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Letters to the Editor

Interviewing for Quality Data

Dhrubaa's letter on my article (NewsReach January 2002) presents another opportunity to explain the purpose of the training I conducted for some Pradanites and others under Sathan's training programme. I would like to clarify the 'way of exploration' I tried to explain, however inadequately. The interviews in this context cannot be conducted at one go in an operating situation to come up with a livelihood intervention plan. The most critical part of this exercise is revisiting resources, particularly in the context of family history. Taking stock of the resource base of a family historically lies at the core of the exercise. This sharing between the family and the development professional paves the way to explore alternatives.

The rest of the exercise depends on other visits. There is no one interview per se. Any haste in conducting this series of interviews results in inadequate information. The professional also has to facilitate family reflection on the collected data, in absence of which the interviews become question-answer sessions, suggesting a failure in the exercise.

The broad objective of the training programme is to build the understanding of trainees to look at the complexities of livelihood interventions. The training would give the participants a framework to move from 'his or her frame of reference' to the 'frame of reference of the families'. The process involves capturing a family's perceptions about their resources through interaction. It would then create enough ground to collaborate with the families to design and work for a planned change towards enhancing livelihoods.

The idea is to get oriented to a particular approach and train our senses to make the required observations. To understand the links between different variables of production (family labour vs. utilisation of land resources, etc.) that generate livelihoods. To identify gaps affecting the process. To learn to collaborate with families to work out intervention plans. With repeated and gradual practice a professional would find ways to use time more economically while visiting a community.

The hope is that such learning would then get integrated in our day-to-day operations. We would not need separate events to understand the livelihoods of our self-help group members. I am not aware if our colleagues are using any PRA tool which helps them to simultaneously capture a multi-dimensional perception about resources and their inter linkages. The idea here is very similar to what medical practitioners do when they learn to dissect cadavers to understand different systems in body and how they are linked to each other. They do not need to cut open the body every time to know where the stomach is.

A concern that I have is that some standard PRA tools are proposed to replace the 'interviews' I propose to conduct to understand people and their livelihood base, and not only their income or expenditure. While I do agree with the general observation that pictorial or standard PRA tools like 100 seeds help us to easily communicate with the people, I find it difficult to accept that everything can be done through standardised tools. I strongly hold the view that to use

PRA tools effectively, we need to do a lot with our communication skills (including interviewing skills) to train our senses to make detailed observations about livelihood bases. Otherwise I am concerned that, instead of us using the tools, the tools themselves will guide us. A camera is a very effective tool, but all of us who have learned how to operate a camera may not be equally effective in capturing a particular landscape.

I would finally request readers to call me to observe their processes and outcomes while practising PRA to make resource analyses and livelihood interventions: All the PRA exercises I have attended till now have yielded poor quality data because the practitioners were not adequately equipped with skills and knowledge required to make quality observations. I found that exploration of the potential and visualisation of the changed scenario was extremely limited. The tools themselves could not help much. Professionals and resource persons came back helplessly satisfied with whatever the villagers said. There was always inadequate data to generate reflection on alternatives.

I must stop here. This response has already become another article. Expecting a lively debate.

Dinabandhu Karmakar, Purulia, West Bengal

We urge all readers to freely share thoughts and responses to articles in NewsReach. Email your letters to pradhanho@ndb.vsnl.net.in or post them to Pradan, 3 CSC, Niti Bagh, New Delhi 110 049.

Grappling with Livelihood

How a 4-day exercise was conducted amongst self-help group members to plan effective livelihood interventions

Kuntalika Kumbhakar

I have been promoting savings and credit amongst women in the Barrabazar block of Purulia district for the past 3 years. This western most district of West Bengal is one of the most underdeveloped. The Barrabazar block lies at the southern edge of Purulia district bordering Bihar. Only 198 of the 216 villages, spread over 10 gram panchayats, are inhabited. Approximately 49% of the total population of 1,29,328 comprises women, 8% belongs to the scheduled castes and 19% to the scheduled tribes.

It is a drought prone area with sufficient but erratic rainfall. The lateritic soil has low water retention capacity. Lands are mostly monocropped with limited surface irrigation facility. The annual income of small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers is much lower than in other districts of the state. A large number of people migrate to prosperous districts such as Burdwan and to the industrial belts of Bihar in search of employment.

The *sabhapati* (president) of the Barrabazar Panchayat Samity (BBPS) became acquainted with Pradan's work in rainwater harvesting to improve rain-fed paddy and promotion of self-help groups (SHGs) in the adjacent block of Balarampur in 1995. We were informally invited to collaborate, as he was impressed with the effectiveness of our techniques and our rapport with the local community. This collaborative relationship with BBPS gave us a unique opportunity to try the idea of promoting SHGs by elected women panchayat representatives.

We thought of conducting training and expo-

sure programmes for selected women panchayat members. If this were successful, SHGs would spread much faster all over the district and beyond. We sounded the idea with the BBPS *sabhapati* and Zilla Parishad Karmadhakshya (district council secretary), who was elected from the same block. They appreciated the idea and mobilised some funds. The block authority took special interest in organising a 3-day residential training event (November 21-23, 1998). Since then our Purulia team has been promoting SHGs with renewed vigour.

We promoted SHGs to evolve a self-sufficient financial institution of economically poor and backward class women so that they could improve their living standards up to the level where they could generate a sustainable surplus. We have been nurturing these SHGs, helping them to access credit from banks and establishing a system linking all the SHGs into secondary and tertiary level organisations. I also had to spend considerable time to standardise the threshold parameters of the SHGs in line with Pradan's objective to make them strong, self-sustaining institutions with financial rigour.

Nagging Questions

While promoting SHGs in a new pocket I am haunted by questions. Is the access to credit sufficient to bring about the kind of change I think is essential? Simply increas-

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ing the number of groups and helping them to access bank loans did not give me a kick. Are the number of groups and number of bank linkages the only criteria for assessing the achievement of the savings and credit programme?

I soon realised that if I seriously wanted to help the women bring some change in their economic condition, I would need to give a lot more time to each group to motivate them, to help them take stock of and analyse their resources and to enable them to utilise these purposefully towards increasing their incomes. They needed help to increase their capacities and constant encouragement to keep moving. It was not possible for me to give them the time required if I had to move on to another pocket to increase the number of groups. I am perpetually left with the concern whether the bank loan really generates additional income for group members. Is the process of credit planning proper? Are the actual requirements of the family, seasonality, risks and its potentiality kept in mind while planning?

Let us consider a case of a poor family that has a food sufficiency for only 4-6 months. They need to migrate to work in a brick kiln to make both ends meet. Both husband and wife migrate, keeping their children with the wife's old mother. They also have a small piece of irrigated land that they can use to cultivate vegetables. Suppose this family takes a small loan and buys a goat. What if the goat dies due to lack of proper care when the elders migrate? The family would be entrapped into debt and might be forced to sell existing resources to repay the loan. Suppose this same family took a loan to cultivate flat beans to increase their income so that they would not need to migrate. Suppose the loan was planned covering the

cost of fertilisers, medicine and other requirements to harvest a good crop. But the family does not even have money to buy enough rice for one square meal a day. Would they not spend part of the cost of cultivation of flat beans on food, thus leading to a bad crop in absence of sufficient input? Where would the family be vis-à-vis its economic condition?

Other members of our Purulia team also raised these concerns repeatedly. We felt that access to credit from banks and other financial institutions also needed to be properly channelled in the direction of increasing the income of the families of group members. We needed an effective process of planning that could be replicated widely. To start with we decided that professionals of Balarampur, Jhalda and Kashipur locations would try out these ideas in their own way and then collate their experiences. We could then develop a standard module that could gradually improve economic conditions through savings and credit schemes.

Planning Module

At Balarampur, Arnab and I developed a module for a 4-day planning exercise and selected a tribal group from the Majhidi hamlet of Bhikaricheliama village, where we were implementing a watershed project, to try it out. We selected this village because we have been working with them for a long time and have developed a strong rapport with the community. The watershed committee chairman, Sri Sukhdeb Singh Sardar, an enthusiastic and influential person, helped us to select the village. The 12-member Majhidi group has been functioning since April 1998 and is in the stage of linking with a bank. All the members are tribals and all, bar one, fall under the BPL (below the poverty line) category.

This exercise comprised 4 days: 2 days interacting with the SHG, a day to assimilate and analyse the data in the office and the last day devoted to planning. The exercise was hinged upon the attendance of every SHG member accompanied by her husband or guardian, as we felt that the women were not the primary decision-makers in the family. To ensure the presence of both members of so many families for 3 days leaving other activities aside was difficult. Sukhdeb Singh Sardar, who was also an ex-pradhan (chief) as well as present karmadhyaksha (secretary), land and forest, and a key person in the panchayats, helped us in convincing the families to attend the exercise for 3 entire days between March 18 and 21, 2001. The module is sketched out in the accompanying table on pages 6-7.

Facilitating Climate

The objective of the first day was to build up a facilitating climate so that the families could share their experiences and aspirations in life and to reflect and think upon them. We were scheduled to start at 9 in the morning but it was not until 11.30 that we got going. The icebreaker was not required since the families were from the same hamlet and both Arnab and I knew the members well.

When most of the participants reached the venue (the primary school), couples were asked to sit together. We started with an introduction in which husband and wife told us about their family members, children, sources of livelihood, who thinks and cares more for the family and shares in work load at home and field. Interestingly, all the husbands present, except one, agreed that the wife cared more for the family. They also unanimously accepted that their wives took on more workload because they did all the household chores, took care of the children

as well as worked in the fields sowing, transplanting, weeding and nurturing. This was significant since the men recognised the important role of women in the household. Some guided questions were made to facilitate the sharing.

In the 3rd session participants were divided in 3 sub-groups to discuss for 15 minutes amongst themselves how they fared in the past 5 years in terms of food, clothing, agriculture and health. The picture that emerged was depressing. We found most were living under severe stress, could not make both ends meet and had to eat boiled maize for many months. They even ate seeds of grass and unripe paddy. The families faced difficulties in commuting and medical patients had to be carried on shoulders to the hospital.

Then the subgroups were asked to discuss only the last year vis-à-vis the situation in the past 5 years. We found that transportation had developed and commuting had become easier. It emerged that last year was bad for agriculture due to insufficient rains. Many had to migrate to Burdwan and Jamshedpur in search of employment.

In the plenary that followed we requested the participants to think for 5-10 minutes and share their most happy and most sad event in life. Although they were uncomfortable with this, we persisted in order to enable them to look closely at their life. Some participants shared sad incidents centred on illness and death. We could not help them share happy moments despite much facilitation.

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Planning Module

Session	Content	Methodology	Output
Day 1			
1.	Ice breaking exercise.	Playing games.	Make the participants free to talk.
2.	Introduction.	Husband and wife introduce their family, etc.	Preliminary knowledge about participants.
3.	Reflection on last 5 years.	Sub-group discussion.	They are made to 'think' about their past and present life.
4.	Reflection on last year.	Sub-group discussion.	Participants made to reflect on their life.
5.	Knowing what is the sense of well-being.	Discussion on all aspects of life.	Idea on their sense of living well and their future dream.
6.	Sharing of happy and sad moments in life.	Discussion.	Participants made to 'think' about themselves.
7.	Introspection by each family to portray where they are and where they aspire to be.	A chart paper showing a happy and a sad face with a number of lines in between would be put up. Each family would show in dots where they are and where they aspire to be.	Emphasising reflection on past and future vision.
Day 2			
1.	Data collection on land and water resources of each family.	Discussion in the group and writing down on charts.	Information collected to know about the resources, its current use and potentiality and the requirement.
2.	Data collection on wage earning and other sources of income.	Asking each couple.	
3.	Data on crops grown by each family and the agriculture practices followed.	Group discussion on data of land holdings.	

Planning Module Continued

Session	Content	Methodology	Output
Day 2			
4.	Data on livestock & agriculture implements.	Asking each couple.	Information collected to know about the resources, its current use and potentiality and the requirement.
5.	Data on expenditure of each family on food, clothing, medicine, festival. etc.	Asking each couple and discussion among participants.	
Day 3	This day was taken off to collate all the data, check any absurdity, calculate the input cost in agriculture, find out total income, calculating expenditure and find out difference between both. These calculations would help in finding potential areas to increase income for a family minimising the risk.		
Day 4			
1.	Family-wise sharing of the derivations from the data gathered and checking for anomalies.	Reading the data like reading a write up on the family.	Checking the data and the analysis.
2.	Generating options with each family keeping in mind their potential.	Participants themselves suggest options that are discussed in the group.	Plan of the activities for generating income.
3.	Final planning and an action plan developed.	Discussion with the participants.	Work plans drawn.

Good Living

In the next session we discussed 'good living' and found that all participants had similar ideas on this front. For them good living meant 2 square meals a day throughout the year. Eating fish, meat, eggs or pulses were a bonus. A couple of sets of clothes for regular use, a separate set of clothes for working in the fields, a concrete house to live in, education for the children and enough surplus to keep the livestock in good health rounded off their concept of 'good living'.

We began the next session by drawing a sad and a happy face on opposite ends of a chart. We drew several lines between the

faces and asked the participants to project themselves on the lines with big dots where they were and would like to be in relation to the happy and sad faces. Almost all the participants visualised their present near the sad face and moved towards the happy face while thinking about the future. The participants found the chart so interesting that we gave the chart to them to stick on the wall where they conduct SHG meetings. It would remind them of their present position and motivate them to work harder to reach a better position in the future.

After lunch we started the discussion on the resources available to the families. It was

necessary to optimise their resources so that they could move towards the happy faces. We started with collecting data on land and water resources. The data on land holdings was put under 4 categories: lowland, medium lowland, medium upland and upland, which was again divided into irrigated and non-irrigated. We also noted down the data on water resources. We noted all this family-wise on charts. We then collected information on livestock and assets such as beds, bicycles, farm implements, clock or watch and radios owned by each family. We concluded the first day's session after collecting the data.

Our focus on the second day was on collecting detailed data on present land use and correlating it with the land data we had compiled the day before. We also collected information on the amount of production. This helped us to

calculate the income of a family. To have a complete idea on family income, we also collected information on other sources of income such as wage earning.

In the next session we collected data on the average expenditure of each family in

a year. Expenses on major items such as rice, oil, spices, fish, meat, eggs, dress, illness, education, housing, ceremonies and livestock were collated. Although this was time consuming, the exercise was a revelation to the participants because they had never thought on these lines.

Glimpses of the Future

At the end of the day the participants were delighted to get a glimpse of the item-wise annual expenditure they incurred in their family. We promised them that they would

know the overall picture about their income as well as expenditure and the deficit the on the 4th and last day of the exercise. We could then chalk out a plan vis-à-vis the resources and the deficit. The eagerness to know this probably encouraged the families attend the last day of the exercise.

We spent the third day in office collating all the raw data to calculate the income and expenditure of each family from all the resources it mentioned. We then prepared an income-expenditure table for each family that showed whether the family was running a deficit or a surplus.

When we interpreted all the data we found that the families were spending very little on agricultural inputs and were using improper methods of cultivation. This adversely affected productivity and income. We also found that all the families had access to some water resource. If they could plan the crops in time and put in sufficient inputs, they could increase their income to a fair extent.

We also noticed some anomalies in the data. In 2 cases the deficit in a family was found exorbitant and it was surprising how the family managed. In other families the deficiency was not much. But from our discussions we sensed that most of the families lived in heavy stress. The deficits calculated from the data did not corroborate our feelings. The discrepancy was due to fact that rice consumption reported was not sufficient for a full meal.

We started the exercise the next day in the presence of some influential members of the watershed committee who could help generate some useful options. We recapitulated the discussion of the first day. When it came

to options, all participants agreed that the lands with irrigation facilities were not fully used and the crops grown in them were not provided with sufficient input.

Discussions were mainly conducted around the collected data, which was an important element in convincing them. We compared the production and net income from the same crops with full input and care. We also assured them of continuous support and field supervision from Pradan. They participants then agreed to take a risk and use the resources available with them for one crop at least. We also decided that we would meet regularly to help them make continuous changes in their income throughout the year.

Participants then decided that before initiating activities requiring large inputs, they would start by growing crops with sufficient inputs using proper methods. For this, they would each grow a selected crop in a planned way.

Planning in Detail

We discussed the plans for each participant in detail, which included the crops to be grown, the area of land on which they would be grown and the cost of inputs required. Money for investment was to be taken as a loan from the watershed committee, which had kept aside Rs 50,000 as a revolving fund for SHGs within its command area.

Overall, the exercise allowed us to know in detail about the potential areas of intervention for income generation of the SHG members. It was an enriching experience and gave us an opportunity to peep into the lives of these people, and to see it through their eyes and feel it as they do. We learnt that instead of searching for some income generation activity, we could intervene in an

ongoing activity like agriculture to bring about remarkable changes. We also learned that the presence of some key person of the village in such planning was helpful.

The response of the participants towards the plan and my involvement in it made me excited. I started feeling that this is what was required. The target was very clear and I could see where I need to take the group.

If each of us would select a few groups in which members are very poor and plan in this detail, I feel that our savings and credit programme could bring about some serious changes. The activities needed to improve economic conditions and to bring sustainable changes could be anything. An important element of this exercise is rigorous follow up. A professional would require to spend intensive time with the groups continuously, helping the women and their families implement the plan. The women would need constant encouragement and technical guidance. And if it really happens nothing would be more satisfying to a professional.

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How an Irrigation Project was Stalled

A case study of the Brahamapanga lift irrigation project provides pointers on how changes in government schemes and the ego of an opinion leader can stall a project

Himansu Saha

Brahamapanga, a small village with 12 scheduled caste (SC) and 9 scheduled tribe (ST) households, is 42 km from Balliguda in Orissa. It suffers from continuous drought spells, which coupled with erratic rainfall, allows only one crop a year. As a result, the villagers have food sufficiency for only about 4-6 months and are enmeshed in debt traps. The lot of the people could improve significantly if irrigation is introduced. If the nearby perennial water sources like springs are tapped, the paddy crop could be saved from dry spells, ensuring food sufficiency. Irrigation would also ensure off-season vegetable cultivation and horticulture plantations.

Pradan decided to implement a group managed lift irrigation (LI) scheme in the village with funds from the District Rural Development Authority (DRDA) under the Million Wells Scheme (MWS).

We had earlier successfully implemented 2 LI pilot projects in the same block, which attracted the attention of the district collector (DC), who asked Pradan to submit more irrigation proposals to DRDA. Brahamapanga was one of the proposals we submitted. This particular DC was the ex-project director (PD) of DRDA Ganjam. We had successfully implemented 12 irrigation projects in Ganjam and he was favourably disposed towards Pradan's interventions. When the MWS was closed down by the government, he was unwilling to abandon the Brahamapanga project and referred it to ITDA. The problem that emerged was that only tribal people could be direct beneficiaries of ITDA.

According to our estimates, it would have taken us one and a half years to implement the project from the time of initial survey for laying the pipeline. The process of installing an LI included initial survey through topography sheets and physical verification with the people; discussion with the villagers; command area mapping; finalisation of site, survey, design and estimate; submission of proposal to DRDA; technical and administrative approval of the DRDA; release of funds to the block; forming of water users association (WUA) and opening of bank account, and finally, implementation through people's participation.

Administrative Delays

We were however delayed because the DC was transferred and the next incumbent was not supportive. The Phulbani PD was also not supportive and with the new DC, he got a chance to linger and stall the project. After the transfer of the second DC, the project got a fillip because the third DC took a lot of initiative in sanctioning the project despite resistance from the PD. It also took us a lot of time to convince the project administrator (PA) of ITDA Balliguda.

All this while Pramod (our professional in charge of the village) had conducted about 30 meetings with the villagers. Some of the meetings were to go through the process of mapping, etc., but some additional meetings were required to appraise the villagers of the shifts that were occurring at the administrative level. Since the project was delayed, we decided meanwhile to demonstrate vegetable cultivation near the wells of the village. We also tried in the interim to demonstrate how

to improve traditional and local methods of paddy cultivation.

Once the project was sanctioned under ITDA, Pramod and I visited Brahamapanga to provide the marks for digging trenches. When we arrived we found no tribals were present. We then realised that there was a problem because the trenches were passing through the houses of some SC families (who could not be beneficiaries under the altered scheme). The tribals were supposed to get water from the last tank through a cemented canal.

During the initial survey, we found 2 sites. In the first one, the pipeline could almost pass through the middle path of both SC and ST lands. This site was technically unsuitable due to higher suction lift and lack of a suitable site for pump-house. The second site was found technically suitable and although the ST families agreed, they were not very happy with the selection.

Tribal Non-cooperation

Differences between the 2 communities were heightened. When the digging for trenches was supposed to start, the tribals did not join work. They demanded that they would work only when they got water through the PVC pipeline up to their last agricultural field or if the pipeline passed through their surroundings. As a result, the water intake had to be from a new place.

We realised that the entire problem was due to a longstanding dispute between the ST and SC families of the village. The ST families thought that the SC families would take all the benefits from the project and they would not get any water. It seemed as if the SC members had taken all the decisions regarding the project and the ST members

were just made to accept these.

After the change of the funding agency, we had taken the people into confidence and explained to them that funding from ITDA was based on the total number of ST beneficiaries and it would be better to include more of them in the executive committee of the WUA. When the tribals knew that it was because of them that the project was being sanctioned by ITDA, they became somewhat more assertive.

When Pramod returned (he had gone to attend the Pradan Retreat), he was taken aback by the developments. He never expected such a problem would arise because he had conducted quite a few meetings in the village and the people had agreed to the proposed path of the pipeline. The proposal and budget estimate had already been sent to the ITDA and it was just a matter of a few days within which money was to be sanctioned and channelled to the bank account of the WUA.

It was time for some fire fighting. Pramod had a long meeting with the tribals regarding all matters right from his first visit to the village to the present day. He pointed out that the tribals had never raised any doubt regarding the ability of the cemented canal to deliver water up to the last agricultural field of the tribals. The ST members however did not budge from their position and wanted the PVC pipe to deliver water to the last agricultural field. Both Pramod and I felt that the tribals were manipulating the situation to their undue advantage because they knew that unless they participated, the proj-

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ect could not be implemented.

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surroundings of the STs' land. I was in favour of cancellation because I thought we should not work in a village where we have such a low degree of cooperation from the community. If there was so much animosity between the 2 communities, there would definitely be more problems during further progress of the project and there would be disputes during the time of sharing of water from the pump.

But Pramod said that it had taken quite a concentrated effort to get this project sanctioned and now that the money was about to be released, Pradan's reputation would be affected if it backed out of the project at this juncture. Moreover, according to him, as the SC members did not have any problems regarding change of the site for the water intake and the subsequent change in the path of the pipeline, we could carry on with the project.

We again held a meeting on the next day. As a result of the meeting, another survey was conducted and the water intake place was changed. I was pretty sure that some of the SC members would definitely make it an issue and would not participate in the trench digging process. In a village meeting where I had accompanied Pramod to get a resolution from the villagers to withdraw money from the bank to purchase pumps and pipes, 2 SC men came heavily drunk and started creating a nuisance. They openly said that they would not allow the pipeline

to pass through their fields and would puncture the PVC pipes if necessary.

This particular meeting witnessed a fight between 2 SC groups. We found that there were 2 affinity groups in the village: caste and religious affinity groups. The SC families who were in favour of the project and had joined hands with the ST families were Protestant Christians, while the rest of the SC families opposed to the project were Catholic.

Old versus New

We changed the LI site after taking into consideration of the Protestant and Catholic stakeholders in the village. The old site was selected downstream of the village rivulet and the proposed pipeline was passing through the lands of Catholic SCs. The new water intake site was more upstream so that the pipeline passed through the lands of Protestant ST and SC families.

In the old site the Protestant group was supposed to get water through a cemented canal from the last outlet. In the new site the Catholic group was supposed to get water through cemented or earthen canal. In the older water intake the slope of the cemented canal was undulating and flow of water to the tribals' lands was not easy. In the new site the slope was uniform and high, making water easier to reach the fields. The new site meant laying 260 metres of additional pipeline. The WUA decided to provide for the additional costs by partly eliminating the cemented canal and partly through voluntary contributions.

The purpose of the new site was to bring more Protestant ST families' land under the command area for which the Catholic SC families had initially agreed. It would

accommodate the lands of the Catholic SC families and ensure sufficient water to all the beneficiaries.

Ego Hassles

We later came to know that the secretary of the WUA, Dawood, was the main culprit behind all these incidents. Initially, the pipeline was passing through the homestead lands of Dawood and one of the proposed outlets was on his land. That was the reason he had taken a lot of initiative in the past. In the second design, such a thing did not happen, which hurt his ego although he was getting more water from the second design. Since he was opinion leader of the opposing SC families, he provoked them to create a nuisance and not allow the project in the new site.

As per the new site, the available head for the pump was less compared to the old site, which was the cause for delivery of more water. But in the new design, there was no proposed outlet in Dawood's land and he had to get water from the last outlet through the cemented earthen channel. Dawood was the opinion leader of the Catholic SC families. He was the person who had seen Pradan's LI projects in the nearby villages and had invited Pramod to assess the possibility of LI in his village. When the change in site was being mooted, he took the lead to convince his brothers.

Although Dawood agreed to the proposal in our presence, he was the person who instigated his brothers to create nuisance and to threaten the others in the village to change the decision again in their favour. As a result, 2 of his brothers came in a heavily drunken condition and abused the Protestant SC families.

Moreover, Dawood had an open well and

had his own pump. From this angle, he did not have much to lose if the project was cancelled. But as he was the community leader, he was selected secretary of the WUA, notwithstanding the fact that he might have less ownership in the project. Although Dawood had taken lots of interest in the project, he created the nuisance to assuage his ego and prove his credentials as a leader.

All the 12 SC families in the village belong to the same family tree. Usually marriage isn't common between SC and ST families in this area. But in this village, 2 Protestant SC men had married girls of the ST community of the same village. This marriage linkage forms the basis of affinity between the ST community and some SC families apart from their religious affinity.

Even after all these incidents, our team carried on with the project after assurance from the supporters of the project that the threat of puncturing the pipes was made under drunken conditions and such a thing would not really happen. Some people even dug trenches hiring labour from a nearby village. Ultimately the pump was delivered to the village and the PVC pipes were next on the line.

Meanwhile, riots broke out between SC and ST families in the adjoining Kotagarih block over the matter of land. This gave a fillip to the opposing SC families in this village. They even threatened Pramod with dire consequences. This whole issue was discussed in the team and we decided not to carry on further with the project.

After all these incidents, our team carried on with the project after assurance from the supporters of the project that the threat of puncturing the pipes was made under drunken conditions and such a thing would not really happen.

The Brahamapanga experience has raised important dilemmas in my mind. Should we work for the oppressed community and try to fight for their rights or leave things as they were and wait for time to settle this matter?

We took this decision after much deliberation. We found that despite open threats, there wasn't any encouraging response from the Protestants. Also, as the particular village was in a new cluster and far away from Balliguda, we decided to postpone the project till there was a consensus among the opposing factions. Our team decided that we are for development and not to resolve internal conflicts especially at a moment when there were riots in many parts of the same district.

Our Compulsions

The ITDA has sanctioned the project on a pilot basis and the name of the village was fixed. We could not change the village without the permission of ITDA. We were new to the area and Pradan's credibility of handling the community was at stake. So the team did not want to back out of the project when the funding changed and the tribals refused to join work.

We were also hoping that people would be convinced of the benefits of the project in due time even though the intake site may be changed as no community was losing in the process. We learnt a lot from the Brahamapanga episode.

We found that funding from the ITDA for group schemes did not take note of the needs of the village but was based on the number of persons of a particular community (STs). This has the danger of bringing about a visible demarcation between 2 groups. It breaks the cohesiveness of a village community. Initially, we too had ignored the political and religious dynamics

of the village, which is so essential for the successful implementation of any project.

Dilemmas

The Brahamapanga experience has raised important dilemmas in my mind. Should we work for the oppressed community and try to fight for their rights or leave things as they were and wait for time to settle this matter? How do we convince people not to promote leaders who don't have a high degree of ownership in a project and who actually work for it to keep their leadership position intact? The social cost of the project increased due to the change in funding. How do we reduce this social cost?

In any group activity, people join hands either for mutual profit or to jointly solve problems. But in land-water interventions, it is difficult to choose a group having more or less equal stake holding in terms of profits and loss. This is exactly what happened in Brahamapanga. If the project was implemented, Dawood would have profited. If it had flopped, he did not stand to lose much. The major lesson we learnt from this was that our people are poor more due to the internal gatekeepers than external ones.

Participate and Evaluate

How to go about applying a participatory method of group evaluation

Sukanta Sarkar

This is an exercise I have developed and practiced in the cluster level forum. The cluster is a forum of 7-10 self-help groups (SHGs) at the panchayat level where 2 representatives from each group participate. A cluster meeting takes place once in a month.

Purpose

The exercise I describe below helps the group representatives to identify the strength and weakness of their groups. It then allows discussion to identify issues related to the functioning of the groups, ultimately helping the groups to improve their functioning.

Procedure

I conduct this exercise in an enclosed area such as the panchayat bhawan and the school. Members are asked to sit in a circle. The results are better if members of the same group sit together. I then spell out the purpose of the exercise and then try to facilitate a consensus among the members whether to carry out the exercise or not.

Once they agree, we ask the members to list down the criteria or indicators of a good group. It can be listed on a chart paper or on the black board. All the members agree before listing any criteria. Once the criteria are listed, members of each group discuss the status of their groups against those criteria. Then one member from each group is asked to position her group against each criterion. The positioning is done on the basis of 3 grades: good, moderate and bad. The older groups can grade themselves on a scale of 10. Sometimes the members become confused or become unnecessarily involved in a numbers game. It can be avoided as the good, moderate and bad

grading has been found user-friendly for SHG members. After the grading of each individual group, other group members of the same village or SHG members of other villages who have some knowledge of that group cross-check the grading.

Once the crosschecking is complete, each individual group starts narrating on the rationale of keeping their groups in different grades against different criteria. During the discussion emphasis is given to those areas where a group has not scored well. At that time the group may draw lessons from those groups who have scored good against that criterion. In this way, groups draw lessons from each other and improve their functioning.

In the next cluster meeting, evaluation is done on those same criteria. This provides comparative data on the progress of the groups. Once this exercise is continued, the group members can visualise the performance of their group over a period of time.

Precautions

Before starting the exercise, I have found that it is important that the participants understand the purpose of the exercise so that they don't feel scared to evaluate their groups. It is also important that participants have faith in each other. Otherwise they may not agree to evaluate their group in front of others. The final chart, to be noted down in the minute's book of the cluster, would look like the accompanying box on page 16.

Group Evaluation by Individuals

I initiated this exercise to identify the possible causes of the malfunctioning of a group

and to initiate and find out ways to improve its functioning.

Procedure

We generally conduct this exercise in the meeting place of the group with all the members of the group present. The members are asked to sit in a circle. We then ask one of the members to narrate the history of the group. This generally provides an idea on how the group started malfunctioning over a period of time. We then try to evolve a consensus that the group is not functioning well and ask the members the possible causes behind this. We have noticed that at this point people start blaming each other.

We then provide the idea behind the exercise and state the objective and purpose of the

exercise. We draw a circle indicating the SHG on a chart paper. Individual members are then given a piece of paper with her name on it. We then ask them to place themselves as they feel close to the SHG.

After each individual has positioned herself, we crosscheck the positions with the other members and make possible changes of the position of the members. We then ask the members to explain why they have put themselves in those positions. Other members crosscheck or ratify the explanations. We finally put the whole picture in front of the group and ask them whether they want to remain in the same position or try to improve it. Once they agree to improve, we ask them to prepare an action plan.

Chart of Evaluation

Serial No	Criteria	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E	Group F	Group G	Group H
1.	Regular and timely meeting	G	B	M	G	M	G	M	G
2.	Attendance in the meeting	G	B	M	G	M	G	M	G
3.	Meeting starts with workshops and songs	B	B	G	G	M	G	M	G
4.	Regular savings	G	G	G	G	M	G	G	G
5.	Timely repayment of loan	B	G	M	G	M	G	M	G
6.	Linked with bank	G	B	G	M	M	B	G	M
7.	Members doing IGA	B	M	G	M	B	B	G	M
8.	Attendance of group in the cluster meeting	G	M	M	G	M	G	M	G
9.	Members having co-operation among themselves	B	M	G	G	M	G	G	G
G= Good		M = Moderate				B = Bad			

Letter from a Banker

How women's groups of Doudi and Jhunkar in Kesla engineered a turnaround in a banker's attitude to provide them credit limits

Madhu Sudan Yadav

In 1997 there was not a single educated woman except Laxmi Bai in the 2 forest villages of Doudi and Jhunkar in Kesla block of Hoshangabad district in Madhya Pradesh. The Suktawa branch of Kshetriya Gramin Bank (KGB) Hoshangabad had financed 56 tribal men in 1982-83 and 1983-84 under government-sponsored programmes such as the Integrated Rural Development Programme. All of them were defaulters till 1997. The Kesla branch of State Bank of India (SBI), which also provided finance in these 2 villages, had a similar experience.

In June 1997, Pradan formed a self-help group (SHG) of 20 tribal women in Jhunkar named Bajrang Mahila Samiti with the cooperation of Laxmi Bai. The women members of this SHG met weekly to deposit their savings and take loans from the group. Their confidence gradually increased through regular meeting, mutual discussions, savings, credit and cooperation. Observing the various activities of this SHG, 7 more SHGs named Durga Mahila Samiti, Sharda Mahila Samiti, Saraswati Mahila Samiti, Durga Bai Mahila Samiti, Yashoda Mahila Samiti, Meera Mahila Samiti and Devi Mahila Samiti were formed in these 2 nearby villages with help from Pradan gradually till 1999. A total of 131 women were brought together in these 8 SHGs, where they started discussing their welfare and development plans. By small regular savings and the interest earned on loans financed to the members, the capital of each SHG increased remarkably (See Box).

These women then wanted to start some economic activity with the help of their group

funds and through funds from a bank. But the main hurdle to take group loans from the banks was the bad record of the male defaulters. No bank was ready to give a paisa more to these 2 villages. The women faced extreme difficulties convincing bank officials that they would regularly repay their group loans.

Stouthearted Women

They refused to lose heart and continued to deposit their savings in the bank and continued with their economic activities from their group funds. By doing this they were in regu-

Capital Gains

	Savings (Rs)	Income by Interest (Rs)
Bajrang Mahila Samiti	20,216	2,269
Durga Bai Mahila Samiti	11,370	2,561
Meera Mahila Samiti	9,713	4,809
Yashoda Mahila Samiti	10,919	9,166
Devi Mahila Samiti	8,510	1,953
Sharda Mahila Samiti	14,455	14,400
Saraswati Mahila Samiti	5,781	3,171
Durga Mahila Samiti	12,599	7,149

After observing their sincere efforts, determination, cooperation, capability and work culture, I can say on behalf of the Suktawa branch of Kshetriya Gramin Bank that we are now ready to give our full cooperation and support to these self-help groups of Doudi and Jhunkar villages.

lar contact with the bank. Gradually the attitude of bank officials changed. Observing the satisfactory workings of the SHGs, the branch manager from the Kesla branch of SBI gave a loan to Bajrang Mahila Samiti, the first group that was formed. After enquiring from SBI Kesla, I came forward as manager of Suktawa

branch of KGB Hoshangabad and sanctioned a loan of Rs 32,000 to Yashoda Mahila Samiti in August 2000 to purchase fishing nets and for farming. The group repaid Rs 14,500 in less than a year.

Our bank also gave a loan of Rs 10,000 to another SHG, which repaid Rs 5,500 within a year. In December 2000 we sanctioned a credit limit of Rs 25,000 to Mira Mahila Samiti. They also repaid Rs 12,850 within a year. Durga Mahila Samiti was sanctioned a credit

limit of Rs 40,000 in March 2001. They have only drawn Rs 5,000, which was repaid in 3 months.

Remarkable Record

These women of the 2 villages are repaying their loans to their SHGs and the SHGs are repaying their loans to the bank on time. Not only this, they are also helping bank officials to collect old dues from male defaulters of their villages. As a result, 17 men out of the 56 chronic defaulters in these villages have fully repaid their loans to KGB. The others are also repaying their loans gradually. This is so remarkable that my bank is considering providing some incentive to the SHGs for their help in recovering old dues.

Other banks are also now willing to extend all facilities to these groups. Our branch at

Suktawa also sanctioned a credit limit of Rs 30,000 to Devi Mahila Samiti in October 2001. The group has drawn Rs 20,000 for Rabi cultivation. These activities have drawn the positive attention of higher bank officials, who have visited these villages.

Four women's groups of Jhunkar village have formulated and implemented a lift irrigation scheme with the cooperation of World Food Programme under the guidance of Pradan. The women have voluntarily contributed their labour to dig ditches and lay 3 km of pipeline from the backwaters of Tawa Dam to their fields. As a result of these efforts, every woman of Jhunkar has water available in her backyard. Recently, under the guidance of Pradan and KGB, they have visited Ghatli village known for growing vegetables and horticulture. They now plan to introduce similar practices in their village.

After observing their sincere efforts, determination, cooperation, capability and work culture, I can say on behalf of the Suktawa branch of KGB that we are now ready to give our full cooperation and support to these SHGs of Doudi and Jhunkar villages.

Communicating the Work in Silk

The Silks of India Exhibition, held in Bangalore from December 4-9 last year, provided an excellent opportunity to showcase Pradan's efforts in tasar

Caroline V Banks

For the first time in its 50-year history, the International Silk Association held its bi-annual congress in India. It was an excellent opportunity to meet overseas buyers working in silk and to show them what Pradan had to offer. Not only it was a cost effective of meeting potential buyers, it was also an ideal forum to communicate the work in silk that Pradan was doing. As I already knew many of these people personally from my previous work, it was a chance we simply could not miss.

I have a degree in textile design and have worked in this field for over 20 years. For the past 9 years a silk importing company based in London has employed me. My achievements include increasing sales by 30% in the first year whilst shifting the emphasis from high volume low profit to lower volume high profit. I set up the interiors department, the export side of the business and was responsible for design development, company branding and all marketing and sales activities.

In 2001 I decided that I wanted a change from my comfortable and routine lifestyle. I attended an exhibition by VSO (Voluntary Services Overseas), an NGO that sends professionals to developing countries to share skills with an organisation and live in the country for 1-2 years. I was asked to look at the job list at the stall. What should I see but the 4 words: Tasar Silk Designer - India. My fate was sealed! I applied and 6 months later I was in Delhi training for my one year posting with Pradan.

The Central Silk Board (CSB) had decided to hold an exhibition to coincide with the congress in order to promote Indian silk. Pradan

was invited to exhibit in order to illustrate the work done so far in tasar silk with the support of both CSB and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A stand of 3 x 3 metre was provided free of charge by CSB. Khitish Pandya and I set off on November 28 after a rushed 10 days of preparation.

The morning following our arrival saw us at the CSB offices. There had been some communication mix up that meant that we had no prior information about the exhibition. We had been told that it was strictly an exhibition where no selling would be permitted. When we arrived with just our samples, we were told that it was a selling show after all. Mr Krishna Rao, the official in charge of UNDP funded non-mulberry projects, took us to the Palace Grounds, where the exhibition was to be held. He was consistently helpful during our stay. We were shown our stand and told we could set it up on December 3. We duly arrived on Monday with our things only to find that the stand had disappeared. The entire layout had been changed. In the end we were given a corner spot just outside the entrance to the CSB main display area.

Out of the Cocoon Again

Our stand consisted of selected framed and captioned photos from the 'Out of the Cocoon' exhibition previously held at the Crafts Museum in New Delhi in August, storyboards with recent designs from Amrut Patel and Devendra Jamsandekar, a National Institute of Design student, together with a hanging rail of scarf and stole samples. A rail of furnishing fabric samples, yarn samples and a 'Tasar By Pradan' sign completed the display. After 3

changes in as many days the stand fascia said Central Silk Board on one side and United Nations Development Programme on the other. This completely confused visitors who had no idea who we were. Much time was spent explaining what we did.

Her Excellency Srimati Ramadevi, the governor of Karnataka, inaugurated the congress on December 3. We had managed to get an invitation to attend so we made the most of the opportunity to find out precisely who had arrived and to meet as many people as possible. It was very pleasant to see so many familiar faces. I encouraged them to visit our stand at the exhibition. Many people involved in silk only know a little about tasar silk as most of the market is in mulberry. The dominant image of tasar is of a stiff natural coloured silk in old-fashioned designs.

The 6 days of the exhibition were long and busy. Around 50,000 people attended the show, many more than expected. After the first day, when every question was "how much is this?" we put up signs saying, "samples only - not for sale". Because of the crowds and the absence of business hours, trade enquiries could not be properly dealt with on the stand. This meant that Khitish had to stay behind after the end of the show to visit companies in the area.

Interest in Tasar

Bangalore is unquestionably the capital of silk with an extremely high appreciation of mulberry silk. Few people, however, seemed to know much about tasar but were keen to discover more and to buy it. The novelty factor was also important for the market, as people always want to see something new. Experimentation and design development are increasingly important in this market as it becomes more and more fashion-led. Fashion

shows were held most evenings for the visitors. One show was for non-mulberry silks and included some of our shawls.

Although we could not sell anything directly from the stand, we started a database of interested members of the public. This will be used to invite potential customers when we exhibit in Bangalore later this year. We have established that there is a definite market for tasar in India as well as overseas, particularly for the new designs we showed. The old image of tasar is starting to change in the minds of buyers and decision makers. The design potential is now beginning to appear.

Many traders and exporters visited our stand and expressed a great deal of interest in both metreage (of the fabric) and yarn. The show was extremely useful as contacts were made with both overseas delegates from the congress and Indian delegates. It was as beneficial to Pradan as doing a trade show and much less expensive. Our aims in attending were met: contacts, publicity, sales, promotion, increased awareness of tasar and the role Pradan plays in promoting livelihoods. We took many sampling orders for yarn from both Indian and overseas companies. Our problem now is that we do not have any yarn available. Demand is certainly outstripping supply at present and we run a very real risk of losing potential customers and credibility due to our inability to supply even sample orders.

This is our next challenge because in the world of business, you don't often get a second chance. If you let the customer down first time then they will rarely look at your products again, particularly in a competitive market for export. We need to co-ordinate our tasar operations so that everything runs together smoothly with clarity of communication between all the different operations.

Close Encounters with Didis

An apprentice is confronted with the results of inadequate attention to group building

Meenakshi Tripathi

NewsReach, November-December 1999

Although the concept of *mahila mandal* (MM) was not new to me, I got to know of its nitty-gritty in the third phase of my apprenticeship. I already had smatterings of the idea behind organising women's savings and credit groups. But more than anything else, my initiation into group meetings helped clarify the theoretical underpinnings. I narrate some interesting incidents and the learning that emanated from them.

My first experiences were with self-help groups (SHGs) of the Pandewara cluster in Barhi. Fourteen groups had been formed in the cluster. They ran smoothly for a year or two but all of a sudden, some groups became irregular and others defunct. The leaders of some groups became passive and the spirit and zeal of the members to run the groups and make plans for the future diminished. One cause of irregularities was the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) programme, which due to a well meaning but inappropriate move, resulted in some people stalling the processes of the groups. Members who were not allotted houses under the scheme stopped attending group meetings, making the cluster virtual deadwood.

Another critical cause was the way loans were taken. Some members had taken more loans than they could repay. The defaulters stopped attending meetings because they were unwilling to face other group members or were not interested in returning the loans. As a result, group meetings came to a standstill. Since leadership was rotational, it so happened sometimes that when a new leader replaced an old one, she found it difficult to

manage the group. In some groups, members were forced to become leaders but the dominance of the old leaders remained. As a result, the new leaders were not getting any chance to handle things independently. Added to all these factors was the lack of ownership of the members and the irregularities of the accountants.

First Visit

My first group meeting was in Nawardi, where I had gone to attend 2 meetings.

When I arrived, the members gathered in a place for the meeting. After introducing myself, I asked the didis to introduce themselves and brief me about their group. After introduction the didis said that the group meetings ceased because of IAY and the passiveness of the new leader. The leadership problem seemed quite complex.

Older leaders complained about the new leaders, who confessed they were forcibly made leaders against their wishes, which is why they could not perform adequately. According to demands of a new leader, I facilitated the group to choose new leaders.

I thought the problems of the group were solved. The feeling that I could solve problems heightened my spirits. But on later visits I realised that the problem lay elsewhere. I identified other problems like some of the members staying in their mother's house and non-payment of loans along with interest for several years by most members.

According to demands of a new leader, I facilitated the group to choose new leaders. I thought the problems of the group were solved. The feeling that I could solve problems heightened my spirits.

The other group meeting in Mayapur attracted me on my first visit to the village. The attendance was satisfactory and the meeting was quite disciplined. The didis were more active and had more potential unlike their counterparts in Nawardi. One didi knew how to conduct the meeting in the absence of the accountant. The meeting ran smoothly. But when I came closer to the didis, I identified similar problems like defaulters and members staying in their mother's house. The didis wanted to remove these members from the group.

There were also leadership problems. The didis of Mayapur had kept the registers, boxes and keys with former leaders. The new leaders refused their responsibilities and the old leaders were forced to continue. I observed that the new incumbents had negative attitudes and lacked ownership of the group. They neither had interest in attending to the group nor in attending cluster meetings.

Later I found this situation common amongst almost all the groups.

Once in a group meeting of Anuradha group of Nareina, the didis found out that Rs 300 from their box had been given to an outsider, who was a relative of a didi and who disappeared after taking a loan for medical purposes. The didi whose relative took the loan and those who kept the box and the key were involved. The meeting turned into pandemonium. Everybody blamed others for the incident. The bedlam continued for almost half-an-hour followed by a lull when everybody looked at me for resolution. I was quiet all this while and opened my mouth only when they asked me something.

But the moment I asked my first question, the chaos returned. I felt helpless and did not know how to control the situation. The didis finally decided to tackle the situation later. Since I was maintaining the books that day, I was at a loss. I could neither show Rs 300 as cash in box nor as a loan against a member. When I mentioned this, one didi spoke for the others and said that they would give Rs 20 each and keep it in the box so that there would be no shortage. They would take their money back when the loan was repaid. The others agreed with her and meeting concluded peacefully.

Poignant Moments

On the same day I came across a very painful situation in another group meeting. A 20-year-old didi with 3 children told us how she had been virtually abandoned by her husband. Her husband was in Bombay since the past three and half years and he was neither writing letters nor sending money. She was facing difficulties in feeding the children. The scene became poignant when she was describing her days of misery. She wanted to withdraw from the group because she could not put together Rs 5 required for savings. She had made up her mind to withdraw and did not listen to me. The other members too forced me to strike out her name from the register. I regretted my action but found no other way to solve the problem. I went back with a heavy heart and a sense of guilt for I could not do anything to help the didi. I realised that social factors influenced the smooth running of the groups in a major way.

After completing my first round of visits to all the groups, I noticed that due to irregular group meetings, the amount of interest was higher than the loan in all the groups. The members were not paying the interest

and seemed unconcerned about this fact. When I shared these problems with my field guide Mala in the office, she suggested a plan. She asked me to help all the members of each group know clearly about the position of their individual loan and interest. This would help them take care of the situation. I started to implement this idea from my next visit to different groups.

The process had an excellent impact on the Nala group of Chapri. When I made everyone aware about their individual loan and interest amounts, they seemed quite serious. The process also helped the women in identifying the defaulters, in pointing out those didis who had not repaid the loan and interest since last 3 years, the didis who had taken loans more than their savings and the didis having more interest against their names than what actually should have been. One didi said she would repay the total amount debited against her name. The amount was Rs 5,520 (Rs 3,000 loan and Rs 2,520 interest). She repaid Rs 3,520 in the meeting and promised to return the rest in the next meeting. Everyone was surprised by her gesture.

Effective Exercise

I applied the same process in the Chameli group of Chapri. A didi had taken Rs 50 more than 2 years ago. The interest amounted to Rs 80, which made everybody realise that once the loan was taken by somebody, the amount to be repaid went on increasing whether she remained in the group or in her mother's house. The process seemed effective as the didis realised the fact very easily. This process continued in all the groups and had more or less similar impact. In some groups, the members had realised that irregular meetings led to the didis defaulting and to save in time.

I learnt a few things through these interactions. The prevailing opinion about new leaders was that they were more passive because Pradan team members did not give them the time they gave to train the earlier leaders. They felt that they should have been trained and guided in the same way as the older leaders. Acceding to some, the change in leadership was the main cause of irregularities in the group meetings. Many felt that irregular group meetings was the sole cause for the delay in repayment.

But overall I found that everyone knew why they had formed their group and how they could benefit from it. The earlier leaders in almost all groups had not lost their interest and enthusiasm. They continued to dominate proceedings of the groups. I wondered why the new leaders were not like their predecessors. I also observed that only those new leaders who had healthy relations with the earlier leaders of their group were active and interested to run the group. I also observed that the earlier leaders had taken big loans and had not repaid for years. This might have discouraged others and resulted in lack of ownership in the groups.

The prevailing opinion about new leaders was that they were more passive because Pradan team members did not give them the time they gave to train the earlier leaders. They felt that they should have been trained and guided in the same way as the earlier leaders.

People News and Events

● OUTREACH, in collaboration with Pradan, has instated the Jimmy Memorial Lecture, to be held each year in January. The 1st memorial lecture was held on January 18, 2002 in Bangalore. S Ray, Principal Secretary, Rural Development, Government of Andhra Pradesh, delivered the lecture entitled "Participatory Watershed Development". Vijay Mahajan and J K Arora shared their reminiscences. OUTREACH Chairperson Nandita Ray presided over the proceedings. D Narendranath attended the lecture.

● D Narendranath attended the first policy sub-group meeting of Sa-Dhan at Bangalore on January 18. This was aimed at the formulation of its policy advocacy agenda on micro-finance for 2002. A number of small and large organisations took part, including BASIX, RGVN, OUTREACH, MYRADA, Sanghamitra and CARE.

● Anish Kumar of our Kesla team participated in the National Level Consultative Meet of the Regional Research Laboratory of CSIR in Bhopal on January 23-24, 2002. The meeting was held under the aegis of the UNDP-DST-TDC-TRC Network, and focused on extension of successful techno-managerial packages (TMP) by Technology Resource Centres. Pradan was invited to share its experience in the TMP to promote broiler rearing.

● Two self-help groups (SHGs) promoted by Pradan in Hoshangabad of Madhya Pradesh were sanctioned project financing of Rs 2.50 lakh each under the government's SGSY for broiler rearing. The groups received their sanction papers from Shri Venkaiah Naidu, the Honourable Minister for Rural Development, in a function held in Hoshangabad.

● A group of 21 women leaders of SHGs linked with UNICEF's convergent community action (CCA) projects in Jharkhand and Bihar visited Delhi for 3 days from February 8-10, 2002 to

meet the finance minister and other policy organisations. They proceeded to Ahmedabad to spend 2 days at SEWA. Eleven women leaders of Pradan-promoted SHGs in Barhi, Hazaribagh were part of this entourage.

● Soumen Biswas attended a World Food Programme sponsored workshop on "Food Security" in Ranchi on February 20-21, 2002.

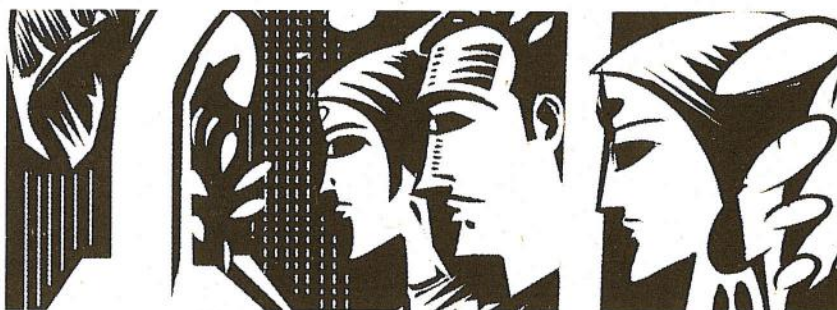
● Eighteen Development Apprentices attended the 2nd phase of the Process Awareness and Sensitivity Module from February 24-28, 2002.

● Twelve of the 18 apprentices who joined the 24th batch graduated to the second phase of the programme. Five of them are agriculture graduates from BCKV and OUAT, 2 are engineers from REC Silchar and Jorhat Engineering College, one is an MSW from Vishvabharati, 3 are veterinary doctors from Khanapara and one is a graduate from IIFM, Bhopal.

● Gumla-based Ajit Naik and Ashok Kumar spent a week in February evaluating the organic composting project promoted by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India). AKRSP (I) promoted the programme from 1998-2000 in 3 Gujarat districts as an entrepreneurial activity with women. Additional purposes were to provide quality organic manure and help women access mainstream natural resources.

● Poulami Roy Chowdhury, an intern in her third year of undergraduate studies at Swarthmore in the USA, is spending 2 months (February and March 2002) with Pradan. Her objective is to understand what micro-credit has accomplished and to what extent.

● The newsletter of the Watershed Organisation Trust (Fourth Quarter, 2001) carried a reprint of Dibyendu Chaudhuri's report in NewsReach May 2001 on his visit to the WOTR.



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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