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book

Creating a role for Civil Society Organizations in Watershed Programs

In 2001, the Government of Andhra Pradesh amended the guidelines surrounding their state-wide watershed management program¹. These modifications stipulated that, rather than having outside organizations implement the program within villages, it should be community based organizations (CBOs) that act as the implementing agencies. However, as most CBOs lack the technical expertise and experience in social mobilization to complete the task successfully, a need was created for external facilitators to assist in building the CBOs' capacities. APMAS is recognized as an organization with strong relationships with both the government and local development agencies. Therefore, the Commissioner of Rural Development requested that APMAS identify non government organizations (NGOs) suitable to act as facilitators to aid in the capacity building process.

During the first three months of 2005, APMAS anchored the process of assessing and rating NGOs for suitability to assist in the state level watershed program. APMAS realized the importance of both the process and the final outcome; therefore, it made sure that the rating of NGOs was carried out in a precise and well planned manner.

The process started with a meeting of all stakeholders to be involved in the identification of NGOs. This crucial meeting resulted in the determination of selection criteria to be used, and a set process to be followed in choosing the NGOs. Following this meeting, a pilot test of the assessment process was carried out in one of the districts. The

Prior to rating the NGOs, APMAS made certain that all organizations met certain criteria, such as having an operational bank account and no record of misappropriation of funds, to ensure that only high quality NGOs were considered.

¹ Watershed management is the process of analyzing, protecting and developing water resources of a drainage basin for the conservation of resources. Managing the watershed effectively can increase the maximum supply of usable water without adversely affecting the soil or water resources.

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pilot testing allowed APMAS to determine what needed to be adjusted in the process so that it could be successfully rolled out in 11 more districts. The next step involved the data collection and initial screening of over 1200 NGOs in Andhra Pradesh. From this initial screening, a group of NGOs in each district were short listed for more in-depth rating and review. The rating of organizations that passed the initial screening involved a wide range of components, ranging from organizational capabilities to their different skills and attributes. These rated NGOs were grouped into three categories; one group ready for immediate participation in the watershed program, one group that could be prepared with one month of intensive training, and a final group who were not suitable for the project.

Due to the precise planning and execution of the rating process, APMAS was able to complete the assessments quickly without sacrificing the quality of the assessments. This rapid exercise, in which each district was assessed within the period of one week, has resulted in 112 NGOs being identified as ready to participate in the watershed program at the district level. A further 96 organizations have been identified as potential future partner after undergoing capacity building training.

Following the assessment process, a state level committee was formed under the Ministry for Rural Development, of which APMAS is a committee member, to further review the role of non government organizations for Livelihood promotion through the watershed program in Andhra Pradesh.

APMAS' timely and high quality third party perspective has provided the government with the necessary tools to move forward with this large and critical project.



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