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Participatory Project Planning (SAVINI): Experiences and Lessons

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Abstract: *This evaluation report examines the pilot phase of the SAVINI Project, an innovative distance education initiative mounted by Indira Gandhi National Open University that targeted at development workers in the NGO sector working for the disadvantaged rural and tribal communities. Through a participatory evaluation process, data was gathered from learners, NGOs and IGNOU staff to assess:*

- *the appropriateness of programme content and materials for the specified constituency of learners that IGNOU is trying to reach;*
- *the effectiveness of the training in terms of learners skills and capacities; and*
- *the effectiveness, including cost effectiveness, of IGNOU's model for delivering distance education in participatory planning.*

The report documents and analyses the findings of this evaluation and identifies the critical factors, the effectiveness of the SAVINI programme which includes: the quality of the NGOs selected, the mix and calibre of learners, the quality of the collaborative relationships between IGNOU and the nodal NGOs the level of IGNOU support, and the quality of programme design and delivery, including the quality of print materials.

The evaluation of the pilot phase points to which factors need strengthening, and how the questions around cost-effectiveness could be addressed.

We have included this report as a sequel to the preceding paper by Shobhita Jain.

The Evaluation of the Pilot Phase

The Purpose

Occurring at the end of the pilot phase of the SAVINI programme which lasted 21 months, the purpose of the evaluation was to inform decision about content and delivery of the next round of SAVINI, to be conducted in 3 additional sites in Uttar Pradesh (in Dehradun and Lucknow) and Madhya Pradesh (Rupantar, in Raipur) as well as the existing sites in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, from July to December, 2000.

Specifically, the objectives of the evaluation were:

- *to assess the appropriateness of programme content and materials for the specified constituency of learners that IGNOU is trying to reach,*
- *to assess effectiveness of the training in terms of learners skills and capacities,*

- to assess the effectiveness of IGNOU-NGO partner relations in furthering training objectives,
- to assess the effectiveness, including cost effectiveness, of IGNOU's model for delivering distance education in participatory planning,
- to engage stakeholders in a democratic and deliberative process of evaluation consistent with the "bottom up" philosophy of the SAVINI programme itself.

Major Stakeholders

The major stakeholders of the SAVINI programme are IGNOU, the collaborating NGOs, their fieldworkers, and Coady International Institute. Stakeholders in IGNOU include the programme coordinator, the project team, and Centre for Extension Education. The collaborating NGOs include nodal NGOs (city-based umbrella organisations) and the smaller, subnodal NGOs affiliated to them. A brief profile of the collaborating nodal NGOs for the first round of the SAVINI and the Coady International Institute is given below.

1. Samarthan

Samarthan (Centre for Development Support) is a voluntary organisation working with voluntary groups, development agencies, and the government of Madhya Pradesh. Its main objective is to support participatory development initiatives through strengthening of local institutions.

Samarthan is a member of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and of its Network of Collaborating Regional Support Organisations. Its work in Madhya Pradesh began in 1995 when this network collaborated in a programme to strengthen the Panchayat Raj in their respective states.

2. Astha

Astha means "faith in people" It was on this basis that *Astha* was founded in 1986 by a breakaway group of rural social development workers who had been working together in another institution, also in Udaipur, Southern Rajasthan. The focus of *Astha's* work has been on facilitating the development of people's organisations, conducting training programmes, and supporting people in their issue-based struggles and efforts.

3. Urmul Trust

Urmul Trust is a family of organisations working in western Rajasthan for social and economic change. Originally created as a health and education service arm of a dairy cooperative in 1984, it took on the role of mobilising collective action by the poor in the face of the devastating drought of 1987. It has since facilitated three integrated rural development projects to counteract extreme poverty, steadily expanding into areas where the URMUL dairy has already set up infrastructure.

4. *Coady International Institute*

Located in Nova Scotia, Canada, the Coady International Institute has been running educational programmes in community-based development since 1959. It is named after one of the founders of the Antigonish Movement, which is known for its mobilisation of farmers and fishermen into producer cooperatives in Canada during the economic depression of the 1930s. In its 40 year history, it has conducted diploma and certificate programmes, notably in adult education, community economic development, participatory planning and evaluation, NGO management, and communications and advocacy. It works in partnership with educational and training institutions overseas.

Research design

This evaluation research employed a mixed method design in a collaborative approach to inquiry. Two of the evaluation facilitators were associated with stakeholders in the programme- one from IGNOU and one from Coady International Institute but neither had direct involvement in the implementation of the programme. A third evaluation facilitator had been involved in the implementation of the programme as a curriculum specialist for IGNOU.

Although this evaluation was consultative and collaborative in its approach, its design and implementation are only moderately participatory. At the design stage, the evaluation objectives were discussed between IGNOU and the Coady International Institute. Facilitators recruited from the nodal NGOs had a free hand in generating feedback from the learners at the third camp, and the issues raised there were incorporated into this evaluation process. However, while the evaluation of the pilot phase was discussed informally with the NGOs, they were not involved in finalising the objectives.

Nevertheless, a collegial, collaborative relationship between IGNOU and its NGO partners should ensure that the findings of this study will be reviewed by the NGO partners before it has wider dissemination. As such, the design falls into the category of "Democratic Evaluation" (Mac Taggart, 1991) or "deliberative democratic evaluation" (House and Howe, 2000). Future evaluation exercises, particularly if the NGOs take more ownership of the distance education programme, will have to take the level of participation of the different stakeholders into account, and ensure that the process of deliberative action is brought to completion.

Research Methodology

1. Document review
2. Mixed group and focus group interviews with the learners at the final interactive camp at two of the three sites. (These interviews assessed appropriateness of content, the short-term impact of the programme, the effectiveness of its delivery, and methods of performance evaluation. They were conducted at one site by the evaluation team, and at a second site by an IGNOU representative with the assistance of the facilitators. At the third site, there were delays in the date of the final camp due to the government deploying NGO staff to conduct the Panchayati Raj elections. As a result of the delay, it was not possible for an IGNOU representative to attend.

3. Interviews by the evaluation team with the training facilitators to assess the above, the facilitators' training manual, and the role of the facilitators.
4. A questionnaire survey. This was designed by Coady International Institute to gather feedback from the NGO whose fieldworkers had participated in the SAVINI programme, based on the results of 1 and 2 above. This survey was mailed to the NGO directors with instructions to discuss the survey with the learners from that NGO and fill in the survey form on the basis of that discussion. The survey addressed issues of programme content, programme relevance, mode of delivery, and cost effectiveness (compared to alternative training models).
5. Individual interviews and group meetings. These were conducted at each of three sites. NGO directors at the nodal and subnodal level were invited to give feedback on the SAVINI programme. Those attending the meeting completed the questionnaire survey, if they had not already done so. The interview and survey data were then analysed by developing a category system (Miles and Hubberman 1991) and summarising and analysing the data in each category. A complete list of those interviewed, and the number of returned questionnaire as a proportion of the total is given in the appendix.
6. Summary and analysis of learner profiles and performance evaluations.
7. Dissemination of this report to IGNOU and the collaborating NGOs for verification, discussion and deliberation.

Note: Some of the learners interviewed in mixed groups and focus group interviews (2) also participated in (4) and (5). In our view, the more the discussion involved the learners, the greater the credibility of the findings, and the greater utility of the process itself. Such meetings served to strengthen communication and support of the field workers.

Summary of Findings

Who are the learners? Are the learners in the pilot phase the target group of learners?

Summary Table of Learner Profile (Learners who completed the programme)

| | Total | SC/ST /OBC | | High School Only | | Female learners | | Years Experience | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | | # | % | # | % | # | % | 1-2 | | 3-5 | | >5 | |
| | | | | | | | | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Bhopal-Gwalior | 20 | 8 | 40 | 6 | 30 | 3 | 15 | 7 | 35 | 12 | 60 | 1 | 5 |
| Udaipur | 21 | 13 | 61 | 15 | 71 | 5 | 23 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 23 | 15 | 71 |
| Bikaner | 28 | 10 | 35 | 13 | 46 | 9 | 32 | 1 | | 13 | | 7 | |
| Total | 69 | 31 | 45 | 34 | 49 | 17 | 25 | 9 | 14 | 30 | 43 | 23 | 33 |

| | Rural | | Age | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | # | % | <25 | | <25-34 | | >35 | |
| | | | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Bhopal | 13 | 75 | 4 | 20 | 11 | 55 | 4 | 20 |
| Gwalior | | | | | | | | |
| Udaipur | 18 | 86 | 2 | 10 | 11 | 52 | 8 | 38 |
| Bikaner | 19 | 68 | 4 | 14 | 21 | 75 | 3 | 11 |
| Total | 52 | 75 | 10 | 19 | 43 | 62 | 15 | 21 |

Overall, the learner profiles reveal the following: 45% of all learners are from disadvantaged groups, a significant improvement on the 6% cited by Reddy (1999) as the norm for IGNOU's courses. Across all sites, male learners were more numerous than female learners, comprising 75% of those completing the programme in the six months. Although programme centres were asked to aim at a 50% female participation, it was not expected that this would be achieved in the first round.

For Bhopal, the "typical" learner was male, belonging to non-scheduled caste, with tertiary education, and 3-5 years experience. Bhopal had the lowest % of female learners. All the 3 were non-scheduled caste. One had secondary school, and one had tertiary education.

For Udaipur, the "typical" learner was male, belonging to scheduled caste, without tertiary education but with more than five years field experience. 5 out of its 21 learners were women, and none had tertiary education. Only one was from scheduled caste.

For Bikaner, the "typical" learner was male, belonging to non-scheduled caste, with tertiary education, and 3-5 years experience. Bikaner had the highest proportion of women learners (9/28) 4 out of these 9 women had tertiary education. None were from scheduled caste.

Is there any relationship between demographic variables and performance?

A partial correlation analysis was run to determine the correlations between caste, level of education, gender, age, and the interactive camp site (as independent variables) and the performance of the learners (the dependent variable) as measured by the final grades awarded to the learners for all components of the programme. From this analysis, the only significant correlation was between site and performance. While this could be an indicator of the quality of facilitation, it could also be an artifact of different grading range used in the different sites. Without a standardised grading system, conclusions cannot be drawn with confidence about this relationship.

For the learners in the pilot programme, was the content appropriate, given their roles and their experience?

At the two NGO sites in Madhya Pradesh (Samarthan and Sambhav) and one Rajasthan (Urmul) site, learners and NGO coordinators stated that the content of the SAVINI programme in some cases provided more of an affirmation of what learners already knew than an introduction to new skills and practices. This was not to underestimate the value of the programme-it is considered an important means of legitimising and reflecting on experience, particularly in an environment where the participatory approach is both central to NGO practice and expected by donor agencies. Given the mix of learners-in terms of age, experience, educational background, it is inevitable that the content was not "all things to all people." However, while some facilitators expressed frustration at the diversity, this comment requires two qualifications based on our observations: Firstly, the larger the number of learners, the more difficult it was to take advantage of the diversity among the learners. Secondly, learners at the third camp at Bhopal spoke about the empowering effect for those with less formal education of having their experience recognised and valued by those with higher formal educational qualifications. Thirdly, given the objectives of this programme to strengthen capacity in participatory planning,

the model of engaging a diverse group of participants in a workshop setting is an important contributing factor in the training process.

The added value of a package of skills, opportunities, and reflections on experience seemed to be key, however. While many learners may have been strongly motivated by the opportunity to get the certificate through IGNOU, they also suggested that under the right circumstances and conditions this programme could make a qualitative difference to their work and their thinking.

Both the learners and the NGO leadership were asked about the content of the programme. Typically, the learners expressed more interest in the skill-based content than the issues-based content, while the NGO leadership, with its broader perspective, identified the content issues more frequently. However, this is no means a clear-cut distinction, both groups appreciating the opportunity for learners to step back and develop deeper understanding of development, as well as the opportunity to learn new skills or have the existing skills strengthened or validated. The challenge is in ensuring the right balance.

Content areas mentioned as particularly useful

- The importance of a holistic approach, involving all stakeholders in the community in analysing and planning for change (mentioned by both learners and NGO coordinators).
- Particular content areas: Group formation, participatory tools for problem identification and analysis and tools for project formulation, proposal and report writing, and budgeting.
- The use of a diary, giving participants opportunity to reflect on their work, and preparing for writing up their project for their final assessment (however, while the diary was considered good preparation for writing the proposal), more guidance as to what to write was needed.

Content areas requiring greater emphasis

Tools/skills (What? and How?)

- More training in creative communication skills to reinforce the sections on group formation and group building, particularly as they could be applied to urban slums (Bhopal site).
- More time needed for practicing PRA tools in the camp setting. The appendix on PRA was useful, but more hand-on training was required (all sites).
- Participatory project evaluation (Udaipur).
- Accounting/ project management skills (Udaipur, Bikaner).
- Problem solving skills using real life experience of participants (Udaipur)

Issues (What? How? and Why?)

- A more thorough treatment of the urban context and the different kinds of social dynamics and issues around group mobilisation that pertain to urban slums (Bhopal, Gwalior, Udaipur).
- How to mobilise, and how to deal with the forces of disintegration. The content should shift field workers away from the notion of social work (and many of them have their formal training in this) more towards how to build pressure groups, how to influence policies, and why people's organisations are important. Forces of disintegration need discussion and analysis as well as strategies for dealing with government bureaucracies and local dynamics (Gwalior, Udaipur).
- More in depth treatment of gender issues, specifically the concept of gender, laws relating to women, activities of women's organisations in India such as the Working Women's Forum and Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), the significance of international feminist activism, and the application of a feminist development approach (Gwalior, Udaipur).
- Coverage of issues such as Naxalism, caste/class conflict, the past present and future of panchayats, distinctions between labourers/workers/the poor, tribal self-rule, human rights, traditional healing practices (Udaipur).
- A stronger emphasis on the analysis of poverty issues and on strategies for change. Field workers need to be able to identify whether change is positive – "Are these small incremental steps significant?" (all sites).

What kinds of attitudinal change was noticed among the learners that could be attributed to the programme?

Attitudinal changes were identified as follows:

- Increased self confidence ("I can do it"), self-reliance, in the face-to-face interactions.
- A deeper understanding of development issues such as the root causes of poverty. One younger learner in Udaipur:
"I used to think that people were poor because they were not working hard enough. Now we are asking the What/where/why/who/when questions and understand that there are structural reasons for poverty. I used to see development as "food, clothes, and shelter", now I see the importance of helping people to think and act, strengthening community from the bottom-up.
- An appreciation for the importance of women's participation in development.
- An appreciation of the importance of the skills and work habits such as writing skills; sensitive listening skills, planning with the community; planning work systematically and efficiently; thinking ahead.

How have the learners applied what they have learnt?

All the nodal agencies in this pilot are involved in training Panchayati Raj (Local Government) functionaries in micro planning. In this way the training in the certificate in participatory programme planning will have immediate application.

During the 6 month period, learners were required to reflect on and apply what they had learnt to do their own work. The following responses represent the outcome of their experience:

Understanding development in a more holistic way, and acting on this understanding:

“There are 47 villages represented by the learners in the SAVINI programme. We had to think holistically about the villagers rather than focus on the segment we have specific responsibility for. This gave us a chance to practice everything”.

Mobilising people with greater confidence and greater appreciation for a strategic approach

“During the programme I was mobilising women mineworkers. The owners came to know and I was constantly harassed by thugs; so I began to work on health issues with the women as a way of distracting the attention of the employers and of developing the confidence of the women that I was genuinely working in their interests. Since the beginning of the programme, a loose organisation with a membership of 300 has developed (it started with 12).”

“One of our fieldworkers works at the zonal level in the integrated rural development. She is working with self-help women’s groups. She managed to activate the group during the SAVINI programme, figuring out how to organise it, plan with the women, etc.”

“In the 6 months I have had much greater success in my project. Initially the women’s group I was trying to mobilise got off to a slow start. There were difficulties getting accepted, since I was not from the area and had to learn a new language. Initially only one woman had taken out a loan. Now she has repaid and many more have joined”

Applying particular tools and skills learnt through the programme:

“She was able to use the project proposal she developed during the programme for a successful funding from UNICEF for a women’s empowerment project”

“Our field workers are applying what they have learnt by carrying out micro-planning with people at the block level around water and sanitation issues, and by scaling up this participatory planning exercise at the panchayat level”

“The fieldworkers have conducted PRA in 50 villages, and helped the communities to plan projects based on the findings”

"He was able to address an International conference on biodiversity in Delhi, using the material he generated during the certificate programme"

How effective was the process of delivering the programme?

The Delivery Process

The basic participatory model of delivery was well received, appreciated, and effective. As one NGO director noted in the survey: "Each camp takes the learners to a level where they can proceed independently". Respondents saw the value of integrating new learning with field-based practice. Several concerns, however, were raised about the length of time in interactive camps; facilitators and learners both stated that the time was too short for interactive type learning to cover the practical and analytical skills required.

The effectiveness of facilitation (determined by facilitator skills, the number of learners in the interactive camps, and resources available to the facilitators) is a critical factor in the effectiveness of the programme. Feedback on the facilitation varied. Respondents felt that consensus needs to be reached on: a minimum set of learning objectives ("descriptive, not prescriptive"), how to prioritise learner objectives and expectations, how to respond to heterogeneous needs and expectations, how to budget time and other resources, and how to make best use of a variety of resources.

The experience of other adult education programmes using mixed groups (Srinivasan 1990, for example) document the rich experience that can result from an interface of learners with different technical, social, and educational backgrounds. However, "a mixed group does require very special preparation so that the activities hold the interest as well as capitalise on the expertise of all concerned". This is true of SAVINI, as well especially in the workshop environment which requires experienced and talented facilitators to accommodate diversity.

IGNOU's regional centres had minimal involvement in the delivery of the programme. It was generally felt that the centers could take on more of the administrative functions conducted by the facilitators, but should not take part in training and facilitating.

Mix of Learners

The learners' educational backgrounds ranged from Grade 8 pass to MA degree, and from 2 years experience to 15 years. There were typically more men than women. Two distinct categories of learners were evident: senior level employees with higher levels of formal education, and field level workers with more experience and less formal education.

In general, this mix was considered beneficial. Those with experience but little formal education were appreciated for their contributions. Those with more formal education and little experience were confident and helpful to others in the group, but also came to realise how much they had to learn. A "community of learners" could be established in which skills and experience could be shared, and the strengths and contributions of all could be appreciated.

While there was active interest in the SAVINI programme scaling up to the diploma level, the NGOs were more concerned about ensuring that the certificate programme met the needs of those fieldworkers with least formal education (Urmul, Sambhav).

The level and style of the Hindi used in the print materials was voiced as needing attention. A suggestion was also made to cater more specifically to different learning needs by using a modularised approach by which learner could graduate to different levels, as follows:

| Level | Type of modules | Purpose | Type of award |
|-------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. | Simplified module | Affirmation of what candidate knows | Letter of appreciation |
| 2. | Simplified module | Affirmation of what candidate knows | Letter of completion of level 2 |
| 3. | Structured modules | New knowledge, deeper analysis | Certificate |
| 4. | Structured modules | New knowledge, deeper analysis | Diploma |

Programme Materials

The following suggestions were made with respect to the print materials used in SAVINI (in descending order of frequency);

- Use more illustrations and improve the clarity of the pictures
- Include more case studies. For example, on women empowerment, and participation, contemporary local examples are needed
- Clarify the text in the sections on:
 - Development, Marx and Gandhi
 - Women in Power
 - Labour, work, and power
- Use recent historical examples
- Use local issues.

Performance Evaluation Process

The evaluation of learners performance was conducted differently in all 3 sites. The facilitators assessed participation and diary entries, but in keeping with the participatory nature of the process of delivery, learners and facilitators designed their own evaluation process for the presentation of the field-based project in the third interactive camp, based on guidelines in the facilitators manual. For example, in the case of Astha, the learning group decided on a set of criteria and each project was subjected to self-evaluation, peer evaluation and evaluation by a panel of examiners, based on these criteria. The final grade combined all three.

There was a positive response to the involvement of learners in evaluating each other's performance, although there was less agreement on whether the criteria for performance

were clear and consistently applied. In keeping with the participatory approach, the process was empowering for the learners, although time-consuming with larger groups.

For the organisation, what are the costs and benefits of this approach to training as compared to others?

Feedback from the nodals and subnodals was generally positive in response to this question, although it was noted that for fledgling organisations the fees might be unaffordable. Others described the fees as "extremely low" or "nominal" compared to other training alternatives and in view of the benefits of the programme. The benefits most appreciated were the fact that participation in the programme could be integrated with on-going project work, and the intensive interactive camps that provided the opportunity for intense hands-on training and discussion. When several learners from the same organisation participated there was potential for these to be added value in the motivation and energy that such a joint experience generated within that organisation.

What is the cost of effectiveness of this programme, from the perspective of IGNOU?

Under the existing arrangements, IGNOU has absorbed the costs of planning, development, and delivery of the SAVINI programme in its pilot phase. Typically, in IGNOU's other course offerings such heavy initial costs are spread throughout subsequent rounds of a course or programme. In the case of the SAVINI programme, however, IGNOU's mandate to reach the most disadvantaged provides a rationale for cross subsidization by other courses and programmes.

Compared to other courses or programmes, SAVINI has particularly high costs because of the interactive camp component, the need for a high facilitator: learner ratio, and the cost of adapting and reprinting of materials in order to ensure continued relevance. If such expenditure proves to be unsustainable, the following options may have to be considered:

- Increasing the total number of learners by replication in other sites (offsets printing and administrative costs)
- Increasing the ratio of learners: facilitators at each camp (offsets facilitating costs)
- Shortening camp durations, or reducing their frequency (offsets facilitation) and accommodation costs)
- Transferring administrative costs to the Regional Centres (offsets administrative costs)
- Raising fees

In light of the findings of this study, a higher learner: facilitator ratio or reduced time for interactive camp would seriously threaten programme effectiveness. Investment in optimising facilitation could be explored.

Analysis of Findings

The SAVINI programme comprises:

- a participatory process for the design of distance education in participatory programme planning for development practitioners;

- a collaborative mode of delivery by IGNOU and its NGO partners; and
- materials and resources for training and education in participatory programme planning.

In assessing the effectiveness of this programme in its pilot phase, these three components have been treated as an integrated package. An analysis of the main findings suggests that there are a number of critical factors that influence the effectiveness of this programme in terms of its first objective, namely;

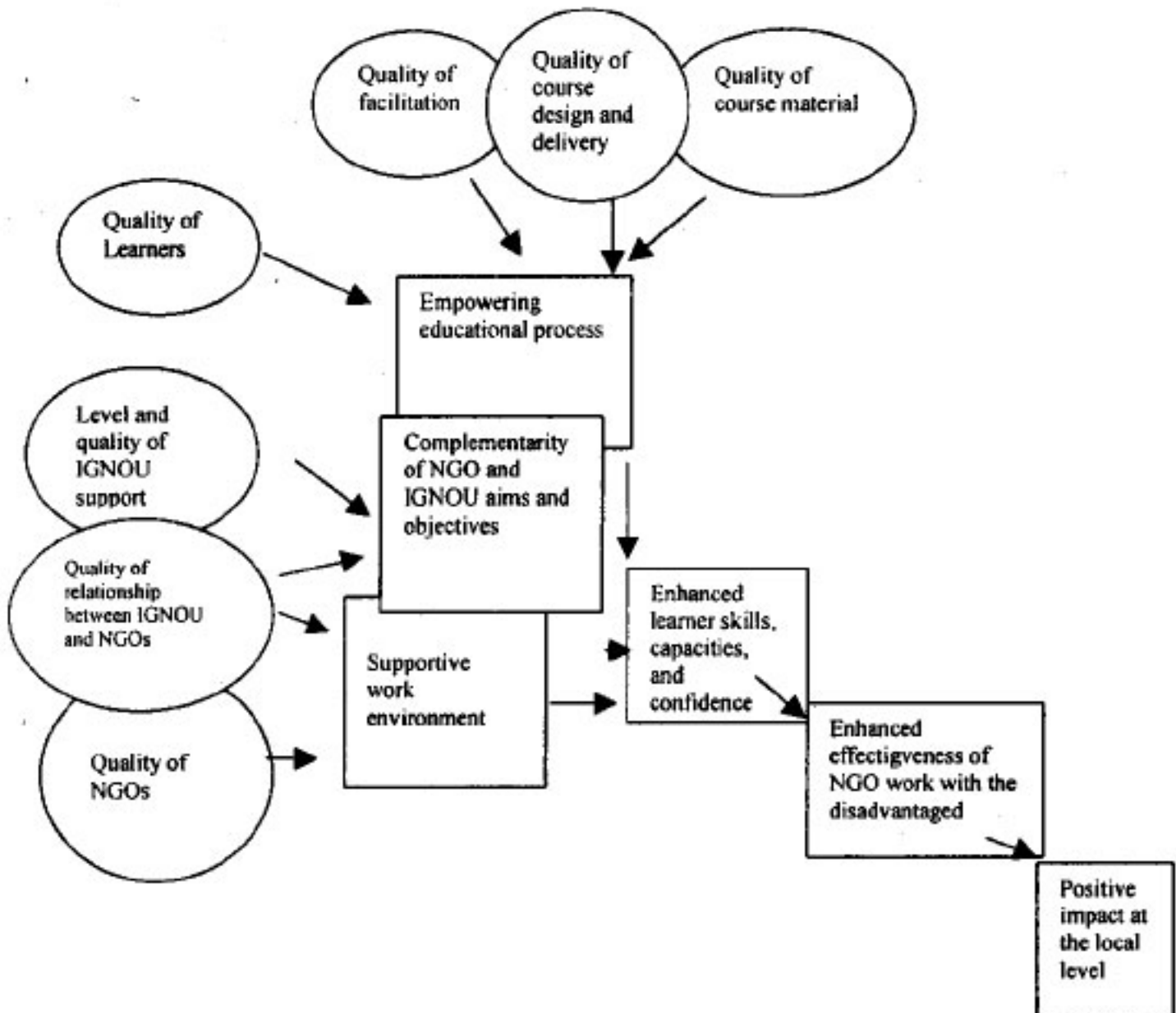
Strengthened capacity of development practitioners working among disadvantaged groups

And it is by understanding these factors and their interrelationships that the programme can be successful in its second objective, namely:

Enhanced capacity of the IGNOU system in facilitating participatory development

Contributing to the enhanced capacity of the individual learner are: the calibre of the learner; the quality of the educational process; the overall design of the programme content; the quality of the NGO environment; the quality of the relationship between nodal and sub-nodal NGO; and the relationship between the NGOs and IGNOU.

Diagrammatically this can be presented as follows:



Note that this diagram is a simplified model. Interactions between these factors also need to be taken into consideration. For example "Quality of facilitation" is a function of quality of NGO capacity in this area and the level of financial support offered by IGNOU.

Critical factors

1. **Quality of Learners:** From this study, the educational or experiential backgrounds of the individual learners appears to be less significant than a mix of backgrounds in the group and high levels of individual motivation. This is consistent with experience of distance education with adult learners from disadvantaged groupings.
2. **Quality of sub-nodal and nodal NGO:** There are two ways in which this factor influences success. First, the three nodal NGOs with their network of sub-nodals that were selected for this pilot phase were NGOs with an extensive track record of working at the community level with a participatory approach. Second, a central premise is that the learner continues his/her work as a development field-worker for the duration of the programme, applying new skills, and reflecting on the work in light of the issues raised in the SAVINI programme. For this reason, a supportive work environment makes a qualitative difference to the learner's experience and the effectiveness of the programme.
3. **Quality of the NGO-IGNOU relationship:** For the most part a consultative, collaborative relationship was established between IGNOU and the nodal NGO partners. Difficulties were sometimes encountered for bureaucratic reasons such as delay in facilitator payment, and delays in graduation certification. In future, given the very different ways in which NGOs and Government Organisations (GOs) operate it is important to have systems in place that conform to everyone's expectations, and do not rely on particular individuals. The importance of university credentials should not be underestimated: the fact that IGNOU confers legitimacy and currency to training through an NGO-IGNOU partnership is a critical motivating factor for the learners.
4. **Quality of facilitation:** The interactive camps are essential to the programme. They provide an opportunity for hands-on-learning; they create a community of learners to learn from each other. However, the quality of facilitation is a critical factor in realising this potential. This is dependent on the quality of facilitators (who need organisational, training, analytical, and facilitation skills), and the quality of their resources (facilitator's guides, course materials, videos, and other technical resources). Large groups tend to negatively affect the quality of facilitation, depending on the skills of the facilitator and the quality of their resources.
5. **Quality of programme design and delivery:** One of the challenges of a participatory process is that the character of programme design and delivery may vary across sites to suit local needs and conditions. While local responsiveness is critical, this has to be reconciled with the need for standardisation of learning outcomes in the interest of ensuring that a certification can be meaningfully applied to all sites.

6. **Quality of course materials:** Several recommendations from the learners for improvements in the course material are documented in the earlier sections. Inviting NGO partners to revise the materials would ensure continued relevance of the materials and an appropriate level of Hindi.

Implications for the Programme

The study raises a number of issues, documented here by a series of questions for discussion:

The learners

- Given the conclusion that mixed groupings (age, gender, caste, educational background) work well, what is the optimum mix?
- What mechanisms need to be in place to support those with least formal education?
- What mechanisms need to be in place to support those with ample formal education but least experience?
- What can be done to encourage those who do not complete the programme in the first 6 months? In particular, what incentives can be introduced to ensure that every one, but especially women, both register and complete the programme within the 6 months?

Sub-nodal and nodal NGO

- What are the different arrangements made by the NGOs for financial support of learners? What can be learnt from the potential for increasing fees to cover costs, and/or a sliding scale system?
- Assuming there is added value (for the organisation and for the learner) of having more than one development worker enrolled in the course at the same time, how can subnodal agencies be encouraged to maximise that potential added value?

NGO-IGNOU relationship and the quality and level of IGNOU support

- How can further roles and responsibilities for the programme be transferred to the NGOs without compromising on critical success factors, and without jeopardising a participatory approach and a minimum level of standardization across more widely located sites?
- Similarly, what are the implications of scaling up this programme throughout India? How can minimum standards of delivery and minimum learning objectives be accomplished without compromising on the need for local responsiveness?

Facilitation

- How can facilitation at the interactive camps be optimised? What different strategies might be employed?
- What additional technical resources could IGNOU provide that would enhance facilitation without incurring extra costs over the long term? For example, in what ways could video be used creatively to record learner field activities, or to provide an additional medium for learner project presentations. How can radio and the telephone be used to maximise communication among learners or between facilitators and learners for the duration of the course?
- How should the costs of equipment used in facilitation and the maintenance of that equipment be covered?

Programme design and delivery

- While respondents typically mentioned tangible skills as the most useful, further discussion also revealed the importance to them of reflection on their work experience and an enhanced analytical capacity. How should the optimum balance between the development of analytical capacity (the Why?), and the practical skills (/What? and How?) be attained?
- What should be the balance between standardised learning objectives and particular learning objectives at each nodal site?
- How effective are the different components of performance evaluation (for example, the diary and the field-based project presentation)? What criteria are used? How comparable are they across sites? Would it be useful to have the results standardised by each site sending a sample of "learner portfolios" from each site to one external evaluator, and correcting grades for inconsistencies?
- Would there be a demand for the staggered approach to obtaining the certificate, as suggested by the director of Samarthan? The suggestion here was to work towards a diploma in stages.
- What norms are required, agreeable to all parties, that ensure comparability of grading across sites?

Quality of course material:

- In what ways would the programme be enhanced by additional materials and resources (TV, radio, telephone)?
- Have the revisions made in preparation for the subsequent edition of SAVINI been adequate?

Implications for further evaluative inquiry

As the programme moves into its second round, it will be important to:

- Characterise and document the relative strength of critical factors at all sites

- Maintain accurate records of costs of running the second round of SAVINI, including IGNOU and NGO staff costs
- Establish computerised data base for learner profiles and learner performance. Ensure its maintenance
- Assess potential trade-offs of transferring responsibility for running subsequent SAVINI rounds to NGOs
- Use focus groups to determine effectiveness of revised print materials for different learner groups
- Assess relationship between NGOs and PRIs, and between NGOs and IGNOU
- Evaluate the programme with a view to its replication in other sites
- Conduct extensive research into distance education for disadvantaged groups across India and the different media being used.
- Continue to track those who registered for the first round of SAVINI, but did not complete the programme in the first six months
- Explore ways of encouraging more women to participate

In future evaluations the following challenges faced in the current evaluation need to be addressed

- **Resistance to questionnaires:** Possible reasons for this are the past experience of questionnaires as an extractive means of information gathering, the lack of ownership and therefore the lack of appreciation of the power of this tool as an instrument of collaborative inquiry, and our own failure to appreciate the different kinds of relations between directors and workers that might make the exercise problematic in some instances.
- **Language:** With non-Hindi speakers (if they are to be part of the evaluation team) a translator is required. In this evaluation, translation often had to be provided by one or the other evaluation team members, which is a constraint on pursuing interviews to the depth and breadth required
- **Timing:** Finding an appropriate time for follow-up interviews is also a challenge; ensuring that interviews do not conflict with other meetings or with reporting deadlines is an important lesson here. Adequate time must be set aside to ensure that all participants and respondents fully understand the purpose of the inquiry and are willing to devote their time to it.
- **Ensuring adequate representation of the view of the least articulate learners** (typically those with least formal education).

Summary and Conclusion

The SAVINI programme is a bold initiative, breaking away from IGNOU's conventional approach to distance education in the interests of reaching the disadvantaged, and pioneering a participatory approach to design and delivery. Its success in reaching out to learners from disadvantaged groups (and to rural and urban disadvantaged populations through NGOs) is evidence of the quality of NGOs selected, and the quality of IGNOU collaborative relations with NGOs. Its more qualified success in delivering a genuinely empowering educational programme in participatory planning relies on the quality of facilitation, programme design and programme delivery.

As the programme continues, effective monitoring of the programme is critical. This means — i) effective *tracking* of the profile of learners (age, gender, caste, educational background) and their progress, and ii) effective supervision and support of course delivery. For monitoring to be effective, a monitoring mechanism acceptable to all parties needs to be in place, supported by an appropriate data-base.

All these critical factors needs to be taken into account, to give the programme maximum chance of success in reaching its ultimate objective, which is to strengthen the capacity of those working with the disadvantaged in the context of a restructured system of local governance, and to do this in a way that respects local knowledge and experience.

In terms of effectiveness in reaching those objective therefore, it must be recognised that learning is not just about acquiring new knowledge and skills, but about affirming and reflecting on experience and knowledge that learners already have and being motivated to apply it. On-going evaluation of this programme must continue to bear this in mind.

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Appendix

Learners assessment of the SAVINI Programme between camps 2 and 3

Selected results relating to programme delivery (combined figures for Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan)*

| Statement | SA | A | Neutral | D | SD |
|--|------|------|---------|------|------|
| Utility value of SAVINI Programme | | | | | |
| 1. Program is useful to the development worker | 80.5 | 19 | | .5 | |
| 2. Structure of program is not related to my development | 33 | 65 | 1 | 1 | |
| 3. Course material is not related to my development work | 33 | 65 | 1 | 1 | |
| 4. It is difficult to complete the course within 6 months Structure of program is not related to my development | 9 | 16.5 | 10.5 | 39 | 25 |
| Quality of course material | | | | | |
| 1. Course content is understandable | 52 | 37 | 6.5 | 3.5 | .5 |
| 2. Language of lesson is difficult | 10 | 21 | 6 | 50 | 13 |
| 3. Presentation of lesson is not interesting | 8 | 14 | 8 | 53.5 | 16.5 |
| 4. Absence of adequate graphics and examples in course materials. | 9 | 16.5 | 10.5 | 39 | 25 |
| 5. Difficult words and concepts without adequate explanation. | 16 | 39 | 5.5 | 21 | 17.5 |
| 6. Lessons can be made more interactive | 30 | 57 | 6.5 | 6.5 | |
| 7. Audio-visual program too few. | 22 | 46 | 8 | 18 | 6 |
| 8. Audio visual programs helped in understanding the course | 31 | 52 | 6 | 7 | 4 |
| Maintaining field diary | | | | | |
| 1. Daily reporting in the diary is difficult | 8 | 13.5 | .5 | 48 | 30 |
| 2. Tenure of fieldwork is inadequate | 15 | 28 | | 37 | 20 |
| 3. I have noted my thoughts, experiences and difficulties in the course in the diary | 22 | 51 | 9 | 6 | 12 |
| Interactivity in SAVINI Camp | | | | | |
| 1. Tenure of camp is too short | 23 | 41.5 | 4.5 | 24 | 7 |
| 2. Adequate amount of participatory element in camp | 15 | 28 | | 37 | 20 |
| 3. Discussion on course material in the camp | 44 | 51 | 3 | .5 | .5 |
| 4. Difficult to reach the camp | 2 | 2 | 12 | 34 | 50 |
| Suggestions for improvement of SAVINI programme | | | | | |
| 1. Include local issues | | 41 | | 63 | |
| 2. Use simple language | | 35 | | 52 | |
| 3. Explain difficult concepts | | 25 | | 37 | |
| 4. Make it a more job-oriented programme | | 19 | | 28 | |
| 5. Increase time duration | | 7 | | 11 | |
| Suggestions for Interactive Camps | | | | | |
| 1. Satisfied with interactive camp | | 28 | | 43 | |
| 2. Increase time duration | | 31 | | 47 | |
| 3. More sharing of experiences | | 26 | | 40 | |
| 4. Should be more activity oriented | | 21 | | 32 | |
| Suggestions to improve evaluation procedure | | | | | |
| 1. Evaluation procedure satisfactory | | 18 | | 28 | |
| 2. Use written and oral procedures to evaluate learner knowledge | | 21 | | 32 | |
| 3. Evaluation should be an aggregate of the various elements: fieldwork, camps, diary, project proposal | | 24 | | 36 | |
| 4. Evaluation of skills and abilities of learners | | 20 | | 31 | |
| 5. Evaluation should be done by a participatory approach | | 12 | | 18 | |
| 6. Through diary work | | 10 | | 15 | |
| 7. Through field work | | 7 | | 11 | |

*9Survey Design by Dr. Nair, results tabulated by IGNOU, April 1999.

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