Empowering Grassroots for Climate Action: Dissemination of Climate Modules

The first blog looked into the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy's (CSTEP's) engagement with Climate Asia (CA) on their Climate Action for Civil Society Organisation Development Programme for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). In this concluding blog, we explore the design and development of the climate modules and share insights and learnings from the engagement.

Chronology of Building Climate Capacity

At the outset, we observed that while the CSOs shared homogeneity in socio-economic backgrounds, they were diverse in geographic locations and primary concerns. Recognising the need to maintain this intricate balance during content creation, we adopted an approach that addressed specific challenges faced by each organisation while ensuring a broad appeal to all participants.

Climate Modules

The inaugural module titled 'Introduction to Climate Change' was designed to ensure a basic understanding of climate vocabulary and concepts, such as the causes of global warming, human contributions to climate change, and the potential impacts on various sectors relevant to India's diverse rural landscape. This tailored approach linking climate science with the social development contexts of the CSOs was useful in breaking the ice with the cohort and understanding their practical challenges. Through narrative-sharing sessions, we were able to gain a deeper understanding of the climate challenges faced by the CSOs; floods, drought, heatwaves, water scarcity, and decreasing agricultural productivity emerged as dominant topics of conversation.

The focus of Module 2, 'Climate Adaptation and Mitigation', was on establishing a baseline of information richness, tailoring climate action knowledge to cater to beginners' curiosity while offering new insights to the well-informed. Delivered as an in-person workshop, this module seamlessly connected narratives from the first session to the concepts of adaptation and mitigation. The participants engaged actively, identifying overlaps and differences between the two through practical examples. Quizzes were employed using Mentimeter (an online, interactive presentation and engagement tool) to assess the level of understanding gained through this workshop.

To address the challenges faced by the CSOs in articulating climate concepts, Module 3 or 'Proposal Writing and Open Data Sources' discussed key pointers in the development of concept notes and project proposals with specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, and time-related (SMART) objectives. Tools and online resources for effective proposal writing were also provided to the participants. Presented as a three-hour webinar, the module integrated climate perspective into CSOs' social development project goals, methods, and long-term sustainability plans.

Module 4, 'A Framework for Quantifying the Climate Co-benefits of Development Programmes', focused on using CSTEP's framework, which was specifically designed for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The session delved into the motivation behind the framework, its three-step implementation process (sampling, assessment, and analysis), and its adaptability for various development programmes.

Module 5, 'Application of the Climate Co-benefits Framework', involved a hands-on application of the framework. The module content was developed on the basis of the participants' inputs on their project-specific objectives, allowing for customised integration of CSTEP's framework. The in-person workshop served as a showcase of the cohort's work and their climate literacy. Through interactive role-play (beneficiary versus project implementer) activities and perception survey questionnaires, participants understood the climate co-benefits of the development programmes, thus applying the framework to their projects.

These modules — incrementally built upon the complexity of climate change — specifically addressed the nuances of climate adaptation projects across Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, and Jharkhand. Spaced at intervals of 3–4 weeks, the modules enabled the cohort to absorb the information, discuss it within their larger team, and return with questions.

Experience and Learnings

Circling back to the knowledge gaps that were noted in Blog 1, we present the following key takeaways from our engagement with the cohort:

· Enhance Climate Literacy for Social Development and Climate Co-benefits

In our evaluation during Module 5, we recognised that CSO projects are categorised solely as social development initiatives; their potential climate benefits are overlooked due to limited climate knowledge. After our hands-on training, the participants have begun to overcome this knowledge barrier. They are integrating climate elements early in their project planning and empowering local stakeholders with timely scientific insights. For instance, *Lucknow Mahila Sewa Trust*, a participating CSO that focuses on women and child welfare, now incorporates links between natural resource management and women empowerment.

· Overcome the Climate Knowledge Gap for Inclusive Opportunities

Despite decades of work, CSOs often face visibility challenges for their work on both national and international platforms. Acknowledging the work of grassroots organisations is crucial for widening impact and securing funding for climate action. Following the training provided, many CSOs have encouraged their staff to use scientific resources to substantiate their development objectives.

Seba Jagat, a participating CSO, emphasised the importance of providing tangible, project-specific climate information and tools to establish an equal footing with external partners. Such organisations recognise the importance of climate science for long-term transformative adaptation. The use of modelling, mapping software, and case studies — as discussed in the workshops — can broaden their outreach, prioritise regions for intervention, and mobilise finances.

· Use Formal, Bilingual Dissemination of Climate Science to Strengthen Indigenous Knowledge in Communities

Many CSOs in the cohort hold valuable traditional and indigenous knowledge about nature, climate, and livelihoods. Recognising this, our engagement aimed to empower the CSOs with universally recognised terms for wider audiences. This not only improves understanding of climate issues but also enables better representation in the domain.

Community-based knowledge dissemination also meant that the modules needed to be interpreted in local languages and simplified to meet specific local contexts. This ensured that

the content not only addressed the global challenges but also resonated with the diverse realities of each CSO.

To conclude, over four months of engagement with the cohort, we were profoundly inspired by the diverse experiences of the CSOs, wealth of their implementation knowledge, and numerous livelihoods they have improved. The inclusion of the climate component is anticipated to further expand their reach, facilitate access to appropriate funding, and enhance their impact on grassroots communities in a comprehensive manner.

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