

GOOD GOVERNANCE NOW

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By: SHANTANU LAKHOTIA

O.P. Jindal Global University

shantanulakhotia@gmail.com

India along with many different nations has brought into existence many schemes for the benefit and aid of the underprivileged citizens of the country, but it can be observed that the main problem does not lie with the 'bringing about' of the scheme but its proper implementation. Poor supervision of Fair Price Shop(FPS) and lack of accountability have spurred middlemen who consume a good proportion of the stock meant for the poor. There is also no clarity as to which families should be included in the Below Poverty Line list and which excluded. This results in the genuinely poor being excluded whilst the ineligible get several cards. Awareness about the presence of the Public Distribution System and FPS to poverty-stricken societies, namely the rural poor has been dismal.¹

The paper will try to emphasize on the fact that instead of just enacting a new scheme, it is much more important to educate the populous about the current schemes in force, which will in turn lead to better delivery of public services. This is one of the core philosophy of an NGO named 'Sehgal foundation', who has carried out this viewpoint by the practice of "SushasanAbhi". "SushasanAbhi" which

basically means Good Governance Now is an initiative designed to enable villagers to understand their rights, learn how to access public services, and participate with government officials in addressing and solving local problems.

Strengthening village-level Institutions is a complementary initiative designed to enhance the responsiveness, accountability, and transparency of the village councils and committees by providing leadership skills, trainings, and interventions for facilitating the effective delivery of key government services.² While conducting my research I used to interact with the villagers where the practice of "SushasanAbhi" was being conducted. The paper shows the success of the natives of two villages in Nuh, Haryana where Sehgal foundation have conducted the classes of "SushasanAbhi" and bring forth the fact that a little awareness goes a long way.

BACKGROUND:

Nuh is one of 22 districts of Haryana state and is located in Northern-India, Meo-Muslim are the predominant population group in this area. Meo-Muslim's are a unique ethnic group belonging to the Muslim-Rajput category, they are essentially Rajput's who profess the beliefs of Islam.³

Nuh is the 12th most populous district in Haryana with a population of 1089406 as per Census 2011. Out of this a major portion of the populace live in the rural area i.e. 88.61%⁴.

The literacy rate in Nuh is comparatively low particularly in the case of female

¹ Culture of Corruption in India, Satishchander Yadav, pg. 78

² <http://www.smsfoundation.org/good-rural-governance/>

³ UNHCR Refugee Review Tribunal. IND32856, 6 February 2008

⁴ <http://www.mda.nic.in/Mewat-Glance.htm>

literacy. Literacy rate is 54.08% against State average of 67.91%, while female literacy rate is 36.60% against State average of 55.73%.⁵⁶

Nuh's sex ratio, 906 females for every 1,000 males, is much above Haryana's 877:1,000.⁷ But the truth behind it is that almost every woman in Nuh suffers from anemia due to lack of nutrition and multiple pregnancies. In addition to this families with 8-10 children, almost every household cited cases of infant deaths. The mother mortality rate (MMR) hovers between 160 and 170, while infant mortality rate (IMR) is 64, both figures again highest in Haryana and one of the worst in the country. The institutional delivery rate is meager 40-42%.⁸

Consequently, the development of Nuh has not been impressive. In fact, low ranking in HDI exhibits the inherent backwardness to which the district is subjected.⁹

It should be noted that inspite of a large number of rights and entitlements guaranteed by the Government of India as well as the Government of Haryana for the welfare of the citizens, the rural population of Nuh experiences numerous difficulties when it comes to accessing these rights and entitlements. Nuh has been long ignored by policy makers who work on poverty issues and empowerment as it is located within the state of Haryana, a well-developed state.

⁵<http://www.mda.nic.in/Mewat-Glance.htm>

⁶http://www.schooleducationharyana.gov.in/download_pdf/achievements/Literacy%20Status%20of%20Haryana.pdf

⁷<http://www.mda.nic.in/Mewat-Glance.htm>

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<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/Nuh-sex-ratio-best-in-Haryana-all-else-the-pits/articleshow/20078557.cms>

⁹ <http://mda.nic.in/Mewat-profile.htm>

The Nuh Development Agency (MDA) which is an autonomous government body has been instrumental in bringing forward various development schemes in Nuh. Despite these efforts, a region socially backward as well agro ecologically resource poor needs herculean efforts to be brought out of poverty.¹⁰ Henceforth, Sehgal Foundation with the vision that every person across rural India deserves to lead a more secure, prosperous, and dignified life began its development interventions in Nuh. The mission of the foundation is to strengthen community-led development initiatives to achieve positive social, economic, and environmental change across rural India. In order to achieve its mission the foundation's team works together with rural communities to create sustainable programs for managing water resources, increasing agricultural productivity, and strengthening rural governance.¹¹

One of the major initiatives pioneered by the Foundation is the Good Governance Now (GGN) or as it is called in the villages of Nuh "SushasanAbhi" initiative. It was launched in 2008 to eradicate the lack of awareness that existed relating to rights and entitlements as guaranteed under some of the prominent government programs like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guaranteed (MGNREGA), the Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

In order to combat this lack of awareness as well as the sense of urgency and confidence, the GGN program started structured training sessions wherein collectives of rural citizens are trained not only about the rights and entitlements under various government programs, but also how to use the existing

¹⁰ <http://www.aea-southasia.org/uploads/Mewatreport.pdf>

¹¹ Sehgal Foundation Website.

<http://www.smsfoundation.org/who-we-are/>

grievance redressal mechanisms in case of any malfunctioning. The main idea is to create groups of active citizens in the villages who can be capable enough to fight for their own rights. Initially, the foundation started with Block Leadership Schools (BLS) under which a group of trainees or 'Susashan Champions' were trained in each of the five blocks. However, since 2014 the Foundation initiated the concept of Village Leadership Schools (VLS) under which training sessions are conducted in selected villages with 25-30 susashan champions in each village.

The Sushasan champions are trained through Village Leadership School (VLS) so that they can share their knowledge with community members and enable other citizens to connect with government officials to solve local problems.

Currently VLS are being held in around 157 villages. To select individuals for the training sessions staff members of the foundation hold a meeting with the key persons of each village for example the sarpanch, in which the details of the Foundation's program would be explained to them and they are asked if they would like to suggest some names for it. After this an informal meeting is held with the volunteers; participation by women is mandatory. Two of the most important criteria on which an individual is selected are: the individual should show zeal to bring about developmental reforms of his/her village, he/she must be able to take out time to attend the training session. After the training of the selected individuals is complete they would be termed as Sushasan Champions.

OBJECTIVES:

- ❖ **To understand how VLS initiative under 'Good Governance Now' is helping rural citizens of Nuh to combat lack of awareness and inadequate delivery of public services**

Methodology:

Study has been conducted in Nagina block of Nuh, in two villages Dhadholi and Rithad in which data was collected from 8 villagers all of which were Sushanasan Champions. The following qualitative approach was taken to collect primary data:

1. An informal interview was conducted with two Susashan Champions
2. A group discussion was conducted with the Susashan Champions during a VLS session attended by 6 Susashan Champions.

The website of Nuh Development Agency was used as a source for secondary data.

DETAILS ABOUT VILLAGE LEADERSHIP SCHOOL:

As mentioned above Good Governance Now (Sushasan Abhi) is an initiative designed by Sehgal Foundation to enable villagers to understand their rights and to raise awareness among rural populace of Nuh about prominent government programs. Villagers are able to learn about pivotal issues related to governmental schemes like Guaranteed Rural Employment, Right to Information, Right to Education, Social Security services and Food Security. They are taught how to apply for and claim their entitlements under aforementioned government schemes and how to appeal to delays and disavowals to an appropriate government official. Using the training

provided they are able to overcome issue of poor service delivery and corruption by government officials and other authorities in Nuh. GGN creates informed and knowledgeable community leaders that are able to improve the transparency of key government schemes which results in the better delivery of public services.

Under the GGN initiative, certain individuals are chosen from different villages who are called to receive training through Village Leadership Schools (VLS). The training center share's knowledge and information regarding government schemes like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Public Distribution System (PDS), Right To Education (RTE), Mid-Day Meal (MDM), Social security measures like pensions etc. as well as grievance redressal mechanisms including Right To Information (RTI) and ways of writing applications or filing complaints. Meeting are held at both the block level as well as village levels.

After receiving training in the VLS session the individuals were able to identify the inadequate implementation of the aforementioned schemes and started to utilize the knowledge that was provided to them on the matters related to government scheme, some of the instances are given below:

IN THE VILLAGE OF DHADHOLI:

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE), is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted on 4 August 2009, which describes the modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 in India under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution. India became one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental

right of every child when the act came into force on 1 April 2010.¹²

One of the highlight of this act is that this act is that, it makes education a fundamental right of every child between the ages of 6 and 14 and specifies minimum norms in elementary schools. It requires all private schools to reserve 25% of seats to children (to be reimbursed by the state as part of the public-private partnership plan).¹³ Kids are admitted in to private schools based on caste based reservations.

In the village of Dhadholi it was seen that the private school was not adhering to the rules stated in the Right to Education Act. The act clearly stated that 25% of the students studying in that private school should belong to the socially disadvantaged group but the school headmaster was not following this rule.

When one of the villagers of Dhadholi got to know about this provision in a VLS training session he went to the school and raised this issue with the headmaster, the headmaster said that, "no such rule or government provisions exists and that we are a private school and we will take our full fee's". After receiving this reply from the headmaster, the villager with the help of Sehgal Foundation filed an RTI against the school and asked for information regarding the admission policy of the school under the Right to Education Act. When the reply came he took it to the headmaster and showed it to him, the headmaster asked for forgiveness and asked the villager not to file a complaint whatever

¹² "Provisions of the Constitution of India having a bearing on Education". Department of Higher Education. Retrieved 1 April 2010.

¹³[http://www.schooleducationharyana.gov.in/download_pdf/rules/Haryana%20School%20Education,\(A%20amendment\)%20Rules%202009%20dated\(21-02-2009\).pdf](http://www.schooleducationharyana.gov.in/download_pdf/rules/Haryana%20School%20Education,(A%20amendment)%20Rules%202009%20dated(21-02-2009).pdf)

he said about the reservation is true and he will start abiding by it.

IN THE VILLAGE OF RITHAD:

1.1. The Midday Meal Scheme is a school meal program of the Government of India designed to improve the nutritional status of school-age children nationwide. The program supplies free lunches on working days for children in Primary and Upper Primary Classes in Government, Government Aided, Local Body, Education Guarantee Scheme, and Alternate Innovative Education Centers, Madrasa and Maqtabas supported under SarvaShikshaAbhiyan, and National Child Labor Project schools run by the Ministry of Labor.¹⁴

In the village of Rithad it was seen that the school authorities were not giving lunch to the children on every working day which is one of the provision under the Mid-day meal scheme. In addition to this the school teachers would not turn up every day or would not teach the children properly. After the VLS training session the trainee's got to know about all the requirements of the MDS, earlier the people of the village did not care if the children got lunch every day or not, one villager told me, 'agar bachokkhana mil jatatohachibaathai agar nahimiltaphirgharakekhiladeta' (if the child gets food it's a good thing and if they don't then they would eat at home). After the training session the people went to the headmaster and asked him that what he was doing is wrong and if he doesn't correct it they will file a complaint against him and submit it with the school authorities. The headmaster said that he will make sure that next time the children will get lunch every

day. A School Management Committee has been formed in the village whose work is to keep a check that the children are receiving lunch every day and that the quality of food is good too. It also ensures regularity of attendance of children in the school and prevent temporary discontinuance and dropping out of children. Attendance of teachers and teacher's absenteeism are reported by the SMC to the standing committee.

1.2. According to the RTE act, scholarships are provided to the children whose parents belong to the BPL category or if they belong to SC/ST category.¹⁵¹⁶

The headmaster of this village was given Rs.35, 000 which was supposed to be distributed as scholarship to the children's parents. The villagers were not aware of this scheme before the VLS training session. After they had learned about the scheme the parents went to the headmaster and said that they have not received any money under the scheme and that he should look into it, the headmaster replied that the money has gone back to the government agency. After this a group of villagers went to the government agency and asked for the money, the person in charge said that the money can't come back and that the headmaster has cheated them. Again the group of villagers went to the headmaster and confronted him, the headmaster apologized and returned the money to the parents.

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http://mdm.nic.in/Files/Right%20to%20information/Frequently_Asked_Questions_on_MDM.pdf

¹⁵

<http://news.webindia123.com/news/articles/India/20090819/1322610.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.socialjusticehry.nic.in/Post-matric%20scholarship%202011-12.pdf>

CONCLUSION: THE POWER OF AWARENESS

The main goal of the GGN program which is-to raise awareness about pivotal government scheme is being achieved gradually. The above mentioned stories show the power of awareness. With the help of the information and knowledge that the villagers now possess they are able to claim their benefits under the welfare programs of the government. Before this the license holder of the ration depot or the school authorities were easily able to cheat the villagers, but now with the VLS in place the villagers are able to identify the inadequacy of the services provided by them and are successfully able to demand a progressive change. The people of Nuh had spent a lot of time blaming the government for a huge array of problems but now they have realized that the government is not entirely at fault. Many welfare schemes have been made by the government but earlier due to the lack of awareness they were not able to utilize them.

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