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# **Creating a shared vision and commitment to social change with narratives from the grassroots to redistribute power and resources through evidence-based advocacy in Odisha.**

## **Overview**

Our vast working experience with indigenous communities in the Indian state of Odisha witnesses multiple gaps ranging from communications to leveraging and taking action on what concerns people the most and what the government offers through its policies in a democratic setup. Even though government policies aim at accommodating people's needs and aspirations, it results less effective as it fails to collectivize their efforts and take feedback from the grassroots to understand their real needs and challenges.

So, there is a need to build evidence from the grassroots and create a shared vision and commitment to shaping policies in order to bridge the communications gap between the policymakers and those who will benefit. That's where Grassroots Narratives exist.

## **Grassroots Narratives**

'Grassroots Narratives' is a feedback redressal mechanism where the communities at the grassroots can share their stories and engage directly with the relevant authorities. This initiative aims to bring lived experiences of people to establish a responsive, transparent, and accountable system through evidence, stories, and movements from grassroots levels.

## **Goals**

The initiative will bring out first-hand experience of stakeholders/beneficiaries on policies from the grassroots, which can help the government revisit their existing policies and their implementation, lacunae, and administrative bottlenecks to receive the benefits to the entitled people.

- Act as an interface to bridge existing gaps between service providers (government) & beneficiaries)
- Document best practices, practical models & success stories which can be used for replication
- Support the government in effective policy-making for the grassroots communities & issues through evidence-based advocacy.

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- Mentor and support the communities to give feedback to the stakeholders (from the village to the state level to the accountable representatives) input on the bottlenecks of the government schemes and other services from the people lens.
  - Create awareness about different government schemes, benefits under each scheme, and beneficiaries' access mechanisms to ensure they get their help and entitlement smoothly and hassle-free.

## **Process and approach**

In Grassroots Narratives, we seek to ensure participation and ownership of local communities in an intervention process and empower local communities. Such efforts also tap into a community's local knowledge and resources, with the recognition that these resources can be crucial to a successful intervention. We follow a top-down and bottom-up approach in our feedback redressal mechanism with the following processes:

- Conduct a literature review
- Primary and secondary data collection
- Building narratives from the data, testimonies
- Consultation with diverse stakeholders for validation and pluralizing voices
- Preparing recommendations/action points and sharing with relevant authorities for appropriate actions

## **How will it benefit grassroots people?**

'Grassroots narratives' brings an integrated framework to bridge gaps between the service providers and the receivers, which will benefit communities in multiple ways, such as:

- It will raise awareness among communities on various rights and entitlements they can benefit from
- It will re-empower communities to have their voices heard and make crucial decisions to address the needs of their people.
- It will bring a sense of ownership and participation to the communities in government schemes and policies, which is essential for its effective implementation.

## **Sustainability: Connecting with ongoing grassroots action**

Consistent efforts to bring people's voices to the policy discourse can work exponentially and long-term to create a shared vision and commitment to social change through policy interventions. Atmashakti believes that collective action is vital to sustainable community development and people's movements have a pivotal role in facilitating this development.

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Atmashakti is a right-based catalyst organization that coalesces Tribal and Dalit people for their socio-economic and political empowerment. For more than a decade, with a consistent focus on collectivizing the community, Atmashakti has facilitated the formation of more than 23 collectives in 17 districts and 84 blocks of Odisha.

So, we can help strengthen grassroots groups and local people's collectives to build their capacities on understanding policies and their implications and accordingly develop new solutions for existing problems and use both local governments and citizens for this. They can create an alternative voice that challenges inequity and discrimination against the poor. Grassroots Narratives, which imbibe a people-driven approach, can also use the grassroots for our issue-based campaigns and movements.

## **Taking the initiative ahead-a collaboration call**

A collaborative approach to this initiative will drive implicit actions, credibility, and accountability in tackling an issue by bringing together different skills and perspectives. It will also build an ecosystem of learning & partnership among like-minded entities who work towards amplifying the voices and vision for grassroots development by sharing and learning from collective experience to create innovation and growth.

### **Support required for Grassroots Narratives.**

1. Collaborative studies & aid
2. Technical competency aid in analyzing primary research
3. Digital aids for effective data management by the team
4. Publication support
5. Solidarity support for campaigns & advocacy