

BINDIS TOOLKIT

3.0

June 2014

How to identify and develop “Bindis”, community Concierge and Caretakers, to share knowledge, empower women within and across communities.



Bindis from Khatmandu

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H

ow to empower women through knowledge sharing, connecting, learning and community building?

Our research on women safety and empowerment in low-income urban areas showed that:

- Feeling safe is often connected to being informed and to be in one's own community
- New comers (in particular migrants from rural areas) are often powerless and "at risk". E.g they are easy target for sex trade or violence.
- Providing jobs to women in low income urban areas is an important step in increasing safety and empowerment through independence.
- Developing a sense of community, shared identity is a first step to empowerment and safety
- Often women have a limited access to jobs due to the transportation issue.
- Safety issues often arise during transportation

Based on this research, we develop the idea of a new role: Bindis.

Bindis are a new role that provides a service to women in the community to help them access to knowledge, learn new skills and feel more empowered, while at the same time empowering the women volunteering as bindis. The creation of this new role tackles the problem of information sharing and community building. It addresses the problem by creating a new role, community concierge, to inform and connect women within the community and with other communities.

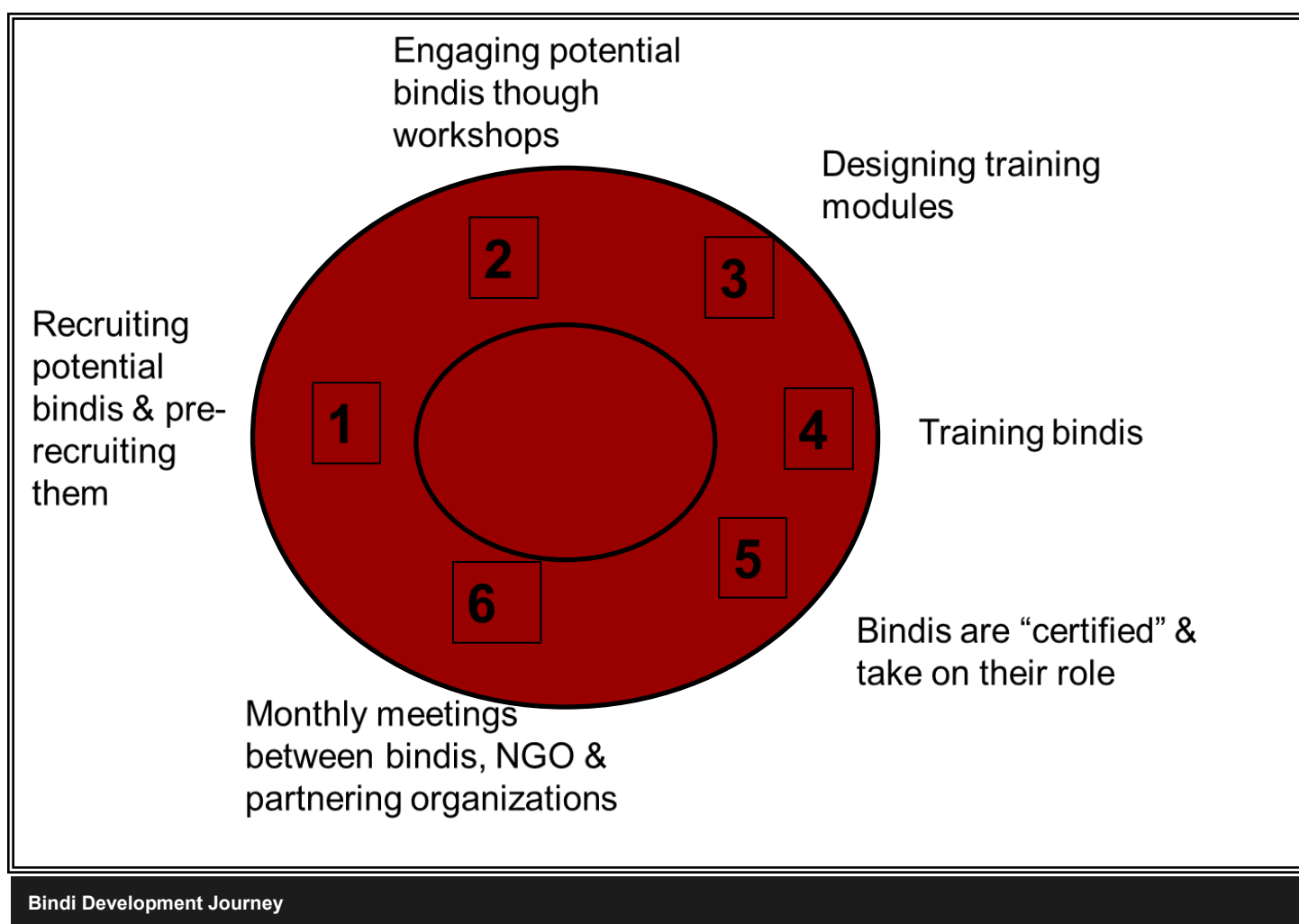
This toolkit provides you with some guidelines on how to develop women in taking on a bindi role that will empower them as help develop their community.

By bindi, we mean "community concierge" and "caretaker". Yet, the term can be adapted to your local context. For example, Women for Human Rights (WHR) in Kathmandu, Nepal has chosen to use the term "sahayogi saathi" which means a "helpful friend" in Nepali. This toolkit is based on our collaboration with WHR and proposes general guidelines in order to find potential bindis, train them and develop them in the community.

The Bindi Development Journey

The figure below presents the different phases involved in developing bindis. These steps are detailed in the following sections of this toolkit.

Takes place at each phase



STEP 1: Identifying existing Bindis

Each community has women who can potentially be bindis because they are well-connected, they have insider knowledge about the community and they are trusted by many. It is important to locate these women as they are the best persons to start with.

First steps to identify the bindis:

- ♦ Interview women in the community asking them who they go for answers and / or help when they have problems.
- ♦ Look for women who have been in the community for at least 2 years.
- ♦ Focus on trust, knowledge and connection while identifying potential bindis.
- ♦ After the first group of bindis has been trained, senior bindis might make recommendations on future bindis. As words of mouth spreads, women might volunteer to become bindis.

As you start the process, you should also start spreading the word about the bindi concept throughout the community during festivals or other community event so that some women might reach out to you expressing interest. It will also raise awareness about this new role.

You also want to start thinking of the space where the bindis will be located: what is the place in the community where people often gather and that is easily accessible? Is there a community center? a market? Will small stands be a better solution? Sahayogi Saathi selected by WHR will also be given a space where they can gather, be trained and also meet with other women.

Sahayogi saathi and WHR case study :

WHR, as they aimed to develop the first group of sahayogi saathis, asked a group of single women they knew in the slum to give them some names of women who they trusted, were well-known in the area and had lived in the area more than 2 years. They noted down some names and asked them if they were interested to be sahayogi saathis and then finally send WHR the names. WHR invited these women to join the first sahayogi saathis training.

Tips

- Make sure that you don't only go for the "popular" women, but for the trusted women.
- Make sure that these women have the potential to develop empathy for other women, less connected in the community, or even new comers.
- Working with local organizations and groups might be useful at this stage.
- Identifying a space where bindis can gather, connect and be found by other members of the community is crucial. It can be a communal space, but it could also be having a small booth in a central area in the neighborhood, or during a market.

Tips

- It is very important to be very open at this stage in order to not impose a model, but co-create the bindi role that works best for the local community. Remember you are working with them, not for them.
- These meetings are great sources of information when it comes to training and developing new programs for the women in the community.
- Different stakeholders need to be involved from the start so that they can (1) adapt their information and their offering (if they offer training), (2) understand the specific needs of the community, and (3) develop relationships with the bindis. It is key that the bindis feel comfortable interacting with the different stakeholders (this is part of the empowerment aspect of the concept)

Step 2: Engage potential bindis

Once you have found a group of women who could potentially take on the bindi roles, you need to engage them to understand their needs, the needs of women in the community and also explain them what being a bindi would mean - in terms of involvement, but also in terms of empowerment and access to resources.

♦ Organize group conversations to understand needs of the community:

◊ What works/ what doesn't? What would they change?

♦ Involve NGO and various stakeholders (e.g. health organizations, microloan organization, governmental agencies).

♦ Make the event informal and friendly. (e.g. provide lunch) so that women feel comfortable.

♦ Explain the concept of Bindis and see how it would work for this group and this community:

◊ Try to find out what would be the best incentive for them?

⇒ Offer options (refer to annex for different models).

⇒ Bindis will also be offered a certificate and a "badge" / uniform that make them recognizable and provide with status within the community

◊ Ask them how much time they are ready / can put in their bindi role

♦ You might also want to meet individually with the potential bindis to understand their motivations, needs and constraints.

Sahayogi saathi and WHR case study:

♦ For example, while WHR focuses on working with single women (widows), during their first meeting with single women to discuss the new role of sahayogi saathi (the Nepalese equivalent of bindis), the women told the WHR team that they thought it would be important to broaden the perspective and involve younger women, married or unmarried in the program for the role of sahayogi saathi to be truly powerful. Based on this suggestion, WHR decided to expand its reach and invited women who were not widows to join the Sahayogi Saathi training.

Step 3: Design the training module

Based on the meetings with the women of the community and the background knowledge of the NGO implementing the concept, the bindi trainig module would be designed. It provides basic skills that would be complementary to other trainings (more specific) that women in the community might receive.

BASIC BINDI TRAINING: THIS IS WHAT EVERY BINDI WILL LEARN TO BE “CERTIFIED” AS A BINDI

This training is organized around 4 main areas:

- ◆ Leadership skills (with a focus on empathy & communication)
- ◆ Home economy skills (e.g. how to start a bank account; how to get a phone; what are your property rights?)
- ◆ Health & sanitation (e.g. sex and health education).
- ◆ Information about major stakeholders that can provide help and resources to them and other women. Opportunities to meet and connect with them.

The composition of the core training will vary depending on the local context. We did not include literacy skills as this would require too much time to include in the core bindi training. In some locations, this might be a specific training module that will allow some women to then join the bindi core training.

Specific training: In some programs like the WHR program, women might receive a specific training that might also be offered to other women in the community. In the case of WHR, their programs focus on handcraft skills. For the Sahayogi Saathis, the women chose to learn how to make traditional wedding shoes (makhmal shoes) as there is demand for such shoes and thus business opportunities. Defining the type of technical knowledge women in the community requires should be done during the engagement workshops (step 2). Other options of technical skills could be training focusing on entrepreneurship.



Tips

- The basic training is at the core of the bindi program as it is what provides the bindis with the skills to empower other women in the community, share information and build connections with other communities. It is also a key motivator for women to volunteer as bindis.
- Empathy for new comers and “outsiders” is crucial. Some well-connected women within their community might not necessarily be very good at the beginning with women that they consider “out of their groups”. However, this is a key component of their bindi role. It is important to teach them to be more open to new comers.
- While we provide you 4 main areas for the basic bindi training, the emphasis will vary depending on the local context.

Tips

- Research shows that providing an artifact (e.g. a certificate, a badge, a uniform) is important to symbolize status. In the case of WHR and the sahayogi saathis, women were asked what they would like and they chose a badge. We then shared with them several sketches for the badge design, and once they chose one, we again asked them for the preference regarding the final badge. Involving women in the process is a first step to engagement and empowerment.
- Having a small ceremony at the end of the first training to officially label the women bindis is also important. It is an official recognition for them but also for the rest of the community.

Steps 4 & 5: Training the bindis / Bindis are certified and take on their role

The length and intensity of training would depend on the type of skills and also the availability of future bindis. It will be about 1-2 weeks of full time training but it can be done over a longer period of time if time is a constraint.

WHR will train the sahayogi saathi in 2 phases. The first phase, the “basic training” (leadership and capability building) will last for 5 days. A month later, the women will receive the specific skill training.

Once the training is achieved, bindis are officially certified as bindis and receive their certificate, badge and / or uniforms. They are now ready to volunteer in helping other women in the community.



Step 6: Continuous Follow-up

Tips

- This evaluation is for bindis to express their concern and get coaching.
- It is also for the NGO and partnering organizations to be informed of the needs of the women in the community (e.g. to develop more specific and relevant programs) and of their perception of the current programs.
- In a central location, such as a communal space (the chhahari space for the Sahayogi Saathis in Kathmandu) two boxes or boards can be installed: one for "needs" and one for "offers" where people could share and drop off notes. Along with other community volunteers and the NGO, the bindis can match the needs and the offers.

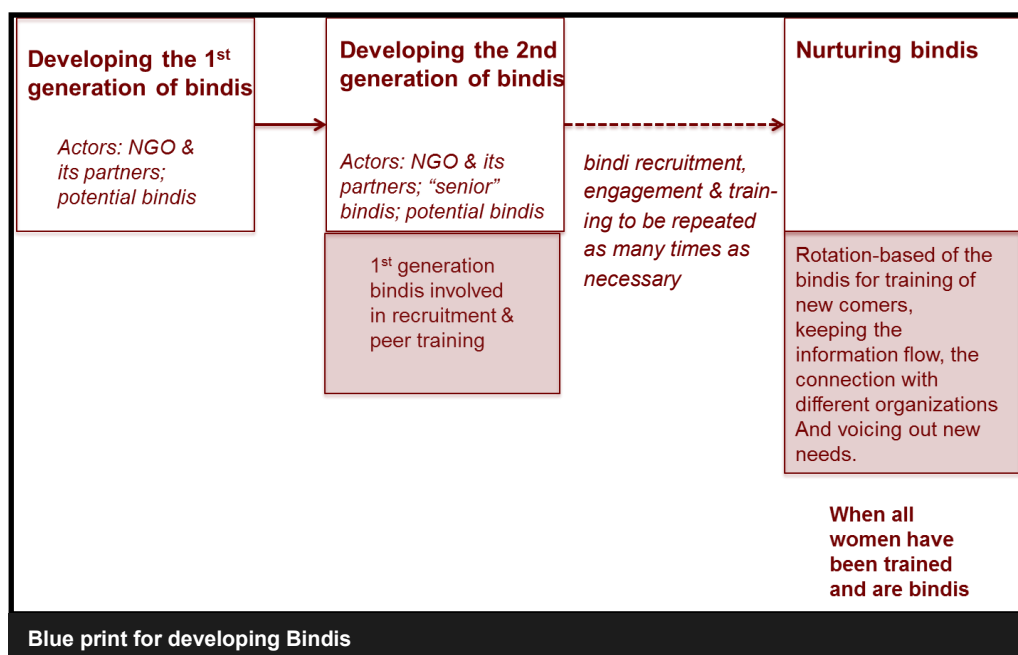
Constant evaluation is crucial in order to improve the program but also develop the bindis. Introducing a feedback loop right from the beginning with various media (e.g. meetings, one-on-one conversations, idea boxes) would help develop a stronger program.

Bindis would regularly be in touch with the NGO (and other stakeholders). They will also meet as a group to discuss their problems and also the needs they see emerging in the community, and will share this information with the NGO and different stakeholders.



A Blue Print for Developing Bindis

Steps 1-6 represent key phases in recruiting and developing the bindis. Once a first group of bindis has been trained and volunteered for a certain amount of time (to be determined by your organization, but we recommend a minimum of 6 months), you want to repeat these steps in order to train and engage another group of women to become bindis. The idea is that training and volunteering more women to be bindis, you slowly empower all the communities to reach a point when you might not need any more bindis as all women have been trained. While originally the NGO should be heavily involved, the idea is that over time bindis would be able to recruit new bindis and train them with minimum support from the NGO. The figure below shows the blue print for implementing and developing *over time* the bindi role in a community.



Tips

- Peer training is key in empowering women but it requires that the first groups of bindis understand their role and feel comfortable teaching others. They need to see it as increased empowerment, rather than losing their bindi status.
- Creating a senior bindi status, where senior bindis are recognized for their expertise and their involvement in the community, and inviting them to be part of a senior bindis committee might help alleviate any fear from senior bindis. It will also provide a useful governance structure and mentoring resources.
- Even though, the senior bindis would become more involved in the recruiting and training process, the NGO and stakeholders would still be involved as key actors and resources. Their involvement is crucial in order to develop an ecosystem of information and connections across different communities. It is also a good way to prevent biases and politics to emerge and negatively impact the bindi program.

Ways of Measuring Success

As for any change program, it is key to monitor the impact of your actions, in this case, the impact of the bindis on their community as well as the impact being a bindi had on women's lives.

- ◆ Number of bindis trained during the first year.
- ◆ Number of women asking to be trained as bindis
- ◆ Informal interviews would be done in the community by the NGO developing the bindis and will keep track of the awareness about bindis and also feedback about their role.

The aim of the interviews is to check that people know about the bindis and to know if they interact with them, in which context and how they perceive them. This will provide us a measure of the engagement of bindis in the community.

- ◆ At each event or training organized by different organizations working with bindis (e.g for the sahayogi saathi and WHR, it would be WHR, their partners and the sahayogi saathi), participants would be asked how they heard about the events: was it through the bindis?

This will allow you to know how successfully bindis disseminate information.

- ◆ Monthly meetings will take place with bindis and different partner organizations for bindis to share feedback about their experience (and receive support and mentoring when necessary) but also for them to share with the organizations the feedback they heard about current programs, trainings or events but also emerging needs and maybe potential new programs.

This will be an opportunity for your organization to see how much information the bindis can collect and disseminate.

- ◆ Bindis themselves will be interviewed at the end of their volunteering period to see if they feel more empowered. Their enthusiasm in getting other women becoming bindis might also be a good indicator. Some might also become interested in helping the organization develop bindis and maybe join them in a training capacity. Such an interest would be another indicator of the success of the program.
- ◆ Bindis after volunteering as bindis (thanks to their experience as bindis - through the skills they learnt or the connections they made) are able to find a job or develop their own business.
- ◆ Eventually, all women should end up being trained as bindis and only giving back a few hours per month. We will have succeeded when there is no more need for bindis!





How to develop a sustainable model for developing bindis in your community?

In order to develop a sustainable bindi program, you need to understand what are the motivations for women to become bindis and how being a bindi can truly empower women who choose to become bindis. We considered the possibilities of providing them an allowance but in most contexts, the lack of resources makes it difficult to envision such a model. The models below (which are complementary and not exclusive) provide you with a way to develop based on an assessment of your context

- ♦ **Volunteering (part-time or full-time if women are not working):** Because volunteering relies on intrinsic motivation, it implies that being a bindi has to be seen (and truly be) a source of empowerment for the women who volunteer. Women who volunteer as bindis would have access to training (the core bindi training and other training programs), gain social status (they are recognized as bindis; signs of status – certificate, badge, uniform, or a booth - matter), and increase their social capital (e.g. by connecting with various stakeholders).
- ♦ **Being a member of a cooperative:** Cooperatives (e.g. Amul Milk co-op in India, Ashrams, Shelter Associates in Pune (India) and handicraft villages) provide an interesting model for developing sustainable bindis. Women, who join the cooperative, where they share resources and profits, are invited to train as bindis and to volunteer during the first year.
- ♦ **Facilitated access to micro-credit:** As women try to start small businesses, they try to apply for micro-credit loans. The NGO developing the bindi program can partner with a micro-loan organization that would recognize the role of bindis as providing some accountability. Hence, by being Bindi your credit score goes up.

In the context of the sahayogis saathis, WHR works with Aadhar, a micro-credit organization which focuses on single women and does not provide individual loans. Usually, the criteria to get a loan from Aadhar is that the women have to be in a group, be single and show some kind of start up business commitment. However, for this project they agreed to offer loans to the sahayogi saathi group (composed of single women and non-single women) as well.

- ♦ **Allowance model:** We have not been able to investigate this model but based on our knowledge on similar models for children's education (e.g. CRY - Children's Rights and You – in India or Sustain a child, a UNICEF program where individuals can sponsor a child's education), we think one could create a similar campaign "Adopt a bindi" where individuals would donate to support a woman to be a bindi (part-time) for 6 up to 12 months.

We hope you will find this toolkit useful in helping you in your journey of recruiting and developing bindis, who can empower other women in their communities while empowering themselves at the same time.

However, keep in mind that while it provides you guidelines and a framework, each step will require you to consider your local context. Moreover, remember that our underlying assumption is that involving women right from the beginning is key to empowering them and to developing successful initiatives.

The design of this toolkit is an iterative process, based on the input of WHR in Kathmandu and other organizations who will use it in the future. . We will keep updating this toolkit adding more stories and specific examples to the ones provided by our collaboration with WHR and the sahayogi saathis. Please share your questions and experiences at designtinkering@gmail.com with us to allow us to develop this toolkit further.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

All photos are photos from WHR programs.

This toolkit was designed with the insights and feedback of the WHR team and the first group of sahayogi saathis in Kathmandu. Thank you for their support and enthusiasm.

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