

Leaving no one behind

The BRSSS story

The story of the Backward Regions Scheme Support Sangha (BRSSS), a community based organisation, empowering people in a hundred villages from the most backwards regions of North Karnataka, India.

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Rural Literacy & Health Programme (RLHP)
No. 343, 2nd Stage, Gayathripuram, Udayagiri Post,
Mysuru - 570 019, Tel: 0821 - 2451216,
E-Mail: rlhp@bsnl.in, Web: www.rlhpmysuru.org

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Leaving no one behind: The BRSSS story

Empowering people in 100 villages from the most backward regions in North Karnataka, India

Overview

The project

Empowering people in five backward districts of Karnataka to access the public schemes is a project to increase and improve the access, delivery and quality of public services aimed at reducing poverty and social exclusion in Bidar, Chitradurga, Davanagere, Gulbarga (now Kalaburgi) and Raichur districts of Karnataka. The programme was implemented from February 2014 to January 2018 to help local authorities and service providers to increase and improve access to information and public schemes and initiatives in the five districts – classified as ‘backward’ – up to the village level in the entire cycle of planning, budgeting, implementation, control and evaluation. The project aims to work with key stakeholders on a multi–sectoral level to address the issue of poor access to public schemes in the five districts.

The project was to leverage the learning from grassroots activities in the five districts through policy advocacy, district and state level consultations and a social audit. To achieve its goal, the project has a threefold strategy of (a) Increasing awareness among the target communities about the targeted health, education and livelihood schemes through analysis and training of project staff on targeted schemes, mass awareness programmes, base line survey, final client satisfaction survey, revitalisation of targeted schemes’ civil society reference groups at village level, training on using the right to information (RTI) and schemes functioning. and mass awareness programmes on RTI and schemes functioning; (b) Strengthening links and accountability between stakeholders of health, education and livelihood schemes through formation of Backward Region Schemes Support Groups (BRSSG) at grama panchayat and taluk level with

vulnerability focus, development of linking systems and systems of downward, horizontal, mutual and upward accountability between BRSSG and targeted schemes, skills building of BRSSGs and (c) Improving governance of targeted schemes for targeted districts through stakeholders' participatory meeting for operation of targeted schemes, demand driven skills building of panchayat raj institutions (PRI, local government) at grama panchayat and taluk level, social audit, systematisation and dissemination of project experience. The programme specifically focusses on inclusion of the socially vulnerable sections and socially excluded communities, especially women and backward classes.

The aim of the project was to address the regional imbalances in development, bridging critical gaps in local infrastructure, by strengthening the local government institutions in the five districts.

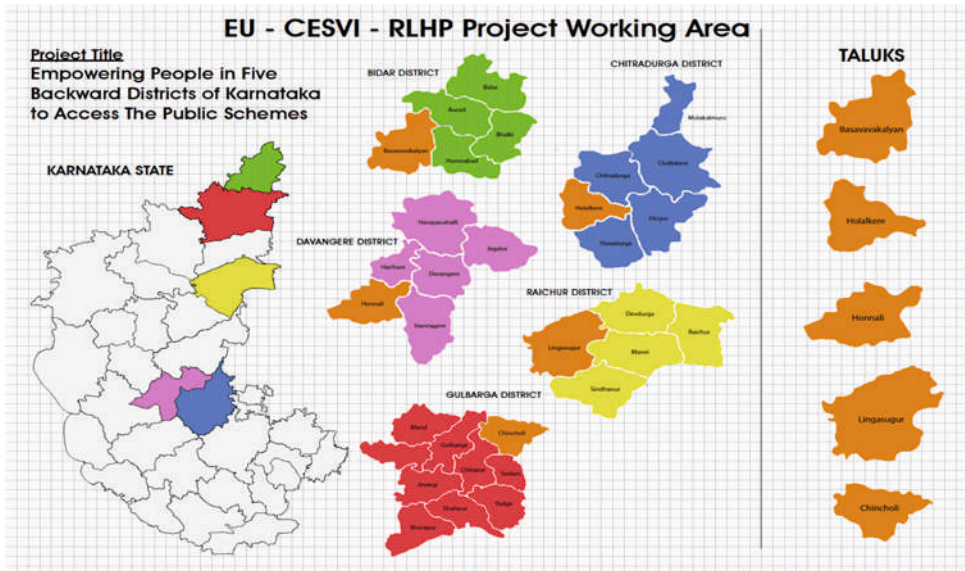
Engaging at three levels the project covered:

- 150,000 community members: Adults: 54,920; Women: 52,700; Youth: 25,000; Children: 17,380.
- 100 local government members: Elected representatives and civil servants.
- 200 other stakeholders: Backward Region Grants Fund (BRGF) monitoring committee members, NGOs, media, district and state level authorities.
- 100 villages: 20 villages of one taluk in each of the five districts.

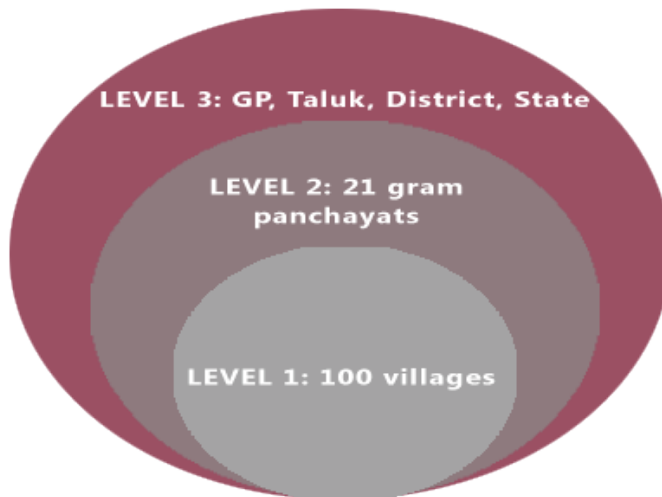
Life before the BRSSS

I didn't know about MGNREGA Scheme. I thought that it is only for the gram panchayat members, and that only they can take the benefit under this scheme. Our community people also were not ready to raise their voice against the landlord. We were afraid to ask the panchayat for jobs. When our accounts were credited with some money, we gave it to the landlord.

-Mr. Durgappa, Kalapur village, Livelihood Committee Chief of BRSSS



Multi-level capacity building for centrally sponsored schemes



Expected results at each level

Level-1: Awareness in 100 rural villages.

Level-2: Linking Accountability and skills in 21 grama panchayats.

Level-3: Skill development and replication at grama panchayats, taluk, district and state level with local agency and stakeholders.

The facilitators

The programme was led by CESVI, implemented by the Rural Literacy and Health Programme (RLHP) and supported by the European Union (EU).

The European Union

The project is one of the 14 Actions awarded by the European Union (EU) under the initiative, *Improving access to information of public schemes in backward districts in India* within the EU thematic programme *Non-State Actors and Local Authorities (LA) in Development* whose main goal is supporting civil societies and local authorities in partnering for more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes. In line with the EU programme goal, and in consideration of the commitments taken by the Government of India in the Twelfth Five Year Plan, the EU call supports actions *meant to increase and improve the access, delivery and quality of public services for reducing poverty and social exclusion*. The thematic programme is specifically to help local authorities and service providers in backward districts to increase and improve access to information of public schemes and fulfil their rights and entitlements throughout the planning, budgeting, implementation and evaluation continuum.

CESVI: Cooperation and Development

CESVI, established in 1985 in Italy, is a secular, independent association working globally for global solidarity. CESVI recognises the needs and aspirations of local communities and respects their traditions, customs and culture by working impartially for their needs without distinction of sex, race, caste, culture or creed. CESVI's interventions focus mainly on health, childhood protection and promotion, water and sanitation, environment and sustainable development. CESVI also intervenes with humanitarian aid and responds to human-made and natural disasters. CESVI has experience of partnerships with various donors and implementing organisations in India.

RLHP: Rural Literacy and Health Programme

The Rural Literacy and Health Programme (RLHP), based in Mysuru, works to empower the marginalised in urban and rural

areas (slums and villages), especially vulnerable children and others affected by natural calamities and climate changes. It helps them respond to the challenges of growing poverty and rights violations through collective action leading to sustainable development and self-reliance. Through its experience over the years from the urban project in Mysuru, RLHP has extensive knowledge, experience and learnings on community development, about organising and creating local institutions for and by the local community. This experience is the reason for successful extension of work to cover the selected communities in the villages of the five 'backward' districts in Karnataka.

CESVI and RLHP had worked together in the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami. Carrying forward the partnership, CESVI and RLHP initiated the project in the backward districts of Karnataka in 2013.

Why this handbook?

This handbook traces the BRSSS model, detailing the major tasks required to embed success and create systems of sustainability. It highlights the milestones in the formation of BRSSS in the course of the project. It is a story of the challenges and the rewards of a participatory approach as a way of working with poor and backward communities, for effective participation of vulnerable people and women. It encapsulates the path to good governance and improved utilisation of the state social security schemes by organising the community, embedding knowledge, developing leadership skills, and building their confidence by establishing relationships with decision makers.

The handbook is to make available the model, the process, methodologies and mechanisms and the learning to a wider group of stakeholders—civil society groups, government, donors and the communities themselves—so that it can be replicated. While the contexts would differ, key components of the model and process can be strategically adapted to match local specificities. It is our hope that the learnings will help others build their own models for empowerment.

From BRSSG to BRSSS

A snapshot

"Four years down the line, through this intervention, the community in these 100 villages have been able to access direct benefits of approximately Rs 20 crores (Rs 200 million). The important part of this model is embedding sustainable attitudes, skills and organisation within the community to create more awareness, more skills, more demand and engagement with government departments. The BRSSS model, which links the community through its leaders from the village, grama panchayat, taluk, district and now at the state level is key to this intervention."

-Alli Basker-India Country Representative, CESVI

The Backward Region Scheme Support Group (BRSSG) – which was later formalised as the Backward Region Scheme Support Sangha (BRSSS) – is a village level leaders' community based organisation developed during this intervention instilling community ownership, creating a forum of leaders with clear roles and responsibilities. The 10 member group has five women and five men, drawn from different formal and informal community leadership positions.

Regular mass contact programmes (MCPs) were organised to engage with the community to access government social security schemes. The MCPs increased the visibility and social acceptance of leadership within the community and with the authorities. The interaction of the leadership with other stakeholders and decision makers is important to ensure the sustainability of the process and the people's organisation.

The process involved engaging, understanding, mobilising, educating/training and empowering, institutionalising and socialisation of local leadership by forming the BRSSGs at village, panchayat, taluk, district and state levels to sustain the process and results beyond the project period.

Its core strategy was to mobilise village communities to individually and collectively redress the extreme backwardness in Bidar, Chitradurga, Davanagere, Gulbarga and Raichur districts

of Karnataka by bridging critical gaps in local infrastructure and strengthening PRIs. Within this there have been efforts to build awareness, skills and confidence, increase community linkages and maximise the use of government funds and services by creating a demand system based on an aware, empowered group of citizens.

"From receiving the Bhagyalakshmi bonds to the construction of pucca houses, reopening of health centres, reducing misuse of rations coming in for anganawadis, pensions for senior citizens, assertion and demand for transparency through use of RTI, village infrastructure, benefits to people have come under different schemes. Continuity and sustainability were two key components built into the design of this project"

– Saraswathi, Deputy Project Manager.

The timeline

- 2014: Establishing village level BRSSG.
- 2015: Establishing BRSSG at the grama panchayat.
- 2016: Establishing BRSSG at the taluk level.
- May 2017: Registration of BRSSS at the district level.
- September 2017: Formation of BRSSS state committee.

The process

January to June 2014:

Building an area profile, establishing community contact

- Baseline survey in the five BRGF districts.
- Analysis of existing schemes.
- Analysis of the village structures.
- Village and home visits.
- Village level meetings with communities and existing groups.
- Formation of children and youth groups.

Motivation to join BRSSS-Making contact, instilling confidence

When RLHP came to my village and conducted a women's meeting and explained the objectives of the project, I thought no one really cares about our village, but let's see! They came again three days later and explained the BRSSG concept of village development, that's when I joined as a member.

-Ms.Shivamangala, Basavakalyana Taluk, Bidar

Building an area profile, establishing community contact



In partnership with the community and the Government



April to June 2014:

Sharing the BRSSG concept and enlisting support

- Sensitising the community
- Identifying leaders open to learning.
- Identifying those with motivation and commitment to the community.
- Selection of BRSSG members from existing structures for monitoring schemes.
- Establishing the village level BRSSG.



Sensitising the public



May to December 2014:

Mass mobilisation through awareness and forging linkages.

- Group formation and confirmation including men, women from vulnerable communities.
- Organising trainings.
- Establishing upward, downward, horizontal linkages with the system.
- Mass awareness programmes (MAP) using IEC materials.



Forging links between the community and the Government

Impact- Mass awareness programme

After attending the mass awareness programme organised by RLHP, I came back home and discussed with my family about the information I received there regarding the MGNREGA job cards. We decided that night that we should apply for it. The very next day I approached the BRSSS member Hanamanth and sought his help, filled up the application form and submitted it to the grama panchayat office. After 45 days we received the job cards.

-Shashidhar Kumar, Community Member,
Anioli Village, Anioli Panchayat, Gulbarga



Mass awareness through campaigns and group formation



**January 2015 onwards:
Deepening leadership through skill building and promoting good governance.**

- Linking PRIs/ systems with BRSSS members.
- Continue training on schemes, RTI and monitoring on, and advocacy for, the selected schemes.
- Organising mass awareness programmes and mass contact programmes (MCP).



Linking the panchayat services with community needs

Impact – RTI

During the mass contact programme organised by RLHP, I received information as to how the Right to Information Act can be used.

Using this knowledge, I immediately submitted an RTI application to the State information Commissioner, Karnataka for my long pending salary from the Panchayat Raj department. After 30 days I received a positive reply from them and my 30 months' salary was paid to me.

-Eshwarappa, Halenahalli Village, Uppereganahalli Panchayat, Chitradurga



Capacity building and training



January to December 2016:

Developing the village community, demanding entitlements.

- Biannual meetings.
- Organising application mela and international women's day.



January to December 2017:

From BRSSG to BRSSS—Institutionalising and socialising.

- Workshop to elicit members' view's on continuing and sustaining BRSSG/S.
- Registering BRSSG as BRSSS under Karnataka Societies Registration Act 1960.
- Electing office bearers for a two year term.

Action planning and future way.

- State level conference with stakeholders to introduce the BRSSS model to state level functionaries.
- State level conference with national delegates to share the BRSSS experience.



Partnering means progress

I work closely with the grama panchayat president and with RLHP in addressing the issues related to the panchayat. Together we want to make Partapur Panchayat a model panchayat. As a PDO I have responded to, and supported, all the requests possible from the panchayat, including all schemes like MGNREGA, SBM, drinking water, job cards and others. Formation of BRSSG is the greatest strength and achievement of this project. RLHP should encourage the grama panchayat, BRSSG and also all PDOs in the taluk to work together, so we can make more progress.

PDO, Partapur Panchayat, Basavakalyan Taluk, Bidar District

The team and stakeholders



Work in progress: Incremental results

Being at subsistence levels meant that the staying power of the community was limited. They needed tangible gains in the short term. This was important since their timespan for effort and effect is short. The project planned for this by mobilising resources for the community through intensive training for the community and BRSSG members and helping them in the assertion of their rights. Fulfilling their immediate needs within their limited timespan was an important contributor in retaining their interest and sustaining their involvement. Once they saw that their immediate needs were fulfilled, they became confident enough to take on issues that would take longer to be resolved.

Given below is a snapshot of the pattern of progress of five villages, one from each district, as recounted by the district teams and leaders. It gives an understanding of the impact of the project in these villages, and how the vision has translated on the ground.

Year 1: 2014

Year 1: Developments in 2014		
District	Initiated in	Meetings, establishing BRSSS, and Baseline
Janapur, Bidar	April–May 2014: The project was initiated with meetings and training.	Meetings with the SHG, women's and youth groups, SDMC, balavikas children and public meetings
Gollarahalli, Chitradurga	2014: At the beginning of the project, RLHP met with the community leaders and grama panchayat members and RLHP's work was explained to them.	Meetings were conducted with senior citizens, youth, women, children and the general public.

Guddehalli, Davanagere	May 2014: Met the community leaders, grama panchayat members and introduced the project.	Initially there was lack of information about government schemes. After the meeting the people knew about the government schemes and how to access them.
Hudadalli, Gulbarga	Meetings started from April to June 2014 with the village.	Public meetings were conducted. Meetings were also held with the SHG, SDMC, local government, women, youth, and children.
Kalapur, Raichur	In May 2014 awareness programmes were conducted for ASHAs, anganawadi teachers, literacy inspector, and PRIs.	People got information about schemes and how to access their rights. Meetings were held with SHGs, public, youth, and women groups. There were meetings at the village level with the BRSSS, PRI, SDMC and children.

Motivation to join BRSSS-New possibilities

Earlier I did not like coming outside as I did not know about the panchayat system or a president's roles and responsibilities. My husband was not very supportive. Once I joined as a BRSSG member, my expectation was to know the Panchayat Act and budget allocation of the schemes so that I could help my community.

As President, I am now in a position to take decisions and provide basic facilities to the community like water, CC Road, and toilet facilities under SBM. Now I am dreaming that my village becomes free from open defecation within my term.

-Grama Panchayat President Mrs. Radamma,
Masadi Grama Panchayat, Davanagere District.

Impact- Awareness programme

The community have got a lot of information about government schemes due to the RLHP intervention. Now the community members visit the taluk panchayat in case of any grievance.

-Babu Rao Rathod, Executive Officer, Raichur

Year 2: 2015

By the end of year 2, people could see tangible changes in their life.

Developments from year 2 (2015) when changes started showing in people's lives					
	Janapur, Bidar	Gollarahalli, Chitradurga	Guddehalli, Davanagere	Hudadalli, Gulbarga	Kalapur, Raichur
Children	Five school dropouts were re-enrolled; there was an increase in the class attendance (2015).	Most children went to school (2015). They are interested to attend the public meetings & also get scholarship. Some go for daily wage labour.	Child dropouts were admitted to school in March 2015.	On 14 November 2015 committees were formed for midday meals and school environment. The children's was also formed.	All children in the age group 6 – 14 were enrolled in school as part of compulsory education (2015).
Young girls		In February, the community got knowledge about personal hygiene and government benefits. They came up with several good ideas for progress (2016).	In March 2015 individual aspirations tangibly increased. They are thinking of employment.	On 10 December there is more awareness about health and hygiene (2015).	There were programmes on elimination of child marriage and education (2015).
Young boys	The thinking of the boys have changed. They now think about the development of their villages.	They are now stopping alcohol abuse and promoting working under MGNREGA. They are showing interest to change their village and get government benefits'(December 2016)	March 2015 They have started to think beyond the immediate and also about self-employment.	On 12 August 2015 the youth group was formed.	Started getting government schemes. Started to serve the community and the family (2015).
Men	The attitude of men towards the staff and towards the village development has changed for the better.	They got jobs under MGNREGA schemes. They took the initiative to stop alcoholism (April 2017).	Participation level in programmes has increased (March 2015).	3 August 2015 They identified issues facing the village and showed interest in enhancing their livelihood.	The level of thinking has been improved.

	Janapur, Bidar	Gollarahalli, Chitradurga	Guddehal- li, Davana- gere	Hudadalli, Gulbarga	Kalapur, Raichur
Women	Women elected as panchayat members, and also getting job under MGN-REGA.	They know their rights and come forward to get entitlements such as ration card, job card, pensions, ICDS facility (March 2017).	Participation level increased (March 2015).	29 July 2015 Empowering women's through SHG group.	29 July 2015 Empowering women's through SHG group.
Senior citizens	The seniors are getting pensions, and bus pass facilities.	They became aware of old age pensions and get the benefits for their parents (December 2016)	They got old age pension and other social security schemes (March 2015)	They made ID cards, Senior citizen cards, and applied for monthly pension (25 Aug 2015)	Eradication of superstitious belief (2015)

Year 3: 2016 onwards

During the project implementation, one of the most visible aspects of progress at the village level has been an increase in the quality and extent of village infrastructure and services. This very tangible aspect has helped in bringing people together and building stronger bonds of cooperation across caste, religion and gender.

BRSSS- Instilling pride in community work

I became a BRSSG member in 2014 and a grama panchayat member in 2015. I attended trainings without fail. On gaining the knowledge about the schemes and ways to solve the village problems, I could solve the drainage issue, get the CC road laid, install streetlights and support farmers by getting MGNREGA work to build a check dam and bunding work. Now I not only try to solve my ward problems but also extend my support to create awareness in the neighbouring village. I am very proud of my work, also more proud when community people appreciate my work and when government officials first approach me to discuss village issues.

-Mrs. Savita, Gramapanchayat member and grama panchayat level BRSSS member

Asserting the right to infrastructure and services: Year 3 (2016) onwards					
Change in the village infrastructure					
	Janapur, Bidar	Gollarahalli, Chitradurga	Guddehalli, Davanagere	Hudadalli, Gulbarga	Kalapur, Raichur
Drinking water	Have installed individual taps in every house and a mini water tank was installed (2016).	All houses got individual water taps(December 2016).	They got the facility through BRSSS members (May 2016). taps(December 2016).	Two bore wellswere sunk and the drinking water facility was repaired (18 July 2015).	Facilities are available (2016).
Road	10 CC roads were laid.	After the mass contact programme the panchayat provided drainage facilities (March 2017).	Got roads through the nammahalli nammaraaste scheme (May 2016).	Ongoing process	Facilities are available (2016).
Drainage	Eight places in the village got drainage system.	After the mass contact programme the panchayat provided drainage facilities (March 2017).	Facilities are available (2016).	Ongoing process	Facilities are available (2016).
Housing and toilets	Out of 226 houses in the village, 158 toilets were constructed.	23 houses constructed. Toilets were sanctioned for five houses (March 2017).	In 95% of the houses toilets were completed	20 individual toilets constructed through the intervention of BRSSS (2017).	Facilities are available 2017

Total sanitation for health

Though I was a BRSSS member, I failed to come out of the practice of open defecation for a long time – despite facing a lot of health issues. However, after attending many trainings, I submitted an application to the gram panchayat under TSC for the toilet construction. However, the process was delayed. After a recent training, I received information about the follow up mechanisms and the pressure to be built to get sanction. After following up my application was sanctioned. I received Rs.15,000 with which the toilet was constructed. Now I am sharing the information with the other community members.

-Ms. Heera, BRSSS member, Bhoglingadalli Thanda, Ainnoli Panchayat, Gulbarga

Asserting the right to infrastructure and services: Year 3 (2016) onwards
Change in the village services

	Janapur, Bidar	Gollarahalli, Chitradurga	Guddehalli, Davanagere	Hudadalli, Gulbarga	Kalapur, Raichur
School	In this village, there is a Marathi Medium School. Children regularly attend classes. Midday meal is provided.	The school building was renovated, basic facilities provided. All nine teachers come to school in time (November 2016).	School building, toilets, SDMC committee, parents meetings were conducted through RLHP intervention and programme.	SDMC formation, compound wall and toilet were constructed. Trees were planted in the school grounds (17 November 2015).	Facilities are available .
Anganawadi	Anganawadi functioned properly. Children were provided with food, milk and eggs. Their health was good.	The anganawadi functioned according to norms.	Facilities are available .	Food was not provided for 15yrs. After interaction, the anganawadi regularly opened and food was provided. Plates and glasses were donated (03 August 2015).	Anganawadi provided good nutritious food..
PDS (ration shop)	The people started getting rations properly				
Panchayat	Not responsive to the village issues, not providing jobs, bills are not passed on time, panchayat staff or member demanding money for constructing house.	Panchayat has provide good service, 60% coverage of drainage, water, house (2017)			PRI meeting was conducted and the grama sabha met.

Asserting the right to infrastructure and services: Year 3 (2016) onwards					
Change in livelihood					
	Janapur, Bidar	Gollarahalli, Chitradurga	Guddehalli, Davanagere	Hudadalli, Gulbarga	Kalapur, Raichur
Wages	In this village, there is a Marathi Medium School. Children regularly attend classes. Midday meal is provided.	Wages have increased under MGNREGA. Consequently, daily wages have gradually increased.	Some people got work under the MGNREGA schemes.	The wages are increased under MGNREGA and so daily wages gradually increased.	Change in MGNREGA wages and daily wages.
Agriculture	Earning more due to use of technology; and also adopting irrigation.	.	Earning more due to use of technology; and also adopting irrigation.	Dry land to wet-land agriculture.	Increase in agricultural productivity and change in technology.
Others	But for Dalits, most families have one person. employed in government.		Other than Dalits, most families have one government job	Sheep rearing & animal husbandry	

Ms Shivamangala, Basavakalyana Taluk, Bidar District

As a BRSSS Member I get knowledge about schemes like MGNREGA and SBM, how to apply, the method to approach if they oppose, further level of action, and legal information. I could create awareness in my SC (Dalit) village about MGNREGA Scheme and benefits. And then together we filled the form (number 1) for getting job cards and submitted them to the panchayat.

After 20 days we got the job card. Then which we approached the gram panchayat and submitted another form (number 6– application for work). After follow up with the support of the RLHP team, we got 20 days' work for village lake desilting. One month after the work was completed we received the salary and so all the people were very happy. Our people appreciated my work since each family received Rs 4,480. After this they started showing interest in what I had to say. Now we are solving the issues of our community one by one. The panchayat president and PDO also know me. By being a BRSSS member, I gained knowledge of schemes with which I serve my village.

My dream is to make mine a model village like Hiware Bazar so that everybody will come to my village to see the development and it will be known even at the state level.

The pillars of success

Pillar 1: Clarity

Clarity of vision

A vision of what is to be accomplished is an important factor in achieving it. It is equally important that the community themselves internalise this vision, so that they work towards it. The following quotes from the community show the extent to which they have reflected on the new path they were on.

"The village as a unit is important because of the people living together. Sharing a bond of caring for the village and for each other can help to build sufficient resources towards the self-sustenance of the village."

"In a situation where the village has scarce resources, frequent migration, continuous drought conditions and other related issues, it is important for the village to be transformed into a model by developing a good environment—natural and human—where all communities can live in unity with rights based community development."

"The situation can be changed with a vision, community action and cooperation. There will be sufficient resources for the sustenance of all. We have the potential to transform our villages into model villages by making use of the government services through the BRSSS."

The expected outcome has to be clear, unambiguous and achievable in the time frame. In this case they were:

- Increase in awareness among the target communities about the Backward Region Grants Fund (BRGF) schemes and allocations for their specific villages.
- Leadership and assertion of rights by those who are left out.
- Utilisation of four poverty alleviation schemes pertaining to BRGF: The target was to ensure 80% utilisation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee

Act (MGNREGA), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana(SGSY), National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC).

- Effective governance of centrally sponsored schemes for selected BRGF districts.

Clarity of strategy

The strategy included:

- Development by linking systems across and upward/downward for accountability between the BRSSS and those administering the schemes.
- Building skills of the members of the BRSSS according to a predetermined skillset; and simultaneously providing skills on demand basis as the need for additional skills became apparent.
- Facilitating participation of stakeholders of PRI at grama panchayat and taluk levels.

Clarity of methodology: How will it be crafted?

The vision needs a clear methodology for implementation. These would need to be matched to the specific outcomes. In the case of this project they were:

- Baseline survey.
- Mass awareness programmes (MAP).
- Formation of BRGF monitoring committees.
- Establishing stakeholder support group.
- District and state level consultations.
- Constant monitoring and review of impact.
- Social audit.

Clarity of roles: Who performs the key functions?

A clear system to support implementation, coordination and monitoring needs to be set up. The clarity of roles is essential to plan the skills required by each actor, and to plan for capacity building if the skills are not already present.

In this project it involved

- Project Management Unit (PMU) to manage and coordinate the action, implemented through the action implementation team. The PMU led was by the project manager and consisted of partners—expert representing stakeholder interest, a general administrator and a project coordinator.
- Project Advisory Units (PAU): The PAU comprised of the associates' representatives and relevant PRIs at different levels.
- Implementation team comprised of the regional team (community mobilizers and coordinators), and the BRSSG members.

The PMU met at least quarterly (and more when required) for the overall coordination and management. The PAU met at least biannually (and more as required) with the PAU to inform on progress, revise the action plans, and share decisions.

Given the multilevel distribution of the stakeholders, the meetings between the units was decentralised, using the offices of the local authorities as venues whenever possible. The regional teams were located at the taluk headquarters to coordinate work at the village, grama panchayat and taluk level in each district, while the main responsibility of coordination was done by the central team of RLHP.

Clarity on sustainability

An important part of the vision was clarity on sustaining the process, and what that sustainability meant. Planning for sustainability within the scope of the project, and incorporation of such plans into the project design, is an essential factor for the continued success of the project. If it were absent, it could lead to reversion to type at best or backlash at worst—neither of which is a desired outcome. By end of the project the objective was to make the BRSSS a community institution so that the efforts of the four years would be sustained. For this, the BRSSS was strengthened sufficiently to continue its interaction with the state mechanisms, monitor the functioning of PRIs as per the guidelines and hold the local government accountable through social audits.

Activating the panchayats for good governance

Grama Sabha: 2014



Grama Sabha: 2017



In this model sustainability is addressed at three levels:

- *Financial sustainability:* BRSSS members from the village level to district level are clear from the initiation of the project that there will be no additional support beyond the project period. The model is based on 'no cash transfers',but investment in a high level of community participation and ownership building.
- *Institutional sustainability:* BRSSS is a community based group owned by people, involving local people and membership is based on their active involvement/leadership for the development of their villages. This has led to not only individuals benefitting from the schemes; it has also enhanced their self-belief and resolve to fight collectively for self-improvement and collective development of the backward region as a whole.
- *Policy level sustainability:* At the policy level the larger issue of inclusion of vulnerable people will remain and this will not change irrespective of government or political party in power at the centre or state. These central schemes are incorporated in the budget of the Government of India and legislated by parliament. Therefore, it is legally binding on both the central and state governments to be accountable to and strengthen the PRI institutions and in turn hold them accountable for good governance and development.

Comments on sustainability of the intervention: What can be sustained? Why?		
1.	Janapur, Bidar	RTI and ICDS will be sustained as the scheme won't be changed. Also, the community is aware of the schemes, and have gained knowledge on accessing it.
2.	Gollarahalli, Chitradurga	Children are aware about their rights and they are going to school. The school is clean, well maintained and disciplined. MGNREGA, BRSSS, school, panchayat, anganawadi and toilet facilities will be sustained due to community awareness and BRSSS participation in the samitis and committees.

Comments on sustainability of the intervention: What can be sustained? Why?		
3.	Guddehalli, Davanagere	MGNREGA, BRSSS, school, panchayat, anganawadi, and the toilet facilities will be sustained as there is community participation with BRSSS members.
4.	Hudadalli, Gulbarga	SBM, SDMC, MDM, water, anganawadi, road, drinking water, individual toilets, good maintenance of health, good SDMC and midday meal will sustain. Proper roads and water pipeline were constructed. It will sustain because the community and BRSSS members have assumed responsibility.
5.	Kalapur, Raichur	School, MGNREGA, RTE, and SDMC will sustain. People have got right information through trainings, awareness level has been increased and transparency is high.

The BRSSS is expected to make a difference in the lives of the poor and secure their basic rights by:

- Increasing access to public services.
- Improving quality of public services.
- Enhanced transparency in governance and accountability.
- Sustained the initiatives by the communities themselves through a legally formed institutional mechanism.

I work closely with grama panchayat president and also with RLHP in addressing all the issues related to the panchayat. We want to make Partapur Panchayat a model panchayat together. As a panchayat development officer (PDO), I have responded to, and supported, all the requests and needs possible from the panchayat. All schemes like MGNREGA, SBM, drinking water, job cards and others have been sanctioned. Formation of BRSSS is the greatest strength and achievement of this project. RLHP should encourage the grama panchayat and BRSSS to work together and also with all PDOs in the taluk, so we can make more progress.

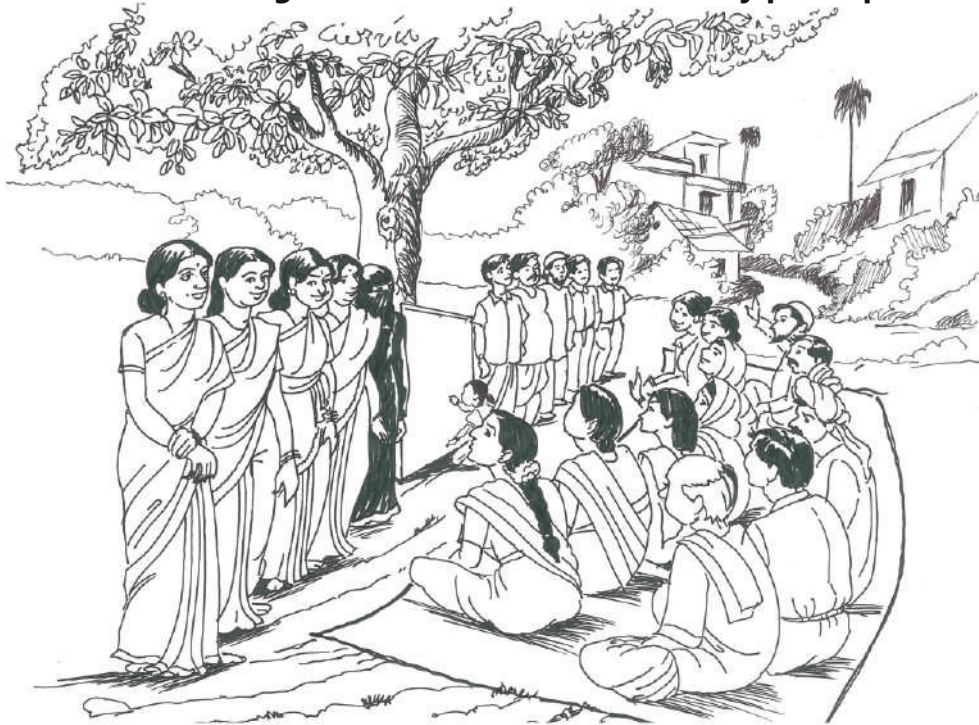
-PDO, Partapur Panchayat, Basavakalyan Taluk, Bidar District

The role of the BRSSG in the sustainability of the project was kept in mind right at the design stage, since that would have bearing on the awareness to be gained, skills that needed to be imparted and the linkages to be formed by the members. The project was designed along with partners with RLHP facilitating the involvement of the different stakeholders. All the key parameters were continuously monitored.

Pillar 2: Capacity building

To gain support, clarity and organisational support, the activities in the first year included: a) Establishing contacts b) Baseline survey c) Setting up 10 member village level BRSSG (5 women and 5 men) d) Conducting mass awareness and mass contact programmes and e) Revitalising existing community groups.

Formation of village-level BRSSG with community participation



Establishing contact and building rapport

Contact was established through initial meetings with a wide variety of people from the community, local leaders and government officials. The local NGOs were also contacted and apprised of the work that was proposed.

Home visits and regular interaction by RLHP team made a huge difference to the communities who were hitherto neglected and had not any interaction either with outsiders or with PRIs. The home visits increased the trust and confidence of the community in RLHP.

Filling information gaps: The baseline survey

The second major activity was the baseline survey, which again meant house visits in all the 100 villages. The participatory approach to generating the village baseline and target setting on utilisation of government schemes was vital to focus the effort in the project, enhance ownership and secure active participation in the process.

The village level survey data provided detailed data that enabled realistic target setting for the project. The baseline details and targets were collected regularly and updated yearly for each scheme by the staff. Based on this, village wise targets on the number of government schemes utilised were drawn up. The baseline data was updated to reorient targets through regularly scheduled half yearly and annual review meetings.

Mass awareness programmes

A series of awareness and skill building activities, conducted systematically, created a surge in support for the initiative. Demand for services and schemes by the community increased exponentially. There was a marked difference in attitude and manner in which the community members dealt with public services and service providers: panchayat leaders, PRI institutions, schools, primary health centres (PHC), anganawadi (crèches), teachers or Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA). The difference did not stop with attitudinal change of community members, but extended to a complementary change in the services provided and the service providers. Though neither process was smooth or consistent, progress was sure and steady.

Training sessions- A time to listen and learn together

The whole experience of attending a training programme with other BRSSS members reminds me of a school class, except that this one was interesting since it was participatory in nature. We were given opportunities to share our views and information. This programme made me feel I am part of the journey towards changing the current status of our community.

-Mallamma, Nilkantwadi Village, Partapur Panchayat, Bidar

On leadership qualities and BRSSS-

One symptom of empowerment is questioning and demanding accountability, so congratulations to BRSSG!

Mrs. Kripa Alva, Chairperson, Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR)

Intensive iterative training – Year 2 (2015) onwards: Thematic, demand driven, issue based, mass contact programmes, awareness		
	District	Programmes
1.	Janapur, Bidar	DDT, SBT, DLSBT, BRSSS Trainings
2.	Gollarahalli, Chitradurga	BRSSS, MCP, MAP, street play, DDT, SBT, DLSBT, stakeholders meeting etc.
3.	Guddehalli, Davanagere	BRSSS, grama panchayat members and community members got all schemes.
4.	Hudadalli, Gulbarga	SBT, DDT, DLSBT, SDMC
5.	Kalapur, Raichur	SBT, DDT, development link system, MCP, MAP, half yearly, annual programmes, biannual programmes, exposure, world environment day.
DDT: Demand driven training; DLSBT: Development link system based training; MAP: Mass awareness programme; MCP: Mass contact programme; SBT: Skill building training; SDMC: School Development and Management Committee		

Some activities that set the pace and tone of scaling up within this project are:

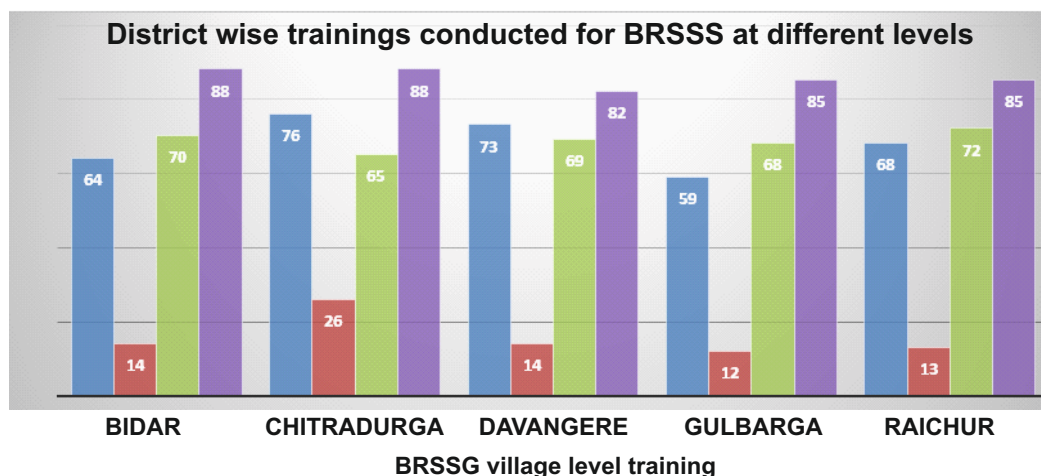
1. Awareness: An average of 70 trainings for BRSSG members at the village level in each of the five districts.
2. Skill building training for BRSSG and PRIs at the panchayat level: An average of 67 trainings per district.
3. Demand driven skill building for BRSSG and PRIs at the taluk level: An average of 86 trainings per district.
4. A combination of mass awareness, intensive personal training, and exposure resulted in a massive surge in the number of people aware of their rights with the expertise to claim them.

As a community member observed *'It is in knowing what is possible that we have gained confidence to claim our rights'*.

Going beyond activity

Making every effort matter and add up towards an objective meant more effort. As training and skill building have been critical to the success of this project, it is useful to understand the effort and process.

The trainings were many with extensive coverage, so that the knowledge and information was disseminated to the maximum number of people. Over a thousand trainings were conducted at village, grama panchayat, and taluk levels, involving leaders, staff, stakeholders, experts and trainers. They were to address specific local issues, create awareness, and enhance skills and expertise. The trainings also served to bring people together across villages—men and women, farmers and teachers, panchayat members and BRSSS members, government officials and the community, all of which promoted familiarity, built linkages, relationships and a shared vision regarding development.



Ensuring impact

- *Iterative training:* The iterative process of training and information sharing and the supportive environment to practice and engage on the issues was critical to sustain leadership and confidence.
- *Information* on the selected public schemes and the Right to Information Act (RTI) 2005 were discussed during such meetings. Involvement of experienced experts as key stakeholders provided an impetus to their participation.
- *Practicing newly acquired skills:* Mass awareness and other public events served as open platforms for the community and officials from several departments to inter-

- act regarding issues/concerns prevailing in their panchayats, villages, schools and anganawadis, and discuss possible solutions.
- *Building links:* Joint training for grama panchayat and BRSSS members meant more mutual understanding, transparency and accountability.
 - *Use of government space* for conducting trainings fostered familiarity, establishing better rapport between the community, BRSSG and officials.
 - *Critical mass:* Expertise and scale of intervention helped in access to schemes, cutting out bribes and waiting time.
 - *Customised for low literacy:* The low literacy rates in the region, lower still among women, meant that the design of the mass awareness programme and intensive training had to be action oriented and adapted for informal settings. The mediums used were chosen to enhance communication with the audience. They included wall paintings, posters, handbills, street theatre, folk arts and documentary film shows. The performances were followed by discussions. Information, education and communication (IEC) material for the different methods of capacity building on the schemes were prepared to ensure ready availability of the guidelines.

Impact of trainings at the individual and community levels

The careful preparation and meticulous design resulted in several tangible benefits, apart from the increasing confidence of an ever larger group of active citizens. Mass contact programmes (MCP), demand driven training (DDT), village to state level linkages of the community leadership led to increased agency of the 150,000 people impacted by the programme. The project documents show that people from these 100 villages have been able to access direct benefits of approximately 20 crores (Rs 200 million) in the form of wages, pensions, community centres, school infrastructure, housing, toilets and scholarships.

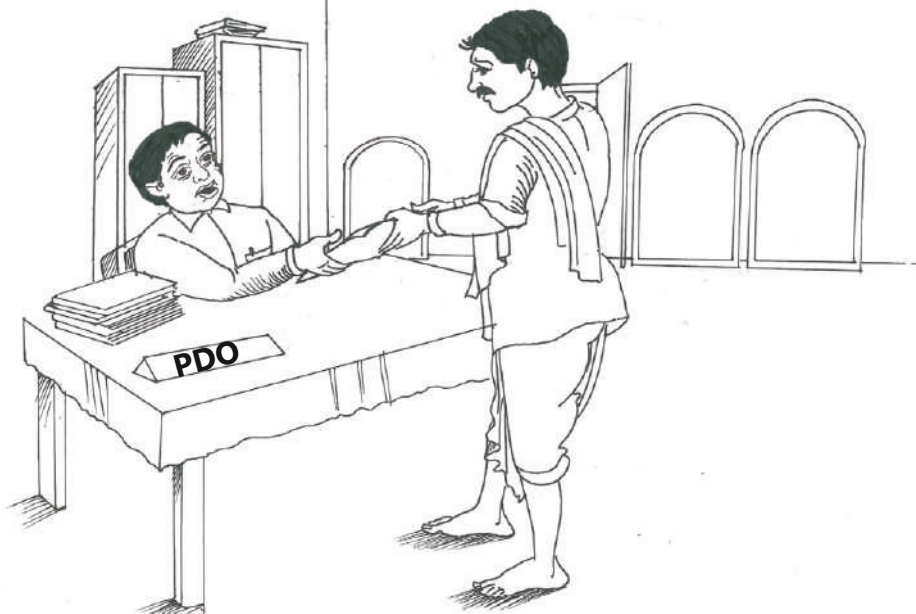
- The community got job cards, toilets, secured children's education, health and nutrition of children below five at anganawadis.

- There is an increase in use of RTI. In some villages/taluks it has been taken up with support of grama panchayat members. Transparency in the grama panchayat increased.
- There is increased participation of women in programmes including in PRIs.
- The parents and community gained knowledge on the importance of education.
- There is improved community bargaining power and knowledge on the social security schemes. This knowledge is much beyond the initial five core schemes chosen by the project.
- Children in anganwadis were getting nutritious food regularly.
- BRSSS members and the community became more confident to visit and interact with officials. There were more successful outcomes from such interactions.
- There is reduction in exploitation by the landlords and political leaders.

Panchayat Office: 2014



Panchayat Office: 2017



Mr Vijay Bhaskar T.M, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary to Government and Development Commissioner, Bengaluru.

Role of NGOs-Nobody invests in human development nor understands it better than NGOs. The weakness is that most NGO interventions are for a limited time. The project is active till it has support. Then there is usually no follow up. So this model of embedding empowerment with the local institution and the local population is one remarkable feature of the RLHP model. The role of NGOs in making government priorities a reality is very important. Their strength is their ability to have direct contact with people.

The values and policy advice coming from or promoted by NGOs have played a critical role in facilitating people's participation and democratising power from the Centre to the village level. The RTI is one such historical development. Regarding the importance of training and awareness building-We often talk about participation, election and decision making at the gram panchayat level, control of the panchayat over the local institutions. But when does such a system yield the best results? Only when panchayat leaders understand and are well aware about their roles, responsibilities and duties. Teachers and other service providers too need to understand their role in village development.

Pillar 3: Social inclusion and gender justice

Identifying and selecting the excluded

Selection of the project area based on objective criteria of community need and initiative and organisational capacity and expertise is a determinant of success. In this case, the government classification of the region as backward, and the communities as vulnerable (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes) were taken as the standard. Additional international standards such as gender and age ensured specific focus on women and children within vulnerable communities.

As a team member put it:

"I feel the context in my taluk makes it an exact fit for selection as an area that required development and empowerment of the people. Its selection by RLHP was exactly right. The people in the area are illiterate and very backward. They know only to work hard every day, earn their wages and live for that day. They had no knowledge of the various government schemes available let alone of how to access them or to utilise them for improving their living condition. So the contact with RLHP project has very much influenced the people in this area. The project and staff formed BRSSG in each village as a support group. They organised a number of awareness and knowledge based programmes. Once the participants became aware of their rights and their duties, they came forward to utilise the government schemes and started participating actively in the project."

Increasing the change drivers

It was logical to create a large constituency to carry forward planned activities so that change is internalised and normalised. Without local participation and ownership, it is difficult, and in the long term unsustainable, to hold trainings, create linkages and build the kind of momentum that comes from participation of a large cross-section of the community. From the eldest to the youngest, men and women, girls and boys, school going and dropouts, differently abled and other vulnerable groups, the project went beyond the five main schemes to mobilise support and address issues that were relevant to the community.

Ensuring equal opportunity for women

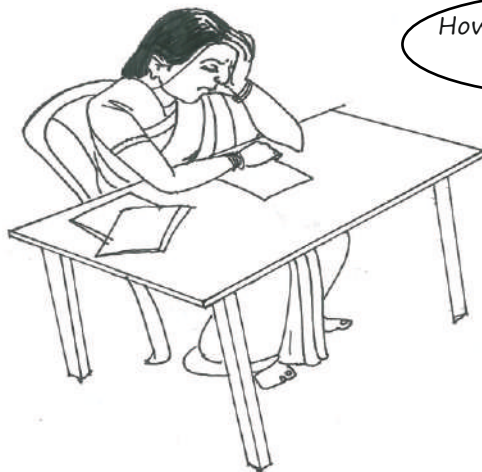
While the selection of the villages ensured that the socially excluded communities, in particular the Dalits (Scheduled Castes), the Adivasi (Scheduled Tribes) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) would be the majority coverage, special care was taken to ensure equal opportunity for women and gender justice.

Equal opportunity of representation for men and women in BRSSG has contributed immensely to active and strong representation of women in BRSSS at all levels. Women's participation has resulted in better identification of gender specific needs in the communities, enhancing the role of women in making women move into leadership roles and participate in the PRI elections. [Out of 70 women who contested panchayat elections, 38 were elected.]

Gaddemma's leadership in Sarjapur Panchayat

Gaddemma a young women aged 25 has completed class 10 and lives with her husband and parents in Kuppegudda village in Sarjapur Panchayat. From the beginning she had a very active interaction and contact with RLHP. As an active member of BRSSS she attended all the training programmes at the village and taluk levels. She attended the taluk level demand driven skill training organised regularly by RLHP for BRSSS members from Kuppegudda village. On learning about various schemes and programmes, Gaddemma took the initiative of mobilising the women to register for job cards under MGNREGA. She led the women to the panchayat office and followed up several times. She explained their need as well as what she had learnt and understood from the training about their right and the need for work especially given the drought and non-availability of work in the area. Encouraged by the cooperation she received from other women in her village and by the support and guidance from RLHP District Coordinator and Community Mobiliser, Gaddemma, took on an active leadership role. She continued to seek clarifications during the trainings with the resource person on procedures to be followed and other details of the schemes. She was very proud and shared her success in registering 62 job cards for women successfully in 2015. She was also able to get orders for work on three krishi hondas (farm ponds). As a women's group, they executed Rs 150,000 worth contracts successfully, at the government rate of Rs 50,000 per pond. This helped them to harvest rainwater as well as to improve the agriculture land. Besides, they have earned cash and were able to operate their bank accounts successfully without any middle men involved or having to pay any bribe. This reflects the role of BRSSS members when they are aware, have clarity of purpose and commitment.

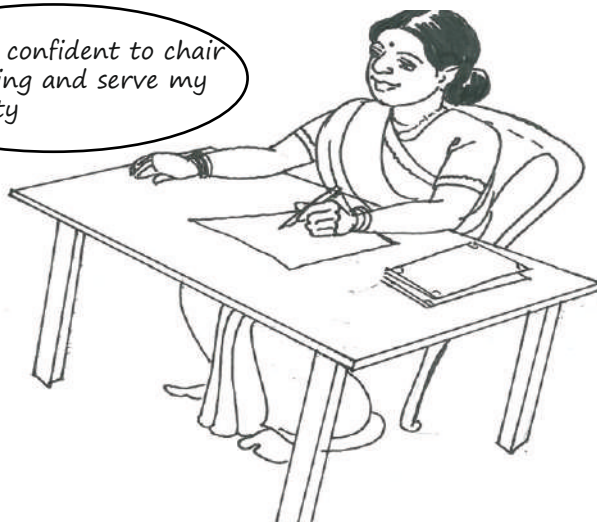
PANCHAYAT OFFICE



How shall i conduct the next meeting?

Women panchayat president before and after training

I am now confident to chair any meeting and serve my community



Women's experience and reflections

- I came out of the house and learnt to work with people and the ability to get work done (Ms Sashikala).
- Learnt how to communicate with the panchayat and also how to collect information (Ms Shantala).

- Earlier I used to be afraid to go out of the house but now I am confident and willingly step out (Ms Swathi).
- If I were at home I wouldn't have known anything, but coming out and being part of BRSSS, I have learnt about various issues and information about government schemes (Ms Meenabai).
- Learnt to be brave and bold to get the work done (Ms Ratnamma).
- I have learnt to be confident in doing bank transactions and bold to go out and visit or seek government support (Ms Manjamma).
- Learnt how to approach and speak to government officials, while respecting them we need to be bold and get the work done (Ms Dyamakka, Vice President, grama panchayat).
- Working with members I learnt how to organise and conduct camps(Roopa).
- Learnt how to plan and get labour cards and benefits (Bandamma).
- I developed the courage to go ahead even when I was stopped by the villagers (Tejamma).
- I gained knowledge about various/new government departments (Nasreen).
- Learnt how to impart information to people (Siddamma).
- Learnt to take collective efforts and go together to government offices (Latha).

Pillar 4: Institutionalisation–A unique approach

Community organisation

In each of the 100 villages, a scheme support group was formed: 20 groups per taluk spread over 21 grama panchayats across five districts. BRSSG as a 'schemes support group' in the project area had the primary responsibility of monitoring proper implementation of all the five social security schemes. They also officially represent their respective villages in the government departments and in all activities related to these schemes.

The village level BRSSGs were organised into district level BRSSGs as they became more familiar with their roles and responsibilities. Once they reached the limits of the possibilities of one level, they organically moved to the next level. Not only were the bodies at the appropriate levels formed, the institutional links

appropriate to that level were also established. The state level BRSSG was formed only in the last semester of the four year project, but it was part of the programme design right at the outset.

Selection criteria

The BRSSG members were selected from the villages in a bottom up approach and transparent criteria.

- Commitment, interest to be part of the project activities and motivation to take up responsibilities.
- Membership in existing committees in the village, such as the SDMC, balavikas samiti, village sanitation committee, MNREGA supervision committee, youth group and women groups.
- Member of a vulnerable section of society (i.e. Backward Class, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or women).

Composition

At the *village level*, the BRSSG comprised 10 members, five women and five men. They meet weekly.

At the *grama panchayat level*, the BRSSG comprised of 20 members. Of them, 15 are from the villages—three from each village, at an average of five villages per grama panchayat. In addition, there were five members who were either scheme experts or from the PRIs.

At the *district level* there were 25 members of whom twenty were elected (five from each grama panchayat) using the same criteria mentioned earlier, and five scheme experts or PRI members. Since all the villages selected are from the same taluk, this committee is sometimes referred to as the taluk committee also.

At the *project level*, it works out to 125 members, 25 members each in five districts including the scheme experts and PRIs, in addition to involving the district level department authorities.

The experts are drawn from scheme officials, as well as from wider civil society groups, local authorities/taluk officials (SDMC, planning officer, PDO, State Swachh Bharat Mission Coordinator) media, union (Dalit and farmers). This BRSSS structure seamlessly links the village to the district level.

Roles and responsibilities

The BRSSG members agreed on their roles and responsibilities collectively.

1. Meet regularly at the specified intervals and more often when required (weekly at the village level, monthly at the district sub-committee level, and quarterly at the district executive committee level).
2. Inform people in the village about schemes.
3. Support planning and monitoring activities with BRSSG at different levels.
4. Lead and organise mass awareness activities and mass contact programmes.
5. Officially represent BRSSG in concerned departments on all activities related to the scheme (two members per scheme).
6. Share roles and responsibilities in the specific group or committee (The BRSSG collectively decided and agreed on the roles and responsibilities for each member).

Consistent monitoring: Tracking results and maintaining momentum

The PMU met at least quarterly for the overall coordination and management of the project. The PAU met at least biannually with the PAU to inform on progress, revise the action plans, and share decisions.

The trainings and the participation of the community in them were rigorously monitored. The RLHP district and headquarters teams and the CESVI team setup systems and procedures to record, review and monitor every training. The district teams were in constant touch with potential participants, assessing needs skills and capacity which they reported to the central teams. Based on this the requirements for each training were decided and the trainings were customised accordingly.

The baseline details and targets were collected during the baseline survey. They were regularly collected and updated yearly for each scheme by the staff. These helped to track the village wise utilisation of the government social security schemes. The baseline data was updated. The updated data was reviewed at the scheduled half yearly and annual review meetings, and new priorities and action plans drawn up when necessary.

At the community level, the reviews were as rigorous. At the village level, there were weekly meetings. At the district level, the sub-committees on education, health, and livelihood (nine members) meet every month. The executive committee, which comprises of the sub-committee members and 11 others (total 20 members), meet quarterly.

This consistent—some would say persistent—monitoring of progress ensured that the motivation of the group remained high and the momentum was maintained. It was a field demonstration of the dictum 'measure what you treasure'.

From a group to a sangha

The sangha formation in the 100 villages during the first year was a result of RLHP support and people's participation. The sangha formation and registration at the district level in year four of the project was about people's initiative finding its own form and agenda. Sustaining momentum has been a contribution of the participatory process of planning together and planning ahead.

The village BRSSG is at the core of this strategy for a well-grounded, bottom-up approach. The BRSSG at the grama panchayat, taluk and district levels, identified committed relevant PRIs and public officers of targeted schemes and involved them in the BRSSG.

Towards the end of 2016 and early 2017, the formalisation of BRSSGs started in earnest. A workshop with all the BRSSG members and elected office bearers were conducted for finalising and legally registering the BRSSG as 'BRSS Sangha', a community based organisation (CBO). They were told of the need to formalise the BRSSG and that office bearers would be elected. The election process was conducted without any political pressure. Only genuine and committed members were elected by the BRSSG members in the assembly.

Each sangha finalised their aims, objectives, and bylaws incorporating suggestions from the members from the five districts. They agreed to mobilise resources for the sangha's basic expenses by themselves. BRSSS members started collecting membership fees of Rupees 10 per member. The entire BRSSS committee enthusiastically participated in the process. Equal participation of women and men in the process was accepted and appreciated by BRSSS members.

Each BRSSS has three subcommittees, one each for livelihoods, education and health Committees. Each committee consists of three members, nine in all. This is for decentralisation and distribution of power and responsibilities. It builds continuous leadership and active participation of all, and ensures a democratic functioning of BRSSS.

The five district level BRSSGs were registered independently in March – April 2017 under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act 1960, as 'sanghas' i.e. associations. The BRSSGs thus became BRSSS as independent entities, guided and supported by RLHP. All five have registration certificates, printed letterhead, logo, seal and bank accounts to deposit the membership fees.

The newly elected executive body met the taluk level CEO, health officer, block education officials, ICDS officer and other officials in each district and apprised them of the change of BRSSG to BRSSS.

Since registration, each BRSSS has been holding monthly meetings. A few initial meetings were facilitated by the project staff. The initial meetings were to set up the systems and procedures for their functioning. The agenda included the essentials such as fixing the frequency of meetings, how to document their discussions, agenda, identifying issues, organising and clarifying their functional needs.

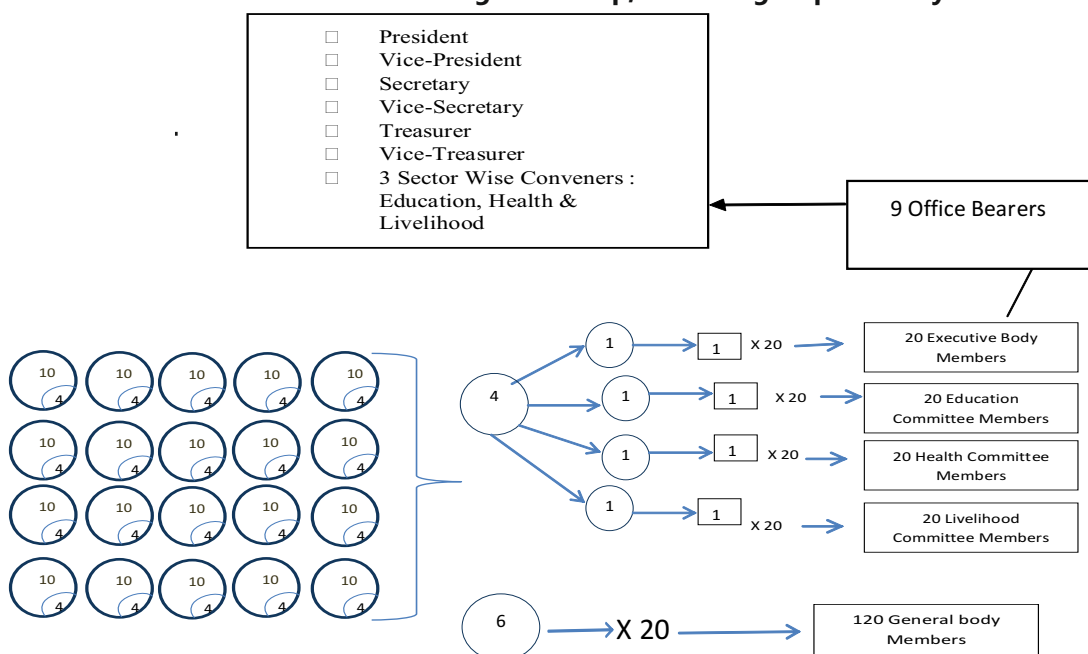
They discussed the roles, responsibilities and activities of the three sub-committees. One action, to be addressed by the BRSSS in all the 20 villages was also identified. The action could be revisiting a pending issue and/or a new issue related to health, education and livelihood. They would also need to continue

accessing various state and central schemes, and ensure that every member of the village understands and benefits from the public schemes. They resolved to have more emphasis on ensuring household level toilet construction and accessing the subsidies and creating awareness on village level cleanliness, sanitation and environment protection including planting trees and other activities.

BRSSS will continue raising awareness and other ongoing activities with the guidance of RLHP. They will continue to campaign on environmental issues, rights of children, specially girl children, and women and continue to access to the government health, education and MGNREGA schemes for the benefit of its members. They will work closely with PRIs and taluk officials to ensure that all opportunities are tapped and the sangha is able to handle the needs of people in realising their social aspirations and social transformation of their villages.

BRSSS COMPOSITION

A model based on building leadership, of sharing responsibility.



10 members form BRSSG at each village [5 women+ 5 men]

Of 10 village BRSSG members [4 members join the executive, 6 the general body]

200 members at the district [80 make the executive body & committee, 120 the general body]

Overcoming challenges

Understanding sustainability requires the wisdom to understand the possibilities and challenges. North Karnataka region, particularly the five districts of the project, are historically characterised by suppression and subordination. The technical, social and political obstacles in accessing government schemes were increasingly tackled in the process of implementing the project and establishing BRSSS as a community based institution over the four year project cycle.

Different challenges were addressed by different means.

- Resistance from landlords and local power holders: RTI is used to tackle corruption and improve the pace of response from the government. However, political intervention continues to pose a threat to mobilise the community sometimes.
- Caste discrimination still requires a lot more work. Empowerment through creating awareness, training, rights discourse and strengthening the emerging BRSSS will enable the community to take on this challenge more openly.
- Landlessness: Addressing issues of landless people in the project area. Sometimes some people could not avail of government schemes (such as the toilet grant) since they did not have clear titles to their land.
- Working with local government: The support of PRIs was won by making them aware that they (both the elected representatives and the officials in the PRIs) would benefit from BRSSS support to meet their development targets.
- Working with officials: As the local authorities have representations only at the grama panchayat level (and not at the village level), the action was focused in strengthening of the groups from this level on. BRSSS members raise their village issues in the grama panchayat meetings and public meetings. They have learnt to prepare memorandums.
- Changing procedures for accessing and benefitting from schemes and transfers of supportive officials dampen enthusiasm. Cooperation is an unpredictable element and one needs to ensure that the pressure on the system to perform has to be maintained by the community staying engaged. Some issues may be beyond the scope of the project but people's strength and resilience can also be surprisingly strong.

A new vision: Aspirations of the state BRSSS committee

The BRSSS State Forum (BRSSSF) was formed in September 2017 with the goal of transforming the five 'backward' districts into 'forward' districts. The state committee members will advocate and lobby with decision makers and the executive. They will present the specific local issues of the five districts so that they can be addressed by the concerned ministers and senior civil servants. They will closely work with the district BRSSS and will take up the issues that cannot be solved at the district level.

BRSSSF consists of members of the BRSSS from the five districts along with representatives of the state level Dalit organisations and farmer's federation, members of the state NGO federation, media and legal experts. The state BRSSS will lead the advocacy efforts and lobby with the Government of India and the Government of Karnataka.

BRSSSF expects to be recognised by the state and district administration within five years as a community institution and therefore be kept informed of any new schemes and new policies.

They are committed to carry forward their collective progress: that all children will be in school, all anganawadis will give good food for children, all villages will continue to be open defecation free, will get good roads, will have more work opportunities and MGNREGA work will be tapped for all in need so that migration will be reduced and the village community becomes more stable and secure to achieve the right to life with dignity as enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

The Committee dreams that all five districts will be developed and no longer be classified backward within the next five years so that all stakeholders in this process can witness and celebrate this change.