

# Solution eXchange

Wider Choices  
Smarter Development



## Solution Exchange A UN Initiative

**Solution Exchange**, a knowledge facilitation service from United Nations Country Teams, offers a free, UN-sponsored space where development professionals with similar interests (“Communities of Practice”) connect to apply their knowledge, experience and enthusiasm towards the common objective of problem solving. Members come from all organizations – government, NGOs, development partners, private sector, research institutes and academia – interacting on an ongoing basis to learn, share and collaborate. Convened by the relevant UN Agency office, Communities are organized around national development priorities and the Millennium Development Goals, contributing to their successful achievement.

Solution Exchange offers a unique approach to building capacities for addressing development challenges. Nationally it taps into local expertise and experiences for solutions. Globally it promotes South-South Cooperation as Communities interact across national boundaries and make solutions available to development professionals everywhere. Solution Exchange also strengthens the Resident Coordinator System by promoting coherence among agencies of a UN Country Team, and by enhancing their visibility as Community conveners.

## Solution Exchange

**improves effectiveness of development professionals**, offering them a wide range of solutions, connecting them to colleagues with common interests, disseminating their ideas and innovations, and enhancing their reputations

**improves influence of Communities of Practice**, providing a forum to articulate and advocate their issues, promoting participation and collaboration on strategic undertakings, and ensuring relevant, appropriate policy decisions

**improves national development efforts**, tapping the power of Communities to help tackle national challenges with solutions informed by deep practitioner experience and wide-ranging perspectives, both within the country and from comparative experiences elsewhere.





Microfinance, India



Climate Change &  
Development, Pacific



Gender, India



Disaster Management  
India

## How it Works

Everyone in a Solution Exchange Community belongs to a mail group facilitated by a 2-person team – a senior domain specialist and a research associate located in a UN Agency, who help members connect, share and collaborate virtually as well as face to face. The Facilitation Team keeps members engaged and interacting with their peers, sharing knowledge, experience and assistance. Familiarity and trust builds between members, collaboration increases, Community identity strengthens, and influence, impact and effectiveness grows.

### Virtual Services

When members have a challenge they post a Query to the Community. Over the next 1-3 weeks the members respond with advice, experience, contacts or other suggestions. When the Query closes the Facilitation Team synthesizes the thread into a “Consolidated Reply” summarizing the responses and resources recommended, and circulates it to the Community.



### Face-to-Face

Community members meet in annual forums and regional events to interact, brainstorm on priority issues, learn from each other and make new connections.

Members also collaborate on strategic assignments, tapping into each others' knowledge, expertise and different perspectives.

## Results to Date

First introduced in India In 2005, Solution Exchange has so far helped over 25,000 development professionals tackle over 1,100 wide-ranging policy, programme and implementation concerns. Currently there are fifteen active Communities in India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and the Pacific Region, as well as a variation running for three Communities in Russia. Solution Exchange has also been active in Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia.

### What the Evaluators say

Solution Exchange has “impacted programme implementation, influenced national policies, improved capacities of individuals and organizations, enhanced knowledge and changed attitudes.” – *India, August 2007*

Solution Exchange has “paved the way for new collaborative ventures and created spaces for discussions that have fed into policy formulation while also providing feedback on implementation (voices from the field)”. – *India, August 2010*

“The members' practical insights are increasingly influencing policy design and helping create more effective programmes” – *Richard McDermott, article in Harvard Business Review, March 2010*

### What the Members say

“Thank you Solution Exchange for such a wonderful initiative. What I see here is the passion we all carry, this is an energy which you need to sensitize and drive towards better developmental causes.” – *Abdul Rahman Ilyas, Hyderabad*

“It is a brilliant work being coordinated in a very efficient manner” – *Survey respondent, Bangladesh*

“Solution Exchange provides a unique medium through which practitioners could be consulted on sector-wide trends. Its membership variety and democratic character makes it a powerful medium of distilling knowledge” – *N Srinivasan, Lead Author, the Microfinance State of the Sector Report (India)*



These examples illustrate some outcomes of Solution Exchange's services:

### From Solution Exchange India

*Consultations on the 12th Five Year Plan.* The Planning Commission engaged Solution Exchange Communities in consultations on the Approach Papers for the coming Five Year Plan. Over 250 members responded. The Communities were also employed to convene face-face meetings, including with marginalized sections of society. Planning Commission members were appreciative of the responses received and insights obtained, and published them on their website. UNDP India also used the contributions to issue a report, "Equity Unaddressed: A Civil Society Response to the Draft Approach Paper."



*National Rural Livelihoods Mission Implementation Framework.* Mr. C. S. Reddy, the Chairman of the Government of India's Working Group on NRLM, engaged the Microfinance Community to solicit feedback for improving the effectiveness of the NRLM. Based on member comments, and on a consultative meeting by the NRLM Working Group organized under Community auspices, a national level roundtable was convened that addressed the NRLM's implementation framework and enhanced its ownership.

### From Solution Exchange Bhutan

*Public Spaces for Democratic Discourse.* Ms. Siok Sian Pek-Oorji, Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD), asked Bhutan's Solution Exchange Community to help prepare a strategy on promoting public spaces for constructive discussions about democracy. A select group of members from government, civil society, the media, academia, the business community and development partners convened to prepare the strategy. A concept paper was presented to the Prime Minister who welcomed the initiative as relevant and timely.



### From Solution Exchange Bangladesh



*Safe Water for the South West.* A large water and sanitation programme in the South West Region of Bangladesh implemented by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), an NGO, was facing problems of salinity intrusion. Mr. Babar Kabir from BRAC asked the Climate and Disaster Risk Reduction Community for insights on supplying safe drinking water and irrigation water to the region. 25 members responded with 17 drinking water and 9 irrigation solutions, and 11 comparative experiences. BRAC adopted some of the readily doable suggestions.



Food and Nutrition  
Security, India



Work and Employment  
India



MDG (Development)  
Community, Bhutan



Climate Change, India

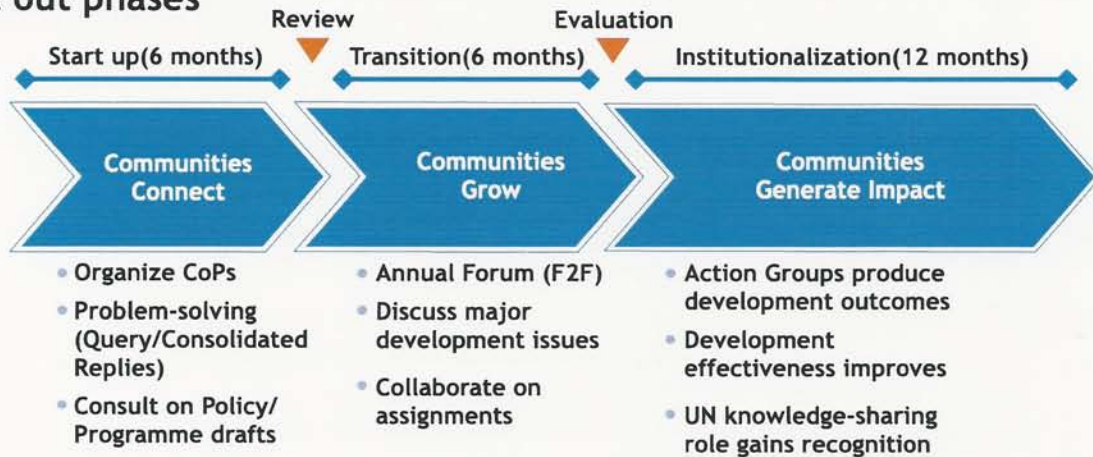


Maternal and  
Child Health, India

## Sustainability Model

Through each of its three phases of growth, a Solution Exchange Community grows larger and stronger, evolving into a full-blown Professional Association able to influence national development outcomes.

### Roll out phases



**Benefits:** Improved member effectiveness >>>>>  
Improved Community influence >>>>>  
Improved national development >>>>>

Solution Exchange's success can be measured by its continued ability to provide front-line workers, donors and government authorities with insights and innovative approaches for effective delivery of services, efficient implementation of development programmes, and responsive policies and plans. Solution Exchange opens up a new way to attain the MDGs – not with more money, but by using what we already know. Needing not much more than a 2-person team, it is a highly cost-effective approach to enhancing development effectiveness.

## Find out More

Solution Exchange Outreach has been created to help UN Country Offices set up Solution Exchange Communities.  
To learn more contact us at [coordinator@solutionexchange-un.net](mailto:coordinator@solutionexchange-un.net)



[www.solutionexchange-un.net](http://www.solutionexchange-un.net)

Photo: Sarah Figge Hussain

