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Through the Fields of Rural Livelihoods

Reflections on the restricted realities of promoting livelihoods for the rural poor and ways ahead

Sankar Datta

I watched the scorching hot Delhi summer from the cool comfort of my air-conditioned car. Added to it was the nuisance of traffic at the red light. I was lost in my thoughts on a rural livelihoods lecture I was preparing to deliver. A furious knock on the car window brought me back. I saw some hands knocking on the window, desperately trying to get my attention to give them some alms. The sealed windows of air-conditioned cars had shut out their one means of earning.

I also saw some hawkers being shooed away by the police. This reminded me of an interview with a hawker I had seen on Star TV. The boy had pitifully lamented, "There is no water in my village. Our fields have run dry. I did not have anything to eat but did not want to beg either. I came here to earn a living. Now you stop me from doing even that because it is inconvenient for the *babus*. Now tell me what do you want me to do?" I was stumped.

The problems of livelihood opportunities becoming a serious issue started dawning on me in the early 1980s. At that time I was working on the Farm Forestry Project as a part of Pradan. A small incident left its mark on me. I was talking to a group of tribal women carrying head loads of twigs to sell in a nearby (20 km) town.

Hundreds of them did this everyday.

Limited Livelihood Choices

When I enquired why they were damaging forest resources, one of the women turned around and quipped, "We don't walk 20 km everyday for fun. It is the stomach not our heads that makes our legs go, makes us chop the trees." A strange sense of realisation filled the mind of the then environment conscious forester. I started realising that the limited livelihood choices (to meet the needs of the stomach) often pushed people to do what otherwise they would not (walk 20 km up and down everyday).

Over time the thinking on conscious efforts to promote livelihoods for the socially and economically disadvantaged sections of people evolved. Some of the early Indian thinkers who initiated interventions to promote and support livelihoods, such as Spencer Hatch in Martandam Project of YMCA (1918), Rabindranath Tagore in the Sriniketan Experiment (1921) and Father Brayane in the Village Development Scheme, Gurgaon (1923), assumed that rural people did not take up more remunerative economic activities because they were not aware of such opportunities and did not have the necessary skills. They proposed extensive exposure and training to

promote alternate livelihoods in rural areas. Even the Community Development Programme proposed in the first Five Year Plan was based on a similar premise.

However, working on this assumption started showing its limitations. By the early 1950s people had started recognising that knowledge was not the only limitation for the rural people to diversify their activities. They often did not have access to the market or the necessary infrastructure.

Recognising this limitation, people started providing an integrated set of services, including exposure, training, marketing, input supply and infrastructure among others, that were required by rural producers to support their livelihoods. The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) and National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) were built around these assumptions.

In Pradan we initiated various livelihood interventions around mid 1980s. Between 1985 and 1995 we initiated various projects including on poultry-rearing and mushroom cultivation in Madhya Pradesh, tasar silk production and weaving in Bihar and leather flaying and tanning in Uttar Pradesh.

These interventions were built on the assumptions of the need for integrated support. Observing the large network of rural financial institutions, we assumed that financial services will be accessible from these institutions and we (Pradan) proposed to provide all other necessary support services.

Outreach not Enough

In Kesla, we started our work next to a State Bank of India's branch. In Suktawa, where we opened our office, there was a

branch of a RRB (regional rural bank) nearby. But our repeated efforts, not only with them but also with their higher officers in Hoshangabad and Bhopal, brought us lots of promises and tea but no credit. We started realising that creating an outreach does not naturally lead to higher access. Although we had a large network of formal financial institutions in India, people could hardly access them for their credit needs.

While working with leather workers in Barabanki, where we (Pradan) introduced a variety of technologies, set up intermediate processing facilities (wet blue tanning), district hide markets, getting Artiyas to come to them and a flayers' co-operatives, we realised that to ensure benefits of these efforts to flow to the leather flayers, it was also important to educate the officers of the cooperative department, Khadi and Village Industries Board (KVIB) officials and Zilla (district) Panchayats.

Although many of these officers presided over decisions that affected the livelihoods of leather flayers, they were often uninformed. Thus we realised that it is important to work at various points in the value addition chain to effectively support livelihoods.

New Thoughts

By the late 1980s the economies had become much more competitive, dynamic and complex. This was making provision of integrated services exceedingly difficult. Observing the limitations, new thoughts about supporting livelihoods started emerging. By early 1990s, Dichter and Mahajan (1991) articulated an alternate contingency approach to support livelihood opportunities in rural areas.

They recognised that there were multiple sets of services that were required to support and promote livelihood opportunities. However, all of these were not critical at the same point in time. This approach therefore proposed that it is important to identify the critical bottlenecks and work on specific interventions that help release those bottlenecks.

BASIX began with this evolving understanding of livelihood promotion. It was a new generation rural livelihood promotion institution, which made financial services available to the people who did not have access. BASIX intended to intervene in multiple points in the value addition chain, identifying specific bottlenecks in sub-sectors it worked with.

While working in rural areas we found that there were many economic agents (fertiliser dealers, seed production organisers, etc.) working in these areas. Many of them had competencies that they were willing to extend to others in the interest of their own businesses.

It started with a bore-well drilling firm in Adoni town in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. They had asked for a loan for a rig they wanted to buy. While appraising the loan, we recognised that with years of experience of laying irrigation pipelines, they had built competencies in irrigation system designs.

The owner welcomed the idea of training some of our sunflower farmers in irrigation methodologies because he saw that as an opportunity to expand his market. He was even willing to bear the cost of the training as a part of his market development cost. With this experience we realised that if technical assistance and

support services were extended in collaboration with such economic players, who provided such services in their own interest, it would become much more sustainable.

Building on Competencies

Building on this argument, we found that different players had different sets of competencies. BASIX had to identify different key actors with complementary skills and competencies and build collaborative polygons to support a large number of livelihoods in a sustainable manner. Taking this newfound methodology, we built collaborative work with many agencies. These included

- Large corporate houses such as ITC-Agrotech, Nagarjuna Fertilisers and Chemicals Ltd and Hindustan Levers Ltd.
- Cooperatives such as Andhra Pradesh Dairy Development Cooperative Federation Ltd and Raichur Oilseeds Grower's Union Ltd.
- Business enterprises such as Amareshwara Agritech Pvt Ltd, Singari Seeds Pvt Ltd and Sarpan Agro Pvt Ltd.
- Development organisations such as OUTREACH, Prerana, Weaker Community Upliftment Service Society, Vasavya Society for Rural Development (VASORD), Gram Abudhaya Mandali (GRAM) and Bharatiya Agro-industries Foundation (BAIF).
- Government and quasi-government agencies such as Department of Animal Husbandry, UNDP-South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP), Drought Prone Area Programme and Andhra Pradesh Well Project, among many others.

In a similar effort BASIX introduced micro drip technology in Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. We collaborated with International Development Enterprises (IDE) to provide the technology. We linked up with women groups promoted under UNDP-SAPAP, who also facilitated the demonstration trials. Input supply and output purchase was facilitated in collaboration with Sowbhagya Seeds Pvt Ltd while Bhartiya Samruddhi Finance Ltd provided credit.

The production of chillies went up by 60%. The quality of the chillies produced was better and Novartis announced a price incentive of Rs 100 per bag for chillies produced using the drip technology. The results of applying the drip kit in cottonseed production and papaya plantations were also encouraging. Even the Sangameshwara Grameen Bank, the local RRB, got involved in extending credit to install such drip kits. More than 1,000 such kits were installed in 2 years.

Surprising Findings

To document the 'success' of such a collaborative effort, we took up field research in collaboration with International Water Management Institute (IWMI). The findings of this study shook me (BASIX-IWMI 2001). It showed that the large majority of people who had adopted this drip kit were by no means small or marginal farmers.

Most large farmers, especially absentee landlords, saw the utility of this kit, which was technically good but cost much less than a regular drip kit (kados to IDE). They therefore used this technology in their fields, primarily to shift out of traditional labour intensive crops to plan-

tation crops. They used their own influence with the formal banking system to activate them and did not need to use the alternate micro-finance services. As they had shifted to crops not recommended by us, they neither used our backward and forward linkage nor our training support. The poor, who had been accessed through their self-help groups (SHGs), could not use the technology for vegetables or small plots of cottonseed. The land area they had was not adequate for them to generate revenue to meet all their needs with the use of this technology.

We knew this. In our view, this intervention supplemented their income. But their main source of earning, wage labour, often required them to migrate, leaving the drip irrigation pipes unattended, leading to unforeseen damages. Thus, in the long run, they, who had received the training and input-linkage support, lost money, not recovering the cost incurred for the inputs.

Benefiting the 'Haves'

This left me quite perplexed. Here was an attempt to improve the livelihoods of the poor by organisations like BASIX, IDE and UNDP-SAPAP, which had a pro-poor orientation, with a technology that had been developed to help the poor. But it was the 'haves' who had got the best out of it.

It left me thinking that unless the livelihood intervention is dovetailed into the living system of the poor, taking many more factors other than the viability and profitability of the activity into the design, the poor would not be able to take the benefit from the intervention.

Our other collaborative efforts also started showing cracks on different grounds.

We had collaborated with NFCL (Nagarjuna Fertilisers and Chemicals Ltd) to finance cotton farmers, financing their input purchase through a network of input distributors, where NFCL was buying the cotton produced by them, and had promised to deduct the loan amount from their sales proceeds. The collaboration, which had taken off, started taking a downturn with cotton prices sliding and NFCL commercial taking a decision to stop purchase.

Our collaboration with Sarpan Agro Pvt Ltd of Dharwad also gave way with paprika prices crashing in the European Market. Our collaboration with HLL and ITC-Agrotech also had started breaking down.

Not through Thick and Thin

While I was talking to an oil trader about these collaborations, he made a telling comment. He said, "Collaboration is a good idea when business is good. But how are you going to keep them together when the business is down? In a company, the equity ensures that you are there together through thick and thin. But your collaboration, with only words at stake, will not last long."

Our collaboration with NGOs like Prerana and Active also started coming under stress. But the problem of collaboration came to a head with our team from Jharkhand writing back, 'the only possible collaborators here are the Pradan team'.

To our dismay we started recognising that the areas where support services are required the most had the least numbers of potential collaborators. We talked to a wide range of NGOs, including the Ramakrishna Mission and Nava Bharat

Jagriti Kendra and corporate houses including the Hindustan Levers, with little progress. Many of these companies present in the area were tapping the market but were very reluctant to make further investments in the area.

As we were working in the vegetable sub-sector, we talked to many firms who were looking for vegetables as a part of their inputs. Most of them, in Ranchi, Kolkata, Delhi and Surat, were aware that Jharkhand was a major production base. They had made a conscious choice of maintaining the current level of procurement network in the area. Most of them blamed the 'unreliability' of the infrastructure, which often implied such costs that made it uncompetitive. Our micro-intervention to see if we could get slightly better prices for the vegetable farmers by accessing alternate markets also drew discouraging results.

Our work in the groundnut sub-sector in Ananthapur district of Andhra Pradesh also indicated similar trends. Most people in the groundnut trade were aware of the production base in Ananthapur. They were also aware of the poor production conditions prevalent there. The price that the groundnut farmers were getting in Ananthapur, in many of their opinions, was the best that they could get for the quality they produced.

Why was the quality of the groundnut poor? I talked to one of the very renowned groundnut scientists at ICRISAT (International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics). In his view, unless water could be assured in the root zone during pod formation, the quality can hardly be improved in the given soil conditions of Ananthapur.

He informed that over the past 2 decades some of the best minds in agricultural science had invested their time in improving the productivity of Ananthapur groundnut, recognising the significance of groundnut in the national economy. But little has come out of the millions of rupees that have been invested for research on groundnut from Ananthapur by the state and central governments. It started dawning on me that the natural conditions often drew such boundaries of livelihood choices and the extent to which livelihoods can be supported, which were difficult to overcome.

Developing Markets

Markets have become quite open places. Entry of many new players, partly due to liberalisation and partly due to societal learning, has made markets more competitive over the years. From both the experiences cited above, we started recognising that with improvements in information technology and development of transportation networks, markets have become very competitive and efficient.

Using some of the statistical methods developed to test the competitiveness of markets for vegetables, and groundnut, the 2 commodities we were working with, we observed the growing competition in both the commodities. Our own micro-intervention with marketing of vegetables from the area around Ranchi also taught us the same.

We realised that by cutting down one or 2 levels of intermediation, we could improve the efficiency only marginally. Most intermediaries were playing some very important function in the value addition chain, and were doing it reasonably efficiently given the status of the

productive infrastructure. In poorer areas, the margins of the trade appear higher, but the infrastructure in such areas are also inadequately developed, leading to higher costs.

Stagnant Prices

We also observed 2 other phenomena in the markets of rural produce, especially farm products. Prices of most of these commodities have remained stagnant in the recent years. The price of soybean for example, had reached Rs 1,100 per quintal in 1991-92, when I was doing my research. A decade later, the prices are in the same range. Paddy prices in the past 5 years have hovered around Rs 600 per quintal.

While the prices have remained stagnant, costs for farmers have not, especially with the liberalisation of fertiliser prices. Increasing costs and stagnant prices have reduced margins for farmers, which they have often passed on to farm labour. For example, in Mahabubnagar wage rates have hovered around Rs 20 per day, which is about half of the minimum wages specified, for the past 5 years of our operations. Taking into account costs of family labour, homemade manure and such other inputs, there are very few commodities today in which the farmer makes any money.

Are the agro-industries making lots of money by squeezing farm labour and the farmer? I am afraid not. Most small firms involved in oil extractions have started shutting down. Although rice mills have not done that badly, flour-mills have been incurring losses. With the margin coming down in most agro-commodities, the disposable margin that these industries had to invest in their market development (which often was

the driver for their collaborative efforts) was also coming down.

Although some of the very large corporations with deep pockets to absorb the losses may continue their efforts (and do well in the long run), their focus would shift to large farms in more productive areas, which gives them a better economy of scale.

Many industrial houses that were either supplying inputs to or buying their inputs from rural areas have also started recognising the need for backward and forward linkages for effectively supporting their business. They thought that it made a win-win combination with the farmers getting a comprehensive package of services and the company buying a set of loyal customers and suppliers.

Nagarjuna Fertilizer and Chemicals Ltd, a large agro-input company of Andhra Pradesh, initiated its Agri-Business Division that proposed to buy the produce from the farmers, who also constituted the customer group for their products. Similar linkages were also built by Mahindra-Shubhlabh, Rallis (India), Kissan Kendras of Tata Chemicals, e-Chowpal of ITC and Hariyali project of DCM-Shriram. Rallis-HLL-ICICI also attempted a collaborative effort, which was also the basis of the design of many of these interventions. Even the spread of tomato in Haryana-Western UP belt with efforts from Pepsi was based on a similar design assumption.

Discouraging Experience

But the experience of building such integrated linkages has not been positive. Informal talks with the managers of these projects tend to show that none of these

projects have been making money, except ITC e-Chowpal, where it is saving on procurement costs for their raw-material, soybean.

Some of the other private efforts of commercial farmer advisory services such as Samakya Agri-services and I-Kissan have also not made good progress. Although they have not yet given up, they see lesser chances as time passes by. Margins in agribusiness have come down so much that it is becoming very difficult to recover the required investments. No effective revenue models are in sight.

Limitations of Sub-sector Intervention

For intervening at various points in the value addition chain, we had found intervention along a sub-sector was one of the most well developed methodologies. But by this time, with a few years of our efforts along the same line, the limitations of the sub-sector methodology were becoming apparent.

First, intervening along a sub-sector does not only help the poor but also all others involved in the sub-sector. Very often, it is the not so poor who retain the larger part of the increasing pie.

Secondly, the very poor mostly survive on truly multiple sources of income. They are involved in a basket of activities (our observations over many years, which have also been confirmed by many researchers such as Ellis 2002). Increase in the income from any one of the activities (from the intervention in the selected sub-sector) does not become salient in their total financial bundle. To top it, intervening along the sub-sector often required very large-scale interventions,

which were not within the ambit of a livelihood support and promotion agency.

A Matter of Attitude

Another area of concern was lack of entrepreneurship, especially among the poor. The problem was much more serious in poorer regions. While working with the entrepreneurs, I also realised that the issue of entrepreneurship was not only a matter of taking risk. It often was an issue of attitude towards taking initiatives.

The first set of issues of risk bearing could be addressed by creating risk funds but how do you handle the issue of unwillingness to take initiatives, which were possibly built over generations and were influenced by property rights, production relations and natural endowment among others?

In BASIX, we addressed this problem with an assumption that every poor person does not want to set up his or her enterprises. They were instead seeking stable wage employment. If local not-so-poor people set up their enterprises, they will generate wage employment for the poor. Although this did happen to some extent, often BASIX customers with the loans from BASIX invested in technologies that, if not replacing labour, did not create any additional wage employment.

Technology Displaces Labour

Why did man develop wheels? So that it makes carrying weights over longer distances easier. Making work easier has been the propelling force for development of all technologies. The other side of the same coin is that technology displaces labour. Shifting to LPG based cooking has definitely lessened the woman's toil in the kitchen. But it has also displaced millions of people who

were involved in making and servicing *chullahs*, breaking coal and cutting wood into smaller pieces.

In this new competitive market, every enterprise needs to use better technologies to remain competitive. The demands for such products that use better technologies and are therefore less expensive are also going to increase.

To add to the confusion, there have been very diverse sets of evidence about what made people diversify and take up new economic activities. While some scholars like Stark (1991) found that choice of new economic activities for livelihood was a deliberate household strategy, some others (Davies, 1996) found it an involuntary response to crisis.

While doing a study in collaboration with ODI (Overseas Development Institute), we found that although some people had taken up attractive economic activities during periods of prosperity as a deliberate strategy of tapping a locally emerging opportunity, many others have sought new activities as a response to a crisis. Very few, if at all, reported having taken up an activity with specific training inputs from an external source, government or non-government.

Ground Zero

Where does this leave us? What are the choices to address the livelihood issues of the poor with increasing competition, with not so positive experience of forward and backward linkages, stagnating agricultural prices, reducing margins for farmers (leading to lowering of effective wage rates) and with market demand favouring labour replacing technologies? What are choices for the poor for whom

wage earning is a significant source of income and who lack the attitude of taking initiatives and risks? What choices do we have recognising the limitations of sub-sector methodology to benefit the poorer segments of the economy? What happens to those who have nothing but their labour to sell? Organise them into trade unions?

One possibility is promoting more labour intensive technologies, not as a regular market intervention, but by building a value for labour-intensive products and services. Although there are some elements of value in the products, its prices are determined by the values that we attach to some of those elements.

These values are often matters of perception. For example, in the recent years a value for environment friendly products has been created. As a result, there are people in the market today who are willing to pay a higher price for such products. Is purchase of a *khadi* dress or a designer dress a matter of choice of the price-quality-quantity? Or is it influenced by the perceived value of fashion?

Creating Value for Labour

Thus, a value for labour intensive products will have to be created in the long-term interest of society. But values do not come alone. They may require building a different value system that values human dignity and labour and is willing to pay a price for it.

Professionals involved in or concerned about livelihood promotion and support will have to take initiatives in this value building process. This proposed value

system (valuing the dignity of labour pays it a wage) is not determined by demand-supply conditions only, or by enforcement of a law. This needs to be done systematically, using a full campaign design. It can be done.

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Innovating on Irrigation

Villagers of Guigaon in Singhbhum have modified their lift irrigation system to derive maximum benefit from it

Aloke Barnwal

Where there is a will there is a way. This has been proved yet again in a remote village in Jharkhand. People in this village have devised a unique system of irrigating their fields.

Guigaon village is situated in Chakradharpur block of West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, about 17 km from the block headquarters. West Singhbhum comprises 23 blocks and 2,916 villages. We are presently working in 13 blocks of the district. The Ho tribes, who comprise 80% of the population, dominate the area.

The terrain in the district is very undulating and receives erratic rainfall, averaging about 1,400 mm a year. Agriculture is mainly limited to rain-fed paddy cultivation. There is a good network of perennial rivers and rivulets in the area. Around 1,500 villages are situated near riverbanks. This has provided us a great opportunity to take up small irrigation projects.

Pradan has promoted a small lift irrigation (LI) scheme in Guigaon. The LI is owned and managed by villagers through the Kisan Raj Sinchai Samity. The scheme was sanctioned in 2000 and became operational in October 2001. We

have also promoted a self-help group (SHG) of women in the village.

After the LI was installed, we took the farmers of Guigaon on a visit to Patamda block of East Singhbhum district to acquaint them with modern agricultural practices. We thought this was necessary since none of the villagers had practiced Rabi (winter) cultivation earlier.

Exposure Visit

We spent an entire day with farmers in Patamda, which is one of the largest tomato producing areas in East Singhbhum district. Tomato is one of the preferred crops for Guigaon farmers. Our main focus was to learn how to prepare the land in order to cultivate tomato. We also talked with local farmers about agriculture as a business.

After returning from the visit 5 farmers of Guigaon started preparing their land to cultivate vegetables. The land on which the first 3 outlets of the LI scheme were installed was almost like wasteland since it was not cultivated in the past 30-40 years. The area was full of bushes. Some parts of it were very badly eroded and sloped steeply. The farmers were nevertheless determined to cultivate on this land and prepared it accordingly.

They cleared the land of weeds and bushes and started cultivating. But they had to face a major problem. The land was undulating with steep slopes. While they were trying to irrigate their small plots of land, the major portion of the irrigation water just ran off from the plots.

This huge conveyance loss proved to be extremely uneconomical for them. The water also carried away considerable amounts of the topsoil, thus adversely affecting the health of the plants. Land levelling emerged as an option after we discussed the problem with the farmers but most found it too costly to implement.

Farmers Innovate

When the situation was looking grim, Manoj Boipai and Kujri Boipai, 2 farmers from the village, came up with an idea. We discussed it all the farmers and implemented it.

The technology was a modification of the conventional flood irrigation system available in the present system of LI to a kind of drip irrigation. Generally farmers irrigate their land by opening the flange outlet of the LI system and then transporting the water to their fields through earthen channels. Considerable water is lost in the process, which also causes soil erosion in undulating land.

In the modified system each flange outlet is fitted with a small half-inch diameter outlet with a 90 degrees bend. This small outlet is welded in the flange outlet's cover so that the head of water available for the lower outlets can be used as discharge while the machine is not running.

The process is simple. The underground 600 ft PVC pipe, which rises gradually to

a maximum of 4.5 m from the water level at the pump, has 5 outlets. Once the pump is started, the entire length of the pipe gets filled up with water. As a result, once the pump is stopped, there is good water pressure at the 3 lower outlets.

In the conventional system, this water pressure is not enough to carry water to the fields because the discharge is not adequate. But the 90 degree bend, which is one-tenth of the diameter of the outlet, builds up pressure and provides enough discharge to enable irrigation. As the water empties from the pipe, the pressure inside falls. The last and highest outlet is opened so that the inside pressure remains adequate.

The idea worked. The farmers got a good discharge after filling the entire length of the pipe. They fitted a pipe on the bend and carried enough water to their fields to water each plant (see box on page 12).

Salient Features

Running time: It is clear that to irrigate 8 decimals of land, water needs to be pumped for only 15 minutes (3 times a week) compared to 25 minutes in the conventional system.

Water requirement: The discharge from the main outlet is 11.6 litres per second (3,600/310) since total running time to fill 600 ft of pipe is 5 minutes 10 seconds (310 seconds) and total volume of water filled in this time is 3,600 litres (120*600/20).

In the conventional system the total water discharged to irrigate 8 decimal of land is 17,400 (11.6*25*60) litres. In this process a field needs to be irrigated only once a week.

Box

DESIGN CRITERIA OF THE MODIFIED SYSTEM

Length of pipe: 600 ft.

Time taken to fill the entire pipe with water: 5 minutes 10 seconds.

Time taken to refill: 3 minutes (since some water remains in the pipe).

Discharge from the smaller pipes: 0.3 litres per second (lps).

Discharge time from small pipe after water is filled in the main pipe: 2 hours 20 minutes.

Land irrigated during this period: 3,577 square ft (nearly 8 decimals).

Number of plants in the area: 1,000.

Under the conventional system, the pump has to operate for 25 minutes to irrigate 8 decimals of land.

Design

Head available: 2 metre (the difference in levels between first and last outlets).

Using the formula $H = 0.8v^2/(2g)$, we get $v = 7.0$ m/s

By using the formula of discharge $Q = 3.14 \cdot d^2 \cdot v/4$ where

D is the diameter of bend = 0.5 inch = 0.012 m, V is the velocity and

$Q = 3.14 \cdot 0.012^2 \cdot 7.0/4 = 0.0008$ cumec = 0.80 lps.

The pipe is not uniformly sloped, resulting in some reduction in discharge. A thin plastic

pipe is fitted at the outlet and carried to fields, which further reduces the velocity.

It is observed that for 100 ft length of such pipe, the final discharge is 0.3 lps.

Length of each pipe: 6 m (nearly 20 ft)

Volume: 120 litre ($3.14 \cdot 2h = 3.14 \cdot (80/1000) \cdot (80/1000) \cdot 6 = 0.120$ cum).

The outlet gets water of 500 ft pipe length: 3,000 litre ($500 \cdot 120/20$). The actual amount of water available to the outlet: 2,400 litres ($3000 \cdot 400/500$).

Actual running time: 2 hours 13 minutes ($2400/0.3 = 8,000$ seconds = 2.22 hours).

Eight seconds of watering of each plant would result in irrigation of 1,000 ($8000/8$) plants.

Therefore, 8 decimals of land can be easily irrigated.

Under the modified system, however, only 2,400 litres of water is used. Since this is not sufficient, the field has to be irrigated 3 times a week. As a result, a total of 7,200 litres of water is used, which is still less by 10,200 litres used by the conventional process. The water thus saved can be used to irrigate another 10 decimals of land.

Advantages

The innovation is a derivation of the conventional system. But it has definitely attracted the farmers of Guigaon to adopt agriculture as their livelihood activity.

During ploughing they irrigate their land

by the main outlet. The modified system is useful and handy to raise nurseries and then to water the plants. There is no need to prepare the land using more laborious methods. There is also no need to dig channels to irrigate the fields.

This system is advantageous when the land is undulating and earthen channels dug from main outlet cause great loss of water during transport to the fields. It is also good for first time farmers who cannot afford costly land treatment as soon as they start cultivating.

Through this system water can be applied directly to the roots. It is the

most important feature of the innovation. In this it resembles drip irrigation, a more efficient mode of irrigation. The plastic pipe is carried to the field and water is applied directly to the roots. It can be modified easily to a drip system by spreading a network of pipes in the field and providing a discharge regulator at the outlet.

This system is effective for cucurbitaceous crops such as bottle gourd, bitter melon, pumpkin, etc. More important, through this system small plots of land can be irrigated at very low cost while cultivating vegetables.

The system provides the dual advantage of both types of irrigation. Farmers can resort to flood irrigation by opening the main outlet (useful during ploughing) and revert to the modified system while raising nurseries and watering the plants.

On the flip side, the innovation works only where there is a marked slope. It may not work in plain areas. The system would require more modifications if we are to irrigate big plots, which might in turn require high initial investment. The system is also not suitable for crops that require heavy doses of water.

Conclusion

According to recent studies, water is considered as the most costly and important input to agriculture. But often farmers apply more water in their fields than is required. This happens due to lack of awareness, adequate infrastructure and skills to manage water. The need of the day is to conserve water and use it wisely for sustainable agriculture.

Farmers of Guigaon have definitely

taken a step towards this. We now need to devise a management system for the sustainable use of the innovation. At present only 6 farmers are cultivating vegetables in the command area. Since it is a small group, the problems are minimal. When more farmers start utilising the system, we need to look at better management systems and frame rules for the larger group to function smoothly.

However, the innovation has had a definite impact in the farmers of Guigaon, who are newcomers to agriculture. Their commitment towards this activity is clearly visible from the fact that Pardhan Boipai and Sukhdev Boipai, 2 farmers who used to migrate every year for wage employment, are to be always found at their agricultural fields tending to their crop.

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REPORT

Internal Learning System in Pradan

Institutionalising impact monitoring, assessment and auditing of social performance of microfinance in Pradan through the Internal Learning System

Helzi Noponen

Pradan has chosen a mix of approaches to impact assessment of the social performance of its microfinance and livelihoods interventions. The mix of approaches includes externally driven 'set-pieces' such as CGAP (The World Bank's Central Group for the Alleviation of Poverty) poverty survey to assess the extent of its poverty outreach. The CGAP survey is expected to yield a few key robust indicators of poverty outreach that Pradan can incorporate into its MIS (management information system) on an on-going basis.

Pradan's impact assessment strategy also includes a traditional quantitative social impact survey carried out through collaboration of Pradan staff and outside technical experts from the Imp-Act programme. In addition to these one-off studies, Pradan has hosted several student dissertations exploring narrower themes such as women's empowerment, health status and debt situations of Pradan participants. Pradan hopes that this external collaboration will result in the building of in-house survey research skills that they can utilise as needed in the future to overcome the disadvantage of the one-off impact study.

Pradan has selected both of these methods to meet the objective of 'external

proving' that it is having the intended social performance impact. The indicators for social performance adopted by Pradan include a wide range of social impacts designed to assess the extent to which Pradan creates organisations among the poorest that can operate in 3 realms.

These include effective self help groups for mutual support; viable units for external financial intermediation leading to livelihood development; and vehicles for economic empowerment of the poor and marginalized households in the economy and for gender empowerment of women in the home, the work and marketplace and the wider community.

Internal Learning System

A key element in the impact assessment strategy, however, is a plan to institutionalise the Internal Learning System (ILS), an on-going participant and programme learning and planning system, within Pradan. The selection of this method is primarily, although not exclusively, for the objective of 'internal learning' in order to 'improve' programme interventions to better achieve social performance objectives and goals.

ILS, depending on adaptations, can also yield quantitative data for external prov-

ing purposes. This is particularly true in the case of Pradan that has chosen an extensive list of quantitative livelihood asset indicators that can be analysed on a cross-sectional and longitudinal basis.

ILS should guide participants through a process of analysing their livelihood situation so that they can make strategic decisions about the use of scarce resources including credit. Keeping in mind the 3 realms for the SHG programme, the system should also encourage participants to reflect on their households and community social, economic and political status so that they struggle individually and collectively to achieve their strategic interests, as well as meet their practical needs.

The aim is to create simple analysis and planning formats that encourage participants to better understand their changing situation and alter their own individual and group plans or behaviour, summon needed training inputs and demand services, negotiate with financial intermediaries and challenge inequitable structures and practices.

Empowering Tool

ILS is a participatory impact assessment and planning system for community development programmes, especially microfinance and livelihoods, primarily designed to meet the learning needs of programme participants, village savings and credit groups and operational field staff.

The system is an empowering tool for poor, illiterate participants and village groups to track and analyse changes in their lives and to use the understanding to alter their strategies as they participate

in the economy and interact with actors and institutions in the wider community.

The medium for ILS is multi-year pictorial diaries or workbooks suited to illiteracy and poverty conditions of participants and longitudinal perspectives of the process of development change. Using pictures or scenes that represent impact indicators, poor and illiterate women can keep a record of change over time by making simple tick marks to note quantities, yes/no responses and performance and satisfaction scale ratings.

The diaries or workbooks are used as part of an on-going system, rather than a one-off or occasional event. Information on the impact indicators can be collected over time, as and when a change occurs, with a space to tally results at periodic assessment intervals over a multi-year period. ILS activities and processes surrounding the use of this information for impact and learning purposes are designed to be integrated into normal programme operations.

The ILS diaries at Pradan are especially designed to enhance participant and field staff understanding of the livelihood base of participants by examining the total asset 'availabilities' (forest, land, livestock and labour) and the gaps and trade-offs in asset utilisation. The aim is to assist participants to make better decisions about the use of their micro-credit opportunities in improving their livelihood base over time, as well as help field staff identify appropriate area livelihood interventions.

Copstake (2003) states that a performance management system combines 3 activities of goal setting, performance

assessment and performance management. In the goal setting activity, feasible goals and policies are first defined by an organisation. In the performance assessment activity, progress in achieving the goals is measured. In the performance management activity, goals, policies and practices are revised according to the result of past progress. Copestake argues that these activities should be carried out in all levels of an organisation in a consistent manner.

Setting Goals

The selection of indicators that are being tracked in Pradan's ILS workbooks were developed with inputs from all levels in Pradan including programme managers, field staff and poor women participants from several field sites. The participants' contribution was elicited in a special story telling exercise in which self-help group (SHG) members first told the story of a 'sad woman' (using the prompt of a artist drawing the face of a distressed woman) explaining all the problems she faced in her life. The picture prompt was replaced with a 'neutral' and then a 'happy' face of a woman and the story telling process focused on improvements in the woman's life and how they were achieved.

In this manner women revealed common problems facing participants and the implied development goal such as low incomes and need for higher earnings; poor health and better health care; no land or livestock and; need for productive assets. Women's beliefs about the means or mechanism for improvement in the hypothetical woman's life were also illuminating, ranging from chance or providence to personal efforts and group interventions.

Problems Encountered

Despite the care taken to gather inputs from many levels, ILS field tests and trials revealed some problems needing correction. For example, field officers working with forest-based tribal groups complained of the bias toward agriculture, animal husbandry and labour versus collection of forest products. Those field officers working in agriculture initially wanted too much detail on land assets differentiating homestead, upland, lowland as well as irrigated versus rain-fed, wasteland, mortgaged out and leased in land, encroached land, etc.

Field officers eventually complained about the complexity of the productive assets sections of the workbook but these were the ones that they themselves had helped to create. These sections were eventually pared down.

The question of developing a system that is consistent with staff incentives became an issue in Pradan, as the staff was dissatisfied in only quantifying changes in the level of productive assets. Internally they were being challenged to demonstrate that they were creating X rupee amount improvement in livelihoods among their participants.

Participants in Pradan as well as other NGOs using ILS have also requested changes in the impact assessment indicators. In Pradan, one group of women heavily dependent on wage work decided to calculate the rupee value of lost wages due to underemployment using their diaries. In another NGO, women wanted to add indicators for sexual harassment by sweatshop owners. In another NGO, women desired greater specificity on shelter and living conditions so they

could better track small but significant incremental improvements, such as moving from dirt floor to paved floor, building a *pucca* foundation, adding walls, adding a work shed, etc.

Underscoring Caution

This process of balancing the assessment needs of a variety of stakeholders in Pradan was a crucial phase in the development of ILS workbooks. It underscores the caution that ILS workbooks or diaries cannot be created by merely selecting indicators from a picture bank or by borrowing a diary wholesale from other NGO users.

If the diaries are created in a widespread participatory process, however, it can serve to strengthen stakeholder relationships throughout the organisation. The danger is to try to do so much that the workbook fails because it is too time consuming or complex.

As with any questionnaire and more so with a pictorial one as in the case of ILS diaries, the instrument must be carefully designed, field-tested, revised and tested again. This requires significant staff time and resources and depending on skill levels within an organisation, it may also require outside technical assistance. The caution here is that although ILS may be simple to use once designed and tested, it is not simple to design.

Question of Benchmarks

The fact that Pradan comprises 19 field sites in 7 different states with varying cultural and livelihood practices mitigates against the establishment of uniform benchmarks. For example, what can be achieved in a more individualised entrepreneurial and accessible area (to markets, development institutions and knowl-

edge networks) will vary dramatically from progress in extremely isolated subsistence-based tribal areas with traditions of collective resource sharing. The same can be said for states in which the monsoon failed versus where it was normal or even above average.

Because of the participant and programme learning focus, ILS is more centred on understanding the reasons for lagging or excelling performance rather than achieving benchmarks. All field sites should be able to report and explain progress or the lack of it relative to their own past performance on development indicators.

They can also compare their results to the programme-wide average to see if they have experienced higher or lower levels of development or change in any development indicator compared with other field sites in Pradan. In which indicators are they lagging and can this be explained by area factors or by programme performance factors? If they are consistently lagging the programme average due to adverse area factors, are they at least matching the programme-wide rate of change in progress over time or are they slipping further behind?

Copestake (2003) distinguishes 3 types of performance assessment that of monitoring client (including poverty) status, impact on 'leavers' and impact on 'stayers'. In addition to indicators such as changing levels of a range of household productive assets, ILS contains several key indicators of poverty status important within Pradan. These include months of food security and extent and length of male and female seasonal out-migration and bonded labour.

The monitoring of impact on 'leavers' is

currently not handled well in a formal manner such as an exit survey. There is no plan, for example, to ask 'leavers' to hand over ILS workbooks for analysis on exiting the programme. If a 'leaver' is part of the sample of individual women whose ILS workbook information is being analysed for impact purposes, then information from earlier time points can be analysed.

Whether there are sufficient numbers of 'leavers' in the sample to uncover underlying patterns is not clear. It is also possible that the more intensive involvement of field staff in processing impact data from sampled women may itself reduce the extent of leaving due to dissatisfaction. In one NGO, the popularity of ILS diaries has increased programme participation resulting in a surge in women desiring to join the self-help programme.

Qualitative findings from other ILS adapters show that field officers now report a greater understanding of the economic problems facing participant households as a result of women using ILS diaries. Several have speculated that this will be useful in understanding reasons for dropouts. The danger is that relying on field officer perceptions could result in anecdotal and superficial reasons.

ILS uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess impact assessment on 'stayers' on a wide range of strategic issues as well as programme participation satisfaction. The modules in the Pradan ILS workbook include the well-being module; the finances module; the livelihoods module; the empowerment module; and the programme participation module.

All new participants joining a Pradan promoted SHG will use the member level

ILS workbook and benefit from the information and data on the impact indicators being tracked over time. Field officers will also benefit from the information being collected in the member diaries, as well as the SHG level workbooks and their own field officer workbooks.

In order to understand programme-wide patterns of social performance and reasons for change the ILS data from member diaries will be analysed on a random sample basis. A sample of older members in each field site will also use a member diary in order to compare the results of newly joined members with those who have been in Pradan supported groups for several years.

Performance Management

Copstake (2003) stresses that social performance assessment is not an end in itself but a means for informing decisions about how services can be improved. The issues of the effectiveness and timeliness of feedback loop in which data analysis results and reports are used to refine programme practices is key.

Too often impact reports are shelved at the top by overworked managers rather than used to change policies and practises. The participant who has the most to gain from impact results is usually ignored altogether in the process of understanding and reporting outcomes. In contrast, the participatory aspects of ILS provide multiple feedback loops operating at each level in the programme.

ILS is truly participatory as the diaries are used by participants at several programme levels in contrast to methods that are steered by managers at the top or outside investigators. ILS extends the notion

of participatory assessment methods.

ILS users at each level, especially poor women borrowers, are the first to learn about programme impact and performance, and alter plans as a result. They are not only data gatherers but they are also the data analysts, planners and trainers. The development community benefits when users share their impact assessments, lessons learned and revised strategies (Noponen, 2001).

To ensure that participation is even throughout, the system has been designed so that all users, especially women members, carry out the same five ILS tasks (albeit to varying degrees of sophistication). These include: collecting data, assessing change, analysing causes of change or troubleshooting, planning and training, and documenting, sharing and reinforcing programme values.

Direct and Immediate Link

At each programme level participants reflect upon their findings, summon user-driven training inputs, make plans, and document their experiences in their learning diaries. There is a direct and immediate link between impact results or the real life changes of participants, and planning and training responses.

Results from recent field trials in several NGOs using ILS including Pradan reveal how reflecting on the data entries in the diaries and workbooks, participants and self help groups (SHGs) have been motivated to change their individual behaviour or group practises. Even before ILS impact data from a random sample of participant diaries could be entered in a computer for statistical analysis, women carried out their own analyses and plans. Within the first few weeks of using the

ILS diaries women were changing their attitudes and actions.

With data from subsequent time periods, quantitative analysis will reveal the extent of programme-wide changes as a result of participating in the programme and using ILS diaries to track and reflect on changes.

Despite the quick feedback for individual and group users of ILS, field officers and managers are also interested in programme-wide or regional impact results and their implications. Are some field sites or sub-populations underperforming and what are the underlying reasons?

These patterns will not emerge from examining individuals' or group diaries in the field. It requires proper sampling, data entry and quantitative analysis. The logistics of collecting data from the randomly selected sample of members across Pradan, recording it in spreadsheets in the field sites, and sending it for aggregating it into a single data-set at the head office is not a simple process. Pradan and other NGOs have all experienced difficulty in data checking and data entry and cleaning. We are currently designing specialised menu-driven software to ease the burden of data entry on field staff and minimise errors.

Impact Audits

Copstake (2003) proposes the alternative approach of the social impact audit to evaluate the adequacy of an organisation's institutionalised social performance monitoring and impact assessment system for the objective of 'external proving'. This would be an alternative to the 'externally driven' and 'one-off' impact assessment study with its disadvantages for timely programme learning. A social impact audit of ILS would be a great idea

to help dispel the misconceptions of external reviewers about ILS.

Cooking Books

Although women have embraced the diaries and are unlikely to allow anyone to control it with false entries, there are other checkpoints that an external audit could investigate. An external social performance impact audit would provide an objective check on the accuracy of quantitative data entries at each level and would help check any tendency to 'cook the books' (ILS diaries) either in women's hands or in field officers processing of it in data spreadsheets.

An auditor could check the extent to which members are keeping an accurate ILS diary that reflects their situation. Next they could examine whether any data used in quantitative analysis corresponds to the actual diary entries, perhaps taking a random sub-sample of the sampled respondents and checking if entries match the original. The auditor could examine the research design by checking the member level sampling procedure and examine the data collected, how well data assumptions have been checked, the quantitative analyses and testing performed on it, and the claims made based on the results.

The social performance impact auditor could also check the quality of the process of synthesising qualitative data. The auditor could oversee field officers ILS Retreat in which the information in force field analyses of lagging and excelling members and groups are synthesised in a combination of card storming and focus group exercises with field officers from across Pradan.

The qualitative methods can be poorly or

properly done depending on motivation and skill levels of programme facilitators. The auditor could assess the extent to which field officers critically assess and question their field observations and how well they probe and discuss possible factors associated with the underlying patterns.

Conclusion

ILS is not a 'set-piece' study but an on-going and participatory system in which all levels of a programme do the work of impact assessment. As such, institutionalisation of ILS process into the organisation in a seamless manner is a crucial requirement.

There are key points in this institutionalisation process discussed above. These include ensuring a broad-based and participatory contribution to the design of the ILS instrument and its extensive field-testing and refinement. The instrument no matter how well it pleases stakeholders must still hang together as a survey instrument containing the needed background and control variables, skip patterns, etc. for any subsequent analyses.

Proper training on the definitions of pictorial indicators so that all users respond to the indicator in the same manner is also essential when detailed instructions in a pictorial format are not possible. Proper training for facilitating the introduction of the workbooks to participants in a sensitive manner is important for the success of the ILS process. Participants must be motivated to adopt this tool for their own benefit or else they will see it as an administrative burden of participation in the programme.

No matter how useful diaries are to individuals and groups a good deal of the value will be lost for field officers, managers and external reviewers if there is not

a proper system for data entry and consolidation of a correctly chosen random sample of members. This will require proper training of staff in-house and depending on internal capacities, it may also require technical assistance in sampling, software development and statistical analyses.

It is clear that the process of institutionalising ILS is not a quick or simple process. No organisation would want to undertake this process if it was not primarily focused on objectives of 'programme improving', 'strengthening stakeholder relationships' and 'building participant understanding and analysis skills'. If an organisation's impact assessment objective is primarily 'external proving' then other less time-consuming methods exist with fewer burdens on staff work burdens with higher current credibility with outsiders.

Likewise, ILS is not appropriate for NGOs that do not have a culture of 'organisational learning' and flexibility. An NGO must be unafraid of examining problems and poor performance in a constructive manner and finding solutions. Some NGO managers are intolerant of mistakes and lagging results and their approach is punitive rather than reflective. ILS is wasted in such an environment.

Also, where there is little tolerance for flexibility or space for programme innovations, then some of the best aspects of ILS such as women, groups and field officers doing their own analyses and making their own development plans is wasted.

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REPORT

Pugnacious Poverty in Bangladesh

BRAC is doing an excellent job of identifying and helping the ultra poor in Bangladesh

Smita Premchander

I just wanted to share my experience of visiting some of the poorest women I have ever met and a really good programme that helps them to come out of this poverty. You probably know that BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advance Committee) is one of the largest NGOs in the world with over 25,000 staff and a programme that covers education, social awareness, legal education and support, skill training and microfinance.

I have been to the interior of Bangladesh and seen the kind of poverty you cannot even imagine. Women who have been in a poverty situation for over 25 years, who have not been able to have 3 meals a day for over 20 years, who have lost 2 or 3 children, each because they could not carry the child or the child was underfed or weak. The children were so weak at the age of 2 or 3 that they could barely stand and walk and then sit down again.

Improved Situation

The women have now been given iron tablets and they feel much more energetic themselves. Their children are walking and running. Most such children have already been admitted to school. The women have been taught to wash their hands with soap after toilet, wear sandals to toilet and have sanitary latrines, which have been given by the project to these

people. In most cases tube wells with hand pumps have been installed close to their homes so they can get water.

They have also been provided with an asset each. Some women got goats, others cows and some others got a unit of 36 hens that they keep in a sort of house (cage rearing). Some have learnt to grow vegetables or plant nurseries, for which land has been leased locally.

These women are now able to earn about 500 to 1,000 taka per month and able to feed their children and themselves. They are taught to have one egg every week. Their husbands have been treated in case they were ill and children have been medically examined and treated.

Complete Change

The women have got tremendous support. Their lives have completely changed in less than a year. They will now be able to stand on their own feet. It is wonderful to see the change in their lives. I feel really privileged that I got a chance to evaluate such a programme. There is no mistake one can find except a little fine-tuning here and there.

While on these visits, we managed to find guesthouses of the electricity company to stay in. These were simple but at least we got clean sheets and hot water and of

course BRAC people made all the meals in their offices. They always have a building in their area offices and keep a room where their own staff can stay on field visits. These rooms are well kept clean and well provided for.

BRAC has bought land and constructed these buildings. They have over 400 offices in the country, which means that you cannot travel more than 15 to 20 km without finding a BRAC office. What infrastructure!

This time I am staying at another of the big NGO's guesthouses in Bangladesh, that of Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service. This one is based only in north Bangladesh and has a range of activities, including these beautifully made and well maintained rooms. There is also a library, a dining hall and an Internet connection. It is like a 3-star hotel with those kinds of rates but they have a good market, too, as most foreign consultants can afford it and so can the staff from donor funded NGOs.

Stark Poverty

Bangladesh has a lot of donor funding but then the poverty here is stark, too. And of course, every year the floods wipe off all the standing crops, the rickshaws have to be taken to Dhaka and tied to poles, the trees break and get lost and the cattle, if not transported, also die. The whole livelihood system for those who lose assets every year is quite different.

On top of all this, the rivers erode their banks every year and many people just lose their homesteads. Then they take their bamboo poles and household goods and try to find some landlord who will allow them to pitch their poles and put a roof and build a home there. They of course have to offer their labour in return.

It is in fact all they have to offer. And of course, the landlords exploit their women.

This kind of hunger, poverty and insecurity is something that prevails in very few areas in India. Only the tribal areas that I saw in Bastar compares with this and perhaps the poverty in Orissa, but for the most part, we are better off in India.

Selecting the Ultra Poor

Anyway, let me end here for now. I will visit Jamapur next, another area that has river erosion. I will see how the ultra poor are selected there. This is another brilliant piece of the design of the project and I will write another time about it.

They did a geographical selection, then social mapping and wealth ranking with villagers, then questionnaire survey of the poorest, and then house-to-house verification. In fact they have found the most destitute people to work with and that is why just asset transfer (grants for the assets created for them) rather than microfinance makes sense for this group.

The first phase covers 5,000 people. It is difficult to believe that there is not even one wrongly selected person, not so far, and my sample has been quite large in the past few days that I have been in the field.

We could replicate this programme all over the world, wherever there are ultra poor but even the funding required for such coverage in Bangladesh alone would be difficult to find. Even so, it is good to see such a programme and its coverage of 5,000 women now (to be extended to 70,000 women over the next 5 years).



PEOPLE, NEWS AND EVENTS

- Deep Joshi attended a National Workshop on Wild Silks Culture and Forestry at the Forest Research Institute in Dehradun on April 21-22, 2003. It was organised by the Central Silk Board at Bangalore and the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education at Dehradun. The main objective of the workshop was to discuss in detail the collaborative efforts of various agencies in protecting and developing the eco races of wild silkworms and its host plants in a natural habitat.
- Eight apprentices attended the first phase of the Process Awareness and Sensitivity (PAS) module of apprenticeship from April 8-13, 2003.
- The Annual Retreat was held from April 2-5, 2003. Over 140 professionals attended the Retreat. Vijay Mahajan, member of Pradan's Governing Board and founder of Pradan, participated in proceedings on the third day.
- Pradan's Consultative Forum met from April 6-10, 2003. The agenda focused on review of performance over the past year and setting plans for the coming year.
- Subhendra Sanyal, based at Lohardaga and Mohua Roy Choudhury, based at Khunti, got married on April 25, 2003. We wish the newlyweds all the best.
- Ankur Singhal from Godda, Jharkhand has been transferred to Sironj in Madhya Pradesh. Shamsad Alam and Arijit Mukherjee were also transferred from Godda to Deoghar.
- Eleven apprentices joined the 28th batch of apprenticeship. Another 9 are expected to join by May 15, 2003.
- Rekha Mehra, Programme Officer from the Ford Foundation, visited Pradan's project at Kesla. Parth Sarwate, an intern at the Foundation, accompanied her.
- Tasar by Pradan exhibited its products (over 250 designs of home furnishing fabrics) at the Helping Hands Mela, recently hosted by the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) at its Connaught Place, New Delhi, premises. The *mela* is an annual pre-Diwali event that showcases several organisations involved in welfare and developmental projects across the country. Other participants included Prayas, Deepalaya, Udayan Care, Ritanjali, Dastkar, Katha, Samarth and Concern India Foundation. Pradan's participation was mentioned in a report published in The Hindu newspaper.



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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