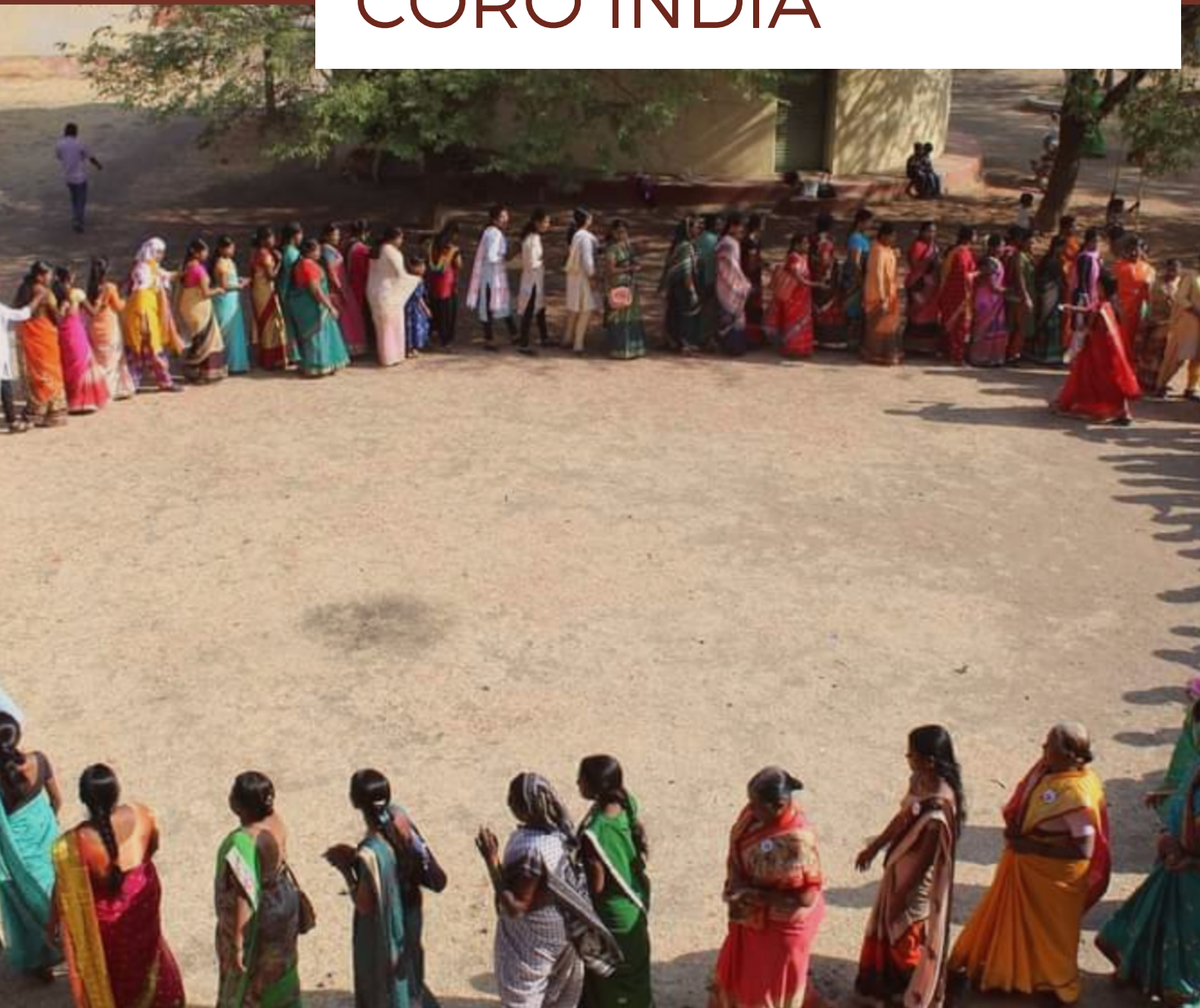


APPROACH REPORT 2023

CORO INDIA



CORO-INDIA'S APPROACH TO GRASSROOTS LEADERSHIP BUILDING



Background

Sharing this note on CORO-India's (hereafter referred to as CORO) approach to grassroots emancipation and leadership building at this juncture has significance in CORO's organisational journey. CORO, with its partner grassroots organisations (in Maharashtra and Rajasthan), is launching the 'Atta Deep Academy' of Grassroots Leadership on September 7-8, 2023. This is a major milestone in the process of actualising CORO's vision. The vision is about building grassroots movements collectively and collaboratively.

By grassroots movement, we mean grassroots leaders, organisations, lived experiences, knowledge and wisdom are acknowledged, recognised, respected, and celebrated across the spectrums of society. It means grassroots leaders become equal partners in all negotiations, ranging from intervention design and planning to policymaking.

The 'Atta Deep Academy' is CORO's broadened and deepened conceptualisation of 'bottom-up' empowerment, building on the impact of its Grassroots Leadership Development Programme (GLDP). The theory of change for CORO's grassroots leadership development programme is to unlock 'power within' the grassroots leaders, enable them to mobilise 'power with' others, and collate 'power to' change the discriminatory contexts. The 'Atta Deep Academy' extends this notion to knowledge, which is the crucial form of power. It aims at building 'knowledge within', sharing 'knowledge with', and institutionalising 'knowledge to' shift the paradigms, content, and meanings of knowledge to make it grounded, inclusive, and accessible.

With the launch of **‘ATTA DEEP ACADEMY’,**



CORO and partners are entering a new, exciting phase of grassroots movement. In a world where transactional relationships overpower, the coming together of different organisations and collectively working to actualise the vision of grassroots emancipation is noteworthy and needs to be shared. CORO's ever-widening, and inclusive approach towards grassroots leadership building has bonded us all together for more than a decade.

CORO's approach towards unlocking grassroots leadership potential focuses on the shift of mindset from being a victim to being a change-maker and a change-leader. It focuses on leaders realising and expanding their 'power within', reflecting critically on the inequitable and oppressive contexts that their communities live in, internalising themselves as the representation of the marginalisation of their community, and acquiring perspective, and skills to steer collective actions.

Therefore, at this juncture, we decided to share aspects of this approach to make it even more inclusive, participatory and impactful. The saying of our saint Tukaram Maharaj 'नोहे हा एकल्याचा खेळ, म्हणुनी मेळ मेळविला' (means This is not the work of any one entity, so striving to make it collective') guides us for the upcoming endeavour.

We trust that this sharing will provide insights and wherewithal for interventions and social-change processes done by the grassroots (from within), with the grassroots (co-creation), and for the grassroots (welfare approach-based support).



STRUCTURE OF THE NOTE

This approach report is a story. It is about the processes that unlocked the grassroots leadership potential that led to a regenerative impact. The impact first manifested in the nearest ecosystem of the grassroots leader. And gradually and collectively, it expanded its orbit of influences.

The approach note has four parts. The first part is about the introduction to the approach. The second part is about CORO's realisations and learnings in the last three decades that built the approach. The third part deals with the details of the grassroots leadership development programme that imbibes this approach. The fourth part is about the envisioned impact and the way forward.

Introduction to the approach

We start our approach story with some examples of grassroots leaders who have been part of CORO's well-structured Grassroots Leadership Development Programme (GLDP), which integrates this approach and is underway in Maharashtra (15+ years) and Rajasthan (8+ years).

Transforming Oneself, Organizations, Communities, and Networks



In 2005, Mumtaz, from the Sahyadri Nagar community in Northeast Mumbai, struggled to deal with the domestic violence perpetrated on her. In 2015, she figured in the BBC's list of the 100 most influential women for her work in the 'Right to Pee' campaign that advocated safe, clean, and free public urinals for women in Mumbai. Today, she leads an at-scale programme on combating gender-based violence and women's participation in local self-governance in Maharashtra.



In 2016, Ashalata, and her two children were deserted by her husband, and she had no hope for the future. But today, she is one of the leaders of an organisation of single women (their own nomenclature) in Marathwada with over 19,000 members and has secured her property rights after negotiating with her in-laws and the local government. The single women's organisation was started by 27 grassroots leaders in the programme in 2014 who were themselves 'single women'.



In 2010, Ganga from Melghat, Amravati, worked as a daily wage worker to help her widowed mother make ends meet. She helped women in distress from her Korku Adivasi community and helped them in self-help-group activities. Today, Ganga is the third time consecutively elected village head (sarpanch) of her gram panchayat, works with 50 villages in the vicinity, and was awarded the best sarpanch award in 2018.



Between the years 2010 and 2014, Akshay Seva Sanstha, an NGO from Bramhapura in Chandrapur, had six grassroots leaders: Sudhakar (the organisation head), Sushma, Chandrabhan, Ramdas, Upendra, and Tejam, who participated in the programme. Till 2010, Sudhakar was a lone ranger of 'Akshay Seva Sanstha', which worked on the individual forest rights of tribal and non-tribal people. In 2011, Sushma was elected as a sarpanch (village head) of the village gram panchayat. Later, with her leadership, Akshay Seva Sanstha built a federation of 30+ gram sabhas on community forest rights. The organisation is now recognised as a resource organisation and works with various government departments on forest rights issues and village microplanning.

In 2009, Vinaya, from the Mankhurd community in Mumbai, survived domestic violence. Because of the constant onslaught on her dignity, she felt like 'trash' at times. Today, she feels she is instrumental in creating a safe environment for women and girls in multiple ways. She works with children in school settings on imbining gender equality, builds awareness about gender-based violence, facilitates village-wide engagement on child rights and gender sensitisation, and runs leadership programmes for women in community organisations across Maharashtra.



In 2018, Sunita Rawat from Data Village, Rajasthan, was frustrated with the gender-discriminatory 'Hatai' practice in her village. This practice disallowed women to walk in front of the village's central place (called Hatai), where decision-maker men sit. All women, including old, sick, physically challenged, and pregnant, had to walk a kilometre while entering or leaving the village. Today, Sunita is the village leader, and women now freely walk in front of Hatai in the village. Sunita leads Rajasthan's "Bhed Bhav Chhuachhut Mukth Abhiyan" (free from untouchability) campaign.



In 2022, Maulana Mohammed Hussein, a local religious leader in the Shivaji Nagar community in Mumbai, actively obstructed the local women's campaign. Women in Mumbai's Shivaji Nagar community tried to address issues of gender-based violence in their area in 2015. Today, Moulanaji is an active member of the task force combating violence against women and girls in Shivaji Nagar. He has designed a curriculum connecting the Koran and the values in the Constitution of India. The curriculum is part of his teaching.



In 2023, Arpita and Reshma (from Aurangabad, Maharashtra) and Damini and Madhuri (from Mumbai) are four transwomen in the grassroots leadership cohort and have brought a new gender lens to the entire process of unlocking leadership. Their participation and involvement have equipped the CORO team and the participants with the new meanings of gender equality.

These are not the 'only few' impact stories. 80% of the 1680+ grassroots leaders who have been part of this leadership programme till today have demonstrated similar growth trajectories at the level of self, organisation and communities.

Transformative aspects of impact stories

All the protagonists in the above stories differ in many aspects of life.

- The continuum of education is from being nonliterate or low-literate to being a graduate.
- The youngest person is in their early twenties, and the oldest is in their late forties.
- The caste-related identities include Scheduled Caste, Mang, Adivasi (tribal), Nomadic Tribes, De-Notified Tribes, OBC, Muslim, and more communities.
- Leaders have binary and non-binary gender identities.
- The issues that they deal with range from gender rights to forest rights.
- Their geographies are different. The contexts are urban as well as rural. Some leaders work in the remotest parts of their region, which are difficult even to reach.

Irrespective of these diversities, the impact created by these leaders seems to be identical over the tenure of the programme, i.e., from 2005 to 2022. There is, therefore, something in the approach and implementation of the programme that helped the leaders transcend caste, gender, ethnicity, age, geography, education, modes of livelihood, etc.

What is unique and common about these leaders? Their experiences of discrimination and exclusion have enabled them to scale this journey with the support they received in the programme. What is support, after all? 'It is the push that one gets to do things that she or he desires to do and is passionate about'

The GLDP filled this vacuum and generated support at various levels for these grassroots leaders.

This approach story is to unpack and underscore those underlying factors in CORO's approach to facilitating grassroots leadership, understand its significance, understand its connection to transformations, and also understand the challenges integral to this approach.

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CORO's realisations and learnings leading to this approach

What have we learned over three decades?

CORO's own journey is a testimony to this integral leadership approach. What we do currently is, in many ways, a personification of who we are and how we evolved as an organisation.

The process of CORO evolving as a community-led organisation is a learning journey. The organisation formed by people from privileged backgrounds (in terms of caste, class, education, livelihood, etc.) in 1989 later evolved into a people's organisation, with people not as mere beneficiaries but as leaders of the organisation. Mahendra Rokade, an adult literacy volunteer in 1989, is CORO's director today and works as a 'Lead-Grassroots Movement'. CORO's entire leadership team has had similar journeys. The approach draws heavily from our own organisational experiences.

Key realisations and learnings in our organisational journey

- People at the grassroots want to change their situation and desire to be change-makers. This was contrary to the popular belief that grassroots people are lazy/ unwilling to change/ are illiterate (different than non-literate)/ do not make any efforts to change, etc. We observed how mutual trust, respect, and valuing dignity are key to people's transformations.
- CORO's realization was that it is the intentionally and systematically constructed identity of the marginalised that does not leave space for them to be change-makers. Their feelings, thinking, saying, and acting.... all driven by these constructed identities. For example, since women from their childhood are constantly and consistently told don't do this/do this/ can't do this/ should not do this/ not allowed to do this, and women are also punished for transgressing their boundaries, -- women then themselves start believing that they are lesser human beings.
- The learning, therefore, was that the social-change processes must invest in transforming the internal, identity-related universe of marginalised individuals and organisations. They need to be freed from the societal labels attached to them, making them defensive or passive beneficiaries. Therefore, transformational efforts in CORO's approach are directed towards working on the fragmented sense of identity of the marginalized. It is directed towards marginalised individuals and communities realising their 'power within'.
- It was time and again observed in our journey that marginalised individuals and grassroots organisations, however capacitated they become individually, can not bring about any significant, sustainable change. Solidarity is the biggest asset for the marginalised. Therefore, collective actions and journeys have to be integral parts of social transformative processes.
- CORO's evolving leadership team constantly referred to the immense support and freedom within the organisation and the safe space to make mistakes and learn. We learned that for grassroots leaders to thrive, the nearest supportive ecosystems need to be built, nurtured, and hand-held.
- We realised that people get connected with any social change process only when it is relevant to their day-to-day lives and they see any hope in changing their situation, context, etc. When it feels relevant, people take the initiative and build feasible solutions, acknowledging and assessing their own contexts, collective strengths and weaknesses, challenges, and resources. But when pressurised for imported interventions, they do not truly participate.
- Contrary to popular perception, we observed that grassroots people do not aspire only for aid or help or mere financial support. Their dignity and respect are core to them, albeit they are forced to compromise them because of the hopelessness, helplessness, and powerlessness that they experience. Being primary actors in planning, thinking through, and decision-making is core to their dignity and respect.
- We also realised that continuous growth and constantly opening up new horizons are crucial for building on the acquired leadership capacities. They contribute to sustainable change. So, ways of constant co-travelling need to be located and executed. Social change processes are, therefore not snapshot or light-touch affairs.

Realisations and learnings informing CORO's 'Theory of Change'

CORO's journey is the evolving journey of a learning organisation. So, all enabling realisations got embedded into CORO's approach and intervention. The obsession with working with the grassroots with a rigid blueprint of interventions and a rigid matrix of evaluations died down.

What we advocate now is process, patience, and participation intertwined to create a conducive environment for locally-led, relevant, feasible, and self-reliant interventions at the grassroots. The approach is embedded in every action of CORO, whether it is CORO's direct intervention or CORO-facilitated participatory processes with partner organisations or hand-holding or co-travelling with any player in the development realm.

We perceive organisations (CBOs/NGOs/Networks) as the possible nearest ecosystems of grassroots leaders. Therefore, by design, we work with grassroots organisations to create supportive networks.

CORO's commitment and perspective can be summarised as 'power within' + 'power with', leading to 'Power to' change detrimental/unequal/oppressive/suffocating power dynamics and their manifestations. This will be achieved by unlocking the potential of grassroots leaders and organisations.



Details of the Grassroots Leadership Development Programme

CORO's unique demonstrative proposition (UDP), acquired over the last three decades, is about facilitating grassroots leadership to facilitate grassroots movement. As mentioned earlier in the note, grassroots movement means grassroots leaders, change-makers, organisations, and knowledge are acknowledged, respected, and celebrated as a societal practice.

CORO's organisational realisations and learning have informed the design of CORO's Grassroots Leadership Development Programme (GLDP), which was rolled out in 2008 (after a pilot in 2005/6) and expanded to all districts of Maharashtra within four years. Since 2015, the programme has also been underway in Rajasthan and has assessed the approach's potential as a process that withstands divergences of contexts, ethnicities, and languages or dialects.



The GLDP design has three major premises:

- The initiative for social change has to come from within- from within an individual and or a community. Therefore, the programme invests in unlocking individual leadership capacities over a long period of time.
- Solidarity, collective efforts, and participation are keys to grassroots social change processes. Therefore, even if the investment happens in individuals, collective processes are embedded in the programme's design. And the efforts are integrally navigated to transcend from 'I to We'.
- NGOs/CBOs/Networks/gram sabha are perceived as the immediate ecosystems; therefore, aspects of organisation development are integral to the programme processes and facilitation. The programme, therefore, works with individuals from the organisations and also with the lead team of the organisations to build bridges and thrive mutually and collectively.

The philosophy, design, and operations

Conscientisation as conceptualised by Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, is the inspiration behind the design of the Grassroots Leadership Development Programme. For us, conscientisation means being aware of 'power within', being reflective and critical about the socio-cultural-political contexts that one lives in, and being collectively assertive to change the oppressive contexts.

Value-based leadership is at the core of unlocking leadership capacities in the programme. For example, equality needs to be understood and internalised as a cross-cutting value and not in isolated compartments of either caste or gender. A conscious process of 'doing dialogue' with various actors is, therefore, part of the strategy in the programme.

The very purpose of the programme, which is to facilitate a grassroots movement populated by grassroots leaders, makes it an issue-agnostic program. Leaders work on issues that they feel are relevant to them and their communities.

The programme aims to unlock or build capacities through a one-year leadership or fellowship program. The leaders get recruited into the programme through an extensive recruitment process. The application has to be accompanied by a recommendation from the respective organisation/network/gram sabha. (Please refer to Annexure-I for details on the recruitment process.)

The programme entails imparting 15 training modules spread over 4 capsules of 3-5 days each in the first six months. (Please refer to Annexure II for the training content details.) Organisational development processes with the organisation's lead team are integral to the programme design. Issue-specific collective campaigns that stemmed from the GLDP and are being led and participated in by leaders in the programme; their organisations are key to the collective processes.



Profile of the participants

The majority of the leaders recruited belong to the most marginalised communities and have experienced discrimination along the axes of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, etc. Out of the 1680+ leaders in the programme, 69% are women (including transwomen), 70% are from the most marginalised communities (tribal, NT/DNT, minorities, etc.), 41% are low- or non-literate or have barely completed secondary education. The abovementioned profiles are indicative of the nature of the cohorts in the GLDP.

Integrated Campaigns:

An Impactful Strategy to Sustain and Enhance Leadership Capacities

In the third year of the programme (2011), CORO initiated, incubated, and nurtured the idea and collective implementation of issue-specific campaigns pertinent to specific regions. These campaigns are led by a consortium of organisations in those regions. Six robust campaigns are underway, evolving and creating a ripple impact in Maharashtra. They are;

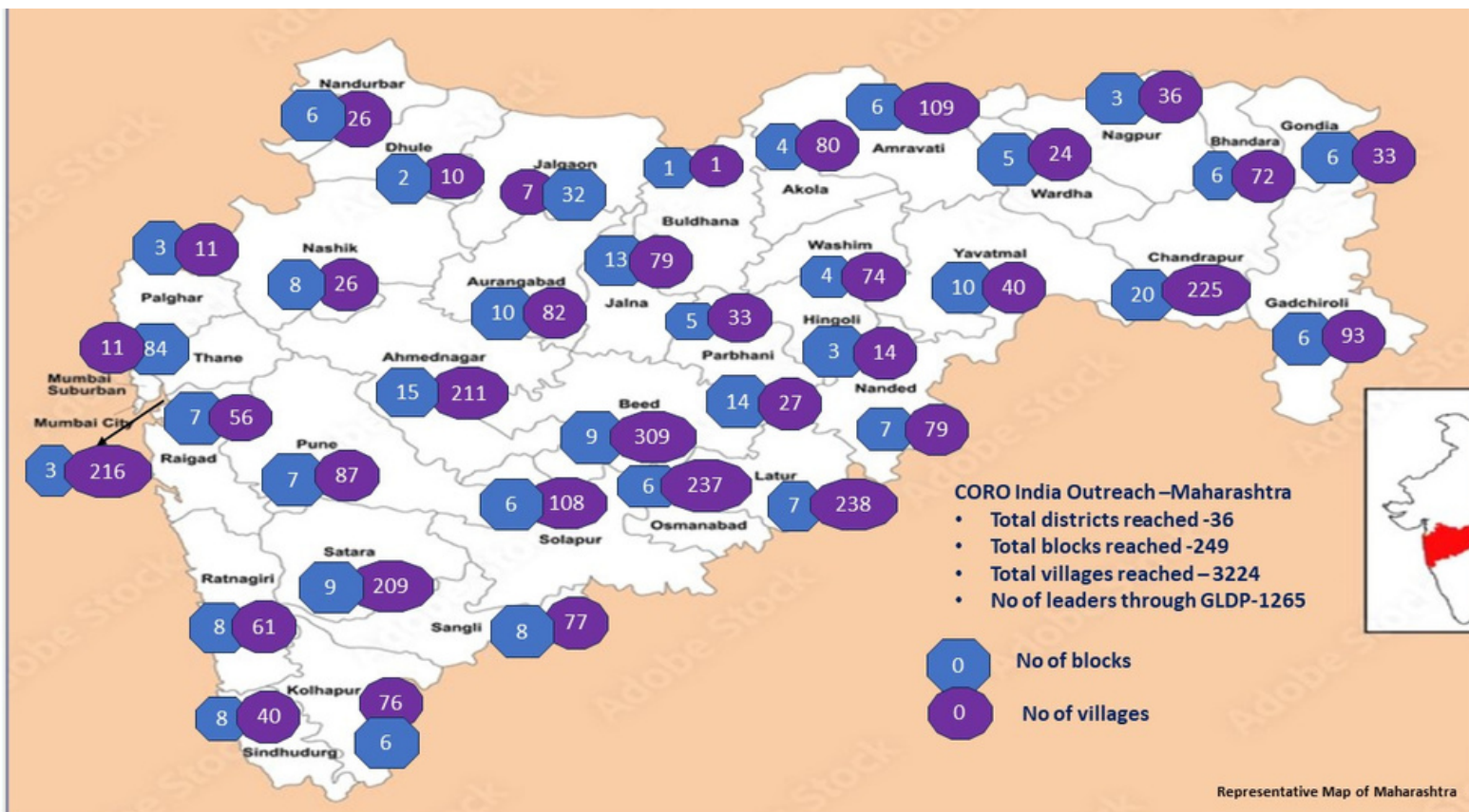
- The 'Right to Pee campaign' is working with the communities with 9 lakh populations on gender and sanitation in Mumbai. The campaign was initiated in Mumbai to secure free, safe, and clean public urinals for women and later spread to Maharashtra, with many grassroots leaders picking up this issue in their contexts.
- 19000+ members of Ekal Mahila Sanghata (a single women's organisation) in four districts of Marathwada. 27 grassroots leaders in the GLDP initiated the sangha. The organisation is working on socio-cultural stigma and violence against single women, property rights for single women, and accessing government schemes for single women.
- Addressing water scarcity in draught-prone areas through community participation in Mann Block of Western Maharashtra. The campaign was initiated in six villages. 4/6 villages have been declared tanker-mukth (free of water tankers), and 80% requirement for water in the other two villages is met. The process is underway in 50 more villages in 10 blocks of Western Maharashtra.
- The campaign for citizenship rights of the Nomadic Tribes/De-notified Tribes (NT/DNT) was initiated in North Maharashtra and is now underway in 401 villages in --- blocks of ... districts in Maharashtra. In addition to the citizenship rights of NT/DNT communities, the campaign is working on their well-being through education, health, and livelihood-related interventions.
- In Vidarbha, 127 villages have acquired 173,000 acres of forest land under the Community Forest Rights Act and are collaboratively developing models of integrated village development. The protection of biodiversity in ecological, social, and livelihood-related aspects is being addressed and documented, and capacity building of local leaders in this aspect is part of this campaign.
- The campaign on 'equal property rights for women' is underway in the Kokan region and is spreading across Maharashtra. 84 leaders 39 organisations are working on the campaign in 96 villages from 41 Blocks of 17 districts of Maharashtra.

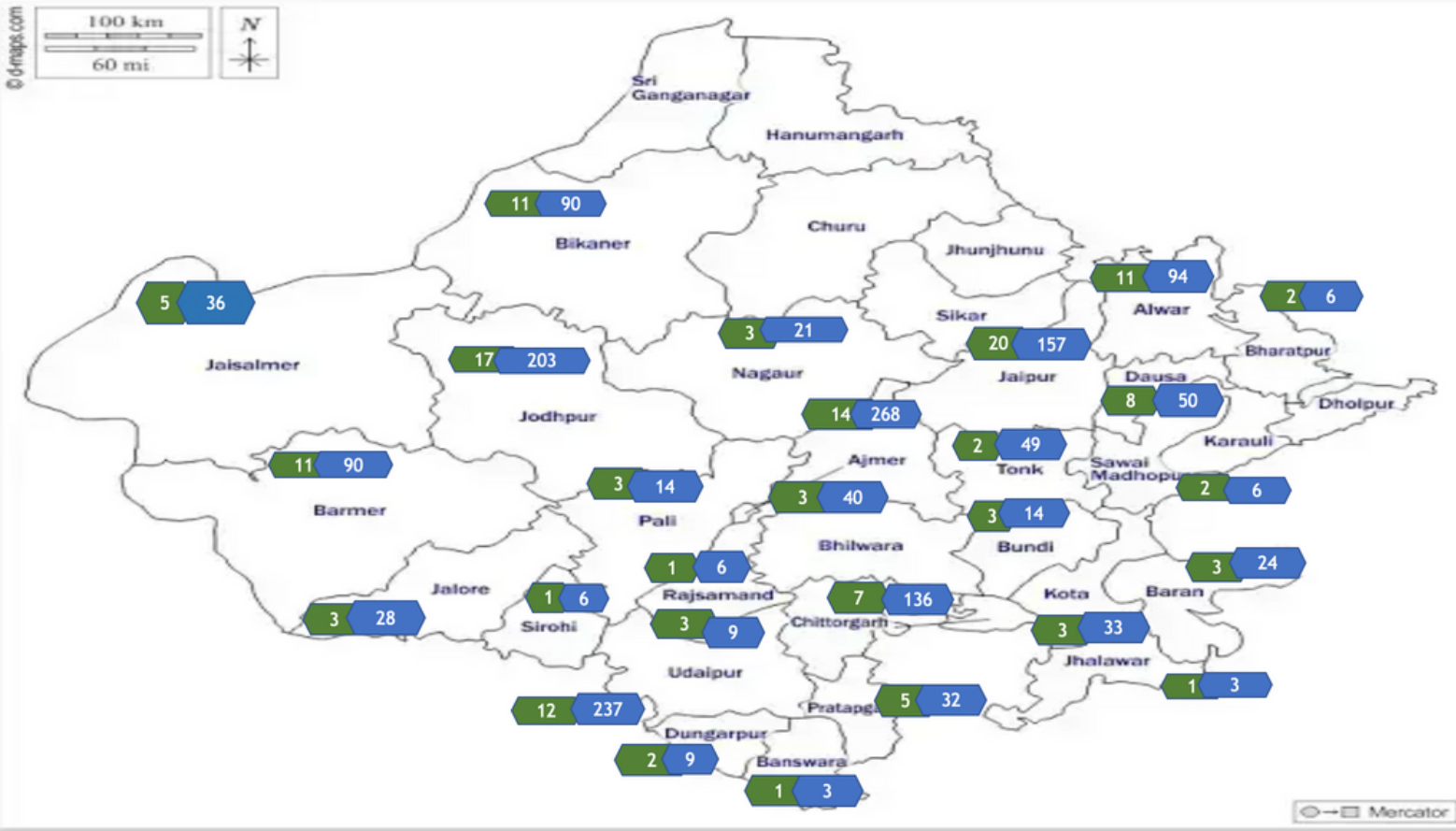
The outreach

In the last 15 years, the GLDP has facilitated a community of

- 1688+ grassroots leaders from 550+ organisations
- Three million+ lives touched by grassroots leaders while working on 16 different themes of equality and social justice in Maharashtra and Rajasthan.
- Covered 3224 villages from 249 blocks of 36 districts of Maharashtra and 1617 villages from 124 blocks of 31 districts of Rajasthan.

(The maps showing the extent of village and block-wise coverage with CORO's intervention approach in Maharashtra and Rajasthan are shown below.





STORIES OF TRANSFORMATION**DURGA
KHARADI**

I ran away to my parent's village, Mor Dungri, in the Udaipur district. I realized I wasn't welcome there when I asked for chappals from the family shop, and my mother asked me to pay her. I had no money, so I left barefoot and dejected.

I sat on the road and pondered my next move. Eventually, I went to a store and bought 'mohua' flowers on credit because the only skill I had was the ability to make country liquor. That's how I survived for the first year. I was deeply ashamed because I'd seen firsthand what alcohol does to a family. If my father earned 100 rupees, he spent 1000 rupees on alcohol, and our whole family suffered. Luckily, a local NGO offered me alternate employment.

I've had many different jobs since then. Before joining CORO's Grassroots Leadership Development Program in 2016, I sold a weight-loss drug to a company in Udaipur. I gave up a 9,500-rupee salary for a 3,000-rupee fellowship stipend because an NGO had once helped me escape a life of selling 'desi daaru'. Now, I wanted to help other people stuck in bad situations.

I selected three villages to work in. CORO encouraged me to empower people, not make them dependent on me. So, my first move was organizing monthly meetings for people to discuss their problems and find solutions. When villagers complained that the local ration shop owner was cheating them, I encouraged them to confront him collectively. 150 people gathered in his shop and exposed the scam. He's now been replaced.

CORO picks grassroots fellows like me because we have certain insights. Once, an elderly man struggled to get his pension because his age on official documents was 35 years old. This was absurd because he had two sons who were receiving senior citizen pensions. I knew the sarpanch had grown up playing with the old man. So, I told all three to go to the sarpanch and politely ask him to pick the eldest. The sarpanch felt sheepish and quickly corrected the error.

During the fellowship, I learned how to make a Facebook account, which led to surfing the net. One day, I found a government website listing the names of 42 villagers who had received money to build cattle sheds. None of these people even knew their applications had been approved. I downloaded the receipts, and they pressured the sarpanch to give them their money.

A few years ago, I set up a 'samiti' in a nearby village to stop men from drinking during the day and harassing women. By design, the office bearers, who had the power to fine people Rs 501 for breaking the drinking curfew, were also the villages' most notorious drunks. The experiment was a success. Today, men work during the day instead of drinking. As for me, I'd come full circle from the days I was forced to peddle hooch to survive."



CHITRA PATIL



“My father was an alcoholic. He married me off in a drunken stupor. I was only 12. It was decided that my in-laws would come and get me after my dad paid a dowry and I got my period. My dad never paid the dowry, and I never got my period.

Eventually, my husband married someone else. I stayed in my parents' home in Beed district's Dhanora village and contributed to the household income by making papads and giving tuition. I never kept anything for myself. I handed over all the money I earned to my family.

In 2013, I was working as a community health worker for the government's National Rural Health Mission. This put me in touch with a community-based organization (CBO), and I started attending all their events. The CBO recommended me for CORO's Grassroots Leadership Development Program, and the organization's head became my mentor.

I am a Maratha. I belong to the Patil Samaj. Women from my community are usually confined to the house. So, at the interview, CORO staff asked if I'd be able to leave the house and if I was willing to work for Dalits and other marginalized groups. I said I would. They also asked me whose side I would take in an argument – my brother's friend or his friend's girlfriend. They insinuated that my brother would get angry if I didn't support his friend, but I told them that I would pick whichever side was right. I think that's why I was selected for this fellowship.

My fellowship project was self-help groups (SHGs). I picked five villages where I created 14 SHGs. By charging a fixed 2% interest rate, these savings groups freed villagers from the clutches of loan sharks. I also helped 100 women get job cards, 30 women access a widows' pension scheme and resolved four cases of domestic violence. Within six months When the fellowship ended, I became a 'saheli' in CORO's Single Women Campaign. The support groups I created in each village now function independently, lobbying for infrastructure and other benefits from the gram panchayat and intervening in cases of domestic violence.

None of this work would have been possible if CORO hadn't helped me understand who I am. Before the session on 'self', I'd never thought of myself as a person. I didn't know I had rights. After the fellowship, I made the radical decision to live alone. I stopped giving all my earnings to my family and instead decided to buy a plot of land and build a one-room house.

This enraged my brother and sister-in-law. My brother insisted that I give him the money or put the land in his name. I refused and the situation at home grew very tense. I would have probably given in if not for the support of my mother and the CORO staff. When it came time to move, I left with just the clothes on my back. I've been living in my new home for the last 15 days.”



TEENA RAWAT



“My name is Teena Rawat. I’m from Mayapur village in Ajmer district. I got married when I was in Std 8. My husband hadn’t studied beyond Std 7. This bothered my in-laws because they didn’t want an educated ‘*bahu*’.

In Std. 12, I found out that my husband had married someone else. I was heartbroken. He denied the rumours, and I believed him. I begged my in-laws to take me in, but they refused ‘supposedly’ because my parents hadn’t given them a motorcycle as dowry. To save face, they told the ‘samaj’ that my family had reneged on the marriage. They hid the fact that their son had re-married and his new wife was eight months pregnant. We didn’t get a chance to speak at the hearing. We were fined Rs 1.5 lakh, and when we didn’t pay, we were ex-communicated. I spiralled into depression and tried to commit suicide twice.

In 2016, I joined CORO’s Grassroots Leadership Development Program, which taught me to question social norms. I began wondering why a man can marry a dozen times without consequences, but a woman’s ‘*izzat*’ is destroyed if she marries again. One particularly insightful exercise involved pasting tags like ‘Rajput’ or ‘widow’ on our backs. We were then told to alter our behaviour towards each other based on these arbitrary tags that we couldn’t control. None of us knew what label we’d been assigned, but we all felt its power. During the fellowship, I decided to work towards abolishing child marriage. After I’d conducted an awareness drive in a school, a Std 6 student went home and told his parents that he didn’t want to get married. If they forced him, he would go to the police with ‘Teena didi’. I also helped 9 abandoned child brides remarry and 12 reconcile with their husbands. I’m one of the last child brides to remarry. At my wedding, I’m going to break with tradition and do the ‘*saat pheras*’. This is unheard of in my community for a second marriage, but I refuse to be punished for something that wasn’t my fault.

The fellowship’s focus on constitutional rights had a big impact on me. I realized that if I want to help people fight for their rights, I need a degree. So, I studied and became an advocate. I’ve been able to eradicate child marriage in three villages because people fear that I will report them.

I’ve also filed five cases against my ex-husband. My proudest moment was when the judge found out that I was both the plaintiff and the lawyer and congratulated me. She told my ex-husband, ‘If you hadn’t abandoned her, this woman would have spent her whole life following you around in a goonghat. Instead, she’s a lawyer. Look at how little you’ve achieved and how much she has done with her life.’



ANJUM SHAIKH

“For me, gender meant only male and female, but [after joining CORO] I understood the true meaning of gender and all that it encompasses – other genders, atrocities, rights and responsibilities..”



Anjum was 15 years old when she dropped out of school and set about earning some money as a teacher in a balwadi (crèche), which she operated out of the family home in an eastern Mumbai suburb. Living alongside her mother and four extremely protective brothers, she was encouraged to make a living by staying put rather than venturing out into the community for work. The years rolled by, and soon, she was married with a son called Huzeifa.

At 21, Anjum's curiosity got the better of her, and she started turning up at local community meetings held by social workers from the Women's Empowerment Programme run by CORO India. Listening to these women talk about their rights, their role in the community, their right to equality guaranteed by the constitution and the different initiatives open to them, she realised what she was missing. Shakila, one of the programme leaders, picked up on Anjum's enthusiasm, saw her potential and encouraged her to take the big step of applying for a place on the Quest Fellowship Programme (run by Leaders' Quest in partnership with CORO). This would mean attending residential training alongside other men and women – an idea that made Anjum incredibly uncomfortable. However, Shakila encouraged her to submit the application form, and eventually, she agreed.

The day of the interview came around, and worried that her family would tell her not to go, let alone enrol as a Quest Fellow – Anjum decided to miss the appointment. But something unexpected happened. When her mother discovered what had happened, she told her she should have gone to the interview. Anjum had underestimated her! Her mother wanted to support her daughter in breaking down traditional barriers, giving her exposure to the outside world and teaching her skills to get ahead in life. This meant so much to Anjum, who made up her mind to reapply the following year.

In January 2015, Anjum successfully joined 89 new grassroots leaders enrolled on the Quest Fellowship Programme, along with their mentors and the CORO facilitator team. To make this first journey to Pune, she left behind her husband – against his wishes – and their three-year-old son and made the journey, hoping to give her life more meaning. Her first session focused on gender and identity, and she, like most of the other women in the room, was nervous about sitting next to men she didn't know or holding hands with them during exercises. But, by the end of the four days, she felt much more confident about herself, her identity and her role as a woman in the community.

As she sat with the group reminiscing, she told them: “For me, gender meant only male and female, but during the training, I understood the true meaning of gender and all that it encompasses – other genders, atrocities against gender, rights and responsibilities, etc. On the first day of the training, all the girls were seen sticking together as a group and not interacting with any men. The trainers, through different ice-breakers and sessions, helped break down this barrier and encouraged us to get comfortable with each other so that we could interact freely without any prejudices.”

Soon after she completed her first training module and went back to her old life in Mumbai, Anjum’s husband came home one night and started getting violent with her in front of their son. He often came home drunk or high on drugs, ready for a fight, itching to abuse her mentally and physically. But on this particular night, Anjum found herself at a crossroads. She’d had enough. In the middle of the night, she left the house, taking her three-year-old with her. She made her way to the nearest police station and – using the very training she’d gained as a Quest Fellow – she lodged a complaint against her husband. A few hours later, the police arrested him. Anjum followed up with an official separation through skilful use of her constitutional rights and gained custody of her son.

Anjum spent the rest of her fellowship picking up skills to help her grow as a leader. Things like community mapping, resource mobilisation, the Right to Information Act, and advocacy initiatives. She felt herself grow as a person, taking on the problems of other women – the very women who were still suffering behind closed doors the way she used to. In January 2016, she completed her fellowship, capping a year during which she’d formed a peer working group of 11 women, 16 girls and 15 boys to work alongside her on community initiatives. Today, she advocates for abused wives and can often be found at the police station, helping others to file complaints and following up by registering court cases and organising counselling. Anjum continued to help women and girls during the COVID-19 lockdowns when violence against women reportedly increased threefold (NCW April 2020).

She often shared accounts of being harassed by neighbours and other community members who didn’t appreciate her ‘audacity’ to accompany and support victims of abuse. Not one to cower from risk or challenges, Anjum soldiered on by standing with women who didn’t have anyone else to turn to. In the months that have passed since the first lockdown, Anjum has also led efforts to gather data for a rapid assessment and response to gender-based violence in Mumbai’s M Ward.

Now, having moved back in with her mother and brothers, who look after Huzeifa while she keeps busy with her community work, Anjum continues to lead the Right To Pee intervention in M Ward.

Grassroots Leadership Development Programme, India -Training Outline

A. Structure of Training Programme

- Total 5 training modules in a fellowship year. (First nine months of Fellowship year)
- All 5 Training modules are completed in first six months, 6 weeks gap between two trainings
- Each module lasts 4-5 days
- Participatory training
- Assignments to be completed after each module during 8 weeks gap.
- 3 modules on leadership core competencies, one on a chosen issue.
- State/regional level resource persons/ resource organizations as trainers. This includes some of the mentors, organization heads and implementing team members.

B. Methodology

The training delivery method is participative, reflective and discourse of thought. Learning de-learning and relearning processes carried throughout the training program, which we can say conscientization.

C. Modules at Glance

Module I: (Five Days)

1. Understanding self
2. **Understanding context/ environment.**
3. **Grassroots Leadership**

Module II: (Four days)

1. Gender and social inequalities
2. Participatory Citizenship
3. Issue based (focus on exploring democratic spaces in the issue based local institution and system)

Module III: (Four days)

1. Communication skills.
2. Research skills as capacity building tools.
3. RTI

Module IV: (Two Days)

1. Process Proposal development

Module V: (Six days)

1. Citizen centered Advocacy:
2. Executive Advocacy
3. Media Advocacy
4. Judicial Advocacy
5. Legislative Advocacy

GLDP Training Content and Expected Key Learning

Sessions covered	Key learning's
Identity an understanding self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to reflect on themselves in terms of their role in their social and personal lives • Ability to challenge, accept/redefine their current identity
Understanding social context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness of their presence in their community • Identify inequalities in the structure of the community • Understanding the immediate physical and social setting in which people live and how it influences people's perception and experience
Leadership, social change and motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased motivation and inspiration • Better understanding of the participatory, reflective, entitlement based and action-oriented approach to social change • Enhanced understanding of leadership skills • Ways to adopting a entitlement based approach
Understanding gender and social inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeper understanding of gender and social identity, stereotypes, discrimination • Deconstruction of gender-based social norms • Increased awareness of laws promoting gender and social equality
Understanding citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity on fundamental rights and duties • Understanding the need of the constitution and its key elements • Significance of citizenship in our day-to-day lives • Enhanced understanding of how the role of democratic institutions as instruments of change can be made more effective through participatory citizenship • Increased awareness of the fundamental rights and duties • Deeper understanding of the 4 pillars of constitutional democracy legislature, executive, judicial and media/citizens' group
RTI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed information on the Right to Information Act, 2005 the need of RTI, What is RTI, Challenges to RTI, Agent of RTI, How to file an RTI • Practical learning in how to use this for solving issues of community

Issue based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides spaces for collaborative learning and networking between participants working on similar issues • Helps facilitate the setting of goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) for at least a year based on organized thinking on the issue and the community with whom they are working
Participatory communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of leaders in communication – mobilization and empowerment • Leadership & communication styles • Elements of communication • Use of communication in conflict resolution: Community dialogue, Negotiation, Mediation, Consensus • Different communication methods: Community dialogue, Collective action, Community theatre, radio, video
Research Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the participatory research process • Research methods: Focus group discussion, Interview, Survey • Fundamentals of participatory research methods • Ethics of participatory research methods • Challenges to participatory research
Process proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the elements of a good proposal and its significance • Deeper knowledge and understanding of the significance of a process to bring about social change • Learning and analyzing the elements of a process proposal
People Centric Grassroots Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the key concepts of grassroots advocacy • Understanding the key elements of grassroots advocacy • Identification of advocacy issues with related to work • Importance of advocacy for the collective process

Executive Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is executive Advocacy? • What is Citizen centred advocacy • Understanding key principles and strategies • Advocacy with the Police • Role of women police officers • Challenges for the police and citizens
Media Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of Media Advocacy • Mass Media, Media Advocates and Media Advocacy tips • Media Advocacy campaign – process and strategies
Judicial Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding judicial system in India • Elements of Judicial advocacy • Concept of Social Justice • Tools of judicial advocacy – PIL, Writ Petition
Legislative Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the Legislative system in India • Key elements and importance of Legislative Advocacy • Understanding Gram Panchayat budget and budget preparation • Role of Elected Representatives • Policy document, Acts / Laws, Government Regulations • Local Self-Government Institutions

Digital Archive

.IDR Articles/ interviews

-<https://idronline.org/idr-interviews-sujata-khandekar/>

-<https://idronline.org/grassroots-leadership-six-things-we-learned-from-sujata-khandekar/>

Dalberg report-

https://docs.google.com/file/d/1YkSYcm3M5VmZHI5M3FtOKz3Vokbffujd/edit?usp=doclist_api&filetype=mspresentatio

Santhakumar blog

<https://practiceconnect.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/creating-leaders-from-poor-and-marginalised-social-groups-part-1/>

<https://practiceconnect.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/creating-leaders-from-poor-and-marginalised-social-groups-part-2/>

Bridgespan report I

<https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/strategy-development/community-driven-change-urban-informal-settlements>

Bridgespan report II

<https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/philanthropy/pathways-to-greater-social-mobility-india>

IDR podcast

<https://fb.watch/mT2tMmq4Zz/?mibextid=v7YzmG>

PAR podcast

PAR-FEM Podcast w/Dr. Sujata Khandekar & Mumtaz Shaikh

<https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/patricia-maguire/episodes/Episode-11-with-Dr--Sujata-Khandekar-and-Mumtaz-Shaikh-e2463n6> Please share with the CORO community.

Grassroot Feminism Articles

January

Article 1 Introduction

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-fminism-sujata-khandekar-accumulation-experiences-equality-of-men-and-women-chaturang-ysh-95-3395259/>

Article 2 Ganga Jawarkar

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-the-tigress-of-melghat-melghataga-kula-gangabai-ysh-95-3425847/>

February

Article 3 Lata Sawant

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-caste-in-nomadic-communities-the-decision-of-the-panchayat-is-final-amy-95-3455869/>

Article 4 Kanta Shinde

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-shishir-sawant-social-norms-women-living-of-work-petrol-pump-chaturang-article-ysh-95-3480405/>

March

Article 5 Hemlata Padvi

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroot-feminism-the-state-is-ours-bhil-tribal-woman-sarpanch-chaturang-article-ysh-95-3508631/>

Article 6 - Sushma Mohurle

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-when-did-amrit-kawle-daughter-madam-become-amy-95-3542344/>

April

Article 7 - Jalnayika - CORO Water Process

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grass-root-feminism-man-taluka-drought-areas-amy-95-3572087/>

Article 8 - Anjum Shaikh

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-sujata-khandekar-anjum-sheikh-of-a-young-woman-chaturang-article-ysh-95-3607072/>

May

Article 9 - Women's Property Rights campaign

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-under-equal-property-rights-financial-security-women-amy-95-3635001/>

Article 10 - Sunita Rawat

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/children-punish-in-school-always-a-subject-of-debate-chaturang-article-ysh-95-3666116/>

June

Article 11 - Young Girl leaders

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-breaking-the-odds-amy-95-3697744/>

Article 12 - Rasika Margaye

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroot-feminism-sujata-khandekar-mussoorie-diaries-rasika-margaye-empowering-women-chaturang-article-ysh-95-3726875/>

July

Article 13 - Vinaya Ghwade

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-vinaya-ghevde-of-femininity-caste-equations-fear-chaturang-article-ysh-95-3754425/>

Article 14 - Ratna - Shanta mane - Yasmin and Saima Shaikh

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-a-continuously-unfolding-enrichment-process-amy-95-3791001/>

Article 15 - Single Women Kabbadi

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-sujata-khandekar-kabaddi-tournament-of-women-passionate-unconscious-joy-of-play-chaturang-article-ysh-95-3818728/>

Article 16 - Anwari Khan

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-a-married-girl-violence-anwari-khan-poverty-chaturang-article-ysh-95-3845152/>

Article 17 - Biju Bhosle - Shakuntala Jadhav

<https://www.loksatta.com/chaturang/grassroots-feminism-this-story-of-women-coming-together-for-social-progress-amy-95-3875303/>



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