

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

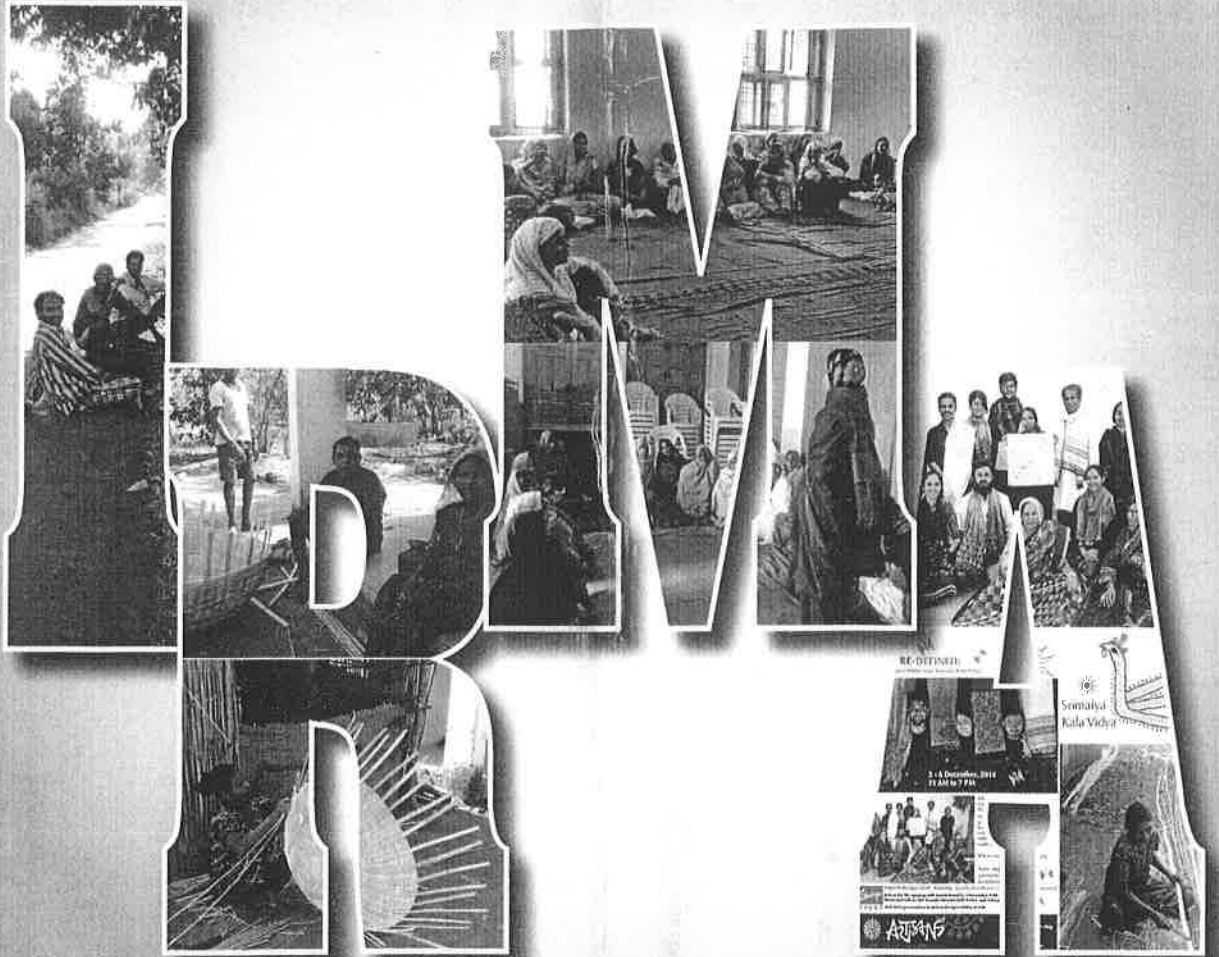
Network

Quar

October-December 2014

Vol. 18 • No. 4

INDIA
STAGE
₹ 7.00
10706



IRMA
सि एमएल एम आनंद
Institute of Rural Management Anand

A flash lesson in management

A former IRMAN gains the experience of a lifetime inside a village meeting room

Wading through dew-filled mustard fields in the rugged Mewat region of Haryana my mind was drenched with random thoughts. Shivering in the cold and fumbling through the zero visibility cottony fog I was trying to get to a meeting of women collectives, known as Mahila Sangathans, as fast as possible, which was a near impossible feat given the inclement conditions. As an employee of the SM Sehgal Foundation, a Gurgaon-based NGO working for women's empowerment, good governance, and improved agriculture and water management in villages, I had my work cut out for me.

The Sangathans, formed in all five blocks of the Mewat districts, comprise women members from

three major village institutions- the Panchayat, School Management Committee, and the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee. These Sangathans are platforms on which women members emerge from their villages to air their views. Congregating at the block level they discuss problems besetting their villages and, aided by Foundation conducted training, arrive at solutions collectively.

All through my (seemingly) unending trek words like 'sustenance' and 'sustainability' kept bouncing off my brain. Words that I had been hearing of late, almost recurringly. Absently picking my way through the aromatic mustard stalks I found myself thinking of the projects

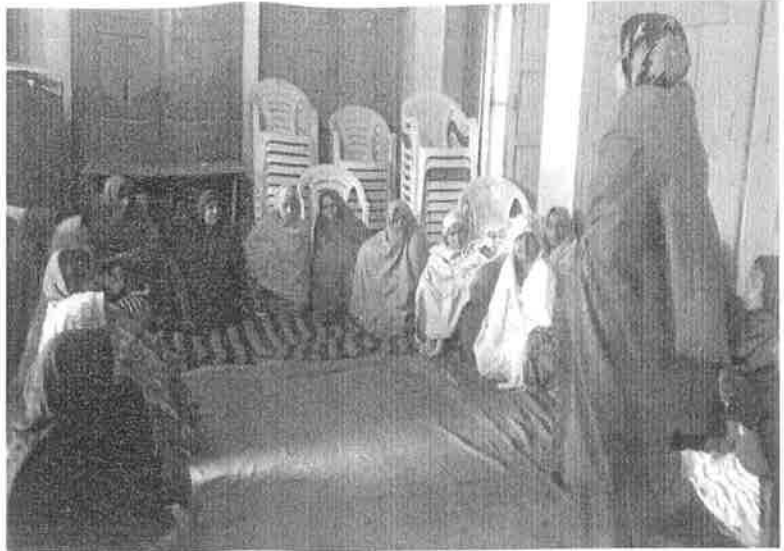


What is the point of sustainability? Why transfer ownership to the community when there is a risk involved? Was handholding support to the rural community on an enduring basis such a bad idea, given that the 'social sector' has been thriving on the development of the rural community?

my organization was involved with and their sheer magnitude. The steps involved in each project included planning, implementing, strategizing, and budgeting. Topping it all was the herculean task of ensuring project sustainability while handing over ownership to

the community. Many a social organization has painstakingly built a structure to have it go defunct once support and services were withdrawn post project conclusion.

This mesh of thoughts made some awry lobe of my brain go active so that I began to obsess about certain questions- What is the point of sustainability? Why transfer ownership to the community when there is a risk involved? Was handholding support to the rural community on an enduring basis such a bad idea, given that the 'social sector' has been thriving on the development of the rural community? I began mulling over the question of funding, whether fund deficit could ever exist in reality given that donors, philanthropists, and the government have been infusing money for social good.



One Mewat woman enlightening the others

Few things move faster than thoughts and I soon found myself thinking of the women of Mewat, the district that has remained backward and undeveloped for a long time. I was wondering if these women would ever become so empowered as to take up political and leadership roles actively and become sufficiently enabled to avail all the government services.

Collecting my erratic thoughts I reached the meeting place where the agenda involved familiarizing the women with the Swachh Bharat Mission and promoting toilet construction as stipulated under the guidelines of the scheme. While the meeting was a run-of-the-mill kind it was the subsequent discussion that left me breathless. From a trainer-cum-facilitator I was reduced to being a mere observer. No sooner

had one woman began voicing the problems of her village than the air began brimming with feminine voices sounding out probable solutions from real-life instances.

Soon a woman got up complaining about the paucity of toilets in her village and the difficulty of convincing the people regarding building them. City-bred and educated I was preparing to cite lack of motivation while mouthing the following words, "Talk to your fellow villagers and tell them about the advantages of the new scheme". But the words were taken away from me when another woman from the other side of the group shot back, "Do you have a toilet in your house?" to which the first woman replied 'No'. Just one simple interjection that sent the feminine cosmos inside the venue bristling. From the avalanche of solutions emerged a voice: "The change should first come from you. If you cannot convince your family members to build a toilet in your home how will you promote it positively among others?" Silence pulsated inside the room for a fraction of a second.

As for me, the muscles around my neck relaxed for the first time since

that morning. The wave of turbulence in my head became tranquil somewhat. Some of my questions were being answered right there. I, who had come to 'empower' these women at the meeting, realized that my role was being diminished; these women were competent enough on their own.

The incident I have cited is a small one, no doubt, but enough to grant me seminal hope with regard to the empowerment I had hoped to bring about in the community. My questions, too, had changed from "Why sustainability" to answers like "Because it is a joyful moment and a satisfying feeling when the community performs on its own".

The bottom line was the biggest learning of that day: "The change should first come from you". Undoubtedly, it will remain etched in my memory forever. People in big cities learn these lessons in psychology classes and meditation centres. Call it the perks of my profession; I learnt it in that small meeting room in a small village.

*By: Shruti Kapoor (PRM 33)
Assistant Program Leader,
Capacity Building*

*S M Sehgal Foundation, Gurgaon
Email: kapoorshruti55@gmail.com*

From the avalanche of solutions emerged a voice: "The change should first come from you. If you cannot convince your family members to build a toilet in your home how will you promote it positively among others?"