



Annual Forum Report Work and Employment Community



Introduction

The Solution Exchange- Work and Employment Community held its **Annual Forum in Patna during 20th to 22nd February, 2008**. The forum, supported by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), saw the participation of more than a 100 members representing 14 states and a range of organizations. The choice of Patna, the capital of Bihar, as the venue of the forum was made for two reasons- one was to address a growing realization among the development practitioners that the eastern region is not given its due recognition in terms of local development initiatives and livelihood models and second is the fact that Bihar is one of the UN focus states for the coming 5 years.

As discussed in the [Resource Group Meeting](#) of the Community held in January, the two and a half day event was a mix of taking stock of the community activities, members getting to know each other better, knowledge sharing and charting the way forward for the community. Main events of the forum included, Action Group discussions, Knowledge Mela, Field Visits and discussions on increasing the reach of the community. To get the local flavor and also to understand the regional realities better, the forum was organized in partnership with a Bihar based organization, Nidan (an NGO involved with organizing the unorganized urban service providers). In all, three action groups were formalized, six themes were explored during Knowledge Mela, and three different field sites were visited.

Following is a brief account of the proceedings and outcomes of the Work and Employment Community Annual Forum.

20 February 2008 – Day 1

Opening, Action Groups and Knowledge Mela.

Session 1: Welcome and Introduction

The forum started with a welcome of participants and Dr. Maxine Olson (Resident Coordinator, UN-India), by the Community Resource Person and Moderator, Ms. Ranu Bhogal. She elaborated upon the purpose of the whole event and also the importance and need of having it in Patna.

This was followed with remarks by Dr. Maxine Olson. She congratulated the Solution Exchange team for having chosen Patna as the venue for the event, as this, in her opinion, will bring the specific regional issues into sharper focus. She stressed upon the need to have a greater engagement of members from eastern region and sharing of their experiences and learning. She further emphasized that a platform like Solution Exchange can also help the practitioners in the Eastern region to connect with practitioners from other parts of the country and learn through experience sharing, discussions and consultations. She wished a fruitful interaction over the next two and half days which she hoped would result in increased participation of practitioners from the region.

Dr. Olson's remarks were followed by a round of self introduction of the participants where they gave a brief of themselves and the kind of work they are doing in their areas. In all 103 participants from 14 states, working with different approaches cutting across various sectors participated in the event.

Next in line was a short presentation (click [here](#) to view the presentation) by the local partner NGO, Nidan. Mr. Arbind Singh, Executive Director of the organization talked about the need to organize the unorganized urban service providers and spelt out the interventions Nidan has initiated in that direction. He also gave an overview of the geographical spread of Nidan's work and learning so far.

After the Presentation from Nidan, Ms. Ranu Bhogal updated the gathering on the status of the community in terms of its current reach, membership profile and geographical spread. She also refreshed members on the underlying concepts of Solution Exchange and the way it is organized and managed. According to her, the community has more than 2,000 members now and so far has brought out 63 Knowledge Products in form of Consolidated Replies, E-Discussions and E-Consultations. She also elaborated upon the recent initiative of regional outreach meeting and developing a hub and spoke model for the community. To see the full presentation, please click [here](#).

Agenda and objectives of the Annual Forum

Mr. Anand Kumar, Coordinator, Solution Exchange set the stage by elaborating upon the [agenda](#) of coming two and a half days and the objectives of the forum. According to him, the main objectives of the forum were strengthening the community further, reflection and analysis of past achievements and demonstrating and encouraging knowledge sharing. He requested the members to use the forum for sharing and connecting through their learning and experiences.

Session 2: Action Groups and Breakaways

Mr. Steve Glovinsky opened the second session by throwing fresh light on the concept of Action Groups and explained how through this semi-structured process community members come together and choose a theme which in their opinion requires further probing and research to improve its understanding. The particular theme is led by one of the community members who are called the "champion" for that particular action group. The outcome of an action group could be a compilation of experiences, setting up of knowledge networks, exploring dynamics between development players or anything as per the consensus within the community.

Presentation "Institutional Models for Livelihood Promotion" Action Group

Dr. Sankar Dutta, The Livelihood School, Hyderabad

The first presentation in the second session was made by Dr. Sankar Dutta of The Indian School of livelihood promotion (ISLP), Hyderabad. Dr. Dutta had championed one of the action groups taken up by the community last year. This action group was on ["Institutional Models for Livelihood Promotion"](#). Dr. Dutta reflected upon the process followed in managing the Action group. He also explained how this group was able to capture a wide range of experiences shared by the members of the community from different parts of the country, each following a different institutional model for livelihood promotion. He called on the members present in the plenary to take this process further by contributing and adding to the existing database which was soon going to be available online on the ISLP website.

Action Groups for this year:

Based on the consultations in the Resource Group Meeting and further discussions with the Convenors, three action groups were identified for the coming year. The three volunteer conveners had prepared concept notes for their respective Action groups that were circulated to the members. They made a presentation of what they proposed to do to the plenary. After the presentation by three conveners the participants broke into three groups for parallel discussions on the three proposed action groups. Each group had a participation of around 25 members. The groups discussed the design and the proposed modality of the each action group. Discussants also decided on action steps and interested members volunteered for taking the process further in their own areas of operation.

Topic 1: Building a Convergent Response Strategy for the Ultra Poor

Convener: Sachin Sachdeva, ARAVALI, Jaipur

Mr. Sachdeva, through his [presentation](#), gave examples of a few livelihood interventions where he highlighted the need to have a specific intervention strategy for the ultra poor as their livelihood dynamics and mechanisms are different from other groups. Giving the example of ARAVALI- Family Livelihood Resource Centre (FLRC), he put forth the need to have a convergent strategy which will take into account funding patterns, institutional mechanisms and capacity building needs to address the issue.

Topic 2: New Initiatives and Approaches to Work with the Market: Analysis of Early Experiences

Convener: Vanita Viswanath, Udyogini, New Delhi

Dr. Viswanath [highlighted](#) the challenges being faced by the NGOs involved with promoting microenterprise and working with the markets. She emphasised the need to develop a new approach for such NGOs in light of emerging realities of new opportunities, costs and new constraints. Her suggestion, as an initial step, was to start analysing the previous examples and existing models of working with the markets.

Topic 3: Designing Effective GO-NGO- Community Partnerships

Convener: R. K. Sama, Water and Sanitation Management Organisation (WASMO), Gandhinagar

Based on his vast experience in the area of GO-NGO collaboration, NRM and rural development, Mr. Sama pointed out that there is a pressing need for strengthening of GO-NGO collaborative arrangements for development projects as the current relationship between the two is strained and in some cases even broken. He informed that the action group proposes to study the past and existing partnership arrangements and make suggestions for effective design for such collaborative GO-NGO partnerships.

Session 3: Breakaway Presentations (Post-Lunch)

After the discussion in parallel break away groups, the participants assembled back in plenary and the respective conveners presented the take away from each discussion

Topic 1: Building a Convergent Response Strategy for the Ultra Poor

Convener: Sachin Sachdeva, ARAVALI, Jaipur

The breakaway group [discussed](#), among other things, identification criteria of ultra poor and differentiate between the needs of different segments of the poor. The group also decided to look at the issue from different perspective of governments, NGOs and Donors. Members also volunteered to take the process forward as per their interest and area of work.

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The group discussed the issue from various dimensions and came up with specific areas that need to be explored further in order to find a way forward for the NGOs. As per the discussion both the implementation dimension (partnership between community/NGO/Companies and the quality of implementation etc.) and the facilitation dimension (the knowledge and linkage building in emerging sector and partnership opportunities etc.).

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The breakaway group on GO-NGO collaboration [discussed](#) the criteria for selection of NGOs and government program to be studied under this group. The group also suggested studying the partners keeping in mind their initial capability of collaboration and operation. As future steps, an e-discussion on the work and employment community was proposed to capture the successful experiences of collaboration and developing a base paper which will be further presented to the community for their comments. The group also pondered on a possible pilot intervention.

Session 4: Knowledge Mela

Mr. Steve Glovinsky explained the purpose and process of Knowledge Mela and informed the participants of its advantages as a knowledge sharing tool.

Knowledge Mela- is a face to face and quick sharing-query-response format. Members displayed their work under a particular theme, explained the concepts and models, raised pertinent issues and stressed on areas that need focus through presentations, posters, and even live samples/models portraying the need for further action. Six themes were shared through ten different knowledge kiosks. These kiosks were walked around by participants who raised critical questions and later discussed these in ten smaller groups in parallel sessions. The discussion outcomes were presented to the plenary by the respective Knowledge Mela theme conveners as detailed below:

1.	Livelihood Security in Flood Prone Rural Areas a. Grameen Development Services (GDS), Uttar Pradesh b. Rural Volunteer Service (RVC), Assam
2.	New Forms of Livelihood Institutions c. Masuta Tassar Company promoted by PRADAN
3.	Business Development Services (BDS) d. In Agriculture (Systemic Rice Intensification, SRI) Basix, Gaya e. BDS for women producers Udyogini, Madhya Pradesh
4.	Organizing Urban Service Providers f. Street vendors, Nidan, Bihar

	<p>g. Waste pickers, Nidan, Bihar h. Rickshaw pullers Samman Foundation, Bihar</p>
5.	<p>Corporate Led Models for Livelihood Security i. Contract farming- Basix, Gaya</p>
6.	<p>SRI with the Poor and Ultra Poor j. PRADAN, Gaya</p>

After the Knowledge Mela process, the Work and Employment Community Resource Team briefed the members on the next day's field visits and explained the objectives of the field visit and logistical arrangements.

Cultural Program, Felicitations of Partners and Dinner

As the last segment of day one, a cultural program of regional performing arts was organized, that gave a glimpse of local culture to the participants. A small felicitation ceremony followed the cultural program. NABARD was thanked for its support. Nidan was thanked for their partnership and their volunteers were felicitated. Community members who came forward and enriched the forum through their knowledge sharing and championing the Action Groups were also thanked and felicitated.

The day closed with a unique dinner which was catered exclusively by the members of organization of street vendors. To add some fun to this and to motivate the street vendors, a jury of three participants were asked to judge the top three stalls. The winners were given a small cash prize and the rest were given consolation prize.

21 February 2008 – Day 2

Field Visits

Three different field visits were organized for the participants to experience some of the livelihood interventions in the region.

Two rural field visits were in the Gaya district:

1. Corporate Led Model for Livelihood Security- BASIX

Basix had joined hands with a local NGO, Sarva Seva Samiti almost three years ago and supported it in forming a Federation of the SHGs with a strong governance and MIS system in place. It also helped in setting up a co-operative under the MACS act and provided a loan support to the co-operative. Basix started working directly in the Banke Bazaar area for the past 10 months. It has initiated a range of interventions in around 30 villages to strengthen the livelihoods of the participating families. The field visit focused on three interventions made by Basix- one was to interact with the members of the SHG federation. The second interaction was with the SHG women and farmers (men and women who have participated in the two farm based interventions- Contract farming and SRI). The contract farming is for chip grade potato with PepsiCo -Frito-Lay along with value chain financing offering a complete package of Technical service(Package of practices i.e. POP, Grading, quality incentive) and Market linkage (for both input and outputs) . The total output was around 150 MT of which 90 MT was sold to Frito-Lay's as per the contract farming agreement this year. The third intervention was the introduction of SRI paddy cultivation technique in 100 acres with 72 farmers. This was done for a service fee.

The visitors were very impressed by the fact that women were very vocal and were quite aware of the interventions. There was some concern with respect to the terms of contract farming agreement; however time was too short to delve into the issue in greater depth. The lesson for the visitors was that there is need to understand the contract farming model better before it is adopted. The experience of the farmers seemed to be mixed with some feeling very happy with the returns while a few others voiced their reservation and questioned the approach. The SRI intervention has been successfully adopted and the ground has been prepared for further extension.

2. Systemic Rice Intensification (SRI) with the poor and ultra poor- PRADAN

PRADAN came to the Bodh Gaya Block of Gaya District at the invitation of BRLP (Bihar rural Livelihood Promotion Project, a World Bank funded project) as a technical resource agency to spread SRI technique that it had successfully established in Jharkhand. PRADAN had the benefit of having fairly well established SHGs that had been organized by another NGO in the past. The SHGs were active and PRADAN decided to use this institution to spread the SRI technique. PRADAN also widened the scope of the SHGs by making village level cluster body (each village has 5-6 SHGs), it introduced the system of a weekly meeting as everything in the village revolves around the weekly haats. It also started using the SHG platform for information dissemination and knowledge sharing rather than limiting it to only thrift. In order to spread the SRI technique it got Master trainers from Jharkhand who were assured of a minimum income and the rest was worked out as an incentive system where by each master trainer would get additional income based on the number of farmers it worked with. This has turned out to be a very effective strategy with the technique getting adopted with great speed. The Master trainers stayed put in Gaya for the entire duration of the crop (i.e. 4 months) PRADAN also has a system of a regular meeting of Master trainers where the PRADAN technical resource person helps with any problems the Master trainers are facing.

3. Urban/peri-urban Field Visit- Organizing the unorganized

One urban/peri-urban field visit was organized in Patna with Nidan and Sammaan Foundation, which exposed the members to a number of interventions aimed at organizing the unorganized urban service providers like waste pickers, fruit and vegetable vendors (organization/better marketing) and rickshaw pullers (organization, better technology, social security)

The urban field visit started with a visit to Nidan's intervention in organizing the waste pickers in the old city area of Patna. The waste pickers earlier used to be nothing more than rag pickers without any organization or social security prone to abuse and exploitation both by authorities and local goons. Nidan organized these waste pickers and formed a company which now employs these waste pickers and provides them social security and fixed salaries along with fixed working hours and better equipments and safety gear like gloves and boots. The second site was a vegetable/fruit market where earlier vendors were treated as encroachers on municipality land and were subjected to exploitation by the quasi-legal *Thekedaari* (contract) system. With the help of Nidan these vendors organized themselves and ran a movement for legal licenses from Municipal Corporation for running their small businesses. They have now got the licenses for three years and now struggling to make these licenses permanent. The third Nidan intervention visited was a bio-composting plant where waste pickers turn the segregated domestic waste into vermin-compost, which does not only add to their incomes but also supply useful manure to local orchards and gardens.

In the second half participants visited the Sammaan Foundation intervention for fruit and vegetable vendors where they are being organized for bulk purchase and market through

improvised vending carts. Another very interesting intervention of Samman Foundation is among the Rickshaw Pullers. Sammaan Foundation has developed an improvised rickshaw which is lighter and easier to pull and has organized rickshaw puller providing them with social security and microfinance services. In this experimental model, rickshaw pullers are not charged any rent for the rickshaw hire but just a nominal maintenance fee. These rickshaws are parked and maintained in rickshaw sheds, which also serves as a common meeting point and networking site. Additional revenue is generated through using sides and back of the rickshaw as advertising panel.

22 February 2008 – Day 3

Field Visit reflections, NABARD presentation, Feedback and Wrap up

The 3rd and final morning of the Annual Forum started with participants reflecting on the previous day's field visits. Each group made a presentation in the plenary where they shared their observations, learning and suggestions.

Session 5: Presentation and Discussions

Farm and Non-Farm interventions supported by NABARD- Mr. P.V. Ramchandran, NABARD, Mumbai.

Mr. Ramchandran started his [presentation](#) with a background of NABARD as a development finance bank. He further elaborated on its major functions and interventions including Watershed Development, Tribal Development - Wadi approach, Non Farm Sector and Micro Finance interventions. With an aim of soliciting the feedback of the forum, he also recounted the experience of these interventions and threw light on NABARD's non-farm interventions of microfinance. Another major focus of his address was NABARD's Rural Innovation Fund (RIF) which aims to encourage product and process innovation. Participants shared their experiences of working with NABARD and gave useful suggestions for improvement in delivery mechanisms of different programs.

Feedback and Suggestions from members:

An elaborate feedback session was run to get participant's feed back on different aspects of the Annual Forum. Some of the points made were:

Knowledge Mela:

- Knowledge Mela was a very innovative platform for sharing ideas.
- Non Members can be involved in the Knowledge Mela. The participants in the KM who display their stalls don't have to be members of the Community.
- The KM can have more stalls and more presentations.
- KM can be sponsored. Sponsorship will help in presenting the material in a more organized manner.

Action groups:

- It will however be a good idea if the previous work done in the action groups is discussed before the annual forum- may be on the internet. Sharing the processes and the outcomes of the action group is a good idea.

Field Visits:

- The way KM had a structure, field visits should be more planned and structured. There should be structured specific questions that people take into the field. e.g. ; what do

people do? What is the institutional support that they are provided. What is the content? Who are the facilitating organizations?

- The field visits should also be theme based which will help the participants also to focus.
- Large groups for the field visit are not feasible. The group should be broken into smaller sub-groups to facilitate more interaction.
- The presentations post the field work should also be structured and planned.
- Time should be given post the field visit for intensive post field visit analysis. Spending minimum 5-6 hours with the organization is very important to know the perspective of their program.

Other issues:

- The CR's and e- discussions in case of the query-response format should be presented in form of an essay/story. It should be a thematic discussion and solutions should be presented in form of a paper.
- Local Hub running a sub-community of solution exchange can use the print media as the target group may not have access to the internet. For local areas say block/district print media should be used in local languages.

In addition to the above the participants were also requested to fill up the feedback forms. We give below the consolidated picture based on the Feedback forms:

- **Over all relevance of content:**

- Learning- 22 (47%)
- Very Relevant- 18 (38%)
- Just Relevant- 7 (15%)
- Irrelevant-

- **Discussion Outcomes of Action group breakaway session (Day 1)**

- Learning- 8 (18%)
- Very Relevant- 20 (44 %)
- Just Relevant- 17 (38%)
- Irrelevant-

- **Field Visits (Day2)**

- Very Relevant- 14 (31%)
- Just Relevant- 14 (31%)
- Learning-18 (38%)
- Irrelevant-

- **Duration of the Forum-**

- Too long- 3 (7%)
- Just Right- 41(86%)
- Too short- 3 (7)

- **Advance Information that you received about the Forum:**

- Adequate- 18 (39%)
- Just Adequate- 25 (54%)
- Inadequate- 3 (7%)

- **Conference and accommodation facilities:**

- Excellent- 14 (30)
- Good-29 (63%)
- Average-2 (5%)

- Poor-1 (2)
- **Do you feel that this workshop has achieved its objective?**
- -Did it succeed in :
 - Strengthening the community: building connection?
 - Definitely- 34 (78%)
 - Adequately- 12 (22%)
 - No-
 -
 - Demonstrating & encouraging knowledge sharing?
 - Definitely- 26 (55%)
 - Adequately- 21 (45%)
 - No
 -
 - Identifying topics for e-discussion
 - Definitely- 23 (52%)
 - Adequately- 19 (43%)
 - No-2 (5)
 -
 - Planning Future activities and
 - Definitely- 18 (42%)
 - Adequately- 20 (46%)
 - No-5 (12%)

The forum came to a close with Arif Hussain from the Community Resource Team proposing a vote of thanks to all the Participants, to NABARD for supporting the event with a financial grant, to Nidan for successfully managing the event and to all the organisations that participated in the Knowledge Mela and helped with the field visits.