

CLEAN GOVERNANCE EVERYWHERE

SAMARTHAN STRATEGIC PLAN

2006-2010

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The Context :

Samarthan came into existence about 10 years ago as a support organization to pursue the mission “***promoting and strengthening civil society efforts and participatory development processes favouring the poor, the oppressed and the disadvantaged sections of society***’. Samarthan envisioned to “***Samarthan envisions creating a social order of equal opportunities and access to information to one and all***”. Samarthan over the years has worked towards strengthening participatory governance and development from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. In these years, Samarthan has supported a large number of voluntary organisations to pursue social change process with enhanced capacities and capabilities. Samarthan has also deepened its engagement with a large number of Panchayati Raj institutions to build their leadership as institutions of local self governance. Samarthan pursued the issues of effective decentralized governance through research and engagement with the policy making institutions. Recently, Samarthan has established an Academy for Civil Society leaders’ primarily to create a platform for interaction and exchange of experiences and information among the various Civil Society actors on local self governance as well as to dialogue with the policy making institutions.

Samarthan has gone through programme evaluations as well as internal organizational reviews for internal self reflection to understand relevance of our endeavour from stakeholders point of view to identify strategic directions to maintain relevance and impactful existence. A strategic planning process has also been initiated.

Organisational Review Process and Findings :

Samarthan, on completion of 10 years of existence organised a self evaluation inviting a team of civil society leaders and experts to reflect on Samarthan’s role as a support organization in M.P and Chhattisgarh.

The evaluation highlighted that Samarthan has played a vital role in seeding a large number of voluntary organisations in M.P and Chhattisgarh. Moreover, it has strengthened their understanding and skills in such a manner which promoted credibility of the NGO sector. Samarthan is also recognized as a specialist organization on the issues of local self governance in rural and urban areas by all sectors in M.P and Chhattisgarh. Samarthan has developed district strategy to influence three tiers of governance. Micro planning at Panchayat level, participation of women in politics and decision making, promoting right to information have been key areas of impact. Samarthan has also made mark on the national scene playing a lead role in the National Social Watch Coalition. The evaluation team visited the field areas interacting with Panchayat representatives and citizens. The team interacted with a large number of stakeholder groups including NGOs, Government representatives, activists and donors.

STRENGTH AS PERCEIVED BY STAKEHOLDERS

- Samarthan has a well defined mission which is shared by all concerned stakeholders
- External stakeholders respect and accept Samarthan's Leadership in local self-governance and support agency for small and medium size NGOs.
- There is a diversified sources of funding including having a training center which meets programmatic and institutional needs.
- Organisation has build strong alliances and networks to capture opportunities, collective action and policy advocacy at the state level as well as with select national level organizations.
- Programmes have empowered communities for local actions and change especially among women. There are more visible impacts in direct field areas and collaborative partnership.
- Samarthan promotes gender sensitive leadership where women feel secure
- Values of transparency, honesty and integrity are practiced by the organization.
- Staff is treated with dignity and respect and rewards- high performance and high commitment
- Mature and diversified board, which shapes up and overseas implementation of policies and strategic directions.

There is a need to bring organizational shared understanding whether Samarthan would promote service delivery led governance or rights based governance. Samarthan established itself as a support organization building capacities of a large number of small and medium size organisations. A fundamental question which needs to be answered remains as what is meant by support and for whom. Does it mean traditional trainings and knowledge management or does it include large issues of social justice. Samarthan has fulfilled the role of seeding new NGOs and such role need not to be dis-continued as a core activity.

WEAKNESS AS PERCEIVED BY THE STAKEHOLDERS

- Geographical area and functions viz. implementation, research and training lead to inadequate attention and specialization.
- Formal human resource policies and procedures have not been standardized.
- Flexible administrative systems of recording, filing, internal communications have not been adequately formalized.
- Informal/Leader centric performance management systems are not perceived equitable.
- Weak organizational support for new staff for self-development results in weak orientation on organizational values and practices.
- Inadequately defined roles and responsibilities and unclear organizational structure leading to weak accountability, autonomy and performance appraisal.
- High rate of attrition is leading to distancing with NGOs and weakening organizational knowledge base.
- Inadequate positive discrimination for women to improve relevant knowledge and skill.

Samarthan need to build capacities to play advocacy function based on research as a large number of social action organisations are visualizing Samarthan to play such a role. Samarthan's direct intervention is viewed as a strong learning ground for Samarthan. However, there is a strong need to link micro experiences with macro action. There is a need to distill learnings from the micro experimentation sites of

Samarthan as well as others action grounds for larger legitimacy to play an effective advocacy role.

Strategic Planning Process :

Alongwith the evaluation team, Mr. Prem Chadha, Strategic Planning expert was requested to participate in the evaluation process to facilitate Strategic Planning process using the evaluation as important input.

A core group of Samarthan's senior and old timer colleagues was formed primarily to design and own the strategic planning process. The core group reviewed the strengths and concerns emerging from the evaluation as well as from the organizational self audit package used to get perceptions of various stakeholder groups on organizational dimensions.

The core group also involved some of the senior long term associates and well wishes of Samarthan to provide their expertise in selective taskforces. The core group over the last couple of months worked on evolving the strategic plan. The base document was submitted to the Board of Trustees for their approval. After the board's approval, the core group worked to detail out strategic plan of Samarthan. Core group will also be responsible for the follow-up on the Strategic plan.

Samarthan's Identity and Mission :

Reflections of the evaluation report and internal consultations have catalysed the process of determining new identity, organizational vision, desired identity and mission.

Societal Vision :

"Clean Governance Everywhere"

India is a country of contradictions where on the one side prosperity and growth is being experienced and on the other side extent and degree of deprivation among the poor, dalits, women and tribals is attaining its pinnacle. Malnutrition, excess to affordable education and health and work for two hands is increasingly becoming life and death issues for majority of Indians, at least bottom 40%, living in poor economic conditions in rural and urban areas. There are ample programmes and adequate resources, yet the deprivation is not meaningfully addressed.

Citizen's are not adequately demanding their rights from the State putting collective pressure on the system for governance-accountability. As a result a sizeable chunk of resources allocated for development go down the drain or siphoned off within the development delivery system. Various constitutional guarantees are not fulfilled and remain as decent provisions on the papers as the larger societal structural rigidities with weak accountability of the institutions build indifferent attitudes among citizens.

Over the last 10 years, local self governance as a constitutional guarantee have existed, survived and attempted in demonstrating their abilities for performing their perceived role of economic development and social justice. Inadequate support and lip services of the State to build such institutions as strong engines of delivering development and social justice has delayed the bottom-up development process as well as suppressed expression of local people, especially the poor and marginalized taking control of their own development.

The unprecedented economic growth in India over the last decade has sharpened the growing disparities among the rich and the poor. The most sufferers of poverty have been the socially excluded groups like dalits and tribals and historically disadvantaged large population of women. The policy making institutions and forms of parliamentary democracy without strong linkages with local institutions of governance is distanced with the larger social realities with the over-presence of dominant caste, class which weakens the voices of the poor and marginalized.

The societal vision of Samarthan primarily articulates the need to look at the governance as a means as well as an end. Mis-governance has resulted in colossal waste of public resources and it has denied justice and development to the poor and underprivileged citizens. The citizens have been treated as unequal in terms of access to resources, services and justice though having equal voting rights. Samarthan believes that more transparent and accountable governance in all sphere whether- State, market or civil society will be a pre-condition for equity and equal opportunity for the poor and the underprivileged.

Samarthan's desired identity

A strategic support organization

**in the areas of research-based monitoring and advocacy,
with a view to promoting decentralized governance:
to that end,
working to strengthen civil society leadership
and amplifying voices of the under privileged,
respecting core values and principles of the Constitution of India.**

This new identity will inspire and steer Samarthan such that it becomes known for advocating the cause of decentralized governance from the vantage point of the poor and other underprivileged sections. In the process of moving towards attainment of its new vision and identity, Samarthan visualizes the following construct:



Samarthan's 'Vision' will be supported by three core initiatives: (a) *Engagement with policy makers based on people-centered research*, (b) *Promotion of successful grassroots initiatives for reality check*, and (c) *Strengthening civil society voices towards creating a critical mass*. Samarthan's new 'Identity' of *promoting people-centered monitoring and advocacy around decentralized governance* will, thus rest on these three essential pillars, which are synergistically linked, and are mutually reinforcing towards optimal thrust for policy influencing. Samarthan will sharpen its capacities and skills for research-oriented advocacy such that its arguments are backed by systematically analysed empirical evidence. Samarthan has, during the ten years of its work, built a large base of voluntary organizations supportive of the varied issues of governance as well as the cause of decentralization at the local and district levels. It will be pertinent to provide them with new knowledge, and enhance their skills to deepen the process of engagement.

Samarthan will endeavour to consolidate its current work selectively, by pursuing relevant and contemporary areas, over a period of time, till it completes a logical transition. Samarthan's future focus will include building a hitherto fore relatively less supported, less engaged constituencies of media and academia. The reality suggests that a large number of well-meaning journalists and academicians, with strong abilities and credentials for policy influencing, are eager to take up the cause of decentralized governance. There is also the fact that Samarthan's distinct identity in the community of research-based organizations is going to rest on its forte of action and participatory research. Samarthan's image for promoting participatory processes – a cutting-edge advantage – will demand Samarthan to continue investments in building grass-roots level models of governance. To avoid straying from its desired identity of a research-based monitoring and advocacy organisation, however, Samarthan will promote its future grassroots initiatives essentially in alliance with partner NGOs in order to reality-test its research conclusions in different socio-economic and geographic settings. In pursuance of this strategy, Samarthan will make urgent moves to make Panna and Sehore as independent legal identities with strong foundation for their sustenance, and continuity in pursuance of the cause. Samarthan will pursue model-building initiatives not only at the village panchayat level, but also at the district and block levels to demonstrate effective bottom-up planning, participatory monitoring and decentralized decision-making, etc.

The reference to 'core values and principles of the Constitution of India' in Samarthan's desired identity is deliberate, and might need elaboration. This implies that the concept of governance that Samarthan will pursue – and draw strength from – will flow from the very Constitution of India. We, the people of India, solemnly resolved on 26 November 1950 to secure for all its citizens *Justice* (social, economic and political), *Liberty* (of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship), *Equality* (of status and of opportunity); and to promote among them *Fraternity* (sharing the dignity of the individual and unity and integrity of the nation). The trinity of the 'Preamble', the 'Fundamental Rights' and the 'Directive Principles of State Policy' constitutes the conscience of Indian Constitution. They together envision the establishment of an egalitarian social order guaranteeing fundamental freedoms and to secure justice – social, economic, and political, *to every citizen* through a rule of law. This also means that our instruments will flow from the very

same source: the right to information, the freedom of speech, and the rights to associate and participate.

Samarthan’s Mission:

Samarthan will build its new identity as a strong advocacy center on governance keeping the following mission :

Through evidence based participatory research, monitoring, advocacy and strengthening of Civil Society institutions pursuing similar goals to endeavour for cleaner decentralization governance representing improved accountability transparency and ethicality towards helping the underprivileged urban and rural communities to secure their legitimate rights and improved quality of life.

Environmental Analysis :

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh which used to be a combined identity couple of years back, constituted the largest state in India. Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are counted among the BIMARU states in India which are economically, socially and politically lagging behind as compared to the national averages.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. A large number of bilateral and multilateral development programmes offer possibilities of seeking support services or capacity building inputs in various operational skills viz monitoring + evaluation, process documentation.
2. Emergence of a large number of networks of CBOs, Panchayats and NGOs demand professional inputs in building networking abilities and network management.
3. Weak research institutions and limited capacities with social action groups to provide growing demand for rigorous analysis from the common citizen’s perspective especially on governance.
4. Growing sizable number of medium and large organization demand high quality customized capacity building inputs.
5. Absence of high impact models in participatory governance at the grassroots to build strong case for further investment in building exemplars.

6. A large number of programmes are offering opportunities for bottom-up planning and participatory monitoring.
7. Modern technological options offer possibilities to reach out common citizens and their networks in large scale through electronic communication materials.

THREATS

1. Without synergistic strategy of interventions in field, capacity building, research and advocacy etc. Samarthan may dilute its identity as a specialist organization.
2. Depleting resources of donors and their withdrawal from India will have significant impact on grant-based resources for the organisational sustenance.
3. Rights based advocacy of engaging the government to change their policies and programmes may affect the collaborative relationship with the Government for grants or projects.
4. Without high quality support services in selective areas, Samarthan will face strong competition with the emerging support organizations to sustain as a leader.
5. Multi-location offices without a strong administrative and systems backup support will send different messages diluting the quality and identity.
6. Weak alliance building with the bureaucratic system and political constituency may weaken the agenda of advocacy.
7. Demonstration of high impact is imperative in quantitative and qualitative terms to gain credibility in the eyes of the policy-making institutions as well as public at large.

Some Strategic Choice Areas

Consistent with Samarthan's *experience-based forte*, *vision*, and *desired identity*, it will be guided by the following strategic choices:

1. **Grow as a center for research- and knowledge-based advocacy on social justice issues and citizen's rights in the areas of decentralized governance**

- and development, including access to information, as against** mass-movement oriented rights-based field-mobilization.
2. **Promote the monitoring of service-delivery systems affecting the under-privileged communities to improve and accelerate high quality grassroots impacts;** *as against* implementation in specific sectors, viz health, education, PDS, livelihood, etc..

The new identity of Samarthan will be centered on using research-based advocacy. Samarthan in its new strategic thrust will focus further on building its research competencies in order to build strong linkages between micro and macro issues for advocacy. Samarthan will maintain requisite objectivity in research, examining and analyzing uncontested data from various legitimate perspectives, in order to more effectively argue in favour of the interests of the disadvantaged sections.

Monitoring social development programmes, whether designed by the state administrations under centrally sponsored schemes, their own programmes, or those resourced by bilateral and multilateral agencies, has become imperative with increasingly higher level of resources being allocated to the districts. As such, there is a need to constantly evolve contemporary instruments of participatory monitoring, dissemination of experiences as well as influencing the service delivery systems through the local self governance institutions (rural and urban) for more effective reach of the benefits to the poorest of the poor.

3. **Engage in forward-looking, high quality capacity-building interventions for the social change organizations, including media and academia, in decentralized governance areas, as against** direct field-based support and capacity building for community-based organizations.
4. **Promotion of women, dalits and tribals as leaders of voluntary organizations in a selective manner, as against** providing general support to all voluntary development organizations.

Samarthan is also accepted and recognized as an informal network of grassroots groups, and of small and medium size voluntary organizations. It would be

worthwhile to build their capacities, such that they can more effectively collaborate with Samarthan initiatives. However, Samarthan will work with a selected group of NGOs in formal alliances, essentially to promote people-centered advocacy, *inter-alia*, through field-based experiments and models. In this segment, Samarthan visualizes advocacy as building assertive examples on the ground – of participatory governance and its wider replicability to impact the quality of life of the underprivileged. Besides, Samarthan will continue to build capacities of the collectives of panchayat representatives, i.e. their networks, to potentise their voices with established power-centres within the communities or with governmental functionaries at the district level and below.

Samarthan will also design and execute futuristic high quality capacity building inputs for voluntary development organizations around local self-governance issues. These events will be largely demand-driven, on a payment basis, with some subsidy in needy cases. The surpluses generated from such events will be redeployed, through a well thought-out strategy, in Samarthan's key impact areas wherever the grants are found to be inadequate.

Strengthening capacities of civil society in the organizational and programme management areas has been a forte of Samarthan. Samarthan will work towards the strengthening of Madhya Pradesh Voluntary Action Network (MPVAN), an emerging network of voluntary organizations, to meet the basic informational and capacity building needs of small and medium sized member organizations. To that end, Samarthan will support MPVAN with basic information on development priorities, programmes and legal matters.

A distinct team of Samarthan will continue to identify the dalit, the tribal and the woman leadership within the voluntary sector and invest in building their capacities. Samarthan will also provide demand-based high quality support services to the bilateral and multilateral programmes and organizations on competitive payment basis.

There is a growing demand for capacity-building of community-based organizations as their numbers are on the rise and the various bi-laterals and

multi-laterals are eager to invest in such initiatives. For effective use of these resources, Samarthan will utilise its capacities in developing learning materials for training the trainers, who can, then, enhance capacities of local organizations. Small-sized partner organizations and their staff may be applied for this purpose. Samarthan will continue to explore possibilities of developing applications of decentralized governance with various sectors or themes.

5. **In strategic partnership with selected voluntary development organizations, develop viable models for participatory governance and development, as *against* expanding model building directly at own field sites.**

Samarthan will continue its focus around strengthening longitudinal action-oriented research, building a variety of feasible and effective models of governance and development. These grassroots models should also throw up issues for in-depth research, and engagement with the policy-making institutions.

Samarthan will move away from expanding its own implementation sites, and rather work towards strengthening capacities of its selected alliance members to experiment new research questions and innovate new ways of participatory governance. Samarthan's field locations may become independent units of operation as separate identities in time to come. The focus will be primarily towards experimentation in different locations with different types of partnership.

6. **Deal with both the urban as well as rural governance, in a synergistic mode, as *against* isolated focus on either rural or urban governance.**

Samarthan's present focus is more on rural governance with a relatively small engagement in the area of urban governance. There is a need to visualize and realize the essential synergy between the two, as the poverty and exclusion of poor and disadvantaged sections in governance structures remain important challenges in both rural and urban contexts, which are ultimately inter-related and inter-dependent. Moreover, in small towns there exists a symbiotic relationship of rural-urban political economy rather than a close divide.

However, Samarthan needs to build strong competencies, perspectives and knowledge-base to specialize in urban governance primarily for promoting the concerns of poor citizens, slums and settlements of weaker sections. This may lead to building a separate team specialising in urban governance.

7. Building Samarthan into a strong self-sustaining support centre with gradual reduction of dependency on grants

Samarthan will consciously invest energies in building effective strategies to mobilize resources other than those through overseas grants. These could be in the forms of consultancies, public contributions, and corporate donations as well as efficient management of internal corpus funds. These strategies should help reduce Samarthan's vulnerability with the shrinking grant-based resource-flow of foreign donors, as well as provide strength to take up policy influencing role with greater persuasion without undue compromises.

Operational details of Strategic choices :

Engagement with policy makers based on people centred research :

Samarthan envisages to highlight various issues of decentralization which are emerging as bottleneck faces by the grassroots institutions of governance. The multiplicity of institutions, diversity of socio-economic context, political leadership and control over the financial resources are predominantly complex areas which demand strong policy support from the State as well as operationalisation of rules and regulations, considering the fact that Panchayati Raj institutions are still in infancy and various practices and systems have yet not been perfected, there is a need to build pressure on the system for deepening the process of devolution.

The key functions in sharpening advocacy roles will be the following :

1. To identify areas of influencing emerging from areas of research.
2. To package these areas into a strong, lucid and compact policy brief.
3. To present the policy brief in an effective manner.
4. To forcefully negotiate the issue with influential stakeholders.
5. To form linkages with the media for coverage of the issues.

6. Building alliances with bureaucracy, polity and other instruments of the State.

There is a need to review various policies and programmes which are promoting or impeding decentralization process. Samarthan will engage in analyzing such policies with a common citizen's perspective and create a larger environment for change. There is a need to look at various dimensions of decentralization process and constantly react on anti-poor or pro-centralisation designs which may have implications to retard the process of strengthening of institutions of local self governance. A larger opinion building and constituency will have to be prepared to counter the vested interests and centralized top down mind set.

There is a need to influence political leadership in the Assembly sensitizing them by providing appropriate information and arguments. The administrative machinery at senior level need to be convinced with the demonstrated models of success as well as scientific and empirical analysis of the situation providing them operational options to deepen decentralization processes.

There is a need to provide field based realities check and demonstrative modules of decentralized functioning to the Planning Commission, State Finance Commission, Ministry of Panchayati Raj and various large scale development programme heads viz. National Health Guarantee, National Urban Renewable Mission (NURM) etc.

There is an increasing fund flow of the bilateral and multi-lateral donors. The development programme designing and its implementation need to be influenced by providing people's perspective and helping them see the various operational bottlenecks as of administrative systems and concrete opportunities of engaging local self governance institutions.

The policy influencing efforts will be based on rigorous research emphasizing on the methodological rigor and high quality data gathering and analysis. Participatory principles of research will be emphasized to ensure adequate representation of common citizen's perspective, concerns and aspirations.

Strengthening civil society voices towards creating a critical mass

Policy influencing areas needs to be backed up with adequate pressure building on the system by demonstrating qualitative and quantitative voices of civil society actors.

Samarthan over the years has build a diverse civil society base in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Over the years, Samarthan has emphasized on building capacities of voluntary organizations on decentralized governance issues, therefore a large number of organizations in different geographical locations have engaged with Panchayati Raj institutions with different perspective and strategic focus. There are several NGOs which are attempting to work with Panchayats on sectoral issues of water and sanitation management, watershed, health education etc. Many others, however, have worked towards strengthening transparency and accountability in Gram Sabhas or helping elected women and weaker sections leaders to perform effectively as development managers.

Samarthan will continue to work with the constituency of voluntary organizations primarily to identify relevant issues emerging from the ground, analyse it and engage with the policy makers/senior executive to influence policy change in consultation with the Civil Society organisations.

Samarthan will initiate a large scale monitoring of centrally sponsored schemes and programmes, which focus on decentralization. Currently, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP) is one such kind of example. There are several other programmes in various sectors of watershed, water and sanitation, health and education which demand concurrent monitoring to systematically highlight issues to improve efficiency and relevance of such programmes.

Samarthan will not only emphasize on NGO/CBO engagement. The thrust of the organization will consider greater engagement with the media and academic institutions. Samarthan will attempt to build a constant rapport with the development journalists who will be provided with the findings of the research/field realities to highlight issues in the newspaper.

Promoting successful grassroots initiatives for reality check

Considering that influencing governance is a long term battle, therefore sustained efforts need to be put to demonstrate meaningful examples of participatory governance on the ground. There is a need to take up various dimensions of participatory governance for longitudinal action oriented research. The learnings of the experiences will be systematically documented as to emphasize the donors and the government to trust the capacities of the decentralized system for delivering more effective, efficient and sustainable development.

Samarthan will work towards identifying exemplars from various parts of Hindi speaking states and provide them professional guidance to sharpen their replication value. Such cases will be documented systematically and utilized for policy influencing, exposure visits for capacity building and building public opinion in favour of decentralized unclear check manuscript to widely disseminate learnings through journals.

Geographical Reach/Spread

Over the years, Samarthan has worked in undivided Madhya Pradesh. Before the creation of new state of Chhattisgarh, Samarthan had established an office in Raipur to provide more qualitative support services to the civil society actors, currently, Samarthan has district level offices in Sehore and Panna districts in Madhya Pradesh and Bastar, Rajnandgaon and Sarguja districts in Chhattisgarh over the next couple of years, district level offices will be converted into independent NGOs working in alliance with Samarthan.

Samarthan envisages to deepen its engagement in research based advocacy, therefore, various field level operations of Samarthan will be sustained by establishing local organizations and leadership to take over the implementation function. Samarthan will continue to support experimentation on the ground in the locations where potential for demonstrating meaningful exemplars of participatory governance are on its way and couple of years of experimentation will help evolve learnings for large scale replication.

Samarthan will spread itself within the states of M.P and Chhattisgarh to collaborate with meaningful NGOs on research issues and participatory monitoring, who have been long

associates with Samarthan will be supported to build examples in participatory governance.

It would be pertinent to build collaborative relationship in the states of U.P., Bihar, Uttaranchal, Rajasthan and other neighbouring under-developed states so that more diversified monitoring and research may be conducted on the issues of local self governance. The strength of PRIA and Regional Support organisations will be of immense value to expand the reach in different geographic location building a collaborative model of support exploring maximum complementarily and mutual learning and gains.

National level collaborative initiatives will be promoted with the help of National level organisations to engage with the policy making institutions on sustained basis.