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Coping with Water Scarcity

Water scarcity in eastern Rajasthan has severe impacts on all aspects of life including health, agriculture and livestock

Yatesh Yadav

I was moving along a rivulet (*nullah*) in the Daang region of Rajasthan in December 2005 when I noticed something interesting. There were several dry areas interspaced with green patches beside the *nullah*, despite the fact that I was moving downstream. On closer observation I noticed that villagers have dug shallow ponds (*pokhars*) on some parts of the *nullah*, resulting in the verdant patches. It drove home the point that even minimal water conservation can make a dramatic difference.

Today water has become an important concern for everybody. Almost everyday newspapers report something related to water: women protesting inadequate or non-existent water supply by breaking pitchers, theft of canal water, irrigation officials roughed up while monitoring such thefts, community meetings to manage water crises in summer, groups formed to conserve water, even brothers fighting over water, and many more.

Things were somewhat better in my childhood. Water was not so scarce as it is today. In fact I remember several instances of water logging, when the groundwater table came up to root zone of standing crops, leading to crop failures through an overabundance of water! There were even times when farmers prayed for sunny days to be able to thrash bajra crops or prepare their fields to sow Rabi crops. There was no crisis over drinking water in summers. But now the situation has changed completely.

In 2005 there were only seven effective rainy days in 62 days of the monsoon in Dausa. This was despite the fact that the cumulative rainfall was 602 mm, more than the annual

average (450-550 mm), with one single day receiving more than 100 mm of rainfall, indicating the erratic nature of the monsoons. In the village where I spent my childhood, the water table has sunk to 35 m. The village hand pump has dried up because there are more than 10 bore wells extracting groundwater. The time therefore has come to use our precious water resources in a more prudent manner.

This article is an abstract of a research on water resources and its use in eastern Rajasthan (Dausa, Dholpur and Alwar). It was supported by the IWMI (International Water Management Institute)-Tata Programme. The research was undertaken to understand water related issues and its implication on people's lives (especially the weaker sections), their production systems, and on ground water quality (see box 1 on page 2).

Area Snapshot

The region where the research was conducted (Dausa, Alwar and Dholpur) is a semi-arid area with average annual rainfall of 550-650 mm and varied topography and demography. The Aravalli range surrounding Dausa have a relative height of 200 m. The seasonal rivers of Banganga and Morel run across the district. Banganga is dammed near Jamra Ramgarh, providing a major share of the drinking water in state capital Jaipur.

Dholpur district is classified into three categories. One, the ravenous and difficult topography along the Chambal River. Second, a plateau of Aravalli hills consisting of hillocks, valleys, undulating stony terrain, with thin soil cover (0 to 2 ft), locally called

Box 1: Water Resource Use in Eastern Rajasthan

Theme	Sub-theme	District	Villages	Respondents
Groundwater quality (Fluoride, TDS, salts)		1	2	71
Irrigation	Supplemental irrigations	2	8	60
	Diesel prices hikes	2	8	100
Future of Agriculture		3	10	120
Livestock	How the poor manage water requirement of livestock	2	5	63
	Own water sources and livestock productivity	2	5	44
Dalits and Water		2	5	57

Daang. It is the upper catchments of Chambal and Parvati rivers. Third, the middle and lower catchments of the Parvati (a local perennial river) with good soil depth, productive, sandy, and sandy loam soils.

Alwar is divided into two by Aravalli's ridges. The western sides are sandy with desert winds. Although the foothills are undulating, they flatten out into the plains. Two rivulets provide the drainage, one draining northwest into the Banganga and the other southeast into the Yamuna.

Dausa is hot and dry with mean maximum temperature of 40°C and mean minimum temperature of 9°C. Dholpur is dry with extreme heat and cold. Daily mean maximum temperature is 49°C in summer and minimum 0°C in winter. Climate in Alwar is also hot and dry. In summer the temperature rises well above 45°C while it goes down to 8°C in winters. Dausa receives an average annual rainfall of 450-550 mm and Dholpur and Alwar receive an average of 550- 650 mm of rainfall, with humidity over 70 percent during the short monsoon (between July and September).

The major communities in these districts are

Meena (ST), Gurjars, Nath and Goswami, Kushwaha, Aud Meo, Yadav, Mallaha, Kumbhars, Nai (OBC), Jaatavs, Chandors, Berwa, Koli, Raigar, Dhanak (SC), and Brahmins, Rajputs and Thakurs, Baniya, Muslims, Sardars, etc.

The Mallah and Kushwah communities are found mostly in Dholpur; Yadav, Aud Rajput and Meo in Alwar, and Bairva, Raigers in Dausa. Almost all major castes are found in clusters of villages. The poorer castes are spread out more evenly, such as Yadavs around the Bahrar-Bhiwari belt, Meos in Mewat belt, Gurjar and Meena largely in vicinity of the hills in Alwar, Dausa, in Chambal ravines and Daang, Kushwah in the agrarian belt of Dholpur along the middle catchments of Parvati river. These people are socially as well as politically dominating in their respective clusters.

Generally speaking, the Yadav, Gurjar and Meena communities are quite well off and are equally good in livestock rearing and agriculture. The Kushwah are good vegetable growers. The Jaatavs, Chandors Berwas, Raigers and Kolis are the poorest. They are mainly dependent on wage labour, forced to migrate

to Jaipur, Delhi and Agra in search of work. These poor communities are socio economically vulnerable and socially insecure, especially in the Daang and ravines areas.

Economy

Land use is mainly for agriculture, but with substantial lands under forest cover, fallow and wastelands and pastures. This allows for large grazing lands, resulting in a large number of livestock in the area.

The soil in the area varies from sandy, sandy loams, black cotton (in some parts), and soil mixed with murram and boulders. The soil depth varies from zero (in the Daang area of Dholpur) to healthy soil depth in the alluvial plains. In certain clusters of Dausa, hard strata are found, restricting water percolation and resulting in soil salinity.

The economy is largely based on agriculture, livestock and daily wages. Agriculture is the main occupation and provides livelihood of the maximum number of people. About 60% of the total geographical area is under cultivation with 71% of the work force engaged in agriculture. About 60% area of total cultivable land is under protective irrigation (one or two irrigation) through surface water harvested during the rains and groundwater (largely wells).

The crops grown include wheat, gram, barley, bajra, rapeseed and mustard, jowar, groundnut, maize, pulses, rice and sugarcane, etc. The major crop in Kharif is Bajra and mustard in Rabi. This is because of the water scarcity in the region. Bajra requires relatively less water, grows well in the rainy season and provides good fodder. Mustard is a low water-consuming cash crop.

Rearing livestock is a major engagement

along with agriculture. To some people, it is part time activity. Buffaloes dominate in numbers, followed by goats, primarily due to their economic importance. Lower incomes from agriculture have added to the increase. The population of cows and camels is decreasing as they fetch lower returns. However, crossbred cows are increasing in some clusters of Dausa, again because their milk yields are higher with lower inputs when compared with buffaloes. Rearing practices remain largely traditional with important gaps to improved practices. The better rearing communities include largely Gurjar, Meena, Yadav, Sardars. These are better off than the others.

Methodology

PRADAN is working in the villages selected for the research, which facilitated data collection. Members of Pradan's Dausa project team were involved in the fieldwork in their respective villages, building on their understanding to engage in meaningful dialogue with the community. The IWMI-Tata Programme provided formats to register data and dialogue. Quality data was collected through transect walks, focussed group discussions, interviews and personal interactions, etc.

The local computer *munshis*, entrepreneurs handling women's self-help group (SHG) accounts, helped in data entry. We also collected data from the district collector's office at Dausa and other secondary sources.

Rain and Groundwater

Rajasthan is a water deficient state, highlighted by the facts that it has 10% of India's geographical area, 5% of the country's population and 1% of India's water resources. There are significant variations in rainfall (which is lower than the national

average), the highest being in the southern region and the lowest in the western parts. Nearly 90% of the total rainfall in Rajasthan is received during the southwest monsoon. Rajasthan has been divided into 594 ground-water potential zones. Out of the 201 dark zones, 173 are overexploited (more than 100%).

We analysed rainfall and groundwater data. As mentioned before, the study region is a dry and hot semi-arid zone, with average annual rainfall ranging from 550 mm to 650 mm. The monsoon lasts between last weeks of June to September. According to the data we collected, rainfall has been decreasing in Dausa between 1990 and 2005. 1995 witnessed high rainfall at 1,248 mm whereas there was only 305 mm of rainfall in 2002.

The monsoon, which directly contributes to agriculture productivity, also shows a discouraging trend. In the past 15 years rainfall during the monsoons has been steadily decreasing. 1995 received 1,184 mm compared with only 244 mm in 2002.

Rainy days are crucial if we look at effective utilisation of rain. Low intensity rainfall spread over more rainy days is considered to be good and productive rains. The experiences over the past 10-15 years show that rainy days keep on changing. Annual rainy days were as high as 50 in 2003 (rainfall 791 mm) and as low as 24 in 2002 (rainfall 305 mm) for last ten years whereas in the monsoon, rainy days were 44 in 2003 (rainfall 742 mm) and 18 in 2002 (rainfall 244 mm).

Things would have been significantly different if we look effective rainy days. The data of rainy days is collected for any day when it rains even 5 mm or less at rainfall measuring points (the tehsil headquarters in this case).

For instance, in 2005 there were only 10-11 effective rainy days in the monsoons in Dausa tehsil in two blocks with a 62-day dry spell. The data of Dausa tehsil however records 29 rainy days during the monsoons.

The data therefore shows that rainfall, particularly during the rainy season, is becoming unpredictable with increasing intensity of rainfall and decreasing rainy days, which is affecting the entire production system including agriculture and livestock rearing.

Increased rainfall intensity is also causing the breakdown of small water harvesting structures, leading to high soil erosion. The increased runoff of heavy rainfall breaches field embankments to drain away ultimately in the Banganga River in Dausa. Whatever small volume of water that could have been harvested in normal rain intensity goes out of the area, leaving behind eroded fields and breached structures that require higher investments to repair.

The groundwater scenario is equally alarming (see box 2). There has been a massive decrease in groundwater balance, the difference between utilisable availability of groundwater and net withdrawal during a year. It has declined rapidly (49%) in the state between 1984 and 1995. Groundwater exploitation is significantly higher in the eastern part of the state. The depth of water

Box 2: Status of Groundwater

Groundwater Exploitation	Nomenclature	Number of Zones
Below 65%	White	322
65 to 85%	Grey	71
Above 85%	Dark	201

Source: *Groundwater Atlas of Rajasthan*

in this region varies between 10-37 m. The level has been continuously showing a declining trend.

It is also becoming difficult to harvest water in small water harvesting structures like field embankments, small dams (paals or taals), which usually break during runoff due to high intensity rains because these do not have spillways. There are 14 big water bodies in Dausa. Most filled up during the monsoons in 2005 but dried up in the last week of January.

A study of water availability reveals that the extraction rate on an average is 25% higher than recharging. There is therefore an urgent need to harvest rainwater. Our analysis shows that there is significant potential of harvesting rainwater.

Water, Health and Social Life

Water scarcity directly affects the health and social life of the people. In Rajasthan 80% of the drinking water demand is met by groundwater. We have seen that the water table is sinking at a fast rate and extraction is higher than recharge. The decreased column of water in aquifers is leading to higher concentration of salts, TDS (total dissolved solids), fluoride, etc. The deepening of wells due to depletion of the water table is also exposing new strata under the ground, also resulting in higher levels of TDS, fluorides, salts, etc.

The water quality in 1003 villages of Dausa district (including more than 300 in Dausa block) augurs ill for the populace. In Dausa block alone 88% of the villages have to drink water with more than the permissible limit for fluorides (1.5 parts per million). In 9% of the villages the fluoride is as high as more than 5 ppm. In one of the surveyed villages,

fluoride content was as high as 12 ppm.

The situation is similarly worrying for TDS and salts. More than 80 villages (out of about 300), have nitrate levels of more than the permissible limit of 45 ppm, out of which more than 20 have levels as high as more than 100 ppm. More than 30 villages have higher than permissible limits of chlorides than is healthy for drinking. Almost 70 villages suffer from high dissolved solids. In more than 10 villages the levels are more than 3,000 ppm (permissible limit 1,000 ppm).

It is therefore clear that a majority of the people in the area have to make do with unhealthy drinking water. This has severe implications for the health. There are widespread reports of illnesses such as fluorosis. This research undertook to study in detail two villages in Dausa, Hingotiya and Nangal Govind, selected on the basis of PHED (Department of Public Health Engineering) and secondary data and on Pradhan professionals' general understanding about implication of drinking water quality in various villages.

Impact of Fluorosis

We identified 71 respondents (44 women and 27 men) in Hingotiya and Nangal Govind through a rigorous process of rapport building and interactions. All respondents have been afflicted with fluorosis. The affected people are across gender or social class (42 SC, 3 ST, 26 General; 50 vegetarian, 21 non-vegetarian). Most of them are female, SC and from vegetarian (generally villages people are vegetarian). Sixty percent were illiterate and 10% had studied up to and beyond matriculation. A majority of the people were poor, with 77% earning less than Rs 3,000 a month and only 8% earning more than Rs 4,000 a month.

Box 3: Impact of Fluorosis

Population of respondents' families	Affected persons	Dental Fluorosis	Muscular Skeletal Disease
389	99	92	30
% of affected population	25.45	23.65	7.71

Our study revealed that more than 25% of all the persons in the respondents' families were affected by fluorosis (see box 3). A high percentage of people (7.71%) were afflicted with the debilitating muscular skeletal disease (MSD).

Fluorosis caused a drastic impact on the economic conditions of the people. Generally people do not treat dental fluorosis. But huge expenditures have to be made to treat MSD. A person afflicted with MSD is unable to work and therefore earn. A large number of people also responded that they have severe joint pains. MSD puts an additional financial burden on the families of the afflicted. Ninety-four percent reported having incurred expenses in the past year towards treating MSD.

Fluorosis also has negative social dimensions. A large number of the respondents' families more than 23%) reported dental fluorosis, which disfigures the teeth. This causes especial problems for young girls as it harder to find matches for them. As for the MSD-afflicted, a majority held that people avoid them. Also, as they are also restricted

in the movements, they become increasingly isolated from society.

A majority agreed that better drinking water reduces the chances of MSD and diseases from the water. Most were not aware whether these effects are reversible. Their perception of the accountability is mixed, though a large number believes that it is the government's responsibility to supply quality drinking water. Most are ready to pay for better water quality.

Water Scarcity and Agriculture

Most rural people depend on agriculture and livestock for their livelihoods. These livelihoods are drastically affected by water scarcity. Water plays important role in agriculture production, particularly after the green revolution because most farmers grow high water requirement crops that fetch more returns. In the area under study, however, supplemental irrigation is prominent than full irrigation, mainly due to scarcity of water.

Rajasthan is well known for rain fed cultivation due to shortage of water. Nowadays

Box 4: Farmer Profile

District	Villages	Respondents	SC	ST	General
Dausa	7	45	14	8	23
Dholpur	1	15	0	15	0

Box 5: Actual Versus Expected Production

Crop	Area	Farmers	Production (Q/ha)	Expected Production (Q/Ha)
Bajra	37	44	10.8	20-25
Mustard	38	44	10.3	18-20
Wheat	30	30	22.8	35-40

farmers try to provide irrigation to supplement water requirement of crops. Kharif crops like millets (bajra) and Rabi crops like mustard yield better harvests if provided with supplemental irrigation.

We conducted a detailed survey in eight villages of Dausa and Dholpur with 60 farmers (see box 4). The majority of selected farmers are small and marginal cultivators. Only 2 farmers had landholdings more than 5.0 ha and seven farmers had landholding between 2-5 ha.

We found that the larger landholdings mostly have wells but only 47% of the farmers owning less than 0.5 ha land had access to wells. A majority of the lands of the respondents depended on the monsoons for cultivation. Only about 43 ha (46%) of the land of 37 (62%) farmers out of 94 ha total land of surveyed farmers is irrigated. Although 48 farmers (80%) used their lands for a second crop, only 60 ha land (64%) of the total land was cultivated twice. Almost no farmers cultivated a third crop. This is essentially because of shortage of water and high irrigation costs.

Hikes in Irrigation Cost

The study found tremendous increase in irrigation cost. Diesel prices have increased from Rs 1 per litre in 1975 to Rs 34 per litre in 2005. This excludes transportation to the

villages. The water table has depleted from 5 m in 1975 to 37 m in 2005.

Therefore, average irrigation cost per hour for diesel pumps have increased by as much as Rs 75 between 1985 and 2005 (from Rs 25 to Rs 100 per hour). This is due the lowering of groundwater table and increasing diesel consumption per hour. Wheat cultivation requires 6-7 irrigations and a bigha of land (one forth ha) requires 7-8 hours to irrigate. Thus irrigation costs are becoming unviable for most farmers, particularly small landholders.

Uncertain rainfall, reducing rainy days in the monsoon, lower groundwater table and increased diesel prices has affected agriculture drastically. The average production farmers are harvesting from their major crops is much lower than expected yields (see box 5). Most of the respondents cultivated bajra in the Kharif season and mustard and wheat in the Rabi season. The sub-optimal production is resulting in lower incomes for farmers and reducing agriculture's contribution in the family's economy.

To be concluded

Micro-enterprise in Saharanpur Slums

Udyogini has taken encouraging steps towards promoting sustainable micro-enterprises among disadvantaged women in the urban slums of Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh

Anand Srivastava

An Udyogini-promoted project towards capacity building for the empowerment of women and children in Saharanpur town of Uttar Pradesh began in November 2004. The objective of the project was to empower women in Saharanpur through economic and social activities, and create an institutional base for the development of social and economic entrepreneurship among women and the larger community in and around the city.

Initially, an assessment of the slum areas in Saharanpur town was conducted in order to select a few slums to start the project. The survey provided an initial idea of the community and their needs. From November 2004 to March 2005, most of the effort was spent on building rapport with the communities, sharing the project idea with them, setting up office and infrastructure, training office staff and developing linkages with other organisations to join hands with them in achieving the targets. The process of forming the groups was started in December 2004 in the selected slums.

Project Location

Saharanpur is situated at the northern end of the Doab, the land between Ganga and Yamuna rivers. The Shivalik hills rise above it on the north. The portion of Doab in which Saharanpur is located was probably one of the first regions of upper India occupied by Aryan colonisers as they spread eastward from the Punjab.

Saharanpur division was made into a district

of Uttar Pradesh in 1997. The north and northeast of the district is surrounded by Shivalik hills, which separates it from Dehradun district in the recently created state of Uttaranchal. The Yamuna River forms its boundary in the west, which separates it from Karnal and Yamunanagar districts of Haryana. In the east lies the district of Haridwar in Uttaranchal. In the south lies Muzaffarnagar district. Saharanpur is roughly rectangular in shape and lies between 29° 34' 45" and 30° 21' 30" north latitude and 77° 9' and 78° 14' 45" east longitude. Its total area is 3,860 square km. According to the 1991 census, the population of Saharanpur is a little over 23 lakh.

Starting Work

Both Udyogini and the idea of forming women's groups for savings and credit activities were new for the selected community. Community members had experience with chit fund companies. Since these companies were involved in several frauds, it was not easy for them to trust Udyogini's interventions.

Although the project has boosted community's confidence and expectations up to a great extent, there were lots of difficulties at the initial stage, particularly in building rapport with the community. After continuous efforts of six months, most of the chosen areas were covered under the awareness generation activities. Initiatives were taken to establish micro-enterprises. These initiatives have generated unprecedented results and have boosted the hopes of achieving major

milestones in the near future.

Two micro-enterprises have been established with the community (Agarbatti and Chunari). Around 618 women have been involved in these income-generating activities. Women earn Rs 300 to Rs 400 per month on an average as additional income from these activities. In many cases, where the women have taken it as the main livelihood activity, earnings are as high as Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500 per month. Now more and more women are coming forward to take part in the income generating activities.

We followed a systematic process of forming women groups. The steps included identification of the area; identification of target group through a general meeting with the community; first meeting with the target group for sharing concept; follow-up of the meeting and relationship building with the target people; formation of the women's group; initiation of saving; introducing books of accounts in the groups, and continuous follow-up for two months. Continuous orientation and rigorous follow up of above activities has been a regular feature of the project. The groups usually hold two meetings in a month (some hold three meetings). The first meeting is for savings and credit and second for grass-roots management trainings (GMTs). In GMTs we orient and motivate them towards micro-enterprises.

Udyogini's Approach

Udyogini's approach in promoting micro-enterprises is based on a model of capacity building for women that differentiate between stages of income generation potential, as women take steps towards livelihood security, and then towards enterprise growth (see box 1).

Box 1: Udyogini's Five-Stage Model

Stage 1	Awareness among disadvantaged women
	Enterprise motivation and management
Stage 2	Grooming service providers
	Selection and training for enterprise
Stage 3	Enterprise promotion and incentives for producers and market players
Stage 4	Ownership and scale-up through systems and institutions
Stage 5	Expansion and outreach

Our Saharanpur project is consistent with this model, with services geared to different elements and stages of capacity building for disadvantaged women (bottom-up), with a simultaneous thrust in market development.

We have divided the process of initiating micro-enterprises into six phases. In the first phase we help the members identify the available options for micro-enterprises. In the second phase they select viable options for micro-enterprise. In the third phase we analyse the feasibility of the various options. In the fourth phase a suitable enterprise is selected and the women's group is exposed to the activity. The fifth phase involves training and start-up of the activity. The sixth and last phase involves regular follow-up.

Chunari Micro-enterprise

Making chunaris (long scarves worn by women over traditional dresses) is a traditional activity in the area. Saharanpur district is famous for its chunaris. Chunari mak-

ing is already a livelihood option for many people in the district. There is good demand for them in the local and neighbouring markets. At times the supply of chunaris are affected due to labour shortages. Many types of chunaris are manufactured in the area for different religious and cultural purposes. The prices vary according to the design and size of the chunaris.

We first conducted a market survey for this activity followed by a feasibility analysis. The women we had mobilised into groups were then provided different kinds of training to take up this activity. We have also been able to establish linkages with nine different traders have also been established. Currently 27 groups have been involved in this activity.

Udyogini conducted a value chain study to explore the opportunities available in markets for making and selling chunaris. The objectives of the study were to:

- Derive a holistic idea of the chunari business sector;
- Find reasons for low wages or piece rates to women;
- Identify potential dealers in the market;
- Identify intervening points in the business chain in order to derive more profit;
- Generate ideas to eliminate commission agents and small dealers or to change their presence positively for the business;
- Identify related products that can be produced and sold;
- Estimate the potential of the business for the next 10 years;
- Understand the business dynamics, and
- Understand our position in the chunari market.

We also found that the chunari production cycle can be broken up into five distinct

processes. They are collecting the required materials from dealers for production; preparing samples; making and cutting of the embroidered chunaris; maintaining a register to keep track of raw materials and finished products, and transporting the chunaris to the markets for delivery.

Udyogini has established two business centres for this activity. We have also trained two business development service providers (BDSPs), Anju and Seema. The BDSMs have been provided with various trainings so that they are able to discharge their services efficiently. They are now handling their respective centres well. They take care of the market end, including dealings with traders, and also ensure that quality of the chunaris are consistent and in accordance with market demands.

After various trainings provided by Udyogini's resource team, the team in Saharanpur is now capable of providing skill trainings to the women entrepreneurs. The team conducts skill and motivational trainings as and when required. These include basics of production; technical aspects of stitching work; cutting of raw materials; folding and packaging of finished products; ways to minimise wastage; ways to develop speed in stitching, and maintenance of stitching machines and other equipment.

The trainings are helping in enhancing quality, quantity and timely production of chunaris. They are also creating confidence among the producers, and have resulted in speeding up of production.

In the near future we feel that the group members need to develop strong links with the dealers. They also need to be fully exposed with the market and its complexi-

ties. There is also need for a systematic channel to minimise the cost of production.

The team would facilitate the work constantly for expansion of production and creating market linkages in local as well as outside markets. We also see a need to develop a sense of ownership for the work among group members.

Agarbatti Micro-enterprise

The second activity Udyogini's team in Saharanpur has been promoting among women in the slums is agarbatti (incense sticks) micro-enterprise. This has met with huge success due to the tremendous interest shown by the women. Twenty-three groups are involved in this activity and 340 women are actively engaged involved in this activity.

After forming the groups, we conducted a 3-day skill training exercise for the women depending on the interest shown by the respective groups. The training on agarbatti rolling focussed on main components of agarbattis and their ratio; importance of maintaining proper ratio; proper method of production; packaging ways to minimise wastage, and quality control in production. Once the training programme is over, further follow up training is done to sharpen skills that ensure quality production.

Learning

There has been major learning for us while working in the urban slums of Saharanpur. For instance, when we hold meetings with the community, we need to be totally prepared with all relevant market information. We need to talk concretely about the options in micro-enterprises available in the market. This might just be a list of options.

We also learnt that we needed to involve the women in second phase of the market survey, feasibility study and while creating linkages. We have observed that the women are pretty well acquainted with the market. Their involvement in all these steps will help in developing ownership and would enable to take charge of the enterprise they would like to take up.

For more information about the project, write to udyoginispur@yahoo.co.in

Present a New Idea for Peer Review

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Women's Empowerment in Rajasthan and Jharkhand

Although women in Rajasthan and Jharkhand face harsh conditions of empowerment, Pradan's interventions seem to have made a positive impact

Hélène Penders

During my stay in India, I had the opportunity to take part in field visits to villages where Pradan is active. I visited six villages in Rajasthan (Japavali, Nagla Badhoria, Jakhi, Jagariapura, Kaharpura and Ghironia) and later, attended self-help group (SHG) meetings in some villages of Jharkhand (Mokunda, Kushmah, Jolo and Rashka).

One of the biggest hurdles to tribal populations in India, Jharkhand is prone to lack of opportunities in economic activities. In addition to the problem of non-fertile land, it also faces lack of choice. This particular situation of Jharkhand has huge consequences on the nature of women's work. They have to work in the fields while women from Rajasthan, who are mainly non-tribal women, endure work within the household. This, of course, highly influences their level of emancipation.

This report summarises evidence on the level of women's empowerment in both the states. The main objective is to assess women's welfare and to evaluate the effects of Pradan's interventions on the living conditions of women. As it remains mainly descriptive, this report does not give prominence to any causal relations.

Defining Empowerment

Many people think women's empowerment only implies improvement of economic and social rights. Even if those determinants are relevant, it is also important to analyse a more personal dimension. A poor woman in terms of lower levels of empowerment is often a woman with a 'poor mind'. It means that she is not able to dream or imagine the

future or even live without fear, stress and anxieties. Moreover, she often considers her condition with fatalism and does not realise the power within herself. In this context, emancipation requires to take into account all the psychological aspects and break the link between poverty and fatalism.

In recent years, there has been much research on the impact of development programmes on these psychological dimensions (Nandi, 2003; Kondkar, 1998; Osmani, 1998; Reddy, 1996). Findings are, however, mixed and show empowerment is not an easy task. In fact, three major factors must be taken into account to analyse it accurately. Throughout this report, I will refer to these three factors to assess the level of women's empowerment in Rajasthan and Jharkhand.

The first factor expresses women's feelings vis-à-vis themselves. Many indicators enter this category: decision making about own healthcare or own purchases, level of self-confidence, vision of future, ability to change things etc.

The second factor examines women's relations vis-à-vis their families. Access to money, domestic violence, mobility, general decision-making and ownership of assets (land, jewellery, etc.) illustrate this category.

The third factor sets women vis-à-vis society through indicators like sex preference and mean age at marriage (these two indicators underlining the impact of social norms on personal decisions), level of education, literacy rate and exposure to mass media.

In order to evaluate women's welfare in the context of women's empowerment in Rajasthan and Jharkhand, I used the data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), collected by the Mumbai International Institute for Population Science in 1998-1999. The problem with this data set is that it was built up prior to the creation of the state of Jharkhand, which was at this time part of Bihar. It became a separate state in 2000 when 18 districts were carved out of Bihar. As a consequence, the results using NFHS data presented in Table 1 depicts the level of empowerment of the entire state of Bihar, which at that time included Jharkhand.

Although this is a major limitation, I still decided to use this data set for two main reasons. First, NFHS gives reliable figures with a direct link to the question of women's emancipation. I did not find any

other reliable sources related to Jharkhand. Secondly, it makes a comparison possible between Rajasthan and Bihar (Jharkhand).

This table shows that women in Rajasthan suffer from harsher conditions of empowerment. This is especially striking for the second category. Indeed, the proportion of women with access to money is really low as well as the percent of women who do not need permission to go to the market. Only domestic violence is an exception in this category. In the third category, even if the sex ratio is very low, Rajasthan seems to compare well compared to Jharkhand (Bihar) and India. Finally, the first category exhibits that many women are not involved in their own decisions.

At the same time, figures from Table 1 bring to light that the conditions of living

Table 1: Level of Women's Empowerment in Rajasthan and Bihar

Indicators	Rajasthan	Bihar	India
Women vis-à-vis themselves (first category)			
Percent of women involved in decisions about own healthcare	40.6	47.6	51.6
Women vis-à-vis their families (second category)			
Percent of women with access to money	40.5	66.7	59.6
Percent of women beaten since age 15	10.9	26.6	21.0
Percent of women who do not need permission to go to the market	19.0	21.7	31.6
Percent of women not involved in any decision-making	13.3	13.5	9.4
Women vis-à-vis society (third category)			
Sex ratio (women / 1,000 men)	921	941	933
Women's literacy rate (%)	43.9	38.9	53.7
Participation of women in workforce (%)	41.0	32.2	30.3

Sources: Census of India (2001), NFHS and International Institute for Population Science (1998-1999)

of many women in Jharkhand are also difficult. It is noteworthy that Jharkhand exhibits better results in comparison with Rajasthan. In the first and second categories, Jharkhand is performing well (with the exception of domestic violence). On the other hand, it shows poor results for the third category. The sex ratio in this last category is quite high compared to India and Rajasthan but we have to keep in mind that it is still below the natural level of women to men.

To some extent, this phenomenon (performance variation between Rajasthan and Jharkhand) could be explained by the proportion of scheduled tribes living in both states. This proportion is equal to 12.6% in Rajasthan while it totals more than 26% in Jharkhand. This characteristic, as shown in the introduction, has huge impact on women's empowerment. Tribal women are more empowered as they work with their husbands in the fields.

Figures from Table 1 seem to strengthen this hypothesis. The status of women vis-à-vis themselves and vis-à-vis their families is better in Jharkhand whereas their emancipation vis-à-vis society, not affected by fieldwork, is better in Rajasthan. Of course, this hypothesis needs to be econometrically tested before drawing a general conclusion. It could be also really interesting to further analyse the reasons of domestic violence.

Empowerment in the Villages

This section aims to analyse the impact of microcredit through Pradan's interventions on women's empowerment in some villages of Rajasthan and Jharkhand. In the literature, many studies point the potentials of group-based micro-credit and savings pro-

grammes for women's empowerment while others show the limitations of these programmes and claim for additional interventions. Let us see what the main conclusions are in the case of Pradan.

In 2003, a discussion paper by Subhalakshmi Nandi (Women's experiences in SHGs – Exploring psychological dimensions of empowerment) examined the impact of Pradan on women's empowerment. It focused on the psychological dimensions of empowerment and showed that microcredit and the three categories of emancipation (women vis-à-vis themselves, their families and society) were positively correlated. However, it is not clear whether microcredit has an impact on empowerment or empowerment an impact on microcredit. In addition to this problem, we have to take into account the selection bias as well as the contamination effects. An econometric study could thus help to deepen the conclusions.

My contribution to the question of Pradan's impact remains descriptive so far. During my field visits, I had the opportunity to attend some SHG meetings and ask questions to women. You can find here the main intuitive results.

In each of the villages I visited, the SHGs are organising a meeting once a week. During this meeting, members save Rs 10. The idea is to gather enough money for providing loans and creating links to banks. On an average, women borrow around Rs 350 for a mean time of 3 months. They mainly use it for household consumption, healthcare, children education, festivals and marriage. I will try to explain how these meetings changed women's lives in terms of empowerment.

In Rajasthan

The first step to achieve this objective is to describe the living conditions of women in Rajasthan. In India girls are often married at birth but first cohabitation takes place only at puberty (13-14 years old). This cultural practice is called *gauna*. The NFHS highlights that *gauna* is still followed in Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, but on a limited scale. In other states, this practice is followed to only a negligible extent, if at all.

Girls go to school due to positive discrimination (school is free for them). However, in India, the percentage of net primary school attendance between 1996 and 2003 was still higher for boys (80% compared to 73% for girls). Moreover, girls often stop at grade eight whereas boys have the opportunity to continue their studies in other villages. It is important to note that girls have had access to school for only 10 years. This means that most SHGs members are illiterate.

Education and Freedom of Movement

Women think education for girls is important because it enables them to lead their lives in an independent way (they can go alone to towns, read letters etc.). However, freedom of movement is very restricted. Women need their husband or in-laws' permission to go to the market, visit siblings, or even to the hospital. Fortunately, urgent cases do not require permission. In fact, women represent a kind of stake (honour, power, pride, etc.) for men.

Many women are not involved in any decision-making. In some villages, though, decisions about healthcare, education and

even about the use of money are taken both by men and women. Women do not have access to mass media. Many of them have never watched television or listened to radio. Their knowledge about the world is thus limited. They only have access to news from neighbouring villages. This fact can explain the lack of questions about our lives in Belgium.

According to the NFHS, at least 10% of the married women aged between 15 and 49 years have experienced domestic violence in Rajasthan. These alarming statistics seem to be consistent with my experience in the villages. While the Government of India has recognised the seriousness of the problem and the need for legislation, it has completely failed to understand the true dimensions of a law on domestic violence. In the Domestic Violence Bill (2001), it is stated, "If a man beats his wife to protect his property, it is NOT domestic violence, this will be taken as part of his right to defend himself."

In fact, the Bill defines domestic violence as conduct whereby the abuser 'habitually assaults' the person aggrieved or makes her life 'miserable' by his conduct. These are subjective terms that would not help a judge in deciding whether a said conduct amounts to domestic violence or not. On another crucial front, the Bill also fails to declare that women have the right to reside in the 'shared household'. It is because of the threat of being thrown out and without viable options that millions of women today continue to silently tolerate extreme violence.

Women have a strong preference for a son. Dowry and future wage are the main reasons. They also do not understand the concept of a dream for themselves.

This description indicates that women's situation in Rajasthan is not really positive. But women have many things to tell when they are asked about the contribution of Pradan in their lives, which shows that they have already undergone changes since the beginning of the meetings. Here, a distinction has to be made between two kinds of villages. Till now, there is no explanation for this distinction.

Pradan's Impact

The first category includes Japavali, Nagla Bhadoria and Jakhi. Women from these villages see Pradan only as a promoter of micro-credit. This implies that they associate its impact only with money. For them, the best improvement in their lives is the fact that they do not need anymore to go to the moneylender who lends at exorbitant rates of interest. This enables them to fulfil small needs (purchase of grains, vegetables, health and education expenditures) in an easier way. Thanks to Pradan, they are now able to project themselves in the future. They see it brighter, with still more money, a beautiful house, a vehicle, etc. These are material considerations but speak of some empowerment. They also mention that Pradan taught them how to write their names.

Jagariapura, Kaharpura and Ghironia form the second category. In these villages, women consider Pradan not only as a promoter of micro-credit but also as an opportunity to evolve. Thanks to Pradan, they indeed find themselves able to achieve most of their expectations from life. For instance, they mention the loss of all their fears, the possibility to meet new women, new people (like foreigners) and the chance to discover new villages and towns in the framework of cluster meetings or simply of

bank linkage. Women also underline the opportunity to learn new technical and medical knowledge or even news from the world, to take a greater part in household's decisions and the privilege to learn how to interact with others.

There are also particularities in each of these three villages. In Jagariapura, women call now their husbands by their names and have stopped wearing the veil. This is a great step towards empowerment. Indeed, the veil was at first a cultural sign, which protected women from men's glances and in that way gave evidence of the husband's property. In Kaharpura, women dare joining forces against violent husbands and in Ghironia, men sometimes have to cook.

In Jharkhand

The living conditions of women are tough in Jharkhand. They are however better than in Rajasthan for some indicators. Gauna is not practiced in tribal societies. They get married around 17 years old and do not have to pay any dowry. The level of education is quite similar to Rajasthan. SHG members in Jharkhand are mostly illiterate.

Young girls go to school in both states but tribal villages' location makes education more difficult for them. Preference for a son is almost absent in Jharkhand. This can be explained by two major factors: no dowry system and fieldwork for girls.

In contrast to Rajasthan, women in Jharkhand did watch television or listen to radio once in their lives. Many of them are even listening to radio regularly in order to get advice for their agricultural crops.

Women in Jharkhand seem to be free in their movements. They do not have to ask

permission of their husbands if they want to travel outside the village. This is probably due to the fieldwork as many lands are quite far from the village. Many women in Jharkhand take part in the process of decision-making (as far as decisions are related to collective stakes). Domestic violence is a common behaviour in Jharkhand but women were reluctant to share their experiences.

This description underlines huge differences between Rajasthan and Jharkhand. To better understand them, it is interesting to deepen the study of tribal populations. These populations are indeed characterised by personal features and face particular difficulties linked to their way of living.

The first problem tribal populations face is related to agriculture. Due to lack of access to knowledge and financial resources, they practice extremely low yielding agriculture on low quality land. A certain set of tribals in Sundarpahari block of Godda district in Jharkhand, known as Paharias, still practice shifting cultivation. It includes the following:

- The tribe first selects a small patch of forest. To create a clearing on the forest, the tribe selectively slashes the natural vegetation by simple tools and burns the logs, so the nutrients are released as ash, which dissolves and is washed by rain into the soil as natural fertilisers.
- A variety of food crops are grown on the land such as rice, maize, etc. The crops grow very quickly, some are ready to harvest after four to six months. But after 2 or 3 years, due to decline in soil fertility, the yield of successive crops declines and weeds grow extensively.

- As a consequence, the site has to be abandoned and cultivation moves to another site, where another patch of the forest will be cleared. They will try not to return to the former clearings for at least 50 years. A long period of abandonment indeed allows the forest to regenerate and the fertility of the land to be restored. In the traditional practice, however, the follow period between crops of the same patch of land is only around 20 years.

Although this system is rudimentary and yields low profit, it adjusts itself to field realities and corresponds to the best option for tribal populations. If NGOs want to help them, they have to keep in mind this particularity. They have to seek for improvements of the actual system rather than imposing new methods.

While analysing the problem of agriculture, it is also important to evaluate the impact of globalisation. They are non-competitive in the market because of the low quality of produce. Their production is also not sufficient to economically compete in the market. Thirdly, most of their produce is grains and millets, which are not 'marketable'.

Tribal Expenditure Patterns

The second most important problem of tribal populations refers to their particular expenditure patterns. They have to allocate huge amounts of money to health related problems. Jharkhand is prone to rapid contamination from parasitic and bacterial diseases (malaria, tuberculosis, etc.). This is due to humidity and tropical temperatures. At the same time, treatment of HIV and leprosy require lot of money.

Tribal people also spend money on kerosene (used for lighting), pesticides and festivals.

We can add to these expenditures the opportunity cost of buying them in far away places. This opportunity cost is then measured by the time lost in travelling.

Finally, the third problem deals with the difficult access to the education system. This leads to many consequences for the child from social and economic points of view and leads to huge brakes for women to work outside the house. They are often not able to combine work and education simultaneously.

In opposition to what was made to analyse the impact of Pradan on women's lives in Rajasthan, the idea is here to look at Pradan's interventions in Jharkhand and to see whether it helps women or not. The solutions proposed by Pradan are summarised in Table 2.

In addition to the common solutions set up in every village, Pradan has launched two new projects in Jharkhand. The first one corresponds to the creation of a small advice centre where people can test whether they are afflicted with malaria or not. This advice centre is headed by a trained villager and offers cheap medicines to many neighbouring villages.

The second project is more interesting because it has an impact on women's empowerment. It corresponds to the creation of a crèche in Raksha village. In Raksha, the main activity among women is a tasar silk yarn reeling centre. They come daily at 9 am and leave at 5 pm. Among them, 20 women have children under five, who stay alone at home or accompany their mothers. As a result, yields and quality of reeling is mediocre but more important, health and security of children are put into

Table 2: Problems and Solutions in Jharkhand

Problems	Solutions
Diseases	Raising awareness at SHG meetings
	Incentives to use mosquito nets (free)
	Incentives to use repulsive soaps (free)
	Medical box in each SHG
	Training 4-5 villagers in microscopy
	Distribution of chlorine capsules
	Training women in midwifery
	Vaccination against measles, polio and DPT
	Introducing hand pumps
	Creating an advice centre
Huge expenses in kerosene	Introducing solar lamps
Widespread use of pesticides	Introducing completely natural neem oil
Limited access to education	Introduction of a professor in Jolo village
	Creation of a crèche in Raksha village

danger. That is why Pradan decided to set up a crèche, which was launched on May 25, 2005. According to Pradan professionals, "Emotional touch and better timing of food, play and discipline not only facilitates children's physical and mental growth and happiness but also helps mother to work peacefully and qualitatively."

Pradan's work in the crèche is organised around 8 activities. They include investigations to find new members; visits to poorest families; arrangement of logistic and doctor's visits; organisation of system of payment; assessment of what is required to improve children's health; organisation of meetings with mothers to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings; encouragement to the crèche worker because people see it as a low status activity, and financial help (55% of the crèche expenditures).

In conclusion, there are solutions to tribal difficulties and some of the solutions are helpful in the fight against hard conditions of living among women. It is noteworthy that women in Raksha were the most empowered women (following all the above criteria) I met during my field visits.

Conclusion

All the improvements in women's lives demonstrate that Pradan's work is really effective in Rajasthan and Jharkhand. This is still more impressive when we learnt about Pradan's difficulties at the beginning of its work in these states. First of all, it was confronted with veiled women totally under the pressure of their husbands. Secondly, it had to deal with poor infrastructure and bandits and finally, it had to convince banks of the strength of the women's groups it promoted.

As a student visiting villages for the first time, it is difficult to have a well-founded opinion. But I am sure Pradan's work is essential if we want to improve women's lives. In addition to my little experience and personal feelings, many studies point to the potentials of microcredit as a tool for women's empowerment. However, other studies show the limitations and claim for

additional interventions.

This descriptive report makes me unable to draw a general conclusion. It should be completed with an econometric study with more variables on women's empowerment (fertility, hygienic conditions, access to healthcare, education, etc).

During my stay in India, I also had the opportunity to meet other persons in charge of NGOs such as Sa-Dhan and to attend a World Bank conference on microcredit. Although these activities were enriching, they did not help studying the question of women's empowerment. Sa-Dhan and the World Bank conference were concentrating on the financial sustainability of microcredit organisations. I must confess that I was disappointed by the conference. I get the feeling that all these people were very far from the reality in the field. I am currently working on that question to be able to better describe my experience.

A Time to Dare

We need to be daring rather than defensive in addressing issues of widespread poverty and crass inequalities

Deep Joshi

Individuals and organisations in the so-called voluntary sector follow a variety of strategies ranging from ameliorative to transformational. Underlying these, however, is a shared concern to influence the future of Indian society and to make it more just and humane so that more and more of our citizens live in freedom a life of dignity and purpose. I believe this underlying vision needs a clearer articulation by all of us in the sector. Where do we think we are headed as a nation, as a society? What kind of future do we envision? What are the objective conditions? What are we working towards? What is a reasonable prognosis for, say, 2 to 5 decades hence? What could we do now to secure the future we want?

I believe we are at a stage in our evolution when it is imperative to ask such questions and seek concrete answers instead of assuming those under broad labels such as development for all, prosperity for all, an egalitarian society, etc. It is not just adequate to rue about the state of things and then proceed with actions as if all is well and 'under control'.

It is well beyond the scope of this paper to draw a comprehensive picture of the likely future. I only highlight here the key issues that must inform our actions as individuals and institutions that value freedom, dignity and purpose and want to enhance those with our actions. In doing so I draw on ideas developed by Robert Chambers and Gordon R Conway in Sustainable Rural

Livelihoods: Practical Concepts for the 21st Century, Discussion Paper 296, Institute of Development Studies, February 1992.

The trebling of India's population over the past 50 years and the prognosis for continued growth through much of this century calls for a basic reassessment and explicit statement of what material prosperity is likely. That alone would inform the choice of institutions and human processes to ensure a climate in which freedom, dignity and purpose would remain achievable objectives for all.

Moderate Wellbeing

Given the overall prognosis for material progress and population growth, it is clear that a large segment of the population in India will have to do with very modest levels of material wellbeing in the foreseeable future. I believe we tend to shy away from speculating about the limits of the modernisation and growth paradigm. It somehow seems only fair and therefore, the contrary, unfair and even a shameful thought, to assume that every one will sooner or later catch up and enjoy the kind of material wellbeing associated with the modern, urban middle class.

Yet a little reasoned thought and analysis would show that widespread material prosperity is least likely. It is not merely a question of time. It is not only a question of what the economically feasible rates of growth are and therefore, how much time it would take to 'pull everyone up', but also a

sociological, political and ecological question of sustainable growth.

In a society endowed with grossly unequal distribution of resources and capability, there would be many who would enjoy unprecedented prosperity as our economy grows, spurred by the unrelenting human search for material wellbeing. This is all too apparent already. In this scenario, unless there is a widely shared sense of equity and fairness, it would be increasingly difficult to keep the social fabric together. Therefore our actions must be informed by a concern to enhance the notion of fairness and certainly not diminish it.

Touchstone of Equity

The idea of equity and fairness has both material and psychological dimensions. That one is able to create choices and influence phenomena that affect one's wellbeing is as, if not more, important as material wellbeing. That everyone has reasonable opportunities to affect one's future regardless of one's roots is basic to the idea of equity. This I believe is an issue that the sector must use as a touchstone in developing strategies and actions. Only if we do so would we come up with alternatives to current normative frameworks.

Capability has always affected human wellbeing. Spurred by the growth in technology, heightened interconnectedness and the pressure on resources, it has now become a critical determinant of human wellbeing. This would become more acute every passing day. There has been unprecedented growth in human capability in India, as indeed globally.

We know more about the natural phenome-

na that affect our lives and that we seek to harness to enhance wellbeing and limit misery. We have developed new ways of doing things and organising our actions. More people than ever before have access to such knowledge. Capability goes beyond such knowledge. It includes one's perception of place in society, one's ability to influence the world one is affected by, the ability to make choices, to adapt, experiment, innovate, to build networks and to contribute to others' wellbeing.

The growth in capability in our society has only been matched by unprecedented inequality in its distribution. While more Indians than ever before now have the capability to make a place for themselves anywhere in the world, large populations are poorly endowed with the capability to affect even their immediate environments. Many, such as tribal people and those earlier dependent on traditional institutions, have in fact suffered erosion in their capabilities.

Our choices of strategies and actions therefore must be informed by an abiding concern to enhance the capabilities of the people. This implies that our work must focus on building people's capabilities rather than merely ameliorating their present situation. More importantly, it implies that we seek developmental frameworks that build on people's capabilities, potential or actual, rather than the other way around.

The development process in India during the past half-century bears a deep imprint of the concern to modernise a 'backward society'. Often explicitly and always implicitly it has meant catching up with the so-

called developed nations. Catching up meant, first and foremost, materially, followed by a fair deal for all as implicit in the democratic and socialist pattern of society we have sought to create.

Inevitably, catching up also meant clearing up the backlog. It meant quickly educating the armies of illiterates, never mind the purpose and efficacy of the education our schools peddle; producing enough food quickly to stave off starvation, never mind the inability of poor people to buy that food; providing health care services to prevent epidemics, diseases and ill health quickly, never mind the motivation of the service providers and the professional and sociological walls that separate them from the poor, and so on. The sheer size of the slate that needed to be cleaned meant the state felt impelled to become the cleaner itself.

Cleaning Messy Slates

The state as the provider of services – the cleaner of messy slates – and as the harbinger of development has thus seen unprecedented growth. This unprecedented turn in human – especially Indian – history has had several undesired implications besides unimaginable erosion in quality, capability and legitimacy of the institution of the state itself. In the arena of institutions, the state has been like the proverbial banyan tree. As the state took upon itself the responsibility of delivering development, other institutions have remained stunted or have even withered away.

Thus it is the state that installs a hand pump for drinking water and the citizens who drink from it do nothing for its upkeep. The state employs over 3 million

teachers but cannot get them to teach, leave alone educate. Citizens readily empty their pockets to bribe government functionaries but cannot collect small sums to repair a school building, a village road or a leaky pond. In short, much of the development fostered by the state-led 'catching up' paradigm is institutionally unsustainable and many actions of the state have eroded other institutions.

I believe much social and political energy in the near future would be wasted in folding back the institutionally unsustainable carpet of development unfolded by the state. The process is already underway. The emerging institutional vacuum also implies that it is not enough to come up with bright new ideas or technologies to solve society's problems. Institutional mechanisms must be created to ensure that the ideas are translated into sustainable action on a large scale.

In this scenario of the state unable to cope and on the retreat, stunted institutions and powerless and emaciated citizenry, voluntary organisations must work to promote institutionally sustainable processes of development. In concrete terms, it implies that people must play a central role and take charge of the development process themselves.

How do we address these challenges? There are no easy answers and I certainly have none. I can, however, offer a few pointers that may aid our continuing search for answers.

Changing Mind-sets

Foremost in my view is the need for us to radically change our self-perception. The

roles and identities of key institutions, especially the state and the market, are undergoing radical changes. So must ours. It is imperative that we get out of the 'interstices' and 'on the margins' mindset. I did not believe such a mindset was appropriate even when the state was the pre-eminent 'development agency'. It certainly is not appropriate now as the state itself is throwing up its hands.

Isolated actions on the margins can hardly affect such monumental issues as equity, capability and institutional sustainability. How can we achieve salience if we continue to operate in our little enclaves on the margins? I believe we need to take a longer-term view of our work and develop broader perspectives. The issues I have highlighted are transformational and call for the involvement of an ever-widening circle of citizens. Should the sector not see itself as the vehicle for enabling more and more citizens to apply themselves to the issues of widespread poverty and crass inequity? I believe it is a time to be daring rather than defensive. If lawful action to create a fairer society is not 'mainstream' in a democracy, what is?

To be in the mainstream, we must first set very high standards for ourselves. I believe there is much scope to improve the quality of internal governance and to inculcate a culture of transparency. We require much higher standards of performance and effectiveness. We need to be far more reflective and critical of the 'what and how' of our work. Our actions must demonstrate our motives, rather than the other way around.

Widening our circle, involving more and more citizens, proactively and methodical-

ly, is another strategy we need to follow. Little is known about the sector and much that is known is biased and not very flattering. We do little to change these perceptions, expecting that our 'good work' will eventually stand out. For example, we do little to use the media or inform the vast numbers of young people in schools and colleges about our work. We need to work to change that and not remain confined to our own organisational preoccupations.

Alternative Paradigms

Another area where there is need to be daring is that of the perspectives and paradigms of development itself. We need to develop and carry through alternative paradigms of development. Much creative work has been done in the sector that has the promise to redefine basic propositions about education, health, governance, livelihoods and the management of the commons and basic services. Rarely do these 'interesting experiments' create new social constructs. For example, can we not develop an alternative system of education so that people themselves would take charge rather than remaining dependant on the state and tied to the 'catching up' paradigm? Can we develop and carry through a construct of local governance outside the '3-tier' framework? Can we imagine and work towards forest management without forest departments?

Perspectives about development are unlikely to change unless our views about people's potential and capability change. We need to build on people's capability and have faith in their capability. After all, little progress can be made unless people themselves take charge of their own devel-

opment. There are plenty of examples to demonstrate that poor people can manage complex human and technological processes. Yet many among us shy away from handing over. For example, we know poor people spend significant sums of money to get poor quality health services and education. Yet we would balk at the idea of designing services that require poor people to pay, at least to their capability. As a result, our approaches often are no different from those of the state agencies whom we rightly criticise.

Finally, I think we need to be much more outward looking than we are. Very few among us build bridges with agencies of the state, the market and even with each other. For example, many among us harbour very negative views about panchayati raj institutions, leave alone collaborating with them. The refrain is that panchayats are dominated by vested interests. It is perhaps true. But how would they change if we do not work with them and create mechanisms to enable poor people get a toehold? After all, the idea of development itself demands that poor people be able to effectively deal with the institutions of society. How would that happen if the agents of change themselves work inside little cocoons?

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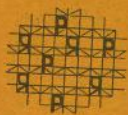
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Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)

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

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

E-mail: newsreach@pradan.net