

POVERTY ALLEVIATION INITIATIVES: THE ROLE OF VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN DISTRICT SANGHAR

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ABSTRACT

Village Development Organizations (VDOs) are non-profit volunteer organizations engaged in socio economic development in rural areas of Sindh province. Though the work of VDOs is under criticism, but yet their role in poverty alleviation cannot be ignored. The primary purpose of this paper is to investigate the activities of the VDOs in poverty alleviation and to identify their problems in the district Sanghar.

A sample of 10 VDOs and 61 sample members and officials were selected from the VDOs working in Sanghar District. A detailed questionnaire was developed and personal interviews were conducted for collecting data. The Survey results revealed that 58% of the respondents acknowledged that the delivery of micro credit was the overwhelming service rendered by the VDOs. Similarly, 48% respondents replied that the health facilities were provided, 26% agreed that awareness seminars were held for the community. Only 5% reported that drinking water supply was provided. In terms of social mobilization, 16% agreed that it was provided to them at door step while 10% responded that income generating jobs were created. The main problems encountered were lack of cooperation from land department, less interest shown by the people to address their problems and shortage of irrigation water. It was recommended that credit agencies should provide interest free loans to the poor; VDOs should also liaise with bigger NGOs so as to create income generating jobs. Moreover, infrastructural development is inevitable for helping the on-going social and economic activities to alleviate the poverty in Sanghar.

INTRODUCTION

Village development organizations are a step towards rural development as it consists of activities that improve the welfare and livelihood of people living in rural areas (Shireen, 2002). Poverty is defined as inability to afford the minimum standard of living. According to United Nations, a person living under one dollar per day is considered to be living under the poverty line (UNDP, 1999).

It has been globally recognized that any programme at grass root level cannot achieve its goals unless the beneficiaries are willing to participate in the programme implementation for long term sustainability (Zaidi, 2005). Active participation of people in positive initiatives will enhance the work of larger agencies in achieving the goals set for community focus programmes (Albertson et al. 1993). Therefore in order to ensure participation of communities in poverty alleviation programmes they are first mobilized and motivated to establish their own organization where every person in the community became a member and contribute toward rural uplift (Mumtaz, 1992). The vision, aim and objectives of the organization is to develop an institutional infrastructure that could lead to sustainable village development on a long term basis. These organizations will help people in remote areas build some confidence and interact frequently and with confidence (consortium for sustainable village development 2008). Furthermore VDOs believe that transparency and participatory decision making is central to the goal of social justice and sustainability (Hamayun, 2004).

It is important to note that for achieving the objectives of the study a sample of 10 VDOs generating jobs were provided.

In this paper, survey results on various activities implemented by village development organization for poverty alleviation in district Sanghar are presented.

Objectives of the Study

- (1) To find out the perception of VDOs about proper use of micro credit and improvement of living standard after giving the loan.
- (2) To examine the role of VDOs in saving environment from degradation.
- (3) To identify the efforts of VDOs for improving poverty alleviation

programmes in Sanghar.

- (4) To investigate the type of services VDOs should provide to alleviate poverty and problems encountered.

METHODOLOGY

Population

The target population for this study consists of village development organization's (VDOs) workers in district Sanghar.

Sample Selection

There are 50 VDOs working for poverty alleviation in both barhoon and lundo (it should be written with capital letter if these are proper nouns) union council Taluka Shahdadpur District Sanghar. However due to the limitation of time and financial constraints of the research only, 10 village development organizations, on the basis of their increased involvement, a sample of 61 members and officials of VDOs were selected for conducting the interview.

A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared on the basis of objectives and assumptions of the study. The questionnaire was finalized for pre-testing and approved by the research supervisor and other committee members. The investigation was carried out personally by the researcher himself to get the accurate information from the respondents. In order to check the validity of the interview schedule, it was pre-tested by interviewing about one-tenth (10%) of the representatives ($n = 6$) of the VDOs. During the process of pre testing of interview schedule, some questions were added /deleted and changed as the situation demanded. Final version was finally approved by the supervisor. In order to achieve the objective regarding proper utilization of loan a question was asked whether income increased after getting loan or not. Data for this study was collected from Barhoon and Lundo union council taluka Shahdadpur district Sanghar in November / December 2007.

Analysis of Data

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 16) was used to analyze the data. The data gathered through survey

were analyzed using frequency distribution and corresponding percentages.

RESULTS

VDO's Activities to Alleviate Poverty

Survey results summarized in Table 1 indicated that the most common activity adopted by VDOs was social mobilization. Social mobilization promotes democratic activities and assists community leaders to build second line leadership. Social mobilization was selected by the majority (61%) of VDOs. Similarly, about 38% of the respondents pronounced microcredit. Total amount dispersed by 38 VDOs was computed to be Rs. 3.0 million with an average of about Rs. 80,000 per VDOs. Almost all the loans were dispersed by Sindh Agricultural and forestry workers Coordinating Organisation (SAFWCO).

Twenty Seven (27) out of 61 representatives of VDOs were of the opinion that awareness programmes were launched. Considering human resource development to be important, 29% of the respondents arranged trainings to improve their knowledge. Exactly same proportion (29%) of the representatives reported that self employment leads to prosperity. About one-fourth (24%) of the respondents were in favor of activities about "savings" launched in their villages. More or less 10% of the respondents pronounced self reliant, development work, and regular meetings were adopted by VDOs. Only 5% of the respondents emphasized that participation of villagers is the most important activity for alleviating poverty.

Table - 1
VDO's Activities to Alleviate Poverty

S.No.	Particulars	Number	Percent
1.	Social Mobilization	38	61.3
2.	Microcredit	35	56.5
3.	Awareness	27	43.5
4.	Trainings	18	29.0
5.	Self Employment	18	29.0
6.	Savings	15	24.2
7.	Empowerment	8	12.9
8.	Self Reliant	7	11.3
9.	Development work	6	9.7
10.	Regular Meetings	5	8.1
11.	Participation	3	4.8

Source: Survey Results 2007.

Perceptions about Proper Utilization of Microcredit Loans

Table 2 revealed that 66% of the respondents were of the opinion that the loan was properly utilized. Due to these loans, household income increased substantially. About one-fourth (26%) of the respondents were of the opinion that there agriculture loans should be recovered after a fixed period of time i.e. 6 months while for business in 1 year. About 13% of the respondents reported that loan was not properly utilized for which it was obtained. For instance, loan was obtained for agriculture/business purpose, but it was used on other heads most likely on health, repayment of old loans, marriages, and repair of house. Other reasons of not proper utilization of the loans were small amount of loan, high interest rates, and small duration.

Table - 2
Perceptions about Proper Utilization of Microcredit Loans

Perceptions	Number	Percent
Loan was Properly Utilized	41	66.1
Agriculture loan should be recovered after 6 month and small business loan in one year	16	25.8
Loans were not properly utilized properly	8	12.9

Source: Survey Results 2007.

Status of Health and Nutrition

Survey results in Table 3 show that half (50%) of the respondents were of the opinion that health facilities are in bad shape and need improvement. The remaining half of the respondents reported that health facilities improved. Segregated data revealed that 21% respondents reported that of health nutrition is good / improved due to establishment of health centre. While exactly the same proportion (21%) of the respondents were of the opinion that after formation of VDOs health status improved since they are running a dispensary on self help basis. Only 3 (5%) respondents reported that they have benefited from awareness seminars/ training programs conducted on health and nutrition.

Table - 3
Perceptions about Status of Health and Nutrition

Perceptions	Number	Percent
Health facilities are in bad shape and needs improvement	31	50.0
Status of health nutrition is good / improved due to establishment of health centre	13	21.0
After the formation of VDO health status improved (Running a dispensary on self help basis)	13	21.0
Benefited from awareness seminars / training conducted on health and nutrition	3	4.8

Source: Survey Results 2007.

The Role of VDOs in Saving Environment from Degradation

Table 4 displays summarized information on the role of VDOs in saving environment from degradation. Survey results revealed that 65% of the respondents agreed that tree planting campaigns was organized in the study area. Environmental conditions help determine whether people are healthy or not. About 34% of the respondents conducted weakly sanitation, waste disposal and general cleaning programs so as to maintain a healthy environment. Awareness campaign on environmental issues was organized regularly by 27% of VDOs. About one-tenth (10%) of the VDOs were found working on knowledge dissemination programs especially on air and water pollution. Only 2 VDOs reported that they are actively working with district government to address deforestation problem.

Table - 4
The Role of VDOs in Environmental Degradation

S.No.	Particulars	Number	Percent
1	Tree plantation campaigns	40	64.5
2	Sanitation and waste disposal	21	33.9
3	Knowledge about environmental issues	17	27.4
4	Air and water pollution	6	9.7
5	Working with district Govt. to address deforestation problem	2	3.2

Source: Survey Results 2007.

Survey results in Table 5 revealed that 60% of the respondents believe that agricultural loans should be provided with low interest. This is an incentive to support small farmers who rely on farming for their livelihoods. According to 11% of the VDOs, government should provide irrigation water that will lead to help in alleviation of poverty. About one-tenth (10%) of the representatives of the VDOs demanded that vocational training centre may be established for capacity building of youth in rural areas. About 8.0% agree that small projects should be given directly to small factories. In view of rising inflation, 5% of the respondents agreed that income generating jobs should be provided

by the government. Very small proportion of respondents demanded that road and transport facilities should be constructed (3%); quality education at low cost should be provided, social mobilization/ technical advice should be provided (3%).

Table - 5
Recommendations of VDOs for Improving Poverty
Alleviation Programmes

S. No.	Demands	Number	Percent
1.	Agriculture loans with low interest rate	37	59.7
2.	Irrigation water	7	11.3
3.	Vocational training centre	6	9.7
4.	Small projects /small factories	5	8.1
5.	Income generating jobs	3	4.8
6.	Road and transport facilities	2	3.2
7.	Quality education at low cost	2	3.2
8.	Social mobilization/technical advice	2	3.2

Source: Survey Results 2007.

According to respondents' opinion in Table 6, 53%, government poverty alleviation strategies were good in principle while 29% agreed that these policies had less impact on their communities. About 27.4% were completely ignorant of these policies were implemented or not. Likewise 10% termed it an appropriate policy as they were not benefiting from it. In the view above stated results, it is recommended that VDOs officials should organize regular awareness campaign in their respective villages to enlighten the people about government policies and strategies and their benefits to the rural community.

Table - 6
Rural Community opinion About Government
Poverty Alleviation Strategies

S. No	Particulars	Number	Percent
1	Govt. poverty programme is good in principle	33	53.2
2	It has less impact on the poor or not reaching the poor	18	29.0
4	They don't know about it/not implemented/not better for us	17	27.4
5	It is not a good policy as we are not benefiting from it	6	9.7

Source: Survey Results 2007.

Survey results given in Table 7 revealed that 27% of the representatives of the VDOs were of the opinion that sustainable projects at community level may be implemented. About 21% of the respondents suggested that skill/need based training programmes should be imparted for self reliance. Funds should be provided to the community through VDOs, as demanded by 18% of the respondents. VDOs should establish training centers for male and female youth, it was asked by about 11% respondents. About 10% of the respondents demanded that VDO should focus on awareness campaigns. Efforts should be taken by VDOs to arrange loan facilities for communities. Further, more VDOs should strive to provide income generating jobs.

Table - 7

Services Provided by VDOs to Community to Alleviate Poverty

S.No.	Particulars	Number	Percent
1	Sustainable projects at community level	17	27.4
2	Skill/need based training should be given to the poor for self reliance	13	21.0
3	Funds should be provided to the community through VDOs	11	17.7
4	Establish vocational training centres for male and female youth	7	11.3
5	VDOs should focus on awareness campaign	6	9.7
6	VDOs should arrange for credit facilities to the community	5	8.1
7	Management and other useful training should be imparted	3	4.8
8	Income generating jobs should be provided	2	3.2

Source: Survey Results 2007.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) VDOs should raise money so as to buy communication facilities.
- 2) Credit agencies should provide free interest loans to the poor so that they can be self reliant.
- 3) Infrastructural development is needed in Sanghar so as to reduce the level of poverty among the poor.
- 4) VDOs must liaise with bigger NGOs so as to establish income generating jobs to those in extreme poverty.
- 5) VDOs should not rely on government to provide funds for future project instead. They can raise funds through savings and donations from rich individuals.

CONCLUSION

The major conclusion drawn from this paper is the perception regarding proper use of micro credit and all other related activities of the Village Development Organizations (VDOs).

According to the survey results 64.5% agreed that the conditions attached to successful usage of credit was that credit must be utilized properly and paid back. While 16.1% agreed that

first select and identify the competent groups who can utilize credit properly. About 19.3% are of the opinion that their living standard will improve only if they have access to credit facilities. Survey results on the role of VDOs in saving the environment from degradation. About 64% agreed that tree planting campaigns was organized in the study area. Regarding the role of VDO in establishing income generating jobs, 18% agreed that they are working to create more job opportunities for the poor.

According to respondent opinion on improving poverty alleviation programmes, 3.2% respondents reported that govt should distribute more land to the poor so as to grow more crops. While about 1.6% respondents agreed that VDOs should work to improve quality education for the poor. Survey results on services VDOs should provide to alleviate poverty, about 40.3% of the respondents agreed that VDOs should provide microcredit to the poor. While efforts should be taken by VDOs to establish livestock rearing programme, demanded by 18% of the respondents. The main problems encountered by VDOs were lack of communication facilities, regular floods and cyclones, lack of coordination and capacity building, extreme poverty and lack of funds to implement future projects.

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