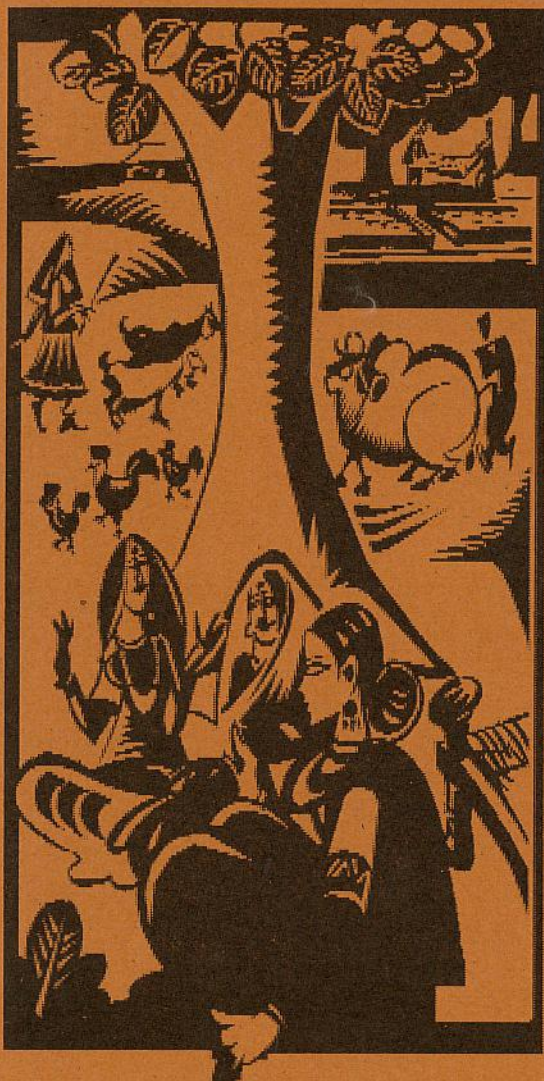


News Reach

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Letter to the Editor

Seeking Information on Vermiculture

We are a not for profit organisation who have adopted 140 villages in Andhra Pradesh. We are working to achieve rapid transformation of the villagers. I am one of the lead partners leading 4 specific modules on scientific waste management; clean drinking water to all; afforestation; and creation of village level enterprises to promote employment and generate income.

I read with great interest the article on vermiculture written by Murari M Chaudhuri and Susmita Layek (*Enriching the Soil*, NewsReach October 2003). We are currently engaged in building 150 to 200 community-managed vermiculture units in the adopted villages and are still learning from the 5 pilots we are running. We have many questions on the subject. Can you suggest the name of an expert with whom we can deal? We have well-established modules in the area of community health, rural literacy, livelihood training, virtual delivery of services, etc. and we can make available our knowledge to you wherever you have a need. Please visit our website at www.byrarajufoundation.org to know more about us.

V Balaraman, Byrraju Foundation, Secundrabad, Andhra Pradesh

Murari M Chaudhuri and Susmita Layek work for the Network for Enterprise Enhancement and Development Support (NEEDS) and can be contacted at needspostoffice@sify.com. NEEDS has been promoting vermiculture through 67 units spread over 17 villages. They will be able to help you further in your queries. Editor

Updates

World Bank Supports Oak Tasar

Appropriate Technology India's (ATI) project entitled Wild Silk Helps Conserve Oak Forests in the Garhwal Himalayas was selected for one of the Development Market Place Global Awards in Washington DC in December 2003. The Development Marketplace is a World Bank programme that promotes innovative development ideas through early stage seed funding. It links social entrepreneurs with poverty fighting ideas to partners with resources to help implement their vision.

The category for ATI's award was Biodiversity Conservation/Environment and the overall theme was 'Market Incentives for Delivery of Services to the Poor.' ATI was awarded funds for 12 months for product development and marketing of oak tasar silk that will help to provide sustainable income and employment for the rural poor as well as to provide forest conservation services. The Global Environment Facility funded the award. It was a highly competitive process - 186 finalists were selected from 2,500 proposals submitted and 40 plus awards were given in 12 categories.

The Directorate of Sericulture, Government of Uttaranchal is a partner in this programme and has been providing ATI with financial and technical assistance and policy support. The Central Silk Board also deserves a special mention for having helped ATI get to the point where the programme has received international recognition. ATI is committed to continue to expand and strengthen their work in improving livelihoods and conserving Himalayan forests through promoting natural resource based enterprises.

Measuring Living Standards in Jharkhand

A survey entitled the Living Standards Measurement (LSM) Study has been initiated in 8 Pradan field locations in Jharkhand. It is a continuation of the poverty outreach study conducted by Dr Rohini Somanathan of Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi.

The poverty study provided baseline information about the well being standards of a selected sample of new entrants to the self-help group (SHG) programme in these locations. The LSM study is a follow up on the same sample to understand the changes that may have happened in the past one year. This process will be repeated for the next 5 years so that changes in their living standards, both economic and social, can be tracked systematically.

The researchers are Dr Somanathan and Dr Jean Marie Balland of the University of Namur, Belgium. A team of 15 investigators led by Suparna Bhattacharjee and Sumita Kasana are involved in the survey. The survey started in the last week of January and is expected to be over by the last week of March 2004.

The original sample comprised 144 new SHG members and 423 non-members because the idea at that time was that the variation in living standards among non-members was much higher than that of the members. But study results showed that members also had a high variation across SHGs. So in the LSM study it has been decided that we will enhance the member sample to equal the non-member sample. Plus an additional set of non-members from non-SHG villages also have been taken as a control population.

From Micro Credit to Livelihood Finance

We need to broaden the paradigm of micro-credit to encompass livelihood finance in order to sustainably promote large numbers of livelihoods for the poor

Vijay Mahajan

The year 2003 marked 12 years of liberalisation and structural adjustment in the Indian economy. During this period, the overall growth rate of the economy rose to a healthy 6+ percent per annum, far above the rate of growth of 3-4% per annum, which had characterised the Indian economy till the mid 1980s.

Indeed, the CSO (Central Statistical Organisation) estimated the growth rate for the second quarter of 2003-04 at 8.2%, thus bringing us over the 8% targeted for the Tenth Five Year Plan period. This is something to celebrate, but we must also acknowledge that India is not 'shining' equally at all its citizens.

Unequal Shine

The NSS data shows that rural poverty has decreased to nearly 25%, but this is coupled with increase in urban poverty. Thus, nearly a quarter of the population in both rural and urban areas, or over 250 million people, is living beneath an abysmally low poverty line. So, if we have another 3-5 years of 8% per annum growth, but not much impact on the bottom of the pyramid, then we are sure to enhance the already severe inequalities to unacceptable levels.

What this means is that there will be a further significant rise in violent rural unrest of the kind already witnessed in many districts of Bihar, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh. Moreover, there will be a lot more inter-regional migration from states like Bihar and Orissa to the faster growing states. Already, this has been a cause of

unrest and that will get exacerbated.

While these 2 are practical considerations due to which policy makers may wish to reduce growth with disparity, the essential need is to increase incomes so that hundreds of millions of Indians can have at least the basic standard of living.

What to do with human resources that are already there or likely to be there between now and 2020? Our rural population right now is 750 million. By 2020 it is likely to be between 950-1,000 million. Rural India alone will have over 300 million women of 15-49 years' age. By current literacy trends, perhaps 150 million of them will be illiterate.

How can the economy productively employ these people and ensure that in the process they get a minimum standard of living, and basics like food, clothing and shelter? The fact is that already millions of able and willing-to-work persons do not get employment anywhere near their place of residence for more than 60-120 days a year. For the rest, they have to migrate, mostly to towns and big cities or to high growth areas like Punjab.

Challenge of Livelihoods

What can be done to promote sustainable livelihoods on a large scale? Generating a large number of sustainable livelihoods, particularly for the poor, is the single most important challenge facing the Indian economy and unless it is addressed forthwith, the problem will threaten the very fabric of our polity and society. The Tenth

Five Year Plan document has identified the need to generate approximately 10 million new jobs per year.

In terms of employment, the formal sector's role is trivial. Together, the formal sector, comprising central and state governments, state and central public enterprises, and all of the private sector account for only 7% of all employment in India. The remaining 93% of the working population is employed either in the rural economy - in agriculture and rural non-farm sector (RNFS) or in the urban informal sector. We all know that access to capital is a major enabler for livelihoods. But do the sectors that generate 93% of the employment get the same proportion of credit? No.

Role of Financial Sector

What is the track record of our financial sector in this regard? While there has been a major expansion in terms of physical outreach by formal credit institutions into rural areas since the nationalisation of banks in 1969, further augmented by the establishment of regional rural banks since 1975, there has not been a proportionate increase in the access to formal credit by rural agricultural and non-farm producers. Credit to urban informal sector producers is even less. The 1998 Economic Census reported that only 4.7% of all the 32 million plus rural and urban micro-enterprises reported getting any financial assistance from a financial institution.

Data from Reserve Bank of India shows that banks had only 37 million loan accounts of small borrowers (below Rs 2 lakh) in March 2002. Compare this with the fact that in the same year the number of agricultural farms was nearly 110 mil-

lion and rural plus urban non-farm enterprise was 35 million.

In other words, while India had 145 million productive units in the agricultural or micro-enterprise sector, the banking system catered to only 37 million or 25% of them. Thus a large proportion of the credit requirements of rural producers continue to be met by informal sources such as moneylenders, landlords, traders and friends and relatives.

Micro-Credit a Partial Answer

Micro-credit has a partial answer to the livelihoods problem. Thus, while banks are physically present in rural and urban areas and offer concessional interest rates, the economically active poor are not able to access them because of borrower-unfriendly products and procedures, inflexibility and delay, apart from high transaction costs, both legitimate and illegal.

It was in this context that NGOs began to examine alternative ways to enhance access to credit by the poor since the mid 1970s. After pioneering efforts by organisations like SEWA, MYRADA, CDF and Pradan, the RBI and NABARD in 1992 encouraged commercial banks to link up with NGOs to establish and finance SHGs of the poor.

From a small beginning in 1992, with a pilot project to link only 500 SHGs all over India, the programme has expanded dramatically and by March 2002 over 760,000 SHGs were linked to banks with a cumulative credit disbursement of Rs 2,064 crore. These reached nearly 12 million borrowers.

In addition, there are over 3,000 micro-

finance institutions (MFIs) - comprising nearly 1,000 NGOs, over 2,000 mutually aided cooperative societies (MACS) and a handful of commercial but large MFIs such as BASIX, SHARE and CASHPOR - which together reach over 1 million borrowers directly. This is a big achievement and worth celebration, both in terms of its scale as well in terms of it emerging from a partnership among NGOs, MFIs, NABARD, banks and people's institutions: SHGs and their federations.

But there are a number of problems still with micro-credit. To begin with, the average loan size through SHGs is only about Rs 1,600. This is too little to even alleviate poverty, leave alone lift a family totally out of poverty. Second, the distribution of the SHG loans is highly skewed regionally with nearly 75% coming to the 4 southern states, while less than 0.6% went to all the 8 north-eastern states.

The geographical distribution of MFIs is not much better. There are also problems of banks and MFIs being forced by vote-seeking political leaders to lend this money at unrealistically low interest rates, which does not cover costs and thus eventually make the whole effort financially unsustainable.

Broaden Micro-Credit Paradigm

Micro-credit is barely enough to create livelihoods. While every effort should be made to expand and improve the micro-credit programmes of banks and MFIs, I maintain that micro-credit is able to address the livelihood problem only peripherally. What we need is to broaden the paradigm from micro-credit to livelihood finance. Let me explain the term first. Livelihood finance is any mechanism

for investment in the very basis of livelihoods, which are

- Natural Resources: Land, water, trees, livestock, energy.
- Human Resources: Nutrition, health, education, vocational training, capacity building of individuals and groups.
- Infrastructure: Roads, power, market-places.
- Institutions: Of law and order, governance and representation, free markets.

Seen in the above context, micro-credit pales into insignificance as a 'solution' for promotion of livelihoods. Micro-credit is by definition, small loans, given for short durations, with repayments beginning as quickly and as frequently as possible. Moreover, whether given through SHGs, Grameen Bank style groups, joint liability groups or directly to individuals, most micro-credit eventually is loans to individuals, not to any collectives.

In contrast, livelihood finance will require large amounts; it may need more than just loans (it may need equity or risk funds); it will invariably be for long durations, at least 5 and maybe 20 years, and its use will almost always be for collective purposes. Thus micro-credit and livelihood finance are fundamentally different.

Let me take you a village called Rojkund in the Bironchi panchayat of Bijadandi block of the Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh, truly the heartland of India, known for the Kanha Tiger Reserve. The village is 16 km from a tarred road.

The district was densely forested, though now the forest cover is denuded near inhabited areas. The rainfall is plentiful,

between 1,200-1,400 mm per annum. The soil cover is still good. The inhabitants are mainly Gond tribals, who till a generation ago lived off the forests and patches of valley land irrigated by rivulets.

Anokhe Lal's Story

Anokhe Lal Gond, a resident of this village, has 3 acres of cultivable land and a separate patch of 2 acres on a hill slope. He has about 20 livestock, including a scrub buffalo, 2 cows, a pair of bullocks and a dozen goats. He is married and has 3 children, and his old mother lives with him as his father is no more and his brothers have separated.

Anokhe is unable to make a living from his land and goes to Jabalpur, about 100 km away, for about 6 months every year. His wife joins him for part of the time, but comes back after every 2 weeks to look after the children and the cattle. With all this, we estimate Anokhe Lal's annual income to be Rs 15,000, putting him squarely below the poverty line.

On first sight, he looks like a potential candidate for micro-credit. But I maintain micro-credit will not benefit him much, if at all. Let us take the typical micro-credit loan, through the SHG route, which his wife could get by being a member of an SHG.

For this, she will have to join an SHG, which someone, perhaps an NGO or a government agency would have to form. No such agency is in sight. But even if an SHG were formed, and then its members met and saved regularly, it would take a bank at least 18 to 24 months before the SHG would qualify for a loan.

By that time Anokhe's wife would have saved say Rs 20 per month, or Rs 360 in

18 months, to eventually get an SHG loan of perhaps Rs 1,000 or 1,500. What would Anokhe and his wife do with this loan?

- They cannot level or *bund* their 3 acres of farm land, since it requires at least Rs 3,000 per acre or Rs 9,000.

- They cannot dig a well, which they need, since that requires Rs 20,000.

- They cannot buy a diesel pump and pipeline to raise water from a nearby stream, since that needs another Rs 15,000.

- They cannot buy a buffalo for that needs Rs 9,000 even for a graded Murrah.

- They cannot plant trees on their 2 acres of sloppy land, since that needs Rs 5,000.

- They cannot get a road to their village or an electric line to their field, since the proportionate cost of each of these is Rs 15,000.

- They cannot educate their elder daughter beyond the local school since it will need Rs 12,000 for her to pass a Teacher's Training Course.

Yet, each of the above 'investment' opportunities has positive rate of return, shown by numerous World Bank and NABARD studies to be in the range of 25-30% and more. One can see a number of pilot projects for watershed management, forest regeneration, wasteland development and tank rehabilitation, all of which show an IRR (internal rate of return) of over 24% per annum. But all of them require larger, longer-term loans, with long moratoriums and no possibility of repayment for a number of years.

Even if we found a financial institution to give a loan for any or all of the above investment opportunities to Anokhe Lal, he alone cannot make much use of it, because almost all of these require collec-

tive action. Even digging a well in his own land, which looks like a simple, private thing to do, is no good, since unless the ridges and slopes overlooking the valley where his land is are treated, the chances are that the water table will go down in a few years and his well will dry up.

Even if he gets water, for him to make a return on investment on his well and his pump, he will have to at least partially grow cash crops such as vegetables and there is no way he can sell those, being 16 km away from a tarred road. In any case, drawing water from a well using a diesel engine is expensive and unless he can get electricity, there is no point having a pump. Thus, if the productive base of the village has to go up, it cannot be just for Anokhe Lal alone, but for a much larger number of farmers, if not all of them.

Anokhe Needs Livelihood Finance

So, in one shot of reality, we find that a Rs 1,500 micro-credit loan is at worst an apology for no access to formal credit, and at best a palliative to be used to smoothen consumption in those months when Anokhe or his wife cannot even migrate to Jabalpur. What Anokhe needs is not micro-credit but livelihood finance.

If the Rs 1 lakh investment were made on the above projects, he would get a return of Rs 24,000 per annum and after paying interest and principal instalments, he would be able to increase his net annual income by at least 50-60%. He would also diversify his livelihood portfolio, reduce the risk due to rain failure after the crop is flowering and generate much needed work for his wife and his mother, while staying in their village.

It would generate wage employment for landless families in the same village for an additional 60-120 person days. It would conserve land, water and increase the tree cover. Anokhe's eldest daughter could study and become a teacher, and the additional income would also enable the 2 younger children to finish school, and perhaps even pursue higher studies.

Completing the Picture

But we need to complete the picture. For the land treatment to work, the hill slope orchards to grow and for the road to be built, functioning local institutions such as watershed committees and panchayats are needed. To provide the initial training and motivation for people like Anokhe to get together and form these groups, NGOs are needed. All these require investment in institution building. Let us say this will need 25% on the Rs 1 lakh of project investments we mentioned above.

So, Anokhe Lal and 40 million households like his, each need Rs 1 lakh worth of direct investment, with 25% of that amount as institutional investment to make it work. Multiply and you arrive at a figure of Rs 500,000 crore (about \$120 billion). This sounds like a large figure, almost 25% of India's GDP.

But is that too much investment to eradicate poverty, while rebuilding the natural and human resource base of our country? Even if India were to spare 2.5% of its GDP for livelihood finance on an annual basis, the task could be completed in a decade and we would still be in time for the 2015 deadline of the Millennium Development Goals for halving poverty.

In any case, if we take into account that

the Golden Quadrilateral and related highway works are costing the nation Rs 100,000 crore, and that the proposed river linking system is supposed to cost Rs 5 lakh crore, livelihood finance is not such an expensive idea.

So what's needed to muster livelihood finance?

- Step one should be an intellectually rigorous analysis, carefully crafting the concept and then a wide and open debate on the idea of livelihood finance. The existing experience of both government and NGO projects in natural resource and human resource development should be thoroughly examined for lessons.

- Step two should be convincing the capital markets that livelihood finance is a good deal and that the risk adjusted returns in it are comparable to or better than well accepted investments such as 'housing finance' or corporate finance, which all financial institutions are chasing with lowering spreads. There is no expectation that livelihood finance will have to be made as budgetary investments from the government.

- Step three would be ushering institutional changes in the way our natural resources are owned and managed. New models will have to be developed which ensure a congruence of interest for the state, the community, and for the investors, since neither the state nor the community is in a position to invest the needed capital. Similarly, investments in human development will be encouraged through policy changes, so that any wastage of this precious resource shows up in pricing.

- Step four is ensuring that high quality human resources are made available to work not just at the policy and strategy levels, but close to the ground where all the implementation is done in places like Bijadandi, Madanpalle, Bhadrachalam.

This article has been excerpted from the James Mascarenhas Memorial Lecture, 2004.

NewsReach Livelihoods Compendium

Are you a grassroots professional trying out new and innovative ideas in the field? Does your organisation work to promote livelihoods for the rural poor? Are you on the look out for tested and successful interventions for the poorest of the poor?

NewsReach Livelihoods Compendium could deepen and broaden your knowledge about successful programmes implemented amongst the poor in the poorest states of India.

NewsReach Livelihoods Compendium is a collection of cases, narratives and articles about Pradan's livelihood promotion programmes. Most of these have been documented by professionals in the field. For your own copy (Rs 80, postage extra) write to Smita Mohanty at 3, CSC, Niti Bagh, New Delhi - 110 049 or email her at smitamohanty@pradan.net.

Joint Venture in Jeypore

The partnership between Harsha Trust and BILT to facilitate development in Jeypore in Orissa enables the latter to discharge its corporate social responsibility in a meaningful way

Phalguni Sahoo

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is viewed as a comprehensive set of policies, practices and programmes that are integrated throughout business operations and decision-making processes that are supported and rewarded by top management of companies.

The term is not new in the Indian context. A lot of companies practice it in some form or the other and a few have incorporated it in their core values. All the leading industrial associations have included it in their agenda. In India, different companies view CSR in different ways. To some it means donating money to charity and to others it may mean building temples, schools, etc. The important thread linking all these activities is that of 'social good'.

Although philanthropy is one of India's greatest traditions, it has limitations in the present context. It is mostly characterised by the cause supported and the monetary resources put aside for it. Philanthropy also brings with it the characteristic of being owner-driven, i.e., supporting the cause closest to the person's heart leading the business. It therefore is more ad hoc in nature. Since it does not integrate itself with the business process, it is always the first to go in times of difficulty.

CSR practice is influenced by 2 major concepts. One is the stakeholder model where it is recognised that good business practice entails engaging all its stakeholders in the company's business. So, good business is not only seen as maximising share-

holder but stakeholder value. The other interesting concept is the triple bottom line. It is agreed that companies will no longer be judged on conventional single (financial) bottom line but also on their performance in the social and environmental bottom lines.

BILT's Vision

The BILT-Thapar group is one of the largest manufacturers of paper in the country. Among all the stakeholders that the company interacts with, the communities around its manufacturing locations form the most marginalized and vulnerable groups. It is therefore imperative that the company draws out definite plans for their development. While trying to make a difference in the lives of these people as a corporate, BILT aims at the communities being active participants rather than only recipients of charity. This way it could empower the community to be a one of the stakeholders of the company. A more active and aware host community ultimately means a better working environment for the company.

As communities begin to understand that the company is genuinely interested in their well being and development, the well being of that company also becomes important to the community. This ensures a harmonious relationship with the host communities, which is essential for the manufacturing process. At BILT the community development (CD) initiatives have been initiated with a focus on sustainability and therefore have been planned as long-term interventions.

One of BILT's units, SEWA, is located in Jeypore in the Koraput district of Orissa. Koraput is one of the backward districts in the state. SEWA, in recognition of its social role, has initiated a project on CSR, with a focus on improving the socio-economic condition of the people residing in the factory's periphery. Initially BILT invited Harsha Trust to conduct a need assessment study for peripheral villages of SEWA. After the study they invited us to implement the community development project.

Partnership with Harsha Trust

The project formally began on October 15, 2002 in 11 villages in the periphery of BILT's SEWA unit. It began in one *gram* panchayat with lot of enthusiasm and hopes to bring meaningful changes in the lives of the community.

The villagers were initially apprehensive that the company had a hidden agenda. Everywhere there was an atmosphere of suspicion regarding this unique endeavour of the paper mill and our authenticity as an outsider NGO. People were sceptical about our integrity as an NGO and our ability to mobilise government facilities for the communities we were to work with. The hostile attitude of the members of Ekamba Gram Panchayat, where we started working, acted as a hurdle in the path of community development.

The lukewarm response of people forced us to try our luck in other *gram* panchayats. We moved to Phampuni Gram Panchayat where the scenario was completely different. The panchayat members, including the *sarpanch*, welcomed us wholeheartedly. The Anganwadi workers also cooperated with us to mobilise the women. We started conducting meetings

with the women. Gradually self-help groups (SHGs) around savings and credit were formed. There were efforts made to break our groups and in certain cases, the vested interests were successful.

Since at that stage we were struggling to get a foothold, it was a major setback for us. But it did not dampen our spirit, as we knew that we would face greater community resistance from being associated with the industry. We sought the help of panchayat members who were positively inclined towards us to convince the people. The transparency of our system acted as a catalyst to bridge the gap.

Intervention in Education

The literacy rate is very low in this area. Although enhancing a child's capabilities through basic education has both intrinsic as well as instrumental significance for the society, parents here did not see any tangible benefits in sending their children to school. Basic education was most typically perceived as a passport to a job, which is far from reality.

Children are considered to be earning hands, engaged as child labour or looking after their younger siblings when parents go out to work. Moreover, to most children learning is a dreary process with little or no joy in learning. It was quite appalling for they are not very far from the sub-divisional headquarter of Jeypore and in the close vicinity of a leading industry.

We started working systematically in education in order to link up with mainstream education at some stage. Presently 9 non-formal education (NFE) centres are operating with a total enrolment of 372 school dropouts. We also conduct classes in the

evenings because the proportion of working children is high.

The classes aim to provide basic literacy skills to the working children with the ultimate objective of integrating the child into the formal system of education. The selected NFE teachers are youth from the local villages. But getting a person with education up to the 7th standard is a big challenge in this area. This is a hurdle in the expansion of our education programme to other villages.

We are working with the teachers to motivate them. They are provided training every month by Anweshan, a training institute, to build their capacity to practice more innovative and creative teaching learning processes so that they are capable to develop the potential in every child.

Intervention in Micro-Credit

From an initial 11 villages, we have now extended our operations to 21 villages in 4 *gram* panchayats. Presently we are working with 41 women SHGs in these 21 villages. We have succeeded in mobilising savings of Rs 1,54,610 and internal lending to the tune of Rs 2,65,970.

The major challenge before us was to garner financial resources from banks and mobilisation of government resources for the SHGs. We started building rapport with the block administration authorities by inviting the BDO (block development officer) as the chief guest in the leadership development training for SHGs. The BDO was impressed with our accounting system and style of working on his very first visit. This has paved the way for smooth functioning with the block administration. Recently, we have been selected

as the nodal agency of Mission Shakti for Phampuni Gram Panchayat.

But networking with banks is not a bed of roses for us. Bank managers of the different branches of Koraput Panchawati Gramya Bank (KPGB) have always extended a helping hand to us though we have differences of opinion with them on certain important issues. There is, however, a strong pressure on bank managers to meet financial targets. Therefore they focus on depositing the entire savings of SHGs in savings accounts rather than promoting internal lending in the group. This, needless to say, is not in consonance with NABARD guidelines. We have raised these issues on different forums and have succeeded in getting support from other bankers.

But when it comes to the actual bank linkage, it depends on the sweet will of the concerned branch manager. In banks such as KCCB (Koraput Central Co-operative Bank) and United Bank of India, Jeypore, the branch managers were not co-operative and did not even hesitate to humiliate me.

It was really unfortunate to see how some bankers of this area look down upon NGO personnel. It is necessary to change their attitude but we alone could not achieve much in this context. However, as of now, 15 groups have already been linked with banks and have received small bank assistance. SHG members have taken up small individual income generating projects with the loans.

Intervention in Health

The district is provided with extensive health services by the government yet the people are unable to avail quality services in their area. The rural commu-

nity here is ignorant about the health facilities they are entitled to. There is also lukewarm response of the service providers towards the communities.

Traditionally, private healers or para-medical personnel provide healthcare in the villages. As private doctors charge fees, their services are not accessible to the poor. As a result, government healthcare workers shamelessly exploit the rural community. The people pay high rates for the drugs provided free to them by the government.

In many villages, the visit of healthcare workers depends on their whims and not on the requirement of the people. The people also depend overly on local witchdoctors because most believe that diseases are the wrath of God on their family. This has resulted in high maternal and infant mortality rates. The unfavourable attitude of the community and apathy of healthcare service providers have resulted in gross neglect of basic public health services.

The need for intervention in reproductive and child health (RCH) is very high in these villages. The people are yet to accept family planning measures. Regular antenatal checkups, proper nutrition, immunisation and medicines are not at all considered to be important among the community. Although health services facilities are available, the people are often ignorant about them.

We felt that there was a great need of an outside intervention to address the different issues of reproductive health prevailing here. We have facilitated a community health initiative where a local NGO called Asha Kiran Society has trained illiterate women (*swasthyamitras*) on com-

mon diseases and RCH. The *swasthyamitras* (health friends) diagnose basic illnesses like malaria, fever, diarrhoea, cold and cough, etc, and dispense medicines for it at a cost. Since the medicines are paid for, the medical kit is automatically replenished at the village level.

A health supervisor monitors the health status of the communities along with the *swasthyamitras*, provides awareness and referrals in case of illness beyond the basic. Although there were initial apprehensions regarding the capacity of the *swasthyamitras*, watching them dispensing medicine without the slightest error is really a dream come true for all of us.

Livelihoods Initiatives

This year we are going to focus on enhancing the livelihood options of the community. The communities have shown interest in various income-generating activities such as agriculture intensification, animal husbandry, goat rearing and poultry. A multi-purpose water tank has been excavated and 2 others are in the pipeline.

We have experimented with the system of rice intensification on a pilot basis. High yielding varieties of paddy seeds have been distributed in 5 villages covering 132 acres. We have also promoted vegetable cultivation with 54 families. Floriculture has been introduced in 3 villages. Training on quality nursery raising, transplanting and intercultural operation has been imparted to farmers. On site soil and moisture conservation practices have also been demonstrated to local farmers.

By imparting regular training on leadership and skill development, organising exposures, encouraging participation of

women in overall village development activities (like SHGs being involved in the construction of the village road), we are creating a good development base at the community level. Due to trainings and exposure visits, the members are gaining new ideas, knowledge. They are therefore able to enhance their self-confidence.

The SHGs are acting as pressure groups and are staking their claim with the panchayat members as well for development activities. We are in the process of identifying some well-intentioned panchayat members and are going to train them in the future so that they too understand the developmental issues and are able to leverage resources.

The Way Ahead

We have completed 15 months of the project period. We have experienced some successes, however small they might seem. Our interventions have made a visible impact on the communities, which is reflected in the confidence they now have on us. Initial apprehensions have given way to positive enthusiasm where most people in the area are coming out in support of the project. As a result, we are not only getting invitation from new villages but also villagers who had a negative attitude earlier are eager to work with us now.

Although we have succeeded in creating a feeling of well being in the community, we are yet to facilitate any substantial increase in the family income of the people. We have plans to undertake livelihood programmes like bee-keeping, maize cultivation, poultry, goatery and dairy on a pilot basis. The success of these pilot projects will determine the future of the income-generating activities to be imple-

mented extensively in the project area in the near future. We are working towards strengthening the people's ability to analyse their problems and possible solutions and augment their individual and collective skills to undertake work to improve their living conditions.

The district administration recognises the effort of BILT-Harsha and sends positive signals to the government fraternity. Although vested interests label us as agents of the industry, positive developments on the field and word-of-mouth from the communities we work with are able to put at rest any campaign against us. Harsha is gradually able to develop more stakes within the communities and is endeavouring to generate sources of livelihoods that people could adopt and sustain.

With inputs from Prabhat Rath of BILT

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A Ladder for the Ultra Poor

Bangladesh Rural Development Committee's pictorial diary to track changes in the condition of the ultra poor has been modified to make it more user-friendly

Helzi Noponen

In December 2003 I spent a month in Bangladesh on a consultant project to review the BRAC's (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) pictorial diary for the Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Program (CFPP). The specific tasks were to 'review the present pictorial diary and provide necessary recommendations if the present content and the process needed any further improvisation'.

There were several problems with the original pictorial diary design - both large and small - that added up to an unworkable design. Many of these problems were also experienced in Pradan's development and field-testing of the 'Boat of Life' ILS (Internal Learning System) Life and Livelihood Workbook. The overall impression of the diary was one of an administrative record for managers with added picture scenes so that women could participate rather than a learning tool oriented toward the capacities and learning needs of illiterate participants.

The problems were:

- Quality of the pictures,
- Complex and small reporting cells,
- Embedded tables,
- Pictures in same topic area are spread over many pages,
- No enriched learning elements for participants,
- No planning formats,
- All elements were not pictorial,
- Elements were better suited for village level analysis,
- Too many time periods,
- Recording symbols were not consistent,

- Indicators do not apply to all women, and
- Ad hoc additional symbols and notations being used in the field.

The New Design

The name and theme for BRAC's new diary design is STEP UP (Self Tracking of Economic Progress by the Ultra Poor). It is a tool for women in CFPP to track their household's progress over time as they work toward achieving a better life and livelihood situation. The motif of a ladder is used throughout the diary to emphasise the point of taking concrete steps to improve their situation over time. It also serves as a 10-point rating scale to measure changes in overall satisfaction in life and livelihoods over time.

CFPP is a special programme targeting the ultra poor who have been left out or missed by previous NGO micro-finance efforts. The programme involves a one-time asset transfer; cash stipend to supplement household income until the asset produces an income stream; technical assistance in the income activity; social and legal rights training and health visits.

The pictorial diary was an original element in the programme designed to enhance women's participation in tracking their progress from ultra poor member selection to graduation to BRAC's normal development programmes over an 18-month period.

The aim of the pictorial diary is similar to Pradan's - to create simple recording and planning formats interspersed with picto-

rial learning elements that encourage participants to:

- Understand their changing situation,
- Prioritise problems and set goals,
- Alter their own individual behaviour and make plans to achieve their goals,
- Summon needed training inputs and demand services,
- Increase their access and participation in the community, and
- Challenge inequitable structures and practices.

The ILS should inform BRAC about how well participants are progressing in each program area of poverty, livelihoods security, social welfare and health status.

Tracking Progress

The STEP UP diary has several data collection formats that represent a comprehensive view of many aspects of the member and her household's socio-economic condition (see box 1).

The original diary contained no enriched participant learning elements of the type that were pioneered with Pradan. The BRAC STEP UP diary is now interspersed with many learning elements such as 'bad scene-good scene' pictures, 'dream scenes' and 'livelihood panoramas'. These are intended to spark reflection and motivate action among participants to modify behaviour or make positive changes in their lives (see box 2 on page 16).

Embedded Tables

The ILS diary is a longitudinal record of changes in the lives of development programme participants. A similar ILS recording format to the one in use in Pradan is also being used in the BRAC diary. It is a free form format that removes time peri-

od markers. This removes many of the embedded tables used for recording responses under different time periods.

The participants will be facilitated to mark their initial or baseline conditions on their own using simple tick and symbols. Once they are certain that their marks are correct, they overwrite them in red ink. Over time, as and when a change occurs, they will make additional marks using a regular lead pencil.

In this way, the participant and any observer can always compare their current condition against their starting point to

Box 1: STEP UP Data Collection Formats

- Overall Life Satisfaction Household Labour Profile (added)
- Household Labour and Activity Profile (includes child education)
- Household Occupations
- Land Assets
- Tree Assets
- Livestock Assets
- Shelter Assets
- Water and Sanitation
- Household Assets
- Meals Per Day
- Nutritious Food Per Week
- Incidence of Illness
- Health Practices
- Access to Services and Community Participation
- Knowledge of Social and Political Rights
- Satisfaction with Treatment by Others (added)
- Savings Plan (added)
- Problem Sorting Exercise (added)
- Priority Ranking Exercise (added)
- Practical Needs Plan (added)
- Strategic Interests Plan (added)

Box 2: STEP UP Learning Elements



- How to hold a pencil
- Interior / exterior scenes of prosperity
- Livelihoods panorama
- Homestead land and livelihood dream scene
- Five step-by-step improvements in homestead land use
- Water-borne disease prevention scene
- Worker dependency ratio
- Reserving profits for working capital
- Prioritising use of profits
- Value of savings
- How to write numbers

see how far they have progressed or not.

However, the information on when interim changes occurred will be lost. This loss of information is the trade-off for greatly simplifying the recording format for participants and drastically reducing facilitation time by staff. The loss of this information is not a problem for many indicators that do not change much in the short run.

The trade-off means that the diaries are

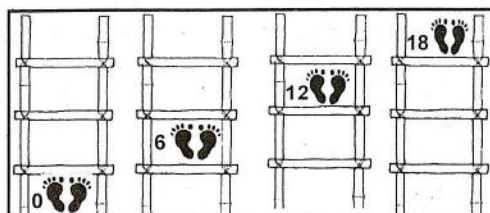
Box 4: STEP UP Current Status and Goal

Current Status	Goal Target
What the participant has in hand at the moment	What the participant wants to achieve
	

now simple enough for participants to teach each other how to mark them, reducing staff facilitation time. It makes the participant diary 'doable' on a large scale or a census of programme participants. It also means that the diaries are easier to 'read' or to reflect upon at a later date by participants.

In addition, for certain indicators such as number of meals, frequency of nutritious foods and illness incidents, which

Box 3: STEP UP Ladder



BRAC hopes to see immediate results (given the asset transfer, stipend and health visits), there are precise recording cells to record the participant's status at different time periods. The time periods have been reduced from 9 to only 4. A ladder symbol with footprints on different rungs of the ladder denotes the time periods for baseline, 6, 12, and 18-month period (see box 3).

In addition to marking current status and changes to current status in different time periods, each indicator also has a place to record a goal target. Two separate symbols indicate where to mark goals and where to mark current status (see box 4).

Innovating on Irrigated Agriculture

We could repackage our irrigated agriculture intervention so that farmers in a small command area would cultivate cash crops to repay loans required for the infrastructure as well as cultivate other cereals for home consumption

Madhabananda Ray

In this article I propose to repackage our irrigation agriculture intervention in the Santhal Parganas region of Jharkhand in such a way so that Pradan can promote irrigated crops on a commercial scale. Agriculture in this region operates at subsistence level. Farmers, particularly with whom we are working with, are still unable to visualise agriculture as a business. Most of them see it as an activity that helps produce food for the family. Thus input-output ratio in agriculture is not a major concern for them.

This mind-set has a direct impact in land use where consumption needs of the family are preferred over the best possible use of the land. Farmers prefer cereals to other crops, as their requirement in terms of volume is the highest in a family. Besides, cereals have several advantages in this area.

First, the produce can be directly consumed and does not require any market to convert and exchange. Secondly, local markets (*hatias*) are still not completely monetised, enabling farmers to easily barter other household items in exchange of cereals. Thirdly, cereals are non-perishable and thus can be stored for longer periods. The surpluses of one year can even be used the next year. Fourthly, rain-fed farming with uncertain rainfall (both amount and distribution) increases risks in agriculture that in turn facilitates cereal-based farming.

It is therefore not surprising that farmers put their best efforts (all possible family inputs with least inputs from outside) to produce cereals. In this case both the cost

of production and value of the produces are on the lower side. There is no problem as long as the farmer is confined to such an economy. The trouble starts when he requires transacting with the monetised economy for things such as medical treatment, for family festivals like marriage, education, family consumables, etc.

Stagnant Cereal Prices

Over the years, the price of cereals has not increased significantly (rather it can be said that it has not increased at all) compared to other items of daily use including agricultural inputs. There seems to be no hope in this direction. For instance, an average village family requires about 2 litres of kerosene oil per week, translating to 104 litres a year. Three years back, the expense on kerosene was about Rs 624, which could be bartered in exchange of 200 kg of paddy or 90 kg wheat or 100 kg of maize.

Today the same quantity of kerosene costs about Rs 1,000, translating into a barter of about 300 kg of paddy or 150 kg of wheat or 220 kg maize since prices of these cereals have remained stagnant. This is one of the many reasons for food-sufficient family becoming food insufficient naturally. Therefore, working for food sufficiency alone is not enough and a family will again enter into a negative cycle gradually.

In such a situation common sense directs that farmers should switch to higher value cash crops. But there are several things (both internal and external) that are required to create an environment for commercial agriculture. The internal factors

include level of poverty, entrepreneurship, etc. The external factors include sustained access to input and output markets, appropriate irrigation infrastructure, farm mechanisation, storage facility, access to timely and adequate credit, etc.

In the context of the area and the profile of families we work with, all the above factors are not available at one time. Thus some enterprising farmers try to come out of the subsistence cycle but fail because of absence of other factors. Repeated failures prevent them taking further risks. These hold back other farmers to go beyond subsistence levels.

Simultaneous Interventions

We need to intervene in all the above factors simultaneously to make the changeover to commercial crops successful on a sustainable basis. We have to keep in mind that farmers practice rain-fed agriculture mostly by deploying only family labour, with seeds kept from last year's produce and utilising domestic bullocks and owned lands. It is thus difficult to determine the exact cost of production, nor does the farmer require doing so as the produce is used at the household level.

The situation in irrigated agriculture is entirely different. Many of the irrigated crops and crop varieties are not natural crops in the area. We need to introduce the crop with all its operational practices. Farmers need to purchase seeds, irrigation water, technology and other agricultural inputs. Such cultivation requires credit or cash, which is a scarce commodity. Access to the market and market information to select the product to cultivate is also important.

Motivating Farmers

Despite providing for all the above factors, it is the farmer who has to decide. Motivating farmers to cultivate commercial crops could be done by crop introduction (risk lies with us) or improving practices in existing crops. Introducing new crops is essential for diversification and is guided by the market whereas improving practices in already cultivated crops is easier (since the risk does not lie entirely with us) but has limitations in the marketing of the produce.

When provided with irrigation infrastructure and initial support (grant in the name of agriculture revolving fund or crop demonstration fund or even SHG loan from bank), these subsistence farmers start cultivating cereals (wheat and maize) to the maximum extent possible land. But they are unable to repay loans or keep a fund intact because they never sell the produce.

In this way the revolving fund is invariably eroded and over a period of time, the command area coverage reduces drastically. The coverage sustains at an extent (much below the potential) when the cost of cultivation in the command area becomes affordable by the farmer from other sources of family income, which is then reinvested in crop production. This may be one of the reasons for low coverage and wide variations in it family-wise, village-wise, block-wise and region-wise in our lift irrigation sites.

We have also seen that land distribution of the command area also has an impact in its utilisation. The existing profile of farmers is comfortable with about 50 decimal of irrigated land. Anything beyond it remains unutilised.

Organisation to manage and optimally utilise the infrastructure is equally important. Organising and inculcating basic values of the organisation such as quality, equity and ownership in any community organisation with members more than 20 becomes extremely difficult for professionals.

Repackaging Irrigated Agriculture

Considering the above aspects, we could consider repackaging our irrigated agriculture intervention. The new package would have a much smaller command area of 3-5 acres (6-10 farmers) per irrigation system with crop planning in such a manner that each farmer cultivates a certain minimum piece of land with a cash-earning crop to repay the loans required for infrastructure as well as for cultivation of other irrigated cereals for home consumption (see box 1).

The advanced farmer, who is not so much stressed regarding food sufficiency, will cultivate the maximum (cash) returnable crop and will purchase cereals with the cash earned for home consumption.

Such an irrigation system will require about Rs 70,000 to Rs 1,00,000 investment that includes irrigation sources (small water harvesting structures or dug-well or river, costing Rs 50,000 to 75,000) and a lifting device (3 horsepower pump with HDPE delivery pipes costing about Rs 15,000). In other words, it would require an investment of about Rs 7,000 to Rs 16,000 per beneficiary.

Potential Areas

The system has potential in areas like Poraiyahat and Saraiyahat blocks in the Godda district of Jharkhand. I have discussed the idea with self-help group (SHG) members and the response is very positive. Each SHG will have 1-2 such system. The groups are ready to take a loan for 5-7 years with a low rate of interest.

We also have successfully demonstrated 2 highly cash earning crops (garlic and sugarcane) with all linkages. Banks are ready to give credit limit that is sufficient for the working capital (cost of cultivation)

Box 1: Repackaged Irrigation System

Suppose the irrigation system is dug-well based and the 5-command area farmers will cultivate 50 decimal each with sugarcane and the rest with other crops according to the need of their families. The farmer will contribute most of the labour components.

Items	Number	Cost/unit in Rs	Total projected cost	Term loan from cluster	Individual contribution	Crop loan from bank
Dug-well (20' diameter and 25' depth)	1	73,300	73,300	60,300	13,000	0
Pump with accessories (3.5 HP)	1	16,000	16,000	16,000	0	0
Cost of cultivation (0.5 acre/family)	5	11,500	57,500	0	17,500	40,000
Total cost of the project			1,46,800	76,300	30,500	40,000

Suppose the cluster charges interest @ 5% per annum whereas the bank charges @ 12% per annum for crop loan. After repaying all the loans, individual farmer can earn net Rs 9,000 per year till the 4th year. In the 5th year, the entire infrastructure loan will be repaid. Rates of return on investment are very high, as the cost of land has not been included (see details on page 20).

Cash inflow			Cash outflow		Net Flow
Year	Particulars	Amount	Particulars	Amount	
1	Sale proceeds	1,10,000	Irrigation system	76,300	
			EYI @ 5%	20,000	
			Working capital	40,000	
			Interest on WC @12%	4,800	
	Total	1,10,000	Total	1,41,100	-31,100
2	Sale proceeds	1,10,000	EYI @ 5%	20,000	
			Working capital	40,000	
			Interest on WC @12%	4,800	
	Total	1,10,000	Total	64,800	45,200
3	Sale proceeds	1,10,000	EYI @ 5%	20,000	
			Working capital	40,000	
			Interest on WC @12%	4,800	
	Total	1,10,000	Total	64,800	45,200
4	Sale proceeds	1,10,000	EYI @ 5%	20,000	
			Working capital	40,000	
			Interest on WC @12%	4,800	
	Total	1,10,000	Total	64,800	45,200
5	Sale proceeds	1,10,000	Balance Instalment	6,868	
			Working capital	40,000	
			Interest on WC @12%	4,800	
	Total	1,10,000	Total	51,668	58,332
IRR		143%			

(All figures in Rupees. EYI = equated yearly instalment.
IRR = Internal Rate of Return.)

requirement. The repayment is not a problem as the produce is sold collectively and the loan amount is deducted at source.

Regarding funding for such product, there are options like bank (direct loan or SGSY or OFWAM) and other non-banking financial institutions (NBFIs). The main issue here is that the group (or individual farmer) requires 2 loans (crop loan and infrastructure loan) at the same time. But such loan products do not match with existing norms and, in case of NBFIs, the rates of interest are much higher.

Suppose if we start with say Rs 50 lakh. We could then create 50-70 such irrigation systems. The next year the repayment amount will be about Rs 10 lakh, will help create another 10-13 such systems and 12-15 the next year and so on. This could solve the problem of generating an infrastructure fund permanently and we can move fast in the promotion of agriculture if we can ensure repayment. I propose to try it in Poraiyahat. If it runs successfully, we can share the experience with banks and other NBFIs to design a suitable loan product. It will help to spread it in other blocks.

On the other hand, we can raise some non-returnable grant from some source and give it to a SHG cluster or block level committee (though managed by us), who will provide only infrastructure loan to the willing SHGs after proper evaluation on their performance with a minimum rate of interest. We will extend all technical support to the group in creation of the infrastructure.

After the creation of the infrastructure, the group will take bank loan for cultivation of crops. We will provide techno-managerial support with proper linkages to the group and will also help the block level committee or cluster in the collective marketing of the produce and repayment of both the loans.

Rasgan Reminiscences

How women of Rasgan village in Rajasthan faced the ire of their men when they tried to develop a common pastureland

Naveen Jha

When I read *NewsReach* I find that lots of nice things are happening in the development sector. But there are also some experiences that are not so nice. I would like to share one such incident with my friends in development.

We had facilitated watershed development through women's groups in Rasgan, a village in the Ramgarh block of Alwar district in Rajasthan. We adopted a holistic approach by not only treating the land and improving the eco-hydrology but also promoting animal husbandry and pastureland development. We had stressed upon capacity building of the women, trying to put to rest the misconception that only men can manage land-based activities.

There were 2 micro watersheds in Rasgan: Pratham Kherli and Duitya Kherli Rasagana. Each of these watersheds had its watershed development committee (WDC) and other activity based user groups such as animal husbandry group and pastureland development group.

There was a forest, commonly known as 'nursery', in the upper ridge of these micro watersheds. It was maintained by the forest department, which after doing plantation work and tending the saplings for 2-3 years handed it over the village panchayat to maintain. The poorer villagers collect firewood from this forest.

There was ample pasture, too. Cowherds from Nakcha bas, Sukka ka bas, Shekam bas (hamlets of Rasgan), Thnouta, Alalpur, Munpuri, Khuspuri, Karmala and Bharatpur came here to graze their livestock.

Green Fodder Shortage

In this area there is an annual shortage of green fodder during the Rabi season. This resulted in frequent tussles between cowherds and farmers since free grazing was restricted as fields are sown with mustard, gram and wheat. Keeping in mind this recurring problem, the WDCs started pastureland development activity based on lines of social forestry in 2001.

They sowed *kali dhamn* grass on 7.5 hectares of forestland in both the watersheds just before the rains. The WDCs planned to introduce a coupon system to distribute bundles of grass at times of shortage. In August, when the grass had germinated, 2 guards were appointed to protect the green patch.

Earlier, some panchayat members were illegally selling trees from the forest. The guards now reported this activity to the watershed committee members, who complained to the village panchayat. Villagers started unfavourably comparing the panchayat with the WDCs.

The elected *sarpanch* (panchayat leader) of the village was a woman. But her husband was de-facto *sarpanch* as he handled all village affairs. He, already not supportive of the women's activities, turned hostile since he felt that this was direct interference in his domain (he was earning a percentage from the deforestation).

He started mobilising the cowherds and other influential leaders on the issue of controlling this important village resource. He campaigned that the women

would restrict entry to the village commons and everybody would have to follow the dictates of the women. The issue was twisted to be men (panchayat) versus the women's committees.

The Women Assert Themselves

The WDCs on their part organised meetings with other user groups and described how they bought grass seeds and sowed them in order to develop the pastureland for the common good. They felt villagers would surely support them. They also decided that they would allow grazing in selected patches, keeping in mind the needs of the cowherds.

The Meo Muslims are a majority in Rasgan. They were in any case not comfortable with the assertiveness of the women. The women's groups had by then become financial intermediaries. Even bank managers demanded their guarantees rather than the so-called village leaders before sanctioning loans. Earlier these leaders used to make money for bank introductions, for getting forms and other government help.

On November 16, 2001 some cowherds forcibly entered the forest to graze about 600 goats and sheep. It was premeditated since the *sarpanchpati* (husband of the sarpanch) had announced the night before that the 'village' would no longer tolerate the mischievous interference of these women in village matters.

The situation spun out of control the next day. The secretary of one of the WDCs phoned me at our Ramgarh office. I came and met the *sarpanch's* husband, who assured me that such things would not happen again. The WDC members met the lady sarpanch in the evening but she

said her husband handles situations like this, revealing her ignorance regarding village matters. Her husband disappeared in the meanwhile.

On November 22, the WDC held a meeting at our Ramgarh office and decided that they would try to convince the cowherds not to graze indiscriminately before they approached government officials for help. Two women from each group started vigilance at the forest and tried to reason with the cowherds. But the cowherds mistreated them, started singing obscene songs and otherwise humiliated the women.

The committee members then decided that they could no longer tolerate the situation and decided to approach the district authorities. They requested us to take some photographs of the deforestation that could be shown to the government officials.

A Mob Attacks Me

My colleague Dipankar and I went to the forest and took some snaps. While we were returning, a mob of 2-325 cowherds descended upon us with their *dangis* (hooked sticks). They snatched my camera and beat me up. We immediately went to the nearest user group and described what had happened. I then went to my room to change my torn clothes. This incident was a big shock to me.

After this episode, the men folk of the women committee members became afraid and forbade the women to get involved in this issue. Even then 20 women came to our Ramgarh office and we approached government officials for action in the matter. Finally, after a lot of petitioning, the district collector instruct-

ed the block development officer and the station house officer (police chief) to sort out the matter.

The next day was January 26. We all went to Rasgan where a village meeting was held. On one side there were about 65 women from various groups. On the other were the more vocal panchayat members and some older Muslims (who were not comfortable with the stepping out of women). The meeting looked like a battle of ownership between the men and women.

The *sarpanchpati* accused the WDCs of appropriating the village commons. The women on the other hand blamed the so-called leaders since they could not make money from the watershed programme. The villagers then visited the forest with the government officials. The attitude of the officials was not encouraging. The police officer assured me I would get my camera back (which I did after a week without the incriminating reel). The BDO threatened the *sarpanchpati* with action if there were any further deforestation. But the BDO told the women not to create further trouble and advised them to concentrate on their household work.

We Step Back

Our Pradan team in Ramgarh then held a meeting with representatives from the women's groups and analysed the situation. The team took the decision of withdrawing from pastureland development activities. We held a meeting in the village on February 19 and publicly announced it.

Needless to say, this upset me a great deal at that time since I was involved in the entire process from the beginning, ever since I was a development appren-

tice. The days that followed were not easy for me. My head buzzed with unanswered questions. For the first time I grappled with real gender issues in the field.

There was a dilemma in my mind. I questioned myself on the type of development or positive change we were promoting or facilitating. Our facilitation was supposed to provide a voice to poor women, who were earlier confined to child rearing, household work and manual labour. But when they spoke out, there was no support from the community. The women found themselves struggling in the middle of the river with expected traditional roles and values on one side and the choice of better living on the other.

Things changed for the better after a few months. I again became involved in watershed development activities. The incident in Rasgan 2 years ago has now become a development practitioner's experience. Perhaps it is a never-ending movement between brooding and wish fulfilment, between what happened and what could have happened, between yesterday's frustration and tomorrow's hopes.

PRADAN in the NEWS

Pradan's website will soon start carrying scans of newsitems about Pradan that have appeared in the press. Please send in news cuttings in any language to Nisha Singh, MFTECH, 1057-I Road No. 45, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad-33 or email a scanned image to nisha@mftech.org or newsreach@pradan.net.

People, News and Events

● Deep Joshi and Manas Satpathy attended IWMI-Tata Programme Annual Partners Meet during February 17-19, 2004. The main agenda of this meet was to present policy research papers prepared under the IWMI-Tata Programme. Close to 150 professionals from different sectors like policy makers, research organisations, IWMI staff, academics, donors, independent consultants, etc. attended. For details visit www.iwmi.cgiar.org.

● Pradan and Sharada Computer Services conducted a training programme for the accounts software on MS Windows platform for NGO's at Shramik Bharati at Kanpur on February 17-18, 2004. Seventeen NGOs attended the programme. The same programme was conducted at Kolkata at Anita Bannerjee Memorial Hall, Jadavpur University, on February 20-21. Seven NGO's attended. The accounting software has been developed by Sharada Computer Services with help from Pradan and funded by the Ford Foundation. It is being distributed to NGOs free of charge and training programmes are being conducted at select locations.

● The last scheduled meeting of the Imp-Act programme was held in Bangladesh on February 13-15, 2004. Besides Pradan, there were representatives from CSYD India and 5 other microfinance institutions from China, the Philippines, Nepal and Bangladesh. Neelam Maheshwari, Dibyendu Choudhary and Helzi Noponen represented Pradan in the meeting. Naila Kabeer of IDS Sussex, who is providing technical assistance, is going to visit Pradan in March to review and consolidate the Imp-Act projects Pradan had taken up. For details visit www.imp-act.org.

● D Narendranath attended the World Bank's (WB) national level conference in Delhi on February 13-14, 2004. The objective of the conference comprising microfinance practitioners, bankers and senior government officials was to share the findings of a set of recent research studies into the state of rural finance in India and to identify potential interventions areas for the World Bank. For details visit www.worldbank.org.

● D Narendranath attended Sa-Dhan Board Meeting on February 6, 2004.

● A refresher training on the SHG software, McFinancier, was conducted in Ranchi during February 22-24, 2004. Seventeen Pradan professionals and 28 computer *munshis* from various locations attended this workshop. The trainer was Sharada Nagarajan from Sharada Computer Services.

● We now have 23 new field guides on board, all of whom have completed the 3-phase Field Guides' Development Programme (FGDP). The 2 final phases of FGDP were held in New Delhi during February 9-13 and February 23-27, 2004. The resource persons were Deepankar Roy and Ramesh Galodha.

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