



Putting Communities First in
EMERGENCY RESPONSE

**A Manual of Good Practices for
Strengthening Community Based Action
Through Social Monitoring Committees**

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Foreword

In this age of 24/7 breaking news, natural disasters especially those that cause large scale devastation, injury and / or deaths, are highly visible. This usually results in an initial outpouring of sympathy and support from around the world and ensures that some of the immediate needs of relief materials are available to survivors. A key priority at this stage is to ensure that systems are in place to deliver the appropriate aid material quickly and transparently to the impacted areas and populations. However, the complex and often difficult road towards rebuilding shattered lives and communities, impacted by a major disaster, is a long haul that lies beyond the immediate rescue and relief stage. Unfortunately, the flip side of the information age, where situations or issues do not stay in global or national limelight for long, ensures that public scrutiny of this crucial stage is often minimal.

Our experience has shown that the usually overlapping identities of socially and economically marginalized groups, like dalits, adivasis, the landless, the elderly, people with special needs, etc., are usually worst placed to be able to negotiate or fully access state or NGO support at the recovery stage. Even within these groups, it is often the women and children who are worse off in a post disaster situation. Women headed households in these communities are especially vulnerable in such situations.

The cumulative experience of working in disaster impacted communities has taught us the importance of maintaining a nuanced and transparent approach in our engagement with the communities that we work with. The fact of the matter is that, familiarity with the local contexts and the depth of what is at stake, community members can be the most important differentiators who can successfully and sustainably turn a breakdown caused by a natural disaster into a breakthrough.

Yet communities are usually not homogeneous groups - and it is important to be mindful of the power hierarchies, interest groups, political, economic and social dynamics that are in play universally in all communities. As a

result, we have taken steps to try and address this and ensure that everybody in a community, including those who are most marginalized, get an equal opportunity to voice their views and have an active agency to determine the road map of recovery for themselves and their families, as well as for the community as a whole.

This Manual on strengthening Social Monitoring Committees (SMCs) is CARE India's humble effort to share with our partners, colleagues and peers in government and in the civil society, all being key stakeholders in disaster related initiatives. It is our attempt to strengthen the body of knowledge around engaging with communities in post disaster situations and also for disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

I would like to thank Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their support for the Emergency Relief to Cyclone HudHud (ERCH) Project, which was crucial for strengthening our experience of forming and working with Social Monitoring Committees in the 15 cyclone impacted villages/slums in Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram districts of Andhra Pradesh, India. I appreciate the effort put in by our local partner, BREDS, for the recovery phase in the aftermath of Cyclone HudHud. I would also like to acknowledge the dedication and hard work put in by my colleagues in CARE, post Cyclone HudHud.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of SMCs, many of whom have been a source of inspiration for all of us. Their sheer energy, their ability to take responsibility as a collective, and to transcend their hesitancy about getting into unfamiliar roles like negotiating with various officials to get a job done - gives me immense hope.

I understand that the work to strengthen and build capacities of SMCs is complex and requires a long haul. This is just a beginning. I hope CARE India, the SMCs and our partners will together be able to nourish this seed that we have planted into a strong movement. I am confident that that this Manual will prove to be a timely tool to strengthen such an effort.



Rajan Bahadur
Managing Director & CEO
CARE India

October 2015

CARE in Emergencies

One of the most respected international organisations, CARE is known for its work in emergencies. Each year, we respond to dozens of disasters across the globe, reaching approximately 12 million people through our emergency programmes.

Our decades of experience, expansive global reach and robust network of partners enable us to take a comprehensive approach to emergency relief, allowing us to focus from providing immediate Relief to Long-Term Recovery in our intervention areas. In this approach, first, we work with communities to prepare for and mitigate the impact of disasters, then we partner with local groups to provide immediate assistance when an emergency hits, and finally, we work with survivors, especially women and children, to help them recover after the crisis has passed.

CARE India in Emergencies

In more than 60 years of its presence in India, CARE has striven to stand beside survivors of every major natural disaster, supporting efforts to provide relief and recovery support to survivors. In all our recent efforts, be it after the Tsunami in 2004; or the floods in Bihar and Odisha in 2008, in Uttarakhand in 2013, in J&K in 2014, and in West Bengal in 2015; or in the aftermath of cyclone Phailin in 2013, and cyclone Hudhud in 2014 - the priority for CARE India has been to ensure that most vulnerable among those impacted by the disasters have access to the aid.

CARE India works towards providing immediate relief and assistance in the rehabilitation process of affected communities in the aftermath of any calamity. We help communities build their capacity to better cope with and recover from disasters. Our foremost goal is to build resilience among the community and various stakeholders in case of any disaster. We work closely with communities, who have been affected by disasters, so that long term development of the communities with sustainable livelihood opportunities may be secured and they are better equipped in future.

CARE India's Key Objectives in Emergencies:

- Addressing the immediate needs of the most marginalized populations affected by disasters, while recognizing people's fundamental right to a life with dignity
- Understanding the underlying causes of vulnerability
- Enhancing capacities to cope with disasters and adapt to climate change
- Integration of disaster risk reduction into the ongoing programmes

ACCOUNTABILITY in emergencies and efforts to develop different mechanisms to creatively build effective accountability has been at the core of CARE India's efforts. Community monitoring is an important dimension of accountability, and the need for this made us venture into conceptualizing and institutionalizing SMCs. This manual is an important step to document, share, and make available good practices that have emerged from our experiments to promote social monitoring.

Context behind conceptualizing SMCs

Often there are multiple committees within communities focusing on various development issues like a watershed committee, water users committee, mother's committees, forest committees, etc. These committees usually have specific responsibilities that only focus on partial aspects of the overall challenges faced by the community. Most such committees have little decision making or executive powers. There are also formal local government institutions like Panchayats and collectives like Self Help Groups. The actual potential of these bodies to strengthen the development work in their community is rarely fully utilized. Often there is little coordination between these committees at the village level to develop a holistic approach to tackle the challenges faced in the community as a whole.

Another crucial limitation that is often visible in participatory local committees is their inability to transcend the set social and economic hierarchies and represent the best interest of the whole community including the most marginalized in their community. As a result, members

of these formal or informal local collectives get little opportunity to have a sense of achievement or accomplishment through their roles in these committees.

In a post disaster context the role played by the State and non-governmental relief agencies gets highlighted. The role of the local community - irrespective of the scale of devastation - usually is not visible. The inherent value of engaging the local community in relief and recovery is also not fully realized.

Local communities can play a critical role in issues like assessing damage, identifying and prioritizing beneficiaries, transparent and effective distribution of aid, developing recovery plans and also conducting disaster risk assessments and DRR actions with the future in mind. Communities can also play an important role in ensuring protection of vulnerable members of the community e.g. children and women who are at high risk of getting trafficked in post disaster situations.

Another important factor especially relevant in post disaster situations relates to some settlements with insecure tenure rights, like non notified slums or those facing forced evictions, where formal or informal local collectives are absent.

It is in this context that the relevance of Social Monitoring Committee (SMC) becomes both relevant and important.

As a result, one of the efforts of the Emergency Response to Cyclone Hudhud Project was to try and keep the role of the community through SMCs at the core of any action undertaken. Though the project was short but the created positive energy among many SMC members because of our engagement with them has convinced us that the role of the community through SMCs is important. It takes time to change mindset and realign the way people look at their contexts and the possibility that things can be done differently.

Action to effectively ensure that the community is an agency for dealing with, and recovering from, any disaster situation has been a weak area of intervention within the DRR discourse. There is a lot of potential for investing in building the capacity of people's committees at the local

community level. Production of a manual for SMCs using the documentation of knowledge acquired through implementation of the Emergency Response to Cyclone Hudhud Project by CARE India hopefully will be a humble contribution for DRR related work in the Indian context, in the future.

ERCH Project in Brief

The ERCH Project was implemented in two phases: Relief Phase, and a follow up intervention for the Recovery Phase. SMCs were an integral part in leading and implementing the second phase of the Project. This Phase was implemented in 15 village/slum communities of Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram districts of Andhra Pradesh.

The overall objective of the Project was to ensure enhanced disaster resilience for marginalized communities especially women and girls affected by Cyclone Hudhud in Andhra Pradesh. The components under the aegis of the SMCs taken up in Phase Two of the project included:

- A) **Shelter Repair** - More than 500 households benefited under this activity and were able to repair their dwellings that were damaged during the cyclone
- B) **WASH** - Construction of community toilets in 5 communities
- C) **Solid and Liquid Waste Management** - Demonstration facilities were put in place along with systems and processes of waste management were put in place in 2 communities.
- D) **Building Resilience in Communities** - Being an overarching focus of the Project, all out efforts were made to ensure transparency and accountability, strengthening of collective decision making, and ensuring flexibility while making needs assessments for each family. Other components under this effort are:
 - a) **Cash Transfer** - This was a key facet of the Project because 80% of money was transferred direct to beneficiary's bank account. SMCs played a key role in ensuring that the support amounts

are rightfully utilized, and that there were no strings attached to access funds for the beneficiaries.

- b) **Awareness on WASH** - Special focus was given to adolescent girls under this initiative
- c) **Skill Development** - Local men and women were trained in masonry to enable them to be an integral part of the recovery efforts under the Project.

Creation of SMCs was an important part of these efforts. One of the highlights of the effort made by some of the SMCs was their ability to go beyond the project mandate, and to use the newly created platform to their advantage for accessing favourable deals e.g. ensuring lower costs through procuring materials as a group or negotiating with the State for basic services like electricity, accessing government schemes for opening bank accounts, or applying for small land parcel for a more secure tenure rights. This is remarkable in the context that not much resources had been invested in SMCs directly, nor have investments been made specifically on the institution-building component

Defining SMCs

Social Monitoring Committees or SMCs are community based collective with representation from all castes and marginalised groups in the community, including persons with disability. Constituted with at least 50 % women members, SMCs also strive to include representatives of all formal/informal collectives in the village. SMCs are also responsible for supporting effective participatory, transparent and accountable management of response interventions with agreed procedures in the ERCH Project. SMC members played a vital role in beneficiary selection, supporting assessments, monitoring progress on various interventions, conflict resolution, recommending and authorising release of funds for shelter repair based on stages of completion of work. SMCs were also responsible for maintaining necessary documents like Resolution Register, Attendance, Correspondence, etc. for implementing a project.



PART I

Social Monitoring Committees - The Basics



Why a Social Monitoring Committee?

- An important challenge faced in post disaster situations often is the expectation among community members of universal approach in selecting beneficiaries, whereas SMCs being part of the community help in following targeted approach based on actual damage caused.
- SMCs are able to leverage their existing links with other collectives within and outside the community, and thus are able to deliver savings in terms of cost, time and durability.
- They act in balancing between rigors of rules and existing social conditions in which people live by bringing flexibility to deserving segments on selection, monitoring and support.
- They act as a buffer at the time of phase out of CARE and partner NGO by acting as a shock absorber and an interface at the time of withdrawal.
- SMCs can leverage social capital already generated as they are pulled in from various existing and well functioning collectives, and there is considerable social dynamism generated positively.
- The marginalized sections in any community find it more difficult to access aid or support for themselves. Thus a need for such a forum to gather requisite information in relation to aid reaching the community.
- Ways in which SMCs can hold organizations to account for their decisions, actions and impacts and also be accountable to the community at large can be crucial.
- SMCs potential to oversee complaints and dispute resolution is very important.
- SMCs have the ability to harness local knowledge and information.
- Capacities developed in SMC members add to community's wisdom and can prove to be critical for DRR work.
- It is easier for the community as a whole to access information from SMC members, and enhance transparency and trust components of any project.
- SMCs create space for sections within a community who have traditionally been marginalized.
- SMCs instill senses of confidence and agency, allowing new community leaders to emerge.

Formation of SMCs

Key points to note

- SMC formation is the most critical stage and SMCs must have representatives from all constituencies within the community. Aspects like caste, class, gender, age, disability, etc should all be factored in at the member selection stage.
- Women's participation and creating a favourable environment for them to manifest their leadership ability would be critical for a successful SMC.
- Building capacity of SMCs and also the field workers in partner organisations who would be working directly with SMC members would be very important.
- SMCs must have a hands-on role in planning, execution and monitoring.



Composition

- SMCs are not totally new structure implanted, but a complement to existing well functioning social collectives.
- The Committee should consist of 10 – 15 members depending upon the size of habitation/village/slum.
- Not less than 50% of SMC members should be women.
- Representation should be given for all castes (SC/ST/BC/etc), persons with disability, elderly, women headed households.
- Representation from Women self-help groups.
- It is preferred that the post of President in an SMC is held by a woman.
- Senior representatives of all formal or informal village level committees/ institutions should have ex-officio linkage with the SMC.

Roles & Responsibilities

- A quorum for convening SMC meetings should be fixed. In addition, maximum number of meetings that an SMC member must attend during a period must also be agreed upon.
- Division of focus areas and responsibilities among SMC members to be pre-agreed.
- Maintain all records and minutes of meetings, correspondence and action taken by SMC.
- Identify Project beneficiaries and assess their needs on actual need and vulnerability.
- Correspond with stakeholders like partner NGOS/CARE/Government officials etc.
- Collaborate, network, and lobby with government officials for leveraging on social security schemes.
- Support community members in getting all necessary documents required as part of project implementation (such as individual application, proof of Residence, Voters ID, Bank pass book First page , individual photo, etc.)



- Help non-bank account holders/vulnerable community members like single women/aged people on implementing various activities in the village.
- Ensure the money is transferred through individual Bank account for shelter and cash transfer programme.
- Ensure that the funds disbursed are being spent in the right manner.
- Act as gate keepers to direct the investment towards end use which is more important in post disaster period due to multiple priorities including pressure towards unproductive expenses including alcohol abuse etc.
- Ensure effective execution and quality of the project interventions.

Positives of SMCs observed during the project

- Ownership and taking of responsibility among community members. People's participation in the project was not for immediate financial benefits or other gains but for gradual engagement towards long term development.
- Addressed the frustration and helplessness because of inability to qualify for the rigid conditions for government aid.



- In many communities, initially some members were aggressive due to lack of faith in the system. Engagement of SMC led to grievances being heard and acted upon, which in turn led to trust development.
- Very often, SMCs leveraged benefits for the community that was beyond the project mandate.
- Encouraging SMCs to actively engage in decision making creates a sense of agency that is very crucial. In the project, SMCs were requested to identify the households eligible for shelter support. The list developed was then forwarded to the engineer who visited each house and did the technical evaluation and valuations, which was again reviewed and finalized by the SMC, CARE and BREDS representatives.
- Flexibility on the deciding criteria for assessing repair cost proved to be a very important trust builder. Based on inputs by SMCs in some cases, the estimate submitted by the engineer was re-evaluated and increased e.g. if the house belonged to an old lady who had to employ others to do the work, the cost could not be same as that of a family who were contributing their labour in doing the repair work.
- SMC in Gandhinagar purchased all materials for the shelter repair work for the entire community in bulk at one go. This reduced the cost of the items and also the transportation costs, which proved to be a major advantage.

- Shared leadership through SMC increased community bonding and the spirit of volunteering among community members was often more visible than usual.
- Ability to take collective financial decisions, making actual financial transactions e.g. through purchase committees consisting of SMC members, and monitoring that the disbursed amounts were being spent appropriately, gave a strong sense of accomplishment to many SMC members.

Some key challenges faced during work with SMCs

- Project period was too short to create self sustaining SMCs.
- Less informed community and the pressure to deliver.
- Problems in the community arise due to lack of trust. Sometimes even those people who were initially positive about the project processes, became aggressive when there was a lack of information. Therefore, investment should be made to ensure clear communication in a continuous and proper way, otherwise things can fall apart and collapse.
- Caste system is still a challenge; direct and indirect impacts of caste system have to always be factored in.
- Whenever matters like remuneration for any programme under the supervision of SMC came up, it usually posed a challenge because there were pressures to employ a known person - often a family member - in the role.
- When doles, payoffs and free rides are a norm, sometimes it appears that SMCs have been romanticized too much.



EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO CYCLONE HUDHUD PROJECT
**Training on Formation of
Social Monitoring Committee**

Place : Vada Chiparugath Date : 11.06.2014
Organized by : Sarva Shiksha and Development Society
Supported by :



PART II

Effective functioning of social monitoring committees - Key points to keep in mind



Key intervention points for ensuring strong SMCs

The Community:

- SMCs should have a clear mandate outlining what they are expected to do.
- Transparency and access to information is critical for SMCs. The same basic project related documentation for a community should be maintained at the SMC / Partner NGO and CARE levels.
- SMCs must have direct decision making role and be an integral part of any implementation process.
- Documentation, maintaining records and their proper filing by SMCs is important.
- A phased step by step plan to build capacity of all SMC members is an important part of the process. A structured curriculum with both social and financial management module should be part of any engagement.
- Learning, feedback and self assessment sessions should be a regular feature of SMCs.

The Implementing partner NGOs / Local Partner NGO:

- Training of field level staff responsible for regular interface with SMCs is critical to enable them to play a facilitative role rather than a monitoring or instructive role.
- A conscious attempt should be made to give more and more decision making responsibility to SMCs.
- Flexibility in the implementation of activities by SMCs are a critical component for supporting SMCs.
- The message for all SMCs should be that it is OK to make mistakes as long as you learn from it, and as long as there is no malicious or corrupt intent behind the mistake.
- Engagement with the community should be according to their convenience in terms of timing and livelihood patterns.

The technical/funding partner:

- Any project aimed at building community capacities in self governance especially in a disaster impacted community should be a long term engagement as it is trying to address and break marginalization and exclusion experienced through generations.
- There should be a constant endeavour to explore how external inputs e.g. use of GIS technology may help SMCs to change the game.

Examples from ERCH Project on processes adopted

Key points to note

- A clearly articulated standard operating procedure (SOP) outlining the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder and must be agreed upon. r i.e. Community, Implementing partner/technical support or funding partner.
- A terms of reference (ToR) or a guideline for SMCs mandate must be agreed upon.
- SMCs may be mentored to conduct baseline situational analysis of the community to prioritize its plan of action.
- SMCs must have all documentation produced by the partners available at the community level.
- SMCs should be at the core of decision making and implementation of all development activities in the community.
- A transparent dispute resolution mechanism may be put in place to assist SMCs.

Within the community

- **Coordinated Group purchase:** The community became an integral part of purchases made for the project implementation with SMC members forming Purchase Committees responsible for buying items required for the project. The cost of items got reduced because of bulk purchases and lower transportation costs. This proved to be a significant game changer in instilling a sense of confidence and achievement for SMC members.
- **Leadership platform for women:** Women SMC members were usually able to use the platform to effectively manifest their leadership potential that would otherwise not have been possible in similar contexts.
- **Support to people with special needs:** In post disaster situations the aged, physically challenged and widows face multiple challenges. Many SMCs were able to bring forth this aspect to and garner voluntary support (in terms of free labour and knowledge) from fellow community

members for repair of houses, opening of bank accounts, and other chores for people with special needs.

- **Common activities:** SMCs played a vital role in needs identification and in finding out innovative solutions through community participation. This was seen more under Cash Transfer Programme, e.g. villagers in Gandhinagar, Kanimetta, Kanimela, Gundapareddypalem, Ekalavya colony and Uttagedda, supported their SMCs by contributing their time and labour to clear sites identified for community toilet construction and solid and liquid waste management.
- **Accessing basic needs:** Many families in the urban slums under the Project did not have access to electricity or water. SMCs in slums like Gandhinagar and Ekalavya colony organized the community to collectively approach government departments and arrange for electricity and water connections despite many challenges. SMCs in some communities are playing an important role in ensuring access to other government services like regular visits of ANMS and Asha workers to the village for taking care of pregnant women and children. Some SMCs have also submitted representations to local governments for issuing of ration cards and old age pensions to community members.

By the implementing partner

- SMCs provided a platform for women members to represent and take a lead role in planning, execution and decision making process of project activities
- SMCs to be seen as complementing the work and not so much as competitors which would dis-insentivise the motivation for empowering them
- Necessary project related information documents such as Village profile, Map, beneficiaries list, estimates, community meeting minutes and resolutions etc, should be available with SMCs

By the technical/funding partner

- Adequate planning is needed to ensure that capacity building training is provided to all SMC members and field staff of implementing NGO partner.
- SMCs can emerge as a one-stop local resource centre for monitoring, gate keeping and leverage support services to the marginalized in the communities.
- The long term focus of the work with SMCs would be to strengthen local community level institution building.

Samples of process guidelines developed for SMCs

For community toilet construction:

Selection of village, based on community need for toilets. Priority given to communities where lack of affordability and space justify construction of community toilets.

Situational analysis, needs assessment and detailing of identified end users by community led by SMC members. Formal request to be made to partner NGO in writing.

Partner NGO with help of CARE to organise awareness camps on water sanitation and hygiene in community. Focus to be especially on women and adolescent girls for better understanding and adoption of practices.

SMC, with the help of community and Panchayat (PRI), to identify a proposed site with access to water facility and an approach road etc.

Partner NGO and SMC Members to coordinate with Local Panchayat, Mandal Development Officer and Mandal Revenue Department for necessary clearances and NOC regarding use of identified site for construction of community toilets.

SMC to facilitate the process of site survey by Mandal Revenue Department officials.

Site preparation activities like bush clearance to make the site ready for marking,; after getting clearance from Surveyor to be led by SMC.

SMC members to finalize proposed toilet model in consultation with WASH consultant.

Marking of community toilet site to be given by WASH consultant in presence of SMC members.

SMC to monitor the construction and procurement processes in terms of quality and update the daily progress in its minutes register.

Review and recommendation by SMC for the release of payments to labourers, masons or any vendors, be compulsory.

SMC to ensure that local people are engaged in the work. As part of improving the skills in masonry work SMC may recommend and ensure the training of some less skilled masons from the village to improve their skills.

SMC to coordinate with PRI for power connection and water supply to community toilets.

Construction is supervised and monitored by WASH technical consultant.

After completion, community toilets to be handed over to SMC members and users by partner NGO.

SMC will ensure maintenance of toilets and take steps to mobilize funds by putting user charge for each family.

For shelter repair

Villagers have to be sensitized and oriented on formation of SMCs, covering aspects like its roles, responsibility, functioning, purpose and norms of cash transfer specifically for shelter repair.

Orienting SMC members about roles and responsibilities for interventions to be taken up under the project.

SMC to maintain a village level register to maintain minutes of all proceedings/major discussions, decisions etc. in the village.

Request letter from SMC to partner NGO, stating that the village be considered for support under ERCH; Information about number of households, nature of damage, effect of cyclone, occupations etc. to be included.

SMC to forward individual applications having the information about type of house ,nature of damage, cost of damage , details of support sought, self contribution by beneficiary family, details of individual bank accounts (account numbers and bank names). In its forwarding letter, SMC would give a commitment that it would take responsibility for monitoring of all processes and ensure its execution. of repairs.

Partner NGO will forward request letters along with abstract to technical consultant (TC) - Shelter repairs. TC will scrutinize the applications and make assessment by visiting each household with a technical assessment tool.

1-2 photographs showing condition of damaged house along with family members have to be taken.

After assessment, TC will prepare an estimate for each house and recommend the support amount for each family.

Based on the SMC's review of the TC's recommendations, and after incorporating any modifications suggested by it for families needing special consideration, e.g. Women headed households or houses of elderly, persons with disability etc. The IST installment amount is to be directly transferred to bank accounts of individual beneficiaries.

TC should visit site to assess progress of 1st phase work. The final release of funds would be based on the SMCs recommendation made to the TC.

On completion, the TC after consulting the SMC would certify and submit the completion report along with the photographs. Any community contribution must get reflected in final completion report.

An acknowledgment and a certifying letter from project participants and SMC on completion of repair work after transfer of final installment to the beneficiary bank accounts to be considered as the work closure process.





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