

THE LIVELIHOODS AND DEVELOPMENT MONTHLY

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The Legal Empowerment Process Initiated in Hazaribag

SARBANI BOSE AND SUDARSHAN THAKUR

Realizing that true power lies in awareness of their legal rights and entitlements, the women of Hazaribag equip themselves through the SHGs and CRPs to fight injustice and violence

PRADAN IN HAZARIBAG

Pradan first set to work in the Barhi-Koderma area of Hazaribagh district in 1992. In 1994, Koderma district was carved out of the original Hazaribagh district. Pradan strategically separated the locations of Hazaribagh and Koderma and, in 2000, initiated another office in Koderma, leaving a few of the older SHGs with the latter. When the Tiliya Dam was being built, Pradan initiated work in Koderma, to explore livelihood options with the community affected by the process. In collaboration with the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) and its Social Integration Project (SIP), Pradan introduced micro-lift irrigation in the area. Looking at the widespread poverty, especially among the landless SC community, and other issues related to the status of women, the team felt the need to organize the women into Self Help Groups (SHGs). Pradan promoted the formation of SHGs, in which women pooled their savings so that they could avail of small loans to help them in times of need. The women, who were earlier dependent on money-lenders and other informal credit sources for immediate needs, such as medical treatment and school fees for children, now have funds in their own hands to meet their needs. Attending the weekly SHG meetings has also developed a sense of bonding among the women, who have similar problems and issues such as lack of drinking water, domestic violence or absence of teachers in schools. The unity and solidarity in the group has given them the strength to cope with these situations by drawing on resources from each other.

The groups organized themselves at the panchayat level next and formed clusters, to help them collectivize their ideas and thoughts and influence the outside world. Later, these members were federated at the district level to have a greater impact on the political and administrative structure as a whole. The federation called the Damodar Mahila Mandal has been actively involved in many rights-based activities for the last 18 years, and today it has a significant recognition in the district. Women from all sections of society have one identity in common, that is, membership in the Damodar Mahila Mandal. The collective strength of the Damodar Mahila Mandal often helps a woman to get justice in her own family or village. There are many instances when these women have solved cases of domestic violence or dowry reported by the members. They have even staged *gheraos* in block offices and banks, to claim their rights related to a government scheme or

The main objective of the workshops was to ascertain the needs and aspirations of the federation members and the issues central to them.

SHG financing. The federation has provided them a platform to fight against the system that has always suppressed their existence. It has helped the groups mobilize loans from banks and also ensured the timely repayment of these loans. The federation is responsible for setting standards for SHG norms and also facilitates the groups to maintain the same.

At present, the Pradan Hazaribag project is operational in three blocks of the districts, namely, Padma, Barhi and Chouparan, with 8,186 families organized into 519 women's SHGs. These are also linked to various financial institutions and government agencies for enhancing income generation activities. Pradan is directly involved with the promotion of poultry, tasar yarn production (spinning) and agriculture as livelihood options. In addition, the members are also running their own shops with credit from the SHGs.

THE CONTEXT

All the groups are linked to clusters at the panchayat level, with an average size of 10 to 15 groups in each cluster. All the members of the SHGs in Hazaribag are part of the Damodar Mahila Mandal and there are three General Bodies (GBs), one in each block. Three representatives from each cluster are members of the GB. An apex body at the district level is still to be formed. The GB meets once a month. Some of the issues that are being dealt by the GBs are:

- ♦ Monitoring of the clusters and the groups, especially for bank loan and repayment

- ♦ Dealing occasionally with cases of dowry and domestic violence
- ♦ Monitoring the performance of groups at the cluster level
- ♦ Organizing a Mahadhiveshan at the district level
- ♦ Monitoring the computerized accounting at the block level

The Pradan team went through a process of brainstorming on the role of the GBs with the members. The team became aware that the members lacked the interest to carry out the above-mentioned activities. There were instances of women dealing with cases of domestic violence, harassment of women, etc., but these were sporadic. One of the reasons for this was that these activities seemed more driven by the professionals in Pradan than by the women themselves. The bodies at block level were becoming more of the professional's problem solving forums for bank loan repayment and other similar issues. Though the GB meetings were regular, the members did not seem to have clarity about their role vis-à-vis the objectives visualized during its inception. The members seemed to depend on the professionals to conduct these meetings, and federation members rarely took decisions on issues. Social concerns and issues were at the core of the federation but due to the absence of any clear road map, the responses in this regard remained sporadic rather than moving with a more definite action plan. The team then deliberated on ways to facilitate the enhancement of ownership among the members by taking interest to initiate action on issues of their interest. The team started with a series of workshops with the members of the GB in the Padma block, followed by the Chouparan GB.

INTERVENTIONS

The main objective of the workshops was to ascertain the needs and aspirations of the federation members and the issues central to them. It also involved facilitating the women to identify a common goal and an action plan to achieve it.

PHASE – I

We took help from the Kesla team, which had done similar workshops with the members of Narmada Mahila Sangh there. They shared a module with us; the theme of the exercise was 'Power'. The objective of the exercise was to define facets of empowered women and prioritize the desired power that they want in their life along with the roles of their SHGs, clusters and federation. Such an environment was necessary to realize, achieve and exercise those powers. (See 'Training for Empowerment', NewsReach, September 2008)

- ♦ An exercise was done to articulate the desired state each one would like to be in. The members were guided to develop a vision about themselves and their surroundings. This was an individual exercise, in which the women were asked to draw a picture showing their desired state. They shared their dreams or the desired state in small groups. These dreams were more related to their own lives. A member shared that her desire was to ride a bicycle; another member said that she desired that all her daughters be highly educated, etc. We tried to depict these components through pictures on chart paper.
- ♦ The next session was on power indicators. There was a brief discussion on power (Shakti) that the members would like to define. They were asked, "Who is the most powerful woman you

A few members, who would go to other villages and conduct meetings around the objectives of federation, were identified.

know?" And "What are the powers that you would need to inculcate to move from the present state towards that vision?" It seemed difficult for them to think beyond the present state. Moreover, there was also a fear in crossing that invisible line of social restrictions. The members held long discussions, in which they started expressing themselves. Some of the powers they mentioned were:

- ♦ Power to unite and organize ourselves
- ♦ Power to take action against social taboos
- ♦ Power to approach different organizations for knowledge and awareness
- ♦ Power to approach block offices, courts and other places
- ♦ Power to fight for truth
- ♦ Power for financial independence
- ♦ Power to run the family/village

They also explored the sources from which these powers can be developed. Some of the sources they identified were clusters, groups, family, village, GB and even self.

PHASE – II

This phase was initiated within a month of the first phase. The members were asked to identify a goal or objective for the federation. The visioning for the GB this time was done for a longer period, that is, five years; the areas they identified were:

- ♦ GB as a bank. There were around 150

The organization wanted to collaborate with Pradan to conduct workshops on legal literacy and empowerment, to create a pool of para-legal workers, who can generate awareness on legal rights among masses.

SHGs federated at each block. The total funds of these SHGs was around Rs 90 lakhs — a huge amount as far as banking is concerned. Thus, it was thought that if members pool part of their funds to the GB, they may not have to depend completely on regional rural banks for timely credit; at the same time, they can increase their own profits.

- ♦ Banks, blocks and district offices mobilized by GB. Most of the government schemes or programmes today remain confined to a pool of influential people in the village; it fails to serve its actual purpose. Thus, the members can unite and together mobilize the district offices and banks to avail of these services.
- ♦ Dealing with issues such as domestic violence and women's rights.

Next, the members drew up their common goal. This was in three parts:

- ♦ Equal rights for all
- ♦ Awareness and action against superstition and other social evils
- ♦ Economical upliftment of families through the financial empowerment of women

Based on these goals, the members identified some activities for five years. They then prioritized these for the first year. Activities

that they decided to take up in the coming five years are as follows:

- ♦ Awareness and action against child marriage, dowry, casteism, domestic violence
- ♦ Awareness and action for girl education, nutrition for children, sanitation
- ♦ Awareness and action against superstitions such as witchcraft and exorcism
- ♦ Building linkages with all the machineries such as banks, blocks and districts
- ♦ Awareness about laws and rights
- ♦ Strengthening SHGs for livelihood promotion and credit linkage
- ♦ Control and monitoring of the PDS system in villages
- ♦ Involvement in major decision-making processes at the panchayat and village levels

The members prioritized the activities, based on the urgency of the issue and the group's capacity for the coming year. The activities prioritized are as follows:

- ♦ Awareness and action to be taken to stop liquor consumption, domestic violence
- ♦ Credit linkage of the groups and their repayment
- ♦ Strengthening and monitoring the health of the groups
- ♦ PDS and anganwadi monitoring
- ♦ Creating awareness among people
- ♦ Monitoring of the schools for quality education as well as mid-day meals
- ♦ Building linkages with banks, blocks and district offices
- ♦ Sanitation in villages
- ♦ Awareness and action against casteism
- ♦ Sending girl children to school

These activities will be taken up in the coming one year by the federation and detailed planning for each activity will be made simultaneously.

PHASE – III

In this phase, a timeline for the activities was drawn up. This was done mainly considering the agricultural season so that they could map out the time to organize meetings in the villages. Some discussion took place on how they could reach out to all other SHG members to make them aware of the activities they were taking up. A few members, who would go to other villages and conduct meetings around the objectives of federation, were identified. Pradan professionals interacted with individual members and visited different SHGs to know their aspirations, which were eventually to be incorporated at the federation level. Budgeting was also done, in which the expenses calculated were mainly for campaigns in the villages, through pamphlets, posters, etc. There was some money kept aside as honorarium to members, who would conduct meetings on these issues in the villages, and their travel.

The only source of income that could be identified was the members' contribution. (The revenue model is still not very clear for the GB members or the team. Some sources for money collection may be identified such as membership fees or insurance. However, to what extent it is sufficient to meet the expenditure of the given tasks is still a concern).

The team did not have much expertise to help the members address the issues identified by the federation in the workshop. It required both knowledge and skill to motivate the members and facilitate them to take action on such issues.

Now the CRPs have better clarity regarding various issues such as dowry, domestic violence and child marriage, which were earlier left to be decided by fate.

INPUTS ON LEGAL RIGHTS

In the meantime, we came to know of MARG, a Delhi-based NGO working on legal empowerment in many pockets of the country. The organization wanted to collaborate with Pradan to conduct workshops on legal literacy and empowerment, to create a pool of para-legal workers, who can generate awareness on legal rights among masses. It was a good opportunity for the team because this would help us to create a pool of resource persons, who would guide the federation members to address their own issues of rights and entitlements, as envisaged in their plan. Participants of the workshop organized by MARG had to be literate in order to read the books that were given to them by the facilitators. Since most of the federation members were illiterate, the community resource persons (CRPs) participated in the workshop. CRPs are SHG members, who are literate, and who had been selected by the group members to provide services such as strengthening of the group norms, maintaining books of accounts and sharing information about government schemes and how to avail them. Pradan professionals trained them thoroughly to enable them to perform these tasks. The CRPs had already been involved in the nurturing of the SHGs for the last two years. They were in regular interaction with the members from the federation as well as clusters, and could closely relate to the issues raised by members. Over the years, they had

Every year during the Cluster Adviveshan, members of the SHG cluster come together to celebrate their unity, beginning with the Baksa Puja, the cash box in which they keep their savings.

developed special bonding with the SHG members, and the members often refer them as *sahayogis*.

Three teams, that is, West Singhbhum, Godda and Hazaribag sent potential CRPs for the training programme. From Hazaribag, eight women CRPs, who were already involved in community mobilization for strengthening SHGs and generating livelihoods for the members, were sent. The training programme was conducted in three phases in Jamshedpur and Ranchi. The workshop was designed and conducted by MARG.

The main objectives of the workshop were:

- ♦ To create awareness of fundamental rights, particularly those relating to women
- ♦ To equip the women to exercise and enjoy their rights as citizens
- ♦ To empower women to speak out and take necessary action when their rights are violated and against any form of gender-based violence
- ♦ To empower women with legal knowledge so that they can resist and protect themselves from violence
- ♦ To empower women to identify and articulate their sufferings and violations in legal terms and seek legal remedies

During the training, the participants were given books in Hindi on legal rights that were

easy to understand. The illustrations in the books were similar to the experiences faced by the participants and so they were able to relate to them well. The workshop provided the participants with a better understanding about gender and other socio-political structures in the society that affect them as well. The trainees were given a certificate on completing the programme successfully. Now the CRPs have better clarity regarding various issues such as dowry, domestic violence and child marriage, which were earlier left to be decided by fate. Being aware about the legal consequences and their own rights made them confident and motivated them to influence the women in every forum.

THE IMPACT

When the CRPs visit the SHGs, the members usually share the problems they face in their day-to-day lives. CRPs help the group members identify the various steps that can be taken to overcome these issues. The primary groups are the places where members actually open up and express themselves; because the members are more closely associated, the issues are better dealt with in these small groups. Sometimes the members also share problems of larger concern such as the irregular distribution of PDS or the lack of drinking water in the hamlet. Then the CRPs discuss the legal rights related to such matters and inform the group of the different options it has. The members decide on the best way to deal with the issue. A little awareness about one's own rights often raises one's confidence and helps to take action. For instance, in Champadih village of Padma block, the PDS dealer used to block the distribution of regular rations to the people. The villagers suffered and had tried complaining about it to the dealer, but in vain. When the MO (Marketing Officer) came for a surprise verification of the stocks

to the village, he asked the villagers about the regularity of the distribution. Nobody had the courage to tell him the truth. However, an SHG member of the Ambedkar Mahila Mandal told the MO that she never got the due quota as was written in her card. The dealer had threatened her and had asked her not to share this information with anyone. Soon, however, she was joined by members of her own SHG and women from other groups. Action was taken against the dealer and now the people are satisfied with the regular distribution of the ration in their village.

In the SHG meetings, apart from regular savings and credit activities, the women make it a point to discuss issues and concerns of their lives and their village. These discussions have not only increased the members' participation in group processes but have also built their solidarity, helping them take collective action against issues that concern them.

The federation now has a collective vision for 'Damodar'; it envisages not only the financial independence of women but also action against social evils and raises its voice for equal rights for all. The awareness and campaigning for legal empowerment is being done in all the levels — from SHG to cluster to federation.

Cluster meetings are monthly meetings attended by the representatives of the groups of a particular village/panchayat. Apart from discussions on status of SHGs and livelihood opportunities, the members also discuss other issues such as the improper functioning of the village PDS, under wage rate payment in works done under NREGA by the contractors, or bribes involved in sanctioning of old age

This year, the federation launched the legal empowerment programme and shared their vision and action plan for the coming year in the forum.

pension, dowry and child marriage. Women share their personal problems such as domestic violence by their in-laws and husband, or desertion by husband, which actually hurts a woman's dignity and existence as a human being. In all such cases, the cluster members have demonstrated their power of unity.

They have planned to initiate this movement in the Cluster Adhiveshans and Mahadhiveshans, which are annual gatherings of SHG members. These events are also attended by bank officials, block officers, etc. Every year during the Cluster Adhiveshan, members of the SHG cluster come together to celebrate their unity, beginning with the Baksa Puja, the cash box in which they keep their savings. All the members march to the venue with slogans and banners, demonstrating their unity and solidarity. Every group comes with their SHG cash boxes to the Adhiveshan and as a ritual worship the boxes; this is a symbol of growth and prosperity for them. They discuss the previous year's achievements, in terms of financial and social progress. They decide on various agendas to be taken up in the coming year. Around 200 to 250 women come together at a panchayat level.

This year, in 2009, the SHG members performed skits and songs, in which they generated awareness on domestic violence, child marriage, dowry, NREGA, Right to Information and The Scheduled Castes and

SETTLING FAMILY DISPUTES

Girija Devi, 30, is the wife of Siyata Mahato, 40, from Harambag village in Hazaribag district. Siyata had three wives; Girija Devi was his first wife. He married again as Girija Devi did not have children. His second wife died. So he married the third time. The third wife is around 25 years and they have two children.

After Siyata got a new wife, his interest in the older woman started dwindling and he started seeing her as a burden. The new wife did not want the older wife in the house. Gradually, the quarrels began. The situation worsened. Siyata and his young wife not only started abusing Girija Devi but also stopped giving her food. When the abuse became too much for her to handle, she would take shelter in her neighbour's and return later. Her sister-in-law, Rukmini Devi, wife of Kartik Mahato, was vaguely aware of what was going on. Girija did not belong to any SHG but Rukmini was a member of Santoshi Mahila Mandal, which operated in the neighbouring hamlet. Whenever Rukmini asked Girija to bring her case to the SHG, she would say that it was her fate and there was nothing anybody could do. But Rukmini persisted and kept telling her that she could talk to the SHG and there were more women from other villages (in the cluster) who could help. But nothing happened. On 5

January 2009, Girija was thrown out of her house by Siyata and his young wife. She went to Rukmini, who took her to the SHG. The SHG members, 13 of them, went to the husband the next day and tried to talk to him but he did not listen. The women then took her to the cluster meeting on 19 January. Till that time, Girija stayed with Rukmini. Girija's case was discussed in the Gayatri cluster meeting in Champadih village. The very next day, 25 cluster members went to Haramba and met Siyata Mahato.

There were members in this cluster, who had attended the legal literacy training. The legal knowledge they had gained was useful. They threatened Siyata by telling him that, having a second wife, when his first wife was alive, and not supporting the first wife were reasons enough for filing a case against him in the police station. They quoted the relevant clauses, and asserted that they were equipped to take such action because they were well informed of the legal rights and entitlements of women. Siyata was just not ready to take on this might of the women's collective. He relented and took Girija back immediately. Girija is now staying with her husband and his second wife. He takes care of her, gives money and food and does not torture her anymore!

the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The women took a pledge that they would do their best to ensure proper justice to the underprivileged. There were around 15 Adhiveshans, in which such programmes on legal awareness were organized and we are looking forward to organizing more such events. The impact of these skits and songs was so strong that many

groups invited the CRPs, who had received training on these issues to their groups for further discussions.

For the last 17 years, the members of the Damodar Mahila Mandal have been organizing the annual event called Mahadhiveshan. The event gives them an opportunity to demonstrate their progress to

The present status of the women in this district demands such foci on rights and entitlements and an enhanced knowledge on women-related laws and their implications.

the larger world. Since it is attended by officials from banks and the administration and political leaders, it is seen as the best way to influence them for further developmental challenges. This year, the federation launched the legal empowerment programme and shared their vision and action plan for the coming year in the forum. Posters were designed with the help of Pradan professionals on the issues that were raised during the Cluster Adhiveshans to be highlighted to the larger mass. There were skits, songs and dances on these issues by the SHG members. For most of them, the word *kanun*, or law, itself had been quite threatening because that had always been a man's business. But the programmes conveyed the message that it was for all of them.

WAY AHEAD

The status of women is very vulnerable. Child marriage, dowry and domestic violence are very much prevalent in the area, making their lives miserable. Around 41.8% girls get married before the age of 18 and around 17.3% become mothers before completing 18 years (DLHS 2007-2008). Six out of ten

women are subjected to domestic violence. Dowry is one of the main reasons that a family is under debt (from SHGs or other financial agencies.); with no resources to repay the loan, the family gets trapped into a vicious debt cycle. For women, whose husbands have migrated, life becomes all the more difficult. She has to depend on the irregular remittance from her husband or, at times, even has to give in to the sexual and physical exploitation by her own relatives for survival.

The present status of the women in this district demands such foci on rights and entitlements and an enhanced knowledge on women-related laws and their implications. The discussions at the group and cluster levels also helped us to draw such inferences. The present engagement with the federation has helped everyone get a clearer picture about the federation's future plans. The members of Damodar have been involved in addressing such issues for a long time and these experiences have helped them to move further ahead. As far as Pradan's role is concerned, we need to equip the federation members to carry their plan forward. Exposure to different organizations and some more training programmes would be helpful. We also need to foster the relationship between Damodar and the other stakeholders such as blocks, banks, women's commissions and other government agencies who can help them accomplish their vision.

Vermi-compost: A Sustainable Livelihood for the Poor – Part II

BINOD RAJ DAHAL AND SANTOSH KUMAR PATRO

Producing compost in a scientific manner has proved profitable for villagers of Salgatand, whose entrepreneurial skills serve as a model for nearby villagers.

CURRENT PHASE (2008–2009)

We were confused after 2007 about how to motivate more villagers to engage in vermi-compost production. A planned expansion started only in 2008 after the intervention in the Siktia cluster in Poraiyahat block under the Tribal Welfare Commission (TWC) to improve irrigation facilities and the quality of the land.

With 11 villages under the irrigation cluster, 133 permanent vermi tanks have already been constructed. Almost 60% of the tanks are in full-scale production. Sixty-six families of Beldang village, under this cluster, have just produced the first cycle of vermi-compost with the average production of three quintals per family, thereby fetching Rs 1,050. The special SGSY project has been the fillip for the expansion of this activity with nearly 1,500 families. With such concrete profit realization, the team is confident about expanding the activity without many hiccups.

The team has now been clear about the objectives of its promotion. Unlike the primary focus of earning cash through marketing in the early days, we are now focused entirely on making use of the vermi-compost prepared by each of the families. The promotion of round-the-year vegetables is the main avenue for the consumption of vermi-compost. For instance, all the families under the irrigation cluster have used the first production cycle for their kharif vegetables. The vermi-compost produced in the second cycle was taken to Pradan Deoghar, where it was used in the plantations of tasar host plants and mango trees, a project implemented under Wadi-NABARD. Since people now have a fair degree of confidence about why and how to process vermi-compost, it is hoped that within two years, the number of families under this activity will increase to 1,500 families.

Since we did not have adequate production at our community level, we bought nearly 100 MT of vermi-compost from Subhashree Fertilizer during 2008–09 for application in horticulture plantations. The plantation was in Poraiyahat block itself and covered around 203 acres. It has nearly 43,000 plants.

As per our request, a nutrient analysis test was provided by the supplier (Table 6.1). Only those villagers, who had pucca tanks, were permitted to produce vermi-compost in order to ensure the quality of the vermi-compost. We have now estimated a cost-effective design of the tank so that even poorer families can invest in the construction of tanks. (Table 2)

Since people now have a fair degree of confidence about why and how to process vermi-compost, it is hoped that within two years, the number of families under this activity will increase to 1,500 families.

TABLE 1: ESTIMATES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE VERMI-COMPOST TANK

S. No.	Materials	Quantity	Amount
1	Brick	300-325 @ Rs 1.75	Rs 570
2	Cement	1 bag @ 260	Rs 260
3	Mason	1 full day for 3 tanks	Rs 50
4	Unskilled labour	1 full day (self contribution)	Rs 60
5	Thatched structure above the tank at 5 ft height with local material, that is, bamboo and leaves of date palm, etc. (self contribution)		Rs 60

TABLE 2: AVERAGE NUTRIENT CONTENT OF SAMPLE VERMI-COMPOST SUPPLIED BY SHUBHASHREE FERTILIZER, DEOGHAR

S. No.	Nutrients	Percentage/ppm
1	Nitrogen (N)	1.60
2	Phosphorous (P ₂ O ₅)	5
3	Potash (K ₂ O)	0.79
4	Calcium	0.43
5	Magnesium (Mg)	0.14
6	Iron (Fe)	174.99
7	Manganese (Mn)	95.98
8	Zinc (Zn)	24.34
9	Copper (Cu)	4.79
10	Carbon : Nitrogen	15.45
11	PH	7.5

The tank is first filled with half an inch of sand. Next, there is a layer of broken bricks, topped by half an inch of sand, to allow the proper percolation of water. This should be the permanent composition of

the tank bed. Cow dung can now be processed in the tank. Layers of cow dung, normal soil and decomposed litter, one above the other, facilitate the decomposition process. Earthworms are

They share their experiences in vermi-compost production — how from being uninformed members, they are now successful entrepreneurs, and about the benefits they have received from this activity, both in cash and kind.

introduced into this natural habitation. We usually use cow dung in the production process.

A tank is 10' x 3' x 2.5', with 5" thick walls. The net cost of one tank is between Rs 880 and 1,000. Each beneficiary has paid Rs 250 for the vermi-compost project besides other labour and material contribution. The financial support received was around Rs 550 per family from the TWC livelihood project. The worms came at a cost of Rs 250 per 1,000 worms. A tank required a total of 2,000 worms; the cost of the worms alone was Rs 500. The cost could be recovered within 40 days of the first cycle because the returns received were Rs 1,600. Vermicompost production is, therefore, a viable and feasible activity.

REPLICATION OF THE MODEL

The idea of vermi-compost production has been shared and many discussions and deliberations have taken place in various community meetings such as the SHG meetings, the cluster meetings and the agriculture planning meeting in the villages. The CSPs and other community resource people (CRPs) are replicating the activity, after having directly experienced its benefits. The Godda team has envisioned that every family that has at least two livestock can start vermi-compost production and use the produce in their land to promote cash crops,

particularly vegetables. We are prepared to move in this direction, and have planned accordingly.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The villagers of Salgatand have shown high interest and entrepreneurial engagement in the activity. They have maintained the high quality of the vermi-compost. They know the benefits of both self-consumption and commercial sale because they have used it to cultivate their vegetables and have sold it to Pradan for *tasar* plantation. Their expectations and confidence in the activity, therefore, has been considerably high.

Between 2003 and 2004, when they had begun the activity, they understood its potential, and its visible and invisible advantages. Salgatand village became the location for exposure visits and for the training of those interested in the activity, within and outside the block. The 25 women and 1 man are now resource persons. They share their experiences in vermi-compost production — how from being uninformed members, they are now successful entrepreneurs, and about the benefits they have received from this activity, both in cash and kind. They demonstrate how vermi-compost is produced. They try to motivate others to engage in the activity and train them so that many more can reap its benefits like them.

Akhilshwor Singh, a CSP for vermi-compost production, travels to many places to impart training. The *didis* are ever-prepared to support those who come to the village to understand the process. Salgatand is now known for the vermi-compost it produces, and many now refer to it as the 'vermi-village'. Continued production has sustained the production of earthworms, which is

distributed to other areas. Beldang village buys nearly 1.25 lakh earthworms from Salgatand — one more benefit of the activity. Subhashree Fertilizer is also a source of technical input. Villagers from Salgatand have visited the farm in Deoghar several times to observe and learn all the technical details of vermi-compost production. Rearers, who have successfully produced vermi-compost, are ready to train others. The expansion

Rearers, who have successfully produced vermi-compost, are ready to train others.

strategy has been practical and sustainable. The CSPs working in the area are now well equipped to deliver technical services.

AKHILESHWOR, A VERMI-COMPOST ENTREPRENEUR

Akhileshwor Singh (38 years), who trained as a Resource Person in vermi-compost production, has dedicated himself fully to the activity. He started his career as an accountant of an SHG in his own village in 1997. People from other districts of Dumka come to him regularly now to buy vermi-compost or earthworms. Officials from World Vision and Jindal Steel Company have also invited him to train their respective beneficiaries, for which Akhileshwor was paid good remuneration. This has contributed significantly to his family income.

worms to 133 tanks in the Beldang cluster. The initial rate of Rs 350 per 1,000 worms has been reduced now to Rs 150 per 1,000, due to surplus production. He provides the worms at Rs 150 per 1,000 to SHG members and Rs 200 per 1,000 to non-SHG members. In five years, he has earned Rs 37,450 from vermi-compost and the worms. His earnings as a trainer have not been accounted for here. Recently, he received a remuneration of Rs 1,500 for a 15-day training that he did for the villagers of Beldang in Poraiyahat block. Thus, intervention in such remote and

PRODUCTION AND REVENUE EARNED BY AKHILESHWOR

Year	Total Production	Quantity Sold (kg)	Rate (Rs)	Revenue (Rs)	Income from the Sale of Worms	Total
2005	750	350	3	1,050	1,050	
2006	1,000	600	3	1,800	500	2,300
2007	2,000	1,500	3	4,500	1,500	6,000
2008	3,600	3,100	3.5	10,850	4,000	14,850
2009 (Jan to April 2009)	1,700	1,500	3.5	5,250	8,000	13,250

Akhileshwor has been the sole supplier of earthworms to various consumers within and outside Poraiyahat block. He supplies

poor villages has shown results and has helped to change the lives of many like Akhileshwor.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

The benefits of vermi-compost production, its cost economics, etc., for self-consumption or for sale to the market have all now become clearer. More people are motivated and interested in adopting this activity. Thus, there does not seem much difficulty in expanding the activity and reaching more people. SHG members can easily take loans from their groups to meet the cost for constructing tanks.

There are around 200 vermi-compost tanks in Poraiyahat block. The Special SGSY project can contribute to construct another 1,000 such tanks whereas people who have not been extended project support can construct such tanks on their own. Since the investment is meagre, it is not a limiting factor. The team, therefore, plans on promoting vermi-compost activity in all 6 blocks of its operational area.

However, the major challenge lies in maintaining the quality of the vermi-compost produce. Unless quality is ensured, no matter how many tanks are constructed, it does not justify the purpose for producing it. Hence,

we are very concerned about maintaining quality. The product when used in their own vegetable cultivation brings the families additional income. This surplus income from vegetables along with the revenue from vermi-compost is another promotional strategy.

The informal associations of agriculture co-operatives in Poraiyahat have been actively promoting agriculture for the last two years and have been associated with input distribution to the large number of farmers in the blocks. It has recently started procuring vermi and linking it with the external market in order to give the activity impetus in the long run. The demand for the product has poured in from various sources, including government offices. A decision was taken that the SHGs would procure the vermi-compost from its members and other producers. The product will be checked for quality before it is evaluated and measured. These tasks will be performed by the hamlet-level committee. The committee comprises select members of the SHGs of the hamlet. This will ensure the quality of the vermi.

A Step towards Something New

PRAVAS CHANDRA DAS

Using the collective wisdom and experience of the GVS and the Sudama Krishi Samiti and adopting SRI in their small landholdings, the villagers of Gurio can now look forward to agriculture becoming a sustainable livelihood once again.

Gurio village is situated in Hazaribagh district of North Chhotanagpur plateau. It falls under the Barhi block and the Bijaya panchayat, and is 25 km from the block headquarters. Gurio is Yadav dominated and has 391 households, of which 52 families belong to the Scheduled Caste (SC) community. About 38% of the villagers migrate to different parts of the country such as Assam, Delhi and Mumbai. The villagers are mainly employed as JCB (a construction and agricultural equipment) drivers, road construction workers and wage labourers. The hopes of the villagers regarding farming as a livelihood are gradually diminishing owing to the low productivity and outdated technology. The average land holding per family is 0.55 ha. The terrain of land is undulating, with a 3-4 % slope.

LAND DETAILS OF GURIO

Total Forest Land	Total GM land	Private Land
330.49 ha	662.46 ha	215.18 ha

Data source: Circle officer, Block Barhi, Forest Dept., Barhi Range

Before Pradan entered Gurio, the villagers were accustomed to depending on informal credit sources during financial emergencies. Several moneylenders and local leaders had spread their network in the village to lend money to the villagers at very high interest rates. On the domestic front, women were subjected to violence, dowry demands, etc. From agriculture to family planning and the education of children, almost everything was being decided by the male members in the family.

Initially, Pradan organized the women in Self Help Groups (SHGs). Two SHGs, namely, Kamla Mahila Mandal and Jyoti Mahila Mandal were started in 1996. The rationale behind starting these two groups was to unite the women on a common platform, link them to the mainstream and increase their participation in other forums such as the gram sabha, Siksha Samiti, etc. The 38 women, who became members of these two SHGs, started weekly savings and credit activities. These SHGs functioned for about a year. However, due to the lack of proper input from Pradan, the SHG became and remained dysfunctional for seven years. Some of the members, who had taken loans, did not repay the amount, resulting in the groups becoming defunct.

From agriculture to family planning and the education of children, almost everything was being decided by the male members in the family.

In 2007, Pradan began the process of reviving these groups. The Pradan team provided periodical training to accountants and organized exposure visits for the members of the SHGs and their families to healthy groups. Six new SHGs were promoted in the vicinity and were federated into a cluster called the Gurio cluster. The core agenda of these groups was to address their financial needs, to have a platform for sharing the events and problems of their day-to-day life and to build linkages with the mainstream.

submitted to the DVC. This watershed development was bifurcated into two phases — the Reconnaissance Phase and the Implementation Phase. There was remarkable response from the community about the implementation of the programme. In June 2008, the villagers formed a Gram Vikas Samiti (GVS), an informal village-level body, to generate ideas about the implementation process to carry forward the activities.

The GVS included all the adult members of the village, irrespective of class, caste and gender. The prime objective of the Gurio GVS was to implement and monitor land husbandry works, which included land levelling and land treatment in 10 ha. There is a monitoring committee and an execution

TABLE PROJECT DETAILS

23.06 lakhs

Villages Covered

32

Project Period

5 years

Gurio village is situated within the 10 km radius of the Telaya Reservoir, Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) Power Station. There is significant quantity of soil and nutrient erosion because the land is undulating. Much of the lowlands of this village is inundated and occupied by the Telaya Reservoir. A major factor for the low fertility of the land is the soil and nutrient erosion, which was identified at 10 tonnes per ha. The lands were gradually getting inundated and the uplands and the medium lands were becoming less fertile. The SHG members then shifted their focus from savings and credit activities to land and water conservation; rejuvenating the natural resources became an agenda for their livelihood.

A proposal, based on land and water conservation, was designed by Pradan and

committee comprising two representatives — a man and a woman — from each hamlet. An apex body was formed at the block level, with three representatives from each GVS, who meet once a month to discuss the previous month's work progress and accounts, and formulate the action plan for the coming month. GVS members actively participate in the decision-making process for site selection, land husbandry works and land treatment. They selected a service provider (SP), trained by Pradan, to assist them in taking measurements, maintaining books of accounts and so on. The other responsibilities, such as payment to labourers, were handled by the Samiti representatives, who also presented the accounts to all the members during the monthly meetings. The execution committee of GVS, Gurio, completed a volume of earth work worth Rs 3,62,633. This was an exciting

experience and a huge achievement for the villagers, who were initially hesitant to attempt the work. Gradually, when they began carrying out the work meticulously and with utmost efficiency, they became confident. They shared that earlier such work was carried out by contractors, and the villagers themselves were unaware of both the accounts involved and the quality of work. The DVC project period was for five years and the GVS was established to not only implement the action plan but also to utilize the forum to resolve many issues and concerns related to land and water. The members planned to mobilize developmental funds from the block and district, which was earlier being diverted to and coming through the contractors. The Samiti also planned to work for the inclusion of all the villagers in dealing with issues such as casteism, dowry, child marriage and so on.

After the land husbandry works were executed, there was a demand for improving the paddy and vegetable yield. As mentioned, the average land holding per family is 0.55 ha. The farmers of this village carry out the traditional agriculture individually. They purchase low quality seeds at high rates from local markets such as Barsot. Owing to the huge crisis in the availability of the diammonium phosphate (DAP) fertilisers in the market, the farmers were cheated by the dealers and had to purchase it at unfair prices. The group members had addressed their credit needs but they felt the need for an institution parallel to their SHGs. The objective of this institution was to make a robust plan for an integrated natural resource management (INRM), with the latest agricultural technologies. The members of the SHGs and the GVS, who had already had the experience of being in a group, were excited about building an institution that would deal

exclusively with INRM and agriculture. They planned to purchase agricultural input as a group at lower rates and explore the possibilities of getting quality inputs from the companies itself. They decided to plan in a group, and monitor and bargain as a collective with the dealers. The villagers wanted to have a forum where they could deliberate on issues related to the improvement of agriculture in their village. Eventually, they came up with a village-level forum called Sudama Krishi Samiti in June 2009.

The GVS dealt with watershed development specifically and so the need was felt by the people to set up a forum in which agriculture as a major source of livelihood would be strategized and systematized. There were many things such as the latest technologies and inputs, procurement, rate fixation, etc., which could not be addressed in other forums effectively. The GVS plans and monitors excavation work plot-wise and looks into the conservation work and other infrastructural work, which are very tedious and time consuming. The GVS also has other responsibilities such as site selection, planning, payment to labourers, muster roll preparation, monitoring, etc.

The objective of the Sudama Krishi Samiti was to have a robust INRM plan focused on agriculture. The group would deal with each family for optimal utilisation of their resources, thereby, enhancing the productivity of land. The Samiti is an informal group with 10-20 members, which meets every fortnight. SHG members and non-SHG members, eager to do improved agriculture, were encouraged to be a part of the Samiti. The main agenda of the Samiti was to conduct land use planning, dissemination of new technologies, input procurement, SP selection, monitoring and follow-up processes.

There was a lot of deliberation about the roles of the SPs, the Sudama Krishi Samiti and the Pradan professionals. The Samiti selected Rameswar Ram, a local villager, as their SP. The Samiti members also came to a consensus about depositing a service tax, which would be utilized for the payment of the SP. The service tax paid by the more experienced farmers would be Rs 50 and for the new farmers would be Rs 25 per family. Farmers, who had earlier participated in the programme, were the experienced farmers. They were already adopting the improved methods of agriculture, following Pradan's previous intervention work, and reaping its benefits. The members decided to keep their service charges low to encourage the new farmers.

This Samiti selected three representatives to the block-level committee (BLC), which meets once a month. The core agenda of the BLC is consolidation, monitoring, review and planning of the work. The money deposited for input procurement in the Samiti is consolidated at the block level; purchases are then made from the market/local entrepreneurs and the inputs distributed among the Samiti members. The seasonal agricultural plan is made family-wise at the village-level Samiti and gets consolidated at the BLC. There is also a purchasing committee, involved with the procurement of inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, etc., which fixes the prices.

Before initiating agriculture intervention, the Samiti is required to have a plan for each of its members. Rameswar Ram was trained by Pradan to conduct the planning processes. He had detailed discussions with the families on several indicators, including the following:

- ♦ Land types — upland, medium land, lowland
- ♦ Land quality
- ♦ Present use
- ♦ Irrigation source

- ♦ Manpower available
- ♦ Livestock
- ♦ Attitudes and interest in agriculture

The planning for each Samiti member is discussed by the individual members in the Samiti meeting. The members prioritise the plans for the coming and the subsequent seasons. There is a Task and Actor Matrix to ensure the implementation of the plans. This also clarifies the role of the SPs, Pradan professionals and Samiti members.

We also maintained a book of records, in which each Samiti member enrolled her/his name by depositing a service tax. The demand for inputs, that is, indenting format, distribution format and beneficiary-wise crop details are included in this book. We conducted training programmes for the SPs to maintain those records with detailed information, including on the crop, area, ensuring PoP, etc.

The Sudama Krishi Samiti came to a consensus about increasing the yield of paddy, a staple food crop cultivated in the medium lands and lowlands. We conducted a slide show of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) in the VLC meeting. At that time, the yield of paddy in the medium lands and the lowlands of the village was between 40 and 45 kg per katha for the past 4-5 years. The population, however, was steadily increasing whereas the productivity remained static. Land was gradually degrading and becoming smaller in size. Given this scenario, the Samiti members were eager to double their paddy yield. With this in mind, SRI was introduced in the village in June 2008. Saro Devi and Dhaneswar Yadav first took the risk of implementing SRI in their plot. The technology was entirely new.

Saro Devi and Dhaneswar Yadav recall the days when other farmers taunted them when they

TABLE: TASK AND ACTOR MATRIX

No.	Task	Actor		
		Beneficiary	SP	Professional
1	Attending village-level committee (VLC) meetings	√	√	√
2	Planning with individual families	√	√	
3	Procuring input		√	
4	Training and exposure			√
5	Delivering input	√	√	
6	Monitoring and follow-up		√	√
7	Collecting data and keeping records in the VLC book		√	
8	Paying the SP	√	√	
9	Grading of work	√		√

saw the single seedling transplants in their fields. Both raised nurseries, practised spacing and timely transplantation. Another farmer, Sahadev Yadav, who came forward to adopt the technology, achieved a yield of 128 kg per katha. This was about three times the earlier yield from the same plot. The three farmers have decided to cultivate all their medium and lowlands, using the SRI method, which will help them save a huge quantity of seeds, going waste earlier. The farmers are happy to see how, with such low investment of inputs, the yield

from their fields have doubled and tripled.

Saro Devi notes that with the revival of the SHG, there is a changing trend in her village. Along with their savings and the availability of credit, the unity and solidarity among the villagers has been fortified. With the setting up of the GVS and the Sudama Krishi Samiti, both men and women work hand-in-hand to work out possibilities of more options for sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their village.

TABLE: POP FOLLOWED IN SRI IN GURIO

Seed rate	100 g/katha
Time of nursery	25 June to 10 July
Nursery bed size	6' length * 3' width bed with 1' width drainage
Manure in nursery	5 kg of well decomposed cow dung and 1 kg vermi-compost per bed
Seed treatment	Brine water test (100 gm salt in 1 litre of water) of paddy seed to discard chaffy grain. After that Bavistin treatment at 2 gm/kg of seed; seeds are broadcasted on the nursery bed and compost and vermicompost are spread to cover the seeds.
Transplanting	10-12 days old seeding were transplanted
Spacing	Plant to Plant 1' Row to Row 1'
Fertilization	Compost 100-150 kg katha Urea 1 kg, DAP 1.5 kg, Potash 800 kg and ZnSo4 350 gm/katha applied during field preparation. Thirty days after transplanting, 1.25 kg urea and during 500 gm urea at the time of 60-65 days during panicle initiation were applied.
Weeding	Hand weeding was carried out three times
Yield	128 kg/katha

Rooted in Professionalism

AJAY MEHTA

Pradan has played a significant role in inducting motivated professionals in the development sector

Neelima was the role model for Seva Mandir in promoting the idea of taking young professionals into the organisation. There was great a deal of resistance to the idea from among the existing workers. They feared that their authority and relevance in the organization would be diminished. Being new and a junior in the management structure, I was not aware of the discussions that had led to Seva Mandir negotiating for a Pradan professional to join Seva Mandir.

Around this time, Deep Joshi also visited Seva Mandir in his capacity as a programme officer for the Ford Foundation. I accompanied him along with other Seva Mandir colleagues on a long jeep ride into one of the interior villages in Jhadol block. We were out for most of the day looking at the work done under the 'Lab to Land Programme' run by Seva Mandir with the help of the Indian Council for Agricultural Research.

I remember this visit because I felt that we had not been able to show anything impressive and that Deep would not recommend Seva Mandir for a Ford Foundation grant. But that was not to be. Deep managed to pilot a \$1,00,000 grant to Seva Mandir for the purpose of bringing in professionals into the organisation. In hindsight, I realize that the grant to Seva Mandir made possible by Deep was part of his larger vision to strengthen the voluntary sector.

BOLD VISION

At the time I had no idea of the connection that Deep had to the genesis of Pradan and that he and Vijay were part of the group that created Pradan. Looking back, it has to be said that the Pradan's vision for the voluntary sector was truly bold, significant and farsighted.

In the post-emergency period, disenchantment with the state was widespread. The need for civic action to countervail the state and contribute to solving problems faced by our society was acutely felt. Pradan was able to translate this unease with the state into a programme of action. It was a huge achievement. I recall hearing about the enormous effort put in by Pradan staff to recruit professionals and place them in organizations across the length and breadth of the country.

It was no mean achievement to persuade, cajole and browbeat institutions to change their ways and accept people who were the Pradan breed of voluntary sector workers. I remember feeling actually embarrassed as I would slink out our office while Neelima would be working away late into the evening.

HIGH STANDARDS

The high standards of integrity, commitment and professional excellence required by Pradan meant that only exceptional people joined and survived in Pradan. The locations of work and the emoluments paid by Pradan made no concessions to normal middle class aspirations. It is remarkable that after two decades of existence the organization has not lost momentum and its ability to attract highly motivated people.

Neelima came to Seva Mandir at a time when the organization was in turmoil. There were differences within the organization over who would take over the mantle of leadership from the founder President who had just passed away in June 1985. The atmosphere for work was not conducive for a young professional or to feel positive about working in a voluntary organisation and yet Pradan and Neelima chose not to abandon Seva Mandir. I mention this to underscore the high quality of leadership and motivation that informed Pradan's work.

CHANGED STRATEGY

A few years down the road Pradan made adjustments in its strategy to strengthen the voluntary sector. From a position of trying to provide young professionals to existing voluntary organizations, Pradan decided to directly implement development programmes. This decision must have been based on the feedback from young professionals attached to institutions. They must have been

thwarted in their desire to achieve significant results. Their talent and commitment must have clashed with that of old habits and dogma and also with the anxieties of peers who were less talented and motivated.

The decision to directly implement programmes from an operational point of view appears to be all too understandable. It would be a rare voluntary organization that would cede initiative to a younger generation of leaders and simultaneously accept a different ethos to work. The resistance to such changes were likely to be enormous and could have derailed the very basis of Pradan.

DIRECT ACTION

Here too the leadership of Pradan seems to have come good. Instead of being defeated by resistance of the existing institutions, they chose to go directly to the field with their vision of professional action for poverty alleviation and social change. The choice of direct implementation reflected Pradan's genius for action and quick thinking.

Having made this choice, Pradan confined its imagination to creating structures centred on the leadership and initiative of people drawn from the educated middle class, in other words, from the conventional class of professionals. What it didn't do was to experiment with broadening the social base of leadership and professionalism in the sector. People differently qualified and differently motivated were not included in their strategy for strengthening voluntary action.

While such an arrangement makes sense from the point of view of getting development done efficiently in the interest of the most deprived sections of society, this model fails to democratize the social base for leadership for change and development.

MODEST SELF-DEFINITION

At another level, by staying within the conventional notions of professionalism, its choice of work tended to be economic in nature and less oriented towards altering social and power relations within society. This assessment of Pradan may be entirely mistaken, based as it is on anecdotal knowledge of the philosophy and work of Pradan. If, however, there were validity in this assessment of Pradan, I would say that Pradan has been modest in its self-definition as an agent of change and public action.

The calibre of people that it has been able to recruit and their loyalty and commitment to the cause of poverty alleviation suggests that these people would have been up to the challenge of working to a more

comprehensive view of social transformation. They could have engaged with people of diverse social and educational backgrounds in transforming their values and identities consistent with the idea of making our society more just. Pradan's original approach necessarily required this kind of engagement; the latter strategy required that it be consciously introduced.

Pradan represents the best in the traditions of voluntary action in the country. It is an experiment that has succeeded and yet it seems to me that they have sub-performed, given their enormous success in attracting the best talent in our country for social change.

*This article was earlier published
in August 2003.*

Letter to Pradan

In 2002, Pradan came up with the idea of evaluating the effectiveness and impact of its Self-Help Group (SHG) programme. They approached researchers from the academic arena, with a view to design a solid evaluation strategy; a joint venture thus evolved that included Pradan, the Delhi School of Economics and the Namur University, Belgium. The issue is of crucial importance because, surprisingly, we know very little about the true impact of the so-called 'microfinance revolution' that has been happening for the last 20 years.

After a preliminary study in 2003, a longitudinal Living Standard Measurement Survey (LSMS) was initiated in 2004. The objective was to compare the evolution over time of various aspects of poverty and human development between SHG members and non-members (difference-in-difference methodology). The sample was identified through a random selection method in 36 villages across the state of Jharkhand. The target population was divided equally into tribal families and non-tribal families. Pradan has been working with people from different castes with different aspiration and hopes. This makes the fight against poverty all the more challenging and important. After the first round in 2003, the same households were interviewed in 2004 and for the third time in 2006. And in January 2009, the final round of interviews was conducted.

Two of us, Timothée Demont, and Roberta Ziparo — Ph.D. students from Namur University — worked, during the third round, with the research team and Amit Kumar and Sanjay Prasad from the Documentation and Research Unit (DRU) of Pradan. The team also included 14 enumerators; 1,080 households (over 90% of the households as included in the study) of the sample were surveyed, beginning January till April 2009.

Travelling the arid landscapes and flourishing valleys, the hills and the immense plains, we spent a wonderful time in Jharkhand to reach the 36 villages spread across the state. East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Khunti, Gumla, Hazaribagh, Koderma, Banka, Godda and Dumka — we travelled from one district to the other. We meandered through fields of paddy, meeting didis and their families, to assess how the ten-year work of Pradan was influencing the evolution of the lives of the villagers.

The study focused mainly on the SHG programme though we also witnessed and recorded data of the numerous livelihoods projects that PRADAN had initiated with these families in order to create productive assets for a sustainable living. The area

in which the survey was carried out is one of the poorest in India: "The initial level of rural poverty, assessed at 49 percent by the National Sample Survey (NSS) in 1999/2000, was the highest among all Indian states." In our sample this year, we found that around 30% of the households could not manage to have three meals a day for almost half the year (the problematic months being mainly May to October). 68.8% did not have electricity and 96.2% did not have any sanitation facility. The research team is now working at organizing the data collected and merging it with the data gathered in the previous rounds, in order to create the panel database that will eventually allow quantifying the actual impact of the SHG programme (and its implication in terms of [re]design and replication of the intervention).

Timothée Demont and Roberta Ziparo

A FEW WORDS...

"I am very happy with the quality of the work that has been done on the field during the survey. We have worked very hard to ensure quality, from the ten-day training of the enumerators to the manual and computer-assisted supervision on the field. The days were long, without any Sunday to rest. But the good spirit within the team made it largely enjoyable. I discovered new friends here and understood better a rural India that has deeply touched me. What I remember from the six months that I have just spent in India (I spent three months in Pradan Delhi to prepare the survey beforehand) is that this

big investment was largely worthwhile. I have been able to progressively understand the context I had to work in, as well as to control the survey from beginning till end, adapting a lot on the way. My long stay especially taught me about a wonderful country, full of diversity, which I liked a lot. I would like to thank Pradan people for the professional support they provided throughout the project and for their work that I witnessed on the field. I saw proud women taking responsibility for their future and their children. I hope to come soon with interesting results, valuable to Pradan and to the issue of microfinance in general." *Timothée Demont.*

"This trip through the heart of India has been a wonderful immersion in a country endowed with the richness of several cultures, which are able to respect each other. Thanks to our friends in Pradan and to the group of enumerators and data entry operators who travelled with us, the implementation of the survey was an easy task. They helped us not only to carry on the work, but also to communicate with the people, to learn a bit of (one of) their language, to understand their culture. We discovered a world full of colours, of energy, of willing to operate. I am overjoyed to have interacted with people, who are proud of their work. They have been able to encourage the passion and resolution of the women. They seemed happy to welcome us, opening their doors with warmth and love, and offering us food and beverages despite their own difficulties." *Roberta Ziparo.*



Saro Devi first took the risk of implementing SRI in her plot. The technology was entirely new. She recalls the days when other farmers taunted her when they saw the single seedling transplants in her fields.

Extract from *A Step towards Something New* (Page 15)



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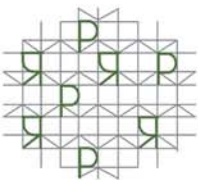
PRADAN



Pradan is a voluntary organisation registered under the Societies' Registration Act in Delhi. We work in selected villages in 7 states through small teams based in the field. The focus of our work is to promote and strengthen livelihoods for the rural poor. It involves organising them, enhancing their capabilities, introducing ways to improve their incomes and linking them to banks, markets and other economic services. Pradan comprises professionally trained people motivated to use their knowledge and skills to remove poverty by working directly with the poor. Engrossed in action, we often feel the need to reach out to each other in Pradan as well as those in the wider development fraternity. NewsReach is one of the ways we seek to address this need. It is a forum for sharing our thoughts and a platform to build solidarity and unity of purpose. NewsReach was supported in the past by Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and Ford Foundation.

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