

# The Gender Resource Centre - *Suvidha Kendras* of Mission Convergence

## A case study

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#### **Introduction**

The *Bhagidari* system or the Government - Citizen partnership system was launched in 1998 by the then newly elected Chief Minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit, with the intention of transforming the city's governance landscape with a new approach. The *Bhagidari* system was described as 'a means for facilitating citywide changes in Delhi, which utilises processes and principles of multi-stakeholders (citizen groups, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the government) collaboration, applies the method of large group interactive events, aims to develop 'joint ownership' by the citizens and government of the change process and facilitates people's participation in governance'<sup>1</sup>.

One of the projects which was brought under the ambit of the *Bhagidari* system was the *Stree Shakti* (women's empowerment) project. It was described as an integrated capacity building attempt 'to empower women, specially those belonging to the economically weaker section of the society' in partnership with NGOs 'to strengthen the ability of women to participate equally in the mainstream of society' and was located within the Department of Social Welfare. Its interventions were prioritised in the areas of health, literacy and income generation. Its methodology to achieve its objectives was to setup Gender Resource Centres (GRCs) and organise *Stree Shakti* camps.

The GRCs were 'intended to be a central focal point for all issues relating to the empowerment of women in general and concerning health, literacy and income generation in particular'. The GRCs were to function as:

- documentation centre and data bank on women's issues.
- undertake dissemination of the data directly and through grassroot level NGOs to the target groups.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://delhigovt.nic.in/bhagi.asp#1> (Last accessed August 2011)

- act as a bridge between the agencies of the government providing services / administering programmes and the community members using them.
- In the subsequent phase, district wise sub-centers of the Gender Resource Centre can be established in the entire NCT of Delhi; also the GRC can undertake direct funding of relevant projects to the grass root level NGOs<sup>2</sup>.

In 2006, when the first Delhi Human Development Report was released, findings confirmed that while by the 2000 census only 8% of the population was below the poverty line, deprivation existed in other forms. The 'three disturbing problems' of Delhi were that the city was 'characterised by many inequalities in living standards'; it had 'much ground to cover in terms of addressing some fundamental problems - of power and water supply, public health and public safety'; 'and despite the expanding opportunities, the city- state has largely neglected street and working children, the homeless, the disabled and the concerns of girls and women' (Delhi Human Development Report, 2006). The report also bared issues relating to governance structures stating that 'governance challenge of Delhi, as can be surmised, is to cope with multiple authorities and competing jurisdictions'. It also appreciated the *Bhagidari* system which put 'citizens at the centre of governance' and set down, along the lines of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Delhi Development Goals (DDGs) which included the eight goals of – eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal elementary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/ AIDS malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, strengthening *Bhagidari* and improve public safety.

It was in response to these articulated needs from the report along with the existing backdrop of experimenting with new governance models for engaging citizens, that the Mission Convergence programme (also called the *Samajik Suvidha Sangam*) emerged as an initiative of the Government of Delhi. Conceptualised in February 2008, it was formally launched later that year, on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

### **Evolution of programme structure**

The programme evolved with the clear understanding that there was a “need to reorient strategic thinking with respect to implementation of social sector programmes if we hope to genuinely improve the quality of life of citizens especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of society” (Singh, 2009). The initial months of the programme were dedicated to the study of alternate arrangements, such as the *Bolsa Familia Programme* (BFP) of the Government of Brazil

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<sup>2</sup> <http://delhigovt.nic.in/shakti.asp#6> (Last accessed August 2011)

which has integrated four cash transfer programmes into a single programme under the Ministry of Social Development and coordinated it with other social programmes and policies, along with several rounds of consultations with various groups – tiers of government officials in different departments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), academic institutions, experts – where the design of the programme was discussed in depth. “The design was not frozen initially, we were open to change”, Rashmi Singh, ex-mission director of the programme, shared. Nivedita Dasgupta, director of Modicare, an NGO involved in the process, explained that the consultations evolved with requirements, “initially, the consultation process involved streamlining the GRC interventions, guidelines, budgets and deliverables by the GRC partners. Subsequently, when Mission Convergence was launched, consultations involved defining the vulnerable people, identifying them through a survey, concerns about actual implementation of welfare schemes and the response by the government”.

Based on the two processes, the programme was envisaged as a single window service delivery system located in the most marginalised communities of the city where the services of nine government departments would be provided. It was consciously decided to use the existing GRCs for the programme as they were decentralised and located within vulnerable population dwellings, had an established infrastructure, as well as a history of being run by NGOs working with the mandate of gender justice and inclusion, it was strategically poised for the added intervention. The GRCs were also an applauded initiative of the department with an established and growing social capital, the addition of *Suvidha Kendras* was conceptualised to develop them further. “Before they came within the Mission Convergence, the GRCs existed in an isolated manner and often the District Collector’s were not even aware of their existence in the region”, Ms. Singh mentioned. It was felt, that by bringing them under the Mission Convergence programme, with adequate support structures, their impact could be far greater. These GRCs became the essential building blocks around which the design was framed and it was decided that the design would include Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the management of the programme, through a Public Private Community Partnership (PPCP) model, the rationale being the need to improve service delivery of welfare schemes and strengthen delivery systems at the grassroot level with strong community engagement.

The process of convergence and decentralisation, being politically sensitive, had to be negotiated with much care within the project structurally. At several levels, coordinating groups and agents have been set up to ensure the smooth functioning across the various stakeholders involved - the government departments, non-governmental organisations, the community and marginalised individuals. While the daily management of the programme was designed to come under the Programme Management Unit (PMU) headed by the Managing Director, above the PMU, to

support the convergence of nine departments<sup>3</sup>, the State Convergence Forum headed by the Chief Secretary, was established. The overall policy direction to the project was to be given by the Policy Review Committee which is headed by the Delhi Chief Minister, making the programme a heavyweight in terms of its location within the government.

Below the PMU, nine District Resource Centres (DRCs) for each of districts of Delhi were established and these were carefully located at the office of the Deputy Commissioner to ensure that the programme had clear visibility in that tier of governance. Akhila Sivadas from Cfar shared that in the initial “re-positioning the DCs office” was “ [...] crucial in the sense that it was to be done without changing the state apparatus and yet creating a dynamic framework for enabling action. Hence the concept of DRC emerged. Several NGOs initially were opposed to it, preferring their community role to the liaising one, but we felt this nexus was very important for shrinking the line of divide. There was a need for creating a check point and monitor the distribution of services”.

The DRCs are under the management of sanctioned NGOs and undertake the responsibility of following up on processes from the field, liaising with the government and the community, addressing grievances and additionally act as a hub of knowledge and information services, mainly on schemes and programmes of the government. DRCs, most importantly, monitor and collate the district level reports on the performance of community based structures of their respective districts. However, since the DRC was run by an NGO with ideologies and systems that are often very different from the government's style of functioning, the design bridged this communication gap by appointing a District Management Unit (DMU) to be set up. It comprised a retired government official, who would advise the NGO on how to interact with the government and help develop an understanding of its processes. The role of this official is thus largely advisory and has been envisioned to facilitate the efficient and smooth functioning of the DRC.

Other methods for ensuring co-ordination and public accountability have also been structuralised by the setting up of regularised meetings at various levels. Where at the department level, the State Convergence Forum has been created to deal with larger policy and programme co-ordination while for the daily functioning, a monthly District Convergence Forum (DCF) meeting headed by the District Collector (DC) and attended by the GRC-SKs of the region, facilitates this process. The effectiveness of this forum, however, is dependent on the approachability of the DC. In an ideal scenario, the DCF meeting could promote downward accountability where the CBO could ask for the status of applications that are delayed or caught in a bottleneck, etc. and this information could then be relayed to the community. At this juncture, however, it remains at a level where for the most part, inherent structural hierarchies are exercised to emphasise the superiority of government

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<sup>3</sup> Namely, Health & Family Welfare, Food & Civil Supplies, SC/ST/OBC & Minorities Welfare, Social Welfare, Urban Development, Labour and Information Technology.

officials over CBOs. Smita K, who works at the St. Stephen's DRC in East Delhi, shared with us in an interview “If the DC is not cooperative, things get very difficult. People look at the hierarchical position of a government official and treat you accordingly, depending on what terms you are on with that official”.

The community based structures were to be the pre-established GRCs, they were now additionally the *Suvidha Kendras* (information centres) earning them the nomenclature of GRC-SKs and were located in regions where vulnerable populations have been mapped, to serve approximately 15,000 to 20,000 households each. The objectives set for the GRC-SK were an amalgam which included improving the condition of women by providing them means of social, legal and economic empowerment. For this purpose the GRCs run skill based training for women in the region along with undertaking regular health camps, providing doctor visits and legal counsel, non-formal education opportunities. The SKs have the mandate to provide information and create awareness regarding the government schemes and programmes, identify beneficiaries and enroll them, facilitate and collate required documents, verify and authenticate information, forward claims to departments, track and provide feedback and provide grievance redressal. The GRC-SKs also had a single form for the 43 schemes of the nine departments which were channelised into the Mission making it more people-friendly. In addition, community mobilisers have been employed by the centre to go into the community with information on new schemes, to encourage people to come in to the centre for registration for government schemes such as the Rashtriya Swasthya Bhima Yojana (RSBY) as well as health or legal aid camps being organised by the GRC. The rationale is to provide a one-stop shop for all the informational needs of the community, in a single window information-cum-facilitation centre. Currently, there are 104 GRC-SKs in the city.

Instead of a government body to monitor and evaluate the functioning of GRC-SKs, Mission Convergence has engaged two mother NGOs to 'facilitate, guide and supervise the functioning of the field NGOs'<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, they hold capacity building and training sessions for members of the GRC-SK on how to create self help groups, conduct health trainings and nutrition camps and provide legal literacy services.

The *Samajik Suvidha Sangam* was established as a state level body registered as a society and is the implementing arm of the Mission Convergence endeavour. The following objectives were adopted<sup>5</sup>:

1. Establish, manage, operate, maintain and facilitate welfare programmes throughout the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi for providing welfare services in an integrated

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<sup>4</sup> [www.missionconvergence.org](http://www.missionconvergence.org) (Last accessed August 2011)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.missionconvergence.org/vision-mission.html> (Last accessed August 2011)

manner to the under-privileged citizens in an efficient, transparent, convenient, friendly and cost effective manner.

2. Identify and recommend the welfare services which can be provided in a converged manner after consultation and coordination with the appropriate departments.
3. Work out and implement the action plan for the welfare schemes in the NCT of Delhi in collaboration with the private sector, NGOs, or Public Private Partnership (PPP) or other innovative methods as per the requirements of the specific areas.
4. Rationalise and streamline the implementation of the schemes related with social services.
5. Generate awareness on the welfare schemes and programmes amongst the masses.
6. Facilitate and promote public-private partnerships and community ownership in efficient service delivery of social services.
7. Improve access of the poor to get the maximum benefits of the welfare schemes.
8. Promote women's empowerment.

Selection of the NGOs who would run the GRCs, DRCs and monitor the system, was through several methods. Ms. Singh said that it was imperative that good NGOs with a genuine interest in the work were selected and hence to ensure this, selection took place in phases where feedback was actively studied and incorporated in decision-making. Other than an internal partnering with the line departments and with NGOs, the programme has also been supported by other actors such as the World Bank for technical contribution to the vulnerability survey; United Way, UNESCO, Times Foundation, Sakshi, for creating a team of volunteers; USAID, Water Aid and Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration on the issue of health, hygiene, water and sanitation; Government of India, including the Planning Commission, Ministry of Labour, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation; corporate houses such as Times Foundation, Max New York Life; international organisations like UNDP, the World Bank, USAID, GTZ and others; academic and research institutions like IIT Delhi, Indian Institute of Public Administration, Department of Social Work (University of Delhi), Jamila Milia Islamia University.

### **Establishing and running the centres**

Once the initial infrastructure and NGOs were established, the first task undertaken by the Mission was of beneficiary identification. As the Delhi HDR clearly showed that pure income based

brackets did not capture vulnerability, there was a need for a more comprehensive multi-pronged index. Mission Convergence proposed a new criteria for beneficiary identification which took into account three aspects : location of stay, social and occupational vulnerability indicators. Location of stay included categories of homeless (including precariously housed), non-notified slums, notified slum, resettlement colonies (F, G, H colonies). The socially vulnerable included old people, disabled people, single women, women headed households, single unprotected children, child headed households and people with debilitating illness. Vulnerability defined through occupation included ragpickers, construction labour, porters and *hamaals*, casual daily wage labour, street vendors / hawkers, casual domestic workers, cycle rickshaw drivers, workers in small household enterprises, workers in household industries. The rationale behind these non-economic indicators was to create a filter whereby vulnerable groups like migrant workers could be included in social security welfare schemes instead of being left out of its ambit, in the absence of stipulated identification documents. Based on this vulnerability criteria, people were divided into groups of 'vulnerable' and 'more vulnerable'. By incorporating non-income criteria for assessing vulnerability, groups that were traditionally been left out of social security schemes have been identified and data shows that the actual number of people trapped in urban poverty is far higher than original estimates indicate (Singh, 2009).

The survey took place in two phases through which the data of 9.2 lakh households was collected, covering a population of 42 lakh people. Currently, a third phase is underway to reach people who have not been covered in phase one and two. To generate this list, a survey was conducted with almost 100 CBOs and 1,500 surveyors, drawn from the community itself. Surveyors, with a minimum qualification of secondary education were selected and given training in filling out data collection forms by the NGO operating the GRC-SK. To coordinate this data collection effort, the Community Health Department of St. Stephen's Hospital was given the responsibility of training CBOs to conduct surveys and thus help develop local competencies to handle information and equip stakeholders and named the Central Coordination Unit (CCU). In addition to coordinating data collection, the CCU also designed the survey form after strategy meetings with the PMO and advisors like the World Bank, GTZ and WHO; also they managed the data entry for all the forms filled across Delhi and generated the vulnerability lists along chosen parameters. The data resultant from the survey is maintained centrally and utilised in several ways.

This process was used for authenticating identities of the vulnerable across the various departments. The identification number granted to the person through the registration at the centre or by the initial survey could be used across departments in order to verify oneself as a resident of the city, especially useful for the homeless, who have also been actively covered within the programme. "Having an official identity, was for many urban poor and marginalised, the first step into the

system. We met women who had previously never been photographed, migrant and homeless populations for whom any identity is vital in beginning to access systems”, shared Ms. Singh.

An unanticipated outcome of this alternate method of defining 'vulnerability' along with a re-organisation of the structures and injection of new actors in the governance landscape, meant that there were several occasions where power realignment brought upheavals. One of the crisis the Mission Convergence faced was in the opposition by the Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs). A dilution of their powers and privileges took place due to the programme, because the system of patronage was replaced by the easily accessible and transparent systems of identification and service provision by the GRC-SKs. Due to the political protest by the MLAs, the process of authentication through the GRC-SKs had come to a stop, and instead their role had been greatly reduced to just supporting the community with putting their papers together as per requirements. The old system of going to the specific departments to process documents was regressed to, yet during the period of this research, the government order for the previous powers of the GRC-SK to be re-instated, had been passed.

Similar power tussles were also faced by the DRCs and GRC-SKs at various levels of the governance structure where old patronage systems had been replaced. At the lower rungs of the line departments, at the DCs office, NGO field workers struggled to establish egalitarian relations. As B.D. Sharma, the appointed DMU official at the District Collector's office in East Delhi, stated in an interview<sup>6</sup>, “Government departments have a particular culture and age-old style of functioning. If they feel that their power is being challenged or there is an encroachment being made on their territory, they will not be amenable towards any new programme”. In this context, the DMU's role is to ease frictions and build an understanding between the two sides.

Since the establishment of the GRC-SKs, the users of the centre interviewed by us shared that information has become much more accessible and processes for accessing schemes has been simplified. Before the existence of these centres either people did not know about the relevant schemes or found it very difficult to keep tracking their files at various departments. Akhila Sivadas from Cfar shared that “We began working with the urban poor communities in 2007-6 where we wove into the community as Cfar and began to take stock of the existing conditions. We found out that conditions were very poor and there was a feeling of being ignored, of being cast away. That their days were in some sense, numbered. It seemed to them that the government had lost sight of them, and communities felt they had lost connection with the government”. One of the community mobilisers with Cfar shared that when they brought the idea of the GRC-SKs to the people 'initially they were suspicious and hesitant about using the centres. There was disillusionment among them

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<sup>6</sup> Interview conducted as part of the field study on Mission Convergence (January 2011)

as several promises such as these had been made and then not carried out. Yet slowly with time, after using the centre, interacting with us, trust was built and now we are well recognised in the area and people approach us with any problem they might have”.

For marginalised women and young girls who due to traditional boundaries have limited scope of venturing out of their locality, especially, the combination of decentralised spaces geographically accessible to them, which also serve as support structures where they can access skill building trainings, join self help group (SHG) activities, receive legal and health counsel along with being able to access information on basic services and schemes, has made quite a difference. Interviews with women users showcased that increasingly women are entering traditional male domains within information seeking, such as information seeking for financial aid, because they have increased access to such domains, through the SKs located in the GRC space<sup>7</sup>. The GRCs also provide a safe space for women to meet, mingle, discuss and learn about their community and life outside through the new networks that are formed by their interaction. Community mobilisers gave several examples of women who have even begun to imbibe a rights based attitude and have courageously challenged government officials to demand services. It is also notable that several of the women SHGs are beginning to collectively build small trades, negotiate markets and learn skills which were traditionally male dominated in their culture<sup>8</sup>. Mohsina, for example, who takes computer training at the Jaffrabad GRC-SK in North East Delhi, was also from the community around and had become a trainer after learning at the centre and now aspires to increase her knowledge and become a teacher. Young girls of 14 to 16 flocked the cutting and tailoring class. Tailoring is the common profession in the community there, but comes within the domain of men. Girls who have grown up watching their fathers and brothers stitch are finally able to learn these skills at the centre too and function as home based suppliers. The SHGs function as a medium through which several such women are able to combine their produce and sell it at competitive rates, a process in which the GRC-SK supports them. A conversation with Shama Sodhi, the current Director of the programme, confirmed that the programme is now exploring a second phase of livelihood options for women in non-traditional sectors.

Having incorporated NGOs with an expertise in gender and social justice, into the system has worked to the advantage of the programme in several ways. NGOs which practice and believe in a people friendly democratic approach, has brought to the project a sensitised second rung leadership which ensures that shifts in the leadership of the project at the political or bureaucratic level will not have severe repercussions on the field. This accountability of NGOs towards the community is highlighted by Lakshmi Krishnan, chief functionary of Society for the Promotion of Women &

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<sup>7</sup> Based on interviews conducted as a part of the field study on Mission Convergence, Delhi. (August 2011)

<sup>8</sup> Based on interviews conducted as a part of the field study on Mission Convergence, Delhi. (August 2011)

Child Welfare (SPOWAC), a GRC-SK in Paharganj. She states, “People do not have much confidence or trust in the government and many government programmes have failed miserably. As an NGO, we have had a presence in the community prior to the introduction of the Mission Convergence programme and we are answerable to the community – the people have a claim on us”<sup>9</sup>. This sentiment of accountability to the community is also voiced by Manu Chaudhary, coordinator of the Guild of Service GRC-SK in Najafgarh, “People in the community have expectations from us. Before the partnership with the government, they would see me as an activist, someone always ready to start a fight, but now I have a bigger responsibility in ensuring that they can access their social security services and claim rights. The partnership with the government has brought credibility to our work as well as responsibility”<sup>10</sup>.

Interestingly, the colourful pre-existing work of the NGOs running the DRCs and GRC-SKs in particular, has a clear reflection in the character of the work undertaken by the GRC-SKs in the field. For example, Datamation has worked on creating computer training modules in the past and this is reflected in the vocational training at the centres run by them, whereas Cfar has engaged on women's empowerment and worked with collectives to build voice and agency, this too is reflected in their work where women leaders from other communities have come and spoken to the new SHGs being created in the communities served by the GRC-SKs and shared possibilities with them.

As new entrants in the actual service delivery landscape, NGOs, be it the ones running the DRC / GRC-SK or the mother NGOs monitoring and guiding the process, have had their share of ups and downs with the system. Nivedita Dasgupta, from Modicare, shared that the challenge as an MNGO was to “learn to monitor more than 45 NGOs, therefore building a team, training them and retaining them always remained a priority”. The MNGOs also saw a shift in their role where they initially began their journey as “an extended arm of the mission” but later were given tasks relating to preparing reports, collecting and collating data. “On one side the GRCs look up to the MNGOs for guidance and support and on the other, the Mission had its own demands from MNGO, many times unrealistic”. Also as the position of the GRC-SKs has strengthened within the system, there are greater demands on the them. Several government projects are now being run through them and have increased the load on the staff making it difficult to keep quality checks on their original tasks. Yet on the whole, NGO representatives spoke positively of their experience with Mission Convergence and felt that while challenging, there had also been huge benefits for the marginalised.

In terms of learning from each other through the horizontal network of NGOs created by Mission Convergence, Ms. Sivadas shared that “It takes about two years to arrive at the same page. It needs

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<sup>9</sup> Interview conducted as part of the field study on Mission Convergence ( January 2011)

<sup>10</sup> Interview conducted as part of the field study on Mission Convergence (January 2011)

to be an active process where people come together and share. As of now it is not part of the project design” although some organisations were partnering / supporting each other on small issues.

### **Technology use in Mission Convergence**

Unique to Mission Convergence is also the strong information technology backbone that has been created and built upon, right from its conceptualisation. Given the large volume of data and information associated with the schemes of nine departments, a robust IT system is vital to facilitate coordination between different actors. To this end, a single registry system for all government departments was created where data on all 40-odd welfare schemes of government departments was integrated. A convergence application was then created to provide an interface whereby the department could access the details of people registered to a particular scheme.

“The initial vulnerability index based survey was digitised and centrally maintained at the PMU after a strong process of field authentication from an early period to ensure transparency and accountability”, shared Mr. Vishwamohan, who heads the IT wing at Mission Convergence. “The database is actively used by the PMU to monitor and plan for the project”. The identity number provided automatically by the system also ensures access to multiple platforms through single authentication. As the Unique Identification / Aadhaar becomes all pervasive, Mission Convergence hopes to make the shift to that identification in the coming days.

The PMU has also been in the process of evolving an interface within a systems integration platform which works at the GRC-SK level and has the following objectives:

- Create a common, dynamic data base of beneficiaries accessible to all line departments, thereby avoiding duplication of efforts, checking leakages, and increasing the speed of delivery of social services.
- Automate processing of applications and provides application tracking, thereby increasing transparency, efficiency, and objectivity of service delivery.
- Involve the community at grass-root level in authentication of applicants.
- Most importantly, identify the unreached who invariably are the most deserving, vulnerable sections of the society.

These, as they develop, will become fundamental to streamlining the various processes between the various nodes and bring transparency within the project. Currently it under testing mode at the GRCs who have been asked to use them and note the glitches they might face. The PMU hopes to

do a finalised roll out of the net based system by December 2011. Furthermore, plans to include the computerisation of GRC activities, finance and SHGs; create a grievance redressal system; allow the management of schemes; computerisation of scheme enrolment workflow; service delivery; integrate SMART Card where required; create required MIS are also in line. In terms of infrastructure investments the GRC-SKs and DRCs are also expected to have computers, scanners, UPS, and printers at GRCs, DRCs, departments and DC offices, in the coming days.