

NewsReach

PRADAN, 3 CSC, Niti Bagh, New Delhi 110 049, India
Tel/fax: 011 651 8619/651 4682. E-mail: pradhanho@ndb.vsnl.net.in

January 2001

Ten Years to 2000: *A Reminiscence*

Vijay Mahajan

In this issue

✿ *Vijay Mahajan* writes on his tenth anniversary of leaving PRADAN. He is the founder of PRADAN, currently based at Hyderabad. **Page 1**

✿ *Satish Srivastava* shares a proud moment. He is a participant in PRADAN's Development Apprenticeship programme in Barhi in the Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand. **Page 5**

✿ *Satyabrata Acharyya* contributes the abstract of the paper presented by him at a Conference to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Central Silk Board. He is based at Deogarh in Jharkhand. **Page 6**

✿ *Soumik Bannerji* shares his concerns about the focus of PRADAN's development intervention in Dholpur. He is a participant in PRADAN's Development Apprenticeship programme in Dholpur, Rajasthan. **Page 8**

✿ *Aparna Dash* shares here a touching incident. She is a member of PRADAN's team in Barhi, in the Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand. **Page 12**

✿ *Dirk Bakker* writes about his recent visit to India, and to PRADAN's project at Ramgarh. He works with ICCO in the Netherlands. **Page 13**

✿ *Vinod Jain* describes here his experiences while on sabbatical. He is based in Lucknow. **Page 16**

✿ *Khittish Pandya* writes about his experiences and concerns as marketing consultant to PRADAN's *tasar* programme. He is based in Delhi. **Page 20**

✿ *Anirban Ghosh* writes about the Lohardaga team's experiences of introducing the cultivation of ginger as a means of livelihood for poor farmers. He is based in Lohardaga, Jharkhand. **Page 22**

✿ *D. Narendranath* wrote this article in 1990 about Bahadur, a Birhore tribal. He is currently based in Jaipur. **Page 30**

It is perhaps not a coincidence that I am writing this article for PRADAN's Newsreach exactly ten years after January 1, 1991 when I left PRADAN. While I have been in touch with many PRADAN colleagues during the last ten years (Deep is on the BASIX Board), I am not sure whether many of you know much of what I have done since I left PRADAN. So I thought it might interest you if I narrate some of my experiences. I do this in some detail, to give you a flavour of what I have been through and to let you draw your own lessons. Forgive me if you find it boring or pedantic.

Some of you may remember that I left "to join politics". The years 1989 and 1990 were of deep turmoil in the Indian polity. Even in PRADAN we felt the impact of bad politics. For example, the pilot project which had managed to significantly improve the performance of the IRDP programme in Kishangarh Bas block, suffered a major setback after Devi Lal's announcement of the loan waiver.

I strongly believed that grassroots action by itself, though the nursery bed of social innovation, is like "jungle mein mor nacha", if it is not translated into policy recommendations and reform of larger systems. Thus, even when PRADAN was a relatively unknown and small organisation in the '80s, I systematically spent time and energy on writing and dissemination work and dialogue with policy makers. For example, while working with ASSEFA,

Anand Niketan and Gram Vikas on pilot projects, between 1984 to 1988, Deep, Sankar, Akhil, and I worked on policy issues for wasteland development and degraded forest lands. (Akhil eventually published a book titled "The Contested Domain" on this topic). The idea of giving access to rural communities to wastelands including degraded forest lands was first mooted in the early 1980s. A forest officer in Arabari, West Bengal experimented for the first time with forest protection based on usufruct sharing with local communities. A fillip came with the establishment of the National Wasteland Development Board in 1985 under the chairpersonship of Dr Kamla Chowdhry. (Initially I, and later Deep, served on the Board's Project Approvals Committee). It is unbelievable that under the Joint Forest Management Policy, today over 10 million hectares of forest land have been handed over to community forest protection committees.

Another example was the work done by PRADAN for improving the design of poverty alleviation programs such as the credit based self-employment program, IRDP and the lean season wage-employment in public works programme, NREP (later JRY). In the former, PRADAN introduced the twin ideas of channeling credit through savings and credit groups (established by various NGOs including MYRADA and PRADAN) and of focussing on specific activities or "sub-sectors" in

†i Ramola of Price Waterhouse,
ne with the idea of the credit
gether we wrote the out-
ben to establish what later
Rashtriya Mahila Kosh.
then asked me to join
Commission as a Con-
as I was being "in-
VP Singh govern-

win issues of Mandal and
Masjid were tearing the nation apart.
(For the record, I was, and continue
to be, pro-Mandal, that is pro-greater
equality of opportunity; and pro-
Masjid, that is against breaking the
Babri Masjid on the ground that it
was perhaps once Ram
Janamabhoomi, because even if it
was, two wrongs do not make a
right). An inner restlessness gripped
me. I felt if we have to aim for large
system change, the route to it is
through politics. So I decided to leave
PRADAN and join politics, exactly
ten years ago!

I wanted to join the Janata Dal, as I
was ideologically averse to the BJP
and the Communists and the Con-
gress seemed too rotten. Moreover,
VP Singh appeared to be an idealist
with some principles. I spent six
months in various forums trying to
enter politics. (I had written a funny
piece on this in 1991, which I seem
to have lost and if any of you have a
copy please share it with me.) But
the summary of it was that I found to
my consternation that no politician
wanted me in any serious role. Of
course, I was given various odd jobs
such as writing "talking points" for
election speeches and I was even
made a member of the Manifesto
Committee. However, the Manifesto
was drafted by the *Netas* and we were
only to do the editing. I did not have
the patience that was required (nor
the bank balance). I quit trying to
enter politics within six months. By
that time, Rajiv Gandhi had been as-
sassinated, Narasimha Rao had be-
come Prime Minister and the State
Bank of India had started shipping
out gold to meet India's debt obliga-

tions. Manmohan Singh had not yet
fully enunciated the economic reform
policies.

Perhaps, I should have come back to
PRADAN at that time. But I was
driven by an inner restlessness to
seek some new platform for my
urges. Moreover, I was genuinely
interested in seriously learning
organisation development and carry-
ing out research in rural livelihoods.
It did not take long to generate op-
portunities for both. Prof. Somnath
Chatopadhyay, one of the gurus of
OD, agreed to take me on as an in-
tern - consultant. Along with Dr
Deepankar Roy, the three of us took
on an OD assignment for Samtel,
then a Rs 500 crore company estab-
lished by a technocrat. I worked on
the Samtel assignment for over a
year - from late 1991 to end 1992. I
learnt an enormous amount from
Somnath and Deepankar while do-
ing OD with Samtel. I think my pro-
cess orientation, which was kindled
in the first place by working with
people like Prof. Ranjit Gupta, Dr
Rolf Lynton and Prof. Udai Pareek,
was firmly grounded in technique
and theory by working with Somnath
and Deepankar.

Also in late 1991, the Swiss Agency
for Development and Cooperation
asked me if I would carry out a study
of the rural non-farm sector. Since
both the assignments were of a long
term but part-time nature, I was de-
lighted that I could interweave the
two. I invited a young man by the
name of Thomas Fisher, whom I had
met during my year at Princeton in
1988, to come and work with me in
India. We together established a
small consulting firm called
"VikaSoko" and bagged our first as-
signment with the Tibetan commu-
nity in exile, to help them formulate
their first five-year integrated devel-
opment plan. This assignment en-
abled us to interweave process with
content.

We also set up a group to study the
rural non-farm sector. The interim re-

singh govern-
Commission was
and Mr L C Jain and
both appointed as mem-
both knew our work in
PRADAN. Mr Jain asked both
Savita (my wife) and me to work on
employment and rural development
issues. We had just returned from a
year in a mid-career program in eco-
nomic development policy at the
Princeton University, USA. Savita
joined the Planning Commission as
a Consultant. One of the things she
worked on was to assist a working
group on drafting a new legislation
on cooperatives. While doing that,
Savita first met Ram Reddy and
Shashi Rajagopalan of the Coopera-
tive Development Foundation, CDF,
Hyderabad. Though it took another
five years, it is gratifying to note that
CDF was the main force behind the
path-breaking Andhra Pradesh Mu-
tually Aided Cooperative Societies
Act, 1995, which has rejuvenated the
cooperative movement in the coun-
try.

Around the same time, Elaben asked
me to flesh out a proposal for the
World Bank for setting up a Women's
Credit Fund, which I had worked on
in the US in 1989, with Lynn Bennett
a former Ford Foundation Program
Officer now with the World Bank.
Lynn had coordinated the report
"Gender and Poverty in India". I
asked a friend in the financial sector,

port, presented in late 1992 over a memorable two days in Neemrana Fort Palace, generated an enormous amount of excitement not just within the SDC but also in NABARD, whose Chairman, Mr Kottaiiah agreed to co-sponsor the study and expand the scope to cover eight states all over the country. One of the reasons for the wide acceptance and policy influence of the study was the "process- sensitive" manner in which it was carried out. Having learnt process from Rolf and Somnath, we were careful to involve a range of stakeholders in various stages of the study - all the way from formulating the research questions to disseminating the interim findings. Even a skeptic like Prof. Malcolm Harper was so impressed by the process that he asked us to write an article on the process of the study and published it the Small Enterprise Development Journal. Eventually, the study was published in the form of a book, "The Forgotten Sector".

The study of the rural non-farm sector (and in a micro-cosmic way, the plan for the Tibetan community) showed me the central importance of livelihood promotion. With every passing month I became convinced that promoting millions of sustainable rural livelihoods was the single most significant challenge facing the Indian economy. The Eighth Five Year Plan computations that I had helped Mr LC Jain with, showed that based on existing unemployment and annual increments to the workforce nearly 10 million livelihoods were required every year during the 1990s decade to ensure near full employment.

During the course of the non-farm sector study, we had met over 1200 rural producers and found that virtually every one of them was suffering from a lack of credit. In the meantime, I was receiving heart-rending

stories from my friend and former PRADAN colleague, Pramod Kulkarni, describing how difficult it was to raise bank loans for establishing small scale lift irrigation schemes on the Krishna river in Raichur. I don't recall the exact date but do recall the moment vividly when reading one of the case studies from Pramod, I swore to myself that we

With every passing month I became convinced that promoting millions of sustainable rural livelihoods was the single most significant challenge facing the Indian economy. The Eighth Five Year Plan computations that I had helped Mr LC Jain with, showed that based on existing unemployment and annual increments to the workforce nearly 10 million livelihoods were required every year during the 1990s decade to ensure near full employment.

will set up our own bank.

Well, easier said than done! To begin with, I did not know anything about banking from behind the counter - all my experiences since 1981 with ASSEFA and PRADAN were to go to numerous rural bank branches to raise a loan for something or the other and usually come back with nothing. By 1986, we had learnt in Kesla, for example, that it was easier to raise money from the Head Offices of IDBI and ICICI in Mumbai than from our own friendly neighbourhood Regional Rural Bank branches. By 1987, when we started the Kishangarh Bas project, we decided that instead of persuading banks to finance the poor households we support, we would support those poor households whom the banks lend to under the IRDP. We would

ensure that the borrowers make an income from the loan and repay it. Those of you who were in PRADAN at that time would recall how different our experience was in Kesla vs. Kishangarh Bas. In the former, the bankers wouldn't let us into the branch offices, while in the latter, we were the convenors of the block level bankers' committee.

From this, we not only learned what was wrong with rural banking in India but dared to come up with an alternative - what are now known as self help groups. While PRADAN was not the first NGO to form SHGs, we were perhaps the first to do so in the BIMARU states, way back in 1987. And NABARD (which had scoffed at this idea) has established a target for itself of setting up and linking over one million SHGs with banks by 2008. But even a million self-help groups are not equal to a community bank. So, where to turn for experimentation except to our original mother lab - ASSEFA - the organisation that virtually gave birth to PRADAN by allowing us to work in their

projects since 1982. By 1988, the "recovery funds" established in different ASSEFA projects were becoming large enough to require a separate management structure. Knowing nothing about these things then, I turned to my friends in the banking and financial sectors for advice. Anoop Seth, then with Bank of America, gave the first idea to set up an NBFC. Thus was born India's first non-banking finance company of and for the people - Sarva Jana Seva Kosh Limited. Later, Bharti Ramola led a Price Waterhouse team to carry out a study of its legal and financial structure and systems.

Back to 1993: Jane Rosser, Program Officer at the Ford Foundation, whom I had got to know due to our mutual interest in community economic development issues, asked me

if I would carry out an assessment of the SEWA Bank. I agreed, on the condition that I would have Nagarajan, PRADAN's auditor, be my fellow consultant. I thought I would focus on the institutional issues while he did the financial analysis. Before I went to Ahmedabad, I asked Bharti about what would be a good way to do the assessment. Between Bharti and Nagarajan, I got really intensive training in financial analysis of a bank. (Remember, it was already over 12 years since I had graduated from IIM-A and my finance *fundas* were fairly rusted). The study was deeply appreciated, most of all by the SEWA Bank. Elaben and Jayashreeben, (SEWA Bank's Managing Director), asked me if I would consider being their long term consultant. I accepted, mainly for the learning it would offer me. By that time, I had gone public with my vow to set up our own bank (whatever that meant). Jane took that seriously enough to arrange for an exposure trip for Sashi Rajagopalan of CDF, Vijayalakshmi Das of the SEWA affiliate FWWB, and myself to visit Shorebank, a well-established community development bank in the USA. By the time I came back, I was vaguely clear that I will set up a rural livelihood promotion institution with a credit and a support services arm rolled into one.

In 1993, the World Bank launched a rural financial sector reform project and Lynn Bennett of the World Bank asked me if I would carry out a study on financial services for the rural poor and women in India. I was very interested but also deeply aware of my inadequacy to carry out a large study like this, up to the World Bank standards. I arranged for a meeting between Lynn and Bharti. Eventually, the study was awarded to Price Waterhouse, with Bharti as the lead consultant and I as an advisor.

We carried out this study over two years. Virtually all other studies on rural credit till then always took a supply side perspective and quickly

got bogged down by the existing institutional dysfunctionalities. Thanks to Bharti, we took an entirely new, demand-side perspective on financial services for the rural poor and women in India. Realising that the depth required in household surveys was beyond the normal practice of market research agencies or socio-economic research investigators, we established our own team for this purpose. Dileep Gupta from ORG joined us and led the team of field investigators for the household surveys. The financial analysis of regional rural banks was carried out by an international team of bankers and I learnt an enormous amount from them in the process. We also carried out a separate survey of the best practices and innovations in India and abroad to serve the rural poor and women. In this context, we carried out detailed case studies of SEWA, CDF, PRADAN (Madurai), the Kosh, and the Tungabhadra Grameen Bank in Raichur.

The World Bank rural finance reform project required frequent interactions with the Reserve Bank of India and the Banking Division of Ministry of Finance. This was the period when the experience of successful rural financial institutions in other countries, particularly Bangladesh and Indonesia was beginning to be written up. We assembled a team of eight persons- four with a banking and finance background including Bharti, Anoop, Nagarajan and Balakrishnan (from NABARD) and four from the development sector: Joe Madiath, Vasimalai, Thomas Fisher and myself. The Ford Foundation was generous enough to sponsor our trip and Jane Rosser also joined us for the two-week study tour. We learnt an enormous amount and documented the lessons in two write-ups which were widely circulated among policy makers on return.

The RBI was sufficiently impressed by our findings to request us to hold a half day workshop their senior managers and at the end of it decided to mount a trip by the RBI Deputy Gov-

ernor Mr R V Gupta and NABARD Chariman Mr Kottaiah and Mr Yashwant Thorat, General Manager, Rural Planning and Credit Department of RBI to Indonesia. Soon after their return, they mooted the idea of deregulating interest rates on small loans and opening up the rural credit sector for private participation through Local Area Banks. Eventually both of these policies were accepted by the Government of India and notified in August 1996.

However, there is many a slip between policy pronouncements and implementation. Thus, while RRBs and LABs do not have any interest rate restrictions on small loans, even today interest rates for commercial bank loans to small borrowers are regulated to 12 percent, thereby perpetuating the famine of credit to small borrowers. The first LABs got into operation only in 1999 and the BASIX LAB was licensed only in December 2000 and we are going to launch it next month.

In the next issue of Newsreach, Vijay will tell us about how he set up BASIX, and what he did in the period between 1996 to 2000.



My Visit to Gaida

Satish Kumar Srivastava

I planned to conduct an informal meeting in Gaida, a village in the Hazaribagh district of Jharkand. As I entered I saw many men and women gathered under a banyan tree in front of the village. Many of the *didis* I had come to meet were in the gathering, so I joined them. I came to know that this was meeting of the Bihar Shiksha Pariyojana. A person from the Bihar Shiksha Pariyojana informed me that the villagers were gathered there to select members of four committees. These committees would then be entrusted with the task of ensuring the proper and fair utilization of the money (Rs 2,000) sent by the government to equip the school in the village, and to beautify it. The villagers invited me to join, and I decided to be seated there for some time and see what happened.

I sat on the mat with them, and looked at the gathering. I was amazed to see that there were only 10-15 men, whereas there were over 50 women present! And almost all the women were from the Damodar Mahila Mandal. This huge presence of

Mahila Mandal *didis* in the village activity made me happy, and I was eager to see their participation.

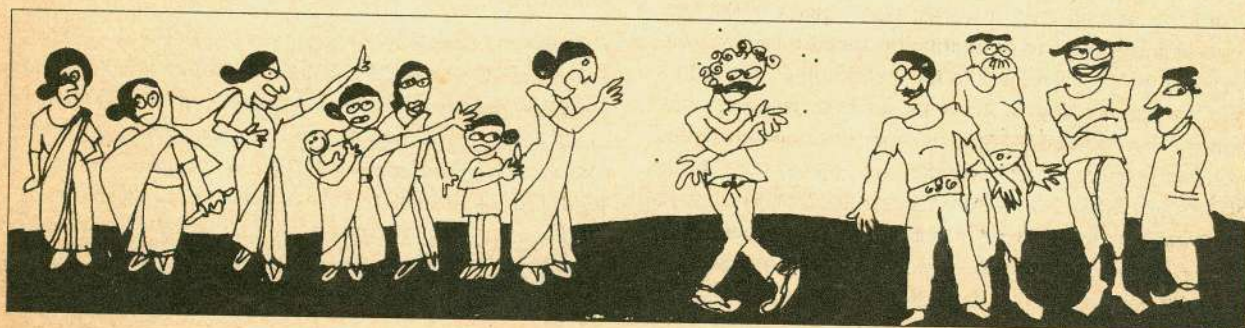
After a short speech by the official on duty on the necessity of education, the process of selection of committee members began. All this in the presence of the *Mukhia* (Head) of the village. First of all the villagers had to select 5-7 members for four committees; a committee of men; a committee of women; a committee of scheduled caste members; and a committee of guest members.

Selection began with the formation of the committee of men. It was amazing, as the *didis* of the Mahila Mandal were deciding the names of the men, even in the presence of the *Mukhia*! The men present did propose a name, but they were soon shouted down by the *didis*, who demanded that his name be cancelled. When asked the reason, the *didis* said that this man used to drink liquor and beat his wife, and that such a man must not be included in village matters. Ultimately, the man's name was removed from

the list, and the *didis* took a breath of relief.

When time came for the selection of the committee of women, the *didis* came forward by themselves and gave their names with confidence. Similarly, during selection of scheduled caste committees the *didis* also came forward and gave their names. The *didis*' active participation in the matters of the whole village, especially in the sphere of education, and their decision making power, surprised me. The *Mukhia* and officials from the Bihar Shiksha Pariyojana said that it was the Damodar Mahila Mandal's constant efforts in the village for the last 5 years that had led to the *didis* being so active and decisive. The officials also said that gathering women is easier for them where there is a Mahila Mandal.

Being a professional from PRADAN, these were compliments for me.



*"Establishment of Private Grainages in **Tasar**: A Strategy for **Tasar** Sericulture Development in Jharkhand"*

Abstract of the paper presented by Satyabrata Acharyya at a National Conference on Strategies for Sericulture Research and Development at the Mysore, November 16-18, 2000

The Central Silk Board (CSB), the apex institution for sericulture research and development in India, was formed under the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, 50 years ago. To commemorate this golden jubilee year of CSB, the Central Sericulture Research and Training Institute organised a National Conference on Strategies for Sericulture Research and Development at its Campus in Mysore between November 16-18, 2000. The objective of the conference was to initiate steps towards the formulation of a strategic plan through interactions among planners, scientists, manufacturers and exporters of silk. Four hundred people were invited to the conference, and the participants were asked to submit papers that presented their cases and opinions. Three hundred papers were received, meant for oral and poster presentations. Expert speakers were also invited to express their views in the fields of finance, extension management, role of state organisations and market needs. The proceedings of the first day took place in the presence of the entire group. It started with formal inauguration by the Chief Guest, Prof M S Swaminathan, in the presence of Shri Dhananjay Kumar, Minister of State for Textiles, Government of India, Chairman of Central Silk Board and the Member Secretary, CSB. The first day had two sessions titled as: (1) Market-oriented Growth in Sericulture and (2) State Strategies for Sericulture Development. The first session had speakers including the Member Secretary, CSB and experts representing Indian Silk Export Promotion Council, Bombay and Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. Three papers were presented in the second session. The first was by the Commissioner of Sericulture, Government of Karnataka; the second was by Satyabrata Acharyya from PRADAN; and the last paper was presented by the Head of the Sociology Unit of ISEC, Bangalore.

From the second day onwards, participants broke into several sub-groups to deliberate on specific issues. Majority of the issues related to the technologies of production and processing of cocoons for both mulberry and non-mulberry silks. A number of papers were presented in these sessions, mainly by the scientists of the Central Silk Board, State Sericulture Departments and scientists from other research institutions. A large number of papers were also displayed as posters. The third day had sessions on subjects like Extension Management for Sericulture

Development and Institutional Finance for Sericulture Development. Several sub-groups deliberated on these issues and the second half of the last day had the valedictory sessions in the presence of the full group.

PRADAN was represented by Satyabrata Acharyya, who presented a paper titled "Establishment of Private Grainages in *Tasar*: A Strategy for Sericulture Development in Jharkhand". Given below is an abstract of the paper. Those interested in the entire paper may contact him at:

PRADAN, Chetna Apartments,
Opposite DC's residence;
PO & District B. Deogarh; Jharkhand 814112.

*India is unique among silk-producing nations. Four different varieties of natural silk, namely, mulberry, eri, muga and **tasar**, are produced here. While mulberry silk production has recorded manifold increase during the past three decades, production of **tasar** has rather exhibited declining trends. **Tasar** offers significant scope for providing livelihoods to over 1 lakh people in some of the poorest pockets in the country such as Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, Chattisgarh and A P. One critical factor that limits the production of **tasar** cocoons at the level of the rearers is the lack of availability of quality **tasar** silkworm seeds, or Disease Free Layings (DFLs). This affects cocoon production, by reducing productivity, overall production, and remuneration to the rearers. As of now, almost all the DFLs are prepared and distributed by the Central and State sericulture establishments. There are virtually no other channels for the supply of DFLs. Jharkhand has the largest number of **tasar** rearers in the country, totalling approximately 60,000 individuals. The supply of DFLs to rearers by the State Sericulture department hardly meets about 3% to 6.5% of their total requirement.*

PRADAN initiated its **tasar** project in the Santhal Parganas region of Jharkhand 12 years ago, and has worked towards addressing the problems of shortage of **tasar** DFLs. PRADAN started with a careful analysis of the process of making DFLs, which revealed that it is a highly labour intensive process and involves tasks that could easily be performed by well-trained village youth. PRADAN therefore mooted the idea of promoting decentralised grainages. These are owned and operated



Talaamay Hansdak Removing Pierced Cocoons in her Grainage in Mohanpur

by village youth as tiny service enterprises. Each has a capacity to produce 3,000 to 6,000 DFLs in one cycle, serving 10 to 20 rearers in the surrounding villages. PRADAN has also designed a comprehensive package of support to enable the traditional rearers to set up their enterprises to produce high quality *tasar* DFLs in the villages. This includes training, infrastructure and facilitating access to credit. The cost economics of a grainage presented in the paper points to its commercial viability. PRADAN has so far promoted 31 private grainages, with a combined capacity of about 1,10,000 DFLs. These private grainages have catered to the needs of more than 300 rearers regularly. They have also contributed to the enhancement of cocoon production, thereby to the income of the rearers. The major advantages of decentralised village-level grainages are: (i) timely supply of DFLs to the rearers; (ii) availability of DFLs at affordable prices; and (iii) pressure from the rearers on the grainage entrepreneur to maintain high quality standards. As a whole, the decentralised network of grainage operators offers a cost effective mechanism for promoting services and ideas to increase productivity and quality in *tasar* sub-sector.

There is huge scope for the expansion of the grainage activity in the entire state of Jharkhand. Some 1,800 grainages would need to be established just to meet 50 percent of the total demand of DFLs in the state. This would serve DFLs to more than 30,000 rearers, helping them go for full-scale *tasar* silkworm rearing. This would directly contribute to the production of 24 crore pieces of *tasar* cocoon, or around 200 tonnes of raw silk.

For rapid expansion and sustainability of small grainages in the private sector, the paper suggested the following:

- Creation of awareness among the rearers about DFLs and training them to distinguish good seeds from diseased one.
- Systematic promotion of grainages and creation of competition among them by promoting several grainages in a contiguous area.
- Secured and timely supply of basic seeds from CSB.
- Support from the Government for infrastructure and equipment.

e v e n t s

Upcoming Events in January 2001

1. A Joint Orientation programme and Orientation to Village Study has been scheduled for the apprentices of the 21st Batch during January 8 - 12, 2001 at our Campus at Suktawa in the Hoshangabad district of Madhya Pradesh.
2. Twelve Field Guides will attend the third phase of the Field Guide's Development Programme (FGDP) during January 16 - 20, 2001. The venue is Scholar House, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi.
3. The Executive Committee will have its bi-monthly meeting during January 22 - 24, 2001 at New Delhi.



Events in December 2000

1. PRADAN's Governing Board met on December 15, 2000.
2. Twenty four Field Guides and Apprentices together came for their second phase of the Field Guide's Development Programme and the Process Awareness and Sensitivity programme respectively during December 4 - 8, 2000.
3. A workshop on livelihoods was conducted by Dinabandhu at Dausa. Participants were Achintya, Deep, Mousumi, Dip Bannerji, Narendranath, Zebul, Sutapa, Neelam, Sulakshana, Sahana, Jyoti, Asif, Sanjeev, Yatesh, Shouvik, Mukta and Pawan. There were two more participants, one from BASIX and the other from SaDhan.
4. Subsequent to the project at Lucknow being wound up, Rajendra Singh has registered YUVA, an NGO and Naresh Prasad and Sanjay Sharma have joined YUVA. YUVA has been selected by DPIP MP to work in the Siddhi district in Northern MP. We wish them all the best!
5. Mr. Palia, Chairperson of PRADAN's board, visited the Kesla Project for two days.



The Nibi Canal System

Soumik Banerjee

Dholpur, the easternmost district of Rajasthan about 250 kilometres south of Delhi, sits at the tri-juncture of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The district can be divided into three distinct topographical zones. The first is the ravines of Chambal and Parvati rivers called *Dangs*, home to *Gujjars* (the herdsmen) and *Mallas* (the fishermen). The next is the rocky Aravali plateau beyond the *Dangs*; and the third, the alluvial plains of the Parvati. Dholpur is famous for its red sandstone that adorns the Presidential House, Red Fort and Parliament of New Delhi. Also famous are the Chambal sands, tomatoes grown here (about 10 to 15 trucks of tomatoes reach Delhi from Dholpur and Mania), chilies and guava. Dholpur has thriving milk collection centres. Among other industries are leather, iron implements, etc.

PRADAN in Dholpur

PRADAN started work here in December, 1999 in 3 watersheds—Surajpura, Bhilagwan and Nagla Bhagat—funded under the government-sponsored Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS). We also initiated a Savings & Credit Programme with women in two blocks, Dholpur and Bari, largely in the Aravali plateau area and home to *Jatavs* (traditionally the leather workers) and *Kushwas* (the vegetable growers). I joined the Dholpur Team as a Development Apprentice in October, 2000. At the end of my first month I was given the assignment to determine the impact of the interventions made by PRADAN at the Surajpura watershed. This watershed does not resemble the conventional ridge to valley model; it has hardly anything like a ridge. Most of the so-called ridge

area is uninhabited, and no-one seems to have any stake in it. PRADAN's main intervention has been to line the existing earthen field channels with cement, thus making them permanent and more efficient. These watercourses channelise water from the main canal, Nibi, and are the life line of Surajpura.

The Nibi Canal System

Uday Bhan Singh, the erstwhile ruler of Dholpur State, built the Nibi Canal System in the year 1935. The Maharaja had a passion for constructing rainwater-harvesting tanks by constructing roads in between mountains. These served dual purposes of road as well as the embankment for the reservoir. A large number of such tanks dot both sides of the road between Dholpur and Bari town. The Nibi Canal System was basically built to get water for his gardens at Dholpur Palace, and as a source of drinking water for the wild animals at Ban Vihar Reserve Forest. The canal is about 17 km long, and has almost 20 km of minors (Source: Department of Irrigation, Dholpur Division, Rajasthan). It irrigates about 2,975 acres (1,214 hectares). The reservoir is located about 22 km from Dholpur town, and is known as the Urmila Sagar dam (after the name of the Maharaja's daughter). The Urmila Sagar dam has an area of 21 sq km, a 3 km long embankment, is 17 metres high and has a catchment of 77 sq km.

The canal system is an unlined one (barring a small section at the head) with 20 villages getting irrigation water directly. In those days there was a definite system of water management, with people paying taxes on the basis of production and area irrigated. There were also proper

times allotted to different villages for efficient water sharing. The canal was repaired each year from the taxes collected, and from leasing fishing rights in the Urmila Sagar.

Once India got independence, the controls went to the Department of Irrigation and thus started the process of neglect. This has continued to the extent that today the canal lies in a deplorable condition, with depressions, breaches and leaks (about a foot of water is lost in seepage and leaks). The Department of Irrigation does not have the money to repair the same. Even the minimum repairs of the tune of Rs 1 lakh a year has become difficult due to the fund freeze by the Government of Rajasthan in recent years. All this, coupled with the decreasing and erratic rainfall patterns, have further aggravated the situation.

PRADAN's Focus: Canal or Watercourses?

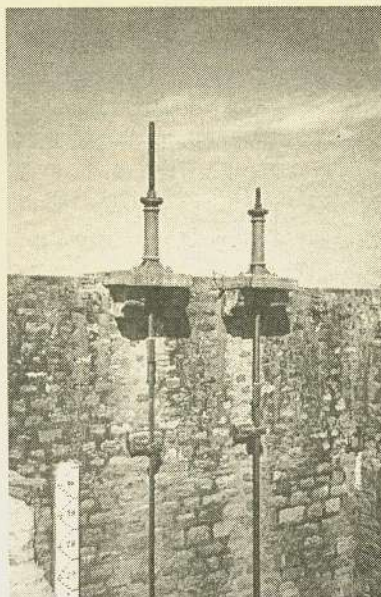
This year the tank had only 17.5 feet of water, as compared to 28.5 feet under normal conditions and 22.5 feet in 1999, a good year. A five foot decrease in water, coupled with almost no repairs, means only one water from head to tail this year. The flow rate is also 38 % of the actual capacity. This means 56 normal buckets of water flowing every second as compared to 112 buckets under normal conditions (Source: Department of Irrigation, Dholpur). The Department estimates that about 10-12 lakh of rupees (about 50 % of the amount spent on each EAS watershed) would be required to repair the canal to bring it to normal flow. Subsequently Rs 1.5 lakh would be required for annual repairs.

The people however tell a different

story; according to them the Department gobbles away the funds and does superficial repairs. This year the situation is really critical. It is 21st November as I write, and the people of Surajpura are still to get the first trickle (12.5 kilometres from head). The people have been patiently waiting for the water to reach them so that they could start preparing for wheat cultivation. They have already lost all hope of getting a second water from the canal.¹

In the absence of the water in the canal, the watercourses built under the watershed program lose their relevance. They stand like empty hopes. People agree that watercourses would benefit them in terms of reduction in seepage in fields near the canal, increasing cultivable area by 30 *bighas* (~15 acres). They also say that these cemented watercourses would be relatively easier to maintain as compared to earthen channels (amounts to saving about 2.5 man days per 100 feet) which need to be cleaned and are easily breached. It would also increase the efficiency of water flow (about 50 % water is lost in seepage, evaporation, etc. in case of earthen channels). However all this is applicable when water flows in the main canal, which has been elusive so far at Surajpura. As residents rightly pointed out, unless the main canal is repaired, the effectiveness of the water channels would be difficult to relate to. This also affects the sustainability as in the long run. If things continue this way, it would amount to a structure constructed without much use, and people will lose their sense of ownership.

At times I really felt like someone who has a car, a road to drive on, but no petrol to run the car on the road! The situation appeared futile every time I looked at the empty canal and



The Empty Reservoir

its channels. Could I not do something to change all this? How? The canal is a huge system and we just have 3 watersheds (all of which lie on the canal's command). Intervening in the canal system is as such not part of our plan, nor possible, under the watershed program. At times I wonder how we can confine ourselves to a watershed when we are dependent on the canal. I always felt we should have probably repaired the canal, reduced its leaks, desilted it, etc. This would create a proper water management system for water sharing.

Presently water sharing has no rules here. Might is right. Villagers upstream frequently hold the water using earthen bunds and fights are common. One lost his feet in a fight at Narpura village (south of Surajpura). This year even shots were fired! (See box) The less fortunate ones often breach the canal walls to feed the natural *nalas* thus taking away water from the canals as has been done in the nearby village of Basai Samanta (north east of Surajpura).

Ganpath has about 3.6 *bighas* (~1.8 acres) of land. Most of his land is unirrigated (70 %) and rest is irrigated from the canal. In the absence of water in the canal he angrily ques-

Gunshots at Sardar ka Pura

On the night of 27th November, as Harbachan Singh of Sardar Ka Pura (north of Surajpura) angrily brought a shovel to remove the earthen bunds constructed by the people of Bhilagwan on the Nibi Canal, the news spread like wild fire. The Kushwas of Bhilagwan came down heavily on Harbachan Singh, in an attempt to dispel them the Sardars fired in the air with their .303s. To counter them the Kushwas tried the natural way! They filled gunpowder in the fruits of *Hingota* tree and fired them. In all this confusion Harbachan Singh was beaten up. The next morning the Sardars lodged a FIR at Dholpur against some residents at Bhilagwan. An enquiry was conducted and what followed was even more dramatic, the collector of Dholpur district ordered a closure of the gates at the Urmila Sagar reservoir. Angered by the collector's decision a '*Chakka Jam*' was organized subsequently demanding the release of water or a declaration of drought in the district. None of them happened however. The gates remain closed to this day.

¹ The department releases water at 15 day intervals till February, with 5 feet of dead storage. This means people have only 12 feet of water to use as compared to 23 feet under normal rains and 18 feet last year.

tions me "What good are your watercourses if they can't provide me water?" As he impatiently waits for the water to come to rejuvenate his lands, it is only he who realizes the pains of a bad crop. Most of the better lands here are owned by the Sardars, who had come on a fourteen-point agreement with the Maharaja from Punjab in the 1930s. Thus they have the means, and their lands are also topographically more suited to exploit the ground water.

The Cascade

This result of all this is crop shifts, with people shifting to mustard, gram or barley that require less water. Some obsessed with wheat (a lot of wheat is simply consumed and farmer does not realize the cost) wait till the last moment for water to come, so that they could start wheat as the mustard-sowing season is already over by now. In the mad rush to get gram the price shoots up and it disappears from the market (this year *desi* varieties were selling for Rs 22 a kilogram as compared to Rs 14 in normal conditions). Barley is also difficult to get. This is like the Futures and Options of derivative markets in commodity trading.²

The absence of water in the canal also pushes up other costs. The cost of drawing water from the canal would come to Rs 25 flat (0.02 %-0.05 % of well charges) per *bigha* of land, primarily paid to the Department of Irrigation as water charges. The farmer now depends on wells. Using a rented engine, the cost of water to irrigate a *bigha* of land would be in the range of Rs 1,250 (water is sold here @ Rs 50 an hour and the farmer requires five hours of water for five irrigations of wheat). The cost for those with their own engine would be Rs 450 (1 litre of diesel consumed every hour).

This year the irrigation rates have risen to 60 per hour. There are problems in this as well. Farmers here do not like sharing water. Once the neighbors start taking water, they also begin to claim rights on the well. Also due to bedrocks at 50 feet depth, bore wells are a failure. Thus not much water can be shared anyway. In the absence of proper irrigation the wheat yield decreases, thus not only decreasing incomes but also affecting home consumption. The credit taken for investing in wheat becomes a burden, affecting the family's entire annual budget.

The Diversity of Benefits

Among the other tangible benefits the Nibi Canal System brings are in terms of fisheries. At present the control lies with the Department of Fisheries, Dholpur, whose main job is to check illegal poaching, measurement of catch, releasing and culture of seeds, etc. Every year the Directorate at Jaipur invites tenders from all over the country for exploiting the Urmila Sagar reservoir. However, since 1997, no tenders have been taken up. The reasons being that during the tender process the contractors pool together to bring down the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of government. In 1997 a contractor, in an attempt to break off from the pool, offered Rs 6 lakhs. He could only exploit only produce of Rs 1.5 lakh, incurring a heavy loss. Since then the government is not ready to reduce its MSP below Rs 6 lakhs, and contractors are not interested and the tender remains unclaimed.

The contractors usually want long leases of three years as it is more economical for them. The first year they wait for the seeds to mature (cultured by the government), while the second year they exploit and also release fresh seeds for the third year. The main catch is *Rohu*, *Katla* and *Mrigal* (among major carps) and catfish among minor carps. It is these very minor carps that make the profits as

these have huge demand (usually sold live, thus attracting the customer as fresh). However culture of only major carps are done as it is easier and less expensive (catfish being carnivorous). The minor carps usually grow naturally, based on fresh water reaching the reservoir from its streams during monsoon. The erratic rains coupled with culture of only major carps makes the contractors question the price.

The contractors are usually from outside Dholpur, and bring in skilled labour from West Bengal and Orissa. The produce gets sold in Delhi and Calcutta markets. The local populations are occasional fish eaters and practice angling at times. No selling is done. The department of Fisheries estimates about Rs 2 lakh of fish would be available presently in the reservoir.

Among the other benefits are about 300 *bighas* of land used by the nearby villagers of Nibi, Khanpura, etc. for cultivation as the water recedes. They pay penalty for the same. Apart from these functions the tank system recharges the aquifers, wells and other numerous small tanks that provide livelihood for many through *Trapa* cultivation. The tank acts as a source of drinking water for animals in summer. The lands at the edge of the reservoir and the canal bed are also used as grazing ground for cattle, providing the much-needed green fodder.

In addition to all this, the Urmila Sagar generates a good habitat for a number of avian species along with migratory birds. A stream by the name *Medki Nala* originates from the seepage of the Urmila Sagar Dam that provides water to about 21 villages at its banks perennially finally ends at river Parvati. The list of benefits can go on.

Future and Epilogue

About 25 villages directly benefit from the canal system, which means a population of at least 2,500 culti-

² Already Soyabean Processors Organization, SOPA, Indore, Madhya Pradesh is thinking of starting futures trading in gram. The Economic Times, New Delhi, Nov 8, 2000.

vators. If each paid Rs 100 annually we could generate Rs 2,50,000. In addition the community could sell fish in the tune of at least Rs 1.5 lakh annually. This could not only be used to maintain the system, but also generate huge surpluses that now largely flow outside. We could develop a Participatory Irrigation Management Programme here. This way we could not only provide water for irrigation but also benefit from the fishing proceeds and numerous other benefits at much less the amount spent on other projects. This would be much more relevant and necessary as compared to the crores of rupees being put into other projects like Rs 4.3 crores being spent on building 117 anicuts.

But then there is no programme of Participatory Irrigation Management here. I feel, what can we really do here? As development workers we have tried to involve farmers to go for barley and late varieties of mustard that require less water, and to treat saline lands with gypsum to bring them under cultivation in future years. We are now thinking about increasing returns from milk sale by developing a women-managed dairy. But these have their own sets of problems — they are *there* and *then*, but the Nibi Canal system is *here* and *now*. As I see the empty canal and watercourses, the barren fields, the long serpentine pipelines, the silent frustrations to get water, I feel like the man in Bob Dylan's song:

"How many times can a man turn his head

Pretending he just doesn't see

The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind

The answer is blowin' the wind..."

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the villagers of Nibi, Khanpura, Surajpura, Bhilagwan, and Sandra for all the information provided. Also thanks is due to Mr Bhargava Advocate-Dholpur Civil Court, Dr Rajoria, S/O ADC to His Highness Maharaja of Dholpur Uday Bhan Singh Mr Tripathi, Mr Jain, AEN, Mr Rambharose, Mr Diwan Singh, Ziladar and Radhey Shyam Patwari of Department of Irrigation, Dholpur Division along with Mr Om Prakash and Mr Vinod Kumar of Department of Fisheries, Dholpur for all the help provided.

Annex

Some Details of the Nibi Canal System

Particulars	Value
Name of the Tank	Urmila Sagar
Catchment Area	77 sq km
Length of the dam	3 km
Rainfall	24 inches
Tank Breach Level	17.69 m
High Flood Level	17.56 m
Full Tank Level	17.51 m
Crosscapacity	573 Mcft
Live Storage	534.8 Mcft
Dead Storage	38.2 Mcft
Length of main canal	17.29 km
Length of minors	20 km
Cultivable Command Area	2253 ha
Gross Command Area	2428 ha
Actual Irrigated Area	1214 ha
Flow rate	65 cusecs
Source: Department of Irrigation, Dholpur Division	

Annual Irrigation Charges for Irrigating One Acre of Land Through the Canal

S.no	Crop	Rate/acre/yr (Rs)
1	Sugarcane	100
2	Rice	46
3	Cotton	58
4	Maize	15
5	Bajra	15
6	Jowar	15
7	Pulses	27
8	Sunhemp and Grass	27
9	Garden	98
10	Gawar	27
11	Vegetables	30
12	Wheat	42
13	Barley	23
14	Gram (first watering)	27
15	Gram (subsequent water)	38
16	Fodder	36
17	Oil Seeds	36
18	Water nut	50
Source: Department of Irrigation, Dholpur Division		



The Night of August 15th

Aparna Dash

The night of August 15th was quite shocking for the *didis* of the Chameli, Ganga and Sita Mahila Mandals of Dapok in the Hazaribagh district of Bihar. How could our *bhaia* (they were referring to Subasis Mukhopadhyay, who was living in their village as part of his apprenticeship with PRADAN) be threatened by two drunkards of the village. Remorse, in the form of tears, trickled down Sewli Devi, Parbati Devi, Gaura Devi and others' cheeks when they narrated the incident to us. "Bhaia is secure, and even now the *didis* are guarding him" was the first statement that they uttered when they came to our office at Barhi. "We won't leave Janki and Lalu. We will send them to jail. It is a question of the prestige of our Mahila Mandals. We are all proof to the event, and we all will give witness before the police".

Janki and Lalu had an eye on the Mahila Mandal formed. Not only had the *didis* dared to come out of their houses, they had also taken an upper hand in sorting village problems and resolving conflicts in the village.

This was quite intolerable to Janki and Lalu, an attack on their male egos. Previous incidences of their abusing Mahila Mandal members were also reported, but the *didis* paid no attention to it. This irritated the men even more. The thought that the *didis* and *bhaia* from Barhi were solely responsible for all this fanned their hatred. And Subbasis's village stay gave them an opportunity to retaliate.

With the intention of beating him up, they tried to venture into the house where Subbasis was asleep, with perhaps a dagger in their hands. It was not clearly visible as it was about 11.30 p.m. Their attempt to harm Shubasis turned out to be a failure as the *didis* of the Mahila Mandal had gathered around after hearing the commotion. The *dada* staying with Subbasis pushed them out of the house. Seeing the strength and unity of the *didis*, Lalu and Janki got scared and moved away from the place. Again, at about 2.30 am, they crossed to the house with sticks in their hand. In the mean time more *didis* had gathered with bamboo canes in their

hand. Seeing such a large gathering of *didis* they did not dare to enter the house, and went back home abusing and rebuking them. All the *didis* stayed there till 3.30 am, and after ascertaining that there was no more danger a few of them moved back home to have a short nap. Early the next morning a group of them came to our office at Barhi to inform us about the events of the night. Seeing the strength of the *didis*, Lalu had tried to make amends with Shubasis in the morning itself. The *didis* were not moved, and insisted that strict action be taken against both Lalu and Janki, and that they should not, by any means, be forgiven. They reported the matter to the police, and all the *didis* came forward as witnesses.

Though the incident was small, praiseworthy was the instantaneous strength, courage and unity that the members of the Mahila Mandal showed in protection of a stranger who had barely spent five days in their village.



Learning Visit to India

A letter from Dirk Bakker

Introduction

From November 20th to December 11th I visited India in the framework of a sabbatical leave granted by ICCO.

I have been working in the Africa Department of ICCO, a Dutch co-funding agency for about 18 years. This followed 5 years of fieldwork in Burkina Faso. For the last 5 years I have been exclusively associated with ICCO's programme in South Africa.

In many African countries, and especially in South Africa, ICCO's counterpart organisations find it difficult to deal with income generating activities and micro finance programmes in a viable and sustainable way.

Seeing the wide spread experiences of ICCO's counterparts in India in these areas, I decided to use part of my sabbatical to come out to India and study some of these programmes from close with the expectation that lessons could be learned benefiting ICCO's counterparts in South Africa. After consulting my colleagues of the India desk, PRADAN was one of the organisations selected for my learning visit.

PRADAN was prepared to facilitate such a visit and so a visit to the Alwar programme was proposed, which I gratefully accepted.

Field Visit

The visit took place from November 21st to 23rd. During that period an extensive field exposure programme has been organised for me in two dif-



Dirk Bakker with SHG Members in Ramgarh.

ferent blocks namely Kishangarh Bas and Ramgarh block. The field visits were taking place under the inspiring guidance of Ms. Neelam Maheswari.

The first day we visited 2 women groups involved in watershed development in Rasgan. The second day we visited two women's groups (SHGs) in Nagal Maunjia and Ismailpur and a watershed scheme run by a men's group in Beda ka Baas. Further a visit to a Federation of women's groups and to a shoe production unit run by a group of men and women was paid. The third day two women's groups in Meokhera and Bamnikhera were visited.

There was ample time to discuss with PRADAN's field staff and members of community groups.

Observations and Impressions

I will not elaborate on the various visits separately, but will give my

personal (not ICCO's) general observations and impressions.

Firstly I was impressed by the dedication and motivation of the PRADAN field staff in Ramgarh. This can be seen as an indication that the staff screening process of PRADAN, which includes going through an apprentice phase, is effective.

PRADAN's primary focus is to enhance livelihoods of disadvantaged communities. Women groups are chosen as an entry point to these communities. Looking at the evolution of the women's groups that we visited, it became clear to me that these groups have a considerable potential to bring about positive changes in their communities.

The organisation of women's groups to become SHGs around saving and credit activities creates a unique space for these women to meet and to gain organisational skills and to think about how to address their basic needs at family as well as at the

community level. This evolution process goes slow, depending on the level of acceptance by the husbands. In the case of newly formed SHGs you could sometimes feel the resistance of the men that came out to observe the meeting that we had with the SHG.

In most cases the SHGs seemed however to be very determined to become more and more active. It is evident that the very unequal gender relations form one of the root causes that slows down the development of these disadvantaged communities like in so many other developing countries.

The existence of an active women SHG does challenge these gender relations. Women are gaining confidence and self esteem and become less dependent, whilst the men are being challenged. This can only be assessed positively. This can be considered as an confrontational approach towards men, which is definitely needed.

A programme to conscientize and make men responsible for their role in the community and on gender relations might be a useful complement to that approach.

I was impressed by the organisational discipline and the skills of the SHGs to run a saving and credit programme as a core activity to the benefit of their members. Many SHGs have a bank linkage. Most of the loans sanctioned to members are for consumption purposes. Most SHGs have not reached the stage to promote income generating activities amongst the members. In some instances the potential is there e.g. milk production to sell to the dairy corporation. Not all SHGs have very concrete ideas on how to engage with community development issues, but the potential is there. Most if not all SHGs

I do feel that the Indian experiences can benefit NGOs in South Africa that want to become more expert in this field.

PRADAN's policy papers on SHGs and the designed credit and saving manuals will be particularly interesting for ICCO's counterparts in South Africa (SA) to peruse and possibly adjust to their specific situation.

need quite intensive support to really grow to their full potential. This applies perhaps even more so to clusters and/or federations of SHGs. Seeing the fast increase in numbers of SHGs I am not sure as to what extent PRADAN has the capacity to give that support. I would opt for not growing too fast and link the growth of the programme to the capacity of the organisation.

With regard to PRADAN's monitoring capacity, I was not able to get a clear picture. I could not get a confirmation that there is a system in place that has developed indicators to assess the progress of each SHG, and to assess the effects of the SHG's activities on the livelihoods of the member families. If there is, it does not transpire clearly in the reporting that I have seen. I do believe there is an urgent need for such a system to enrich the management information. In this regard I was a bit surprised not to find a separate report on the PRADAN Alwar programme activities beside the overall annual report for the whole organisation. PRADAN's policy papers on SHGs are very articulate and could be used as a basis for the development of indicators to assess progress of the SHG programme.

Lessons Learned

Trying to compare the South African context with the Indian context is hardly feasible. What I have seen from the Indian context, is three different districts out of an enormous subcontinent. These three different districts (Alwar and Udaipur in Rajasthan and Nizamabad/Adilabad in AP) have already shown me the big diversity of the Indian context. However by focusing on saving and credit/income generating

activities an interesting comparison can be made.

A number of critical factors can be identified that impact on the viability of a saving and credit scheme as an instrument to improve family livelihoods and enhance community development.

- To work preferably with women groups.
- Groups need to be as homogeneous as possible.
- A culture of saving and business orientation.
- Mobilizing own resources through saving is good point of departure.
- A conducive government policy.
- Access to finance, bank linkage.
- Access to markets.
- Consistent NGO support to build up and strengthen groups capacity to manage own affairs.
- Supporting NGOs need to bring in specific expertise in the field of income generating projects to assist groups in identifying viable opportunities for income generation.
- Challenge groups to engage with issues of the wider community.

Comparing the Indian situation with

that of South Africa with regard to these critical factors, I see the following differences, that favours the Indian situation;

- The culture of saving and business orientation is more developed.
- Access to finance through bank linkages is easier.
- Government policy is more conducive.
- Local markets are more developed.

Taking into account these critical factors and the major differences, I do feel that the Indian experiences can benefit NGO's in South Africa that want to become more expert in this field.

PRADAN's policy papers on SHGs and the designed credit and saving manuals will be particularly interesting for ICCO's counterparts in South Africa (SA) to peruse and possibly adjust to their specific situation. In addition to that I will personally share my experiences with these SA counterparts.

The option of a concrete exchange of experience between e.g. PRADAN and one or more SA ICCO counterparts should not be excluded, but the ground needs to be firstly prepared.

I realize that I made this document a bit in a hurry which makes the analysis a bit superficial here and there. More systematic analysis is still to be done.

I want to conclude by expressing once more my gratitude for the facilitation of my learning visit. I found it a very rewarding trip, that fully met my personal expectations.



I n f o r m a t i o n

GIVE Online to PRADAN at www.icicicommunities.com.

Give Foundation was legally born on April 28, 2000, (incorporated as a non-profit company, under section 25 of the Indian Companies Act, 1956). It is a not-for-profit financial services organisation dedicated to professionalisation of the "third sector". Their mission is to promote the act of "giving", by helping good NGOs raise funds and promoting greater transparency and accountability in the "third sector". It has setup a charity portal, GIVE ONLINE, that will allow people to donate online, with a high degree of personalisation and assurance.

GIVE ONLINE is sponsored by ICICI, and hosted as a part of www.icicicommunities.com. Donors may choose the activities and organisations they want to support (from a selected list), the mode, amount and period of payment, as well as the kind of impact they would want their money to have. All this through a unique concept of "giving products".

Giving Products are unitised values of donations that help a donor make a concrete, specific and highly tangible contribution like donating for a start-up-kit for an SHG, to an SHG to finance a loan, drinking water to a village, towards the apprenticeship programme, towards our corpus, etc.

A Rich Harvest - Musings on my Sabbatical.

Vinod Jain

I joined PRADAN in 1986. After a 13-year uninterrupted stint, I took a sabbatical in June 1999. I initially intended to be away for one year, and thereafter extended it for another year. After such a long stay in PRADAN, I had the feeling of ennui. I had reached a plateau with not many new strands of thoughts, ideas, concepts or inspiration. I needed a break to explore the world of development, and to decide what kind of work I would like to pursue in future. It was essential to experience diverse approaches, contexts and organizations. For this, I decided to take up short-term consultancy assignments rather than join an academic course. In the following, I describe my experience and learning of nearly one and half years. I also briefly share my views on the areas of professional growth for a Pradanite and opportunities to address them, as well as the new challenges and opportunities that PRADAN could address.

I have worked on assignments from three organizations - Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), World Bank (WB) and SIDBI Foundation for Micro Credit (SFMC). Ex-Pradanites who were working on different assignments helped me get into the act quickly. All the AKF and WB assignments I did were with Ved Arya (who has founded SRIJAN Trust). One SFMC assignment was with Biswajit Sen (through TRIAD, founded by him for supporting enterprise promotion). I also worked on two assignments with SFMC independently.

Working on the AKF Assignment

The Aga Khan Foundation is interested in the development of the Mewat region. The triangular area between the Delhi-Agra and Delhi-Jaipur roads as two sides, and the Agra-Alwar road as the third side roughly forms the Mewat region. It lies southwest of Delhi, and contains parts of four districts — Gurgaon and Faridabad in Haryana, and Alwar and Bharatpur in Rajasthan. The region draws its name from the *Meos*, the Muslim community who inhabit the area. Incidentally, our Alwar Project lies in Mewat.

The AKF assignment offered me an opportunity to study the Mewat region, to identify the problems, and suggest areas and strategies for intervention. I was not encumbered by livelihood issues only, and could look at other

developmental issues in the region like education, health, status of women, etc., in their totality. The area has specific problems related to the minority community. The prospect excited me. This was to be done through a comprehensive base-line survey of the Mewat region. The second part of the assignment was to build the capacity of three Mewat-based NGOs assisted by AKF, to help them be more effective in their current interventions, and strategize and lead in resolving the problems identified.

Ved put together six people (including him), with a core of three (including me), to work with the NGOs, and to conduct the survey. While I did not participate in the actual survey work, I was involved in all the deliberations of planning, and later in the analysis of data. I got a good sense of how to systematically draw out relevant information. I also became more aware of the different sources of secondary information, and of methods to analyze and interpret this information to understand the problems in a particular region. For those who might be interested, SRIJAN has come out with a good publication of the survey.

Of the three NGOs selected, I was involved in the capacity building of one that promotes enterprises. We conducted a workshop with their staff, to understand their contexts and the factors that constrained them from giving their best. This helped us build an inventory of areas that required inputs. Subsequent workshops focused on developing clarity about the project; perspective planning, including clarifying the mission and objectives of working in the Mewat region; and enhancing specific skills in project activities. I, too, learnt specific workshop skills from my partner.

AKF could not assure its financial support to the NGOs for a longer period, and the inputs from the SRIJAN team were part of this package. We could, therefore, not sustain these inputs beyond a certain period, although we were able to see some change, even in the short period that we worked with the NGO team. People had moved from their earlier positions to a learning orientation, so essential to the process of change. This was a new experience for me, and I gained confidence in the "process approach" for capacity building.

Working on the WB Assignments

Review of the Rural Women's Development and Empowerment Project (RWDEP)

My first assignment was as a member of supervision mission for reviewing the WB-assisted RWDEP of the Government of India. The team consisted of three persons from SRIJAN (with Ved as the leader), and one from the government. It was a very short assignment requiring us to visit four of the six States participating in the Project. I visited Haryana, UP and MP.

In Haryana, we interacted with the Managing Director and Project Director of the Women's Development Corporation, and the concerned Principal Secretary in the State government. The overview of the government functioning that we got would not have been possible but as a mission member. I realised what constrains people in the government, and how they gravitate to their lowest level of energy and enthusiasm. There was an utter lack of will to change their way of functioning. And there was no comparative standard of performance.

In MP, it was quite hilarious as it turned out to be a PRADAN show all the way. Zulfikar Haider (ex-Pradanite from our Kesla project) was the Project Director in the MP Mahila Arthik Vikas Nigam, a counterpart of State Women Development Corporation. Our field visit was to Kesla, and we met our Suktawa team there. Then there were two of us (Ved and I, an ex and a present Pradanite) in the WB review mission. We got a fair deal of inside information, which further corroborated our hypothesis formed in Haryana.

In UP, an important implementing agency for the RWDEP is the UP Bhumi Sudhar Nigam (UP Land Development Corporation -UPLDC), a wholly-owned government organization. UPLDC attains over 50 percent of the project's target. The visit to UPLDC was a revelation. It was quite unlike what one normally expects to see in a government setup, or for that matter what we observed in the other States we visited. The staff here was very zealous, proud of their work and put their best foot forward. Their fieldwork was as good as that of any professional NGO. There was definitely something in the UPLDC that made the people on deputation from the government a changed lot. What surprised us the most was that it was a learning organization. Starting from zero, they had built up a good repertoire of processes to carry out their work efficiently and effectively. They had broken down the complex village processes into simple steps, and documented it. They had converted this into training material for new people, so that they were fast off the block. We were amazed to see so much training activity. I began to correlate this with PRADAN. I could have done similar documentation in the Resource and Research Centre (RRC) for systematic training of processes that we understand well, but did not...

I realized the significance of softer things, like the "culture" in an organization, and how it influences otherwise different personalities in their parent departments to perform according to the organization's norms. How anecdotes transmit and keep the culture alive. I became conscious of the role of some to act as guardians to keep watch, to give feedback and chasten those who strayed. I also recognized the importance of standard setting. It became clear, too, that the leadership has a principal role to play, and primary responsibility for all this.

My visit to UPLDC changed my view of the government and organizations. The axiom, "people make organizations and organizations make people" was there to see. However, it is not a chicken or egg issue. The starting point is good people, who shape and make the organizations. Hence, there is a need for a set of early pioneers to shape organizations, even in a government outfit. Thereafter, it is a two-way process between the new leadership (that should renew) and the organizational norms and culture (that need to change with the experience and demands of the environment) that leads to a positive or negative spiral. Visiting UPLDC was a humbling experience for me. I became more confident of human capabilities and in human processes.

The District Poverty Initiatives Project (DPIP)

DPIP is another WB-financed poverty alleviation project, in Rajasthan, MP and AP. SRIJAN was involved in Rajasthan and MP. The SRIJAN team consisted of Ved Arya, Yugandhar Mandavkar (he was associated with PRADAN through IGSSS's SMILE programme in the eighties), Tejinder S. Bhogal (another ex-PRADANite) and me. Our involvement in DPIP Rajasthan was for a short time, whereas our engagement with DPIP in MP continued for a substantial period.

The assignment in Rajasthan was short. We wrote up some parts of the project document. We were involved at a time when most decisions related to the project had already been finalized with the State government, and it was not possible to open issues up. We could not influence the final project design much. Even in this short period, I got a glimpse of how World Bank projects are designed, negotiated with the government, and finalised.

Our involvement in MP was more intensive. Our contract was to come up with mechanisms to ensure inclusion of socially disadvantaged groups, organizational analysis, project guidelines and implementation processes, community level processes, capacity building requirements, etc. This assignment offered us an opportunity to draw on our grassroots experience, and our inputs were incorporated in the various sections of the project document.

The mission and the objectives of the Project are translated into sequential steps through the Project Manual. It is the most important document for the field implementers. I wrote the manual and thoroughly enjoyed it, particularly the challenge of translating the project concept and processes into specific steps.

MP does not have too many known and established NGOs. Hence, it was decided that government employees will also be involved at the community level, unlike in Rajasthan where only NGO staff are involved. We devised a selection methodology to bring good people from different government departments on deputation to the DPIIP. This methodology comprised psychometric tests, sociometry and interviews. Psychometric tests were to test achievement motivation, psychological blocks, etc. We conducted three rounds of selection to perfect the methodology, and thereafter started training the selected staff in applying and carrying out selection.

To give proper direction to staff joining the project, we conducted an "Orientation Camp". This provided inputs about the project, and also sensitized them to core values required. We also suggested a revised capacity building strategy for the project. We are now in the process of designing sequential training modules, also equipping the district block agencies to conduct these modules locally.

My involvement with the DPIIP in MP has been an excellent learning experience. I now have a better understanding of how major poverty alleviation initiatives come about; what critical factors can mar an otherwise good project; how to translate concepts to actionable steps; and how to develop a stakeholder constellation. Finally and most importantly, I have a better appreciation of my own potential, including as a process facilitator.

Working with the SIDBI Foundation for Micro Credit

SIDBI has launched SIDBI Foundation for Micro Credit (SFMC) to promote micro-credit in the country. It is part of SIDBI, slated to become separate entity over time. My first assignment to suggest a capacity building strategy for SFMC was with Biswajit Sen.

I visited seven different organizations engaged in micro credit, including our project at Hazaribag. Though all these organizations were working primarily with women groups, they followed very different ways/methods of forming groups, collecting savings, extending loans, ensuring repayments, deploying human resources, etc. I saw, for the first time, the ASA, Bangladesh model of micro-credit. SFMC itself is interested in creating and supporting prospective micro credit institutions (MFIs) that would themselves be engaged in providing the loans. Hence, I studied these organizations with greater scrutiny.

This time I evaluated the SHG programme at Hazaribag more objectively, perhaps as an outsider would have done. I could identify a number of areas that needed improvement. These were on-time repayment, loan assessment procedures, group performance evaluation criteria, peer review by groups, team performance evaluation, etc. If not for the assignment, I would not have been so hard-nosed and critical. To be fair, I did raise bit of a stink about it while I was in PRADAN. But then, I was only familiar with our SHG model, which focussed on bank linkages. Here too, having not worked on it myself, I was diffident in raising contentious issues. After seeing so many diverse models of micro credit, my perspective about it has changed, and I am able to appreciate the nuances.

SFMC engaged me to do organizational study and suggest a capacity building plan for Cashpour Technical and Financial Services Ltd. (CFTS) and SEWA, Lucknow. CFTS is a Grameen Bank replicator, registered as company. SEWA, registered as a society, is working with women *chikan* embroidery workers in Lucknow. It has been quite successful in *chikan* production and marketing, having annual turnover of over Rs 2.5 crores. It wants to get into micro credit activities.

These assignments required me to brush up my knowledge from a training course on Organization Development that I had attended a few years ago. I worked very hard on these assignments since there was no one to fall back upon. However, I enjoyed the hard work, and liked the output I delivered. I wonder if the contract form of working isn't a good way to draw the best out of people. Especially for people like me, who work to deadlines... So much for my experience of the past one and a half years. Now I turn to the opportunities that I see for PRADAN in the current environment.

Opportunities for PRADAN

The State governments are bankrupt. They are hard put to pay salaries to their employees. After the implementation of the recommendations of fifth pay commission, it has become untenable to maintain such a large work force. The States have responded by retrenching and closing units that are at the periphery. Thus, we see Government of MP retrenching 50,000 temporary staff and closing loss-making corporations. What we see as large allocations in the budgets for different departments, including rural development, are actually to support the bloated bureaucracy. There is hardly any money for development finance. However, political compulsions demand otherwise.

There is also internal realization in the government that it has to improve its effectiveness. It is also coming under lot of criticism and pressure from outside to change

its functioning. Consequently, we see that the State governments are open to external influence like never before. As they search for money from agencies like the World Bank, and other multilateral and bilateral donors, they are amenable to new ideas and suggestions that would not have been possible otherwise. Changes may be required in programmes, projects, schemes, policies, etc. Sometimes even a little change in the project/programmes can lead to huge positive benefits. For example, a decision to transfer the power to sanction village level projects to the gram-sabha empowers it, and creates an environment in which communities begin to make choices more judiciously.

Appropriate changes have to be incorporated during the design of the projects. Once a project is finalized, it is difficult to make changes. How we wish that the *Tasar* project with Japanese cooperation in Chattisgarh (earlier MP) was designed differently! With so many years of grassroots development experience, PRADAN is well-placed to give such strategic inputs. It will not only stand us good at the time of implementation, but will also create spaces for other genuine actors in development. There is little purpose in lamenting the poor design of such large multi/bilateral projects, when we are not ready to contribute our bit. PRADAN has to proactively seek and position itself for this role.

Our senior people, those who can play this role, need to develop an appropriate orientation. We have to become familiar with the internal systems of multilateral and bilateral agencies, and develop an understanding of the context in which they work. We will need to learn their language and develop personal rapport with people in these agencies. Personal relationships also play an important role in influencing change, just as they do in raising funds. Relationships have to be developed and nurtured. Taking up various short-term assignments, of the nature I have been involved in, can give an opening. These assignments also help develop perspectives, and raise awareness of the current trends and thinking in policy forums. These agencies also seek people with appropriate grassroots experience to help them design effective programmes. Should we shy away?



People News

1. Arijit got married on December 7, 2000. Congratulations!
2. Ashish, Rajashree, Smita, Alok and Sutapa, apprentices of the 18th batch graduated. They have all joined PRADAN as Executive (Projects). A big welcome to all of them!
3. Haldhar has resigned from PRADAN. He and Roshan (Ex. PRADANite) have started a new organisation in Erki village of Ranchi District of Bihar. We wish him all the best!
4. Mala, Sarmishtha, Sandip, Santanu, Debashish, Srirup and Subhankar Saha, all apprentices of the 20th batch, have dropped out of the apprenticeship programme. Our best wishes to them in their new careers.
5. Madhab presented a paper in a workshop organised by BAIF, Pune. An abstract of his paper will appear in the forthcoming Newsreach.
6. Amrut Patel, a designer, will help our *Tasar* team out with the design of fabric.
7. Archana is close to becoming a "doctor"! She has been on leave to complete her doctoral thesis at GBPUAT, Pantnagar.

Send your contributions to NewsReach by email to pradhan@ndb.vsnl.net.in or by mail to PRADAN, PO Box 3827, Niti Bagh, New Delhi 110 017.



Obituary

We are very sorry to inform you about the sad demise of Mr. James Mascarenhas, Director, Outreach, Bangalore. He was known as Jimmy among us. He passed away at 2 a.m. on January 6th, 2001. He was suffering from a lung infection for the past few months.

Jimmy was one of the first few people to join PRADAN, way back in 1984. He was deputed by PRADAN to work with MYRADA, an NGO based in Bangalore. Jimmy continued to work with MYRADA after 1989, when PRADAN wound up its policy to place professionals to work in other NGOs as Action Consultants. He then went on to found Outreach, a Bangalore-based NGO.

We pray that Mrs. Mascarenhas and their two children have the strength to bear this untimely loss. Given below is the address of Outreach for those of you who may wish to send in messages to Outreach or the family:

OUTREACH,
109 Coles Road, Fraser Town,
Bangalore - 560 005
Email - outreach@blr.vsnl.net.in

Marketing of *Tasar* Silk Fabric: *Quo Vadis*

Khitish Pandya

Tasar Fabric: An Introduction

Tasar to most Indians is the golden hued fabric for kurtas and sarees, much in favour with the aristocratic Bengalis and Biharis. No trousseau is complete without a *tasar* saree in Eastern India. Just as mulberry silk is to the South, *tasar* is to the East. So when I joined the *tasar* team to handle marketing, I expected we would be targeting this large segment of *tasar* users. But much to my surprise, I discovered that we were making home furnishing fabric in *tasar*, of which I would like to confess, I was not even aware as a marketing option. So much for being an expert help!

To the uninitiated, *tasar* may be a fabric for the elite, but there is more to it than its fashion appeal. It is a product with immense scope to provide sustainable livelihoods for *adivasis* and other poor rural families in certain parts of India. *Tasar* silk is obtained from the cocoons of the worm *Antheraea Mylitta*. These cannot be reared indoors, but have to be bred on leaves of live *Arjuna* and *Asan* trees. This makes rearing of *tasar* worms for *tasar* cocoons a forest-based enterprise in which *adivasi* people have a competitive edge. The next step in producing *tasar*, of extracting yarn from cocoons by reeling or spinning, is also manual and could be done by trained women/men in villages. Finally, yarn is mostly woven into fabric on handlooms, which again is a source of rural livelihoods. Thus, the entire process of producing *tasar* fabric is a potential source of sustainable incomes to poor people in rural and

forest areas. The following would illustrate the development potential that *tasar* holds:

100 meters of *tasar* handloom fabric generates a living for:

- an *adivasi* family for 2 months in cocoon rearing.
- a spinner's/reeler's family for 2 months in extracting yarn.
- a weaver's family for 1 month in weaving the cloth.

If PRADAN can create an additional demand for even say 50,000 meters a year of *tasar* fabric from hitherto unexplored markets, it will generate new sustainable livelihoods for over 200 families. The overall potential is huge considering that Europe alone imports 70,000 tons of silk yarn. If *tasar* could capture just a 10 percent share, we would be looking at sustainable incomes for over 40,000 rural families! And that just from the yarn exports to only one global market. The overall market worldwide, for both yarn and fabric, would be very large. As our country has a natural advantage in the form of the requisite flora and fauna, *tasar* is worth focusing on as a source of rural livelihoods.

Tasar Marketing: First Encounters

As our product is home furnishings fabric in 100 percent silk and blends, the target segments are exporters of home furnishings made-ups, up-market households, institutional clients like offices and hotels, and overseas market for furnishings yardage. When I joined I felt that the best route

would be to contact existing clients¹ and the locally based exporters of made-ups for home furnishings. I began making the rounds and got the same feedback everywhere, that our fabric was costlier than the market. Existing clients also complained of replication and delivery problems. To add insult to injury, the inspector at the Silk Board to whom I had gone to get a sample export shipment certified took one look at the rates on our invoice and declared that we would never be able to get any orders if we priced ourselves so high.

Product and Production Problems

The high cost is partly, and genuinely, due to the fact that the people engaged in the various production processes earn fair wages. However, I am not convinced that this is a *fait accompli*, and that nothing can be done to lower costs. I still think that we need to explore how we can lower costs, such as by introducing cheaper substitutes, etc. Otherwise we shall not be competitive in the market, and will forever be banished to operate through the NGO network and high fashion boutiques, where cost of the product is often a non-issue. This could lull us in a false sense of security. It would also mean that our development intervention would be marginal, as the total demand in the NGO sector and in high fashion boutiques would be a very small fraction of the market. This should not be acceptable to us.

¹ PRADAN had been supplying *tasar* fabric to local and overseas buyers for a year and a half before I joined.

The problem of poor replication that some buyers have complained about is partly due to the inherent nature of *tasar*. For example, there is variation in the colour of yarn from different lots of cocoons, and there would be variations in handmade yarn produced by different spinners/reelers, etc. Another reason is that we have so far only had small production runs, accentuating this problem. Finally, there remains room for tightening quality control over job workers² (weavers). The practice of getting job work done demands very tight control; otherwise both quality and delivery suffers and that is exactly what is happening with us.

It is also imperative that we have a minimum size of orders every month. Else the weavers will abandon us (most of them are job workers). And when we do get orders, we would have to work with new weavers, again leading to quality and production problems. To ensure regular orders is thus critical to keep a reasonably sized production unit occupied through the year. It is primarily by tapping domestic markets that we could meet this requirement, at least in the initial stages. Export and overseas market segments are more difficult to reach out to in the short run, with longer gestation period for orders to come in, often varying from 6-12 months.

The Export Market

Trying to introduce our own designs means a 6-12 month wait between the initial sharing of swatches and finally getting an order from an exporter, or from an overseas wholesale agent. There is, on the other hand, a steady flow of enquiries from the same segment, to meet their current require-

ments. We too have fielded enquiries for large volumes of *tasar* fabric, with minimum order sizes of 20,000-30,000 metres! However, most of it was woven with *Ghicha*³ yarn, which we do not produce in our project as a deliberate policy.

The process we follow to get orders for own designs is as follows.

The designs are first introduced to exporters/overseas wholesale agents. They, in turn, get approval from their overseas clients, based on the swatches we give them. The buyer selects some swatches, and places orders for small quantities of fabric to fabricate made-ups for final approval. Only if the made-ups are approved, is an order placed for fabric. Such orders would normally be large, but with short delivery periods and stringent quality parameters. I have heard horror stories of exporters/suppliers going bankrupt as buyers have rejected their material on grounds of poor quality. There is also a chance that an intermediary gets approval from his buyer for our design; and he would then start looking for a trader who could find a cheaper source of fabric with our design. Such theft of designs is a fairly widespread practice in this industry.

In spite of the tough working conditions of this segment, we have to supply to this segment as this is where the most potential exists for silk home furnishings. The ideal situation would be to get linked directly to overseas up-market furnishings stores, which would ensure large orders at remunerative prices regularly. We could then also circumvent the problem of high production costs, as we eliminate one intermediary in the channel. I have already initiated this

process of direct communication through the Internet, and by registering ourselves with trade portals. We also urgently need a web site of our own and I hope to do that early next year.

Meanwhile, to ensure regular orders in the short run, we need to reach out to top-end households and local institutional markets. To do so, we need to go through furnishings retailers, as it is unviable for us to sell directly. We cannot even hope to offer the variety that a retailer is able to. We also need to accept here that the domestic market for silk home furnishings is limited, mostly due to the high cost and the difficulty in maintaining such fabric with so much dust around. Yet the market is large enough to keep a small producer like us busy round the year, and till such time that we are able to operate in the international market.

We currently follow the practice of producing fabric after receiving orders. While this has advantages of not being stuck with large unwanted stocks, it has disadvantages too. It handicaps us while servicing exporters/overseas markets, as they initially need small quantities of a variety of fabrics to make samples. Obviously, they would not like to wait for the 30 to 45 days that we need to execute a fresh order. To remedy this situation, we have now decided to have a showroom-cum-godown in Delhi to stock at least a roll (about 30 meters) of each of our designs. Exporters will soon be able to pick stuff off the shelf. This would also help service small lot orders from the retail trade. Eventually we should be able to identify the faster moving designs and stock more than a roll to service the market efficiently.

The Domestic Market

The domestic market requires sheers, and dyed fabric, that we do not produce at present. The natural look fabric that we currently produce has very few takers here. By the way, this also

² The cocoon rearers, grainage (or seed) producers, spinners and reelers belong to families supported by PRADAN, and we actively promote these activities. Weaving, however, is done on job-work by weavers in Bhagalpur. They are generally from poor families.

³ *Ghicha* is yarn that has been thigh-reeled. This is a practice that we have been dissuading. PRADAN has introduced a reeling and twisting machine that ensures production of reeled *tasar* yarn without the drudgery and the socio-economic disadvantages that thigh reeling foists on women.

tasar

by PRADAN



The Tasar Logo

The Tasar Stall at Heimtex 2000

seems to be true of the international mass markets. So the first and foremost task before us is to develop fabric in response to the feedback from the market. Though we have received some orders for our current designs from this segment, there is scope to do much more. For example, by working with say 60 retailers across the country, each selling 75 meters a month, we can sell over 4,000 meters every month. An additional advantage here is that there is no seasonality. Another critical feedback from the market is that it is price sensitive. In order to penetrate it, we need to develop thinner fabrics in various dyed versions with a properly coordinated range in the price range of Rs 125 to Rs 225 a meter.

Dilemmas of a Newcomer to the *Tasar* Market and PRADAN

The demand in the market is for *tasar* fabric woven with *Ghicha*, which is a thigh reeled yarn. This yarn is almost synonymous with *tasar*. However, we do not make it because the process is painful and degrading for women and is not particularly remunerative either. Unfortunately, we also do not have a substitute that we could use to make similar looking fabric. It would be worthwhile to try and develop one as it would open up a large market.

Initially, I did not get a good response for our designs from local buyers, and had a target to generate orders worth 3,000 meters a month. I changed tack then, and began visiting boutiques, shawl and scarf manufacturers and other such places, though we did not have any suitable product in our repertoire for them. I also explored selling yarn, and received very positive

response from the market. I could not respond to this and had to abandon the idea, as I learnt that we were unable to meet our own yarn requirement at the time and selling yarn was out of the question.

To be able to develop overseas clientele, participating in a trade fair is a very cost effective and viable method for a debutante like us. To this end, we had booked a stall in Heimtex India, an international trade fair for home furnishings textiles and made-ups. The fair was organized for the first time in India by the same people who organize the Frankfurt Heimtex Fair, the largest trade fair of its kind in the world. It was a real disappointment to see a poor turnout of business visitors and poorly organized infrastructure, which made it extremely difficult to operate in the hall. The fair was held indoors in Delhi without air conditioning in the first week of October. With temperatures hovering around 40° C, foreigners visiting the fair were so bothered by the heat that they just did not spend time discussing business. Of the few visitors we did get and the trade enquiries we elicited, the final outcome is still not in. It is difficult to be sanguine as the turnout of potential buyers from our target segment was very low.

It was fascinating to see the variety on display at the Heimtex, and it made us feel that we had miles to go to become even as competent as the local guys in the business, leave alone the international competitors. One thing to our credit and advantage was our exclusive focus on *tasar*, which helped single us out in the crowd. Unfortunately, we made a faux pas by putting our organization's full name on the masthead - as the rules of the Fair did not allow us to prominently display "*tasar* by PRADAN" and our beautiful logo that goes with it! Many a visitor gave our stall a cursory look, thinking we were some government/industry body engaged in assisting visitors. So much for "professional assistance"! I think this alone must have cost us many potential visitors.

I was running my own small-scale industrial unit before I joined PRADAN. Managing and raising funds was what mattered most of the time. Being within budget, trying to make the most out of limited resources and trying to save a rupee here and a few paise there was the mantra which would help me scrape through till the next payment came in. In that vein, I had got a catalogue and a brochure printed for Heimtex. My colleague who had attended a textile fair in Europe felt that these were not up to the mark and another brochure was printed at the last moment. There was no time to redesign and print the catalogue. It was unnerving for me to see large sums of money being spent to undo a perceived lack of quality of a brochure, which to my way of thinking was incidental to the objective of doing business at the Heimtex. In my previous work, I would not have been able to spend again on a brochure even if I had realized that the brochure was not up to the mark. But then I have not operated in the international market and was not qualified to judge the quality of the brochure, nor the impact it would have on our business at the fair. Luckily, the quality of the brochure became a non-issue as visitors were more interested in the catalogue of designs that had information about our products and the fabric that was on display.

It is but natural that there would be such discordant experiences when one begins to work in an environment different from what one has been used to for some time. I had, rather I should say I still have difficulty in working in a team as all along I have been used to deciding and doing things alone and also facing the consequences alone. It is at times difficult for me to consult others as I am not used to it and I also did not have anyone to consult most of the times. I would be a HR analyst's dream case study!

Another experience worth mentioning is about a customer who manufactures lampshades. We got an enquiry from this customer for 25,000 meters of basic *tasar* fabric. The order was more or less in the bag for at least 3,000 to 5,000 meters, worth Rs 7.50 lakh. But we let it go because we were not willing to use *Ghicha*, which was a component of the fabric under consider-

I realize that for an NGO engaged in development, the priorities would be different from that of a purely commercial outfit. Here lies the biggest dilemma of all for someone like me who believes that in Rome one has to behave like the Romans to get anywhere.

ation. It really shook me. In different circumstances I would have taken the order and served it through barter or something to pouch the client for ongoing trade in the future. I realize that for an NGO engaged in development, the priorities would be different from that of a purely commercial outfit. Here lies the biggest dilemma of all for someone like me who believes that in Rome one has to behave like the Romans to get anywhere.

Another concern is the perpetual temptation to be in all areas of *tasar* fabric, and to go for value addition to augment sales. For example, it is easier to operate in the local garment fabric market (sarees and kurtas) but this is a highly cost conscious segment and we are more expensive than competition. Hence this would be a difficult market for us to operate in. Yet, there is great temptation to do some value addition to our fabric and make it acceptable to this market. I have to keep reminding myself that we would

be sucked into a whirlpool where to sell expensive yarn, we get into fabric and then to sell expensive fabric, we get into made-ups and then to sell expensive made-ups, we get into retailing and then ... a never ending spiral. Clearly, having done so much in the *tasar* home furnishings fabric, we should try to build on what we have already done till we realise that what we are doing is not feasible or changing/expanding the product line would help achieve our objectives in a better way. Fabric being a basic commodity has tremendous potential and it is easy to get carried away by the possibilities in various forms.

However, to succeed one has to concentrate on one or two closely related product lines. Therefore, we should focus on how to make our existing products competitive and not to look at escape routes. Here a detailed study

of the entire production process should help us understand and solve our problems.

I personally feel that we should also explore the market for yarn and popularise it in sectors and markets where it has not been tried out earlier. This would help expand the overall demand for the yarn and develop the sub-sector. Trying to be both in yarn and fabric is possible, but perhaps not at this moment for us, given our staffing and expertise.



Intervening Gingerly

Anirban Ghosh

Background

Lohardaga is a small district in Jharkhand, around 75 kilometres from Ranchi, known for its vast Bauxite deposits that feed the major Aluminium factories in the region. Despite the development of mining since the 19th century, the district remains backward. The narrow gauge railway link to Ranchi, laid in 1916 is yet to be converted to broad gauge. The roads are terrible, worsening by the day due to movement of bauxite-laden trucks. Electricity supply is unstable and even the mines depend on their own power generators. The mines have directly or indirectly provided wage opportunities to perhaps four to five thousand people (e.g. labourers, truck drivers, eateries, etc.). A vast majority of the population depends on agriculture, mostly rain-fed paddy cultivation, untouched by the development of mining. There is large-scale migration after paddy is harvested.

PRADAN's team at Lohardaga has, since 1992, been developing small irrigation sources to enable farmers to take a second (*rabi*) crop. Our hypothesis was that access to irrigation would add to the family's food security, perhaps also reducing distress migration. However, over the years we have learnt that changing the economic status of a large number of families, or the general economic trends in an area, is not so straightforward. A major problem we face is that cultivating wheat using diesel pump sets to irrigate is not very remunerative. It provides food security to families that have food to last till the wheat harvest, but growing cereals to sell is not attractive economically due to the low productiv-

ity of land and high irrigation cost. As a result, utilisation of the command area of irrigation schemes promoted by us has fallen over the years and presently some 40 percent households do not use the irrigation infrastructure. Yet farmers scramble for irrigation in the neighbouring blocks of Ranchi, the 'vegetable-belt' that feeds major cities like Calcutta, Jamshedpur, Rourkela, Bokaro, Ranchi, etc. Trends in these markets are a major influence on the cropping pattern in the area. The demand for products in these markets and supply of credit by agents, both in cash and kind, together lead to large scale changes in cropping pattern in the area. Therefore, the challenge before us is to help farmers in our project area grow cash crops, such as vegetables, and link them with this booming vegetable belt. The average farmer lacks skill, know-how, capital and linkages for this type of agriculture. Helping fill those gaps has come to be the focus of our work, now that the physical infrastructure has largely been developed.

The Idea

The team keeps an eye on the trends in the vegetable belt as reflected in the local *haats*, and our thrust areas during agriculture planning are usually crops that are on the advent in these *haats*. Some four to five years ago there was significant potato cultivation in both the *kharif* and *rabi*, besides other vegetables. We noticed a changing pattern in the markets, with ginger being traded in the *haats*. On enquiry we found that farmers were facing a price crash during the potato harvest season. The limited

cold storage capacity is in high demand for storing both potato and tamarind in the area. The alternatives for potato farmers were few. About the same time the agents began providing support for ginger seed with buy back facility. The returns in ginger cultivation were significantly higher. This was in 1996-97. We discussed the issue internally, and felt that the high investment in inputs and highly intensive intercultural operations were critical bottlenecks for the growth of ginger as a major cash crop in the area. And we decided to leave it alone.

Our analysis of how the crop would fare locally proved wrong. Ginger heaps in the *haats* kept growing with every passing year. Beginning with a few bags, several truckloads of ginger soon began leaving the *haats*. In 1999 we took a fresh look at the whole thing, and decided that it was time we introduced the crop in our project area. We designed a strategy and intervention plan using the following guiding ideas/hypotheses:

- We would include all hamlets of a particular pocket and the entire cultivable land, making a strategic shift from the erstwhile "command area planning" to "area-based planning". This we thought would help make visible impact on the agricultural pattern and practices in the selected pocket. It might eventually even create a large enough market to draw support services and agents (e.g. marketing services, input suppliers, storage facilities, etc.) essential for the long-term sustenance of 'irrigated agriculture'.

- Changing age-old agricultural practices of tribal people is an uphill task for any change agent. Perhaps a good demonstration of alternate crops and practices, followed by timely exposure to better-cultivated areas, would bring a measure of self-confidence, leading to change in agricultural practices.
- In addition to the above, subsidising the input cost of improved varieties or new crops to a level at par with the existing traditional varieties would help fence sitters take initiative. Such subsidies encourage people to try out varieties and practices they have heard of but not tried.

With these considerations we chose pockets where we have irrigation schemes backed by well functioning savings and credit groups. The focus would be on "interested" families. The project would give a subsidy of 50 percent¹ of the seed cost as start-up support to the first time farmers. The intervention would follow these steps:

- Seed the idea at a meeting of representatives of hamlet-based groups (self-help groups or SHGs/ water users' associations or WUAs) organised by PRADAN,
- Conduct hamlet level meetings to discuss the practices, economics, etc. and generate a list of families interested in to cultivate the crop,
- Arrange for the interested families to meet an experienced ginger farmer from the adjoining blocks of Ranchi at a pocket level meeting to discuss the practices and disease/pest attack in detail. At the end of the meeting, the list of families along with the seed requirement would be finalised.
- The meeting would also decide a group of persons/local seed shop owner who would purchase the

seed well before the sowing season to avoid the last minute rise in seed prices. The seed shop owner will treat the seed with fungicides before selling to the farmers. He will earn Rs 2 to 3 per kg of seed for his efforts and investment and to cover the weight loss of seeds.

- PRADAN team members would issue subsidy coupons to individual families to be encashed from the concerned seed retailer. The families would pay half the cost and we pay the balance to the retailer on production of the coupons.
- There would be camps at the time of sowing where existing cultivators from adjoining areas of Ranchi would demonstrate the process of sowing and mulching the plots.
- Thereafter PRADAN team members would follow up with each farmer in their fields.
- The PRADAN team would have weekly meetings to review the progress of all crops and each and every plot². (The team had plans to intervene in some other crops also e.g. cabbage, tomatoes, hybrid paddy, etc.)
- We did not anticipate the need for any support to sell the produce (availability of the market was the basis for introducing the crop). However, we would be ready to intervene if the situation so demanded.

The 'Professional' Mahajan?

Implementation of the plans began in December, though the crop was to be sown during May and June. We wanted the seed to be purchased by March as prices escalate from April onwards. As planned, farmers of the Baratpur pocket, about 10 km from Lohardaga, were the first to decide the number of cultivators and quantity of seed. They used their trainer Karma Oraon, an experienced farmer

from Ranchi, to help them procure seed. Karma acted as a broker and put together the requirement of 24 quintals of seed (at about Rs 2,200/quintal) from various cultivators in his area. The amount was paid to him and he distributed it to the various farmers. A few days later, PRADAN's Gumla (neighbouring district) team also purchased about 25 quintals of seed from the same person. The prices suddenly shot up to around Rs 2,800/quintal. When we went for the second consignment of about 60 quintals, Karma claimed that the price would be Rs 3,100 to 3,300/quintal. Sensing some foul play, we began enquiring about the prices in other areas. It was a difficult time for us, with very few leads. Pawan went with the farmers' representatives in our office jeep to various villages, looking for farmers willing to sell seed or find local agents ready to supply seed at reasonable prices. By then word had gone around to the agents that a big player from the Lohardaga/Gumla area was sourcing seed. Pawan and the villagers returned empty handed. We put our heads together and concluded that the only way to get seed at reasonable prices was to enter the open market like a trader. That meant cash purchases, handling numerous sellers and other market operators, checking quality and quantity of each purchase, packing the seed and transporting it to the villages. We felt nervous as none of us had ever done such a thing in the vegetable market, but the price issue pushed us into this tricky business.

I requested the Deputy Commissioner to lend us a truck from the District Rural Development Agency to transport the seed (he was aware of our plans and agreed with the approach). The second issue was to withdraw around a lakh of rupees from the bank and carry it safely to the market. Pawan, along with the farmers' representatives and seed shop owners, went with the truck to the *haat*. Samir went with the cash

¹ There was hope of bringing down investment levels to those of potato cultivation. However we subsequently discovered that the investments made there were higher by at least 30-40 percent even after subsidy.

² Our past experience had been that we were good at planning but unable to follow-up in the agricultural fields.

in the office jeep later. They actually installed a *kanta* (weighing scales) and purchased ginger like any other vegetable contractor. The villagers inspected the quantity and quality. Pawan was the trader, taking note of weights and rates. Samir was the cashier, making payments after taking a *kuccha* bill. By the end of the *haat* they were able to procure around 40 quintals at an average price of Rs 2,200/quintal. Even with the cost of our time added to it, the price worked out to be much lower than the 'through agent' route. Encouraged by the success, a second entry to the open market was made a few days later. And on that day the vegetable sellers of the area saw something unusual, a woman trader with a truck. Pratibha, not to be left out of the action went along with Pawan to procure the balance requirement. Despite the problems, we were happy to have been successful in procuring seeds at a reasonable price (Rs 22-24/kg). The price for the end user was about Rs 25/kg³.

'Grounding' the Idea

Seed in place, the next step was its treatment with the fungicide, Indophil M45. This was the end of March. Once the seed was treated, we encouraged farmers to pick it up



³ Who knew then the problems these *kuccha* bills would cause at the time of the Annual Audit. The mention of these bills probably still gives Tom, PRADAN's Finance Team Leader a few nightmares. In retrospect I think we should have given the money to the seed shop owners as advance and taken a distribution list and certificate from them at a later date.

since weight loss during the summer months is quite high. We organised meetings with farmers and they decided a last date by when the subsidy coupons had to be used by picking up the seed after paying half the cost, i.e. Rs 12.50/kg. In some pockets the retailer had to revise the rate due to the high weight loss. But with our constant follow up through hamlet level meetings, discussions in SHG cluster meetings and visiting hamlets where the off-take was slow, the seed was distributed by the end of April.

Farmers with irrigation facilities (all were members of SHGs but not necessarily of WUAs, i.e. every one cultivating the crop did not have access to irrigation) began sowing the crop from the middle of May. As they had not cultivated ginger before, and many had not ever seen the crop in the field, we had a lot of explaining and hand holding to do. Questions at this stage were mostly about preparing land, making furrows, plant spacing, size of the seed (where to break the tuber before sowing, can we sow cut pieces as in potato?).

The most difficult part was the mulching⁴ of the field after sowing. As forests are close by, getting leaves for mulching was not the problem. The method of placing those was the issue. Many people put the straw or/and leaves on the field and left it like that. The wind came and took the leaves back to the forest. The field is covered with green grass in a few days, feeding on the fertiliser meant for the ginger crop well before the seedlings⁵ saw the light of the day. At the other end of the spectrum were farmers who had put paddy straw, topped it with big size leaves and then put cut pieces of firewood to prevent the leaves from being blown out, but also ensuring the seedlings

⁴ To prevent the emergence of weeds, mostly grass.

⁵ It takes three weeks for the seedling to emerge.

would never see the light of the day. Also, there were farmers who forever were planning to sow the seed, but always finding an excuse not to implement their plans. Subhendra and Bijay from our team had many opportunities to explore strange (or are these normal practical situations faced by the community?) behaviour patterns. Gura Oraon of Uru Kadamtoli village was initially very late in sowing the seed on the pretext that he lacked manpower. Subhendra had to really chase him to ensure that the seed was in the fields. However, after an exposure to the advanced agriculture belt of Ranchi he got really motivated and has today one of the best-cultivated plots in that pocket. After a lot of running around in villages and the fields, all the seed was sown by the end of June.

We took stock of the numbers: 141 farmers with sowed 81 quintals of ginger seed in five pockets, although three pockets accounted for the most.

Briefly, the distribution of the seed cultivated is as follows

(See Box on Top Right Page)

The next operation was weeding and raising the earth around the seedlings. This is done to loosen the soil around the roots of the ginger plant; otherwise, instead of fleshy ginger one would get long roots going deep into the earth. In this operation the soil is dug from the furrows around the root and placed on the ridge where the plant grows. This operation is to be carried out in 21 days after the emergence⁶. However, there was wide variance in actual practice, depending on the practices followed in sowing and irrigation in the post-sowing period. Some families who

⁶ i.e. shoot coming out of the soil.

Seed, kg	Land, acres	Families, No.	Families, %
25	0.025	23	16.50
26 to 50	0.025 to 0.05	65	45.60
51 to 100	0.05 to 0.10	45	32.10
Above 100	Above 0.10	8	5.80

got delayed in sowing germinated the seed at home by sprinkling water on it. Once the shoots were 4 to 6 inches, they sowed it in the field. These plants grew rapidly in the initial stages, catching up with seed sown almost 15 to 20 days earlier. At the other end of the spectrum were farmers who sowed the seed on time (end of May to early June) but irrigated very sparingly due to high cost of irrigation. Here the germination was delayed (it took almost a month) and the post germination growth was slow.

Anyway, by the time the crop had grown enough for the first inter-cultural operation to begin the first rains had already come. Many families got so tied up with ploughing their paddy fields that they had no time for the inter-cultural operations of ginger. Actually, despite the seeming abundance of labour in rural areas, there is a terrible labour shortage during the early *kharif* season (July - August). An average family finds it difficult to manage paddy sowing, even with all the members working long hours together. And now they had another 'to do' on the task list by way of 'weeding the ginger plot and raising earth around ginger plants'. At the time of planning we had lost sight of the fact that the first inter-cultural operations would coincide with the paddy-sowing season. PRADAN team members had to visit every field and report the status in weekly agriculture meetings. By July, this operation was over for all farmers. Thereafter things were smooth. Farmers had got some confidence and they started building some hope/dreams around the crop. There were people

who had dreams of buying a motorcycle! In fact we began relating the dreams with the crop health in the field. The people with clearly articulated hopes/desires/dreams had well kept plots with healthy looking plants! Many a time I seriously thought of studying such relationships, if any. I, for one, believe that motivation is the most important link between plans and action.

Then the Dreams Nearly Became Nightmares ...

Things seemed to be going fine. We were making mental calculations. 81 quintals seed ... expected output 810 quintals ... expected price Rs 1500 to 1800/quintal ... the total value of the output would be about Rs 15 lakh, about the same as the yearly 'Development Support Budget' of the team. Ginger intervention alone would pay back the team cost by way of income to the people. With all these dreams floating around, just as we were feeling that the worst is over, came the BIG PROBLEM.

The farmers cultivating ginger successfully for the past four to five

Phoolchand Earns Three Times his Investment

Phoolchand Mahato is a member of the water users' association of village Salgi, Garbhutoli. He usually cultivates wheat, peas, cauliflower and other vegetables in the *rabi* season, along with paddy, maize, finger millets in the *kharif* season. He cultivated ginger for the first time this year, after discussion on ginger in the combined irrigation user group and SHG meeting in the hamlet. His investment for cultivation of ginger on one tenth of irrigated land was:

Expenditure	Rs
• Seed 114 kg @Rs 13/kg (at 50 percent subsidy)	1,482
• Fertiliser 10 kg Urea and 15 kg DAP	200
• Weeding 10 days one person	250
• Irrigation twice	100
• Pesticides	30
• Market visit five times @ Rs 30/ day	150
Total	2,212
Revenue:	
• 300 kg Sold @ Rs 13/kg	3,900
• 300 kg yet to be sold @Rs 18/kg	5,400
Total	9,300

His profit is 3 times his investment. Next year he plans to cultivate ginger on 0.3 acres of land and sow 300 kg of seed.

A 250% Return on Capital!

Maheshwari Devi (aged 30 years) is a member of the SHG at Kasitarn. Her husband Janak Prajapati is the accountant of the SHG and is known as an advanced farmer in the hamlet. They have 5 children, 4 girls and one boy. The eldest is a 10-year-old girl. They own a well and a pump set, and grow vegetables (beans, cauliflower, cabbage, onions, etc.) on about half an acre of land. They had never grown ginger and decided to cultivate the crop when it was discussed in the SHG meeting. They bought 40 kg seed availing 50 percent subsidy from the Pradan designated outlet @ Rs. 14/kg and in addition purchased 60 kg seed from the open market @ Rs. 30 /kg. The expenditure on and income from one tenth of an acre of irrigated land was:

Expenditure:

• Seed, 40 kg @ Rs 14/kg	560
• 60 kg @ Rs 30/kg	1,800
• DAP, 10 kg @ Rs 10/kg	100
• Urea, 25 kg @ Rs 3/kg	75
• Irrigation and pesticides	100
• Weeding four times with five labour @ Rs 15	300
• Harvesting three days with two persons @ Rs 30	180
• Marketing 10 days @ Rs 30/day	300
• Transportation of produce to the market	300
• TOTAL	3,715

Revenue:

• 1st harvest 200 kg @Rs 15/kg	3,000
• 2nd harvest 32 kg @Rs 15/kg	480
• 3rd harvest 40 kg @Rs 12/kg	480
• Yet to harvest (in Jan/Feb) 500 kg @ Rs 18/kg	9,000
• TOTAL	12,960

The 'yet to harvest' figure is conservative, as only a small damaged portion of the plot was harvested and sold. Also the current rates are given but the future rate would be higher. Next year this family plans to cultivate 200 kg of ginger on one-fifth of an acre of land.

years had led us to believe that there are no major diseases or pests affecting the crop in the area. We had been told that once the crop has taken roots and the field is well drained there is practically no threat. So we were relaxed, as the major problem was sowing and stabilising the seedlings, and we were past that stage. But in August word came trickling in about a fungal attack and plants drying up. On close inspection we found that the junction of the stem with the seed bulb was rotting. The disease would spread fast, covering the entire plot within a few days. We had discussed the problem in the team and got confirmation about the fungicide selected by Ashok in the Gumla Team. We planned the operation of spreading information about the disease to all the farmers. SHG cluster meetings, meeting families in village *haats*, visits to individual hamlet, etc.,—we employed all these means. Slowly the disease covered more and more villages. Probably the heavy rain in the early *kharif*, followed by a dry spell in mid-August, resulting in high temperatures, was the cause.

Whatever the causes for the disease, we had to get the situation under control. Interestingly, till the fungal attack reached a village, farmers did not take the information about the name and source of the fungicide seriously. Nobody thought that it could come to his or her fields. We ensured that the seed shop owners stocked 'krylaxil', the fungicide we were prescribing. Team members moved about with the fungicide in their bike boxes. When the fields sprayed with the fungicide showed signs of recovery we were relieved.

Actually, seeing the condition of the crop we often had little faith that anything would work. The critical factor was the delay. Families wait for some time before informing, and if the information channels between the community and our team were weak they would try a few medicines before asking us. Luckily the information flow was good, mainly due to

extensive field visits, SHG cluster meetings, visits to local *haats*, and we were able to save the crops of almost all the farmers. The local seed shopkeepers also supported the exercise. Farmers bought the medicine from their homes when the market was off.

Some, of course, did not act, in spite of information and access to medicines. Hula's is a case in point. He is a matriculate, member of a WUA, accountant of the hamlet SHG. The information about the disease came first to his hamlet and the medicines were stocked in the same hamlet. He had sown 0.5 quintal of seed and when the disease struck his plot in September, he waited and waited, God knows for what. Most of the plants had perished by the time he sprayed the medicine. He could get only a little more than the seed he had sown.

There were seven other farmers whose crop got damaged (more than 50 percent loss) despite their own efforts and ours. All other fields were saved. Some farmers have sold or are in the process of selling a part of their crop. Approximately 25 percent of the crop has been sold. The majority of the produce sold is from fields damaged by the fungal attack. Most farmers whose crop had no incidence of fungal attack are growing it to sell as next year's seed. In many cases the crop is still in the field and they will harvest it around January 2001. The present (November, 2000) price of ginger is between Rs 1,200-1,400 a quintal wholesale, and around Rs 20-25 a kg in retail.

In the adjoining areas of Ranchi and Gumla, where the crop is being grown for the past few years, the fungal attack has caused extensive damage. Most of the crop from these areas has already been sold well before the usual harvest time of December to February. The prices in the harvest season are expected to be high this year (though we have not studied the factors affecting the price,

e.g. production in the North East). In the sample studies of returns we have found that the production is volumetrically at least 8 times, the returns on investment around 3 to 5 times i.e. net profit of 3 to 5 times after deduction of cash expenses. We plan to collect detailed production data along with profitability data for all the farmers.

The Future

There is now demand for ginger crop in and around the pocket where we intervened. Already new families are asking the existing growers for seed. This intervention, along with the support in other *kharif* crops and strong follow-up, has created confidence among the farmers/SHG members in our team. This was not there in the past years. It was heartening to see men and women come to our office on market days to ask about some problem in the field, or meet us in the weekly market and seek suggestions on certain intercultural operations. The most memorable event was of a woman member of a SHG in Salgi along with her husband running a good 300 meters from their farm to stop us (Pawan and me) so that we could see whether they had transplanted tomato seedlings correctly (spacing, fertiliser, etc.).

Another development has been that the intervention has caused greater bonding among the team members. The level of seeking support, admitting ignorance, level of confrontation on 'why' something happened or did not, has increased. The two to three hour weekly review meetings helped a lot to transfer information/best practices across areas, share problems and ensure that things went according to plan.

On the whole the exercise was far more than learning the technical details of the cultivation process, it was discovering what teamwork is all about.

Contributions

Confused?

In a dilemma?

Want to share your questions?

Done something differently?

Found a new solution to an old problem?

Used a known solution to solve a new problem? Write in to NewsReach.

Did an article strike a chord within you?

Do you disagree with something you have read?

Would you like to share your experiences with the writer?

Or ask her or him a question or two?

Do send us your responses to the articles in this edition to promote the exchange of views. We would publish them in the next issue.



Bahadur, Bir-Bonga and Bandicoots

D. Narendranath

"Johar-gea! In 'Bahadur, In 'Manjhi Haram!" (Hello! I'm Bahadur, the Head Man!), drawls Bahadur Birhor, as he stumbles towards us, his eyes red and face flushed, indicating that he is on the bottle, at 2 p.m. The sickening stench of cheap country liquor hits us squarely on the face. "*Johar-gea Bahadur, dudup-me*", (Hello! Sit down) I say, drawing on my limited Santhali. He looks at me, quizzingly, understandably amused at an apparent '*diku*' (outsider) greeting him in his own language. Disabled by the alcohol garbling his thought processes, he does not seem to wonder about this for more than a moment. Words, warped and twisted due to an uncooperative tongue, tumble out of him as he unsuccessfully tries to put together a sentence. And one more, and then more. He is trying to tell us something. I don't get most of it, but I do get a general idea of what he tries to convey. He says he is very poor, does not have a proper house to stay in, does not own any animals, not even a pig. Even discounting the dancing effect caused due to the alcohol, I reflect, it would be difficult for one who has listened to normal Santhali language to distinguish what he is saying.

The set of forty Birhor families living in their colony in Karma village in the Chatra district of Bihar is a community we have recently selected to work with. The Birhors are one of the most ancient and primitive tribals of Bihar. In spite of the 'best' of governmental efforts, they even now lead a life of abject poverty and misery.

Even the other tribals look at the Birhors as primitive and backward. "They are forest dwellers and do not engage in agriculture like us. Bir means a forest, and hor means a person. They survive primarily by hunting small wild animals and birds. They also dig around for wild tubers. They don't stay at one place and their language, too, is crude", said one Santhal acquaintance to me, a little distastefully. Birhors still lead a mostly nomadic life, though of late many of them have chosen to settle in government-built Birhor colonies. More about these colonies later.

Orak means a house and *sukri* means a pig. *In* means I, *me* and *Manjhi Haram* means the Head man. Bahadur had used these words as he spoke and that is how I guessed what he was trying to convey.

I do not think Bahadur needed to say what he did. His very appearance, the general air about him, the houses, the women, the kids - just the sight of them said it all. That Bahadur and his clan were fighting with their backs against the wall. His eyes rolling like marbles in a *katori*, he stood there - the

Manjhi Haram - the headman - the king! Blissfully unaware that his kingdom was swaying and falling as he was at the moment. He stood there blinking at me, an epitome of the skewed priorities of our development system - a mute witness to the insensitivity of us all.

Bahadur sits by our side. By this time, a few more of his gang have joined in. Some women and kids hover around listening to the conversation. The majority of the gang seems dazed due to heavy drinking. It is Wednesday and it is their rest day. All the Birhors who go out to hunt and forage for the six days, return on Tuesday evening to their colony. Therefore, to meet them one has to come on Wednesday. But Wednesday is also the day in which they drink throughout the day. Talking to them today is an excruciating task. The only people who do not seem to be drunk are a few unkempt kids who are sitting around, chattering. Dressed sparsely in torn underpants or frocks, visibly unwashed for weeks, hair haggard and body bathed in mud, the kids present a pathetic picture of extreme malnutrition. The grown ups are no different. Yet all of them seem to be in a merry mood.

Sudhirji, who is with me, and I are at a loss where to start. So we decide to flow along with the current. "*Powrajom?*" (Did you drink?), I question. Even though grammatically incorrect, the sense is clear. Bahadur and his companions answer in gay unison, "Yes". I continue in Hindi, "How much did you have since morning?" "Not much, two bottles", a look of disappointment shades his eyes.

Even while he answers, his eyes curiously glance at the helmet which Sudhirji has kept by his side on the ground. Bahadur picks it up and examines it closely in and out, turning it around in his hands like one does while purchasing a vessel from a potter. Obviously he hasn't seen a helmet at such close range before, and I wait expectantly for his observation. He slings it by the chinstrap on his fingers, and makes a mocking comment, to which the others answer in agreement, chuckling. I immediately ask for a translation, and clutch my belly in uncontrollable laughter as the answer registers. He says the helmet is useful as a rat-proof storing device for maize grain, as it can be hung up using the strap. Extremely ingenious, I think, and I try to imagine the face of the helmet manufacturer if he heard this. With one masterstroke, I believe Bahadur has made a devastating statement on what he thinks of modern technology.

Bahadur dons the helmet and looks around at his subjects like a king, just coronated. I watch the others closely and

see them looking at Bahadur with admiration. The desire in their eyes is transparent, "if only I too could get to wear this thing!"

Undaunted by Bahadur's blunt disapproval of the usefulness of hi-tech, I proceed to actually demonstrate to him the magic of the headgear. I pick up a small stone and throw it at his head. It ricochets off the helmet. Bahadur exclaims in astonishment, "*kuchh nahin hua!*" which is instantly echoed all over.

Immediately, there is a spate of stones flying at this head from all directions. Bahadur sits there unaffected, all smiles. There are cheers from the ranks. Unfortunately, one stone hits him on his cheek, making him angry, and throwing cold water on the fast-becoming-popular entertainment. But there is still wonder and conviction in the air, that the helmet actually protects from stones.

Now is the time to build, I think. Gradually win them over. I pick up a large stick from nearby and wield it menacingly at his head. Bahadur is agile and jumps away, making short work of my plans. Bahadur really does not believe this technology can protect him!

Clearly Bahadur and his people have learnt from History. Modern technology and modern development have only wrought havoc on their peaceful existence in the jungles. And the disastrous results are there for all to see. There are just over 1,000 families of Birhors surviving in the whole of Bihar. They, too, are fast facing extinction. In fact, the Government has declared them as endangered (as in "endangered species" - the Great Indian Bustard, the Lion Tailed monkey - the nomadic Birhor?). The consummate nomad, the hunter-gatherer, the Birhor could not cope with the mindless invasion of outsiders into their domain. They found their home disappearing as the forests depleted. They wandered wherever the winds would take them - a few days here, then a few days there. They moved in groups and built leaf-tents wherever they set down sail.

The leaf-tents - which they call *kumba* - are very crude; conical shacks made mostly of sal leaves. The cone has a base diameter of about 6 feet and a height of about 5 feet. There is a hole at one corner of the base of about 2 feet in diameter, which serves as an entrance, reminding one of an igloo. Its frame is first set up, using branches. Leaves are then woven in. Warm during the winter and cool during the summer, and very waterproof, the Birhors even now prefer to live in these leaf-tents.

On the other hand, the concrete houses which the government has built for them are broken here and there due to poor quality work. They let in cold air at night. Sleeping inside these has become impossible for these hapless people, with no proper clothes to keep them warm. The government had distributed blankets to each family. But one blanket per family hardly protects against the chilly winds of Hazaribagh and Chatra districts. The *kumba*, closed and congested, is a much better place to sleep. Especially when they sleep in a circle around a bonfire. For good

measure, they have also prised out the window-shutters of their concrete houses to use as cover for the entrance of the *kumba*!

The colonies of one-room concrete houses, each 15 feet by 10 feet, have been the major component of the government's Birhor rehabilitation programmes. In addition to the concrete houses, the colonies are complete with small low-cost latrines (the authorities seemed to be more worried about how they would excrete rather than how they would eat!). These latrines were never used. In this particular colony, I could see only two of the latrines being used, by a neighbouring Yadav family - not as latrines, but rather to tie their goats! The pan had been filled with mud and the floor leveled to make small, cosy stables!

The concrete houses had been inhabited for some time, but then fell into disuse as the walls developed deep cracks and the roofs caved in. The contractors and the engineers had their share of the eighty-five paise, as Rajiv Gandhi had confessed, and the remaining fifteen paise did what it could.

It is altogether a different story that the initial set of these simpletons who were provided these concrete houses hesitated to stay in these houses purely due to cultural reasons, and such systematic malaises like corruption and pilferage were beyond their comprehension. Seeing a flat concrete roof high above them was quite a nerve-racking experience. They were convinced that it would fall on their heads (how true that was!). A story also goes around that some of the initial settlers slept with their legs raised above them, *a la Pawan-muktasana*, so that if the roof fell, they could protect themselves!

Another major reason for their aversion to those houses was that the rooms echoed whenever they spoke, which led them to believe that there were ghosts in there! After seeing the dilapidated state of these buildings now, one could say with hindsight, yes, there were ghosts in there - those of the mindless greed of the corrupt officials.

The story of the exploitation of these poor tribals by people around them, and how insensitive these neighbours have been to them, is really painful. I saw one Yadav neighbour who was painstakingly trying to convince these people that they would keep good health only if they keep moving from place to place in the jungles, and did not settle down, as the *Bir Bonga* (Jungle God) would be angry with them. They would all fall sick and perish, he said. This Yadav later turned out to be the one who had usurped some of the land which the government had given them. It was naturally in his interest that the Birhors remained nomads!

There is a general belief in these areas that the Birhors keep good health because they brave the bad weather, and continuously roam around in the jungles eating anything and everything. That is why they are not seen going to hospitals or health centres! Nobody has actually bothered to check the reality. The fact is that they are a highly malnourished lot, and their rate of mortality is very high (unfortunately I have no data). They shy away from hospitals primarily due

to their strong faith in their own traditional system of *jhaad-phook* (driving away evil spirits) and witchcraft; and secondly, due to their ever-diminishing faith in the government system which has been severely insensitive, and even oppressive at times.

It is a cruel irony that instead of enabling these people to overcome their backwardness, we have only pushed them further into their miserable existence through our mindless (in) actions!

"Give me a rupee, *Huzur*, let me go and get myself some *khaini* (tobacco). See, my kids are starving. Let me buy them some food, Give me a rupee, *Saheb*", intones an old, dishevelled lady as she spreads her palm towards Sudhirji. He is pained at seeing the old lady begging, and expresses it by chiding her very strongly, "Don't beg! You are not beggars, you should not beg!" It sounds so hollow and meaningless. I feel miserable. I think, "Oh! God, is this the pass that we have brought these Birhors to! These Birhors who once believably ruled the jungles!"

Sudhirji's chiding visibly has had no impact on the old lady. She has expressionlessly gone back to weaving the mat which she was doing earlier. That mat, which she says, would take her about a week to ten days to complete, would fetch her anything between Rs 20 to 25 in the market. She also makes ropes from the fibrous plants one finds in the jungles. One kilogram of rope which requires about 7 days for her to prepare would bring fifteen rupees.

She and many of her companions - both male and female - have such skills. But never the proactive marketeers, they use these skills only when they have a requirement, or when a diku places an order. On order they even make bows and arrows out of bamboo or even collect honey.

Agriculture has never been their forte. The lands given to them by the government are either lying waste, and the usurpable have been usurped. It is only of late that some Birhors have taken to wage labour in the neighbouring farms, out of pure economic necessity.

There is only one thing that the Birhors compulsively engage in — hunting and gathering. *Chulua* - they call it. Every man, woman and child who can go out, are out on *chulua* throughout the week. They hunt in groups and individual *shikars* are grouped together and then evenly shared.

They do not have any firearms to hunt with. What they have are mainly nets to trap small animals, and birds and bows and arrows for larger animals. The nets are laid as traps at various parts. Small animals, like rabbits or wild fowls, are driven to these traps by creating lot of noise and beating around thick bushes in which these are suspected to be hiding. If what they catch is more than what they require for their immediate consumption, it is sold in the market, to truck drivers or to hotels.

In addition to hunting, they excavate around for wild tubers. *Gaitha* and *tona* are two such tubers which they relish. These are extremely bitter, and are made edible by a special pro-

cess. The tubers, each the size of a coconut, are peeled, then boiled. These boiled tubers are packed in a gunnysack and left in the flowing water of a stream overnight. This washes away the bitterness. The sack is taken out next morning; the tubers are boiled again and then passed around.

Jungles have become scarce, and have receded. The Birhor finds himself traversing larger and larger distances in search of *shikar*. As the jungles disappear, so too, do the animals. "Rabbits have become very scarce these days, Babu," complains a worried Mahavir, Bahadur's companion. He is oblivious to the more worrying reality that it is he and his tribe that are in danger, not the rabbits. Yet I would not be the one who would want to tell them this. If ignorance is bliss, let them live (or die) in bliss.

The deadpan expression which Bahadur, Mahavir and the whole gang wear perpetually, alters at the mention of *chulua*. One of the young enthusiasts of the sport, Kesho, jumps in. "You know Babu, last week I went to Domchanch (which is a good 80 km away). I found a very big bandicoot in that jungle and you know, that rat was this big!" He gesticulates excitedly, and shows us that the rat was as big as a football! Exaggeration possibly, but there is elation in his eyes which arrests me. I remember fondly having seen the same excitement in the eyes of my four-year-old niece, who had just returned from Calcutta and described to me the Howrah bridge! Suddenly his face falls and his voice acquires a nostalgic tint, "Nowadays it has become so difficult to get even bandicoots in the jungles. It is no more like the earlier days...."

Yes, Kesho, I want to tell him. You will no more find any rats in the jungles. Because, you know, we have domesticated all the rats. Now the only rats that you will find in the jungles are us, the outsiders, the privileged ones, who gradually gnaw away at the abundant bounties of nature. Slowly, we will strip your jungles. But you need not know any of this, because we know what is good for you. We will build jungles of concrete for you, of course, complete with latrines. You can live in these peacefully, never mind the ghosts! You can get your children admitted to the *panchayat* schools. Please do not think otherwise if the other children call them "untouchables" and chase them out. They are kids after all, aren't they?

My mind is crowded with their faces as we slowly drive away from the colony. The faces of the flushed Bahadur, the excited Kesho, the crumbled old woman - all clamour together. Children, yes, children they are, innocent. Vibrant, playing with my helmet, chasing around rats. Children - uninitiated to the ways of the world, happily unaware of the depressing realities. They are children who have lost their way. They need to be taken home; their needs attended to. Because - because they are our brethren - we are the children of the same God.