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Ansab Resource Centre: A Sustainable Way for Resource Generation

In the context of organizational development, 'resource mobilization' connotes the management of capital, labour, social support, legitimacy and ideas in order to meet an organization's goals. The right mix of resource mobilization action facilitates an organization to be effective and efficient in achieving its set objectives. Many theorists, including McCarthy and Zald (1977), and Kitschelt (1991) agree on the value of resource mobilization for organizational growth and thereafter, the social development it promotes and works on.

This case study shares the experience of one such organization's struggle, efforts and success in mobilizing resources to sustain itself and its work towards conserving biodiversity and poverty alleviation in a South Asian country.



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ANSAB

The organization is Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources (ANSAB), an IDRC partner, headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal. An independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization that, since 1992, has been working with the vision of “creating rich biodiversity & prosperous communities”. Committed to biodiversity conservation and economic development through community based enterprise-oriented solutions, ANSAB is staffed by a dedicated and highly qualified team with diversified skills and specializations in different aspects of ecology, natural resources, enterprises, community development and local livelihoods.

Organizational growth and Resource mobilization: Challenges

ANSAB today claims a focal position in the field, through its work over a decade at the ecological, technological, economic, and socio-cultural fronts, for the benefit of poor rural people in Nepal and parts of India and Bhutan. ANSAB’s community level interventions in forest based enterprise development; marketing; natural resource management; research, capacity building and networking have helped it retain this niche position in the sector.

However, this has not come easy and the organization has faced several challenges in its process of growth and interventions.

One of the most significant of them has been the political context of Nepal, which has put considerable pressure on ANSAB to efficiently engage in contributing to its goal of conservation and poverty alleviation. In the late nineties the intensification of conflict between the Maoists and the government resulted in the demolition of many social institutions and created several hurdles in development work. ANSAB continued its work at the field level, fortunately with no harm caused to its staff nor any direct harassment from the government or the Maoists to the organization and its work. Unfortunately, however, development donor support to Nepal as a whole abated and some existing donors shifted their priorities to anti-violence and human rights’ programs. ANSAB also faced difficulty in attracting sufficient donor support to fulfill its objectives in such a scenario. Some of ANSAB’s most effective and appropriate programs for local needs remained unfunded as they did not match donor priorities at the time.

Meanwhile, since its visibility and work had grown in the region, since its inception, ANSAB was faced with other organizational and financial issues, which worked in a vicious cycle:

Increasing demands on the organization: ANSAB’s work had made an intensive impact at the local level and created many livelihood options for the communities it worked with. As a result, the demand for ANSAB’s programs increased, and there was a felt need to scale up its programs and deliver more than what it started with.

Increasing competition and limited staff: The increase in the number of organizations working in the forestry sector in Nepal meant an increased competition among organizations for the limited grants and donor support in this field. Given the workload on ANSAB’s staff, the focus was more on fulfilling the goals and objectives of its ongoing projects. This implied that the limited number of staff had no extra time to be involved in fund raising activities, which was crucial for the long term sustainability of the organization.

Need for resource mobilization

Given the above challenges, ANSAB recognized the need to find ways to increase donor funding but also explore more sustainable and ‘independent’ sources of fund generation.

The organization brought together all the staff from the field to discuss ideas on the manner in which more and more benefits could be created for poor people, and how each staff member could generate or mobilize resources to fulfill the organization’s objectives. It organized a number of workshops to develop its strategies for long-term sustainability and effectiveness of its programs, and strengthen the fund generation capacity of its board and

staff members. In these workshops, ideas as diverse as selling ANSAB products, organizing concerts or charity shows, raising funds during festivals and establishing a resource centre were discussed. All the options were considered as effective ways of generating financial resources. However, a big drawback with most of these ideas was that they were one-time events. After much deliberation, the staff felt that the most viable and sustainable option to generate resources seemed the establishment of a Resource Centre, which would be both an activity and a tool for fund generation.

The following factors went in favour of a Resource Centre:

- Nepal's market-based, livelihood generation sector of forestry needed the knowledge and skills for its promotion, and ANSAB's capacity to provide such services to the wider clients was found to be underutilized. The establishment of a resource centre would provide an opportunity to tap this potential.
- It would help generate funds and at the same time, contribute to the organization's objectives through building the capacities of stakeholders and clients.
- It would require minimum investment, and had potential for maximum output.

From Capacity Building to a Resource Mobilization Strategy

ANSAB spent a considerable amount of time and energy working on the 'Resource Centre' idea to overcome its financial challenge, but not much progress was made to take it forward immediately after. The staff in particular was not sure how a non-profit organization could promote a profit-based entity for resource generation. For two years, a lot of attention was given to this idea, but slowly the staff lost interest.

The momentum was built again after ANSAB's key staff members, including the Executive Director, received a series of IDRC sponsored Capacity Building Resource Mobilization (CBRM) trainings starting in 2003.

These learning opportunities helped shape an effective resource mobilization strategy for ANSAB. Realizing the importance of such a strategy, ANSAB decided to re-design its organizational framework and orient its entire staff to a 'resource mobilization' perspective as against the 'donor dependent' mode. With participation of all ANSAB's staff and key partners in strategy planning workshops, ANSAB re-visited its vision, mission, set its targets and designed activities to be carried out by the organization in a renewed way.

To meet its targets, ANSAB considered a sustainable resource generation approach as one of the important contributing factors. In line with this, a 'Sustainability Fund' was set up to include funds received from various donors or as appropriated by ANSAB from accumulated surplus, with the purpose of utilizing them for institution-building and strengthening field activities.

The learning's made in the CBRM trainings proved to be supportive for successful fund-raising and the ANSAB team became more confident to approach donors once more. In fact, ten new programs and projects were funded by different donors (IDRC, USAID, Ford Foundation, ICCO, SNV, FAO, and SANREM-CRSP), in the aftermath of the CBRM trainings. By 2005-2006 ANSAB succeeded in achieving its goal with the support from donors, partners and communities. The donors were generous in funding the proposed programs; communities participated actively and cooperated with ANSAB's plans; the political social situation was enabling; and overall economic situation in the region was improving. These helped ANSAB carry out activities such as research, program development, fund raising and some key services for grassroots communities and community-based enterprises. ANSAB's interventions resulted in a total of 65,351 rural women and men realizing US \$5.54 million in additional monetary benefits through 502 economic entities that are producing, processing and marketing natural products.

However, ANSAB realized that a strong resource mobilization (RM) strategy was necessary to sustain itself and that it was necessary to make RM a part of ANSAB's overall strategy. In 2006, ANSAB implemented a Capacity Building in Resource Mobilization (CBRM) Mini-

Challenge Project, supported by IDRC. This focused on building the capacity of ANSAB's staff in resource mobilization; develop a systemic approach within the organization on resource mobilization strategies; and, establish and encourage innovations within the organization.

As ANSAB's resource mobilization strategy began to unfold, it felt the need to seek other resource generation options apart from grants. As part of this project, an appreciative inquiry and team building workshop was organized in 2006. In the workshop, the team that participated in the CBRM trainings revived and reinforced the idea of establishing a Resource Centre as a way of generating funds and contributing effectively to conservation and poverty alleviation. This idea then became a topic of 'chat' and was discussed in formal and informal discussion forums at ANSAB including the coffee shop, restaurant, lunch gatherings, and during tea breaks. The agenda for setting up a Resource Centre reserved a big share in a range of workshops, sharing/ feedback and strategic planning meetings and even at the ANSAB board meeting held on March 26-31, 2006.

During this meeting, the ANSAB board also discussed the role of its members in resource mobilization and provided inputs for ANSAB's strategic revisions. The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the ANSAB board especially promoted and encouraged everyone to step up the concept of generating revenue from selling services. The staff was encouraged to make other suggestions as well. To enable the staff to have an effective RM orientation, another internal workshop was organized in June 2006. In July, a Resource Mobilization and Team Building workshop, facilitated by an international RM expert from Venture for Fund Raising, helped identify resource mobilization opportunities and tools, as well as refine the roles and responsibilities of ANSAB staff for RM activities. Building on the consecutive capacity building exercises, a documentation workshop on RM opportunities and tools was held in September 2006. The final draft of ANSAB's strategic plan was prepared and RM strategies were shared, which resulted in ANSAB's 2007-2012 strategy plan. This plan also focused on building a strong human resource capacity on resource mobilization; systemic understanding of RM issues; and, development of ANSAB's Resource Centre.

ANSAB Resource Centre – a tool for Resource Mobilization

With focused attention on the resource centre, research was undertaken to identify demands that the centre would meet and a business plan was developed. Having identified the potential for success of the Resource Centre, and with refined ideas and a clear vision, ANSAB's management committee, led by the Executive Director, decided to set up the Resource Centre as a semi-autonomous body of ANSAB in 2007. The overall set up time was allocated from January to April 2007. A Resource Centre Management team was drawn together and responsibilities allocated for devising plans, services package development, management and marketing. The Resource Centre began its operations from April 2007.

Mission and Strategies

The Resource Centre's mission is to support ANSAB to achieve its vision of biodiversity conservation and economic development through community-based enterprise-oriented solutions. Its specific objectives include:

- a) Providing livelihood-promotion trainings for conservation and poverty alleviation;
- b) Building capacities of stakeholders in community based economic development and natural resource management; and
- c) Generating income for itself and ANSAB as a whole.

The Resource Centre develops and extends services and trainings to ANSAB's programs/projects and various other clients locally, nationally and internationally. The clients pay for the services provided by the Resource Centre. The major areas of training and services include: natural products' enterprise development; sub-sector BDS development approach; value chain analysis; non-timber forest produce (NTFP) management and marketing; community resources centre development; participatory forestry; resource assessment and sustainable harvesting; participatory biological monitoring; participatory action research;

tools and techniques for natural resource management; and forest certification and study tour packages. In five years, the ANSAB Resource Centre aims to be a renowned service provider in the South Asia region and provide services to development projects and organizations on enterprise-oriented resource management; enterprise development; business planning and; sustainable forest management and certification.. It aims to generate US\$100000 as revenue each year, with a 10 per cent growth rate on the increased base value. The centre has now also focused on designing and implementing a strong marketing and resource centre promotion strategy; that includes internal capacity building, networking, partnership and effective service packages development. The underlying ethos of the Resource Centre's approach is, "to contribute to biodiversity conservation and economic development through business development model" and it expects to fulfill its mandate with a professional approach.

Structure and Management

The Resource Centre is planned in a way whereby it raises partial funds to manage operational costs of ANSAB. At start up, the Centre received some funds from ANSAB. However, it began generating its own operation costs within a month after, through delivery of its services.

The centre is led by a Manager who designs programs, prepares proposals, supervises the activities carried out, handles public relations and networking. Other employees in the centre are responsible for accounts and administration, logistics management, marketing and documentation. ANSAB's management committee and the Board of directors advise the Resource Centre leadership and staff on necessary administrative and programmatic aspects. The central office of the Resource Centre has been housed within ANSAB's workplace, with branch offices in Dolakha and Ilam districts of Nepal.

The Resource Centre has pulled in expertise from networks of partner organizations universities and research institutions, government and non-government organizations, and business associations in Nepal and South Asia. In addition, it is working closely with a number of reputed consultants and has developed a roster of experts which includes more than 200 individuals across different areas of specialization, as per the services offered by the centre.

Activities

The Resource Centre has developed a diverse package of services on various subjects which are on offer for different clients, from the community to the international level:

- ◎ Feasibility studies for community based enterprise development and marketing facilitation and linkages;; value chain development, especially on NTFPs and high value crops and enterprise-oriented resource management. Training with a focus on enterprise development planning for natural products; business planning and scheme preparation for enterprise development; start and improve your business (SIYB); enterprise oriented community forestry operational plan preparation and revision; value chain analysis for natural products; sub-sector analysis of natural products; enterprise oriented resource management; participatory resource inventory, forest certification services for resource managers, forest user groups, and companies. .
- ◎ Market information services including, online database, market study reports, business contacts, marketing requirements and fee-based market strategies, rural market center development with marketing facilitation and linkages ; customized traders directory and manual development.
- ◎ Process facilitation on implementation of tools and techniques of sustainable forest management practices such as forest certification , chain of custody certification.

- ⊙ Study tour on community based forest enterprises: Customized services to the national and international audience on NTFPs, high value crops, enterprise orientation and community forestry innovations.
- ⊙ Publication and documentation services: Promotion and dissemination of ANSAB's publication and facilitation in preparing and publishing; services and process documentation; and dissemination.

Barriers faced, Solutions found

While ANSAB deemed that setting up the Resource Centre was the right path, managing a profit-based operation under a non-profit organization became a debatable point. After intensive discussions, ANSAB developed a strategy to simultaneously enhance the organization's capacity and hence was decided that a contribution of 20 per cent of the net profit of the income of Resource Centre's would be provided for the rest of the organization for its sustenance – because money does not come from harvesting from the field, money comes from the financial transaction, and is a part of capitalization. ANSAB also recognized that it had to improve in many areas to compete in the competitive world of cut throat business. It was quite a new experience for ANSAB as it had to generate monetary resources from selling services and receiving small amounts from its clients in the form of fees. It realized that providing individual or a package of services, and managing and marketing the services required entrepreneurial staff, a good business plan and an effective management system for overall endurance. ANSAB had to also create a balance between two different values as well as among them. To respond to these concerns, it chose innovation to be a better way. Since there was no other organization providing services like that of its Resource Centre, it decided to hire the smartest management and marketing experts to achieve its goals. Further it provided inhouse trainings on management and planning skills; restructured incentives to encourage and motivate staffs in order to yield better results and increase performances and prioritized service packages, profile customers, and standardized courses.

With sufficient numbers of trained and skilled staff in place to operate and manage the scale of business, today the Resource Centre is endeavoring to build on the expertise it requires, the culture and values it has to develop, to strengthen management skills and promote marketing tools.

Impact

Within six months of its operation, the Resource Centre successfully organized two international events, four national level events and ten district level events. It provided professional skills to over 500 individuals and information services to over 200 organizations. The Resource Centre has also received several requests from national and regional organizations to provide services to them, reaffirming ANSAB's confidence in setting up the centre.

By gaining knowledge of rural communities across their livelihood patterns on the one hand, and understanding the perspective of private players on the other, the resource centre has developed win-win models of private-public partnerships.

During this period, the centre generated revenue of Nepali Rupees 2.3 million from its work on certification, study tours, chain of custody trainings and enterprise development trainings. It also provided services to WWF Lao, SNV Lao, SUFORD, NSCFP, LFP, WWF Nepal, DRSP, Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), NORMS, FECOFUN, COFSUN, CARE NEPAL, NEHHPA and SBTG.

The centre has been able to offer 20 per cent of the total revenue generated to ANSAB for its organizational operations within this short time frame. The remaining earnings are being used to cover the costs of running the centre and for further investment in infrastructure and services offered.

Through the Resource Centre, ANSAB is on its way to generate the required revenue to complement grants diversification.

Lessons learned

ANSAB's resource mobilization strategy is showing positive results and the organization is inspired to think of other ideas that would help in sustainable resource generation for the long-term.

This has been possible because of several reasons, which also serve as lessons for similar efforts in the future.

ANSAB recognized the importance of a participatory approach from the design to the implementation stage of its resource mobilization strategy. It involved its board, staff, donors and partners, in different ways and at different times during the RM strategy development exercise, received and processed the feedback received to make it a collectively owned process.

The organization invested in building knowledge and skills of its staff on the resource mobilization perspective and enabled them to make the RM actions successful.

Having decided on the Resource Centre as a tool for fund generation, ANSAB ensured that necessary inputs in the form of business plan development and management systems have been made in setting the centre up. This investment paid off in the way the centre and its services have been received by clients.

While adopting a profit-based strategy, ANSAB responded to the demands in the market rather than trying to create a market to gain profits, making the resource centre strategy an efficient one. While earning money from clients that can pay for its services, the Resource Centre fulfilled its social responsibility by building skills for livelihood generation and biodiversity conservation through the services offered to the poor and marginalized.

Finally, this effort has helped ANSAB recognize that an effective resource mobilization strategy and initiative contributes both to generating funds and strengthening organizational goals not only through the use of funds but also the way it generates funds.

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