

# News Reach

JANUARY 2002

Volume 2 Number 1



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## Letters to the Editor

### Limitations of Long Interviews

Dinabandhu's article *Learning Livelihoods* (NewsReach October 2001) regarding long, in-depth interviews to ascertain livelihood aspects of a family was thought provoking. The elaboration that he provided in the article would help us in practice. The detailing about small things that he mentioned in his article do matter a lot in the field.

However, there is one aspect about his way of exploration that I am uncomfortable with. I believe that the long interviews that he has suggested have certain limitations. It requires a lot of skill not to provide direction in such a long interview. This skill varies from person to person. How can we be consistent on this front? Also, long interviews require a lot of patience of both the interviewer and interviewee. Often the interviewee feels bored during such an exercise. Wouldn't it be preferable to employ some interesting way of getting into an individual's frame of reference by using pictorials, PRA or tools used in the visioning exercise?

**Dhrubaa Mukhopadhyay, Executive (Projects), Godda district, Jharkhand**

### Excellent Forum

As a greenhorn in Pradan I am still exploring possibilities that the development sector has to offer and more importantly, what I can to offer to it. I find that NewsReach is an excellent forum to exchange ideas and thoughts. It keeps me abreast of the experiences of other individuals and teams in the organisation and outside. I am of the firm opinion that each issue of NewsReach with its rich content would help me grow into a better professional and a better individual.

I have a few suggestions. There are a couple of specific things I would like to read in NewsReach. Can we, for example, hold a debate on a development issue on which diverse views may be expected and exchanged by persons having substantial experience to discuss the issue? This would help us to have a balanced view on the issue and help us ascertain the merits and demerits of both sides.

I would also like to read about the personal experiences (preferably in the first person) of people who have been here in this sector for a considerable time. I would like to know how they got to know about it, what pulled them in, their first impressions, what made them continue and how they perceive they have grown into their jobs, organisations and sector. In this section I hope to read about senior Pradan colleagues and also about people who have been associated with us.

I have been working in Pradan for just 2 months and am still not sure about the number of teams we have spread over the country. I also do not know what projects these teams have been handling. A detailed write-up about each Pradan team, pointing out their recent



involvement and achievements, would keep us abreast about happenings at other locations.

It would also be nice if we had a section which introduced the recent entrants into the folds of the organisation by detailing their names, native place, the institutions they have attended, academic qualifications and their work experiences. I hope these introductions would help make the journal an even more interesting reading. We could also have a question-answer forum on issues of development and related topics.

At Siddhi, I have an interesting opportunity to work on the poultry project. I consider myself lucky to have joined Pradan and to be given with this responsibility. It is an excellent learning opportunity for me. Looking forward to hear more from NewsReach on the above issues.

**Sameer Singh, Development Apprentice, Siddhi, Madhya Pradesh**

*We urge all readers to freely share thoughts and responses to articles you read in NewsReach. Email us your letters at [pradhanho@ndb.vsnl.net.in](mailto:pradhanho@ndb.vsnl.net.in) or post them to Pradan, 3 CSC, Niti Bagh, New Delhi 110 049.*

## Marshalling Milkmaids

**Lessons and challenges in federating women's self-help groups into a women-led dairy co-operative in Acchiwas village in Dausa, Rajasthan**

**Sanjeev Kumar**

Pradan's team at Dausa in Rajasthan started work in April 1999. Dausa is one of the newly formed districts of Rajasthan, carved out of the erstwhile Jaipur district. It has been identified by the state government as a needy pocket and is covered under the World Bank sponsored District Poverty Initiatives Programme (DPIP). A characteristic of the area is the seasonal migration of men for wage employment. As a result, women back home suffer. They have to shoulder agricultural and dairy work on top of their household duties. Healthcare and education of the young are jeopardised in the process. Men return home during the sowing season for the Rabi crop. Women are left with very little cash in hand, as there are few safe ways they have to receive remittances from their husbands. Emergency needs of the family are thus met by local sources of informal credit, which is often not available when needed.

Under the circumstances, dairy seemed to be one way that could be boosted as a source of daily income for these families, increasing their credit-worthiness as well as strengthening their hand. Women in the area also shared that an income earning option to the tune of Rs 10,000-12,000 a year would complement the employment opportunities for their men, who would then need migrate only when wage rates were high in Jaipur and Delhi.

### Community Dynamics

The community we are working with is the poorer section amongst the small and marginal farmers and the scheduled caste (SC) families. About 70% of our self-help group

(SHG) members are SC and the rest are from backward communities. The families either have small land holdings (average 1.5 bighas) or are landless. They are highly prone to migration either throughout the year or during lean seasons. They do not own much livestock (1-2 buffaloes or 4-5 goats) and the women are mostly illiterate. Most families are indebted (Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000) to the village moneylender. Although credit sources are multiple, major loans are taken from local loan sharks, mostly from the influential communities of Rajputs or Baniyas. Dairy producers make and sell *ghee* (rectified butter). Lending by *dudhiyas* (milkmen) is not prominent in the area, unlike in our nearby project area in Alwar.

The area that we have chosen is a poverty pocket of the district, falling in the Dausa and Sikrai blocks. It is characterised by undulating lands that fall in the catchment of the Kalakho reservoir in the south and southeast and in the catchment of the Banganga River in the north. The southern border of the district is the Lalsot hills, the runoff from which has caused gullies up to the Agra highway where the Kalakho reservoir has been constructed. Much of the area chosen by Pradan is co-terminus with the area chosen by the DPIP.

The data we collected from the savings and credit groups we have promoted in the area showed that around 60% of the target com-

**A characteristic of the area is the seasonal migration of men for wage employment. As a result, women back home suffer. They have to shoulder agricultural and dairy work on top of their household duties.**



The increasing ability of the SHGs to leverage bank and bulk credit has meant an almost unidirectional increase towards buying milch animals.

munity have one or 2 low productive buffaloes. The livestock were of poor genetic stock, producing only 2-3 litres of milk every day. The data also showed that around 70% of loans generated by the groups went towards livestock rearing and dairy business. This analysis strengthened our belief that we could impact livelihoods in a significant way if we could help the families get better returns on their money. The increasing ability of the SHGs to leverage bank and bulk credit has meant an almost unidirectional increase towards buying milch animals. This is particularly true in Dausa, where dairy is one economic activity perceived by the women as "theirs", which brings in a regular source of income for household consumption.

### Acchiwas as a Microcosm

We selected Acchiwas to try out our idea. This village is about 15 km northwest from Dausa district headquarters. It falls under the Bane ka Barkhera Gram Panchayat. Acchiwas is home to 125 families, majority of them being Bairwah (SC), Brahman, Rajput and Kumhar (potters). Agriculture and livestock are the main sources of livelihood. Migrating to the nearby city of Jaipur is the most prominent option for men to earn wages.

About a year and half ago Pradan promoted an SHG comprising the very poor in the village. Realising the importance of the SHG, another 11 poor families of the village requested Pradan to help in forming another group. And the poorer set from the remaining families formed a third group. The newest of the 3 groups was 10 months old in October. All the groups have taken loans from the bank. Two groups received a revolving

fund of Rs 25,000 each under SGSY (Swarnajayanti Grameen Swarojgar Yojana). One of the groups received a loan of Rs 28,000 from the service area bank. Dairy was the only perceived income-generating source for women in the village. Around 6 months ago the members of the groups began to discuss their problems in selling milk in the village.

We tried to understand why the women were not able to sell milk although Dausa was not too far away. The reasons that emerged were:

- Most of the producers in our group have 1-2 kg of marketable milk. Private traders did not find it cost-effective to collect milk from so many producers in such small amounts and then sell it in Dausa.
- The village is remote and lacks an all-weather road. One needs to travel 6 km by private vehicle to reach the village. Unavailability of public transport also discourages private milk traders.
- Gujjar milk producers with significant marketable surpluses go to a dairy in Bhandrej, 6 km away, to sell their milk. As the poorer men migrate to cities, selling milk by going outside the village becomes extremely difficult for the women.

Our team then carried out an extensive survey amongst 100 producers from 21 gram panchayats in the district. We found that there were also gaps in knowledge about profitable practices between good producers and our clientele. The availability of inputs to poor producers was another major constraint. Market and credit for dairy were perceived as the immediate felt need of the community. We then prepared an intervention plan based on data analysis and obser-

vations in the field to augment income for our target community (See Box 1 on page 6).

### The Process of Intervention

Dausa is a part of Jaipur Dairy Co-operative Milk Union, which is organised on the lines of Anand Dairy Milk Union. A chilling plant with installed capacity of 60,000 litres is operating at Dausa district headquarters. It has about 200 dairy co-operatives societies (DCSs) organised in different villages. Most of the DCSs are organised in the Mahua, Bandikui and Lalsot blocks of Dausa, accounting for 70-80% of the milk procured.

The poverty pockets identified by us have just 2 DCSs in an area stretching about 25 km. The absence of DCSs has forced the producers to prepare and sell *ghee*. This calls for cottonseed feed, which is a costly concentrate. Besides, in the absence of assured market and infrastructure, producers look at dairy more for household consumption than business. This results in poor management of resources and overall loss in the activity.

We delineated a viable milk route where 3-5 DCSs could be initiated. We had already promoted 6 SGSY groups and 2 SHGs along the route. Four SGSY groups had availed a revolving fund of Rs 25,000 each and one SHG had got a Rs 28,000 bank loan. Most of the loans had been utilised to buy agricultural inputs and finance household needs. The SGSY groups were repaying the revolving fund and were in the process of getting an activity loan to the tune of Rs 2.5 to Rs 3 lakh per group in the coming months. Each group planned to buy 22 cows from these loans. Every member planned to buy a lactating cow from the first loan instalment and a second cow after 5 months of the first by availing the second instalment.

We held 2 meetings to estimate the need and viability of a milk collection centre in the village. We designed a data format to collect information on livestock population, lactating animals and marketable surplus milk available in the area. The collected data were verified in a meeting. We just distributed wheat grains and women were asked to put as many grains in a box as the dairy animals they had. We followed the same process to determine the number of lactating animals, total milk yield per day and marketable milk.

With this clarity that an opportunity existed to start a milk collection centre, we called a meeting of all the 3 SHGs in the village to select a secretary and a helper, who would undergo the training at Jaipur Dairy Co-operative Union. The community had earlier decided that a woman secretary would be selected and a man from the village would officiate as the helper.

### Selecting the Secretary

Before the start of the meeting, we had a fairly strong belief that the group should select a literate woman. We had thought that only such a woman (there was only one in the village) could take up the role and maintain records. We even tried to persuade her to take up the role. But she declined. It proved to be the turning point in our approach. We realised that if we were to promote milk selling amongst the poor families, we have to develop a mechanism to train an effective secretary from the illiterate SHG members.

If we were to promote milk selling amongst the poor families, we have to develop a mechanism to train an effective secretary from the illiterate SHG members.



Intervention Plan for Acchiwas			
Problem	Intervention Planned	Action Strategy	Role of Pradan Professional
Marketing of liquid milk at competitive prices.	Initiating dairy co-operative societies (DCSs) in the area.	Identifying self-help group (SHG) members engaged in dairy and federating them into DCS members.	Assisting the community in initial planning and linking them with the dairy union.
Credit for purchasing quality dairy animals.	Linkage with banks	Prepare the need-based plan and channel credit for dairy on a priority basis.	Help the group in planning for credit
Excess cost of concentrate feeding and lack of balanced feeding.	Promoting pelleted balanced feeds and practice mineral mixture feeding to supply minor nutrients.	Ensure availability of palleted quality feed in village through DCSs and credit from SHGs. Impact data collection and sharing.	Set the system of procuring and distributing feeds and mineral mix. Design and execute training.
Irregular calving, repeat breeding, long inter-calving period.	Fertility camps for treatment. Training on improved practice.	Series of training planned with milk producers of DCSs. Involve concerned line departments.	Linkage and preparing training calendar for DCSs and increasing community knowledge base.
Reducing agricultural by-products.	Shifting from buffalo to cow to reduce roughage need.	Initiating cow rearing from bank loans and intensive training and exposure.	Plan training and exposure visits.
Availability of service provider for first aid, primary healthcare and artificial insemination.	Select and train entrepreneurs from groups.	Select and train entrepreneurs from groups.	Select training agency and provide link for training.
Orientation for business acumen in dairy animal rearing.	Collect data and present to group, sharing amongst good producers in area and target community.	Data collection on economics of present and improved practices, organise cattle fairs.	Planning and initiating events.

women managerially and financially to create a sustainable mechanism.

Group identification came strongly into the picture once we tried facilitating the decision of selecting the secretary. Anticipating the problem, we had invited 2 names for the secretary and 2 for the helper, with the condition that the final decision will depend on the training outcome and sincerity. But the problem was much deeper than expected and we finally had 7 names from different groups (3 for secretary and 4 for helper). A 7-day training was imparted to them. It proved to be a filtering factor as only 2 woman and 2 helpers took the pain to travel and attend the training daily. Dairy officials conducted a verbal test to ascertain suitability. The secretary was finally selected in a meeting of group members.

Shimala Devi was selected as the secretary. She was educated till the 3rd standard and could write her name, identify the simpler names on the roll and do simple arithmetic on her fingers. As far as her confidence is concerned, she was able to deal with the dairy co-operative officials and frequently visited Dausa (at least thrice in a month) to receive payments, procure chemicals for fat testing and assert her demand of the supply of inputs. She did fat testing, weighed the milk and carried out routine operations. The helper recorded the daily amounts of milk and fat, made receipt and payment entries and wrote vouchers. Shimala distributed payments herself. Her husband helped her in recounting the balance amounts.

In the past 2 months her confidence in dealing with producers and dairy officials has grown. One problem she faces is that dairy officials are not sensitive to women DCSs and she has to wait for 4-5 hours to get chemi-

cals or utensils for fat testing. Reading out financial records and presenting it in front of the managing committee is still a problem for her. Her numerical ability is also a perceived problem. But she is keen to learn reading and writing and is being taught by the brother-in-law of the local *aganwari* (crèche) worker.

The Acchiwas women's DCS has completed 2 months of its operation of milk collection and selling (in October). On average 25 producers are selling 70 litres of milk every day. The management committee of the DCS meets twice a month on the 5th and the 20th. The secretary and the helper present financial and operational issues in the meeting. The committee deliberates on the con-

#### Income-Expenditure Details of Women-led Dairy Co-operative, Acchiwas

**Reporting Period:** September 10 to October 10, 2001.

**Inaugurated on:** September 5, 2001.

**Milk collection started:** September 10.

**Initial Capital:** Rs 3,000 (Contributed by 3 SHGs).

**Producers:** 21.

**Total sale to dairy:** Rs 16,780

**Total price paid to producers:** Rs 15,003

**Gross profit to Co-operative:** Rs 877.

**Expenditure (Chemicals, brushes etc.):** Rs 364.

**Net Profit:** Rs 513.

**Overheads deposited in co-operative account:** Rs 502.



cerned issues and decides future action. In September-October, 2001 the DC has booked a total profit of Rs 877 (See box for financial details). As one of the SHGs is in the process procuring a bank loan of Rs 2,98,346 to buy cows and the milk inflow in the collection centre is expected to increase manifold.

### Emerging Issues

**Three women will make payments to avert any tendency to use the cash for personal purposes. It would also bring transparency to the timely payments.**

In an economic activity like milk collection and selling, quick decisions regarding operational issues are essential. For instance, the Acchiwas DC was running at a loss due to adulteration by the cart owner who transported the milk. Monitoring adulteration was a problem as nobody was following daily fat contents and the amount of milk at the plant and the collection centre. Although the secretary and helper came to know about this, they were not able to pinpoint the source of the problem. Similarly, the secretary had accepted milk with low solid non fat (SNF) and consequently the DCS had taken a loss. The management committee meetings are held only in 15-day intervals and the core team of 3 women is also not able to check the operation of milk collection everyday.

In October 2001, the managing committee meeting deliberated on these issues and decided to divide the work into 2 components. They are:

- Collection, fat testing and transportation of milk up to the milk route, and
- Payment to the producers and operational expenses.

The first one involved total responsibility

and accountability of the secretary. She was free to negotiate with camel cart owner and to deal with errant producers. The management committee would help if so required.

We are also introducing a cash box with a lock and key to store payments. The cash received from the dairy union will be kept in the cash box and the key will be kept with another woman. Three women will make payments to avert any tendency to use the cash for personal purposes. It would also bring transparency to the timely payments.

One issue we are still struggling with is how to pay the secretary. One option is to pay a fixed salary according to milk collection (Rs 500 up to 100 litres of milk collected per day, with increments of Rs 100 for each additional 50 litres). The other option is to give her the generated profits (except commissions) in the initial days. Although the first option is preferred from a developmental perspective, our experience suggests that the management committee might not be vigilant enough to enforce this. The women of Acchiwas are in favour of the second option, as they cannot devote the required time in dairy supervision.

In this economic activity, group decisions need to be taken fast. At present the management committee, where 9 producers from 3 SHGs have been elected (3 from each group), meets twice in the month. Parent SHG identity is very strong in the meetings, often hindering the decision-making process. The frequency of meetings and our efforts at making the members aware of their responsibility towards other producers has helped to mitigate this problem to a certain extent. It would have been better if we had provided some exposure and training on collective responsibility before initiating the DCS.

However, we have been successful in exposing the members to the benefits and process of operations at the collection centre and the chilling plant. But the lack of women-managed DCSs in Dausa has posed a few problems. We are planning to expose the management committee members to the women-led DCSs in the Jaipur district.

All milk producers have equal stake in the DCS and not just SHG members. More than 50% of the milk in Acchiwas DC is coming from non-SHG members. Most of the producers come from distance of 1-3 km and cannot think of sending their women to deliver the milk. So by design they are not participating in the management committee. Also, their value system is quite different from that of our women SHG members. Although such producers have an equal stake, we are not certain whether we should be included in the society.

We need to increase milk collection to at least over 100 litres a day if we are to sustain the DCS (bearing the cost of salaries, chemicals and travel). This increases the workload of the secretary and increases the chances of adulteration of milk by new producers. At present such an increase also poses chances of loss in the DCS if proper vigilance and monitoring is not maintained. We have to deal with this dilemma till our SGSY groups have accessed their loans to buy dairy animals.

### Epilogue

When we look back to our last 4 months (ending October) to review our efforts, we are a bit confused about the result in contrast to our overall purpose of the dairy intervention. We intervened to increase the profits of our target families in the dairy business through improving their dairy

animal management practices, helping them avail breeding and feeding services and creating dairy assets. Our efforts till now are in the direction of initiating and establishing dairy co-operatives.

Building the capacity of target women to run DCSs collectively and with mutual help and understanding is the major challenge ahead of us. This calls for a whole set of different training for co-operative building. As a team we have to decide where to limit ourselves. Right now the sky seems to be the only limit.

#### Write in NewsReach

- Confused?
- Caught 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 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?
- Send your responses to the articles in this issue to promote the exchange of views.



## Community Coralling Checks In

Villagers in Sundarpahari are assured of a second crop as free grazing is restrained through community initiative

Ashish Chakraborty

It was in early 1997 when Pradan's team in Godda got its first opportunity to address the long awaited desire to do something in the field of natural resource management. We began work in 3 micro watersheds, funded by the District Rural Development Authority (DRDA) under the National Watershed Development Programme in the Sundarpahari block of Godda district in Jharkhand. Sundarpahari, considered to be one of the poorest blocks of India (*Everybody Loves a Good Drought* by P Sainath), is situated in the arms of Rajmahal hills and is dominated by Santhal and Pahadia *adivasis*. The block is famous for its abundant floral diversity, undulating terrain and richness of *adivasi* culture.

Poverty is widespread here in the heart of the Santhal Parganas region of Jharkhand. The topography is undulating with the Rajmahal hill range straddling the division north to the southeast. The region is characterised by large areas of degraded lands, unprotected and overexploited forests and a high concentration of *adivasi* population. It receives over 1,200 mm of rainfall, mostly during the monsoons. But due to the near total lack of water conservation measures, runoff is as high as 90%.

More than 30% of the land in the Sundarpahari block is forest and rocks and 25% is classified as wasteland. Agriculture, the main occupation of majority of the population, is practically impossible on more than half the land. The single paddy or maize crop is entirely dependent on the monsoons. The crop is often subjected to extreme water stress due to erratic rainfall, drastically affecting production. Crop failures are frequent. The produce caters to the food requirement of an

average household for not more than 6 months. Other livelihood sources are dependent on forests. However, due to the rapid degradation of available forests, such sources are drying up. As a result people migrate seasonally in search of livelihood.

### Great Opportunity

The micro watershed projects arrived as a great opportunity to set up a model for the area and a challenge for our small team. All of us were enthused about it. We started exploring the watershed and work started with resource mapping, delineation of the watershed, baseline data collection and participatory community building process. At the time we were sharing the concept of watershed with the local communities, scarcity of water was a common refrain amongst the people. Exploration of the watersheds revealed a few sources of water which, if properly developed, could be used by the people to cultivate a Rabi crop.

On further discussions with the community we found that one major obstacle to developing an efficient watershed programme was free grazing. This was a traditional practice among the Santhals, intertwined with their cultural values. The Santhals celebrate a festival called *Bandana* (*Soharai* in Santhali), which starts before *Makar Sankranti* (mid January) just after the winter paddy harvest. The festival lasts 5 days. The first day, known as *Lahan*, is celebrated as cattle's day. The Santhals worship their livestock on this day and then set them free for grazing. This practice proved to be disastrous for the standing second crop.

It was a difficult task to change a tradition.

But our frequent and continuous efforts in the watershed committees created a web of understanding. The community ultimately realised the pitfalls of free grazing. The realisation took roots at the Suryaday Watershed Committee (SWC), which first broke out of this age-old tradition.

The SWC unanimously decided to check free grazing by building a community corral for the cattle, locally called *argarha*. The concept of *argarha* was already there with the community. It was in fact attempted during a watershed development intervention by the block authorities under the jurisdiction of the circle office. The attempt failed because the community did not understand the logic behind the concept. Our effort to simultaneously introduce new crops, especially *chaiti arhar* that could be cultivated without additional water resources, added fresh dimensions to check free grazing.

To us the watershed committee appeared as a strong platform to introduce this concept of coralling, which was already there in the community's repository of traditional wisdom. The commitment to the traditional system was weakened by lack of understanding and visioning by the *manjhiam* (village headman). This was coupled with its dilution due to the intervention of missionaries and the ignorance on the part of the government to understand the potential of this system. This combination of factors led to an unparalleled sluggish pace of this social institution, in contrast to the fast moving and continuously changing outer world.

When our team tried to implement the practice of *argarha*, the main obstacle we faced was the legal viability of the *argarha*. Cattle and livestock locked up in the corral without prior information to the owner could have

led to court cases, which might have disrupted the whole process of implementation. We held discussions with the panchayat *mukhia* (headman) and even considered registering the *argarha* as a legal entity. However, assurances from the community put our apprehensions to rest.

### Argarhas Raise Resonance

The concept of *argarha* struck a chord in the community with the intervention of new crops such as wheat and maize. Villages in the other watersheds started replicating the idea. The community felt confident enough to cultivate a second crop now that the menace of free grazing was checked. The initial fears of functioning of the *argarha* and the tussle for acceptance within the community slowly started receding with time. It has been 2 years that we initiated the concept. Now *argarhas* are an accomplished fact, a process that provides assurance to the community that they will be able to harvest a second crop.

During these 2 years self-help groups (SHGs) promoted by us also started spreading their wings. The SHGs not only saturated the watershed area but spread beyond. Communities in areas outside the watershed also started feeling the need for *argarhas*. There was also a felt need within the Suryaday watershed and the other 2 watersheds of Batsnay and Swala that a single *argarha* was insufficient to corral all truant animals. The distance of the *argarha* from peripheral villages also proved to be disheartening.

There were other hiccups as well. Watershed committee members started showing a lack of interest in the functioning and maintenance of the *argarha* because the payment of Rs 500 every month was assured. Also, the committee failed to rationalise the distribution of profit except the fact that the *argarha* checked free



grazing. As a result, the *argarha* was functioning lackadaisically and we were hard pressed to find a viable solution.

### Enter the SHG

In early April 2000 a meeting was conducted in Bokrabandh, a village outside the watershed that has 4 SHGs, to deliberate on the concept of a SHG cluster. Some members of the SWC were present in that meeting as they had prior experience of SHG clusters. At the end of the meeting some members of another SHG articulated that they needed an *argarha* in their village. The secretary of SWC, who was present in the meeting, replied that since the village was outside the watershed area it would not be possible for the watershed committee to invest in an *argarha* that is outside the demarcated area. But he also suggested that the villagers could build their own *argarha*.

The suggestion appealed to the SHG members. The first *argarha* build through an SHG (Machkunderbaha Mahila Mandal) came up solely on contribution from SHG members without any help from outside. The SHG-operated *argarha* functioned on the basis of performance. The person who looked after the *argarha* and the cattle was paid on the basis of the total collection. This provided a direct profit to the members and the money earned was utilised in the village itself. This happy state of affairs appealed to the community.

Other SHG-operated *argarhas* have since been built. There are now 3 *argarhas* run by SHG members with all the groups booking profits. The concept has proved so fruitful that last year the Machkunderbaha Mahila Mandal of Bokrabandh village incurred all the expenses for the cluster *sammelan* (meeting) from its *argarha* operations.

Argarha Algorithm				
<b>Operating Group:</b> Meerubaha Mahila Mandal				
<b>Village:</b> Damruhat (Matkom Tola)				
<b>No of Members:</b> 12				
<b>Argarha started on:</b> February 2001				
<b>Rate:</b> Goat @ Rs 15 Cow @ Rs 25 Horse @ Rs 50				
Distribution of Rate:				
Animal	Rate(Rs)	Distribution (Rs)		
		Farmers Affected	Duty Charge	SHG
Horse	50	15	15	20
Goat	15	5	5	5
cow	25	7	7	11
<b>Expenditure:</b> 2 bamboo per member as contribution.				
<b>Income:</b>				
Animal	Rate (Rs)	Numbers	Income	
Horse	50	1	50	
Goat	15	68	1,020	
cow	25	86	2,150	
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,220</b>			
<b>Direct Profit:</b>				
Farmers affected	-	957		
Duty man	-	Rs 957		
SHG	-	Rs 1,306		
Profit per member	-	Rs 108.80		
<b>Indirect Profit:</b> The villagers have cultivated onion, garlic, maize, chilly and wheat in their fields this year. Pancho Tudu, a resident of Damru village harvested 4 quintals of wheat from 15 decimal of land for the first time in his life.				

## Are We Reaching the Poorest?

A report on the Workshop on Microfinance for the Very Poor, held in South Africa in November 25-29 last year

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Are we reaching the poorest in the areas we work in? Are many of the poorest left out of our programmes? Do we have an articulated strategy for targeting the very poor? What is the impact of our programmes on the very poor vis-à-vis the not so poor? These were not the questions that the Workshop on Microfinance for the Very Poor, organised by Small Enterprise Foundation in Thayoundou in the Northern Province, South Africa, in November 25-29, 2001, sought to answer. But these questions needed to be addressed before we could answer the questions that the workshop dealt with.

The workshop, organised in a swanky hotel called the Venda Sun, was about assessing the impact of microfinance on the very poor. It was organised as the first get together of the thematic group formed by organisations participating in the Impact Assessment project (ImpAct project) that had a special interest in working with the very poor.

The ImpAct project is co-ordinated by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex and sponsored by the Ford Foundation. It has set up 4 themes for special research, which include microfinance for the very poor, wider impacts of microfinance, impact assessment as a MIS tool and microfinance networks. We are participating in 2 of these: microfinance for very poor and wider impacts. The other organisations participating in the "very poor" theme are CYSD Bhubaneswar, SHARE Hyderabad, BRAC Bangladesh, PROMUC Peru, K-Rep Kenya, SEF South Africa, LAPO Nigeria and PRIZMA Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The workshop sought to address 2 key issues. The first asked whether microfinance could reach the very poor and bring about substantial transformation in their lives and livelihoods? If that was so, then what kind of innovations in methodologies and funding need to be formulated? The objectives of the workshop were:

- To examine in greater detail the issues outlined above as the focus for the work of the group.
- To initiate an action research methodology to help design programmes that focus on impacting the very poor and to monitor and learn from the impact.
- To develop a plan of action for the thematic group to initiate processes in each organisation and at the project level.

The final task in the workshop was to work out an agenda for future action by the thematic group. This agenda attempted to come out with policy recommendations for the sector, especially the donor community, on how impact on the very poor could be assured through microfinance interventions.

### Conceptual Sessions

Right at the beginning participants arrived at the consensus that we are working for the "very poor". Dr Martin Greeley of IDS, Sussex, handled the session on poverty concepts and its measurement. He gave an overview of the many theoretical constructs that define poverty. The money-metric approach to poverty defines it as the lack of income. This



is the most commonly used definition of poverty because the indicators are directly and objectively measurable.

But is poverty just about not having some cash income? The "capabilities" school thinks there is more to it. This school posits that if the capabilities, which include knowledge, skills and attitudes, could be enhanced, the poor will find their own way of coming out of poverty. There is yet another school that talks about "social exclusion" as the cause of poverty. The level of social exclusion of the people from various processes in the community, whether social, cultural or political, denotes their level of poverty. Then there is the gender aspect to poverty. We need to understand that irrespective of how one defines poverty, women experience poverty more intensely than men do.

Poverty analysis has to address the issue of 'information loss' associated with failure to incorporate these different perspectives. Thus an organisation that looks at poverty only as an issue of income will not have issues of capabilities and exclusion in its analysis. An organisation needs to develop a working definition of poverty that would reflect in all its activities and would enable it to orient its programmes accordingly. The framework for impact assessment of the organisation's work at a later stage would evolve from these initial assumptions and goals.

### Compassion to Capitalism

Dr Greeley expressed concern that microfinance today is generally not oriented in favour of the very poor. There has been a marked shift away from "compassion to capitalism". The "very poor" sub group should be able to halt this trend of excluding the most vulnerable and poor from the ambit of

microfinance and get them involved. If there is a cost involved in this, we should be able to sensitise donors towards meeting it.

Mr Syed Hashemi of CGAP (Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest of the World Bank) held a similar view in his presentation, "Microfinance for the poorest". He said that microfinance the world over is now dominated by the Latin American school. It emphasises on "financial sustainability" of the microfinance institution (MFI) translated into the ability to cover operating and financial costs and make profits after having accounted for loan losses and inflation.

This approach has led MFIs to cut down their efforts at specific poverty targeting because it slows you down. Transaction costs are high while working with the very poor because of the higher efforts needed in identifying and reaching out to them. The very poor often need small loans for consumption purposes, which are more risky. Thus the tendency for the sustainability focused MFIs is to make only enterprise loans and work with only those clients who have need for relatively larger enterprise loans.

Mr Hashemi said that the experience of South Asia, in terms of its effectiveness in reaching out to the very poor, has got drowned in the sustainability debate. The dominant paradigm now is that the very poor do not need credit services, so lend to the better off for enterprises. The very poor need only savings and insurance services, so it is okay not to lend to them because they do not have activities to lend for anyway.

The gist of the discussions that followed was that we needed to demonstrate that the very poor are creditworthy, going by the experience of the participants. The consensus was

that concern for poverty should be put before that of sustainability. It is possible for a MFI to be sustainable while lending to the very poor. Only the time frames may be longer.

### Presentation by Pradan

The presentations made by the participants provided an overview of their concern as they tried to target the very poor and bring about substantial impact. The overall opinion that was reinforced repeatedly was that it is possible to generate viable business by lending to the very poor. In my presentation I highlighted the cost effectiveness of the SHG (self-help group) model and its potential for sustainability (Readers interested in reading the paper presented on behalf of Pradan may write in to NewsReach).

I said that our objective is to establish sustainable linkages of our SHGs with the banking system, which in India, unlike in many other countries, is quite widespread in the countryside. This takes about 3 years of close engagement with a SHG for it to develop a working partnership with the local bank. The cost of such an effort is about Rs 15,000 (about \$300) per SHG, translating into Rs 750 to Rs 1,000 per family (about \$15-\$20). Such an amount of subsidy is well spent because it results in constructive linkages of the very poor with the mainstream. In the long run, Pradan also plans to try convincing the banks to foot group promotion costs because a well-functioning group adds to the bank's bottom line.

The other presentations also dwelt on similar issues. Dr Dash from Orissa-based CYSD expressed the concern that the banks are not very co-operative and they may think of floating an MFI to provide credit to their SHGs. He stated that handholding and capacity building of the very poor is a pre-

requisite to making them sustainable.

The presentation of PRIZMA by Mr Sean Kline revealed the current socio-political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The protracted ethnic conflicts that the country has witnessed and the transition from a planned economy (of Yugoslavia) to the present market economy has resulted in the emergence of the 'newly' poor, who are a major clientele of the MFIs.

Ms Mary Florence made the presentation from SHARE, a MFI from India. SHARE has a very rigorous method of reaching out to the very poor in their service areas. The eligibility criteria for being a client of SHARE is the total asset holding of the family should not be more than Rs 20,000 and the per capita average monthly income should not be more than Rs 350. This is strictly enforced in SHARE. They had about 100,000 clients. The methodology followed to benefit the clients includes rigorous training, designing suitable loan products based on clients' needs, setting an easy repayment schedule and strict loan utilisation checks.

The presentation by Mr Hugo Yanque of Peru-based PROMUC sounded very different from the way the Latin American school was depicted earlier. PROMUC is a support NGO to a number of NGOs that promote communal banks. These communal banks are groups of about 25 very poor women, quite similar to our SHGs. They have regular fortnightly meetings where they discuss issues not only related to microfinance but also about other social issues. Since the commercial banks in Peru do not reach out to the very poor, the NGOs lend to the communal banks. PROMUC

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has strict targeting mechanisms, including geographic segregation of poverty pockets such as slum areas and provision of small credit to reach to the very poor.

**The discussion highlighted that organisations need to firm up their poverty definitions and targeting mechanisms and devise products and methodologies to reach out to the very poor.**

The work of KDA (K-Rep Development Agency) from Kenya, as Ms Miriam Cherogony explained, is quite challenging. Some of the innovative microfinance products developed by KDA include Financial Service Associations (savings and credit SHGs that are linked with banks), Smallholder Agriculture Savings and Credit, Low Cost Housing Finance, Adolescent Girls' Savings and Credit, Health Care finance, Renewable Energy Finance and Savings and Credit for HIV/AIDS affected.

BRAC of Bangladesh is one of the biggest MFIs of the world with a client base of 4.25 million, 98% of who are women. In addition to microfinance, they have taken up a number of development and welfare programmes with their clients. BRAC has taken up a major initiative called Special Investment Programme for the extreme poor.

According to Ms Sonya Sultan of BRAC, this new initiative is strictly targeted towards the most vulnerable sections of the population - the set of people that no other MFI has yet reached out to. The women of the selected families will be provided intense training, provided subsidised health care and assets if required, as well as training for social awareness and confidence building. These inputs would be given for a period of 18 months, after which financial services from BRAC will be provided to them. BRAC plans to pilot this approach with an initial

set of 70,000 families, with a total investment of about \$30 million.

### South African Grameen

The day after the presentation we were taken on a field trip to the working area of SEF, a Grameen replicant operating in the Northern Province. SEF has developed an elaborate methodology of PWR (participatory wealth ranking) to target the very poor in the villages. The villagers themselves segregate the poor and the non-poor.

We also saw a participatory impact-monitoring sheet used by SEF. It is a pictorial sheet that the client is supposed to fill in at the time of taking a loan. Each time she takes a loan, she has to answer questions regarding the status of her enterprise, the quality of her house and other similar welfare indicators. The purpose is that the sheet becomes a learning tool for the woman, who is made to think of the incremental difference that each loan is making to her life. This is a toned down version of the ILS (Internal Learning System) that we are envisaging, where the women will be keeping diaries tracking a much larger variety of indicators.

After the field trip there were discussions on the next day regarding various issues such as defining poverty, microfinance methodologies, policy issues and impact assessment. The discussion highlighted that organisations need to firm up their poverty definitions and targeting mechanisms and devise products and methodologies to reach out to the very poor. They also need to take up studies to understand the impact of the programme on the very poor and those who are being left out.

The last day was devoted to developing a set of guidelines for best practices and working

out an action plan for the thematic group. The guidelines also reflected the concerns and issues that came up repeatedly in the past days' deliberations. Some of the major outputs are given below.

### Poverty

- Evolve a definition of poverty.
- Develop and articulate an active poverty targeting mechanism.
- Take steps to see that the very poor are not being excluded through active or passive mechanisms by clients or staff, or as unintended consequence of programme design.
- Develop a culture in the organisation that seeks to reach out to the very poor.

### Design of Services

- An approach that seeks to build the social capital is very crucial while working with the very poor.
- Provide other services in addition to microfinance such as training, production inputs and access to markets.
- Sustainability and cost effectiveness are necessary.

### Impact Assessment

- Segregate impact by poverty level.
- Use indicators based on the broader understanding of poverty.
- Assess the value added by credit plus (livelihood support) and credit plus (social capital development)
- Monitor penetration rate and mission drift.
- Develop impact assessment processes in which clients use the information and learn from them.

### Policy Issues

- Take up studies that prove microfinance can be useful to the very poor.
- Challenge the conventional commercialisation paradigm.

- Give guidance on what additional support in form of subsidies and linkages would be required to make microfinance work for the poor.
- Take up advocacy with the government to mobilise subsidies.

These guidelines are selected from a long list and are indicative of the concerns of the "thinking" practitioners in the sector. We expect that Pradanites will reflect on them and respond. In-house discussion on these topics is important to articulate and document an organisational approach to target the poor and reduce exclusion.

As part of the action plan we are supposed to develop a definition of poverty by the next meeting of the theme in May 2002. The inputs from every Pradanite will be required in this process. The learning from the workshop has vindicated our approach that microfinance does not necessarily equal livelihoods. In fact, the feeling that the savings and credit plus livelihoods plus empowerment approach is achievable through SHGs has been reinforced.



# Insight into Access and Control

A PRA exercise on women's control over household income, expenses and assets

Dhrubaa Mukhopadhyay

The purpose of this exercise was to learn about women's access and control over household income, expenses and assets and to help women members of self-help groups (SHGs) understand a given situation. We also wanted to understand what to do to help them improve their the situation. We selected 3 women from 3 different families: a resource surplus family, the poorest family of the group and a family headed by a woman from the members of Annapurna Mahila Mandal (AMM) of Sarbindha village in Godda district of Jharkhand.

We followed the same process for all the 3 women, with minor variations. I will mention the process followed with the first woman and the differences that followed with the other women. The day before the exercise we had asked members of the AMM to select the families.

On the appointed day we met with Hemia Devi (from the resource surplus family). We did not have to put in any effort to build rapport as she welcomed us warmly and offered us sherbet. We explained the purpose of the exercise and asked her to bring her son Dayanand along so that he could help her when needed.

We began by asking her about the different sources of family income. Initially she was hesitant and wanted to know whether we would be providing a new programme. She however opened up after a while.

We asked her to use symbols to denote the different sources of income. Since she was illiterate, it helped her to overcome a mental

block that she might not be able to perform the exercise. The other 2 women drew on cards we provided to indicate different sources. Both methods worked.

We then asked her to indicate the proportion between the different sources of income by using 100 seeds, which helped in triangulation. Our next step was to calculate the actual annual income from different sources. This Hemia did in consultation with her son. She then marked income by men and women by using coloured cards.

We next went into expenditure following the same steps. Another set of triangulation was done when the gap between income and expenses became evident. Our next step was to list household assets, colour coding men and women's ownership.

## Learning from the Exercise

We learnt that it was better to start with expenses rather than income. People hesitat-

Sources of Income	Proportion %	Amount (Rs)
Agriculture	23	8,000
Wage Earning	15	4,500
Carpentry	16	5,000
Goat Rearing	11	2,000
Keeping Pigeon	7	200
Job in Anganwari	18	6,000
Midwifery	4	200
Stitching	6	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>26,100</b>

ed to talk about income in the beginning. The exercise on proportions became complicated when we tried to tally the actual income with it. What was important here was that it reflected people's attachment or perception about a particular source of income. For example, keeping pigeons, stitching and midwifery contributed almost equally to Hemia's income but she indicated a higher proportion to pigeons than midwifery since the latter is looked down upon locally.

Initially Hemia had difficulty in accepting the chart as her own because we had drawn the cards without consulting her while replacing the sources (symbolised by objects) from the ground to the chart.

When we talked with the other 2 women, many men came in to see what we were doing. They remarked that women are good only for collecting fuel wood and cow dung. When we were talking to the woman who heads her family, her son-in-law was initially answering all the questions on her behalf as if she could not answer properly. After the exercise, her neighbours, particularly men, taunted her for mentioning midwifery as one her sources of income.

## Content of the Discussion

### Resource surplus family

The interviewees were Hemia Devi and her son Dayanand Mandal. Hemia's household comprised 4 men and 2 women out of which 4 men and one woman were literate. The detail of sources of income of Hemia Devi's house is shown in table 1.

The women's participation in the family income were as follows:

*Agriculture:* Both men and women of the family participated in the physical work. The men

provided funds for purchasing inputs for agriculture. Since Hemia's husband was occasionally out for other work, she managed arranging labour and the like, for which she was quite proud. Hemia herself was very strong and hardworking.

*Wage earning:* Hemia's two sons worked in trucks as labour. None of the women earned wages.

*Carpentry:* Hemia's husband worked as a carpenter.

*Goat rearing:* The goats were Hemia's. Her elder son Dayanand helped in grazing them.

*Pigeon keeping:* The pigeons were maintained by Hemia, who retained the income out of it.

*Job in Anganwadi:* Hemia's daughter-in-law worked in the government-sponsored crèche for children in the nearby village. Occasionally she had to go to the block development office (12 km from the village) for the work. Her husband Dayanand takes her on his bicycle.

*Midwifery:* People called Hemia at the time of delivery of a child, as she knew the work of a midwife. But people also taunted her, as this was the deemed to the work of doms, a lower caste people.

*Stitching:* Hemia's daughter-in-law knew cutting and stitching, which she did in her free time.

The family owned some assets. When we asked Hemia about assets of the family, she started with physical assets and ended by stating that her sons are also assets for her. Table 2 on page 20 shows the ownership pattern of the family assets.

According to Hemia's perception, the asset mentioned as joint meant that if her sons get separated she gets her share in absence of her husband. Ornaments were the most valuable assets owned by women of the family. The women also owned what came from their parents' house. The details of the expenses of the



**Table 2: Hemia's Household Assets**

	Name of Assets	Ownership
1	House	Joint
2	Bicycle	Elder son's
3	Land	Joint
4	Well	Joint
5	Cow	Joint
6	Bullock	Joint
7	Goat	Hemia's
8	Almirah	Daughter in law's
9	Transistor	Elder son's
10	Wooden cot, watch, etc.	Joint
11	Ornaments	Hemia's and daughter-in-law's

family are given in table 3. The deficit of last year was met by year before last's savings in bank. Hemia's elder son kept and managed the cash and Hemia was custodian of the grain. The men spent all large amounts. The actual medical expenses were less than Hemia perceived. This was corrected at the instance of her daughter-in-law. Her daughter-in-law con-

tributed significantly to the family's income. She was remarkably confident and was able to push through her opinions and stake.

#### Poorest family

The name of the interviewee was Tunia Devi, wife of Dudhu Ray. There were 3 men and one woman in the household. The 2 sons were attending school. One son had died last year. The details of income of and expenses incurred by the family in last year are shown in table 4.

The situation of the family was miserable. It was sunk heavily into debt. Recently Tunia's husband went to Delhi in search of employment. Tunia's husband had the drinking habit. He rarely contributed his wages to the family income but often beat up Tunia as she protested or expressed her grievances. The major portion of the income came from Tunia's earning. She was the person who supported the family.

Table 4 showed a major deficit but there were

**Table 3: Hemia's Family Expenses**

	Expenses	Proportion %	Amount in Rs	Whose Responsibility
1	House construction	17	20,000	Men
2	Cereals for consumption	11	12,000	Men
3	Soap, oil, cosmetics	8	2,000	Both
4	Spices	6	1,500	Both
5	Well construction	10	5,000	Men
6	Agriculture	9	2,500	Both
7	Vegetable	5	1,500	Both
8	Festival	4	1,000	Both
9	Medical treatment	10	2,500	Both
10	Clothes	11	5,000	Men
11	Travel	5	1,500	Both
112	Battery for transistor, watch, etc.	4	500	Men
		100	55,000	

**Table 4: Household Income and Expenditure of Tunia**

Sources of Income	Amount (Rs)	Participation in Earning	Expenses	Amount (Rs)	Participation
Wage	1,600	Both, 70% by women	Medical	2,300	Both
Agriculture	900	Both	Clothes	1,700	Both
Tasar Realing	800	Women	Cereals	4,500	Both
Help from Brother	400	Money to man	House Repair	500	Both
<b>Sources of Credit</b>			Fertiliser	200	Man
Moneylender	1,500	Man	Book	200	Both
Mahila Mandal	1,000	Woman	Vegetable		
Mortgaging Land	2,200	Both	& Spices	1,000	Both
Neighbour	1,000	Man	Travel	400	Both
Shopkeeper	500	Both	Bucket	100	Both
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,900</b>		Festival	300	Man
			Soap, Oil, etc	500	Both
			<b>Total</b>	<b>11,700</b>	

no ways found to meet it. Daily wages were the main source of income of Tunia but there were limitations. First, employment is available only during monsoon sowing and harvest of paddy. Secondly, women cannot get work such as thatching houses and constructing wells, considered a man's domain.

As far as the assets of the family was concerned, Tunia reared a pair of bullocks and a goat entrusted to her by some better-off families on certain conditions. She was free to use the bullock as long as she fed them. If the goat gave birth to kids, she was entitled to them if the owner wanted the goat back. Neither she nor her husband owned the assets fully.

#### Family headed by a woman

The name of the interviewee was Badami Devi. There were one man and 3 women in the household. The only son was attending school.

Badami's husband died 8 year ago when her youngest daughter started eating solid food. Since then she has been running her household and has been able to bring up her children despite enormous difficulties. Three years back she married off her elder daughter. The second daughter is now of marriageable age. Her son attended to primary school and the youngest daughter grazed cattle.

The detail of income of and expenses incurred by the family are given in table 5 on page 22. Badami was the main earning member of the family. Her second daughter also earned some wages and her son started ploughing this year and helped her make puffed rice, although he is too small to do hard manual work.

All the assets of Badami's family came from her maternal aunt who treated her like a daughter. She had been a great support to Badami and had gifted her ornaments, cows and goats.



Table 5: Household Income and Expenditure of Badami			
Sources of Income	Amount (Rs)	Expenses	Amount (Rs)
Wages	2,500	Vegetable	800
Goat Rearing	0	Fertiliser	400
Puffed Rice Making	2,500	Travel	600
Agriculture	2,300	Books	500
Help from Aunt	1,000	House Repair	1,000
Mahila Mandal	1,600	Medical	700
Moneylender	3,700	Cereal	6,000
		Loan Repaid	300
		Clothes	1,500
		Spices etc	1,100
		Festival	700
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,600</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>13,600</b>

Badami faced a lot of problems since she was a widow. She complained that some people stole her goat from her house since she was too weak to protest. People were also not co-operative when she asked some one to plough her field. On the one hand ploughing is not socially allowed to women. On the other, people taunt a widow who asks any other man to plough her field.

### Group Learning

We organised a SHG meeting in the village just after completing the study. We asked interviewees to present their cases. Badami's outburst about her condition created an emotional and sympathetic environment. Members accepted that since the problem was women specific, women should do something about it. The women also decided to stand by Tunia when she confronted her alcoholic husband.

The members were surprised and happy seeing that they could keep track of their household income and expenses. They had earlier thought it was the men's domain. In Hemia's presentation members saw that Hemia has

some small and but independent sources of income. They started realising that they should follow her example. The net outcome of the discussion was that women of the Mahila Mandal started to feel the need to have their own assets.

## Marketing with a Difference

**MESH (Maximising Employment to Serve the Handicapped) helps in providing marketing support to the disabled and those afflicted with leprosy**

Jacky J Bonney

To try and embrace the notion of disability into one definition is nearly impossible as the variety of the constituents is so great. One may subdivide them into mentally and physically disabled people but these groups could be broken down into many subgroups with very different needs and problems. However, there is a common need amongst all disabled people for economic independence and stability. It is this need that MESH (Maximising Employment to Serve the Handicapped) attempts to address with a special concern not just for disabled people but also for those affected by leprosy.

MESH is a small Indian NGO based in Delhi that attempts to maximise the employment efforts of disabled people and those afflicted with leprosy by marketing the items they produce. Besides selling through a retail outlet in Delhi, MESH also exports merchandise to sympathetic international buyers in Europe and North America. The purpose of the exercise is to enable those disabled people that are trying to attain economic independence to reach their goal so that they need not beg or depend on relatives or well wishers for the basic needs of life.

A major problem of NGO and government income-generation schemes is that while they provide skill training, they rarely have any marketing effort. One repeatedly hears of exciting programmes to train people in new skills and provide them tools and start-up equipment at subsidised prices, but the skill results in working capital blocked up in unsold stock because there is no marketing intervention. This is felt acutely by disabled

artisans. Community-based rehabilitation is the pet of our times but it is tremendously hard for many disabled people to manage to produce items for sell at all. If they then have to go out and sell them, they are faced with all the barriers of a society that does not even pay lip service to matters relating to accessibility, disability-friendly public transport, etc. So for many disabled people, a sheltered workshop or system of homework for a rehabilitation centre is a viable alternative.

For people affected by leprosy, a common approach is to come together to live in one community or colony and try and develop work activities within that community. With medicines now available to treat leprosy, most people afflicted with leprosy will not become disabled. When there is no disability there should be no need to move into a separate community or work in a special workshop. But the stigma attached to leprosy is still very strong and regular employment may be a problem even for people newly affected by leprosy. It is with such groups that MESH has worked most closely since its inception.

Once a group of disabled artisans become known to MESH, they are invited to show samples of what they make. We at MESH evaluate whether we can sell the items or whether skills can be adapted to develop a product that has a wider market. At the end of the process MESH buys the selected products, adds transport costs and 15% service charge and sells the item locally or through export. There are many intermediate stages of development that may involve sharing of information and upgrading of skill-



### Quality Control

Two major activities in MESH are quality management and product development. For example, Amarjyothi Leprosy Rehabilitation Society (ALRS) is a leprosy colony in Bahadurgarh, where people had asked MESH more than a decade ago to help them develop weaving skills known to them from their pre-leprosy lives in Tamil Nadu. MESH found funding and training support and has since been ordering and buying tablecloths and bedcovers from ALRA.

We have a policy of buying and selling seconds quality woven goods at reduced rates. However we noticed a few years ago that large stocks of seconds quality tablecloths were piling up in our shop. We then invested time and effort with the weavers to improve the finish and quality. The final lesson had to come with the rejection of a batch of substandard goods, a situation that the colony could barely afford but which resulted in improved quality.

When an international buyer expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of standardisation of dye shades in the tablecloths from a leprosy colony in Faridabad, we contacted the weavers service centre to train the dye man in skills to overcome quality problems. The buying group paid for the training and for additional equipment, which resulted in better products and bigger orders.

### Product Development

A rural artisan in India cannot be expected to know the taste and buying capacity of a wealthy urban Indian, much less the taste of a Canadian house owner. Look at home furnishings for example. An artisan whose home includes a charpoy and little else needs a great deal of guidance to appreciate the need for tablecloths with matching napkins in a standard quality and a colour that matches

the rest of the décor in the house. MESH attempts to provide a constant supply of new ideas and product suggestions to these people, thereby acting as an intermediary between the buying market and the producing artisan.

I consider it naïve to believe that these skills can be taught across continents and cultures and the rich and poor divide. However, it is possible to teach some basic concepts and provide warning about what potential customers will never buy. Let's take an example from Bethany Colony Leprosy Association, Andhra Pradesh and Mr John Babu. Mr Babu came to MESH last year for help in devising a more methodical approach to marketing. He had been to school and at one point studied to be an optometrist, but now he is the marketing officer of Bethany Leprosy Colony. The son of parents who had leprosy, he grew up in that rural colony with precious little exposure to design in the formal sense of the word. During his visit we sat together with a range of colours sent by one of Bethany's buyers in America. They knew what colours they wanted to promote in 2002 and I suggested that Mr Babu work out some design patterns using those colours and a whole set of magazines that we have in MESH. He had to learn to think both patterns and colours. He learnt about different kinds of checks and finishes. He also learnt how to label and code the products and how to make nice photographs with information to send to the buyers. The selection he came up with included gorgeous maroons and mauves and lovely terracotta and green. He has already secured an order and I am confident there will be more.

MESH also helps procuring raw materials and work out cost and price of products with artisans. Since most of the groups are autonomous, MESH must be invited to assist.

On occasion if a product seems too expensive or cheap, we ask the group to look at the price again. It is not uncommon for a group to have missed out a small or a big cost: perhaps a label that has to be stitched inside or even the labour of the women who so often are expected to do secondary tasks.

In one of the leprosy colonies near Delhi, we noticed that the women were always excluded from community discussions and were delegated unskilled, low paying tasks. Experience in another leprosy colony had shown that when the women were organised in a mahila mandal, they became a strong body able to add considerable support to the efforts of their men in the development of the entire community. MESH enlisted the help of Effcor to form a mahila mandal in ALRS. The women were trained in skills to manage their own activities. A direct result of that activity has been the training of some members in a new skill making necklace kits for export.

### Unleashing Processes

Our efforts to assist disabled people to market their products have effects beyond the immediate income earned from a sale. One of our stated aims is to buy as regularly as possible so that each group may have some degree of security. It is significant that economic security is one effect that often results in social security. Today Bethany Leprosy colony is highly organised, serving as a fine example of what can be achieved with unity and solidarity. It was a colony of beggars and until the weaving rehabilitation activities started, the beggars included the women. Over many years, with inputs from many sources including MESH, the regular orders for woven goods have proved an alternative to begging for the women of the colony. As they are now able to stay at home, they have made sure their children attend school. We now

have a situation where children of people affected by leprosy (many of whose fathers still beg) are studying engineering and post-graduate courses.

A person from this colony has had so much experience in pricing and costing and managing weaving activities that he has been invited to conduct sessions at workshops on costing and pricing, training other artisans in skills. It has changed his life and given him confidence and pride. These were qualities he had lost when he discovered he had leprosy.

Lakshmi is a young woman in Hubli whose legs are bent under her as a result of polio. She was the first girl to be trained in wood-carving at Hubli Hospital for the Handicapped Rehab unit. Ten years down the line she earns more than her parents who are vegetable vendors and more than her tailor brothers. Her savings bought the family a new house and with it the recognition that this girl was not a burden on the family.

MESH encourages supplier groups to pay the artisans in a fair manner. We know that many supplier groups pay salaries that include provident fund provisions as well as special loan schemes and medical subsidies, benefits that add to the economic and social well being of the disabled workforce. For instance, retired workers in an unit in Andhra Pradesh are receiving a modest pension from the provident fund scheme.

MESH would like to reach more disabled people with its services. If you know of any groups of people either affected by leprosy or disabled in any way that might benefit from our services please tell us about them. Please contact us at MESH, 5, Local Shopping Centre, Uday Park, New Delhi 110 049. Phone: 6965039.



# How and How Not of Empowerment

Lets start a debate on what empowers and what does not

Deep Joshi  
1994

Let me begin this brief article with a disclaimer: I know next to nothing about power and empowerment. This is a topic about which a great deal has been written through the ages. Much contemporary debate about development has been inspired by the concern for empowerment. So how come I, an ignoramus, choose this profound topic?

Which are the ways of performing each of these tasks that will be empower and which would achieve the reverse? How do we decide which is the "empowering way" of doing a task?

We talk much about empowerment and say our strategies are inspired by a concern for it. I am sure, therefore, many among you, especially those engaged in practice on the ground, would have thought a good deal about it. My purpose here is to start a debate to draw you out. After all, the value of knowledge to us is that it enhances practice. Otherwise, how does it matter whether it is burnt or buried when we die?

## Ways to Empower

Empowerment figures prominently in our work with groups and is often the reason why we promote groups. In fact, we now work only through groups in all our projects. These include savings and credit groups, lift irrigation groups, tasar vikas samitis (tasar development committees), flayer co-operatives, poultry groups and tank groups. Let us begin with the favourites of non-vegetarians, the poultry groups in Kesla. How are individual poultry rearers in Kesla empowered by forming a group? How might they not be empowered despite forming groups? These groups per-

form a host of tasks. To list just a few, the groups enrol new members, train members, help members obtain finance for setting up poultry enterprises, buy inputs for members, decide who will produce how much and when, decide whom to sell to, how much, at what price and when, etc. There is obviously more than one way to perform each of these tasks. Which are the ways of performing each of these tasks that will be empower and which would achieve the reverse? How do we decide which is the "empowering way" of doing a task?

To elaborate further, it might help to sort these tasks into categories. For example, some tasks are essentially internal, pertaining to dealings with members of the group, such as the manner in which decisions about sequencing production or sharing working capital are made. Other tasks pertain to dealings with the world beyond the group, such as sellers of feed or buyers of birds. Does the "empowering way" of doing a task depend on whether the task is internal or external? There may be other ways similarly of sorting into categories and similar analysis might be applied to other kinds of groups we are promoting or working with.

## Mainstream Mantra

Mainstreaming is often talked of as a way to empower. This is another characteristic of how we work with village communities. For example, we take great pains to link villagers to mainstream sources of finance such as banks and government programmes. The soft option of using donor grants is frowned upon. In fact, we go further and insist that



the people should directly be linked to the mainstream by refusing to be a conduit. If this is so important, what is this creature called "mainstream"? In what ways does it empower? What are the characteristics of the mainstream? What, therefore, determines whether mainstreaming will "succeed"? Most importantly, how is it being done in poultry, credit lift irrigation, et al?

Before I end this monologue, let me turn to what is often talked of as the opposite if not the enemy of empowerment: amelioration. Remember the Chinese proverb that says that teach a man how to catch a fish, etc. Well, what about feeding the man a fish? Especially if you had enough fish to give to last a lifetime and a cold storage to boot! Mind you, this is not as hypothetical as it sounds. In many situations we seem to be in a position to root out a problem through direct intervention. Take the case of our work

with the flayers in Uttar Pradesh. Why shouldn't we spend all our energies in cultivating a minister or 2 and get the policy of licensing reversed? In the present political situation in the state, it just might work! So why not?

I hope some of you would share your thoughts in the forthcoming issues of NewsReach. If knowledge and sharing is power, we seem to have an easy way of empowering ourselves.



## People News and Events

- Congratulations to Rajiv Baranwal in Dholpur on his marriage to Mridula on December 8, 2001.

- Neelam Maheshwari has been transferred from Ramgarh in Alwar district of Rajasthan to the Research and Resource Centre in New Delhi from December 8, 2001.

- Sudipta Biswas, Ramesh Chandra Kar and Bimal Chandra, apprentices of the 24th batch based in Barhi, Gumla and Kesla respectively, dropped out of the apprenticeship programme.

- Pradan participated in the International Silk Congress held in Bangalore from December 4-9, 2001. It is for the first time in its 50 year history that the International Silk Association held its bi-annual congress in India.

- Asif Zaidi and Dhruvaa Mukhopadhyay attended the IDS (Institute of Development Studies at Sussex, UK) workshop on Wider Impacts of Micro-Credit held in Bangladesh on January 6-9, 2002. They also visited BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) in Rajendrapur.

- Ellie Bosch, consultant at I/C consultants, The Netherlands, visited our project in Alwar to study Pradan's SHG (self-help group) programme. She is co-ordinating an ICCO-sponsored study on Models of Micro-finance in India in partnership with Sa-Dhan in India.

- Anirban Ghose attended an UNDP-sponsored workshop on "Micro-credit and Empowerment" in New Delhi on January 9-11, 2002.

- The newly developed HRD systems software will be launched from April 1, 2002.

Accountants and Team Leaders from Kesla, Vidisha, Delhi, Baliguda, Raigarh and our 3 teams in Rajasthan attended a 2-day training programme at Kesla to learn how to use the software on December 27-28. Accountants and Team Leaders from the teams in Jharkhand, Keonjhar and Purulia attended a similar programme on January 14-17, 2002 at Ranchi. A detailed user manual accompanies the software, developed by Dr Sharada Nagarajan.

- Twelve Apprentices from the 24th batch attended the Joint Organisational Orientation, Village Study Orientation and SHG Thematic Orientation programmes on January 8-16, 2002 at Kesla.

- Ten Apprentices from the 23rd and 24th batches attended the first phase of the Process Awareness and Sensitivity (PAS) module on January 19-24, 2002.

### An Appeal

As you are all aware, GRASP's Jeep met with an accident in December 28, while returning from Pune where they lost 2 of their finest colleagues. Their Chairperson-cum-Chief Executive and Pradan alumnus, Dr Rakesh Kaushik suffered serious head injury. He is undergoing treatment at Jahangir Hospital, Pune. He is slowly responding to the treatment but remains semiconscious. The expenses for his prolonged treatment will be quite high. GRASP and MITCON have paid part of the bill. Those of you who wish to express your support to the family may send demand drafts in the name of Mrs Vijay Kaushik c/o Mr Jaideep Gupta, CEO, Jahangir Hospital & Medical Centre, 32 Sasoon Road, Pune 411001.





PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) is a voluntary organisation registered under the Societies' Registration Act in Delhi. We work in selected villages in 6 states through small teams based in the field. Our focus of work is to promote and strengthen livelihoods for poor rural people. It involves organising the poor, enhancing their capabilities, introducing ways to improve their incomes and linking them to banks, markets and other economic services. PRADAN comprises professionally trained people motivated to use their knowledge and skills to remove poverty by working directly with the poor. Engrossed in action, we often feel the need to reach out to others in PRADAN and the wider development fraternity. NewsReach is one of the ways we seek to address this need. It is our forum for sharing thoughts and a platform to build solidarity and unity of purpose.



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