

CCRC Young Women: A Hawking Experience

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BHITARKANIKA

Bhitarkanika, located on the East Coast of Orissa State of India, is a National park that lies between 20° 8' N and 86° 45' E and spreads over 145sq.km area. It is a unique Mangrove Forest Ecosystem, which harbors the largest known rookery of endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles in the world. It is 140 km away from the State capital, Bhubaneswar, approachable through road and boat.

There are 190 villages in and around Bhitarkanika Mangrove ecosystem inhabited by 46000 people (as per 2001 census) out of which 14000 children are under 18. To truly involve the local communities in implementing solutions, these same communities must be somehow empowered. But empowerment is not a static state; it is a continual process—a process that depends upon awareness and development of cooperative community management skills. People living close to the sanctuary are depending on mangrove forests for their basic wood based need. Most of the people are poor having thatched houses and depend on agriculture and fishery for their livelihood. Because of rise in human as well as animal population day by day, the demand for wood is increasing as a result of which the pressure on mangrove forests is increasing. This has led to shrinking of area under mangrove forests and deterioration of quality of vegetation. This may invite the occurrence of more flood, more cyclone, loss of fertile soil more salinity of fertile land because of invasion of sea, loss of plant species, bird species, animal species and loss of ecological balance of the region in future.

Coastal Community Resource Center

There is no concrete policy to address these issues and no visible governance to involve the coastal people. To hand over them some practicable formula to nourish the mother earth and empower them to grow sustainable "By them & For them" principle, an innovative concept of a management model devised that is what the Coastal Community Resource Center (CCRC) at village Gupti. It has been constructed with the conjunction of the UNEP-GPA & NC-IUCN-TRP of The Netherlands in 2005 and the Govt. of Orissa with the Dept. of Forest & Environment has extended supportive role with signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to move ahead with this mission. This is truly an achievement of positive experience to partner with Government of Orissa to help in implementing forest governance to benefit the coastal communities.

The CCRC at village Gupti of the Bhitarkanika area is a true learning center, offering practical workshops and hands-on experience in varieties of livelihood fields. The nearby local communities are greatly benefited in the practical experience they gain, as the Center designed to demonstrate the appropriate and alternative educational strategies to mobilize fishing communities in particular and others to conserve and restore the mangrove ecosystem.

The Center's objective is to aware and educate the coastal girl children, women and Senior citizens about the importance of health education to gain behavioral knowledge to care their own health in the most inhospitable coastal situations of Bhitarkanika. After the 'Super-Cyclone-1999' the coastal communities have no giant options to health services because of huge devastation and abject poverty. The worst affected streams of people are young girl children, women & senior citizens. During community interaction an innovative action strategy got evolved to form CCRC Young Women to spread awareness on healthcare with the assistance of Health Care Professionals. This is in its infancy but the hawking experience of the CCRC Young Women is appreciable. They have zeal & zest to design the Distance Adult-Learning materials to attend

education to spread awareness on health care and management by themselves. They learn here the awareness campaign messages for preventive diseases, water-borne diseases, ailment because of Indoor Air Pollution, HIV AIDS, migratory diseases through demonstration and ICT equipped curriculum. This has been further improved with outreach training strategies to serve all with the spirit of volunteerism. They are being trained to persuade the community folks to adopt healthcare and sanitation tips, skills to stay healthy. They have made trained to connect the community with HEALTH-knowledge.

Population Control and Women's Education

One of the easiest (though easily most taboo) ways to reduce poverty is to decrease the number of poor people. Unfortunately, cultural traditions about the discussion of sex (in what forums it's appropriate, if ever, and the willingness of people to listen) make such things difficult. Though there are population control program underway in the government, even one directed at the poor, the local people are continuing to reproduce at a much greater rate than is seen in the cities and very little is being done to assess why.

Perhaps it is a problem with the person disseminating the information. Is it appropriate for someone who is urban and perhaps perceived as being upper class to come to a poor village and encourage population control measures? Of what gender should that person be? Will the discussion of such matters make it impossible for the people to take this person seriously when they address other vital concerns such as conservation or sustainable energy?

Maybe it is simply lack of knowledge directed at the right people at the right time. Perhaps if women were educated before their marriage, they would be better prepared to start things off right, and perhaps their confidence in performing marital duties could increase and environmental justice be served in a way. And what about already married women? There is the overwhelming and undeniable demographic trend that the more education women receive, the less children they tend to have, which has lead to decreasing if not zero or negative population growth in many developed countries. And yet the women in these coastal villages (as well as the men) have little, if any, formal education.

Still, there must be women who would like to have fewer children, especially since poor nutrition during pregnancy, pollution, and the hard work that they must also endure, makes pregnancy an increased risk, and decreases life expectancy. It is a natural (evolved) trait to want to regulate and control pregnancy, if it is possible. Even ensuring that a woman is not pregnant during the busy harvest season or that she doesn't give birth during the monsoon or the end of the dry season where the environmental and bacteriological conditions make childbirth much more risky.

Simple education (early on) about natural birth controls, such as timing according to monthly cycles, alternative forms of pleasure and coitus interrupts, even the use of local foodstuffs that might decrease fertility without other adverse health effects, could help both to empower women and to put the breaks on population growth and thus help with the problem of horizontal supply of labor. This is virtually cost-free and confers a huge benefit, both to local populations, the environment (historically human population growth has always resulted in the destruction of the natural world, there's no reason this should be an exception), and the country as a whole.

Other options such as the dissemination of condoms or birth control pills might be too technical, culturally inappropriate, or expensive (as they most likely could not be done for free), though education about such options and assistance if their desire certainly represent a way to benefit the marginal few that might want to spend the money for such things. Even government sterilization programs that offer monetary returns for those that are willing to limit the number of children they have, are falling prey to bad education and myths of health problems. People are failing to take these options even though they have relatively little to gain from more mouths to feed (especially when the supply of labor is horizontal) and could gain at least some funds if they were to undergo the treatment. Perhaps this represents another failure to see the tradeoffs or

perhaps the investment potential (in an area where electricity and thus many services are not available and entrepreneurship is virtually nonexistent). While general basic education for women would most likely be the most permanent and generally desirable (especially because it's not coercive) way to halt population growth, education about what methods can be used and awareness and promotion of existing government programs could be invaluable.

The community young women are made understood in CCRC by their demonstrative work to organize 'Community Group Conversation' on issues of this importance. The CCRC grows as a development platform where the community young women sit, discuss and decide the demonstrative methodologies to aware all women about the necessity of community health, sanitation and conservation of the mangrove ecosystem.

Designing Education Program

1. Expanding access to knowledge using ICT/ ODL on health education and care.

- Education materials about Health Care/Nutrition

Middle-aged literate housewives of near by urban areas are engaged to design the education materials on epidemics, polio, HIV Aids, TB, Diabetics and other women diseases. After adequate training five Young Women are teamed to put the education materials to the doorsteps of the women small fishers. Some experienced Nurses are put to guide them doing the whole exercise with the help of slides and Power point presentation with ICT support. The beaming faces of the illiterate, ignorant community women could tell the magnifying realization about the purpose of Health Care/Nutrition.

- Information available about birth control procedures
The State of Orissa is having the highest in child mortality and the coastal villages are in panic stage. The CCRC Young Women are trained to make the pregnant ladies to be in regular check up and put awareness to over come the hazards due to worst sanitation.
- The running of clinics such as eye and vaccination clinics
There are some volunteer Doctors run free Eye Camps, Vaccination clinics, Orthopedics consultation in CCRC campus with the active involvement of the Young Women. A weekly pathological investigation is opened to the community women by trained women Pathologists.

Demonstrative Actions

The Young Women and their team have designed an education program for capacity building by using familiar common local language and concepts for the Bangladeshi Refugee settlers. Effort are attended to understand the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of the larger women community and to set specific objectives as to how those attitudes and behaviors may be positively influenced. A multi-pronged approach combining printed materials, audio-visual presentations, and face-to-face interactions is exercised widely as an effective way to initiate the planned awareness-raising program on Good Health & Sanitation. This strategy can augment management plan and facilitates the sustained engagement of communities. They prepare regular hand written newsletter in simple language and design with accurate content on health issues and disseminate them among local coastal communities. The demonstrative activities practiced by the Young Women to spread general awareness on Health Care /Nutrition in the near by local villages could term it as their 'hawking experience'.

Threats of Indoor-Air Pollution

Cooking with the wood itself also poses significant risk. Indoor-Air pollution causes death in children, chronic respiratory and back problems for women (who spend large amounts of time in front of the stove or carrying wood), and represents a malady that is easily solved with more

efficient and cleaner cook stoves and chimneys. The disproportionate burden on women in this regard (considering that the women also fish for food and venture into the forest in search of wood or crabs, though the men do as well) presents an environmental justice concern as well as a signal to those who wish to intervene that women would be more open (as they have more to gain and even more concrete sufferings in the present) to reform. But the team of the Young Women could take a lead to convince the community women during a group discussion to hold training to understand the purpose and utility of Improved Cook-Stove involving the women SHG groups in a phased manner on a random basis selection. It is the first of its kind in this mangrove ecosystem and has contributed a lot to serve our CCRC-mission. A great deal of activities are undertaken to inform, equip and empower the coastal communities to choose alternate livelihood practices to curb their excessive dependency on the coastal wetland marine resources.

The manufacture of improved cook stoves by the local community represents an entrepreneurial business that could secure the livelihoods of some, as has been demonstrated in Africa as well as Cambodia. Empowering women by showing them that they can better their own lives in this way, and introducing them to manufacturing, small business, and hopefully ways to invest and deal in the market (an ideal use of micro credit loans) can both provide concrete good and help to rectify concerns of environmental justice. Additionally, the creation of human capital and better understanding of markets allows people to view conservation in a different light, as an understanding of scarcity, trade-offs, and investments in the future are all critical to a complex and workable desire to conserve.

Expanding access to health education and care so that people do not die of easily preventable diseases; Making education and adequate nutrition a priority so that children can grow up to lead healthy and productive lives; Providing skills training and support for small entrepreneurs to increase opportunities for employment and income generation; protecting the environment, to ensure that natural resources are conserved and renewed for future generations; addressing gender inequality, to increase opportunities for women and to ensure that the women have a say in decisions that affect the lives of themselves and their children; strengthening the role and capacity of local organizations, to make communities more self-sufficient.

Conclusion

Research has shown that CCRC Young Women are eager to become key players in service learning and society at large. The integration of youth voice within service-learning provides a natural means by which young women can assume leadership roles while gaining valuable skills they need to become lifelong, active citizens. In return, CCRC as a community organization gain the energy, perspective, commitment and skills of the young minds. Studies also document a sustained involvement in service learning and a greater willingness to forward the health Education and care/Nutrition who are given a meaningful voice in this most inhospitable coastal situation through the CCRC. In an era of declining civic engagement among future community women leaders, this connection between present service and future citizenship is crucially remarkable.