

Mission Convergence: Good Governance through Shared Leadership

Context

Urban poverty alleviation is a challenging task before the nation which calls for imaginative new approaches. The goal is to adequately feed, educate, house and employ the large and rapidly growing number of impoverished city dwellers. The Government of India's *Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Report 2007*, points out that despite good economic growth and improved fiscal situation, the country is not on track to meet goals pertaining to hunger, literacy & school attendance, malnutrition, gender equality, maternal health, sanitation and environment. The first goal under the Delhi Development Goals (DDGs) that the state plans to achieve by 2015 is 'to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger'. As per the figures in 1999-2000, only 8% of Delhi's population lived below the income poverty line. The state has set records in reducing levels of income poverty between 1973-74 and 1999-00, with a reduction in poverty levels by 82% during this period. At the same time Delhi's per capita income today is more than two-and-a-half times the national average and it also has the country's highest monthly per capita expenditure at Rs. 1408. These may suggest that the state is on the right path to achieve one of important goals of DDGs.

The task is enormous, with a population of 13.8 million in 2001, even 8% will translate into 1.1 million people in poverty. However the figures of income poverty mask the other forms of deprivation in the lives of countless millions. An estimated 45% of Delhi's population resides in slums that include informal settlements-squatter settlements and unauthorized colonies, where the housing and living conditions are appalling. Basic amenities like safe drinking water and sanitation facilities are still out of reach of more than 25% of the poor. Majority of these people are migrants from the neighboring states who come in search of employment. Since majority of them are unskilled and illiterate, they end up in the unorganized sector which employs almost 4.3 million workers. The absence of job security, benefits and any safety nets compounds their problems. The extent of this problem is only going to increase as the latest *UN Habitat Report* has projected Delhi to be home to 22.5 million people by 2025, making it the world's fourth

biggest city by population.

India's Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12) has laid down specific MDG-oriented targets at national and state level for economic growth, poverty reduction and overall social development, with a particular focus on removing regional disparities and improving service delivery, especially for disadvantaged groups and from amongst them the focus being on women, children, SC/ST and minorities. This top down approach both in formulation of schemes and entitlement criteria opened up ample opportunities for incentive distortions that in turn manifests in poor targeting and numerous deliveries channel leakages¹. The State has been making serious efforts to improve the quality of life of its citizens. Social Sector spending as a proportion of development expenditures was 74% in 2003-04. Education, Health and Urban Development together account for more than 85% of the total social expenditure. An analysis of 58 plan schemes in 17 sectors had a budgetary outlay of Rs 562.14 crores for the year 2008-09 and all these programmes were targeted at the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of society including women, children and old. However it has been generally accepted that these efforts have not yielded results to the desired levels.

Mission Background and Rationale

Global thinking on development now converges on the idea of making services work for the poor. The failure of welfare programme implementation may not simply reflect failings of design, or the larger plan within which they are ensconced, but of issues of governance within the local setting of service delivery. The current initiatives of the government are characterized by a multiplicity of initiatives, spread across over nine departments, with implementing agencies often duplicating the efforts of each other. This is further complicated by the fact that there are no converging nodes or point person close to the point of service delivery. Hence for the needy citizen, who should have been the beneficiary of the government's welfare entitlement services without any hassle, such a situation translates into endless running to various government departments and engaging with different procedures adopted by different departments for the same beneficiary. Compounding this is the fact that the most vulnerable also lack the capacity to engage with the government. Further, overview mechanisms fail to accurately estimate either the numbers or who the right beneficiaries are. Hence the writing on the wall is to simplify government procedures, enhance its effectiveness at the field level, and increase citizen involvement.

Taking cue from the above, we initiated a series of consultative deliberations with credible grassroots civil society organizations and academic institutes, and came to the considered view that we need to reorient our strategic thinking with respect to implementation of social sector programmes if we hope to genuinely improve the quality of life of our citizens especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of society. It was proposed that various welfare entitlement schemes of nine participating departments be guided and delivered in an integrated manner at the targeted urban vulnerable and poor community level chosen through a more simplified common criteria. The selection of the entitlement-holder and the processes for accessing the entitlements would be jointly carried out in partnership with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). This would bring greater transparency in implementation of the schemes, and address the errors of inclusion and exclusion in a focused manner. This would also lead to convergence of public resources within a rights based framework that would improve fund utilization at the level of implementation (district and below) and catalyze greater effectiveness (and social inclusiveness) of service delivery. For convergence to be sustainable (beyond individuals' efforts) and effective (relate to actual change on the ground), a concerted effort to link needs assessment, scheme rationalization, coordination, implementation (including budgeting and fund-flow) and strong M&E is required which would be based on a robust IT system.

To achieve this vision, with the Mission Convergence, the government has brought all welfare entitlement schemes on a common platform, while strengthening the implementation machinery at the lower levels, and incorporating civil society organizations as partners in overseeing the entire process. The specific mechanisms range from the use of modern Information technologies, to rationalizing administration, and partnering with CSOs at the field level. Long-term objective of this project is to package useful social sector welfare schemes focusing on empowerment of the poor together at delivery level thereby maximizing their impact and efficiently utilizing scarce financial resources through active involvement of community in a concerted and focused manner. The causes of the present situation are known and the concern is to find ways to improve service delivery of welfare schemes on a priority basis and identify the approach and mechanisms to do the same. Inadequate access or lack of availability of these services affects the livelihoods and life expectancy of the poor. Mission Convergence attempts to tackle this through a multi-pronged, a multi-disciplinary convergence of services covering welfare schemes

such as health, education, nutrition, social security, employment, gender equity, pension and empowerment of communities.

The Mission Mode Initiative has developed a convergence model by bringing together welfare schemes of nine departments (Heath & Family Welfare, Education, Women & Child Development, Food and Civil Supplies, SC, ST, OBC and Minority Welfare, Social Welfare, Urban Development, Labour and Information Technology) on a common platform, rationalizing the schemes, simplifying administrative procedures for availing benefits, strengthen the implementation by use of IT and partnering civil society organizations for effective delivery. The Mission believes in the paradigm change of looking at welfare measures as rightful entitlements of citizens rather than doles handed out by the state. It is also necessary to empower the most vulnerable to avail their entitlements and helping them in finding a way out of poverty. This is an inclusive process which also includes creating livelihood opportunities, skill development, education and health schemes benefits to be delivered by the CSOs.

The *Samajik Suvidha Sangam* is a State level body that works under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary of the NCT of Delhi. At the apex is a State Convergence Forum, which includes the secretaries of all the line departments. At the District level, the Dy Commissioners head the District Convergence Forums. The Mission Director is the CEO. This entire set up is committed to bring services of the government to the people who need them most. It aims to redefine the role of the government from the person who is at the bottom of the pyramid creating structures at the community level which are empowering and sustainable. This set up works on the understanding that those at the bottom of the pyramid remain largely remain largely invisible.

Setting up the Structures closer to the Community

In the institutional set up for Mission Convergence, the significance of setting up structures and delivery points closer to the community was realized from the outset. The need for making women as the focus to facilitate the process of change and empowerment was a learning borne out of previous experience of successful public private partnership programmes for community outreach. From the very successful *Stree Shakti* (literally meaning women power) program, which was a camp based approach to engage with the women in the targeted poor areas, it was decided to graduate to community owned and partnered structures at fixed locations called the 'Gender Resource Centre' (GRC). The GRC objectives are based on the *Bhagidari* (citizen-government Partnership) philosophy of the Government of NCT of Delhi. It is a

proactive attempt for provisioning of basic services in the core areas of - health, literacy and livelihood creation and sustenance. To consolidate and institutionalize the gains achieved through the *Stree Shakti* Camps, a long term strategy was evolved for sustainable empowerment of women through the *Stree Kosh* Project, i.e., a name given to it as Gender Resource Centre. With the launch of Mission Convergence in the year 2008, the GRCs were made the operational arm of the Mission at the grassroot/ community level, and given the nomenclature of 'Gender Resource Center – *Suvidha Kendra* (GRC-SK)'. The GRC-SK today acts as a single window for information and facilitation for improved access to the welfare services/ entitlements to the vulnerable and needy.

GRC-SK serves as first point of contact for the community. These structures have been set up by the Government in partnership with the civil society organizations (CSOs) to reach out to people and take government programmes to communities. GRCs have been setup in areas having vulnerable families based on poverty mapping exercise with a mandate to cater to 15,000-20,000 households (population of one lakh). Starting from just 4 in number, a quantum jump has been made in the last three years to have 80 such centers all over Delhi. Besides assisting in availing entitlements, these centers work towards social, economic and legal empowerment of women by interventions in the area of legal rights, economic initiatives-skill building, microenterprises and entrepreneurship development and health. The planning for the required interventions starts within the community and the implementing machinery comprises of a combination of professionals with social work background, community mobilisers to local community volunteers and organized groups of women from the community in the form of self help groups, *mahila mandals* (women's groups) etc. The Mission thus looks at holistic model of empowerment with a focus on women, thereby continuing the focus on gender mainstreaming and gendered development. It is through the women that the families are reached out.

Addressing Urban Poverty

There have been globally recognized best practices which prove that concerted effort through a convergence model can reduce poverty much faster than conventional models followed by the government. For example the Bolsa Familia program, through a minimal expenditure, adopted a convergence model and was able to reduce poverty by 30-35%. The need for integrated and unified arrangements for addressing the problems of poverty reduction comprehensively has been demonstrated by such models, which facilitate better targeting of

programmes, effective identification of beneficiaries, better institutional coordination etc.

The Mission takes a two pronged approach for the provision of social benefits to vulnerable individuals and households. Firstly, it seeks to make identification of the vulnerable sections of the society easier. Traditionally, income has been used to measure poverty. This has led to significant inclusion and exclusion errors, wherein people who are ineligible for the schemes get included and a large number of people who are eligible remain excluded. Additionally, other subjective indicators of vulnerability, such as ones born of disability, occupation, age, gender, etc. get overlooked if only income is used as a measure of poverty. Therefore, to create a more objective filter for inclusion of the vulnerable into social welfare scheme delivery, in discussion with a number of CSOs we developed a criterion based on vulnerability factors to identify the poor. The use of non economic criteria for identifying the poor has been influenced by the *Kudumbashree* model in Kerala too. The proxy indicators for identifying poor based on their vulnerability adopted by the Mission includes three filters. The first level of identification of vulnerability is the place of residence, therefore targeting those who live in notified slums, non-notified slums, resettlement colonies and the homeless. The second level looks at socially deprived groups which include women headed households, children headed households and families having old people, differently-abled persons and those suffering from debilitating illness. The Occupationally Vulnerable Groups includes among others people earning their livelihood as rag pickers, construction workers, street vendors, casual domestic workers and cycle rickshaw drivers. Under the new methodology, the poor identified on the basis of their vulnerability are categorised into two groups, the most vulnerable and the vulnerable. Income is used as an exclusion criterion instead of inclusion criteria.

Based on the new criteria, the Mission has launched a survey which is a virtual census of the poor and the vulnerable in the state. Already about 1 million households have been identified through this process, out of which the list of the vulnerable, most vulnerable has been drawn, and the mapping of these families is being done against the existing schemes and programmes of the government. A unique feature about this survey is that it is being carried out by community based organizations who are working in the area and who would be responsible for helping these people to access their entitlements too.

The preliminary analysis of the survey has some major findings.

Of the total households surveyed, 66% were from JJ clusters whereas the remaining was in F, G, and H colonies (the lowest categories with reference to municipal property taxation rates). Moreover 52% respondents covered belong to the OBC, SC and ST (the historically disadvantaged section in Indian context) categories. This goes to show that vulnerability based identification has been able to cover the socially and economically weaker sections of society. For the first time it included groups which were hitherto completely excluded from both the data bank and welfare entitlement schemes, groups like homeless people, waste pickers, street vendors, destitute etc. who could seldom provide enough documents to be part of either the BPL list (below poverty line) or claim entitlements. The simplified and common criteria show that the actual number of people trapped in urban poverty is much more than previously estimated.

Secondly, the Mission seeks to make the institutional processes and mechanisms of availing schemes citizen-friendly, transparent, and efficient. Based on the survey data, a uniform data bank of all the vulnerable is being created by the Mission. This would prevent duplication of efforts, and need for repetitive documentation. All scheme implementation points would be IT enabled and connected to a central server to facilitate the flow of information for MIS reporting purposes. For availing the schemes, potential beneficiaries would receive a unique smart card that would make identification easier and leave less room for error. This would also give the scheme delivery points instant access to the beneficiaries' socio-economic data, thus making verification easier and eliminating hassles related to submission of various forms and documentation for availing these schemes.

Further, in an effort to rationalize schemes, the entire gamut of schemes for social security under implementation by the nine departments (45 in number) was studied. The study showed that many of these are defunct or do not serve any useful social purpose. A set of new principles, criteria, and guidelines has been developed for rationalization of the existing schemes. As a result revisions have been made in the eligibility criteria, reducing documentation requirements, simplifying administrative procedures, avoiding duplications across schemes, and the process has been initiated for scrapping of irrelevant schemes and revising certain entitlements.

Another major step has been bringing about administrative convergence by making the Deputy Commissioners (DC) office the central point for all welfare schemes in a district. Nodal officers have been nominated for all line departments who report to DCs. District Resource Centre (DRC), run by a district level nodal NGO selected out of civil society organizations with long years of experience of working

in the social sector, have been setup at the district level in order to assist the DCs in implementation of mission convergence activities. The DRCs operated by CSOs thus facilitate the interface between citizens and government.

Developing Community Leaders

Under the Mission a large network of community based organizations have been made equal partners in governance. While there are 100 such organizations actively involved, with each of these a strong team of local volunteers is engaged along with regular functionaries with social work background. Based on the newly developed criteria, these CBOs were trained to carry out the survey. The process involved building the capacity of a large cadre of local community leaders, mostly women, so that they in turn could empower the community with relevant information about their rights and the ways in which they could access their entitlements. Going beyond the identification, the community groups have also been empowered for authentication of the antecedents of those who were denied of any services and entitlements in the absence of documentary proofs. The Mission initiated a series of workshops at different levels to share information on the Mission's vision and goals. The CBOs were trained through adopting appropriate modules for conducting surveys, interfacing with the community and in answering queries of the entitlement scheme related questions. Many interface meetings were organized between the Dy Commissioners, nodal officers of departments, and CBO functionaries for better coordination and interface to solve the citizens' problem. This process has made them not only more aware of their rights but also unleashed their full potential as productive citizens. Most of all it is the women who have proved to be the effective harbingers of this change. Building up leadership at the local level is having the desired effect of diluting and phasing out the hitherto paternalistic approach of the government and the elected public representatives. A dedicated effort by the Mission functionaries for enhancing awareness levels is not only leading to more and more community participation in the programme, but also imposing greater accountability into the system to ensure delivery. A reversal of trend has been set in motion that of the government reaching the needy's doorstep, rather than the needy approaching the government, a far cry earlier. Those who never counted in the system earlier have now been given an identity and the system can no longer overlook them from being reckoned in the public policy and services meant for them.

Emerging from the foregoing discussions, it can be concluded that

Mission Convergence is a small step aiming towards larger structural changes. It redefines public service reforms by engaging NGOs not as brokers to whom government functions are merely offloaded but as equal partner to change. Secondly it demonstrates on the ground government's commitment towards inclusive growth and creating structures at the bottom which is able to perform leadership roles. Thirdly, the government itself has redefined its role from that of a regulator to a facilitator. This shift is expected to strengthen the democratic governance by giving a voice to the voiceless and through a more inclusive citizenship. The journey has not been easy though given the resistance to change faced at multiple levels. But we are confident that with the community empowerment and strong engagement in the process of change, there can be no reverse tide.

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Endnote

¹ Human Development Report, UNDP 2007.