



## Harnessing the Potential of Community Resource Persons for Mobilizing Rural People for Maximizing Mutual Benefits

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### ABSTRACT

Community resource persons are trained experts from among the community members who enjoy homophily with other members of the community and can prove to be good support for development professionals in handholding the community and persuading community to move forward even after withdrawal of the development project. Community persons are now recognized as a major human resource by several professionals and government organizations to actively engage in the development activities leading to the success of the development programs. These CRPs are named by different names in different spheres: agriculture, animal husbandry, community health, revenue, self-help groups and entrepreneurial development activities. CRPs are nation's human resources creating a silent revolution in our villages.

**Keywords:** community resource person, rural women, NRLM, SHG, rural development

### Introduction

Generally, there is always a dearth of qualified resource persons willing to work in villages for various development programmes of the government, in the sphere of agricultural and rural development. Often these resource persons are seen with suspicion as they are outsiders and it takes a long time for rapport building initially, building trust and eliciting people's participation in the development programs.

So, few innovative training professionals initiated this idea of selecting few empowered persons from among the trainees to help them in group activities and

later act as co-trainers. The trainers could identify the essential traits of motivating, mobilizing people and ease of explaining in simple terms to fellow trainees as adequate attributes to promote these best trainees as resource persons from the community. They trained them further to lead their own community. This idea caught the attention of programme designers and they could see great potential in this process and developed standard operational procedures (SOPs) and brought this idea into mainstream. Now all the government departments have their own cadres of community resource persons to help in their schemes and operations in the field.

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### Community Resource Persons

Community Resource Persons are village-level community or extension workers who support various developmental activities.

The CRP model has its roots in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh where an inventive Revenue Officer created a programme in which village youth helped families to register *sadabenami* (plain paper) transactions on a mass scale, as part of distribution and allocation of land to rural poor.

Andhra Pradesh took lead in creating cadres of community resource persons through NGOs in all development departments of state bureaucracy. A group of women community resource persons with specialization in self-help group formation & management were sent to Amethi in Rae Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh to work as CRPs in Rajeev Mahala Vikas programs.

The National Rural Livelihood Mission of the Government of India adopted concept and further developed this to mobilise women to self-help groups to undertake various livelihood activities. Many states have adopted this concept and trained women to become CRPs.

### Need for Resource Persons from the Community

The experts and resource persons coming from outside of the community are

usually met with suspicion and doubt and take long time for rapport building and garnering trust of people. So, a need is always felt for developing in-house experts from among the empowered trainees in the community.

Over the years, civil society organizations and voluntary organizations have been struggling with the uncomfortable question of how to reach a large number of citizens in many locations. There is scarcity of committed professional and resource persons for up scaling successful initiatives.

Usually, any non-government organization approach villages as outsiders. The NGO professionals come, interact with the village community, work with them only for a period of three or more years and wind up their operations and leave as the project phases out or concludes or ends. This will result in dissipation of the hard-earned results and impact of the project as no exit policy or strategy is in place or no one in the community is handed over the responsibility to continue operations.

More than the phasing out of the projects, the fundamental question has been about the community taking charge of its own developmental processes and ownership.

Kanitkar (2017) argues, “Do communities continuously remain in the mode of recipients or is there a way out when they become not just initiators of their own

developmental agenda but also become torchbearers for other communities.”

## Special Attributes of Community Resource Persons

Community resource persons are the persons coming out of communities, usually as a bye-product of development efforts of professionals working for community development. These persons – both male and female – have been identified for their accomplishments and natural traits of leading others and taking them along on the path of development. They are the epitomes of skill acquisition, collaboration, empowerment and enchantment and demonstrated their powers of building trust, motivating and leading their own communities.

Generally, the community resource persons are simple people living in the community, who are trusted and followed by others. Some of their special characteristics are:

- The community resource persons (CRPs) are local and belong to their own communities. They get easy approval from the members of the community, compared to outsiders who are unfamiliar and seen with suspicion and mistrust.

- CRPs speak the local dialect and local idiom and are easily understood and accepted.
- CRPs enjoy homophily with community members and so have great empathy as they share the same culture as their audience.
- CRPs would become great assets to development program organization as they prove to be cost-effective in yielding excellent results and lasting impact.
- CRPs can save time, energy and funds as they can complete tasks in a short period of time.
- CRPs listen actively, take initiative, get along with others easily, motivate, lead and enable others, communicate persuasively, build public opinion and enjoy support and patronage of others.

Community resource persons need to be identified and trained thoroughly so that they can be good co-trainers in capacity building of the community members for group actions.

## Creative solution

The idea of CRPs is a creative solution that believes that the poor can be the best extension workers for many communities. The idea is not just a theoretical proposition but has

been silently practiced over last several years. It is time now to celebrate this success.

In different parts of the country, women from various communities are taking the lead in sharing with other women what development means to them and what it has done to them.

A silent revolution is sweeping the country, from east to west and north to south, in hundreds of villages. The champions and torchbearers of this silent revolution are none other than hundreds of community resource persons (CRPs) building foundations of a resurgent countryside (Kanitkar, 2017).

## Different Names for CRPs in Different Development sectors

The nomenclatures are different but the spirit is the same.

- In Andhra Pradesh, *kisanmitra* for agriculture and *gopalmitra* for animal husbandry works are very popular among villagers.
- In the work of Self-Employed Women's Association ([SEWA](#)) with lakhs of women in western India, they are called *aagewans* (those who lead from the front in Gujarati). The *aagewans* have reached out to hundreds of villages in Gujarat to spread the message of self-reliance and

dignity, a task that SEWA staff on their own could not have done.

- The familiar sight of accredited social health activists (ASHAs) and *Anganwadi* (day care center) workers is another manifestation of the village-based professional spreading the messages of better nutrition and health practices among mothers and young children.
- The *pashusakhis* of UMED, Maharashtra's Rural Livelihood Mission, are village-based veterinary professionals, all women, trained by a professional agency. These *pashusakhis*, are village-based veterinary caretakers. They are selected from the community, trained intensively in the task and placed within the same community they hail from.
- There are *krishisakhis*, the women in agriculture who are spreading message of sustainable agriculture.
- There are innumerable stories of women accountants and auditors in villages, meticulously auditing transactions, keeping tabs on loan repayment and so on. They are using android and computer tablet

applications to perform the tasks efficiently.

- UMED trained more than 50 *matsyasakhis*, women resource persons to improve livelihoods in inland fisheries in Maharashtra.

Primarily CRPs are developed by local officials to get the programs and schemes running well. The CRPs are used for different schemes.

### Self-Help Group work

The CRPs educated the new SHG members about the norms of SHGs, the importance of regular and timely meetings, and regular savings and credit, book-keeping, etc. They monitored the progress.

In Maharashtra, more than 100 women (*vardhinis*) travelled from Wardha district in the east to Ratnagiri on the west coast to share the messages of the livelihood mission.

### Community Health Scheme

Community Resource Persons (CRPs) are cluster-level workers implementing the community interventions of the Uttar Pradesh Technical Support Unit on reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health (RMNCH+A) interventions in Uttar Pradesh.

### Biodiversity Management

Community resource persons are trained and used for Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) in Tamil Nadu. The women are trained to make regular records of

biodiversity data and teach people understand the value of biodiversity conservation in their agroecosystems.

### Agriculture & Animal Husbandry

The Tamil Nadu State Rural Livelihood Mission (TNSRLM) has created a pool of resource persons under various themes such as agriculture, animal husbandry etc. CRPs are categorised master trainers, and resource persons who will conduct training at state, districts and blocks. There are hundreds of women in the CRP networks in Tamil Nadu.

A Chhattisgarh woman can be more credible in telling her neighboring villagers the benefits of improved rice cultivation as propagated through the System of Rice Intensification (SRI). No wonder the SRI revolution has caught up the imagination of farmers across the central India that has led to significant improvement in productivity and reduction in costs.

### Opening new frontiers

The work of CRPs is not just limited to forming women's groups but expanding to cover new sectors. Hundreds of women are now venturing into territories that were otherwise seen as taboo and or male bastions. The contribution of these silent professionals has been manifold. Firstly, they have ensured last-mile connectivity. There are scores of instances where CRPs have travelled to far corners of Telengana, Jharkhand and

Jammu and Kashmir as a part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission. The CRPs, with their sheer hard work, dedication and self-experience, persuaded local women to join in the SHG movement, form groups, start savings and begin a journey of self-development.

Secondly, the fact that a woman is sharing her life story with another woman has brought credibility to the process of development.

Thirdly and most importantly, the CRP movement has broken the barriers imposed by the stereotypes and patriarchal beliefs long cherished by the society. Why can't a village woman use software to calculate the interest spread and portfolio at risk (PAR) on the loan that is outstanding for her federation? Why cannot a woman tell the difference between organic farming practices? There are innumerable examples that illustrate the breaking of the norms that prevented girls and women from performing tasks that are considered to be only men's prerogative.

### **Our responsibility**

The CRPs and their contribution need to be recognized. Their work and participation need to be seen with appreciation. They are performing a herculean task in their local context and that deserves a certain reward.

Lastly, they are not just CRPs. If the country has to bridge the divide between shining and deprived India, the community resource

persons are the country's resource persons. These are our most critical human capacity ushering in changes in all parts of the country, at the last mile.

The greatest strength of today's India is its human resources and they need to be utilized for harnessing their potential for transforming India with maximum impact.

*One of the biggest strengths of India as an emerging super power in the new millennium is the high percentage of youth in the population as compared to countries like China. These young people can play a huge role in shaping their country's destiny.*

(APJ Abdul Kalam, Former President of India)

### **CONCLUSION**

A qualified resource person coming from the community is always a great asset to any development program, service organization and community as the community resource person enjoys the confidence and patronage of the community members and can perform the development tasks with great ease and efficiency. CRPs can save time and energy for performing tasks. CRPs are credible, empathetic and can motivate, mobilize and lead communities. Hence, community resource persons need to be identified, trained and empowered to lead the communities for self-help groups, entrepreneurship development,

adult education, agricultural and dairy development, rural development, agroforestry, gender sensitization and mainstreaming, social justice.

## REFERENCES

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