

Convergence of Livelihoods Creation: An Innovative and Proactive Initiative

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Transforming the lives of villagers by combining the resources of the community, the government and the local leadership, PRADAN uses collaboration and convergence as the basic approach in creating a significant impact on the livelihoods of the community

Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) has initiated a process of convergence of schemes, particularly MGNREGS, that directly benefits the poor in Dhamtari district, Chhattisgarh.

CONTEXT: RURAL POVERTY AND VULNERABILITIES

Dhamtari district has a population of 8 lakh people, of which 81 per cent live in rural areas. The district has a literacy rate of 78.95 per cent and ranks second in the state. However, the literacy rate amongst women is much lower, at 63 per cent.

People in this district belong to the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, (PVTGs) (Kamar) and landless household (Nishad, Kumhar, Yadav) communities, all of which are very vulnerable groups. The Gonds are one of the major tribes of the district whereas the Kamars, a PVTGs, constitute nearly 1 per cent of the total population and live in the Magarlod and Nagari blocks. Women form a disadvantaged group and as per the 2002 Census, 35 per cent of the rural households in the district fall in the below poverty line (BPL) category.

Fig 1: Relative Economic Status

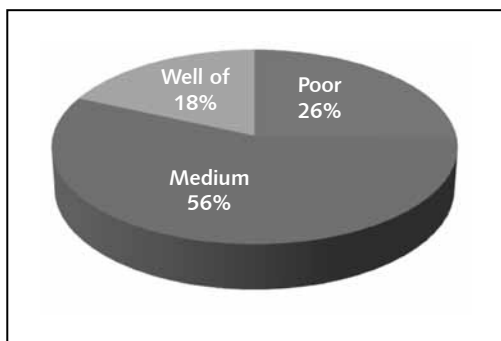
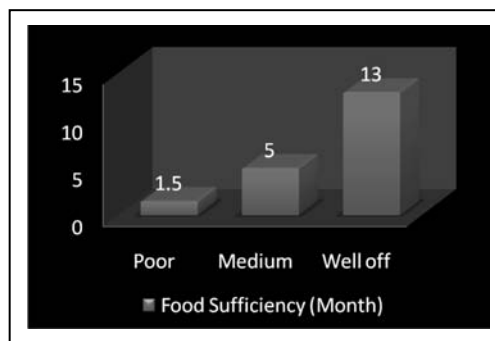


Fig 2: Food Sufficiency



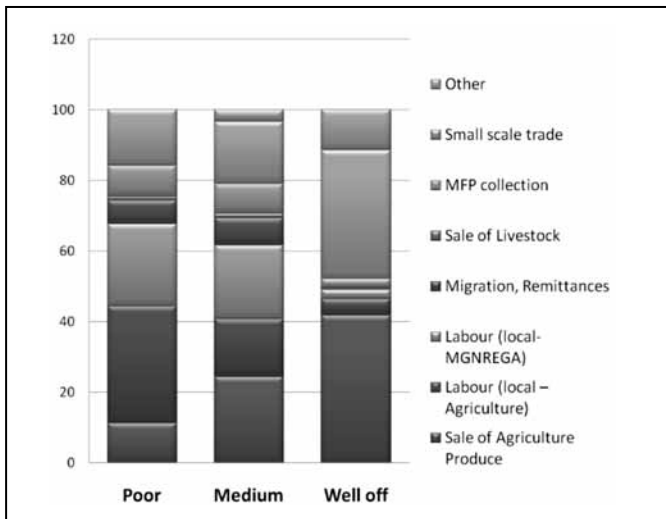
Traditional rain-fed farming results in poor yields and insufficient food, consequently leading to insufficient capital for further investment. This is one of the primary reasons for the abject poverty in the district, and a sample survey in the tribal-dominated area of the district shows that almost 82 per cent of the total households are struggling to make ends meet. Food insufficiency coupled with alcoholism,

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LIVELIHOOD CONTEXT

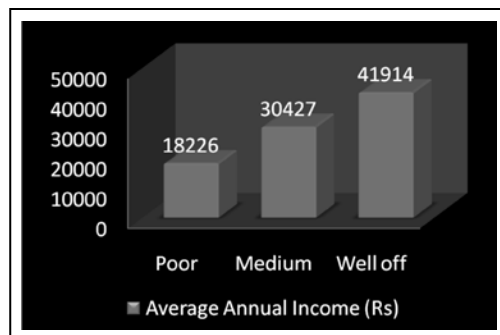
About 85 per cent of the workers in the region are primarily engaged in agriculture as cultivators and agricultural labour. The Kamars are dependent on minor forest produce (MFP) collection, hunting and bamboo basket making work. As per the sample survey conducted by PRADAN, the poor, whose livelihood depends primarily on selling their labour, earn around Rs 18,000 per annum. For households that belong to the 'medium' category, selling labour, collecting MFP and engaging in subsistence farming are the major sources of livelihood. Poor productivity in agriculture and allied sectors and a depleting resource base (land, water and forest) are the major developmental challenges for sustainable livelihood at the household level in the district. The non-farm sector is underdeveloped in the district, and requires on-time credit, systematic training and marketing support.

Fig 3: Sources of Income and their Contribution



leading to poor health, are major household-level vulnerabilities here. Out of distress, people from backward areas, especially from the Nagari block, migrate to the plains of Chhattisgarh. The public distribution system (PDS) in the district covers a sizeable area but provides inadequate support in addressing issues of food sufficiency holistically, especially among the poor. Thirty-four per cent of the gram panchayats (GPs) in the district are affected by flood and drought, making the district extremely vulnerable geographically.

Fig 4: Average Annual Income



PRADAN'S ENGAGEMENT

For its area of operation, PRADAN selected a contiguous patch of 323 villages, covering a part of Nagari block, the forest fringe area of Magarlod block, and the Duban area of Dhamtari block in Dhamtari district and the Narharpur block of Kanker district. There are 37,000 families living in these villages, of which 80 per cent families belong to the STs and 61 per cent are officially BPL families. The team started its operation in this area in 2007 by organizing the community, especially the women into Self Help Groups (SHGs).

The major developmental challenges of the area, identified by the team, are:

- a. Lack of food security from own cultivation
 - Low production leading to less investment in resources.
 - Limited irrigation infrastructure
- b. Reduced participation of women in decision-making roles
- c. Underdeveloped markets and services related to agriculture
- d. Limited access of community to government schemes
- e. Dependency on rapidly eroding non-timber forest produce (NTFP)

At present, in 2012, the team is working with 4,562 families, organized into 350 SHGs spread over 82 villages in the project area. The team is engaged in the following activities:

Last year, PRADAN worked with 919 families, using improved technology to produce paddy, millet, pulses and vegetables on 278 ha of

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land. About 35 per cent of the households got additional food sufficiency for three months and about 57 per cent of the households earned an income of more than Rs 10,000 from their own cultivation. Fruit trees (mango and cashew) have been planted by 500 families on 188 ha of uplands, land has been developed and in-situ water harvesting structures have been built. These structures have been built on 621 ha of land owned by 762 families.

THE INTERVENTION—CONVERGENCE FOR LIVELIHOODS CREATION FOR THE RURAL POOR

In 2008, PRADAN, in collaboration with NABARD, initiated a livelihood intervention programme with a fruit crop plantation in the uplands of selected villages in Dhamtari. The funds available under the project for the development of water resources to support the plantation and to facilitate inter-cropping were insufficient. This created the need for building linkages with the Department of Agriculture and Horticulture, to mobilize the remaining funds to develop water resources.

Initially, it was very difficult for PRADAN as well as the community (the SHG members) to draw resources from existing government schemes. After a year, when the effort and engagement of the community resulted in plantations of green mangoes and cashew in the barren uplands, it attracted the attention of the field-level officials. They started believing in PRADAN as well as the community. The officials supported the team by connecting the villagers with the Department of Agriculture and Horticulture and its existing schemes, to create irrigation infrastructure (such as bore

wells, sprinkler pipes, irrigation pumps and the construction of vermi-composting units) and gave various inputs for cultivating field crops and vegetables. Gradually, PRADAN stepped back, and an organic relationship between the field-level officials of the department and the SHGs slowly emerged. The officials scheduled their visits according to the meeting schedule of the SHGs and started using the local Community Service Providers (CSPs). The CSPs had been groomed by PRADAN to provide technical help to SHGs. The community also reciprocated by supporting and appreciating their efforts at different forums. Post this, discussions began with the SHGs for the development of other land, harvesting of rainwater and MGNREGA. In early 2010, PRADAN received a small grant from the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT), Mumbai, to demonstrate land and water resource development work in one village. There, PRADAN demonstrated in-situ water harvesting and land development work in a contiguous patch of 17 ha belonging to 32 families. The results were particularly encouraging because crops in other patches of land struggled to survive for want of water whereas there was sufficient water in the farm ponds to save the crop in this land. PRADAN organized several exposure visits to the village, and the community became enthusiastic about planning the development of land and water resources. With the link now firmly established between the community and the field-level officials of the Department of Agriculture and Horticulture, the community was motivated to engage with the *gram sabha* for MGNREGS. This meant that the doors were opened to plan

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for land use at the household level and to converge different schemes as per the need of the households. Most importantly, government officials at the district level also came forward to support these initiatives.

OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERVENTION

The objectives of the intervention were to:

- ♦ Enhance productivity of resources (land and water) by following the Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM) approach.
- ♦ Use collaboration and convergence as the basic approach in creating a significant impact on the livelihoods of the community.
- ♦ Plan according to the need and demand of the community.
- ♦ Encourage involved participation of the community (the SHGs and the *gram sabha*) in both, the planning and the implementation process.

With these objectives in mind, PRADAN demonstrated (initially in one village) the entire process from the beginning of the planning stage to the implementation and monitoring of the intervention. The process helped develop and standardize formats, estimates and processes for future replication by PRADAN itself as well as by other government functionaries. Until date, PRADAN has replicated this land use-based planning at the household level in 14 villages of Dhamtari district and 10 villages of Kanker district. The implementation was done by synchronizing the convergence of various government schemes.

PROCESS

a. Village Selection

Based on previous experiences, the team selected a village wherein approximately 60–70 per cent of the households were first mobilized and then organized into SHGs. This was done because a significant number is required to influence the *gram sabha* and the GP, for these bodies to pay attention to the needs of the community. The community, which is now aware, organized and mobilized, can get its plans approved, and exert pressure on the district and block officials for the required sanctions on time. The numbers are also needed to check the irregularities that might emerge and to ensure proper implementation of the work under MGNREGS as well as other programmes. This newly organized community was also able to support and empower the *sarpanch* in dealing with the bureaucracy. Moreover, wherever government functionaries were replicating the model under the guidance of the MGNREGS cell at the district level, the community selected a GP in which the *sarpanch* was pro-active and development-oriented.

b. Planning

The hamlet/village was taken as the base unit for planning. Exposure visits for SHG and Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members to villages were organized, wherein the community came forward to plan and implement land and water resource development-based activities. This was done in order to enhance the production and yield of the land. Along with this, hamlet-level meetings were organized immediately after the exposure visit, in order to decide whether the community is interested and whether it can pursue the plan in its own *gram sabha* and with the administration.

Planning is an extensive three-day exercise, in which the present status, the use of resources and the potential for using these resources further are assessed. The present status of existing schemes in the village and related subjects are discussed in detail. The plan is then prepared and tasks are divided among PRADAN team members, the CSP and SHG members. In this process of task allocation, the engaged participation of the SHG and the PRI members is sought and hence ensured. PRADAN team members facilitate the entire planning process and a plan is prepared for the duration of a year. This is because it fits easily with the requirement of the concerned government departments, which are aware of the funds available for the work and can ensure proper implementation. Afterwards, the first-hand experience of the work done in the first year is minutely analyzed, in order to help the community prepare a better plan for the next year. During the planning exercise for the first year, different departments such as agriculture, horticulture and fisheries are involved. This is done in order to support the community in linking its plan to the utilization of assets, planned under MGNREGS. Subsequently, when the existing schemes of the district are mapped in the 'planning format', the community makes a plan with the schemes, in the same way as the government departments plan for MGNREGS.

The planning process involves the following stages:

- I. **Social mapping:** The community conducts a 'social mapping' of the village, in which all households of the hamlet and all available resources and facilities are depicted. The mapping helps identify the missing facilities or resources that the community needs such as a hand pump, an *anganwadi*

centre, toilets, etc. The plan then seeks to incorporate these.

- II. **Resource mapping:** This involves depicting different types of land (upland, medium land, lowland, and homestead), available water bodies and vegetation on the 'revenue map' of the village. The status of resources, their use and the returns earned through these are discussed with the community. Along with this, the alternative and potential use of the same resources and the expected returns from these are discussed, in order to help the community in developing a vision. Based on specific considerations such as patches on the ridge, the relative status of the family, etc., the community selects a patch for the annual plan.
- III. **Transect visit:** Post the social and resource mapping, representatives from all households that own land in that patch, along with SHG members, PRI members, CSPs and PRADAN professionals, visit each plot within the patch. The land-use options and the work needed to be done are then discussed, based on the location of the land and the other resources available.
- IV. **Finalization of the plan and activity mapping:** After the transect visit, a meeting is organized at the hamlet or the village level, to finalize the options discussed during the transect visit. The community then depicts the final plan on the revenue map of the village.
- V. **Types of planned work:** The type of work, commonly planned, includes the following:

(i) Under MGNREGS: Farm pond,

dug well, field levelling; bunding, plantation

- (ii) MGNREGS and Horticulture: Orchard, nursery shed for vegetable cultivation
- (iii) Community nursery for grafted fruit plant to the SHG, MGNREGS and TSC: Toilet
- (iv) Department of Agriculture Horticulture: Bore well, composting, distribution of farm implements, sprinkler pipes and agricultural inputs
- (v) Department of Fisheries: Distribution of inputs for fisheries, training, etc
- (vi) CREDA: Biogas

VI. Documentation

- a. Work planned under MGNREGS: Villagers have to submit an application, a copy of the job card and land records; the PRADAN team then helps them with computer-related work. The community then deals with the *patwari* (a government official who keeps records regarding the ownership of land) for the land records. Usually, the *patwari* is invited to the village, and after the required documentation, the community submits the plan to the gram *sabha* and the GP. The community then takes the related receipts and submits a copy of the same to the block and district offices for sanction. The PRADAN team intervenes only if there is a problem. PRADAN helps the district and its relevant departments in preparing a 'model estimate' for the first time. Subsequently, all the work is sanctioned as per this 'model estimate'.
- b. Work planned under other departments:

The CSP helps SHG members to fill relevant forms and attach the required documents such as the copy of the land records, etc. The community then submits the application to their respective government departments and, subsequently, submits a consolidated plan sheet to the district office.

IMPLEMENTATION

a. Work planned under MGNREGS

After obtaining an official sanction from district-level officials, a 'work order' is released by the block to the GP, in which the GP is the work agency and the government department is the implementing agency. The community selects mates and *rojgar sahayaks* in the *gram sabha*. PRADAN conducts a training for the mates, the *rojgar sahayaks* and the technical assistants of the block before the initiation of the work. Mates note the daily measurement and record the attendance, which is signed by each worker, and which ensures that the work qualified as one working day is indeed done. The community monitors the work for quality and checks irregularities. In some

instances, SHG members are recognized as the village monitoring committee, VMC. The *rojgar sahayak*, with the help of the mates and the daily measurement register, prepares a muster roll, and the technical assistant of the block checks the measurement and evaluation of the work done. All the GPs are organized into clusters and a roster (starting from the day of initiation of work to the day of payment) is prepared for each cluster. This helps in making the community aware about the procedure before the payment. They are then able to follow each step with the *rojgar sahayak* for timely completion of different tasks. Work planned under other departments meant that the concerned department sanctions all work, planned exclusively with other departments and not necessarily in convergence with the MGNREGS. The field-level officials of the department implement the plan in co-ordination with the SHG and the CSP.

b. Monitoring

As part of having a proper system of checks and balances, representatives of different SHGs at the hamlet or the village levels meet every month, to monitor the progress of the plan. They use a monitoring sheet, to help

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

- ♦ All poor/job cardholders to be organized into SHGs
- ♦ A facilitating agency for continuous follow-up and for coordinating work among the beneficiaries
- ♦ Exposure visits and capacity building activities for various stakeholders
- ♦ Individual involvement of higher officials
- ♦ Forming convergence committees at the district and the block levels, to monitor and step up the task
- ♦ Presence of officials of different departments in planning meetings and for continuous monitoring at the village level
- ♦ Needs of individual job card holders to be assessed.

ascertain the status of each part of the plan; an action plan is prepared during the meeting for a follow-up with the relevant departments, block and district. Roles/tasks are divided among the members, after which a follow-up is conducted in the *gram sabha*. The district collector also monitors the progress of the plan from time to time, during his meetings with the department heads.

c. Replication

A workshop on NRM-based planning and convergence was organized for the block *panchayat*-level functionaries and the PRI at Chhindbharri village, to facilitate peer-to-peer learning.

The CEO, the Panchayat Officer, the technical assistants from all the blocks, the *sarpanch*, the *sachiv* and the *rojgar sahayak* from the selected GP participated in the event. The SHG became the pioneer in spreading the message when the orientation and training was provided to the local youth (CSPs/Bharat Nirman Volunteers), in order to support the community in the planning and the documentation processes. The technical assistants were trained in preparing land use-based village plans, and the mates and the technical assistants were trained in implementing the plan. The planning formats that were developed were circulated to all the GPs for their annual plans; and the other departments used the village plan as the base for their own plans.

OUTPUT

The planning process boosted the self-confidence of the community because it got a clear perspective about how to create plans. The community was successful in producing a proper working plan with the PRI as well as government officials and brought the community together for INRM. The process brought government departments together,

leading to an effective convergence. This convergence was mainly of two types: it included different departments focusing on a single family and different departments working for a similar activity such as the *sabji kuti* or the community nursery. A village development plan was prepared for 56 villages spread over three blocks, namely Nagari, Magarlod and Dhamtari. The plan aimed at directly benefiting the livelihoods of 1,009 rural households by developing their resource base. Most of the work planned for the first year has been completed. The plan for 2012–13 has been approved by the *gram sabha*. PRADAN is directly engaged in only 24 villages. In other villages, PRADAN supports the government staff and the interventions of the agriculture and the horticulture departments through their on-going programmes for irrigation support (bore wells, pumps, pipes), agriculture equipment (sprayer, weeder, etc.) and inputs such as seeds, bio fertilizers and bio pesticides. These are mobilized as per the plan to facilitate the utilization of the assets created.

a. The Outcome: Village Chhindbharri

The village of Chhindbharri is near Madamsilli dam and is 30 km from the district headquarters of Dhamtari. It is 50 km away from the block headquarters at Nagari. There are 75 households in the village with a total population of 415. Ninety-five per cent of these are Scheduled Tribes (STs) and 85 per cent are BPL households. The average landholding in the village is five acres; marginal farmers constitute 32 per cent of the total households and small farmers constitute 33 per cent. The village has 52 per cent uplands; 29 per cent medium lands and 19 per cent lowlands. Fifty per cent of the households are food sufficient for six months or less and 38 per cent are food sufficient for six months to one year in the village.

Labour (agriculture, MGNREGS and migration) constitutes 55 per cent of the primary sources of income; NTFP collection and trading constitutes 24 per cent whereas other household activities (fishing, trading, etc.) constitutes 21 per cent of other sources of income.

There are five SHGs and one village-level committee, promoted under the various programmes, in the village. Forty-two families of the village were facilitated by PRADAN in 2009, to develop orchards of mango and cashew in 35 acres of marginally utilized upland, with financial support from NABARD and the Department of Agriculture and Horticulture. Land and water resource development work under MGNREGS in 2010 included a participatory plan prepared by the SHG being presented to the *gram sabha* and being approved. The plan also includes the development of an irrigation facility, composting, agriculture implements and other

inputs in convergence with the agriculture and horticulture departments. Infrastructure was developed to harvest 56,380 cu m of rainwater in the fields of 31 families. Soil erosion was checked in 91 acres of land of 31 families and an additional 40 acres were covered by irrigation. This resulted in enhanced income from agriculture because more than 60 per cent of the households earned an income of Rs 15,000 and above.

b. Effect on individual households

Sushila Bai and Kisun Netam

Sushila Bai is a member of the Bhumi Swa Sahayta Samuh of Chhindbharri village and has one-and-a-half acres of land, of which one acre is upland and the rest is a paddy field. The returns from agriculture were not sufficient to meet the basic requirements of the family. Her husband, Kisun Netam, was primarily an agricultural labourer, who used to migrate

THE STORY OF TULARAM MARKAM

Tularam Markam is a resident of Amlipara village of Nagari block in Dhamtari district. He owns about 4.5 acres of land. About 3 acres of his land is upland, which is marginally cultivated because it is undulating, has poor soil fertility and no irrigation support. The remaining 1.5 acres are used to cultivate short duration paddy due to lack of irrigation support. It contributes about six months of food to Tularam's family. Wage labour is the other source of income for his family. During the planning process at his village, Tularam decided to develop his upland as a fruit orchard, level the medium and low lands and build two farm ponds. Tularam developed an orchard in 2.5 acres of upland, with support from NABARD and the Department of Horticulture. He also planted mango and cashew plants in his land; and MGNREGS helped him construct a cattleproof trench (CPT) in the orchard as well as in the medium land. He created a farm pond in the medium and the lowlands for paddy cultivation and constructed a low-cost nursery shed for vegetable cultivation in his orchard, with support from the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) and MGNREGS. Tularam then went on to complete 100 days of work under MGNREGS. This year, in 2012, Tularam cultivated chilli, groundnut, tomato, brinjal and turmeric in the upland and paddy in the medium and low land and earned an additional income of about Rs 25,000. He was supported by the Department of Agriculture and Horticulture for inputs such as seeds and implements, and PRADAN provided training and technical support to him.

to the plains of Chhattisgarh for 45–60 days a year to harvest paddy. Seeing the fruit plantation in the adjoining land and the development of irrigation infrastructure, Sushila Bai felt motivated and decided to venture into fruit and vegetable cultivation in her one acre of upland for the first time. She planted 25 mango and 30 cashew plants in 2010 and grew some vegetables. Slowly, she developed her land, constructed a *sabji kuti*, with support from MGNREGS, and got a sprinkler pipe from the Department of Horticulture. She cultivated potato, brinjal, tomato, chilli, bottle gourd and sponge gourd and earned about Rs 33,000 from the land; earlier, from the same land she earned less than Rs 1,000 a year by cultivating black gram. Last year, her husband did not migrate for paddy harvesting. He stayed in the village and worked for 100 days under MGNREGS.

LEARNING

A mobilized and organized community is critical for preparing and implementing plans. Following up with the GPs and relevant government departments for sanctioning and proper implementation is equally important. The presence of a facilitating agency (such as PRADAN) is necessary for continuous co-ordination between the community and various government departments involved. It is essential to facilitate exposure visits and organize capacity-building activities for the community and other stakeholders involved, from time to time. The administration, the GP

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and the community are the three major stakeholders involved in the programme and, eventually, the three need to be involved and their activities coordinated.

One could begin with collaborating with any one of the most favorable stakeholders; however, engagement with only one stakeholder alone is not enough. This is important before

any major scale-up. Government officials, especially those working at the field level, struggle to achieve their targets and many times adopt other means to do so. They generally do not receive any support from the community; on the contrary, they usually receive complaints at different forums. Appreciating them for what they have done will help and influence them to work in an organized and efficient way. PRI members (especially in tribal-dominated areas such as Chhattisgarh), including the *sarpanch* and the *janpad sadasya*, are often misunderstood by both the community as well as the officials. It is important that they are supported (something which is usually missing) in order to serve the community better. An organized community (the SHGs), with the orientation of building linkages, can empower these PRI members to put pressure on the delivery mechanism of the government. Support from higher officials at the district level is always helpful and hastens the process, and no one can deny the importance of a genuine demand by an organized community. Engagement with the GP and the departments at the district level is required for technical support as well as to build a system and process favourable to the community.