"Yojana Se Labh Tak" workshop
Role of NGOs and Civil Society organizations as social service providers

Digital Empowerment Foundation conducted one day workshop on 12th December 2018 in Ranchi (Jharkhand) at Visvesvaraya Sanitation & Water Academy on "Yojana se Labh Tak": Role of NGOs and Civil Society organizations as social service providers.

The workshop was organized by New Delhi based Digital Empowerment with the support of European Union Delegation in India and Bhutan and Qualcomm. The participants included representatives of NGOs and CSOs from various districts of Jharkhand.

Dr Syed S. Kazi, Deputy Director of Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), introduced the context of the workshop.

The context of the Workshop

According to a Primary Research conducted by Digital Empowerment Foundation in 2015, there are approximately 350-400 schemes in each state run by both central and state government but there is hardly any awareness among the beneficiaries. Citizens waste their time and energy to avail the benefit of the schemes or to get the information about the schemes due to which they lose all their hopes and stop applying.

Despite numerous schemes implemented by the government, there are large numbers of people (disable, elderly, women, tribes etc.) who are still abandoned from their rights of getting the benefit of these entitlements. The Government of India is trying its level best to reach out to the people living in information poverty but despite creating awareness regarding the schemes on health, education and livelihood, unfortunately, the process of availing the information regarding the schemes still remains ambiguous. Therefore, NGOs /CSOs can play a critical role in frontline service delivery agency and facilitate the access of government

schemes and benefits and as the role of Information and Communication technology is emerging day by day. Our societies are also becoming digitally connected more and more, thus, ICTs can also play an important part in helping the NGOs/CSOs to deliver government schemes, information and benefits to the citizens.

Inaugural Session

The workshop started with a welcome address by Dr Syed S. Kazi, deputy director of DEF. He briefly introduced the theme of the workshop, mission, vision and activities of DEF and ways the organization in providing the benefits of the government welfare schemes to the last mile communities. He also emphasized the role of NGOs/ CSOs as social service providers in terms of delivery information, schemes and benefits to the last mile connectivity. Dr Syed Kazi also stressed the current scenario of government welfare schemes in India and the importance of schemes.

The dialogue was also addressed by **Prof. B.K Jha of Birsa Munda Agriculture University**, **Mr Abhishek Tirkey of SAMETI (Department of Agriculture, Jharkhand)**, **Mr James Heren, Convenor of NREGA WATCH** and **Ms Srividya Balasubramanium from University of Leipzig, Germany**.

The focus of the workshop

The focus of the workshop was to address the key issues people face in availing the government welfare schemes and benefits.

Key issues discussed were:

1. Inaccessibility of government schemes information to the people living in villages and communities
2. Lack of community-level reliable access points or platforms to access information, benefits and grievance readdress.
3. Lack of facilities and mechanisms in panchayat offices to provide regular and smooth information and services related to schemes, entitlements and grievance collection and disposal.
4. The top-down approach to delivering schemes and benefits.
5. The huge gap between design, implementation and delivery of government schemes and welfare programmes.

Session 1: Scenario of schemes and entitlements

Dr Syed Kazi facilitated the dialogue with the presentation on the current situation of government welfare schemes and entitlements. He also focuses on the present challenges faced by the government and other non- profit organizations and civil society organizations in reaching out to panchayats and people in the villages with the welfare schemes and benefits. He also pointed out the scope of work and the role of social service providers in this area of schemes and entitlements.

Session 2: Views from the Panellists

The panellists those who shared their experiences regarding the current situation of schemes and entitlements in their working areas were:

1. Mr James Heren, Convenor of NREGA WATCH
2. Ms Srividya Balasubramanium, a researcher from the University of Leipzig, Germany.
3. Prof. B.K Jha of Birsa Munda Agriculture University
4. Mr Abhishek Tirkey of SAMETI (Department of Agriculture, Jharkhand)

They also shared their views on community information resource centres and the mechanisms which can connect the people with the schemes and their benefits. Importance of digital technology was also a major point of discussion.

Some of the points covered by them were:

- Role of NREGA workers in reaching out to with the agriculture-based schemes.
- Role of Self-help groups in the delivery of the schemes and services in their community
- Role of gram sabha in the village for delivery the information, schemes and entitlements.
- Role of technology in providing services and scheme benefits in the community

- People acting as social infrastructures thereby bridging the gap between technology, citizen and welfare schemes.
- Role of intermediaries in creating rural digital empowerment
- Actions that need to be taken in improving the public scheme access and delivery.
- Intermediaries as vital links between rural population and digital platforms.
- Creating hubs for Information sharing or knowledge transferring.
- Necessity of Integration

Session 3: Importance of technology in bridging the gap between people and government welfare schemes

Mr Saurabh Srivastava from Digital Empowerment Foundation also described the current scenario of schemes and entitlements. He focussed on technology playing an important role in reaching out to communities with schemes, information and benefits. He also explained the soochanpreneur model and gave a live demonstration of MeraApp, a mobile application designed by DEF which acts as a catalogue of government welfare schemes and also helps people in getting the schemes and services. It also creates employment for the rural youth and makes them the intermediaries those who form the links between government, citizen, technology and welfare schemes.

"Yojana Seva Framework" was also discussed in the consultation so that social service providers can adapt and implement this framework with the support of digital technology in reaching out to last mile connectivity.
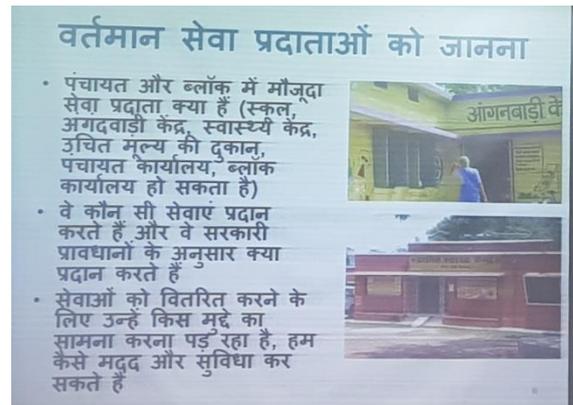
Session 4: Suggestions

The consultation decided to constitute a "Jharkhand Yojana Seva Network" to support and work to improve last mile access and delivery of schemes and benefits.

Some suggestions given by the other NGO/CSO representatives were:

1. Formation of what's app group of "Yojana se labh take" for information sharing regarding state welfare schemes.
2. Involving the women population through SHGs for the delivery of schemes and services
3. Creating facebook group of the NGOs/ CSOs participated for grievance readdress.

In the end, the process of collaboration and partnership document was shared with the interested representatives of the NGOs/CSOs those who attended the workshop.