is the physical basis of the village community. However, for a community to be considered "genuine," its members must share at least certain values, a shared language, festivals, and cultural icons. In some of the typical Indian villages, everyone follows the same caste and religion, and they all share identical clothes, speech, beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors. When I am working on watershed projects each micro-watershed is divided by points of land

(hills or slopes) that are greater altitudes than the other regions. Water flows into distinct watersheds in various directions from these high elevations. Therefore, one or two panchayaths with particular characteristics typically fall within one micro watershed. In order to restore the ecological balance, CD must therefore prepare the project report based on specific geographic areas that involve communities and that cover and improve degraded natural resources including soil, vegetative cover, and water through watershed management activities.

### **Communities of Interest**

It is referred to as "communities within communities". Members of these communities choose to associate with each on the basis of a common interest (e.g. Farmers Club) or shared concerns (health camps). The villager didn't receive sufficient medical attention because of transportation issues, a shortage of doctors and medicines, and other issues. In such circumstances, the CD serves as the village's point of contact and is skilled in obtaining primary medical care. The CD frequently conducts medical camps in numerous villages and maintains continuous communication with Primary Health Center (PHC's) and Doctors. As a result, the villagers are consequently often examined for underlying medical conditions like diabetes, hypertension, orthopedic issues, etc.

### **Virtual Communities**

Its group primarily communicates through communication mediums rather than in-person. "They create a network using technology that is known as an online community. The fastest approach to spreading awareness is where people engage in those public dialogues for long enough and with enough humanity to develop personal connection webs. Virtual communication with the community is helpful in assigning, monitoring, and sharing knowledge when we are working in different villages in India. It was extremely useful during the COVID pandemic, and many meetings

with Farmer producers, NABARD, and pay Agri Innovation Solutions took place online.

### **Value and Principals of Community Development**

#### *Democratic and Inclusive*

The Community Development Program in Indian Villages (CDP) should make sure that all opinions are taken into account, minority and forest rights are upheld, and internal solutions are sought. A number of factors, including poverty, disabilities, old age, race, and ethnicity hamper the inability to participate in society. All community members have the right to be heard and involved in decisions that affect their lives, and a healthy community values diversity. The settlement of Sadivayal, a tribal hamlet in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India, underwent numerous changes when I was there from 2015 to 2020. This is because the community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems and offer a practice that is part of a process of social change. Everyone in the hamlet had abandoned farming, which was the main source of income and food security when I first arrived in 2016. We came up with the solution after many rounds of discussion. All members of the community held a group discussion about the issue, prepared a minute book, opened a joint bank account, bought seeds through government programs, making organic fertilizer, brought water from the top of the hill by cutting downward streams, and turned 44 acres of fallow land into an organically certified village. In Sadivayal village, it addresses issues of hunger, unemployment, and food and nutrition security. It also meets SDG1 (Eliminate Poverty), SDG2 (Erase Hunger), SDG3 (Establish Good Health and Well-Being), SDG6 (Improve Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG8 (Create Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG10 (Reduce Inequality)

#### *Non-Authoritarian*

Organizational structures are as flat as they can

be, with equal importance and input given to each participant. It is crucial to write down minutes from every meeting to maintain a non-authoritarian structure. For future clarification, every significant topic and duty is noted in the book. Maximum participation in all discussions and planning is required. Each community member should be given responsibilities and duties. When the Farmers Club was founded in 2018 Gudupaticervu, each member was given a task and obligation. Even the villages are a six-hour trip to Guntur (the main city) with minimum transport facilities. Few farmers who are knowledgeable about seed selection are chosen from the group and given the task of buying seeds. Women's groups are trained to prepare and promote organic manure and save the cost of agricultural produce. Twenty-two farmers started cultivating chilies cultivation on 43 acres of land in 2018 after joining a farmers' group. After joining a farmers' group, 22 farmers began growing chilies on 43 acres of land in 2018. The average yield of this variety (Teza Lepakshi), which is sold for 85 to 90 Rs/kg, is 1200 to 1500 kg per acre. Six distinct cotton varieties are being harvested simultaneously on 94 acres of land, with an average yield of 1000 kg per acre. "When cotton is sold for 40 rupees per kilogram, a profit of 23,000 rupees is generated per acre. Each member contributed Rs. 50 to their account, and the group's total savings at the end of the year is Rs. 18000, which is used for welfare purposes.

#### *Universality and Community Ownership*

Services are available to everyone, without requiring means or needs testing. Communities thrive when they develop their own assets but also when they "own" their problems and issues. When communities accept that it is "their" problem, and then they are more likely to work together to develop a solution, and the solution will be better than one provided solely by an external "expert". When we were working at Naniborvai Village, we established a dairy unit

under Amul's direction. We first identified the issue during my visit to the area and discussion with the local communities. The community has a sufficient number of cows and buffalo, but they have to travel a distance of four kilometers to sell their milk. After a few months, we eventually came together as a group, addressed the issue, and convinced Amul management to open a dairy unit in Naniborvai. Every solution is found within. Each woman in the group now makes more than Rs 5000 per month through dairy farming. The farmers began organic farming by using manure and applied for organic certification.

#### *Top to bottom approach*

The difference between top and bottom approaches employs a river as a metaphor for the growing effects of circumstances and occurrences that interfere with the system as it relates to the point of intervention. For instance, if there is an issue at the top, it will influence the river's water quality for everyone who lives below. You can either concentrate on treating the ailments that the people who live downstream are suffering from (bottom approach) or you can stop the spill and stop others from occurring in the future (top approach). When we are working in a rural Indian village. After forming farmer groups or as JLGs or SHGs, we learned that many government programs are available to farmers or groups but have not yet reached the end user. Community developers in this case have the responsibility of bridging the communication gap between village residents and local government officials. When everyone in the village is aware of their rights, a bottom-up strategy will work perfectly. The community developer must maintain very good relationships with all government officials in order for them to timely inform all programs or schemes in order to manage a top-to-bottom approach. When I first started working with farmers in Guptapada, Barapita villages of Odisha, no government official had ever visited the hamlet. However, once our coordinator approached the KVK, they set up training programs for farmers

and provided them with seeds and fertilizer for millet and pluses.

#### *Enhance natural capacities and networks*

Every community has its own unique strengths, such as unofficial networks, social support networks, or individuals with special skills or the ability to assist those in need. These already-existing community resources are found by a community developer who collaborates with them. It's crucial to avoid duplicating already established structures and roles because doing so could make the community weaker rather than stronger. Every village has a knowledgeable individual who is an expert in local knowledge. We taught farmers how to create organic pesticides and fertilizers in the village of Sadivayal. Farmers that have a thorough understanding of leaves through which they can make various pesticides. Everything is based on their experience. The respect that community developers show for the local community and indigenous knowledge and their ability to impart information to them is what makes them successful. Success rates are higher when traditional and modern knowledge are effectively merged.

#### *Community self-determination*

Community members gather during meetings to discuss their issues, concern, and choices, and come to their own decisions and be left with the best-fit solution. They may ask for advice from "experts," but they also take into account information from other sources and their own experiences when coming to final decisions making. Once the farmers club is formed in each village, many officials are invited and begin to attend and offer their professional insight frequently. If someone tries to impose the knowledge, conflicts may result. It is always preferable to work in win-win circumstances.

#### *Social justice and Equity*

This is essential to community development and,

if not explicitly stated as a program goal, is at the very least implicit in every CD effort. When working in an Indian hamlet requires us to interact with a variety of communities, each of which has its own caste system, culture, and religion. Creating ideas, making decisions, and sharing responsibility are all examples of meaningful community participation and social justice that go beyond physical involvement. People are motivated to engage for a variety of reasons, such as the desire to actively improve their own lives, the need to fulfill social or religious obligations, and the desire for a sense of community. The CD must operate with a sense of justice and accountability, giving each member equal weight.

#### *Service Integration*

There are sometimes gaps, duplications, and perhaps competing advice or treatments since the services supplied to people in need are often fragmented, making it difficult for one care provider to know what other services are available or being used. Here, CD has a significant impact on the community's services by integrating and supporting them all. For example, the community would not gain if two non-governmental organizations opened a tailoring shop in one village. If CD is powerful and knowledgeable about the community, he will ask NGOs to start two distinct activities so that it will increase the community's income and provide additional jobs.

#### **Qualities**

The core qualities or personal attributes are essential to good community work:

#### *Integrity*

By being sincere, fair, diligent, meticulous, morally upright, and honest in everything they do, the CD can establish trust and respected relationships with others. Due to community members unpleasant experiences, the residents of Sadvayal Village, a tribal hamlet in Coimbatore, where I used to work, didn't believe any official who

visited the community with offers. For me to establishing a relationship with the residents and holding meetings in the village required at least three months. Every day I travelled three hours to get to the village, where we sat under a Fig Tree (Ati tree) because there was no office and talked to people until we finally built a rapport and steadily gained each other's trust.

#### *Compassion and Empathy*

When working with communities, empathy is a crucial skill to possess. No two villages in India are the same. Empathy entails putting yourself in another person's position, experiencing their emotions, and making an effort to comprehend their viewpoint. Never try to push our ideals on the community; instead, always try to listen to their problems. A community services professional must have a strong sense of empathy and compassion because they will frequently come into contact with weak people who may be going through some of their most trying times. It's critical to be able to relate to the clients you serve as community services work and to give judgment-free counsel. When we are working in villages no community worker can find solutions. If CD has compassion and empathy they try to find a way by connecting the problems with concern departments.

#### *Objectivity and Priorities*

The processes by which local communities can raise their own standards of living are generally referred to by this term. When we are working in remote village we formed farmers group to meet local needs such as food and nutrition security, income generation and employments. "The goal is to establish things like when farming must begin, how to prepare the land, where to buy quality seeds, how to make fertilizer or pesticide, how often to use fertilizer or pesticide, whether any government programs are available, what each member's duties and responsibilities are, the overall cost of cultivation, and marketing. Priorities should always change and be

determined by the group's shared concerns.

*Patience & Flexibility.*

Working in a community the CD required a lot of patience. CD may be dealing with emotional individuals who at first choose not to heed your advice. Participating in a community conversation raises everyone's level of awareness, enables people to speak up for their ideas, and provides a structure for gathering suggestions or direction based on the knowledge and experiences of the community. Selected volunteers in the community discover that even while they may not be able to assist everyone, those they do assist improve their lives and make all the effort worthwhile. When dealing with communities, I typically observe that different members of the community have different goals. Many times when we fix a meeting in the village, some of them do not attend the meeting because at that time they have some other priorities to fulfill. Some must take their children with them, and the best option I can think of is to hold meetings in the evening. Always being adaptable helps to comprehend community requirements.

*Work Structure*

Without a vision, however, communities have a limited ability to make decisions about these problems in the villages. It is analogous to driving across different village without a proper work structure. Prior to getting people to collaborate, you must assist them in connecting with and developing trust in one another through group meetings with shared objectives. The work structure like the minute book, bank accounts, soil card, ration card, health card, Aadhaar card, etc to avoid confusion. Community workers typically work with a number of members simultaneously across different villages in different states, so it is very important to stay organized and connected. You'll need to keep track of the requirements each village set forth as well as other relevant information, as well as your members' needs. This entails organizing files that list ongoing projects, contact information for village and panchayat officials, bank accounts, and other official and individual members' information. Managing all the responsibilities of community services won't be a problem for you if staying organized comes naturally to you. I always handle files for each village where I worked. The steps to community development is shown in figure 1.

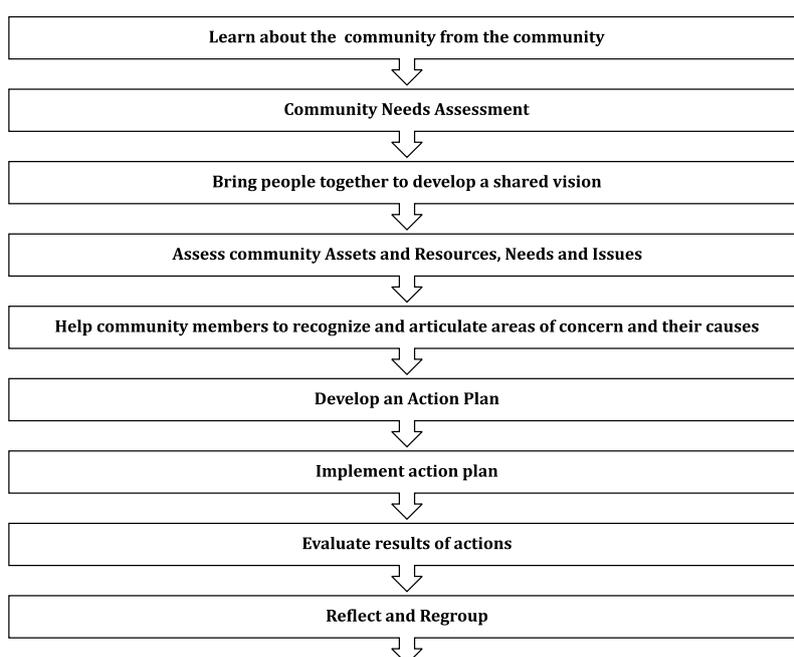


Figure 1. Steps to Community Development

1. Learn about the community from the community:

The best approach of formation is through community-based information. Try to learn from the community over the first few meetings about their problems and local solutions before implementing them. It gives confidence to find solutions and encourages all members to engage in the process. In this manner, CD can pinpoint problems, assets, requirements, leadership structure, and decision-making procedures. Significant insights into the community's strengths and faults can also be gained by carefully observing it when you engage with it. The example of formation through information is when I went to Sadivayail Village. The majority of farmers stopped farming in 2016 because of a variety of problems, including a lack irrigation facilities, low productivity, lack of adequate use of inputs, poor extension leading to large yield gaps and rising fertilizer and pesticide prices. I then formed a farmers' group and registered under cooperative society and opened a bank account. Identified the problems one by one and find a solution in groups, channeled water from a hilltop 2.5 km away, and taught participants how to make organic fertilizer (Jeevamrutham & Beejamrutham), pesticides, and insecticides using extracts from five and seven leaves. All of this reduces the upfront costs of farming. We eventually converted the village into an organically certified village with continued effort and support of farming community.

2. Community Needs Assessment

Reading and observation alone won't teach you what you need to know. When we listen, we become more educated on how to serve them best. A community needs assessment is a methodical procedure for determining a community's needs or service gaps, as well as the resources and strengths available to address those needs. A multi-step process is necessary to conduct a needs assessment, and it often entails defining a population and collecting data using

a set of indicators. Discuss with the locals and pay attention to what they have to say before fixing a set of indicators. To gather adequate information to make suggestions, judgments, and priorities, staff must be in regular communication with the community. As I've learned, always teach the local community how to gather data for various purposes. Although it initially appears challenging, with good and ongoing training, we may turn community members into resource persons for gathering data for various purposes, including census, health, education, and agriculture. We pick a few young people from each village and provide them with the necessary training; after that, the educated individuals gather the necessary data. It is usually beneficial to boost authenticity. We gathered data in Naniborvai Village utilizing local resources to present to Amul in order to start a dairy unit.

3. Bring people together to develop a shared vision

The next stage is to host a community gathering once you have determined that there are some shared interests among community members and you have located a few people who appear willing to work on a community development program. It might be appropriate in some situations to invite government representatives who can help the initiative. The goal of this gathering would be to create a common "community vision," which would entail picturing their ideal community and talking about their thoughts with one another in order to arrive at a shared vision and some broad strategic orientations that everyone would be committed to working towards. You might also use the meetings to solicit support for the project, get community feedback, and invite people to join a steering committee or ask them for assistance in other ways. We first identified the issue with community members before beginning to look for a solution together. Every meeting was documented, minutes were prepared, and tasks were given to each member. We include the local

pachayath and all government representatives in the meeting. Additionally, it promotes transparency and equal respect for all members. One such initiative is been undertaken by SARVATHOBHADRAM-ORGANIC. In order to help small and marginal farmers adapt, and fit the system to their needs, the Farmers Club was founded with 50 members after meeting with Thanniyam Agriculture officer, panchayath members to discuss issues and potential solutions. The farmers club projects seek to provide Anthikad Block Panchayat with a secure supply of food and nourishment. A strategy was created to rebuild the community's agriculture from the ground up, generate additional revenues, and entice farmers to switch to organic farming after realizing the dismal situation of the paddy farmers.

To boost food diversity in the diets of the participating families and decrease reliance on the market for fruits and vegetables, a primary intervention undertaken by the program was the distribution of seeds through self-help groups (SHGs) to develop kitchen gardens. Therefore, despite the fact that during the COVID-19 lockdown, deliveries of perishables from other states decreased by more than half, community-led initiatives assist in meeting the total demand for vegetables and fruits in Anthikad Block Panchayat. Through kitchen gardening in the block, the project helped 6,500 households by securing food supply and nutrition. The effort was scaled out to cover 25 hectares of wetlands into organic paddy cultivation and transform 13 hectares of fallow land into organic vegetable.

After 17 years of cultivable wasteland, the decision to try organic farming was difficult and had uncertain outcomes. The farmers in Anthikad Block Panchayat, however, are now determined to advance it. The group as a whole has access to irrigation infrastructure and possesses around 25 acres of rich land. The participants outlined their roles and created internal management

policies. They began with tasks like choosing crop types, soil testing, seed testing, crop planning, water budgeting, and conservation measures under the direction of Sarvathobhadram-Organic and with assistance from Krishi Bhavan (agricultural office). The group talked through each phase to come up with solutions. Started the kitchen gardens, which assist the participating families' diets to become more varied and rely less on the market for fruits and vegetables. By giving 50,000 saplings, seeds, and organic fertilizers to SHG groups so they could start kitchen gardens, the effective model was expanded to various wards of the Block. Through kitchen gardening in Block, the project provided food security and nutrition for 6500 families. The arrival of perishables from different states is down by more than half during COVID.

Greater Sustainability It became evident that organic farming offered the marginal farmers a more sustainable future because the price of and reliance on agricultural chemicals frequently drove them into losses. The farmers received instruction from SARVATHOBHADRAM-ORGANIC on how to make natural insecticides and fertilizers like Jeevamirtham (a mixture of cow dung and urine, legume powder, and jaggery).

The farmers, in turn, gave their full support and expressed confidence that via this new endeavor, the livelihood of their entire community could be restored and that a better future lay ahead. Numerous checkpoints are constructed on the channel to regulate the water flow, thereby lowering the velocity. The consequence of the group's risk-taking and experimentation was the sale of a new crop for \$.96 (Rs.70/kg) as opposed to the government's minimum support price of \$.40/kg (Rs 28.50).

#### 4. Assess community assets and Resources, Needs, and Issues

Always prepare resource mapping that includes data on community, human resources, and natural

Thorough community assessment CD gathers qualitative and quantitative data on a range of community aspects is very beneficial. Unfortunately, time and money constraints frequently make it necessary to select between approaches and restrict the assessment to specific areas of interest. A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of the community may help in determining what and how much information to collect by highlighting some areas as greater priority for action. In the practice of community development, a variety of community evaluation techniques are used. A tool that aids in our understanding of a community's resource base is the Village Resource Map. Social Map; Wealth Ranking Objectives; Local Perceptions of Malnutrition Mapping Objectives; Venn Diagram on Institutions; Resource Cards; Seasonal Calendar; Income and Expenditure Matrix; Daily Activity Clocks; Focus group discussion: Constraints and Opportunities to achieving Nutrition and Household Food Security; Semi-Structured Interview: Household Case Study; Community Workshop and Daily Evaluation and Planning Meeting.

#### 5. Help community members to recognize and articulate areas of concern and their causes

In any community development process, it is the community that is in the driver's seat. We need to build each other up from the inside and look for locally relevant or indigenous answers. However, community members are the ones who are most familiar with the circumstances and, frequently possess knowledge and insight that an outside "expert" does not. Community developers enable the community to begin taking ownership of the challenges and the creation of solutions by offering tools, resources, meeting space, and facilitation.

When we try to implement projects in the villages, we always have more success when we discuss the issue in groups and come up with a local solution. Experts must provide them with

technology that satisfies regional requirements. Paddy and Arecanuts are the primary sources of revenue in Byse village, Karnataka.

The members formed SHGs and received training to produce eco-friendly; biodegradable arecanuts from palm leaves that had fallen from trees in order to enhance their livelihood and income. AMMACHI Labs has fixed a pressure machine that is required for giving the plates the right shape in order to support the women's group with technology. It evolved into an environmentally benign substitute for plastic plates, which are a significant contributor to environmental pollution and a significant source of cash for women's groups.

#### 6. Develop an Action Plan

After an initial discussion with members in villages, a strategic plan of action was created. A thorough strategic plan that includes long-, medium-, and short-term goals as well as mid-level plans for communications, resource development, and human resources may be in order. In addition, if there are a number of activities or events to plan, you will need a separate action plan for each one. The goal is to create a well-thought-out plan that community members can understand, that clearly connects activities with objectives, and that outlines roles, deadlines, and resources needed. After forming the farmers club, the CD had a well-thought-out plan that included everything from primary tillage to harvesting, then branding and marketing. In the vast majority of the villages, we implemented this plan.

#### 7. Implement action plan

This is the core of the effort, where volunteers and members of the community, as well as financial and human resources, are organized to take action. This could come in a variety of shapes. In communities, we create an agricultural calendar that details the crops to be planted during specific seasons, various irrigation

techniques, government insurance programs, the preparation of fertilizer and pesticides, post-harvest techniques, and marketing strategies.

#### 8. Evaluate the results of actions

Community development professionals have relied less on formal evaluation processes to direct their activity and more on their personal experience and anecdotal information from others. The most crucial thing is that you might have to show that your activities did not affect anyone else. Performing an evaluation may also be necessary to satisfy funding criteria, show the initiative's viability so that it may be continued, and gather data for other people or future efforts. Plans for evaluation can be formal or informal, depending on the needs and available resources of the group. Participatory evaluation engages community members or program participants in the evaluation design, data collecting, analysis, and result interpretation.

#### 9. Reflect and regroup

Before starting the next project, give the group time to rest and rethink. Make sure there is good follow-up communication with the media, partners, and funders. Thank everyone who contributed. Celebrate the group's accomplishments and consider any potential disappointments. Review the effectiveness of the organizational structures and processes and point out any areas that require improvement before the next surge of activity.

It's crucial to give participants a place to reflect on how being a part of the group has helped them grow personally. When the team is prepared to take on a new project, they may wish to review the results of the community assessment and the strategic goals to determine whether any of those processes should be repeated or if any additional new ones should be included.

#### **CONCLUSION**

From my experience working in Indian villages, the success of any community program depends upon the "chemistry" between CD and members of the community. Planning is the first step of effective collaboration with the community. Agreement, consideration, and commitment are required for every component of the collaboration, including its goal, function, decision-making process, risks and rewards for each participant, and anticipated outcomes (usually by signing a written agreement). Therefore, it is necessary to organize every meeting, and work schedule, preparing a recording of each meeting before approaching government officials or to implementing agencies. Fostering a shared goal among all societal members is essential, and this includes participation from every cross-section of society. The program must be designed such that the village economy may thrive at a lower income level, creating jobs for women and young people, rising productivity, and a thriving village economy.

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