

Stories of Success: Converging Schemes for Generating Livelihoods

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Converging various government schemes and helping village women take charge of the planning and implementing processes is proving to be a big leap in creating self-sufficiency, boosting confidence in their abilities to negotiate with the government and other agencies, and helping women take ownership of their prosperity and progress

SAVITRI BAI DARRO

Savitri bai is a marginal farmer belonging to the Gond community. She lives with her husband Fakir Ram and their two sons in Bhothapara village, Nagari block, Dhamtari district. Last year, she conducted her daughter's marriage. She says, "*Hamar pariwar ka abhi khushhali ke din chalat hai.* (Our family is living a prosperous life these days)." Looking back at her life, however, reveals a different picture.

She recounts that her life was full of struggle before she joined her SHG in 2008. She has two acres of cultivable land in the rain-fed area and, earlier, it was very difficult to get more than six quintals of rice from one acre of land because her land is undulating and there was no provision to arrest the flow of water from the uplands. The paddy yield was barely enough to feed her family. Her husband used to work in a rice mill as a labourer, and she collected minor forest produce (MFP) and firewood from the village forest. She migrated to the plains area (locally called the Chhatar Raj) of Chhattisgarh, to work as a labourer and earn money. She reminisced how difficult it was for her to leave her home and children, and go look for work in a distant place. She had to work really hard to make ends meet. She remembered how anxious she would become when she was away. At that time, a few community works were being initiated under MGNREGS but that was for not more than a week, and she did not know how to get work under the Scheme.

In 2009, Savitri Bai went for an Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM) exposure visit, organized by PRADAN. She saw how SHG members had done land-levelling and constructed farm ponds to save water and provide for irrigation in the dry season. Back from the exposure visit, she shared her learning with the village officer (VO) and expressed her wish to work in a similar manner.

Savitri Bai decided to level two acres of her land, build two farm ponds, and dig one bore well with support from the Department of Agriculture. She also sought support on setting up one *sabzi kuti* and one home under the Indira Awas Yojana. A meeting was organized in the village, where officials from the different departments were present. Savitri, along with other members of the SHG, presented their plans. Her plan was sanctioned by all the departments as well as by the *gram sabha*.

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She got a grant of Rs 1.31 lakhs from the *zila panchayat* under MGNREGS for land-levelling and constructing a pond on her farm. She completed the work on her land by the end of 2011. Today, she harvests 10 tonnes of paddy from her land in two seasons. She is also actively engaged in vegetable cultivation. She received a subsidy of Rs 50,000 from the Department of Agriculture and a loan of Rs 40,000 from the Punjab National Bank. She constructed a house. She completed 100 days each year for three years in MGNREGS. Her husband has

stopped working as a labourer in the rice mill and she no longer has to migrate to another district because she has ample work to do in her own land.

She proudly announces, "*Abhi pet bhar chawal aur sabzi apne khet se mil jaat hai* (Now I get enough rice and vegetables for our needs from my own land)." One of her sons is studying



Sukhwati inter-crops brinjal in her mango and cashew orchard

in college and the other is in middle school. She has been elected the ward *panch* and has been actively engaged in generating awareness among other SHG members about the schemes that can be useful to them. She thinks that MGNREGS and other such schemes need to be continued for a few years in her village so that people can develop their resources and reap results from them.

Sukhwanti's knowledge regarding MGNREGS and how to interact with various government departments has increased. She is proud that she can easily get her work done through the panchayat even though she has never been to school and is uneducated

her children, providing clothes for her children and having a good house were distant dreams for Sukhwati. MGNREGS work was rare in her village. Only some construction work such as renovation of traditional water bodies and roads was being organized. These did not provide work for more than a week.

With intervention from PRADAN and by liaising with different departments, she made plans

to construct six ponds and level two acres of land under MGNREGS. She got them sanctioned from the *panchayat* in 2010. She also contributed Rs 35,000 as support for a bore well from the Department of Agriculture. She organized a demonstration on farming by the Agriculture department in her field and on biogas from Chhattisgarh Renewable Energy Development Agency (CREDA). She applied for a vegetable mini-kit to the Horticulture department. The village Community Service Provider (CSP) helped her family link with the different departments. She and her husband participated in some natural resource management (NRM) training programmes as well as productivity enhancement and convergence planning sessions in the village.

In 2013, she harvested 15 tonnes of paddy from five acres of land. She is now getting vegetables round-the-year from her land, and managed to sell vegetables worth Rs 10,000 last year. She sold five tonnes of paddy in a co-operative society and five tonnes in the village market, after keeping enough for home consumption. Her husband is the member of the co-operative society and owns a Kisan Credit Card (KCC) that insures her crops, and gets bonuses and loans from the co-operative society. In 2013, he took an agriculture loan of Rs 15,000 from the co-operative society.

SUKHWATI NETAM

Sukhwati Netam is a marginal tribal farmer of the Gond community in Chhindbharri village, Nagari block, Dhamtari district. She had five acres of un-bundled land and had no irrigation facilities before 2009. It was very difficult for her to protect her crop in the rainy season because no conservation structure existed to arrest the flow of water. Her crops were often infested with termites, and destroyed due to the delayed and fluctuating monsoon in Chhattisgarh. She felt anxious about her land gradually getting degraded because of the soil erosion in the uplands, high run-off, and siltation in the lowlands and medium lands. She never harvested more than a quintal of paddy in a year.

Her husband, Katha Lal Netam, earned money by delivering goods on his bullock cart and working in the rice mill in Dhamtari. Sukhwati occupied herself by collecting MFP and firewood from a nearby forest. It was very hard for her to have even one meal a day. Speaking of her plight, she said, "*Hamman din mein maria pej peyat rahe aur raat mein ek time chanwal* (We used to drink only *maria pej*—a mixture of finger millets and boiled rice—in the day and ate rice in the night)." Having enough food for her family, educating

She says that now they are living a happy life. She actively participates in the *gram sabha*. Sukhwati's knowledge regarding MGNREGS and how to interact with various government departments has increased. She is proud that she can easily get her work done through the *panchayat* even though she has never been to school and is uneducated.

She is thinking of starting horticulture in one acre of land and constructing one farm pond in the future. She thinks that the MGNREGS programme should be continued and should be linked with other schemes. "It has made a great contribution in transforming our lives and livelihoods."

URMILA BAI MARKAM

Urmila Bai Markam is a tribal farmer of Amlipara village in Nagari block. Her family comprises six members, that is, her husband,

The village development samiti mobilized funds from the Department of Forests for water supply in the village. A bore well was dug and a water tank was constructed in the middle of the village. Each family in the village invested Rs 1,500 for a tap water connection in individual households in the village

son, daughter, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and herself.

She used to migrate to the plains of Chhattisgarh as an agricultural labourer for 45–60 days in a year. In spite of having three acres of land, the family did not produce enough grain because they had no irrigation facilities.

Urmila Bai recounted that she was part of the SHG that was formed under a government programme. However, they never had regular meetings and savings in the SHG. When PRADAN came to their village, it revived their SHG. The team from PRADAN interacted with the SHG members, their families, as well as PRI members and talked about livelihoods, attending the *gram sabha*, and meeting officials at the block and district levels. Initially, people were skeptical of PRADAN's activities but a drastic shift came when her SHG members visited the PRADAN team in Raigarh. She learned from the exposure visit that she had to



Drip irrigation system developed in convergence with Department of Horticulture

strengthen her village Cluster, to be able to interact with different stakeholders.

She participated in membership, accounts, INRM, and productivity enhancement training programmes. She began paddy cultivation, using the SRI method, in 2009. Her experience with SRI was good, even though there was low rainfall that year. Urmila Bai focused on vegetable cultivation and got a return of Rs 12,000 from 10 decimals of land. She developed one acre of land into an orchard, with support from NABARD Tribal Development Scheme in 2010 and planted mangoes and cashews, and now does inter-cropping of vegetables and pulses in her orchard.

In 2010 with the help of the Department of Agriculture, she had a bore well dug, which she shared with an adjacent farmer. She received Rs 45,000 as support from the Department of Agriculture to purchase a motor pump for the bore well. She contributed Rs 25,000 by taking a loan from the SHG. In 2011, she also got a free vegetable mini-kit and an irrigation pipe worth Rs 12,000 from the Department of Horticulture for vegetable cultivation and, in 2012, she planned drip irrigation in her orchard land for better vegetable cultivation for which she got Rs 50,000 from the Department of Horticulture. Her own contribution towards the drip irrigation on 0.75 decimals of land was Rs 15,000. Encouraged by the results, she planned to develop two acres of land, one water-harvesting structure, a NADEP tank, a cattle-shed and a urine tank under MGNREGS for which she got a sanction of Rs 1.02 lakhs from the *zila panchayat*.

Participatory micro-planning exercises were taken up in SHGs and the others in the village. On the village revenue map, the landholding size of each household and its nature and needs were mapped. A list of various schemes available was then drawn up, listing all the possible benefits. These were then matched with the needs of each household

The village development *samiti* mobilized funds from the Department of Forests for water supply in the village. A bore well was dug and a water tank was constructed in the middle of the village. Each family in the village invested Rs 1,500 for a tap water connection in individual households in the village. Urmila also contributed Rs 1,500 to the village *samiti* to get a water connection in her house. Now she does not have to go to the village pond to have a bath, a pond which was also used by animals. She says that

the women of the village no longer have the itching problem that they used to have after bathing in the pond.

She has also developed a kitchen garden, which she irrigates using water from the tap. Her kitchen garden supplies round-the-year vegetables for her own and her family's consumption. She has also constructed a bathroom in her house at her own cost. She has made the bricks that she is going to use to make a toilet in her home.

HOW IT STARTED

PRADAN started working in Dhamtari in 2007 by organizing the community into SHGs. During the team's initial exploration and through discussions with the community and the SHG members, the team identified that the major development challenge of the district was high food insecurity due to low production on the degraded land. Although the average annual rainfall in the district is about 1,200 mm, of which 80 per cent falls during the months of June to September, the crop suffered because of the lack of irrigation.

Migration, though seasonal, was quite widespread. People usually migrated to the plains of Chhattisgarh to work as labourers in the paddy fields. The team also found that people had little awareness of or access to public schemes, especially in the case of those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

PRADAN encouraged women members to take part in the gram sabha. Gradually, they developed confidence and began to first attend and then participate in the meetings; eventually, they were able to place their issues in the gram sabha

prosperous farmers. The village meetings discussed the essential need to build linkages; and because the schemes under MGNREGA were being implemented in the district, PRADAN and the community thought of converging these schemes so that farmers can derive maximum benefit and generate sustainable livelihood options for the people of the area.

In 2008, PRADAN, in collaboration with NABARD, initiated fruit crop plantation in the upland plots of farmers. However, the funds available under the project for the development of water resources, to support plantation and facilitate inter-cropping, were insufficient.

There were other government departments that had schemes available for the poor but because of the lack of awareness on the part of the community and the department's indifferent attitude, the resources in these schemes were mostly siphoned off by

However, convincing the officials of the different departments was a herculean task. More than a year of persistent efforts led to the field-level officials finally showing interest. Field visits were organized for the officials to the villages, where barren uplands had been converted into mango and cashew orchards. They then began to believe in PRADAN professionals as well as in the community.

PRADAN initially focussed on the team and then helped the community to develop their



Solar energy driven water supply system developed in convergence with Public Health and Engineering Department and CREDA

plans, based on the resources available. Participatory micro-planning exercises were taken up in SHGs and the others in the village. On the village revenue map, the landholding size of each household and its nature and needs were mapped. A list of various schemes available was then drawn up, listing all the possible benefits. These were then matched with the needs of each household.

During the initial planning phase, officials supported the community in linking with the existing schemes of the Departments of Agriculture and Horticulture for the creation of irrigation infrastructure such as bore wells, sprinkler pipes, irrigation pumps, construction of vermi-compost units and various inputs for cultivating field crops and vegetables. Gradually, the professionals of PRADAN moved out and an organic relationship developed between the field-level officials of the departments and the community SHGs. The officials scheduled their visits as per the meeting schedule of the SHGs and began using the CSPs, groomed by PRADAN, to extend their programme to the community. The community also reciprocated by supporting and appreciating the efforts made by these officials at various forums and occasions.

Gradually, discussions in the SHGs on developing more land, harvesting rainwater, and convergence with MGNREGA began to take place. Initially, it did not generate enough excitement or energy among the SHGs to engage with the *gram sabha* and influence it in the planning and implementation of MGNREGA. They thought that it would be very difficult to influence the *gram sabha* and the PRIs; moreover, the women did not take part in the *gram sabha* meetings. It was the domain of the men; it was easier to deal with the officials because they were outsiders, but difficult to confront people from their own village and panchayat. PRADAN encouraged

women members to take part in the *gram sabha*. Gradually, they developed confidence and began to first attend and then participate in the meetings; eventually, they were able to place their issues in the *gram sabha*.

PRI members were also sensitized and there was encouragement from the district administration, which regularly asked PRIs to take the support of PRADAN. Exposure visits were conducted for both the community members and the PRIs, to develop an understanding of in-situ water harvesting and land development work through MGNREGA. The community began developing linkages with the field-level officials of the Departments of Agriculture and Horticulture and energized themselves enough to engage with the *gram sabha* for MGNREGA. It opened the doors to land use-based planning at the household level and for converging various schemes.

PRADAN is no longer as engaged with the community and the PRI as it was earlier. A series of training programmes for SHGs members, PRIs, *rozgar sahayaks* and mates were conducted in the first and second year; subsequently, these resource persons and SHG members have taken charge of the planning and the implementation of the village development plan. They have also enhanced and nurtured their linkages with various government departments, such as agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, CREDA, forests and other institutions. Today, a village community resource person (CRP) has his/her direct relationship with the department, to mobilize resources for the development of their village. The knowledge and self-confidence of SHG members have been enhanced by the planning, implementing and monitoring of the programmes.

The CRPs, mates, *rozgar sahayaks* and SHG leaders support the village organization

to prepare the village perspective plan around the resources available. The village organization has sought out the most deprived and the vulnerable families and included them in the SHGs for their well-being. The villagers are involved in the complete process of selecting the patch of land, transecting the fields, generating options and helping families choose the best options for the development of their land. CSPs help the village organization in orchestrating the linkages with the other

departments. PRADAN professionals now make very little contribution in planning or implementing the programme.

MARKS OF CHANGE

The convergence of MGNREGA with other programmes was initiated in Chhindbharri village, Changaon *panchayat*; later, it was implemented in the four *panchayats* of Bhotapara, Chanagaon, Bagrumnala and Siyarinala.

WORK COMMONLY PLANNED

MGNREGA: Farm ponds, dug wells, field levelling and bunding, plantation

MGNREGA and Horticulture: Orchards, nursery sheds for vegetable cultivation, community nursery for grafted fruit plants

MGNREGA and TSC: Toilets

Department of Agriculture/Horticulture: Bore wells, composting, distribution of farm implements, sprinkler pipes and agricultural inputs

Department of Fisheries: Distribution of inputs for fisheries, training, etc.

CREDA: Biogas

Particulars of Convergence	Source Department	Funds Mobilized (in Lakhs)
Land and water development work for 273 families	MGNREGS, Zila Panchayat	2.9
Vermi-compost units to 66 farmers	Horticulture department	7.9
Nursery sheds for 60 farmers	Horticulture department	7.6
Vegetable seeds for kitchen gardening to 622 families	Horticulture department	
Sprinkler pipes for irrigation for 75 farmers	Agriculture department	12.7
Biogas units to 80 families	CREDA	6.40
Community nursery sheds for fruit plants with mist chambers	MGNREGS, RKVY, Forest department	10.0

During the planning process, the whole village sits together; SHG members take charge of the meeting process and, with the help of the CSPs, facilitate meetings. The participation of families from all strata in the village is ensured to give an opportunity to the deprived, disadvantaged and to single women. Discussions over the funds flow, labour used, work done, monitoring of work take place in these village meetings, ensuring transparency. SHG members also ensure that there is discussion in the *gram sabha* about the provision of facilities such as crèches, medical aid and drinking water, thereby enabling greater participation of women.

They also ensure that tents are made available at the location of work so that women can breast-feed their children. The social security and safety net of the MGNREGS programme, especially for pregnant women, has affected their quality of life and provided for their unborn children. The *janta* chart is displayed at the work site mentioning the rate and amount of work for labour work, helping workers to calculate their work amount. With the effective implementation of MGNREGS, the trust in the *gram sabha* as an institution has grown, and the people now actively exert their citizenship by not only participating but also by being actively involved in village development issues. Mainstreaming with different organizations has not only helped in resource development but also enhanced the confidence of SHG members. They now interact with the officials without any inhibitions. Today, most of the

farmers have KCCs, and the SHGs links with banks makes taking loans and investing for a better quality of life easier.

The Department of Agriculture has helped in the enhancement of productivity by supporting farmers with agriculture inputs such as weeders, bore wells, sprayers, drip irrigation, fertilizers, vermin-tanks, insecticides and pesticides. CSPs mobilize these resources and the farmers also make a contribution. The Horticulture department supports the farmers by providing vegetable mini-kits and seeds. Today, farmers purchase quality seeds from the market to ensure better productivity.

PLANS AHEAD

PRADAN is now planning to replicate the convergence model of development in all parts of the district through Community Based Organizations (CBOs). With the support of PRI members, the village organization and MGNREGS functionaries, the planning has been completed. All departments and developmental agencies will come within the framework of the village organization, which will not only work in planning and implementation but also mobilize resources and partner with different stakeholders to change the human conditions in the village. PRADAN will work in developing the capacity of CBOs so that these are able to work in building the linkages with various government departments for comprehensive development in the village.