

OTELP Plus Consortium in Koraput: An Experiment in Collaboration

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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.

O TELP 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 O TELP 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 O TELP 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 O TELP 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

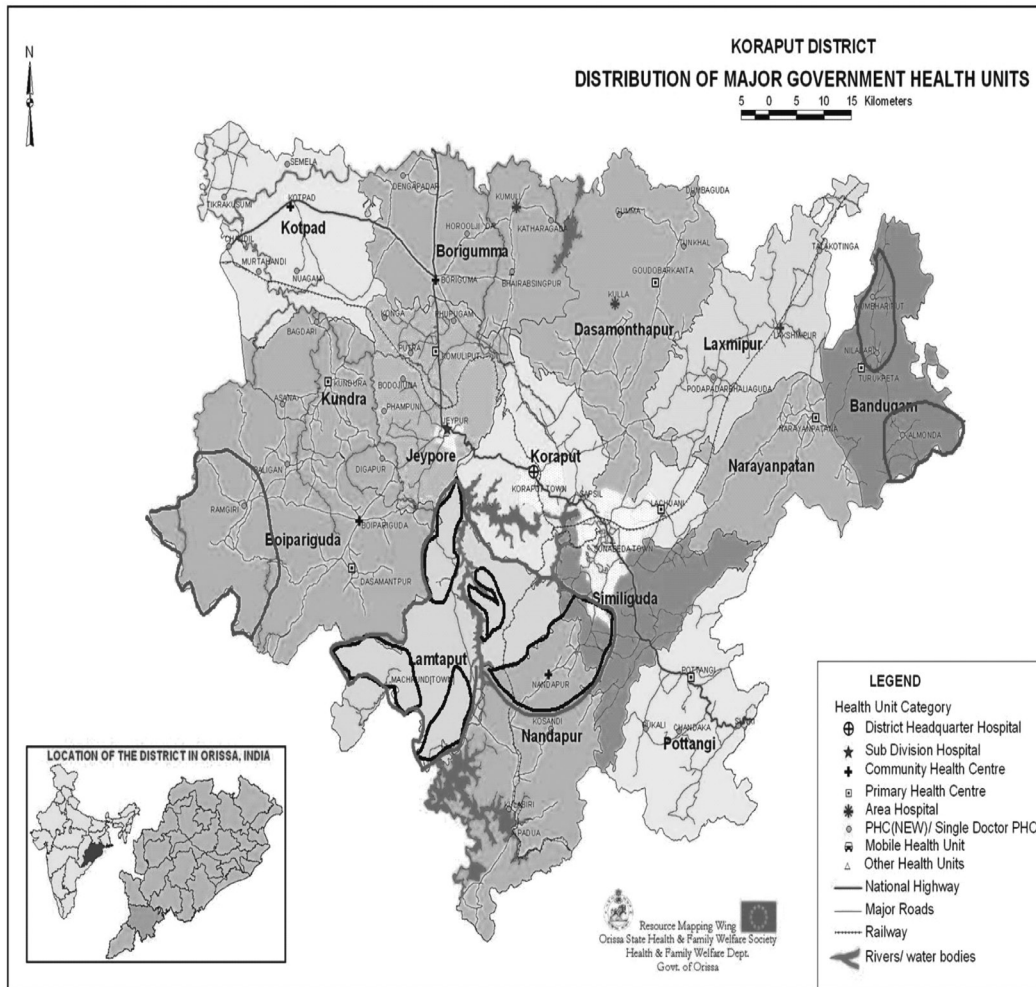
FNGO level: For every 10–12 MWSs (5,000 ha treatable area), the respective FNGO placed a Watershed Development Team (WDT), comprising three professionals and one Managing Information System (MIS) executive-cum-accountant. Of these three professionals, one is chosen as the team leader for co-ordination. 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 Population
1.	PRADAN	Lamtaput	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.	CHEITNA	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



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-ordinating role with ITDA and other line departments for all project-related affairs.

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

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

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

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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.)

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

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

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 Bandhugaoan 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.

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. 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

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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.