



Women as Partners of Development

Ajeesh Sebastian¹

ABSTRACT: Developing Partnership with the stakeholders and giving space for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the project for their own development is an ideal situation of participatory development. It is the popular as well as effective way of development and leads to sustainable progress. When this partnership involves strong participation from the part of women folk, the dynamism of the developmental changes takes in a drastic form.

SPED III (sustainability through participation, empowerment and decentralization) is a five-year project funded by CIDA and implemented by Save A Family Plan Trust India through their 28 partner NGOs and in 520 villages across India. The methodology of the SPED III is based on the decentralized planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In this process, women are taking important stand and new partnership brings about fundamental changes when it is analyzed from the point of view of stakeholders. The researcher analyses and seeks to find out the comprehensive, multilevel process by which the stakeholders or partners in the development especially women develop, leverage and manage the partnership.

The researcher has taken five cases of exemplary changes occurred as part of a participatory development programme. Descriptive design using case study method is applied to do in-depth analysis of the cases. The primary data has collected through interview schedule and FGD with shortlisted cases and secondary through sources such as case studies and annual and bi-annual reports of the CIDA programme.

The researcher observed the development of perceived need into felt need where the people especially women get involved into the village issue and the spirit that takes them into transformative leadership and partners in development.

It was also observed that the when women gets resources to overcome the binding chains, they came out of the culture of silence and they move far ahead in achieving the hierarchy of needs which consequently improves their quality of life at personal and community level.

Partnership with women has substantially influenced the gender relations in the villages and power dynamics between male and female. Also partnership has given legitimacy of the role and positions of women in public sphere including social, economic and political realms.

Keywords: Women, Partners of Development, Woman's Participation, Development

¹ Social Worker, National Institute for Research in Reproductive Health, Mumbai, India
Email: ajeeshsebastianmsw@gmail.com; Telephone: +91 9020425261

1. Introduction

Developing Partnership for development is a major discussion point of academicians as well as policy makers who are engaged international and national level of developmental sectors. There were several studies and practices are going on all over world in this regard. But the popular as well as effective way of development was making partnership with the stakeholders and work together for sustainable development. The funding agencies for the developing nations also changed in this regard and there is a growing demand for this right based and participatory approach. Here the researcher would like take the attention of readers to the SPED III programme, which has provided sufficient room for the concept – partnership with stakeholders for their own development.

2. Background of the study

Save A Family Plan (SAFP) is an international development organization and a registered charity in Canada, United States of America and India. It is a non-governmental voluntary organization with a vision of 'partnering with the poor for a just world'. It originated as a charity organization and developed into a movement for providing supporting income to poverty-stricken families through small-scale projects and has now reached a stage where it is capable of providing support systems for sustainable development of families and communities. Over the past 6 years of human service, SAFP has maintained a strong donor base of supporters, a consistent network of thousands of volunteers, development organizations, developmental & technical professionals and thousands of grassroots level people's organizations actively involved in the development process.

Sustainability through Participation, Empowerment, and Decentralization (SPED) III is a 5- year program currently being undertaken by Save A Family Plan (SAFP) in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development (DFATD), beginning December 30, 2010 and ending March 31, 2016. This program aims to empower communities to address their problems and issues in a participatory, scientific and sustainable manner by themselves. By participating in the SPED III program, village communities have the opportunity to engage in a participatory process that supports continuous analysis and learning and leads to local ownership, control, and sustainability.

In partnership with 28 regionally based NGOs, SAFP is working to implement this process in 50 villages with poor and marginalized communities. The majority of the direct beneficiaries are from marginalized groups, including Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backwards Castes (OBC), as identified by the Government of India.

Village Action Teams (VATs) is the basic unit in the SPED III Programme. It comprises of village-level leaders, Self Help Group (SHG) representatives, and volunteers, and invited representatives from local Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI's). They will receive ongoing training facilitated by the CFTs in local venues. They will be empowered to conduct village-level participatory assessments and analyses of key issues, and as such, are drivers of the core process, and important instruments of change in local communities.

SAFP not only recognizes the need for effective long-term development strategies in communities, but also ones that allow communities to acquire the skills to capably address problems and issues in a participatory and scientific manner. The proposed program envisages facilitating a 'core

process' whereby primary stakeholders actively participate in the process of gaining rights, control and ownership over their development results.

The stages of the core process are given below:

I: Generating awareness, sensitivity and consciousness on various issues and problems by creating a village-level database and information bank; there is an evolutionary process of knowledge building that leads to social actions. Awareness of human rights, social justice, constitutional rights and privileges, etc. is an essential part of that evolution.

II: Household and Community level issue-based micro-planning (person-centered, family and location specific micro-planning); this helps stakeholders to gain control and ownership over the process. Once the plans at the community level are set, they can be integrated with those at the Panchayat (local government) level.

III: Household and Community level local initiatives/actions; this involves mobilizing local resources and accessing government schemes and services for the implementation of community plans.

IV: Household and Community based Monitoring and Reflection; this is to establish participatory internal monitoring and evaluation systems at the community level. This will reinforce the community learning and action dynamics in a sustainable manner.

Each successive activity in the core process is built upon the results of the preceding activity. The focus is to facilitate empowerment of village communities to gain rights, control and ownership over the process and results of addressing issues. The expected results are that primary stakeholders will gain analytical and experiential knowledge on the issues; they will be able to develop plans and strategies in a scientific and systematic manner; they will be able to effectively make use of local resources, public services/facilities, and government schemes and projects to address their issues; and they will gain capacity to advocate for the purpose of influencing public policies and programmes. The methodology is such that each village community will focus on addressing one issue in the first year and one in each succeeding year.

3. Women, Social Development and Sustainability

Social Development is the promotion of a sustainable society that is worthy of human dignity by empowering marginalized groups, women and men, to undertake their own development, to improve their social and economic position and to acquire their rightful place in society....." (Bilance, 1997). It is a process where both the genders are contributing to the secure a rightful life in society with worth and dignity. The process goes upward through making strategic choices in life that in turn empowers the person. Regarding the social development of women, they are lagging behind men because their development process was dictated or formed under existing patriarchal system. So the hitherto history of development of women narrates the tragedy of a marginalized group who are deprived of designing their developmental course of action by themselves.

The discussions over sustainability of the existing patterns of development where in question when one gender lagged behind the other in all aspects. Theories and literature on development were questioned and explored. The three pillars of sustainable development such as social, economic and environment were deeply interrogated. These dimensions are interrelated and one of the components of the interrelation is the gender participation in the development. When the

development projects are planned, implemented monitored and evaluated by the male gender, they have framed the needs and milestones, role and functions of women in development. As it is a product of patriarchy, the benefits were nominal in nature and remained only in reports. Evaluative studies have highlighted the plight of such developmental projects and suggested the need for more gender inclusive and women-partnered developmental programmes for sustainable community development.

United Nations and World Bank studies show that focusing on women in development assistance and poverty reduction strategies leads to faster economic growth than gender-neutral approaches (Stevens, C., 2010). The donor agencies found that the existing projects are male handled and many at times its effects are not trickled down to the needy sections of society especially women and children. So increased the concentration of women as 'partners of change' and it is been prevalent in the recent developmental projects.

UN Women (2013) holds the view that investing in women economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth. The origin and rapid development of MFIs and SHG movement soon caught the attention of academicians. They found the creative and versatile efficacy of women in developing transforming changes in their own personal lives and in society by making use of the resources like MFIs, SHG etc. it was another step in the history of Women as partners in development. Following the MFI model and women empowerment, several theories, frameworks are developed which focused on the creative role of women in sustainable development. The paradigm shift has influenced the NGOs and service sector and there boomed the era of women empowerment by GOs, NGO, VOs and CBOs.

4. Methods

Five Cases from the SPED III are taken as sample for analysis. These case studies are shortlisted for further analysis. They are been further analyzed by visiting the case locations and conducting in depth interview with the stakeholders. Also the concerned NGOs and the coordinators of the project interviewed to get insights about the partnership. The researcher has tried to incorporate more and more accurate information from the data generators in order to establish the focal point namely women as efficient and effective partners of development.

The selected cases are briefed below:

- Involvement of women folk in addressing the issue of common bathing and washing place for the Malideepa village in Pithora Block, Raipur.
- Women leadership in Panchayats from VAT committees in Karnool, Andhra Pradesh.
- Women entrepreneurship and empowerment in Amitnagar, Chadrapur, Maharashtra.
- Collective action by women for availing government scheme for proper drainage system in Rasra, Baliaya District, U.P.
- Saving Trees nearby village through Rakhi Bandhan in Attaragudi village, Pithora Block, Raipur.

Case no. 1

Malideepa is a village of about 1000 population. The village is situated 20 km .from Pithora and comes under Sukipallii Panchayat.

For eight long years, Malideepa with its 300 families had no bathing facility .So the people – men

and women, children - trekked daily 4 km. to Sukipalli , a near-by village for their bath and washing clothes. So, the need to have a pond of their own was felt by all. The VAT organized a meeting on January 20th, 2013. The meeting was attended by SHG groups, Forest protection committee and others numbering 153 men and women. The participants decided to dig a pond in the government wasteland measuring about 3 acres.

Mr. Babulal (name changed for confidentiality) also took part in the meetings and thought of using the opportunity. He has approached the Patwari, bribed and got the documents of the land in favour of him. The villagers especially women groups came to know about it and have protested in a democratic way under the banner of Village Action Team and SHG groups. The protest lasted for more than one month and the protestors could not convince the authorities regarding the encroachment. Finally, the Collector, Tahasildar, Revenue Inspector and Patwari intervened in the issue and villagers got back the land for common good.

Case Study – 2

Amith Nagar village is one of the backward village in the Chandrapur district in Maharashtra. People of this village belong to different categories. Most of the families are migrated from other places in order to work as labourers in cities. People of this village are poor and they do not have agricultural land and other income earning sources. Mrs. Sunadha Govardhan Surpam and her family were migrated to this village and are economically very poor. They have a small mud house and are striving for their daily survival. They do not have work every day.

Loksamgraha Social Service Society under SPED III conducted the survey and found that there were issues like alcoholism, unemployment, poverty and illiteracy in the village. When the SPED III project started in this village, all women were attending the programmes and training. Sunadha was also attending the meeting regularly. She needed a help. She was selected for IGP activity and was given a small general shop an amount of Rs. 3500 including her contribution.

From the beginning, she was getting less profit but gradually it is increased. According to the need, she buys and keeps things in the shop. Her daily income goes to 200 to Rs.300. Now she is confident that she can do this business well. She bought a refrigerator for the shop purpose by loan. She gets more income in summer season. Sunadha and her family are very grateful and thankful for the timely help and support given by LSSS through SPED III project. Now she is a very active SHG member and is actively involved in all the activities of the village.

Case study 3

Andhra Pradesh has been in political turmoil for the many years. It also affected the panchayath level elections too. Many at times, VAT found the existing representatives are not accountable or responding to the needs of the villages. Their experiences point towards the beginning of a positive change process. The future challenge continues to be their will to carry forward the aspirations of millions of women they represent and to fructify their development needs. The women leaders have increasingly realized the power of their position and feel empowered to demand their basic rights. They may not succeed in each case, but the message that comes clear through these examples is the courage and commitment shown by women in standing their ground, doing exemplary work despite the odds, under the watchful eyes of the villagers to whom they are

accountable.

Panchayat Election was held on 30th July 2013 in all the SPED III Villages. From among the members from our Village Action Team, seven of the women contested in the election: one of them for the post of Panchayat President and others for Panchayat Ward Members. Seven of them got majority in their own respective wards. The success of the candidates is mainly because they were partnering with the project and striving for the development of the village. Also during the past two and a half years of the SPED III Program, strong awareness was developed in the communities on gender equality and women's empowerment. The villagers were well satisfied with the working nature of these candidates and they voted for them.

Case Study 4

Attargudi is one of the backward villages in Pithora. People of this village belong to BPL category. When the SPED III project started in the village, they were responding well because they were having several issues to be addressed. But the women population was often silent in raising their voices. There were several trainings and other resources, which are specifically addressing the gender empowerment component within the village development.

The incident for the base of case study is actually happened when some encroachers under the influence of local leader tried to cut down the trees nearby the village. As the village folks used to spend the location as a resting place after their tedious work, the trees were solace to the village. But the woodcutters came on a day when the male population were absent in the village. Seeing the atrocity, the women VAT members summoned the rest of the women folk and stopped the poachers from the act. They have tied 'Rakhi' to the trees and pledged to save the trees at any cost. Later it came to the notice of the rest of people in the village and the authorities, they have warned the leaders and poachers against such malicious activities. The researcher has personally visited the location and interviewed the leaders of the collective action.

Case study 5

Uttar Pradesh is known for the patriarchal system and rigidity of gender imbalances. Often the issues of women are unaddressed by the power holders. Fed up by the system and the negligence and indifference, women members of VAT and SHG of Bitkuna were joined together against the panchayat who was not paying attention to the problem of lack of proper drainage system. As the drainage water was lagged around the tube well, which was the source of drinking water, often the village population faced health issues like water borne diseases. When they are united for the cause, the SPED III project also facilitated the process by giving the inputs like ICT on government schemes related with village development especially the construction of drainage system, health check-ups and health camps, interactive meetings with District and local Panchayat authorities. Finally, the issue was solved by sanctioning and construction of proper drainage system.

5. Result and analysis

The theory of motivation by Maslow states the hierarchy of needs. In the ladder, the individuals are move towards upper levels of needs when they fulfill the lower levels i.e. the ladder from basic needs to self-actualization. Its fulfillment depends on the different factors especially the

environmental factors. The researcher has enquired women folks in the case study location about the motivating factor behind their actions. Majority were dissatisfied with the existing conditions that does not favour them and waiting for opportunities to explore. When they are facilitated by the SPED III project team, they have unleashed their capacity to achieve higher level of needs like self-esteem needs and self-actualization needs. So the role of motivation is momentous in the women-partnered programme just because they were marginalized for centuries and they need a push to awake from the dormant condition and unchaining themselves from the existing spiral strings of oppression. In order to come out of the 'culture of silence' and live the life under 'conscientization' process, they have learned about the world around them, the state and its welfare schemes, the politics and sociology of gender and gender discrimination. The educated mind thus started searching for the potential identities they can achieve through their individual and collective action.

Community is handicapped when a common issue is infiltrating into the daily life of the community and the community on the other hand finds it difficult to address the issue in a healthy way. When an agency offers helping hand, the community gets united in several intensity in relation with the severity of the problem. Alter and Hage (1993) have synthesized existing theories on collaboration of stakeholders in a project by emphasizing the role of perceived need for collaboration and organization's willingness to collaborate. In SPED III, the villages were selected based on the initial survey. The benefits of development of the state were not reaching to the selected communities. So they are dissatisfied with the existing conditions. The project acted as a platform for them to achieve their perceived needs. Therefore, the community members especially women have joined in the action.

While considering the women's partnership in the developmental activity, the process framework for partnership proposed by Mike Valentine is relevant. When the community is dissatisfied with the existing conditions and constraints, which are exhibited, in the form of perceived need, they make effort either by themselves or with the help of external agencies to strive over the situation. In the sample five cases, the partnership of women was happened because they found the perceived needs are significant in contributing quality of the life of the community. All the five cases studies are happened in areas that are known for patriarchal system, caste system and socially and economically backward in nature. However, the implementation of the project initiated the process of developing the collaboration between stakeholders of project. Thus it has gone through the process of 'developing, leveraging and managing strategic partnership' (Valente, M., 2010) for development.

Naila Kabeer (1999) and empowerment theory depicts the triangle relationship between agency, resources and achievements. When women are entered in partnership for their development, they decide so out of their pre-existing conditions that restrains them to develop. By using the resources of the SPED III, they start practicing strategic choices that ultimately lead to achievements. In the case study of newly elected PRI members in Karnool, this triangle relationship is very much significant. In a political system where male used to contest in the election and plan and implement programmes according to their whims and fancies, these women were ascended into the power. They used SPED III and VAT as resource in achieving their credibility. So the resources helped them to develop their networks in the community, which

eventually led to the victory in the election.

Amartya Sen (2000) on poverty and inequality says that poverty is the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as low income. This deprivation of elementary capabilities is reflected in the form of social problems such as higher morbidity, malnourishment, domestic violence etc. When the vulnerable population is trained to meet with and overcome the disabilities through strategies such as trainings and Income generation programme, women enjoys the benefits of the development because they are capable of utilizing their own essential capabilities. When the essential capabilities are flourished, the quality of life improves.

In the case study of women in Amitnagar and their petty shops, the same fact reveals. They were deprived of the essential capabilities and impaired with purchasing power or lacking resources to change their life. The partnership with SPED III has changed their life into an earning member of the family.

Adam Smith's analysis of strong connections between necessities and conditions of living are found in the project especially when women take ownership of the project. The case study of common water source in Malideepa and issue of availing government scheme for drainage system exemplify the process. The women members are strongly united in the matter of the drainage because the polluted water mixed up with the tube well, which is their drinking water source. Men folks get the water at any time and the women are in duty of collecting the water.

As their necessity for having clean and non-polluted drinking water, they united and it ultimately improved the quality of life of their own and those who live depending on them. They take up issues that are important to them. The male population has never seen it as an issue or they simply take no attention to it because it never came in their priorities. As the VAT was increasingly gender sensitive, the women have more say in the development process of the village, which ultimately have an effect on their life.

The theory of feminism (Lengerman, P.M. & Niebrugge, G., 2010) postulates three basic questions and the third one asks, "How can we change and improve the social world so as to make it more just place for all people?" the partnership with women in development gives answers to the question. The partnership with stakeholders to address the perceived as well as real need is well accepted and well implemented in the SPED III project. These case studies show how women use the opportunity to address the issues, which affect their life. They ventured in the world of 'learning by doing' and these experiences such as engaging in social action to avail the government schemes, engaging in vocational training as well as income generation programme, engaging in common issues of village, contesting in election at local panchayat level etc. have contributed to their empowerment.

Considering the new role of women as partners, the queer theory components are worth noticing. Traditionally the roles of the women in the case study locations were determined socially and they have no say in the development process which happens around them and which has effects on their lives too. However, the project has catalyzed their role as a partner in development. So the silenced identities are proved that they are no longer stable identities like life behind doors or walls. They came forward and partake in the community organization. This transformation of identities includes change from household worker or coolie worker to women entrepreneur or Surpanch/ward member of the Gram Panchayat.

6. Conclusion

The partnership with women in addressing developmental issues at micro, meso and macro level is all-inclusive in nature. All the developmental issues are solved until the least one are got free from the resultant consequences. Post-Independent India has spent billions for the development of marginalized sections especially for women empowerment. But the policies and programmes were not given adequate space for women to partner in planning, developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the programmes, which are meant for their development.

Realizing the need for such partnership, developmental projects are now seeks collaboration with the stakeholders in its entire project management. In SPED III, the same principle is followed and the result is diverse and among them, only five cases are taken for analysis. The analysis says the theoretical and practical prospects of collaborating with women for far reaching results that will sustain for over a long period.

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