

A Way Towards Community Ownership

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Striving to ensure food sufficiency and improve livelihood opportunities and the overall quality of life of the tribal communities of Chaibasa, PRADAN's interventions with INRM-based approaches were planned and executed by the villagers themselves

INTRODUCTION

The tribes of Chaibasa district have corpus money of about Rs 9 million in their community account! Yes, Jharkhand Tribal Development Society (JTDS) transferred this money to the 23 different programme execution committees (PECs) in its watershed villages, in participation with PRADAN, which promotes livelihoods.

According to a villager of Nilaigot village of Sonua Block, "The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Scheme (MGNREGS) should be implemented in the same manner as the Jharkhand Tribal Development Programme (JTDP)." PRADAN professionals feel inspired when they know that they have worked on something worthwhile for the community. Earlier, this was not so; the people of the area were not aware of the implementation process of land and water activities. This happened after the inception of JTDP. There is significant ownership and accountability by the people of the programme. There are various reasons behind this, which we will explore further.

JHARKHAND TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (JTDP)

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand, formed JTDS. The objective of the programme was to develop and implement a replicable model that ensures household food security and improves livelihood opportunities and the overall quality of life of the communities. For this very purpose, JTDS was constituted and it is responsible for the overall programme. It invited some of its own NGO partners to implement the programme in these areas; PRADAN is one of these NGOs.

CONTEXT OF THE AREA

PRADAN joined the programme in West Singhbhum district (it had already been implementing other projects in the district) and got an opportunity to partner JTDS and become a facilitating agency. Its functional areas were in Sonua Block and Tonto

Block. The average rainfall in the district is more than the national average; however, 80 per cent of the rainfall that precipitates here runs off just after the rainfall ceases. The agriculture is rain-fed and cropping intensity is 100 per cent. Paddy is the staple crop, and the average paddy productivity of the land is 1–1.5 tonnes/ha. Water for irrigation is not available in the *rabi* season;

people, therefore, are not able to cultivate and harvest crops. Due to lack of irrigation, people are forced to migrate to urban areas or move to construction sites.

Forests in the upland regions of the district are another source of livelihood. The forests are full of a number of products such as tamarind, *mahua*, *cirunji*, custard apple and some medicinal plants. People, especially women, collect the seasonal forest produce to generate more income.

There are three types of land here, namely, uplands, medium uplands and lowlands. The lowlands conserve a little bit of moisture in the soil through the year; the other types of land dry up by the end of the December–January. A majority of the people here are small and marginal farmers, and wage earners. The challenge before PRADAN was to develop action programmes, through JTDP, to transform the lives of poor families.

CONCEPT SHARING

Taking the context of the area in consideration, PRADAN thought that if the treatment of the land could be done in such a manner that water that precipitated could be harvested, it would change people's lives in the area.

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At a hamlet-level meeting organized with the community, PRADAN put forward an Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM)-based approach to the community. The villagers were taken on an exposure visit to Bandudih village, Purulia district, to understand the ongoing land and water treatment programmes there. The exchange of ideas

that took place played a very crucial role in helping the visitors plan their activities.

VILLAGE-LEVEL INSTITUTION

During the entire project period, 151 women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) were promoted in village-level institutions. The project laid special emphasis on capacity building and the involvement of women at all stages. Significant progress was achieved because there was equal participation of women in its implementation.

SHGs play an important role both in the financial and non-financial aspects of the daily lives of women. The level of involvement of women in the many forums, especially in the *gram sabha* (GS) and the cluster meetings, increased. The women took important decisions and helped settle many village-level conflicts. The SHGs are moving forward to federate at the block level, to show solidarity with each other.

The PEC, drawn from the GS, acts as the chief supervising body and takes charge of the entire planning and the implementation process. It comprises two members—one woman at least—from each hamlet. The members of the PEC choose their office bearers, namely, the president, the secretary and the treasurer,

who open a bank account in the nearest bank; the programme fund is directly transferred to this account from JTDS. The office bearers also liaise with JTDS, PRADAN and the stakeholders.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Several training programmes have been organized for SHG members and the leaders to help them run groups democratically and manage the initial task of savings and credit. As a result, a pool of women resource persons emerged; they helped the community run the SHG programme smoothly and also helped PRADAN work in the adjacent areas.

In order for the groups to function without continuous external support, a broader sense of solidarity was essential. For this purpose, a second tier of SHGs, which are called clusters, was also promoted. Here, three representatives from all the SHGs met once a month, to discuss the health of the SHGs as well as their own social well-being, especially issues relating to domestic violence. It empowered women to step outside their village because a cluster covers more than one village. Women now are one of the change agents of society.

A number of other training programmes were conducted during the pilot phase, including INRM planning, design and structures. These helped when replicating the programme in the scale-up phase because the community itself took charge of the planning and implementation. Resource persons, who had been trained, helped in the implementation of the scale-up phase of the programme.

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PROCESS AND STRATEGY FOLLOWED

The process followed took into consideration the involvement of the communities in decision-making and planning, and the transfer of responsibility of managing the development programmes to the villagers, in order to generate a greater sense of ownership.

A pool of local Community Resource Persons (CRPs) were identified and trained, to assist in the planning and the implementation of rainwater harvesting and micro-irrigation systems. Agro-ecological considerations were combined with the needs and aspirations of the community and with each hamlet/village through a micro-watershed to develop a rainwater management programme. This led to the inclusion of all the families smoothly under the programme.

PRADAN seeded the concept of the project in the GSs of all villages. The villagers accepted the essence of the project and cooperated with PRADAN. Because PRADAN insisted on including women in the project, half the PEC members as well as the signatories are women.

The selected PEC members represent each and every hamlet of a village; their primary responsibilities were to make the plan for every household in their hamlet and village. All the office bearers of the PEC work on an honorary basis. Assistants, selected by the villagers, were being paid by the JTDS and were responsible for assisting in the programme. They are now capable of making plans for each family and cover a vast majority of families.

PRADAN guided the community to forward its plan to their respective offices; thereafter, programme funds were transferred to the account of the PEC. A huge amount of money was transferred for the creation of different land water-based infrastructure. Rs 1.4 crores were invested for developing 107.59 ha of the command area for land and water management, including plantation, by promoting 750 activities, the 5% model, seepage tanks, innovation works and land levelling. As many as 2,150 families are benefited directly and indirectly from these assets/infrastructure, in terms of food grain production, cash income from cultivation of vegetables, pulses and oilseeds, fish rearing, etc. The inclusion of a large number of families under this project in this manner gave the community a great sense of satisfaction and happiness.

THE SUPPORT SYSTEM

One of the most attractive and significant parts of the programme for the labourers, and small and marginal farmers was food for work, which ensured food security to the families of the workers employed at sites. They got good quality food at cheaper rates than the market. World Food Programme (WFP) supported the project and took the responsibility of making food available to the labourers. A deduction of Rs 9 (2.5 kg of rice and 200 gm of pulse) or Rs 10 (3 kg of rice) from the wages was made that the money transferred to the Village Development Fund (VDF). This provision gave the villagers direct assurance of food in the families after a long day at work. The labourers

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were happy with the quantity and quality of rice that they got at cheaper rates.

Simultaneously, payments were made to the workers every week; this was done by members selected by the community itself. The involvement of the community in each and every part of the programme provided it with a transparent system of

the implementation. The fund was available with the community and they owned it; this gave them a great sense of achievement. Now, they are capable of running a programme themselves in the area.

VISIBLE CHANGES

Communities of the watershed villages of Chaibasa have a variety of functional working groups. These are responsible for the execution of specific tasks in their own domain. The domains are mainly SHGs, clusters and federations, land and water infrastructure implementation (both for the SHGs as well as the PEC).

A large area of land was treated through this programme. Now, the moisture regime is visible in the medium uplands. As a result, people are now cultivating *rabi* crops in their fields or having a second crop after paddy. This has enhanced the cash income and the food security of the villagers. A variety of new crops were introduced by JTDS such as pigeon pea, potato, ground nut and horse gram, which ensured an increase in the nutrition value of the food consumed by the community. This was, therefore, helpful in controlling migration from the area.

MAJOR LEARNING/EXPERIENCES

- ♦ The Gram Sabha Resource Management Plan (GSRMP) at the grass-roots level was very effective; it had a high level of acceptance compared to other land and water development projects/programmes.
- ♦ The PEC owned the project, being a beneficiary as well as the executive body for the villagers.
- ♦ Women's participation in village-level institutions such as GS and PEC was found to have increased significantly.
- ♦ A significant number of CRPs came forward to support various aspects of the activities such as the accountants for the SHGs and the PEC, for technical layout, monitoring and taking measurements.
- ♦ There were a significant number of community leaders, especially women, who represented their groups in various forums.
- ♦ The transparent financial transaction system in JTDS and the PEC fostered the confidence of the communities in the programme; more participatory involvement, therefore, was observed.
- ♦ VDF, a new concept for villagers, came into being.
- ♦ There was increase in food grain production and cash income for families that got direct and indirect support from the irrigation infrastructure that was created; farmers became acquainted with improved crop production systems and increased crop diversification.
- ♦ There was a high level of acceptance by the community of this programme as compared to other similar government programmes.

CONCERNS

The GSRMP covered all the families of each revenue village of the programme area. However, due to lack of time, about 50 per cent of it is still to be implemented; this is reflected in the demands of the community.

Earlier, WFP provided pulses but it was withdrawn due to some technical reasons. This is a deduction of protein source from the meals of a vulnerable part of the community.

The programme had ample scope to provide other livelihood opportunities such as animal husbandry, fishery, goat rearing and duckery, which would help the landless and the small/marginalized farmers, but this is yet to be implemented.