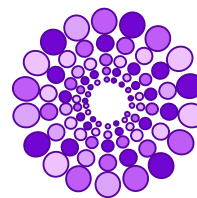




The Social and Health
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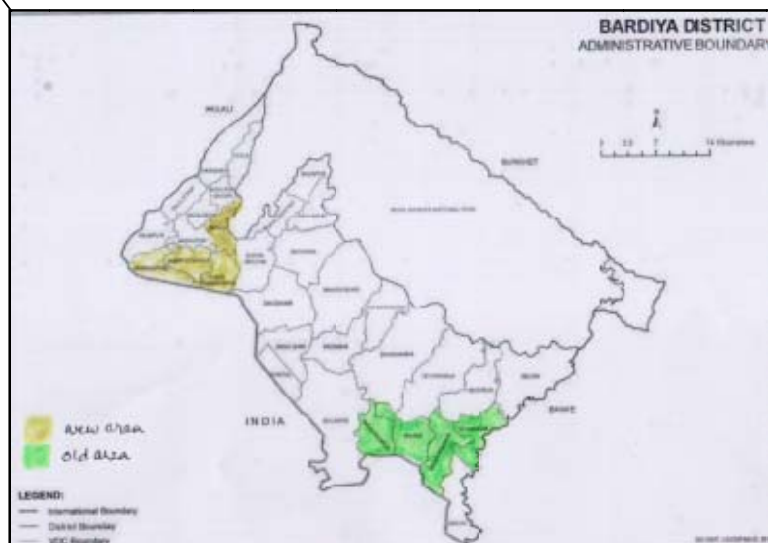
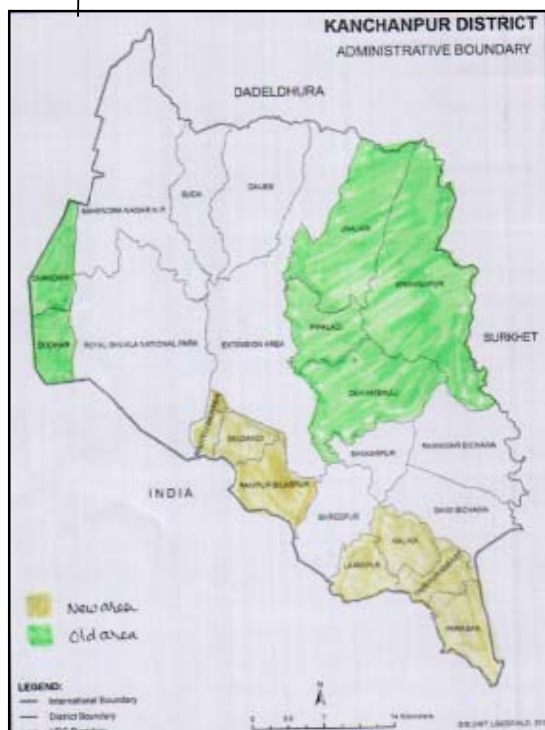


**Evaluation report of the
South Western Nepal Community Governance and Empowerment
Programme of
Sahakarmi Samaj and the Social and Health Education Project**



**Conducted by Mal Simmons and a team of SS staff
on behalf of Irish Aid
November 2013**

Programme locations



Executive Summary

This evaluation was commissioned by Sahakarmi Samaj (SS) on behalf of The Social and Health Education Project (SHEP) and by extension, Irish Aid, to independently assess the achievements and impact of the South West Nepal Community Governance Enhancement Programme (SWNCGEP) being implemented in Bardiya and Kanchanpur districts of Nepal. The evaluation was undertaken over a period of three weeks in October/November 2013 by a team comprised an independent consultant and 12 program staff of Sahakarmi Samaj. In total the team undertook 31 semi-structured interviews with individuals, 19 semi-structured group interviews and four focus group discussions in Banke, Bardiya and Kanchanpur Districts, two stakeholder workshops in Nepalgunj and one interview in Surkhet District.

The team interviewed a total of 348 people, 75% of who were women, from ten Community Groups (CGs), five Main Committees (MCs), three Community-based Networking Organisations (CBNOs), five CG Facilitators and the board, executive team and program staff of Sahakarmi Samaj. Group interviews were held with 16 CBNO and MC leaders and seven VDC Secretaries while individual interviews were held with VDC Secretaries, local leaders of five different political parties, community-based social workers, school teachers, especially vulnerable families and one Nepali NGO. A rudimentary 'control group' was also constructed from interviews with five people who were not participating in or benefiting from the programme.

During the past three years 143 new community groups (CGs) have been formed, bringing the total to 288 groups in 21 VDCs across the two districts. These groups have a combined membership of just over 8100, 85% of whom are women almost exclusively from poor and marginalised families. During this time 11 Main Committees (MCs) and three Community Based Network Organisations (CBNOs) were also formed from and in support of the new CGs and provided crucial support in accessing resources and services from VDCs and other government offices. Often relying entirely on their own resources, the 143 new groups reported undertaking almost 1800 separate actions in areas such as community infrastructure, health, environmental protection, education, social issues, savings and loans schemes and the claiming of rights, services and entitlements. In the process personal attitudes, skills and sense of agency have been transformed, bigotry reduced, gender stereotypes challenged and self reliance encouraged. However, groups formed prior to this programme were becoming less active and more focussed on the growth and use of their group funds.

Work was also done with over 300 especially vulnerable families with a view to enabling them to become more fully involved in and supported by their local community. This involved befriending, counselling and referrals on a wide range of issues, from HIV infections to uterus prolapsed, conflict and flood displacements to domestic violence. However the addition of this individual casework to the by now standard group empowerment activities has not been done well, leaving many field staff confused and ill-equipped for this activity. Work was also done with VDC Secretaries in particular to increase their awareness and responsiveness to community needs. Good working

relationships have been built and the work and reliability of the community groups and Main Committees are held in high regard. Influenced by these community-based groups, officials were found to be more transparent about the size and allocation of budgets. But the absence of a community-elected VDC Council is frustrating efforts at bringing about even more significant changes.

Sahakarmi Samaj has also made considerable efforts to promote its process-led approach among other development agencies through the provision of training, mentoring, meeting presentations and publications and there is some evidence of changed practices. Changes have also occurred within Sahakarmi itself as a result of continuous reflection and internal reviews. But the current environment for development assistance is not conducive to the adoption of this approach by others, despite its apparent efficacy.

The programme is highly *relevant* to community needs and national priorities, but is at odds with (or complements) the government's penchant for 'hardware' as the antidote of poverty. In reaching the poor and most marginalised communities and bringing about positive change in the lives of individual families, the programme has also been very *effective*, and was said to have been transformative for many. The approach is *efficient* in that it mobilises communities to maximise the use of their own resources and to access resources from others in addressing larger development needs. By the end of the normal 6-year cycle outputs (monetised value of actions undertaken) outpace inputs (from the programme itself) by a ratio of 3:1.

Impact has been highly significant at individual and community levels but quite limited with respect to national policies, neighbouring communities, government offices and other development agencies. Considering that networks set up over 15 years ago are still operating, and could be said to be stronger than ever, the *sustainability* of this approach is evident, even if the locus of activity has shifted from the community groups to their networking organisations. While undergoing minor adjustments along the way this programme is effectively a continuation of the work done in Surkhet and Banke districts, and has since been taken to Dang and is starting up in Kailali and Jajarkot districts. The *replicability* of this programme is proven, albeit by Sahakarmi Samaj alone.

Several lessons were learned during the process of the evaluation; one being the composition of evaluation teams themselves and the other about influencing others. If the findings of an evaluation are to be considered credible, particularly among critics, while ensuring that the implementing agency maximises its learning from the exercise, then outside team members (possibly drawn from known sceptics) should be used alongside programme staff. In promoting change in others then it is also essential to be open to change ourselves. The belief in and defence of the Sahakarmi Samaj approach is so strong that staff risk being seen as evangelical and closed to other ideas.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations, to be considered only in the light of a very effective programme. These are to: i) Make effective use of the upcoming strategic planning process; ii) Identify and address organisational development needs within Sahakarmi Samaj itself; iii) Strengthen the depth of management within Sahakarmi Samaj; iv) Encourage CG members to stand in VDC Council elections; v) Conduct awareness raising campaigns on common social issues and vi) Revisit many of the recommendations of previous evaluations.

Table of contents

Map of programme locations	ii
Executive summary	iii
Table of contents	v
List of acronyms	vi
Evaluation team	vii
1. Introduction	1
2. The SWNCGEP programme	4
3. Key findings	9
Objective 1	9
Objective 2	15
Objective 3	21
Objective 4	23
Objective 5	25
Objective 6	27
Organisational matters	29
4. Conclusions	31
5. Lessons learned	39
6. Recommendations	41
 Annexes	 A 1
Annex 1. Terms of reference	A 2
Annex 2. Evaluation schedule	A 6
Annex 3. SS Organisational structure	A 7
Annex 4. Key and guiding questions	A 8
Annex 5. Stakeholder analysis	A10
Annex 6. Interview list	A11
Annex 7. SS staff workshop	A13
Annex 8. Validation workshop	A19
Annex 9. Case study	A28

List of acronyms

CBNO	Community Based Network Organisation
CG	Community Group
CGEST	Community Governance for Empowerment and Social Transformation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (EU)
DDC	District Development Committee
HIV / AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICCO – KiA	ICCO - Kerk in Actie, now known as ICCO Cooperation
INF	International Nepal Fellowship
MC	Main Committee
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SS	Sahakarmi Samaj
SHEP	Social and Health Education Project
SWNCGEP	South Western Nepal Community Governance Enhancement Programme
UMN	United Mission to Nepal
VDC	Village Development Committee





Evaluation team

Mal Simmons	External consultant / Team leader
Ghanashyam Acharya	Organisational Development Facilitator, Banke
Krishna Adhkari	Senior Community Educator, Bardiya
Punaram Panthi	Program Monitoring Facilitator, Dang
Netra Narayan Regmi	Program Monitoring Facilitator, Bardiya
Bhuwaneshwari Pandey	Organisational Development Facilitator, Bardiya
Sher Bahadur Khatri	Senior Community Educator, Kanchanpur
Indra Khadka	Community Educator, Bardiya
Khadga Prasas Sharma	Program Coordinator, Kanchanpur
Janak Raj Awasthi	Program Monitoring Facilitator, Kanchanpur
Ram Bahadur Tharu	Senior Community Educator, Kanchanpur
Devi Acharya	Assistant Organisational Development Facilitator, Kanchanpur
Ram Bahadur Air	Senior Community Educator, Kanchanpur
Sunita Thapa	Interpreter / translator

1. Introduction

Purpose

This evaluation was commissioned by Sahakarmi Samaj (SS) on behalf of The Social and Health Education Project (SHEP) and by extension, Irish Aid, to independently assess the achievements and impact of the South Western Nepal Community Governance Enhancement Programme (SWNCGEP) in two districts. The programme had run for three years, from November 2010 to the end of October 2013, and been funded through Irish Aid's Civil Society Fund and ICCO Cooperation from The Netherlands. The evaluation process and resulting documentation is also intended to contribute to the enhancement of the Sahakarmi Samaj programme and inform the impending strategic planning process that is due to commence early next year.

Evaluation Team members also saw this exercise as a means of motivating staff and enhancing donor understanding of the rather special programme approach. Other stakeholders in the outcomes of this evaluation were identified as the many community groups and associated networking organisations, VDC and district-level government staff and officials, local political leaders, organisations and individuals sceptical of the approach and others who wish to further the process. For this to happen, the findings of this evaluation will need to be transmitted in different ways, depending on the audience, but Sahakarmi Samaj is strongly encouraged to have the concluding sections translated into Nepali so that they are accessible to at least the staff with and from whom they have been drawn.

The objectives of the evaluation were developed by the team, in consultation with Executive Team of Sahakarmi Samaj at the very start and became:

1. To determine the extent to which the project's objectives have been achieved.
2. To identify the outcomes of the project's interventions on the lives of poor and marginalised people in the host communities.
3. To identify the strengths of the SS approach and recommend ways to modify this approach to deliver improved outcomes for communities.

The goal and objectives of the programme itself are provided in Section 2 below. The programme was also evaluated against the six DAC criteria stipulated by Irish Aid.

Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken over a period of three weeks in October/November 2013 by a team comprised an independent consultant and 12 program staff of Sahakarmi Samaj. The same consultant had undertaken an evaluation of the preceding program in May 2010 and this familiarity brought with it both advantages and challenges that were acknowledged at the start. Just as the team leader was required to challenge the assumptions and ingrained beliefs of the team members about the program, so too did the team challenge the leader over what was now or was no longer the reality. The consultant was assisted throughout by an independent

interpreter / translator, while several senior management team members alternately provided mentoring support during field trips. The other three senior management team members, along with three board members, assisted and actively participated in the various evaluation workshops.

The team collectively developed a series of 11 'key questions' that would directly address the first two evaluation objectives. These were guided by the six program objectives against which achievements were to be measured. Each of these questions was broken down into a number of guiding or operational questions that formed the basis of the evaluation interviews. A stakeholder analysis was then used to determine who should be interviewed and what questions should be addressed to whom. The team's knowledge of the programme and the consultant's review of project documents provided leads to questions and useful respondents. (Copies of the questions and stakeholder analysis can be found as Annexes 4 & 5.)

Towards the latter end of the field work the team used discussion starters or 'codes' comprised of different PRA exercises, to stimulate greater participation and discussion among the interview participants themselves. This combination of deductive and inductive techniques generated a rich array of information and deepened our understanding of the how the program was viewed by the respondents.

Due partly to time constraints brought on by the approaching national Constitutional Assembly election and the associated threats (and staging) of strikes, the selection of communities and respondents was influenced both by accessibility¹ and representativeness, with an equal balance of stronger and weaker project-related groups included. All the groups had mixed memberships in terms of caste/ethnicity and gender. The evaluation process was highly participatory and involved staff, community members, local government officials and other stakeholders. In total the team undertook 31 semi-structured interviews with individuals, 19 semi-structured group interviews and four focus group discussions in Banke, Bardiya and Kanchanpur Districts, two stakeholder workshops in Nepalgunj town and one interview in Surkhet District.

The team interviewed a total of 348 people, 75% of who were women, from ten Community Groups (CGs), five Main Committees (MCs), three Community-based Networking Organisations (CBNOs), five CG Facilitators and the board, executive team and program staff of Sahakarmi Samaj. Group interviews were also held with 16 CBNO and MC leaders and seven VDC Secretaries. Individual interviews were held with another three VDC Secretaries, six political leaders from five different parties, five community-based social workers, two school teachers, three especially vulnerable families and one Nepali NGO. A rudimentary 'control group' was also constructed from interviews with five people from neighbouring communities who were not directly benefiting from the program. VDC Secretaries, SS board members

¹ Even so, for the evaluation team to reach one area for consultations with those communities involved a four hour journey by car, bus, motorbikes, (a visibly leaking) canoe, bicycles and foot, over badly maintained roads, floating bridges, a fast-flowing river and hardly discernable paths. This is mentioned not so much for what the evaluation team endured on one day but what the field staff of Sahakarmi endure on a weekly basis and members of those communities almost daily.

and representatives of 24 different local and international NGOs also participated in the validation workshop. A list of interviews is provided as Annex 6.

Report structure

A brief overview of the program's history and philosophy is presented below, followed by the key findings of the evaluation, listed against the programme's six strategic objectives. Additional observations or information on programmatic and organisational management issues are included here. While activities and outputs from the programme are noted the focus of this section is on the outcomes, for marginalised families and communities in particular, resulting from these interventions. The conclusions that then follow have been drawn from these findings but are presented against the standardised criteria of i) relevance, ii) effectiveness, iii) efficiency, iv) impact, v) sustainability and vi) replicability. This is followed by several lessons learned through both the process and findings of the evaluation. The final section addresses the evaluation's third objective and offers suggestions for discussion by Sahakarmi Samaj on possible ways to further strengthen the programme.



2. The SWNCGEP programme

History

The concept underpinning the programme under examination originated in a pioneering community empowerment initiative successfully trialled by United Missions Nepal (UMN) in Surkhet District in the early 1990s. Following an evaluation of a conventional community development programme which concluded that communities had become more dependent on outside assistance, not less, a rather radical and austere approach was developed of empowering communities without providing any material assistance. Growing out of this new project, Sahakarmi Samaj was established in 1997 and commenced work in Banke District in 1998 using essentially the same approach. A significant number of Sahakarmi Samaj staff were involved in the Surkhet Project in those days and remain involved and very committed to the approach today.

The philosophy draws heavily on the early work of Paulo Freire, and his theory of 'false consciousness', and the humanistic, person-centred approach of Carl Rogers that emphasises the importance of people identifying and overcoming obstacles to their growth for themselves. The approach is aimed at helping very poor and marginalised people to combat fatalism and effect meaningful developmental change through mutual support and considered collective action. An ex-post evaluation conducted in 2000 found that many of the institutions and institutional relationships established earlier had been sustained and were continuing to support inclusive, justice-oriented development five years after the project had stopped. The team leader of this evaluation visited one CBNO that had been established 15 years ago in the wake of the Surkhet Project and another in Banke District that had formed through the SS programme but had been operating independently for the past six years.

The Social and Health Education Project (SHEP) initially provided planning support for Sahakarmi Samaj in 2006, subsequently entering into a 'learning partnership', and a year later the partners were successful in securing funding from the Irish Aid Civil Society Fund and from ICCO Cooperation to commence operations in Bardiya and Kanchanpur districts while providing some support for strengthening civil society organisations that had already been established in Banke District. This project was the forerunner to the current SWNCGEP project under evaluation.

While the essence of the approach remains steadfastly unchanged from that of 15 years ago, there have been minor functional changes along the way in response to ongoing action learning and specific conditions of the working area. An external evaluation of the Banke programme in 2008 commended its unique and highly successful approach to empowerment, enhancing the capacity of disenfranchised communities to claim their rights to external resources.

Similarly the 2010 evaluation of the programme in Bardiya and Kanchanpur concluded that the approach was very sound and that caution should be exercised not to change the fundamental principles. Like its predecessors, the current SWNCGEP programme takes the very difficult but principled stance of not providing any material or financial resources to communities in order to encourage the development of strong links with (primarily government) institutions tasked with providing these resources and services. The programme has however placed more emphasis on building the capabilities of network organisations to advocate for the rights of communities and on strengthening the duty bearers to deliver on these claims.

Problem and target group

There exists in Nepal stark deficiencies in the personal and institutional capacities of local communities and local government/non-governmental agencies to effectively address the growing range of obstacles to people's achievement of human rights, sustainable livelihoods and psychosocial wellbeing, particularly among the very poor and marginalised. In recent times, traditional community institutions in Nepal have been undermined and largely replaced by structures of community governance, involving Village Development Committees (VDCs) and District Development Committees (DDCs) through which government resources for development are channelled. Whilst some of these committees were effective in promoting and supporting local development many suffered from partisan politics. The ensuing ineffectiveness of local government fuelled discontent and encouraged many people in rural areas to support the Maoist insurgency that, in many places, saw the VDCs replaced by Maoist forms of administration.

Many of the NGO-instigated community institutions collapsed following the forced withdrawal of the concerned agencies from many conflict areas. Despite the ceasefire and incorporation of the insurgents into mainstream politics, the mandate of the elected members of the VDC councils expired eight years ago and the VDC budgets have been managed by VDC Secretaries under the advice and reportedly coercion of groups of unelected, and often ill-equipped, representatives of the main political parties. Although this direction for the involvement of political parties has now been rescinded, respondents to this evaluation claimed that little has actually changed in practice. These events have left Nepal with a greatly impoverished institutional infrastructure, both in local communities and in local government. They have also left the country with a legacy of division and bitterness which serves as an obstacle to the emergence of collaborative deliberation, planning and action.

The SWNCGEP programme focused on the Terai districts of Bardiya and Kanchanpur that had been severely affected by the civil conflict and pose particular challenges for community building and institutional development. Many of the people now living on the Terai have been forced to migrate there from the hills due to growing pressure on limited land resources. There is little sense of collective identity amongst these recent settlers and no history of community cooperation. In addition to the strong caste and gender discrimination that exist in traditional Hindu society there are cultural differences between recent settlers and the original inhabitants, the indigenous groups of the Terai. Divisions also exist between the Hindu settlers from the hills and the Muslims from India, the majority of who have settled in the Terai.

A legacy of the civil conflict and generations of discrimination and marginalisation has been the lack of personal confidence and sense of agency. Women have been denied an education, married off early and responsible for raising often very large numbers of children; effectively bound to their homes when they are not working in the fields. Men have become landless, excluded from certain social and economic activities due to ethnicity or caste, and often forced to migrate to India in search of work. In choosing to work in these districts and focusing on the poorest and most marginalised communities this programme sought to empower the most vulnerable individuals and families to justly claim their rights and to promote the emergence of democratic, inclusive and justice-oriented community institutions that can support and meet these claims.

Intervention process

The standard process for working with communities starts with the selection of particularly disadvantaged communities through a participatory community screening process that allows people to define their own communities, irrespective of administrative boundaries. This is followed by listening surveys and social analyses in the selected communities and a period of facilitated group emergence and vision forming. Drawing on the information gleaned from the listening surveys, generative themes are identified and community groups (CGs) are guided through a process of problem posing and problem analysis leading to participatory planning, collective action and post-activity evaluation. Each of the groups are encouraged to commence saving and this group fund is then used to give low-interest and occasionally interest-free loans to members. Consideration is given here to the specific needs of particularly vulnerable families through individual and family coaching. This component is considered as Phase 1 of the process and was implemented in 143 communities in Bardiya and Kanchanpur districts as part of this SWNCGEP programme.

As the groups begin to show resilience they are provided with a series of trainings intended to further strengthen them and pave the way for the formation of representative VDC-level network organisations, known as Main Committees (MCs), and cluster-based Community-Based Network Organisations (CBNOs) comprised of representatives from a number of MCs. These organisations are in turn given organisational development support and advice on strategies and the possible sources of technical and material assistance. The CBNOs are then encouraged and supported in registering with the government. This is Phase 2 of the process and covered 145 communities that had been through Phase 1 during the previous programme.

Programme objectives

The goal of this programme, essentially the mission statement of Sahakarmi Samaj, has remained unchanged from its predecessor and reads:

"To ensure that there is sufficient capacity amongst disadvantaged and marginalised people, as well as among the organisations and institutions which are mandated to serve them, to initiate and sustain inclusive processes of governance oriented towards the just distribution of rights, opportunities and resources and an optimal quality of life for all."

The programme is also defined by six rather detailed strategic objectives, covering: i) the formation and strengthening of community groups able to analyse and often

address community issues using local resources; ii) the formation and strengthening of network organisations to advocate and seek outside resources on behalf of the community groups using a clearly rights-based approach; iii) social, mentoring and material support for especially vulnerable families that will enable them to join and actively participate in groups set up in their communities; iv) training and influencing the work practices of government staff to encourage an appreciation of a process-led approach to development and greater responsiveness and accountability to communities; v) influencing the understanding and approaches of other development actors to improve community-led development practices; and vi) sharing learnings with like-minded agencies to advance the knowledge and effectiveness of this process-led approach. These objectives are expounded in the Key Findings section below.

Changes in the political context

Partly to ascertain whether the continuation and replication of a previously successful intervention might no longer be relevant in the current and ever-changing socio-political environment of Nepal, the evaluation explored changes in national policies and practices since the previous evaluation in 2010. It was also thought that these changes might reveal opportunities (and threats) for the programme into the future. Many of these changes seem positive in terms of community engagement with the development process but the implementation of these policies and practices is often said to be questionable. In summary the government has introduced policies and/or promoted practices that:

- i) Recall the Nepalese military to cantonments and encourage the integration of previous insurgency groups into the national armed forces.
- ii) Stipulate ward-based development planning that is used to inform decisions at the VDC level.
- iii) Provide or increase allowances and entitlements of especially disadvantaged groups such as widows and ethnically endangered groups.
- iv) Open the way for citizenship to be established through the mother and encouraging the registration of land in the woman's name by offering a 50% discount on land tax.
- v) Ban the practice of caste-related 'untouchability' throughout Nepal and encourage the inter-marriage of Dalit and so-called higher castes and counter the stigma that often prevents widows remarrying.
- vi) Encourage the formation of one cooperative, effectively a local savings and loans association, in each VDC to meet the borrowing requirements of community members at reasonable rates.
- vii) Promote efforts to educate communities, construct household latrines and establish "Open Defecation Free Zones" in various districts and VDCs across the country.
- viii) Increase the annual development budgets of VDCs, dissolve the previously stipulated political representation on VDC councils and, while waiting for community-elected bodies, delegate more power and responsibility to the (supposedly) politically unaligned VDC Secretaries who decide on the allocation of these funds.
- ix) Prioritise the implementation of government programmes by local groups and organisations and take local priorities into consideration when deciding on the use of government funds and services.

However, the machinations of national politics continue to overshadow these developments. After years of apparent gridlock over changes to the constitution, the Maoists withdrew their support for the Constitutional Assembly that had been governing the country since the peace agreement and national elections in 2008 and almost immediately split into two groups, one continuing to engage in the political process and the other choosing not to participate and committed to disrupting the upcoming elections, through the implied threat of violence. The withdrawal of by far the largest political party brought down the Assembly and administration of the country was handed to a non-aligned group of technocrats led by the Chief Justice until new elections for the Assembly could be held. This new political hiatus has meant that many of the reforms legislated in recent years cannot be or simply have not been implemented. Elections for the new Constitutional Assembly will occur on 19 November, literally days after completion of this evaluation.

Previous evaluation

The fore-runner of the current SWNCGEP programme in Bardiya and Kanchanpur districts was evaluated in May 2010 by the same external consultant and again a team of SS staff, half of whom were team members of this evaluation. The 2010 evaluation concluded that the programme had been highly successful in most areas of interest and recommended that "Sahakarmi Samaj hold firm to the values, principle and practices that underpin their development approach as these are both needed and highly effective in facilitating fundamental changes in the lives of poor and marginalised groups with whom they work." The evaluation did however make a number of recommendations that were to be considered in the light of the above. An assessment of the changes that have resulted from these recommendations is made in the Key Findings section that follows, against Objective 6.



3. Key Findings

The major finding emanating from the fieldwork and various workshops held in Nepalgunj are presented below against the relevant objectives of the programme. Outcome indicators used in the programme's "Results and Outcome Matrix" required the collection of numerical data and were unsuited to the qualitative approach taken by the evaluators. The two assessments should ultimately complement one another.

Objective 1: At least 180 formally constituted groups of marginalized people in 10 VDCs in Bardiya and Kanchanpur Districts will have demonstrated an autonomous and sustained capacity to identify, analyze and mitigate shared problems through inclusive democratic deliberation, planned collective action and the effective mobilization of local and external resources.

At the start of this current programme in October 2010 there were already 60 Community Groups (CGs) operating in Bardiya and 86 in Kanchanpur. It is reported that since that time the programme has seen the establishment of another 55 CGs in four VDCs in Bardiya and 87 CGs in six VDCs in Kanchanpur, bringing up a grand total of 288 CGs in 21 VDCs across the two districts. These groups have a combined membership of over 8100 mainly women from poor and marginalised families.

Analysing data on those groups formed during the current SWNCGEP programme only, there are 3783 members from 3518 different households. (Considering that the average household size among the Tharu community for example is around 25 members, the occasional acceptance of more than one member from a household into a group is understandable.) The average size of each group in each district is either 26 or 27 members, indicating a consistency across the programme. There are 56 women's groups, two men's groups (in Kanchanpur) and 85 mixed groups but, on average, women make up 85 percent of the members, a slight increase over the previous programme. Disadvantaged and often discriminated groups such as Dalits, ethnic and indigenous communities make up almost 67 percent of the group members, up from 60% in the previous programme. This is largely the result of a very significant increase in the number of members from indigenous (Tharu, Rana, Sonaha) communities. There are also a small number of Muslims and Christians among the overwhelmingly Hindu membership but few people with disabilities were seen to be participating in groups.

While these groups are open to anyone who wishes to join, and is accepted by the other members, it is clear that they are attracting the poor and marginalised people in great numbers. Interestingly, most of those choosing not to join groups at the beginning were saying to the evaluation team that they would like to do so now. Several men claimed that they thought the groups were only for women and several of the women-only groups suggested that they might be better off having at least a few men so the perceived criteria for membership may not be as inclusive as first thought. Still, the number of mixed groups, in terms of gender, ethnicity and/or caste is high and considered very valuable for understanding and addressing issues such as discrimination, cultural practices and gender-based violence.

Many of the groups interviewed mentioned how the attitudes of their members had changed quite significantly after becoming a member with people from other principal identities. Brahmins were entering the house and even eating with Dalits, women were attending festivals together, groups were recognising and even celebrating religious and cultural events of others. One community group talked of having people from different ethnic and caste allegiances, different sexes and different ages as a definite strength in that they could draw on the knowledge, skills and contacts of those different than themselves. There was a general acknowledgement that these community groups were fostering tolerance, understanding and a sense of solidarity among people of different caste, ethnicity, religion, sex and even political persuasion. Despite the closeness of the national elections and the fear of inter-party conflict, there were no tensions mentioned or perceived among group members interviewed.

"Only when we are truly free (of bias, prejudice, preconceptions) can we achieve good things"

CG Facilitator, Bardiya

Sahakarmi Samaj staff seek out the most marginalised communities through an initial survey across a chosen VDC. In fact, SS had been warned not to work with one community because it was vulnerable to cross-border attacks by brigands and the VDC had warned that "the women have an axe in one hand and alcohol in the other." This is one of the participating communities and attitudes towards this community have reportedly been turned on their head. A number of respondents remarked that the community groups were also different to those set up by other agencies. Sahakarmi Samaj respected and went along with the agenda of the members whereas other had a limited focus on issues related to their own programme. The fact that staff of other agencies only visited the community for a few hours every week and then 'disappeared' after their project stopped also contrasted with the way the Sahakarmi staff were perceived.

Group members are encouraged to save money on a regular basis in a group fund, the amount being left to the group itself. Basic bookkeeping and loan calculation training is provided to each group and was considered to be very valuable in terms of eliminating corruption, or the suspicion of it. One group talked of starting out at ten rupees (Rs.10) every month, which subsequently rose to Rs.50 / month and now stands at Rs.100. This reflects both a growth in the ability and practice of saving and a trust in the security of their money.

The team leader observed a normal group meeting facilitated by a young CG Facilitator that was well run and arrived at decisions on how the group would participate in the upcoming *Devali* celebration in their community and raise money for their group fund at the same time. This group claimed to meet weekly but had not done so for the past month due to festivities and harvesting that had occurred in recent weeks. Participation at the meeting was recorded (and signed), the fine for late arrival by a young woman who was representing her father was waived and minutes of the discussion and decisions were duly recorded - but it appeared that these standard practices were not adhered to regularly. Several observers of the community groups, such as community social workers, teachers and even VDC Secretaries expressed concern that the functioning of some of these groups declined significantly once SS staff ceased to be involved.

Actions tended to bring about functional changes in the lives of the CG members in particular and did not consider the structural or policy-related causes of these problems for communities in general. Out of the discussions conducted in 143 community groups established during this programme, a total of 1793 separate actions were reported to have been taken. Taken from the annual progress reports the range of actions undertaken during the programme period is highly impressive and a sample of these – those specifically mentioned during this evaluation – includes:

- i) *Group funds.* This fund is comprised of the compulsory savings from the group members, the annual group membership fee and other fundraising efforts undertaken by the group. These latter efforts included working as a group during transplanting and harvesting and contributing a percentage of their wages to the fund, collecting money from their community during festivities, interest charged on loans from the fund (usually 2% per month compared with the 5 - 10% charged elsewhere), collectively gathering and selling firewood, hiring out of group assets such as cooking and catering equipment (pots and pans, plates and utensils) for community events, and profits or savings made in implementing activities under contract to other agencies, including the VDCs. One group was planning to rent land and jointly grow sugarcane to generate income for the group.

Loans from these funds were mostly used by members for household living expenses or to meet emergencies but some were used to start or grow income generating activities. In fact most groups were now offering loans at 1.5% interest to those using them for income generating activities in the (possibly mistaken) belief that this will facilitate repayment. One group had been able to use part of their fund as required collateral on the erection of electricity poles being provided by the government. The average group fund is reported to have reached Rs. 26,344 among the newly formed CGs and a number of respondents mentioned that groups became less active over time and more interested in the growth and use of their funds. Still, it is the borrowing and repaying of these loans that keep the groups meeting on a regular basis and thereby retains the sense of and opportunity for cooperative action.

- ii) *Community infrastructure.* Using their own local resources CGs, with the support of other community members, reported being able to build and repair community roads and paths, construct a small bamboo bridge and a temple, and install hand pumps for drinking water and irrigation purposes. Most of the groups visited had built their own meeting place, which was then made available for other community meetings or purposes. One hall had been identified to house a mobile clinic, much sought after by the community, but it burnt down only days before the doctor was due to arrive. Another had been used to temporarily house families displaced by recent flooding in the area. It was this community infrastructure and the role that the CGs had played in its provision that were most often mentioned by non-members as achievements of the groups.
- iii) *Health.* In line with the national priority of promoting open defecation free zones across the country, CGs have been very engaged in educating their neighbours about the dangers of open defecation and actively promoting the construction of latrines. Despite ridicule in some communities about the need for latrines CGs persisted and one was cited by a VDC Secretary as being used as a model for

similar campaigns in neighbouring communities. A common issue raised by women, but only after a fair degree of trust has been established, is that of uterus prolapsed. One woman spoke of having to endure the pain and discomfort for 45 years because she did not know what the problem was and was too afraid and embarrassed to mention it to her husband. Once broached and discussed within groups women were talking to their families and seeking appropriate treatment; in most cases changing their lives remarkably. Other women who had been suffering in silence were then encouraged to seek treatment for themselves.

Similarly with HIV infection, members have made aware of the causes and availability of treatment. In one community a mother and daughter known to be infected are being visited on a regular basis by group members and were given food collected from among the group members. In several communities, in areas where the CGs have been active for many years, the acceptance of HIV positive people is said to be complete and inter-marriage (between known positive and uninfected young people) is condoned. One of the group presidents is known to be HIV positive, as is one of the CBNO staff. Malaria was a concern in one community and the CG was able to negotiate with the District Public Health Office directly for the supply of impregnated mosquito nets. A greater understanding of the causes of illness was said to have encouraged more and more group members to seek medical attention from the government health post, which in turn swelled attendance records and lead to more government support to those clinics.

- iv) *Environmental issues.* Most groups had undertaken campaigns to clean up their environment and had sought community agreement in banning tethering of animals along roads and pathways to keep them free of dung. One CG reported having secured a parcel of unused land to plant trees and to use as a community forest whereas another was able to negotiate access to a nearby national park to collect roofing thatch during a greater period of the year. Another group became engaged in riverbank protection when the erosion resulting from unregulated sand and stone removal was threatening crop land. Not only did the group manage to stop incursions from across the border in search of sand and stone, they stopped Indian farmers renting riverbank land to grow vegetables and planted trees and other vegetation to secure what was left of the bank.
- v) *Education.* One of the issues commonly raised in the community groups is the low rate of school attendance by children in their community. This was addressed in different ways in different communities but inevitably resulted from discussions about the implications of non-attendance, for children and their parents. One group even decided to fine members if their children were found to be missing school. Another group decided to regularly monitor the progress of their children and asked that the school keep better records. For topics such as education and children's health children from the community, whether of group members or not, are sometimes invited to participate in the discussions. A recent phenomenon is that of the use of mobile phones in the classroom. On a school-by-school basis or more often by working with and through the local VDC, CGs were able to have phones banned from schools in the interest of improving the environment for concentration and learning.

vi) *Entitlements*. Through facilitated discussion and inputs from Community Educators and other outside resource people, CG members became aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens of Nepal. This was mentioned by VDC Secretaries and political leaders in particular as a very important role played by the groups. Not only were group members and by extension family members and neighbours able to lay claims on duty bearers and stand up for what is due them but authorities were more easily able to disseminate information of new policies and services to communities through these groups. The newly legislated widow's allowance was mentioned as one example of this but women were also being encouraged to apply for citizenship cards for the first time and to register their marriage, the births of their children and even deaths and divorces. Both men and women were informed of how to apply for migrant cards that allowed them to travel about the country in search of work.

vii) *Social issues*. Drunken and disorderly behaviour was identified as a major social and family problem in most communities visited. A number of the groups had managed to have restrictions placed on the consumption of alcohol in their communities; in one banning the sale of alcohol completely after 9.00 pm and another, with the support of the local police, fining disorderly behaviour. This latter action was reported in the local newspaper and acted as a warning and an option to others. Gambling was also mentioned as a waste of family resources and potentially productive time, and the playing of cards and *carum board* have been banned in some communities as a result of actions taken by the local community group. Smoking was an issue that had not been raised during the previous evaluation but it seems that group members are now more aware of its dangers and are progressively giving up the habit. One group has banned smoking among its members and ten of 15 members stopped immediately and the others on notice to do so. Women talked of having allowed their children to light their cigarettes but this lark was now recognised as habit-forming and was no longer practiced.

viii) *Family issues*. Perhaps the most commonly mentioned source of conflict within families was that between mothers and daughters-in-law. Most groups mentioned this as a topic that had been discussed and that other group members had been invited to intervene or mediate in cases that could not be resolved internally. Interestingly, one of the causes of this conflict was said to be attendance at the group meetings where daughter-in-laws in particular were seen to be shirking work and wasting their time. After hearing more from what had been discussed at these meetings, seeing the benefits that these groups were bringing to the community and the availability of low interest loans through the group, these criticisms usually faded and it was reported that mothers and daughters-in-law were now attending meetings together.

"Belonging to the CG was thought would break the house (family) but it actually made us stronger."

CG interview, Bardiya

A rudimentary analysis of the resources used by all groups in Bardiya and Kanchanpur indicates a marked decline in the value of actions undertaken after the third year (the end of Phase 1) and a steady decline in the use of local resources over the whole six year period. Several of the older CGs visited admitted that their weekly meetings had stretched to fortnightly and were now held only once a month.

However, the size of the group fund grows annually and this keeps the group meeting and possibly explains the group's greater focus on this by the end of Phase 2.

In belonging to community groups members had access to training and opportunities to develop skills that had not been previously available to them. Some had attended vocational training in for example sewing, concrete ring making (for latrines) or animal husbandry while others in leadership skills, group facilitation, mediation and group strengthening. Most groups had also received health and hygiene training. The weekly, or in some cases fortnightly, discussions of issues was said to have honed people's speaking and listening skills, taught them how to run meetings properly and to analyse problems before settling on a solution. These skills were also said to be of use outside the group.

Some non-members had participated in community activities organised by neighbouring groups and were now interested in joining themselves. A few claimed that the group had not done anything at all – a perception that was blatantly incorrect. One non-member saw no need to form a group as his community was entirely of the same ethnic group and automatically worked and celebrated festivals together, whereas another from the same ethnic group praised the SS programme for encouraging and empowering women to leave the confines of their homes and engage in community work.

Gender roles and responsibilities were said to be changing slowly, with husbands and children helping more about the house while their wives were engaged in CG activities. Men were no longer suspicious of their wives or daughters attending the meeting with other men, and women in more conservative communities were being allowed for the first time to attend community festivities or attend outside training provided they do this in the company of other group members. While gender-based violence was only mentioned superficially during the evaluation interviews groups were occasionally called upon to intervene and provide protection for the vulnerable members of a household where it is known to be a problem.

For many of the particularly female members, membership of their community group had been genuinely transformative. Before all else, most mentioned that they were now "able to speak" and one admitted the pride that she felt in

"Before I was dumb, I could not speak, but Sahakarmi Samaj gave me a tongue"

CG interview, Kanchanpur

simply being able to sign her name. These women were in their 40s or 50s and had spent all of their lives under the cloud of shyness and illiteracy. One woman had gone onto become president of her local school committee, another was now chairperson of the VDC public works monitoring committee in her area. Some local political and community leaders were even said to be unhappy with this empowerment of group members as they had lost much of their influence over people who had previously needed their help in contacting the VDC, for example.

Tolerance of others was also often mentioned as a by-product of belonging to mixed groups where issues of discrimination, stereotyping and difference were discussed and lead to a growth of trust among the members. Awareness and concern for others was also said to have increased through the group discussions. Groups talked of providing social and material support to individuals and families who were not members of their group but were experiencing a crisis of some form. It was claimed

that members had willingly provided shelter, food and clothing to families from other communities displaced by recent flooding whereas before they had not even helped out neighbours whose houses had burnt down. In another case two local perpetrators in the rape of a 14 year-old girl were only brought to justice when the CG lobbied local police on the family's behalf. CG members also talked with the girl, her family and her teacher and she eventually returned to school.

Attitudes had also changed significantly among group members with the realisation of their individual and group agency after having addressed often long-standing issues without need to call on outside assistance. The quality of self reliance was a badge of group pride, and

"When my husband offered to go to the police instead, I said 'No, it is our problem and we will solve it ourselves'"

CG interview, Kanchanpur

cooperation an effective way to overcome adversity. There was a noticeable growth in the confidence of groups over time, with those in Phase 1 of the process, having been formed for less than 3 years, very concerned about Sahakarmi Samaj withdrawing whereas those who were completing Phase 2 were confident of their abilities and ready to continue on their own, provided that Sahakarmi does not abandon them completely. As one MC president said, "In my view we have to run our own group, to be independent. If we need help from others we can ask."

Objective 2: At least 10 VDC-level Main Committees (MCs) and 3 Community Based Networking Organisations (CBNOs) will have been formally and democratically constituted in new working area as well as 10 MCs and 3 CBNOs will have demonstrated an autonomous capacity to provide guidance and support for constituent community groups and to engage effectively with relevant governmental and nongovernmental organizations to secure available resources and to advance legitimate advocacy claims.

The formation of Main Committees (MCs) and Community Based Network Organisations (CBNOs) usually occurs towards the end of Phase 1, in Year 3. Each of the CGs in a single VDC nominate two members, if possible a man and a woman, to represent them on a MC whose role it is to support and coordinate between CGs in their VDC and advocate with them or on their behalf with service providers at the VDC level. These committees usually meet monthly at a central location but can be called together more frequently if required. Each of the MCs in turn selects two representatives to a higher committee established by a geographically-related cluster of VDCs. The latter group is referred to as the CBNO and is charged with supporting and coordinating between MCs, and advocating with service providers and authorities at a district level. This group also meets monthly. Both MCs and CBNOs undertake capacity assessments every six months to identify where organisational development support is needed.

At the end of the preceding programme there were already ten MCs set up, four in Bardiya and six in Kanchanpur, and three CBNOs. During the course of the SWNCGEP programme another 11 MC have been established (four in Bardiya and seven in Kanchanpur) and a further three CBNOs, adding one in Bardiya and two in Kanchanpur. Due to the number of women-only CGs the number of women on MCs usually greatly outnumbers that of men but this imbalance is much less at the CBNO level. The three CBNOs established prior to the current programme have been

registered with the District Administration Office and the three more recent CBNOs are in the process of doing so.

The formal registration of these organisations was considered to offer a number of advantages, and encumbrances. Firstly the organisations are officially recognized by the government, making it easier to advocate over issues or lay claim to resources and services offered by the government. VDC Secretaries in particular were adamant that registration was essential if the organisations were to survive in the future. Registered organisations are periodically invited to meetings at VDC and DDC levels where information on new policies, entitlements and services is disseminated. The act of registering was said to stamp the independence of the organisation, encourage stability among the staff and governance body and foster commitment to the organisation's sustainability.

According to the legislation, registered organisations must renew their registration annually, provide annual reports on activities and annual financial audits of the organisation, allow government access to funding agreements, and hold an annual general assembly open to all interested

stakeholders. In having to meet such obligations registration is thought to demand a higher standard of discipline and accountability than would otherwise be practiced. However, the expectation that CBNOs, often with volunteer staff and very limited budgets, are able to meet the same standards and obligations as often much better resourced NGOs has been a concern for a number of years. Most of the older CBNOs, in Surkhet and Banke Districts, have also established and registered cooperatives that provide microfinance services to the members. CGs can choose between managing their own group funds and depositing the funds in the cooperative where they receive interest and/or dividends.

"I used to think that development means only those things you can see but now I know that it must include personal development to be sustainable."

CG Facilitator, Kanchanpur

The role of the MCs is primarily to provide support to their member CGs. This is done through the provision of training and the sharing of information coming from the CBNO or other outside sources such as VDCs and NGOs operating in the area. Sahakarmi also arranged exchange visits between MCs and CBNOs in Kanchanpur and Bardiya to facilitate the sharing of information and experience. MCs are often called upon to motivate CGs that are becoming inactive and to intervene in conflicts occurring within and between CGs. Such issues and invitations are brought to the MC meeting by the relevant members and the appropriate action decided on through discussion of the members. Assistance is most often called upon by CGs during their annual planning process and in arranging their annual assembly but the MC might also monitor the management of a group's fund if there are doubts over the competency of the group members.

However the main function of the MC is to identify issues common among the CGs, helping to resolve these issues using local resources where possible or advocating with or on behalf of their members with the appropriate bodies. Coordination between CGs can take the form of joint actions, sharing of information and skills and occasionally solicitation of donations for particularly needy cases. The CBNO in effect provides the same services to the MCs. For this CGs pay a monthly fee to their MC and each MC pays a monthly fee to their CBNO to cover operational costs. The

MCs and CBNOs do not generally raise funds through other means, except in the case when they manage projects on behalf of outside agencies and claim a management fee for doing so. Project management can present a problem for these umbrella groups when the programmes of outside agencies have not come from the communities, a core principle of the SS programme. In some cases the MCs have managed to obtain funds from VDCs to set up and run revolving animal banks and other forms of loan schemes and the interest charged on these loans are often shared between the MC and participating CGs. In one case the MC obtained project funds directly from the DDC. Since the bulk of the funds are held at the CG level the MCs and CBNOs are dependent and therefore more accountable to the communities.

In seeking outside resources to supplement those already available within communities, the MCs and to a lesser extent CBNOs have focused their attention on the VDC. In recent years the VDCs and the VDC Secretaries in particular have effectively become the gatekeepers and facilitators of all government services. Without their approval offices at a district or higher level will no longer entertain submissions. As such, relationships with VDC Secretaries are crucial and MCs spend considerable time and effort nurturing these. All the interviewed VDC Secretaries considered their working relationships with MCs in particular, but also CGs and occasionally CBNOs, to be good and they appreciated the way that these groups readily shared information on their activities, were cautious and transparent in their use of funds and both understood and followed the correct procedures in seeking assistance from the VDC. As a result MCs are regularly being invited to attend meetings of the VDC.

A cursory examination of the level of assistance obtained from outside sources during the current 3-year programme indicates a very significant difference between CGs in Phase 1 (with Sahakarmi support) and those in Phase 2 (without this support). The types of issues that have been discussed with VDCs, all of a functional nature, and specifically mentioned during this evaluation include:

- i) *Open Defecation Free Zones.* MCs and through them the CGs have been instrumental in promoting this national campaign at community level. VDC Secretaries praised the work of the groups in educating, persuading and facilitating implementation of this policy. Not necessarily an issue emanating from communities, the adoption by CGs and their ability to mobilize these communities are seen as key to the success of this campaign. VDC Secretaries had cited the approach used by CGs as a model of good practice for other organisations working in nearby communities.

In conjunction with this campaign is the construction of latrines and MCs/CGs have been very active in this area also. Where outside resources have not been available, CGs have encouraged the construction of temporary facilities using local resources. These are part of their strategy to introduce more hygienic practices prior to the provision of more permanent structures. In one of the VDCs visited the local MC had been given a contract by the VDC Secretary to fabricate the concrete rings used in latrine construction and to sell them onto communities. Through this the VDC was assured of a ready uptake among communities and the MC was able to make a small profit which went to the committee.

- ii) *Health services.* MCs and CBNOs reported having sought VDC support prior to lobbying the District Public Health Office over the provision of medical services at community level. In one well-publicised case the CBNO, with the support of the VDC and Sahakarmi Samaj, prepared and ran a segment on local radio that highlighted the absence of a doctor at a local clinic. With the threat of further public action the DPHO soon found a doctor for the clinic and this campaign became a model for other organisations. In other cases MCs lobbied for the establishment of a mobile clinic to be accommodated in a CG meeting room, the allocation of a doctor and provision of snake bit vaccine to a particularly vulnerable area, and for the provision of impregnated mosquito nets. Some of these requests have been met and others are still under discussion. The high incidence of uterus prolapsed among poor women has also been discussed at VDC level and education campaigns are now being run by local organisations, including several CBNOs, with outside funding.
- iii) *Community infrastructure.* Local roads and pathways are often constructed and maintained using solely local labour and resources but larger or more permanent solutions require support from outside the community. MCs have successfully received such resources from VDCs, DDCs and in one case the Community Forestry Dept for the construction or upgrading of roads. The MC is often instrumental in coordinating between communities affected by the work. In one case authorities had been unable to proceed with a road between two communities for more than 40 years because a single landholder refused to give over any of his land. The MC, together with the two respective CGs, held a number of discussions with the farmer and an agreement was eventually reached. The road was finished two years ago and children are able to take a bus to school rather than walking for hours each day.

As mentioned earlier one CG, in collaboration with their MC, lobbied the relevant government department to supply electricity to their community, and put up part of their group fund as collateral on the project. The group, comprised wholly of women, were able to negotiate with the authorities and "did not ask help from the men because we could do it ourselves." The lines are now there and families are saving to purchase meter boxes before their houses will be connected to the grid. In one community where two children had drowned trying to cross a stream to reach their closest school, the MC managed to secure VDC funds to supplement what the local CG had raised from the community and a new school has been built. MCs have also helped CGs obtain access to public land to construct meeting rooms and have been offered space within the VDC offices to hold their own meetings.

- iv) *Services.* CBNOs and MCs have been actively involved in accessing and disseminating information about the rights of citizens in relation to government resources and services. They have facilitated access to mushroom training for example, seeds and animal vaccines from the District Agricultural Office, along with fertiliser for farmers whose crops were deemed to be failing. They worked with the CGs to enable discriminated and marginalised families to obtain citizenship cards, widow's pensions and special entitlements for endangered groups. MCs were also instrumental in encouraging families to register births, deaths and marriages, and for individuals to apply for migration cards.

- v) *Campaigns.* MCs in particular have actively supported CGs in their campaigns against smoking, drinking and gambling in a number of VDCs. In a somewhat unusual case one CBNO lobbied a local bus company to allow short-distant (local) passengers to use seats previously reserved for long-distant commuters. Initially unsuccessful, the CBNO called for support from the relevant MCs, CGs and local political leaders, they blockaded the road and forced the company to reconsider and eventually agree to their demand. Most recently, and as a result of a national CBNO Learning Workshop organized and chaired by Sahakarmi Samaj and hosted by a SS-instigated CBNO, participating organisations have joined forces to lobby the government over what are considered excessive demands placed on CBNOs as conditions of registration.

In discussing distinctive roles and responsibilities of the MCs and CBNOs there was some confusion among recently formed groups. Inexperienced, poorly functioning or simply unconfident MCs tended to pass their responsibilities onto the CBNO, particularly when it comes to advocacy and accessing external resources. Members of the MCs and CBNOs are elected for two year terms but most, it seems, are repeatedly re-elected.

"Other organisations might provide snacks but I learned more from the Sahakarmi training. In fact, I learned more from them than from my own parents"

CG interview, Bardiya

However attendance at MC meetings was raised as a concern, with members either not motivated to continue in what they may see as a superfluous role or over-committed in being also a member of their CG, possibly their CBNO and inevitably other community/project groups set up by other agencies. It was clearly difficult for weak MCs to support and motivate poorly performing CGs. It was said that people often called for the abandonment of the MCs as not needed but then later recognized their value. Some even see them as crucial to the system. This confusion over roles and responsibilities was much less but not fully resolved towards the end of Phase 2, which focuses specifically on building the capacity of these bodies.

However, the genuine community base to the structure and the ownership that most members feel make a good foundation for long term sustainability. Like the CGs, all MCs hold an annual assembly meeting of stakeholders and the CBNOs hold what is considered a general assembly with a much broader range of participants. The evaluation team leader visited two CBNOs that had operated independently of Sahakarmi Samaj for many years. One, in fact, had grown out of the Surkhet Project and while they have very close ties to Sahakarmi Samaj had not been set up by them. The other had been established in Banke District in 2002 and had now worked with no direct support from Sahakarmi Samaj for the past six years.

Since being established these CBNOs have continued to promote and facilitate the formation of new CGs. Of the three CBNOs operating on their own Banke one is said to be struggling, partly the result of late formation and insufficient organisational development support during Phase 2 of an earlier programme. Another CBNO which is about to launch out on its own has already identified two community groups and three communities where they will nurture the formation of CGs and add them to their network.

Both organisations had built their own offices and were managing annual budgets in excess of 100 lakh rupees (USD 100,000), each with 12 - 15 paid staff. The boards of these CBNOs were comprised of MC members who in turn were part of and answered to CGs. Staff were now recruited by the board, with fixed term contracts often linked to project funds. There is a proportional over-representation of men the higher up the system one goes. While 84 % of the CG members are women they make up 72 % of the MC members and 62 % of the CBNO committee members. In the two long established CBNOs, the senior staff were all men. This trend toward men in senior positions is explained by the greater level of education enjoyed by men. Interestingly, there was good gender balance on the boards of both these older organisations.

Both Executive Managers interviewed stated that their boards, and in turn the community groups, were very much in charge of setting policies, priorities and directions of their programmes. Annual plans arise from the assembly held by each of the member CGs to their MC and from there to the board and finally the Executive Manager and staff of the CBNO. There was often pressure from donors for CBNOs to expand their programs into new areas (beyond that of its members) and a persistent tendency to take responsibilities from the CGs. One Executive Manager said that his greatest challenge was not raising funds to support the organisation but in maintaining the integrity of the system. He claimed that, having initially relied so heavily on their own resources, CGs had learnt to "think outside the box" and were less dependent on outside resources, even after 15 years.

For CGs in Phase 2 of the programme, the most important role of the MC and sometimes the CBNO is to obtain the external resources required to larger address community needs. For these resources there is understandably a very high reliance on the annual VDC budget. MC members complained that CGs often had unrealistic expectations and after some time prioritised external assistance over the use of local resources, but put less effort into consulting with their community, project planning and even budget preparation. CGs were wanting to obtain the funds first and then decide how they would be used. CGs were said to occasionally have submitted requests for resources that were intended to benefit the members themselves rather than the community at large.

"Now that we have the knowledge about human rights we will never close our eyes again."

CBNO leader, Banke

While VDC Secretaries praised the integrity and capabilities of the MCs and CGs they were said to favour submissions from organisations that brought their own funds to the project or covered wider areas, often encompassing every community in a VDC. CGs were also said to be submitting proposals without first soliciting support from other organisations working in the same area. The focus on poor and marginalized communities means that submissions are not seen to be representing the communities as a whole. Much of the annual VDC budget however is allocated to certain, prioritized sectors such as women, youth, Dalits and endangered communities, thereby encouraging submissions that target specific sectors and groups across communities. When MCs are unable to obtain the resources sought by communities their value is questioned.

Indications are that the securing of external resources takes a sudden and drastic fall after the initial three years (Phase 1) of Sahakarmi's engagement but then gradually

rebuilt over subsequent years, presumably as MCs and CBNOs become more adept at networking, advocacy and project development. The group funds provide a sound financial base and resource for the system, with all CGs contributing monthly to the operational costs of their MCs, who in turn support those of the CBNOs. By the end of the six years the system can effectively maintain itself financially without dependence on outside assistance. The recent national-level CBNO Learning Workshop was largely funded through contributions from Sahakarmi's CBNO network. In this case 1652 CG members each donated 2-3 kg. of rice, or the equivalent in cash, towards the event and most of the 65 participants were accommodated in private homes.

Members at different levels of the system have received training appropriate to their needs and have embraced the philosophy and vision underlying the programme. One respondent felt that SS staff sometimes took control away from CBNOs of the more important tasks, such as facilitating major workshops or writing proposals, and that this did not build the skills needed by them in the future. By the sixth year however, most MCs and CBNOs consider themselves well capable of assuming full responsibility. As mentioned earlier, the registration of CBNOs is also thought to enhance their sustainability, provided the government does not penalize them for not meeting all their obligations under the agreement.

Objective 3: At least 500 especially vulnerable families/households will have demonstrated an enhanced capacity to address or (if necessary) cope with the difficulties they face in the context of an enhanced local support network.

Some especially vulnerable families come to the attention of the SS staff during the initial house-to-house listening survey, others are mentioned during CG meetings and others are identified through referring to community health volunteers and the local health post. Records provided by Sahakarmi Samaj indicate that some 527 such families were identified in Bardiya and Kanchanpur and 316 were assisted during this SWNCGEP programme. Issues faced by these families included STI and HIV infections, conflict affected, uterus prolapsed, cross-border banditry, severe food shortages, disability and domestic violence. The purpose of working with these families was to build their resilience, knowledge of the entitlements and services available to assist them and to encourage those who are not already members to join their local community group for ongoing social support. This was to be achieved through regular mentoring visits with the families, information and referrals to available services as appropriate and encouragement of CGs to accept and support their membership.

Interviews with three vulnerable women revealed very little as they were accustomed to talking about their problems but were generally unable to identify how their lives had improved as a result of this special attention. However all three women, aged between about 22 - 65 years, had suffered uterus prolapsed – clearly a major health risk for very poor women – and were very grateful for the help that SS staff had provided in explaining this condition and encouraging them to seek treatment.

"The people who used to live the life of a frog in a well are now going outside and learning"
Social worker, Bardiya

All three women belong to community groups but the youngest one has been disappointed by the lack of support shown by other members and is still to have the required treatment for uterus prolapsed. Her case is not yet severe enough to require an operation. The other two women firmly believed that they would not still be alive had it not been for the treatment. One of them borrowed money from the group fund to partially cover the cost of her operation. However the wound had still not healed properly a year later and she had been told that what she needed was complete rest – unlikely in a household of 28 members. For two of the women the mere sharing of their health issue with family had brought relief and positive changes in the family. Family members could now understand the problem and were very pleased with the change in the woman following the operation. The third woman has delayed having treatment because of the lack of interest and care being shown by her much older husband.

One of the women claimed that, had it not been for the house-to-house listening exercise undertaken by SS staff in the early days and the subsequent personal visits she would not have trusted them enough to mention her very private concern. She added that other organisations had not shown any interest in her personally but simply went about their activities. Based on this very small and largely unresponsive sample², it is thought that the friendship and information offered by SS staff had made a difference in the lives of these vulnerable families but, other than addressing the uterus prolapsed issue, had not been significant. Groups talked of providing material support, by way of food or money, to vulnerable individuals or families but this was not mentioned by the three women interviewed.

It is clear that most staff are not comfortable or not clear about this (new) component of the programme and could not explain how it fitted with the programme they had been effectively replicating for 16 years. Discussions with SS staff revealed a number of issues explaining their relatively poor performance on this objective. Firstly, staff are not clear of the purpose or ultimate aim of working with individual families. Other than listening to their problems, providing information and possible referrals to available services and encouraging them to join or remain in their local community group, what changes could be expected in their lives? Secondly, staff had difficulty identifying especially vulnerable families when most of those they were meeting during the listening survey were struggling. There are no criteria to help them.

The link between group empowerment and what is in effect individual casework is also not evident. Normally individuals are encouraged to bring personal problems to their groups and through the process of discussing, analysing and eventually taking action as a group the empowerment process is accomplished. While some claim to be comfortable to work with individual families others lack the confidence or commitment to do so. For the majority of staff the two approaches do not fit naturally together.

² It was realized too late that the interviews should have been conducted by staff members who were familiar to and already trusted by the respondents. As a result, evaluation team members first spent considerable time building the relationship needed to broach both personal and family issues.

Objective 4: Local government officials (VDC) will have demonstrated an enhanced awareness of process-led change in disadvantaged and marginalized communities and an increased level of responsiveness to the legitimate claims of disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

As mentioned above, Sahakarmi Samaj along with the CBNOs and MCs have given priority to nurturing good working relationships with VDC Secretaries wherever the programme is operating. Recent changes in the way decisions are (or are meant to be) made over the use of the annual VDC budget, by depoliticising the process and placing more funds and authority in the hands of the VDC Secretaries, has meant that these government staff can be highly influential in where and how development funds are used. The VDC Secretaries are also effectively the gatekeeper over issues going to government offices at the district level. Developing relationships with VDC Secretaries provides the opportunity to influence the way they see and carry out their role, the way they set priorities and view development in general and the way they are (and are held) accountable to the communities whose funds they administer. The Secretaries pointed out that they are constantly being lobbied by a range of organisations with or on behalf of community groups operating in their area.

Relationship building begins at the very start of a programme when SS staff seek the advice of these Secretaries as to the most vulnerable communities in which to start work. Field staff make a point of meeting these administrators on a regular basis, both to seek their advice and information, and to share information about the SS programme and planned activities. Virtually all the VDC Secretaries interviewed appreciated the transparent way Sahakarmi Samaj conducted its programme and the fact that it followed the correct protocol and procedures in pursuing their aims. One VDC Secretary claimed that before Sahakarmi started work in his area in 2010, people used to blockade the VDC office if their demands were not met but now they were coming with the expectation of learning more about and participating in the annual planning process, and are more willing to wait to the next year to have their requests addressed.

CGs and MCs have also developed a reputation for reliability and scrupulous use of funds that has encouraged some VDCs to effectively subcontract out work to them. Promotion of the Open Defecation Free Zone programme at VDC level is one such example. The community mobilisation and organisational strengths of the SS approach has meant that such programmes have been much easier to implement and more successful in communities where Sahakarmi Samaj is active. The same was said for vaccination campaigns, notification of agricultural support and services and even information dissemination by political parties.

"SS has sown the seeds but it is our responsibility to take care"
Political leader, Bardiya

Sahakarmi Samaj has invited VDC Secretaries to training sessions run for MCs and CBNOs and has even delivered training tailored to the Secretaries themselves. The Secretaries were of course invited to a lot of training provided by different organisations and did not see Sahakarmi as particularly special, even if their approach was very different. SS staff acknowledged that the Secretaries saw these trainings as an information sharing exercise that would allow both MCs/CBNOs and VDCs to work better together and had little to do with the fundamental way that the Secretaries conducted themselves and their work in general; this was largely

determined by their line managers at district level and by the government system in which they worked, some for most of their lives. For some of the trainings with MCs and CBNOs, Sahakarmi Samaj invited government staff as resource persons, both to share information and to foster relationships between government and the participants. In one instance the VDC sponsored a course on public speaking for women, organised and run by Sahakarmi Samaj in conjunction with the local MC.

Relationships have also been nurtured with local political leaders of all parties in recognition of their role and influence in the allocation of government resources at VDC level. All political leaders interviewed spoke highly of Sahakarmi Samaj and the empowering work it was doing in communities. They praised the fact that staff lived with and really listened to the people and were able to bring these views to the attention of the VDC. Most however had a very low opinion of NGOs in general. Interestingly, one political leader said that the reason that Sahakarmi was so respected in communities was that they were not associated with any particular political party. Sahakarmi Samaj also produced community newsletters three times per year and distributed these to CBNOs, NGOs, government offices, VDCs and communities in the districts where they are working. These newsletters often contained stories of change sent in by programme participants.

Partly as a result of these relationship-building efforts there have been a number of changes in VDC practices. These are particularly in the area of greater transparency. Members of MCs and sometimes CBNOs are now regularly invited to VDC meetings to share information and to advise the Secretary on community needs and priorities. They are able to ask or hear about services available from government and the eligibility requirements. In turn, there is a standing invitation to VDC Secretaries to attend monthly MC meetings and personal invitations for annual assemblies hosted by the CGs. There is said to be a high level of mutual respect between the two groups and one respondent suggested that MCs should establish a permanently staffed office within the VDC compound to further this collaboration. Another suggested that the VDC have volunteer community liaison officers to interact with the various community groups. At the request of MCs, annual budgets of the VDCs are now made available and in most VDCs, representatives of MCs and/or CBNOs, along with others from outside, are invited to participate in the annual VDC planning session where the allocation of these budgets are determined. The influence of the MCs and CBNOs on VDC decision-making varies from VDC to VDC but all MCs report that the Secretaries are now listening more to the voices of the community - along with those of the political leaders.

VDCs are reported to be more closely monitoring the use of these funds by various community groups, CBNOs and local NGOs and reporting on this use against the goals set out during the annual planning session. Volunteer monitoring committees have been established, occasionally involving CG or MC members, to handle the funds and scrutinize their use, but they were considered to be ineffectual. Disadvantaged groups for whom there are special provisions set out in the budget guidelines are able to see where the money intended for them had been used and thereby hold the VDC and grant recipients more accountable. However, in one interview it was said that CG expenditure reports often showed money remaining whereas "VDC budgets always showed a zero balance".

With the encouragement and sometimes assistance of SS staff or MC members, VDCs have provided training to community leaders (*bhadghars*) to enhance the level of understanding between the two groups. In VDCs where Sahakarmi Samaj is working and where MCs are established, a signboard has been erected in front of the office setting out the 'civic charter', i.e. the roles and responsibilities of the VDC. This had been a directive from Kathmandu but was reported to have been followed only in VDCs where MC members were active and had encouraged this to happen. It was claimed that work practices had in fact changed very little in the other VDCs and there was little or no knowledge of Sahakarmi Samaj and its process-led approach outside the VDCs where the programme is currently operating.

As mentioned above under Objective 2, there have been changes in the make up of VDC Councils in recent years, with local political parties being stripped of their power in favour of the VDC Secretaries alone. The existing legislation calls for a Council comprised of 48 members, most of whom will be elected by and from the various communities in each VDC but this has never been implemented due to the inability of the Constitutional Assembly to reach agreement on the planned amendments. Political leaders claim that they now no longer have much influence over how budgets are allocated and monitored but a number of VDC Secretaries were either confused on their role or felt that nothing had in effect changed. Whatever the case, and it appears to vary from VDC to VDC, there is more openness and more participation from community representatives in meetings where decisions are being made and, it was said, more community ownership of the results.

Objective 5: At least 300 development workers (voluntary and professional; CBNO, NGO and GO) from at least 20 agencies will have demonstrated an enhanced awareness of process led change in disadvantaged and marginalised communities and have taken identifiable steps to re-orientate their work programmes accordingly.

During the course of this 3-year programme Sahakarmi Samaj has provided training for 1423 participants from 19 different INGOs, NGOs and CBNOs. These could be staff of other organisations or, on occasion, their board members. Sessions have covered topics such as i) community group strengthening, ii) report and proposal writing, iii) facilitation skills, iv) resource management, v) organisational management, vi) social auditing, vii) advocacy skills, viii) policy formation and ix) leadership skill development with a view to imbedding the values and core principles of the SS approach in courses of more practical use. These trainings were held in various locations arranged by the contracting agency as Sahakarmi Samaj does not have its own training centre.

However, it was realised during this programme that training was more effective if it was tailored to the specific needs and interests of the participants and the earlier practice of offering a set programme of standard topics was replaced by individualised training developed in discussion with the interested parties. The same change was made in the capacity development approach used with MCs and CBNOs during Phase 2 of the programme. This opportunistic and individualised training approach is almost certainly a more effective way promoting learning but raises questions as to the financial viability of Sahakarmi Samaj setting up and running its own training centre as a cost-recovering enterprise. One respondent who was

involved in the development of this training said how important it was to "listen to participants if we expected them to learn from us" but, when pressed, was unable to identify anything that he had actually learnt from the participants.

The ICRC engaged Sahakarmi Samaj to provide a number of group strengthening trainings to their staff and partners in different parts of the country. A TOT manual was developed in collaboration with Sahakarmi that is in use and has now been translated into English and made available to ICRC offices in other countries. SS staff were also asked to assist at least 12 NGOs review their internal policies and saw this as an opportunity to use policies to influence the values of these organisations. Samari Utthan Sewa, a local NGO, sought advice and training on restructuring their programme and is now channelling their support to a newly formed CBNO rather than implementing their programme through community groups directly. Following a SS workshop attended by staff of MCC Nepal the organisation is now promoting aspects of the SS approach among its partners in country.

ICCO Cooperation is also supporting Sahakarmi Samaj to implement a programme in Dang District and 12 months ago engaged Sahakarmi to provide organisational development assistance to cooperatives of Drinking Water Technicians in Dang and Banke Districts. This latter work is being done in collaboration with Practica, an appropriate technology NGO from The Netherlands. Mercy Corps has been working with CGs in various communities on environmental protection and has just signed a 2-year agreement with Sahakarmi Samaj to strengthen and promote this approach more widely. UMN, the organisation in which SS's process-led approach germinated, recently asked Sahakarmi Samaj to provide facilitation training to its partners prior to them starting work in new areas of the country.

SS staff used a variety of meetings, seminars and other gatherings to present their programme and outline their approach. In a DDC coordination meeting in Dang District, the SS representative was allowed to continue speaking for over 30 minutes, compared with the standard 5 minutes given to others, due to the level of interest in the

SS approach. More effort has gone into awareness raising at the district level than had previously been the case but staff believe that more still needs to be done. This past year the development plans of SS partner CBNOs have been included in the official DDC plans in Surkhet, Banke and Bardiya largely, it was said, due to the efforts of SS staff. There may be some confusion however over the core principles that underpin the SS approach and the way these are pursued in practice. Sahakarmi Samaj may have found the formation of CGs, MCs and finally CBNOs an effective way of empowering communities and having the voices of the marginalised heard, but it is not the only way and the structures and approaches being set up by other agencies need to be respected for what they can offer.

"Sahakarmi is an ocean of knowledge and even we political leaders should try to learn from it"

Political leader, Kanchanpur

There have also been segments on radio and local newspapers on the work of Sahakarmi Samaj, one article coming out during the evaluation itself. This coverage was thought to provide encouragement to CGs, increase their credibility in the eyes of authorities and enhance their chances of getting resources from VDCs and others. While it was claimed that others are learning from the SS approach, this can be very superficial. An example given by a VDC Secretary was of NGOs wanting to follow

Sahakarmi's practice of not paying per diems to training participants. Increasingly CBNOs are engaging with other organisations in implementing joint programmes which provides opportunities to influence the way others work but also puts pressure on the CBNOs to compromise. The Executive Manager of one, long-established CBNO was however able to name funding agencies / NGOs with whom they now refuse to work as their principles are simply not compatible.

While Sahakarmi Samaj has continued in its effort to promote its philosophy of process-led development and a strong emphasis on the self-reliance of communities, the fact that this approach is still rather unique indicates that they have a long way to go. The most obvious reason is that, unlike those who provide material resources and infrastructure to communities, the results of the process-led approach used by Sahakarmi Samaj is not immediately visible.

As with the doubts expressed by newly formed community groups it is difficult to trust that the process will deliver in the end. Donors are also said to be sceptical and prefer to fund programmes that deliver tangible outputs in quick time - as does the Nepal government. The SWC now has a requirement of at least 60% of programme costs going to material assistance. This has forced modifications to the approach used by Sahakarmi Samaj in Dang after the international donor was unable to get approval without introducing a significant 'hardware' component. Unless funding and longer-term commitment are available to implementing agencies then very few of them can afford to change their approach, even if they are convinced of the benefits.

The very strong conviction of SS staff to their approach may actually be proving an obstacle to the spread of their ideas to others. There was a sense during the validation workshop that some if not most of those not closely associated with the SS programme felt accused of getting it wrong – and were defensive and/or possibly dismissive. There was certainly scepticism as to whether an evaluation team comprised of SS staff could be sufficiently objective to make it more than simply a promotional exercise. The team was also challenged over the lack of quantitative 'proof' over the outcomes of the programme, raising questions about how best to establish such proof in a form that will be accepted by sceptics. These were valid challenges that perhaps question more the way the SS programme is being promoted than its actual effectiveness.

Objective 6: Learning from the SWNCGEP derived from ongoing organizational learning and external evaluation will have been disseminated to promote best practice through the FEST approach.

Sahakarmi has a well developed system and set of procedures for reviewing the programme at regular intervals through the programme cycle. There are said to be fortnightly team leader meetings in each district to review progress, discuss issues and opportunities, and plan for the coming two weeks. Every 3-4 months there are district-level programme workshops involving all field staff where experiences are shared in an atmosphere of mutual learning, and common problems are addressed. Partnership Workshops are held every six months in which the CBNOs provide feedback to Sahakarmi Samaj on the programme, from their perspective. This is also a time when the 3-year partnership agreements now being signed with the CBNOs

are referred to in relation to the obligations of both parties. And then there are annual 'CBNO stakeholder meetings' facilitated by Sahakarmi at which different government ministries have an opportunity to outline their plans and priorities and listen to those of the CBNOs.

Sahakarmi Samaj hosts annual stakeholder meetings in each district, bringing together representatives from the DDC, VDCs, government line ministries, CBNOs, MC board chairpersons and other organisations working in the district. There is also an annual operational plan and development workshop which involves the more senior level SS staff together with the SS board. The results of this meeting are then taken to the General Assembly for approval, along with the previous year's performance and financial reports, and the next year's plans and budget. The General Assembly attracts up to 58 people, all members of Sahakarmi, most of who are from outside the organisation. Out of these meetings and workshops have come new insights and new ideas, most often leading to minor functional improvements to the programme.

Examples of these changes are: i) tailoring the organisational development support provided to CBNOs; ii) terminating all direct support and engagement with CBNOs at the end of Phase 2, while remaining available for consultation at the CBNO's request; iii) revisions to the training materials and an increased emphasis on advocacy skills for MCs and CBNOs; iv) concessions to the normally stringent practice to include seed grants in the Dang programme at the insistence of the SWC; v) exploratory work with school children in using codes to stimulate classroom discussions in Bardiya, vi) improved coordination and joint planning between the various programme units within Sahakarmi Samaj itself; vii) partnership agreements with CBNOs and viii) relaxed guidelines on the standard of accommodation for field staff. Another notable change is that the organisation has chosen its first female chairperson and increased the number of women on its board.

Changes have also been made in response to what in retrospect was an imposing number of recommendations from the previous programme evaluation in 2010. A sign of Sahakarmi's commitment to bringing about change is the fact that a number of these recommendations are listed in their annual programme reporting format and the organisation is forced to report annually on progress against these. In the team leader's mind the most critical of these recommendations were those related to maintaining focus and resources in the hands of the CGs and this has occurred. A number of others are still worthy of consideration.

The area where least work appears to have been done lies at the more conceptual level, calling for i) deeper analysis of the structural causes of poverty, marginalisation and injustice, ii) a more robust approach and accompanying framework for measuring community empowerment, iii) an assessment of the sustainability of behavioural changes brought about by the programme, and iv) the articulation of Sahakarmi Samaj's model of change. Perhaps outside facilitation might be useful in working through some of these in the future.

In addition to the strategies listed under Objective 5 above, Sahakarmi Samaj has set up its own internet website and Facebook page, both of which suffer from not being regularly updated and only available in English. Sahakarmi has been a contributor to the FEST (Facilitation for Empowerment and Social Transformation) website which

draws on the thoughts and experiences of practitioners of the process-led approach from around the world, again only in English. Senior staff and board members of Sahakarmi Samaj, together with staff of a second Nepali organisation, shared experiences with a local NGO operating in Orissa, India that is also using the process-led approach. Case studies have also been prepared and shared with CBNOs and other interested organisations to showcase successes of the approach in different areas of the country.

Perhaps the main learning event is the annual CBNO Learning Workshop which is a national event organised by Sahakarmi Samaj and first staged in 2010. Attendance at the first workshop was said to be 25 participants from 11 organisations. This jumped to 111 from 24 organisations in the first year of this programme and has risen steadily to the most recent workshop where 65 people attended from 35 mainly CBNOs, 12 of whom are affiliated with Sahakarmi. These are occasions when participants can share approaches, strategies and experiences, and from which common issues can emerge. The issue of CBNO registration united the participants at the most recent workshop and a national advocacy strategy was developed and agreed on.

Organisational matters

Once again the evaluation team leader was impressed by the very high level of conviction and commitment of the SS staff. Every staff person spoken to was proud to be associated with the programme and believed to varying degrees in its austere approach. They had seen the results first hand and were frustrated when others did not seem to believe them. The comprehensive system for reviewing work outlined above ensures that complacency does not set in but may focus on functional changes needed to the programme while an annual retreat may allow staff to step back a little and assume a wider and more detached perspective. Governance of the organisation seems very sound, with regular meetings, very committed members and a genuine faith in the process and management of the organisation but the same comment may apply about focusing on functional aspects of the organisation rather than in this case providing the vision.

If they weren't before then Sahakarmi has turned its staff into evangelists of the approach. The energy that abounds throughout the organisation is truly inspiring but this passion for the work has its costs. Firstly, there is uniformity in the approach that raises questions as to what degree staff feel free to experiment or to adapt processes to specific areas and communities, inadvertently discouraging individual initiative. The second by-product of this fervour is that of busyness. Everyone it seems is doing several things at once and there seems no time to simply sit and reflect. One of the respondents claimed that "community members feel bad to disturb SS staff because they are always too busy." Busyness can become a huge barrier to communication unless staff at all levels are very careful. It can also mask a lack of proper planning and will, on occasion, lead to inefficiencies.

Thirdly, there appears to be a lack of openness to learn from others, whether they be other NGOs or CBNOs of their own making. When asked what had been learnt from interactions with other organisations the response from SS staff was inevitably about what the other organisation has learnt from them. Whenever challenged by

outsiders, as the programme was during the validation workshop, the spontaneous response from staff was one of fierce defence. An admirable quality that may be getting in the way of learning and certainly one that discourages others to open up to learn from Sahakarmi Samaj. We encourage others to change only if we honour who they are now.

On the other hand, the organisational culture is one of respect, social equality and humility. The qualities staff profess to value in terms of their work in communities are demonstrated in their relationship with one another, including the senior managers. The decision for Community Educators to wherever possible rent rooms and share meals in the houses of very poor families is an example of all three of these qualities. The organisational culture also respects and accommodates the personal and social needs of staff while ensuring that professional standards are maintained and targets met. Annual family picnics and joint celebrations of festivals seem to compensate staff and their families for the time spent at work. 'Burnout' is a common occurrence in activist organisations but does not seem to be a problem within Sahakarmi Samaj. The programme was kept running for three months back in 2010 using the organisation's own funds, with all staff taking a voluntary cut in wages, and this commitment to job security (and to communities) has resulted in a very low staff turnover during this programme.

The SS Executive Team has virtually remained unchanged since the establishment of the organisation. This must be seen as a very positive and reassuring thing as they know the history, embody the values and keep the programme on a steady course. Despite an increase in programme size, now working in three districts simultaneously, the size of the Executive Team has not changed. This all raises the question of succession planning and the grooming of middle managers to eventually assume leadership of the organisation. Outside the Executive Team the level of English proficiency among staff is low and, while this should not be a barrier to managing, it is certainly an obstacle for leaders who are expected to meet foreigners, write proposals and reports and deal with donor visits. While they appear very free to enter into discussions and voice their ideas it is obvious that staff still look to the leaders, and very often the Executive Director, for the decision. There is also a severe gender imbalance among the senior staff of the organisation, suggesting that many decisions are being made without the benefit of a woman's perspective.



4. Conclusions

The following conclusions are presented in accordance with the standard DAC criteria and in compliance with the Irish Aid evaluation guidelines. They draw primarily on the findings of this evaluation but are inevitably influenced by those of the previous assessment in 2010.

Relevance

Nepal is classified among the world's Least Developed Countries and the vast majority of its population has been denied basic rights and services throughout their lives. Chronic political instability, civil war and economic mismanagement have been the cause and result of this national impoverishment. Illiteracy runs at about 40%, most of whom are girls and women who have never attended school and are often effectively confined to their homes. For the country, and perhaps more importantly, the people of Nepal to escape this least developed status then people need to be empowered to take control of their own development, to be made aware of their rights and to be able to claim these from the appropriate duty bearers. This programme of Sahakarmi Samaj does just that. It treats empowerment as a fundamental need and for very poor and marginalised their way out of poverty.

The programme is particularly relevant to people's needs in that it responds to the issues that the people themselves choose to work on. Unlike most other sector-based programmes, the SWNCGEP programme allows the communities, through their community groups, to determine their own priorities. This has resulted in activities addressing myriad issues from the highly personal to those facing whole communities and regions. Even the Open Defecation Free Zone campaign being promoted nationally by the government has been incorporated into this community-led programme in such a way that the community remain 'in the driving seat'. Figures collected by Sahakarmi Samaj however indicate that group funds far exceed the total value of activities being undertaken by these groups by the end of Phase 2 and there is a concern that these groups will focus increasingly on their role as savings and loans and place much less emphasis on community mobilisation and social issues as Sahakarmi support is withdrawn. In the long-established networks the CBNOs are now primarily managing relatively large projects for outside donors on behalf of the communities.

The government's 3-year National Development Plan 2011-2014 prioritises the need for social sector development, social inclusion of the poor and marginalised and good governance. This programme contributes very strongly to all three objectives. In terms of the latter it works with and often through the administrative system of VDCs set up by the government and is working to strengthen these institutions and build the capacities of the officials to become more responsive and accountable to communities. VDC Secretaries were highly appreciative of the way that, unlike many others, the SS programme was strengthening the government system by sharing information openly, coordinating over the development of plans and following

protocols and procedures. There are indications that the programme is not only supporting the system but influencing it - making it more responsive, more effective and more accountable.

However, the SS programme can be said to at best complement the government's view of how development will be achieved in Nepal. The government's emphasis on 'development hardware' and macro-economic policy contrasts sharply with the programme's almost exclusive focus on communities and the 'software' aspect of development. The focus on quick, tangible outcomes has become mainstream and is accepted by governments, donors and NGOs alike. One of the INGO participants at the validation workshop, no doubt speaking on behalf of many of those present, "why is it that everyone else is swimming in one direction and only Sahakarmi Samaj is going the opposite way?" While the two approaches are not opposed there will continue to be tension and misunderstanding between the proponents of the two. Insufficient attention has been given to influencing government policies.

Sahakarmi Samaj has continued to enjoy a very supportive and mutually beneficial relationship with SHEP since the first partnership agreement was signed in 2006. There is strong coherence between the core values of the two organisations and between the strategic objectives of SHEP, Sahakarmi Samaj and this programme. Fundamental beliefs in the person-centred and process-led approach to development are central to both organisations. ICCO Cooperation has been supporting the work of Sahakarmi Samaj for six years now and considers the organisation a key partner in Nepal. The SS programme is also consistent with the principle policy objectives of the Civil Society Fund, namely 1) to support an enabling environment for civil society to organise and engage with government and its own broader constituencies, and 2) to support the role of civil society in i) promoting participation and good governance, ii) ensuring prop-poor services and growth, and iii) building a constituency for development, human rights and social justice nationally and globally.

Effectiveness

The target number of people directly benefiting from this programme was set at 5300, of whom an estimated 3,300 (62%) would be women. Taking just the number of community group members, and discounting the work done with vulnerable families, VDCs and other organisations, the programme directly benefited 8111 individuals in 288 community groups. Approximately half of these were set up under the programme and the others strengthened during it. Women make up 6100 or 84% of the members. An analysis of the social composition of these groups also revealed that over two thirds of the members is from the Dalit, indigenous or ethnic groups in what the VDC Secretaries considered the poorest and most marginalised communities. Clearly the programme is effective in reaching its target group.

The target of the programme was to set up 180 new community groups, against which only 143 actually emerged. The programme did however achieve its target of ten new Main Committees and three CBNOs, which are now in the process of registering with the government. Records show that programme staff also provided mentoring support to 316 especially vulnerable families during the course of the programme but questions remain about the effectiveness of this intervention.

However, there appear to be very few benefits or changes in communities not directly involved in the programme. The very rationale for this programme, being people's lack of agency, could very well explain why the multiplier effect of this programme is so low. If people had the confidence and initiative to replicate what they see happening nearby then they possibly don't need this sort of programme anyway. But this cannot be assumed and more could be done to understand why these ideas are not spreading.

In terms of increasing marginalised people's feelings of self-worth and sense of personal and collective agency this programme has been highly effective. Statements such as "now I can speak" and "now we can do it ourselves" were heard so often during the evaluation and symbolise the truly transforming nature of the programme and the changes that people have experienced in their person and their lives. Women who had previously been confined to their homes, men who had used alcohol to suppress feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness, communities who had been divided by caste, ethnicity and religion spoke of how their lives had been fundamentally changed for the better.

But, as one respondent asked; "This programme brings the people from the dark and into the light, but is this enough?" By focusing so heavily on the empowerment of individuals and community groups the programme tends to uncover and address problems existing in the current system and perhaps does not see the structural causes that lie beneath these problems. Although the most important changes generally begin within ourselves, they must eventually be translated into changes in community, national and global institutions. The programme should be mindful of the changes needed at all these levels and contribute to their realization.

Over 90% of the groups are mixed in terms of caste, ethnicity and/or gender so group discussions were instrumental in challenging stereotypes and discrimination, while fostering a sense of solidarity, mutual understanding and tolerance. The fact that women in the *Madhesi* communities can now attend festivities in the company of group members, that people from the Tharu community can now visit their VDC office and enquire about their entitlements and group members from the Dalit and Brahmin communities are now visiting one another's houses and eating together are all signs of how effective this programme has been in changing long-standing discriminatory attitudes and practices.

The emphasis from the very beginning of engagement with communities has been on self-reliance and this is manifest in the number of activities that community groups have managed to do with no or very little outside assistance. But the aim of empowerment and awareness raising on rights is that communities will be better able to claim their rights from designated duty bearers, and usually the government, and there are ample examples of communities or groups within communities obtaining citizenship cards, migration permits, special entitlements, government services and simply access to information. The MCs and CBNOs have also shown themselves adept at accessing resources from the VDCs in particular although the gross amount of resources drops significantly when Sahakarmi Samaj withdraws direct support to the CGs during Phase 2 of the programme, but then appears to rise gradually after then.

Efficiency

It is certainly very difficult and possibly meaningless to try to measure empowerment in monetary terms as the quality of a person's life as a result of becoming empowered is demeaned in trying to do so. However, the manner in which Sahakarmi Samaj uses the funds that are given it can be considered as highly efficient. Salaries are said to be low in comparison to most other local NGOs and certainly compared with the experience that many of the staff have. Offices are modest and equipment minimal. Field staff usually rent rooms in local houses and travel by motorcycle, bicycle or foot to other communities. The staff required to implement the programme has come about through many years of experimentation and it is now well-established that a field team of four persons cannot manage more than 30 CGs. The Executive Team has not increased despite an increase in the size of the programme and operating costs seem to have been kept to a minimum.

If we measure efficiency in terms of mobilising local resources to address issues arising in communities then the monetised contributions from communities is more than four times that from outside sources in every year of the standard 6-year cycle. Towards the end of Phase 1 each CG was on average accessing almost Rs. 14,000 from external sources compared with an estimated own contribution of Rs. 61,300. While the level of activity drops to approximately half that in Phase 2 the community contributions still make up more than 80% of the value of the work done. A number of respondents claimed that CGs not only became less active, an assessment backed up by Sahakarmi's own figures, but relied more heavily on external funding. This does not seem to be the case and the efficiency of the programme in terms of mobilising community contributions appears to remain steady throughout the 6-year cycle.

Comparing the total annual cost of the programme with the monetised value of the activities undertaken by the CGs then a very rudimentary analysis of the figures provided by Sahakarmi Samaj indicate a cost ; benefit ratio of 3.5:1 during the first year, dropping to 1.2:1 at the end of Phase 1 and 0.3:1 at the end of Phase 2. One of the CBNOs visited who has been operating without financial support from Sahakarmi for six years now has an annual operating budget of just over US \$100,000. These are resources going into communities that more than likely would not have done so, and certainly not to that magnitude, had it not been for the SS programme.

Several of the VDC Secretaries commented on how they had come to trust the CGs in their area to use any funds granted them very cautiously, and transparently. The fact that they were able to mobilise their communities in support of activities meant that "more was achieved for less". In several VDCs the Secretaries had given contracts to MCs to provide services to communities in relation to the campaign for open defecation free zones because of the known reliability of these groups. The planning and management skills of the groups are said to be minimising losses due to inefficiencies and malpractices. The group funds are now a factor in the economics of communities, loaned out to members at lower than market rates for consumption, crises and income generating activities. Interest-free loans and grants are given to especially vulnerable families in cases of emergency. This circulation of 'low-cost' money is stimulating the local economy with absolutely no inputs from the programme. Group funds have also been used as security on the provision of government services, in the case of the electricity poles for example.

Impact

As noted above the programme has had a transforming effect on the confidence, self worth and sense of agency among the participants. The impact of this on individuals was palpable during the interviews when almost every CG came out with "now I can speak" as the most important outcome of belonging to a group. The fact that these changes are limited to communities, and often to community group members where Sahakarmi Samaj is or has been working is however a limiting factor in the impact of the programme. Uptake by other organisations is very low and very little work has been done in trying to influence the opinions and priorities of donors who, in turn, often determine the policies and programmes of NGOs. But the number of CBNOs taking an interest in the approach, as evidenced by the steadily increasing number participating in the annual CBNO Learning Workshop, is encouraging.

Similarly the relationships that have been built between castes and ethnic groups at the community level have brought about fundamental changes in attitudes and behaviours. Brahmins have broken taboos by sharing meals with Dalits and Madhesi women by attending festivities outside the home. While there is little evidence to show that these attitudinal changes are making their way into the communities immediately, a longer term perspective confirms that they are. The experience of one long-established CBNO was of whole communities changing their attitudes and behaviours toward people infected by HIV/ AIDS as a result of changes within individual community groups. Gender relations have also been changed, particularly with regard to the respect that women have earned by achieving tasks assumed well beyond their capability, and relations within households are said to be improved but the depth of these changes is questionable. Men are still holding most of the senior positions within CBNOs, and even in Sahakarmi Samaj itself, so gender equality is still a long way off.

The effort that goes into developing good management and governance practices within CGs, MCs and CBNOs was obvious on meeting several Executive Managers of long-standing CBNOs, both of whom espoused sound management practices with their staff and genuinely supported the idea of community-based organisations. Both had functioning boards comprised of members from their constituent MCs, who were in turn members of and answerable to CGs. Sahakarmi Samaj itself has a well-functioning board that is responsive to the wishes of the general assembly but is very clear on its mandate and does not interfere in the day-to-day management of the organisation. Sahakarmi is transferring their knowledge, skills and experience to others through the many trainings they offer, the mentoring they provide and the organisational development assistance they give to NGOs and CBNOs alike.

The impact of the programme on the practices of government, and the VDC Secretaries in particular, is less obvious. There have been functional changes in the way that government officials respond to calls for transparency and accountability but the extent that this is due to the programme is unclear. SS staff themselves recognise that VDC Secretaries fail to recognise the fundamental changes that are required of them in order to be truly accountable to communities. The political hiatus at the national level is preventing the election of community members to VDC Councils and is blocking meaningful change at the VDC level.

An inherent limitation of the process-led approach, where issues are determined and addressed by communities themselves, is the tendency to focus solely on local

concerns and to seek functional changes, i.e. improvements in the current systems. What is often lacking is the broader perspective that calls for structural (policy) change. This programme is having a significant impact on individuals and on individual communities but is doing little to change policies and systems that lie at the heart of poverty and marginalisation in Nepal, as elsewhere.

Sustainability

The very existence of the SS programme came about as a result of concerns over sustainability associated with conventional community development approaches. An evaluation of the UMN programme back in 1991 found that communities had become dependent on UMN for resources to further their development process and were possibly weakened by the process. From this the Surkhet Project was born. Sahakarmi Samaj was formed to ensure that this highly successful model was not lost to the country. Interestingly, UMN who had moved away from this model back in 1997 is now engaging Sahakarmi to train their staff in the process.

As mentioned above, many of the changes have been at a personal level and have been transformational. Women who can 'now speak', landless labourers who can now challenge the VDC, Brahmins and Dalits who have now eaten together and attended one another's festivals and family ceremonies are changed for life. Even if the groups cease to exist at some time in the future, these personal changes will not.

Over the years Sahakarmi Samaj has honed their approach but the essence has remained unchanged. Community groups are formed and strengthened during the initial three years (Phase 1) and their network organisations, the MCs and CBNOs, are strengthened during the second three years (Phase 2). The certainty over when Sahakarmi Samaj will withdraw is a motivating factor in the development of the networks. Most MCs and CBNOs visited at the end of Phase 1 were very unsure about their future and very dependent on Sahakarmi Samaj for support whereas those approaching the end of Phase 2 were confident that they could manage without the support of Sahakarmi, other than occasional advice.

This model appears to be working well in terms of producing sustainable community-based networks and structures that have now stood the test of time. The CBNO visited in Surkhet has been operating now for 15 years, has its own purpose-built office, paid staff and an active board comprised of representatives from the member MCs. All major decisions are made at annual General Assemblies and performance is reported back to CGs through the board members. The other long-standing CBNO visited was in Banke District where the same indicators of sustainability were found – permanent offices, paid staff, active board. An ex-post evaluation conducted in Surkhet in 2000 found functioning networks supporting inclusive, justice-oriented development years after the end of the project.

A possible weakness in this somewhat uncompromising timeframe is that those CGs, MCs and/or CBNOs that are formed later receive less capacity building support. The main reason given for the under-performance of one network in Banke is that the CBNO was formed late and hadn't received enough support. Sahakarmi Samaj is dealing with this by allocating a few staff to respond to requests for assistance from CBNOs in districts where the programme is no longer working.

The training of community group members has also shown to be effective in that most CGs continue to meet and manage their own finances without assistance from outside. A lot of the training has gone into the CG Facilitators of whom there are initially four chosen per group. Often young women thought by their group to be better able to learn new things, these members are also likely to marry and possibly move out of that community, taking the skills that they had developed with them. Although this loss of capacity is a potential threat to the sustainability of groups it does not seem to have become a major problem.

Perhaps the threat is not to the continued existence of these groups, and the associated network organisations, but to the functions that they perform within communities. Initially set up to enable poor and marginalised people to identify, analyse and address issues pertinent to their lives, using their own resources where possible and to lobby others for assistance where not, the CGs, and hence the MCs, have become less active over time in terms of instigating community actions and more involved in managing their ever-increasing group funds. In turn, MCs have become less active in soliciting resources from VDCs and other sources and CBNOs become more intent on project management and the operations of their cooperative that both bring in the funds needed to cover salaries. While these shifts in focus may ensure the sustainability of the networks there is a danger that issues facing the poor and marginalised are no longer addressed.

But it is the values and principles underpinning this programme that are most under threat. As the validation workshop participant implied, the programme is going against the tide of current development practice. Macroeconomic policies of governments are not able to measure the impact of an empowered population and need measurable, often material outcomes to show progress toward development goals. Donors are very reluctant to fund activities that do not produce tangible results within a relative short timeframe and this has a significant influence on how implementing agencies see development needs and formulate solutions to address them.

Communities in turn have been 'trained' in what to expect from development agencies and, despite experiencing the satisfaction of achieving results using only their own resources, are tempted by the apparent ease with which resources are simply made available by other organisations. Members and those familiar with groups in their formative stages often suggested that it would be better for Sahakarmi Samaj to provide at least limited material assistance but those who were facing the imminent withdrawal of Sahakarmi appreciated the fact that they were not financially or materially dependent on the organisation in any way.

Replicability

The model that underpins the current programme was first established in Surkhet and, despite very minor modifications along the way, has now been implemented in 18 VDCs in Banke District, eight in Bardiya, 13 in Kanchanpur, nine in Dang and is about to be taken to Kailali and Jajarkot. Altogether there are now more than 891 functioning community groups with a combined membership in excess of 19,000 mostly poor and marginalised women. Independent evaluations have consistently concluded that the programme has delivered very good results in each location and staff are still genuinely enthusiastic about the process. The fact that this programme

has been and continues to be implemented in new areas is a testament to its replicability, albeit always under the careful guidance of Sahakarmi Samaj.

As noted above, there has been relatively little interest shown by other agencies in embracing this approach, and certainly not in its entirety. Sahakarmi Samaj has provided a number of trainings to staff of other organisations in various aspects of the approach and these are reported to be now in use or being transferred to partners. Others are more interested in picking up ideas that will simply make their programmes easier or less costly to implement rather than respecting principles. Visiting communities for several hours and then returning to offices in the town is a bigger obstacle to developing relationships than the way community surveys are conducted. Unless the values that underpin this programme are also taken on board then the mere techniques are unlikely to have the desired results.



5. Lessons learned

i) Composition of the evaluation team

The first lesson that was learned was about the evaluation process itself. There is a lot of scepticism about the value of the SS approach, particularly from those who may feel threatened by it or accused of being on the wrong path when it comes to genuine development. The use of an evaluation team drawn solely from staff of the implementing agency, along with an external evaluator who had already shown his strong support for the approach, meant that sceptics were able to readily dismiss the findings as partial or a foregone conclusion. Some staff within the programme may have privately questioned the objectiveness of such an evaluation and wondered whether it will deliver genuinely new insights. Even though the main purpose of the exercise had been to learn from rather than judge the programme, the critics were looking for proof and, as it came to light, proof in the form of numbers. The qualitative approach used during the evaluation was considered unscientific and therefore dubious.

Wholly external teams would possibly provide the 'judgement' aspect and statistics the chimera of fact, but at what expense? The previous evaluation, and the one before that, had not been translated into Nepali and so had not been read by most staff. Had it not been for the team discussions and the challenging of one another during the evaluation itself then learning by the organisation would have been minimal.

It has now been realized that an evaluation team comprised of both internal and external people could possibly serve both purposes. Involving staff from the CBNOs for example would provide insights that are not shared by staff, thereby enhancing the learning, and challenging some of the assumptions. Selecting people who are known, and known by others, to be sceptical of the programme could serve a dual purpose. Their participation would certainly give greater credibility to the findings in the eyes of the sceptics and their experience may very well convince them of the efficacy of the approach. What more persuasive advocate than a former critic.

ii) Promoting change

The SS programme is all about the promotion of change, change in the way that poor and marginalized community members see and feel about themselves and how they organize to achieve their rights as citizens of the country. The programme also sets out to change the way duty bearers, mostly government officials and VDC Secretaries in particular, view their roles and responsibilities in relation to communities. The third area of change is in the level of understanding and acceptance by other agencies of the process-led approach. The staff of Sahakarmi Samaj need no convincing and seem totally committed to the approach.

A core value of the approach is that of respecting the experience, knowledge and potential for change in communities. Work starts in new communities with a

'listening survey' in which staff spend considerable time developing trust and listening to the concerns of poor and marginalised families in particular. But this same level of attention does not seem to go into listening to and developing an appreciation of the beliefs and concerns of VDC Secretaries for example. Similarly NGOs using a different development approach are seen a target for change but of having very little to offer Sahakarmi Samaj.

If we encourage others to change only if we honour who they are now then listening is not enough. We need to be open and in fact keen to learn from those we eventually hope to influence. Learning should be a mutual purpose, from which changes will come. This is in fact core to the Freire approach that provides the theoretical underpinnings to the SS programme. Also, people change only when they discover that they, or their performance, or their programmes, will become more of who and what they are by becoming something different. The aim should not be to convince others that they are doing the wrong thing but that their desired outcomes will be reached even better if they make changes in the way that they work. And "seeing is believing". People are more easily convinced by seeing the results of a particular action or approach than by hearing about it. The more sceptics can see and hear for themselves the effects of a different approach the more likely they are to accept it.

To encourage change in others we should be open and willing to learn from them, focus on what they will gain rather than lose by making these changes and provide opportunities for people to discover these changes for themselves. For an organisation such as Sahakarmi Samaj that is so convinced in its own programme these present a real challenge but one that must be addressed if they are serious about fostering change in others.



6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made with a deep respect for what is already there in the programme, belief that new insights will emerge through challenge and discussion and a genuine desire to learn for myself from the deliberations. It is in this spirit that Sahakarmi Samaj is recommended to:

i) *Make effective use of the upcoming strategic planning process.*

This evaluation comes at a very opportune time in that Sahakarmi Samaj is about to develop its next 6-year strategic plan. This should provide an ideal opportunity to reflect on past performance and learnings and revisit the recommendations of programme evaluations undertaken during the course of the current plan. Time will need to be made to adequately consider the various suggestions and options before decisions are made but, if used properly, this should be time well spent. To involve the different staff in a meaningful way may also require that certain documents or parts of documents currently only available in English to be translated into Nepali so that all staff can read them themselves. It is recommended that an external facilitator be called upon to assist with this process to encourage an atmosphere of openness needed for change to be considered.

ii) *Identify and address organisational development needs within Sahakarmi Samaj.*

The strength of the current senior management is certainly not in question. Their embodiment of the values, grasp of the principles, experience with the programme, loyalty to the organisation and relationship with staff is hard to fault. But the composition of the Executive Team has virtually not changed since the formation of Sahakarmi Samaj and there is a danger that the organisation could become stuck in what is sometimes referred to as its "pioneer phase" where organisations are run very much as a family by their highly knowledgeable, highly respected and often charismatic founding members. This can be an effective way of operating, particularly common among activist groups, but is highly dependent on the leaders and can limit growth and innovation within the organisation. A lack of policies and procedures is symptomatic of this phase.

iii) *Strengthen the depth of management within Sahakarmi Samaj.*

More effort should be put into recruiting and retaining women staff into or capable of assuming management positions as their current absence in the senior ranks of the organisation is not healthy. Consideration should also be given to grooming middle managers to eventually take on the roles of leadership by providing opportunities for management training, for greater management responsibilities and for making and learning from mistakes. The issue of English proficiency among middle managers is also part of the process of preparing them for leadership.

iv) *Encourage CG members to stand in VDC Council elections.*

While the current political machinations in Nepal are inhibiting truly bottom-up development there is a chance that plans to elect members of the VDC councils could go ahead after the election of a new Constitutional Assembly this month. If so then this is an opportunity and a platform by which communities can express their views and exercise their priorities in a meaningful way. With more development money now being channelled through the VDCs and access to government services at district level being brokered by them, there is a real opportunity for communities to influence the way government is run at a local level, and in turn influence decisions being made at higher levels. Civic engagement is, after all, about decision making, and about who and how and by whom a community's resources will be allocated. The network of community groups, coming together with the MCs, provide an ideal vehicle through which people with a belief in participation and the 'bottom-up' approach, a commitment to and experience in democratic and accountable management, and an affinity with the poor and marginalised can move into positions of influence. Running candidates selected by and from the programme's networks can also help to depoliticise the VDC election process.

v) *Conduct awareness raising campaigns on common social issues.*

Very good work has been done through the programme on social issues such as drinking, smoking, gambling, domestic violence, uterus prolapsed, school attendance and in establishing open defecation free zones but these tend to be undertaken at a community level. The number of women who have been living with the pain and discomfort of uterus prolapsed for years, often decades, appears to be frighteningly high and yet they are only able to put a name to their condition and seek a cure to it after this issue is raised in their community groups. Admitting publicly to a very personal affliction requires a great deal of trust whereas raising awareness about the causes and possible cures for it does not, provided there is someone willing to share their story. Sahakarmi Samaj should source educational material on a number of common (especially women's) social issues and train members of the MCs or CBNOs to deliver these across their areas. If nothing else this would bring these issues into CG discussions and start to 'normalise' the issues.

vi) *Revisit recommendations of previous evaluations.*

As noted in Findings section under Objective 6, Sahakarmi Samaj has made a genuine effort to address some of the recommendations made during the previous evaluation. The report also contained a section on points for discussion which it seems was not useful. There was also an evaluation conducted in 2008, which offered sound suggestions for change. Many of these are similar, or at least complementary, and may provide guidance for programme innovations going into the next strategic plan. Again it is recommended that these discussions are facilitated by an outside person, possibly someone from SHEP or ICCO Cooperation, to encourage an open dialogue and stronger commitment to any actions or changes decided on.



Annexes

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Annex 1. Terms of Reference | Annex 6. Interview list |
| Annex 2. Schedule of work | Annex 7. SS staff workshop |
| Annex 3. SS organisational structure | Annex 8. Validation workshop |
| Annex 4. Key & guiding questions | Annex 9. Case study |
| Annex 5. Stakeholder analysis | |

Sahakarmi Samaj**Evaluation of the South West Nepal Community Governance Enhancement Programme (SWNCGEP)****Terms of Reference****Background:**

In 2007 Sahakarmi Samaj initiated a new programme in Bardiya and Kanchanpur Districts of south-western Nepal; the Community Governance Empowerment for Social Transformation (CGEST) programme. The CGEST programme involves the deployment of facilitators in marginalised communities to support the development of community groups and community based networking organisations (CBNOs) in which local people analyse their circumstances and act to address their concerns by mobilizing local and external resources. The CGEST programme builds on the success of Sahakarmi Samaj's earlier ten-year SAKTEE programme in Banke District and 3 years CGEST programme in Bardiya and Kanchanpur districts which was evaluated in May 2010.

The CGEST programme was designed in 2006 following a strategic review of the work of Sahakarmi Samaj and the development of a six-year strategic plan (2007-2013). It now operates with funding from the Irish Aid Civil Society Fund (CSF) and from ICCO-KiA. This funding is channelled through The Social and Health Education Project (SHEP), Ireland which was already engaged in a 'learning partnership' with Sahakarmi Samaj and which, as an Irish civil society organisation, met Irish Aid's eligibility criteria for CSF support. Whilst Irish Aid has no direct involvement with Sahakarmi Samaj's programme in Nepal, both ICCO-KiA and SHEP provide programme support under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding which sets out the responsibilities of the respective programme partners (Sahakarmi Samaj, ICCO-KiA and SHEP). After completing the first phase of CGEST programme in 10 VDCs of Bardiya and Kanchanpur, SHEP and SS submitted an application for the second phase of CGEST which was started from November 2010 in 4 and 7 VDCs of Bardiya and Kanchanpur respectively.

The Evaluation Contract:

The current funding period extends from November 2010 to October 2013. It is a contractual requirement that CSF-funded projects of this kind be externally evaluated in accordance with Irish Aid's *Guidelines for Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation of projects funded under The Civil Society Fund*, which state that '*Organisations in receipt of a multi-annual CSF Grant are required to independently evaluate the project at the end of each three year funding cycle. For projects with a budget greater than €100,000 the evaluation should be conducted by an independent consultant(s)*'.

According to the Guidelines, the evaluation should address the following points:

Relevance

The evaluation should consider the extent to which the project addresses the needs and priorities of the target. It should also consider how the project fits in with the priorities and policies of the country and of Irish Aid.

Effectiveness

The evaluation should consider if the project design was the most effective means of achieving the objectives and the extent to which the objectives have been achieved taking into account the relative importance of each objective. The evaluation should examine how the inputs (financial, technical and human) contributed or hindered the achievement of the objectives.

Efficiency

The evaluation should assess whether the cost of the project can be justified by its results, taking alternatives into account.

Impact

The evaluation should determine the long-term effects of the project, whether these are positive or negative, intended or unintended, and the relation to the overall goal of the project. (Please note that this is the most important section of the evaluation from Irish Aid's point of view).

Sustainability

The evaluation should determine if the project outcomes and impacts will be sustained without continuing external financial or technical support.

Replicability

The evaluation should also determine whether a successful project or successful aspects of the project could be replicated.

It is indicated that 'The evaluation should preferably use participatory approaches and there should be consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including beneficiaries, staff, management, government officials, etc'.

The reporting requirement for Irish Aid is relatively modest.

A written evaluation report should be submitted to Irish Aid. The report should be approximately 30-40 pages in length excluding attachments.

The following format is proposed for the report:

Format of the Project Evaluation Report

Executive Summary:

Provide a synopsis of the evaluation emphasising the principal findings and the evaluation's conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned. It should be written in a concisely and with consideration of the fact that some people may only read this section.

Introduction:

Present the purpose of the evaluation, including information on by whom and how the document will be used, the evaluation criteria, the principal questions to be answered, and the methodology uses. The introduction should also set out the structure of the evaluation report.

The evaluation:

Describe the principal characteristics of the project, its location, a brief history, a description of the CSF grantee, local partners, beneficiaries and other stakeholders. This section should convey the principal problem addressed by the project, the project objectives, and its logic of cause and effect. It should include a description of activities which were undertaken and the principal results. This section also includes any assumptions made in relation to external factors in planning the project and the accuracy of these assumptions. If a project has been evaluated previously the findings and conclusions should be summarised here.

Findings

The findings consist of responses to the questions posed by the evaluation terms of reference based on evidence (data and examples) from the evaluation. *This is the main part of the report and evidence should be presented in a systematic way which will allow readers to form an opinion on the strengths and weaknesses of the conclusions of the evaluation.*

Conclusions

Present an assessment of the project and its results against the evaluation criteria set out in the TOR (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and replicability), and against standards of performance and established policies.

Lessons learned

Present the findings and conclusions that have potential for wider application and use.

Recommendations

Specify the actions that should be taken on the basis of the evaluation. These may relate to policy and programmes design, contract arrangements, the relationship with the implementing organisation. The recommendations should be specific and directed to relevant recipients.

Annexes

Terms of reference, methodology for data gathering and analysis, references etc.

The evaluator will be expected to meet the requirements set out by Irish Aid. However, recognising that this evaluation comes at the end of the six-year strategic plan, s/he will also be expected to write an explanatory commentary on the evaluation report and provide clear recommendations to guide those who will be taking the programme forward. Report should be about 30-40 pages in length. S/he should undertake the evaluation in a collaborative way with Sahakarmi Samaj and the international programme partners (ICCO-KiA and SHEP) and share her/his findings directly, as well as through written communication.

The contract for the evaluation will be awarded by Sahakarmi Samaj in consultation with the other programme partners on the basis of criteria set out in this TOR. It is anticipated that the evaluator will need to spend 12 days in the Sahakarmi Samaj work areas and a further 10 days working on the report and other tasks related to the evaluation. The evaluation fieldwork must be completed by the end of October 2013 and the first draft of report, commentary and recommendations must be submitted by 15th of November 2013. As Sahakarmi Samaj itself is the committed organisation for the empowerment of poor and marginalized communities and has the limited budget, it is expected that consultant's fees will be pitched at a level that is fair for both parties to the contract. All necessary travel and accommodation costs will be provided by SS.

Person Specifications for the Evaluator:

The following qualities will be sought in the evaluation consultant:

- Experience/understanding of empowerment-focused capacity development with marginalised groups in the Majority World
- Experience/understanding of humanistic community education (Freire, Mezirow, Rogers)
- Experience/understanding of process-led development (participatory situation analysis, action-planning, plan implementation, monitoring and evaluation)
- Experience/understanding of organisational and institutional development
- Experience of participatory evaluation
- Ability to contribute a balanced external professional analysis
- Excellent inter-personal skills/communication
- Excellent facilitation skills
- Excellent documentation skills in English
- Capacity and willingness to travel to rural parts of western Nepal

Nepalese language skills and experiences in rural Nepal would be an advantage. But an independent Nepalese translator/resource person will be provided to support a non-Nepalese evaluator).

Expressions of interest:

All enquiries should be addressed to:

Narad Prasad Sharma

Sahakarmi Samaj

Executive Team Office

Rajhena - 7, Anandanagar, Kohalpur

Banke, Nepal

Tel: +977-81-540099/540999

Fax: +977-81-540999

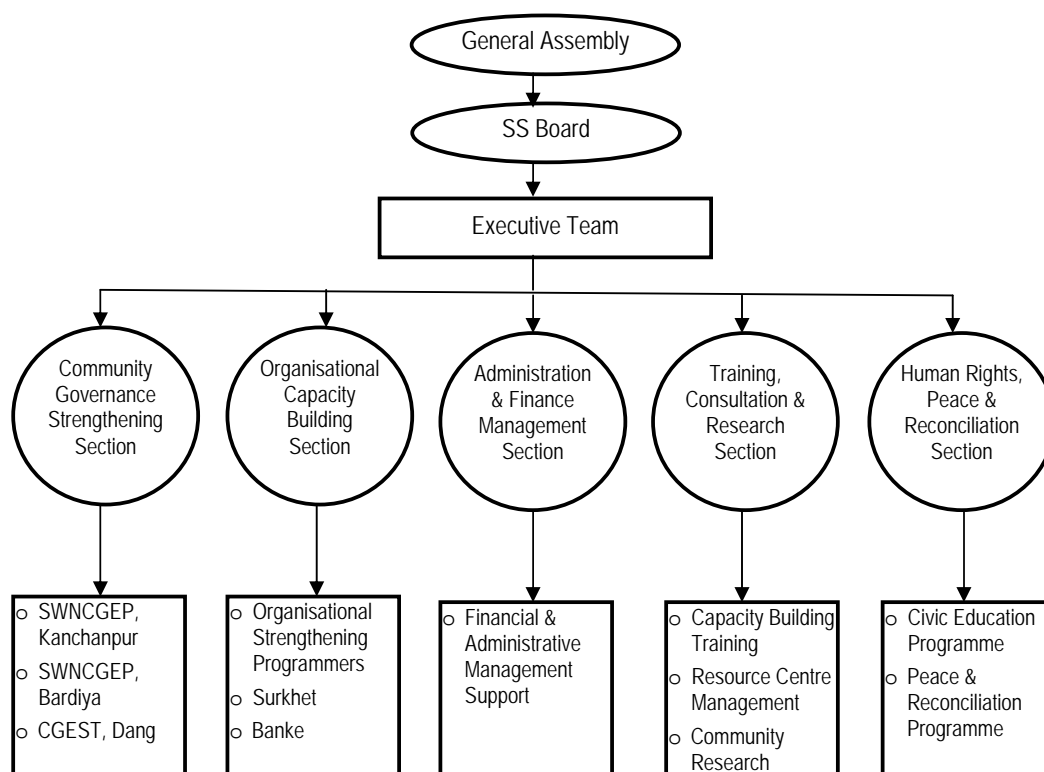
Mobile: +977-9748012377

Email: narad.sharma@gmail.com

Evaluation schedule

Date	Activities	Days
19, 20 Oct.	Yangon-Bangkok-Kathmandu-Nepalgunj	
21 Oct.	SS staff workshop	1
22 Oct.	Evaluation Team preparation	1
23 Oct.	Fieldwork preparation, travel to Bardiya	1
24, 25 Oct.	Fieldwork in Bardiya	2
26 Oct.	Interviews feedback in Nepalgunj	1
27 Oct.	Interviews feedback, travel to Kanchanpur	1
28-30 Oct.	Fieldwork in Kanchanpur	3
31 Oct.	Interviews feedback, travel to Nepalgunj	1
1-5 Nov.	In Surkhet, return to Nepalgunj,	2
6-7 Nov.	Draft conclusions with Evaluation Team	2
8 Nov.	Validation workshop	1
11-15 Nov.	Finalise draft	5
16,17 Nov.	Nepalgunj-Kathmandu-Bangkok	
19-30 Nov.	Finalise report	1
		<hr/>
		22

Sahakarmi Samaj Organisational Structure



Key questions, indicators and guiding questions

	Key questions	Indicators	Guiding questions
Objective 1	1. To what extent are CGs able to identify and analyse the causes of their problems?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of generative themes used. • No and type of issues discussed. • No and type of trainings attended. • Degree of analysis on causes of problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What training has SS provided for your CG, and what of this was most useful? • How often does your CG meet to discuss community problems and what are the main issues that have been discussed? • How has your thinking changed about the causes of your community problems?
	2. To what extent are CGs able to address their problems using local resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No of action plans made, no of action plans implemented • Range of stakeholder interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If SS does not provide resources to your community, how does their presence help you? • What community issues have you been able to resolve/mitigate using your own resources? • What community issues have you referred to the MC or CBNO for their assistance?
	3. What are the personal and social benefits associated with belonging to a CG?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal wellbeing, attributes and skills. • Relationships with significant others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have your personal skills and feelings changed as a result of belonging to the CG? • How have relationships within your family changed after joining the CG? • How have your relationships with others in the community changed after joining the CG?
Objective 2	4. To what extent are MCs and CBNOs providing support and guidance to CGs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency of MC/CBNO meetings. • No of visits to VDCs and other duty bearers. • Nature of support given to CGs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often does the MC or CBNO meet to discuss issues coming from the CGs? • Does the MC or CBNO consult and feedback regularly on what they discuss and decide? • What forms of advice or non-material support has the MC or CBNO given to CGs?
	5. To what extent are MCs and CBNOs able to advocate and secure outside resources for CGs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy efforts with duty bearers. • External resources accessed. • Use of external resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the MC or CBNO been able to help CGs to change govt. practices? • Has the MC or CBNO been able to help CGs to access govt. resources for the CGs? • Does the CG, MC or CBNO control the use of resources coming from outside?
	6. To what extent are the MCs and CBNOs capacitated and able to continue functioning after direct support is removed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence and skills developed. • Clarity of roles after SS withdrawal. • Formalisation of network structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is/will be the role of the MC when SS is no longer involved in your community? • What is/will be the role of the CBNO when SS is no longer involved in your community? • Do you think the registration of the CBNO is useful, and why?
Objective 3	7. What changes have occurred in the lives of vulnerable families as a result of SS program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of non-material support • Referrals to other services. • Confidence and decision-making capacity. • Changes in familial relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What assistance has you received from SS staff and was it helpful? • How has your economic/social life changed since SS began helping you? • How could SS improve the way it helps you considering its very limited resources?

	Key questions	Indicators	Guiding questions
Objective 4	8. To what extent has the understanding of govt. officials changed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No and nature of meetings with duty bearers. Openness to community inputs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has SS staff or program participants explained the approach being used by SS? Is there any difference between communities where SS is working and where they are not, and what are they? How could SS improve the way that they work with communities, considering their limited resources?
	9. Are govt. officials more responsive to community rights/demands than before?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsiveness of govt. to community needs. Accountability and transparency of govt. officials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do communities where SS work ask for more or less assistance from local authorities? Is the VDC allocating more or less resources to communities than three years ago, and how is it allocated? Do communities know what the VDC budget is and how it was used last year? Was this the case 3 years ago?
Objective 5	10. What changes have been made in the approaches of other agencies as a result of learning from SS?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature of interactions with other agencies. No and types of training provided. Changes on others' programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How often have you met with staff of SS in the past 3 years to discuss their approach to development? Have you integrated any of their ideas into your program, and what? What do you see are the weaknesses of the SS approach?
Objective 6	11. What changes have been made within SS or other like-minded agencies as a result of sharing experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in response to own learning and evaluations. No and type of publications shared. Learning from and by SS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How often have you met with like-minded agencies in the past 3 years to share experiences? Do you believe that you have more to learn from others or more to teach others about a process-led approach? What are some ideas/practices that your agency has learned and adopted from the experience of other agencies?
General	12. How has SS and its program changed since 2010 and have these changes been positive or negative?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in SS practices since 2010. Level of interest in SS support. Known weaknesses not yet addressed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have the requests to SS for assistance from communities, govt. and/or other NGOs increased or decreased over the past few years? Why? What improvements have occurred in the SS program in the past 3 years? What are the weaknesses in the SS approach that have not yet been addressed?

Annex 5

Stakeholder Analysis

Key question		Primary stakeholders										Secondary stakeholders				Sub-total
		CGs	MCs	CBNOs	CG Facilitator	SS Exec. Team	SS staff	VDC office	Political leaders	Neighbouring communities	Social workers	Teachers	Other NGOs	Vulnerable families	Other CBNOs	
Objective 1	1. To what extent are CGs able to identify and analyse the causes of their problems?	X	X	X	X											4
	2 To what extent are CGs able to address their problems using local resources?	X		X				X		X	X					5
	3 What are the personal & social benefits associated with belonging to an CG?	X			X					X	X					4
Objective 2	4. To what extent are MCs and CBNOs providing support and guidance to CGs?	X	X	X	X											4
	5. To what extent are MCs and CBNOs able to advocate and secure outside resources for CGs?		X	X	X			X								4
	6. To what extent are the MCs and CBNOs capacitated and able to continue functioning after direct support is removed?	X	X	X	X											4
Objective 3	7. What changes have occurred in the lives of vulnerable families as a result of SS program?	X					X							X		3
Objective 4	8. To what extent has the understanding of govt. officials changed?	X	X					X			X	X				5
	9. Are govt. officials more responsive to community rights/demands than before?	X	X					X	X			X				5
Objective 5	10. What changes have been made in the approaches of other agencies as a result of learning from SS?			X		X							X			3
Objective 6	11. What changes have been made within SS or other like-minded agencies as a result of sharing experience?			X		X							X		X	4
General	12. How has SS and its program changed since 2010 and have these changes been positive of negative?	X	X	X	X	X	X									6
Sub-total		9	7	8	6	3	2	4	1	2	3	2	2	1	1	

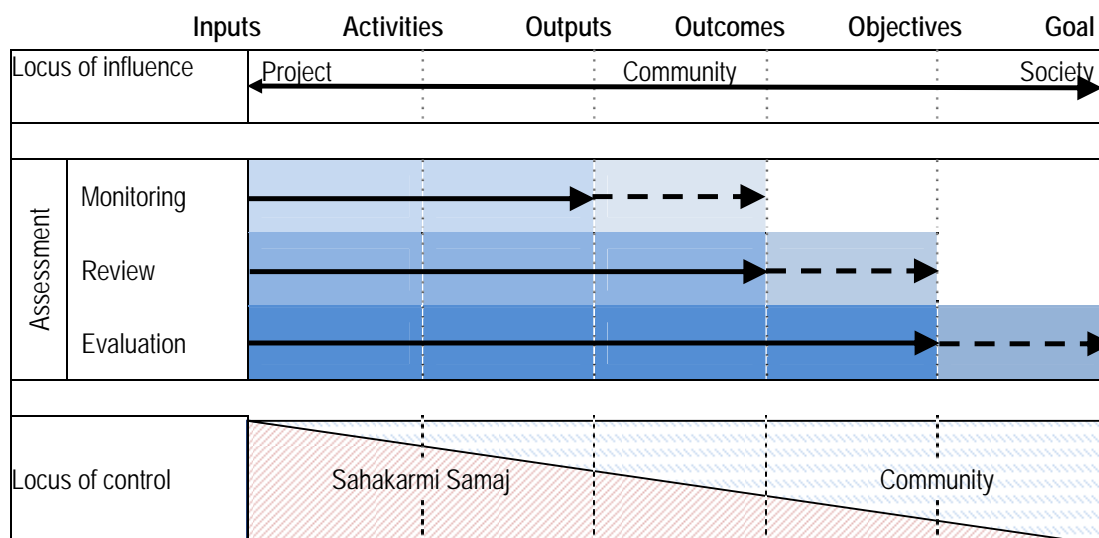
List of interviews

Date	District	Interviewee	Details	Male	Female
22 October	Banke	CBNO & MC leaders	New project areas	10	6
		VDC Secretary	New project areas	7	
24 October	Bardiya	Community group	Manau VDC	3	28
		Political leader	Manau VDC	1	
		Political leader	Manau VDC	1	
		Political leader	Manau VDC	1	
		Vulnerable family	Manau VDC		1
		Community group	Manpur Tapara VDC	10	10
		Main Committee	Manpur Tapara VDC	1	9
		Social worker	Manpur Tapara VDC	1	
		CG Facilitator	Manpur Tapara VDC		2
25 October		Main Committee president	Mainapokhar VDC	1	
		VDC Secretary	Mainapokhar VDC	1	
		Community group	Mainapokhar VDC	3	5
		Social worker	Kalika VDC	1	
		Community group	Surahawai VDC	1	10
		CBNO	Mainapokhar VDC	3	1
		Teacher	Sorahawa VDC	1	
	Banke	CBNO leader	Jana Jagaran Samaj	2	
		SS Chairperson	Banke		1
26 October		SS Exec Team	Banke	4	
28 October	Kanchanpur	Community group	Trivuan Basti VDC		25
		Main Committee	Kalika VDC	2	15
		Community group	Parasan VDC		18
		Non members	Parasan VDC		2
		Teacher	Parasan VDC	1	
		VDC Secretary	Parasan VDC	1	
		CG Facilitator	Parasan VDC		1
		Political leader	Parasan VDC	1	
29 October		Community group	Rampur Bilaspur VDC	4	25
		Non members	Rampur Bilaspur VDC		1
		VDC Secretary	Beldandi VDC	1	
		CG Facilitator	Beldandi VDC		1
		Main Committee	Beldandi VDC	4	14
		Social worker	Beldandi VDC	1	
		Vulnerable family	Rauteli VDC		1
		Social worker	Laxmipur VDC	1	
		Vulnerable family	Kalika VDC		1
		CG Facilitator	Laxmipur VDC		1
		Political leader	Laxmipur VDC	1	
		Non members	Laxmipur VDC	2	
		CBNO	Kalika VDC	2	10
		Political leader	Beldandi VDC	1	

Date	District	Interviewee	Details	Male	Female
30 October	Kanchanpur	Community group (1)	Dodhara VDC		12
		Community group (2)	Dodhara VDC		13
		NGO	Dodhara VDC	1	
		Social worker	Dodhara VDC	1	
		CBNO	Dodhara VDC	2	3
		Community group	Jhalari VDC	2	19
		Community group	Krishnapur VDC	1	23
		Main Committee	Pipladi VDC	3	5
3 November		CBNO leader	Surkhet district	1	
Total		52 interviews		85	263
21 October	Banke	SS staff workshop	Nepalgunj, Banke	14	2
8 November		Validation workshop	Nepalgunj, Banke	35	10
Total		2 workshops		49	12

SS staff workshop 21 October 2013

1. Levels of assessment, influence and control



2. Why evaluate the SWNCGEP programme?

- To learn about effect of the programme
- To learn how to make it more effective.
- To learn the positive & negative aspects of the programme
- To learn how to make programme more specific
- To generate more motivation to work
- To influence & inform donors
- To expand programme into new areas

3. Who is it for and how will it be used?

<u>Sahakarmi Samaj</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring implementation of recommendations • Planning + Reporting • Develop program strategy • Put experience/ new knowledge into practice 	<u>Donor</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide proposal • Share report • Innovative ways
<u>Community</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback session • Respond to community ideas 	<u>Government</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To convince the government • Advocacy • Share report
<u>Other interested organisations</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of references' and replications • Short presentation to likeminded organisation on evaluation report 	<u>Long-term supporters</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of changes • SS made changes/ improved

4. What are the implications of CBNO registration?

- Renew annually
- Annual reports of activities
- Access to agreements
- Invitation from governments
- Access to grants
- Annual audit report
- General assembly
- Independence/sustainability
- Stability/discipline
- Accountability

5. Revolving group discussions

Table 1: What changes have occurred since 2010 with respect to: i) national political / policy situation and ii) availability of resources/ services at community level?

National/political policy situation

- One cooperatives one village
- Government announced Open defecation free zone in different districts and VDCs
- Planning should be formation from ward and lead by ward nagrik munch
- Dissolved the all party mechanism in VDC level and power delegated to VDC secretary
- Government announced 'Caste based untouchable free zone Nepal'
- Dissolved constitutional assembly and formed new govt under the leadership of chief justice for new election
- Government developed the policy to encourage inter caste marriage between dalit and non dalits and widow (single women)
- Peace process has been taken into conclusion like; maoist cadre has been managed (adjust into Nepal army and returned back)
- Election CA 2nd announced and taken into action
- Provision of social security allowances has been revised like giving allowances to widows, increased the rate of the money provided to endangered community
- Nepal army has been replaced in the cantonments (infrastructure)
- Government changed the VDC level political mechanism and make VDC staff more responsible
- Government developed regulation of getting citizenship certificate in the name of mother

Availability of resources/ services at community level

- Government has developed the provision 'If the land is register in the name of women 50% tax discount.'
- VDC budget has been increased
- Local groups, institutions are in given to priorities in the government program

Table 2: What changes have occurred since 2010 with respect to: i) the SS programme and ii) SS relationship with others (govt., donors, other NGOs, etc.)?

Changes in SS programme

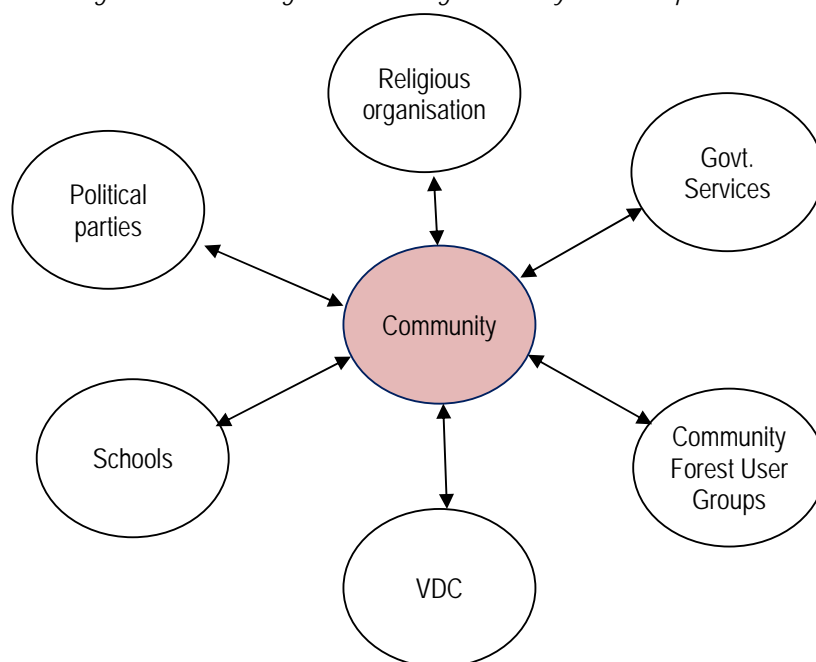
- 2nd phase of SWNCGEP has been started in Bardiya and Kanchanpur (11 VDCs)
- Placement of new organisational development Facilitator and Assistant ODF in Bardiya and Kanchanpur respectively in old working area (Phase 1)
- Existing OD support to the CBNOs has been stopped. (Salary, of executive managers)
- Model of community support in Dang has been slightly changed with the pressure of SWC/GON (Provided seed money to CGs for IG activities)
- The norms of SS i.e. 'CAT should manage their Dera in the proper community' has made flexible
- Sahakarmi Samaj started to work in the marginalized communities of hill area -like Dang (previously we have experience of Tarai)
- SS revised the process of CBNOs support process and doing 'general agreement' with SS supported CBNOs and made OD process more specific.
- Revised training manuals as per the need and level of understanding of community like - book keeping and leadership trainings

Relationships with others

- Always alert to participate in the government coordination meetings and stakeholders interactions
- Developed specific trainings and activities for related VDCs
- Invite the government people in the SS training to community people as a resource person
- Given more focus to MC/CBNOs capacity development for national, regional and local level advocacy
- Provided training as per demand of different organisation like; ICRC, INF, HPC, SUN, UMN, etc.

Table 3: What actions have been taken in response to the 2010 recommendations of:

- 1) *Deepen community understanding of structural causes of poverty, marginalisation and injustice.*
 - Discuss and analysis
 - Training
 - Advocacy
 - Interaction among mc level
- 2) *Be cautious about transferring resources (saving) and decision making away from CGs To focus on income generation*
 - Developed loan policy
 - to keep witness during loan process
 - Encourage to provide loan on productive activities rather than entertainment
- 3) *Retain focus on strengthening CGs a main ways of empowering communities*
 - Facilitated group strengthening training
 - Group fund management training
 - Resource identification and mobilization training
 - Conducted issue related workshop and VDC level mass meeting
- 4) *Develop indicators way of systematically measuring empowerment*
 - Developed spider web tools and implemented in group, MC and CBNO
 - Conducted Organisational assessment workshop and SWOT analysis
 - indicators has been developed in each objectives of programme and used during reporting and monitoring
- 5) *Under take study into effectiveness of programme in bringing about sustainable behavioural change*
 - No activities has been done
- 6) *Develop and documents SS model of change to identify the key elements of the approach*
 - We have developed many exercise to explain change model of SS approach
- 7) *Develop framework/guide for measuring and monitoring community relationship with the external environment*



Indicators for measuring relationships

- Access to resources
- Participation in Decision making process
- Participation in local institutions e.g. CFUGs, SMC etc.
- Initiation for doing advocacy in local issue
- Use for local resources
- Capacity of leadership

Table 4: What action has been taken on the 2010 recommendations of:

- 8) *Expand coverage of programme to reach all communities in chosen VDCs*
 - 143 community groups
 - 11 new MCs in VDC level
 - 3 new CBNOs in Cluster level
 - Existing groups are supported
 - increased house hold visit
- 9) *Organize national seminar on empowerment and present SS approach to wider audience*
 - Correspondence with like minded organisation
 - Conducted national delegation to SWC and local development ministry to make separate CBNO registration policy
 - Conducted 3 national level CBNO learning sharing workshop
- 10) *Expand programme to include other marginalized groups such as children's and migrated communities*
 - Code facilitation in Schools of SS working area at Bardiya
- 11) *Try new ways to recruit and train new staff and build understanding capacity of middle managers*
 - 3 days one events of mid-level management training to mid level staffs
 - Responsibility and power delegate to mid level staff
- 12) *Reconsiders the decision to construct large office/ training complex in light of impression /values to could represent.*
 - SS has fenced the land
 - It has prepared design of proposed SS training centre building, by the way it has been revised and made smaller one
 - SS has thinking on how to construct a manageable and sustainable structure
 - SS has developed SS building construction fund with separate Bank A/C and generating resources to that fund
- 13) *Explore in country funding possibilities such as doing work for the VDCs*
 - SS intensively explored possibilities for in country funding and submitted proposals to more than 7 organisation
 - Mercy Corps awarded grants, signed agreement and received money.
 - Discussion is on going with MCC Nepal for partnership
- 14) *Explore foreign funding possibilities such as entering consortia with other agencies*
 - Re-proposed to SHEP and ICCO and granted to next 3 years
 - SS proposed to EU but not selected.

6. What things should we explore during the field work in order to know whether we have achieved the program activities or to learn what are the organisations or program strength and weaknesses ?

Objective 1: Formation of CGs capable of identifying, analyzing and mitigating shared problems.

- Code facilitation on community generative themes
- Series of trainings (GST, CFT, COST, RMT)
- Issues related training
- Family coaching and mentoring
- stakeholder interactions
- No of action plans made, No of action plan implemented
- no of issues discussed
- Capacity of CG members of understanding problems, identify the solutions

Objective 2: Formation of MCs and CBNOs capable of providing guidance and support to CGs and advocating for and accessing resources from outside (govt., NGOs, etc.).

- No of visits by CGs/MCs/CBNOs to VDC and other organisations
- Group/MC and CBNO plan submitted to VDCs and other agencies.
- Monthly meetings
- Minutes
- CBNO records
- Coordination meeting records
- Activities
- Group visit report
- Rotationally CBNO meeting
- Group visit plan

Objective 3: Build capacity of especially vulnerable families to address or better cope with life's difficulties.

- Family respect
- Open sharing/trust building
- Social security
- No of patient for treatment
- Self confidence
- Involvement or participation in social activities
- Precaution against HIV/AIDS
- Decision making capacity
- no of events they assessed to resources /supports
- Differences between present and previous life status
- Status of participation in family or community

Objective 4: Build awareness of local govt. officials (VDCs) on process led change and responsiveness to claims from communities.

- Budget utilization form local govt
- Involvement in VDC level decision making process
- Newspaper cutting/FM
- Mutual activities
- Invitation on VDC assembly
- Establishment of manifesto (Nagrik Badapatra)
- Invitation to VDC in MC and CBNOs
- Involvement civic ward munch
- Response of VDC to community group
- VDC budget allocated to CGs

Objective 5: Development workers and programmes of at least 20 agencies have adopted a process led approach.

- Organisational governance
- Capacity-building of communities and staff
- Programme process
- Attitudes towards the transformation of community

Objective 6: Learning from program experience has been disseminated to foster best practice among likeminded agencies.

- Use of SS documents by like minded organisation
- no of organisations , individuals that visited SS last 3 years and got orientation
- Response got by SS on the community newsletter 'DKC'
- No of invitation that got from other organisations for sharing/orientation

What are the strengths of Sahakarmi Samaj and its programme that did not exist in 2010

- Correspondence
- Meeting attended/called
- Published news in local news paper/media
- Demanded training by govt organisations
- Members of V-Wash CC
- SS support requested by other organisation
- Increased community demand for group formation

What are the weaknesses or vulnerabilities of SS and its programme that have become obvious or not adequately addressed since 2010

- Still not to be covered hole VDC and all marginalized communities
- Not all marginalized people from communities where CG formed are participating

7. Evaluation report outline

Report section	What to measured	Source of data
Achievements	Activities +Outputs	Monitoring reports, SS
Findings	Key indicators of program objectives	Field work, SS
Conclusions	Assessments against set indicators	Evaluation team+ Consultant
Recommendations	Suggestion for improvements	Consultant + Evaluation team

**SWNCGEP Evaluation Validation Workshop
8 November 2013**

1. Welcome and introductions [Narad]

2. Purpose and outline of day [Mal]

Morning	Evaluation objectives and methodology Objectives of the program Overview of the program Key findings Tentative conclusions
Afternoon	Group discussions Feedback Way forward and workshop close

3. Evaluation objectives [Janak]

4. To determine the extent to which the project's objectives have been achieved.
5. To identify the outcomes of the project's interventions on the lives of poor and marginalised people in the host communities.
6. To identify the strengths of the SS approach and recommend ways to modify this approach to deliver improved outcomes for communities.

7. Methodology [Janak]

Scope of evaluation: 1 November 2010 to 31 October 2013

Data collection techniques

- 31 semi-structured individual interviews
- 19 semi-structured group interviews
- 4 focus group discussions
- 1 workshop

Sample method and size

- Convenience and purposive selection
- 348 respondents (85 men + 263 women)

Respondents

- *Banka*: SS Board Chairperson SS Executive Team, SS staff, 1 CBNO, 7 VDC Secretaries, 16 CBNO & MC leaders.
- *Bardiya*: 1 CBNO, 2 MCs, 4 CGs, 1 VDC Secretary, 3 political leaders, 2 social workers, 2 CG Facilitators, 1 teacher, 1 vulnerable family.
- *Kanchanpur*: 2 CBNOs, 3 MCs, 6 CGs, 2 VDC Secretaries, 3 political leaders, 3 social workers, 3 CG Facilitators, 1 teacher, 2 vulnerable families, 5 non-members.
- *Surkhet*: 1 CBNO leader

8. Goals of the program

[Ghanshyam]

Overall aim: There will be sufficient capacity amongst people in disadvantaged and marginalised communities, as well as amongst the organisations and institutions whose purpose is to serve them, to initiate and sustain inclusive processes of governance that are oriented towards the just distribution of rights, opportunities and resources and an optimal quality of life for all.

Objective 1: At least 180 formally constituted groups of marginalized people in 10 VDCs in Bardiya and Kanchanpur Districts will have demonstrated an autonomous and sustained capacity to identify, analyze and mitigate shared problems through inclusive democratic deliberation, planned collective action and the effective mobilization of local and external resources.

Objective 2: At least 10 VDC-level Main Committees (MCs) and 3 Community Based Networking Organisations (CBNOs) will have been formally and democratically constituted in new working area as well as 10 MCs and 3 CBNOs will have demonstrated an autonomous capacity to provide guidance and support for constituent community groups and to engage effectively with relevant governmental and nongovernmental organisations to secure available resources and to advance legitimate advocacy claims.

Objective 3: At least 500 especially vulnerable families/households will have demonstrated an enhanced capacity to address or (if necessary) cope with the difficulties they face in the context of an enhanced local support network.

Objective 4: Local government officials (VDC) will have demonstrated an enhanced awareness of process-led change in disadvantaged and marginalized communities and an increased level of responsiveness to the legitimate claims of disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

Objective 5: At least 300 development workers (voluntary and professional; CBNO, NGO and GO) from at least 20 agencies will have demonstrated an enhanced awareness of process led change in disadvantaged and marginalised communities and have taken identifiable steps to re-orientate their work programmes accordingly.

Objective 6: Learning from the SWNCGEP derived from ongoing organizational learning and external evaluation will have been disseminated to promote best practice through the FEST approach.

9. Program structure

[Punaram]

Bardiya	2 (1) CBNOs	8 (4) MCs	115 (60) CGs	3217 (1699) members
Kanchanpur	4 (2) CBNOs	13 (6) MCs	173 (86) CGs	4894 (2629) members
Total	6 (3) CBNOs	21 (10) MCs	288 (146) CGs	8111(4328) members
Gender breakdown:				
Men	16 (17) %	Women	84 (83) %	
Social breakdown:				
Brahmin	6.6 (7.4) %	Chetri/Thakuri	24.2 (27.5) %	
Madhesi	1.2 (2.2) %	Ethnic	4.6 (6.7) %	
Indigenous	37.1 (26.1) %	Dalit	25.0 (27.8) %	
Muslim	1.2 (2.3) %			

10. Key Findings

Key evaluation questions

Objective 1: Formation and strengthening of Community Groups [Sher Bdr Khatri + Ram Bdr Air]

1. *To what extent are CGs able to identify and analyse the causes of their problems?*
 - Training provided and skills developed
 - Regular meetings with proper procedures
 - Action plans to address problems
 - Aware of rights and entitlements
 - Discuss personal and common issues
 - Manage intra-group conflict
2. *To what extent are CGs able to address their problems using local resources?*
 - Savings and group fundraising
 - Community infrastructure – roads, community halls, hand pumps & bores, bridge, temple,
 - Income generation – group fund, vocational training, group farm activities, cooking utensils,
 - Environmental protection – riverbank protection, community forest
 - Health – latrines, medical staff, clinic for snake bite, malaria, uterus prolapsed, ODF zones
 - Education – attendance, mobile phones
 - Social – celebrating festivals,
 - Vulnerable – interest free loans, support for flood victims,
 - Entitlements – widow's pension, citizenship cards, migrant cards,
3. *What are the personal and social benefits associated with belonging to a CG?*
 - Attributes – confidence (able to speak), respect, recognize personal capabilities, solidarity
 - Skills – listening, analytical, vocational, leadership, facilitation, literacy (sign name),
 - Attitudes – agency, tolerance, non-discrimination, gender, cooperation, self reliance,
 - Family issues – conflict, domestic violence, gender roles
 - Social issues - alcohol, smoking, gambling
 - Solidarity – not alone, working together, group decision-making,

Concerns

- CGs less active after SS steps back
- focus shifts from own resources to accessing outside resources
- older groups focus on savings/group fund

Objective 2: Formation and strengthening of CBNOs and MCs

[Indra + Netra]

4. *To what extent are MCs and CBNOs providing support and guidance to CGs?*
 - assist CGs with certain functions - motivation, general assembly, planning, fund management, internal conflict
 - identify and try to solve issues common to CGs
 - coordinate between CGs – actions, information, skills, donations to needy, conflict between CGs

5. *To what extent are MCs and CBNOs able to advocate and secure outside resources for CGs?*
 - nurtured good relationships with VDCs – space for meetings, invited to meetings
 - MCs may lose support of CGs if unable to mobilize external resources
 - accessed significant resources and services from VDCs and govt departments – electricity, clinic, road, and agricultural seeds.
 - worked with and mobilized authorities and communities over social problems - smoking, drinking, gambling, open defecation free zones
 - successfully advocated over community issues – bus passengers, doctor, snake bite treatment,
 - advocating nationally over registration process for CBNOs.
6. *To what extent are the MCs and CBNOs capacitated and able to continue functioning after direct support is removed?*
 - ownership, genuinely community based
 - capable members with clear mission
 - legally registered CBNOs
 - sound funding base and internal fundraising system

Concerns

- Confusion over role of MC – meeting attendance, over-commitment,
- Reliance on VDC budget - prioritising NGOs who bring own resources, coverage of VDC, sectoral budgets
- CG expectations – focus on getting funds before planning, VDC funds used by CG members only,
- Registration – CBNOs with little/no budget cannot meet requirements

Objective 3: Enhanced coping capacity of especially vulnerable families [Devi]

7. *What changes have occurred in the lives of vulnerable families as a result of SS program?*
 - identified by various means – listening surveys, references of health post and health volunteers, CG discussions
 - counselling support – regular visits, referrals to services,
 - improved family relationships – understanding & acceptance
 - provide information – gives options

Concerns

- difficult to combine group empowerment with individual casework
- lack of clear strategy and goal
- unclear definition of vulnerable
- mixed performance/commitment of CG staff

Objective 4: Increased awareness and responsiveness of local government [Ram Bdr Tharu]

8. *To what extent has the understanding of govt. officials changed?*
 - Meetings & training – VDC Secretaries, interaction meetings, tailored training, use of govt resource people
 - Publications
 - Reputation – sharing plans, proper use of VDC funds

9. *Are govt. officials more responsive to community rights/demands than before?*
- Two-way respect – VDC and MC/CBNO, inviting to meetings
 - Following procedures – budget allocations, recording budget use, civic charter
 - VDC training of *badghars*

Concerns

- Little knowledge of SS program in other VDCs
- VDC council not elected from community, unclear membership and structure
- VDC Secretaries trying to work differently with different organisations

Objective 5: Increased awareness of process-led change among other organisations [Krishna]

10. *What changes have been made in the approaches of other agencies as a result of learning from SS?*
- Meetings & trainings – training for staff & boards, coordination meetings, general assembly, others' meetings, CBNO Learning Workshop, Dang DDC presentation
 - Assist others with policies, training material – reviews, ICRC manual,
 - Changes in others' program approaches – Samari Utthan Sewa, Caritas partners

Concerns

- low commitment to process – no belief, long time, difficult to appreciate different approach, donor reluctance, SS's openness to learning
- difficult to influence government policies – SWC, little influence if not contributing large budget to country, absence of rigorous evidence

Objective 6: Dissemination of learning

[Bhuwaneswari]

11. *What changes have been made within SS or other like-minded agencies as a result of sharing experience?*
- Websites – SS, FEST
 - Meetings, mentoring & training – ongoing CBNO support, CBNO Learning Workshop
 - Exposure visits and sharing case studies
 - Program evaluations

Concerns

- Like-minded agencies not aware of SS program details
- Lack of time to meet and discuss program with others

Programmatic matters

[Mal]

12. *How has SS and its program changed since 2010?*
- improved coordination between units
 - tailored OD support to CBNOs
 - no formal link with CBNOs after second phase
 - Modified approach in Dang – community seed funds
 - Revised training manuals
 - Increased focus on advocacy skills for MCs and CBNOs
 - Numerous changes in response to previous evaluation

Organisational matters

- Election of first female Chairperson and more women on board
- Strong conviction and commitment,
- Organisational culture - humility, respect, equality, simple,
- Mutual learning – review mechanisms
- Integrated personal, social, professional approach
- Staff stability
- Sound governance practices

Concerns

- Uniformity and busyness discourages initiative, experimentation
- Not so open to learning from others
- Succession planning, gender imbalance

11. Conclusions

[Mal]

Relevance

- Addresses fundamental needs of empowerment and people's right to control over their own lives.
- Relevant to people's needs as they choose the issues to work on.
- Program in line with govt. priorities but not approach but insufficient effort to change policies
- CGs tend to gradually focus on group fund and reduce their mobilisation role.
- Highly supportive relationship with SHEP (ICCO and Irish Aid).

Effectiveness

- Able to significant increase people's sense of agency, responsibility and feelings of self-worth among marginalised people.
- Reaching marginalised communities, and majority of members from lower castes in the groups.
- Facilitated group discussions build understanding among members of different castes, religions, ethnicities and sexes while successful actions fosters sense of solidarity leading to harmony and tolerance.
- MCs and CBNOs accessing resources
- Little change in neighbouring communities
- Previous evaluations concluded effectiveness

Efficiency

- Community activities draw heavily on local resources and community contributions, initially delivering significant benefits with minimal inputs from outside.
- Very efficient if inputs (mainly SS staff) and material outcomes (both internal and external resources mobilised) are compared.
- Planning and management skills of groups are minimising losses due to inefficiencies and malpractices.

Impact

- Very significant impact on awareness and sense of agency of individuals.
- Significant impact on relationships within target communities, including gender and caste.
- Successfully promoting good management practices within groups and VDCs.
- Focused on local issues and not addressing structural causes of problems.
- Limited 'ripple effect' due to lack of uptake by others.

Sustainability

- Changes have often been transforming for individuals and will not be lost even if groups cease to function.
- Clear and consistent withdrawal timeframe, leaving strong CG-based governance structures and formal registration of CBNOs.
- Sound financial and competency base, but skilled members may leave on moving to new areas.
- Danger of CGs transforming into simply savings and loans groups.
- Initial expectations of communities, dearth of like-minded agencies, conditionality of donors and the prevailing focus on deliverables is challenging values and purity of approach.

Replicability

- Proven ability to be replicated in other areas.
- Interest by some NGOs rather superficial and not leading to fundamental changes.
- Replicability by others questionable as values of agency and staff more important than techniques.

12. Group discussions

[Khadga]

Table 1: *What are the advantages and disadvantages of SS covering all wards in a VDC?*

Table 2: *Should CG / MC members stand for election to VDC Councils as a way of influencing the procedures and allocations of resources?*

Table 3: *Should the focus of SS during Phase 2 be on strengthening MCs as the direct representatives of CGs at the expense of CBNOs?*

Table 4: *Should SS undertake campaigns on common issues affecting communities, such as uterus prolapsed, domestic violence and migrant labour?*

Table 5: *What changes should be made to the programme to make it more effective?*

Table 6: *What else did you want to say or ask during the presentation of the evaluation findings?*

Feedback session (see next page)

13. Way forward

[Narad]

Preparation of draft report for comments	15 November
Completion and submission of final report	30 November
Evaluation review and action plan	31 December
Feed into new strategic plan	January onwards

Workshop close

[Ghana]

Discussion feedback

1. *Advantages /disadvantages of approach*
 - Able to access equally of marginalises people of all wards of VDC
 - Easy to distribute the local resources equally to all
 - Easy to mobilise equally, the resources of the VDC
 - Easy to give information to all about the budget of VDC
 - Easy to facilitate and solve common issues
 - Easy to advocate for women's rights to the concerned agencies
 - To build unity, trust, relations, solidarity in the community
 - To expand the program to all places where people are backward from the opportunity
 - "Keeping tigers and goats in one cage and empowering the goats"
2. *CGs/MCs standing for VDC election*
 - They can, there is system of participation from NGOs, community organisations in the process of VDC
 - They have clear understanding about methodology of VDC – clear about own roles and process, facilitating the process of VDC
 - Taking selected planning of CGs from ward assembly to the village committee and influence the process of VDC
 - Assist to keep account and sharing the decision of village committee for transparency
 - By building the capacity of leadership and making aware of roles and responsibility of MC
3. *Strengthening MCs*
 - Need of help and coordination of MC for strengthening CGs
 - It is needed to strengthen CBNOs
 - If there are many groups then MC is needed
 - It is the main base of CBNO
 - It can directly influence in making policy and revise at VDC level
 - To identify and mobilise local resources and expansion coordination
 - To play a strong role to include the local problem in the planning of concerned agencies
4. *Run campaigns*
 - To grant communal justice
 - make them feel for the change in society
 - build independent society
 - reduce all types of discrimination on society
 - for the marginalized communities to have control over their lives
 - involve in the main source of development
 - preserve and promote the rights of marginalized communities
 - CGs and MCs should run these campaigns rather than SS
 - should be voice and leadership of people concerned to issues

5. *Improvements to program*

- I felt the activities of SS for the community good governance strengthening is very effective for sustainable development, which can be also known as part of software. For the environment to keep good relation, solidarity and unity, based on economic and structural development should be included.
- Need of support and facilitation to increase access to concerned agencies for the balance of activities of good governance strengthening and structural development.
- Remain the CG to build the capacity of CGs and formed another new groups only when it is needed
- Develop the skills and address to use the saving for income generating program
- Review the model of program when it is needed
- Review plan according to suggestions got from program evaluation by third party (independent consultant)
- Coordinate with other local coordinating agencies
- lack of roles
- Develop the nature to learn from others
- Disseminate at national and international level about own program process

6. *Comments of presentation*

- In how many VDCs of Bardiya is SS working?
- Which countries are supporting SS?
- Need the practice of choosing the word (translation not clear)
- Presented about the influence in policy level but influence to which policies is not clear – pro-poor, pro-marginalised, pro-Dalit
- Program would be more effective if SS give information about their activities and budget
- Talked about group screening but I felt there is a lack of information about impact of group screening.



The rise and rise of Ram Bahadur Pun

Ram Bahadur Pun is the Executive Manager of Janajagaran Samaj (JJS), a community based network organisation representing seven VDC-level Main Committees, 129 community groups and 2273 members, 60% of whom are women. JJS has an annual budget in excess of 100 lakh rupees (USD100,000), 16 full-time paid staff and more than 20 volunteers implementing seven inter-related projects in the areas of food security and sustainable livelihoods, civic education and peace and reconciliation.

But Ram Bahadur has not always been an Executive Manager. Fifteen years ago he had a CMA and Bachelor of Education but no job, and was worried about how he would support his family. Due to political violence they had been forced to move from their native Rukum District to Banke where they knew no one. When the SAKTEE programme of Sahakarmi Samaj began in Banke District, his wife became a member of a community group. Ram Bahadur himself was very dubious about NGOs and often criticized their role in community. Therefore, he enquired about Sahakarmi Samaj in different ways and places. He even joined one of the community group meetings in his village with the sole purpose of checking up on the organisation. He surprisingly found one of the exercises - an analysis of who in community get more resources - interesting and educative, and found that he enjoyed participating in the group meeting and started participating regularly with his wife. He particularly enjoyed the different exercises and issues discussed in the group that increased unity and mutual respect among group members of different ethnicity and caste.

Belonging to the group allowed Ram Bahadur to make friends in his new community. He also found that relationships within his family and with neighbours began to improve as he shared and practiced what he had learnt with others about him. He was very industrious and the group selected him for the community facilitator training provided by Sahakarmi Samaj. He then joined other leadership and concept building trainings that encouraged him to think more about poor and marginalized families. After a while he was elected by his group to represent them on the Main Committee, from where he was elected to be a board member of their local CBNO, Janajagaran Samaj. JJS had just launched their RISE (Reconciliation Initiatives for Social Empowerment) programme in partnership with Sahakarmi Samaj and Ram Bahadur trained and worked as a Peace Facilitator in this programme. He worked hard and learnt a lot about working with conflict and how to facilitate meetings.

After one year he was appointed to the post of Office Assistant for JJS and several years later to that of Executive Manager and secretary to the Board. The Board is comprised of 11 people, six men and five women, from seven Main Committees, as Ram Bahadur himself had once been and meets every month, without fail. When asked about who makes the programming decisions he is very clear that the direction and issues are determined by the board members, each with direct links and accountable to the community groups, and it is his job to implement these decisions. JJS now represents the interests of 129 community groups.

Several years ago JJS built its own office, funded through contributions from 67 different NGOs, MCs, CGs and individuals. Ram now spends most days, and upwards of 12 hours per day, in the office working for poor and marginalised communities that make up the membership of JJS. But he has not forgotten the days when staff meetings were held, not in an office but in the open, sitting on the ground. He has had to struggle, along with the people, for what he believes in but has helped to make JJS what it is today, a model for other CBNOs in the district, but he claims that his learning about empowering others has not stopped. Despite the long hours at work Ram thoroughly enjoys his job and is proud of what they have been able to achieve.

Ram Bahadur Pun epitomises the empowerment process being, or having been used by Sahakarmi Samaj in almost 900 community groups across south western Nepal.



Chairman of the Board in front of the Janajagaram Samaj office in Banke.