



RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES NETWORK

HOW FAR THE NEW CMST MODULE IS USEFUL: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMMEDIATE RESULTS OF THE NEW CMST MODULE

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23 August 2019

Preamble

In the RSPs social mobilisation approach, community leaders play important roles including mobilising communities for a common cause, manage their community institutions, plan and execute development initiatives and mobilise resources from internal external sources. Given the importance of their roles, RSPs provide proper training to the community leaders so that they can understand their roles and responsibilities properly and serve their communities efficiently and effectively.

RSPs have developed different training modules to train community leaders. The most basic and commonest training is Community Management Skills Training (CMST) designed to train the man and woman Presidents and Managers of the Community Organisation (CO), which is the base of the three tier social mobilisation model of CO, VO and LSO. In the year 2018, RSPN felt the need to revise the CMST module. The reasons for revising the CMST module were that the old module mainly focused on transferring knowledge, skills and tools regarding organizational management, cooperation and collective action which are important, but they lack materials on essential topics such as core human values, active citizenship and roles and responsibilities of the community leaders in fostering these values across the communities. Second, the old module mainly relied on lecture method. Therefore, they were not effective in terms of transferring the knowledge and skills to the illiterate participants of these trainings. So in the revised CMST module, both the contents and methods were revised. RSPN trained master trainers for the interested RSPs, so that they train field level trainers to facilitate CMST sessions. BRSP and NRSP Turbat have trained a number of master trainers and are using the new CMST module for training CO Presidents and Managers under BRCAE programme.

As part of RSPN's technical support and backstopping to BRACE member RSPs, I visited CMST roll out events at Kech district of NRSP Turbat on 12 December 2018 and Pishin district of BRSP on 18 January 2019 to see whether the field staff are able to deliver the training properly or not, and second to check the effectiveness of the module in transferring knowledge to the training participants and as to how far it is instrumental in changing their behaviour and attitude. I submitted my observations and recommendations in the form of a report to the senior management of RSPN, BRSP and NRSP.

A need was felt to assess the utility of the new module in achieving its stipulated objectives. Therefore, I visited Killa Abdullah, Loralai and Zhob districts of BRSP from 17 to 20 July 2019. where a number of CO leaders have received CMST trainings five to six months ago. This report summarises the findings of my learnings through interviews with CMST trainees and field staff of BRSP as well as observation of self-initiated activities of CMST trainees and record keeping of their COs.

Purpose of the Study

The first purpose of the study is to see how far the new CMST module is effective in achieving its main objectives, which include:

1. Personal level development of trainees as community leaders
2. House hold level development, in terms of initiatives on income generating and social sector activities
3. Communal activities initiated by the trainees at CO level

4. Improvements in the quality of CO meetings
5. Foster collective savings and its utilization and ensure its safekeeping
6. Initiatives to include women, poorest and PWDs in COs

The second purpose is to observe challenges and issues faced by the Trainees and their COs in achieving these objectives and recommend measures to overcome them.

Methodology and Key Activities

Keeping in view the constraints of resources and time, it was decided to conduct field visits to BRCAE districts and conduct Focus Discussion Group (FDG) meetings with CMST trainees and BRSP field staff to collect data and information through an open ended questionnaire. In addition to that, visited offices of three VOs and held meetings with the Presidents and Managers of the VOs and their member COs to see the impact of the CMST on their overall performance as community leaders. Moreover, the records of the VOs and their member COs were also checked to see improvements as well as challenges in managing record keeping and holding effective meetings.

The following activities were carried out to develop the assessment report:

1. Developed a questionnaire
2. Conducted FDGs with 17 CMST trainees who had received the training at least 5 months ago at districts Killa Abdullah (3), Loralai (11) and Zhobe (3)
3. Conducted FDGs with 18 District Field staff at Killa Abdullah (3), Loralai (8) and Zhobe (7)
4. Conducted meetings with 3 VOs at district Loralai (2) and Zhobe (1) and checked their records
5. Physically checked records of 6 COs at Killa Abdullah (1), Loralai (2) and Zhobe (3)
6. Visited two ongoing CMST roll out trainings, one at Killa Abdullah and the one at Loralai

Limitations

Due to local cultural considerations, I could meet only men CMST trainees and men VOs and COs and could attend men's CMST courses.

Training Delivery

By 30 June 2019, BRCP has conducted 469 CMST trainings, 287 for men and 182 for women under the BRACE programme. A total of 9,311 trainees, including 5,678 men and 3,633 (39%) women CO leaders have participated in these trainings. BRSP hire services of master trainers to deliver CMST trainings. The master trainers are Graduate and Post Graduate level educated men and women preferably residing in the district. BRSP hires them and then train them by making them participate in 3 to 5 CMST training courses facilitated by the CMST master trainers trained by RSPN. The local master trainers are then asked to facilitate CMST sessions in the presence of the senior master trainers. The senior master trainers provide them feedback on their weaknesses and guide them on further improvements, till they are able to facilitate all CMST sessions independently. These local master trainers then facilitate the CMST trainings on their own under the supervision of the district level Capacity Building Officer (CBO). By end of June 2019, 50 master trainers including 33 men and 17 women were facilitating CMST courses.

I attended two CMST events during my field visits, one at district Killa Abdullah and another at district Loralai. The Education level of the master trainer at Killa Abdullah was MA and the master trainer at Loralai was BA. I found that both master trainers have proper command over the contents of the CMST manual and they were effectively delivering the sessions in local language.

The master trainers were using the CMST manual and they said that since the manual has explained each and every step of the sessions, they find no difficulty in delivering them. A second advantage of following the CMST manual is that it ensures that no point has been missed. Wahid Shah, CBO district Zhobe said “when I received the master trainer training at Karachi by RSPN, I wondered how to teach such difficult themes to illiterate community activists. However, when I facilitated actual trainings, I found that the participants can easily follow them and enjoy. This is because the delivery method is systematic, participatory and practical. Unlike the previous CMST events, the participants take deep interest in each and every segment of the new CMST. Therefore, they never feel bored or exhausted”.

The training halls were spacious and conducive for learning. All required training materials were made available to the trainees. However, the training schedule was not given to the trainees. The BRSP CBO said that since a large majority of the trainees are illiterate, it is useless to give them the training schedule. I would suggest that the training facilitators should keep copies of the training schedule with them and after registration, give copies of the training schedule to the literate trainees.

Another issue that came into my notice was the fact that no government officer was invited in the training course. On my query, BRSP staff said that despite their best efforts, government officers, like AC, DO Education, DO Health, DO Agriculture and Livestock etc. do not take interest in attending the CMST events which are held in far off places. I proposed that instead of trying to invite such senior government officials, they should invite the Head Teacher of local government school, Secretary Union Council, Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Union Council in the training events.

The EU visibility requirements were properly fulfilled. The training banner with EU logo was displayed in the training rooms at both places.

On my enquiry, the trainees who were attending training events as well as those who had attended the training over six months ago expressed their satisfaction on the training arrangements and the quality of the trainers. They said that they face no difficulty in understanding the training contents.

The CMST runs for four days. The CMST module developed by RSPN is taught on the first three days. On the fourth day, the sessions of the Community Awareness Tools (CATs) developed by RSPN are introduced to the trainees. The trainees like the CAT sessions very much, because they broaden their development vision, provide them tangible objectives to hold their CO meetings and serve their members objectively. The trainees also mentioned the Exclusion Exercise, the Resource Mobilisation Game and the Colours of Pakistan sessions as the most interesting and educating ones.

Training Results

The key findings as a results of my discussions with CMST trainees and BRSP field staff and physical verification of record keeping and minutes of meetings are summarised as below:

a. Personal Development of CMST Trainees

A primary objective of the new CMST module was to make the participants understand the required qualities of community leaders, compare their leadership qualities with those through soul searching, point out their strengths and weaknesses and try to improve their weak capacity areas.

All trainees said that the training improved their understanding, knowledge and skills about community development. They acknowledged that the training greatly contributed in furthering their human values and leadership skills like serving their community especially the poorest and disable persons, honesty, time consciousness, hard work, seek information and learn new things, respecting other members views, motivation skills and communication skills. However, very few of them said that they had taken steps on their own to further improve their personal capacities to improve their CO management, planning, resource mobilisation and the like. Even those trainees who said that they had taken initiatives could not produce any tangible examples of self-initiated activities for their personal development. The reason for this could be a) the trainers did not put enough emphasis on this point, b) other topics especially those covered by CAT sessions were so relevant, need based and hence interesting that they attracted most of their attention, c) no follow up by BRSP staff was carried out to check whether the trainees are working on their personal development or not. Therefore, it is recommended that BRSP should consider all three causes seriously and try to overcome them in future.

b. Household Level Development

The primary development focus of the CO is at household level. The trainees of CMST were expected that they would understand the importance of Micro Investment Plan (MIP) at household level, develop an MIP for development of their family income and assets and implement it through self-initiatives either by pooling resources from within the household or by combining family resources with external resources, so that they can guide other CO members through their own examples.

It was observed that a large number of trainees had developed and implemented MIPs on their own without waiting for BRACE programme support, which is quite encouraging. Examples of self-initiated MIPs include:

1. Tunnel farming to cultivate vegetables
2. Submitted an application to Govt. Agriculture Department to assist in installation of tunnel farming
3. Cultivation of vegetable for household consumption as well as for marketing
4. Rented agriculture land and cultivated vegetables on commercial basis
5. Kept a saving box at home to make household level savings
6. Started goat rearing by buying a goat
7. Enrolled two out of school sisters in school
8. Started collective marketing of wall nut
9. Implemented kitchen gardening for family women
10. Established tire puncture shop
11. Started embroidery for the women members of the family
12. Prepared CNICs of three family women
13. Installed water purification system in the house

There is a need to document the socio-economic benefits and the strategic importance of the successful self-driven MIPs and disseminate them widely among COs and VOs with the view of guiding and motivating other CO members to follow these successful MIPs models. The reason is that under BRACE programme, 40 poorest families per UC will receive IGG support, 75 families per UC will receive CIF in the first round of disbursement and 10 households will receive TVET facility. If CIF is rolled over three times during the BRCAE programme period, 225 families will receive CIF. By adding all three components (IGG, CIF and TVET) the maximum beneficiaries to receive support for their MIPs will be 310 families. Since the average households per UC in the BRACE programme

districts is around 2,000, only 15% organised households will receive income generating support from the programme funds. So unless we motivate CO members to plan and execute self-driven MIPs, the large majority of organised households will not receive any tangible benefits from the BRACE programme. This will have negative effect on their motivation to remain organised, attend meetings and contribute savings and donations. If the implementing RSPs convey the message to maximum CO members that only few poor families will receive direct financial support from BRACE programme, while all can get technical support and guidance from the BRCAE staff on how to develop and implement their self-initiated and self-reliant MIPs, they will take keen interest in this message and follow their instructions. This is the most effective way of guiding and supporting community members, both men and women, in harnessing their household level potentials. If implemented properly, we can bring in huge impact in terms of income generation, asset creation and socio-economic empowerment in the lives of a large majority of the organised men and women under the BRCAE programme.

c. Improvements in Quality of CO Meetings

The General Body members of the CO is required to conduct regular meetings on monthly basis as well as on need basis to discuss and decide common development matters through consensus or through majority votes, in a democratic manner. The role of the CO President and Manager is to lead the discussion and decision making processes during the meeting and to ensure active participation of each and every member in the meetings. Moreover, the CO President and Manager are responsible to ensure participation of majority of members in each meeting, record keeping of meeting agenda and key discussion points and decisions, taking attendance of meeting participants and note down savings of individual members in the attendance and saving register as well as in the saving pass books of members with their signature. The trainees were trained and sensitized on these topics during the CMST training. Therefore, they were expected to make visible improvements in the quality of their CO meetings.

The trainees said that after the CMST training, they realized the importance of holding regular meetings. Therefore, they now convene all scheduled meetings. They also understood the importance of attendance of members in the meetings. Earlier, they used to mark even the absent members as present, but now they strictly observe the actual attendance of the members. As a result of that, the number of members' participation in the meetings has increased.

The trainees also said that before the CMST training, they used to meet only to collect savings because they had little idea about the kind and nature of development issues which they should discuss in the monthly meetings. But after the training, they learnt about the development themes covered under CAT sessions and therefore, they now discuss their development issues in their meeting, take decisions on them, fix responsibilities of certain members for their implementation and follow up the implementation process and progress in the next monthly meeting.

During the field visits, I checked registers of 10 COs. The records of 9 COs (90%) were properly maintained. The reason for not writing one CO register was that the trainee himself was not literate, and he was waiting for the CRP to visit their CO and write the minutes. He had kept records of members' savings on a separate note book. This was in Killa Abdullah district. BRSP staff has noted this and they are expected to send the CRP to this and to other similar COs for timely record keeping.

The staff of BRSP also confirmed that both the frequency and quality of CO meetings improved after the CO leaders received CMST training.

d. Improvement in savings

The trainees said that though they were practicing savings during their monthly meetings, as that was part of their development partnership with BRSP, but they were doing it just for the cause of fulfilling their contractual obligation with BRSP. It was the CMST training that made them understand the potential benefits of collective savings. So after the CMST training, they shared the importance of collective savings with their members and decided to increase the amount of savings. A large number of trainees said that they have increased the amount of saving per member per month from Rs 50 to Rs 100 and from Rs 100 to Rs 150.

However, the utilization of savings is yet very low. Only three CO leaders said that they had used part of their savings for internal lending to their members, mainly to start a micro enterprise. The main reason for not making internal lending are lack of proper training in financial management and risk of default.

Experience world wise suggests that there are a number of advantages to combining community savings with internal lending activities. First, they draw community members together on a regular and continuous basis. Second, the financial mechanisms are grounded in daily activities; saving and lending are quick, simple and related to the real daily needs of the rural poor. Third, savings and loan activities provide the rural poor with their own resource base to answer their basic needs. Fourth, the process creates an ongoing learning within the community about each other's lives, about how to manage together and how to relate to external systems with greater financial strength in order to achieve more than day-to-day needs.

Savings and loan activities are not simply an end in themselves, rather they are a means to strengthen community processes so that people can work together to achieve their multiple and diverse needs. There is an opportunity to link saving and lending activities with the MIPs of CO members, because the common hurdle mentioned by the members in implementing their MIPs is lack of money.

This could be done in two ways, a) individual members set a saving target over a fixed period of time (six month or one year) to buy a productive asset and save the amount with CO. Once the required amount is saved, he/she can withdraw the saving and buy the planned asset; b) CO members lend their collective savings to one or more members to buy productive assets in turn.

Since COs cannot open institutional bank accounts due to the strict rules and regulations of the State Bank, they keep the savings with their Manager. This poses risks for the safety of saving money. In-secured cash is highly fungible and prone to high risk of fraud and theft. Internal lending of savings is a risk mitigating strategy against in-secure cash, because it diversifies the risk. Second, since all lending and recovery transactions of internal lending are carried out in CO meetings, it promotes financial transparency and reduces risk of financial dishonesty and deceit.

Therefore, BRSP should provide the CO leaders with basic training in management of savings and internal lending, to enable them to manage the whole process in safer ways and minimize the risk of saving embezzlement and loan default.

e. Initiatives to Include Women, PWDs and Transgender in Development

Women, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and transgender are marginalized and excluded from social activities and development work. Therefore, a key feature of social mobilisation approach to

development is to ensure inclusion of these marginalized members of the community into development so that they can take part actively not only in their own development but also in the development of the wider society. Therefore, a number of topics are included in the CMST module to provide them with awareness on the negative impacts of exclusion and the strategic importance of inclusion of the marginalized members of the community into development programmes.

The level of awareness of the CMST trainees on inclusion of the marginalized groups is very high. All trainees fully support inclusion of women by fostering women COs and VOs, and they reported formation of COs and VOs in their areas, which is very encouraging. Though there is still strong opposition from the religious leaders on organisation of women, these community leaders are engaging them in constructive dialogues and are trying to remove their negative perceptions about NGOs. The WCOs are supporting their poorest members by giving interest free loans from their savings, while men COs provide resources like sewing machines to needy women to help them start home based micro enterprises. These activities, though quite modest at this stage, are helpful in removing doubts about women programmes.

Another strategic activity to mainstream women in development is preparation of their CNIC, because CNIC make women eligible to cast vote, get medical treatment from government hospitals and access IGG, CIF, TVET and Adult Literacy training from the BRACE programme. All CMST trainees reported that they provide full support and guidance to the women of their community in preparation of CNIC. The BRSP staff said that the CMST trainees have become the most vocal advocates of organizing women in COs and VOs. In fact, they convince the other male members for women CO formation and then invite BRSP women staff to form COs.

However, providing women membership in the LSO is still a challenge. Though restrictions on formation of separate community institutions for women have been eased off, there is still a strong opposition from the religious leaders forming mixed organisations of men and women. Majority members of women COs are from the same households of the men COs. So far, only 50% COs are women's, they do not represent the majority households of the UC, hence they cannot form separate women's LSO. If BRSP wants to form separate women's LSOs, they will have to organise at least 60% households of the UC.

Therefore, BRSP is following a cautious strategy on this matter, which is to wait till the benefits of women COs and VOs are materialized and acknowledged widely by the local community, so that demands for providing women direct membership in the LSO is also raised by the local community. For the time being, women's development needs are included in the Union Council Development Plan by ensuring inclusion of Village Development Plans (VDPs) developed in consultation with women VOs and by taking women's views in shaping the final UC DP. BRSP is also trying to persuade some progressive communities to take women VO leaders in the General Body and Executive Committee of LSOs. This will make precedence for other communities in future.

A number of CMST trainees said that they have made PWDs member of their COs. In fact, BRSP has identified PWDs through a survey and is providing them medical treatment as well as assistive devices. BRSP found that the majority of PWDs were already CO members. However, there is no explicit plans under way to organise those PWDs in COs who become capable to take part in community work after getting medical treatment and necessary assistive devices. BRSP should issue a guideline to the field staff to organise such PWDs in local COs.

The CMST trainees said that they found no transgender persons in their areas. Otherwise, they were ready to offer them CO membership.

f. Community Development Initiatives

The trainees said that the CMST training provided them with ideas of a range of community development initiatives they can take on their own, with limited or no external support. The orientation to CATs sessions was very instrumental in this regard. After the training, they shared these ideas with their CO members and started planning and implementing them. Examples of such activities include ban on cutting olive trees from the natural forest, construction of latrines in all households, timely repair of transformer, provision of loan from savings for construction of local mosque, arrangement of utensils, crockery and blankets to arrange wedding and other communal functions at a central place and arrangement of NADRA mobile van for preparation of CNIC of members. Since the forum of the VO is more suitable to plan and implement collective development activities, they incorporated them in the VDPs and are now implementing them.

During my visit to three VOs, I noticed that the VOs were planning and implementing a number of activities on self-help basis. These include:

1. Organised left out households in COs
2. Solid waste management through awareness raising, installation of waste bins out of village and disposing off the waste
3. Plantation of trees at large scale in open spaces in and around the village
4. Enrollment of out of school children in schools
5. Arranged collective prayer for rain. Collected donation of Rs. 25,000 from members for this purpose. As a result of the collective prayer, heavy showers of rain came and filled their earthen dam
6. Prepared CNICs of women
7. Resolved disputes over business and land
8. Complained against the lady teacher who was not coming to government school regularly. She now regularly comes to school
9. Provided utensils, beds, blankets and clothes for a family whose house was burnt due to fire
10. Repaired a Dam which was damaged due to flash floods. Collected Rs. 6,000 from each member CO for the repair work
11. Support to BRSP in survey to identify poor families for distribution of mosquito nets as well distribution of mosquito nets
12. Support government Health Department to achieve 100% Polio vaccination by convincing refusal cases

g. Recommendations for Further Improvement

1. The trainees said that they liked and enjoyed the interactive sessions very much. Therefore, they suggested to present the remaining non-interactive parts of the contents on interactive methods. The problem is that we cannot make each and every component interactive. Some points like description of certain points, sharing information and data etc. needed to be presented in lecture method.
2. The trainees said that the Mother & Child Health session of CAT contained technical points. The master trainers were not fully clear on these points. Therefore, this topic should be facilitated by a technical person. I think that arranging technical persons for each CMST training is not feasible. What is possible is to teach this and similar other CAT sessions properly to the master trainers, so that they can answer queries of the trainees.

3. Another suggestion was to add a session on dispute resolution. Dispute resolution is very important, but it cannot be taught in a CMST session. Second, CO forum is not best suited for dispute resolution. VO and LSO forums are more suitable forums for this purpose. Therefore, instead of adding a session in the CMST, BRSP should guide VO leaders on how to form a dispute resolution committee. RSPN has developed a guideline on it and handed over to SUCCESS partner RSPs. The guideline is in Urdu, and I will share it separately with BRSP management.

Conclusion

The revised CMST module is quite effective in achieving its objectives. The trainees are happy with it. The module has been instrumental in fostering the leadership qualities of the participants, including honesty, time consciousness, hard work, seek information and learn new things, respect other members' views, motivation skills and communication skills. In short, the module has improved their understanding, knowledge and skills about community development. As a result, the trainees are taking self-driven initiatives both at household level as well as community level. Using their newly acquired learning and skills, the trainees have improved the meeting, savings and record keeping of their COs. There is no need to change and modify the training module for the time being. BRSP should guide VOs and LSOs in forming dispute resolution committees using the guidelines developed by RSPN.

Annexes:

1. Questionnaire
2. List of CMST Trainees participated in FDGs
3. List of BRSP staff participated in FDGs