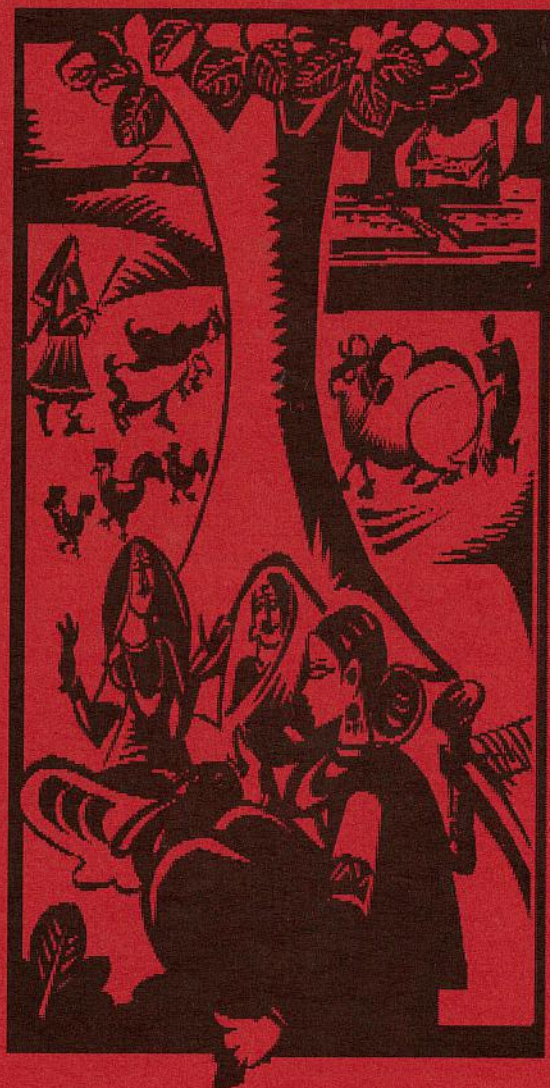


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Field Guide Special

Pradan was established on the belief that well educated and sensitive young women and men have to work directly at the grassroots to bring about social and economic development. This approach has led to the recruitment and deployment of large number of such young people by Pradan. The results they have been able to achieve have ranged from the dramatic to the remarkable, some glimpses of which we attempt to provide you through the pages of *NewsReach*. But the road has not been rosy for these young enthusiasts in the field. They have had to strive hard, putting in long hours in villages, and struggling constantly alongside impoverished villagers in their quest for a better life. What has kept them going?

The first year that a youngster spends in Pradan she is called a Development Apprentice (DA). This period provides the DA an opportunity to closely assess the life at the grassroots. It offers a chance to ask basic questions such as is she suitable for this job? Is this what she wants to do? Does she think she will be better off someplace else? What will her family and friends say? Would she be able to convince them? These are tough questions and the answers she chooses have long-term implications. It is not just selecting a job, but making a career choice. Making an informed choice is of paramount importance here. At the same time the DA also picks up basic skills and competencies required to get along in villages.

The task of making this informed choice calls for the presence of an experienced person who is available to listen, offer alternatives, advise, act as sounding board, act as an emotional support as well as be a problem-solver when the need arises. This is the role of a Field Guide (FG) in Pradan. The FG is a friend, teacher, philosopher and a co-traveller to the DA. The FG also facilitates learning for the apprentice by creating opportunities for reflective practice.

There are tensions in the life of the FG too. She is a cutting edge implementer in Pradan. Projects revolve around her. Organisational demands, task demands, pressure from local stakeholders, the community and family all converge on the field executive. The job of guiding an apprentice has to be balanced with these responsibilities. It is neither possible nor fair to give an apprentice just a cursory hearing and go on one's way. The DA requires time and support. The job of the FG calls for fortitude, sensitivity and empathy. These are attributes gained through experience and training. The Field Guide Development programme (FGDP) is an important source of input to the FGs to build themselves to do justice to the roles that they are supposed to perform. The FGs who have written in this issue of *NewsReach* highlight the contribution of the FGDP to their own personal development, which in turn made them better guides.

The Field Guide's Forum is another support platform created voluntarily by the FGs from locations in and around Jharkhand. The FGF, initiated almost 5 years ago, has acted as a platform for the FGs to reflect upon their practice of guiding, sharing and learning and re-tooling.

This issue of *NewsReach* is a Field Guide Special. In this we publish 2 articles by Wungmaya Lunghar and Raja Chakraborty, who share their experiences as development apprentices. Dhruvaa Mukhopadhyay and Kirtibhusan Pani then share their experiences of being field guides. The next 2 articles by Ajaya K Samal and Dibyendu Chaudhari provide clear pictures of the Field Guide's Forum, and how it has helped the FGs reflect on and hone their skills.

My Experience of Being Guided

My field guide helped me to adjust to the harsh realities of the poor and orient myself properly as a development worker

Wungmaya Lunghar

Television programmes that really caught my fancy invariably featured people on missions to small villages for research or outreach missions. I have always wanted to have this kind of experience in my life. But sadly, when I had real life experience of what I saw on television, what seemed to be a little heaven on television turned out to be a thousand of little hells on earth. My heart grieved whenever I visited villages during my field exposure because I felt so helpless.

When I joined Pradan as a development apprentice (DA), I was fresh from college with no exposure or experience of any job. There was a lot of fear and nervousness of being in the first job, not knowing what exactly I will be doing. But my field guide spent quality time with me so that I got to know more about my team members, about the organisation and its projects, activities and interventions, about various location offices and our mode of operation in the field. This served as an excellent introduction about the organisation and of the team since I was to be a part of this team and organisation.

Before reporting for work, I did go through the reading material for apprentices issued to us along with our offer letter. When my field guide (FG) explained the learning agenda for the first phase such as exposure visits and village stay, the purpose of the various modules became very clear to me. I

then went for exposure visits to 3 sub-locations (Saraiyhat, Mohanpur and Katoria). When I came back and shared my varied experiences with my FG, she made me realise that I should not be in a hurry to understand the apprenticeship process.

Initially I was anxious to gather a lot of external information and did not attend to important learning agendas like self-evaluation, whether I will be able to adjust with the living environment, mingling with other colleagues, adjusting socially and culturally, etc. that I should have been concentrating on. My FG helped me to focus on these aspects and guided me to learn gradually with every experience during my village stay and other assignments.

Initial Shock

My first stay in a village was in Machanma in Katoria block of Banka district in Bihar. The life in Machanma was not as easy as I thought it would be. I had many first time experiences during the stay, which were too hard for me to bear at that time. It really shook me inside and I was totally confused about the kind of career I had chosen. I confess to this although I have always wanted to be a social worker. I began to rethink about my career in this sector because of those hard experiences and challenges.

I even questioned myself whether I was taking a step forward or was I going back-

wards? Was it really worth working here? What does it matter if I do not work here? There were such thousands of questions that arose in my mind. I was really confused about my destination or the path I was taking. So I came back from my first village stay totally confused.

I shared my experiences and confusion with my FG and other seniors in the location. They spent a lot of time with me, sharing experiences, giving feedback and allowing me time for reflection and retrospection. I shared my heart out with them and they made me realise the importance of such experiences and how it helps a development professional in the future.

Adjusting the Sail

I was not forced by my FG to stay back but it was my clear choice to remain because of the kind of guidance and support I received from my FG. It made me realise the truth in a proverb that says that the pessimist complains about the wind, the optimist expects it to change, but the leader adjusts the sail.

These lines made me realise that I was not here to complain about living conditions or expect that it would change with time. I am here to experience the hard life, find a way out and lead the poor to the other shore. This realisation gave me new strength and encouragement and reinforced my commitment. It made me able to live and work among with people who are less fortunate in our society.

Besides the support, guidance and encouragement from the FG, sharing experiences with the other professionals at various locations was one of the biggest learning opportunities. Whenever I shared with other professionals, I received really useful

feedback. For example, I had a lot of preconceived assumptions about the poor but the reality was very different. When I received feedback I put it into practice. During my village study, I sought my FG's guidance on how to go about it, what issues and subjects to cover and concentrate upon in depth.

Right from all this to report writing, compilation and conclusion, I sought her help and she always spent enough time with me to reveal insights from my experience and reports from the angle of how a development worker should observe and conduct a village study. I rewrote and re-conducted my village study thrice. It was an eye opener and solid experience for me.

In the first (and partly the second) phase of my apprenticeship, whenever I came back from exposure visits, village stays or village study to the project office, my FG would always spare time to sit with me for internal review of the past weeks. She would find out what I was up to, discuss what I should do next and how I should go about it. Most importantly, she helped me to orient myself properly in the field of development.

I believe that the FG and DA relationship is not confined only to the professional front. Because of the regular interaction and sharing, I even shared my personal feelings and problems and sought help for things like inconvenient accommodation and boarding, financial problems, family problems, etc., which helped me to release stresses and renewed my energy level.

Changing Guide Midway

Unfortunately, after the second phase or so, I somehow felt that there was a little

gap in communication, sharing and spending quality time with my FG. Somehow we could not continue to spend time together in the same spirit as before. It was maybe because my FG was changed. After coming back from the apprentice orientation programme I was told that I had a new FG.

My new FG's office was at a distance from my project office. Besides, he had a lot of responsibility on his shoulders and also, the major activity I was preparing to take up and his area of concern did not match.

I was therefore a little hesitant seeking guidance from him. I feel this should be taken into consideration when someone is assigned to guide because it takes time for someone new to open up or vent his feelings to any senior person. I do not state this as an excuse. I should have taken the initiative to approach him. Instead, I found myself sharing and seeking more guidance from my previous FG. Nevertheless, things worked out gradually and I started relating with my work, thanks to all the support I received from my colleagues.

I would like to thank my FG for his valuable guidance whenever I approached him, which he provided despite of his busy schedule. I also thank my first FG for her continuous effort in nurturing an apprentice like me till my graduation as an executive. Last but not the least, I thank all my seniors and location mates for being field guides in the true sense and for all their valuable advice, guidance, encouragement and help.

Incredible Experience

My experience of growing up in the guidance of the FG and other senior profession-

als was incredible because I learnt many important lessons under their guidance, be it understanding the people and community and accepting them as they are and who they are.

I still remember how afraid I was to deal with women in self-help groups (SHG) when I visited one of their meetings with a senior professional for the first time. Then I did not understand the dialect and did not know how a SHG functioned. I was introduced to SHGs under the guidance of my team mates, which gradually put me at ease.

That is how I grew up under the guidance of my FG and my seniors and they nurtured me in every way. I was given every space and opportunity to learn and grow in the team. It was because of my FG's extra effort that I could attend all the necessary training programmes that help me well on the ground today in interacting with the people and other external institutions.

Finding My Place

Most importantly, the guidance I received developed me as a person, as a follower, as a leader and as a member of the team. Besides, I explored and visualised my role and responsibility as a Pradanite and a development worker.

Now I see my first role in the organisation as a member who respects and adheres to its core value and mission, and keeping up the standard, spirit and commitment in community work. I now see my role as a change agent and as a leader. We are trying to bring about a positive change in the life of the rural poor and for those who are less fortunate through various intervention and activities, innovations, technology trans-

fer, exposure and nurturing. I now personally feel that I need to know the people, build strong relationships, identify and understand their problems and strive for a positive change.

Interacting with the people, inculcating discipline and helping them to visualise their future is what I have learnt under the guidance of my senior colleagues and FG. This I feel is the most appreciable asset. In the field of development, there is one thing I have closely observed and learnt from my senior professionals that integrity facilitates high standards and builds trust. It results in a solid reputation and not just an image.

I would like to define integrity as 'living it myself before leading others' and this is what our organisation demands or expects from each and every growing professional who graduates as an executive. I see so many roles that I would be playing in the near future and the roles that demand my attention and contribution to make an impact in the life of the poor people and to make their livelihood sustainable.

But at the top of the list I placed 'developing people' as my primary role because when we talk about 'development' and especially about 'sustainable development', I could not find any thing that can better define our role and better explain the sustainability other than this old Chinese saying:

*Go to the people,
Live among them. Learn from them.
Love them.
Start with what they know,
Build on what they have.
But of the best leaders,
When their task is accomplished,*

*Their work is done,
The people will remark,
We have done it ourselves.*

This is the message and the greatest lesson I have received under the guidance of my whole team.

NewsReach Livelihoods Compendium

Are you a grassroots professional trying out new and innovative ideas in the field? Does your organisation work to promote livelihoods for the rural poor? Are you on the look out for tested and successful interventions for the poorest of the poor?

NewsReach Livelihoods Compendium could deepen and broaden your knowledge about successful programmes implemented amongst the poor in the poorest states of India.

NewsReach Livelihoods Compendium is a collection of cases, narratives and articles about Pradan's livelihood promotion programmes. Most of these have been documented by professionals in the field. For your own copy (Rs 80, postage extra) write to Smita Mohanty at 3, CSC, Niti Bagh, New Delhi - 110 049 or email her at smitamohanty@pradan.net.

Memories of an Apprentice

Fond memories of discovering new worlds in Putidih and Baruakocha villages of West Bengal and learning how to work with the rural poor

Raja Chakraborty

When a colleague asked me to share some of my experiences, it was quite obvious for me to share the days of my apprenticeship. Pradan was familiar to me from my university days. I even pursued my internship in Pradan. It was a voluntary effort to know Pradan more closely. At that time I had also got some experience in the corporate sector, where it was all targets and achievements. The big 'F' (feeling) was somehow missing.

The orientation phase of my apprenticeship was with the Purulia team. My heart and mind was full of Amagara, Bandudih, Adali and Panhri villages in those 7 days. The world seen through the eyes of the villagers and the effort put in by Pradan professionals provided an excellent booster dose at the start of my career in the rural development sector.

Putidih

I then joined the Jhalda team (also in Purulia district in West Bengal) along with fellow apprentice Debashish De (is full form of 'Deba' correct?). It was a cold evening when I, accompanied by my senior colleague Saikat Pal, first stepped into Putidih village for my village stay. It was a unique month long experience of staying in a remote village.

Fortunately for me, because of my intimate association with the villagers and their lifestyle from the beginning, I never had difficulty in adjusting though I have been brought up in cities. I shared my bed with Sanath, the elder son of Jagannath Mahato

of Putidih. Bidyut, Upen and Sanjati, all below five years old, were my playmates.

Although I had studied agriculture at the university, its practice in the field increased my knowledge significantly. But more than that, I still remember the red morrum road, the surrounding forests, evening chat at Harimandir (temple), the green fields, collecting lac with Bidyut and Sanjati, and self-help groups (SHGs) meeting at Karmalipara. That month long experience enriched my quality of interaction with village people, better understanding about their needs as well as my role as a development worker.

Carrying out a village study was another important aspect of my apprenticeship. We were given training in conducting a village study through a mock exercise in Kesla. I did my village study in a tribal village called Baruakocha.

Baruakocha

I studied various things in Baruakocha, from settlement pattern and history of the village to its social cultural aspects and livelihoods. Time to time feedback from senior colleagues and a presentation in the team helped me understand how minutely I should look at a particular aspect. My colleagues also helped me draw meaningful inferences by analysing the data.

The village study enabled me to understand the relationship and interplay between peo-

ple, resources and institutions. My stay at Putidih gave me a better understanding about the people and their needs but the village study gave me an idea of the villagers' dream and aspirations, how they view their resources and their own thinking about interventions required.

After doing one livelihood exercise with a SHG, I became convinced that they are capable of doing their own planning for the betterment of their families, including investment planning. The L group and MBTI training were two other aspects of my apprenticeship that I still recall today.

Being able to 'know' my own behaviour, their manifestations, assumptions, motives and obviously the self-image helped me as a person to become more spontaneous in responding; expressing my own feelings and thoughts in front of a group; accepting and giving feedback, and most importantly, respecting others feelings and thoughts. MBTI helped me to understand myself in respect to others. The qualities I have and I don't. Understanding others as per their typology.

On the flip side, I still feel that although we learned in phases, all development apprentices had to handle a lot of work and expectations related to target and achievement issues. Sometimes I felt it adversely affected the real task in hand.

People of Pradan

It was not merely the design of the apprenticeship programme that helped me to associate myself with Pradan. It was the professionals, with their knowledge, dedication, effort and attitude that made me feel proud. I also watched with interest how my senior colleagues Saikat and Alok managed their professional and personal lives. It is not an

easy task as our work does not follow a fixed time schedule, but they spend time with their families whenever they got an opportunity.

Debashish and I were the two DAs in the team. We were part of their families from the very first day. Our (my and Debashish's) small needs were a big concern for them. I always felt that I was with my family.

That was not the only time I felt so, since even today understanding peers and helping them to sort out their problems are one of the major concerns of my team. Introspection and its expression are easier for me due to my team members' continuous feedback and appreciation. This working in teams, sharing tasks and responsibilities, has helped in constant value addition to my thoughts not only as an individual but also as a team member.

Presently I am working at Saltora in Bankura district of West Bengal. It is a different location from where I have done my apprenticeship. The area of my work has shifted from livelihood through SHGs to watershed implementation. The work demands collaboration skills with the district and local administrations, and PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions). But I had picked up a smattering of these skills from my apprenticeship days.

So, whatever the responsibility I am given now in my field of work is a continuation from the learning, where senior professionals had gradually provided enough space for an apprentice to shoulder responsibility and to set a goal for his own growth. After 3 years as a professional, it is now my turn to give my young colleagues what I had received from my seniors earlier.

A Field Guide Learns

Despite being a guide to development apprentices for the past few years, participating in the field guide's forum revealed new insights in ways to interact with people

Dhrubaa Mukhopadhyay

I am surprised to realise that I guided quite a few development apprentices (DAs) on their way to become professionals in Pradan. I remember Tamali Kundu, Sarbani Bose, Mithun, Saroj Nayak, Anamika Bose, Samit Chattopadhyay, Manisha, Amit Saha, Wungmaya Lunhar and Dilip Kumar Rabha. Presently I am guiding Nirmalya and Sandeep of the 35th batch of DAs.

I have mentored the DAs from the insights and learning I got from the Field Guide Development Programme (FGDP) conducted by Deepankar Roy and Sukhvarsha Roy in 1999-2000. I like to perform the role of a guide as it fulfils my inclination in mentoring people. I enjoy it whenever I perform this role either with my team members or with village women, men and children.

Field Guide's Forum

I heard about Field Guide's Forum (FGF) from my colleague and husband Madhabananda Roy. He is a regular participant of FGF since its inception. I always liked the idea of this forum because I realised that if I do not reflect on my way of guiding people, I will not be able to improve my skills. Besides the concepts, I had learnt from FGDP the principles of guiding (attending, listening, responding to content and feeling, and personalizing). I need to practice these to hone my skills and make it spontaneous.

I was invited to the forum in 2003 but I was not sure whether to participate. At that time I was participating in number of other organisational trainings and events like village study presentation and PRA workshop for DAs, ILS (Internal Learning System) workshops, livelihood training programme, etc. I was therefore hesitant to add any new meetings. Another reason was that the forum deals with human processes and Madhab was a regular participant. I was not sure that whether there would be any problem (given my personal relationship with Madhab) in participating in the forum. I however wanted to participate in forums related to human processes.

Before the last meeting of FGF held at Ranchi in December 2005, I was again invited. This time I decided to attend because Pearl Degro, an external resource person was coming and she would teach us about a new concept and approach of Transactional Analysis (TA) and Emotional Literacy (EL). Pearl's approach was similar to FGDP in the sense that she avoided intellectual discussion on concepts. Instead she introduced the concept of TA and EL by exploring live cases of the participants.

Various Ego States

One of the new areas I learnt was that when we interact with others, the way of interaction depends on whether we interact

from our parent ego state, child ego state or adult ego state. When we talk like 'you should do this' or 'it is better for you to do this', we are talking from our parent ego state. We sometimes behave like a child because we have a child in us, which is our child ego state. When we use logic and rational discussion then we are in our adult ego state.

Our parent ego is largely influenced by how my parents actually behaved with us in our childhood. This concept was explained by analysing the participants' interaction in the workshop. If one had a caring parent in childhood, one's parent ego state will be more caring in nature. If one had a controlling parent in childhood, one's parent ego state would be more controlling in nature.

We also learnt that there is a need to arouse our child ego state as it facilitates our creativity. Our child ego state stays alive through our hobbies that facilitate creativity in us. This heightened my awareness of my way of dealing with my own child. Suddenly I realised that the way I behave with my child is controlling in nature and it would affect proper growth of his personality.

Strokes of Appreciation

Another area that was very striking was that every one of us is thirsty for appreciation. However, at the same time we are unable to express out true feeling due to many blocks. In a session in the workshop we experienced our need of getting and giving positive strokes to others.

It was a memorable experience for me when after receiving a positive stroke from me, my partner shared that for her it was as

loving as her mother's touch. Her mother had expired a couple of years ago and it was after a long time she experienced her mother's love. It was amazing to see what I could do for others.

In giving positive strokes, physical touch is as crucial as a verbal stroke. In case of a child, the need of physical touch is quite visible and less physical touch can affect her physical growth. It can even affect the digestive system of a child. It is equally important to an adult.

Another interesting area was the way we can measure our depth of love for others. I tried to put in the following way:

I like you	I like what you do
I like you	I don't like what you do
I don't like you	I like what you do
I don't like you	I don't like what you do

Obviously, the first option is the most loving relationship. Now I can assess my relationship with others in reference with this framework. If my relationship with somebody is going up from the fourth rank, then my relationship is getting better.

Moreover, I understood that love is not something obvious. It does not happen automatically. Love is an option, a choice. If you have chosen this option then you have chosen to act in a particular way. It means you have to practice it to nurture it. You have to put in effort to express your love to others. The highest stage of love is unconditional love (I like you irrespective to whatever you do). For me it was an eye-opening realisation.

Hard Contracts

Let me also talk about the concept of 'hard contract'. If you want to improve in your dealing with others, you have to make a plan, more specifically, a contract with yourself. Hard contract can be defined as an explicit bilateral commitment towards a well-defined course of action. The different stages involved in a hard contract are given in the accompanying box.

Box: Stages of a Hard Contract

- Awareness and acknowledgement
- Recording and documenting, which helps to be explicit and specific
- Publishing
- Reporting after some time
- Asking for appreciation on success
- Celebrating success or ignoring failure

The entire meeting turned into a workshop and it shook me heavily. I started to reflect upon my behaviour and felt the need to improve myself. I made 3 hard contracts: I will increase physical intimacy with my child; I will experiment one new way of teaching children like in checking dictation words, ticking the right spelling and ignoring the wrong spelling by not marking those, and I will record my appreciation to others daily. Some other group members also made hard contracts and published those in the forum.

After this experience it became important for me to participate in the next meeting, as I had made some hard contracts, documented it and published it in the forum. So I had an urge to share the success or fail-

ure of my contract with the group again.

The next meeting was held on December 23-24, 2005 at Puri in Orissa. This meeting provided an opportunity to share my success and failure with other group members and learn from others. We also discussed how one succeeded in one's contract and what had helped in the success. Some of our learning included:

- Hard contracts really work if it has a specific task and outcome;
- Identifying a positive thing in self or giving positive stroke to self reinforces that component;
- The more the distance you can see, the more stable you are;
- Feeling being challenged and then getting success adds to motivation;
- Conscious application of learning strengthens learning;
- Appreciation to others increases ownership, sense of fulfilment and closeness in relationship, and
- People feel relaxed and comfortable while giving positive strokes to others.

Some of the forum members shared my concern that appreciation to others is achievable but it was more difficult to ignore the negatives. I got an insight from forum member. He said that in some cases when he saw something negative in the other person, the same negative he found in himself in some situations. This reduced his irritation to quite some extent.

Emotional Literacy

Emotional literacy helped me to improve my behaviour not only on my personal front but also in interacting with my team and community. I learnt that women in particular are malnourished as far as getting appreciation or positive strokes are con-

cerned. This remains in my mind when I interact with women in the villages.

Emotional literacy actually deepened my interactions with the village people and helped to see a new dimension we can add to our programmes. I have started a day care centre for children of women engaged in reeling tasar yarn. In my dealing with this matter, I became conscious about the emotional and physical touch to the children. It has become one of the important components of the day care centre.

Lastly, the forum helped members to make new contracts and modify old contracts by listening to the contacts and appreciating members for making contracts and taking the forum's help to publish it. This way this forum has become very close to me and I am looking forward to meet my group members in the next meeting.

I do not want to lose any opportunity to appreciate my DAs and team members. In first team meeting of 2006 I gave my team members the following poem as a gift.

*You are my inspiration, you are my strength
You are my mirror to me, what is myself
You can change the world that I am sure to say
You can bring happiness to those who need your help
You work in the scorching sun and in chilling cold
You are those heroes, who don't care what they get back, happiness or sorrows
You can add fire to the torch of our mission*

*You can show the world a new horizon
I salute your hardship and your zeal
I love you so much that only my heart can feel*

Present a New Idea for Peer Review

Pradan has always been in the forefront in innovating on new ideas that could be implemented at the grassroots. **Concept Papers** in NewsReach are a way to share and air new untested ideas to solicit peer feedback. If you have a new idea you would like to test before implementing, send us a 2,000 word **Concept Paper**. If you have experience or views on any **Concept Paper** that would help the author, email us at newsreach@pradan.net.

My Experience in Guiding

The skills and competencies in guiding can only come through sympathetic practice and continuous feedback from both peers and apprentices

Kirtibhusan Pani

After being in the development sector for a few years, I realised that this sector has a serious deficit of professionals. Most NGOs have very few professionals who can directly work with the community and find out better ways to eradicate poverty. It is also a well-known fact that government functionaries are not very pro-poor. There is a need for well-qualified and sensitive people to critically look at development issues and find out ways to facilitate the poor to come out from the vicious cycle of poverty.

Given this deficit scenario, it is essential to orient young, sensitive and well-educated people to this sector. I believe there are lot of people are interested in such work although the pay structures are not that competitive compared to other options available to well-qualified students. But the real challenge is to provide them the right orientation.

It is in this context that Pradan's development apprenticeship programme plays such a major role in placing professionals at the grassroots level. Admittedly, the recruitment process of such people is very important. But equally important is to involve them in the development process. It requires an enormous amount of forethought and effort on the ground. The apprenticeship programme in Pradan tries to do this through an innovatively designed one-year induction process.

Our apprenticeship programme has 3 major facets: development apprentice (DA), field guide (FG) and the team. A FG is a senior professional who guides the DA to work in a team with the rural poor. To my mind, it is an excellent way of helping a person to be effective on the ground.

Incomplete Guide

I want to share some of my experiences as a field guide, particularly because I have changed a lot in my approach and application in guiding since the time I started as a FG 5 years ago. In the initial days of my guiding I used to evaluate an apprentice on day one itself.

For example, an apprentice once asked how he would stay in a remote village (Pradan works in underdeveloped and remote regions). I made an immediate judgement that he would not be able to adjust with physical hardship. I now realise that it was obvious that a person would have this kind of a concern at the beginning. At that time I held the view that as an adult the apprentice would see us working and would be capable of deciding whether he wants to join us or not. So from the beginning I expected him to be at par with working professionals. I paid very little attention to his preferences and was not able to understand the way he thought and acted.

In those days, as soon as a DA came to me,

I used to send him to a field site location and there he used to roam around in the villages. This was followed by a stay in a village. As a result, he was not clear what the apprenticeship programme was all about and what he was supposed to do. Things have changed. Now when I talk with a new apprentice, I discuss the objectives of the apprenticeship programme and formulate a shared plan to achieve it.

In retrospect, I basically did not try to understand the background of his or her situation. Let me give another example. A DA was not interested to go and stay in a village. I simply conveyed that it was part of the apprenticeship programme, with the assumption that once he goes and actually stays in a village, his problem will go away.

In reality, this DA went through the process merely to complete the hardship part so that he could retain the job. Now I try to explain the objective of the village stay and discuss the problems he is foreseeing and also check later whether he finds it useful.

Understanding and Acceptance

Gradually I realised that an apprentice needs to be part of the team. I therefore needed to be a friend who could help an apprentice to share his thoughts and feelings. I needed to help the newcomer to explore and take decisions. It is now obvious to me that a FG and DA should have a good understanding relationship, which can only be achieved if the FG understands the apprentice and accepts him as he is.

To achieve this I first try to make an apprentice feel at home and spend some informal time at the beginning. Earlier I

used to involve him more on work. I now follow the process of keenly listening to him without prejudgment and building on his initiative during the weekly meetings with the DA. Although many a time I am not able to completely follow the process, the plan that comes out of it has a more ownership than it used to be earlier. Earlier I used to tell a DA how to make a plan and then give feedback.

Generally I used to tag the field visit with a DA with my usual work plan, which is normally rather strenuous. I then realised that for the DAs it was de-motivating to see so much hard work on their very first day in the field. Now I try to be more considerate on the field visits with an apprentice.

When I began to guide apprentices, I sometimes did not provide timely inputs. After a while this made me feel really guilty because I felt I was not doing justice to my role as a FG. I then fixed a weekly meeting, a discussion for 2-3 hours that helps to know and understand each other and also helps in planning for coming week. The correct scheduling is important so that both DA & FG would feel free and not tired during the discussion.

I realised that spending informal time with a DA is extremely important. I try to take out time to visit and even stay overnight with a DA during his village stay phase of apprenticeship, preferably during the initial period because it helps to minimise discomfort of staying in a village.

In one of the meeting in the Field Guides forum, we prepared a checklist for the FGs. I find this checklist extremely useful to keep me reminded of my responsibilities as a guide. My checklist is given below.

Box: Checklist of a Guide

- Did I spend a night with my apprentice in a village?
- Have I interacted at least once in a week?
- Did we explore issues raised by him jointly?
- Did I try to know his potential?
- Did I encourage him to take help from others?
- Have I explained the roles and responsibilities of the guide?
- Did I allow him to speak more during the last interaction?
- Have I provided written feedback?

Lessons from Guiding

From guiding several apprentices, I have come to realise that their initial experiences need to be positive. For instance, we (the DA and FG) discuss and design assignments for the DA after the completion of the first phase of apprenticeship. These assignments should not be too difficult. For example, if an apprentice plans to form new self-help groups, the area should preferably be an easy one and the FG should be available on few of the important steps. If it fails, sufficient discussion is needed to find out the reasons. Otherwise, I have found, a sense of incompetence grows. A guide needs to always watch out for these situations.

I have found the following process useful: I do, you see; followed by a discussion, and then you do, with the team ready to help whenever required. I think this is a good first step to inculcate working skills and competence.

Lastly, I would like to say that the FGF have helped me enormously in fulfilling my roles and responsibilities as a FG. It is through the support and feedback from my peers that I have been able to cover the shortcoming in my guiding. But at the end of the day, the key indicator of good guidance is a healthy and trusting friendship between the guide and the apprentice.

The Mentors Meet

Despite initial hurdles, the Field Guide's Forum has emerged as a robust platform for guides to refresh and hone their skills

Ajaya K Samal and Dibyendu Chaudhari

After an organisational meeting at Kesla in Madhya Pradesh, 7-8 Pradan professionals were returning from Itarsi (the nearest rail-head) on the Amarkantak Express, out of which 5 were members of the Field Guide's Forum (FGF). So naturally we started discussing the FGF. During the discussion we tried to delineate the contours of the forum. When we started writing this article, we thought that it would be best if we began with those spontaneous thoughts that we shared with others in the train. They were:

- Self-development and helping others are not easy. It requires courage and a peer group for support. The forum has been useful in this respect.
- The forum reminds us about helping relationships.
- It helps us to think whether we are really helping our apprentices or are we just administering the apprenticeship. It reminds us to spend quality time with our teammates and apprentices.
- We feel that this congregation is useful and the concept should be shared with the world.
- We strongly feel that this forum should continue and we really do not know why we have not met for a year.

Pool of Guides

Pradan had in 1999 and 2000 trained a pool of Field Guides (FGs) through various processes including the 4-phase Field Guide Development Programme (FGDP). The training in FGDP was based on learning more about oneself, building skills in recognising behavioural patterns in self and others during various

interactions, and most importantly building attitude and skill to help others.

The FGs were expected to provide focussed guidance on the field to DAs so that they can decide for themselves whether and why they want to be in grassroots work, how to become effective grassroots development workers and Pradan team members, and the role they could play in the near future.

Subsequently, in a meeting of trained FGs at Ranchi on August 13-14, 2000, we realised that we had spent much time, energy and resources to conduct the programme and also that our learning would not remain with us without a follow-up or support system. We decided that the members attending the meeting would meet once in 2 months for at least the next 3 meetings and then review if such a forum is needed.

In the fourth meeting held on May 3-4, 2001, the forum reviewed its past meetings and decided to continue as a group to sustain, consolidate and build on learning and insights gained in the FGDP (see next article *A Gathering of Guides*, first published in *NewsReach* in December 2001).

The FGF started with 14 members as an informal group to help the FGs to:

- Enhance self-development;
- Enhance attitudes and skills of helping others;
- Explore practical applications of learning from FGDP with different sets of

people, and

- Promote forming such groups elsewhere in Pradan.

Gradually we felt the need to develop operating guidelines for our functioning (see box 1). We have now met 13 times. During this time, some FGs who were not earlier members of this forum expressed their interest about it. We invited them to attend a meeting. After that meeting, 4 FGs opted to be members and continued attending the meetings. At present, a few more FGs are willing to be a part of this forum.

Each of our meetings lasted for one and half to 2 days, facilitated by 2 members by rotation. Tools regularly used in the meetings include individual exercises, subgroup discussions, role-playing and plenary presentations. Although there are many objectives of the forum, we have been concentrating on improving our attitude and skills of guiding. In one of our meetings we also realised the value of giving written feedback and clarified various issues related to guiding.

Practicing Platform

The forum has been a convenient place for us to practice the 4 steps of helping interaction (attending, responding, personalising and initiating). Although we had learned these skills in the fourth phase of the FGDP, we felt that it required a lot of practice. The forum became a convenient platform for practice and feedback.

The members feel that their confidence has increased in attending and responding. We however still need to improve on our personalising and initiating skills. We also thought to increase our skills on counselling and sought feedback from our FGDP

trainers on this issue. They suggested that instead of getting stuck on the skills of personalising and initiating, the forum could focus on presenting case studies on guiding that could be gainfully analysed.

We accepted this feedback and focused on presenting cases. The FGs have since then voluntarily presented specific cases. To get to the other side of the case, we also interview the concerned apprentices.

The forum analyses the cases and FGs receive feedback and suggestions for improvement. FGs share the difficulties faced by them such as the problem of widely differing personalities of the apprentices, non-seriousness of some apprentices, instances of apprentices dropping out, difficulties in creating an environment for interpersonal exploration, as well as the learning out of the experiences on designing assignments, staying with the apprentice in the village, etc.

The interviews with the apprentices include observing their discomfort in interacting with their guides and team members, whether the guide is spending insufficient time in the field with the apprentice, whether the apprentices felt there was inappropriate questioning by the guide, etc. as well as the effort made by the guides in helping them.

Learning from both sides provides a fuller picture of a specific case. The deliberation on the case provides insights on various issues like the differences in perception by the guides and apprentices, faultfinding attitudes, team environment etc. The deliberations have helped the FGs to receive feedback. It also provided the opportunities for others to know and learn the difference in practices in various teams. Overall, the case presentation and analysis method have

Box 1: Operating Guidelines of the Field Guide's Forum

- The forum will comprise Field Guides (FGs) of Pradan. Each member of this forum will consciously act on the issues related to guiding newcomers.
- This forum will meet in every 2 months. Each meeting will be facilitated by 2 members by rotation. The facilitators will remain responsible for the forum till circulation of minutes of the meeting facilitated by them in the next meeting.
- Members will be encouraged to share their experiences with others, listen to others' views, experience and feedback. They will draw some experiences and agenda to practice in the field and try to build attitudes and develop skills.
- It is every member's responsibility to keep the forum environment non-threatening so that all can share and get a chance to reflect with help from other members.
- The forum will cherish the values of non-evaluative listening, questioning for clarification, confrontation, maintaining equality and maintaining anonymity.
- Every member should try to attend all the forum meetings. In unusual situations (illness, attending organisational events), she may inform the facilitators of the concerned meeting well beforehand.
- Members of this group will try to help the other FGs to initiate similar groups across Pradan. This forum will maintain inter-group relationship with other forums of similar nature.
- To facilitate entry of new members, the forum will induct them by mailing minutes of the previous meetings and by sharing up-to-date content and process and briefing in the beginning of the current meeting.
- The forum will try to have external resource persons in its meetings whenever felt necessary.
- The Forum will attempt to keep its costs as low as possible. The members will also attempt to reduce cost through contribution of their time and resources.
- The forum may amend these guidelines. For any such amendment, consensus among its members is necessary.

enriched us on various issues of guiding.

In order to further understand the views of the apprentices on guiding, few members of the forum conducted a questionnaire survey, where 52% of the respondents had expressed that 'the team environment was not so supportive even though it does not hamper the DA's growth'. The deliberation upon this in a forum meeting.

Self-Appraisal

Gradually members felt the need to prepare a checklist for the self-appraisal of a guide. Before preparing the checklist, the members focused upon the attributes of a guide and the process that a guide should follow. After discussion members felt the chief attributes of a guide needs to include genuine relationships (authenticity, honesty, trustworthiness, open to confrontation and interested in the other

person), non-evaluative listening, entering into the other's frame of reference, flexibility, acceptance, positive attitude, and providing a non-threatening and friendly environment.

While reflecting on this, the members found that sometimes sticking to these have been difficult. The guides face problems as they are playing 2 roles simultaneously: as a guide and as an administrator who wants to evaluate and retain the apprentices. We need to be conscious about this.

While deliberating on the process for a guide to follow, the focus was on the regular interaction (FG and team members), discussion on reading materials, providing sufficient scope to understand and coming out with solutions, joint planning, thematic orientation and inter-project visit. We felt that we guides need to facilitate an apprentice's involvement and interaction with other team members. The relationship of a guide with her apprentice should be such that the apprentice understands that her FG is available at all times for her. The forum has prepared a draft checklist, which we are currently finalising.

Impact of the Forum

Till this time, the forum has had a lot of impact on us. For us, it has upgraded our skills on helping interactions. It has been a long time since we had been trained under the FGDP. We could have very well forgotten the skills of attending, responding, feedback writing, etc. had it not been for the forum. It has helped us to practice these skills and upgrade them by continuous feedback. It has reinforced the values of guiding (genuineness, expressing feeling without value addition, being specific, to make the apprentice more expressive etc).

When we hear from our apprentices that we

are good listeners it makes us happy. When our apprentices like and appreciate our written feedback to them, we become more confident. In fact we have realised that apart from meeting, the written feedback is extremely important. We have learnt the attitude of accepting and liking the apprentices from our peers in the forum. We think it has changed our personas. It has also led to effective interaction with the community and changed the environment in the team.

The forum helped us in understanding the review and feedback system administered to the apprentices (meaning of empathy, effortfulness etc). The confidence in active listening has increased a lot. This is because of the practice in forum meetings.

We have developed a positive attitude towards the apprentices and are comfortable in entering into an apprentice's frame of reference. We learnt various practices in guiding like providing opportunities to the apprentices to experiment, keeping exploration in the core while designing assignments, etc.

The forum meetings have continuously reinforced our attitudes and behaviours in guiding. The forum has now become a part of us. At the same time, irregularity of the forum is a major concern. We are now trying to address this issue.

At this point of time, there is a sense of ownership of the members for this forum and everybody wants to take the good work forward. Also, as some members of this forum have been transferred to different locations, it is perhaps time to look at regional forums. The present FGF is ready to extend all support required to create such forums across Pradan's field locations.

A Gathering of Guides

The Field Guide's Forum is emerging as a robust assembly for field guides to hone and reinforce their skills

Dibyendu Chaudhari

In the beginning of August 2000 I got a telephone call from my colleague Arnab. It was a year after I had completed the 4th phase of FGDP (Field Guides' Development Programme) in June 1999. I was in the first batch of 15 field guides to graduate from the FGDP. Arnab told me that we were organising a meeting at Ranchi for people who have completed all the phases of FGDP. I was asked to join the meeting.

When I asked the reason for the meeting, he answered that we would discuss the effect of FGDP in human life. I thought it would be an interesting topic for the meeting, which Arnab said would be facilitated by HR consultants Deepankar Roy and Sukhvarsha Roy. I thought they would come to see the output of the 4 phases and would try to ascertain the effects of the programme on us.

The meeting was scheduled for August 13-14. On the 14th Arnab and I reached Ranchi at 9 in the morning. The meeting started at 10 am at our Ranchi office. The 14 participants were Soumen and Manas from Ranchi, Sujata from Khunti, Kirti from Gumla, Jibdas and Rajesh from Dumka, Saroj and Madhab from Godda, Avijit from Barhi, Anil from West Singhbhum, Ajaya from Lohardaga, Jui from East Singhbhum and Arnab and I from Purulia.

Support System

All participants in the meeting agreed that we needed a forum to sustain the learning

from the FGDP. Although people would be practising the principles in the field, we felt that a support system was required to monitor future growth.

We then discussed the objective of the forum. Obviously it had to be at par with the objective of the FGDP. We decided that the forum would be utilised for self-development and all kinds of human interactions, particularly the relationship between the guide and the apprentice. We also debated on what we really wanted to discuss on self-development and interpersonal relationship development.

We also discussed topics such as balancing between introversion and extraversion, difficulty in accepting others as they are, too much responsibility on self, communication problem, lack of skills in giving feedback and lack of skills in helping others. We felt that since these trouble most of us, we need to address these issues. But could this proposed forum provide that opportunity?

Till then I had a notion that Deepankar and Sukhvarsha will always be there to facilitate. We would come with some issues related to self and interpersonal relationships and they would facilitate the forum to deliberate on and help find a way for a better and meaningful life. But they made it clear that they had come only for the first meeting. If we wanted to continue this forum, we had to do it on our own. A couple of us could facilitate the meeting and a couple could provide logistics support.

The facilitators would design the whole meeting. I thought it would be difficult for us to facilitate this kind of sessions where a different kind of atmosphere, trust and confidentiality is required. I thought it was not possible without skilled persons like Deepankar and Sukhvarsha. Ultimately we decided to conduct 3 meetings, after which we would review whether those had been purposeful or not. We would then rethink about continuing the forum.

The next day participants tried out the facilitator's role. Two sets of facilitators conducted 2 sessions. Ajaya and Jui comprised one set and Sujata and Manas the other. The facilitators designed and conducted the sessions. As the sessions were only 2 hours long, it was difficult to sustain intensive discussion. But we gained some idea about facilitating such groups. We learnt how to set an agenda, what process to follow in order to generate data and to intensify discussion and what factors to keep in mind while designing the meeting.

Role Playing

We also got some practical experience on that day. For example, one set of facilitators designed 'role-playing'. A person played the role of apprentice while the other played the role of his guide. They were asked to interact. There were animated discussions after their interaction. Some felt that the apprentice was not properly represented in the role-playing. Somebody said that the guide was feeling pressurised because he was performing in front of others.

The practical experience we gained on that day on the uses of different tools for generating data, practising skills and giving feedback ultimately helped us to design the next meetings. Earlier we had seen Deepankar and

Sukhvarsha jointly facilitating a session. This time we got a chance to practice it.

The apprentice facilitators faced some difficulties in the first session. It looked like one of them was facilitating and the other was helping that person. We raised the issue and discussed ways to facilitate jointly. In the next session the facilitators divided responsibility among them and could jointly facilitate the sessions.

I remember there was a long discussion about giving a name for this forum. Somebody proposed that the forum should have a name. So people started generating names. We could generate around 20 names, which included Atmamanthan, Follow-up of FGDP, Trained Guide's Meet, Inter Action, SADHU (Self-Advancement for Helping Us), SIDDHI (Self-Improvement to Develop the Depth of Human Interaction), Field Guide's Network and Network on Helping Relationships. Although SIDDHI and Network on Helping Relationship emerged as frontrunners, we could not reach a consensus on the name. But gradually people started to call it the Field Guide's Forum (FGF).

On the 15th we fixed dates for the next 3 meetings. We also decided that each meeting would last one and half days because we felt that investing more than 2 days, including travel, was not sustainable. For the next meeting Madhab, Saroj, Jibdas and Rajesh took on the responsibility to facilitate. According to all the participants, they were to design the meeting in such a way that they themselves could participate in the discussions. We decided to meet in Ranchi on October 30.

In the meantime I became guide to an apprentice. This was my first experience after

completing the programme. While guiding I found that I needed to develop skills to write feedback. We had learnt some related skills in the last phase of FGDP. We had learnt how to attend to someone who has come to share something, how to listen, how to respond, how to personalise it and how to help the person to prepare an action plan so that he can come out from his dilemma or problem. I faced difficulties in some of these skills and expected that FGF would help me in this area. Some of my expectations were fulfilled in the next meeting itself.

In the next meeting I got an opportunity to learn about how to write feedback. The facilitators had already collected a report of an apprentice. We read it and then tried to write a feedback to that report. We then sat in small groups and discussed each written feedback.

The Spirit of Feedback

The apprentice should get the feeling that his guide had made a genuine effort to understand the report. Wherever the guide faced difficulties in understanding the report, he or she could ask the apprentice to make it clearer. The objective of the feedback should be raising issues and questions, which would lead to more exploration on the part of the apprentice.

We should also keep in mind that the written feedback is not an evaluation sheet of the periodic report. This discussion helped us to see the written feedback in a different way. For example, when we found that some portions of the feedback were evaluative, we re-framed the sentences to be non-evaluative. That was the whole spirit of the feedback.

The most interesting thing about the second meeting was that we had been able to

address, practice and deliberate on such issues without Deepankar and Sukhvarsha. After this meeting I took to writing the feedback in a different way. I could see a sea change in my way of writing feedback. Earlier my written feedback used to be more suggestive and in some instances, evaluative. But now I consciously tried to follow the concept that was discussed in the meeting.

Although from the very first meeting it was clear that this forum was meant the guide's development, we did sometimes get into discussion about the apprentice's development. But we tried to keep the focus on guides. After the second meeting I began to see the forum as a collection of people who are in a helping role coming together to get help and reinforcement from each other so that they can perform better.

Sharing Cases

In that meeting we also discussed some part of the review system. While discussing the review system something came up that can be called the turning point of the forum. While talking about effort one guide shared a real-life case, which sounded very lively to all of us. We considered this "sharing of cases" a major element in all our future meetings as they were based on real experiences. It would be easier for others to help some one by providing feedback for his particular behaviour. Others too could learn from a successful case.

In the next meeting that was held on January 5-6, 2001, at Deoghar, Arnab and I got a chance to facilitate. Although we had 2 months time to design, we ultimately did it just a few days before the meeting. Arnab and I decided that in the next meeting we should get a chance to practice skills such

attending, responding, personalising and initiating. While designing the meeting we asked for advice from Dinabandhu. He suggested that participants should feel that they were getting something for their own from the meeting. We tried to design the meeting keeping that factor in mind.

In that meeting all participants got a chance to play the role of a guide and an apprentice. All 'apprentices' shared a case to their respective 'guide'. The case was to be about an interaction with any human being, which had till then a deep impact on them. After that they shared why they had selected that particular case.

On the first day there was one 'guide', one 'apprentice' and 2 to 3 observers in every subgroup. The 'guide' would attend to the 'apprentice', respond, personalise and try that the 'apprentice' prepares a plan of action. While doing this all of us found that it was very difficult to do counselling in front of observers. The 'apprentices' found it difficult to open up in front of observers.

So on the next day we decided to repeat the exercise without observers. It was a great experience for me. While I was playing the role of 'guide' my partner started with his issue that was bothering him. I attended to him and responded with feeling. As the discussion progressed I also started raising issues. My partner found that what he shared at first was only the surface of a deep-rooted problem. Then I tried to help him to formulate an action plan to overcome the situation. We made an action plan but both of us realised that this action plan was made in hurry and would not be very effective. Actually we needed more time for that. In a real situation this discussion would take several days.

As an 'apprentice' I found that just by getting a person who would listen to me eagerly and could relate to me, I could tell him everything what I wanted to say. When he started raising issues and questions, it helped me to clarify my doubts. In this case also we tried to make the action plan as if it was our ultimate output.

While presenting their experience almost every group felt that this desire for an output was not proper. Attending and responding was comparatively easier than personalising or initiating. The forum wanted a more intense understanding on this issue. We thought about calling some outsider who could help us in this regard; one who might show a different way of looking at the whole thing.

At the end of the meeting Arnab and I got suggestions from the forum on how to improve us in the role of a facilitator. People pointed out our faults and gave suggestions to overcome those. It was useful for the next set of facilitators too so that they would not repeat the same mistake in the next meeting.

Soumen and Manas were selected as facilitators for the next meeting. Since we had decided to invite experts, Soumen contacted Deepankar and Sukhvarsha for their suggestions. I forgot to mention that we had an unwritten law that the facilitators for the next meeting would be the office bearers for the time between the meetings.

Is the Guide a Counsellor?

On the last day of February Soumen issued a letter to all forum members. This was in connection to his letter to Deepankar and Sukhvarsha regarding their help in understanding a helping relationship. Their reply was attached with his letter. They suggested

that we should not be too bothered about personalising and initiating. Rather, if someone among us had some positive experience regarding these, it could be shared in the meetings. They also raised a question: How did the forum visualise the relationship between a guide and an apprentice? Was the guide a counsellor?

In the forum and in FGDP workshops we had discussed about the relationship. This relationship, we had discussed, was like friends and co-travellers. We never thought of the counsellor role. In the letter they also suggested that we establish a co-traveller kind of relationship with the apprentice. About counselling, they wrote that it was not merely a technique or skill. It is an art that needs a certain kind of quality.

Our next meeting was held on May 3-4. Manas and Soumen came up with the design that 2 persons will share their experience of guiding their apprentices. Anil and I wanted to make the presentations. The participants decided that I would discuss the first phase of apprenticeship and Anil would talk about the second phase.

In my presentation I focussed on the decision making process of my apprentice. There was a discussion after my presentation. Since most of the time is spent in villages in the first phase of apprenticeship, we discussed more about it. The role of field guides and their availability to the apprentices were the main issues around which the discussion was held.

Next to present was Anil. He made a presentation up to the ninth month of the apprenticeship. The major discussion on the presentation revolves around giving assignments to the apprentice.

It might be questioned that all these discussions and presentations can be done at the team level. So why have another forum for it? First, in the team meetings we discuss several types of issues. Most are field related work and experience, targets and achievements. So it is almost impossible to talk only about interpersonal relationship issues in one team meeting.

Secondly, I have noticed that in a team the kind of assignments the apprentices were getting in their first phase was almost the same across time. So when the guides got an opportunity to hear from others, they had different ideas. They also got a chance to revise their design when other people questioned their assignment. This was not possible in team meetings.

In the meeting we had long discussions about knowing, being and doing. We also discussed where we should focus while giving assignments. This discussion provided me more clarity on these issues. We also discussed taking in some new members, especially women members since we did not have any in our group. We decided to invite Dhrubaa, Mousumi and Nityananda for the next meeting.

The next meeting was held at Ranchi on July 14-15 where Kirtti and Anil played the role of facilitators. But due to some communication gap between the facilitators, the new members were not informed about the meeting. We invited Nivedita for this meeting. She wanted to join the meeting for updating the HRD unit. It was short meeting this time. Some orientation about the apprenticeship programme was going on at Ranchi. We started after the end of that programme and could continue till afternoon of the next day. Only Rajesh could get time to present his

experience of guiding an apprentice.

Here and Now

From the July meeting onwards we consciously started using this forum as a mechanism for confronting or getting and giving feedback for different behaviour and action on a here-and-now basis.

We also took a decision that we would prepare a guideline for this forum. Jibdas took the responsibility for preparing the draft. This article is also a result of that meeting. We decided that others in Pradan should also know what we have been doing in the name of FGF. I was given that assignment.

The FGF is more than one year old now. In the first meeting I thought the group would be short-lived because I did not learn much from that meeting. But the next meeting was exciting. I got something there for myself. But Jui stopped coming after the first meeting. Besides her, Sujata is the only person who stopped coming to this group after leaving Pradan.

In the first meeting we were 14. Now 12 remain. The average attendance is 10-11 per meeting. This is a voluntary group. The organisation will not question if you do not attend. It shows that the participants are benefiting from this.

I can say confidently that I have benefited from this forum, particularly when I was guiding my last apprentice. I drew help from our forum in designing the assignment, spending time with him in the field or in his room, trying to understand him and helping him to take decisions.

Besides our retreat, there is no smaller forum where people meet regularly. Earlier we used

to have thematic forums. Maybe that is why we have started liking this forum so much. Members of this forum have become very close to each other. So when somebody threw up the idea of breaking this forum into regional forums with other members, we could not agree to that. Do we want to form a close group where there is no transaction with the outside world? We discussed this issue in one of our meetings.

Our colleagues who have completed FGDP are also willing to join this forum. Somebody has even said that they would form a forum at their place. So we have decided to invite some new people for our next meeting. If they find it interesting, they might join us. We could also facilitate other regions to form their own groups.

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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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