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NZ VASS IMPACT ASSESSMENT: PILOT PROGRAMME

Facilitators Report

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1.0 Context:

VASS (Voluntary Agency Support Scheme) provides funds from New Zealand's Official Development Assistance Programme for New Zealand NGOs that are working with partners overseas to address poverty and promote sustainable development. It is based on principles of partnership, gender equality, self-reliance, community and beneficiary participation, capacity building and sustainability. Within the VASS, funds have been made available to NZ NGOs for a number of years to encourage and support better appraisal monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects funded. The 1998 VASS Evaluation found that the majority of these funds were used for appraisal and monitoring visits with a very limited focus on evaluation of wider impacts. It concluded that there was a need for a more comprehensive evaluation system with a focus on learning that in turn would improve performance of the NGOs and the projects they support as well as provide accountability for funds spent. The evaluation recommended a number of changes and additions to current systems.

The findings of VASS were accepted by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). The approach proposed the pilot impact assessment programme having two stages. The first stage aiming at building capacity among all involved in the process both in developing an understanding of the philosophical and methodological approaches to impact assessment and in learning lessons from the experience. An important objective was to develop knowledge and capacity in impact assessment for all involved. The most important criteria in selecting NGOs to be involved in this first stage was the level of interest and commitment to the process that can be demonstrated by both the New Zealand and overseas partners. An existing rationale and strong desire on the part of a partner to conduct some aspect of impact assessment of their work (rather than seeing this as an 'imposed' evaluation process) was considered critical to the success of the exercise.

South Asia was identified as the geographical focus for the first stage of this work. Four organisations (World Vision, Caritas, CWS, and Tear Fund) agreed to initiate this activity with their partners in South Asia. The NGOs who showed interest to be part of the process in South Asia were: World Vision, ADP Banswara (partner of World Vision, NZ), Women Development Resource Centre, Madurai (partner of CWS, NZ), The Bridge Foundation, Bangalore (partner of Tear Fund, NZ) and Caritas, Bangladesh (Partner of Caritas, NZ).

2.0 Overview of the Stages of Participatory Impact Assessment

The participatory impact assessment pilot programme was divided under the following steps:

I Step: Planning of Participatory Impact assessment: The first step in the process was identification of NZ NGOs and their partners in South Asia for the impact assessment. VASS initiated discussions around impact assessment and its rationale with the NZ NGOs who later engaged their partners in South Asia (India and Bangladesh) for the process. This need was originated during the evaluation in 1998.

II Step: Workshop in Wellington: The second step was a two days workshop in Wellington for the NZ NGOs on building the perspective on participatory impact assessment. This workshop was facilitated by PRIA, which was contacted during planning stage by the VASS consultants to co-ordinate, and facilitate a process in South Asia. The workshop in NZ was followed by visits to the NZ NGOs (World Vision, CARITAS, CHRISTIAN WORLD SERVICE and TEAR FUND) to get an understanding of their partnerships with the Indian and Bangladeshi partners and the subjects which the partners were interested in for the impact assessment exercise.

III Step: Identification of facilitators: This step marked the preparation work in India and Bangladesh. Four facilitators were identified by PRIA to facilitate the process in all four partner agencies in South Asia. World Vision Banswara (partner of World Vision, NZ), The Bridge Foundation, Bangalore (Partner of Tear Fund), Women Development Resource Centre, Madurai (Partner of Christian World Service, NZ) and Caritas Bangladesh (Partner of Caritas, NZ). The basic criterion for the selection of facilitators were:

- Basic understanding of impact assessment
- Ability to understand and speak in the local language
- Understanding of the local context.

The facilitator made a field visit to all four organisations with the following objectives:

- to confirm mutual acceptability and interest in working together
- to gain an understanding of South Asian NGOs, the project and the intended impact assessment
- to identify any issues or concerns from South Asian NGOs that need to be addressed at the Delhi workshop

IV Step: Delhi Workshop: The fourth step was the Delhi Workshop which was facilitated by PRIA and involved all four South Asian NGOs (2-3 participants), their partner organisations in New Zealand (2 representatives), VASS Consultants (2) and facilitators. This workshop broadly aimed to:

- develop a common understanding of participatory impact assessment - the rationale, concept, principles, methodologies, indicators;
- develop a framework for undertaking the impact assessment case study including the objectives and scope of the exercise, the types of data collection required and appropriate methodologies to obtain it;
- plan the field visits with the Indian or Bangladesh NGO and their partner

V Step: Planning with the staff and the community: This step followed the Delhi workshop. All four facilitators accompanied the team (NZ NGOs and South Asian NGOs) respectively to visit the NGOs sites to facilitate a detailed planning with the staff and the communities. This step involved building understanding on PIA in staff and the communities, deriving objectives of PIA, developing indicators, identifying methods.

VI Step: This step was an action part, which led to the process of data collection, analysis and consolidation. This step engaged the staff of NGOs and communities to work together to assess the impact of their intervention.

3.0 The process

The important component that ran through all the four cases was capacity building. The facilitators with the participants who had attended Delhi workshop organised a similar kind of perspective building workshop for other staff and the communities who needed to be involved in the process. This enabled in building confidence of the staff and communities to take the process forward. Sensitisation process for senior staff like Governing Board Member, Executive Directors contributed in successful completion of all the four PIA. The role of facilitators in this process has been very crucial in providing support and guidance to the team.

In the case of CARITAS, the APEX leaders and group members were invited in a workshop at Khansama. In the same workshop some staff members were also present. Indicators identified were divided into four categories -at individual level, family level, group level and at apex level. The participants prioritised first three important indicators by putting individual votes. Prioritised indicators by CARITAS staff in Delhi workshop were also put across to make a final list of all three indicators, again through casting votes three indicators were selected which had got highest number of votes. In WDRC, after going from Delhi workshop, several meetings were done with women federations and sangams on empowerment. The discussions led to nine possible indicators. Those nine indicators were put on the wall, the nine women leaders were given four bindis to vote. The highest priority ones were selected as final indicators.

In World Vision's case, the indicators drawn in Delhi workshop were changed entirely and finally three had emerged during the workshop in Banskwarra which involved staff of ADP. The indicators identified by the staff were later discussed with the community who looked at these indicators as changes in their lives and agreed that those indicators were quite encompassing. The team tried to involve community in identifying indicators but the effort could not prove useful as the community members failed to comprehend project holistically. The objective of PIA in World Vision's case was very large and had involved the whole community representatives rather than a group of people. In the case of Bridge Foundation also the indicators were drawn with the staff.

The data collection and analysis process involved community members and the staff. The results were shared with communities and the organisations.

4.0 Deviations

Some deviations were commonly seen in all the four cases. Such as shift in indicators or change in the methods used for data collection, in the case of World Vision, finally three key indicators were selected and the objective of PIA got more refined. Other deviation, however was delay in the start of the data collection. Due to the delay in the process, even analysis and report writing got affected. The reasons were mainly other institutional responsibilities and demands, Timing of the exercise was not very appropriate as March-April are marked by festivals, migrations and intensive work to cope with harsh summers and internally amongst staff the feedback mechanisms remained weak. In WDRC's case some meetings were affected as due to elections some govt. officials could not be met otherwise no major deviation occurred there.

5.0 Involvement of facilitators

The facilitators were involved in the following ways:

1. **Pre Workshop:** Assessing the interest and expectations of South Asian NGOs in PIA.
2. **Delhi Workshop:** Providing guidance and support in identifying scope and in initial planning.
3. **Planning:** Strengthening capacities of the staff of the South Asian NGOs and the communities in planning PIA with communities, identifying objectives, indicators and methods for data collection. In the case of CARTIAS Bangladesh where the facilitator oriented CARITAS facilitators on PRA tools, conducted sessions for APEX leaders and local elite. Facilitators were also engaged in discussions with senior leaders and board members of the organisations to get their support for PIA. The visits were made in the villages to facilitate the process of sharing and learning.
4. **Data Collection:** The facilitators gave their support during this stage in varied ways, while in World Vision's case the role of facilitator was providing inputs on checklist of questions developed on indicators for collection of data, finalisation of methods, capacity building of the team by demonstrating participatory methods. In the case of TBF, facilitator also conducted one model PIA in one of the villages. The facilitator was also involved in preparing some learning materials on participatory methods. The other facilitators also provided support by providing inputs on data collection process to data collectors.
5. **Analysis and presentation:** Facilitators were involved in providing inputs on analysis and data consolidation to the NGOs. They gave inputs on report formats and organisation of data. Some facilitators were present during the sharing of findings of PIA with the stakeholder groups.

Personal visits, contact over telephones and e-mails was maintained.

The facilitators were keenly observing the process (by documenting it) in the fields throughout and were in touch with NZ NGOs, PRIA and VASS.

6.0 Involvement of the community

The communities with whom the impact assessment was done were always an integral part of the process. All four cases involved communities from the beginning. To elicit their participation in PIA where the whole village was contacted as in the case of World Vision, the meetings were held and through role plays their stake in the development, negative impacts of development interventions and their perceptions were shown. The core groups in the village were made, indicators were shared, roles and responsibilities were given, and capacity building on methods was built. Similarly, in CARITAS case the capacity building was taken up with the apex leaders and indicators were decided on a priority basis with them. In TBF and WDRC the communities were involved in planning and analysis. Their responses during data collection had evoked lot of analysis by them. While the communities were involved in planning, indicator finalisation but their involvement in data collection remained limited except in the case of World Vision where the communities were engaged in data collection. The reasons of not being involved could be - the technical part of collection of data, which means employing methods, which the communities have never used before, the belief of being uneducated and unaware pose as an obstacle in the process. These however can be overcome by instilling faith in the communities through encouragement and sensitization which needs to be an ongoing effort. Since this pilot project was time bound and had constraint of time, such issues were ignored.

In the case of World Vision also wherein the communities were involved in data collection, they had seen and experienced use of participatory methods, they were mostly the members of VDCS, MMs and SHGs who were actively involved in making project proposal etc. However, the criterion of education and literacy skills excluded some members from being the core group members.

The communities were involved in analysis by giving their inputs on findings. The workshops/meetings were organised to share the lessons.

7.0 The addressal of gender issues

The participation of women in PIA was given utmost importance. The staff who was engaged in the process had constituted of both men and women. Even in the case of WV where the core group was formed, the women were involved in data collection and analysis. Though some difficulties were faced when the survey was to be carried out and which demanded certain amount of educational status. Since most of the projects focused on women's empowerment such as WDRC's organising women into people's organisation, CARITAS and TBF's on Self help groups, the objectives got clear focus in PIA. In the case of World Vision, the project on integrated watershed management under PIA focused on impact on gender as an important objective. The empowerment indicators were built to assess the impact of interventions on women and some very qualitative indicators were drawn. In case of World Vision where the empowerment of communities (men and women) was taken up, the list of indicators were made which was common to both the gender and an effort was made to look at empowerment of both men and women.

The women staff of NGOs were also involved in the process. Their capacities were strengthened on PIA and methods, they were put in the teams for collecting data. Women in the communities were involved in planning, collection of data (as the members of core group in the case of World Vision) and in analysis.

8.0 Description of Methods

The various methods like role-plays, games, PLAs and surveys were used in all the four cases to collect data on impacts of social development interventions.

Role-Play: This method was used in the beginning of the PIA when the concept of participatory impact assessment was introduced in the community. This method enabled stimulating discussions, paved the way for collaboration with the communities in PIA. This method however could not be used in gathering data during impact assessment, as it appeared to be manipulative. The information needed in impact assessment was spontaneous while in this method, the roles had to be allotted and some expected results unconsciously get transferred by the facilitator to the performers. The results, which appear, are often those which one intends to hear.

In the case of TBF, the role play was used in understanding physical abuse on women. Two volunteers were selected to play the role of husband and wife. They were asked to show through role play a situation before SHGs on women and after the SHGs were formed. Some women actively played the roles. In the discussion it was realised that cases of wife beating were reduced not mainly due to SHG but some other factors also contributed.

In the case of WDRC also the role play was used in planning to assess the reduction of cases on domestic violence.

Mobility Mapping

This method was used to assess the mobility pattern of villagers. Coloured spherical papers (two colours) and in some places (especially with the women groups) bangles were used. Two areas were demarcated. The internal circle depicted places inside the villages, while external circle depicted places outside villages. The communities were asked the places where they could go inside the villages, and one coloured spherical papers were marked with the names that they were mentioning. Those papers were put inside the circle. The similar exercise was done with them by asking the places they would be going to outside the villages those were also marked on the papers and put outside. Another coloured spherical papers were used to demonstrate inaccessible places in the circles. After ADP interventions, there was change in colours as the inaccessible places were made accessible for the communities.

This method was also used by CARITAS to assess the mobility of women. Here the circles were drawn to depict the Para (hamlet), village, union, upazila, district and other distant place. Then they drew picture of different places on each circle with one colour to show where they went before and with different colours they depicted places where they began to visit now.

Venn/Chapati diagram

Through this method, social relationships and distances were assessed in bhil communities in World Vision's case. Two coloured papers were used to depict bhil and yadav communities. The parameters like access to education, water resources, eating together, sitting together, acceptance of food from each other, intercommunity marriages were taken and the sphericals were put near, or far depending upon mixing of the two communities on these parameters. The difference in social relationships was assessed as this exercise was helpful in demonstrating the effect before ADP's intervention and after ADP's interventions.

This method was also used in CARITAS to assess the contacts and the relationships the group had built with different agencies. The participants were asked to write down name of GO and NGOs with whom they have established linkages. They were asked to re-size the Venn/ round paper according to the importance of the organisation. A symbol of samiti was drawn in the middle of a big paper and the participants were asked to place the Venn/ round paper near or far from the symbol of samiti according to the frequency of contact. After completing the diagram they analysed the output

Seasonality and Time trend

This method was used in order to see the pattern of crops sown throughout the year. This method helped in assessing the new crops varieties and the changes in sowing crops due to ADP's interventions. The use of technologies like use of tractors, fertilisers were also noted down.

Impact flow chart

In CARITAS's case, to assess the impacts of awareness on education, health, income generation, legal rights, dowry, divorce this method was used. Some papers were taken on which sectors name were written or depicted in the form of symbols. A paper symbolising samiti was kept in the centre and on samiti was kept in the middle and these sectors were written on small papers other round papers were put near or far from the centre depending upon the degree of awareness developed.

Matrix Ranking and Scoring

With an objective to assess the most important benefit derived from benefits, this method was used in the case of CARITAS. On asking what were the benefits of savings, the participants made the list of benefits on a big paper. Individually they voted the points which were most important to them. This was followed by discussions and analysis on benefits of savings and credit.

Situation analysis

In the case of CARITAS, the participants were asked to list down all the activities done by the women in a big paper. After listing all activities they were asked to put vote on the left column of the matrix to show who did these activities before joining the samiti (Men, women or both). Then they were asked to put vote on the right column to show who is doing the activities at present (Men, women or both). After

giving vote by all participants the whole matrix was presented to them and they were asked to clarify the situation of women's activities before and after joining samities.

This method could bring out very clearly the gradual sharing of responsibilities by the men and women. The men are sharing household work which was absent earlier.

Listing, Prioritisation and case studies

This method was used to know which social actions benefited the group made by CARITAS. The participants listed down all action and they identified which were the important ones by putting dots. A lot of analysis was generated on the actions which got highest votes.

Vote and Mood Meter

CARITAS, the facilitator drew a matrix with number of loans received in columns and the first column showing three different moods (happy, average and sad). Then participants were asked to put dots under column to show number of loans received by the participants against the mood. Finally the participants explained why they were happy or sad with the loans.

Pie Chart

In CARITAS, the APEX leaders were asked to find out the activities under Planning and Monitoring where women developed skills. They identified the activities and shown it on a Pie chart (by slotting in an anna). Finally they explained the issues of each activities.

Score Causal diagram

The participants were asked to identify the sectors where women feel they have attained empowerment. Considering the scale of women empowerment as 100 they were asked to distribute score to the different sectors according to the achievement of samiti (Education, health, environment etc.) Finally they explained different issues under each sector where women had benefited most.

Time matrix

In TBF's case, for understanding the workload on women, daily activities of women and men work-time matrix was drawn on the board. It was found that women were working more than men, were less paid and were engaged in unskilled and unpaid work.

Focused group discussion

This method was used frequently in PIA. The groups like Mahila Mandals, VDCs contributed in generating data on specific questions. These were mostly semi structured, and gave space to the respondents to express their views. This also helped in exploring people's attitudes and feelings.

Interviews

The interviews were used as one of the methods in most of the cases. In the World Vision's case, this method was used subsequent to FGDs as some members were identified to be asked with some specific questions. Such as SHG Chairpersons or treasurers who were especially spoken to. For the purpose of triangulation, secondary sources/stakeholders were also interviewed. In TBF, interviews were carried out to understand sharing of house work, girl child education, physical abuse, self confidence, improvement in literacy, getting Government facilities, self employment, savings, assets, and regular income.

KPA (Knowledge, Practice and Attitude) survey

KPA survey was designed in the case of World Vision to cover the maximum population in the villages. Though like other survey methods, it also relied on extracting a sample. 16 questions were put in the questionnaire ranging from assessing knowledge, practice and attitudinal change.

Simulation

A simple simulation was designed for understanding decision-making and conflict resolution in TBF's case. The scene selected was SHG and the issues related to giving loans. The members were given different roles, including NGO worker, SHG leaders etc. Women actively participated in simulation. The decision making and conflict resolution process of the group was analysed in the debriefing, finally application to their own SHG was discussed.

Game or group exercise

In TBF, this has been used for leadership in the group. The existing leaders of the SHG were made the team leaders of a team having seven more members. The task given to the group was to make the strong, highest and beautiful house with locally available material with in 30 minutes. The resource persons were divided and involved in recording the process. After the construction debriefing the role of the leaders and the relationships between the leader and members were analysed. Finally the existing situation in their SHG was discussed.

Social mapping and trend analysis

Combination of these two methods was selected in the case of TBF to understand the impact on dalit oppression and the degree of empowerment. The participants were divided into small groups and were asked to draw the pictures on a white chart, showing the distance with different social structures before the interventions and now. Along with this, they were also asked to note the changing trends in the relationships of dalit with others.

Case studies

We prepared two case studies one related to women rights and another related to other gender issues. Women were divided into small groups given the case studies written in local kannada language. In the village where I participated women participated lead the process better than I expected. They were involved and the outcome was also very interesting. then we had discussion about their knowledge about laws related to women, other gender issues and future action.

9.0 Impact of PIA in Organisation and in the community

9.1 On Organisation

1. The organizations were very enthusiastic about the pilot initiative and its results. PIA might be adopted in other projects of the organizations in an ongoing basis.

2. Through the exercise, an assessment of staff's capacity could be done. The staff has provided an opportunity to enhance their skills on identifying indicators and the use of methods. In this process realization has dawned on them that impact assessment, evaluations are not the domains of external agencies only, they themselves can be engaged in this process which could be more rewarding.

3. This exercise has also enhanced awareness of staff on some unintended impacts of their interventions resulting in greater understanding of different strategies to minimize such impacts in future interventions.

4. The biggest realization was the obliteration of certain stereotypes that tend to settle down in the mind. Due to cultural barriers and the historical exclusion of women, the WV team always had inhibitions to involve women. But seeing their qualitative involvement during PIA, the team began to feel that those stereotypes were main barriers, which need to be abdicated in future.

5. Because of effective use of methods like role plays and folk lozenges in planning, the organisations, especially world vision realized the strength and positive aspects of such communication channels in conveying the messages to the community. In future, the team will be making use of such methods in their intervention areas.

9.2 On the Community

1. The community realized that their stake in development is very important. This exercise has cultivated a sense of ownership amongst the community.

2. Their involvement throughout resulted in increased awareness about the importance of women's participation in public forums. Women during PIA of World Vision realized that there is unequal representation of women and men in VDCs and low representation of girl children in the schools. They emphasized upon equal opportunities for women and men in the village.

3. Community's participation in doing the exercise gave further boost to their confidence as they saw their journey from close quarters. In case of WDRC, women groups were excited to know how far they have come in a long journey.

10.0 SOME ISSUES

- Capacity building is a long-term and gradual process. Training programmes can serve a limited purpose in a structured environment. Unless the learning is translated into action and tested in the field by those whose capacities to impart training has been built the objective remains unfulfilled. Structured events like training coupled with opportunities to be able to practice learning enables the process and helps in enhancing the skills, thereby reinforcing the ideals of *learning by doing*. The process of *learning by doing* empowers and gives confidence to the people engaged in the process. If learning by doing is an enabling tool, those with capacities to provide training must practice and hone up their skills in real settings and environment.
- Individual capacities have to be institutionalised in the organisation to be sustainable. It also calls for developing elaborate mechanisms and strengthening those so that a space is provided to innovate, take risks and try out new ideas.
- It is commonly seen that day-to-day institutional affair and those relating to the needs of the community take precedence over activities like project monitoring and regular reviews. Some organisations treat project monitoring as just another activity, which is low on their priority. It is also seen that some organisations are apprehensive and sceptical about undertaking activities like, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment guided as they are by notion that these are tasks that can be performed well by external agencies or consultants on hire. However, when the same organisations tread this path despite hesitation, they find the exercise quite stimulating as also feel excited to discover their own capacities.
- The gap between *knowing and doing* needs to be bridged in institutions. Those who have been exposed to capacity building interventions may not necessarily be directly engaged in doing or implementing things. Those who get directly involved may not have necessary capacities to carry out the work. The distribution of roles and responsibilities should be on the basis of skills and capacities related to the demand of the task.
- The existing power relationships, hierarchies and structures within the organisation influence the process to a large extent. The decision-making powers vested in individuals does make a difference to the idea of implementation of capacity building interventions. Those who are placed in responsible positions, need to get sensitised more in order to play a supportive role in the entire process. All capacity building efforts may become ineffective or less effective if support from the team or seniors is lacking in providing space for experimentation or implementation.

11.0 Summary

The participatory impact assessment pilot initiative derived strength from involvement of all stakeholders from the initial phase of the project. The effort to make participatory impacts assessment *non-imposing* contributed enormously in smooth completion of this pilot initiative. The space was provided to NZ NGOs to constantly engage in a process of dialogue and discussions with partner organisations including chief executives and the board members to win support and trust. An environment of openness and candour proved extremely conducive in facilitating the process. The facilitators for the partner organisations were not seen as evaluators but as guide to the process. The planning with facilitators, NZ NGOs, partner organisations and the community was the hallmark of the process. The communities were constantly engaged in a process of quest, exploration and analysis in various ways. Effective methods were used to collect information on the impact to elicit maximum participation of the people involved. Greater involvement led to a better understanding of the impact, both intended and unintended. This also resulted in the planning of future strategies to overcome or minimise the unintended impact. The whole process highlighted the specific niche and capacities that the communities exhibited while carrying out impact assessment. They themselves saw the entire process as *empowering*.

Besides the enabling factors that facilitated the process, attention was also drawn to certain areas that are larger and universal issues such as mainstreaming participatory impact assessments in the organisations. It is often seen that day-to-day institutional matters tend to take precedence over impact assessments, reviews, monitoring etc. For strengthening and institutionalising participatory impact assessment in organisations, very serious effort needs to be undertaken in terms of commitment towards impact assessment on a regular basis which also calls for investment in capacity building of the staff.