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# Life of a PAI: Mediation by willingness and ability for beneficiary community engagement

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## ABSTRACT

Improving the performance of Poverty Alleviation Interventions (PAIs) is crucial to justify the resources they consume, and for how they pitch and then address aspirations of the beneficiary community. In this paper, we work from the accepted premise that engagement response of the beneficiary community is central to the performance of such interventions. ‘Willingness to engage’ and ‘ability to engage’ are articulated as two dimensions that shape this response with examples and a discussion on how research has related with these constructs. We argue how willingness and ability have an evolving interface over the PAI lifecycle, and examine a drinking water and sanitation PAI in East India. Our propositions from this inductive study culminate in a theory of community response mediation. We suggest that willingness and ability fully mediate each other’s effect on community engagement response with implications for how PAIs are resourced, designed and delivered.

### *Keywords*

- Willingness;
- Ability;
- Community engagement response;
- Poverty alleviation interventions;
- Mediation

### *Highlights*

- Theory of community engagement response in Poverty Alleviation Interventions (PAI) is proposed.
- This comprises mutual mediation by willingness and ability to engage for community engagement.
- Guidelines for managing the dynamic interface between willingness and ability during a PAI.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Poverty alleviation interventions can be understood as projects and programmes targeting impoverished communities for progress along different dimensions of the human development index and associated capabilities (UNDP, 2014; Sachs, 2005). Reducing relative levels of deprivation within an overall absolute increase in good being is the broader socio-economic goal they contribute to, and invariably, consuming significant resources in the process. The amount spend on them as international aid is nudged at close to 1% of the gross national income of the ‘rich’ nations with additional resources being committed by national governments, corporations and domestic aid agencies (Provost and Tran, 2013). By some estimates nearly a trillion dollars per annum are being earmarked as ‘official aid’ for poverty alleviation within the remits of overall global social policy under the Millennium Development Goals (Sachs, 2005; UNDP, 2011; Kwon and Kim, 2014).

There are varying PAI contexts and associated development objectives, ranging from income generation, literacy, health to more focussed niches therein. This heterogeneity in objectives that PAIs serve across different social, economic and cultural domains, is underpinned by one common, established and essential premise of design and execution for PAIs - that of seeking community engagement. A favourable beneficiary ‘community engagement response’ i.e. where the community is receptive to the PAI and is able to reach out and receive its benefits is crucial for desired outcomes.

Over time, experiences and evaluations of PAI performace have resulted in a renewed focus on partnerships, quality of governance, and equitable socio-economic returns. In tandem and particularly with the general tightening of purses in recessionary times, evaluating outcomes in relation to resourcing of PAIs has come under considerable scrutiny during the last decade in particular (e.g. Vachani and Smith, 2008; Contu and Girei, 2013). The ‘relatively impoverished’ target beneficiary community has continued to be affected by such scrutiny

because their favourable response is widely considered to be a crucial determinant of sustainable and effective outcomes (Bamberger, 1980; Johnston, 1982; Swapan, 2014). The precise form of such response can vary from one intervention to another, but is usually made explicit as ‘contribution expectations’ in aid policy and design of a PAI. Whether it is contribution in terms of labour, time out from present occupations for training, or even in terms of some explicit monetary contribution - such expectations are integral to most PAIs in contemporary times (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Ortrud, 2011).

The desire to ‘help their own cause’ in the first instance can be seen as ‘*willingness to engage*’. This finds a suitable proxy in perceived utility of the core objectives of an intervention- typically requiring ‘sensitisation’- in development parlance an idea that is beyond just communication about the intervention. Sensitisation seeks a ‘buy in’ by articulating benefits or removing misconceptions about the process and deliverables that may affect an intervention’s uptake. For instance, sensitisation efforts become very challenging, if there is a legacy of poorly delivered past interventions, or in other cases, a conflict of PAI objectives with say religious or cultural beliefs (Nguyen, Trans, Kaagwa-Singer and Foo, 2011). However, willingness by itself may not translate into effective community response. Despite the desire to engage with a PAI, present livelihood constraints or even constraints to do with say, mobility and health issues, among others, may compromise the ‘*ability to engage*’ of the beneficiary community.

Different dimensions of deprivation may interact to create progression on any one aspect more difficult than would be in a world where these aspects were independent of each other. For example, poor education may affect progress on health dimension, because of inability to break away from superstitions, inability to objectively evaluate and let go of conflicting rigid beliefs, and inability to understand and accept new approaches. Similarly low income levels may affect the ability to take benefit from initiatives seeking enhancement along the education

dimension because of time required away from meagre occupations. From this perspective, ability support in an intervention may help beneficiary communities negotiate barriers by looking at affecting issues outside the core remit of the intervention to improve ‘*ability to engage*’. In light of the examples above, it could be in the form of meals or payment for coming to literacy programmes, and focused investment in educating the community for them to draw on benefits of health interventions. The nature of such support has come forth as an important aspect in post-hoc analysis of PAI performance ( Kremer and Miguel, 2007; Banerjee, Deaton and Duflo, 2004). An much in practise instance of such ability support is documented for many rural arid regions of Asian and African countries in particular, where women and even young girls have to still fetch water from long distances, purchase water or queue up for long periods a limited locally based water sources (Reddy, 1999, p.100; Nauges and Strand, 2011; Graham, Hirai and Kim, 2016). This compromises, physically and time wise, their ability to attend say literacy programmes directed at them. With enhancing literacy being the intervention objective, drinking water provision is a manifestation of ability support (as configured outside the core intervention remit) to free up time that women can commit to the literacy intervention.

Studies focussing on specific poverty alleviation interventions have juxtaposed field evidence with assertions from economic modelling to support this rationale behind such support: “Being unwilling to pay for a commodity should not be spontaneously, and “naively”, interpreted as an evidence of a lack of preferences for the former” (Matraia, Giacaman, Khatib and Moatti, 2006: 319).

Our propositions from inductive analysis also make for guidelines in context of taking onboard the interplay of willingness and ability levels to inform policy and practice. The propositions culminate into a theory of response mediation, positing that willingness and

ability are strong mediators of each others' influence on beneficiary community engagement response.

## **TWO DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNITY RESPONSE: 'WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE' AND 'ABILITY TO ENGAGE':**

As enumerated, the importance of beneficiary community response is clearly underlined in a gamut of research narratives of poverty alleviation interventions. Going deeper this recognition yields two perspectives. There is research that prescribes community contribution as sacrosanct, and arguably, with the onus being mostly on beneficiary communities (Stijin, et al., 2009). The second perspective comes from studies that are critical of the manner in which such contribution is scoped, and of the often ill-conceived use of ability support to facilitate contribution (Schischka, et al., 2008; Stijin et al., 2009). Forgoing some part of daily wage earnings to attend literacy classes, or providing free or discounted rate wage labour for construction of water harvesting structures are some examples of 'community contribution'. Such a contribution can usually come forth typically when mediated by some form of associated 'ability support', i.e. with some proportion of assured wage labour, free meals or free materials. The importance of opportunity costs from a consequences perspective is also crucial to table when discussing the mediation or, in other words facilitation by ability support. The opportunity cost in real terms is very high when seen from the lens of consequences that forgoing meagre income can have, providing free meals or supporting income even if discounted wage labour may thus be crucial to draw community engagement.

There is however a flip side to the logic that such a conditional-negotiated premise will ensure sustainable long term community engagement. For example the target beneficiary community may come in for free meals to literacy classes, not forgoing any livelihood

earnings, more concerningly, if not engaging with the literacy objective either. This is often the case if associated sensitisation has not been delivered and there is no real buy-in with the primary i.e. the intervention objective (Sasmal and Guillen, 2015). When poorly configured and not tempered with appropriate sensitisation, ability support may not improve intervention performance - it may not help alleviate poverty but exacerbate it. Impoverished communities may become used to 'dole outs' where ability support becomes the primary attraction and the core objectives of the PAI are lost track of. On the other hand, over orchestration of sensitisation when the beneficiary community is already very keen about the core objectives of a PAI may lead to squandering of resources. Ability support as a tangible resource input thus requires careful design, in conjunction with requirement for sensitisation.

Willingness to engage, by itself has often been looked at in the economics and social sciences literature as a bi-fold concept comprising willingness to accept and willingness to pay (WTA-WTP) (Alozie and McNamara, 2009). 'Willingness to Pay' and 'Willingness to Accept' have been examined for the difference in their conceptual moorings. However, despite the variation in how willingness to accept is configured in econometric modelling, there is consensus on: both being conceptually different due to perceptions about the offering that recipients hold and; income levels being only one of the influencing variables (i.e. scope for perceptual understanding of value). The case of non-market goods being characterised by a greater and more unexplained difference underpins our understanding of these two concepts not capturing the notion of willingness to engage in poverty alleviation interventions (Haneman, 1991; Shogren, Shin, Hayes and Kliebenstein, 1994). Research also emphasises a dynamic nature of divergence between willingness to pay and willingness to accept as conditions evolve over a given context. The former leads the latter, but often, willingness to accept may not translate into willingness to pay – what is often called 'community

contribution' in the context of PAIs, due to an inherent inability to contribute, thus making a case for mediation by ability to allow the relationship between willingness and community response to come into effect. Expectations from the community and link with willingness and ability of beneficiaries has been implied in econometric studies as well supports our conceptualisation of ability support for enhancing ability to engage (e.g. Kling, List and Zhao, 2013).

## **POLICY AND PRACTICE**

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's (1999) path breaking contribution resonates with the need to re-examine shaping of beneficiary community response in PAIs. Sen speaks of "functionings" or support for people to be able to carry out expectations from them, and be able to exercise their choices- fundamentally questioning the neo-classical premises of public choice (Sen, 1998; Sen 1979). He argues that poverty is denial of choices and opportunities because of deprivation, and an extension to not being 'able' to engage with project intervention follows this argument. Millennium Development Goals can be said to have an appreciative view of the ability paradigm. This is in their emphasis on different goals – expressed in terms of order of priority, and seemingly in recognition of Sen's 'capability deprivation' premise (Ortrud, 2011). For instance, the first goal is income growth and education: helping communities to objectively relocate themselves in the socio-economic schema and understand their own role in shaping poverty.

There is an explicit acknowledgement of the need for a critical mass of resources as a starting point in working to address capability deprivation. This is argued to help address diversity in environmental conditions and arguably dampen socio-cultural rigidities that can shape very strong barriers to poverty alleviation (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006). Despite research



evidence and policy recognition, aid policy remains rather conservative in allocating resources for ability support. Sensitisation on the other hand is often subject to generic templates rather than being customised to the conditions specific to a PAI. Aid policy argues ability support to be more of ‘conditioning’ requirement that to a large extent should be met ‘locally’ by beneficiary communities and through local government participation (Kremer and Miguel, 2007). What has been lost track of in this trading of responsibility for effective ability support and sensitisation, is the need to give more attention to informing the manner in which they should be designed in a mutually enabling interface and over the life of the intervention. In this paper this dynamic and evolving interface finds expression and evidence to conjecture how it can be managed for superior performance of PAIs

## **DATA & METHOD**

We started by examining PAI narratives in research publications and understanding variation across different PAI contexts they described, the succinct description allowed us a sharp view into these, usually deployed as research sites. The studies have different remits; the common space they share is use of PAIs as their research site. Understanding if there was a rationale from practitioner perspective in arguing that different PAI contexts could be different in terms of willingness and ability levels that marked them was intriguing. We took forward a purposive selection of such descriptions as vignettes and used a Q-Sort approach to analyse opinions and converge assessments on relative willingness and ability level in each description. The participants comprised a cumulative of seventy years of field level PAI implementation experience primarily across south east Asia and also South America and sub-Saharan Africa. A total of 6 practitioners were engaged in this workshop moderated by one of the authors. The Q-Sort approach helped analyse opinions and converge assessments on PAIs (Weldegiorgis and Ali, 2016). Practitioners were asked to rate the vignettes along ‘relatively’

low, moderate to high levels of willingness and ability respectively, and then discuss iteratively to converge to an agreed rank ordered assessment. This exercise validated our construction of willingness and ability as variables that can be seen at different levels across different PAI contexts. A summarised view of key aspects with brief illustrative instances that influenced categorisation are provided in table 1. The Q-Sort validates the point that willingness and ability vary across different PAI contexts. However, it does not provide a picture of how these change over the life of ‘a given’ intervention which is quite central to our pursuit of understanding willingness and ability as determinants of beneficiary community response, propelling us to present an in-depth analysis of a PAI over its life.

**Table 1: Willingness to engage and Ability to engage: Typical Illustrations drawn from published research evidence from across geo-economic zones**

ABILITY TO ENGAGE		
LOW-----MODERATE -----HIGH		
<p><b>A1.</b> The beneficiary community has a high opportunity cost of engagement. For instance, by having to make time out of very meagre and fickle occupations like daily wage labour, or from tasks like collection of drinking water over long distances. (E.g. in - Nauges and Strand, 2013; Boone, Glick and Sahn, 2012; Suryahadi, Yuma, raya and Marburn, 2010)</p>	<p><b>A2.</b> The target beneficiary community has a relatively moderate opportunity cost of engagement. For instance, there may be some slack in the annual working schedules – say due to seasonal variation when say the community has time off its main occupational pursuit of agricultural. It may work with lower intensity on supplementary occupations. (E.g. in - Alary, Corniaux and Gautier, 2011) .</p>	<p><b>A3.</b> There is basic resource and skills set in the target community that is directly aligned with core objectives of an intervention. For instance, an agricultural community that feels a need to create water harvesting structures for irrigation, and therefore, is very receptive to interventions for enhancing such structures. ( E.g. in - Kasie, Shiferav and Muricho, 2011).</p>
WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE		
LOW -----MODERATE -----HIGH		

<p><b>W1.</b> The target beneficiary community has been subjected to poorly performing interventions in the past (E.g. in - Romijn and Caniels, 2011). Intervention design may also be conflicting with socio-cultural norms, or expectations of control over wellbeing -in relation to beliefs held. (E.g. in - Chrisler, 2014)</p>	<p><b>W2.</b> The target beneficiary community have been subjected to mixed performance of past interventions. There is scope for vested influence of say local money lenders/loan sharks to dissuade engagement with PAIs. (E.g. in - Ault and Spicer, 2013) .</p>	<p><b>W3.</b> Superior performance of PAIs in the past (in other domains than the intervention in question). There may be existing capabilities that have demonstrable demand for inputs like skill development support or seed capital support. There may also be potential of strong local resource endowments that could be taken forward (E.g. in - Koning et al., 2011).</p>
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The findings from the inductive longitudinal approach to examine a PAI in India uses primary (Key Informant) and archival data (this intervention’s 13 workshop reports since inception) to understand how willingness and ability evolve over the life of a PAI.

The intervention we examine in-depth is labelled Neer Swach Abhiyan (NSA)- pseudo name for a drinking water and sanitation intervention. NSA is nearing a stage where closure by handover to the community was being attempted, as at the time of writing this paper. This intervention has sought to provide sustainable safe drinking water and ecological sanitation systems in a rural cluster in eastern India. The cluster is characterised by a poor score on ‘human development status indicators’ of income, health education and infrastructure. It is also a flood prone zone with a higher population density relative to the national average. Contamination of drinking water sources has been a major cause of high infant mortality rates and water borne diseases in this area. Lack of access to appropriate sanitation facilities compromises the dignity of people - especially that of women during floods. During regular times also, poor sanitation practices coupled with the high water table cause contamination of ground water. Since its inception, NSA has targeted areas that have been severely affected by

floods and consequently led to ground water contamination. It has been supported by external donor-aid, and is delivered through a network of five local voluntary sector organisations (VSOs). These came onboard to comprise the intervention team. The team is led by an external rural development practitioner as the facilitator. The local VSOs have provided the field cadre for NSA and have participated in strategy formulation and implementation.

We capture how NSA has worked on ability support and its interface with sensitisation for enhancing willingness over the life of the intervention. The findings help articulate a framework that maps NSA's progression. A broader articulation of PAI contexts from published research narratives (table 1) that precedes the analysis of NSA, captures varying levels of willingness and ability.

Authors have been involved in efforts by the NSA to generate capital towards supporting its proposed spin off - a micro-enterprise initiative. The field study was conducted at two points in time; one of the authors was an observer in workshops held to brainstorm progress and support for NSA. Workshop documents and progress reports at NSA were also made available to us. About 15 such workshops as major events that track and orient NSA strategy have taken place since its inception, we had access to 13 of these workshop documents.

Workshops provided the main inputs for brainstorming the way forward, in addition to other monitoring and strategy meetings on a smaller scale. The workshop reports quote participants and also major decisions agreed to. Along with reports made public by the NSA, these were used as the main data source. This data was sequentially aligned over the life of the intervention; 10 to 15 NSA personnel participated in each such workshop that formed the first

source of data. The cumulative number of participants over 13 workshops (with repetition) was 152.

Issues around assessment of willingness and ability conditions and consequent design of ability support and sensitisation were derived from these discursive workshop reports. The themes generated were then discussed with multiple key informants in semi structured interviews (Boje, 1991). The key informants numbered 9 in all and comprised five field workers, the facilitator of NSA, and three executive members from the partner VSOs. All these were involved with NSA since inception. Key informants helped validate and sharpen our mapping of progression and key markers therein at NSA from the workshop reports. Arriving at a reliable, internally consistent view of punctuations that mark a longitudinal process through juxtaposing historical narrative with key informant reflections, is well established as a methodological robust approach (e.g. Ferguson-Amores, Gracia-Rodriguez and Ruiz-Navarro, 2005: 156-157)

Despite good level of access, for ethical reasons a pseudo name (NSA) has been used for the intervention. This was partly because NSA was in transition at the time of writing up this paper- funding was running out and political tensions within the NSA set up were becoming somewhat visible, as the intervention was seeking to hand –over control to the community. Data from workshops allowed for more objective and politically less sensitive use of key informants.

The findings section articulates willingness and ability as they interface over the life of NSA. We divide it into three stages to capture movement in terms of levels of willingness and

ability as the initiative progressed, towards what is now heralded as a successful intervention, struggling only in handover to the community and withdraw external facilitation.

## **FINDINGS**

With reference to the progression desired towards higher levels of willingness and ability, there are two aspects to be taken onboard as process innovations work on the dynamic interface between the two variables. The first is to assess the baseline context shaped by combination of ability and willingness levels. The second is to understand the shift that progression may cause and require overtime adaptation in the ability support and sensitisation approaches. Findings from filed study are presented keeping these aspects in mind.

***Initiation of the intervention:*** Initiation of NSA confronted institutional barriers in setting up an awareness campaign in this highly politicised, flood prone, and till recently, the most law-less part of the country. Furthermore, the community were low on willingness due to mistaken beliefs about ailments caused by consuming rain water. The importance of this barrier was pitched as fundamental to be negotiated and was emphasised:

“...we had information about conditions on the ground but without community members who worked with locally based VSOs- to find out about the resistance to rain water consumption...it would have taken time...maybe we would have missed it completely...” [Key informants (KIs) reflecting upon partnership discussions and decisions over Workshop 2 and Workshop 3 (W2, W3)– as arranged in chronological order].

Involvement of local VSOs was effective in circumventing the local law and order conditions that impaired functioning by external or less familiar entities. It paid dividends in terms of being able to function in the area and work the trust factor in, as noted in an earlier workshop:

“...people tend to listen to us because we are familiar faces if not acquaintances...”

[KIs, reflecting upon status and outcomes discussion in W2, W3].

High instances of water borne diseases and poor sanitation- especially during floods were clearly recognised in the comments. These conditions supported ‘willingness’ to some extent despite mistaken beliefs and failed or poorly performing prior interventions:

“...the amount of money spend on water harvesting structures both large and small and government interventions on health has been poorly coordinated ...of what small proportion of stated funds have actually seen some physical investment, structures and inputs are deliberately shoddy so that crisis can happen again in times of floods and fresh funds flow comes in to be eaten away...” [KIs, reflecting upon status and outcomes discussion in W2, W3].

Willingness to engage with the intervention was low to moderate once all these factors were brought into the picture. The main sensitisation strategy used was that of jal yatra (water journeys) [ reflections over W1 and W3] to demonstrate that it was safe to consume rain water by literally consuming it in front of people – a template drawn from water –health related awareness campaigns in the past.

The NSA team demonstrated that ecological sanitation went a long way in improving the quality of ground water characterised by a high water table, and in preventing water borne diseases. Direct intervention during flood times with drinking water and sanitation support was a form of ability support that had a knock on effect on willingness to engage. NSA provided cheap, hygienic and dignified sanitation facilities during flood times in the form of temporary sanitation packets. These were also indigenously produced with urea in

polyethylene bags – where urea decomposed human waste that was let loose in the flood waters after use.

Such support facilitated relief from immediate living and health conditions to some extent. It helped the community realise the utility of the intervention and coherently think about how community could use and leverage the intervention's offerings in terms of practices and artefacts:

“... people would come to us because they felt that we had credibility and sought to do something useful .... they also felt that illness prevention especially just after the first floods we targeted in this cluster was important. They actually thought about prevention than just trying to recover from the ailments – we reduced child mortality and water borne diseases by at least one fourth (during floods) ...and it helped in getting the response...” [KI, reflecting upon status and outcomes discussion in W3].

***Propelling forward:*** Successful initiation process supported introduction and uptake of indigenously made artefacts like earthen vessels with water filters and ecological latrines. Ecological latrines became popular with households, these collect liquid and solid human waste separately for easy processing rather than letting them seep into the ground; they can also be housed in raised bamboo structures that remained more usable when flooding occurs. The NSA team generated demand from households for these artefacts; ability support could now be directly aligned with the intervention objectives in meeting such demand locally.

A range of local artisans in pottery skills, bamboo craft and also metal works were becoming involved in making of these artefacts. There was generous range of these artefacts - like indigenously made filters, water harvesting and storage systems, and latrines. An indigenous



technologies institution was brought in to provide such designs based on similar interventions elsewhere [Progress in W6]. The necessary traditional pottery, masonry and even bamboo craft skills were easily available. Local production also assured, reasonable pricing of these artefacts and ability to support to enhance this was widely discussed [KI, status and progress reported over W6, W7].

Pricing of artefacts was affordable for households because it was subsidized and at other times delivered with an instalment payment option. The willingness thrust had now clearly given way to ability support being more directly aligned with the intervention, whereas in the initial stage, ability support was oriented more for imparting trust in the intervention (i.e. more about flood time relief rather than sustainable sanitation and drinking water):

“...the realisation is there now, and people are now looking for ways and means to acquire these at reasonable costs, affordability and availability are both important, we have to maintain momentum otherwise the feeling will relapse into another intervention that just promised a lot...”. [KI, status and progress reported in W7, W8 and W9].

Increasing the involvement of local community cadre comprised of field workers and of the more active community members, marked this phase. It was considered important to keep them abreast of and participate in brainstorming about what was required to keep up the momentum [KI, discussion in W9].

*Contemplating withdrawal:* Attempts towards an income generating enterprise were initiated over 2010-2011. The idea was to establish a micro-enterprise venture around the artefacts like *matka* filters (earthen water pots system with filters), and services like construction of onsite ecological latrines and rain water storage systems [KI validation for plans reported in

W9]. The envisaged outcome of this was that in time, and through surpluses generated, it would sustain NSA as a crucial sensitisation front, skill building portal and technical capacity provider.

“... tapping into what is already happening and in a way that NSA continues to keep the momentum could create mutually supporting systems. NSA could continue to help generate the demand and could be supported by surpluses from an earning system that would benefit the local artisans also...” [KI validation for status for agreement to the idea articulated in W9 and W10].

Willingness here was not only about the community being willing to engage in the initiative, but more about the community being sufficiently motivated for and willing to take ownership of the programme, supported by a sustainable resourcing system [KI validation for plans reported in W9, W10]. Development of leadership through inclusive decision making with a community based cadre of workers is a challenge at NSA for which novel approaches are still being contemplated [KI validation for discussion reported in W12]. Showcasing small clusters for highlighting NSA achievements - to induce long term funding commitment from the local government, is another approach that is being contemplated [KI validation for plans reported in W12]. Overall working towards withdrawal has been more about raising willingness for community ownership of the intervention and trying to organise sustainable resourcing for the intervention.

## **DISCUSSION**

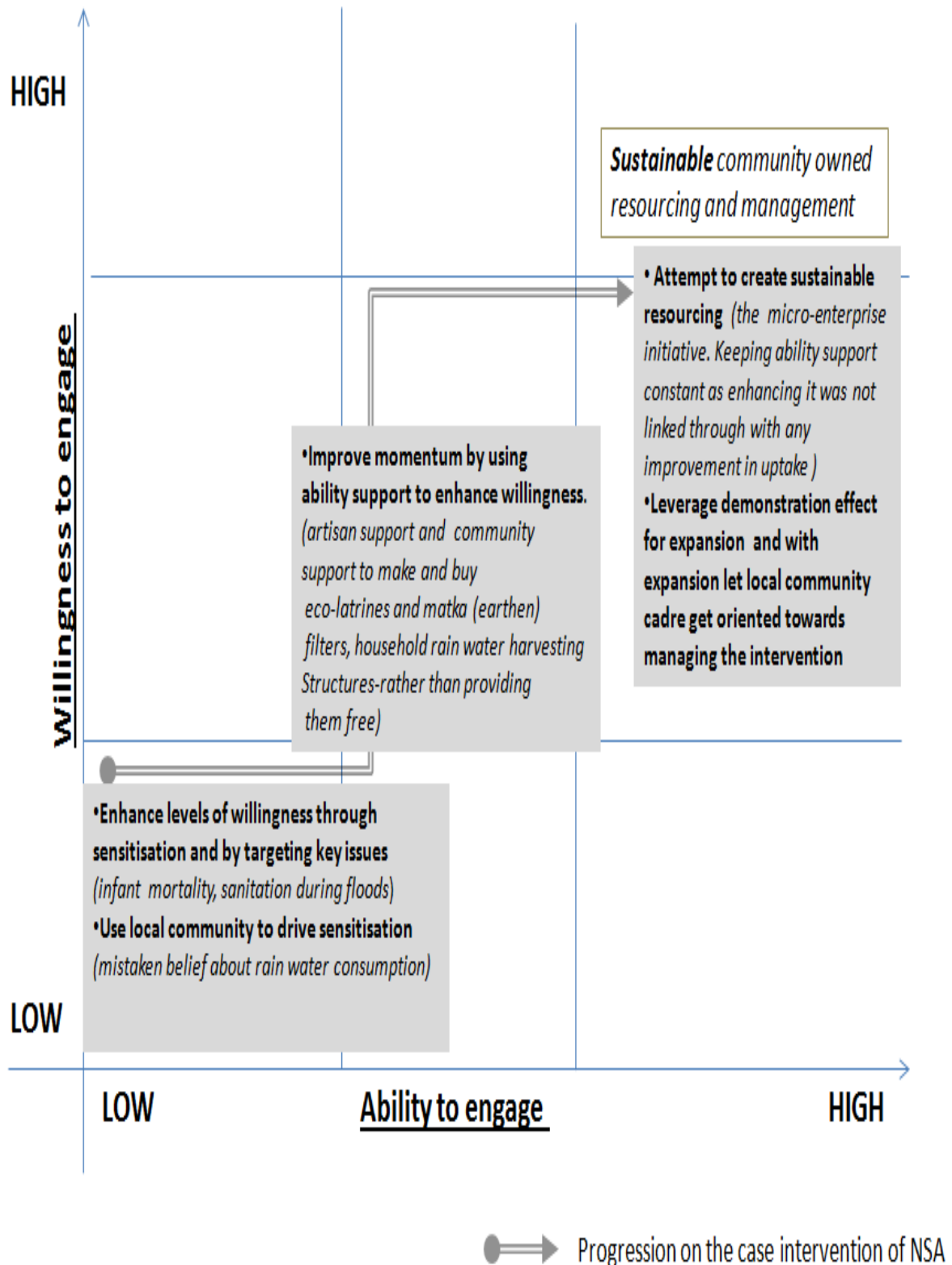
Progression from initiation to seeking withdrawal at NSA shows a trajectory that is mapped in figure 1. This is typical of a project system in poverty alleviation where closure comes with achieving sustainability and handover to the community. NSA does not reach the end of

the road with unequivocal high willingness coupled with high ability. Ability support in the ‘propelling forward’ stage had a positive interaction with willingness enhanced through sensitisation. The initiation stage had some reasonable level of baseline willingness because of water borne diseases during floods already making the community receptive, though at the same time adversely affected by mistaken beliefs about consuming rain water. The ability support as relief during flood times helped up the willingness levels to a point where ability support could be more conditioned to the core objectives of the interventions i.e. promoting consumption of rain water and uptake of water filters and ecological latrines.

Figure 1 populates the practices that were deployed in each progression stage, arrived at as an outcome of practices in the previous stage.

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**Figure 1: Practice premises that delivered the progression at NSA**

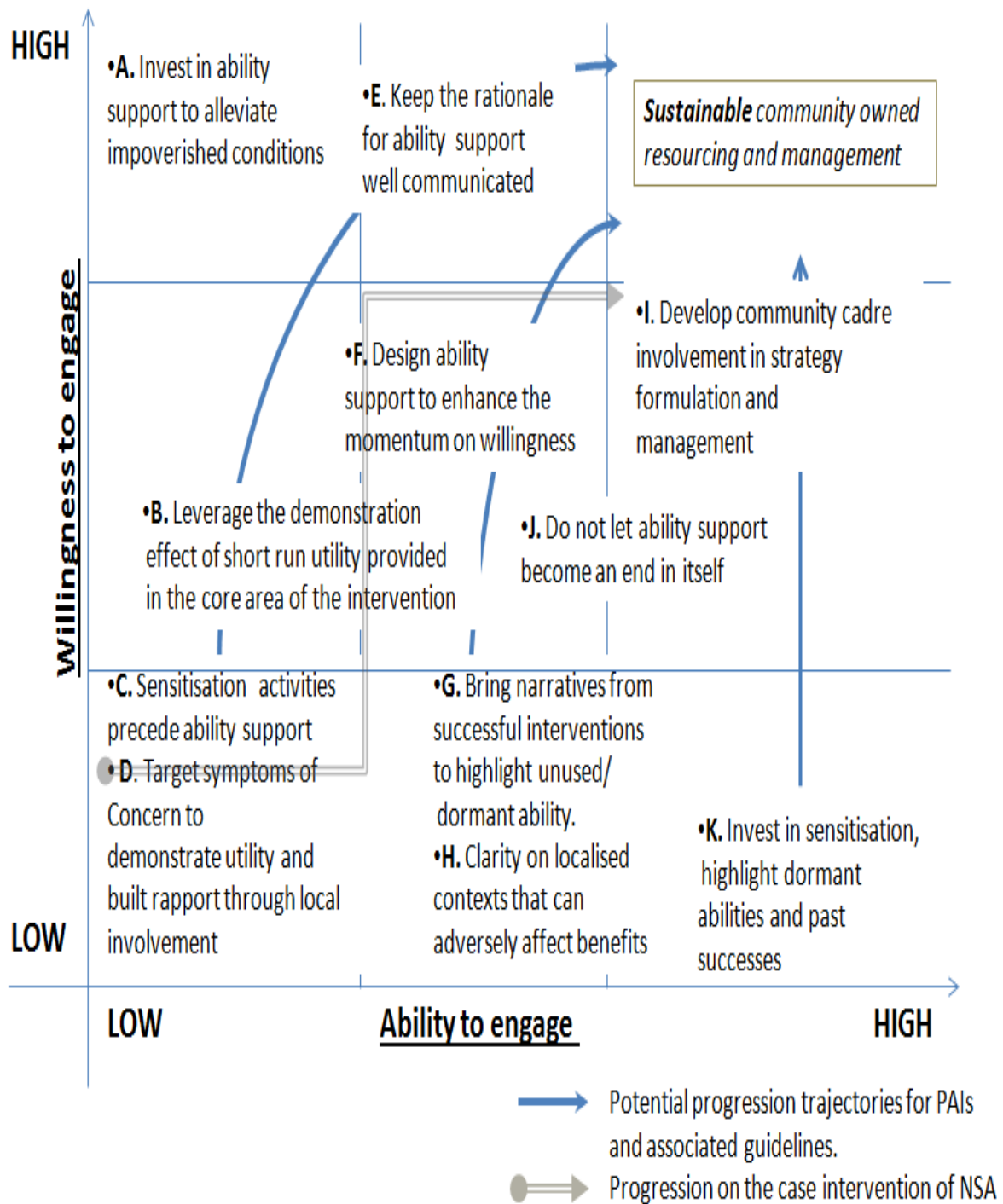


**Figure 2: Enhancing willingness and ability to engage in PAIs**

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Different conditions mark different interventions and call a broader platform to understand how the dynamic interface between willingness and ability can be managed through process innovations. Such conditions and contexts have been illustrated in table 1. As per our intent to use the NSA narrative as one fully amplified narrative of the interface between willingness and ability, we now take forward the NSA experience. Each guiding premise is subject to assessment of baseline conditions at 'initiation' and also during the intervention, as over 'propelling forward', and 'seeking withdrawal' by handover to the community.

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It seems quite important to monitor willingness and ability throughout the life of a PAI. As they tend to change over the life of a PAI the implications are crucial for the design and resourcing activities for superior performance at any given point. We draw from the inductive

longitudinal analysis of NSA to present figure 2 where we propose some guidelines referred to in presenting our propositions as we look at this interface between willingness and ability. To think about monitoring this interface and its consequences lets start by looking at the instance where willingness to engage is high.(Label A: Figure 2). In a literacy intervention provision of study materials will directly support the core objectives and will be received well instead of say, support in the form of say meals to encourage attendance. When willingness to engage is low such incitements will have to link to ability support that is more distant like provision of meals.

- *Pitching ability support in line with the intervention objectives is likely to be more effective when willingness for engaging with the intervention objective is high*

If the community is keen to seek benefits from intervention already in the case of high willingness there can much clarity derived as to how sensitisation efforts are focused and designed. High willingness levels during the course of the PAI need to be noted say, from initial success and demonstration effect can be worked in rather than sensitisation across all aspects- letting the outcome do the talking through publicising them, and reducing emphasis on ground up utility emphasis through other mechanisms like extensive community meetings may yield faster and more robust uptake in nearby regions and community segments that the intervention expands to . High willingness could also be fuelled by no significant instances of poor experience with past interventions, or alternatively, effective ones in the past. This also reduces the need for efforts in design of, and investment in sensitisation- crucial resource savings that a careful assessment of evolving willingness levels can orient.

- *High willingness implies that there is no need to overtly orchestrate sensitisation and ability support - often done as 'standard' in PAIs.*

There could however also be less than desirable or mixed performance of past PAIs. The community can be made receptive due to initial utility provided, like at NSA which passed along this interface (Label B: Figure 2). Demonstrating short term relief benefits, to pitch core elements like artefacts and behaviours for better drinking water and sanitation was useful. This was close aligned with, and at NSA came after Labels D and C (Figure 2) with the targeting of symptoms of concern like infant mortality and; relief during floods sensitisation activities, respectively).

- *To gain initial legitimacy for the intervention, it is often useful to seek and deliver to opportunities for short term community benefits/utility through ability support*

If relief provision and targeting symptoms would have continued, it would have made for point 'J' (Figure 2). The need is to resist this trap in the trajectory and consciously breaking the momentum towards it. Once into it the community expectations of continued relief will become embedded and there will be 'dissatisfaction' if relief is withdrawn then. For instance, in NSA the community could have started to expect work from the intervention as a flood relief agency, as against engaging with its wider mandate of safe drinking water and ecological sanitation. However, at NSA the purposive interface where ability support became an influencing variable to enhance willingness made the trajectory pass through F instead (Figure 2: Design ability support to enhance the momentum on willingness). Such risks of being on J, where the ability support is heavily tuned to becoming an end in itself can be



visualised through other examples, say like that of drinking water provision in arid regions to encourage women to come to literacy classes, or for maternal health care information sessions. In these interventions also, the criticality of such relief could usurp the utility of the core objectives of the intervention.

- *The risk of ability support becoming an end in itself could be reduced by convergence of such support towards the core objectives of an intervention.*

There may be a need to negotiate local contexts say like political and cultural schema that may be holding back understanding benefits from engagement (H) and; there will also be a need to highlight (in sensitisation design) - the abilities that the community has and how they can be translated to effective outcomes through the intervention (K). For instance, interventions to do with maternal and sexual health frequently encounter rigid beliefs and religious barriers. Sensitisation investment and using narratives and stories to cajole willingness becomes crucial here. The emphasis on education and awareness as a principal determinant to enhance willingness of the communities is apparent in such contexts. Paucity in efforts to design and deliver these will make the intervention falter (G).

- *Investing in sensitisation through narratives of utility and/or past impact is fundamental when willingness is low and ability to engage is high .*

Reverting to when willingness is high as for Label A (Figure 2) discussed before, investing in ability support directly aligned to the intervention objectives (viz. literacy materials instead of free meals for a literacy intervention) and making it transparent (E) will make the community ownership aspect come forth. For instance, groups created for micro- enterprise

initiatives and working on the existing occupational base are likely to be receptive for taking up ownership of the intervention (I). This will be irrespective of the route taken to reach high levels of both willingness and ability.

- *Enabling the beneficiary community for local ownership once willingness levels have been improved is crucial for successful and timely withdrawal of external facilitation.*

The above propositions suggest a mutual mediation by willingness and ability on each others' impact on community engagement response. Willingness's impact on community responsiveness is mediated by ability levels. High ability support will not necessarily transpire into increasing the impact of willingness on inducing community engagement response. Of consequence will be how it is pitched contingent on existing link of willingness levels with community engagement response. The argument is thus in favour of mediation (making a relationship functional) instead of moderation (impact a relationship's strength) being at play here.

Interestingly the corollary also holds true. Willingness mediates the ability – responsiveness cause effect relationship in a similar way. The level of willingness will not really be the complete picture when it comes to shaping the impact of ability on engagement response. It is how willingness is configured based on impact ability has on responsiveness that will matter. Absence of willingness will not allow ability to have any impact on community engagement response. The corresponding is also true, no ability would mean that irrespective of willingness levels, community engagement response will not be there.

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Insert Figure 3 About Here

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## CONCLUSIONS

Research in the niche domains of development studies and economics typically provide rich narratives and critiques of policy and practice to relatively evidence free modelling of relationships that are of relevance to PAI design and execution. Mainstream management research has also been attracted to the ‘bottom of pyramid’ arena for some time, working to deliver lessons learned, but as of yet, remains distant from evidence based research that can inform core theorisation to lead development of practice guidelines for management of PAIs (e.g. Alvarez and Barney, 2013; Karnani, 2007; Prahalad and Hart, 2002). We have provided such a basis through our community response mediation theory. The propositions that culminate into the theory clearly shape good practice guidelines to understand and inform the careful orchestration of ability and willingness respectively.

The huge interest in understanding project-based schemas comes close to the configuration of PAIs as well despite PAIs being a rather different breed of projects with stakeholder sets and emergent issues being vastly different typical corporate understanding of projects. This area of work can also seek to draw implications of the willingness and ability based response mediation theorisation to see if there is full of part mediation across stakeholder sets and what implications for practice can be drawn. Also, in discussing some fundamental dilemmas in the domain of PAIs and taking them forward for examining ability and willingness as explanatory mutually mediating variables, this paper hopes to have not only provided theorisation as a guiding framework to platform enhancing beneficiary community

engagement response, but at a more fundamental level, contribute to the debate on aid policy, conditions thereof, and the overall congruence of macro level strategies with design and delivery of PAIs.

The impoverished beneficiary community in the case of PAI failures, which are unfortunately many, cascades downwards into a spiral of iterative relief support that is not sustainable and tends to diminish over time (Vidal, 2013). Poor community response is often attributed as a reason for failed PAIs and often becomes a cloaked reason for non-selection of that region or community for future aid by donor agencies. Donor agencies also pin the blame for poor performance of such interventions on governments, and governments, on the apathy of the donor agencies (Weinstein, 2005; Gabriella, 2010; Genus and Jha, 2012). The overall schema amplifies the need to improve management of PAIs along the fundamental dimensions of willing and ability- as central to the debate on failures and attribution of the same.

PAI design and demands on it through the life cycle of a PAI struggles with the confines and politicisation of the resourcing envelope, made complex by the aspect of managing an evolving beneficiary community engagement response. To deliver sustainable benefits while coping with pressures of stakeholder interests that are often at odds with each other is challenging— nowhere more than in the context of PAIs. The significance of our work we believe lies strongly in coping with this challenge which is ‘shaped’ at the forefront by policy orientation of the aid agencies; ‘influenced’ in the field by interests of local governments and community leaders and; very crucially, eventually ‘affects’ the most, interests of beneficiary communities that are central to such interventions and least capacitated in the mix.

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