

Advancing Development: Community Swaraj



Madurai Symposium 2021
Fostering Development Knowledge

October 25-29, 2021

Madurai Welcomes all Development Stakeholders and those interested in Development to a “Unique” Knowledge Mart in Development from October 25-29, 2021. This is the Tenth Biennial Madurai Symposium, where many stakeholders with diversity in development: Community Organizations, Civil societies/NGOs, Government, Banks, Insurance Companies, CSR Foundations, Donors, Philanthropists and Academia gather to share and learn from each others' experience and practices to serve the underprivileged and deprived communities. The previous edition of 2019 saw participation of 10,000 stakeholders and deliberated on the approaches and mechanisms for Women empowerment among the vulnerable and poor/down-trodden segments of the society.

2021 has special significance for both Madurai and world of development as it marks a century of Mahatma Gandhi's historic identification with Poor by renouncing the formal attire for the simple Dhoti (White loin cloth), leaving the torso bare. This has transformed the freedom struggle not just for the nation, but, also for the poor from the deprivation and poverty. This also signaled powerfully the imperative of enabling and engaging with the deprived communities and make them part of the process of gaining freedom and development. Inspired by this Gandhian approach, DHAN Foundation, the facilitator of Madurai Symposium has shown “enabling model of development” to engage, involve and owning process of development by the community themselves. The year 2021 also marks the DHAN's silver jubilee of its development journey with poor communities across the country. As the communities are at the heart of

development, their distinct identity in the process of development and with their active participation and ownership would lead to not only sustaining development but also, communities taking charge of the development. There is no better celebration than the realization of community swaraj as desired by Gandhiji and Vino Bhave as the country celebrate its Platinum Jubilee of independence.

Community Swaraj in Development

Madurai Symposium 2021 would bring several development stakeholders together to take stock of the Community Swaraj in the national agenda of Inclusive growth and development. The contributions of the communities individually and collectively have been monumental in charting the course of development in the country and there have been many anonymous and unsung illuminating icons of communities who gave direction to the course of development since independence. It is a matter of gratification that the





nation has been increasingly recognizing such communities. This augurs well for the community led development and nation building and achieving the goal of Community Swaraj. The host of development programmes run by stakeholders reinforce the participation and ownership of the community and brought to fore several dimensions and aspects of Community Swaraj. They can be broadly captured in the following:-

1. Community Institutions with embedded thematic programmes with purpose-focus
2. Community Partnership with Mainstream Institutions
3. Community & Pandemic Management
4. Policy Influencing by the Community
5. Community Governance
6. Community Financing and Sustainability

Community Institutions with embedded thematic programmes with purpose-focus

The poor and the deprived largely remain unorganized. Development programmes with any purpose and objective, in order to achieve larger impact spatially and temporally, needs to focus on organizing the communities as social capital. Building solidarity and strengthening the social capital goes beyond just organizing, building structural framework as institutions of the communities is an important requisite. We have very interesting experiences of various types of institutional framework, as a differentiated social capital, depending upon the purpose of the programmes. For instance, the self-help groups and its federations have been spawning multiple institutions focusing on livelihoods, mutuality based financial services, etc. The emerging FPO eco system is a classic example for farm-

based livelihoods. In other words, thematic focused community institutions have been emerging at grassroots and provide wide and stronger network for effective implementation of development programmes. The process of building the institutions and evolution based on the differentiated social capital enhanced our knowledge in building community institutions and its imperatives for long term development work. The community leaders will share their experiences in the Symposium conventions and seminars in building their institutions.

Community partnership with mainstream institutions

As they say, development is everybody's business and the role of mainstream institutions be it government or corporate/non-governmental cannot be over emphasized. There is paradigm shift the mainstream institutions have realised that they need to seek collaboration with the local community institutions to make the development work more meaningful and sustainable. As for instance, the Banks and Insurance companies and CSR foundations, increasingly connect



with the community-based institutions. The role of enabling NGOs has been a catalyst in the process of connecting the supply stream of mainstream institutions and demand stream of community institutions. Over time, the collaboration gets deepened and assume the characteristics of partnership for a long-haul engagement. The Symposium would show-case successful models of several community partnerships with mainstream institutions for wider synergetic expansion.

Community & Pandemic Management

The communities of federations organized under institutional framework have shown collective action in

creating awareness about the risks of the pandemic for the lives and livelihoods. After the initial phase of enabling and knowledge building, they have taken the role of managing the precarious situation thereby avoiding the panic. Worthy of mention is the quick response of the leaders and the community volunteers from the large membership of federations in distributing personal protection kits (masks, sanitizer, herbal immunity boosters, etc.) and their active spreading of the message regarding the hygienic practices, avoiding the crowd, wearing the mask, etc. Vaccine literacy and promoting vaccination have been spearheaded by the community themselves. Significantly, they have taken proactive steps to distribute groceries and essential food



and medicines including nutritional supplements among the members of the federation with the governing body leading from the front. Wherever loss of livelihoods is experienced, the communities coordinated with village Panchayats for more man-days under MGNREGA for such people. As the pandemic situation is still not behind us the experience of communities in the management of the pandemic would offer inspiring stories to be shared with stakeholders in the Symposium.

Policy influencing by the Community

The community institutions running various development programmes with the support of civil societies and mainstream institutions have many interesting experiences and lessons to share with the Governments to shape and develop appropriate policies. Beyond participation and ownership of these institutions, the communities with their native wisdom and practices have come out with fresh, novel and more appropriate ideas and approaches to make the programmes more effective and relevant as we have seen in natural resource management - water commons, forest, pastures. The community inputs arising from their experiences have been a compelling enabler to influence the policy changes for more productive outcomes. The anemia control programme through appropriate nutritional intervention by SHG federations for the women members, promoted by DHAN Foundation, has emerged as a scalable model for National Rural Health Mission. Another case in point is the policy change of MGNREGA to engage the rural labour for building village level water commons. There are scores of success stories across the country where the communities have and continued to contribute and

influence the policies of Government for effective implementation. Madurai Symposium would set the platform for wider exchange of these policy changes impacted by communities across the country.

Community Governance

Wherever the development programmes have been built on the framework of community institutions, there have been many positive fallouts. The systems and processes of community institutions are arising and expanding and enlarging in its scope and action. This has led to the forming of Governing structures depending upon the purpose and the objectives of the institutions. In other words, differentiated Government structures have become imperative among the various types of community institutions depending on the purpose and themes. There have been good insights into the process of making governance structure in the community institutions which has enlarged the scope for building community leadership. In fact, the SHG movement has thrown excellent grassroot level leaders at the SHGs and federation level and the quality of leadership has also been an eye opener that given an opportunity the deprived and poor communities can assume the leadership role with aplomb. Farmer leaders are emerging from FPO eco system even as the governance structure of the Farmer Producer Companies and Organizations are being strengthened. Many community leaders from different types of institutions have been playing active role in the panchayat governance and they are also ensuring interface of the local people with the panchayat and district administration. Some of the governance structure of the community institutions have emerged as role model for the panchayats for participatory governance. The

leadership and the governance structure of the community institutions bids fair to ensuring a sustainable institutional eco system at the grassroots. These leaders from across the country will converge in Madurai Symposium and share their experiences.

Community Financing and sustainability

One of the important positive outcomes of the community institutions, as any development stakeholder would vouch-safe, is the influence of governance and the community leadership in taking charge of the management/administration of their institutions. They have also been able to promote a shared understanding among the people of the nitty-gritties of the management/administration. This awareness and realisation across the leaders/governing bodies and members have led to the appreciation of the finances/funds to be contributed by the community members themselves. The role of community at large in raising and managing the finances, spending for the programmes with enabling of the civil society NGOs is widely recognized by the members. This recognition has led to communities now sharing, coming forward to share their part of the financial contribution for the development programme of their institutions. Like in the restoration/rehabilitation of the village based water tanks used for irrigation, farmers not only contribute considerable share of the initial capital cost as also completely defray the recurring expenses for maintenance of the water commons. Furthermore, they also use the usufructs from the tank eco system for effective financial management. It is a given now in any development projects/programmes that where the communities see the benefits, their participation and assuming the role of management of these programmes

and projects, financing by communities is part of the project funding. What is more, they are more than willing to foot the bill for continuous management expenses in the long run. This community financing is most important pillar on which the sustainability of the project depends. Coupled with leadership governance and participatory implementation and monitoring, community financing would, in future, ensure long term sustainability of the development programmes. Many such experiences would be on display in Madurai Symposium for wider sharing with the stakeholders for appreciation.

It is fitting that there have been stronger expression of community actions triggered by the SHG and farmers' movements, as we begin to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of Independence, which when supported and encouraged would lead to Community Swaraj which is seen as Gram Swaraj by the Father of Nation. In the contemporary scenario, the planners of development and practitioners would juxtapose this objective in the eco system contexts. And we need to celebrate communities for their seminal work. Madurai Symposium would do just that in a grand manner. The Symposium has the following formats to showcase the community actions as examples of Swaraj.

Conferences, Seminars and Workshops

Madurai Symposium 2021 would be a festival of celebrations of community led development process and the larger impact on the life of communities. The primary stakeholders of development, being communities, would take center stage in Madurai Symposium and it would be an exhibition of power of communities in all the events. Notable among the achievements are the self-help groups and its



federations as the fulcrum of development across India for addressing deprivations of women, their empowerment and the vast social capital. Community work in water conservation and judicious use of water – revival of water bodies and thereby the eco systems have been an exemplary model of sustainable development impact. There are many unique community led health programmes across the country influencing the mainstream for larger impact. So also in several other development themes.

The symposium will have many conferences, seminars and workshops to provide a platform for the community as the primary stakeholders (demand stream) and the other stakeholders comprising of supply and enabling stream to share their work and the impact on communities from the perspectives of institution

building by the communities, community governance and leadership, community contributions towards appropriate policies by the Government. The successful experience of collaboration and long-term partnership by the mainstream institutions with communities would be deliberated and knowledge exchange for wider adoption. Needless to say, these knowledge events would provide a stage to facilitate cross learning through best practices in the process of community led development.

People Conventions

People conventions would be the signature events of the symposium as the focus is on communities' Swaraj in the development process. The conventions would provide great opportunities to the communities and leaders to share their





success stories focusing on the participatory and inclusive process in steering the development programmes through their institutions, unique methods, including self-regulation practices and also future pathways whereby communities can take charge of the development programmes from the designing stage itself. The conventions would be inspiring communities at large, the stakeholders in the supply stream of mainstream institutions and enabling stream of civil societies/NGOs and other development foundations in the focus areas of the themes mentioned above. The conventions aim to elicit the experiences of these community stakeholders through dialogues, round-table and focus group discussions which ultimately result in greater learning that has to be taken out of those experiences for advancing community empowerment.

Events for Public

Cultural evenings: Reviving and preserving traditional folk and arts is need of the hour which is still relevant. The Symposium would create an opportunity for the





folk and traditional artists to perform variety of cultural programmes related to community empowerment and community swaraj to exhibit their talents. This would facilitate the development stakeholders to find a way for promoting and preserving the traditional folks and arts which are the symbols of ancient Indian culture.

Exhibition: There is need for greater awareness of the public about the rights and equal opportunities of the deprived communities and their empowerment



processes and pathways in development sectors will be finding place by way of women, farmer, youth entrepreneurs displaying and exhibiting their business products, paintings and other skills. The Symposium 2021 would attract the public from the city to get exposed to the talents and creativity of the poor people/communities through exhibition of crafts and wares made by them.

Development Films: Screening development films for the development stakeholders including the public is important part of the Symposium. Exciting experiences of different development interventions towards community swaraj would be displayed through this event to sensitize the stakeholders, communities and common public on various development initiatives and interventions. The best films would be recognized and suitably awarded.

Date: October 25-29, 2021

Nominations for Events

The Facilitation Committee of the Madurai Symposium 2021 invites NGOs, academic and research institutions, Government Organizations, industries, banks, donor organizations, entrepreneurs, producer companies and cooperatives to host conventions, seminars, workshops and conferences on topics relevant to the theme of the Symposium. The Committee would facilitate logistics and other needed support for the events organized by the host organizations..

Madurai Symposium so far

- 2003 - Advancing Development
- 2005 - Advancing Development
- 2007 - Advancing Development towards Building Alliances
- 2009 - Advancing Development towards Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- 2011 - Advancing Development towards Sustainable Livelihoods
- 2013 - Governance for Advancing Development
- 2015 - Localizing Sustainable Development Goals
- 2017 - Building Resilience for Sustaining Development
- 2019 - Women Empowerment for Sustaining Development



**Facilitation Committee of
Madurai Symposium 2021**

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DHAN Foundation

1A, Vaidyanathapuram East, Kennet Cross Road

Madurai 625 016, Tamil Nadu, INDIA

Tel: +91 452 2302500, Fax: 2602247

Email: maduraisymposium@ghan.org

Website: <http://maduraisymposium.net/>

<http://www.dhan.org>