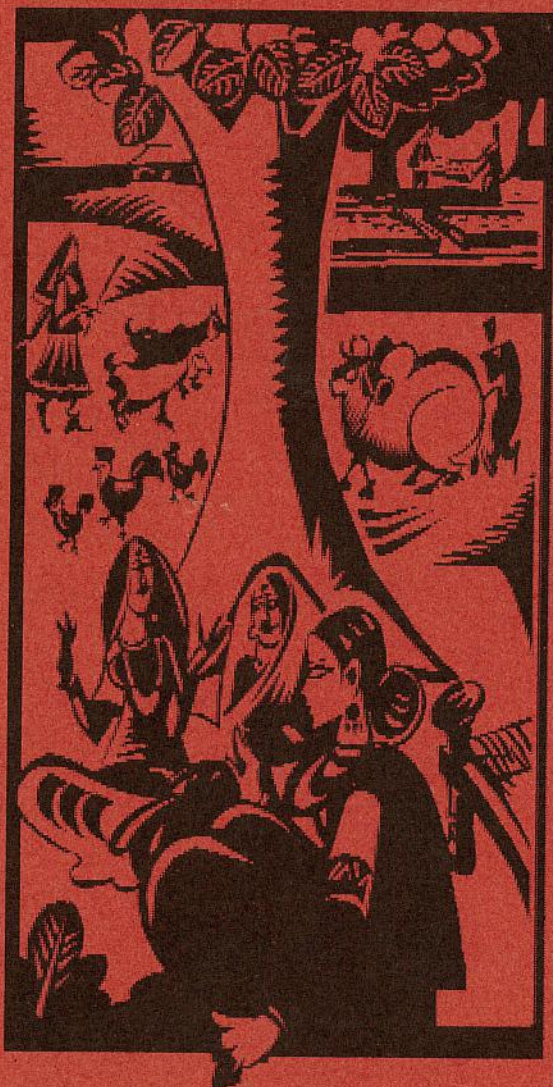


# News Reach

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## Letter to the Editor

### Fixed is Best

This is in response to the queries raised by Malcolm Harper (*Equity of Benefits*, NewsReach October 2003) on my article on homogeneity of groups (*Varied Functioning*, NewsReach July 2003). The Balliguda team provides this response based on our experience with self-help groups (SHGs) promoted by us at Balliguda in the past 3 years. Our response is based on the assumption that the higher the credit availed by a member the greater the benefit to her. It is our experience that in case of poorer members, the value of a small loan like Rs 100 taken for purchasing BPL (below poverty line) rice is much more than the value of a higher loan taken by a better-off member such as a Rs 500 loan for repairing the house.

While providing loans in a group, priority is given to credit for emergencies, which is availed more by the poorer members than the better off. Here the opportunity cost (time and effort required if loan is taken from other local sources) is more in case of a poorer member. Besides financial gain, the poorer members gain more socio-political ground by way of having equal say in the decision-making process, responsibility sharing, confrontation, etc.

We feel that mixed groups (not highly skewed) are better than the ones where there are only poorer members as the former type provides poorer members exposure to the instances of utilisation of loans by better-off members of the same group. The poorer members learn from the experience of the better-off members, who initiate various activities with their comparatively higher risk-taking ability, which adds to the confidence of the poorer members.

However, a promoting agency like ours needs to consider different factors in these mixed groups. For instance, the poorer members generally get lost in the group. Special efforts need to be taken by us to make them come out in the group. For a promoting agency like us, suitability of an activity for a member should not depend on the savings of the member. Rather it should be on the credit behaviour of the member, interest level of the member for that activity, etc.

Moreover, for any particular group, we should come out with different activities so that all the members of any group take up some kind of activity that is best suitable for them. A mixed group should be such that there should be a sizeable representation of the poorer members rather than a few who generally dropout in due course of time under pressure from better-off members.

Rilata Patnaik and other members of the Balliguda team, Orissa



## Updates

### Maize Intervention Successful

The Khunti team promoted maize and pigeon pea cultivation during the last Kharif season with considerable success. We followed a systematic strategy. To start with we conducted concept meetings at the hamlet level with self-help group (SHG) members and their husbands in approximately 45 hamlets with 1,300 families. Interested families deposited Rs 100 as registration fee. We selected 30 service providers (one for every 30-50 participants), undertook land measurement camps in every hamlet for all plots and facilitated loan documentation for ICICI loan. We procured inputs (5 tonnes of seeds and 60 tonnes of fertiliser basal dose) and stored them in 21 stock centres across our project area.

On the technical front we ensured the proper layout of the field and sowing in rows at specified distances (achievement 98%). Sowing was done on 510 acres. We also facilitated inter-culture operations (weeding, etc.) at 10 and 30 days (achievement 80%), furadon application (achievement 80%) and application of other pesticides on need such as for termite, aphid or betel attacks during long dry spells (achievement 70%). We assisted in harvesting, packing and marketing and in the repayment of loans.

The status of repayment is good. Farmers received Rs 12.08 lakh from ICICI Bank. Till date most loans have been repaid except about Rs 1 lakh. On an average, people harvested yields of 11-12 quintals per acre. Gross income was in the range of Rs 5,000 per acre from an investment of about Rs 1,700-1,900. Some families who followed the intercultural operations properly got yields of up to 15 quintals per acre.

### Pradan Papers Appreciated in IWMI Workshop

The International Water Management Institute organised a workshop in January 2004 at Anand, Gujarat for authors of the various research papers for the Central India Initiative (CinI) of the IWMI-Tata research programme. The researchers presented their findings and recommendations of the second phase of this research project. Nearly 25 studies were presented in 2 days. The studies presented successful cases of water management in tribal areas, tribal irrigation census of a few selected districts, water management technologies used by them, river basin studies, etc.

Participants from Pradan were Manas Satpathy, Arnab Chakrabarty and Kashinath Metya. Kashi presented a Raigarh district study, Arnab presented the Purulia case of paddy intervention with tribal families and Manas (along with former Pradanite Gurucharan Naik) presented the study on technologies used by tribal people in 3 selected districts of central India. All the 3 studies were well received by the workshop participants.

Dr Sanjeev Phansalkar, principal researcher for the programme, will prepare a synthesis paper of all the studies that will be presented in the IWMI annual partners' meet during February 17-19. State-specific project concepts will subsequently be developed and shared with the respective states. A workshop is also planned in Delhi to share the findings with the potential donors who can support some pilot projects in a few states. For details visit [www.pradan.net/resources/weblinks](http://www.pradan.net/resources/weblinks).

## Promoting an Ancillary Corp

Service providers could complement Pradan professionals' efforts to promote larger numbers of livelihoods amongst the rural poor

Ajit Kumar Naik

Pradan professionals working in the field provide all the services to promote livelihoods amongst the rural poor. As a result of this, each professional's outreach is restricted to a few families (within 100). If these numbers increase we oft fail to respond properly to the livelihood support services needed by all the families.

Since we professionals provide the entire gamut of services at the doorstep, knowledge of backward and forward linkages are often limited to a particular professional or field team. For example, procurement of high yielding varieties (HYV) of paddy seed in large quantities has various dimensions, the experience of which is restricted within the domain of the teams. This often dilutes the vital component of 'enabling' communities as well as sustainability of our work. Trying to do everything, when each team is planning all-round livelihood enhancement, does not always meet the demands of the times.

### Scaling Up Activities

On the other hand, once a team demonstrates a livelihood package and professionals acquire the skill of understanding the 'pulse of the communities' blended with an attitude of continuous upgrading, that particular activity could be scaled up (involving much larger number of families) with the help of service providers (SPs).

Let me further elaborate on this. The present role of a Pradan professional includes demonstrating successful livelihood packages; motivating households by exposure and direct interaction, facilitating and monitoring group and cluster meetings of self-

help groups (SHGs), arranging programme funds and liaising with external agencies.

At certain points, our interventions require rigorous follow-up. For example, paddy nurseries are transplanted after 20 days, generally between July 15 and August 1. It is, however, not possible for one professional looking after 100 to 200 families (with other programmes to follow through) to correctly monitor and ensure the correct process of transplanting. Also, it is not logical and cost effective to deploy a professional for an activity that could as well be taken care of by locally trained people.

### Local Arrangements

In most teams SHG memberships ranges from 1,000 to 8,000. Our mission is to work for livelihood enhancement, mainly with these families. Therefore we have now opted for local computer *munshis* to take care of SHG accounts, thus taking a major load off from professionals.

We also have a system through which we intend to sustain the development initiative started by Pradan once we shift our role or withdraw. We do this mainly by promoting people's organisations such as cooperatives and SHG federations. These organisations are structured to 'provide services'.

Similarly, by creating a pool of local human resources, we could enable the community. For example, SHG accounts could be kept by an external paid person selected and paid for by Pradan but we would rather search for and train persons from the community itself, who would be paid for by the SHGs. We have thus enabled the SHGs to gain



access to a control over accounting services.

There is a thin line of distinction between the role of providing services and the role of enabling. For instance, we could prescribe a strict process for paddy promotion to the SPs that they are then supposed to follow. On the other hand, we might provide training to them on different kinds of fertilisers and seeds, and their chemical content and usefulness.

In our present practice, the task of 'enabling' is strictly in our *jhola*. The SPs do not proactively pursue this. There is nothing wrong with it as long as the Pradan professional is able to deliver such services in the proper manner to our clients. But we have to keep in mind that while scaling-up activities, professionals may not be able to keep in regular and frequent contact with each family. In that case SPs could deliver the proposed enabling role.

Information flow and data collection is a very vital part of our activities. SPs can facilitate this task to a large extent. We can do this by systematically allocating responsibility to SPs. We will have to keep in mind that the role of SPs and their interactions with professionals in different teams, or even in different pockets of the same project area, will vary according to the activity and maturity of the project.

We can, therefore, say that the basic objectives of the SP would be to:

- Sustain the development initiative,
- Scale up activities, and
- Enable the community.

Apart from these, SPs would also play a vital role in the flow of information to and from Pradan via its professionals.

### Types of SPs

Local people who are capable and available could easily be SPs. Selection is a critical task. The service users need to do this, after which Pradan could adequately train them. A service provider can be a promotional agent for a particular activity or work as an extension worker or be an entrepreneur. It is important to sort out in our minds the ways we would like to utilise them.

The first category involves skill in organising the community around an activity, sharing the concept, setting norms, etc. It is more of a facilitator's role, which is also developmental in nature. The second one is of performing a pre-designated set of tasks. Sometimes the first and second roles overlap. Setting norms in SHGs is an example. Initially for groups, this is developmental in nature, which is facilitated by a Pradan professional. But follow-up could be handed over to a task performer. However, it also requires understanding and facilitation skills. Examples of the third one, an entrepreneur who becomes a SP once the activities are established, can be found in tasar grainage entrepreneurs, computer *munshis* and agri-input suppliers.

### Gumla Experience

Our Gumla project has about 6,000 SHG members. Almost 90% of them own land. The average land holding is 1 hectare. Almost 50% of the members do not have food sufficiency. The productivity of paddy can easily be doubled by introducing HYV and better cultivation practices.

After credit needs are fulfilled or avenues opened, the requirement is to streamline input and output services at the families' doorstep. Almost 30% of the people have homestead land and water for irrigation.

These people can opt for intensive vegetable cultivation around the year, ensuring Rs 5-6,000 as additional income. We therefore decided that we require one SP per hamlet to increase agricultural productivity.

We started utilising SPs as agricultural extension workers. We selected local village youth, grooming them through motivation and training to provide certain regular services. We were clear in the beginning that we needed a person from each hamlet where we work. One objective was to scale up activities in those hamlets where successful demonstrations had already been made.

Our other objective was to motivate the SPs themselves to practice more scientific agriculture. Besides being a demonstration point for our packages, better productivity would make them confident. A person providing agricultural services should himself be a good farmer. We chose people who were sociable and mobile. We concentrated our efforts with people who were eager willing to learn.

### Selection Process

We first shared the need, concern and concept of SPs in SHG and cluster meetings and generated a list of names. The idea was that the SHG members should propose at least 2 names, ensuring their stake from the very beginning. Our criteria for shortlisted candidates were:

- Persons from the 20 to 40 years age group who would be staying in village in the near future
- He had to be sociable and accessible
- He should have a general interest in agriculture
- He should possess an attitude to learn new things and capability to teach others
- He should have reasonable time to spare

and be mobile (own a bicycle)

We then called 100 candidates to make a final selection and share concepts. The candidates filled up a bio-data form after concept sharing. We then used a group discussion (GD) tool for selection. We could not eliminate too many candidates from the GD process since sufficient numbers were not available. We also graded the socio-analytical skills of the candidates for future use.

The results of this process were mixed. A few vocal persons during the exercise stepped down after we explained the responsibilities of a SP. On the other hand, some who were quiet initially subsequently performed very well in demonstrating our packages to the selected farmers.

We then provided the selected candidates orientation and training on technical aspects. We designed a yearlong training programme starting with 2-day orientation called *Swabalamban ki Oor* (Towards Self-sufficiency, see box 1 on page 6). We trained the SPs as agricultural teachers, who in turn were supposed to give weekly classes in their own and nearby villages. The SPs will continue to receive practical and theoretical training for 2 days a month over a year. We intend to work closely so that their capacities can be built up.

### Garnering Respect

It helped in boosting the agri-tech knowledge of the SPs to a basic level so they were able to deal better in prescribing various practices. We found that farmers were giving SPs special value and respect. There was a sense of fulfilment for the SPs. They are now aware about how to check seed quality, fertilisers, expiry date of pesticides, prices and quality of pesticides, etc.



**Box 1: Swabalamban ki Oor: First phase of 2-day orientation workshop**

**Day 1**

11-11.15 am	Registration and tag distribution, minutes register .
11-11.30 am	Game: <i>nadi-kinara</i> .
11.30-11.45 am	Introduction.
11.45 am-12.15 pm	Chinese whispers for attentive listening & communication.
12.15-1 pm	Content briefing, scheduling, norms (with discussions), etc. What they know about Pradan and what more they want to know, about Pradan, objective of the workshop.
1-2 pm	Lunch.
2-3 pm	Visioning exercise about their villages 5 years from now. Drawing the vision on chart paper and pasting it on the wall.
3-3.30 pm	Scope and opportunity in agriculture. Sharing Pradan's agriculture experience, generate data on vegetables.
3.30-4.15 pm	Generating vegetable calendars in subgroups.
4.15-5 pm	Presentation & discussion.
5-5.30 pm	Finalisation of vegetable calendar, making subgroups for the next day.
6.30 pm	Dinner.
7-10 pm	Visuals on agriculture, composting, watershed, film Laagan.

**Day 2**

8.30-9 am	Preparation of presentations.
9-9.30 am	Presentation on movie: The 'things they have learnt'.
9.30-10.30 am	Maize and <i>arhar</i> : why, how, economics, package, roles & responsibilities of SP, remuneration.
10.30-11 am	Participant's views and queries. Discussion in subgroups.
11-11.30 am	Presentation and answers.
11.30 am - 12.30 pm	Paddy experience sharing, data generation on impact and opinions on coming year.
12.30-1.30 pm	Land calculations, format sharing.
1.30-2.30 pm	Lunch.
2.30- 3.30 pm	Scheduling for hamlet visit jointly by SPs and professionals. Fixing date of next meeting and mode of reporting. Pamphlet distribution.
3.30 - 4 pm	Feedback and closure.

Although we started with 100 SPs, 6 months down the line we are continuing with 50. The main reason for dropouts is that we have not yet established our strong presence within those pockets because of manpower shortage or change of professional. In a few villages the SPs have been made the 'point of demonstration' for the rest of the farmers. It has tremendous value in generating conviction and enthusiasm among neighbouring farmers.

The SPs are supposed to meet farmers regularly and hold weekly meetings in their respective hamlets. Although a formal meeting of SPs is scheduled monthly with our professionals for monitoring and training, they are supposed to report to our field office on a weekly basis.

Most SPs are themselves farmers. During peak agricultural season, when everybody has a lot of work, it becomes difficult to spare extra time, especially when an average farmer needs a regular push. On an average we have found that, except in a few cases, most of the SPs have not pushed sufficiently to ensure implementation of the full package in the right time. Therefore, as far as the SPs are concerned it requires confidence, motivational skill and remuneration linked to performance.

**Remuneration for SPs**

According to ballpark calculations, if a SP can earn Rs 900 to Rs 1,200 per month, it would be financially attractive to him. Thus on an average he could earn Rs 10,000 by providing the various services. For such earnings a person may choose to specialise in one or more areas out of the various activities that we promote.

Last year we asked the farmers to pay

Rs 100 towards the SPs' remuneration after a successful demonstration of Kharif tomato. Around 150 farmers paid. The calculated time requirement was 25 man-days @ Rs 40 per day. Therefore, Rs 1,000 was paid by a group of 10-15 farmers for vegetable cultivation in one season (2 days a week for 3 months). This was apart from the promotional cost met by Pradan.

For services in the agriculture sector, we thought very broadly of implementing the following models:

- Seed companies and seed dealers to SP: Remuneration on sales, free crop demonstration etc.
- PRADAN to SP: Remuneration by subsidising the cost partly, creating opportunities, co-ordination role, capacities building.
- Communities to SP: Remuneration by paying certain percentage of profit earned.

These avenues of remuneration are self-explanatory but things need to be worked out. We have to keep in mind that the communities with whom we work are not traditionally agrarian. We need to figure out to the extent they can be motivated to pay for these services. This is an area of concern.

Similarly, tagging income with the seed companies and dealers needs intensive work. This can be done by systematically giving an exposure to 'our reach with farmers' (on an average 5,000 to 6,000 per district) to the various stakeholders.

Regarding the remuneration package our assumption was that we would create opportunities and space in the area for the SP, where he will be groomed and developed. Each SP would earn based on his quality of service. It is hence entrepreneurial in nature within a stipulated time period.



## Entrepreneurial SPs

Generally under circumstances where the economy is bearish and the market not competitive, both the qualities are thought to be mutually exclusive. But in principle, a good entrepreneur needs to provide quality service and vice-versa. A particular kind of person can be targeted for this role.

We are talking of those who generally sell seeds in local market. Basically he would be a reasonably good farmer. He might spend 2-3 days in such business in a week and remain engaged in agriculture the rest of the days. If such people can be groomed and trained, they can spare a little more time on market days to the farmers (who often come to weekly *haat*) for agriculture extension services.

We may keep a register in that shop to collect the desired information. We could also be present in the initial days to acquaint farmers and the service providers with what is expected of them. Few of such SPs may act as entrepreneurs who will ultimately service the entire input needs.

Till now in Gumla SPs have been trained on basic concepts of improved seeds, fertilisers, pest management, etc. They can now prescribe certain pesticides, seed varieties and how to check expiry dates, etc. to the farmers. The SPs have helped in generating the indent, identifying the plots and distributing the inputs. Their own plots have been good demonstration points for others. The SPs have also helped in marketing, especially tomato. The induction of SPs has enhanced the information flow between Pradan professionals and farmers. We have also made attempts to develop training modules including the use of audiovisual aids like Annadata.

## Concerns

The main problem that we foresee is finding suitable persons, those who also practice basic agriculture, have entrepreneurial abilities, socially accepted and motivated to serve in the long run. A majority of our SPs are farmers. Multiple crops cultivated simultaneously have created problems when they had to cultivate paddy on their own fields.

The SPs shared the technical know-how correctly. But getting the right things done for others in time was not in their hands. They faced problems in motivating others to practice the complete package. We could not adequately attend to and groom the SPs in dealing with the community. Hence they were not always able to demonstrate the theories in which we trained them.

Filling up various monitoring formats was really difficult for most of them. The team therefore needs to more strictly monitor the programme. We also faced problems in training related logistics arrangements (especially when such place was not available in our office premises) and development of training modules. We also need to work out the time management of our professionals in the changed scenario.

Our strategy for the coming year is to promote more SPs for larger coverage of our activities. We therefore need to look at the sustainability of the programme and the financing for training and supporting them. Lastly, we also need to think about who will monitor their activities after Pradan withdraws from a particular area, and how it will be done.

## Let Community Leaders Motivate

Building the capacity of leaders of self-help groups to conduct behavioural training within the overall format of membership training could yield significant dividends

Sarbani Bose

Most self-help groups (SHGs) in the Poraiyahat block of Pradan's Godda project in Jharkhand are more than 4 years old. Since they are so old, it is difficult for professionals to enforce certain new norms in these groups. For instance, some groups flatly refused to implement the fine system and charge weekly interest. These new norms were not considered essential by SHG members as they have been operating 'successfully' for the last 5-6 years. Most have 4-5 bank linkages.

However, the long list of SHG defaulters in Poraiyahat and the negative attitude of bankers was a matter of concern. It was high time for us to initiate activity to counter this trend. It was necessary to conduct large-scale membership trainings for SHG members. We found it easier to motivate groups that were 1-2 years old as the older and so-called 'mature' group members claimed that they knew more than us (the 'new' professionals).

In December 2002 we heard membership training modules in our Barhi project near Hazaribagh were being run in full swing. We also learnt that local trainers impart such training. We sent a few SHG leaders from Godda to Barhi to see these exercises. Eight group leaders were selected based on their education and communication skill. Three of them were tribal since 30% of groups in Poraiyahat were tribal. The group leaders attended 3 training events.

Mira Singh (a successful trainer from Barhi) came to the Godda project in January. We organised a few training

events where our local members who had attended the Barhi training programmes were asked to conduct a few sessions. It was a great learning experience for professionals who attended. We then selected 4 local trainers, 2 of them tribal, to impart membership training.

## Behavioural Aspects

While designing the training sessions we included some behavioural inputs (see box 1 on page 10). The present module followed by most Pradan teams does not really pay any attention to the behavioural aspects of membership. This has been our understanding from the feedback after the process awareness and sensitivity workshops and entrepreneurship motivation training (EMT) events conducted for our staff. It is my case that we seriously need to review whether we should include some sessions related to these, which would be conducted by local community leaders.

This is necessary given the scale of activities that needs to be undertaken. We can argue that unlike EMT exercises where professionals attend different phases to become EMT trainers, we do not have training for trainers exercises for membership training. Thus professionals are handicapped while conducting such trainings.

## Poraiyahat Scenario

The case of Poraiyahat is illustrative. I have been working here for more than 2 years. Most of the other professionals in this block have just graduated from being development apprentices. Language is one of the biggest problems we face here as more than



Box 1: SHG Membership Training

Day	Steps	Methodology followed	Time
Day 1		Participants asked to introduce themselves (name, husband's name, household members, condition of life) in pairs and introduce partners	45 minutes
	Sharing objective of the training and explaining responsibility of participants	Interaction on why they have come here and participants duty to share their learning with other members not able to participate	20 minutes
	Causes of poverty	Marble game and discussion on the results	1 hour
	Who is poorest in the family	Listing work that women and men do and the inequity in rights	30 minutes
	Women are nameless	Asking them about the names and bad names of women	20 minutes
	LUNCH		
	Level of independence of women	Ribbon game	45 minutes
	Stake of women in livelihoods	Presentation of picture showing various household work	30 minutes
	Cultural Programmes	Role-play showing evils of society and songs	Till Dinner
Day 2			
	Brief review of the previous day	Ensuring participation of each member	45 minutes
	Need for organisation	Fish game.	45 minutes
	Group meeting normal and ideal	Role play	1 hour 45 minutes
	Sharing responsibility	Brick game.	45 minutes.
	Lunch		
	Structure of SHG	Concept of cluster and federation.	45 minutes
	Relation with external agencies	Concept of bank linkage, etc.	45 minutes
	Cultural Programmes	Role play	Till dinner
Day 3			
	Review of previous day		45 minutes
	Success story	Showing pictures of successful women	1 hour
	Lunch		
	Action plan	Asking each member about the plan for her group	2 hours
	Feedback		

30% of the members are Santhal. For training like this we need to understand the society and their culture well because many sessions are related to social change like status of women and their stake in livelihoods. We are thus left with only 1-2 professionals in each team who have all these 'local' skills added to the skill of providing training. How can we then train such a large number of group members?

I also believe that solely imparting training cannot be the job of professionals. It is our job to design the sessions for each training exercise according to the age and need of the groups. We also need to assess whether the training imparted needs any change. We are also responsible for providing proper feedback to the groups.

While concentrating on these aspects, we can utilise the potential of community leaders who had proven skills in motivating members in clusters as well as in forming groups over the years as membership trainers. We need to train them by providing various exposure visits and regularly guiding them.

### Tapping Local Potential

We have been practising this approach in Poraiyahat with some success. The potential of these leaders in knowing the pulse of the community and narrating their own success stories can be well utilised in these membership trainings.

We have of course modified some of the sessions after conducting a series of such training events. These changes were effected after feedback from professionals as well as the local trainers, keeping in view the particular community participating and the motivation level of the groups. For

instance, in case of Santhal women the status of women in society is better than non-tribals. We therefore focus more on drinking habits that remains one of the biggest problems of the Santhal community.

When we organised the series of training events in villages, we started with the cluster approach since the number of groups was quite large. We conducted training for 6 members from each group from each cluster. We had to ensure that both vocal and less vocal members participated. We restricted the number of trainees to 25. We attended each training exercise to ensure quality inputs.

The training exercise is for 2 and half days. Since it is residential, the following factors need to be taken into account:

- Good water facility (hand pump or well).
- A nearby pond is preferred for bathing.
- A *sabha bhawan* or school a little isolated from the village.
- Nearby villages should ideally be co-operative.
- Arranging for chart paper, sketch pens and posters at the training venue.

At the end of each training exercise, we were satisfied because the trainers conducted each of these successfully without hesitation. Although it will take more time for perfection, the output of these events cannot be ignored. The local trainers better dealt with some of the sessions such as gender sensitisation than us professionals. They also did a better job of narrating true cases related to their own life and villages (see box 2 on page 12), which had a deep impact on trainees.

The local songs of the *mahila mandals* emphasising women's education and



## Box 2: Hemanti Devi's Story

Hemanti Devi, a trainer, narrated her own story in one training exercise. She is now an accountant of her group and an active member of her cluster. Due to her active role in *mahila mandals*, women from different villages know her and consult her in case of problems in their groups.

Hemanti Devi has 5 daughters and one son. She says proudly that all her daughters went to school. One of her daughters is an accountant of the group in her in-law's village. Her husband helps her in household work when she goes for some meeting or other outside work (auditing group accounts or attending cluster meetings).

Life was quite different a few years ago. Her husband used to drink regularly and beat her. She was not allowed to go out or speak with outsiders. Somehow she joined a *mahila manda*! since she knew she could not continue to be like this.

Writing the books of accounts for her group was another bold step. Gradually she started revolting against her husband and contributing to the family income. She started visiting other groups. Even government officials approached her for pulse polio campaign and other work.

When she ended her story, there was a long silence in the room. The reaction was clearly evident in the participants' eyes. I knew that I could never narrate a similar story if I were to conduct the same session.

social status were the highlights. At night trainees prepared various skits to perform on the next day. Despite a hectic schedule, there was always energy left for entertainment at night. On the last day, when we asked for feedback, there was a mixture of happiness and sadness among the participants. It was a totally new experience for them, which they said would remain with them for years.

### Post-Training Scenario

After the training exercises, professionals visited the groups and noticed significant change in members' behaviour (see box 3). The groups started their meetings with prayers and lighting *agarbattis* and ensured proper norms like regular interest payments. They have also instituted fines for latecomers and absentees. Even the children would sing the songs taught in these trainings. A few members who used to be permanent absentees have started showing up. What more can we expect?

In some of the training exercises we faced some problems with the men. They alleged that we were interfering with their social norms. In such cases, we tackled the problems very cautiously. Sometimes we even changed our venue. Each training exercise gave us a new sign of hope and learning.

With the help of these local trainers, we can now hope to cover a large number of groups, ensuring training to more members. This strategy is going to help professionals to focus more on activities rather than fire fighting in these groups.

We need to however note that groups of various ages require different types of inputs. For example, in groups that are older than 4-5 years, more emphasis has

## Box 3: Impact of the training on Sunita Mahila Mandal of Borachapar

The group is 4 years old. All members are tribal. The group had earlier been linked to a bank but like most groups, timely repayment and other norms were not strictly followed. Except 2 members, the others hardly participated in the meeting procedures. The group was selected for training. Six members were selected who in turn could influence other members.

In the training exercise the participation of these members was excellent. The weekly meetings of this group were regularly monitored to find out the effect of the training on the group.

To our pleasant surprise, they followed almost all the norms. The members discussed among themselves whether to give loan to a particular member or not and whether she can repay back on time. The meeting started with a prayer that had been taught in the training. They planned to do various activities that can increase their income.

The group was linked eventually linked with a bank for a cash credit limit of Rs 70,000 for agriculture. They cultivated *arhar* in Kharif and also planned for Rabi cultivation. After the training, participation of the group in cluster meetings has also increased.

Many groups went to Borachapar for exposure and were inspired by their performance. The group is now a good example for others.

to be given on group norms, the importance of timely repayment and how the group needs to think beyond savings and credit. Since the groups had been already exposed to various forums like clusters or block level meetings and participated in various social movements, we need not focus too much on the social empowerment aspect.

For groups that are less than 2-3 years old, both aspects need to be stressed. We need to help them reflect on why savings and credit is useful and also how it is going to influence their socio-economic role. Since these groups are newer, general awareness regarding banks and other external agencies is also a must.

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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](mailto:smitamohanty@pradan.net).



## Smallholder Solutions

Innovative smallholder solutions can improve food and livelihood security in South Asia

Dawn Rodriguez

Many farmers in developing countries depend heavily on rain-fed agriculture for food and livelihood security. They face a constant battle against water scarcity, drought, water contamination and other problems. There are, however, some farmers in rural communities who are practicing innovative ways of dealing with the challenges of water management.

Unfortunately, the benefits of these 'home grown' solutions are rarely scientifically verified and do not travel beyond their original village or community. If they do, they have the power to transform the quality of life for countless agrarian communities. Implementing these low cost technologies on a big scale can be an alternative to introducing large-scale irrigation infrastructure, which is complex to manage, and requires huge capital investment.

Six low-cost smallholder solutions developed by local communities in India and Nepal show great promise for improving the livelihoods and food security of poor farmers across South Asia. The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) evaluated the 6 practices used by these communities in different parts of India and Nepal over a 3-year period, beginning in April 2000.

Local development organisations worked directly with smallholders at grassroots level to implement the practices, which are all environmentally acceptable. The Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK funded the project.

### Reviving Paals

In the Alwar district of Rajasthan, farmers are restoring *paals* that are traditional water harvesting structures constructed across seasonal watercourses (*nalas*). These *paals* capture water during periods of heavy rainfall. With time, many existing structures fell into disuse but Pradan revived the practice.

Farmers collect water over an area of 4 to 5 hectares for 2 to 3 months. During this time, water saturates the upper soil layers and seeps down to recharge underground aquifers. The technology is suitable for areas not subject to salinity, excessive flooding or water logging. Fine sediments carried by run-off get deposited in the submerged area creating a rich layer of silt and clay. Crops can be grown during the post monsoon period using residual soil moisture stored in the field.

During dry seasons, farmers use the recharged groundwater to irrigate low-water consuming crops. Farmers can also pump more water at reduced pumping costs due to raised water tables. The *paal* revival has helped generate more income for farmers and considerably improved livelihoods and food security within the community. *Paals* can also be built in locations where constructing a dam or building a surface reservoir is not possible or is too costly.

### Using 5% Pit Technology

Farmers in the Purulia district of West Bengal depend on rain-fed agriculture but face uncertain weather patterns that put their crop yields at risk. The 5% technology, innovated and promoted by Pradan, is a

technique that greatly eliminates the risks. A pit representing 5% of the total area of a land is dug at the most upstream part of the plot. This pit collects runoff water and stores it for use during dry spells. Each pit is around 1.5 metres deep and water is lifted manually and applied to crop fields.

Five percent represents the minimum area for supplying required irrigation to upland paddy during critical growth periods after the monsoon. The choice of making bigger or deeper pits is there, depending on land availability and soil type.

Many farmers are taking up vegetable cultivation or fish farming during the dry season. Five percent pit technology improves water availability, minimises soil erosion and improves land productivity during times of meagre rainfall. The technology is appropriate for areas where rainfall is erratic and for fields in upper catchments which dry early even during monsoons.

### Integrating Land and Water Management

Farming communities in arid and semi-arid areas of Rajasthan are severely affected by land degradation, frequent droughts and scarcity of water for drinking and for agriculture. In areas like Udaipur, Rajasthan, less than 20% of the land is cultivated. The remaining land belongs to the state but provides significant support to farming communities by supplying fodder, grazing land and wood for fuel.

To help mitigate the effects of drought, recent efforts by Seva Mandir has integrated rainwater harvesting with afforestation, rejuvenation of grazing lands and improved watershed treatment with significant community involvement. As a result,

villages have developed a self-sustaining system to recharge groundwater that provides enough water for fodder and livestock even during drought conditions.

It results in a great improvement in private land quality and improved crop yields through more reliable supplies of water. Even silt deposits above *bunds* (embankments) are made use of. They create small new agriculture 'fields', which farmers or the landless can use for planting vegetables and fruits, or growing trees for timber.

### Rejuvenating Ooranis

*Ooranis* are traditional village tanks dug below the ground and used for collecting rainwater and runoff. They are a major source of water for drinking and domestic use where groundwater is not available in adequate quantities. *Ooranis* are dug to depths ranging from 2-5 metres and the excavated earth is deposited as a bank around the lower perimeter. Throughout south India many of these tanks are defunct due to disuse or lack of maintenance.

The DHAN Foundation is helping to restore these tanks, starting in the Ramnathapuram district of Tamil Nadu. Previously, women would walk long distances to find water and children often missed school because they had to collect and carry water.

In villages where *ooranis* were restored, families have saved 45 working days per household per year. Women have more time to look after the home and children can attend school regularly. Properly restored tanks provide safe drinking water. Women in the village personally supervise the hygienic use of these tanks as a source of drinking water.



## Using Wastewater

Along the Musi River, between the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad in Andhra Pradesh, an estimated 100,000 acres of land is irrigated with domestic and industrial wastewater flowing from these cities. Farmers in the areas have successfully switched from paddy to growing non-edible cash crops like para grass, which generates more income while minimising health risks.

Studies led by the IWMI show that approximately 95% of cultivated land in urban and peri-urban areas around the Musi River is cultivated with para grass. This is a type of animal fodder that requires little attention. This activity is income generating for landowners who rent out land for fodder or vegetable cultivation. Others also benefit. Milk vendors can lease grass fields to feed their buffaloes. Also, labourers who cut the grass and those who transport it to markets benefit from the income derived from these activities.

A number of farmers are also cultivating jasmine, which is high in demand, being worn daily by women. Coconut palms and banana plants are grown with wastewater in the heart of Hyderabad. Banana leaves are used as decorations for weddings and religious ceremonies. Wastewater is also used for livestock, fisheries and toddy production.

## Low Cost Drip Irrigation Kits

Crops irrigated by the drip technique show water savings of up to 50% and yield increases of 30-50%. Drip irrigation has the advantage of delivering water directly to the plant through a system of plastic tubes. Unfortunately, many smallholders cannot afford conventional drip systems

because of high initial investment costs. However, in Nepal and India, a number of farmers are using low-cost irrigation kits that require little initial investment.

International Development Enterprise (IDE) has developed these systems. The drip systems are divisible and sold in kits that farmers can install and maintain themselves. They are also expandable so that farmers can start small and scale up as their income increases. As a result of this technology, many farmers today are growing high value crops for sale, using previously unproductive land. The impacts of these systems are felt through higher household incomes, better nutrition, improved standards of living and education opportunities.

For more information on smallholder solutions, visit [www.iwmi.cgiar.org/smallholdersolutions/](http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/smallholdersolutions/) or [www.pradan.net/resources](http://www.pradan.net/resources).

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## Progressive Break

Traditional rituals give way to modern practices for better agricultural productivity in Mayurbhanj in Orissa

Bishnu C Parida

Villagers in the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa have some customs that prohibit agricultural operations at the right time, according to modern scientific understanding. They follow certain rituals and worship their village goddess before undertaking paddy cultivation, transplanting and inter-culture operations.

The modern packages that we are introducing in the area have a different regimen and time schedule, the adoption of which is hampered by the rituals that accompany the institutionalisation of traditional systems of cultivation. The present generation of farmers realise this but do not dare to change it since it is linked to their belief and religious systems.

Kadadiha is a village in Karanjia block of Mayurbhanj district. About 110 families reside in the village, out of which 50 are Kolhas (scheduled tribe) and 60 are Mohanta (other backward castes). It is situated at 8 km from Karanjia block headquarter towards the Thakurmuda block. The main occupation of the people is agriculture. Many people also supplement their family income by making and selling sal leaf plates; wage labour and petty business such as small grocery and betel shops, trading in minor forest produce, goats and bullocks. In 2003 Pradan's team began to work towards enhancing the productivity of basic food crops in the area during the Kharif agriculture season (paddy, maize and vegetables) with 20 families in Kadadiha. We also experimented with the SRI (system of rice intensification) in Kadadiha with one farmer (see box 1 on page 18).

## Sacred Grove

The people of Kadadiha celebrate many festivals and practice many customs throughout the year. There is a place in a sacred grove of old sal trees in the village where they believe their village goddess resides. People call the place *sala*. There are many earthen idols of elephants and horses in the sacred place.

The villagers offer *puja* and sacrifice goats and hens during various occasions. A priest of the Bathudi tribe from nearby Singada performs all the rituals. The people collect Rs 20-25 per household for the *pujas*. A village committee decides about collection of money, and dates of various festivals. It also imposes fines on persons who break the rules of the village.

There are 3 festivals related to agriculture: Tirtia, Aasadi and Nuakhia. Tirtia is celebrated in the month of Baisakh (April). After Tirtia people apply compost on the fields and start ploughing and sowing paddy and maize. Aasadi is celebrated in Asada (June). After Aasadi farmers transplant paddy and initiate inter-culture operations, known locally as *bihuda*, which involves thinning and weeding in the broadcasted paddy fields. Nuakhia is celebrated in Bhadrav (September). After the harvest of upland paddy and *puja* in the *sala*, people start inter-culture operations (weeding) in the transplanted paddy fields.

The dates of celebration vary from year to year and depend upon the decision of village religious committee, the tribal priest and harvesting of upland paddy (in case of Nuakhia). Serious problems may be



### Box 1: System of Rice Intensification

It is a set of principles and management practices through which rice production is increased sustainably without application of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. A higher yield of 8 tonnes per hectare (ha) is possible by this method.

#### Objectives

- To achieve higher productivity
- To benefit both farmers and consumers, especially poorer ones
- To promote equity and sustainability
- To improve the condition of environment by introducing different practices for managing plant, soil, water, nutrient and microbial interactions.

#### Principles

- Rice is not an aquatic plant
- Rice seedlings lose growth potential when transplanted beyond 15 days of age
- It is important to avoid trauma to seedlings, and especially to their roots, during transplanting
- Wider spacing of plants leads to greater root growth and accompanying tillering
- Soil aeration and organic matter create beneficial conditions for plant root growth

#### Benefits

- Five kg good variety seeds with more than 70% germination sufficient for one ha
- Traditional varieties of seed may be used
- No need for chemical fertilisers
- Plants more resistant to pests and diseases
- Profuse tillering (30-50 per plant, 80-100 possible, sometimes 100+)
- Greater root growth of 5-6 inch diameter so more resistance (kg/plant) to uprooting
- Larger panicles of 150-260+ grains
- Higher grain weight (often 5-10% more)

#### Practices

- Proper land preparation in main field
- Selection of good quality seeds by using salt solution
- Wet bed nursery
- Transplanting with young seedlings (preferably 8-12 days old)
- The time gap between uprooting from nursery to planting should not exceed 15-20 minutes
- Plant one seedling per hill
- Plant in a square pattern to facilitate weeding
- The spacing should be 25-30 cm
- Keep the soil moist but well drained either through alternate drying and wetting at 3-6 day interval or applying small amounts of water daily
- Frequent weeding and hoeing to facilitate better aeration and weed control
- Application of nutrients in organic form such as compost, bone meal, etc.

caused if the festivals are delayed for any reason. Often farmers start ploughing and sowing quite late. Even weeding is often delayed considerably. There is also a shortage of labour as all the farmers start the respective activities simultaneously after the festivals.

This often has a negative impact on the productivity of paddy. The following case study is an example. For the first time we experimented with SRI paddy with a farmer in Kadadiha. One of the management practices of SRI requires alternative drying and wetting of the land every 5 days. We selected a farmer (Keshab Mohanta), who has 8 decimals of land near a pond.

He had brought HYV paddy called Surendra (maturity in 135 days). He used Surendra for the SRI experimentation and practiced methods described in the box with active guidance from Surjit Behera, my colleague in Keonjhar team who leads the agriculture theme. Only 150 gm of seed was used on Keshab's land. The nursery was prepared on July 4 and sprouts were transplanted on July 16.

### Traditional Roadblock

A month passed. The time came for inter-culture operations in the SRI field. Keshab was delaying the activity. When I asked him about his hesitation and reasons for delaying it, he told me about their custom of Nuakhia and subsequent agricultural practices (see box 2). He told me that Nuakhia festival was not yet celebrated and if he undertook weeding and hoeing, the village committee would impose a fine.

I told him that I would convince village committee members about the timely need of this practice and he would be spared from fine. Keshab was not convinced. So I tried another option. I decided that I would start weeding first in his field and if the village committee imposed a fine, I would pay it.

I initiated the process and Keshab completed it with other labourers on August 23. Some people came to know of this breach of village customs and they convened a village committee meeting on August 25 to take a decision on the matter. Keshab informed

### Box 2: The Naukhia Festival

Old people say that the custom of not cutting grass and weeding before Naukhia festival developed 50-60 years ago. At that time Karanjia division was a dense forest. Outside contractors were given permits to cut trees to supply to railway line construction and other work in Orissa and other states.

Kadadiha was full of sal jungles. Trucks were not able to come to the villages due to narrow and muddy roads. Contractors sent bullock carts to Kadadiha to take out sal logs. The bullocks and the labourers stayed for months in the village. The cart owners fed grass to their bullocks by cutting from the *bunds* (embankments) of paddy fields of Kadadiha.

Domestic animals of the village sometimes faced shortage of grass due to the outsiders. To forbid outsiders from cutting grass and leaves, the village framed a rule in a committee meeting. Gradually no weeding and hoeing in the transplanted paddy fields before the festival became a part of that rule. People of Kadadiha have been following it since.



me about the development and requested me to attend the meeting.

On that day, around 40 villagers gathered at a central place in the village for the meeting. The committee members charged Keshab with breaking of the rule and demanded a fine of a goat. I tried to convince the people about our experimentation and the need of such weeding at the right time. I also told them about my involvement in the work.

At that time the growth of SRI paddy was very good and there were 25-30 tillers in one hull compared to 10-15 tillers that general methods yield. We had organised several exposure visits for people of nearby villages to that SRI field of Keshab. Many people of Kadadiha had also seen the SRI field.

### Progressive Support

Some young and progressive farmers supported me during the meeting. But the older people and 3 persons who had paid a fine previously were not convinced. They kept demanding a fine. Support and counter arguments continued for an hour. Finally it was decided that Keshab and I would give a goat to the village as a fine. We had no option. I along with Keshab purchased a small goat for Rs 365 from local weekly market and gave it to the committee members.

After this Keshab regularly weeded the plot, following the package. The growth of SRI paddy and other Kharif paddy facilitated by us was good. I convened a village committee meeting with Keshab's help on November 16. I once again explained the need of inter-culture operations at the right time and our experiment with SRI. I invited members of the village committee

to visit the SRI field.

The SRI field was looking remarkably different from other fields. The plants were strong, healthy and beautiful. Plants of nearby fields had fallen on the ground due to rain and wind but SRI plants were standing upright. I explained the methods of SRI to them.

### Relaxed Ritual

The committee members were convinced about the need of timely inter-culture operations in agriculture and agreed to relax the rule. First they proposed that those who wanted to start weeding before the Nuakhia festival would inform committee members and offer a simple *puja* (*pani chhada*).

I suggested that there would be many farmers who would want to begin weeding operations earlier and it would be difficult and cumbersome to arrange *puja* separately for different persons. It would be better if a common *puja* were organised for the entire village to undertake the weeding operation at the right time (normally in July-August). The committee members agreed to convene a meeting in the next Kharif season to reinforce the change for better agriculture production.

We learned a lot of things about new ways of cultivating paddy. People of Kadadiha and nearby villages are very enthusiastic about the new practice. The positive results have been able to shift celebration dates of traditional rituals that prohibit inter-culture operations at right time in agriculture. Encouraged by our experience, we are planning to introduce SRI paddy in more fields of Kadadiha and surrounding villages.

## A Trust for Trees

We could conserve important tress rich in non-timber forest products in the Rajmahal Hills of Jharkhand through a save trees corpus

Soumik Banerji

The Sundarpahari block in Godda district of Jharkhand is home to the Paharia and Santhal tribes. Sundarpahari is interweaved by the Rajmahal hills in the north-south direction. The Paharias live on the hilltops and practice shifting cultivation on the slopes. They cultivate millets and pulses by following a 7-year cycle (2 years of agriculture and 5 years of fallow).

The Paharia tribe is completely dependent on forests for its survival with even agriculture practiced in the forests. Apart from agriculture, a number of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as mahua flowers and seeds, mango and tamarind are important constituents of the Paharias' income. Besides these, a number of fruits act as buffers for food during scarcity.

### Traditional Practices

All the forests on these hills are private revenue lands. The trees have grown naturally or have been planted by the Paharias through the ages. Despite practicing shifting cultivation that requires pollarding trees in selected patches of the forests, the important NTFP trees such as mahua (*Madhuca latifolia*), mango (*Mangifera indica*) and jackfruit (*Artocarpus integerifolia*) are not touched.

The Paharia family economy is precariously balanced on the yield of their main cash crop cowpea that grows best on the slopes. A typical family has a cereal (bajra and maize) sufficiency of 6-8 months. The rest (rice) is bought from the markets from profits from cowpea and other NTFPs, mainly mahua and mango. Each family produces about 3-4 quintals of

cowpea annually that sells for about Rs 1,700-1,800 per quintal in the local village markets.

There are, however, a number of factors that make the yield from cowpea uncertain. These include:

- Both monkeys and wild pigs relish cowpea and can cause major damage.
- Heavy rains towards the end of September results in underground water logging that causes the crop to die.
- Due to high morbidity and mortality of malaria amongst the Paharias, watching crops is irregular, resulting in loss to wild animals.
- Interest charged by moneylenders (100-150%) makes agriculture unproductive and traps the families in a debt cycle.
- Loss of more than 15% of the cowpea crop means that a family has a deficit budget for the year. This along with loss of bajra and maize (also heavily ravaged by wild animals) means more staple food to be procured or exchanged, which usually favours traders and moneylenders.

### Bearing the Brunt

The brunt of all this is borne by the trees. When a family is unable to pay for its treatment by quacks (who may charge Rs 2,000 for a case of cerebral malaria) or is unable to repay its loan to the moneylender, outside forces quickly lure it into selling some of its most precious possessions - the trees - at throwaway prices.

The moneylenders cannot take land into possession as it is governed by the Damin-I-Koh norms developed by the British that disallowed non-tribals from possessing trib-



al lands. Also, since most of the lands are largely in the hills, outsiders are seldom interested. They eye the trees instead.

A large mango tree yielding 4 quintals of mango annually may be sold for Rs 500-1,000. This is then quickly sliced up and converted into planks, beams, etc., transported down the hills in cycles during the night to avoid watchful eyes and sold at Rs 300 for a pair. This translates into a profit of Rs 5,000 -20,000 per tree.

During the Saturday *haats* (market), huge amounts of timber are sold, mainly of mango, mahua, jackfruit, kusum, semal and sal (*Shorea robusta*). Unfortunately, the forest department has not been able to do much about this practice. We have campaigned repeatedly to the concerned officials but to no avail.

We have also taken up the issues of this utter destruction in the Pradan-promoted self-help group (SHG) and cluster meetings as well as narrowcast issues of conservation and taken up livelihood activities based on the NTFPs. This has but brought about small changes.

By losing these trees, the Paharia tribe is not only inviting a number of ecological problems but also adversely impacting livelihoods by selling timber for cash while losing the long-term benefits of selling NTFPs, thus doing away with the ability of a family to tide over financial and food crises. With sal trees becoming almost extinct, traders now target cutting down jackfruit, mango and mahua trees, which can rightly be called the 'eco-currency' trees.

### Save Trees Corpus

In an attempt to get over this ecological-

economic crisis, we propose the creation of a Save Trees Corpus that would be managed by the SHGs and exclusively used to extend loans on tree mortgages or else buy trees that are being sold for timber. In the Sundarpahari hills we have promoted 30 women SHGs grouped into 2 clusters, namely, Komojola Pahari Samity and Swalak Pahari Samity across 25 villages. We are in the process of forming 2 more.

The SHGs would act as the 'mortgagee' where a person or SHG member ('mortgagor') would be given a loan of 50-75% of the total value of the tree (at prevailing market rates of live trees) at an interest decided by the SHG (could be about 12% per annum) through the proposed corpus. Thus the SHG would be in possession of the NTFP the tree yields till the amount is recovered. The NTFP would be collected, processed and marketed by SHG members and the proceeds would be ploughed back into the corpus. The mortgagor would have the option to take back his or her mortgage at any point of time by paying back the loan amount along with the interest.

### Collective Efforts

We found that such collectivist efforts are already working to save trees. For instance, a huge bijasal tree (*Pterocarpus marsupium*) was no one's tree, meaning it was in the village commons. Thus many government officers trying to cut the tree were unsuccessful even after offering Rs 20,000 since the villagers could not arrive at a consensus on selling the tree and ultimately deciding to save it as a heritage.

Another striking example is a number of large sized sal trees near the Cheo village that remain untouched, being common

property of the village. In fact, this is the only place where the grandeur of sal can still be seen. Taking lead from these initiatives, we feel that trees procured by the SHGs would be better managed.

We thus propose to initiate a corpus of Rs 30,000 to save the trees (to begin with) with every SHG. The villagers who wish to mortgage trees can approach the SHG and fix the terms and conditions of mortgage as well as take measurements to assess the mortgage amount of the tree according to prevailing market rates. They also need to decide on the benefit sharing arrangements of the products and penalties for infringement.

### Sound Economics

The money generated from the tree by selling its NTFPs will be ploughed back to the corpus as repayment. After breakeven is achieved, the proceeds can go as income for the SHG that can be utilised to buy more trees or utilised as the SHG may deem (in case the mortgagor does not release his mortgage). The SHGs would also be involved in marketing the produce.

This way the mortgagor would get the money at need and the trees would be saved and the proceeds of the products would enhance the corpus. A SHG member would also get back her asset (tree) after repayment from the products from the tree.

In a small way the process has already begun. For instance, Gulabphool Mahila Mandal of Tatakpara village recently procured a mahua tree for Rs 400 from one of the villagers who was selling it to a trader to pay for his son's funeral. The SHG procured the tree from the profits it had generated from commodity trading. According

to local estimates, this tree yields about Rs 200 of NTFPs in the form of mahua flowers and seeds. Thus in about 2 years the cost would be recovered by the SHG. It would also make a flower trading profit of Rs 130 in 2 years that would be shared by the SHG members equitably.

There are other instances. Simripup Mahila Mandal of Salgama village decided to procure the huge jackfruit tree that one of its members were selling for Rs 2,000. The seller needed money to pay for his children's education in the nearby mission school. By procuring the jackfruit tree, they were not only able to save the tree but were also able to pay off the invested amount in 2 years.

We hope this would help in a long way in not only maintaining ecological balance but also enable Paharia families to cope with distress situations that otherwise results in a total loss of family assets. To start with, we can take up 10 SHGs to look at the viability of this endeavour.

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## People, News and Events

- An interview of Deep Joshi has been published by IndianNgos.com. For the full text of the interview, visit [www.indian-ngos.com/interviews/deepjoshi.html](http://www.indian-ngos.com/interviews/deepjoshi.html).
- A group from Assam Rural Infrastructure and Agricultural Services Project Society visited West Singhbhum project for an exposure visit to our irrigated agriculture projects during January 17-20, 2004. The team comprised 5 engineers of the Assam irrigation department, 7 NGO co-ordinators and 19 villagers from 5 districts of Assam.
- Saroj Mahapatra, Alak Jana, Nirmal Beura, Mahua Choudhury, Nitin Sharma, Debasish De, Santanu Mukherjee, Satya and 6 persons of the watershed committee of Jhalda and Balrampur visited BAIF - Mitra (Maharashtra) and BAIF - Dhruva (Gujarat) during February 4-7 2004. The visit watershed projects, the Wadi model promoted by BAIF and cattle development projects.
- Thirteen participants from different teams attended the Gender and Sustainable Development Programme during January 28-31, 2004 in Kesla. Resource persons were Abha Bhaiya and Kalyani Menon Sen.
- Twenty - two apprentices of the 28th and 29th batches attended the Village Study and PRA Workshop during January 27-February 1, 2004 in Deoghar. Resource persons were Yogananda Mishra, Jui Gupta, Dhruvaa Mukhopadhyay, Ajaya K Samal, Avijit Mallik and Nityananda Dhal.
- Twelve development apprentices from the 28th and 29th batches attended the Process Awareness and Sensitivity Module (PAS-I) during January 4-9, 2004 in New Delhi. Deepankar Roy and Ramesh Galodha were resource persons.
- Twenty three participants from different teams attended the Field Guides, Development Programme (FGDP-II) in New Delhi. Deepankar Roy and Ramesh Galodha were resource persons.
- Himansu S Sahu from the Balliguda team, Sanjeev Kumar from the Dausa team and Archana Singh from the Kesla team have resigned from Pradan. We wish them all the best.
- Avik Swarnakar, Anup K Dutta, Chavvi Rastogi and Sudip Biswas, development apprentices based in Gumla, Vidisha and Godda respectively, resigned from Pradan. We wish them all the best.
- Binju Abraham, based in Khunti in Jharkhand, became the father of a baby girl on January 2, 2004. Asish Chakraborty and Sarbani Bose, based in West Singhbhum in Jharkhand, had a baby boy on February 4. Nityananda Dhal, based in Balliguda in Orissa, became the father of a baby girl on January 6. Pankaj Sinwar, based in Ramgarh in Alwar, Rajasthan, got married on February 6. Congratulations.

पश्चिम मध्य रेल/West Central Railway

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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.



**Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)**

3 CSC, Niti Bagh, New Delhi 110 049, India

Tel/fax: 011 2651 8619/2651 4682. Website: [www.pradan.net](http://www.pradan.net)

E-mail: [newsreach@pradan.net](mailto:newsreach@pradan.net)