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NewsReach

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Single versus multiple sector interventions

I would like to present my views on Madhabananda Ray's article *Ways to Promote Livelihoods* (NewsReach March 2003). There is no doubt that promotion of livelihoods is a major challenge before us. I really do not see many options other than the 2 (large-scale and small-scale sectoral interventions) proposed by Madhabananda.

There is no doubt that large-scale single sector interventions would help us to get rid of exploitation by middlemen. But getting rid of middlemen is an expensive proposition and carries the danger of bringing down the whole effort by conspiracy of the middlemen. Middlemen have strong networks and research have shown that their concerted action can scuttle many successful and planned initiatives. We could think of some other way to utilise this important section of people like the way BASIX tried to work through them by channelling credit to them, thereby making use of their already well-established network.

We also require strong support from local and central governments if we are to make large-scale sectoral interventions work. Till now we have not been able to garner the required support from government agencies despite our best efforts. There is also the question of competition. Would we be able to compete with the global players with our kind of exposure and experience?

I think a single sectoral intervention would work faster and could be managed more

efficiently than sectoral interventions with SHGs. But by doing so, we will have to leave the landless families behind. To me our priority should be targeting the poorest of the poor. Who could be more vulnerable than the landless who have no physical assets other than their malnourished bodies? We have to then bid farewell to many of our core values like empowerment, capacity building, etc. while working along sectoral lines. We could make the activity sustainable though.

Sectoral intervention with SHGs seems to be a distant dream as the writer himself expressed lot of apprehension. Although many of our member families would be covered under this intervention, manageability would be a big question. I think small-scale sectoral intervention, given the changing global scenario and the increasing number of people we want to work with, does not really stand a chance since it would not give our operations the minimum scales of economy.

Could we think of some intervention that would take care of the benefits of large-scale intervention and at the same time would encompass the families who are in the real sense marginalized and do not really fit in single large-scale sectoral interventions?

Jui Gupta, Jamshedpur, Jharkhand



FIELD UPDATE

Computer *Munshis* go Online In Purulia

Our Purulia team has implemented computerised accounts of all SHGs. Our professionals attended meetings of each SHG to explain the concept of computerisation of SHG accounts and its implications. We also explained the importance of sending weekly RMTS to the computer centre. Our team also identified and trained efficient SHG accountants to feed in the data.

The weekly data is collected in SHG meetings in the duplicate forms of the RMTS. SHG members then post these sheets at collection post boxes placed in markets, panchayat offices, teashops and important gathering places frequented by villagers. We have regularised this step for nearly 98% of the SHGs.

The RMTS sheets are collected by designated postmen and brought to our office where it is placed in the files for each SHG. The postman is paid Rs 2 per sheet. The RMTS is then fed into the computer by the *munshi* (a carefully selected local person), for which he is paid Rs 2 per RMTS.

Data has also started flowing to the SHGs from our office. We have been able to ensure monthly outflow of data to groups.

The computerisation of accounts has brought various benefits. We are saving significant time that was earlier spent tallying member-wise balances and the trial balance. The groups are also confident that even if an accountant makes a mistake in

the passbooks, the computer sheet supplied by the *munshi* would rectify it.

Since we now attend cluster meeting with precise data, it has become easier for us to provide feedback to the groups. Our main emphasis is now on on-time repayment. The data sheets that we give to cluster representatives have made it easier to identify defaulters so that the groups can bear pressure on them to repay on time. As a result, the number of defaulters is decreasing rapidly in all groups.

We also discuss member attendance of less than 80% with the help of these data sheets. If a cluster representative is not able to explain the non-attendance, 2-3 members from other groups visit that particular group to look into the issue. As a result, overall attendance is also increasing.

We will soon be able to send the data weekly to all groups. The groups are expected to pay for this service once they realise its importance. We plan to implement this within a year. We also intend to gradually stop paying the computer *munshi*. He is expected to start his own business after the initial year of support from us.



ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

The Rainbow People of Pradan

Pradan and its colourful people have come a long way since its inception 20 years ago

Vijay Mahajan

What can one say for something that is so dear, so much of a part of oneself and yet has grown from just an idea in a conversation between Deep and I to a well-respected organisation 2 decades later. My first instinct was to merely quote Eliot's lines:

So here I am in the middle way, having had twenty years-

Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres -

Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure

Because one has only learnt to get the better of words

For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which

One is no longer disposed to say it...

T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, East Coker.

But it would be a cop-out to not say something, however trite, on the 20th birthday of Pradan, particularly as Nivedita had forewarned me. It is Holi as I write and I think the best way for me to celebrate Pradan's 20th birthday is to recount its many splendoured people, some within and some outside.

Over the last year, since I was invited to join the Governing Board of Pradan, I have visited a number of Pradan colleagues.

I was at the Sukhtawa campus in Madhya Pradesh (MP) and spoke with Anish Kumar about his business-like expansion of the poultry programme, which is now the largest such cluster in MP and the poultry growers' Kesla Poultry Society maturing every day. They had been invited to expand in Sidhi by the MP rural development minister and to Jharkhand by the secretary, co-operation, Raj Bala Verma, who was a DRDA (District Rural Development Agency) Project Director when she first met Pradan in the 1990s.

Both the expansions have taken root over the past year. Talking to Madhu, I learnt that the self-help groups (SHGs) work and the mushroom growing is also well established, though on a smaller scale. It was also good to see Madan, who has stuck on for so many years.

In Full Glory

In Jharkhand over 3 visits, I could see Pradan's work in full glory. I flew to Ranchi on New Year's Day 2003 (what better way to start a new year!) and walked into a surprise. Soumen had organised a kind of a 3-day mobile (back of the jeep) workshop on Pradan's work in the field of small lift irrigation and how it can be transformed into irrigated agriculture.

There were 9 Pradanites there from various teams in Jharkhand. It was a delight to talk to them as well as see their work and build on their ideas. After 600 odd lift irrigation installations, Pradan is not able to continue much growth because the government has diverted its funds to other priorities.

I had prepared myself for the meeting by reading Manas' excellent study of the lift irrigation work, which he carried out while on a sabbatical with former IRMA Director and former Pradan Chair Tushaar Shah's International Water Management Institute.

My first visit in Jharkhand was to the Gumla district, accompanied by Ajaya and his colleagues, where we saw a number of tribal groups run small lift irrigation schemes. Among others I met 90-year old Father Broewer, who still rides around on his 30-year old Rajdoot motorcycle.

He said, "God bless Pradan. You are one of the few organisations that are really doing some good work. If I could get the government of Jharkhand to give you Rs 10 crore every year, I would have done my work."

But no such luck, so in my next visit, in mid February, I went to Lohardaga with Mr Gopinath, GM, Rural and Micro Credit, ICICI Bank and 2 of his young colleagues. I wanted to show them the work and see how it could now be loan financed.

On the same visit I met Anirban, who is based in Khunti and is working on reviving lac-based livelihoods. He is also developing an idea for maize processing into poultry feed with a supply tie up to Godrej Agro Vet Ltd. The ICICI Bank decided to finance that idea as well as the working capital for tasar grainages in the Godda area.

On my third visit, I took with me Sasidhar and Sonali, 2 young BASIX colleagues shifting from micro credit work in Andhra Pradesh to livelihood promotion in Jharkhand. Ramana, my IIM-Ahmedabad batch mate, who after working in ITC's Agri-Business division for 20 years, joined BASIX a year and a half ago, also accompanied us.

Vishnu Virat Roop

We went to Dumka and then with the local team led by Yoganand, went on to the nearby Phitkoria village, where we saw Pradan in its '*Vishnu Virat Roop*'. There was a well-preserved forest under the Joint Forest Management scheme and the stream emanating from that forest was harvested 3 times over in cascading structures built by villagers.

Three crops were now cultivated on the land in the valley, including vegetables, while the sloping uplands were under pigeon pea for the first time. Little further up, the village forest was covered with Arjuna trees on which they were rearing tasar cocoons. Disease-free layings (DFLs) for these came from a nearby grainage promoted by Pradan. A cocoon reeling centre for village women had come up with the help of the local DRDA.

A rough estimate shows that Phitkoria's GDP must have tripled in the past 5 years.

But I did not need to calculate. I could see the twinkle in my colleagues' eyes: "This is livelihood promotion". Since then Ramana has helped market the pigeon pea.

Although I have not been to other locations in Rajasthan, Jharkhand, MP, West Bengal and Orissa, I have heard colourful accounts from those who have visited these locations.

In early March, I was in Madurai with Loganathanji, who in a way is a co-founder of Pradan as he first allowed us to use ASSEFA as an experimental ground for 'professional assistance for development action'. The idea was truly born when Loganathanji accepted Achintya as the 'second' Pradan professional in ASSEFA, Bihar in 1983.

I dropped in to visit the DHAN Academy, located in the beautiful Boy's Town campus, 20 km from Madurai. Professor Ranjit Gupta, though frail, was in high spirits and one could see the joy in his eyes as he talked about the 2 batches that have graduated from the DHAN Academy under his guidance.

Building People

Ranjit who was Chairman of Pradan's Board, continues to do what he believes most in 'building people to build people'. After seeing Ranjit, I went to the Thamukkam ground in Madurai, where DHAN had organised a big gathering with community seminars on savings and credit, livelihoods and empowerment. So while Vasi, Narender and a number of others have moved on from Pradan, they continue to do what Pradan was set up for, do it bigger and perhaps better.

Violet

Many others have moved on and let me dwell for a while on what they are doing. Jimmy Mascarenhas was the Pradan colleague based in MYRADA during 1983-90. He moved on to establish OUTREACH in the early 1990s. They have done outstanding work in watershed development and savings and credit groups, all the way from the Kolar district in Karnataka to Bhadrachalam in Andhra Pradesh.

Before he set up Outreach, Jimmy worked with Robert Chambers to develop the technique of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which is now a respected and well-used method among both development practitioners and researchers. Jimmy passed away suddenly in January 2001. Sankar and I could fly down in time for his funeral.

Aloysius Fernandes, the inspiring first Chairman of Pradan's Board, was there too. So many memories of MYRADA, Al, Jimmy... We helped set up an annual lecture in Jimmy's memory. And, talking of death, Deep and I went to Rakesh Kaushik's cremation in January this year. Rakesh, who regaled us with stories about honest middlemen and corrupt officials, gone now...

Indigo

Neelima Khetan, who is among our initial colleagues and was placed at Seva Mandir, Udaipur in 1985, stayed on and became the Chief Executive in 2000. Neelima and I now serve together on the Board of IRMA.

Ironically, in 1983, when we offered Neelima a position in Pradan and she accepted, we both were admonished because we had violated IRMA's rules that its students could only be placed in 'designated organisations' and Pradan was not yet been designated. I still manage to go to Udaipur

once in a while and read T S Eliot to Neelima and her husband Hardi, formerly of Eklavya, whom she met at a Pradan Retreat.

Blue

Ajit Mani, who was the other Pradan colleague based in MYRADA, has been running Intervention India Pvt Ltd for over a decade. This was perhaps the first private development consulting company in India. Ajit has just come back from Japan after conducting a programme on development process management.

He continues to be wise and boisterous as only Ajit can be but still remembers Pradan fondly every time we meet. The last time he was here we used the speaker phone to call Gurucharan Naik, who after nearly 10 years in Kesla, moved on from Pradan to do excellent work with International Development Enterprise (IDE) on spreading the treadle pump in the eastern states and then innovated the low cost micro drip kit for dry land areas. Guru has now set up a private consulting company called Livelihood Solutions Pvt Ltd. Bravo, Guru!

Which of course, brings me to Subodh, who has recently set up Safal Solutions Pvt Ltd. He was in my office yesterday and showed me his business plan, complete with a suite of products - Saral Fin for micro finance institutions and primary agricultural cooperative societies, Saral Map to display performance information geographically, Saral Net for e-learning and so on. Looks like Subodh will be the first millionaire Pradanite. Get ready to send your grant proposals to the Safal Foundation!

Green

Pramod Kulkarni, who moved to Raichur and established Prerana in the early 1990s,

is deeply involved with lift irrigation schemes along the Krishna River and women's SHGs. In addition, he set up a second organisation Sathi, which works with homeless children, mainly on railway platforms, a number of whom are reunited with their families.

Pramod also serves on the Board of Krishna Bhima Samruddhi, the local area bank set up by BASIX. He wants to something at the policy level. Pramod and I made a presentation to the NABARD management with a proposal to revive defunct lift irrigation schemes along the Krishna River. The idea may be picked up by the ICICI instead!

Yellow

Biswajit Sen, with whom I spent 5 days together last week in a training workshop, is now guiding Grameen Development Services, which is engaged in micro-credit work in eastern Uttar Pradesh and micro-enterprise cluster development work in a number of locations, including some power loom clusters in Andhra Pradesh.

Bis also spends time with another organisation, Nalanda, which works on primary education. He told me that they have recently been invited by a group of Muslim educators to provide teacher training and curriculum development inputs. Bis has also made a number of trips to Kenya, Ethiopia and Iraq as a UNICEF consultant on development.

Orange

Raja Menon set up Jeevika in peri-urban Kolkata and Ranjan Mahapatra has set up an NGO in Orissa. Ved Arya runs Srijan, a development consultancy organisation and Vinod Jain is a freelance consultant. Girish Godbole heads Save the Children Fund

Canada in Pune. From this organisation, he has focused on the issue of child labour and supports a number of NGOs including ASSEFA in the Sivakasi area, which is notorious for child labour engaged in match factories and cracker manufacturing.

Tapas Datta is in UNICEF, Patna. Akhil Pathak taught at IRMA for a number of years and is now teaching at IIM-Ahmedabad. Pradeep Bose is based in Bhopal and does development work, and his poignant profiles of poor households were published in the recent Madhya Pradesh Human Development Report.

Mithilesh Jha, a scientist on deputation from the Central Tasar Research and Training Institute, who established the tasar programme in Godda, is now based in Lucknow and does freelance work, including with Bis.

Teji and Ranu live in Bhopal and continue to do development work. Alkesh Kumar is in the IAS in Kerala. Malika Singh was in FWFB till a couple of years ago. Prava Rai is settled in Goa. Sankar and I, of course, work in BASIX. Sankar has just been named as the Founding Dean of the School of Livelihood Promotion, which BASIX is about to set up.

Red

Does any one know where Sylvie - Chittaroopa, our only activist colleague is? The last I know she was working with the people displaced by the Narmada dam.

So, happy 20th anniversary to the VIBGYOR of Pradan. I will pontificate some other time. This is the time to celebrate. "I am not eager to rehearse my thought and theory, which you have forgotten..." Further words fail me, so I resort to Eliot again, to complete the quote with which I began:

...And so each venture

Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate

With shabby equipment always deteriorating

In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,

Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer

By strengthen and submission, has already been discovered

Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope

To emulate - but there is no competition -

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost

And found and lost again and again; and now, under conditions

That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss,

For us, there is only the trying, the rest is not our business.



SHGs not One-Stop Shops

Is financing livelihoods primarily through self-help groups a viable option?

Anish Kumar

Let me state at the onset that I write to share my confusions and seek guidance from all Pradanites on this vexed question. My colleague Madhab has also raised the issue (*Ways to Promote Livelihoods*, NewsReach March 2003). Before I state my position or confusions, let me admit that I have limited interaction with self-help groups (SHGs) and most of my thoughts have been built vicariously. I have also been guilty of not participating in any of the SHG roadmap meetings.

I will begin by referring to the excellent 2-part article on SHGs (*Group Dynamics*, NewsReach July and November 2001) by Naren. The article eloquently and eruditely captured the 'mood' of Pradan's effort. In this paper I will only discuss my confusions on the issue of SHGs as vehicles of livelihood investments.

Begging to Differ

Essentially the point made in the article and later in the various roadmap workshops is that 'investments for livelihood efforts can be mobilised through SHGs'. I beg to differ and would like to request all of us to look at our own experiences in mobilising investments through SHGs. However, before we delve into the issue, there are a few things to sort out.

First, what constitutes Pradan's livelihood interventions? The range is befuddling.

At one end we have replacement of exorbitant interest credit transactions or reduction in multiple and costlier trade transactions by much cheaper bulk transactions. We have the very useful and valuable investments of Rs 50 that enable a SHG member to go for migratory wage earning giving an end surplus of 1 bag of wheat or paddy worth Rs 600 and therefore providing a fantastic ROI (return on investment) of over 800%. At the other end, we have high investment interventions like intensive irrigated agriculture and poultry providing absolute incremental incomes of Rs 10,000 or so.

Secondly, there is the issue of single or multiple interventions. Some time ago many of us talked of interventions giving a minimum of Rs 7,000 a year and a potential of well over Rs 15,000 would be considered worthwhile. Now many of us talk of multiple activities, each providing small incomes but together would add up to significant amounts.

Then there is the question of who decides on the intervention: the people as recipient partners with maximum stakes or us as change agents with stakes of a different nature (motivation to reduce poverty, professional pride etc.).

What outcomes are we talking of? What investments are we talking of? I am confused. My own position is very ambivalent:

whatever works is appropriate. The best indicator is the market. We should do it if there are enough takers for the intervention and it adds to significant incomes. Well, this does not leave us any wiser.

Inappropriate Institution

I am thus taking up a limited position that SHGs are not appropriate as institutional forms for livelihoods, both from the points of capital infusion and efficient management of the activity. I have several reasons for saying this. Mobilising investments through SHGs are neither easy nor does it give you an advantage when you talk of large loan sizes of Rs 15,000 to Rs 30,000 per member. Many of our interventions, however, are of this type.

An intense livelihood activity requires a different institutional structure for effective and efficient administration, maintaining books of accounts and marketing. This is the case with irrigated agriculture, poultry, mushroom, dairy or even large-scale maize cultivation. With our work in economically backward areas and exclusive focus on the poor, it is difficult to intervene in building autonomous individual livelihoods with significant absolute returns.

I need to mention that these constraints with SHGs would disappear in interventions where investments are small (built on available infrastructure) and where possibilities exist to build autonomous linkages at the level of individual. There are many activities of this type – small loans enhancing crop productivity leading to increased food sufficiency, small loans for artificial insemination in areas where dairy is a well developed activity, etc. These are basically activities where the missing links are motivation, knowledge, skill or information.

I agree that as livelihood promoters we must look for such opportunities wherever possible, but I doubt we would be able to come up with a large number of livelihoods of this type given our work in remote areas with poor infrastructure, with exclusively poor communities and dearth of poor friendly initiatives by the state or market.

Most often we have to and would continue to intervene with a package of interventions encompassing work on production infrastructure, capacity building, financing, marketing and managerial support. This, as our recent intervention with even a small investment activity like maize in Jharkhand shows, requires different institutional structures. It was possible in this case to raise finance for such structures.

Our experience of increase in incomes of over Rs 25,000 a year in tasar sericulture with an out of pocket investment of just about Rs 500 for purchase of DFLs (disease-free layings) shows programme investments are required in other areas. In fact Rs 500 required at the level of rearer is not a critical factor for the success and outreach of this activity.

Raising Finance

Let us now address the central issue of raising finance to promote livelihoods on a large scale. Let us first understand why a banker extends loans to SHGs and the limitations of these premises for big loans. They are:

- Credit need assessment is very good at the group level as women members know each other;
- It ensures very good repayment due to social collateral and peer pressure;
- It reduces bank's transaction costs for small borrowings.

Even now in older groups most of the loans to members are what in commercial banking parlance are called 'personal loans' – consumption loans (to buy food, healthcare and medicines), social ceremonies and asset servicing or purchase (house repair, etc.). It is clear that there is very little to appraise here other than the creditworthiness of the client. This is also the area where 'affinity groups' like SHGs can learn to do a good job. However, larger livelihood investments are not of this type.

My own understanding is that a 'livelihood investment' requires a more sophisticated credit appraisal process with issues like cash flow projections, risk association and its effect on cash flows. It will be very difficult for women from our target communities to be equipped with these. Bankers thus find it difficult to entrust the groups with this task, particularly when large sums are involved.

This is not because of any problem with intentions but a problem of capacities. It explains why the same banker keen to provide small loans of Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000 develops cold feet when we discuss large loans of Rs 1 or 2 lakh.

The attraction of near 100% repayment on small loans at low transaction costs lessens to a great extent with large loans, as now transactions costs are manageable and a banker can demand 'proper' security.

I would be willing to take the extreme position that 100% repayment is possible only with small loans. The use of peer pressure (social collateral) to prevent defaults – so aptly said by almost all our groups that 'if the member does not repay we will confiscate other assets like goats, utensils, etc.' – is no guarantee for loan sizes bigger than the entire recoverable asset base of the defaulter.

In any case it just amounts to the banker shifting a messy and costly part of loan administration to close friends of the defaulter, a crueller process than use of bouncers by slick multinational banking giants. If you look at such cases of recovery by big banks, it is mostly for 'personal loans'.

I understand the same will be the case with SHGs. For livelihood investments, for example in dairy or lift irrigation, it would make sense for the banker to create collateral on these types of movable assets rather than rely on 'social' collateral.

Central Point

We need to accept SHGs would only constitute as 'credible guarantors' to the loan for bankers. There are many more issues in accessing a loan. This is very similar to the existing system of loan administration by banks. We all know how critical finding a guarantor is. Very often the banker himself finds one for a good borrower.

We need to appreciate the critical importance of a sound business plan and cash flow projections. We need to therefore focus on market linkages to assess mainstream finance for livelihoods and not overemphasise SHGs as institutional systems that would substitute sound legwork by us.

I also believe for these reasons that 'business or livelihood groups' would find it easier to raise finance. This has been our experience in Kesla. Wherever we did manage to leverage bank (SGSY type) finance – 5 groups for poultry, 2 groups for dairy, 2 groups for mulberry and 2 groups for rearing goats – it had less to do with the fact that the bank was dealing with SHGs and more with the fact that a clear, long-term, acceptable, business proposition was explained to the banker.

The main point I am trying to drive home is that if it is really difficult to raise investments through SHGs for a large number of our programmes, why invest so heavily in creating sophisticated systems for internal loan administration in the groups. In many locations we are really finding it difficult to implement OTRs, weekly interest rates, computer *munshis*, etc. In the process we are making the process very top heavy, further 'knowledge alienating' the women members from this crucial function, that too with no concomitant benefits.

Not Particularly Useful

I would like to learn from all our colleagues involved with SHGs and promoting livelihoods how useful they have found the SHG financial system when they have implemented livelihood programmes. A new livelihood intervention such as dairy, poultry, etc. requires creating a new set of financial and reporting systems. Why should we invest so heavily in the SHG accounting system, which is not particularly useful when we promote livelihoods?

SHGs are supposed to be 'homogeneous', 'stake congruence' groups. I have come across 2-3 year old groups where this homogeneity is seen in what I call a 'homogenising or equalising effect'. Members tend to pull down the more risk-taking member.

What the 'homogeneous', 'stake congruence' syndrome does is gradually bring about a 'comfortable' risk and 'moderate' motivation level, allowing the group to slip into a static position instead of breaking free into a positive spiral. This happens often when a member decides to take up individual enterprises like isolated dairy. My contention is that SHGs as an institutional system would fail to respond to individual members' quest for isolated enterprises.

We have similar situations when even well functioning groups are not availing sanctioned credit limits or older groups carrying huge 'idle cash'. This credit line is expected to trigger investments in latent requirements like 'credit cards' do with urban consumers.

Why does the 'credit line' trigger fail to take off? Is it simply the issue of dreams or vision? Let us reflect more on it. My understanding is that women are just plain fearful of a very different (and volatile) livelihood order. If this is the case, how can SHGs become vehicles of spearheading large livelihood programmes?

Clarifying Confusions

The whole confusion in my mind revolves around what is required for livelihood promotion and what role SHGs play in this. It is not as if I do not understand or appreciate the usefulness of SHGs in building livelihoods. They are useful for reasons that include

- Helping individual members align their positions with the collective position;
- Inculcating norm adherence behaviour and creating right ambience for group action;
- Helping members build stake and take material responsibility for the behaviour of other members;
- Helping to target livelihood interventions at the women and the poor;
- Providing a ready forum to mount livelihood interventions.

I recognise that SHGs should be the principal mechanism for triggering livelihood interventions. SHGs should provide members access to affordable small credit, primarily for consumption and small production. The financial system should be easily understood and managed by members themselves.

We should work on them as long as small credit and individual autonomous livelihood interventions are possible. But in cases where the livelihood interventions are required with other elements also, we should facilitate creation of 'proper business organisations' and should try to leverage finance or pump prime investments through these organisations since they are structurally sounder to leverage and absorb investments.

Parallel Perceptions

How many times have we come across groups not doing well on 'our' parameters of OTR and other financial intermediation but 'otherwise' doing very well? In the last consultative forum meeting many teams captured this dichotomy when the groups the facilitators thought were doing well came croppers when we applied the evaluation format provided by Naren.

Was it just a huge perception gap? Or is it a confusion of the 'heart versus head' nature? Many of us working with women around SHGs realise and want to work with these genuine women institutions on issues other than just financial intermediation.

We are less constrained by our mission focus on promoting livelihoods than by the strong focus on the systemic role of SHGs for financial intermediation and therefore attending to the various systems required for SHGs to make the grade. What is the solution to this?

I am clear in my mind that we should not dilute our focus on livelihoods. At the same time, we should also remember that in medical science 'brain dead' is a reality but there is nothing called 'heart dead'.

We can work both in the realms of livelihood promotion and empowerment even

within the given framework of 'livelihood focus' by reducing some of the systemic add-ons in the financial system and working only on the essentials within savings and credit. This would release a lot of professional time required for livelihoods and women issues. Both are equal pegs on the issue of 'dignity' rooted in an inequitable social order.

Women-Owned Activities

Let us move away from 'women-labelled activities' to 'women-owned activities' where women really have a control over the use of incomes created from the livelihood and more importantly life. Last week, Sharda Bai of Borkheda village, an excellent poultry producer who earned over Rs 11,000 in just 7 months, committed suicide. In this case, it was a bit more than 'labelling'.

She was trained in the activity, the asset was created in her name and all the profits were always directly given to her. Still she chose to die. After knowing the reason for her suicide, I get the feeling that had we worked on developing the group in all its 3 realms, Sharda Bai would have still been in this world.

Let us stop chasing the chimera of making this group of 10-15 illiterate tribal or *dalit* poor women struggling with their lives in a remote isolated village a one-stop shop for all financial services. Its high time we downscaled the financial systems and made it really women focussed in the true spirit.



LEAD ARTICLE

Life after Tasar

Measuring the positive impact of modern tasar silkworm rearing amongst 36 poor families in Dumka

Chandrakant Pradhan

Pradhan started work in Dumka in 1997, initially to implement micro-watershed projects under the National Watershed Development Programme. In 1999 we started promoting self-help groups (SHGs) to reach out to a large number of poor families and have since promoted 212 SHGs in Kathikund, Shikaripara and Dumka Sadar blocks.

Dumka is predominantly inhabited by poverty stricken Santhal and Paharia tribes. The Ghatwal (OBC) community forms another substantial proportion of the population. The main occupations of traditional rain-fed agriculture and collecting minor forest produce are insufficient to meet annual food requirements of the people. They therefore migrate seasonally to West Bengal in search of wage employment.

Dumka has ample forest cover and under-utilised uplands. We therefore identified 2 potential activities in 2001 for intervention: tasar sericulture and upland *arhar* (pigeon pea) cultivation.

Introducing New Packages

Rearing tasar silkworms on naturally growing Asan (*Terminalia tomentosa*) trees is a traditional activity in this area. But traditional rearing practices are not remunerative since rearers are able to produce only 10-15 cocoons per DFL (*disease-free layings*).

We initiated the intervention by demon-

strating the activity in 5 villages of Kathikund with 36 rearer families following a scientific package (see Box 1). We procured DFLs prepared by the grainages promoted by our neighbouring Godda team.

These 36 families reared a bi-voltine crop and produced 3.1 lakh cocoons of which about 2.8 lakh fetched a price of 70-85 paisa each. The total earnings exceeded Rs 2 lakh, with each family earning about Rs 5,800 for an activity lasting about 45 days. These encouraging returns from the activity initiated enthusiasm amongst the many active and passive rearers in Kathikund.

Box 1

ECONOMICS OF TASAR REARING FOR 250 DFLS

Cost of DFLs:	Rs 1,000
Fertiliser:	Rs 100
Insecticide:	Rs 25
Sodium hypochlorite:	Rs 50
Total input cost:	Rs 1,175
Expected production @ 40 cocoons/DFL:	10,000 pieces
Cost of 10,000 cocoons @ 80 paisa per cocoon:	Rs 8,000
Net profit:	Rs 6,825
Mandays required:	90
Two persons for 5 days for cleaning field before rearing.	
One person for initial 15 days of rearing.	
Two persons for next 15 days of rearing.	
Three persons for last 15 days of rearing.	
Earning per person per day:	Rs 75.83

Since I was closely associated with this activity, I was often curious about the impact of our intervention in the lives of the poor villagers apart from providing them gainful employment of a month and a half and income to the tune of almost Rs 6,000. I wanted to know how tasar silkworm rearing could positively contribute to a family's development.

I came to know through regular interactions with rearers that earnings from tasar cocoons have helped them to overcome food scarcity, enabled them to buy clothes, medicines and other household requirements and repay old debts to local *mahajans* (moneylenders).

I conducted Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises in villages that revealed the nature and details of expenditure made by individual families (see Graph 1). We also collected information about family profiles to correlate the expenditure.

Profile of Rearers

All the 36 families belonged to 5 neighbouring villages. Out of them 20 families were Santhal, 14 families were Ghatwal and 2 families were Paharia. The average number of members per family was 5.6 and average land holding was 7.45 *bigha*. Four family heads were literate up to class ten standard and 11 others had attended school.

Based on the economic conditions, these families can be divided into 4 categories. Families that are food sufficient for 6 months spent the maximum to repay moneylenders and to buy food. The rest of the earnings was almost equally distributed for other purposes. Their expenses on productive use, health and education were negligible.

Families that were nearly food sufficient (8-10 month's food sufficiency) had equally distributed their earnings to cater to all needs, the maximum being on health. It was not because they were better in financial management but because they had to cater to a wide range of needs. The better off

among the families had lower pressure unlike others to buy food grain or repay moneylenders. They spent most of their earnings in things like expenses on festivals, marriages and clothing.

When we consider average family expenditure, two thirds is spent on debt servicing, buying foodgrain and healthcare. Assuming that the 36 rearers are a representative sample of the villagers of this area, we may say that the expenditure increases vigorously with rise in food sufficiency levels (see Graph 2).

It would be pertinent to mention the expenditure pattern of families of 2 villages under study (see Graph 3 on page 16). Bamerjhanti is a village where we have implemented a watershed programme. The tasar rearing Ghatwal families were members of a 2-year old SHG. In Sahritola village, all the rearers were tribal and members of a 5-month old SHG.

Rearers in Bamerjhanti did not spend much on food. They invested in agriculture to grow wheat and serviced moneylenders'

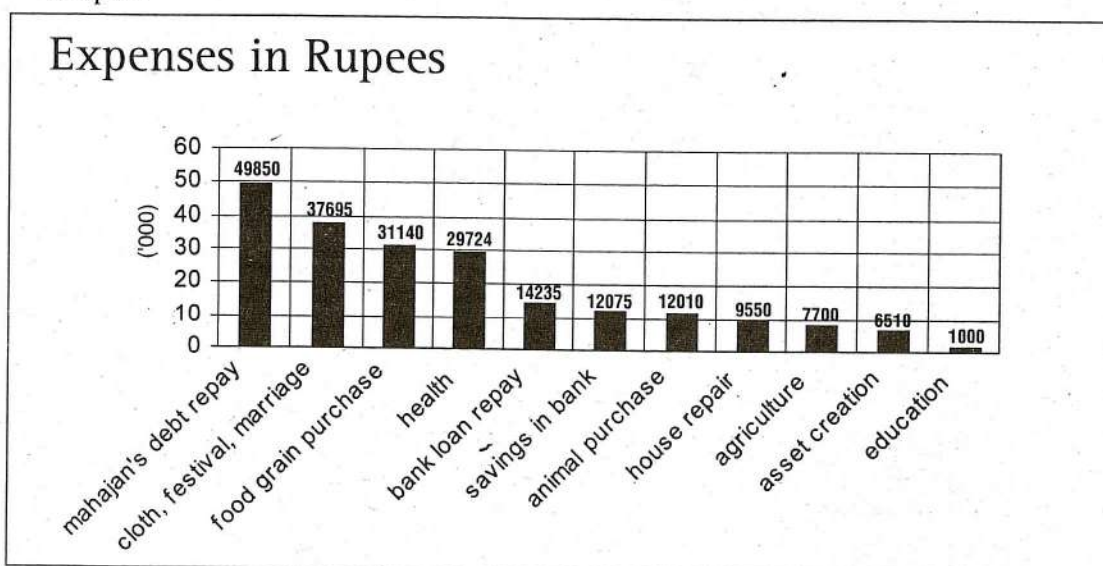
debts. The spending on festivals and clothes was higher in Sahritola than Bamerjhanti. In Bamerjhanti, the 10 rearer families spent Rs 13,500 to combat malaria, about 25% of the cumulative tasar earnings of Rs 54,110. As people in the village are moving towards food sufficiency, more money could have been saved or utilised productively, had it not been for the high medical expenses.

Spending Behaviour

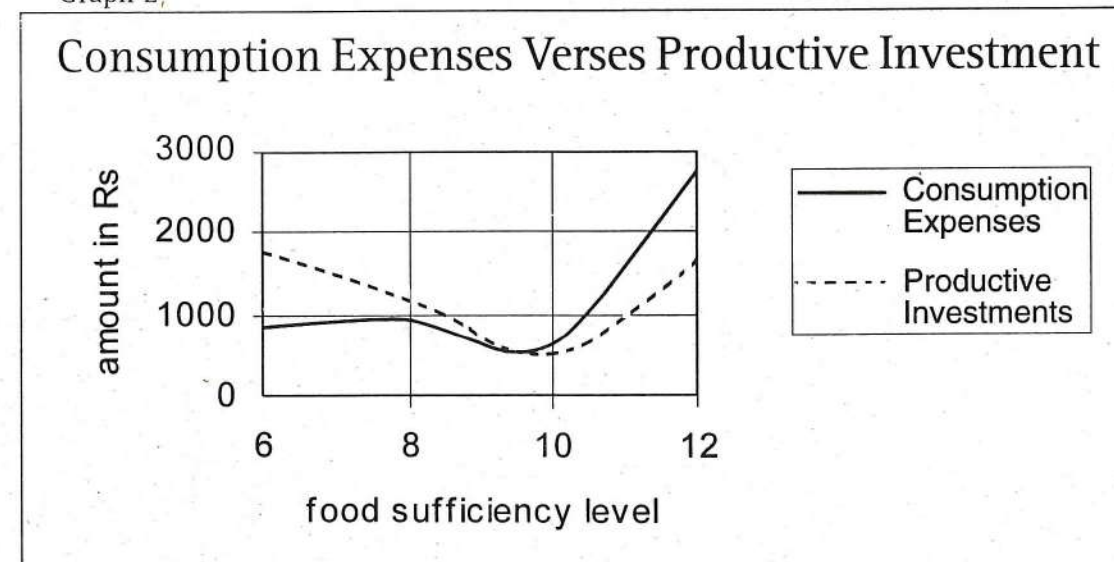
My study revealed that barring a few exceptions, the spending behaviour of all the 36 families followed some common trends. It was probably because their socio-economic environment was similar.

The average food sufficiency of the 36 families was 8 months. For the rest of the time they depended on sporadically available wage earnings, migration to West Bengal and by borrowing food grains from moneylenders. Earnings from tasar had certainly brought a new means of sustenance for the marginal farmers of the area.

Graph 1



Graph 2



We found that 27 out of the 36 families procured food grains from the earnings. Of the rest, 6 were from Bamerjhanti village, where they have the option of Rabi crops since irrigation facilities are available through a watershed management programme we have promoted.

The 27 families purchased 44 quintals of rice worth Rs 31,140. Since the total number of family members was 143, the rice ensured food for at least 61 days, assuming consumption of half a kg per person per day. Indirectly, these families escaped a debt burden of at least 22 quintals of rice to moneylenders since the latter charge 1.5 times of the actual debt per year.

Since these people have attained food sufficiency for at least 2 months, seasonal migration will be checked naturally in the subsequent years. The people usually migrate for work in August and December, critical periods of tasar rearing. Now they have a better alternative for self-employ-

ment where they can earn as high as 3 times that of daily wages.

Repayment of Old Debts

The moneylenders in the area have traditionally run a lucrative business. They were the only source of timely but exploitative credit for the villagers. Ever since we have promoted SHGs the moneylenders' influences on the village economy is declining.

Although people's dependency on moneylenders has decreased, they are yet to return all their old debts. The average family debt of these 36 families was found to be Rs 1,637. These debts were incurred during acute economic distress. In many cases these were taken by mortgaging whatever little land these families had.

The families needed a one-time infusion of funds to repay moneylenders' debts. We found that 26 families were able to repay their debt to moneylenders from their tasar

earnings. They cumulatively paid more than Rs 49,000, which was the maximum expenditure under a single head. It points at how desperate the people are to rid themselves of the moneylenders' debts.

Healthcare Spending

Kathikund is malaria prone. Although common malaria caused by *Plasmodium vivax* and cerebral malaria caused by *Plasmodium falciparum* occur around the year, they are particularly virulent from September to January. We found that out of the 37 families, 27 utilised tasar earnings for health expenses. The total money spent on medical expenses was more than Rs 29,000, out of which more than Rs 28,000 was used to combat malaria.

It was important to note that all the money was spent within 2 months of earning it. In many cases the expense was made even before the harvest. It shows how malaria menaces the health of the people in this area.

Repaying Bank Loans

The bank loans the villagers had taken are old IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) loans, which are already considered as non-performing assets by the concerned banks. Still, 7 families repaid bank loans of more than Rs 14,000. This reveals that the villagers are more eager to repay moneylenders than banks.

Consumption Expenditure

Although consumption spending is often considered 'unproductive', it is an indicator of development. In these remote villages, the consumption expenditures made by the villagers have worked towards a better quality of living. With an increase in family

earnings, the poor tend to change their living standards.

With the winter following the tasar harvest, the people purchased winter clothes. Other clothing was purchased during the festival of Shivratri, a big festival for the people of Kathikund. The families spent more than Rs 13,000 to purchase clothes, averaging about Rs 350 per family.

One more thing is clear from the data. Out of the 14 non-tribal families only 6 (42%) spent on clothes while 16 out of 22 tribal families (72%) purchased clothes. The families also spent more than Rs 8,000 during festivals. Interestingly all of these expenses are made by the Santhal families. They spent this during their greatest festival, *Sohrai* or *Bandana*, which is held in January.

Among other expenses, spending during marriages of family members and relatives was noticeable. The families' weekly purchases of goods and rations from local markets doubled. They were also able to purchase vegetables, spices and cosmetics.

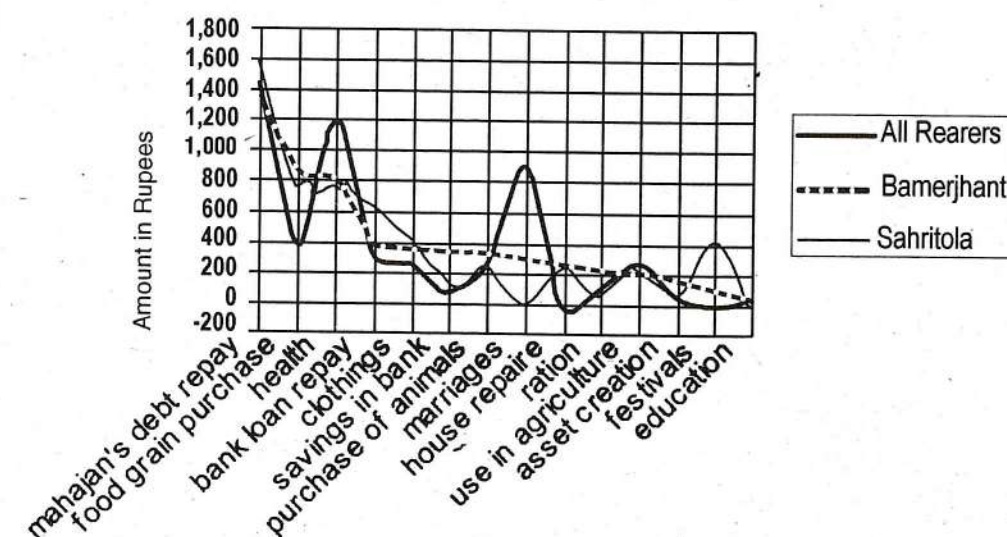
Productive Spending

We found that families who had the option of irrigation invested in Rabi crops. Six families bought inputs for Rabi wheat in Bamerjhanti and 5 families purchased inputs in the next season's Kharif rice. Four families purchased bullocks. Interestingly, all these families were the poorest among the rearers, who generally migrated to West Bengal every year.

It is obvious that they would rather work in their own fields than migrate. Since they lacked the means of doing so, they considered migration a safer way of sustenance. Three families purchased milch cows and one family purchased a pair of piglets.

Graph 3

Differential Expenses Across Villages



Creating Assets

Last year 5 families purchased bicycles and one family purchased a radio out of their earnings from tasar. One family purchased a *bigha* of land. Twelve families repaired their houses.

According to my findings, 5 families saved money in banks. Out of the 5 rearers who did so, 3 were better off and educated. This was surely not a mere coincidence. It reflected how education changes the attitude of people.

Interestingly the other 2 rearing families among the 5 were neither food sufficient nor educated. I would like to mention the case of one Baldev Rai of Raibandh village. Baldev's 2 *bigha* of land can feed his family of 5 for 5-6 months. He has to therefore depend on wage labour and tasar silk-worm rearing.

Last year he reared 200 DFLs and harvested 9,600 cocoons, which fetched him a return of Rs 6,720. Out of the money, he purchased 3 quintals of rice worth Rs 2,175. He also purchased a box to store the nylon net (required for silkworm rearing) with Rs 545. He saved Rs 4,000 in a bank. That clearly gives an idea about his thought about the future. He was the only person among the 36 rearers who had purchased a box for keeping the nylon net safe.

Pravu Rai lives with his 8-member family in Bamerjhanti. He grows Kharif rice by borrowing from the village SHG and produces 15-20 quintals of rice. He also grows Rabi wheat with irrigation. His own sources of production almost meet his family's annual grain requirement since the past 2 years.

In 2000 we encouraged him to rear tasar silkworms in the forest protected by the villagers. He bought 300 DFLs to produce cocoons that gave him a return of Rs 9,500. He recently married off his daughter and spent Rs 17,000. A significant portion of the expenses came out of his earnings from tasar.

As we are going to work with a large number of poor and marginal people under different income generating activities, 1 thing we should address 2 issues in particular.

- Can we bring about an attitudinal change of all the villagers we are working with like that of Baldev?
- We are bringing about a telling transformation in the savings behaviour of the rural people through SHGs but that is limited to small savings only. Can we create a mechanism that can also help the villagers to save bigger amounts that they generally earn at one go through income generating activities? Savings in banks is still inconvenient for the rural people. Many more people might have saved money this time had there been a facility to do so in the village.

Concerns

Looking at the production and usage data we can safely claim that tasar rearing is a highly profitable option for the poor living in forest and tribal dominated parts of India like Kathikund. Good production not only ensures good earnings but also influences the living quality of the villagers in many ways, as it did for the 36 families in Kathikund.

During collecting the data, I heard a lot of people saying that they have learned how to earn but do not know how to make judicious use of it. While every family has some priorities for expenditure according to their own needs and plans, we can also bring about an improvement in the affairs that follow production and marketing.

In our livelihood promotion programmes, we often limit our efforts to organising the community to build up sound and sustain-

able production systems and leave utilising the enhanced income solely on the community. I believe proper attention to improvement in the utilisation of incomes will make our endeavour to build livelihoods more meaningful.

The experiences of Pravu Rai and Shyamlal Rai, 2 rearers who have now seen better days as a result of rearing tasar silkworms, are encouraging examples of the success of the programme.



Shyamlal Rai is a poor farmer of Bamerjhanti. He owns 5 *bighas* of land. Although he grows Kharif rice and Rabi wheat, it meets food requirements for only 7-8 months for his 8-member family. They have to therefore depend on wage earnings and borrowing food grain from the local moneylender to whom he had mortgaged one *bigha* of land.

In 2002 we encouraged him to take up tasar silkworm rearing. By following the techniques we recommended he raised 8,880 cocoons from 200 DFLs, which fetched him a return of Rs 6,500. The first thing he did was to buy 2 quintals of rice to ensure 2.5 month's food supply for his family. He repaid Rs 2,100 to the moneylender out of a total outstanding amount of Rs 2,500 and released a piece of the mortgaged land. He also repaid a bank loan of Rs 300, which he had taken through the village SHG.

He then invested Rs 600 to buy inputs for cultivating Rabi wheat. He was also able to spend Rs 600 towards treating malaria in his family. He purchased a milch cow from the Rs 1,500 that was left of his tasar earnings.

Says Shyamlal, "I have repaid the moneylender and would have saved some money had malaria not intervened. Anyway, I have discovered a gateway to prosperity." What more can a development professional wish for?

REPORT

Bridge over Troubled Waters

A report on community managed micro irrigation projects undertaken by Assam Rural Infrastructure and Agricultural Services Project

Saroj Mohapatra

I went to Assam on January 12-16 on invitation from the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) of Assam Rural Infrastructure and Agricultural Services Project (ARIASP) and Rashtriya Grameen Vikas Nidhi (RGVN) regarding the implementation of their community managed micro lift irrigation (CMLI) projects. I visited 14 proposed CMLI projects in Kamrup, Tejpur, Sonitpur, Naogaon, Murigaon and Darang districts of Assam.

I visited villages where CMLI projects were being implemented. These included sites in Pakadoli village in Darang district; Quilani and Tokradia villages in Kamrup district; Katorati, Bahabari and Kotia villages in Sunitpur district; Batmari and Dhuniabhati villages in Naogaon district and Mechowa village in Murigaon district.

Various Achievements

I interacted with various stakeholders of ARIASP during the trip and found that there was close collaboration between the people, NGOs, irrigation department and government officials.

Irrigation implementation committees were formed in all 7 districts under the programme to channel funds and to monitor the progress of work. I think this is a step towards mainstreaming, where in the long run farmers can directly negotiate with government officials and information from all levels can be disseminated to the grassroots.

I also found that in almost all the cases, people were involved from the very beginning in implementation of the projects. This would go a long way to establish the stake and ownership over the system of the people and make the projects sustainable.

The Assam irrigation department officials collaborated with RGVN and PIU to organise workshops for various government officials and NGOs to seed the concept of community managed irrigated projects. In some cases like in Katorati village of Sonitpur district, villagers are very positive about the simple technology. The proposed sites are in a cluster, which would saturate the irrigation potential of a particular patch of land.

The first project was implemented in Sunitpur district, a major breakthrough for ARIASP. The villagers believe that it is possible to cover 35 acres of land tapping a small water source by using a smaller horsepower (HP) engine and underground pipes.

Observations

Overall I observed certain things regarding the implementation of the programme. The PIU is implementing 31 CMLI projects across 7 districts to demonstrate the CMLI technology in the pilot phase. It would perhaps have been possible to implement the projects by selecting a contiguous area to tap the entire irrigation potential.

This would have been cost effective. The total investment is not more than Rs 40 lakh, so perhaps the overhead expenses could have been lower. Also, the techno-managerial support could have been provided in a better manner following an area saturation approach.

I therefore felt that instead of spreading the activity to a larger area, these 31 projects could have been implemented in a particular block based on the various factors and the blocks should be selected based on these factors like techno-institutional fit, feasibility of technology, target people, etc. The process could then have been replicated over a larger area.

Selecting People

One has to be very clear about the people targeted under the programme: whether they are resource poor or rich, men or women, real users or perceived users, etc.

In the initial phase they could include the fittest person into the whole system, who could contribute cash to avail the infrastructure facility, thus ensuring more ownership.

The progressive farmers could be included in the entire approach since they are the best teachers for the rest. One also needs to understand what makes a person utilise a facility. There are already some shallow tube wells in the proposed command areas, which are not used by the people.

Engineering Issues

One should also be clear about the suitability of the technology to the geo-hydrology of the region; the financial requirement of the technology and the size of the project. In some cases low lying, waterlogged lands are proposed in the command area.

Instead of implementing a lift irrigation project in such areas, they could have looked into other available options, taking into consideration the people's priorities.

One has to look at the issue from the people's frame of reference. Villages like Katorati in Sunitpur district are quite suitable for lift irrigation projects, where a small water source was tapped and being lifted to the uplands.

The projects are being implemented through the irrigation department with the respective nodal NGOs. The irrigation department has so far played a positive role in selecting sites and collaborating with the NGOs. But one needs to realise that each organisation has a different set of culture and ideology that influence its method of working to bring about change in the peoples' lives.

It is here that the issues of cost effectiveness, competencies and capabilities need to be addressed. There is a need to learn from each other about the arrangements that brought about the best results.

One also has to be very clear about what one is doing, why and for whom? For instance, the change agents need to find out whether the focus is implementing a lift irrigation scheme or is it enhancing the income of the people? I found that the most essential component, the people, was missing in many sites that I visited.

Conceptual Issues

The objective of irrigated agriculture is the exploitation of potential water resources by setting up people managed micro irrigation projects and drawing resources from various mainstream institutions. This also entails building peoples' capabilities in order to sustain the project in the long run.

But I found that people were carried away by the technical part of lift irrigation. In some cases they could have intervened in rain-fed agriculture to enhance peoples' incomes. For instance, there are some good vegetables growing belts in some pockets of Kamrup and Naogaon districts that are dependent on the monsoons. In these areas, proper input and output linkages can be established and sectoral interventions could be strengthened.

My point is that before intervening we must take stock of the local resources, the available infrastructure and the people's existing livelihood patterns. We could then identify the gaps and finalise the intervention points. We need to understand the requirements of the people and then propose different interventions.

People's Contribution

Almost all the NGOs I visited said that people's contribution of 30% of total project costs was a major bottleneck for the delays in completion of the projects. We had a brainstorming session on this issue that included the necessity of peoples' contribution, how villagers perceive this contribution and finally, how it can be done (by labour contribution in unskilled earthwork and by minimising costs).

In almost all the projects, the cost estimate was Rs 2.3 lakh to irrigate 12 hectares (ha) of land. The capital cost per ha is thus around Rs 19,000, which makes the projects financially unviable. It is possible to reduce the estimate by 40% (around Rs 7,500 per ha) by minimising pipeline length; avoiding earthen canals and masonry pump houses and using smaller diameter pipes in the branch lines.

The most important issue here is the design requirement. In most sites in Kamrup and

Naogaon districts, where the head is around 8-10 metres and the command area is 9-10 ha in the Rabi season, there is no reason to opt for a higher HP pump. The diameter of the PVC pipes and the HP of the pump could be determined depending on the quantum of irrigation water to be provided.

If the costs are rationalised then the contribution amount comes down to around Rs 25,000 - Rs 30,000 per project or Rs 2,500 per ha or Rs 1,200 per beneficiary (assuming that there are 20 beneficiaries). Our experience shows that by getting the people to contribute upfront a part of the cost, the stake and ownership develops automatically.

We need to include those people who can initially agree to contribute cash before starting implementing the project. We therefore need to understand financially sustainable investment and opportunity costs versus the benefits and financial viability.

In the proposed sites of Darang and Kamrup districts, people are already growing 2 paddy crops in a year. They are now thinking of growing paddy by means of irrigation. In this case could we not think of commercialisation of farming by introducing some changes in the cropping patterns?

Alternatively, is it possible to adopt a sectoral approach to promote vegetable cultivation so that the people who have round the year food sufficiency can earn more cash? One needs to therefore clearly define the impact of an intervention (like impact of project on the economy of the region, indicators like return per ha, impact on livelihoods and associated factors) before starting implementing a particular project or programme.



FIRST PERSON

Which village are you from?

An involved observer's account of a 2-day visit to Kesla

Branko Klawer

"Which village are you from?" Mrs. Saroj from Borkheda asked me. "I am from Utrecht." I answered.

Mrs. Rukmani is a poultry farmer and member of the Kesla Poultry Society (KPS) in Sukhtawa. KPS has invested in branding its fresh, processed poultry products. They have established 2 retail outlets in Bhopal, a city as big as Utrecht in the Netherlands.

KPS has 300 members active in broiler farming. The cooperative has a board of 15 people. A farmer-member has a contract with the cooperative to buy one-day old chicks, rear them and sell the 1.5-2.5 kg broilers at a fixed price to the cooperative.

Important Differences

This could be a regular cooperative in The Netherlands. There are a couple of differences though. Mrs. Saroj, a Gond tribal woman, is illiterate, has no access to electricity and earns \$ 0.80 a day. This means that she belongs to the group of 400 million people in India who live far below the poverty line of a dollar a day.

Despite this, her performance in broiler farming is much better than in Holland. The average mortality rate at the 300-birds farm of Mrs. Saroj is 2%. A farmer in Holland would be jealous at such a performance where 5% mortality is normal.

KPS is working according the latest supply

chain management model described by Wageningen University. The cooperative has defined a strategy based on forward and backward vertical integration. The first step forward was setting up 2 shops where birds are slaughtered in front the consumer. The next investment will be in a feed mill.

The KPS cooperative has been set up with the help of Pradan. Their goal is to set up projects for people who live below the poverty line of a dollar a day. Besides poultry, they have set up projects in the fields of irrigation, silk production, oyster mushroom production and milk production.

The farmers, who are mostly tribals, can get out of the poverty line with the increased income from these activities. They do not need to borrow from loan sharks at an interest rate of 200% a year if they need money for an emergency (mostly healthcare).

This is one of the examples of the work of Pradan. Nelleke van der Vleuten and I were guests at Pradan's campus in Kesla for 2 days. It was 2 unforgettable days. I have never experienced so many highlights and contradictions. I found people with so little but with so much humour and joy. The people were so proud of what they had achieved with such limited resources.

"Which village are you from?" I am from another planet.



PEOPLE, NEWS AND EVENTS

- April 18, 2003 marks 20 years since Pradan was registered. NewsReach would mark this with a year of special anniversary articles.

- Pradan participated in the International Food Fair, AHAAR 2003 at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi from March 9-13. We displayed our products that included dry mushroom, pickle and mushroom powder. The purpose was to generate awareness about the products and solicit trade enquiries from the local and institutional buyers. We also launched our new 40-gram retail mushroom pack. Our products have received an excellent initial response from consumers, exporters, distributors and retailers.

- Anupal Saikia, based at Kesla and an apprentice of the 26th batch, is on study leave for the next 12 months. He has returned to Khanapara in Assam to complete his Masters in Veterinary Sciences. We wish him luck.

- Manas Satpathy, based at Ranchi, and his wife and son, Shanta and Prateek, were travelling in an auto-rickshaw near Dibdih rail crossing inside Ranchi town when a truck (AS 01B 5302) collided with it on March 15. The driver and Manas and family suffered head injuries. Shankar Ram, the

driver, passed away the following day. Prateek, Manas and Shanta are under medical observation and supervision. We wish them a speedy recovery.

- The process awareness and sensitivity module for the 26th batch commenced on March 24, 2003. Ten apprentices attended the programme. Deepankar Roy and Ramesh Galohda facilitated it.

- Buy a copy of *Sustainable Learning for Women's Empowerment: Ways Ahead in Micro Finance*, edited by Linda Mayoux and published by Samskriti. Contact Editor, NewsReach for a special discounted rate for NewsReach readers.

- The Hindi version of Pradan's SHG manual has been reprinted. The price remains Rs 80. Those interested in procuring copies may write in to the Editor, NewsReach.

- Visit Pradan's Tasar Web site at www.tasarbypradan.com

PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) is a voluntary organisation registered under the Societies' Registration Act in Delhi. We work in selected villages in 7 states through small teams based in the field. The focus of our work is to promote and strengthen livelihoods for the rural poor. It involves organising them, enhancing their capabilities, introducing ways to improve their incomes and linking them to banks, markets and other economic services. PRADAN comprises professionally trained people motivated to use their knowledge and skills to remove poverty by working directly with the poor. Engrossed in action, we often feel the need to reach out to each other in PRADAN as well as those in the wider development fraternity. NewsReach is one of the ways we seek to address this need. It is our forum for sharing thoughts and a platform to build solidarity and unity of purpose.



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