News Reach

Inside

Land Acquisition, Governance and the State: Issues and Complications

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Examining the volatile issue of land acquisition vis-a-vis the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013, the article explores the concept of 'eminent domain' and the state's power to acquire private land, the source of this power, and the justification for its use

INTRODUCTION

Land acquisition by the state is an issue that is fraught with numerous complications, strong opinions and conflicting viewpoints everywhere in the world. In India, it has contemporary relevance, given the focus of the present government on economic growth as a means of development and poverty eradication, and the consequent pressure on acquiring land for industrialization, infrastructure development, urban expansion, raw material and energy.

There has been increasing public awareness about the land acquisition issue because of the widespread protests and agitations, which have been highlighted by the media. There is social unrest, Maoist violence and a cloud of suspicion over the state using its powers for the well-being of a well-connected few to the detriment of the majority of the people.

There are weaknesses in the laws relating to land acquisition, especially regarding public purpose and the just compensation to land owners. The exploitation of these by the state has led to discussions on the need for a more contemporary law that walks the line between economic growth, equitable distribution and human rights. As an outcome of this dialogue, the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Act 2013 came into force on January 1, 2014.

This paper examines land acquisition by the state from the perspective of governance. It begins with studying the concept of 'eminent domain' that provides the basis for the state to appropriate private property; then delves into the philosophical underpinnings of LARR and how it is different from its predecessor, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. It further discusses the state's power to acquire private land, the source of this power, and the justification for its use.

It then examines the matter of public purpose regarding land acquisition and the issue of fair compensation. The third section describes the shifts in thinking from government to governance and enquires whether the change from the Land Acquisition Act (1894) to LARR epitomises this thinking.

It also addresses broad questions such as whether LARR will help better governance and whether it requires the state to relinquish or devolve some of its powers. In the process, this essay seeks to discuss the complications around land acquisition and the complex inter-dependencies within them.

EMINENT DOMAIN

The basis for LARR, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, and land acquisition by the state in most parts of the world, lies in a concept called 'eminent domain'—the power of the state to acquire private property for public purposes with reasonable compensation. This is a politically sensitive instrument of state power because it can not only help economic and technical progress, and inclusive growth, but can also trample on property rights, economic

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interests of the vulnerable group, and fundamental principles of justice.

The right to private property is fundamental to liberal democracy and free market principles. For those who believe that a state taking away the property of its citizens is an act of robbery and, therefore, sign of a weak, klepto-cratic or a less-evolved state because it exists to protect property rights, let me clarify that the state can acquire, confiscate and appropriate private property with or without compensation and frequently does so, even in countries with sophisticated legal systems.

Eminent domain is as old as political society itself and is deemed necessary because 'public projects cannot be blocked by the recalcitrance of persons who happen to own property in the path of improvement'. When it is exercised, a corresponding right to compensation arises.

PROPERTY, SOVEREIGNTY AND POWER

As a legal term, property denotes certain rights (and not material things), most importantly 'my right to exclude others from interference with my enjoyment of that which the law recognizes as mine'.This right is not a relationship between an owner and a thing; it is one between an owner and other individuals, with reference to things.

The distinction between property and sovereignty goes back to Roman law and its discrimination between dominium, or rule over things by the individual, and imperium, or rule over individuals by the king or state. Dominium over things was also imperium over

fellow human beings; land was power and the landlord was, to the tenant, an agent of the state.

The modern economic and political system changed this by making land a mere factor of production and seeking to simplify and modernize the laws in order to commoditize it, and take it out of the hands of the landed aristocracy signalling, thereby, the end of their political power and control. Contemporary laws around property and related rights have a basis in this modernization process.

Cohen (1927) observes that no individual rights can be exercised in a community without public regulation and, in the case of property rights, the state enforces an owner's right to exclude others and places restrictions and duties upon owners on matters such as usage of the land and what will be done with it upon the owner's death.

The state can also deprive a person of his/her property, justly so, when done in public interest, and there is no absolute principle of justice that requires the payment of compensation for this (although Cohen says that it is generally advisable to do so).

What is the source of the state's power in the eminent domain?

The 17th century philosopher Hugo Grotius ('On the Law of War and Peace') rationalized the foundation for state power in the recognition of transferability of rights. Rights are powers and faculties that humans possess and are, therefore, commodities that may be traded like all other possessions.

Rights come to the state from private individuals through collective agreement—

Eminent domain is particularly controversial because it overrides individuals' right to property which, in liberal democracies, translates to wealth, income and a means to livelihood

innumerable, separate and sequential decisions that occur over a protracted period of time during which individuals agree to form institutions that govern society by imbuing them with some of the power that they naturally possess. These institutions gel into a single coherent entity, the state. The state's power is, thus, the product of wilful transference of individuals' powers or rights to it.

Eminent domain is particularly controversial because it overrides individuals' right to property which, in liberal democracies, translates to wealth, income and a means to livelihood, and is, thus, a base for other rights and democracy, market principles and economic growth. Yet, despite its criticality to the system, the Right to Property is not always recognized as a fundamental right.

In India, the Constitution had designated the Right to Property as a fundamental right. The 44th Constitutional Amendment of 1978 changed this to a Constitutional one under Article 300-A, for which legal remedies and protection moved from the powerful Article 32 to Article 226.

In the move from the Land Acquisition Act 1894 to LARR, the state continues to have the power to acquire land from private owners if it wishes. The differences between the two laws lie in the clearer definitions of public purpose and compensation, restrictions around the acquisition of multi-cropped land (which, according to several commentators reflect a concern for aggregate food production and prices, and not the property rights of land owners), procedural safeguards (in the form of adequate notification, social impact assessments, the use of *gram sabhas* in

obtaining consent, etc.) and narrowing the urgency clause to national defence, security and natural calamities.

Some of the inadequacies of the previous law around eminent domain continue in LARR, especially the obfuscation of the scope of LARR when land is acquired under the 16 other laws of land acquisition; as the state acquires a bulk of its land using the Land Acquisition (Mines) Act (1885), the National Highways Act (1956), the Coal Bearing Areas Acquisition and Development Act (1957), the Railways Act (1989) and, more recently, the Special Economic Zones Act (2005).

THE ISSUE OF PUBLIC INTEREST

The power of the state to forcibly acquire land from private individuals is widely (albeit grudgingly) accepted when carried out in public interest, for a public purpose. The public purpose or public interest (and I use these terms synonymously) objective is critical to the justification of the use of eminent domain, at least for a democratic government, in the public eye. This begs the question—what is public interest?

An examination of the literature on public interest suggests that this is one of those admirably flexible terms that affords most users a measure of identification; that there is no clear agreement as to what it constitutes and that this flexibility around the term facilitates considerable room for manoeuvre for decision-takers and policy makers.

Even so, public interest is the standard that guides the execution of law and introduces objectivity, order and unity into an administration. The task of the government in a democracy is to adjust competing socio-

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economic forces. Public interest is the standard that should determine the degree to which the government lends its forces to either side.

In India, much of the recent conflict around land acquisition has been centred on the issue of whether the government can forcibly acquire land on behalf of private companies, corporate interests and other private profit-making entities while claiming that this has a public purpose.

The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 stipulated public purpose behind land acquisition and left its interpretation to the state, allowing for the use of eminent domain on behalf of private entities. This developed into a means for powerful industrialists, bureaucrats and politicians to use leverage to grab land arbitrarily without paying just compensation.

LARR defines a set of activities as coming within the realm of public purpose. Whereas it continues to permit the use of eminent domain for private entities, it requires the consent of 80 per cent of the affected families in these cases (75 per cent for public-private partnerships) through a prior-informed process, before eminent domain can be exercised for the remaining land.

The prior-informed process includes a social impact assessment that determines the public purpose in a particular land acquisition exercise to be undertaken by an independent entity (other than the state, the sellers and the buyers). The social impact assessment uses participatory mechanisms and elicits opinions from a wider cross-section of people than those directly affected (for example, the social impact process recognizes the role of the *gram sabhas* in Schedule V and VI areas and involves

the indirectly affected, such as agricultural labourers, as well). LARR is thereby also compliant with the *panchayats* (Extension to Scheduled Areas) and the Forest Rights Acts of 1996 and 2006, respectively.

LARR ultimately takes the view that whereas the market works well in bilateral transactions, its effectiveness drops exponentially as the number of parties to a transaction increases, especially when property rights are poorly defined, land records are fuzzy, courts work at a glacial pace and the likely outcome of large-scale land acquisition through the market would be a legal quagmire. LARR sees state participation as necessary in such cases because of the reduced transaction costs and expedited processes that occur due to the value attached to equity and justice, and because the state has an interest in enabling socially useful projects to succeed.

The Issue of Compensation

To many, the entire brouhaha around land acquisition boils down to a single and rather more mundane issue—whether the owner is adequately compensated for the loss of his or her land.

Kratovil and Harrison (1954), identify two irreconcilable theories of compensation. The first is 'owner's loss'—that compensation should aim for the owner to be in as good a financial position as she or he would have been in if his or her property had not been acquired. The second is 'taker's gain'—that the state should pay for only what it gets, not the larger losses suffered by the owner because that would impose an inordinate drain on the public exchequer.

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The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 was aligned with the second theory—it laid down the principle that compensation should be equal to the local market price for land and that the market price should be calculated based upon the average price of all land transactions completed in the area in the previous three years.

This was grossly unfair because, in many regions, land transactions are few and not very well-documented and leave room for officials to manipulate figures; the full value of land deals is often concealed in order to evade stamp duties, and distress sales often constitute a bulk of previous transactions. Moreover, given that land acquisition often leads to appreciation in local land prices, the dispossessed landowner is usually unable to buy back land with the compensation money, leading to land alienation.

LARR aligns itself with the first theory. It combines acquisition, compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement into a single Act, specifies the compensation amounts and the basis for their calculation clearly (LARR Schedule I), recognizes the claim for compensation of those who have not lost land but whose livelihoods have nevertheless been affected, outlines rehabilitation and resettlement entitlements of land and livelihood losers (LARR Schedules II to VI), and prescribes mandatory procedures for these to mitigate the negative impact of displacement. It also includes all private purchases of land above a threshold level within its ambit while requiring prior consent and evidence of public purpose in these transactions. In the process, it aligns itself with the seller of the land.

Involuntary land transactions are now increasingly difficult; compensation is much higher and procedures for rehabilitation and resettlement are clearer and more inclusive. These make land acquisition much more expensive, burdening the taxpayer and possibly placing a brake on the industrialization process.

Ghatak and Ghosh in the article "The Land Acquisition Bill: a Critique and a Proposal" (2011) suggest that the use of a market price for a voluntary transaction as a proxy for an owner's value in forced acquisitions of land is fundamentally flawed. The value of a plot of land to its owner, they say, is not tangible or subject to objective measurement—it is subjective and whatever the owner deems it to be.

In a perfect asset market (which the market for agricultural land is not; it is thin, fragmented, and riddled with friction) all current owners value their asset more than the prevailing market price, otherwise they would sell and not hold. Market price is, thereby, a lower bound on valuation and not a good estimate of compensation in the case of assets that are forcibly seized. On the other extreme, any system of compensation involving a negotiated price provides incentives for landowners to make exaggerated claims. Any acquisition process, therefore, must feature a formula for determining compensation amounts that reflect the dispossessed owner's own valuation. The stipulated compensation formula in LARR is weak because it uses no inputs from landowners, with respect to their own valuations.

There are merits to this argument from the perspective of market failure in the form of inefficiencies from transaction costs, agency problems and informational asymmetries in incomplete markets. Yet, alternatives to market price, in some form or the other, as a basis for just compensation are not clear. LARR does reasonably well in providing a set of transparent and fixed rules regarding compensation (though this is based upon market price) and in leaving less scope for the discretion of officials and experts in this matter.

GOVERNMENT, GOVERNANCE AND LARR

LARR recognizes the claims of those who have not lost land but are nevertheless affected by the acquisition. It specifies compensation amounts and their basis clearly and outlines rehabilitation and resettlement entitlements of affected populations. It defines a set of activities as constituting public purpose and has a narrow urgency clause in place. Thus, it makes involuntary land transactions much more difficult and the compensation for loss considerably higher. It also uses local people's institutions in the acquisition process and brings more people within its ambit.

'Government' to 'Governance'

The term 'government' is associated with formal institutions of the state and their monopoly over legitimate coercive power. It is characterized by an ability to take decisions, a capacity to enforce these and the formal institutional processes that operate at the level of the nation-state to maintain public order and facilitate collective action. It seeks to enable the state to cope with external challenges, prevent conflict among its members, procure resources and frame goals and policies.

'Governance' has two (closely related but nested) meanings. In the first, governance can refer to any mode of co-ordination of inter-dependent activities. The second meaning is heter-archy itself, which involves the self-organized steering of multiple agencies,

institutions and systems, each of which are operationally autonomous from one another and yet are structurally coupled due to their mutual inter-dependence.

Governance, therefore, includes other actors (in addition to the government, such as civil society organizations and the private sector). It is associated with the modern state that has welfare and developmental functions as well as administrative responsibilities. It seeks outcomes that are similar to those of the government but with processes that blur the boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors, and with mechanisms that are without the authority and sanctions of traditional institutions of government.

LARR and Governance

The actors and institutions involved in the land acquisition process under LARR include the state Social Impact Assessment (SIA) units, independent practitioners, social activists, academics, technical experts, public functionaries, requiring bodies, CBOs, CSOs, NGOs, the media, political representatives at different tiers of the government, environmental agencies, institutions of local self-government, *gram sabhas*, governments at the district and sub-district levels, and various other public forums—each operating with its own internal code and logic, in its own strategic and structural context, having its own values, visions, and missions.

Table 1 contains a summary of the actors, institutions and processes, as outlined under LARR.

THREE QUESTIONS

Would LARR enable better governance?

LARR involves a large section of society in decision-making—NGOs, CBOs, CSOs

and institutions of local self-government. Would this result in better governance or in more chaos?

It is the author's considered opinion that, by virtue of the devolution of decision-making processes, involvement of more stakeholders in the processes, the creation of decentralized forums for debate and discussion accessible to a larger number of affected people and the transparency provisions envisaged in the Act, the conflicts around land acquisition stand a higher chance of being played out in the open and resolved through democratic means. There will be less recourse to violence, underground anti-state movements and other unconstitutional disruptive mechanisms. LARR can be seen, therefore, as a move towards better governance.

Does LARR require the state to relinquish power or to devolve power to decentralized entities?

This is dependent upon the way power is defined—whether it is 'ego' or 'other' oriented, and whether it permanently exists or exists only in relation to specific acts. The use of the political scientist Robert Dahl's (1957) intuitive idea of 'A having power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something B would not otherwise do', that is, power as 'other' oriented, and related to a specific act, would lead to the possibility of LARR devolving power on land acquisition from the state to various decentralized forums and institutions.

It is, however, the author's considered opinion that the state's power under eminent domain is of an 'ego' oriented and permanent nature and this has not been relinquished or decentralized in any way under LARR, despite its provisions of transparency and participation.

This is seen in the manner in which LARR envisages the participation of stakeholders and the affected communities; in the use of

Table 1: Actors, Institutions and Processes under LARR

Actors/Institutions	Processes

◆ State SIA Unit
◆ Qualified SIA resource partners
  ▪ Independent practitioners
  ▪ Social activists
  ▪ Academics
  ▪ Technical experts
  ▪ Public functionaries
◆ Requiring body
◆ CBOs, CSOs and NGOs
◆ Media
◆ Political representatives at different tiers of the government
◆ Environmental agencies
◆ Expert groups
◆ *Panchayats* and equivalents
◆ *Gram sabhas*
◆ Government
  ▪ State
  ▪ District
  ▪ Sub-district
  ▪ Line departments
	◆ Notification
	  ▪ In local languages
	  ▪ Within outlined time frames
	  ▪ Use of public places, Internet and government offices
	◆ SIA
	  ▪ Collecting and analysing qualitative and quantitative information
	  ▪ Undertaking field visits
	  ▪ Using participatory methods
	  ▪ To ensure adherence to public purpose as outlined in LARR
	  ▪ To do a detailed land assessment
	    • Area of impact
	    • Land prices and recent changes in ownership
	    • Total land requirement
	    • Is it minimum?
	    • Is it demonstrable last resort?
	    • No. of affected families
	  ▪ To ascertain consent
	  ▪ To assess nature, extent and intensity of positive and negative social impacts
	  ▪ To prepare a Social Impact Monitoring Plan (SIMP) with ameliorative measures to address identified social impacts
	◆ Public Hearings
	  ▪ To present SIA findings, seek feedback, incorporate omissions and additional information
	  ▪ Facilitated by a member of the SIA team, held in the local language
	  ▪ In at least all villages/towns where 25 per cent of the residents are directly affected
	  ▪ Appraisal by Expert Group

'invited' participatory spaces wherein the preliminary agenda is controlled by planners and policymakers, which can preclude alternative perspectives, re-enforce existing privileges and lead to the de-politicization of participation and the possibility of co-optation of the agenda. Whereas LARR legislates the use of participatory spaces (and this is a positive step), it does not guarantee the empowerment of the affected communities at the cost of the power of the state.

Does the administration retain its ability to manipulate land acquisition outcomes under LARR?

The rules regarding LARR processes (listed in Table 1) are remarkably detailed and make involuntary land acquisitions considerably more difficult compared to the earlier Land Acquisition Act. Despite this, in the author's opinion, there is scope for manipulation of LARR outcomes, even in cases where the urgency clause is not invoked.

Land acquired under hydro-electric and irrigation projects, for example, by-passes the SIA process under the rules—an environmental impact assessment conducted by a state agency is deemed sufficient to meet the objective of assessing the social impact. The SIA process also contains possibilities of manipulation, owing to the fact that the requiring body pays for it and acquires the power, thereby, to influence who is on the SIA team, what its terms of reference are and which of the SIA processes have adequate financial provisions. This ability is not necessarily negative—an administration requires flexibility to function effectively and this includes the ability to influence land acquisition outcomes, wherever a clear sense of public purpose is discernible.

The references for this article are available on request from newsreach@pradan.net

CONCLUSIONS

Whereas opinions around eminent domain may be varied, eminent domain itself is a fact. The state will always have the power to acquire private land for any purpose it sees fit and societal, governmental and constitutional checks and balances on this power will never be sufficient to entirely prevent it.

The needs of society as a whole will always require a delicate balance with the rights and requirements of individuals and eminent domain, though fraught with the complications described above, ultimately enables this.

LARR reflects these complications and attempts to maintain this delicate balance. The 'government to governance' line of thought is seen as applicable to the differences between LARR and its predecessor, especially in its wider objectives and clearer definitions of public purpose requirements and compensation amounts, and in the involvement of a larger section of society in decisions and processes around land acquisition.

Is LARR a 'good' Act? The very fact that no commentator is entirely happy with the Act—it is either too generous to the dispossessed landowners or tramples on their rights, defines public purpose too vaguely or does not give the state the necessary flexibility in this matter, brings too many people within its ambit or leaves out some categories of the affected populations, inter-alia—can be seen as a point in its favour. After all, to quote Pranab Bardhan, "The greatest challenge facing Indian democracy is that of finding a way to balance the needs of economic growth, equitable distribution and human rights, and this requires rescuing these complex and sometimes conflicting objectives from the demagoguery of single issue advocates."

OTELP Plus Consortium in Koraput:
An Experiment in Collaboration

MONISHA MUKHERJEE AND SRIHARI CHITY

Partnering with other NGOs and forming a Consortium is proving to be beneficial and efficient for PRADAN because it holds the promise of participating organizations influencing policy-makers to design and implement programmes that benefit the rural population

PROLOGUE

PRADAN's tryst with development in the hinterlands of Koraput, one of the southernmost districts of Odisha and a Maoist hotbed, began in 2010. Located at an altitude of 3,000 ft, Koraput, with its moderate climate, its pollution-free atmosphere and pristine beauty, is a perfect place to live. However, it has its own share of suffering. It is far from any town or city and is devoid of basic amenities. Moreover, lack of awareness among the inhabitants and an apathetic attitude of the administration have turned the area into one of abject poverty and a breeding ground for Maoists. In addition, lately, industrial moguls have entered the area, to exploit the vast amounts of bauxite ore in the region, increasing the suffering of the local population and signalling an ominous future for the tribals of Koraput.

It was difficult for PRADAN to initiate work in the area because there were already thousands of international, national and state-level NGOs as well as several local voluntary agencies working there. The mind-boggling lack of development has attracted a limitless inflow of developmental funds.

Koraput was quite different from the places PRADAN had engaged with earlier. Wherever PRADAN had started work thus far, it was an empty canvas on which PRADAN painted whatever it wanted. In Koraput, more than 16,000 SHGs had already been formed. The canvas there was full of paintings; PRADAN had to find a different way of working in order to change the picture noticeably for its contribution to be discernible.

PRADAN explored many villages in Koraput; the team found many NGOs, some active, some dormant and waiting for funds to initiate work. Although, PRADAN initially wanted to work in partnership with these NGOs, it was treated as an unsolicited guest, who had intruded upon the sacred territories of other agencies. Hence, the team decided to abort this strategy and move back to the old PRADAN way of directly working with the community. The team was aware that it would, at some time or the other, have to get back to partnership mode again, primarily because of the following reasons:

- In places like Koraput, where poverty is rampant, it is difficult to facilitate a just and equitable society where everyone cares for each other, by traversing the path alone.

- There are numerous well-intentioned NGOs working in the area, and collaboration with these could hasten the development process.

- PRADAN, by itself, can reach only a limited number of families; by joining hands with other NGOs, it could reach thousands more, living in interior and remote areas, where PRADAN might not reach because of its limited human resources.

- Because many NGOs were doing very credible work, there was huge scope for cross-learning and for making the development process more efficient.

- Many local NGOs were interested in building their organization and were unable to do so due to the lack of resources and expertise.

After two years of direct action work, we sensed an opportunity to work in collaboration with other NGOs when we received the news that the Government of Odisha was planning to launch the Orissa Tribal Environment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP) Plus in the remote and Maoist-affected Koraput and Malkangiri districts of southern Odisha.

OTELP PLUS

OTELP is a programme supported by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Department for International Development (DFID), World Food Programme (WFP), Government of India and Government of Odisha, to ensure the livelihoods and the food security of poor tribal households, through people-managed initiatives for sustainable management of natural resources and off-farm enterprise development.

The Scheduled Tribe/Scheduled Caste (ST/SC) Development Department under the Government of Odisha was to be the nodal agency for implementing the programme, initiated in 2004. Select NGOs were involved in the project to facilitate and support social mobilization, capacity building and participatory planning and implementation. The villagers were organized into Village Development Associations (VDAs), to plan and execute the activities under the project, by receiving funds from the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) of the respective districts.

Seeing that the programme was well-accepted by the tribal community, the Government of Odisha, during the financial year 2010–11, decided to extend the project as 'OTELP Plus'. OTELP Plus was launched first in the highly Maoist affected areas of Koraput and Malkangiri districts in December 2011. Unlike OTELP, this programme was fully funded and facilitated by the state government, which meant that the village development plans

would be implemented through the convergence of different government programmes at the district level.

Some of the programmes targeted for convergence were: MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) for land and water development and participatory forest management, Biju Koraput, Bolangir and Kalahandi (KBK) for capacity building and skill development, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) for horticulture and livestock development, and Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF) for community infrastructure creation.

OTELP Plus is a seven-year project with three distinct phases. The initial two years were called the probation phase when community organization and capacity building for preparing the village development plans were the focus. The subsequent phase is for three years and called the implementation phase, which focuses on the execution of the village plans and the capacity building of the community to make the best use of the developed resources. The last two years will be the consolidation phase to help the community manage its affairs on its own by having strong linkages with the government and other institutions.

A NEW BEGINNING

The objective of the OTELP Plus programme was largely aligned with that of PRADAN's, which decided to participate in the programme and to collaborate with other NGOs as a consortium. Each of the participants would then become empowered and gain from the

The team was quite excited about being associated with such a programme because its objectives, that is, "to improve the livelihoods and food security of the poor tribal households through natural resource management and promotion of off-farm and non-farm enterprises" was in consonance with PRADAN's objectives

experience. The participating organizations could also as a group, in turn, influence policymakers to design the programmes that would benefit the rural population.

The PRADAN team shared its thoughts with other NGOs present in South Odisha; after two to three rounds of discussions, Chetana Organic Farmers' Association (COFA), Harsha Trust, PRAGATI, Livolink Foundation and PRADAN agreed to collaborate with each other and participate in the programme as a Consortium.

The government, however, wanted one NGO to take the lead role and sign the MoU on behalf of the Consortium. All the NGOs unanimously nominated PRADAN as the lead agency and asked it to take charge of the Consortium Execution Body because it had initiated the collaboration and also had a long, positive experience with OTELP in Kandhamal district of Odisha.

PRADAN signed the MoU on December 9, 2011, with ITDA Koraput, on behalf of the consortium to develop 51 Micro-Watersheds (MWSs) in approximately 150 villages over the next seven years under the OTELP Plus programme. PRADAN had to implement the programme in 15 MWSs directly and in 36 MWSs by partnering with the other four NGOs.

The team was quite excited about being associated with such a programme because its objectives, that is, "to improve the livelihoods and food security of the poor tribal households through natural resource management and promotion of off-farm and

non-farm enterprises" was in consonance with PRADAN's objectives. And second, the programme was highly relevant developmentally and sustainable because the funds would be raised through convergence of government programmes such as MGNREGS, BRGF, BKBK, and RKVY. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) too had a major role to play in the implementation of the project. If it were to work, the programme could be replicated across the country.

DELINEATION OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Overarching goals and perspective at the beginning

- Empowering the tribals of Koraput and enabling them to enhance their food security

- Increasing income and improving the overall quality of the livelihoods of tribals

Role of PRADAN as the lead agency

- Assessing the capacity-building needs of the personnel engaged in the project by all the partners

- Building their capacity to implement the project through community-led processes

- Disseminating good practices among the partners to facilitate quality execution everywhere

- Helping partners to have proper systems to monitor the quality of works/processes and execute corrective actions timely.

- Compiling the project information and report to ITDA and the others concerned

Role of all agencies as Facilitating NGOs (FNGOs)

- Implementing the assigned number of MWS projects by directly receiving funds from ITDA and engaging the required personnel

TEAMS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

FNGO level: For every 10–12 MWSs (5,000 ha treatable area), the respective FNGO placed a Watershed Development Team (WDT), comprising three professionals and one Managing Information System (MIS) executive-cum-accountant. Of these three professionals, one is chosen as the team leader for co-ordination. WDT members are primarily responsible for the direct implementation of the project in the corresponding area. This team conducts monthly review meetings. For 51 MWSs, there are five such teams with 20 staff members.

Consortium level: For the operation of the Consortium there are two separate bodies.

Secretariat: PRADAN is the lead agency and has an Execution Body, comprising three professionals and one MIS executive-cum-assistant. Of these three professionals, one is designated as the team leader, one is the livelihood expert and the third is the social expert. In the beginning, one regular PRADAN professional was deputed as the team leader and the others were hired on a contractual basis. This body is primarily responsible for assessing the capacity of all 20 staff of the five WDTs working at the FNGO level and helping them to enhance their capacities to ensure the deliverables of the project effectively by arranging periodic training programmes

Table 2: Reach of Each Organization under the Project

No.	Name of FNGO	Area	No. of MWSs	No. of Revenue Villages	No. of Natural Villages	Gram Panchayat (GP)	Total House-holds (HH)	Total Popu-lation
1.	PRADAN	Lamptaput	15	37	61	11	3,188	12,016
2.	HARSHA	Bandhugaon	10	22	25	5	1,719	7,188
3.	HARSHA	Baipariguda	10	16	35	3	1,635	6,136
4.	CHETNA	Baipariguda	6	19	28	3	1,314	5,275
5.	HARSHA	Almonda	10	22	25	5	1,304	5,707
Total			51	116	174	27	9,160	36,322

Report: OTELP Plus Consortium in Koraput: An Experiment in Collaboration

and exposure visits. When needed, outside experts are invited to impart training and to build capacity of all the FNGO staff. Besides, the staff of the Consortium Execution Body remains actively engaged in the field for conducting demonstrations. In addition, the Consortium Execution Body plays a co-coordinating role with ITDA and other line departments for all project-related affairs.

Consortium Board: A Board was formulated to guide the operations of the Consortium. One senior staff member from each of the partner agencies was selected to be a Board Member. The Board meets every quarter and is entrusted with the task of giving directions for the effective running of the Consortium. The Board members go on field visits before each Board meeting, take inputs from the FNGO staff as well as the Consortium Execution Body. The Team Leader (TL) of the Consortium presents its accomplishments before the Board in the each Board meeting.

COMMENCEMENT

The first Consortium meeting was held on January 5 and 6, 2012, when the Board was officially formed. All the participating NGOs signed an internal agreement in the meeting, which explicitly stated the roles and responsibilities of each agency.

MAJOR CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

Building trust: The first and foremost challenge was to build camaraderie among the NGOs. It was much more difficult than the PRADAN team envisaged. Harsha Trust was open to discussing its strengths and struggles but the others were not. Several measures were taken to improve the situation. There were many rounds of deliberations to

There were many rounds of deliberations to understand the objectives for joining hands to work together

understand the objectives for joining hands to work together. In addition, the partners were consistently invited to give their views on matters pertinent to the Consortium and to establish their ownership in the project. Furthermore, all the NGOs also visited each other's fields, to understand the other's work and areas of strength, and to increase appreciation of each other's work.

Initially, the feedback that was offered was largely perceived as a criticism or a questioning of the credibility of the concerned organization. The PRADAN team had to find a way of giving feedback so that partner agencies would take it constructively. At times it faltered because the feedback was too blunt and made things much more complicated. In the case of one NGO, the Consortium Execution Body staff stationed at the field location became frustrated because of the apathetic attitude of the partner NGO staff towards the commitments made in the OTELP Plus project. The staff wrote a letter to the concerned agency's head regarding the lack of seriousness and the apathetic attitude of their field staff. This did not go down well with the partner agency and they wanted to disassociate themselves from the Consortium. Also, they could not cope with the deliverables demanded from the project and eventually withdrew from the Consortium on a sour note. This created a commotion among all the partners. All of them tried in vain to persuade the concerned agency to not leave the Consortium. ITDA, however, had no complaints regarding the withdrawal because it was very dissatisfied with the performance of the said agency. As far as the other NGOs were concerned, the PRADAN team took their senior management into confidence and thereby ensured their participation, comments and feedback on Consortium affairs.

In the meantime, ITDA was not very open to the idea of the Consortium. Much of its power was curtailed in this power-sharing arrangement. This resulted in many conflicts in the beginning because ITDA tried to interfere in the day-to-day affairs of the Consortium. The personnel from ITDA tried to define the roles and responsibilities of the Consortium Execution Body, tried to push its agenda such as the promotion of broiler poultry or tissue culture banana with individual agencies whereas the Consortium had decided not to enter into any livelihood activities in the first year.

Initially, it created a misunderstanding among the partner agencies and also created a rift between the Consortium Execution Body and FNGOs. Whenever something of this kind occurred, the Consortium Execution Body had to intervene to neutralize the damage. Time and again, the PRADAN team had to meet the concerned officials of ITDA to explain to them the role of the Consortium, why it had been brought into existence, how it could improve the performance of the OTELP Plus programme; what kind of support it required from ITDA to play its role effectively, etc. After many discussions, negotiations, re-negotiations and deliberations, ITDA no longer saw the Consortium as a threat but a supporting unit to further the cause of OTELP Plus.

In addition, for the initial two-year period, PRADAN, as the Consortium Secretariat Holder, wore two hats—one of a mentor and another of a monitor. This created a conflicting image among the partners and hindered the process of trust building. Therefore, after the completion of two years of the probation phase, which was largely the community mobilization and planning phase, when the Consortium partners did reasonably well, the MoU with ITDA was renewed. This time, PRADAN's role of compiling the project information and reporting to ITDA and the others was deleted. This helped in two ways. On the one hand, PRADAN could relinquish its monitoring role and, on the other, it could partner with the NGOs and ITDA. Communications improved and the partner NGOs' confidence in dealing with the stakeholder also increased. ITDA is happy with the current arrangement because it no longer has to depend on the Consortium Execution Body to reach the individual partners.

Putting systems in place: Only one professional from PRADAN was assigned to look after the affairs of the Consortium. Running the Secretariat for the Consortium, however, called for numerous tasks, as listed below.

- Day-to-day co-ordination: Co-ordinating at various levels such as with the respective NGO heads, all WDTs, ITDA, PSU and other line departments, as and when needed, to establish an appropriate alignment at all levels. This is done through e-mails, telephonic communications, meetings, etc.

- Reporting: This encompasses timely submission of financial statements such as MPR, Utilization Certificate and requisitions. Programmatically, it requires submitting a month-wise progress report around some indicators set by OTELP, various plans such as the MGNREGA plan, the consolidated capacity-building plan from all the FNGOs with a month-wise break up, and various training reports. Besides this, it involves reporting internally to PRADAN and drawing expert influences from PRADAN, as and when needed.

- Capacity-building: This starts with a needs assessment for the experts of the Consortium and making a capacity-building plan accordingly. As per the plan, appropriate training programmes are designed and conducted for the experts.

- Networking and linkages: Networking and building linkages with ITDA, PSU, other line departments, block officials and district administration are required for influencing strategy formulation at that level, by sharing the best practices experienced by the team. For this, so far, the PRADAN team has engaged in process guideline writing, preparing the SOP for SHG promotion, presenting the CSP concept note, helping the PSU by proposing a tentative cost norm for it, suggesting effective trainings, designing trainings and sometimes helping as a resource person, etc.

- Attending meetings and workshops: Attending various meetings, training programmes and orientation workshops arranged by the OTELP Plus.

- Writing proposals: This is required for initiating any activity. For example, submitting proposals for agriculture support, goat-rearing or any small micro-enterprise development to different departments and ITDA for or on behalf of the Consortium for all the FNGOs.

- Facilitating periodic review (monthly) meeting of the team leaders: This monthly event is one of the key forums for mutual learning, mutual consultation, sharing of best practices and effective planning for the following month, both for individual FNGOs as well as the Consortium's Execution Body, with the help of the group.

- On-field support to partner NGOs: This is the backbone of the entire partnership. This involves intense hand-holding support to each of the experts or WDT members in the field, for grounding any concepts or ideas.

- Overall office administration and management: As PRADAN receives Development Support Cost to run the Secretariat, it involves both financial and office management. It includes verifying and approving various bills, facing the audit of OTELP Plus, responding to queries arising thereof, verifying financial statements such as the Monthly Progress Report, Utilization Report and helping the accountant prepare the indent for the following quarter, following up both with ITDA and PSU for timely release of funds, facilitating each of the FNGOs to submit various financial reports and consolidating each FNGO's report and submitting it to ITDA, etc.

- Documentation: Documenting minutes of each and every meeting and circulating it in the group for information and future reference, writing the SHG manual, writing process guidelines, writing on any best practices for knowledge dissemination across the Consortium, writing the OTELP Plus strategy paper for PRADAN to track what is going on, preparing various presentations, etc.

One of the major problems was getting quality staff to take care of much of the managerial work so that the assigned professional could take care of the partnership aspects. Recruiting such persons, training them and managing them was a huge task and, initially, much of the time was spent on managing such issues, thereby diluting the actual objective with which PRADAN had entered the partnership.

Later on, realizing the gravity of the situation, PRADAN allotted another senior professional so that much of the field demonstration aspects and capacity-building of partners' staff could be taken care of.

In the meantime, all partner organizations worked with contractual staff, who did not own the mission and vision of the concerned organizations. This was one of the biggest obstacles in the initial days. However,

influencing each of the partner organizations to orient their staff and depute senior persons to provide strategic guidance to the unit and several rounds of Consortium-level orientation on the developmental needs of the area, helped in this regard.

Evolving a mutually agreed-upon strategy: Each of the partner organizations had its own viewpoint regarding institution building. Harsha Trust and PRADAN were in favour of Women's Self Help Groups (WSHG) whereas, for PRAGATI, WSHG was a failed concept and it wanted to promote VDAs, wherein all the adults of the village were members, and COFA had male farmers' co-operatives and user groups. The journey of arriving at a consensus gave many insights.

The partners visited each other's fields to understand the functioning of their institutions and tried to gauge which form would lead towards achieving the goals in a holistic and efficient manner. After the exposure visits and multiple rounds of discussion, the group decided to nurture WSHGs as the primary institution to take charge of the developmental activities of the area because the group found WSHGs to be more vibrant than any other form of community mobilization.

Fulfilling the demands of ITDA beyond the deliverables mentioned in the MoU, when PRADAN and the partner NGOs pushed many government programmes such as the plantation programme and the small micro-enterprise programmes during the community mobilization phase, often caused compromises to be made in the process. Among the partners also, there was a varied response to such demands. Some were interested in taking up these programmes without taking the villagers into the fold because they would

The partners visited each other's fields to understand the functioning of their institutions and tried to gauge which form would lead towards achieving the goals in a holistic and efficient manner

find it very tangential in nature whereas others considered it an infringement on the part of ITDA.

However, because we, as a group, were clear about our stance, we could negotiate well with our stakeholders. In the initial 18 months, things mostly moved in a PRADAN-driven manner with much of the load of running the affairs being taken by PRADAN. After several rounds of discussions, each of the organizations decided to anchor one or two themes. For example, PRAGATI took charge of the SRI theme, Harsha Trust took charge of the WADI theme, COFA took charge of the organic farming theme and PRADAN was entrusted with the institution building theme.

However, the Consortium Execution Body had to push hard for the others to take the initiative and take charge of the themes they had agreed to anchor. The collaboration now has started to go beyond the project deliverables, to understand each other's strengths better. Multiple exposure visits to Harsha Trust's area and COFA's area, and experience-sharing have already been conducted although much more needs to be done to strengthen the Consortium.

To bring all the partner-NGOs on the same platform, a vision building exercise was conducted in two phases, with the facilitation of an external consultant, Mr. Ramakrishna, an Organization Development (OD) consultant in May and September 2014. The Consortium has come up with the following document:

INPUT-OUTPUT OUTCOME

A training calendar is prepared every year, as per the needs assessment and approved by the Consortium Board. These training programmes

VISION DOCUMENT OF THE CONSORTIUM (COFA, HARSHA TRUST AND PRADAN), KORAPUT

Vision for the Network

Long-term goal: To create a culture of partnership of CSOs to jointly pursue the developmental needs of the rural poor of Koraput district.

Short-term goals (milestones for the next three years):

1. Establishing democracy in the network by rotational leadership at the Board level.
2. Developing a common and agreed strategy and expertise of professionals on the following:
   a. Institution building (WSHG, Cluster, Federation, VDA and VDC).
   b. Livelihoods (Both agricultural and allied)
   c. Natural resource management
   d. Documentation for better knowledge management
   e. Team building
3. Achieving a mutual learning platform and institutionalizing best practices.
4. Establishing an effective M & E system in all its member organizations.
5. Focussing on a need-based policy influencing.

Vision of the Network for the Community of Koraput

Long-term goal: Building a just and equitable rural society in Koraput through sustainable change in the human condition (social, economic, psychological and extending self to others).

Short-term goal (milestones for the next three years):

1. Organizing at least 80 per cent of the women in the operational area into SHGs and federating them into Clusters.
2. Ensuring that women's collectives (SHG, Cluster, and Federation) and VDAs are able to guarantee:
   a. Round-the-year food security and extra cash income of Rs 10,000 for an additional 60 per cent of the families through improved agriculture and allied activities
   b. Irrigation facilities of at least 20 decimals of land per family for at least 50 per cent of the total landholders of the operational area
   c. Planning and implementation of projects for sustainable use of natural resources
3. Making certain that at least 70 per cent of the women participate and influence the *palli sabha* and 30 per cent of the women participate and influence the *gram sabha*.
4. Increasing the access of women to *gram panchayats*, blocks and other institutions for an effective implementation of government schemes.
5. Creating a mutual learning forum in the community to disseminate best practices.

are mostly organized and facilitated by the staff of the Secretariat, held by PRADAN and, at times, by external resource persons, as per the requirement. The training cost is provided by ITDA.

Mentioned below are some of the central-level class-room and on-field training programmes conducted for all partners.

1. Orientation on OTELP Plus and the Consortium approach
2. Brainstorming on the type of community institutions
3. SHG Orientation Phase 1
4. SHG Orientation Phase 2
5. Training on INRM
6. Training around the various aspects of EPA
7. Village Development Livelihood Plan (VDLP) Phase 1
8. Vision broadening through an exposure visit to Baliguda
9. VDLP Phase 2
10. Livelihood training
11. Agriculture basic crop production training
12. Training on various government schemes
13. CSP grooming
14. Training on WADI
15. Exposure visit to Majhaput on *Kharif* agriculture, through VDA
16. Vision building exercise Phase 1
17. Vision building exercise Phase 2
18. SHG membership training
19. SHG record-keeping training
20. MGNREGA estimation preparation
21. Detailed Project Report (DPR) preparation for spring-based water supply project
22. EPA case-record writing
23. Trellis and rain shelters
24. Basic engineering

In addition, field-level support was provided to partner NGOs to build their capacity. Given below is the list of inputs given at the field level to COFA in the first two years of the association.

1. Project concept seeding
2. SHG concept seeding and nurturing
3. Arranging exposure visits for the senior staff around the SHG
4. SHG membership training
5. Treatable area calculation
6. Survey for spring-based water supply project
7. Demonstrating the MGNREGA five-year plan preparation
8. Kharif agriculture support
9. Rabi agriculture—training to farmers along with field demonstrations
10. MGNREGA layout and intensive day-to-day follow-up
11. WADI support
12. MGNREGA plan preparation
13. Training to CSPs around VDLP steps
14. Complete VDLP demonstration at sample villages of each Cluster
15. EPA layout, estimation preparation, case-record preparation and site visit
16. Filling up the Measurement Book (MB) at ITDA
17. Technical supports for Drip Base Irrigation (DBI), lift irrigation, drip installation, etc.

Tangible outputs achieved through the Consortium in partner organizations' operational areas:

1. Approximately 300 women SHGs, 19 Clusters and 82 VDAs have been promoted and nurtured
2. Village Development Plans have been prepared in 80 revenue villages
3. 1,700 farmers have adopted improved agricultural practices
4. 232 acres of land has been developed under the WADI programme
5. Land development work of more than Rs 50 lakhs has been achieved by leveraging

funds from the MGNREGA programme

6. Asset creation of approximately Rs 1.5 crores under IFAD top-up assistance and BKBK (dug well, community hall, small lift irrigation, low-cost housing, DBI, drip irrigation, etc.)

Outcomes achieved at the staff level of partner organizations

1. Staff are more confident about community mobilization aspects and are able to independently promote and nurture SHGs, VDAs and Clusters

2. Staff are able to facilitate Village Development Plans independently

3. They are able to document Village Development Plans independently

4. They have also learned the nuances of INRM

5. Organizations have started collaborating with ITDA independently

REFLECTIONS FROM THE ODYSSEY

This three-year journey has been very eventful and has thrown up many questions and some answers that the larger PRADAN team can learn and benefit from.

Who does PRADAN partner? What should be the criteria of choosing an NGO for collaboration?

In the case of the Koraput Consortium, Harsha Trust was chosen because of PRADAN's past associations with the organization and, therefore, it would be easier to work with it. In the same way, the Livolink Foundation was chosen. PRAGATI was chosen because it had a strong presence in Koraput and was recognized as a livelihood promoting NGO. COFA was

The objective of the collaboration, in the beginning, was to efficiently achieve the deliverables of the OTELP Plus project. Therefore, the focus was more on meeting the targets

chosen because it showed keen interest in the programme.

All these NGOs did not have a presence in the project area and neither did they have any permanent staff, who could be deputed for the project. This created enormous problems for these NGOs to set up teams and manage them efficiently. Later, it was realized that it might have been better to partner with NGOs, who were present in the project area, such as Rural Action for Development (RAD) and Ankur in Bandhugoan area, and Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), Society for Promoting Rural Education and Development (SPREAD) in Boipariguda area because they had been engaged with the community and could have brought fresh viewpoints to the partnership, especially because two of them were also engaged in the rights perspective.

The objective of the collaboration, in the beginning, was to efficiently achieve the deliverables of the OTELP Plus project. Therefore, the focus was more on meeting the targets. The other objective such as institutionalization of the learning was not explicitly brought to the table in the beginning. Organizations placed contractual staff, thinking that PRADAN as the lead agency would guide them in achieving the deliverables, instead of deputing their permanent staff to these projects. The contractual staff had little understanding of the organization's mission and vision and many used it as a stop-gap mechanism while looking for other opportunities. These contractual persons largely failed to work as a bridge between the Consortium and the respective organizations. Therefore, the Consortium faced a high level of struggle on both the fronts. First, to achieve

the target set by the OTELP Plus programme and second to experiment with something that was not owned by the senior staff of the respective organizations. For example, there was very low acceptance of WSHG as the major community mobilization strategy among the staff of the different agencies.

Although the Board was in place to address such mis-alignment issues, its inputs mostly remained limited to the intermittent Board meetings. Upon reflection, it might have been better to have discussed the commitment towards this collaboration more explicitly in the beginning and negotiated harder for the engagement of influential persons from the respective organizations on a day-to-day basis so that they could have worked as a bridge between the Consortium and their organization to institutionalize the learning from the experiments that were taking place. This was done afterwards; by then one-and-a-half years had already passed.

Should partnerships be bound by project commitments? What should be the output of the partnership? Can project output be the output of the partnership? Is project-bound partnership a real partnership or just a sub-leasing of work taken from a donor?

Primarily because the Koraput Consortium is a project-bound association, there have also been many positives through this experimentation. First, this has made an impact on a large number of families in the interior parts of

Though there are multiple positive experiences in this association, there also exist numerous challenges. We, as a group, realized that to ensure institutional partnership, it requires focus on the shared vision beyond the task delivery and to pursue it jointly. It requires effort to build upon each other's strength in the true sense and to arrive at a fine balance between moving ahead with consensus and the timely fulfilling of the project mandates.

Koraput, which would not have happened otherwise. Second, the sound demonstrations have helped partner agencies use their working area as an exposure ground for the rest of their organization thereby institutionalizing the lessons they are learning in those areas. Just as in direct action, where the team sometimes becomes distracted from the actual objective and immerses itself in fulfilling project commitments, this also happens in partnership.

WAY FORWARD

Although there are multiple positive experiences in this association, there also exist numerous challenges. We, as a group, realized that to ensure institutional partnership, it requires focus on the shared vision beyond the task delivery and to pursue it jointly. It requires effort to build upon each other's strength in the true sense and to arrive at a fine balance between moving ahead with consensus and the timely fulfilling of the project mandates.

Above all, PRADAN has visualized 'women's collective' as 'change agents' in our direct engagement, for partnership; similarly, it has also visualized the following: Whoever (meaning the NGOs) acts as facilitator, the vision of 'women collective as change agent' must be pursued. Although sensitizing partner organizations about the importance of promoting WSHGs has already laid a foundation for this, it will require much more follow-up and investment of time to actualize it.

PRADAN NSO and OLM: Rolling Out the SRI Programme

NITYANANDA DHAL

Engaging closely for the first time with the government to roll out the System of Rice Intensification programme in Odisha, despite some misgivings and apprehensions, has been very encouraging and valuable, both in terms of visible results in the field and in the learning process

Over the years, PRADAN has established its position as a pioneer in the field of rural development. Its direct grass-roots engagement has contributed significantly to the lives of hundreds of thousands of poor and vulnerable families in central India's poverty pockets. However, many supporters and well-wishers of PRADAN often criticize its inward focus and limited policy-influencing role even though it has extensive ground experience. Many believe that PRADAN needs to pro-actively engage in shaping various government-run poverty alleviation programmes and extend support to other non-profit development players in the field of rural development. By doing so, it could contribute immensely to the efficiency and effectiveness of various development programmes and also reach a larger number of poor families. Responding to the feedback and taking into account the opportunities, PRADAN has initiated a few institutional and programme partnerships with some NGOs in the last few years.

In August 2013, a dedicated wing of PRADAN called NSO (NRLM Support Organization) was established to extend support to the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), a flagship programme of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. In this connection, PRADAN-NSO has been engaged with the Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM) as a knowledge and capacity-building partner since 2014.

Following an extensive field assessment, it was decided to help OLM roll out its System of Rice Intensification (SRI) programme in the *kharif* season of 2014. This is probably the first time that PRADAN has been closely engaged in supporting the government in rolling out its programme. Contrary to many apprehensions, the outcome has been very encouraging, both in terms of visible results in the field and in the learning process of OLM.

OLM, under the World Bank-supported Targeted Rural Initiative for Poverty Termination and Infrastructure (TRIPTI) project, has been promoting paddy productivity enhancement measures since 2011. In the *kharif* season of 2013, approximately 61,061 farmers participated in this programme, spread over 23 blocks of 10 districts. The main objective of this programme is to enhance productivity of small and marginal farmers and, thereby, reduce food insufficiency of the poor and the Extremely Poor and Vulnerable Group (EPVG) category farmers, by adopting SRI principles.

The strategy was mainly to engage external agencies experienced in SRI to support the implementation of the programme by directly engaging with producer groups (PGs) and OLM's core staff at the state and the district level, As per the reports received on crop-cutting, productivity has been enhanced by 10–25 per cent, despite the damage caused by Phailin, the cyclonic storm experienced in large parts of the state during the project.

TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT (TNA) EXERCISE AND FINDINGS

To chalk out the engagement areas of PRADAN-NSO and OLM, a detailed TNA was conducted by a team comprising two

To chalk out the engagement areas of PRADAN-NSO and OLM, a detailed TNA was conducted by a team comprising two senior persons from PRADAN and a senior person from OLM

senior persons from PRADAN and a senior person from OLM. A week-long, extensive field visit to three districts, namely, Jagatsingpur, Nayagarh and Puri, was organized, which involved interaction with six SHGs, four gram *panchayat* level Federation (GPLF), three PGs, 10 Cluster Co-ordinators (CCs), nine Cluster Livelihoods Co-ordinators (CLCs), nine block staff and three District Project Managers. Many rounds of discussions were held among the staff from NRLM, OLM, World Bank and others.

Most women, especially from the poorer families, had been mobilized into SHGs, which were practising key norms such as regular weekly meetings, weekly savings, inter-lending and repayments, and transparent accounts maintenance (called the *panchasutra*). The resourceful staff members, such as the CC, the CLC, Block Livelihoods Co-ordinators (BLC), and the Block Team Leader (BLT), are extremely pro-active and have established a strong rapport with the community.

The farmers covered under SRI last year have shared that their productivity has improved although their understanding of SRI techniques, which are widely different and some are quite the opposite to the accepted principles of cultivation, is still limited. The SRI programme was implemented largely through PGs at the hamlet/village level.

However, the understanding about PGs (the why, what and how of this arrangement) is rather unclear among the community as well as the staff. The staff, such as CRPs, CCs and CLCs, engaged in primary mobilization of farmers had limited technical and conceptual understanding and practical experience of

SRI intervention and, thus, had little confidence about guiding others. Although SRI had been promoted for two years, the potential outcome or benefit has not yet been established through proper demonstrations.

During this period, the agriculture department of the Government of Odisha promoted a paddy line under Bringing the Green Revolution to Eastern India (BGREI) banner. There was considerable overlapping of this initiative with that of OLM's SRI promotion efforts. As a result, the packages promoted also overlapped and adoption of the full package of SRI was observed in very few areas.

ENGAGEMENT AREAS OF PRADAN-NSO

The broad frontiers that PRADAN-NSO was engaged in to strengthen this programme were:

Capacity-building of the staff and CRPs: In addition to helping OLM develop training plans for the staff, the CRPs and the community, training modules and training material were also prepared. Expert trainers, both from PRADAN and outside, were deployed to conduct a series of training programmes.

First of all, a two-day event was conducted on strategy preparation-cum-technical orientation programme for the District Project Manager, team leaders, Livelihoods Co-ordinators and State Livelihoods Anchors, to roll out the SRI programme. During this event, the participants were taught the basic principles of SRI. Experienced farmers and PRADAN professionals shared their experience and answered all queries. Sumant, a farmer from Bihar, who was the 2012 record-holder for the highest productivity through SRI in

Capacity-building of the staff and CRPs: In addition to helping OLM develop training plans for the staff, the CRPs and the community, training modules and training material were also prepared

the country, also spoke to the farmers. All these processes helped develop confidence of the participants. Subsequently, goals were set, in terms of productivity and coverage, for each of the block units. An overall training and mobilization strategy was framed to implement this programme.

Looking at the time constraints, it was decided to focus on at least one block from each district, where the block team members evinced greater interest than those of other blocks. Of the 31 blocks covered in 10 districts, where the SRI programme was carried out, 11 blocks were strategically selected-one block in each district and two from Nayagarh district, for intense engagement.

Following the first central event, a series of training programmes was conducted on SRI, to develop the necessary conceptual and technical know-how competency of OLM staff such as the TL, LC, CLC, CC and the Master Community Resource Persons (MCRPs). In these 11 intensive blocks, training was conducted for TLs, LCs and CCs in three batches. They learned about SRI principles and the roll-out strategy, and witnessed a practical demonstration of seed treatment and seed-bed preparation processes.

In Sadar block of Anugul district, the trainees were asked to share about those experiences of crop production, in which the yield was significantly high, as per their own assessment. They were asked to identify the practices they had followed that, according to them, may have contributed to the high productivity. They shared about their potato, chilli, onion, paddy and sugarcane crops. Interestingly, analysis revealed that their practices were related

Anugul Block Training of CRPs in Uprooting and Transplanting Seedlings

to key SRI principles. This exercise helped participants understand the importance of the principles of SRI, and also that these were not just a set of random practices being promoted.

Following this, training programmes were conducted at the block level on seed-bed preparation, land preparation, transplantation, weeding and nutrient management. By this time, many of the MCRPs were identified and, thus, training was conducted for them as well, along with all the block OLM staff.

The third phase of training was conducted on plant protection measures. Emphasis was placed on various non-chemical measures. It was observed that as preventive measures, the farmers have adopted various Integrated Pest Management (IPM)measures.

The last training phase was on scientific crop-cutting technique, to systematically assess the yield data. This was mainly conducted by the OLM staff, with minimal involvement of PRADAN-NSO. Significantly, the rigour practised during training events was adopted in field practice as well.

In addition to these training events, about 30 CRPs from PRADAN's operational areas in Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts were deployed to mobilize local MCRPs. After the initial round of orientation, they were divided into small groups and spent about a week with the block staff, helping them mobilize the community, improving their knowledge and boosting the confidence of the staff. Although, initially, these CRPs were meant to provide hand-holding support also, this did not materialize. However, this arrangement was very effective in the initial mobilization.

To support OLM in farmer mobilization, a number of Information Education Communication (IEC) material was developed by NSO. User-friendly booklets, flip-charts for trainers, banners, large-sized flex banners, a movie on SRI and training manuals in Oriya, etc., were designed and printed. However, large-scale printing and use of these materials did not happen because of some procedural issues. Formal approvals of the finances for printing were required. The learning from this experience was that it is always advisable to get approvals for the whole range of things well in advance, instead of getting the approval one by one. Nevertheless, wherever this material could be used, it was very effective in communicating to and mobilizing people. Overall, almost 75,000 farmers were covered under this programme during the *kharif* season of 2014.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

During a consultation event between PRADAN-NSO and OLM representatives, it was agreed that this experience be systematically captured and the lessons drawn from it be incorporated in the programme in the coming years. These insights, experience and achievements needed to be shared with the various stakeholders.

Meanwhile, a concurrent study was being conducted to assess the impact of this intervention. The assessment was conducted in two phases. One was after the transplantation phase (during the second half of September 2014) and the second during the harvesting period (the second half of November). The study was conducted with guidance from and under the supervision of Professor Dr B.C. Barah, Agricultural Policy Expert and economist and formerly NABARD Chair Professor, Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI). A survey team comprising Mr. Amit Kumar from the Research Unit of PRADAN and five experienced surveyors from Keonjhar was engaged in making the assessment.

it was agreed that this experience be systematically captured and the lessons drawn from it be incorporated in the programme in the coming years

The stratified random sampling process was followed for selecting farmers for the assessment. Three blocks of Anugul, Badamba and Nimapada were identified for this purpose. Stratified Random sampling (SRS) process was done at various stages of cultivation. Due to constraints of manpower, PRADAN-NSO could not engage with all the blocks equally when extending support. Anugul district was selected because all the MCRPs were women and its terrain was relatively more suitable for adopting SRI principles and it was not so affected by floods. Also, substantial inputs had been given to this block. Badamba was selected from 10 intensive blocks and Nimapada was selected from 20 non-intensive blocks through a random selection process. Five PGs were selected randomly from each of these selected blocks and, further, 12–15 farmers were selected randomly from these selected PGs. In this way, 219 farmers in all were selected for the assessment purposes. In addition, direct information collection by the study team, could cover only 135 farmers in the crop-cutting exercise. The standard system of crop-cutting and yield assessment, as per the guidelines of the Agriculture department, was followed for the Impact Assessment Process.

Crop-cutting in a 5 x 5 m field (left) and measuring the SRI yield (right) for the Impact Study in Anugul block.

STUDY FINDINGS

Overall, 78 per cent of the farmers adopted SRI principles whereas 15 per cent adopted line sowing and seven per cent went for traditional practices. This figure varies widely across blocks. Whereas in Anugul and Badamba blocks (the intensive blocks), 96 per cent and 88 per cent, respectively, of the farmers adopted SRI principles, this is quite low in Nimapada block. One of the main reasons for the low adoption in Nimapada could be the floods affecting the area.

Approximately, 73 per cent of the farmers received training on the basic principles and practices of SRI and most of them attended the field training programmes, which PRADAN-NSO was very particular about when rolling out the training plans.

Table 1: Percentage of Respondents Who Received Various Training Programmes on SRI

Kind of Training	Classroom Training	Field Training
Seed selection	78	59
Seed treatment with bavistin/cow urine	85	69
Nursery preparation	83	76
Field preparation with drainage system	77	65
Use of marker/rope marker	85	79
Careful seedling uprooting with soil	79	72
Single seedling used per hill	88	78
Soil loosening and weed management	76	59
Drainage of main field	75	62
Use of chemical fertilizer	55	39
Use of organic manure, FYM, vermi-compost, *Jeevamrit*	88	68
Plant protection, chemical measures	46	30
Plant protection, IPM, organic measures	65	43
Overall	73	61

Table 2: Percentage of Respondents Who Adopted Various Principles of SRI

Principles		% of Households Adopted
Seed selection through brine water test		74
Seed treatment		88
Age of seedling used	12 days or less	40
	13 days to 18 days	35
Proper nursery raising	Largely	38
	Partly	44
Spacing 10 x 10″		75
Seedlings used per hill	Single	79
	Double	18
Use of weeder	1 time	15
	2 times or more	52

Productivity enhancement

The yield from the same plot in the previous two years along with the practices adopted, that is, SRI, line sowing or the conventional method was recorded. Because the area was affected by the Phailin cyclone in 2013 and by various other climatic factors every year, an attempt was made to map the perceived yield in the same plot in the current year assuming that the farmers had gone in for the conventional method of cultivation. There were 34 farmers each, in the surveyed farmer group, who had adopted conventional practices in 2012 and 2013 and SRI in 2014 in the same plot. A comparative yield-increase was assessed vis-a-vis conventional practices. Clearly, a significant yield gain was achieved in 2014, with the adoption of SRI. The yield increased by 144 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively, against the yield realized in 2013 and 2012. Table 3 captures the actual yield realized after

adopting SRI in 2014. Simultaneously, the farmers were also asked to guess the yield from the same plot if they had gone for the traditional practices in 2014. Table 4 shows that a huge shift in production, in the range of about 100 per cent, was achieved by adopting SRI principles, except in Nimapada, where the conventional yield was much higher than in the other two blocks.

Table 5 captures the overall shift in SRI adoption and the increase in yield over the years. In all the blocks, more and more farmers have adopted SRI; the adoption rates in the intensive blocks, that is, Anugul and Badamba, are relatively high in comparison to Nimapada, the non-intensive block. Productivity under SRI has increased significantly over the previous two years in the intensive blocks in comparison to Nimapada.

Table 3: Paddy Productivity with Conventional and SRI Methods

Year	Method of Cultivation	No. of Farmers	Average Productivity in the Same Plot in Kg/Acre	% Increase in Productivity
2013	Conventional	31	992	
2014	SRI	31	2,417	144
2012	Conventional	34	1,737	
2014	SRI	34	2,367	36

Table 4: Percentage Shift in Yield through the SRI Technique as Compared to the Perceived Yield from Traditional Methods in the Same Plot

Block	N = 160	Yield under SRI 2014 in Kg/Acre	Perceived Yield in Kg/Acre under Conventional Methods in the Same Plot, 2014	% Shift in Yield under SRI over the Perceived Yield
All	97	2,251	1,152	95
Badamba	40	2,365	1,086	118
Anugul	49	2,241	1,121	100
Nimapada	8	2,228	1,648	35

Table 5: No. of Farmers Adopting SRI and Paddy Productivity in Select Blocks

Year	Total	Anugul	Badamba	Badamba
No. of farmers adopting SRI				
2014	108	57	43	8
2013	47	21	21	5
2012	24	7	14	3
Paddy Productivity under SRI Practice (Kg Per Acre)				
2014	2,283	2,236	2,356	2,228
2013	1,567	1,693	1,436	1,590
2012	1,354	1,247	1,368	1,539

FUTURE PLANS

Table 6 shows that 160 out of 170 SRI farmers and 32 out of 33 line-sowing farmers are willing to adopt SRI principles in the coming year and are also willing to increase the crop area by 40 per cent. This shows the impact of the current SRI intervention. However, almost all the farmers shared that they needed further training on SRI.

The highest yield realized among the farmers covered in the study was 35.2 qunitals per acre, both in Anugul and the Badamba blocks. The average productivity increased to 22.83 quintals per acre in 2014 from the average yield of 15.67 quintals per acre in 2013 and 13.54 quintals per acre in 2012.

LEARNING

This engagement has provided many lessons for us. The following are some of the distinct insights. Creating the necessary excitement and energy is more important than the precision of the intervention. Moreover, one also does not know which process is actually appropriate because the whole setting (community, staff as well as organizational system and process)

is different. Thus, a good mix of the prior game-plan as well as being flexible to get things moving seems to be the more workable strategy. Nurturing a relationship is important because that will contribute to the overall effectiveness of the programme at a later stage. Always welcoming discussion, keeping an open mind and helping others gather some understanding in the journey are essential. OLM needs to go through the full learning cycle.

CRPs selected from PRADAN's direct field area, to provide training and hand-holding support in the TRIPTI area, were not found to be very effective. This shows that no matter how efficient CRPs are in their own area, they need to be provided with additional training to become equally efficient in other areas. Moreover, the expectation also differs and thus these CRPs, who have been groomed and engaged in the PRADAN setting for many years, need to be re-oriented and equipped to become efficient in different contexts. Usually, in a government setting, one needs to follow protocols and procedures, which take considerable time to get approval. PRADAN is moved more by the purpose and, often, the

Table 6: No. of Farmers Planning to Adopt SRI in 2015

Block	Method of Cultivation	No. of House-holds	Average Area (Acres)	No. of Households Planning for SRI in 2015	Average Planned Area (Acres)	% Area Increase
Anugul	SRI	70	1.02	65	1.49	46.1
	Line sowing	3	0.78	3	0.95	21.8
Badamba	SRI	66	1.64	61	2.08	26.8
	Line sowing	8	0.91	7	1.59	74.7
Nimapada	SRI	34	0.98	34	1.64	67.3
	Line sowing	22	1.23	22	1.75	42.3
Total		203	1.23	192	1.73	40.7
Overall				95%	140%	

professionals in PRADAN tend to overlook formalities. This is not possible in a government setting, as was evident in the failure to use the IEC material developed although so much time and effort had been spent in creating it.

Experience revealed that even though it is a Mission, different units function in an isolated manner. Unlike in the PRADAN team setting, where members often meet and talk formally and informally and learning is shared, the different units in OLM function in isolated manner. So to institutionalise any learning, a formal system is required.. A core group needs to be formed, to engage around this collaboration, meeting regularly, taking stock of the progress and consolidating the learning. In the absence of this formal arrangement, it is very difficult to institutionalize the experience.

CONCLUSION

Although PRADAN had initial reservations in helping OLM roll out its SRI programme, the end result has been very meaningful and encouraging. There was a significant paddy productivity enhancement, that is, 45.7 per cent increase over the past year. In addition, PRADAN succeeded in bringing about a few shifts at the OLM level. First is the quality and intensity to the livelihoods training programmes for its cutting-edge staff and CRPs by way of developing objective-based training modules, quality trainers and conducting these mostly in field settings with manageable group sizes. Even after the engagement was over, similar practices were adopted in the last *rabi* season. Second are some changes in the rolling out the strategy of the overall programme. Now, SRI is largely known as a set of principles rather than a set of practices. Training modules, material and IEC material are available now in Oriya for wider use.

The results were visible and drew attention and appreciation at many levels. This has helped develop confidence in the PRADAN team to expand such engagements with other state missions. This engagement fostered mutual appreciation between PRADAN and OLM, and both are looking forward to further intensify this collaboration in the coming years.

Bundelkhand: Building on Partnership

RAKESH SINGH

Working in one of the most backward regions of the country, guiding farmers to build resources and infrastructure, using the latest technological advances to help farmers, PRADAN, in partnership with local NGOs, is supporting the transformation of barren lands into fertile fields as well as infusing confidence in farmers about self sufficiency

THE DRY LANDS OF BUNDELKHAND—A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Geographically, the region of Bundelkhand is the centre of India and, therefore, has played an important part in the history of the country. It covers six districts in north Madhya Pradesh—MP—(Datia, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Panna, Sagar and Damoh) and seven districts in south Uttar Pradesh—UP—(Jhansi, Lalitpur, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Mahoba, Banda and Chitrakoot). It is located in the central Hindi belt, south of the Yamuna, between the fertile Gangetic plains, stretching across northern Uttar Pradesh and the highlands of central Madhya Pradesh.

Once considered a prosperous region, this is now one of the most backward regions in the country. Prolonged drought, low industrial growth, rampant poverty and apathy of the administration have forced the people to migrate from this region. Since early 1960s, there has been discontent in the area; and there has been a call to establish a separate state of Bundelkhand.

The Bundelkhand region is drained by a number of rivers of the Yamuna river system. The main rivers are Yamuna in the north, Ken in east, and Betwa and Pahuj in the west. River Yamuna flows from west to east and its first order tributaries—Betwa, Ken, Pahuj, Baghain and Paisuni flow from south to north. Also flowing along the west are the Sindh and the Chambal rivers whereas Narmada flows in the south. Betwa, Ken and Pahuj are the main rivers; their seasonal fluctuations, however, are very great. For example, the average annual discharge of Ken is around 800 cusecs; in winter it falls to around 300 cusecs, and it dwindles to practically nothing in May. Such fluctuations undermine the security of irrigation.

Unfavourable rainfall patterns and geological and topographical conditions, coupled with the lack of a proper planning strategy for water harvesting, have made the Bundelkhand region prone to water shortages. The region receives an annual precipitation in the range of 200 to 1,000 mm with 20 to 50 days of rainfall every year. A popular saying in the region is: *Gagari na phoote, chahe balam mar jaye* (Let the water pot not break, even if the husband dies). The above statement sums up fairly accurately the value of water in the Bundelkhand region. The non-availability of water is a major concern in the region.

The J.S. Samra Committee report on the drought mitigation strategy for Bundelkhand states that, historically, in 18th and 19th centuries, the Bundelkhand region of UP and MP experienced a drought once in 16 years. The frequency of these droughts increased three-fold from 1968–92. The most recent and continued period of poor rainfall recorded in Bundelkhand was in 2004–07 and in 2009–10, when below average and erratic rain was reported in most parts of the region through all the years.

The long dry spells lead to people sinking bore-wells and overusing the ground water. Except in Jalaun district of UP, all other districts of Bundelkhand show a projected annual groundwater availability of less than half a billion cubic metres.

Mahoba and Chitrakoot are two districts where the annual groundwater balance is close to zero, indicating that the groundwater abstraction is far larger than the annual recharge. Jhansi in UP, and Damoh and Tikamgarh in MP are not too far behind.

> *Unfavourable rainfall patterns and geological and topographical conditions, coupled with the lack of a proper planning strategy for water harvesting, have made the Bundelkhand region prone to water shortages*

This has a negative impact on the local moisture regime. Many attempts by the government and the farmers at digging wells and bore-wells have failed due to improper selection of sites and also because there is no focus on improving the water-table through in-situ, rainwater harvesting. The water scarcity is alarming and it adversely affects the people, the ecology and the socio-economic development of the region, particularly the life of the resource-poor, farming communities of small-holders. The Scheduled Tribes (ST) and the Scheduled Castes (SC) are the most deprived in terms of irrigation support because they have to mostly rely on purchasing water from a higher class person, who owns the bore-wells and wells.

CHALLENGES

Status of women in Bundelkhand

As in most other rural parts of the country, women in Bundelkhand's villages toil from dawn to dusk—cooking, working in the fields, grazing cattle, collecting dung, collecting water, collecting firewood, doing manual labour at construction sites—and their contribution is not realized. When they work for wages, women get lower daily wages. This is an unchallenged norm. In the entire Bundelkhand region, there are no strong and extensive women's rights movements although many small, localized efforts do exist. Domestic violence is common in Bundelkhand and largely remains uncontested. Among the forms of violence practised is the literal demonstration of the phrase *naak katwana*— the woman's nose is chopped off. Women from the SC groups are also vulnerable to sexual assault by upper caste men.

Social and political challenges

From the time of the Chandelas, Bundelkhand's ruling clans have claimed high Rajput status and behaved accordingly. A feudal culture emerged and remains quite strong, especially in some of the Bundelkhand districts of MP such as Tikamgarh.

The chief features of the feudal culture include:

Sense of honour: Even after losing all power and privileges, the Bundelas remain highly conscious of their claim to upper caste status. The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India report that any low-caste person, who passed by a Bundela house, had to salute them with the words, "*Diwan ji ko Ram Ram*". No lower caste person could go past the house of a Bundela, riding on a pony or holding up an umbrella. Women had to take off their footwear when they went past a Bundela house.

Rules of Dadus: Across Bundelkhand's villages and in its local newspapers, one routinely comes across people being harassed or terrorized by *dadus*—equivalent of *dabang*, a common North Indian word for one who exercises power through the use of force. In Bundelkhand, the *dadu* is usually a member of a family that has enjoyed feudal privileges in the past and has not accepted the realities of democratic politics and society. The *dadus* continue to lord over many villages, maintaining control over key resources of land and water bodies, *panchayat* affairs and expenditure of public money. There can be more than one *dadu* in a village and they usually work together, with areas of control implicitly demarcated.

> *Local institutions such as* gram panchayats *are in an abysmal condition. If a* gram pradhan *comes from a particular community, her/his emphasis is to give maximum benefits to her/his vote bank, caste and clan, and s/he does not particularly care for the overall development of the* panchayat *or the village*

Although Wcaste-based discrimination has decreased in the last 10–15 years, it is still prevalent in some form in the Bundelkhand region. The communities are still structured along feudal lines and caste, with the lower-caste women at the bottom of the rung. The status of the SC and the ST is lower than that of the general population. There is an unequal distribution of assets, especially land, which makes these groups economically vulnerable.

Occupationally, a high proportion of the labour class belongs to the SC and the ST, which makes them vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation at the hands of their upper class employers.

Local and mainstream institutions

Local institutions such as *gram panchayats* are in an abysmal condition. If a *gram pradhan* comes from a particular community, her/his emphasis is to give maximum benefits to her/his vote bank, caste and clan, and s/he does not particularly care for the overall development of the *panchayat* or the village. Although many water bodies have been developed in the villages, the emphasis is more on utilizing funds and making money. There is no participatory planning, and structures that are constructed do not follow the top-to-bottom approach but focus more on the construction of big structures that attract greater funds. Large farm ponds are dug at the top of the fields where there is no scope of catching the running water except from direct rain. And when the scheme fails to conserve water, these institutions declare that this technology is not suitable for Bundelkhand.

Timely payment in schemes such as MGNREGA is a big issue and a hindrance to these schemes.

Civil society institutions

There are also many small civil society organizations at the grass roots, working in the Bundelkhand region. These organizations are mostly localized and are formed by the local people, who understand the local context. However, due to lack of experience, expertise and regular presence in a single domain for a long period, they are not able to demonstrate a good developmental model in this region. Because of the absence of a good development model, influencing the mainstream institution is also a challenge, especially in the UP part of Bundelkhand.

Some of the organizations have considerable experience of working with the community and have been working on various issues prominent in the area.

INITIATIVES

Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT) launched the Bundelkhand Initiative, to address poverty and inequities in the Bundelkhand region, through partnership with local NGOs. However, there were problems because there were no specific livelihood prototypes for the region, and also the potential partner NGOs lacked the experience and the technical capabilities for promoting livelihood interventions.

PRADAN, in its effort to reach out to the very poor population in weaker areas,

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identified Bundelkhand for developing partnerships with existing local NGOs. PRADAN and SDTT initiated a joint endeavour, wherein PRADAN would be the knowledge and resource partner of the NGOs whereas SDTT would provide the financial support to the partner organizations. PRADAN then initiated a pilot project in the region, with the focus on enriching and introducing Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM)-based livelihood planning processes, and enhancing the competencies of the NGO partners for implementation of livelihood enhancement activities.

This was a new approach for PRADAN, wherein instead of directly working with the community, it would support existing organizations to reach out to a larger section of the poor and, in turn, build the capacities of small NGOs, which would gain immense learning from the endeavour. PRADAN began work in the new region by setting up a small team of three people—one executive and two technical staff—to support the endeavour. PRADAN supported 18 NGOs in six districts of Bundelkhand. They were to gain from the expertise of PRADAN and initiate INRM-based livelihood programmes, and received the grant directly from the SDTT for one year.

Bundelkhand Development Consortium (BDC)

The first organization PRADAN supported was Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Sewa Sansthan (ABSSS) in Bundelkhand. Working with ABSSS gave PRADAN the confidence to build partnerships with other NGOs in the region.

As part of the PRADAN team, we had many challenges, including building a relationship of trust and support with the NGOs in the implementation of the projects within the short time-frame of one year. We made it very clear to the partners that we would were a resource organization and would not be taking on the monitoring role. The staff in the organizations was unaware of the new technology available for soil and water conservation, agriculture and so on. Moreover, the organizations had not had a chance to work on a larger canvas earlier because so far most of their projects were donor driven. The flow of funds and the availability of human resources was also a big challenge for the NGOs although they were keen to work in the field even with very limited resources. A continuous flow of funds to sustain themselves was the biggest challenge for them. So, in order to sustain themselves, they took up projects that did not follow a larger vision for the community or the region. In the absence of a flow of funds, the staff sometimes worked without remuneration.

Being in close interaction with the local NGOs, PRADAN had the opportunity to witness the struggles faced by smaller organizations. Despite initial differences with them, our team members began building a relationship with the staff in the organization. The relationship that developed was more collegial in nature, in which the organizations felt free to seek each others' support and also share their experiences of success and failures. Through regular engagement, several NGO partners began to share information with each other as well. Meetings involved planning, reviewing and giving feedback to each other.

We extended our support to all the organizations in the field, according to their needs and priority. As a group, we also

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promoted a culture wherein the partners come together, share a platform and support each other's growth. For us, at PRADAN, it meant learning and improving our skills of functioning in peer groups. After technical discussions, we also spent time trying to understand each partner's strengths and weakness and how we could learn from each other.

Practising this regularly helped the partners and us to develop a healthy relationship with each other. And together, we took the responsibility for any failure and celebrated our successes. "We have been working for many years but the recognition we have received and the good work we have done in the last three years, with the support of PRADAN and other partners, are very impressive," said Abhishek from the Arunoday Sansthan, Mohoba, in one meeting.

Because the partners were funded for only a year, our thrust remained on promoting sustainable livelihoods for the community. For that, two necessary elements had to be ensured: one, to create and strengthen the assets base of families so that they could generate food or income, and two, to enhance the capability of farmers so that they could engage themselves with the assets created.

We planned to build the capacity of the staff of the partner agencies systematically, and conducted a series of trainings to transfer the required knowledge and skills to them so that they could engage with the community. We modified the training modules according to the capability and the language constraints of the staff, and prepared the reading material accordingly. PRADAN also provided hand-holding support at the field level, helped in community mobilization and provided

technical support for planning and implementing projects.

Proud of his team's work, Dhruvji (the Chief functionary of the Margshree Charitable Trust) said, "We never thought of doing this kind of work (work related to INRM) and also didn't have the confidence that we could do any such work, especially in these barren lands. But with support from the network, we have done some very good work and the community has started appreciating us. Our staff is, now, much more confident."

Equipped, thus, both technically and as a collective, the coalition of NGOs set upon the larger task of transforming Bundelkhand. Together, we hoped to usher in development and well-being of the poor and disadvantaged communities in the area.

IMPACT OF PARTNERSHIP

Within a short period of three years, the agencies reached 4,000 families in 45 villages. Of these, 2,300 families benefitted directly through soil and water conservation work, by which infrastructure was created on 1,300 ha. As many as 261 farm ponds were dug on the farmers' land. This was a huge task; the farmers were very sceptical about developing farm ponds on their own land because they assumed that the land would then be unavailable to them for cultivation. The farmers demanded only conventional field bunding on the downstream border of each individual plot, without considering the limitations of bunding, including no uniform moisture regime across the plot or depletion of shallow groundwater resources.

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In some cases, people wanted to sink bore-wells. Through persistent effort, however, it was possible to establish that dividing bigger plots into smaller ones and adopting small, on-farm, water harvesting structures (ponds) would be a better option. We had to convince the farmers that the smaller structures would create better opportunities for crop diversification and reduce the inherent vulnerabilities of the existing cropping system. In some cases (by the Vidyadham Samity Naina Sansthan, Banda, Abhiyan and Grameen Parampara in Chitrakoot and in others by the MCT, Lalitpur), demonstration of the working of a small, community-managed, lift irrigation system helped farmers understand how they would get assured irrigation. Besides this, a gravity-flow irrigation system (using underground PVC pipes) was implemented by the ABSSS at Tikamgarh.

In brief, the on-field impact of this project is reflected in the longer residence period of surface and shallow surface water beyond the rainy season, an increased moisture regime in the top soil, a recharge of shallow ground water and an overall better crop yield. All the partner-NGOs now are more confident about implementing INRM-based livelihood enhancement programmes.

In the past, the local administration had stopped promoting farm ponds under MGNREGS; in September 2012, it had even published an order in the local newspaper giving instructions not to include farm ponds under MGNREGS. However, upon seeing the results in the field of the Gramonnati Sansthan (in Mahoba) this year, the District Magistrate,

Mohoba, instructed the relevant department and PRIs to take up farm ponds in every farmer's field, while inaugurating one himself.

Similarly, seeing the impact of the work of the other partner organizations (Gramonnati and Arunoday Sansthan), the villagers demanded that their local *gram panchayat* also take up similar land development activities. However, the complexities and the weaknesses in the system of MGNREGS in UP, hindered the mobilization of MGNREGS for convergence with SDTT-supported projects.

Due to the inconsistency of rain in the Bundelkhand region, only 25–30 per cent of the land is sown in the *kharif* season and the farmers rely on the *rabi* season cultivation for their sustenance. *Rabi* crops need to be irrigated. With enhanced stability in the moisture regime, the farmers whose land had been treated in a contiguous patch, now have round-the-year food sufficiency and are getting an incremental income in the range of Rs 20,000–50,000. Farmers have been introduced to new cropping practices for traditional crops such as sesame and black gram. The farmers have cultivated paddy through SRI and DSR methods and much

effort has gone into promoting vegetables to increase income.

Jaykaran, from Chilheta village, Banda district, in the UP region of Bundelkhand, narrated his experience. "I was not convinced about what the people from the NGO (Gram Unmesh) were telling me to do. They were asking me to divide my land into five small patches and do levelling and field bunding in the small patches of land. I talked with the other farmers but no one was convinced and everyone thought that this would drastically reduce the land available for cultivation. Later, I thought that in any case the land lies barren; so there was no harm in trying out what they were suggesting. I did as the NGO staff told me to. And while I was only half-way through the work, the rain came and my small patches of land were filled with water. I had never seen so much water in my land before. I was very happy and with the technical support of the organization, I grew paddy through the SRI method. All villagers thought I had become mad but when the fields became green, everyone stopped by my field to admire my crop. We now have enough rice to sustain us through the year. I am now growing vegetables."

Uncultivated barren land being converted into fertile land in Lalitpur Bar block. Farmer Khilu Sahariya cultivated wheat for the first time on this land.

Ramkripal of Salarpur village, Mahoba, earned Rs 45,000 by adopting the Machan technique for creepers.

Other scope with partner organizations

As PRADAN's relationship with partner organizations developed, the latter sought support from PRADAN on SHG-based community institution building. We arranged for exposure visits of the partner organizations to PRADAN teams in Kesla in MP and Dholpur in Rajasthan for understanding women's collectives better. Community Resource Persons (CRPs) from Dholpur provided training to SHG members. Six partners have visited Dholpur and the entire collective (BDC) has seen the Kesla team's work. One partner (Society for Pragati Bharat, Lalitpur) also hired CRPs of Saheli Federation from Dholpur, to train their SHG members. They are very excited about adopting the processes and approaches in which PRADAN believes.

The organizations also showed a keen interest in understanding PRADAN's systems and approaches and sought its support in improving financial and HR systems. PRADAN scheduled a training for them on finance and organization development. Experts from within PRADAN were invited. This training had not been conceptualized in the design by SDTT but emerged through the close partnership. There was transparency, accountability and mutual learning in the partnership.

BUILDING A COLLECTIVE VISION FOR BUNDELKHAND

After three years, there has been a visible change in the approach of the organizations. They are now more pro-active and seek support from each other, come together, think together, understand mutual strengths and limitations, work together without compromising on individual spaces and create more spaces for collective action to better the living conditions of the people who have been 'left out' for generations.

Isolated efforts by individual agencies will not be able to create such a large impact. If the picture of Bundelkhand is to be changed, organizations must share a collective vision and all steps must lead to achieving that collective vision. With this idea in mind, the Bundelkhand Development Consortium (BDC) was formed. In November 2013, a workshop was organized for all the partner agencies in Kesla, Madhya Pradesh, facilitated by experts. They helped the organizations concretize the picture and collectively create a vision statement.

"*Bundelkhand ke vikas ke liye samaan vichar dhara ke logon dwara samanta, pardarshita, sahbhagita, parasparikata, , lok kendrit vikas ke sidhant se karya karega.*" (People of similar ideology will work together for the development of Bundelkhand upholding

Isolated efforts by individual agencies will not be able to create such a large impact. If the picture of Bundelkhand is to be changed, organizations must share a collective vision and all steps must lead to achieving that collective vision

the principles of equality, transparency, collaboration, mutuality and people centeredness).

WAY AHEAD

In Bundelkhand, over the past one year, BDC is being nurtured. PRADAN believes that such a partnership, built on mutual respect and confidence, will be effective in spreading successful experiences. Considering all these positive initiatives by the partners and the investment made to build this base in Bundelkhand, it makes sense to take it to a logical end. The PRADAN team believes this has created the environment of working as a collective to realize the vision of a better society. The task of transforming Bundelkhand will certainly require long-term and patient engagement of BDC, along with all the other stakeholders.

The references for this article are available on request from newsreach@pradan.net

Of Deepening Democracy, Financial Inclusion and Organic Detergents: Whither Development?

SANJEEV PHANSALKAR

Seeds of wisdom buried in jest! Categorising those who are involved in the 'Business of Do-Gooding', the article compels us to look at what motivates us in our endeavours to work for the rural poor

A lot of water has flown under the bridge since 1981 when I wrote a rather short and, I thought, pithy note, 'The Business of Do-Gooding'. The Late Sanjay Ghosh and many other *developmentwalahs* had gone on to condemn or praise the arguments in that note. Some of them naturally raised very valid questions about the locus standi of a 25 year-old, who had then seen only a little of the country and even less of development organizations.

The argument presented was that development interveners needed to (a) get over the unnecessary debate about the ethics of intervention, (b) learn to focus more and (c) attempt only those tasks that are within the reach of their resources and implementation competence. Since then, I guess I have gained much poundage and lost much hair. The combination significantly reduces the propensity of anyone questioning my locus standi.

The intervening decades have been quite pregnant with changes. That period of the late seventies was followed by a decade when people talked much about community based, participative and sustainable development, and then by a decade when people talked about sustainability, gender and equity. We are now in an age when the heavy burden of all these words is further augmented by the weight of high-minded and long-winded expressions about rights, empowerment and accountability in governance. So how does the development discourse and practice seem now?

In the current scenario of development action and discussions, I notice three broad buckets. These are named here as 'deepening democracy', 'financial inclusion' and 'organic detergents'. The names serve to symbolize, rather than exhaustively describe, these buckets. These names, of all other possible names, have come about because of a recent conversation I had with a *developmentwalah* of the clean-shaven *kurta* type. (Men in the development field broadly come in three categories: the bearded and *kurta* type; the clean-shaven and *kurta* type; and the scraggy cheeked or unshaven but in human dress type. The well-shaven and human dress specimen is either the heartless corporate fellow or a bureaucrat. Now that is called keen observation and incisive analysis!) The buckets are presented sequentially in increasing order of 'tangibility' and decreasing order of 'cogent development content'.

Let me start characterizing them or rather caricaturing them. I will strive to introduce the same degree of irreverence across all three caricatures lest I be accused of bias. After all, familiarity does breed, at least in this case, irreverence.

Oh, and by the way, due to sheer compulsive consistency, I must put everything and everyone in a pigeonhole. So I am going to categorize the readers as well. They are basically of five types. The first type, perhaps the most sensible, will ignore this and not read this at all. The second, not wishing to be found wanting when a donor officer writes something, will read and dutifully laugh and perhaps email his appreciation. This is the organizational equivalent of *sarve gunaha kanchanmashrayante.* The third will read a huge insult in what I have written about the

In the current scenario of development action and discussions, I notice three broad buckets. These are named here as 'deepening democracy', 'financial inclusion' and 'organic detergents'

bucket in which they think they find themselves. The fourth will laugh it off and watch a *saas-bahu* TV serial. And the final one will take me very seriously and search for those seeds of wisdom that I have mentioned in the title. A chamber of mirrors with tricks does have similar categories for its visitors. So that's all this is: a tricky mirror. What the reader reads into this article is more a reflection of what is in his mind. I offer no apologies. Stop reading, if you are sensitive! And all the seeds of alleged wisdom are accidental.

DEEPENING DEMOCRACY

'Drishya jagat ka shabdbrahm me niraas!'

This bucket has a wide spectrum of *developmentwalahs*, whose ideologies differ widely but who have one thing in common: pretentious verbosity. That such verbosity often turns out to be vacuous is not really material. The proponents are, perhaps, far too busy writing unreadable pieces of theoretical constructs and elaborate conceptual frameworks defending their ideology, to actually go out and practice what they preach. 'Development as transformation', 'engendering development', 'nurturing identity to allow human potential to flower', 'deepening democracy', 'expanding civil society spaces', 'people's articulation and voices', 'alternate development', 'social capital' and other such high sounding terms crowd the deepening democracy bucket.

This really is the rarefied realm of the intellectual *developmentwalah*. This world has some pre-requisites or ground rules. One of them, for instance, is that if you are a male, then sporting a beard and wearing a *kurta* is mandatory. Second, if the reader understands whatever you write in the first

reading, you are not a bona-fide member of the world. 'Transparency' is everywhere except in writing. Third, you cannot quote any Indian scholar because doing so clearly flouts the most basic norm. Fourth, you must sing wholesome praise of the abstract thing called 'cultural heritage of India' but if you have to discuss anything concrete about India at all, it must be in a dismissive, derisive manner. Fifth, the only things pertaining to India allowed a mention in your write-ups are: the Mahatma, Tagore, Amartya Sen and the Bhagvad Gita. Next, in practice, you believe that the stage for development lies in or in between the India Habitat Centre and the India International Centre. Finally, anyone seeking a touch of verifiable reality in what you say or do must be looked through or otherwise ridiculed, ignored and banished.

Over time, however, two things seem to happen. The first is that despite the best efforts, people do start demanding some reality check on the 'discourse' of the member of the deepening democracy bucket. Now, this is dangerous. You cannot actually ask an adept 'hot air merchant' to defile himself by doing things on the ground. Yet, to retain an omniscient image, he has to demonstrate something. And that he does by taking recourse to even more rarefied verbiage. So he produces even less readable papers, thus leading to the destruction of one more tree to produce copies thereof.

Two consequences follow. His slot as a speaker in the next global 'Hot Air Forum' is assured. And the novelty of the new formulation keeps the pressure for reality check in check. There is one more consequence—when the ruling elite changes, these ideas are sent to the nearest junk-bin. The purveyor of the older 'formulation' of the bucket now has to scurry around to keep pace to remain relevant. Most

of them, in such circumstances, choose the lofty position that the world must learn and keep pace with them and not the other way around. The new regime has its own 'hot air merchants' and so the struggle to juggle new words with old ideas is an on-going struggle.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Yehi hai right model, baby---ahaa!

This bucket comprises those *developmentwalahs*, who address some concrete and complex problems faced by millions in real time and space, and not just in the India Habitat Centre. The concrete problems they address could be many: 'watershed development'; 'reproductive and child health'; 'crop improvement'; 'school education', etc. Whether due to their own preferences or due to circumstances, the members address such problems in different ways. Naturally, the personnel of each intervener is completely persuaded about this particular way being the only sensible way and that everything else is rubbish. That is why each of them believes in the sub-title: *yehi hai* right model, baby! The *ahaa* comes in validation, which some of them reach.

The chief requirement for this approach to flourish is that its implementation must be in very poorly connected remote locales in the middle of nowhere. Just see the history: Dahod, Jamkhed, Mulkanoor, Chitradurga… consequently, only the very pious pilgrims make the sacred *yatra* to these far-off locales to learn from the model. (By the way, the biggest mistake my mentor made was that in addition to Anand, he also ran his model in far more reachable locations such as Vadodara and Guntur!). Oh yes, the pesky consultants (what I was till 2005) and process documentation fellows also go there.

But in case that happens, these consultants, by and large, create no problems, knowing which side of the bread is buttered. And the donor honcho goes there basically to lay a foundation stone or to cut a ribbon. As a combined result of all this, like some excellent pickle, the reputation of the model keeps improving and the halo around it becomes larger. Quite a good piece of work to begin with, over time, the model becomes a sort of a legend about which everyone must speak in appropriately respectful tones. And remember to end their statements with 'Amen'!

This ethos creates the situation wherein the world that the *developmentwalahs* live in becomes sanctified. This situation is further compounded by the conviction of each of the 'financial inclusion' bucket members has that, "My job is not to solve this problem for every place and every person. I am demonstrating how to solve the problem by solving it my way. I am showing a way. It is for others to learn lessons from my work and replicate it wherever they want it to work."

If everyone were to say the same thing, the logical question would be: who are these others who will learn from the models? Usually, there are none!

An unintended consequence of the 'financial inclusion' bucket methods and models is that they breed a whole new faction of people, who make their careers out of studying the specific model and producing new wisdom, where the scope for doing so, is limited. And then there are seminars and round-table conferences to propound the wisdom. After all, for us argumentative Indians, hair splitting is not just a pastime, it is a national passion! In effect,

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it sort of adds to a substantial class of 'hot air merchants', who, over a period of time, become more prominent than those who evolved the financial inclusion bucket models in the first place. And the reluctant consumers of their verbosity can claim familiarity fairly easily, if not actual expertise on the subject purely by reading and, at times, without even visiting a single solitary site of the implementation of the model.

ORGANIC DETERGENTS

Yeh duniya hai ek Excel sheet!

This is the bucket of *developmentwalahs*, who are faintly reminiscent of bubbly pups at the life-stage of cutting their teeth. They are very vivacious, charming and exceedingly tiring! They keep sniffing at everything, trying to bite off many things at the same time and jumping around so fast as to leave a whirr of a continuous canine movement caused by the persistence of vision.

Concretely, the bucket refers to interventions based on very specific, narrow inputs that claim to contribute discernibly to a class of people or a class of problems. Usually, the bucket relies on either some technical innovation or some innovative application of a known technology or, at times, even an innovative juxtaposition of known data, to produce an output that is claimed to be developmentally relevant. The proposed interventions are strictly supply side. The subjects—actually more often the objects—of this all new class of development actions are treated as passive recipients, (whom the *entitlementwalahs* have anyway reduced to invertebrate supplicants). So the other sub-title could have been: *'Yeh duniya hai ideas ka junk bin'*.

A junk bin cannot resist, no matter what is pushed into it. Some dumb government department, presumably headed by a fellow who has returned from his 'sabbatical' from the 'Land of Revelations', ably assisted by a private charity, become collaborators with the pup, to try out his nine-day marvel. They are expected to provide the 'platform' for experimenting or implementing, and, of course, the seed capital (to use the contemporary language), and help ramp up the solution to its break-even point beyond which it 'becomes commercially viable'.

Sweet youthful faith in miracles and oracles—or rather, given the context—in Oracle and miracles! Anglophone and tech-savvy, the proponents speak the contemporary language of philanthro-capitalism: business plans, impacts and impact pathways, revenue models, measurable outcomes, metrics for measuring progress and so on. Quite often, the bucket members refer to pilots, which have been tried in some tin African country, the President of which has the same complexity to manage and hence has the same savvy as an average BDO in India. If not a certified product of the University of Universal Wisdom (Indian graduates from Indian institutes, try your luck elsewhere!), the chief quality needed to get access to the dumb department and the charity is an 'accent'. The mentor of the bucket member, as well as the member himself, is persuaded that India is, after all, no more than a collection of say 5,000 of these locales for the pilot. And hence relevance is taken as a given.

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The rest of the game is conducted by the convenience of Microsoft Excel. The world is an Excel sheet, development action its pivot table and it is only a matter of pulling the cursor down to reach every one with the wonder solution. Their write-ups are replete with meaningless global comparisons on parameters pertaining to various aspects (such as the number of potatoes eaten every week or the length by which toe nails grow every day).

India does not seem to fare too well, either on the potatoes or on the nail growth. There is, and must be, a thundering silence in the write-up about the proven and successful models and work in the same field in India. Oh God! No, never do that! That would introduce an unwise comparison with the pup's thesis. And how can you do that? Is the first axiom not 'The white man's world knows'?

All resistance to such write-ups is ascribed to the objectors being retarded, or retro or senile, if not actually green with envy. Chief attributes of the proponents are: actual white race or its conceptual equivalent in the form of degrees, the right lingo and idiom, spoken with the right accent and, of course, a complete disdain for any inconvenient brush with Indian reality.

The above is more a commentary on the naivety of our development supporters rather than any implied villainy on the part of the pups. The pups are sweet and innocent. They are well-meaning and genuinely enthusiastic. They are quite willing to rough it out in the settings in which our *developmentwalahs*

work. When they do that, they become even more charming. While their personal idealism is without question, the naivety of the idea and of the supporters remains unquestioned.

The pups with staying power inevitably broaden their engagement, become much less preoccupied with the original nine-day technical marvel they wished to introduce in the communities and become more useful. But unfortunately, they turn less bubbly. I could name some great people as examples of this marvellous metamorphosis. A fair, if not a large, number is very eager, however, to count their chicks before the eggs hatch. These men can be trusted to restrict their development activity to the Excel sheet to demonstrate how their business plan will become op-ex neutral in three years or some such pie in the sky. They might have some tiny little pilot in some remote place.

Foolishly, if they actually try it, they build it through sheer verbiage into a legendry success. Because many funders restrict their own travel to city limits, and their own analysis to cursory reading, the ploy certainly works for a while. But shooing all the pups is a bad idea. Perhaps today's old dons also began as such bubbly pups?

A MAYAVAD OF THE DEVELOPMENT WORLD

Granted that each respectable member of each bucket thinks he is the messiah for whom the world has been, in fact, waiting for centuries; do any of these fellows really

> *Granted that each respectable member of each bucket thinks he is the messiah for whom the world has been, in fact, waiting for centuries; do any of these fellows really accomplish anything that is significant? Do people, the all-so-necessary disenfranchised, oppressed, backward poor really benefit from their noble acts? Or are the developmentwalahs, essentially catering to their own needs?*

accomplish anything that is significant? Do people, the all-so-necessary disenfranchised, oppressed, backward poor really benefit from their noble acts? Or are the *developmentwalahs*, essentially catering to their own needs? *Atamnastu kamay sarv idam priyam bhavati.*

This is the most insensitive and irresponsible question you would say, not allowed for the attendant of a chamber of funny mirrors. But consider this. Vasant Sathe's colour TV push of 1982 may have caused the complex chain of TV invasion in villages, which became the hardware base for the media explosion and that, in turn, has led to much education about reality among the masses. The change in policy on subsidy for rural telephones, from per connection to subsidies on shared towers, has led to a huge explosion in tele-density, which has made India so much smaller. It has also caused the Internet invasion. And both have, in turn, ushered in myriad 'technology enabled' changes in the lives of the people. Have they led to development? Or has the long-winded lecture of the deepening democracy fellow led to any changes? Have RTI and MNREGA led to greater change in the work of the financial inclusion bucket fellows? Do these worthies and their donors not create, and desperately try to maintain, a very self-serving illusion about their efficacy and the far-reaching impact on society?

Of course, there is evidence that an occasional Munnibai has become bold enough to speak with the Collector and we can be proud of her and of ourselves, but is that impact really enough for all that we have gone through?

It is a great illusion, of course. It is an illusion that enables us to think so highly of ourselves and can even lead others to hold us as shining examples for the younger folk to follow. Perhaps, it is an illusion that serves two purposes. First, it does contribute to the overall fellow-feeling and attracts some idealists to the fold. And second, it so necessary for us to continue to believe we were right and proper in denying ourselves the opportunity of chasing big money in our careers.
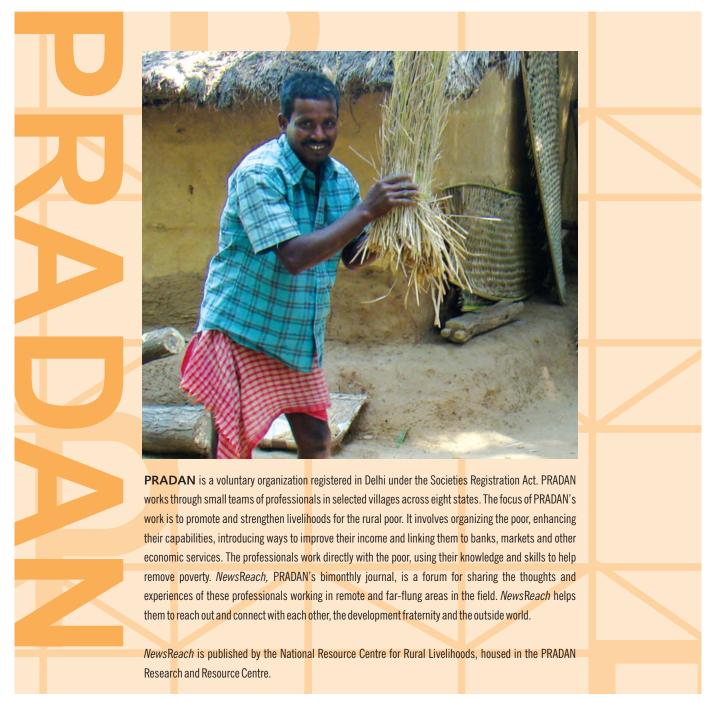
But let us reflect a little deeply. There is the story of the old Brahmin, who went to complain to 'Him' saying that although the King and all the Court revered him, he still was so poor that he had to feed his child a solution of flour pretending it was milk. Was that fair? And He replied: "You can have either all this respect or have a lot of money to live well. How can you have both?"

Can we ask ourselves this question? We can either live in the illusion of bringing great benefit to people while enjoying the attendant benefits such as awards and citations and the focus of the media or we can have the wealth bestowed upon the purveyors of alcohol or of pink soap. Not both.

So you, my dear *developmentwalah,* are getting your wage in terms of your pretentious illusions and the attendant benefits. Keep them and be happy.

Many small civil society organizations work at the grass roots in the Bundelkhand region. However, isolated efforts by individual organisations are not able to create a large impact. If the picture of Bundelkhand is to be changed, organizations must share a collective vision and all steps must lead to achieving that collective vision. With this idea in mind, the Bundelkhand Development Consortium (BDC) was formed. Seen in the picture above is Dinabandhu Karmakar from PRADAN providing on-field support to the staff of Margshree Charitable Trust in Lalitpur Block, Bundelkhand.

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 bimonthly 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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