

## Dare to Dream: Kamala and Jaisen Sakia

*The willingness to take risks and experiment with innovative methods, with the backing and guidance of professionals, proves to be life-changing for the tribals of Koraput district and especially one family...*

Kamala Sakia is a 35 year old Gadaba woman, who lives with her husband, four daughters and a son in Chaparamba, a far-flung village in the tribal-dominated Koraput district of southern Orissa. She has been living in this village since her birth.

The main source of livelihood for her family is agriculture, followed by wage labour. They own approximately 2.5 acres of land, of which half an acre is lowland, where they cultivate paddy twice a year, and the rest is upland, where they cultivate upland paddy, *ragi*, *nigera*, and vegetables in the *kharif* season. At one time, they used to cultivate only cereals and oil seeds, and had food sufficiency for six to seven months in a year; after the government introduced the Rs 2 per kg rice, they get 25 kg of rice with their BPL card. Once the pressure of food security was taken off, they have begun cultivating some vegetables and there by earn some extra cash for their household expenditure.

In February 2010, PRADAN began its intervention in this village. Poverty was abject and pervasive and the people highly vulnerable; literacy rates were dismal, the village was poorly connected and there was a soaring migration rate. PRADAN started its work by mobilizing the women into Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The task was more difficult than anticipated. The women in this village had been members of SHGs twice before. Unfortunately, they lost their valuable savings both times, and also lost faith in outside agencies. Therefore, a lot of time had to be invested in rapport building and community mobilization.

Kamala was one of the women, who could be taken into confidence, because she was still hopeful and optimistic. She helped mobilize nine other women to form an SHG. The next obstacle PRADAN faced was that there was no one in the village who could maintain records. The only person they could think of as their record-keeper was Narayan Saika, a village youth, who was away in Akula, Maharashtra, to work in a concrete pole factory as wage labourer. They decided that they would start the SHG once he returned but they were not certain about his homecoming.

PRADAN promised to help them with an accountant until Narayan returned, and in March 2010, the Siba-Sankara SHG was formed.

A few meetings with the village women and men showed that the village had an abundance of upland resources but these were gradually degrading due to high erosion and landslides. Also, the villagers wanted to cultivate vegetables round the year but because they did not have the facilities for irrigation, they were unable to do so; instead, the villagers migrated to faraway places in search of work after the *kharif* season. The

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story was more or less the same across PRADAN's working area in Koraput. Past experience indicated that the introduction of Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM) activities could help the

villagers arrest erosion, increase ground water and provide them round-the-year water in the medium uplands for vegetable cultivation.

Nevertheless, the introduction of the INRM required a considerable amount of money. PRADAN was new to the area; therefore, it



was difficult to raise the money locally. A project was conceived then to demonstrate INRM activities in Chaparamba village so that the people in the village would be benefited; in the interim, the local administration could be persuaded to take up similar activities elsewhere in Koraput district under MGNREGA.

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A project proposal was submitted to Jamshedji Tata Trust (JTT), and after its approval, the INRM planning was done in April 2010. Kamala stayed in the forefront during the whole planning process, and mobilized the villagers to participate in large numbers. She included all her uplands towards planning for bonding; in partnership with another farmer, she planned to construct a ring-well in her medium upland.

In May 2010, the implementation of INRM work began, and Kamala and Jaisen both participated in it. In June 2010, they started constructing thea ring well. But due to the onset of the monsoons, they had to abandon work after the excavation work was done.

After the *kharif* season was over, the villagers once again started the earth work. Kamala and Jaisen finished the bonding work in two acres of their upland, and also completed the construction of the ringwell.

Though the effects of the land-bonding activities are yet to be seen, the ring well has already been a boon for them in the 2010 *kharif* season and the 2011 summer season. When paddy in their medium upland was in its growth stage, the area experienced a dry spell and it did not rain until harvesting was over. The ring well saved the crop of the

villagers because they irrigated their fields from the half constructed ring well. In addition, in summer, on the same land, with facilitation from PRADAN, Kamala cultivated hybrid tomatoes. From around 15

decimals of land, she harvested 30 quintals of tomatoes and earned approximately Rs 10,000.

Kamala's husband did not migrate to Maharashtra after the *kharif* season was over because wage labour was available within the village. He and Kamala earned more than Rs 7,000 from the INRM work done in the village. They also expect enhanced production from their developed up-land this year.

With this income, they have bought two cows this season and have increased their herd of goats and number of hens. Now, when we visit Kamala Sakia, she talks about the education of her child and of availing of better medical facilities for her family. When PRADAN first intervened, the conversation was only about earning enough to feed her family and stopping her husband from migrating to other areas. Her confidence has increased manifold, and when villagers from the surrounding areas and officials come to see the INRM work in their village, she shows her work with pride and motivates them to take up the same kind of work in their villages. Evidently, she and her family have entered a developmental spiral, and both Kamala and Jaisen are now able to dream of a brighter future for their family. These positive changes could not have been possible, without the perseverance of PRADANites and the generous financial support from JTT.