

Isha's People Participation Guiding Principles

Whatever the activity or community event, Isha strives to incorporate the following principles into its actions:

Grassroots Volunteering

Isha volunteers are the building blocks of Isha Foundation. A reliable network of people willing to change themselves and their surroundings, more than 2 million volunteers are spread over 150 city-based centers. Their dedication and willingness to share their experience and expertise in various fields allows Isha to implement large scale development activities.

Throughout the course of the project, wherever it's possible, community leaders enable teams of Isha volunteers to live as guests within the beneficiary communities. Simply sharing a meal or day-to-day events with members of the community helps develop solidarity between the Isha project teams and the people they serve. This dynamic often draws the community leaders right into the heart of the project, closing a gap that might have existed due to status or wealth, and inspiring them to become increasingly engaged in the possibilities available for their communities.

Children

Even at a primary school age, a child's creativity and understanding about what is best to do for health and the environment outshines most adults. Isha views children as 'today's parents'. They are naturally curious and eager to join in with Isha project activities – often without prompting – fostering unforeseen, long-term benefits on the spot. Collaboration with government schools, youth corps and clubs proves time and again that children are capable 'development actors' within their communities. Bringing urban children into rural areas to experience village conditions and local lifestyle and to interact with their rural counterparts is a priceless exchange that opens minds and generates advanced understanding at a very young age.

Women

Women's participation is also of paramount importance in the overall improvement in community health and well-being. Women are considered the main force in a village community, charged with housework, earning income, organizing community activities and child rearing. If women are convinced about incorporating a simple herbal supplement into the family diet, then it becomes certain that the nutrition of the family—and children in particular—will be positively affected.

Celebration

Historically, ancient Indian culture was attuned to daily celebration and feasting 365 days per year. In recent times, however, this celebratory spirit has been drained as obligation replaces innate euphoria, and the stresses of daily life—economic sustenance and marginalization—have quelled the natural expression of joy. Experience has shown that positive results occur in an unforeseen and unique way when project cycle management is infused with a spirit of celebration. Whether in tree planting, health screening or community education, Isha strives to foster an inclusive atmosphere of joy.

Ownership

In order for initiatives to become self sustaining, communities need to be inspired and motivated, with all parties benefiting through their fullest inclusion and participation. Self sufficiency and self respect replace dependency and helplessness, reigniting hope and transmitting that hope through highly successful engagement strategies that invite and inspire participation. As such, community capacity building is core to all Isha's interventions.

The Role of the Government

Isha programs bring existing government schemes and support to the people. Villagers become aware of how to benefit from such opportunities, and are eventually capable of self-administering programs, such as the Kalaingar Health Insurance Scheme.

Farmers

Farmers play a fundamental role in Project GreenHands by adopting Agroforestry as a means to utilize agricultural land, including otherwise fallow land. As such, farmers' mobilization through awareness generation and regular follow-up visits are given priority.

Creativity

Finally, even the best project identification and planning exercises cannot anticipate the realities of implementation. The creative adaptability of the target population must be tapped to identify problems and propose solutions. The networking of interest groups, such as self-help groups, community-based organizations, national authorities, the business community and NGOs brings synergy to a project. Difficulties are alleviated thanks to a broad base of support. Logical planning may well offer a high level of control over the project, but it will not deliver the kind of 'illogical' success that comes when exuberant community members surpass the "final expected results."

