

News Reach

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Successful Intervention in Lac

Innovative approaches in promoting lac cultivation is proving to be a success in Jharkhand

Ashish Anand

Lac are insects (*Laccifer Lacca*) that live on trees called lac host trees where they secrete the lac resin, which is scraped off and manufactured into shellac. Around 300,000 insects secrete one kilogram of lac resin. Shellac has been utilised in the manufacture of many products over the years. In the past, gramophone records were made from it. It was formerly the largest single outlet for shellac. It was also used to colour Indian soldiers' uniforms and is still used to dye oriental carpets.

Today shellac is used in paint and varnish, as a hat stiffener, a glaze for fruit, coffee beans and nuts, a coating for tablets, as a leather dressing, as a component in rubber compounds, as a sealing wax, to make gasket cement, as a mould for dental plates, as printing ink, in cosmetics such as hair lacquer, in confectionery such as chocolate, as a food colouring, as a sealant and as a glossy silky finish on superior quality playing cards. In America large quantities of bleached shellac are used for floor polishes, especially the No-Rub polishes.

India and Thailand are the main producers and exporters of lac. Over 90% of the approximately Rs 60 crore Indian stick lac (raw lac) is produced in the states of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Orissa. Jharkhand is one of the major producers of lac in the country. Approximately 60% of the total Indian production comes from the state.

Within Jharkhand, the principal lac pro-

ducing areas are Ranchi, West Singhbhum, Gumla and Simdega districts. In this area, the principal host plants for the lac insects are Palash, Kusum and Ber. The Khunti subdivision is an important production area with Namkom, Khunti, Arki, Bundu, Tamar, Torpa, and Rania blocks producing a large quantity of raw lac every year. There is a number of lac processing units in the area, which procure lac from the farmers through a network of traders, many of whom use a credit trap to enhance lac procurement.

Present Situation

One of the major problems of this sector in the recent past has been instability of prices and frequent price crash of stick lac in the local markets. This has led to lack of interest among farmers to take up lac cultivation. The production has come down drastically in the recent past. Experts in this field say that the Indian lac industry is totally dependent on the export market and the uncertainty of production leading to the uncertainty of prices make foreign buyers wary to enter the market.

This scenario is coupled with the low level of penetration of training, capacity building and extension efforts on improved technology for lac production by the various promoting institutions engaged in this sub-sector (NGOs, resources institutions and the government agencies). One needs to appreciate and understand that without interventions to stabilise the production, prices cannot be stabilised.

Simply intervening in the market through

procurement and other methods of price administration are not sufficient. Thus, to achieve stability in the entire sub-sector, stabilisation of production through intervention in technology 'availability' with the farmers, coupled with backward (brood lac producers) and forward linkages (community based lac procurement agents) are essential. This endeavour requires convergence of efforts from resource institutions, grassroots action organisations and the state lac promotion institution.

Intervention Focus and Strategy

The core of the intervention flows from the belief that stabilisation of production will in the long run lead to stabilisation of the lac sub-sector. If production has to be stabilised, improved production technology has to reach the farmers. They also have to be provided sustainable forward and backward linkages.

Further, only a one-time supply of quality brood lac is not sufficient. A mechanism has to be started through which the farmers will have access to quality inputs in the long run without the intervention of the promoting agency. Similarly, the market linkages with alternate market channels need to be developed to provide the farmers greater choices for sale of their produce.

The intervention in lac cultivation in Pradhan's Khunti project was initiated in October 2001. In April 2002, a two-year project aiming at providing scientific lac cultivation technology to 500 families was launched. This was subsequently expanded to cover another 250 families in 2003. The year 2003 proved to be one of the worst years as far as the production of crude lac

is concerned. In general, the farmer made a loss in lac production. At the same time, the 750 farmers who adopted the scientific process of cultivation at least got some consolation. The average conversion for these farmers was 1.03 times (from brood to scrapped lac). The journey continued with new things being added each year.

In 2006-07 we intervened in both the cycles with all the hosts available. In Kusumi, we not only intervened in the February-March cycle but also in the June-July cycle. Four hundred and fifty farmers were motivated to take the Kusumi cycle and 9,000 kg of brood were inoculated. The result is quite encouraging.

We also succeeded in helping 1,507 farmers to inoculate about 15,700 Ber trees (8,000 kg of brood lac). In the harvest season of May the production was around 80 tonnes, translating to about Rs 80 lakh in revenue.

Pradhan's intervention includes three points, which is not totally new for the villagers. The lac insect sucks the juice of the stem to survive. Hence, our first intervention point focuses on the need to develop more and more juicy twigs in the host plants by scientific pruning. Earlier farmers used to prune their trees but without any plan or system, which mostly resulted in the tree getting bad to worse in terms of shape and size.

Inoculation is another crucial practice in the lac cultivation. One of the major reason of death of the lac insect is the over inoculation of brood lac. Our intervention focuses on proper inoculation in a net bag to trap the predators at their initial stages.

Box 1: Managing the Intervention

We have tried to make the management aspects issues of the intervention community based and sustainable

Packed Brood and Cutting and Packaging Centre: Quality brood lac is one of the crucial inputs in the entire intervention. Earlier, we used to distribute brood lac with the help of community based Local Resource Persons (LRPs). It was presumed that the family would pack it into bags and inoculate. The LRP was supposed to take care of the completion of the task. Since the life of brood is short (just 15 days), the families sometimes inoculated the trees without proper net bags (in terms of weight and size of each packet).

From 2005 we introduced the concept of a brood centre and introduced the concept of packed brood to provide the farmer quality brood lac. A brood cutting and packing centre was established for every group of 50 farmers. Women from self-help groups promoted by Pradhan were trained in cutting and packing the brood. Programme management thus became easier. We have already seen that the package of practice has become more robust.

Brood inspector: With continuous intervention in the commercial and brood cycles, more and more farmers are now preserving brood. Last year, approximately 350 quintals of brood were produced in this area. It is no longer a brood deficient area. This has made some of our tasks easier.

However, farmers should inoculate the best brood. To insure this we made a slight change in our programme management in 2005. To service the farmers who preserved their own broods, we promoted extension workers called Brood Inspectors. The Brood Inspectors were trained in brood selection. Villagers with their own brood will bring it to the inspector and get it checked. Only then would they inoculate them. This enables us to maintain both uniform quality and higher quantities.

Unlike other crops, lac is also prone to attack by enemy insects and fungus. Our third point focuses on preventing this.

In all these years we have played two major roles. One, we tried to take the whole concept of scientific cultivation of lac in the interior pockets of the state to increase the sustainable production and second, tried to convince the other stakeholders of the sector like government agencies, other NGO's, state level lac federation for procurement and marketing, and factory owners and the India Lac Research Institution (ILRI) to help the sector to rejuvenate. In our journey we

succeeded to an extent but still the road is full of turbulence.

After the disastrous results in 2003, which was a bad year for most lac farmers, the state government showed some interest in the sector. The state government requested Pradhan to draft a proposal for the whole state. Pradhan, with the help of ILRI, drafted a proposal for the government, aiming to promote a scientific package of practice in lac cultivation in eight districts and 20,000 tribal farmers of the state in three years.

The Planning Commission of India made a

Box 2: Field Innovations

Some of the things we tried in the field that proved to be a success

Kusumi Intervention: We started with the Rangeeni strain of lac but soon realised that unless the programme is spread throughout the year, the momentum cannot be maintained. So, in 2005-06 we also included the Kusumi strain into our basket. The result with Kusumi was an eye-opener. In comparison to Rangeeni, where the average conversion rate is 3-4 times the brood inoculated, in Kusumi, it just doubles. Today we have almost 750 farmers cultivating Kusumi.

Kusumi Intervention on Ber: Kusumi is generally grown in Kusum tree, which takes almost 18 months from pruning to inoculation. Scientists claim that it can also be grown on Ber. However, it was never tried in the farmers' fields situated deep in the jungle. We tried it in 2005-06 with 54 farmers of Khunti and Namkom blocks. The average conversion rate was eight times the inoculation (from brood to scrap). It opened a door of opportunity for thousands of tribal families in the region.

Intervention on Palash for brood: Brood is the most crucial input in the production of lac. The life of the brood is just 15 days. Hence it cannot be stored. Most of the people left the sector or are still leaving it because of the lack of availability of brood lac. After intervening in the lac production, it is important to intervene in the production of brood lac.

Brood is mostly grown on Palash, which is seen in abundance in the jungles of the

areas where we are working. In 2004-05 we started our intervention in the brood sector. In a short span of two years, this brood deficient area not only became sufficient to meet the demands of local farmers but also helped others to inoculate their trees. This year the brood production in this area was approximately 350 to 400 quintal (resulting in 30 lakh to 40 lakh of revenue generation).

We have not restricted our brood intervention in only Palash. With technical help from ILRI, we are testing a new way of cultivating brood lac on Ber (the coupe system). It is not a totally new technique. It is a way of preserving brood on Ber trees.

Coupe System in Ber: A Ber tree can have multiple of pruning points and canopies. It is seen that lac incrustation is too low in the upper part of the canopy. The Rangeeni crop matures in the month of May. The hatching of eggs takes place in June-July. So, if the crop can be left on the tree for two months, it converts into brood. In the coupe system what happens is, some of the branches that bear low incrustation of lac are left untouched and the rest is pruned. The tiny insects will emerge from these branches in June and July, which can then be used as brood.

Semialata Intervention: Ber, Palash and Kusum are known as the three major hosts of lac. Apart from these, there are other minor hosts. But due to their size and proximity to

the village, people hesitate inoculating these trees. Apart from this, there are number of reasons that affect the cultivation of lac. In countries like Sri Lanka and Indonesia, production has been stabilised by intervening much more in controlled host plants.

Flemengia Semialata is one such shrub. It is a host that can be grown on homesteads and can be inoculated after just one year of its plantation. The shrub attains an average

height of six to eight feet. Last year, with the help of ILRI, we trained 20 farmers so that they could grow Semialata plantations with some irrigation. Eight thousand plants were planted. Today, the plants are 4-5 feet in height and are ready to be inoculated in July. It will be a boon to the farmers with low or no traditional host plants and can give a massive boost to the production of crude lac.

special allotment of Rs 9.84 crore for the project. In this programme Pradan is directly working with 5,000 families and helping government to assist other NGOs so that they can cover another 15,000 families. For speedy implementation of the programme a project cell is constituted comprising Pradan professionals, scientists from ILRI, and officials from the state forest department, with the tribal welfare secretary as its chairperson.

We have helped others NGOs within the state (NBJK, FEMALE, KSRA, NEEDS and WORLD VISION) and outside the state (KARAMDAKSHA of Chhattisgarh) and few entrepreneur farmers of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to take up this activity.

Our objective of rejuvenating the sector is still some way off. A comprehensive roadmap is necessary to rejuvenate the sector. With changing climate and decline in the flora and fauna, the sector needs important inputs from research institutions. Brood lac is still the crucial input and with rising temperature every year, preserving the brood in traditional host plants is becoming more challenging.

The kind of milestone the whole team

achieved this year is something extraordinary. The crucial role of local resource persons in all these years in shaping the whole programme is something that cannot be denied. We managed to bring smiles to thousands of tribal families in our areas but more are still waiting their turn. We are moving forward each day with new energy, keeping in mind, "hum honge kamyab ek din."

Cooking Range for Rural Women

Promoting a low-cost, fuel-efficient, eco-friendly and hygienic cooking range for rural households

Aniruddha Dey

The project 'Sajha Chullah' was initiated to develop a low cost, user friendly and fuel saving oven for poor rural women. Under the project, a multipurpose oven has been designed to help rural poor families to save firewood and fossil fuels like kerosene, coal, etc. The *sajha chullah* is a smokeless oven with three burners and a huge pipe that acts as a chimney. It also has an in-built container beside the main stove to heat water.

The *sajha chullah* intends to reduce the drudgery of women who, while cooking in conventional *chullahs* suffer from the smoke, lack of space to cook, uncomfortable posture and disturbances from the elements while cooking outside the house. It is capable of meeting various demands of family members (like making tea) which otherwise interrupt the cooking process.

The *chullah* is designed in such a way that it is easy for the women to maintain clean surroundings with little effort. The *sajha chullah* also reduces health hazards from food cooking in unhygienic conditions and reduces the household's expenses on fuel. Its fuel efficiency helps promote conservation of natural resources.

The project's achievements are measured in various ways that include the reduction of the family's expenditure of cooking fuel; increase in leisure hours for women, saving time by being able to simultaneously complete household chores while cooking and increasing comfort while cooking by avoiding an uncomfortable posture.

It also cuts down on medical costs incurred for food poisoning or contamination, results in lower incidences of arthritis among women (from cooking with an uncomfortable posture), reduction in cough and irritation in the eyes and early blindness due to smoke and heat and reduction of cough and cold from cooking in the open.

Multiple Benefits

The *sajha chullah* project benefits the community in various ways. Cooking is the primary task of women in any Indian family. Women spend most of their time in cooking and rarely get time to take care of themselves. They cannot get involved in other productive work, as they have to take care of household chores, for which they spend most of their time. This leaves them with no opportunity to earn. They remain dependent on the male members of their family. This project was initiated to minimise the time and effort put in by the women so that, if they so wish, they could get involved in some productive and remunerative work.

Since the requirement of firewood is low, women save time in firewood collection. This also reduces the chances of engaging children of the family in firewood collection. It also reduces the risk of harassment of adolescent girls and middle-aged women in the forests and isolated areas by unscrupulous elements, as in the rural areas many people collect firewood from the nearby forests.

Even if the women wanted to maintain healthy and hygienic conditions in the place of cooking, they are often unable to do so due

to the faulty designs of their houses. Sometimes having a proper cooking space gets no priority and women's choices are hardly taken into consideration. This frequently affects their health.

The *sajha chullah* provides them with comfort in various ways. It facilitates appropriate posture, provides shelter from rain, wind and fire and makes for a safe and cosy kitchen devoid of spider nets and greasy utensils.

There is also lower risk of dehydration as flames do not come outside the oven, which also reduces the risk of burns. Since residual heat is available in the oven even till one hour or more the oven has been shut down, women can make tea or any other quick preparation with little effort. There is no need to heat leftover food since the 'keep warm' provision is effortless, fuel and time saving. This in turn helps keep the food value intact with no change in taste. Use of this *chullah* will help women and their families develop hygienic practices. For instance, they become aware that using lids on utensils saves fuel and time.

The *chullah* is smokeless and non-polluting. Fuel saving itself is beneficial for the environment. The same amount of fuel, which is used in conventional ovens for cooking one item, can be used in the new oven for two items at once. Hot water is available without any disturbance in cooking and effort. It reduces the cooking time. If coal is used as fuel, once the cooking is over, the coke can be kept aside for further use.

Forest wood and coal are most commonly used fuel in rural India. Growing demand of firewood is one of the major factors of forest depletion. Saving firewood for cooking

can also help saving our forests. Fossil fuels are not available everywhere. Moreover, it is often too costly for poor folk to afford. Saving fossil fuel for cooking means less exploitation of resources. Less use of forests means more regeneration and conservation.

PRISM's Efforts

This innovation was developed as part of PRISM's efforts to promote rural technology and address the livelihoods challenges of rural communities. This innovation tries to promote a dignified cooking environment for rural women, saving family expenses and facilitate economic independence of women. It addresses a range of issues related to women and cooking.

Sajha Chullah is low cost, uses locally available resources and is easy to maintain. PRISM, after developing the device, first experimented and then trained a few women SHG (self-help group) members of flood prone villages in West Bengal with limited livelihood options, who were willing to take it up as an income generating activity for them.

This had a ripple effect in the area and *sajha chullah* was widely accepted by families. It has the potential of replication on a large scale. It can be introduced as package in the Indira Awas Yojana (the rural housing programme in India for families living below the poverty threshold). The forest department and the forest protection committees can encourage the forest dwelling communities to use *sajha chullah* in their households, which not only will reduce various problems as mentioned above but also have an impact on the family income by reducing fuel expenses and generating employment (production of *sajha chullah*

Materials Required

For each unit material requirements are as follows:

- a) Bricks: standard 3"x5"x10" - 40 pcs;
- b) Hume pipe: made of asbestos, diameter 4", with bend;
- c) Aluminium Container with lead and tap fitted.

on a large scale) in the rural sector.

We have offered our services for promoting the *sajha chullah* in the Kalinganagar project of TATA Steel for the newly constructed houses of the displaced persons at the relocation site. A skilled team of four women SHG members from Gaighata and Swarupnagar blocks of North 24 Parganas district in West Bengal, promoted and trained by PRISM, will visit the place with one supervisor.

The team will impart training to the interested women SHG members at the Madarihat-Birpara block in Orissa, promoted and nurtured by PRISM, who can work initially as apprentices with the skilled team members under direct supervision of the supervisor. Once new learners start performing satisfactorily, they will be given responsibilities to make *sajha chullah* independently. Two days are required to construct one *sajha chullah*, which means if on the first day a woman can make two units, then on the second day she can finish those two and make two new units to be finished on the next day.

After being informed about the device, TATA steel at Kalinganagar, Jajpur Road, Orissa invited a team from PRISM through their partner agency for constructing 20 units for

Cost of Materials

For each unit cost of materials is as follows:

- a) Bricks including carrying cost @ Rs 3.00 (approx.) X 40 = Rs 120.00
- b) Hume pipe with bend including carrying cost @ Rs 60.00 (approx.)
- c) Aluminium Container with lead and tap @ Rs. 140.00 (approx)

20 displaced families at their relocation site. A four-member workers team was selected after assessing their performance during the training programmes. They went to Kalinganagar accompanied by a supervisor.

After successful completion, TATA Steel placed orders for 1,200 units for the project. This provided an opportunity to a group of women SHG members of North 24 Parganas to earn a handsome amount in a dignified way through their sincere efforts and created potential for other SHG members to adopt it as an income generating activity.

Nature Smiles Upon Bhadubeda

Integrated land and water management interventions optimise natural resource use and enhance livelihood options in a tribal village in Orissa

Surjit Behera

Bhadubeda is a tribal dominated village situated in the southwest of Karanjia block in Orissa, around 16 km from the block head-quarter. It falls under the Kerkera Village Panchayat. The village is poorly connected. One has to take public transport from Karanjia town to the Kerkera post office (about 7 km) and then walk for about 4 km to reach the village. It can also be reached on private vehicles through mud roads. Villagers have no option but to use the former route.

The forests around the village, mainly of sal and asan trees, are highly degraded, leading to severe shortage of firewood. The land is undulating in parts. Out of the total 70 hectare (ha) of cultivable area, 40 ha are upland (57%), 20 ha are medium land (28%), and 10 ha are lowland (15%). More than 25 ha of the 40 ha upland are wasteland.

The soil varies from sandy loam to clayey loam. Farmers cultivate a single crop of paddy in a year. The yield is a meagre 2 tonne per ha, against a potential of 5 tonne per ha. The poor yield results in food-sufficiency in most households for only half the year.

There is a perennial stream that divides Bhadubeda from Kerkera village. It serves as the major irrigation source for the few farmers who cultivate vegetables on the banks of the stream. The only other source of water is a panchayat pond, which is used for household purposes.

Although there are electrical connections in the village, power is yet to reach the households. There is a post office, four grocery

shops, and three pan shops in the village. There is a residential primary school and a middle school. Female literacy in the village is 31.8%. There is one *anganbadi* centre (*crèche*).

Bhadubeda comprises four hamlets. It has a population of 712 distributed among 135 families. Out of these families, 104 families are scheduled tribes (77%), nine families are scheduled castes (6%) and the rest, other backward castes. The main tribes are Bathudi and Saunti.

Key Developmental Issues

As agricultural production in this village lagged far behind in cereals, pulses, vegetables and other food articles, it did not meet the food requirements of the people. This is despite the fact that a majority of the population own land. There was vast potential to increase production and enhance livelihoods by increasing the cropped area, irrigated area, use of inputs, and productivity of different crops and introduction of cash crops.

People were forced to migrate in search of wage labour because of uncertainties and setbacks in locally available livelihood opportunities. Food insecurity was the prime issue of a vast number of families. Thus, enhancement of food crop production was the primary developmental concern.

Our Intervention

Our first intervention in the village was to form women's self-help groups (SHG) in 2000. Initially it was difficult to mobilise the women because of various apprehensions they had, particularly of being converted to

Christianity. They were even reluctant to visit other SHGs in the area.

Ultimately, we brought two of our older SHG members in order to convince them that we were not interested in conversion. With much reluctance the women from 22 families formed two SHGs.

We worked closely with the groups. The women started to trust us because of our attitude and involvement. They went on exposure visits to other SHGs. We also conducted various training programmes to strengthen the SHGs.

Some of the features such as keeping the money with themselves, getting credit at times of need and all decisions being made by them had a positive effect on the women. They started showing more interest in the groups. Some members took an initiative to introduce more women into the groups. The others also started believing us when they saw the benefit from the groups.

Currently there are 9 SHGs in the village, seven promoted by us and two promoted by the Integrated Child Development Services. A total of 113 families (84% of the total families and 90 % of our target families of the village) are involved in the groups. The seven SHGs that we have promoted have a total savings of Rs 1.67 lakh and the internal credit rotation is Rs 2.67 lakh. They have mobilised around Rs 1.8 lakh from commercial banks. The credit is mainly used for agricultural purposes, besides health and household consumption.

For livelihood enhancement, we intervened to increase the production and productivity of paddy. The intervention was successful by increasing production by a factor of 1.5.

Enter ICEF

Then we undertook the ICEF (Indo-Canadian Environment Facility) project to address the developmental challenges of this village. ICEF, established in 1993, is the joint project of the two governments for the purpose of undertaking environmental projects in the water and energy sectors.

This project aimed at demonstrating sustainable livelihood options through natural resource management for forest dependant communities to improve local environment. This land and water project in 2003 was undertaken in Bhadubeda.

We discussed with the SHG members about their resources (land and water), present livelihood activities and shared the proposed livelihood intervention through ICEF, which focused on only land and water.

To make people to understand the importance and benefit of natural resource management (NRM) based livelihoods, we organised an exposure visit for the villagers to our Purulia project where NRM-based projects have been successfully implemented. The visit created excitement among the people about the various conservation measures like 30X40 model, 5% model and multi-use of seepage pond.

After coming back, a meeting was organised in the village where the people who had gone for the visit shared their excitement about the various measures of conservation and utilisation of land and water with rest of the villagers. At the end of meeting villagers decided to implement such a land and water project in their village.

As mentioned earlier, there are four hamlets in the village. For better implementation of

the project, four hamlet level committees (HLCs) were formed with 116 families. These committees included both SHG and non-SHG members. Both women and men of the families were members of the committee. The women were the primary members.

The committees were named Jala O Jami Vikash Samity (Land and Water Development Committee). Membership fees of Rs 25 were collected from each family as a first step towards building ownership towards this project

We then organised special meetings in each hamlet with both men and women. The purpose was to include the entire community of the hamlets. We discussed various livelihood issues, natural resources, aspiration and expectation of the people, proposed ICEF project, its objectives, activities, components, conditions (for instance, people's participation and contribution).

In each hamlet, committee members selected an educated hardworking youth, who took an interest in community work. They were called Village Level Experts (VLE). There were 3 men and one woman VLE in Bhadubeda. Four representatives were also selected from each committee (2 female and 2 male) for overall supervision at the hamlet level.

Capacity Building

The capacity building of VLEs was undertaken through various trainings (classroom and field visits). These included reinforcing the need and scope of natural resource based livelihoods promotion at the village level; awareness about the activities of ICEF, and role, responsibility and payment structure of VLEs.

We also conducted a baseline survey that included a list of the families and basic

socio-economic data, with a special focus on land. The data collection and resource mapping was done by VLEs with help from Pradan professionals.

Members of HLCs and VLEs were trained by Pradan professionals to conduct meetings, and to promote improved agriculture, plantation and vermicomposting. Vision building and planning exercises were conducted in all the hamlets. It was a full day programme where all the family members of that hamlet participated. Two professionals facilitated each event with prior preparation and discussion in the team.

Preparing a Vision

The daylong event started with warming up exercises to divert people's minds from their day-to-day household things to think and plan for the ICEF project. We then set the objectives of the exercise by asking the participants their expectations, summarising and then sharing the design of the exercise with a time frame. All this was written on a chart paper.

We then invited the members who had gone for the exposure visit to Purulia and conducted a fishbowl exercise around their learning, their feeling and what they thought about it. The fish bowl exercise was then summarised.

We then divided the participants into three subgroups for discussing the intervention in the three types of land by preparing pictures. The subgroups presented their findings. The plans were fine-tuned through discussion (whether the intervention could be done in isolation, what the benefits will be, etc.)

We then shared the details of the project,

The Story of Champamani Naik

Champa lives with her husband Kaitu Naik, a mason by profession. She has 3 acres of land, which was only adequate to meet their food requirements for half a year. They were arranging for food for the rest of the year from the wages from masonry work. In 2006, Champa constructed a farm pond (50 x 50 x 11 ft) in her upland through the ICEF project and cultivated tomato, brinjal and cauliflower in her 10 decimal of land. She earned an additional income of Rs 5,000. Now she hopes to meet food requirements for six months from the proceeds of the vegetable harvest. She does not use chemical fertilisers, using vermicompost instead. She is very happy with the results.

Kaitu now works as a mason only in summer when there is little water in the pond. Champa and Kaitu are planning to cultivate vegetables on the banks of the village stream next year, since they would be able to avail of irrigation facilities. They expect to earn Rs 20,000 by cultivating vegetables. They are also doing pisciculture. Till now they have sold Rs 700 worth of fish. More than Rs 500 worth of fish they have eaten themselves. Champa and Kaitu no longer have to worry about insufficient food.

mode of implementation, financial contribution, and environmental concerns with the participants. There was discussion on the possible interventions. We also conducted individual family exercises for detailed planning.

After the completion of NRM planning in each hamlet, follow-up meetings were conducted once in a week. In the HLC, people prepared plans of action for different activities, which included construction of seepage pond, agriculture intervention, plantation and vermicomposting. The concerned Pradan professional facilitated the process.

The representatives and VLE then prepared indents (amount of money required for various activities) in the weekly meetings with consent of other members of HLC. Two representatives and the concerned VLE came to Pradan's office with the resolution (copy of meeting book) and took cash advance from Pradan in the name of the HLC.

Before the weekly meeting, the concerned VLE and representatives measured the earthwork

of each work and prepared vouchers. Pradan professional verified the voucher. The cash-book was updated in the meeting itself. The balance cash was kept in the cash box while the key was kept with another representative. The VLE kept the books and records. The seepage pond owners paid the labour charge to labourers engaged in earth excavation work. Women took a leading role and successfully completed the project on time.

Initial Achievements

During the Kharif season, 80 farmers cultivated vegetables, earning a total of Rs 2.4 lakh additional income. The average additional income per family was about Rs 3,000.

Thirty-six farmers cultivated SRI paddy. The average yield was 6.5 tonnes per ha, which is 35 quintals more than the prevailing yield in this area. The total increase in production was 105 quintals in 3 ha. This has added an income of 0.5 lakh. Fish was cultivated in 50 ponds, which yielded an additional income of Rs 0.5 lakh. Fifty tonnes of vermicompost worth about Rs 1.5 lakh has been produced.

In total this year Rs 4.9 lakh additional income accrued to the poor villagers. This was an extremely encouraging sign since all the infrastructure installed will become fully functional only the next year. The total project expenditure in Bhadubeda has been Rs 17.12 lakh.

Future Scenario

Out of 25 ha on un-embanked cultivable wasteland, 18 ha (72%) were brought under plantations after it was treated with the 30X40 model of in situ soil and water conservation. Almost a hundred families (73% of total village and 85% of total committee members) have been benefited through this plantation of fruit trees, which include cashew and mango trees.

More than 11,000 other trees (Acacia, Gamhar, Eucalyptus, Teak) were also planted as block and boundary plantation around the fruit tree plantation. This activity converted the cul-

tivable unproductive wasteland into a productive area. This land would generate an income of Rs 6 lakh from fruit trees from the seventh year onwards. After 10 years, around Rs 30 lakh would be earned from selling the timber trees. The acute problem of firewood would also be met through this plantation.

Seven ha of medium land was improved through the 5% model, benefiting 35 families. This assures cultivation of better Kharif paddy. Farmers could now cultivate high yielding varieties in these fields. This would give them and additional production of 25 quintal per ha. As a result, 275 quintals of additional paddy production would generate an income of Rs 1.1 lakh income to the 35 families.

Through this project, irrigation facilities have been provided to 100 families through construction of 51 tanks (64 families), 16 dug wells (16 families) and lift irrigation from

The Story of Suryamani Naik

Suryamani is living with her husband Raghunath Naik and seven children. The family has 1.5 acre of medium and low land from which they could earlier arrange food for only 6-7 months in a year for the big family. Raghunath migrated regularly to Jamshedpur and Kolkata in search of wage labour. He came home once in 3-4 months to give money and return for another 3-4 months.

Things have now changed for the better. They have constructed a well in the homestead land under government's million wells programme. They earn around Rs 4,000 by cultivating brinjal and tomato. In the ICEF programme, they dug a farm pond (40 x 40 x 10 ft). This year they have cultivated cauliflower and earned about Rs 10,000. Suryamani does pisciculture in her farm pond. She earned Rs 1,500 even after regular household consumption.

Earlier they used to harvest a meagre 10 quintals of paddy from their 1.5 acres of land. This year they used high yielding varieties of paddy and harvested 18 quintals. Suryamani also plans to earn Rs 40,000 by cultivating vegetables in the uplands. This year they also bought a pair of bullocks for ploughing out of the wages they earned from the ICEF project.

She has also done mango and teak plantation in 1.16 acre of upland where she opted for the 30 x 40 model for better growth of the plants. She now says that there is no shortage of food for the entire year. She plans to marry off one of her daughters next year without worrying too much about it. Suryamani says she and her husband could see Jamshedpur and Kolkata in their own Bhadubeda.

The Story of Kamalakanta Naik

Thirty-five year old Kamalakanta Naik has studied up to the 12th standard. He lives in Bhadubeda with his wife Radhika, two daughters, one son, one younger brother, one younger sister and mother. He and his wife are the only earning members in the family because his only brother is deaf and dumb.

Kamalakanta owns land of around 3 acres, out of which 50% constitute upland with no irrigation. He was able to meet food requirements of his family for only 4 months in a year from the land. For the rest of the year he was working as wage labour in agriculture fields in the village. His wife was helping him by stitching leaf plates. Much of earnings went for the treatment of his children.

Despite his hardships, he has a love for his village. Initially he helped a lot in mobilising people for this project. As he was educated, he also helped many SHGs in maintaining their accounts.

He was selected by the villagers to work as a village level expert (VLE). He went through different trainings on accounts, improved agriculture, plantation, vermicompost and earthwork measurement. He is now earning Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 per month for last two years by providing his services.

Since his health has deteriorated, he wished to opt for something that was physically less taxing. He has started an agri-input business in the village. Through the ICEF project he was funded in order to construct a low-cost poly house. This year he has supplied quality vegetable seedlings to the villagers. He is also supplying other seeds, fertilisers and pesticides. He is expecting an income of Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 a month from this business. Kamalakanta is even planning to take a loan from the bank to expand the business.

stream (20 families). This would provide assured irrigation to 20 ha of Kharif crop and 10 ha for a second crop. During Kharif, it would generate an additional income of Rs 2 lakh (at Rs 10,000 per ha). Farmers would be able to cultivate an additional 25 quintals of paddy per ha through by employing modern methods of cultivation on these 20 ha of land.

There would also be additional income from cultivating a second crop. It is expected that each of the 100 families would earn an additional Rs 5,000 by cultivating vegetables (Rs 5 lakh additional income for 100 families). This year, the families earned at an average of Rs 3,000 despite heavy infestation by pathogens.

Sixty families intend to cultivate paddy by using the SRI (System of Rice Cultivation) method. This again would add another 25

quintals of paddy per ha, thereby adding another Rs 0.6 lakh income to the village.

Fish is being cultivated in almost all the newly constructed ponds. This would provide give an additional income of Rs 0.51 lakh to the village (at Rs 1,000 per family), besides meeting the protein requirements of the families.

Seventy-six families have started vermicompost pits and another 15 are under construction. They are converting waste straw, leaves, vegetables and FYM to organic compost. This is expected to produce 76 tonnes of organic compost that would cost Rs 2.28 lakh. The use of vermicompost has already increased in the village.

In total, Rs 9.49 lakh would be generated as an additional income to the village every

year from the second year onwards. After 7-8 years, the additional income would be to Rs 15.49 lakh every year with an additional income of Rs 30 lakh from the timber.

Positive Outcomes

Initially the women of this village were extremely shy. They were reluctant to go outside of the village and were confined to household work. They were never involved in any decision making process. Now women are now more organised. They are actively participating in taking family decisions on livelihood activities. For instance, the entire agriculture intervention planning was done through women members.

The women are also participating in different block level workshops. A few women attended workshops at the district and other block headquarters to share their experiences in farm ponds, vermicompost and SRI. The Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) has sponsored a seven-day residential programme for a woman called Kauslaya Naik of the village on organic SRI.

Women were also actively involved in successful implementation of this NRM project and its management. For instance, while the plantation work was in progress, women contributed labour for digging pits for those families who did not have adequate manpower. Women are also guarding the plantation to protect it from free grazing. All the women are working on the village pond in order to complete it on time.

Women are also taking initiative to include more families in this project. Sukumari Naik, Chudamani Naik, Amruti Naik, Srimati Naik, Anjana Naik and others, who were not earlier in the HLC, have joined it after a year of work. The women went to them, tried to

understand their problems and convinced them. Now they have benefited through plantation, the 5% model, and seepage pond and dug wells.

Women are also organised to take an initiative in other developmental activities. For example, working on panchayat roadwork of the village, demanding services from anganbadi workers, getting involved in the midday meal scheme of the school and so on.

In livelihood activities, people are accepting new livelihood opportunities to improve their lives. More people were going for the SRI method of paddy cultivation. Vegetable cultivation has gained a momentum in the village. Kamalakanta Naik, a VLE, has become an entrepreneur to start an agri-input business with a poly house. Pisciculture as an activity is growing in the village.

As irrigation facility was extended to a maximum number of families, there is round the year engagement through vegetable and other crop cultivation. Migration has reduced to a considerable extent. Earlier around 30 to 35 young people were migrating for wage labour. Now hardly 1-2 persons are migrating. People prefer to be engaged in their own fields than going outside.

Vermicompost has reduced the use of chemical fertiliser in vegetable production. Availability of leaf and twigs as firewood from the plantation has reduced pressure on nearby forests. Awareness of NRM has prompted people to protect their own resources.

The number of saving accounts in village has increased from 20 to 80. People are opting for multiple savings such as recurring deposits, fixed deposits and insurance.

Reviving a Cluster

The once defunct Shahad Dade cluster in East Singhbhum has revived itself with a little innovation and renewed motivation among members

Tarun Shukla

About a year ago, meetings of the Shahad Dade cluster were brought to an end. The decision was logical as the interest of the participating members was dwindling. It appeared as if the women attended only to avoid the fine for absenteeism. The meetings were listless and it was taking a heavy toll on the participating members and me. Although we discussed on a lot of issues, it was I who had to speak the most.

When I compared these cluster meetings with those of the Ganga Devi cluster, the differences were hard to swallow. Although the Ganga Devi cluster was new, it was highly energetic and witnessed high participation of the women. For me to tackle Shahad Dade cluster meetings just after Ganga Devi cluster meetings was proving to be too much. So with a heavy heart I decided to end the meetings at the Shahad Dade Cluster. I felt the energy was missing and that I was trying to build a high rise with a weak foundation.

Basically, the self-help groups (SHGs) of this cluster were in bad shape. Barring two groups, no SHGs were following any group norms regarding financial transactions. Members were taking loans without any planning. This resulted in a high percentage of portfolios at risk. This was the main reason driving members away from savings activity. As a result, 10 out of 13 groups had attendance percentages of less than 50. This clearly indicated the continuous decay of the SHGs as an institution.

Moreover, barring one, all of these groups were older than seven years. This was a

signal that if something very substantial not done, these groups will be nearing natural death. So the decision to terminate the cluster meetings was to help the groups get a new vision for themselves. I thought to give some time in individual groups and help them in developing a clear vision.

This was in May 2006. My plans to give time to individual groups went awry because of other responsibilities that came my way. When I realized it, I was filled with remorse. I lamented the day I stopped the cluster meetings. I felt if I restart the cluster meetings now without doing anything in the groups, it would probably be in a worse shape. All the SHGs would take the event as a joke and it will further reduce their interest in SHG as an institution.

By October 2006, all the clusters in our area started making regular payments to the computer munshi (CM), barring three. The Shahad Dade was one of the three. There was no point in paying the CM when the SHGs were dying. So while compiling the data for SHGs paying the CM, I was once again stuck at the same place, planning different options to strike the right note and do something to improve the situation.

Cluster Vision

Then I came up with a novel idea of a visioning exercise for the cluster. It was during an informal chat with a colleague based in Keonjhar in Orissa that the idea first struck my mind. She told about the

visioning philosophy and the basic theme of developing a vision based on present weaknesses and strengths.

There was no looking back after that. I was charged up with the thought of reviving the Shahad Dade cluster. I started thinking of the future when this would be the best cluster in the location. But there was also concern. What if the idea fails? Again the advice of my colleague came in handy. She had said that no one would lose anything if this idea fails. We would only gain in cohesion with SHGs. So I thought of taking a chance and a step forward, and started planning for the visioning exercise.

There were a few things clear in my mind while planning. The women should understand the importance of the SHGs, importance of leaders, what the losses are if they failed the SHG and, last but not the least, the importance of their own stake in the entire state of affairs. Based on these aspects I thought of the tools that would be required to shake them thoroughly and generate discussion and interest in the meeting.

The first thought about tools led me towards a live SHG meeting in a theatrical form. I also thought of using ILS (Internal Learning System). Although I had never used ILS before, I had heard a lot about its efficacy from senior colleagues. I thought to use it for my own learning while experimenting on this new thing.

Including the Men

When the tools were ready, there was the question of who should attend, as it was an important meeting. Here I realised the importance of men, as the major chunk of the credit was availed to meet the needs of

the family, mostly on the insistence of the male members. This was happening in this cluster very frequently. It was perhaps one of the reasons why the repayment ratio was low.

While interacting with a few defaulting SHG members, I found that though the credit has been taken by her, its use was decided solely by head of the family (men). Once her husband falters in repaying, she found it embarrassing to attend the meeting where everyone would be asking for repayment and reminding her of the timeline to return the money. She could not say that the timeline was not under her control.

The person with all the control was not questioned by anyone and the wrath of discontent was borne by the lady. Ultimately such a person stopped attending meetings, which created further furore in the group about her attitude. So the idea was to make a peer group of male members who could handle situations like this and force their brethren to repay on time. I therefore decided to invite seven members from each SHG. The attendance of two men from each group was also sought.

The day of meeting was same when regular cluster meetings were held. The meeting was scheduled at 11 am but no one reached on time except two groups, so I was apprehensive that the entire plan would fail even without execution. Soon, however, I saw hoards of people arriving toward the club where meeting was to be held. The SHG members were accompanied by their spouses. All my tension was alleviated as I found except for one all groups had reached by noon.

The meeting started with the regular cluster prayer once everyone sat in a circle at pre-designated places. Then one member from each SHG was called to join an inner circle and asked to sit around the box. They were asked to conduct a regular group meeting with four members given the role of acting as defaulters. The agenda was to discuss the reasons for defaulting on timely repayment. I knew it was a regular phenomenon in the meetings of the groups. The women found no difficulty in acting out parts they were continuously seeing and were soon deeply involved.

There were heated arguments and those made the play livelier. The theme had hit the right chord both among actors and audience. The play continued for half an hour. Once it was over, the audience appreciated the play and all actors were asked to stand up to receive the ovation.

Engine, Wheels and Wagons

Now it was the turn of the audience to summarise the play and state what they felt about it. Most of them agreed that this was a regular affair in their SHG meetings. I asked them to classify the actors in three categories: Engine, Wheels and Wagon. I explained the meanings. Engine was the most vocal members or leaders. Wheels were less vocal; who occasionally raised concerns but usually went with the tide. Wagons were the mute spectators, who kept silent and never participated.

Once the classification among actors was done, the audience was asked to relate the play with their SHG meetings and relate herself with engine, wheel or wagon of the SHG. The members clearly got the message and understood the concept of engine, wheels and wagon. Soon they aligned

themselves with what they thought of themselves. This was the most entertaining part with few members quipped that others have joined the wrong place. This was followed by some more discussion and a final realignment.

Once they all settled on their respective places, I explained the importance of engine, wheel and wagon, continuing with the analogy in respect with the SHG. I explained about horsepower and suggested that each one of them should consider herself capable of one horsepower (HP). Then I raised some issues. Could the engine drag the wagon if it has less HP? The SHGs with more members acting as engine were bound to be disciplined, but too many engines can create unnecessary arguments. So there was a need for balance. They have to reach the balance themselves so that their train (SHG) can traverse long distances in a short time.

Active Reflection

This play and the following discussion had shaken up the members. It was then time for some self-reflection. Members were asked when they formed the SHGs and why they formed it at all. Almost all of these groups are relatively older groups so they were nostalgic about the past. They related the formation of SHG with their breast-fed child who is now going to school. Some felt as if it was yesterday when they formed the group. Then the groups were like new brides and now they were totally settled in their respective places.

Most of them said that they joined the groups because others did. A few however said that they found it to be a platform to free themselves from the clutches of moneylenders. There were more such reflection

and recollection. The women related how they took loan from the SHG to save their child, husband and their land.

The men also started participating. They praised the SHG as an institution to save the poor from economic and social exploitation. They related how the SHGs helped develop cohesion among the women by meeting once a week. Then they recounted how they collectively helped each other in transplanting paddy and the growing importance of the women in the village as they had money.

The women recalled the joy they felt when they started counting their money, how happy they were when their saving reached a thousand rupees and then ten thousand. Again they recalled bitterly how a few members' non-repayment and defaulting tendency created tremors.

First they tried to understand and felt it was an exception. However, soon more members joined the defaulter club and their SHG was in serious trouble. Each member felt they observed the dying process, and felt apprehensive to attend the meetings. In the village, the pride that the SHG used to be had given way to ridicule.

Need for Urgent Action

Simultaneously, there was a feeling of urgency and a need to do something immediately. Perhaps by then they realised why they were attending this meeting, considering it the last chance to revive their SHGs. Their presence meant that they wanted it by heart. They were looking for methods. At this juncture I suggested some methods.

For this part I used ILS tools. Members

were given ILS pages that prompts them to decide what a SHG was. Although the pictures were clear to me and were very interesting to the participants, they could not understand a few things in the pictures. I tried to explain what the pictures meant.

This was the introduction. Although it had little consequence on the actual learning of the process, I was amazed to see the intensity in their eyes when they were looking at the pages and discussing the pictures among themselves.

Then I showed them pictures of the different dimensions of SHGs and asked them to encircle the most appealing one. As expected, almost all of them circled the mutual help and credit part. Then they were left to discuss the issues among themselves.

Soon they came up with ways, with the men also taking a part. They clearly mentioned that they considered defaulting a deadly and infectious disease for SHGs. They wanted to make sure that the defaulting ratio needed to come down by ensuring timely repayment. Now they were asked the need of a cluster. They felt it needed to act as a platform to check the commitments of SHGs and ensuring their seriousness.

The Cluster Restarts

So it was decided that the cluster would start meeting again from next month. The venue would keep rotating among the different villages so that members can directly come and voice their grievances. The peer group could help in monitoring that everything was moving smoothly.

I then asked them about the roles of Pradan professionals and Mahila Mandal

Community Developers. By then there was a feeling that if they could do what they have committed then things will keep going without any external help. Finally the realisation dawned that they are the real stakeholders of the SHG and not us - the outsiders - so whatever action has to be taken had to come from their side.

The meeting was concluded after requesting feedback from the participants. Most of them liked the SHG theatrics part and also found ILS useful. They said they wanted to keep those pages in the SHG to keep reminding them of the task ahead. There was a general consensus that this type of meeting should be arranged more often and all other members who could not attend should attend to own up the things.

Changing Scenario

Two months have passed at the time of writing this article. I have since then attended two cluster meetings of Shahad Dade. Things have changed. I am now enjoying these cluster meetings and the Shahad Dade cluster is fast catching up with others. They are now linked to McFinancier computing system and pay for the CM.

A few SHGs have started asking the men to attend at least one meeting in a month to keep tabs on accounts, where trial balance and member balance are read. Other SHGs who were initially inhibited in calling the men are planning to do the same.

Still, these are initial days. They all have to keep the tempo going. Here, I feel my role is to provide them with motivational and emotional support. Soon after the monsoons I will be calling members of my best cluster that still is the Ganga Devi

cluster to give Shahad Dade members an insight on leadership and how to carry on with the cluster meetings in absence of professionals.

Present a New Idea for Peer Review

Pradan has always been in the forefront in innovating on new ideas that could be implemented at the grassroots. **Concept Papers** in NewsReach are a way to share and air new untested ideas to solicit peer feedback. If you have a new idea you would like to test before implementing, send us a 2,000 word **Concept Paper**. If you have experience or views on any **Concept Paper** that would help the author, email us at newsreach@pradan.net.

Onward Rural Crèches

The initiative of setting up community managed rural crèches for working mothers is gathering momentum

Dhrubaa Mukhopadhyay

The focus of Pradan's work is to promote and strengthen livelihoods for the rural poor. This involves organising them, enhancing their capabilities, introducing ways to improve their incomes and linking them to banks, markets and other economic services. While working villages, it is women who are primary actors Pradan's intervention in livelihood activities and the key persons selected from poor families.

Women of poor families in villages work very hard inside and outside of the house. Because of not having modern amenities, household work takes up a lot of their time and energy. They work outside as well, in agriculture, tasar rearing, collecting leaves, tasar reeling, in order to generate livelihood for the family. As a result, there is not much time and energy left for the women to take care of the children. They are not at all happy the way they bring up their children. Moreover, they hardly feel relieved or relaxed because they are always overloaded with work.

Objective of Rural Crèche

The objective of establishing crèches is to relieve working mothers from overload and ensure proper bringing up of the children. Thus Pradan envisages that promoting crèche programme along with economic activities will improve quality of life of mother and children along with improving the economic condition of the poor families.

With financial support from ICCO (Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation) of the Netherlands, Pradan initiated the programme in 2005-06. The objec-

tive of support from ICCO was to demonstrate community and self-help groups (SHG) managed good quality crèche programme in four villages of Saraiyhat block of Dumka district in Jharkhand so that Pradan could then approach government agencies to get mainstream finance for expansion of the programme.

ICCO's financial support would also help PRADAN to work on development of a sustainable prototype of community-managed crèche before going for expansion of the programme.

What Pradan achieved during 2005-06, the first year, included:

- Identified Mobile Crèches as our partner for supporting us in developing a model, providing training to the community, building skills of crèche workers and helping us in the field to establish crèches
- Assessed the need for crèche with working women in the rural community and developed a community managed model of crèche
- Capacity building of village women to be crèche worker
- Development of components of the programme
- Capacity building of the SHG and crèche committee members to manage the crèche
- Developed understanding on the gestation period to make the crèche a community-managed one.

Initial Issues

The crèche worker is selected by the community from the village itself. She has come with the level of awareness of the general village women. To improve the level of

awareness related to child healthcare, they need proper orientation and intensive training. Quality of training provided by Mobile crèche is quite good. Still a single phase of training is not enough.

In first phase the crèche worker gets orientation to the work, understanding of the spirit of the work and learns some basic practices for better healthcare. After working for some time in the crèche, she needs a second phase training where she refreshes her previous learning and learns some new components and activities of managing the crèche. We have provided training to some crèche workers for the second phase. According to our assessment, crèche workers require refresher training every year to maintain the quality and standard of the crèches.

Another important issue was whether the cost for rearing the child in a crèche would be affordable or not to the target families of Pradan in Jharkhand. Till now in crèche children get one meal and snack (small meal) in the afternoon. The cost of food is within Rs 3 per day per child. Parents contribute this. We started from collection in terms of cash, which was a bit difficult. Then we made collection flexible. Now a parent can pay either in kind or cash, whichever is easier. Still people compare the crèches with free midday meal programme run by government in primary schools and expect a grant for food for the children.

Once we get financial support from the government, the amount of contribution could be lower. But only with government grant, which is a very small amount (Rs 1.87), a crèche cannot provide quality food. So, even then a crèche would require contribution from parents for food.

Till now Pradan is paying the service charge to the crèche worker. In the long run the government can pay to them. It would be very difficult for the parent to pay the service charge of crèche workers over and above paying for the food.

Enabling Creche Committees

The other issue was how to enable the crèche committee to work as a support group to crèche. It has been our experience that a lot of input is required to orient and build capacity of the committee to look after the crèche. What we have done till now is forming crèche committee of 15 members by selecting members of SHGs of the same village, facilitating the committee to select candidate suitable for working as a crèche worker, and taking the committee to an exposure visit to a good crèche.

Till now we have conducted an exposure visit to Mobile Crèches, and have ensured regular interaction on different issues related to management of crèche through organising monthly meeting of crèche committee. We have also tried to identify the roles of the committee members and reviewed how far the committee is playing out its role. Currently, committees of two crèches are playing their role properly, as a result of which the performance of these crèches is very good.

Another issue was ensuring a regular doctor's visit to the crèche. We approached the medical officer of the government primary health centre at Saraiyhat block. He did not cooperate, as his view was that they have auxiliary nurses working in the area, which he deemed enough. He also said that it was not possible for the doctor to visit villages. Then we approached many doctors but no one wanted to visit the villages. Fortunately, Dr

Anil Sinha, MBBS, MD, who is a government doctor posted at Hansdiha, agreed to our proposal to visit the crèches. Till now he is visiting the crèches once in a month.

Present Status

Now we have three crèches functioning in three villages, Raksha and Rajdah in Saraiyhat and Bara in Poraiyhat blocks. Presently these three crèches take care of 85 babies.

We have trained one crèche worker for 10 babies. We have 10 trained crèche workers. The crèche workers are running crèches very effectively. They keep the place clean. Children have developed good habits. They have learnt to speak, and many activities like games, rhymes, songs, etc. The quality of healthcare services provided in the crèches is far better than the *anganwadi* programme run by Government.

With the financial support from ICCO, we have met the cost of training, created small assets for crèches, and constructed a building for the crèche at Raksha and a hand pump for Rajdah. A proper building is very important for a crèche as providing clean and safe environment is one of the important components of crèche programme.

The Raksha crèche building is quite large. We can develop it as a resource centre for expansion of new crèches. We can organise skill building training of crèche workers at Raksha. We now need to convince the government that a crèche cannot be run without a building and other basic facilities, as a primary school cannot function without a school building.

In Raksha and Bara, the crèche committees play an active role. The committee members

have taken the responsibility of collecting the contributions. They are looking after proper utilisation of material, checking stock and resolving conflicts. Committee members play their role in rotation. In Rajdah, the main concern is that the crèche committee tries to control the crèche workers instead of playing the role of support group. We are trying to improve the situation.

Pradan has also recruited a Subject Matter Specialist on crèches, who works under the guidance of the team leader of the Deoghar project. Pradan organised training for her in Mobile Crèches. She regularly visits the crèches, looks after day-to-day activities of the management of the crèche. She helps the crèche worker to manage things in a better way. She interacts with committee members and attends their monthly meetings, interacts with mothers, ensures that doctors visit crèches and arranges logistics like learning material for crèche children.

Mobile Crèches was equally active as a resource organisation to support Pradan in establishing crèches. It conducted a sensitisation workshop where they helped SHG women members to develop a model of the crèche. It also trained crèche workers on building skills. Its team visits the villages at regular intervals to follow-up the trainee crèche workers, and helps them to manage in a village situation. For large scale expansion Mobile Crèches can help Pradan to build a resource team within Pradan to lead the programme.

The Current Model

The crèches are divided into two segments: a crèche for 0-3 year children and Balwadi for 3-5 year children. It however runs as a single unit. Each such crèche is capable of providing care to 50 children. The components

of the programme are given in the accompanying box.

Anticipated Scenario

According to the provisions under government programmes like Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme, the government would support such initiatives by bearing recurring expenses like cost of crèche workers, doctor and partial cost of food for the children. Government would provide for the building from some other welfare scheme.

Parents would contribute a partial cost of the food for children either in kind or cash or a combination of both. The parents' contribution would be Rs 1.5 per child per day (Rs 45 per child per month). This translates into Rs 540 per child per year, which is more or less affordable for poor families Pradan work with.

Apart from financial requirements, an important aspect is promotion of this programme. Pradan, in collaboration with Mobile Crèches and SHGs of the villages, would promote the programme effectively. Pradan can mobilise the community, orient it, build capacity of community and crèche workers, and mobilise finance from funding agencies.

Mobile crèches would play the role of a resource agency. It would help Pradan to build its resource team for the programme and collaborate with the team in the steps to promote the programme including the orientation of SHG members, skill building training to crèche workers, building capacity of crèche committees, developing parameters for monitoring the performance of the programme, etc.

SHGs would play the role of a support group to the crèche in the process of establishing

Crèche Components

- ◆ Providing safe and caring environment
- ◆ Providing clean, airy and spacious place
- ◆ Providing healthy fresh food
- ◆ Building awareness of parents on health care
- ◆ Inculcating healthy habits in children
- ◆ Exercises for physical and mental growth
- ◆ Doctor's visit
- ◆ Annual function by children

crèches and build ownership of the community to sustain the crèche and maintain its quality.

Pradan's Plan & Strategy

Pradan's next step would be mobilising fund from the government for a large-scale expansion of the programme. We are going to submit a proposal to the State Welfare Board of the Government of Jharkhand for promoting 100 crèches in the two districts of Dumka and Godda in next three years.

Pradan would orient its executive to build awareness on the need for crèches for rural poor families. Pradan would recruit subject matter specialists for monitoring and following up day-to-day management of the crèches and maintaining quality standards. These specialists would work in tandem with Pradan professionals.

Mobile crèches would play the role of resource agency. It would help Pradan to build its own resource team for the programme and collaborate with the team in promoting the programme.



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



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