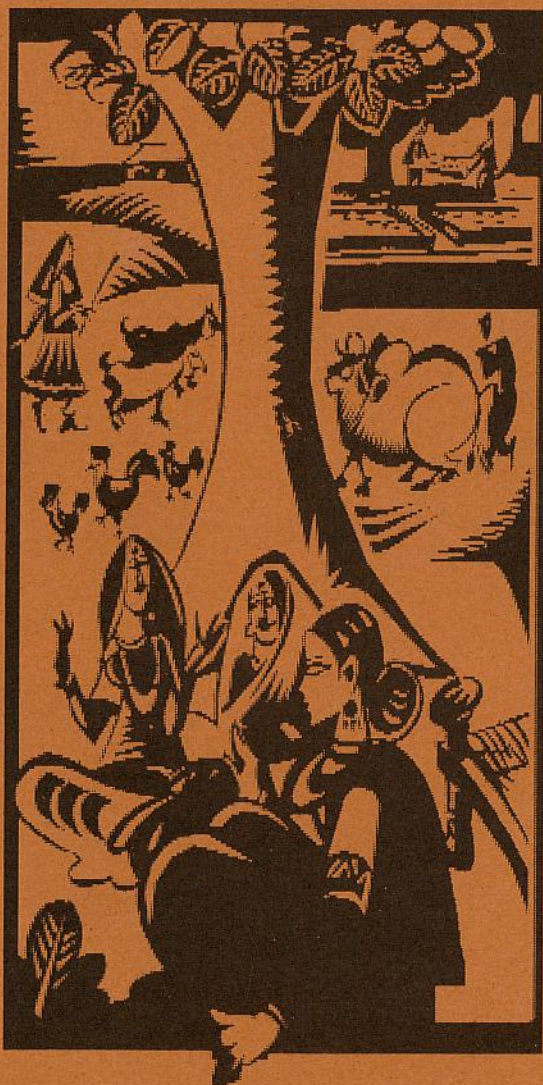


The Livelihoods and Development Monthly

NewsReach

JUNE 2004

Volume 4 Number 6



Lead Article: The Road Ahead in Livelihoods 2

Sankar Datta posits that to ensure a modicum of economic security for the poor, it is necessary to build an alternate value system that encourages labour intensive production processes that can compete in the global market. Sankar is a former Pradanite. He now works for BASIX and is based in Hyderabad.

Case Study: Soybean Success 10

Prashant Mishra studies Pradan's intervention in improved soybean cultivation that has yielded excellent results in Sironj in Vidisha district of Madhya Pradesh. Prashant is based in Sironj.

Tool Kit: Development Freelancing II 14

Shaswati Ghose concludes the primer on freelancing in the development sector. Shaswati is an independent consultant based in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

Report: Promoting Livelihoods in Two-in-One Fairs 21

Maitreyi Shankar and Rashmi Adlekha share experiences in organising agriculture fairs combined with self-help group conclaves in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. Maitreyi and Rashmi are development apprentices with Pradan in East Singhbhum.

Letter to the Editor

Expand or Enable?

I went through Ajit Kumar Naik's interesting and insightful article on the role of service providers to complement Pradan professionals' efforts to promote a larger number of livelihoods amongst the rural poor (*Promoting an Ancillary Corps*, NewsReach February 2004). As he is known for, Ajit went through each detail about the potential role of the service providers. But there seems to be confusion between the terms used such as service provider, task performer and entrepreneur. Could the guy with the maximum number of wins in bets in cockfights in local markets be termed as an entrepreneur? The Oxford English Dictionary defines entrepreneur as a person who makes money by starting or running a business, especially when this involves financial risks.

I share the same concern with Ajit about identification of a suitable candidate for a service provider. His criteria are:

- Practices basic agriculture (90% of the populace has land, hence majority of them presumably practice agriculture);
- Have entrepreneurial ability (Difficult to judge but let us say not many have the opportunity to prove the skill. Thus they do not qualify for the 'in-doubt-candidate-is-out' policy);
- Socially accepted (Let us presume nobody is unacceptable);
- Motivated to serve in the long run (Everybody is motivated if they are well remunerated).

Put these in sets, the only critical criterion here is entrepreneurial ability (shall we say good entrepreneurial ability?). This takes back me to my Pradan days. We had a lot of debate about forming cadres of back support for different activities such as accounting, agriculture-promotion, technical service providers and marketing. Although these were good in theory, they could not be implemented due to many constraints. I believe during that period (1994-99), about half of the people trained in pump repairing and maintenance stopped doing what they were trained for in the Ranchi area. With the potential fear of being labelled 'unprofessional', let me say 70% of my biking time (based on a calculation of my then motorcycle logbook) just went for providing information in villages during my Karra days in 15 months (1995-96).

I think down the line we development practitioners have to decide about the main focus: expansion and reaching larger numbers of poor or enabling and empowering them (in our own perceptive ways). Both of these are interdependent. The real clash of ideology lies there.

M Biswanath Sinha, Dehradun, Uttaranchal

The Road Ahead in Livelihoods

To ensure a modicum of economic security for the poor, it is necessary to build an alternate value system that encourages labour intensive production processes that can compete in the global market

Sankar Datta

Responses on the reflective note on my journey through the fields of rural livelihoods (*Through the Fields of Rural Livelihoods*, NewsReach May 2003) astounded me. I had written it as a reminiscence of my work since the Pradan days on the occasion of its completing 20 years. I started hearing about it from various corners. Almost all of the board members of BASIX, some ex-Pradanites, some faculty members of various management institutes and even some other development professionals wrote back. Though complimentary, most of them, including Sudhir Katiyar's article (*A Case for Migratory Labour*, NewsReach September 2003), had the same complaint: having built up the argument, I had left the future search incomplete. Thanks are due to all of them.

It made me look at the argument more carefully. It gave me an opportunity to reflect more critically and look at some of the literature. Vijay suggested that I reread Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*. Loganathanji suggested I look at work of Kumarappa's *Economy of Permanence*. I looked up some of the literature on new institutional economics including Bromley, North and Uphoff. I revisited Adam Smith. In search of the road ahead I took a dip in some of these books.

Returns to Labour

I saw there have been different efforts to enhance return to labour by concerned people: introducing appropriate technologies, making capital accessible to people at reasonable cost and organising them into groups that take up the entrepreneurial role

in the form of co-operatives and trade unions, where the group left the specialised entrepreneurial function to the entrepreneur, while managing a collective bargain with them.

There are 4 factors of production: land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship. These are exchanged in the marketplace using a mechanism of price determined by the demand and supply of a factor or resource. The demand for goods and services keeps coming down the more and more it is utilised (the first glass of water quenches thirst and is desired more than the second and the third).

In this paradigm, the entrepreneur brings the factors of production together to produce goods and services, which are brought to the market for exchange. Efforts to pass on the return on entrepreneurship by the collective has had limited success.

However, there still have been some people concerned about the low returns to labour. Marx recognised that they always did not get the best return out of a production process, as they did not own the means of production. Others realised that they did not own the means of production as they were fragmented and none of them individually owned enough capital to own the means of production. To counter this, some efforts were made to organise them into co-operatives. These collectives were expected to play the entrepreneurial role and give a better return to labour in addition to passing on the return on entrepreneurship to the same group of people.

Today we understand why such collective entrepreneurship does not work. There are different arguments such as Prisoner's Dilemma, Tragedy of Commons and Arrow's Impossibility, which gives some insights into why collective action does not work.

Also, we understand today that entrepreneurship is not just an ability to take risk (which is often looked at in a very economic sense), but also involves attitudes towards taking initiatives and having the emotional intelligence to take appropriate decisions. Thus, collective entrepreneurship has not worked except under situations where some socially concerned leader has played the entrepreneurial role.

In the earlier parts of this century, it was the entrepreneur who also brought in the capital. Thus he also tried to enhance the return on capital. But with the evolution of the finance industry, these 2 interests got decoupled. Capital started being provided by large number of dispersed savers. Therefore, it became possible for the entrepreneur to pass on the benefit of reduced cost of capital also to the labour.

This ramified in the emergence of the micro-finance industry, where socially concerned entrepreneurs made capital accessible to the poor and helped them get a better return on labour from the market. This assumed some amount of entrepreneurship among those who ran the micro-enterprises and added the return on entrepreneurship to the return on labour. Thus, these efforts also reached their limits very soon.

The other effort to increase the return on labour was by organising them into trade unions that negotiated the 'price' with the entrepreneur. However, these efforts recog-

nised that entrepreneurship was much more than the ability to take risk by making capital accessible. Thus, they left the task of entrepreneurship with the entrepreneur, taking up only the limited role of collective bargaining with them.

In the wake of the industrial revolution this played a very important role in stabilising return to labour with individual enterprises slowly giving way to large corporate bodies becoming the employer.

Returns on Land

Efforts to pass on the return on land were serendipitous. This is one element on which we have little control. With increasing pressure on resources, the 'price' of land will keep going up. The only way we can put a brake is through new innovations and technologies. For example, with the introduction of the high yielding varieties with management intensive cropping system that led to the Green Revolution, production per unit of land went up, reducing cost of land per unit of production.

Similar is the effect of changes in the information and communication technologies. Efforts to introduce appropriate technologies have tried to increase the return to labour by reducing the return to land by enhancing productivity. We continue our endeavour to invent better technologies. But when we get them will often be a matter of chance, with little control of the entrepreneur who will utilise them in the market. However, as there is a definite gain for the entrepreneur in reducing return on land, the entrepreneur continues to invest in research.

Only the socially concerned tried to enhance returns to labour. Although increasing the

returns on entrepreneurship by reducing returns on land or capital was aligned with the interest of the entrepreneur, the will to enhance returns on labour remained fragmented. It was steered only by entrepreneurs with public interest.

Let me re-emphasise that except for some trade unions, all other initiatives to increase the return on labour, whether in the form of co-operatives or by introducing appropriate technologies or by making micro-finance services accessible, all initiatives to enhance the return on labour came from people working in public interest, with a different value system.

Professor Yunus established that the poor are bankable in the 1980s. In the 1990s Vijay Mahajan demonstrated that it was not only possible to bank with the poor but also possible to do it profitably. Professor C K Prahlad emphasised that India should start looking at the poor as the market and not as beneficiaries, which rhymed well with the argument of Mahajan. But does an average entrepreneur 'invest' in rural banking? Or even the highly evolved, socially concerned entrepreneurs?

Re-look at Value System

The price of an article depends upon the value that we attach to it. Today it is fairly well known that the price of a commodity is determined by the value that society (or the market) attaches to it and not by its cost of production. The value of a stone sculpture by Michelangelo fetches a price much higher than the value of its stone and labour because society attaches a value to that piece of art. The value of designer dresses are higher than just its cost of material, as customers attach a value to their unique designs.

The whole science of advertisement revolves around creating such a value in the minds of customers. Although the basic purpose of food is to reduce hunger, we often attach a higher value to its ability to appease the palate. There is nothing natural or biological about what appeases the palate. These are cultivated.

If meeting hunger were the only determinant of food prices, then plain rice and *daal* would have fetched higher prices than most fast foods. Coke for that matter would be selling for free. Thus, we see that the price of a food item is determined by what pleases the palate.

What we value depends upon what we were 'conditioned' to value. That 'what pleases the palate' is matter of mind became clear to me while discussing food with one of my Carnatic friends. She argued that 'Bengalis did not know about good food. All they cooked tasted very much the same, *jhol* and *bhat*'. My Bengali palate tired of *idli* and *dosa* found this statement indigestible. With a little discussion we realised how our minds had been tuned to appreciate different tastes as 'good'.

How did it happen? When? I guess as small kids, when one is made to appreciate what the mother cooks every day. But it shows that very different parameters of what is 'good' can be defined by society. That also forms the foundation of a culture.

Now, let us look back at some of the labour-intensive products that we have left behind, hand-pounded rice for example. Why has the common man stopped eating them? Possibly because over the years we have been told about the goodness of the sparkling white rice too many times.

Of course, we have not been told that hand-pounded rice is more nutritious. We have been told about the drudgery of the women but were not told how they did it with care and affection. Have we ever stopped to think that if half the rice eaters of this country shifted to eating hand-pounded rice once a day, it would support the livelihoods of more than 2 million people on a sustained basis?

Have we ever stopped to think that by introducing tea in plastic cups in Indian Railways, we not only created the trouble of non-biodegradable plastics but also took away the livelihoods of more than half-a-million potters?

Some of us will argue that these are cheap. Therefore, demand for these would be high. Yes, but that again points towards the predominant values that the society upholds. Cheap or expensive are relative terms with which we value a product. But this predominant value also determines what our scientists' research on.

The fact that our research has not focused on how to make these products 'cheap' without reducing the labour component or without sacrificing quality, is also a reflection of the values that the society holds as important.

Given this process of conditioning, early education plays a significant role in shaping one's value system. Apart from what is taught in the classrooms, it teaches us the value of structured linear thinking right from early childhood. We also learn to value winning, passing a test, coming first. These give a shape to our value system. This value building process starts right from the time of schooling. I find that the issues of 'con-

cern for others' have slowly been dropped from this value building process.

Things We Value

The prevailing value system today does not encourage a concern for the economic security of the poor. Once Kumarappa along with a few others were visiting a mat weaver of a village in Travancore. He writes, 'Just then he called us in to take our seats. I was shown to the middle seat, being considered the chief guest and my companions to the other seats. I glanced at the seat meant for my august presence. I exclaimed, "I now know why your industry is languishing and you are facing ruin. The fault lies in your scale of values." He implored me to explain how that was.

I asked him, "Where did you get these *asanas* (mats) spread for my companions?" He replied, "Sir, they are specimens of the humble labour of my hands, I made them." Then I enquired, "Where did you get this mat that has been spread for me with this tiger printed on it?" He said, "That is a Japanese mat I bought in the bazaar."

I then explained, "Considering me the principal guest you thought of honouring me by seating me on this Japanese mat, while you provided my friends with your own handiwork. This shows you valued the Japanese mat more than your own product. If you could do so, can you blame others doing the same? If many others follow your method of valuing foreign articles, they will also cease buying locally made mats. How can your industry flourish with all your old customers gone? Are you not the chief culprit to destroy your own trade?" With folded hands he accepted the reasoning and forthwith replaced the Japanese mat by one of his own make.'

For me this story was an eye opener. What do we value in the society today: those colourful synthetic mats over the hand-woven ones? Whether we chose to use branded white fragrant rice of Kellogg's or hand-pounded rice (which is nutritionally richer) is often not made on the rational basis of meeting the needs of food. It is often made on the basis of the values, which we have been slowly made to believe.

Choices in society are made on the basis of the predominant value system, where logic ends. Today we all believe in making the cake bigger before thinking of its distribution. Is that choice completely rational? Or have we been conditioned to believe in the same?

We believe in efficiency. Sounds good. Why should we encourage the inefficient? Our education has made us to believe so, without actually questioning what efficiency are we talking about. Does the cost-benefit include only some of the goods and services or does it also include happiness? Concern for the person who loses her job while competing for efficiency with a machine determines how we value her hunger as a cost.

Question of Merit

Kenneth Arrow (2000) observes that looking at global experiences, 'programmes to assure a modicum of economic security for the poor and to guarantee equal opportunity have faltered in recent years.' He has argued that meritocracy which is becoming popular these days is actually contradictory to any such efforts. Merit, as Amartya Sen also argues in his paper *Merit and Justice*, has to be judged from some perspective. This perspective is determined by the currently shared values in the society.

It is these values that tell what is considered meritorious. Thus meritocracy is embedded in the dominant value system, which Arrow argues is inherently against equality. By rewarding merit, you are acknowledging inequity. He also brings out the inconsistencies in 'equality of opportunity', which often is held as a fig leaf of concern for those who did not have the opportunity.

I also find a similar argument in the works of Mao Zedong. He argues that a cultural revolution is necessary after the proletariat acquires power over the means of production to build a new value system under the dictatorship of the proletariat, who guards against the common value system influencing the choices. We see the results of this in the nature of growth in China.

Chinese scientists focused their research on developing labour intensive technologies, which could be taken up in dispersed small locations by the masses, as the generally held value system told them that, that is what is worth researching upon. In contrast, in India, although Mahatma Gandhi appealed for 'production by the masses' and not 'production for the masses', the value system generally held did not prompt us to do more research on technologies suitable for 'production by the masses'.

For example, in recent years of research on cotton in India, the basic gene pool of American cotton has been used to improve the staple length of cotton, without recognising that though these long staples were good for mechanised spinning required in a labour-shortage economy, there were endogenous genetic material which were more suitable for hand-spinning. Had we developed these varieties further, it could

have generated large numbers of livelihoods. Very much like the absence of research on hand-pounded rice. Even cotton of Indian origin has been sidelined.

Therefore, to ensure a modicum of economic security for the poor and to guarantee equal opportunity, it will be necessary for us to build an alternate value system which encourages labour intensive production processes, which can compete in the global market, that values our own handmade mat over a synthetic Japanese mat and is based on a system of compassion.

One question that bothers me is that if the role of value systems is to provide a basis for assured behaviour, then they need to be relatively stable. Various scholars have looked into the process through which such norms are created in a society. Ruttan and Hayami (1984), in their article, *Towards a Theory of Induced Institutional Innovation*, and Douglas North (1990) in his book, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, have delved into this issue.

Changing Values

When we look at some of the major changes in the value system that we see, we find that there have been various factors such as development of new technologies and opening up of new trade, which have necessitated changes in the expected behaviour of others. These have, therefore, often led to changes in values, which are often articulation of expectations from others.

There have also been cases where conscious efforts have been made to change the existing value systems. Farsighted leaders have made significant dents in value systems, especially those promoting collective bene-

fit over individual good. Leadership has played a critical role in making such changes. Most of these leaders have taken conscious steps to articulate their concerns and have made forceful arguments about the usefulness of the proposed new values.

We do find the marks of such conscious value building processes in the works of the leaders like Raja Rammohan Roy and other leaders of the Young Bengal Movement. Similar conscious efforts for changes in the value system have often been looked at as social reforms, if not religious.

And people have done it. Chinese goods have flooded Western markets. Most of these products use labour-intensive production technologies, without sacrificing quality. Thus, they can compete in the market giving the customer value-for-money. The research there has been focused on developing technologies that are labour intensive but can maintain international quality.

Thus, I find that the research that we do, the technologies we develop, the products that we appreciate and the price that we are willing to pay, depend on the larger value system that we hold as a society.

But this has required conscious efforts to build an alternate value system, through a rigorous change in the primary education system in China. However, in this method of change, it was necessary to protect the education system from the influence of prevailing values. Thus, this needed sealing off China from the rest of the world. We also see similar efforts of creating pockets of alternate value bases by isolating themselves in various developmental and educational endeavours such as Santiniketan, Auroville and Kalakshetra among others.

Another significant example of changing the value system can be seen in Indian society itself. With the introduction of British education under colonial rule, outlined by Lord McCaulay, the East India Company and later, the British Government, made the country believe that Western science and technology and their system of trade and governance were better than those existing in India.

As Gandhi had argued out in his book *Hind Swaraj* (1908), the British had come to India for trade and not for governance. For the purpose of strengthening their trade, which was necessary for their survival, when they were required to take charge of the governance, they did. So long as their trade interests were protected, they cared little for who governed. The new education system introduced by them created a small section of people, 'who were Indian by birth, but British by their attitudes and opinions' and who kept their interests protected (McCaulay's *Minutes 1835* had proposed such an arrangement).

It has also been pointed out that collective good is often not coterminous with individual good. That is, if every individual maximised her own benefit, the benefit to the society in general will not be maximised (Bromley, in *Economic Interest & Institutions*, 1989 and North 1990, have discussed this in great detail).

While the traditional Indian education system taught people to maximise collective benefit, the newer education system introduced by the British changed that to maximising individual benefits, which today we all believe in.

Even major socio-political changes have sig-

nificant implications on the generally accepted behavioural norms, well illustrated by the changes in values since the democratic governments replacing the monarchical systems since the great world wars.

Role of Leadership

In each of these cases, we find that leadership has played a very critical role. Some leaders, social interveners, often close to religious transformers, have observed social anomalies and proposed an alternate behaviour patterns. They have gathered a small group of people, who have seen the value in these changes. Some of these people have also contributed resources in various forms.

These leaders have taken initiatives to communicate their concerns and the proposed alternate values to large numbers of others. This has often initiated debates at various forums, where people have considered the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed values, with slowly a large number of people getting convinced of the same.

Therefore, I think we can create value systems suitable for the Indian economy. As the value building process begins at school, this will have to involve basic changes in the education system. Building this value system would also necessitate a large-scale well-planned campaign. However, if Coca-Cola in 1948 could plan how they would make people believe that it was a part of the body fluid system, why cannot we draw up a plan for making people believe that hand-pounded rice is richer than mill polished rice?

It is a tough call. But the difficulty therein is also ingrained in the same statement. If people start believing Coca-Cola as a part of the body fluid system, the owners of Coca-

Cola stand to gain. There is a direct incentive for them to build such a belief. If people start believing in the goodness of hand-pounded rice, millions of poor people stand to benefit. They are dispersed. As a dispersed body of people, not even constituting the median voter bank, they cannot articulate such a need, nor can they finance or steer such a large-scale campaign.

Thus, we see the 'public purpose' nature of this good. The persons who invest in such a value change campaign do not necessarily stand to gain themselves. There are many externalities. A variety of factors that are beyond control also affect currently held values. Large investments need to be made for a considerable period of time before any tangible changes start showing.

Belling the Cat

Who will then bell the cat? Good leadership is necessary for any such value building process. Someone will have to articulate the problem and demonstrate to the satisfaction of many others, the value of the proposed new solution. This leadership may come from socially concerned individuals who will have to take the initiative.

There have been concerned entrepreneurs in India, like Jamshetji Nausarwanji Tata and Jamnalal Bajaj, who have taken bold steps towards building the country. Possibly they would have to rise to this challenge. Such a large-scale campaign may also have to be financed by the state. The civil society, as the eyes and ears of the state, would have to draw the attention of the leaders of the state to this inevitable solution for livelihoods in the country.

Another significant element in building a value system would be repetition of the

message from various credible sources. The role of repeating has been widely acknowledged. According to the Upanishads, repeated recitation is better for understanding of all *sastras* (*Abritti Sarvasastranam Bodhadapi Gariyasi*). Various leaders have also used it. Thus, for the creation of a new value system based on compassion, which values the labour of the neighbour, we will have to repeat that it is necessary for our country, many times, at all possible forums.

We could therefore chart the following course of action:

- Identify a small group of people who are willing to allocate some resources for such a change. This can be done through series of meetings, writings, publications and seminars.
- Advocate a policy change in favour of labour-intensive activities among some of the senior policy makers of the country.
- Develop a detailed project proposal and mobilise resources: human, financial and material.
- Initiate mass education campaign using some of the best educators and advertising professionals.
- Initiate policy advocacy for change in school curricula.

Some socially concerned individuals today are trying to make financial services accessible; others are working on appropriate technology, while yet others are involved in organising labour into trade unions. If they start seeing value building as an essential element of their work, they would devote time to identify these individual entrepreneurs and undertake policy advocacy work.

Soybean Success

Pradan's intervention in improved soybean cultivation has yielded excellent results in Sironj in Madhya Pradesh

Prashant Mishra

Pradan's Sironj team in Madhya Pradesh had intervened to improve soybean cultivation through a pilot programme in 2002 (*Soybean Symphony*, NewsReach June 2003). We had selected 60 small farmers from 6 villages, who had landholdings of less than 10 *bighas* (2.5 hectare). All the necessary inputs (implements, fertiliser, culture, etc.) required for the programme were mobilised by Pradan.

The results were outstanding. While the yield before the intervention was abysmal (an average of 2 quintals per *bigha*), some farmers like Gangaram of Tarvariya village harvested a bumper crop of 6.35 quintals per *bigha*. On an average, the yield per farmer rose to 4-4.5 quintals per *bigha*. For many it was no less than a miracle. The produce was sold at a rate of Rs 1,000-1,300 per quintal. The effect of this demonstration was immense in the area.

Building on Success

Based on the success of the pilot programme, the team decided to scale up the intervention during the Kharif season of 2003 to include 435 farmers from 23 villages. The participants, organised into common interest groups (CIGs), were small and marginal farmers with average landholdings of one *bigha* (0.25 hectare).

The objectives of the soybean programme in Sironj were as follows:

- Introducing improved soybean cultivation practices.
- Ensuring availability of quality seeds.
- Increasing productivity of soybean;
- Increasing income of participant families.

Since our team had decided to facilitate soybean cultivation on a larger scale, it was imperative that we seek help from other organisations and individuals. Many such organisations and individuals played important roles throughout the programme, including the Madhya Pradesh District Poverty Initiatives Project (DPIP); the Indore-based Soybean Processors Association (SOPA), Mahindra Shubhlabh Services Ltd (MSSL); Dr P S Bhatnagar; crop technologists (CTs) and services providers (SPs).

To run a programme on this scale, a large amount of money (about Rs 12 lakh) was required. This money was mobilised from DPIP by forming 35 CIGs. SOPA provided us with 85 quintals of foundation seed, of which the major chunk was of the variety JS-335, others being NRC-37 and PK-1024 (both of which were taken up as experiments in the area). SOPA also arranged an orientation programme for SPs engaged in the activity.

Dr P S Bhatnagar, ex-director of Indore-based National Research Center on Soybean, proved to be an important resource person as he provided training to the SPs as well as team members throughout the season in 5 phases, each time covering specific issues to be dealt with in that particular phase of the cultivation.

MSSL provided the logistical support to the team during the soybean season. This included supply of good quality fertiliser, pesticides, farming equipments, etc. at rates 25% less than prevailing market

rates. This considerably reduced the headache of mobilising these inputs on a large scale while ensuring their quality. It also helped in paying to a single entity rather than making payments to many organisations at the same time.

Based on the previous year's experience of a crop technologist (CT) playing a crucial role in the process (particularly the follow-up), the services of 2 CTs were taken up this season. Apart from the follow up of operations being taken up under the programme, another important role of the CTs was to train the SPs and participating farmers.

In order to function smoothly on a large-scale programme, we had decided that the services of literate local youth would be taken up in the role of a SP to the farmers. We selected 25 such youth from every village in which the programme was to run and provided them with rigorous training. An inter-phase assignment programme imparted skills to facilitate the farmers as SPs and also trained them on improved techniques of soybean cultivation. They served as the backbone of the programme as they ensured the implementation of the package in their respective villages, even in the times of heavy rains when nobody from outside was able to reach the villages to provide a helping hand to the farmers.

Programme Outline

Our team decided to embark upon facilitating large-scale soybean cultivation in late March 2003. The biggest challenge that team members faced at that time was that of forming groups in 25 villages, two thirds of which were hitherto untouched. We took up the double task of entering a new village, gathering data and gaining rapport, as well as forming new CIGs for

soybean cultivation.

Also, the team had to select and arrange for the training of the SPs. As we were intervening on a large scale for the first time, the presence of SPs was a must. It was a challenge for the team to get these SPs trained and to provide them with hands on experience in tackling the participant farmers.

Since we were working on a large scale, with around 110 hectares of land to be deep ploughed within a week or so, tractors had to be arranged in a hurry. The operations started a bit late because of this and the deep ploughing started only in the last week of May. Around this time, the first phase of the training for the SPs, CTs and team members started.

Hurdles on the Way

Since our team was composed of young professionals, many of them with less than a year's experience, the experience of soybean cultivation on a large scale was a challenging one right from the beginning. The first problem we faced was the quality of deep ploughing since the land had become very hard during the delay in arranging for the tractors. Even when a 35-HP tractor with a MB plough was successful using all its strength, the clods formed were very big and it was very difficult to break these.

As the time of sowing came closer, it dawned upon us that there were no seed-cum-fertiliser drills available in the area to meet the requirement of applying the fertiliser separately as against the prevailing custom in the area of mixing the seed with fertiliser at the time of sowing. Ultimately, we entered into deals with the

tractor owners, giving them an option of buying the drills with an advance from Pradan, which would be deducted from the operations in which their tractors would be involved in the villages. It worked. The tractor owners purchased 5 drills and were able to repay the advances from Pradan.

Another problem that we faced was applying the fertilisers correctly. The fertiliser suggested in the package was a combination of SSP, urea and MOP, of which the urea and MOP were to be dispensed through the drill. As the sowing was taking place in the rain, the atmospheric moisture formed clogs of fertiliser in the drill, causing it to choke and reducing the speed of operations remarkably. It forced farmers to altogether stop using the drill and resort to broadcasting of the fertiliser, which defeated the entire purpose of bringing in the drills.

We also observed an overdose of weedicide and pesticide in some cases, which led to damages to some crops. Forate-10G, which was used to check soil borne insects, caused nausea to humans and death to birds that ate the dead insects in one village. This is one issue that we have to look into closely in subsequent interventions.

Later, as we tried to go for a seed certification programme, we faced some more problems. The process required the photocopy of land records of the participant farmers. People were very apprehensive in providing the records as they thought that we might misuse them. This was not surprising because land records are the tools for the mortgage business in the area. Therefore, in order to get these, professionals were forced to visit every farmer and persuade them to provide a photo-

copy. It took not less than 3 person-days of everyone in the team.

The biggest problem that we faced was ironic. It was the first time that the team was involved into such a large-scale programme. Everybody in the team was full of enthusiasm, anticipation and challenge and professionals had to really stretch themselves in the capacity of implementer and learner. The participant farmers would find team members personally involved in each and every operation, riding a tractor while it deep ploughed or sowed, mixing culture with the seed, spraying weedicide in the field and so on. As a result, our interaction with the community suffered a little.

Misplaced Ownership

Of course, one big motive behind this was to motivate the farmers to get involved in practices introduced in the programme like deep ploughing, seed treatment, sowing with 18 inch spacing, using the drill, etc. but unfortunately things turned out to be different. The community started to feel that the ownership of the team members in their crop has become greater than their own, probably with some ulterior motive, and so they started considering the one *bigha* of soybean crop as 'our' crop rather than 'their' crop.

This had great repercussions in the coming days. Farmers started demanding for harvesting, threshing and transportation of the crop. They felt apprehensive as to whether we will snatch away every grain of the crop. As time of the harvest came closer, a mistake occurred on our part.

The message about the procurement of the soybean as seed material got distorted and some farmers thought that we would give

just the cost of cultivation for the crop in return for the soybean procured. They veered away from us and refused to even provide us the information about the actual yield of the crop.

This and the failure of crops in some villages due to insufficient rains reduced the number of farmers associated with the programme to 339. Nevertheless, with all these lessons on running a large-scale programme, the results of the crop were very encouraging to the farmers, SPs and professionals.

Results

Before initiating the intervention, we conducted a survey by using a questionnaire in the project villages to understand the prevailing situation in soybean production. We found that the average productivity was between 1.5-2 quintals per *bigha* or 6-8 quintals per hectare. The practices of using the same seed over the years, sowing seed mixed with fertiliser, insufficient spacing and improper dose of fertiliser were the main causes behind this low productivity.

After the intervention, the scenario was transformed. Out of 339 farmers for whom we have already collected data, 46 produced up to 2 quintals, 90 between 2-3 quintals, 135 between 3-4.5 quintals and 68 produced 4.5 quintals and above (see table 1). It is evident that only 14% of the farmers remained at earlier production levels. The rest had increased yields up to 1.5 to 2.5

times. Among the different varieties taken up in the programme, JS-335 emerged as the best performer, giving uniformly better results than NRC-37 and PK-1024.

The rise in production had resulted into better incomes to the farmers to the tune of 1.5 to 2.5 times. This intervention has ensured the availability of 400 quintals of quality soybean seed, which has been procured by the seed banks of 5 villages and would be utilised by the farmers across the project villages in the coming soybean season.

Encouraged by the success of the intervention, the community has assimilated many new technological interventions into their package of practices. The 18-inch row-to-row spacing, deep ploughing in summer, use of insecticides and weedicides and the seed-cum-fertiliser drill has been taken up by the community. We expect that in the coming years, these implements would remain not just with the farmers of our project area but would also spread to the adjacent villages.

The biggest achievement of the programme was the enthusiasm, sense of achievement and the hope that has been generated amongst the farmers. It has been demonstrated to them through this intervention that, with the right technology and timely interventions, production can be increased manifold, nullifying the earlier belief that the production of the crop cannot be changed.

Table 1: Soybean Yield (in quintals)

Yield	2	2-3	3-4.5	4.5 +
Farmers	46 (14%)	90 (27%)	135 (39%)	68 (20%)

Development Freelancing II

The concluding portion of a primer on freelancing in the development sector

Shaswati Ghose

Start-up Costs and Requirements

The formalities of starting an NGO or a private limited company will involve expenses of legal drafting and filing for registrations. Obtaining service tax registration (development consultancy falls under the domain of management consultancy, which is liable to service tax) and income tax PAN number is advisable and may involve leg-work and expenses.

You also require an email account that is regularly accessed and a telephone. A corner of the house should suffice as workspace. But working from home could well mean more intimate involvement in house affairs, which may be distracting. Helping little kids to learn to let daddy or mummy or auntie work awhile is difficult. When you persist with freelancing and start forging relations with agencies who may not know you well, you would need an office room where you could meet people whom your family may not be happy being forced to meet.

A computer is not a must. There are cyber cafes easily accessible in larger metros with negotiable hourly rates and reliable power backup. Accessing external facilities may compel you to do some work on each trip and reducing pending work – it's like imposing a work discipline artificially. If you do invest in a computer, consider a battery backup as well. Mere fervent prayers to the almighty hoping in turn to placate the electricity board may not suffice by way of crisis management when hard pressed to deliver on schedule.

The overall idea should be to keep recur-

ring costs low when you are only sizing up the scene and building on it. Assure yourself that each asset that you acquire 'pays' for itself.

High Adrenaline Existence

Freelancing is a high adrenaline existence. It is physically draining as you perpetually live on deadlines – the report or proposal that just has to be submitted today or the presentation that had to be readied. You may well find yourself perpetually hurtling along trying to assimilate every client agency's deadlines as your own.

Managing an office single-handedly is difficult. Even if it's a one-person office there are several fixed tasks. This difference will be even more acute after years of having being used to services like support for filing, accounting, office administration, office equipment and vehicle repair, ticket bookings, etc.

Fee Considerations

While working as an independent consultant, setting the fee is crucial. If you continue working on assignment basis with the agency you were employed by earlier, you risk getting stuck with the logic of 'what they would have paid if you had continued on their pay roll'. This is a bad basis for negotiations as its based on specious reasoning. Help them snap out of it.

For an appropriate comparison, convert the annual cost to the company (not just salary but also all post related, contingent and deferred benefits). Then after reducing for all holidays (Sunday, Saturday, earned leave, casual leave, sick leave), arrive at

the effective workdays per annum obtained for the 'cost to the company of the benefits' paid. Divide the total benefit with the resultant number of 'real' working days. Mark up for any increment percentage or mark down for any concessions you would be happy making. This is the value of each day of work but hold it awhile till you finish with the following.

You have to further mark up negotiated fees for the fact that while in a job, what you take home is your income but as freelancer it is your inflow. Even with field expenses paid by the agency, other expenses like payments to assistants, expenses of internet, stationery, printing, fuel, preliminary travel expenses, assignment negotiation costs, office expenses, cost of hired assistant and cost of tax planners have to be paid for by you. The remaining is your income. So the figure settled for has to be higher than the one arrived at the previous paragraph.

Getting Paid

Getting payments can be a pain. Willy-nilly I have become a donor to several agencies despite clear budgetary provisions available with them. Lesson? Take signing amounts and stage wise payments as a necessary rule. Also, unless you are absolutely certain, do not submit bills in advance. Otherwise, while few agencies may pay up, most others may dither.

In case of some agencies, it is at times tempting to divert the sanctioned funds against your bills to other heads and purposes. You could of course take the case to the donor, etc. but try factoring in the cost and time of doing that and you will find developing a discipline is easier. There is often at least implicit comparison

between your fees with the average take home of the people of agencies you work for. Being more open with the risks, the actual number of workdays and the value per 'real' work day works better with agencies employing professionals. But there are small agencies with local staff who may well feel injured. This dies out only if the perceived value added is distinctly high. It requires very serious working at and would iron out ultimately when you earn their 'respect'.

I feel uncomfortable about being a paid service provider in the development sector (probably my mindset is still that of *samaj sewa* (social service) irrespective of my professional training) and could easily be manoeuvred to accept lower fees till a friend hammered into me that my accepting a lower fee does not necessarily mean the money I save for the agency would be any better spent. Getting rid of this guilt is important.

Cash Flow Considerations

Also, remember to draw travel advances or require the client to pay for all expenses. You may otherwise require large cash reserves to keep you going while payments are processed and you continue investing in other assignments. Having significant money caught up in these could severely affect your cash flow position.

A small time weaver working on his own funds once told me that thrice the normal working capital amount is required to keep operations going. One tied in inventory awaiting sale, second tied in inventory that is sold but payments are being processed and third to keep machines running in the meanwhile. So even for this operation, remember to suitably

mark up working capital requirement.

Discourage discussions over telephone. They can be tremendously distracting and time consuming. They can be a pain when people conduct entire discussions or firm up a nascent idea over telephone. Use email or letters which enable you to schedule time for replies, think out your responses, check out schedules. The subsequent point elaborates further how this coupled with bad management at agency's end can eat up your time.

Setting a time frame for responses or feedback or critique of a report is important. Over phone or otherwise, you would have employees of client agencies pursuing you for supplements and details that are beyond the mandate of the original assignment when you are deep into another assignment or are plain relaxing and can ill-afford the costs of their lax, laidback attitude.

Therefore, allow a set time for responses to your reports and recommendations. They cannot sit over the report for months and then wake up one day expecting you to be automatically willing to discuss it or work on it further. A firm no is the only way to enforce subsequent discipline though I have been branded as 'touchy'.

Timing Mismatch

Stay off co-working with the personnel of the agency. This applies to situations where parts of the task in hand have to be done by the hiring agency (for example, undertaking to collect data while you are to do the editing for their as well as your data). Sometimes in hierarchic organisations this works fine when the agency can issue a fiat and all fall in line. Elsewhere,

you may be in a situation where you have no handle on the process of 'compelling' them to do their share of their work within time. This arrangement is flawed.

You are on a limited time contract trying to work with people with assured fixed time period salary jobs. For them there may well be another time and no loss. I am ruining this arrangement since the past few months waiting for 'block profiles' to be sent though the contract period was over in November. Time overruns due to their refusal to work affect you severely in terms of assignment lost or inability to move on or close an assignment. Build in a time limitation clause that puts some compulsion on the agency. If the agency or its person lets you down you would still be absolved of liability with no loss or can clearly say that time having over run due to them, you will now complete it at your pace.

Broadbase your contact in an agency especially if it's important for you. Typically, relations are not forged with agencies but with certain people in agencies and turnover could affect equations and work flow. Further, some may approve and another may be lukewarm to your candidature, despite limited or no interaction with you but a marked preference or dependence on someone else.

Scrupulously and reliably backup all data on computer and paper. Keep copies in web mail, on other computers not linked to yours and retain periodic hard copies of reports (at its worst you can farm out typing to different people and rebuild). Invest that little extra on USB key chain data drives or at least faithfully periodically back up on CDs.

Nature of Work

First let me tell you about the downside. Freelancing can be lousy at times. You may be engaged in inane meaningless assignments, which will not have any one interested once the wind has blown the other way. You may pick up your fees but derive little satisfaction.

You might get boxed up. Your initial few assignments may determine the sectors of your future work irrespective of your interests. Same specialised skill sets may not be in demand in the future.

You have no control over results and their utilisation. You may 'own' the standard operating process which was given up midway or that report on insurance sector which you expected to see build up to action or be irked by inexplicable gaps between your testing of software and its improvements. All this may happen but not in line or time-frames that make sense to you.

Fairly high degree of travelling is involved. It's not just more travelling but halts at wayside stations and waiting alone for a bus. There may not be the friendly organisational driver to drop you. It can mean, for instance, being stranded at small stations that 'die' till the next train is due to arrive hours away.

Public transport, if they exist at all, is not the best way of accessing villages. They typically have a routine reverse to your own. They travel out of villages in the morning and head back in the evening. Frequently there is no transport out of a village after 3 pm, leaving precious few hours for work. Living with the community in such cases is a better idea for extended work but may give rise to other issues. I

drive a four-wheeler to local field not out of any bravado but to protect my time and myself.

Two makes for company and better field study. Wherever feasible try to build-in the expense of an assistant or a co-worker you are comfortable with. This becomes feasible only after some years at it and when agencies see additional value from this arrangement.

Freelancing may put a full stop on 'hands on learning' at 'real work'. 'Learning by doing' may cease, as you would be for example assisting or at best guiding, not managing an self-help group project. The option of learning vicariously is of course there, but this knowledge has the risk of becoming outdated or even rusty. You would be acquainted with thoughts as evolved at a point of time but not always be updated on why a logic driving an approach was abandoned or modified.

Organisations invest in their staff in terms of training and exposures of staff. As a freelancer this would cease. You would need to be willing to teach yourself and yet, opportunities will be few and far between. As a consultant you can ill afford to rust – you may well be saddled with an outdated skill set which few may want later. Update, learn new skills or perish.

Real Versus Vacuous

A freelancer also risks being seen as vacuous and empty by the people who perceive themselves as 'real grassroots workers'. Let us try illustrating this. While I agree people removed from day to day operations may need to ask very fundamental questions, they do deserve a hearing at times. I was once required to prepare a perspective

report on status of micro-finance, micro-finance players and also assess credit demand for an entire state. I was hired and 'shipped' in by the Delhi based headquarters.

Once on the field I realised there was an undercurrent of tension between the field team and the headquarters. The field team perhaps saw this as just another HQ pursuit of inane activities forcefully taken on to justify their overheads but not intended for any real benefit.

The field office appeared convinced that the slated exercise would require upwards of a month. They already had local agency lined up vouching for the same. The HQ's assessment of time was simple – it had woken up a little late to the need and had only 3 days. I was quizzed by the field-in-charge on the feasibility of assessing credit demand in this timeframe. I made the fatal mistake of saying that it was feasible with some dithering. I must have sunk to the depths of their esteem.

Valued Automaton

You as a freelancer are valued as an automated machine for generating project proposals and your perceived value is directly proportional to sanctioned projects. Absolute strangers from far away turn up for assistance in this one matter. It takes effort to say, 'I do not develop project proposals', and still establish it's not an ability problem. I develop proposals for select agencies whose operations I know well and judge the fitness of the proposed venture in keeping with their capacities.

Valued for the *angrezi*-obliging organisations, friends, associates with editing their annual reports and project reports is all

right but draw a line if this is the only type of work or the major type of work formally offered to you.

Contrary to perception that professional support is a big need in development sector, you may be viewed as someone who should be drawing up proposals that fetch grants easily. Your value would be proportionate to the perceived value of funds generated. If you are not alert, there are also risks that this is the only work you would be doing. It may keep cash registers ringing 'if you have it in you to write winning proposals' but there is little future.

If one can afford the luxury, I would advise people with less than 5 years of experience to go for smaller agencies as clients with low payments but willing to permit greater involvement and much richer depth of work. You would effectively earn while you learn.

I feel preferring big agencies may have negative fallouts for younger people with barely 1-3 years of experience as this could mean some set tasks like case writing, report editing and data entry. You may never graduate to more demanding tasks that would be farmed out to more 'capable' seniors. So bide your time rather than rushing it.

When invited to discuss an assignment, organisations may finally invest more time in selling you merits of one of several existing vacant positions available with them. This is a likely issue so long you are in the employable age.

When you get too close and are friendly with all groups of a faction-ridden agency, you may get drawn into refereeing disputes

between groups. Trying to be fair can be mentally exhausting and avoiding it not always feasible.

Most NGOs revolve around a (occasionally more than one) personality. Despite all the brouhaha on commitment to women's empowerment – much of it is only talk – perceptions and attitudes do not automatically change despite platitudes. An offbeat life could give offbeat expectations. Make it apparent, despite the possibility of charges of condescension, that you do and why you do compromise on fees for a selected few.

When on your own, you have little support to fall back on. Your dependence on a host agency is very high. Therefore, take calculated risks and expand your client base.

Reports and Outputs

Maintaining distinct notebooks, files and softcopies for each assignment including names of contact persons, field personnel and observations helps. They come in handy when you have to go back or advance the report.

Developing an informal team around you who could support in field studies and data entry is key to timely reports. However, generating a reasonably regular flow of work for these people is the key.

A special focus on outputs is warranted. Being scrupulously honest in report production is important. I came to know of a senior consultant whose report for 2 diverse regions across a multi-state agency had entirely similar content – word for word including punctuation marks but no acknowledgements. The observations may well have been valid across both but repu-

tation was certainly badly hit.

Content is primary but presentation of reports is just as important. Remember to invest that little more on improving the appearance. I still remember what I was told by a senior director in the organisation I worked – 'later no one will remember under what circumstances the report was prepared but the report will alone have to do the speaking for you.' When you start out, if time constraint compels a quick job, do follow it up with a final fully edited report with proper appearances even if not required.

High Points

If like me, you like the idea of being on your own, chafe at any structuring of your life, would not mind some slides and jolts, are not bothered by opportunity costs, have an entrepreneurial mindset and feel you possess some of the key requisite abilities, you may be cut out for it. If the organisation's hierarchical ladder holds no appeal but being your own boss has a heady feeling and you are game for the risks, this is worth a try.

Life where going to office means taking a flight of stairs down. Waking up to the luxury of no office hour rush or being able to reschedule the day as per imperatives is a strong plus for the likes of me.

If like me your diurnal clock operates a little differently from that of the majority, for example, you are low by 3 pm and unmanageably sleepy at 8 pm but wide-eyed alert before 3 am and your best work hours in a day end before 10 am – this is perhaps the better option rather than perpetually trying to mesh with the regulars.

This is a more amenable option if you need to spend more time with ageing parents or for any other reason would like to select your location and then build your work life around it (as opposed to building life around a job).

Locating myself at Ranchi as opposed to a metro did appear like turning the revenue generation model on its head. I was alone 5 years ago but now in and around Ranchi other smaller groups too have started coming up in the past few months.

As a freelancer you can work on range of sectors and issues. I have worked on micro-finance, early childhood development, right-based approach, livelihood and legal literacy. But this alone is not a good enough reason to start off alone. Comparable experience is feasible as an employee in development support NGOs or development division of a consultancy major.

There are several other positive points such as being able to 'donate' my time to agencies and causes that appear to merit my time and learning about new initiatives and people behind them.

The forced interactions and experience has broadened my worldview. At one time I had a bias towards revenue generating models of development and a strong preference for micro-finance and livelihood. But realisation dawned. We cannot tell the hungry to hang on as we have the long-term solution in the making and you will be saved once our system works. I now view with greater respect work of agencies focussing on education or health or nutrition, even if they are not sustainable operations, realising that while development initiatives take

their time to show impact, acute hunger and deprivation needs to be addressed immediately and often concomitantly.

Freelancing enables you to pursue a wide range of non-work issues like defence of civil liberties or even a blatantly political cause without any worry of violating some written or unwritten terms of your service contract. With some disciplines you may be able to maintain a more diversity of interests.

In conclusion, if you feel this is what you would like to do, sample it out and then decide. Bon voyage!

Get VOLAC Accounting System for FREE

Are you part of a NGO that needs a state-of-the-art accounting system for general ledger, funding agency accounts, cost centre accounting, project accounting, programme accounting and budgets? VOLAC could then provide an end-to-end solution for all your accounting. This accounting and management information system for NGOs has been developed by Sharada Computer Services with help from Pradan and funded by the Ford Foundation. VOLAC is being distributed free of cost. For more details write to Thomas Mathews, PRADAN, 3 CSC, Niti Bagh, New Delhi - 110 049 or email him at thomasmathews@pradan.net.

Promoting Livelihoods in Two-in-One Fairs

Experiences in organising agriculture fairs combined with self-help group conclaves in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand

Maitreyi Shankar and Rashmi Adlekha

*Unnat Kheti, Badiyan Dhan,
Anaaj se Bharpoor Hamara Graam
Bhindi, Tamatar, Lauki, Khira
Hoga Mahila Mandal ka Sapna Pura*

(Improved farming, good paddy,
Our village will fill up with good produce,
With ladyfingers, tomato and cucumber
The women's dream will come true)

Think of a *mela* (fair) and what are the images that flash by your mind? It would be music, joyrides, large crowds, chaos, food, balloons, stalls, colour and *meena bazaar* (women's market). It's a well-established fact that *melas* are an inextricable part of rural India. In most areas, *melas* tend to be attached with a religious occasion and act as a platform for congregating, celebrating and participating in small-time trading.

The *mahila adhibeshan* (women's conclave) cum *kisan melas* (farmers' fair) organised by Pradan's East Singhbhum team in March this year were a careful blend of the traditional *mela* with an additional agenda of motivating *mahila mandal* (women's group) members to adopt income-generation options. Almost every year since its inception, Pradan's East Singhbhum team has tried to organise an annual *adhibeshan* (conclave) with members of all self-help groups (SHGs) in its project area, keeping in mind the recognition and mainstreaming of Pradan promoted SHGs popularly known as Subarnarekha Mahila Mandals.

Solidarity Plus

Apart from the women, various important officials such as the district collector, district level officials and bankers, promi-

nent politicians and state ministers, attended the *adhibeshans*. But these conclaves remained a solidarity forum, marked by rallies, slogans, lamp lighting and cultural programmes. This year was a departure since we thought it appropriate to add a new dimension to the annual event of solidarity.

Pradan's East Singhbhum team was formed in 1997. Between 1997 and 2001, the East Singhbhum team was largely involved in promoting SHGs. The team also facilitated the creation of some irrigation infrastructure and provided basic agricultural support like providing HYV (high yielding variety) seeds from reputed companies.

In 2001, we started intervening in agriculture in earnest, promoting cash crops (especially vegetables) with some SHG members. Over the past 3 years, we have streamlined the packages of practices of quite a few vegetables. Besides agriculture, we promoted poultry as a second livelihood option in the end of 2002. There was a shift from rearing Kuroiler birds to broiler chicken in December 2003. The poultry co-operative floated by the team is stabilising gradually.

Broad Basing Activities

When our livelihood interventions made through the SHGs had a measure of success, we thought of broad basing the activities and scale them up in order to reach more families. Against this backdrop we decided to organise a *kisan mela* at both our project locations in Potka and Ghatshila. The idea of organising a *kisan mela* was blended with the annual event of

mahila adhibeshan. In the Potka block, this dual-purpose *mela* was held on the March 24. We organised a *mela* in the Ghatsila block on March 27.

These *melas* were meant to be a medium that would help to reach out to large numbers of people and facilitate attaining the following set objectives:

- To orient SHG members towards income-generating options;
- To utilise the *mela* as a platform for information dissemination;
- To propagate the purpose of Pradan as a livelihood-promoting organisation.

We had set out with these broad objectives, expecting around 4,000 people to attend the event at each location. After deliberations we realised that just putting up 13 stalls related to livelihoods would not hold the attention of the crowd for very long. We needed to involve the SHGs as well as their families. This was when we thought that the annual SHG conclave should be clubbed with the *kisan mela*.

Getting Started

The task of organising an event on such a large scale seemed daunting at first. There was a need to involve more people beyond the handful of Pradanites on the team. We decided that the village-level meetings would be conducted by us. To begin with, we demarcated panchayats where each member from the team would inform the SHGs about the event.

We also needed to train resource persons from the community to 'man' the stalls. We needed to plan the cultural events and identify and prepare the selected groups. To publicise the event we printed pam-

phlets that were distributed and pasted at crucial points in various villages in order to reach out to as many people as possible. We had to design the stalls, procure the required materials, prepare visuals, prepared guest lists and invite them and also raise funds for the events.

We were able to raise funds from the Bank of India, UTI Bank, seed companies, the DRDA and through some personal donations. Our expenses included hiring a tent house, printing pamphlets and photographs, arranging for food for guests and resource persons and buying banners.

Creating an Impact

To involve the SHGs in the event and create an impact in the area, we asked the groups to conduct a rally from their village to the main road. Each group was to prepare a slogan that would be noted as they entered the venue. We intended to organise a competition where the 3 best slogans would be awarded.

In the morning of the event all roads leading to the Haldipokhar Haat Maidan (the venue in Potka) were flooded with groups of women chanting slogans, carrying placards and banners and singing songs. As the different rallies entered the venue they were welcomed with flowers, *tilaks* and songs made popular by the women's movement.

The groups immediately proceeded to visit the stalls. There were 13 stalls (for paddy, SRI (System of Rice Intensification), tomato, bottle gourd and cucumber, okra, other crops, irrigation structures, poultry, SHG, banks, seed companies, insurance companies and a consultancy stall) that were prepared to address all queries. We had pre-

pared relevant visuals for each stall. The economics of the crop or activity, relevant photographs and models were displayed; sometimes live as in the case of DOCs (day old chicks) in the poultry stall and fruit borers in some of the vegetables, along with the package for the particular crop. To reinforce these visual aids, experienced farmers and poultry rearers from the community explained each visual to the audience and shared personal positive experiences.

The programmes on the stage began simultaneously: with a welcome address, slogans chanted by a group of SHG members and a Santhali prayer. The programme schedule on the stage was conceived with the dual objective of entertainment and sharing experiences related to livelihoods. Songs and dances were strategically interspersed with the addresses of the guests invited for the occasion.

The women enacted 3 skits: one on the impact of the SHG in a village where the women fought against alcoholism and domestic violence; another on the poultry intervention and the changes at the individual and familial level and the third on agricultural intervention. The crowd appreciated these very much.

We also developed a theme song entitled *Amar sapno je satti holo aaj* (my dreams have turned true today). Women sang this song in the interlude between the skits. After the 2 *melas* we came to know that the song had become very popular among the members.

Pledge of Solidarity

Amra aaj agun, jal, akash abong mati ke saakhi rekhe shopoth neechee... (Keeping fire, water, the sky and the earth as the

witness, we pledge...). Imagine 3,500 women standing in solidarity with their right fist outstretched, taking an oath to move forward on the path of development. It was an inspiring sight and we could sense the synergy between every individual standing under that *shamiana* (awning) while they were repeating the oath.

In the afternoon when the attention of the audience was at its lowest, a quiz was held to get the crowd involved in the proceedings. The tradition Chhau dance was performed at both locations as the closing item. The event at Galudih in Ghatsila block was wrapped up with a community dance.

Lesson from the Fairs

In retrospect, a lot went off smoothly at both the locations. All fears surrounding stampedes and fires in large crowds were unfounded, much to our relief. At the end of the first *mela* we realised that the groups entering the venue were not getting enough time at each stall. Therefore, at the second location the stage performance began an hour and a half after the groups arrived at the venue.

This gave most of the punctual groups enough time to enter each stall and gather the required information from the resource persons. The consultancy stall was dropped from the list for the second *mela* because very few people approached the agriculture expert who was invited from Chaibasa for the first *mela*. The feedback from most stalls was very encouraging.

Most people who attended the *melas* said that they found the event very interesting. The paddy stall received positive responses from all around. Most people also said that

they enjoyed the skits. We realised that well presented plays act as a very powerful medium to reach out to large crowds.

It has been 2 years since a conclave was held in this area. The new groups said that they were very surprised at the number of groups that were present at the event. It gave them an idea about the number of groups that are associated with Pradan. Before the *mela*, groups that were relatively new in the area perceived Pradan as an organisation that promoted SHGs only. They were fascinated by the interventions in livelihoods and were keen on taking some of the work in their villages.

Outcome of the Fairs

Given the age of most of the groups in our project area, an event linking the solidarity of groups along with livelihood interventions was a lot more relevant than only an *adhiveshan*. The event acted as a good catalyst to move groups from savings and credit and into exploring income-generating options.

We are now involved in raising lists for the coming Kharif season and most of the people are talking about the impact that the *mela* has on the decisions that they are taking about agricultural interventions.

In these parts, temperatures were soaring in the last week of March. Many group members said that it would have helped if the event had been organised earlier on in the year. Yet, even while the mercury was at its peak in the afternoon, crowds remained seated in front of the stage. They said that they constantly felt involved in the programme.

There is some food for thought for us on

the team about integrating the 2 elements of the *mela*: the stage and the stalls. The efforts of each sometimes negated each other. Once the programme began on stage, very few people visited the stalls. We need to look into this while organising future events.

At the end of the event we were left echoes of the slogans of different groups. One of them succinctly sums up the *mela* (written by Sawnta Furgal Mahila Mandal, Dukurdiha).

*Kamayenge bhai Kamayenge,
Kheti karke kamayenge
Banjar si is dharti ko
Phir hara-bhara dikhayenge*

(We will earn, we will earn
We will earn through farming
We will transform the desolate Earth
And show her the face of green again).

Hurry! Subscribe to NewsReach

We request all readers to subscribe to NewsReach at the earliest. Annual subscriptions are Rs 240 (for individuals / NGOs) and Rs 500 (for institutions / libraries). *From July 2004, only subscribers will receive copies.* We look forward to your continued support. To subscribe to NewsReach contact Alice at 3 CSC, Niti Bagh, New Delhi - 110 049 or email us at newsreach@pradan.net.

NewsReach



Subscription Form

Yes! I want to subscribe to *NewsReach*
Livelihoods and Development Monthly

Annual Membership (Tick where applicable)
Individual/NGO Rs 240

Institution/Library

Rs 500

Membership and Payment Details

Name: Mr/Ms/NGO/Institution/Library

Mailing Address:

Pin code: Phone: (Res) (Off)

E-mail:

I wish to pay by cash ... Demand Draft ... Cheque* Dated
payable to **PRADAN**
Please add Rs 30 for outstation cheques

For Office Use

Subscriber ID:

Subscription Start Date: Subscription End Date:

*Please photocopy this form if you would like to subscribe to more than one issue of **NewsReach***



PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) is a voluntary organisation registered under the Societies' Registration Act in Delhi. We work in selected villages in 7 states through small teams based in the field. The focus of our work is to promote and strengthen livelihoods for the rural poor. It involves organising them, enhancing their capabilities, introducing ways to improve their incomes and linking them to banks, markets and other economic services. PRADAN comprises professionally trained people motivated to use their knowledge and skills to remove poverty by working directly with the poor. Engrossed in action, we often feel the need to reach out to each other in PRADAN as well as those in the wider development fraternity. NewsReach is one of the ways we seek to address this need. It is our forum for sharing thoughts and a platform to build solidarity and unity of purpose.



Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)

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

Tel/fax: 011 2651 8619/2651 4682. Website: www.pradan.net

E-mail: newsreach@pradan.net