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Forest Rights Act 2006: Providing Land to the Landless in Orissa

AMULYA KHANDAI, NITYANANDA DHAL AND TARAPRASAD TRIPATHY

Reaching out to the tribals in the remote areas of Orissa, Pradan is participating in the process of implementation of FRA 2006, which seeks to legitimize the use of forest land for habitation, cultivation and livelihood purposes by tribals, who have been present in the area for generations.

INTRODUCTION

Across the world, people who reside in the fringe areas of forests are mostly poor, illiterate and backward although they stay amidst rich natural resources. This contrast can only be explained by the fact that forest dwelling communities do not have access to the rich natural resources around them, and thus are not able to benefit from them. Upon losing ownership over these forest resources to the forest department, the traditional systems that were evolved for the judicious use and conservation of forests disintegrated. This is primarily because without the participation of local communities, the department is unable to manage forest resources properly whereas the forest dwellers continue to depend on such resources. However, with the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 coming into force, the Government of India has provided these most deserving communities with usufruct forest rights and the opportunity to protect forest resources. The Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 recognizes forest dwellers as both the real users and the custodians of forests.

FRA 2006 is of significance to the work Pradan is carrying out in the five districts—Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Rayagada, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj—of Orissa. Communities in these districts depend on natural resource-based livelihoods and, therefore, most of Pradan's interventions are aimed at increasing the carrying capacity of land, be it revenue or forest. In the course of Pradan's work on livelihoods, we became aware of the many difficulties the forest dwellers were facing in availing of rights under the aforesaid Act. At the request of the community members, and realizing the importance of the Act, we engaged actively with departments/institutions at the village and district levels.

This article captures some of our chief experiences and learning from Kandhamal district in central Orissa. Kandhamal district was formed in 1994 by the division of

erstwhile Phulbani district. The district comprises 2 subdivisions, 12 blocks, 153 panchayats and 2,546 villages. It is regarded as one of the least developed districts in Orissa. Of the total population, 52% are scheduled tribes (STs) and 17% scheduled castes (SCs). The Kandha tribe, after whom the district is named, constitutes 91% of the total tribal population in the district. More than 78% of the families here live below poverty line (BPL). Due to a high percentage of the geographical area being under forests (72%), the average land holding per family is below 2 acres, and that too of very poor quality. As per government records, 31% families are landless. They cultivate encroached revenue and forest lands. In such a context, the FRA gains special significance.

KEY FEATURES OF THE FRA

- A person will be eligible to avail of the rights of this Act if he/she belongs to an ST and has been occupying the forest land before 13 December, 2005. For other forest dwellers, they should have been staying or occupying the concerned forest plot for at least three generations (that is, 75 years) before 13 December 2005.
- The Act provides the right to hold and live on forest land under individual or common occupation for habitation, self-cultivation and/or livelihood purposes by person(s) belonging to forest dwelling STs or other traditional forest dwellers.
- Forest dwelling communities can exercise their right of ownership, access to collect, use and dispose minor forest produce, which has been traditionally collected within and outside the village boundaries. Community rights also include the use of forest land for common purposes such as for the village school, village tank, road and electricity connection, community hall and grazing.
- The right to use and maintain forest land cannot be transferred to any other person but only to his/her offspring.

STEPS TO IMPLEMENT THE ACT

1. A Forest Rights Committee (FRC) is formed through gram sabha meetings in each village, comprising 10 to 15 members, with at least one-third representation of STs and women.
2. Eligible individuals must apply to exercise their right (both for individual and community claims) to the FRC in prescribed formats within three months of the formation of the committee.
3. Each application needs to be accompanied by proof such as caste certificate, voter identity card and a minimum of two proofs showing the use of this land by him/her and a rough sketch of the plot.
4. The FRC forwards all the applications to the sub-divisional level committee (SLC) after an initial verification of the claims and having them vetted by the gram sabha.
5. The SLC examines the resolution made by the gram sabha by conducting ground verification through people deployed from the revenue department and forest department. Following this verification, it prepares the records of forest rights and forwards them to the District Level Committee (DLC).
6. Any individual, aggrieved by the decision of the gram sabha, may

make a petition to the SLC within 60 days of the decision. Similarly, a person may lodge a petition with the District level Committee (DLC), within 60 days of submission of record by the SLC to the DLC. After

this stipulated period, the DLC takes a decision that is final and binding.

The role and responsibility of each of the actors in the steps mentioned are provided here.

No.	Institution/Committee	Role and Responsibility
1.	Forest Rights Committee (FRC)	<p>Receives and acknowledges the receipt of claims in specified forms along with the supporting evidence for each claim.</p> <p>Prepares a list of claimants by physically verifying claims on forest rights.</p> <p>Prepares the records of claims, prepares maps and delineates areas under claims by indicating recognized landmarks.</p> <p>Prepares claims on behalf of the gram sabha for community forest rights.</p> <p>Presents its findings on the nature and extent of the claim before the gram sabha for its consideration.</p> <p>Resolves conflicts with other FRCs by calling for joint meetings. If such conflicts are not resolved, claims are referred by the FRC to the SLC.</p>
2.	Gram Sabha	<p>Plays a role in the formation of the FRC, and oversees the functions performed by the FRC.</p> <p>Verifies the claims, records and maps prepared by the FRC, and vets the same before passing the same to the SLC.</p>
3.	Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SLC)	<p>Being constituted at the sub-divisional level, this body examines the resolution passed by the gram sabha and prepares the record of forest rights and forwards it to DLC for final decision.</p>
4.	District Level Committee (DLC)	<p>The committee is headed by the District Collector, who finally approves of the record of forest rights prepared by the SLC. The decision of the DLC on the record of the forest rights shall be final and binding.</p> <p>It receives and reviews grievances from individuals, who are not satisfied with the decision of the SLC.</p>
5.	State Level Monitoring Committee (SLMC)	<p>Constituted at the state level, it comprises officers from the revenue, forest and tribal affairs departments of the state government, who monitor the process of recognition and vesting of forest rights.</p>

THE PROCESS ADOPTED IN BALLIGUDA AND KANDHAMAL DISTRICTS

In mid 2008, the district-level administration called for a meeting, which was attended by Block Development Officers (BDOs), District Forest Officers (DFOs), officers from the revenue department and NGOs having an active presence in the area. Pradan also attended this meeting. The District Collector stressed the need for implementing the FRA on a priority basis here. Keeping in mind Pradan's success in implementing the Orissa Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP), Pradan was invited to participate in the implementation of FRA in Balliguda block, comprising 14 panchayats.

The block administration was given the responsibility of organizing the preliminary meetings in each panchayat and ensuring that gram sabhas are conducted. The forest and revenue departments were asked to demarcate and measure all such lands that come under claims. Pradan, on its part, was expected to facilitate village meetings, and provide support in constituting the FRC. Pradan was also required to assist the revenue department, especially the tehsildar, in its efforts to delineate and measure lands under claim, and assist the claimants in filling and submitting the prescribed forms to the FRC.

Soon after this meeting, Pradan fixed the date for the first FRC-related meeting, in consultation with the gram panchayat. The date for the meeting was fixed at the panchayat-level meeting, attended by all the ward members. With the assistance of the

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ward members, Pradan then made sure that the community members, particularly those living in remote habitations, were informed of the date well in advance. Pradan also relied upon its cluster of SHGs to spread awareness about FRA and the importance of attending the upcoming meeting. The meeting resulted in the successful formation of a FRC.

Shortly after the formation of the FRC, a team was formed to undertake the verification of forest plots. The team was headed by the tehsildar and comprised one representative each from the revenue and forest departments, and Pradan. The team was supported by a few volunteers and *amins* hired on a contractual basis by the revenue department. In order to ensure that there was no confusion and that the survey is carried out in a well-planned, phase-wise manner, Pradan called for preliminary meetings. Such meetings shed clarity on the areas that the team would survey, and also ensured the presence of the claimants at their plots during the survey. In addition, care was taken to ensure the presence of the village heads, ward members and FRC members during ground verification. Besides playing a vital role in the verification of forest plots, Pradan assisted individual claimants in undertaking the necessary paper work and arranged for the required support documents such as the voter identity card and the caste certificate.

To hasten the process of filling forms, village-level service providers were selected and they were given information about the Act. They

were trained in all respects, especially with regard to the maintenance of registers and records at the FRC level. A small amount was fixed for the services of such individuals. It was decided that the service providers would get Rs 12 per application—Rs 7 when the form is filled and submitted before the SLC and Rs 5 when the household receives the *patta* (record of land ownership).

Once the plots were surveyed and applications put in place, the date for the next gram sabha meeting was fixed, in order to prepare resolutions and forward the applications to the SLC. The district administration deputed two more officers, of the rank of tehsildar, at the sub-division level to expedite the process. Pradan did another round of information sharing to ensure that community members participate in the second meeting as well. As a result of all such

Of the 14 panchayats in Balliguda block, Pradan has succeeded in reaching out to 10 panchayats, in partnership with the block-level authorities. The total number of households at the block level comprises about 12,400 families.

efforts and the constant follow-up, the SLC prepared its reports and forwarded them to the DLC within 60 days, as required by the Act.

RECOGNITION OF CLAIMS

Of the 14 panchayats in Balliguda block, Pradan has succeeded in reaching out to 10 panchayats, in partnership with the block-level authorities. The total number of households at

the block level comprises about 12,400 families. The collective effort undertaken by Pradan has helped to reach out to 8,959 families falling in these panchayats. So far, 3,000 claims have been processed by the FRC and passed on to the DLC for final sanction. These 3,000 claims amount to nearly 1,015 acres of land. Considering the meagre landholding of the tribals in this area, ownership of such lands would greatly ensure tenure for a large number of households. Most of lands will also become eligible for other government programmes such as

TABLE 1: ACHIEVEMENTS UNDER FRA 2006

No.	GP	Total Families	SC	OC	ST	Families Claimed	Claims Passed by FRC, Submitted to SLC/ DLC	% of Families	Area (in ha)
1	Bataguda	883	222	167	494	461	461	93.3	206.6
2	Rebingia	698	100	165	433	429	417	99.1	181
3	Mediakia	541	135	132	274	250	250	91.2	126.5
4	Rutungia	749	162	90	497	401	401	80.7	149.2
5	Landagaon	553	111	289	153	58	58	37.9	23.7
6	Sudra	916	112	195	609	382	382	62.7	101.2
7	Balliguda	2,455	640	1,525	290	250	0	86.2	
8	Khamankhol	680	112	295	273	241	241	88.3	
9	Salaguda	852	141	234	477	420	420	88.1	107.6
10	Budrukia	632	85	131	416	370	370	88.9	119.5
	Total	8,959	1,820	3,223	3,916	3,262	3,000	83.3	1,015.3

NREGA. All such incentives are likely to decrease the pressure on forest resources, and provide greater impetus for conservation.

Pradan is now aspiring to reach out to the remaining 4 panchayats within Kandhamal. These panchayats comprise 3,500 households, of which more than 50% are STs. Simultaneously, a plan is being prepared to develop the newly claimed lands under NREGA.

Another achievement has been the survey of reserve forest lands under the provisions of the FRA. Previously, only revenue forests were being surveyed and measured for the purpose of claims. Pradan was able to raise this issue directly with the District Collector, and have tracts of lands that fall within the reserve forest areas surveyed by special teams constituted under the Act.

CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

However, all was not smooth. Like most of the programmes or Acts, which are being implemented by the government, the FRA 2006 faces a number of hurdles. Following are some of our observations and learning:

1. In most remote villages, barring a few, people do not have any knowledge about this Act. This makes it all the more important to ensure proper awareness. In this regard, timelines should be prepared, depending on the awareness level of the community, available human resources, seasonal engagement of people and ease/difficulty in carrying out physical verification. On an average, a full year should be given to complete this

On an average, a full year should be given to complete this application generation exercise with field verification. The short duration allocated as of now does not help achieve the true and full purpose of the Act.

application generation exercise with field verification. The short duration allocated as of now does not help achieve the true and full purpose of the Act.

2. Forest dwellers have been fined heavily in the past for encroaching government lands, especially the revenue wastelands. There is some apprehension, therefore, in

availing of rights under the FRA 2006. Forest dwelling communities most often suspect that an admission of their encroachments (as far as FRA 2006 is concerned) might end up inviting the government to forge encroachment cases against them, as has happened in the past. Such myths should be dispensed.

3. At a very basic level, people do not even know the category of lands they have occupied. To make things even more confusing, there are several instances in which a part of the total encroachment has been regularized in the past and a part has not. In such cases, farmers do not know for which of their plots they should make a claim. The absence of *pattas* or land documents adds to the problem. Revenue records should be made freely available to the farmers in order to assist them in making claims. Needless to say, land is always a sensitive issue. True claims are often compromised by the false claims made by the more influential lot. The administration must recognize such instances of land grabbing by well-off farmers.
4. Other backward castes and SCs cannot avail of the benefits of the Act because

- they are required to provide proof of occupation (over land) for a minimum of three generations. This has resulted in friction in certain villages where other backward castes and SCs feel that they are not receiving their due even when they have been dwelling in the forest fringe areas for just as long as the STs.
5. Likewise, at the village level, gram sabhas are meant to play a crucial role. But everyone knows that gram sabhas hardly take place, except where there is the active presence of an NGO, such as Pradan. It is well understood in the development sector that, in the absence of proper investment in group building, no collective operates in a participatory manner. In such cases, the poor suffer the most. This makes it all the more important for the administration to rely upon the community organizing skills of NGOs, in order to ensure the proper implementation of the Act. Without proper gram sabhas and community mobilization, FRCs will continue to exist on paper. In addition, the poorest of the poor or those living in remote habitations are likely to remain left out.
 6. Surprisingly, not much budgetary allocation has been made for handholding as mentioned above. The implementation process involves a lot of paper work and it goes through various actors at distant places before the final processing at the district level. Poor and illiterate people usually lack confidence in dealing with the above situations and depend on outsiders. The involvement of local NGOs should be encouraged, and sufficient financial allocations should be made to ensure their continuous engagement.
 7. Providing a proof-of-caste certificate is a mandatory requirement. This has to be attached to the application form. Getting the caste certificate within a short span of time from the tehsil office not only involves frequent trips to and fro, but also involves significant costs, in terms of the legal fee and under-the-table transactions. However, a decision taken by the SLMC grants that a gram sabha attended by at least two-third of its total members can pass a resolution confirming the caste status of individuals. Such resolutions can be produced in lieu of caste certificates. The process can be further simplified, as done by Pradan in Kandhamal and Balliguda, by providing the entire set of claim-related papers in a single set to community members.
 8. Ensuring access to leaves for leaf plate making through the provisions of the FRA is one of Pradan's biggest achievements. However, the claim cases for community rights are very low and claims for community rights over minor forest produce are mostly absent. This makes for a serious issue, amounting to a non-recognition of community based measures for ensuring forest conservation. This also undermines or overlooks the dependence of forest dwelling communities on minor forest produce, which, as several studies reveal, contribute significantly to the food and livelihood basket of forest dwelling communities.

CONCLUSION

The Forest Rights Act has tremendous power to conserve and regenerate forest resources. This will not only stop the current alarming situation of environmental degradation but also help in providing promising livelihood

opportunities to poor forest dwellers. However, the present way of implementing the Act may lead to many irregularities. It might even fail to benefit the most deserving households. Extensive awareness-building in each and every hamlet, allocating sufficient time to forest dwellers to understand and engage,

proper handholding support by a pool of volunteers and NGO involvement are the most critical requirements to effectively implement this Act. Proper budgetary allocations to enable handholding on the part of NGOs will also help in fulfilling the very objective of the Act.

System of Rice Intensification in Rainfed Areas

WORKSHOP REPORT

Bringing together the different stakeholders—facilitating agencies, practitioners, scientists and senior government officials—on a common platform, the workshop discussed several aspects, including the achievements, concerns and ways ahead, of SRI in India.

The National Resource Centre for Rural Livelihoods (NRCRL), hosted in PRADAN, in collaboration with the Aga Khan Foundation and Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, held a one-day experience sharing workshop on 23 December 2009 at the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi. The workshop succeeded in bringing together different stakeholders involved in promoting SRI. Presentations were made by facilitating agencies, practitioners, scientists and senior government officials. Discussions were held to evaluate the role and importance of SRI in ensuring food security in rainfed areas, as well as to identify the scope for affirmative action within the prevailing policy framework.

Over the last 50 years, 23 million hectares have been added to our Net Sown Area (NSA). Most of such landholdings fall in the ridge portions of rainfed areas and have been brought under rice cultivation. The fact that such holdings are located in the poorer parts of India makes SRI all the more relevant—precisely for the cost and yield advantages it offers on the one hand and its resilience to the water scarce conditions that characterize rainfed areas on the other. To validate the importance of SRI in this respect, a number of NGOs presented their experiences. PRADAN said that, despite delayed monsoons, households have reported enhanced yields of 4 to 7 tonnes per hectare in kharif. Likewise, the Peoples' Science Institute (PSI), Dehradun, informed the participants of the increased grain yields under SRI to the extent of 67% (2006), 89% (2007) and 53% (2008) when compared to yields obtained through conventional methods.

Where cost reduction is concerned, a study carried out by the Gujarat Institute of Development Research (GIDR) revealed that SRI farmers, being supported by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme-India (AKRSP-I), have roughly saved Rs 10,873 per hectare more than the farmers adhering to conventional methods. In terms of resilience, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

show that SRI has been able to withstand extended periods without irrigation. Similarly, the SRI Secretariat, Bhubaneswar, recounted that whereas 38% of the entire cropped area under SRI suffered pest attacks, the percentage stood at 45% for lands under conventional methods.

The participating NGOs shared about effective strategies and the constraints faced. Watershed Support Services And Activities Network (WASSAN), Hyderabad, spoke of how it has successfully promoted SRI in the command area of village tanks by accounting for traditional modes of tank management and training irrigation overseers (*neerugattis*) in SRI methods. The Madhya Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Programme (MRPLP) conveyed the many ways in which it has collaborated with both government and non-government agencies to upscale SRI in the tribal-dominated parts of Madhya Pradesh. M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSSRF), Chennai, outlined how the drum seeding method can be integrated with SRI practices. In discussing the challenges faced, NGO representatives and participants voiced the need for more intensified awareness-building and training that would reach out to farmers as much as the input suppliers and department heads at the district level. SRI specifically targets rainfed regions and demands an alternative system of wetting/drying. The participants, therefore, agreed that it was crucial to dovetail in-situ soil and moisture conservation (SMC) measures such as field bunds and farm ponds along with SRI. Similarly, the need to

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contextualize SRI for boro paddy was emphasized.

The workshop also revealed a number of areas requiring further research and study. Dr. B.C. Barah from the National Centre for Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (NCAP) spoke of the complexities that circumvent the issue of food security at both the household and national levels. He said that since the nature of the problem is very different at both the levels, greater understanding is required to forge a course of action. To ensure success in the long run, the importance of assessing the reasons for disadoption of SRI practices was also emphasized. An equally important need was expressed to assess methane emissions under SRI, in order to make a case for SRI as a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The necessity for scientific research to ascertain the suitability of different seed varieties, both traditional and hybrid, to different agro-climatic zones was voiced. Likewise, the nutrient requirements and absorptive capacity of crops under SRI remains to be accurately ascertained in order to make for a system of good practices that will ensure timely replenishment of soil. The participants suggested that a collection of good practices in due course could be pooled to make for a comprehensive Package of Practices.

In relation to the prevailing policy framework, the modalities of National Food Security Mission (NFSM) and its working arm at the district level, namely the Agriculture Training and Management Agencies (ATMAs), were clarified. Shri. Mukesh Khullar, Mission Director, NFSM, said that the Mission

proposes to increase rice production by 10 million tonnes to meet the shortfall of food grains. The Mission is targeting 5 lakh hectares for the promotion of SRI alone. The areas identified for SRI fall predominantly in high potential districts that comprise large tracts of rainfed areas. Considering that SRI is specifically suited for such resource-poor regions, NFSM provides NGOs working towards food security a novel opportunity to intervene in such areas.

Shri. Khullar stressed the need for NGOs to partner with ATMAS for the successful expansion of SRI. He reiterated that in working with ATMAS, the Strategic Research and Extension Plans (SREPs) prepared by the ATMAS need to be pursued in all seriousness to locate the scope and strategy for SRI implementation at the district level. In addition, it was made clear that NFSM—in the hierarchy of institutions—may only be approached as a supervisory body for dealing with impediments or easing implementation in the long run. Speaking of the achievements under NFSM, Dr. M.C. Diwakar of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) made a comprehensive presentation, which provided great clarity on the macro-economic situation. He said that the enormity of India's food-grain needs is such that it cannot be fulfilled with imports alone. Senior representatives of NFSM and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), particularly Dr. Saini, highlighted the government's interest in investing in SRI for the purpose of achieving self sufficiency. They expressed that there is no dearth of funds but rather the need to strengthen collaborative ties between the government and NGOs to achieve this end.

The necessity for scientific research to ascertain the suitability of different seed varieties, both traditional and hybrid, to different agro-climatic zones was voiced.

As part of the ongoing dialogue with senior government officials, the plenary expressed that the approach adopted by NFSM with regard to SRI is too focused on scattered demonstrations whereas the effort should be on bringing contiguous plots under SRI.

Where the NFSM works through agriculture extension workers in a top-down manner, it should ideally be farmer-led and bottom-up in its approach. Similarly, the focus should be on confidence and skill building rather than remaining confined to making physical inputs available to farmers. To achieve these, the focus should be more on compact area development. Up-scaling SRI through compact area development would require facilitating agencies to understand landscape realities. They would also be required to engage with prevailing institutions and departments. The plenary affirmed that such an approach is sure to bring contiguous tracts under SRI and generate the required synergy for replication.

The issue of subsidy found considerable mention as part of the deliberations on policy framework. The suitability of leveraging Employment Generation Programmes for supporting farm labour (engaged in SRI) was considered. The need for subsidy was also questioned, especially since SRI has already proven itself to be lucrative in practice. The participants also asked how the subsidy (if proposed) should be structured. The requirements at the individual level are not much; therefore, subsidy should be directed at creating infrastructure of common benefit for the community as a

whole, such as tools, implements, weeders, etc. The aspect of developing lands and water resources could also be achieved in this way. In addition, subsidy should be structured to ensure year-round availability and access to updated information on SRI technology. This more than subsidizing individual needs and requirements will enable the adoption of SRI at a mass level. Professor Phansalkar from the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT) cited the example of the telecom industry, and how a shift of subsidy from individual lines to the installation of telephone towers (a common property) triggered an exponential increase in connections. It was jointly agreed that the issue of subsidy requires policy research and more careful forethought because it will have far-reaching consequences.

Shri. V.V. Sadamate, Member, Planning Commission, shared towards the end of the workshop that the provisions of the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna (RKVY) were equally

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enabling where SRI promotion is concerned. Shri. Sadamate pointed out that interested organizations should pursue the Comprehensive District Agriculture Plans (C-DAPs) and refer more specifically to the sections pertaining to SRI therein. He clarified that SRI-related sections in the C-DAPs would provide the basis for NGOs to formulate proposals

for SRI expansion, in cooperation with district-level bodies. He guaranteed that proposals with merit would be processed speedily because the government is open to partnering with NGOs.

The workshop concluded with an effective recap of the day's discussion and the prospect of evolving a two-fold strategy, which could address issues at the national and household levels. The participants were thanked and it was hoped that the clarity that emerged from the day-long workshop would result in working partnerships with the government, and the formation of nodal agencies at different levels—village, district, state and national.

Once a Pradanite, Always a Pradanite

PRATYAY JAGANNATH

Looking back at the beginning of his journey with Pradan, the trials and tribulations, the highs and lows, an ex-Pradanite recalls the enriching aspects of his learning that he cherishes to this day.

While studying rural management in Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar (XIMB), I was somewhat keen to pursue a career in health. I had done my summer and winter training in CARE and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Both these organizations promised many comforts to its employees. CARE and UNFPA deal with child and reproductive health. As an intern, I had to carry out a mid-term evaluation of their projects, namely the Integrated Nutrition and Health Project-II of CARE and the Integrated Population Development Project of UNFPA. The work setting provided for high pay, accommodation in good hotels, conveyance by taxi and AC travel in trains. These facilities were far better than those being offered by other corporate companies, where many of my batch-mates were undergoing their training. This deluxe lifestyle, which came with the job, became one of my primary incentives for wanting to join a plush NGO working in the area of health. The dream faded when no such NGO came to the campus for interviews. While I was pondering about my options, one of my professors, Shri. S.S. Singh, advised me to think seriously about organizations such as Pradan and the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART). It was a difficult decision because my seniors kept telling me about the tough rural life that would be mine should I join such an organization.

I recall that when I was a child, one of my cousins used to work with Pradan. My father had once commented that it would be better for him to work in the government as a grade three employee instead of wasting his life in Pradan. Work in an NGO was considered lowly. The image of a social worker working in NGOs in the remote areas of Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj was of a jhola-carrying variety. NGOs were mostly thought of as organizations started by unemployed men, who would have an armada of vehicles, but were none the richer. Activist NGOs, on the other hand, were categorized as those that were primarily interested in finding faults with the system.

The first organization to step into the campus for recruitment was Pradan. The day before the placement I spoke to one of my close friends, to settle upon a strategy for placements because one had to step out of the list of placement aspirants once

a job was secured. That is, once recruited, the candidates were not allowed to appear for another placement. He advised me that I should think about Pradan seriously because this would be a great stepping-stone to funding agencies in the long run. That was it ... I did some research on Pradan, and decided to appear for the interview.

The night before the placements, I was very anxious. The interview went smoothly and I was selected. I requested my interviewer not to place me in Orissa or Jharkhand, both very near to my home. I did not want to stay close to home for many reasons, one being that I wanted to become self-reliant. I wanted to be posted in Dausa, Rajasthan, and this was confirmed by the HR department in Pradan. Soon after, I packed my belongings and left for Dausa, a good 2,100 km from my home!

I left by Hirakud Express from Bhubaneswar in a sleeper coach and alighted at the Agra cantonment station. From there I took an AC bus to Dausa. When I reached Dausa, on 28 May 2004, there was little doubt that it was the hottest day I had ever experienced in my life. I reached the office and expected that Pradan would give me hotel accommodation. I was asked about my preference—would I stay in the office itself or in a hotel? I chose the hotel remembering my training with CARE and UNFPA. That night, it started raining and the electricity went off. It made me happy in some ways to know that it rains in a desert. I always had the impression that Rajasthan never received a drop of rain.

The first day in Dausa was a reality check. A senior member from the team asked me as to what I wished to accomplish in Pradan. My

NGOs were mostly thought of as organizations started by unemployed men, who would have an armada of vehicles, but were none the richer.

answers were vague. I told him that I wanted to work for bettering the health of village folk. The senior reminded me that Pradan is not like college, which taught us everything. I am responsible for what I do, and I should be clear about what I want to achieve. I

thought this was a bit rude.

Three days after joining, I was sent to a village where I could not understand the dialect; nobody offered me food. Since the SHG there was newly formed, I was looked upon with grave suspicion. My staple diet comprised chillies and two-inch thick rotis that ended up giving me a bad stomach. Every morning, I would set out looking for a river or pond (so common in my native villages of Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj) but would come across none. I would find myself at the same marshy pond, where I would do my job and be relieved for the day. On Sundays, I would get away to Dausa.

Fortunately, after a while, the team took a decision to send me to a new village. The villagers were very welcoming and I enjoyed my stay there for about a fortnight. The first day I stayed with a very poor family, which prepared my food with a lot of interest. But I developed a bad stomach and suffered chronic diarrhoea over the next few days. There was no medicine available in the village and I had to sneak away in a milk van to Dausa in order to have myself examined by a proper doctor.

Later, when I approached a senior of the team to discuss my problems, he was somewhat unconcerned. He asked me what had prompted me to leave the village and come this far to Dausa in search of treatment for a

minor ailment. He told me that there could have been better ways of handling the situation. I felt angry. My senior noticed this and added that there was no reason for me to feel bad. He hinted that I should instead think of the plight of the villagers, who face such situations on a daily basis.

Over the next few weeks, I was again moved to a hamlet of Scheduled Caste (SC) people, who had been running SHGs for about 6 years. I remember the family that hosted me. It had nothing except onions to offer with *rotis*. They always prepared a stew of onions. The children of the house were amazed to see a person, who could not eat more than one *roti* and whose stomach was absolutely intolerant of chillies. It was also peak summer and the *loo* blew continuously. Apart from my struggle to get used to the food, I had to stay outside the house for the most part because of the lack of space, except when it rained. Owing to the fact that I had to sleep outside in the wind and cold, I fell sick. I went to the nearby village to see a doctor. But I only found quacks, who treated patients with steroids and almost all fluid loss cases with saline injections. On any given day, I would have preferred to take the advice of Pradan's veterinarian than approach any of those quacks!

Notwithstanding this, once I began to look beyond my personal condition, I got to observe the different caste dynamics that were being played out in the village. The social setting before me was very different from the tribal communities that I had observed in Orissa, where women are not subjugated to such extremes.

In Dausa, there was no escaping three questions. The first and foremost question would be about my caste. At times, I

wondered what would have happened to me if my father's full name didn't have a 'Panda' in it—by a strange coincidence, 'Panda' was a common surname in Dausa. The second most likely question would be about my marital status, and the third whether my parents were still alive. The last question always came after I clarified that I was all of 23 years old and (still!) unmarried. This would most often make people assume that I am probably single on account of having lost both my parents. Perhaps, people in Dausa linked my single status to my being an orphan because child marriage of young girls and boys was a common thing unless, of course, you had lost both your parents. But despite such intrusive questions, I enjoyed the slow paced life of the villages fully. I was happy to sleep beneath the neem tree and to be surrounded by so many peacocks. I started writing my daily diary, required of us during apprenticeship. I completed my first phase without much difficulty despite the constant, gnawing thought that people are so poor and miserable. I came back from the seven-day home stay and joined the orientation programme in Kesla.

Just when everything seemed to be falling into place, the orientation programme threw up challenges of a different kind. I was deeply disturbed by the gender training. I wasn't the only one. Some of the issues were really new to me. I had never considered them before. At times, it appeared as though the facilitator was being rather forceful in trying to change us. And yet, at the facilitator's prodding, I was made to acknowledge many unseen facts of my life, such as how I had been accustomed to ordering my mother around for a glass of water. What was being expected was a role reversal, much different from my earlier beliefs and notions. Regardless of the way I felt initially, I carried

forward lessons from the experience and came to respect the extra effort my women colleagues had to make to break barriers. All this was a revelation.

During this time, I also got to learn a lot from my senior colleagues. I learnt about village study and watershed. I was quite a chatterbox at that time and they tolerated my innumerable questions. One of my senior colleagues was from the Institute of Rural Management, Anand, (IRMA) and was able to provide me with deep insights. With their encouragement and guidance, I finally decided to carry on in Pradan.

As I began to work actively in the villages, the community members would often call and complain to my team leader that the thin and long person with spectacles is dumb because he can't even write in Hindi. As a result, I learnt Hindi while in Dausa. With time, I began to handle a few SHGs in the second phase of apprenticeship with the help of a senior team member. Earlier efforts under the District Poverty Initiative Programme (DPIP) had been so successful that it was a cakewalk for me to form SHGs in the area. I gave all my energy in nurturing the SHGs that I formed. I regularly went to the meetings, gave them all I could. There is little doubt that I was very protective and possessive about my SHGs. There wasn't a single defunct SHG in my area. The major learning for me was to love and nurture an SHG like one's own child. When there were difficulties in facilitating groups, my team leader would intervene directly. She would look into the entire matter, the entire string of events leading to the discord and then work out a solution.

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Where money was found to have become the primary binding factor amongst the group, she would warn the members of the pending danger of the group going defunct. In addition, she would gently reorient the group to its foremost values of unity and solidarity.

Though there was a lot of enthusiasm on my part to help the poor, dealing with the more influential Gurjar and Meenas was always a dilemma. They were keen to take the fullest advantage of the loopholes in the DPIP programme. It was heartrending to see that people, who owned tractors and flourmills, had infiltrated the below the poverty line (BPL) category. During my initial village study, I remember coming across an elderly couple without any offspring or land, who were not included in the BPL category. I noticed that for powerful castes such as the Meenas, Gurjars and Brahmins, it was easy to join an SHG. Once they became members, they would create a mess by trying to interfere in the financial transactions, especially in the bank dealings. The men would offer zero support and not let their women participate in the purchase of assets. Besides, they would try and make decisions on behalf of their women counterparts in the groups.

Within the team, attrition was a worrying factor. There was an apparent paradox. Many of the older team members would prod me with questions such as, "*Kitna door tak dekhte ho?*" meaning how far ahead can you see, how much of foresight do you have. But the same members would readily leave the organization for higher pay scales. A few of my batch-mates said that if Pradan could

offer better pay, this trend could be curbed. Attrition was also the result of the frequent swapping of working areas and SHGs among the staff. Like many others, I was uncomfortable with swapping responsibilities. I never liked the idea of handing over my groups to someone else. Sometimes, I didn't even trust my colleagues with my groups. On the other hand, DPIP entailed the collection of a lot of personal and household-level data. It also involved a lengthy set of procedures for the release of grants. Having to switch SHGs every now and then and having to fulfil a great many administrative responsibilities at the same time made me somewhat scatter-brained. I took on many tasks and completed only a few. Noticing this, one day a senior member of my team took me to the field and insisted that I finish all the work in one given location before moving to the next. He also encouraged me to take the help of other colleagues when required. In this way, I learnt to prioritize my work and coordinate my activities during the day. This was a timely and valuable lesson.

Pradan started an operation in milk marketing. As part of our efforts, we had to frequently stay back in the villages for the night. We had to sleep outside in the freezing cold nights and wake up and commence collecting milk from individual households as early as four in the morning. Painstakingly, we used to carry the milk to the collection centre in Dausa from where it used to be distributed to the localities nearby. With time, the quantity of milk began to increase and it became more difficult to collect and transport the milk personally on one's two-wheeler.

The experience taught me the importance of participation, of involving local communities at every stage. It taught me both, what must be done and what shouldn't be, to ensure the success of a livelihoods initiative.

Transporting milk in this way would most often result in delays and the customers in Dausa would complain, "*Der se aaoge to purana dudhiya ko laga denge,*" meaning that they would switch over to their older milkman if there was any delay in the future. The project, being anchored by a few individuals such as me, could not be sustained in this manner for long. We identified the different reasons for the failure of the project. We thought of an alternative model, with greater participation on the part of the communities themselves. The strategy was altogether different from one that was spoon-feeding the beneficiaries to one that perceived the beneficiaries as equal participants in the process of change. With support from the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT) a Bulk Cooler was installed. In addition, livestock support services were made available centrally in Dausa. The entire value chain of operations was reorganized to heighten the participation of local communities. In retrospect, the experience taught me the importance of participation, of involving local communities at every stage. It taught me both, what must be done and what shouldn't be, to ensure the success of a livelihoods initiative. All this learning would not have been possible without the inspiration I drew from my role models in Pradan.

In the development sector, there is never a dull moment. With success come a different set of lessons. When I finally became an executive, pride began to get to me. Without realizing it, I started ordering around my juniors and assistants. Fortunately, Pradan is reasonably non-hierarchical in its functioning

and my juniors pointed out my fault. I immediately rectified myself. I realized that a leader is motivated by a will to serve, not to dominate. Thereon, I began to give my full support to the development apprentices (DAs), who joined the team. I helped them as much as I could. Even when DAs were found to be disinterested in their work or were performing very poorly, I would try and understand their reasons rather than expel them summarily.

However, after two years in Pradan, I had a feeling that I was learning nothing new. I was performing tasks on a routine basis. The zeal and enthusiasm to work was fading and my health was failing. I seldom had breakfast or lunch during my tenure. It was the same with almost every other person in the team. We rarely had the luxury of having food in the field.

By June 2005, I was among the three remaining executives. I had to handle about 50 DPIP SHGs for which I needed to purchase small and large animals through camps in Ajmer, Bhilwara, Haryana, Jaipur and Dausa. I did the task efficiently with the only glitch being that my SHG meetings got neglected. I could see my clusters disintegrating and was worried, but I didn't have the liberty to overlook other responsibilities. I began feeling that my SHGs are there only in name. However, this belief was not entirely true; there were good groups too.

Being straddled with too many tasks, I began to lose my human touch in work. With a semi-autocratic approach, I scheduled meetings, according to my convenience.

Pradan opened up an entirely whole new world, very different from the one that I knew of earlier. It helped me observe society, with all of its caste-based dynamics, class rivalries, poverty and yet its shimmering hope for a better future.

Three colleagues left Pradan between February and March 2006 from my team, and two more left in the following months. I was losing focus on account of the added pressure. The DPIP programme was very demanding, and so were the growing expectations of the communities we were working with; but there were simply not enough of us to partake and share in the aspirations of the people. Once, I met with a serious road accident and, on another occasion, contracted jaundice. Owing to such reasons, I finally resigned.

Although it has been quite a few years since I resigned and I have worked with different types of organizations, my years with Pradan were the most formative. Starting off as a young lad, who was looking for a comfortable lifestyle, a cosy corner in an NGO working on health issues, I landed in Pradan. That rude wake-up call from a senior team member reminding me that college is over, and that too on the very first day of work is well remembered. Today, if I exercise caution before taking decisions, it is on account of that very reminder. I know too well that I am responsible for every decision that I make. More than anything, the Pradan years brought me to look beyond my dithering and my personal comfort. Pradan demanded a lifestyle change and though it did take a toll on my health in the long run, it left me with a great deal of empathy for the village folk. In addition, Pradan opened up an entirely whole new world, very different from the one that I knew of earlier. It helped me observe society, with all of its caste-based dynamics, class rivalries, poverty and yet its shimmering hope for a better future. While

we were all eager to address issues of poverty at the village level, Pradan ensured that we questioned many of our own beliefs—sessions on gender during our orientation workshop readily come to my mind.

I had to adapt urgently and the whole process of adapting was very enriching. Besides requiring me to leverage programmes such as DPIP and facilitate the formation of a dairy enterprise at the village level, my work required that I remain astute and diplomatic in dealing with conflicts or with trouble makers. And as I learnt of the outside world and how to work with it, I even learnt of how one must prioritize work and coordinate activities with one's peers. There were challenges at every step and every success brought many great lessons with it. Fortunately for the work culture that prevails in Pradan, I am glad that my juniors rarely hesitated to correct me where and when required. Likewise, the inputs of my seniors and their invaluable guidance are treasured till date. From their example, I learnt the delicate art of facilitating SHGs, the formidable skill of anchoring larger projects and ensuring the participation of

More than anything, it was the genuine concern and utter simplicity of many of my seniors that inspired me. Even today, after having risen to senior posts, be it in Pradan or elsewhere, they feel no shame about sleeping on the floor or sharing the home and hearth of a poor farmer.

communities all along. More than anything, it was the genuine concern and utter simplicity of many of my seniors that inspired me. Even today, after having risen to senior posts, be it in Pradan or elsewhere, they feel no shame about sleeping on the floor or sharing the home and hearth of a poor farmer. Similarly, it was never in their nature to advertise any of their achievements. This is the ethos

I learnt in Pradan, and not through text books but through sheer experience and example.

Interaction with researchers and development professionals from other organizations has convinced me further of the credibility of Pradan's work. Pradan has never compromised its belief in working with the poor. Instead of grappling with theories alone, Pradan has been able to effect significant changes at the grass-roots level. The appreciation that I received from community members and my colleagues is cherished to this day. It is for this reason that another ex-colleague and I strongly believe that, "Once a Pradanite always a Pradanite." I am proud that the Pradan experience has not left my soul.

Nanalal Angari: Profile of a Village Leader

SEVA MANDIR

One man's passion and commitment becomes a formidable movement, in which forests are protected and resources enriched...

Nanalal Angari's story is that of an exemplary leader. Despite his humble upbringing and lack of formal education, he has played an active role in freeing the surrounding forests from encroachment. His concern for nature and regard for the many ways in which natural resources support human life motivated him to establish community-based institutions for the protection of forests. Nanalal's contribution has won him many awards, including the Village Hygiene and Cultural Communication Award in 1986 from the District Education Officer as part of the Yuva Netratva Shivar. He also received an award for exemplary work on Self-Governance by Seva Mandir, Udaipur, in 1995. Narratives on village leaders being scarce, this article speaks of the qualities of a true village leader and shares how Nanalal has successfully couched a strong conservation ethic in the beliefs, values and practices of his people.

Nanalal belongs to the Angari clan (ST) that numbers around 36 families in the village of Shyampura, Rajasthan. Nanalal was born in 1952 and is the eldest of four brothers and five sisters. His parents used to earn paltry sums of 75 paise and 50 paise per day and needed extra hands to supplement the total income of the household. Nanalal was, therefore, pulled out of education at an early age. He began to graze the cattle of a prosperous Patel household in Bichiwara to earn some money. He would do household chores and get paid a sum of Rs 200, in cash or kind, for the whole year. These small sums supported a hand-to-mouth existence but did not allow the household to make savings.

In 1969, Nanalal started working at the Nagmala Talab for 75 paise per day. Later on, he went to Vallabhnagar to work as a wage labourer in the Kikawas canal project for a mere Rs 6 a day. He worked in the canal project for four months and then returned to Shyampura. Later he was taken by a contractor to Dhariyawad (Datriya pond), where he worked as a wage labourer. The earnings were irregular and scarcely enough. Nanalal was on the lookout for other opportunities. Just then, a tailor from the neighbouring village got in touch with Nanalal and expressed his willingness to take on Nanalal as apprentice for an annual sum of Rs 300. Nanalal was already getting tired of the exploitation at the work sites; he, therefore, consented to work under the tailor. However, this money also fell short of meeting

his household requirements and he eventually started his own work as a tailor. He continued in this vocation for 25 years. In retrospect, Nanalal says that his job as a tailor gave him the financial stability to be able to engage with other concerns related to the degradation of forests. It also gave him the luxury of examining the fabric of society from close quarters.

In 1982, a centre for adult literacy was started by the NGO, Seva Mandir, in Shyampura. Nanalal attended classes religiously from 8 to 10 p.m. in the evenings at the centre. Even though the classes often stretched late into the night he would be awake at four in the morning and set out to collect firewood for the household. He would have to walk no less than 6 km to the forests of Bada Bhilwada to collect firewood. There were no other sources of wood around his village. Whereas his night-time lessons made him ponder over the beauty and importance of forests, his visits to collect firewood during the day motivated him save the forests from degradation. Enthused by this feeling, he planted 75 trees, including 19 neem trees in 1984. This was the first of his efforts to regenerate forests. He continued this private wasteland development effort by re-planting 20–25 plants every year. As of today, he has planted 700–800 saplings. Inspired by him, 12–15 households in the community are trying to develop their own wastelands in a similar manner.

From 1982 to 1991, he actively participated in all sensitization efforts being undertaken in the area in the fields of education, health and watershed development. The construction of an anicut in 1987 brought the entire village together and thus paved the way for more serious community-based protection mechanisms. The collective effort resulted in

the formation of Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) and Gram Vikas Committees (GVCs) in early 1991. Nanalal was chosen as the head of both these with full consensus.

Besides his active participation in both these committees, he played a central role in the Joint Forest Management (JFM) exercise carried out in 1991 in Shyampura. This was one of the first of a series of such exercises carried out in Rajasthan. In the following years, Nanalal reached out to members of the nearby villages of Phalasia and Jhadol. He inspired the youth and women to participate in forest protection and conservation initiatives. Feeling the need for a federating body, the Van Utthan Sangh (VUS) was registered on the 15 October 1998. Most of the members from the 22 committees under the Van Utthan Sangh lacked the capacity to lead the federation from the front. So Nanalal was unanimously selected as the head of the federation.

After the formation of the Van Utthan Sangh, Nanalal started devoting all his time for the cause of environmental protection. Nanalal shares that his family members initially opposed his increased interest in conserving forests because it ate into the time he had to exclusively fend for the household. This was a genuine concern because Nanalal had inherited just two bighas from his father when eight bighas were distributed among the four brothers. Most of this land had no irrigation facility. His livestock holding was also confined to two work animals and one buffalo. Owing to all of this, his wife had to toil as a wage labourer while he gave his time and energy to the cause of forest conservation. But despite the initial grumblings, his family members eventually began to discern the true

worth of his work. Today, Nanalal enjoys the full support of his family in his ventures, which seek to ensure the common good of the whole community.

As mentioned, one of Nanalal's foremost achievements has been his fight against the illicit privatization and encroachment of forests and commons lands. In 1984, the forest department carried out trench digging and plantation work in Shyampura. Nanalal helped mobilize the support of local communities for this. But some people, who held encroached lands near the plantation, obstructed the plantation work. With assistance from the forest ranger, Shri. Laluram, and other village leaders such as Valanath, Bheranath and Hukavela, the villagers were finally able to remove the encroachments. Group meetings were held to sort out issues in a positive manner. The plantation was established and remained under community protection till 1989.

In the mid-80s, there were 19 encroachments in the village. Nanalal brought this down to 7 by 1989. As per his suggestion, practices such as stall-feeding of cattle and limited lopping of the forest became popular in the village. The people from the neighbouring villages of Turgarh and Amlia had also encroached on the common lands of Shyampura. Under the leadership of Nanalal, the members of the GVC went to the encroached places and destroyed the huts. Not just this, they also took legal action and filed a case against the encroachers. In this way, 37 hectares of land was brought under JFM arrangements. In due course of time, FPCs were also formed in Turgarh and

One of Nanalal's foremost achievements has been his fight against the illicit privatization and encroachment of forests and commons lands.

Amlia. That many villages suffered from the problem of encroachments became increasingly clear; therefore, it was necessary to have a common forum to deliberate on it.

A meeting was held at the sacred grove of Kirit Mahadev Ji, which was attended by senior people from the forest department such as the Ranger, Aravalli, Shri. Satish Sharma, the staff from Seva Mandir, including Shri. S.N. Bhise and Shri. Suresh Sharma, and people's representatives from 22 villages. Various legal issues such as those related to encroachments were discussed and it was decided that a common representative organization should be formed. Thus, the Van Utthan Sansthan was formed and 11 members were nominated/elected to carry forward its activities. Nanalal was elected president, given his good track record in dealing with contentious issues such as encroachments. The more recent encroachments in the villages of Madri, Ognia, Amlia, Tunder and Bada Bhilwara was brought to light in the meetings. Each of these cases was dealt through the Van Utthan Sansthan, in order to get the commons freed from illegal encroachments.

In 1999, a paryavaran yatra, in the nature of an environmental rally, was conducted to express unity among the forest dwelling communities. In one of the cases taken up by the Van Utthan Sansthan, people from Tunder encroached upon some of the land of Bada Bhilwara where a JFM site was proposed. Van Utthan Sansthan, under the leadership of Nanalal, took the matter to the forest officials in 1992–93. The Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) went along with them and

destroyed the hutments. Thus, 712 ha of forest land was freed from encroachment.

Soon after, 50 ha of this land was brought under JFM in Bada Bhilwara village. Another 100 ha were taken up in a similar manner in 2002. On the day of the *shilanyas* of the JFM site, Nanalal was leading the people to the JFM site when people from Tunder started pelting stones at them from a nearby hillock. Subsequently, Bada Bhilwara filed a case against Tunder and hence resolved to get the commons freed from encroachments at all costs. The people of Bada Bhilwara thus become more conscious of the value of their resources.

Similarly, Madla had 56 ha under a JFM site, but the sarpanch, Dhularam, was not willing to impose restrictions on the unabated cutting of grass. Van Utthan Sansthan, under the leadership of Nanalal, took the help of the forest department and resolved the dispute. Disputes between Shyampura and Amlia, Bada Bhilwada and Tumdar, Madla and Sigri, Madri and Pargiapada, Som and Karel were sorted out successfully through the Van Utthan Sansthan in a similar manner.

Nanalal engaged with the bureaucracy and district-level departments, to ensure the protection of forests. As far as the issue of obtaining the JFM lease from the forest department was concerned, there were procedural delays and red-tapism. Accompanied by Seva Mandir staff and three other members of the Van Utthan Sansthan, Nanalal went to Jaipur in 2000 and pressed for the speedy grant of JFM sites. They met with the Chief Conservator of Forest (CCF)

Accompanied by Seva Mandir staff and three other members of the Van Utthan Sansthan, Nanalal went to Jaipur in 2000 and pressed for the speedy grant of JFM sites.

and explained their eagerness to conserve forests through community-based measures. They also got the opportunity to meet the forest minister, Smt. Beena Kak.

Nanalal has shown how motivated individuals and advocacy on their part can

lead to the successful management of common property resources in the long run. Over the years, Nanalal has played a significant and considerable role in taking the membership of Van Utthan Sangh from the initial number of 22 in Jhadol to about 103 in Jhadol, 38 in Kotra, 18 in Phulwari ki Naal Sanctuary, 28 in Kherwara, 28 in Gogunda and Badgaon blocks of Udaipur District.

From the initial 22 FPCs, today Van Utthan has become an umbrella for more than 100 FPCs, sharing grievances as well as experiences. It has been instrumental in helping the FPCs to start their Joint Forest Management programmes through regular follow-ups with the forest department.

Thus, Van Utthan Sansthan has been able to make JFM a success in quite a number of villages such as Shyampura, Madla, Pargiapada and Bada Bhilwara.

Despite the many accolades, Nanalal believes that when working for the common good, one should keep away from mainstream politics because it detracts one from his/her social ideals. Nanalal feels no shame in acknowledging his failures, among which he counts the encroachments of Turgarh and Amlia. Nanalal has keen foresight and knows that many of the social problems are because of the paucity of land, which is under twice the pressure because of the population

explosion. He believes that this has reduced options for the tribal people. In his opinion, it is very necessary that somebody takes up this issue with the authorities.

Although Nanalal has achieved much in a short duration, he feels that he has a

long way to go before he can say that his work is done. Nanalal does not take any stipend for the work he does. This gives him a greater feeling of pride and selfless service. He thinks that anyone can become a village leader, so long as he or she is service-minded and impartial.



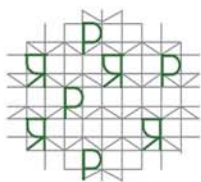
Nanalal Angari's story is that of an exemplary leader. Despite his humble upbringing and lack of formal education, he has played an active role in freeing the surrounding forests from encroachment. Narratives on village leaders being scarce, the article on Nanalal Angari speaks of the qualities of a true village leader and reveals how Nanalal has successfully entrenched a strong conservation ethic in the beliefs, values and practices of his people.



Pradan is a voluntary organization registered in Delhi under the Societies Registration Act. Pradan works through small teams of professionals in selected villages across eight states. The focus of Pradan's work is to promote and strengthen livelihoods for the rural poor. It involves organizing the poor, enhancing their capabilities, introducing ways to improve their income and linking them to banks, markets and other economic services. The professionals work directly with the poor, using their knowledge and skills to help remove poverty. *NewsReach*, Pradan's monthly journal, is a forum for sharing the thoughts and experiences of these professionals working in remote and far-flung areas in the field. *NewsReach* helps them to reach out and connect with each other, the development fraternity and the outside world.

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