

*You rigid ploughmen!
Your labor is for future hours
Advance! Spare not! Nor look behind!
Plough deep and straight with your powers!*
- Richard Henry Horne

PRASAR Strategic Plan 2023-2028



PRASAR

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PRASAR Strategic Plan, 2023-2028

Preface

Nothing is permanent but change

- Heraclitus, c.500 BC

Developed against the backdrop of the Agenda for Sustainable Development and, with commitment to our constitutional values of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, the PRASAR vision for the Strategic Plan, 2023-2028 remains 'achieving social democracy to guide the efforts for human development by addressing socio-economic inequality & deprivation and climatic imbalance'. And, this is to be achieved by 'enabling the poor & the marginalized to end poverty through interventions in critical disciplines of health & nutrition, education and climate-resilient agricultural livelihoods', with the objectives hereunder:

- Enabling the poor and the marginalized communities, particularly women & adolescents, to squarely face challenges, and avail opportunities by outspreading the provisions of crucial services like health care – reproductive, and child health, education & nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene etc.
- Creating conditions of climate-resilient agricultural livelihoods by developing necessary skill and resources, facilitating access to capital and establishing market linkages
- Addressing inequality in socio-economic conditions engendering carbon-intensive lifestyle, and safeguarding earth's finite resources and ensuring environmental sustainability

These objectives essentially highlight the response to the changing development scenario vis-à-vis the felt needs of our partner communities and, build on organization's decade-long experience of working with diverse stakeholders. The objectives, moreover, reflect our resolve and commitment to key disciplines of intervention in the specific geographical context we are better adapt to and deliver our work.

This document is principally focused on what PRASAR intends to achieve as a professional development organization committed to its basic vision of developing social democracy, that is, a recognition to the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, together with ensuring social justice, improving the conditions for the development of historically marginalized sections as enshrined in the Directive Principles of State Policy – the basic fixture of our constitutional scheme. The visionary quest for social democracy provides impetus to harness the resources of the organizational experience in implementing development programs, and the partnerships that we have built over the years, in promise with our mandates enshrined in the strategic as well as organizational objectives.

01. Landscape with Figures - The Setting

'What are the roots that clutch...?'

- TS Eliot

PRASAR has principally been focused on keeping its activities limited to central and adjoining eastern districts of the state of Uttar Pradesh. Hence, it is sustaining strong presence in most of gram panchayats/villages of all the development blocks of Barabanki. Besides, the eastern districts of Bahraich, Shravasti, Gonda, in addition to Pratapgarh & Bijnor have also been on the map of our organizational activities.

As a development organization, we are increasingly faced with complex array of challenges awaiting critical response from the government, civil society, corporate bodies, international aid agencies and, above all, the communities. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been with us for quite sometimes. Now there is 2030 Agenda, committed to deliver on these challenges along with SDGs. In the face of multifaceted-achievements in curbing poverty, greater awareness of climate change and use of digital technologies, coupled with artificial intelligence, the indicators of human deprivations continue to paint a disturbing picture. Inequalities, particularly those reinforced by caste and gender, discrimination and violence against women and children, unfair norms and practices against vulnerable people etc., fades away much of the gains of progress and development.

Climate change, on the other hand, has emerged as one of the most critical challenges affecting agriculture and food security, weather conditions, climatic balance etc. Climate-related disasters are becoming more and more recurrent, taking huge toll of human lives and livelihoods. The Expert Committee on Impact of Climate Change set up by the Ministry of Environment & Forests noted the bearing of the phenomenon in diverse areas, namely, water resources, agriculture, ecosystem, health etc. This eventuality necessitates structural transformations, that is, to say, transitioning to low-carbon lifestyle and material culture, along with responsive governance and elimination of inequalities and, above all, resilience to short-term shocks (earthquake, flood, drought etc.) and long-term environmental crises.

Notwithstanding the wide-ranging implications of climate change for the survival of life forms on the planet, the question of livelihood – the agriculture-based livelihood, in particular, acquire special significance: Primarily, because as it is widely considered as the key to providing the crucial adaptation and moderation-collaborations, besides rendering environmental benefits. And, secondarily, the conditions in our field areas are increasingly at the risk of producing food security and other aspects of agriculture-based livelihoods. The local agricultural communities, mostly producing subsistence, have no option except to adapt to climate change. This adaptation will necessarily entail transition to a more sustainable agricultural practice. By implication, many of the changes they might make to augment resilience will also amount to increased productivity and reduced inputs like fertilizer, water etc.

The National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), released by the Prime Minister in 2008, aims to develop capabilities to adapt to climate change and augment the ecological sustainability of the development trails. Articulated through as many as eight National Missions forming the core of the National Action Plan, there is an explicit focus on encouraging the understanding of the phenomena (climate change), adaptation to its imperatives and mitigation, energy efficiency and natural resource conservation. But, in the meantime, the focus continues to be on poor and vulnerable population through the mediation of appropriate technologies in ways which are uncompromisingly inclusive and ecologically sustainable, and provides room for civil society interventions.

Nevertheless, it is to be noted that none of these challenges are exclusive. The pervasive questions of poverty alleviation, inclusive social & human development, livelihood security & well-being etc. continue to persist as the core of development needs of most people across the social spectrum in our field area. There could neither be a single approach of addressing them. The multiplicity of challenges might require intelligible actions on different fronts, from different vantage points.

Given this intricate landscape and figures, the Strategic Plan, 2023-2028 sets the modalities of realizing the organizational vision in the broader context of development goals laid out by SDGs and 2030 Agenda, over and above, the felt needs of partner communities. Nonetheless, the problem that withstands is how, in conditions of incessant and quickening change, to put the women first in letter and spirit – given the enormity of the burden of drudgery of fields and household chores; how to enable sustainable well-being for all in equitable manner, while sustaining the fast-depleting natural resource base. The crux of the document is that solutions can be sought in a new paradigm with a new professionalism. Basic to this new professionalism is the primacy of collectivism – the power of collective choice and action; and the potential for doing better in what is known as development – the sustainable development. And the new paradigm needs change and adaptability in its genes; for managing and coping with change has to be inherent in the paradigm itself. This document, with all its intent and purpose, is oriented towards achieving these ends.

02. Organization Profile

02.1 Background

PRASAR has accomplished a longish journey of development activism spanning over one and half decade - beginning with as an isolated individual endeavor, fighting adverse social conditions for bringing about a change through limited range of essentially educational activities with the marginalized and excluded communities in Barabanti district of Uttar Pradesh. Initially it was largely a lucky-go-happy affair in all intent and purpose, until the advent of The Hans Foundation (THF) in 2011 with its comprehensive package of organizational and programmatic support in the form of 'Maternal and Adolescent Health Care Program'. Precisely, ten years of this partnership with THF enabled the organization to develop organizational and financial systems, technical expertise & human resource, community organizations and expanding our outreach. Today, our portfolio encompasses diverse areas of maternal and adolescent health care, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), nutrition, agriculture-based livelihoods, women empowerment, social inclusion etc.

02.2 Statement of Vision, Mission and Objectives

Vision

Achieving social democracy to guide the efforts for human development by addressing socio-economic inequality & deprivation and climatic imbalance

Mission

Enabling the poor & the marginalized to end poverty through interventions in critical disciplines of health & nutrition, education and climate-resilient agricultural livelihoods

Objectives

- Enabling the poor and the marginalized communities, particularly women & adolescents, to squarely face challenges, and avail opportunities by outspreading the provisions of crucial services like health care – reproductive, and child health, education & nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene etc.
- Creating conditions of climate-resilient agricultural livelihoods by developing necessary skill and resources, facilitating access to capital and establishing market linkages
- Addressing inequality in socio-economic conditions engendering carbon-intensive lifestyle, and safeguarding earth's finite resources and ensuring environmental sustainability

02.3 Outreach

Partner Communities and their Organizations

The communities/groups supported by the organization belong to the poor and economically marginalized sections. They are predominantly landless - living on scarce wage employment, largely drawn from the erstwhile untouchable Scheduled Castes and backward communities, including minorities. The programmatic activities remain focused on women and adolescent girls, besides the elderly and differently-able people.

The organization has kept alive its presence among the partner communities through development and mentoring of their organizational structures. For instance, in Barabanki, we have duly empowered women farmers' groups, 68 in number, with a membership of 1,532, leading to the formation of a farmers' producer company. On the other hand, we have vibrant health groups of women (145), girls (145) and men (28). Similarly, in Pratapgarh, total number of 137 community-based organizations (CBOs), comprising health groups (24), women self-help groups (59) and children's groups (05) continue to be vibrant. The CBSs were further organized into a block-level federation, namely, '*Jan Adhikar Manch*'.

02.4 Geographical Coverage

The organization has largely been focused on keeping the activities limited to central and adjoining eastern districts of the state. Accordingly, we have strong presence in most of gram panchayats/villages of all the development blocks of Barabanki. Besides, the eastern districts of Bahraich, Shravasti, Gonda, in addition to Pratapgarh & Bijnor have also been on the map of our organizational activities.

02.5 Partnerships

We are open to wide ranging partnerships involving village institutions, private/public sector companies, government & non-government agencies & networks, UN bodies etc. striving to endorse and deliver pro-poor, gender-just, inclusive and climate resilient development. Over the years of our strides, there has been partnerships with The Hans Foundation, DFID (PACS), Child Fund, India, Care India, Azim Premji Foundation, Milan Foundation, Ipass Foundation, SBI Life Insurance, State Tobacco Control Cell etc.

The organization is also a part of networks like SATHI-UP, UP Forces, Uttar Pradesh Voluntary Health Association (UPVHA), Uttar Pradesh Voluntary Action Network (UPVAN), Alliance for Immunization and Health, Men's Action for Stopping Violence Against Women (MASVAW), Forum to Engage Men (FEM), SAHYOG, Lucknow etc.

02.6 Thematic Focus

The organization is primarily focused on the following thematic areas:

- Maternal and adolescent health, education and nutrition
- Safe drinking water, sanitation & hygiene
- Inclusive development of Scheduled Castes and other marginalized communities
- Women empowerment: Mobilization and participation in education and employment
- Development of girl child
- Climate-resilient agricultural practices and generation of livelihoods

03. PRASAR Vision and Approach

It is not that we should simply seek new and better ways for managing society, the economy and the world. The point is that we should fundamentally change how we behave.

- Vaclav Havel, 1992

The core of our vision, that is, development of 'Social Democracy', has roots in our Constitution and the ideology of Dr BR Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution. It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the core principles in unity. Democracy sans this unity of trinity of principles is an otiose. And, therefore, is defined as the form of 'associated living', with no scope for coercion, relating to shared experience, aspirations and values. Social Democracy is thus about social relationships, which, according to Ambedkar, have been blocked by divisions in Indian Society.

Our vision thus obtains room for universality – that 'leave no one behind' and 'reach those furthest behind first' in no uncertain terms, particularly in the process of addressing diverse development challenges ranging from basic development needs to bringing about structural change for sustainable development from the vantage point of inclusiveness, gender justice climatic-resilience.

As indicated, our approach mostly tends to take shape in the light of varying combinations of resources, capacities and structures in program design and implementation. On top of it, partnership-based approach often comes to reckoning in order to leverage the range of skills and resources for effective resolutions. This strategic plan document, however, makes a resolve to uncompromisingly support the principal question of sustainability in defining the contours of our approach for program implementation.

Over the years of development activism, PRASAR has been applying multisectoral integrated resolutions in maternity and adolescent health program, coupled with the provision of service delivery, in addition to enabling the community to access the benefits of development. The said program also addressed the structural barriers to women and girls' social empowerment, and ensuring realization of their legitimate entitlements.

Over and beyond, there have been concerted efforts to hasten structural transformation in terms of gender role socialization considered essential for absorbing and sustaining the gains of progress at the behest of programmatic interventions. These efforts involved emphasis on inequality and exclusion. Lately, on the other hand, efforts were made to generate awareness about the hovering crises of climate change through demonstration of agricultural practices entailing the economy of water and fertilizers and transitioning to low-carbon, if not zero, development. These processes also encompassed mediations at the level of local governance, exemplified by the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRIs), for better accountability and greater inclusion of women & other economically vulnerable and socially marginalized groups. Of

particular significance has been the resolve to give the farming women a new identity of 'farmer'. The initiative has been of greater avail in encouraging and empowering their *agency*.

The specter of Corona Virus or Covid-19 brought us frontally with protracted crises along with sudden economic downturn, in addition to rampant short-term shocks owing to climatic hazards. Such events invariably prompted our volunteerism to support the government in their efforts in strengthening resilience to future crises by building on the resources of inclusive and accountable governance, with explicit focus on the inclusion of gender and vulnerable people.

Then, at the organizational level, there have been errors both in the understanding and, in the process, on a continuum between two poles: At one pole are those which lead to learning; at the other, errors are mainly embedded and result in sustaining mistakes. Given the complexity and diversity of the domain of our work, it is but natural for errors to occur. And those in-charge of implementation efforts have no escape from learning, adapting and adjusting on the run. The problem is with the *other* class of errors – the embedded errors, which go deep and persist, but persist in consonant with the view of most powerful and dominant vested-interests. The solutions, however, lie in the thought of how and why we, as a professional organization, allowed them to recur and how similar errors could be avoided.

04. PRASAR Approaches and Resolutions

*If those lips could only speak,
If those eyes could only see,
If those beautiful golden tresses
Were there in reality.*

This Strategic Plan, 2023 -28 document, informed by the organizational vision and mission, builds on the theory of change with a mix of interventions and, hereby proposes a series of resolutions derived from the experience of program implementation and intensive consultations with varied stakeholders, including the partner communities. It is, however, to be noted here that these resolutions essentially illustrate our approach, to be delivered in partnership with donor agencies in line with implementation capabilities of the organization.

04.1 Social Democracy Programs

Aristocratic nations are naturally too apt to narrow the scope of human perfectibility; democratic nations to expand it beyond compass.

- De Tocqueville

The resolutions for social democracy programs will principally encompass liquidation of barriers to the achievement of the coveted goal of 'one person, one value' - the way political democracy articulates itself in terms of 'one person, one vote'. And these resolutions are to be the quest for strengthening livelihoods incorporating a mix of, in addition to income enhancement, various aspects of life, namely, better standards of health and education, healthier coping mechanisms (migration, for instance) for managing livelihoods under stress, preparedness to adapt to the imperatives of climate change and developing resilience, initiatives on the part of government, civil society and corporate bodies to squarely face the hazards of climate change etc. Beyond the livelihood-based essentials, there are diverse questions, for example, gender and caste-based inequalities, access to water and other WASH services and infrastructure, social security basics, clean energy, financial inclusion etc. posing formidable obstacle to building social democracy and, therefore, by implication, constitute the spectrum of diverse resolutions. In farming areas, moreover, these resolutions will also amount to augmenting food security and resilience of agricultural systems.

Beyond the array of these resolutions for achieving social democracy, the need of bringing about structural shifts in society and its agricultural pursuits, economic diversification, technology and skills alignment etc. also constitute important resolutions.

04.2 Local Self-Governance

The resolutions concerning the need of an inclusive, effective and accountable system of governance system at the local level for building the architecture of sustainable development processes constitute one of the most important agenda of our Strategy Plan. The idea is to open

up varied avenues for sustainable and inclusive development. Our past experience of addressing the governance issues laterally has been of critical avail for all our social democracy programs, particularly during crises situations unleashed by the outbreak of Covid-19 epidemic. Furthermore, many campaigns launched by the organization, for example, 'Mobilization for Nutrition', among numerous other, could not be able to deliver effectively without the support of responsive and accountable *Panchayati Raj* Institutions ensuring proactive participation of women, youth, people with disabilities and other traditionally marginalized groups.

04.3 Biodiversity and Ecosystems

You have to assume that transitions are going to continue forever and ever and ever. You have to talk about the systems that remains continuously dynamic, and that are embedded in environments that themselves are continuously dynamic.

- John Holland

The resolutions for strengthening biodiversity and ecosystems in order to firming up the footing of human lives - all the life forms as well - through unified efforts and participation of women & men, young & old, differently-able people across the social spectrum in a local setting, shall constitute invocation and use of local human and material resources of nature. Our own experiences of certain specific contexts have demonstrated how local nature-based solutions can help to enhance food and water security in agricultural practices oriented towards sustainability.

04.4 Clean Energy

The resolution for access to clean and affordable energy is of critical significance in warranting sustainability of development processes. This involves not just the access, but preferment of renewable energy and increasing its efficiency in tune with the need of local population; having implications for curtailing the load of air pollution and low-carbon development.

04.5 Gender Inequality and Female Deprivation

*Adjusted to local needs of valleys
Where everything can be touched or reached by walking,
Their eyes have never looked into infinite space.*

The persistence of endemic illiteracy, low female to male ratio in population, suppression of women's *agency* in society, relative restrictions on women's freedom of movement – these are only few of the indicators having extensive consequences not only for the well-being of women but also for economic development and social progress, specially in our rural constituencies. The restrictions women's freedom gravely diminishes their ability to act effectively even in household domain. Their lower rate of women participation in education and labor force are yet other aspects of limited opportunities of interaction with outside world and, by inference, amount to the suppression of their *agency* role.

PRASAR has been on proactive in formulating and implementing programs with women at the core with the idea of enabling them to realize their *agency* role through multisectoral interventions, which continue to be the key resolution during the present strategic plan period of

2023 to 2028. In addition, the document is looking forward to develop interventions to reform discriminatory laws, institutions and social practices and, resolves to safeguard access to basic services and infrastructure including clean energy, sanitation and physical security.

04.6 Agri-Entrepreneurship

PRASAR has been experimenting the idea of entrepreneurship program in agriculture with explicit focus on women – the ‘women farmers’ - in our field areas comprising the district of Barabanki in Uttar Pradesh. The program got a new lease on life by introduction of novel practices from the perspective of climate-resilience, gender-justice, food security and income generation through convergence and field-based demonstrations and trainings. The ‘Agri-Prasar Farmers’ Company’, with all the ten board members from amongst the ranks of ‘women farmers’ cultivated under the program. Moreover, in learning what these women could do with their capabilities and motivation, it is as though a succession of dominoes has fallen.

The organization is looking forward to a resolution of continuing experimenting with the existing entrepreneurship model so as to make it more diverse and effective, while facilitating the emergence of new business models in varied domains, including consulting and hand-holding services for aspiring individual entrepreneurs beyond the field area.

05. Endnote – Way Forward

This is just astonishing. We know each of these pieces because they are parts of our existence. But we have never thought of it all put together like this. This is our life and history.

This Strategic Plan, 2023 – 28 builds upon surfeit of lessons drawn from assorted experience of program implementation, their processes and outcomes, besides, of course, the bottlenecks. The experience also gave us the insight that local people have largely unexpected capabilities for appraisal, analysis and planning, if armed with the confidence. While recognizing the potential of particularly women and girls in ensuring the effectiveness of a certain program, it is to be reckoned that nothing was possible without reversal of powers between men and women, that is, from extracting to empowering. Passing initiative and control to women, as learnt in the process of developing the 'Agri-Prasar Farmers' Company', has built-in tendencies to make the shift – the reversal of power.

In the light of this Strategic Plan, 2023 – 2028, the organization will work to develop integrated and sustainable programmatic content, on the basis of strengths and opportunities coming to fore, with a multidisciplinary, targeted approach to strengthen social democracy in all its facets. It will necessitate consolidating partnerships and strengthening englobing systems and structures, including that of governance, from the vantage point of Sustainable Development Goals and 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Furthermore, ongoing efforts are to be intensified for collaborative actions in achieving the imperatives of the Strategy Plan, 2023 – 28, that is, realizing the overarching quest for gender equality and justice through empowerment of women and, mobilizing their participation in improving governance and attaining sustainability and climatic-resilience in the broader domain of development.

The challenges thrown up by the cohesive and transforming nature of Strategy Plan, 2023 – 2028 are immense, most important being capacity development of our core team and engendering support agencies with compatible priorities. The organization, however, is prepared to begin with old partners with new approach.