

Selection of Mentors – A process documentation

Since being recognized as a National Resource Organization (NRO) in the year 2013, the organization has put in place a comprehensive institutional structure involving professionals, monitoring mechanisms and linkages with State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLM) to achieve the projects goals in both the domains- PRI-CBO Convergence and Enterprise Development. Mentors, form an integral part of this structure as they are responsible for providing hand-holding support to the local community cadre in partner states. The mentors are chosen from Kerala and have rich experiential base of working within the institutional structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and Community Based Organization (CBO). The idea behind using them as a resource for driving the project was to take the advantage of their insight into various development programmes and their ability to make on-field judgements. These mentors have several years of experience of working as CDS chairpersons, training group members, KAAS members and as Micro Enterprise Consultants (MEC). Another major reason behind engaging them as mentors is their-depth knowledge they possess on various areas and their ability of working with the grassroots. Many of them have also worked outside Kerala as part of the National Literacy Mission.

It was in the year 2013, the first mentor selection took place and since then several mentors have been selected through comprehensive selection processes. The process initially starts with a need assessment which involves taking into consideration factors like the number of mentors to be placed in a particular block/state, the area of expertise required, fluency in languages (although no particular emphasis is laid on this, candidates with knowledge of

languages other than Malayalam, especially Hindi are given preference), age, availability of the candidate to start work immediately etc.

Kudumbashree NRO has been recruiting mentors in two major domains- PRI-CBO convergence and Enterprise Promotion. For selecting mentors under PRI-CBO Convergence, former CDS chairpersons, training group members as well as women part of the community network and having adequate knowledge on the functioning of the Panchayath are given preference. Whereas under the enterprise development domain, preference is given to KAAS members, Micro Enterprise Consultants (MEC) as well as resource persons and trainers working in the area of enterprise promotion. Once the above factors are assessed, the District Missions are informed about the same. The District Missions in turn get in touch with all the CDS in their district and convey about the requirement of the candidates. MCG members, known as the Mentor Core Group play an important role in the selection process of the mentors. Mentor Core Group consists of a group of seven members selected initially from the first batch of mentors and are basically cream of the crop. Being a core group, they play a vital role in contributing to projects objectives including supporting in the selection process, conducting training programs for mentors, providing on-field support to states when needed and even representing Kudumbashree-NRO in different local, national and international platforms.

The next step is to decide on the module of the selection process as well as the date of selection. Simultaneously, applications received by the District Missions are then handed over to Kudumbashree-NRO, after which it is screened and finalized. Candidates are then informed about the schedule of the selection, venue and other relevant details. The selection process adopted by Kudumbashree-NRO is extremely comprehensive and spans over four to five

days. The process includes written tests, individual and group exercises, extempore, interviews as well as home based assignments. A group of experienced personnel from Kudumbashree-NRO evaluate the candidates based on several criteria like leadership skills, innovation, participation in the group, ability to communicate within the group and to others, clarity of thought etc. On each criteria, candidates are marked and at the end of the selection process the marks are consolidated. This is followed by the preparation of a rank list and at the end of the whole process the candidates are informed about their rank. The list is also published online to maintain transparency of the whole process.

Based on the chosen domain, the candidates are placed in partner states for immersion. During the immersion, which can span over a period between ten to fifteen days, the selected mentors are given specific tasks like meeting block officials, community mobilization, door to door visits, getting basic data of the community, meeting panchayath officials, understanding of the system etc. The mentors are expected to submit detailed reports of their experience during the immersion along with their reflections and learnings. With this, the selection process gets complete and based on the need the mentors continue in their respective states or are called back to provide further training. Most often mentors are also given training in basic spoken Hindi. During the training period, the mentors are encouraged to speak and give presentations in Hindi.

The idea behind using a comprehensive process for selecting the mentors is to elicit information from the mentors and to determine their ability to perform the job especially keeping in mind the varied challenges that they will have to face once on the field. With more than 69 mentors under PRI-CBO convergence and 67 mentors under the enterprises domain, mentors have

proved their ability in meeting difficult challenges and delivering the project's outputs on time.



Mentors participating in selection process



A group activity in progress