

# Stakeholder Engagement for a Sustainable Initiative: A case of a project by ACF focusing on women veterinary care providers in Darlaghat, Himachal Pradesh, India

**Anagha Mahajani**

Ambuja Cement Foundation, Andheri East, Mumbai, India.  
Corresponding author: anagha.mahajani@ambujacement.com

© *Author(s)*

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**Abstract:** The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were ratified in September 2015. They intend to set the development agenda for the next 15 years by deliberating the process of integrating partnerships, thereby achieving goals and ensuring sustainability. It also seeks to magnify the scale to reach its maximum. Partnerships highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement in the process of development planning, implementation and performance review.

The Account Ability 1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard<sup>1</sup> defines stakeholders as 'those groups which affect and/or could be affected by an organisation's activities, products or services and associated performance. This does not include all those who may have knowledge of or views about the organisation. Organisations will have many stakeholders, each with distinct types and levels of involvement, and often with diverse and sometimes conflicting interests and concerns.' Stakeholder Engagement (SE) is defined as 'the process used by an organisation to engage relevant stakeholders for a purpose to achieve accepted outcomes.' (Accountability 2008)

Stakeholder Engagement is a critical component in the context of social development projects designed to benefit large section of communities. Sustainability is the key concept in social development and stakeholder engagement plays a vital role in contributing towards sustainability. The available evidence in the literature review indicates positive resultant outcomes in the process of stakeholder engagement. Further, for a project to remain relevant and survive in a challenging environment, it requires sustained interaction with key stakeholders of the project. The process is multifaceted, especially when there are diverse stakeholders involved in the project; and the participation of direct stakeholders play a critical role in ensuring sustainability of the intervention. Ambuja Cement Foundation (ACF), an NGO and the CSR arm of Ambuja Cements Ltd. (ACL), is engaged in facilitating holistic development of ACL's neighbouring communities. With its mission, 'Energise, involve and enable communities to realise their potential', ACF has been promoting integrated rural development through its programmatic interventions. ACF started working in Darlaghat, Solan district of Himachal Pradesh, India, in 2005-'06. It is a hilly terrain, wherein villages are spread across a wide area. There is a lack of access to transport facilities, information and better opportunities for development. Animal husbandry, though an integral part of the culture, was never considered as a livelihood source. The community as well as the government veterinary department faced serious issues related to service provision. ACF and the local government veterinary department saw an opportunity to strengthen the primary health care access through a planned intervention. The collaborative project attempted to train local women to facilitate the reach of services provided by the government veterinary department.

This paper is based on an exploratory qualitative study focussing on stimulating partnership model developed by ACF - an NGO and the government veterinary department at Darlaghat in Solan district of Himachal Pradesh, India. The study focused on the participation process of Pashu Swasthya Sevikas (PSS) – the women trained as veterinary service providers at the community level under the partnership model and the resultant outcomes of participation of stakeholders. It uses stakeholder engagement model to review participation of key stakeholders.

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The paper draws on the data collected through participant observation, in-depth unstructured interviews and group discussion with varied stakeholders. The analysis captured in the paper highlights target communities' improved access to animal care services as well as change in the animal rearing practices where women veterinary care providers are today connected. The data shows several evidences about project objective being achieved and further crusade towards unanticipated socio-cultural change.

The paper, however, particularly focuses on key stakeholders and their participation in the process of project implementation. Interestingly, the process of active engagement of key stakeholders further strengthens the project by broadening its scope. The paper also cites an interesting dimension through incidences of participation of the stakeholders and its extent, resulting in stimulating responsiveness from other stakeholders.

The resultant change is multi-faceted. The role of women veterinary care providers broadens to encompass preventive and promotive health care for animal which was unforeseen at the inception of the project. The resulting outcome of effective engagement is witnessed in the area of personal development of participating local women, augmenting economic development, evolving livelihood preference and importantly, in the creation of social capital. The intense engagement of stakeholders led to ownership and adaptability with the changing scope of the project ensuring sustainability of the same.

Based on the data available in this study, the paper hence argues the relationship of the key stakeholder engagement and the project sustainability.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder Engagement (SE), Ambuja Cement Foundation (ACF), Sustainability, Veterinary Health Care, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

### Introduction

A review of development in India and across the globe provide several insights with regard to the role of active participation of all those concerned with development. In India post-independence a strategic planning for development began with a first five year plan. It viewed Community Development Programme as a method of rural development.

Over a period of time the presumption that all the sections of the society will become a part of the process of development was realized to be inappropriate. This was the time when community development and community participation got clearly distinguished and received due attention. It was then established that community participation is a vehicle ensuring movement towards the defined goal of development and that participation in itself has immense potential to empower the involved stakeholders. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, multilateral agencies, such as FAO, ILO and UNRISD, also began to promote popular participation in development projects and programmes (Rudqvist and Woodford-Berger, 1996).

The concept of development underwent sea change and sustainability became an integral part of the process of development. The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were ratified by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. They intend to set the development agenda for the next 15 years by deliberating the process of integrating partnerships, thereby achieving goals and ensuring sustainability. With partnerships it seeks to magnify the scale and significance of the development efforts. Partnerships mentioned in the SDGs highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement through the process of development planning, implementation and performance review. Effective engagement of stakeholders is considered to be a stimulus for participation in development.

Stakeholders are defined as individuals, groups and organisations that have an interest or stake in the particular issue at hand. This includes 'providers, partners, customers (beneficiaries) and any other interested parties' (USAID2011). The UN (2001) defines stakeholders as 'any group or organisation which may affect or be affected by the issue under consideration'.

The stakeholders play a vital role in completion of a project. Unwillingness of stakeholders to continuously support the objective of the project leads many projects to fail. Chinyio and Olomolaiye (2010) stated that stakeholders can affect an organisation's functioning, goals, development and even survival. The evidence from the existing research highlights stakeholder engagement supporting project objectives. Further it stresses that the cooperation among stakeholders is necessary for reducing redundancy in the project, efficient use of time & skills, and fostering a positive work environment.

Stakeholder Engagement is a process to engage relevant stakeholders for a defined purpose to achieve expected outcomes. It is now also recognised as a fundamental accountability mechanism, since it obliges an organisation to involve stakeholders in identifying, understanding and responding to sustainability issues and concerns, and to report, explain and be answerable to stakeholders for decisions, actions and performance (Accountability 2008).

Stakeholder Engagement is a critical component in the context of social development initiatives for sustainable change. With the advent of CSR rules of the Companies Act 2013 in India, corporates are expected to play a significant role in promoting development. Stakeholder engagement demands to be a key part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and achieving triple bottom line. If corporate responsibility is about minimising negative and maximising positive environment and social impacts, then stakeholder engagement is one of the core skills and key activities which enable this to happen successfully and effectively (David Grayson 2009).

The project referred in this paper is initiated by Ambuja Cement Foundation (ACF), a CSR arm of Ambuja Cement Limited (ACL), a leading cement manufacturer in India, a group company of world conglomerate 'LafargeHolcim'. ACF was registered in 1993 under section 8 (earlier 25) of Companies Act 2013. The current outreach of ACF is in 21 locations of 11 states in India with a footprint of about 14.5 lakh people through its holistic program interventions. The main focus of the programs is communities around its plant locations. With its mission, 'Energise, involve and enable communities to realise their potential', ACF has been promoting integrated rural development with active participation of communities. Promotion of livelihood is considered one of the key emphasis areas by ACF.

With the ACL manufacturing plant being commissioned, ACF began its work at Darlaghat Himachal Pradesh, a state in Northern India. It is known as lower Himalaya spread across valleys with 90% of the population lives in villages and small towns. Solan District forms a part of outer (lower) Himalayan belt which is also known as lesser Himalaya. The altitude of this zone ranges from 350 meters (1050 feet) to 1500 meters (4500 feet) above mean sea level. Hilly terrain, isolated remote villages with sparse transport facility, limited access to information and services make the area inaccessible.

Around 2005-06 ACF began working with communities around the plant. During the initiation of development plan along with the community member local situation and local needs were discussed. Women formed majority of this group. Exploring the possibility to promote agro based interventions it was learnt that men in this region are generally away from home for work while women take care of agriculture and allied activities. It was further noted that animal rearing was a traditional activity and most community members owned a minimum one or two milch animals. However local breed of animal hardly met the milk sufficiency at family level.

The ICAR Report (2012-13) reiterates the same and mentions that in Himachal Pradesh, number of women who had control over use of land resources was more than the male members of the family, because men stayed away from the villages for their livelihood and attended farming operations seasonally. Women have higher responsibilities in backyard management including livestock with highest participation in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka states of India.

The livestock census of Himachal Pradesh highlighted the declining trend in overall morbidity and mortality rate. It highlighted causes of reproductive, digestive and other diseases due to poor management<sup>2</sup>. One of the critical gap found during the initial dialogue with the community was access to veterinary services. Epidemic deaths and recurrent infections among the milch animals caused rampant deaths. Lack of Timely availability of veterinary services was shared to be an issue. To address this critical need ACF made attempt to engage with stakeholders with common interest. The effort evolved in developing a strategy for a project focusing on capacity building of local women through training as paravet or the veterinary care providers known as Pashu Swasthya Sevikas (PSS). The role of these paravet (PSS) was considered to be a facilitative link between the government veterinary department and the community. This paper takes a profound reviews at the process of engagement of stakeholders in a CSR project, extent of their participation and the resulting outcome of the process of engagement in meeting project objectives. The paper further draws some conclusions referring to the contribution of stakeholder engagement to sustain the initiative.

Using the case study the paper examines the role of stakeholder engagement contributing to sustainable change through CSR initiatives. Stakeholder engagement is a key part of any social development process. Through this process an organisation attempts to involve people who may be affected by the project or can influence the

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implementation of the same. In the context of CSR stakeholder engagement is critical in achieving triple bottom line. Engaging stakeholder is a requirement of the Global Reporting Initiative. Though the value of the engagement is undebated, there are few research and evidences highlighting the process of engagement, methods of engaging and the resulting consequences of the same contributing to sustainability of an initiative.

The structure of the paper is as follows: section two provides the methodology followed by the section focusing on findings & discussion. The section reviews the process of engagement and the outcome of the project. The last section highlights learnings from the case and its implications provide some concluding remarks.

### **Methodology**

This paper is based on an exploratory qualitative study focusing on multi-stakeholder engagement in a project initiated by ACF. The project is active in 23 villages with 23 local women PSS functioning as veterinary care providers. The stakeholders include Pashu Swasthya Sevikas (PSS), their family members, beneficiary community, influential community leaders and government veterinary care department along with other stakeholders.

The study focused on participation of local women trained as Veterinary care providers (PSS) and other key stakeholders in the project. Quantitative data was extracted from project records maintained as part of its management information system. The qualitative data was collected through participant observation, in-depth unstructured interviews and focus group discussion with varied stakeholders. Using matrix of association the data gathered from multi stakeholders was analysed. The paper is based on the evidences drawn from the study. The paper builds an argument around relevance of stakeholder engagement in ensuring sustainability of an initiative especially in the CSR context.

### **Findings and discussion**

The section provides summary of detail findings through participant observation, in-depth interview, FGDs with stakeholders of the project. The data is analysed to review the process of stakeholder engagement and the resulting outcomes of the process.

#### ***The process of identifying and engaging with stakeholders***

*Community an important stakeholder* was involved in the initial need assessment that raised an issue of need for improved veterinary health care services at community level. The process contributed in prioritising the issue of animal care services over other issues and in clarifying the role of local women as primary stakeholders in the project.

ACF believed in focusing on *exploring solutions within the available system* and hence first explored for effective way to address the issue in the given environment. Considering government being the largest development agency having an evolved system, ACF resorted to a dialogue with local government veterinary department. The issue was considered to be critical also by the government system and the intent to resolve the issue was a shared thought. The subsequent meetings then resulted in agreeing for the join exploration for solution to the issue. *The second important stakeholder became part of the project with commitment to partner for solution.*

The government veterinary department was faced with serious manpower constraint in ensuring timely reach of services considering the hilly topography of the area. A government veterinary officer was typically responsible for 10 veterinary dispensaries. Each dispensary has a pharmacist and the dispensary caters to 10-20 villages depending on the size of a village. A veterinary officer hence is responsible to ensure services to about 130-140 villages (about 6000-10000 HH) spread across a wide geographical area. Constraints of communication & public transport for reaching villages made it impossible for veterinary health care person to attend to the emergency. The Government veterinary officer hence was unable to translate willingness to serve communities into an action strategy. The critical issue identified was about the connect between the government veterinary system and the people in need of veterinary health care.

ACF shared its learning from programs model in human health care with capacity building of the local cadre. This was a period of 2008-09 when community faced with an issue of access to primary health care especially in the area of maternal and child healthcare. ACF initiated a project replicating a model tested at other location of ACF in the state of Maharashtra. It focused on capacitating Village Health Functionaries (VHFs referred as Sakhis) trained by ACF to ensure provision of primary health care for their community. VHF model was discussed with government veterinary officer and was considered to be an opportunity to replicate the model in the area of provision of veterinary care. A discussion with the government was formalised by conceptualising a model of building capacities

of local women to facilitate access to communities for services of animal care. An agreement evolved on ACF taking care of costs in terms of token honorarium for the PSS, training costs, provision of handholding support to PSS and coordinating with the community. Government veterinary department will bring in technical modules ensuring delivery during the training and will extend technical support and services to PSS in the field. *A model solution hence got finalised.*

Considering women playing primary role in animal care at the family level, they were considered potential key actor playing an important role in facilitating access to veterinary care at the community level. ACF connected with panchayats in 23 villages of outreach. Communication was also planned through the existing project forums within communities such as Village Health Committee (VHC), Village Watershed Committee (VWC) and Self Help Groups (SHGs) of women where existed. These local women were regarded to be a link between the government veterinary system and the community in need of veterinary services. The primary objective was to facilitate primary veterinary care for animals. Self-nominated women and nominated by panchayat were shortlisted to form a group of 23 women. *At this stage the third critical stakeholder became part of the project.*

*The family members of the shortlisted women candidates, another stakeholder (subsection of the community) was contacted by the ACF team.* The ACF team communicated with them to clarify the nature of role, responsibilities for a PSS and continued communication through project implementation.

The training of local women as veterinary service providers at village level (Pashu Swasthya Sevikas) began in 2008-09 and continued through several modules focusing on provision of effective veterinary care. The training module included technical inputs, demonstration and field practice. It was prepared by the team of government veterinary office. The technical knowledge component of the training evolved in module form following discussion between the stakeholders. A platform for review and sharing was also finalised at this stage of the project. A fortnightly meeting with PSS and a monthly project review meeting was firmed up. The rolling out of training hence began with a strategic plan.

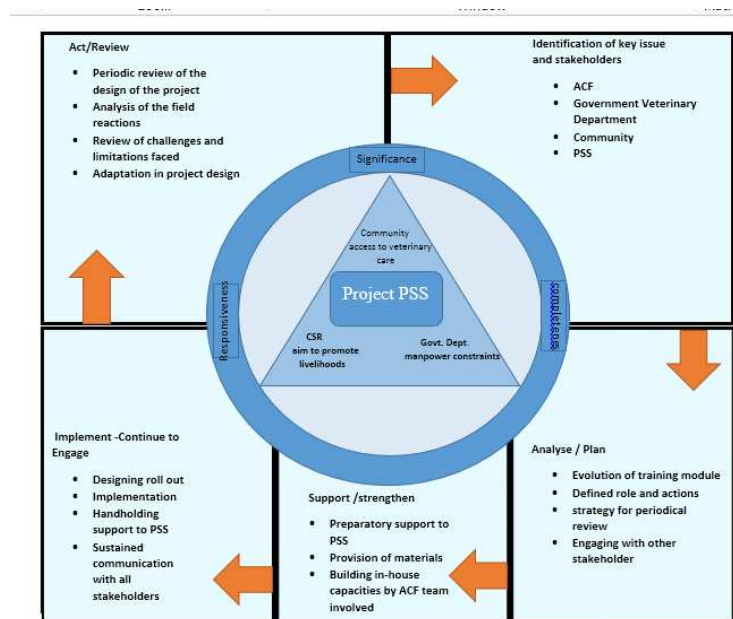


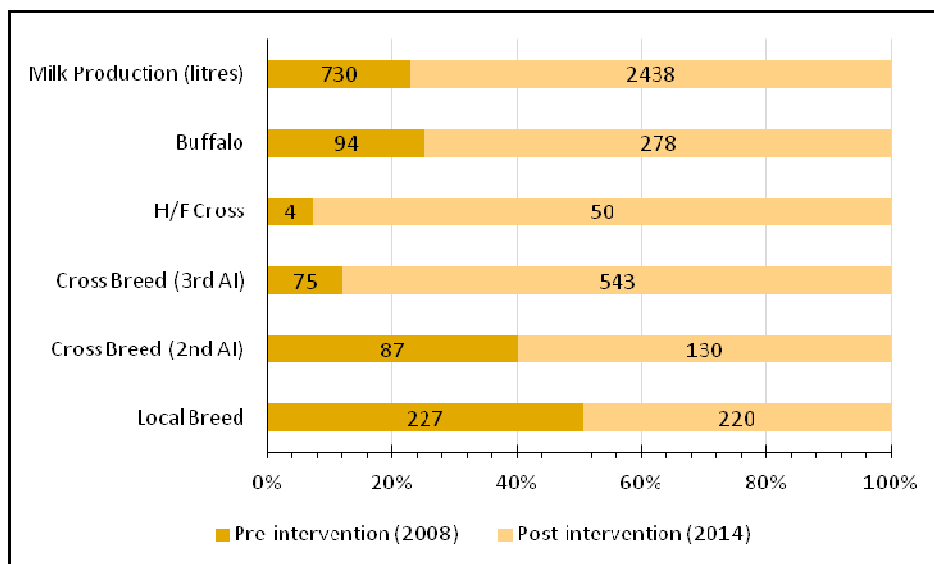
Figure 1. Five stages stakeholder engagement model (adapted from Stakeholder Engagement Practitioner Handbook, 2008) graphically illustrates the process of engagement of stakeholders in the project case study.

### Performance of the project

The commitment to work together was translated in clarifying roles and responsibilities and the data highlights that the project evolved through the process of implementation. Six modules of training for PSS covered curative and promotive aspects. Improved breed, diseases management, feed and fodder, hygiene, vaccinations and pregnancy diagnosis (PD) were some components included in the training modules planned through five year of project implementation. 23 local women were trained as veterinary care providers with the training conducted at ACF by the government veterinary doctors in partnership with ACF. The process of participation brought about anticipated project outputs and certain unanticipated change in participating local women PSS. With increased confidence and motivation to excel the local women could undertake several initiatives in animal care which strengthen the project implementation. The evidence in the study cites increased negotiation skill and leadership abilities among women PSS encouraging their participation at family as well as community level.

The data in the study highlights resultant change at the community level through enhanced awareness among the local communities on animal health care, changing breed preferences, adaptation of animal rearing practices promoted by women PSS. The evidence highlights *increased number of milch animals with higher earnings through animal husbandry impacting livelihood preferences.*

Table 1 Broad output of the efforts of PSS



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Table 2 . *t*-test Results for Number of Milch Animals and Milk Production

Outcome	2008		2015		n	t	df
	M	SD	M	SD			
<i>Milch Animals</i>							
HF Cross	0.35	1.02	4.35	10.25	23	2.02	22
Cross Breed (3 <sup>rd</sup> AI)	6.52	15.17	47.22	108.63	23	2.09*	22
Cross Breed (2 <sup>nd</sup> AI)	7.57	17.61	26.61	62.87	23	1.98	22
Local Breed	58.17	138.21	42.39	101.18	23	-1.82	22
Buffalo	8.17	24.52	24.52	58.52	23	1.93	
Milk Production	63.48	146.26	218.43	501.34	23	2.09*	22

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

As displayed in Table 2, the average number of 3<sup>rd</sup> stage artificially inseminated milch animals per village increased significantly from around 7 animals in 2008 to 47 animals in 2005. A corresponding significant increase can also be noted in average milk production for a village in 2008 to 2015 from around 63 litres to 218 litres respectively. In 2015 the total number of 3<sup>rd</sup> stage artificially animals was also almost perfectly correlated with the total milk production in the year ( $r = 0.996$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ).

#### **Generation of social capital**

Social capital constitutes the personal and institutional relationships and customs within a community that determine the quality and quantity of social interactions and has been shown to influence collective trust, cooperation and social cohesion (Fukuyama 2002; OECD 2001; Woolcock 1998; World Bank 2011) In other words, social capital is the “subjective disposition and attitudes of individuals and groups, as well as sanctions and rules governing behaviour, which are widely shared” (OECD 2001). The data in this project provides several evidences in the area of creation of social capital.

The data provides confirmation about change in social norms, beliefs, values, networks and understanding that enable collective action or cooperation. The data provides evidence of women PSS witnessing increased community trust in them and the government veterinary system. Being viewed as a resource and authority by the community also in areas other than animal care PSS witnessed elevated social status. Acceptance and encouragement for the increased participation in the community decision making at panchayat, community acceptance for the altered cultural practices such taking as not covering head during work (known as ghughat, a local practice) and acceptance for the changing social norms of caste stratification while serving for animal care is considered to be the sign of development of social capital.

#### **Engagement positively influences participation**

While reviewing performance of the project we could review the contribution of key stakeholders. PSS played a critical role in the project. The initial scope of the work for a paravet (PSS) was geared towards being present at the veterinary camps for assisting the government veterinary team during the camps and vaccinations. PSS were expected to attend to primary issues of animal care and to be a local connect communication channel supporting the government veterinary system. But over a short span of time, PSS with their active enthusiasm in taking up added responsibility encouraged the project to accommodate change in scope by including further aspects of animal care. Review of the need by ACF and the government veterinary department culminated into development of further modules of training to accommodate promotive and preventive aspects of animal health care in the project.

Several evidences of high involvement resulting in new initiative by PSS get cited in the study (ACF 2014). *“In my village when the pharmacist came with vaccines, my role was to assist him if required but I thought I must also know how to do vaccination so I requested him only to guide me. The pharmacist was supportive and I first did vaccination for my own animals and then completed all the vaccination in the village in his presence. The presence of the pharmacist there was a big support for me and I felt very confident after doing it myself”* (as stated by a PSS in an individual interview). While another case of PSS taking initiative in linking the village to a dairy with promoting milk collection at a village level, benefiting the village in linking with the market. Several evidences in the study highlight relationship of high ownership of PSS translating into self-initiation broadening the scope of their work in the community.

Engagement of government veterinary department grew from the initial commitment of developing basic module to accommodating advanced module for the technical training and each of the practical needs identified PSS in their field practice. However evidence in the report highlight their involvement and readiness in proactive effort in involving PSS in critical case being handled by them. A PSS cites, *“a neighbouring village had a case of death of an animal eating poisonous tree. The doctor was called in. Doctor asked me and PSS from that village to be present at the post-mortem. He explained by citing the effects of poison on the body of the animal. Initially I found it stressful to witness the post-mortem but learning by seeing was very effective. The doctor asked us to note down and bring the noting in the next review meeting and ensured that we share it with other PSS”*. PSS mentioned this to be an effective methodology and enhanced their confidence to face such critical situations. The data provides several incidences of initiatives taken by the government doctor in providing further knowledge and technical guidance to the project which contributed in enhancing project value.

ACF's initial role in providing handholding support continued and enhanced with supportive aspects of work. Coordination with community, external stakeholders, government veterinary department increased with the increase in the scope of the project. However critical role was also in terms of managing stakeholders within the system. PSS being women faced several challenges in participation in the project. ACF played a valuable role in facilitating communication with their families, community and created a support system of 23 PSS by promoting interaction among them. ACF team member cited initial experience of caste, community determining seating arrangement and mutual interaction among PSS. ACF attempted to systematically work on changing systems by creating facilitative environment during the classroom session. Each enthusiastic step by PSS was supported by ACF ensuring logistics and finance involved. ACF team members puts it as, *“it became our responsibility to match enthusiasm of PSS and the support from the government veterinary department by extending project component”*.

There is evidence in the study data about the performance of PSS and the increased benefits of their work leading to alerting family relationships. Some PSS reported reduced non-cooperation of the family members whereas in some cases PSS were able to sought active support from the family. There is an evidence of performance of PSS altering family relationships. A PSS referred to initial inhibition of her husband towards her work changing into support by taking time off from work and taking care of children that enable PSS attend the refresher training.

Community got engaged initially by nominating village women, further took on the role for coordinating with ACF to highlight her role at village level. It further extended to inviting community contribution, encouraging PSS to participate in areas other than animal care. The evidence in the study shows a section of community eventually creating hindrances affecting the work of PSS. However with the improved ability of PSS to take upon the challenges and face hurdles with courage PSS were able to manage the same.

#### ***Active stakeholder participation stimulating other stakeholders***

The evidence in the study highlights association of high ownership and active participation of stakeholder positively influencing participation of the other stakeholders. The government veterinary officer referred to high engagement of PSS encouraging them to respond to every difficulty faced in the field and incorporating felt needs of PSS for further skill and knowledge in the training module. Further the high performance of PSS motivated the veterinary officer intervene to ease the anxiety of government pharmacists over the role of PSS. Veterinary officer compares knowledge skill and confidence of PSS to pharmacists and showcases PSS as best case of able local workforce handling critical emergency with confidence. The interns (student pharmacist) at the dispensary were encouraged to be with PSS for their field practice. A PSS explains, *‘When doctors are contacted by the community, they ask us to assess how animal's situation is and after ensuring that the first aid is given, we are expected to report back to doctor if he is still required to visit’* (as stated by Shobha in a group discussion).



High involvement of PSS and increased support from government veterinary department encouraged ACF to incorporate further aspects such as provision for a tool kit, medicines, exposure visits for PSS, liaisoning for demonstration of improved feed and fodder for animals, linking with dairy. Each advanced module of training was developed based on the sharing by PSS about the limiting factors in their work. The forum in which it was discussed was mainly the fortnightly review meetings of their work. The suggestions by PSS were looked into and when the government Veterinary Officer felt confident to allocate further tasks to PSS, a module evolved.

Community was recipient of services of PSS and the active involvement of PSS brought about several positive change for them. The report highlights acceptance of several animal rearing practices recommended and demonstrated by PSS. Setting up travis at each village for vaccination was a felt need by PSS and PSS motivated community to contribute and ensured setting up travis in villages where they worked. Setting up a travis made the diagnosis, treatment and vaccination easy for the pharmacist and PSS.

The study cites several hierarchies of engagement types and levels have been developed through the process of participation. Engagement range from low level of engagement ('passive participation', 'tokenism', 'manipulation'), to a mid-range where participants are involved in decision making about largely predetermined questions; to the higher-end of the scale where stakeholders undertake their own initiatives or are enabled to develop strong leadership roles (e.g. 'partnerships'; 'empowerment', 'citizen control') (Buchy and Hoverman 2000, Stalker Prokopy 2005).

The study highlights how stakeholder participation could facilitate engagement. Further the study indicates communication across hierarchies being a contributing factor at the highest level of engagement.

#### ***Factors enabling stakeholder engagement and sustainability***

The case highlights the existence of sustainability strategy & structure both evolved in the project. Review of project performance using dimensions of sustainability (IFAD 2006a) concludes that the aspects of sustainability are integral to this case. There data cites an evidence of social acceptance, social cohesion ensuring ownership and social sustainability. Economic suitability is ensured with minimal external financial support, sustained community contribution and financial gain to the community with increased earning. Technical soundness of the project, optimum utilisation of resources and resilience to environment enhanced value creation.

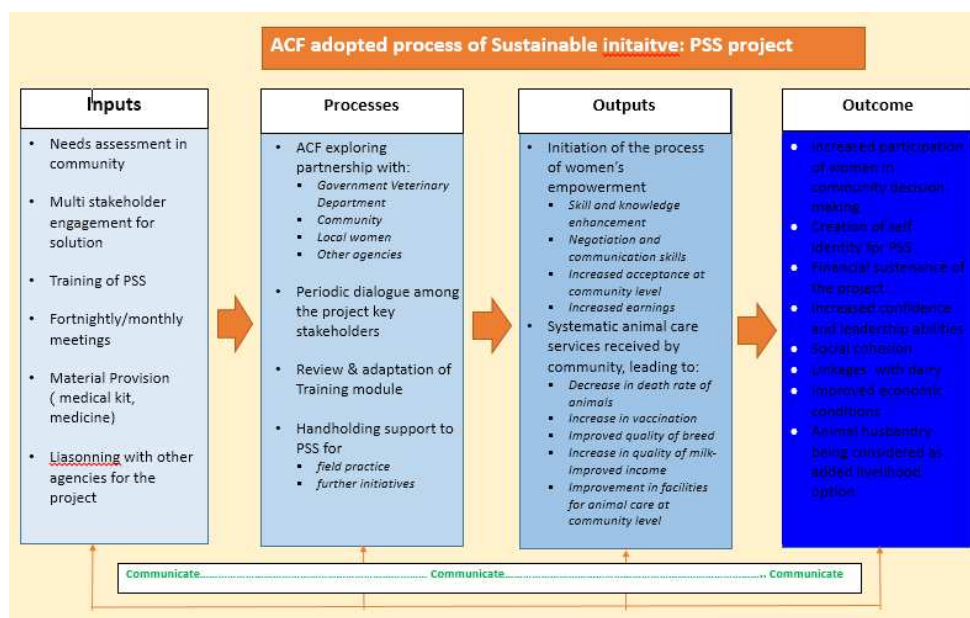


Figure 2: The process of sustainable project implementation depict the inputs and the resultant change witnessed at the community level in

## Conclusions

Currently there is a growing interest in the area of CSR and sustainability globally. Corporate responsibility aims to address issues related to poverty, equity and accessibility. CSR aims at developing initiatives for lasting change. To effectively respond to the community issues and problems through projects, stakeholder engagements can be a potential tool. Stakeholder engagements will help organisations explore common needs and resources, minimise risks, draw on strengths of stakeholders and optimise resources.

Shared responsibility will contribute in building trust and relationship that lasts. Corporates will continue for a long period and the goodwill generated by long lasting relationship through sustainable initiatives will add value to the performance of the business.

A proactive engagement plan and implementation process to ensure that initial stakeholder engagement will provide a foundation for attaining and sustaining support of stakeholders, and in particular directly affected local communities, throughout the life of the project (IFC 2014). It will certainly contribute to the sustainability of initiatives in working towards issues of poverty alleviation. This CSR case study hence attempts to contribute by providing insights into the potential scope in instituting stakeholder engagement in rural development projects especially those initiated as CSR. Further it instates the potential role of corporations as catalysts for the entire process of engaging stakeholders in community development.

### *Learning from the case study*

The stage of the project at which stakeholders dialogue and engagement gets defined is critical to the project performance. The project referred here cites several evidences of early engagement of stakeholder beginning with identification of the project, evolving model solution leading to creation of shared value and ownership. It is interesting to observe that the ownership has grown through the process of implementation. *From the CSR program implementation it would be important to initiate and sustain dialogue with stakeholders.*

Identifying stakeholders is a critical task. Potential of the stakeholders needs to be optimally utilised ensuring best outputs for the communities. *In the case of this project an evident factor promoting sustainability is partnership with the local government.* This partnership has that contributed to sustenance, trust among the community. Identified women PSS being local shared knowledge about practices in animal care, could built excellent rapport with community. PSS were accessible 24x7 to support and played instrumental role especially in emergencies which built trust of the community. *The model is hence scalable and replicable in similar context.*

Adaptability is an important element that get highlighted in this case study. Ability to respond to changing situations and demands by encompassing change in the project design emerged to be an important element. This helped in keeping pace with the expectations of the stakeholders and maintaining relevance of the project. *The project design in the case of referred project has evidently undergone change resulting in broadening the scope of the project.*

Continuous strategic communication emerged as a strength in this case. Multi-stakeholder communication followed through project implementation. The time gap between identification of need to modify design and the solution was hence minimised. *This promoted satisfaction among the stakeholders for being part of the decision making and being heard. This is important for furthering their ownership in the project.*

IFC (2014) mentions, 'Communicating early, often, and clearly with stakeholders helps manage expectations and avoid risks, potential conflict, and project delays. An initial ESSE program also provides an opportunity to substantively build asset value, enhance company branding, and create shared value for stakeholders broadly'. Jeffrey (2009) describes seven core values for the practices of gaining meaningful participation of which perhaps the three most critical are stakeholders' involvement in decision making, their ability to influence decisions and participants taking part in designing the project. The project case qualifies in all the above aspects and hence emerges to positively influence the lives of the communities.

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