

# COMMUNITY CONTROLLED MONITORING AND EVALUATION A BAREFOOT APPROACH

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## 1. BACKGROUND

Social Work and Research Centre, ( SWRC ) also known as Barefoot College, is based in a small village called Tilonia that has a population of 4000. Barefoot College works with the poorest of the poor, men , women and children living in 110 odd villages of Silora Block, Ajmer District, Rajasthan. The organisation established as a registered voluntary organisation in 1972 and founded by Bunker Roy and two others that included a cartographer and typist, presently has a critical mass of more than 250 full-time and 400 part-time volunteers , men and women as well as 5000 or more honorary members belonging to different village committees. As a group they are continuously involved in an on-going process of decision-making to monitor and evaluate all initiatives of the Barefoot College. This participatory process of monitoring and evaluation has emerged over three decades through their role-perceptions and regular self-evaluation exercises that determined the working principles of the organisation which are non-negotiable.

## 2. THE PROCESS (ES )

As a process, community endorsement is a precursor to all decisions taken up collectively by Barefoot College and the poorest of poor in rural households. Village Committees with equal representation of women are then formed to plan, implement and review initiatives. The Committees have financial powers and responsibilities with two of its members including a woman who operate joint bank accounts in the nearest bank to their villages. Its members meet regularly every month to monitor and review and the minutes of their discussions are recorded for documentation. Social Audit of expenses incurred to implement initiatives are held for public scrutiny in villages.

## 3. THE INITIATIVES

Over the years Barefoot College has been taking up joint efforts with the marginalised sections of rural communities as well as economically deprived groups for meeting their basic felt needs like Education, Drinking Water, Health, Employment, Energy and Womens' Rights through legal literacy. The groups consist of Agricultural Labourers, Women and Children, the Physically and Mentally Challenged, Artists, Artisans, Tribals, Small and Marginal Farmers and Landless Labourers.

Members of village level committees monitor and evaluate Barefoot College's innovative efforts in training semi-literate and literate rural women as well as rural unemployed as barefoot doctors, engineers, architects, solar engineers, designers, teachers, vets, chemists, videographers, communicators and accountants. Since 1993 a Children's Parliament, monitors 150 night schools, in 8 blocks of 5 districts in Rajasthan. More than 4000 rural working children attending Barefoot College's night schools, elect MP's every 2 years. There are 56 MPs monitoring these night schools through full-fledged Cabinet Ministers and their Prime Minister chosen by the MPs.

They meet once a month in any one of the 150 villages where their night schools are situated. The Village Education Committees in these villages are responsible for its day-to-day administration.

#### **4. THE BAREFOOT APPROACH**

Organisationally, the full-time volunteers of Barefoot College have spelt out priorities for a Barefoot Approach to Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation processes through their own self-perceptions in controlling and managing village-level developmental initiatives. The priorities internalised by them are:

- (a) Equality in terms of gender, caste and economic status
- (b) Collective Decision making on all matters
- (c) Decentralisation
- (d) Self-reliance

The underlying factor is of having an austere lifestyle in consonance with the poorest of the poor, which necessitates them to take a living wage and not a market wage as well as a preparedness amongst each one of them to take up multiple responsibilities arising out of ground-level realities.

This approach has enabled the group to cope with crisis and crunch situations using their inherent traditional wisdom and common sense. In essence the barefoot approach believes that sustainable solutions to basic felt needs of the rural poor can only emerge through community control and management of both natural and human resources.

#### **5. HOW DOES IT WORK**

SWRC, Tilonia's organisational structure puts the decision-making process upside down in the sense that the village committees being at its start and end point. Specific responsibilities and functions are delegated to persons who are either Co-ordinators or In-charges. The former is responsible at Tilonia and its decentralised level of field centres while the latter with their team of trained volunteers plan and implement initiatives jointly with village committees. The decentralised field-centres are the link and at this level there are Co-ordinators who have a group living and working together. In principle most co-ordinators at this level are women

Decisions taken by the committees are discussed by Co-ordinators, In-charges and the Director, Barefoot College every month. The process of participatory monitoring and evaluation is two-way wherein the committees' decisions are deliberated by this nucleus in their monthly meetings. Having discussed them they are presented back to the committees who endorse the relevant changes suggested if any and incorporate them in their decisions.

Crisis and crunch situations arising at the ground level are in this process therefore resolved in a timely manner by those who are the most affected. This provides and elicits their mandate that is critical for the process and non-negotiable.

The entire nucleus if it considers necessary also invites from time to time external resource for assessing impact of specific initiatives through evaluation studies. The committees however remain the eventual arbiters of such one-off external evaluation studies with the specific objective of qualitatively improving the implementation of joint efforts. The willingness to constantly incorporate changes and assessing both short-term impact as well as long-term repercussions in decision-making processes at the ground-level by a group that collectively plans and implements initiatives ensures that all stakeholders are in constant rapport with one another. This can only work if people at the ground level are accountable to each of the decisions taken.

**6. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF SWRC, TILONIA  
VILLAGE LEVEL COMMITTEES**

