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Striving for Success Part - I

Lalita Dhal

Promoting SHG Clusters for the purpose of helping communities build a mutual support mechanism was a learning process for the PRADAN professionals.

The Mayurbhanj team has promoted Self Help Groups (SHGs) since 2000 as a means of helping families initiate savings in an organised manner and access credit easily, without their falling into the clutches of unscrupulous moneylenders. As part of our SHG intervention, we formed clusters of SHGs. A cluster is the representative forum of all the SHGs in a contiguous patch of, say, six to ten villages within a radius of 2 to 3 km. We also considered the formation of a similar representative forum for the SHGs at the block level, called a 'federation'. However, we realised even before the formation of the Federation that the cluster representatives and the SHGs had begun to lose interest in the proceedings of the cluster meetings; the attendance of the group representatives in the cluster meeting was thinning rapidly. The alarming situation called for an in-depth analysis of the situation to find out why a forum, which had been initiated with such conviction by the SHG members and the Mayurbhanj team, had started to lose its zing and appeal with the members. This narrative summarises our efforts at energising the clusters and explains how our own approach to SHGs and community organisations evolved, in response to the situations and complexities that came up over a period of eight years from 2000 to 2008.

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SHG Clusters

The team started to form SHGs in 2000. By the end of the year, 29 SHGs had been initiated in the project. With time and growing expertise in forming groups, the number of SHGs also went up, and by the end of 2003, 156 SHGs had been promoted in Mayurbhanj. In 2002, we started to organise the SHGs into cluster-based forums. Each cluster's representative body would meet once a month and the members would share their problems and exchange thoughts on social and financial issues. The main expectations in the forming of clusters were:

- a) It will help us reach out to a larger number of groups in single forum.
- b) It will help the SHGs learn from each other's experiences and solve problems (irregular attendance, irregular meetings interest and principal non payment, etc.).
- c) It will also help us to organise and impart training to group members, leaders and service-providers such as the group accountants.
- d) It will be effective for disseminating information about schemes, etc., and tackling social issues (domestic violence, alcoholism, etc.), which require the support of peers.

Structure of a Cluster

Three members, known as Group Representatives, represent each SHG in the cluster. Of the three, two are long-term representatives and one a representative chosen by the group every month, from amongst the rest of the group members. This ensures that every member (besides the chosen two) will get a chance to attend a cluster meeting and become aware of how the cluster functions. The fixed or permanent members are re-elected, although when clusters were first being formed, it was not fixed as to whether it would be after six months or after a year. Cluster meetings are scheduled on a fixed date every month. The required materials (cashbox, cluster book, minute book, keys, etc.) for the meeting remain in the safe-keeping of those groups who are responsible for organising the cluster meeting. In its very first meeting, a cluster chooses three representatives, known as Cluster Representatives, for a period of one year, to conduct (read out minutes, tally cash, mark the attendance, etc.) the meeting.

The Cluster Meeting Process

The following is the process that was followed at that time:

- A meeting's first agenda is to designate the chairperson for the meeting. The chairperson would be selected from amongst the three cluster representatives.
- The cluster representatives take the Cluster Oath.
- The cluster has a cash box in which all the SHGs of the cluster give a membership fee on joining. Besides the membership fee, late fines and penalties, levied by the cluster on the SHGs or their members, are also collected in this box.
- The members, who are late or were absent in the previous meeting, give their late penalties.
- One of the representatives takes out the money from the cluster cash box and tallies the money with the last month's closing amount.
- The minutes of the last meeting and the performance of the groups on certain financial and non-financial parameters are read out. (Box 1). Based on this assessment, the problems of each group are taken up and tackled in the cluster meeting. There could be other issues besides the financial ones, for example, savings linkages, credit linkages, interpersonal issues between members, etc.
- The professional from Pradan uses the forum to pass on information regarding schemes in the block and other government departments, visit plans of the professional, etc.

- At the end of all deliberations, the Cluster Representatives count and tally the money collected.
- The date, time and venue for the next meeting is fixed and the SHGs responsible for keeping the cash box,

keys and cluster documents are decided upon.

In 2003, the team introduced the concept of a cluster book to help the facilitator and the groups conduct group meetings.

Box 1: Cluster Book

A cluster book is one of the important tools for facilitating the meeting, documenting issues, monitoring and evaluating the SHGs. It comprises three sections:

A) The first section covers two pages.

- a) This primarily comprises details of the meeting such as the date, the agenda and the 9 questions on financial and non financial parameters. These parameters, used to keep track of all the SHGs in the cluster and on which the 9 questions are based, are:
 1. Whether the group is organising their meetings regularly or not?
 2. Is the Group taking reformative actions or not (late penalties, absentia penalties etc)?
 3. Are the group members ensuring timely principal repayment within the group?
 4. Are the group members ensuring interest repayment within the group?
 5. Whether there are any loans which are past due?
 6. Does the group have a system of penal interest and whether it is levying and collecting the same?
 7. Principal repayments to bank, whether the SHG is doing it on time or not.
 8. Participation of members in Group activities:
 - a) Is the Cash box, register and keys being rotated amongst the members?
 - b) Whether the member attendance is there till the end of the meeting?
 - c) Whether the groups assign the responsibility of counting and tallying the cash to a new member in every meeting?
 - d) Are the cluster representatives attending the cluster meeting regularly?
 9. Are the Accounts being maintained satisfactorily?

These questions are asked by one representative. The other representatives, with help of the professional, check the cash book and look for instances of norms not being fulfilled. This is followed by a discussion, in which good performances are appreciated by the representatives. If there is a problem, probing questions are asked by members to help the group find a solution. This method also helps members get to know other groups and support each other.

- b) The details of the cash transactions of and the loans taken by the SHG are carried here, including information of the idle cash available with the group and the outstanding loans of every group in the cluster.

- B) The third page of the cluster book comprises details of the loans taken from the cluster (from the funds available through a WFP grant to the SHG cluster) and the status of the repayment of the principal and the interest. Space is provided to record discussions and decisions.

The cluster book also records were four important facts.

- i. Cash in Box
- ii. Cash in Bank
- iii. Loan outstanding per member of the SHG
- iv. Bank loans outstanding

- C) The formula $(A + B + C) - D$ was applied to the data to calculate the Group Fund.

- D) The last section comprises a single page for the signatures of those who have attended the meeting. Some space is provided for tallying the cash and keeping a record of it. It also has the details of the collection by the SHGs for the running costs of the Computer Munshi System, new SHG membership fees and the penalties collected.

The main need for introducing the cluster book arose because small but vital group norms such as meeting regularity, levying of penalties (late fines, penal interest, etc.), rotation of cash book, box and keys amongst the members, etc., were not being adhered to. As the numbers of the groups (156) was high and was also increasing with time, it became difficult for one professional to go to each and every group and address their problems. What was required was a system of monitoring the progress of groups, to help the professional. Therefore, a cluster book was designed and put into practice.

The cluster book helps the professional to monitor the group in the cluster meeting. Neither can it replace the professional's visits to the group nor has not it been designed for that purpose. It helps the professional to get a holistic understanding of the groups in the cluster.

Role of the Professional in Cluster Meetings

The team saw the professional as a catalyst, who is able to facilitate meetings in such a manner that data from various sources such as the cash book, pass books, etc., are used

by the women to identify areas of weakness and improve on their performance. The professional initiates discussions and helps the groups identify the areas of weaknesses such as group norms (financial or non financial). For example, loan defaulters are identified in these meetings and the SHGs are facilitated by the professional to explore various options to deal with the issue. The options may be that a cluster committee for loan recovery is formed and it would organise discussions with the SHG and the concerned member or that the SHG itself organises a meeting and discusses the situation at hand with the defaulters. The professional initiates discussions on issues such as why certain SHGs were performing better than the others; and facilitates discussions so that members cull out the positives from the experiences and help their peers in the cluster. The professional helps the groups plan their strategies to maintain the SHG health.

Social issues such as conflicts between members of same or different groups and incidents of alcoholism and domestic violence started to surface. Since the forum was new, the team wanted the professional to 'help' the women express their problems and explore

options for tackling these issues. In every meeting, the professional helps group members take stock of the decisions of the previous meeting and evaluate the actions taken. The professional also helps the cluster forum members to monitor continuously the progress of the decisions taken by the cluster forum in their meetings.

In 2003, the financial software for the groups, McFinancier, was introduced; it took a whole year for us to implement it. By the end of 2004, we were able to ensure the full circle of information and data flow from the groups to the Computer Munshi and, subsequently, from the Munshi to the groups, on a weekly basis. For this, various systems have been set up. For instance, Regular Meeting Transaction Sheet (RMTS) boxes were put up in important places for the women to deliver carbon copies of the RMTS I. Messengers were appointed to carry all these sheets to the Computer Munshi on a designated day. The Munshi would feed the data into the computer and hand over the RMTS II sheets to the messenger, who would deliver it to the groups.

The vision of the team was that the cluster would be the forum to play a big role in sustaining SHG mobilisation in the region. However, although various natural leaders had emerged, what was necessary was a process through which these leaders could be helped to visualise their future with the structure. This vision needed to be developed with all the representatives of the SHGs in the cluster and the Cluster Representatives. In the time spanning from the year 2003 to 2006 the team organised various visioning exercises with the SHG representatives first and later with the Cluster Representatives. It was organised for the emerging leaders of the groups. These leadership training programmes were aimed at helping the participants realise their potential and understand their collective

strength, and at building a core group of women, who would take over the task and the responsibility of promoting and nurturing groups in the area. The workshops were aimed at helping the members conceptualise a vision for the SHGs and examine various options as regards the kind of work they would want the SHGs to take up. The members discussed and debated and reached a consensus as to what exactly they wanted from the forums and what the issues were when they would want the forums to intervene, amongst various other things.

In the annual planning meeting in 2006, the team, after lengthy discussions, decided that it was not necessary for the professional to attend each and every cluster meeting. The team thought that the professional should look at disengaging himself/herself from the cluster level forums so that the women are able to take charge of the forum. This decision came about from two facts:

- For the previous three years, the professional has been actively and intensively engaging with the cluster. The understanding was that the representatives would now be able to organise and conduct meetings on their own.
- The team realised that it was time to diversify the work of the team into large-scale livelihood programmes. For that to happen, the team would have to invest substantial time and energy of the professionals. This shift to intensive livelihoods would also mean organising a number of training programmes for beneficiaries, exposure visits, etc. This could only happen when the professionals lessened their time and energy investments in the cluster forum and the SHG interventions.

Thus, the process of disengagement was initiated in the team with the professionals attending an average of just one cluster meeting in three months or on a need basis. This coincided with the team investing its energies to initiate and stabilise livelihood interventions, which saw the augmentation of irrigation infrastructure, large-scale horticulture, land and water conservation activities, organising people around livelihoods and training of stakeholders among other activities.

However, in early 2007, a year after having disengaged from the cluster-level forums, the

team realised that the cluster no longer had the same interest and energy levels that it had when it was conceptualised. The attendance in most cluster meetings was floundering and its norms were not being adhered to. Problems such as dwindling interest in meetings and thinning attendance drew the team's attention to the design of the cluster meetings and our vision of the cluster and the role it would play in sustaining the whole structure of SHG-Cluster-Federation. The team initially was at a loss as to what had gone wrong with the cluster-level forums and what had to be done to bring it back to its original intent.

Bamboo: The Way Ahead in Orissa

Pratyay Jagannath

The Bamboo sector has the potential for creating robust livelihoods for a large number of poor families in forest dominated States such as Orissa

Introduction

Bamboo, as the poor man's timber is strongly associated with Orissa, which has one of the largest number of poor households in India. It is the lifeline grass for sustaining livelihood of thousands of traditional bamboo artisans and has immense potential for boosting handicraft industry in the State. However the bamboo handicraft industry in Orissa is relatively smaller than some of the North Eastern States where the industry is well developed. This article attempts to identify critical bottlenecks and opportunities available in the Bamboo sector to promote livelihood opportunities for poor through bamboo based handicraft.

Bamboo Stock

Orissa is forest rich and bamboo is an essential constituent of dry and moist deciduous forests (along with Sal and Teak). 27 percent of the crop composition of forests in Orissa is bamboo (as per the Forest Survey of India report). Extent of pure bamboo forests is about 375 sq km and 17794 sq km of forests have bamboo with other trees. Two species of bamboo, *D. strictus* (salia) and *B. bamboos* (daba) grows widely in the forests of Orissa and annual harvest is about 1.8 Lakh tonnes excluding the Protected Areas.

Bamboo is found in almost all parts of the State and in all types of land including commons and revenue lands, but found more in forests of central and southern Orissa. Salia bamboo (*D. strictus*) in dry deciduous forests of Angul, Athamallik, Balliguda, Ghumsur north, Kalahandi, Rayagada, Bamra, Bonai, Rairakhol and Sundargarh forest divisions; and Daba bamboo (*B. bamboos*) in moist deciduous forests of Dhenkanal, Nayagarh and

many other forest divisions. Only four forest divisions i.e. Keonjhar, Karanjia, Baripada do not have bamboo felling series (regular bamboo working).

Main species in Orissa includes, *Dendrocalamus strictus* (Salia); *Bambusa bambos* (Kanta); *Bambusa vulgaris* (Sundarkani), *Bambusa nutans* (Badia Bauns), *Bambusa tulda* (Taleda Bauns), *Schizostachyum pergracile* (Dangi), *Gigantochloa rostrata* (Panibans or Bolangi), *Thyrsostachys oliveri* (Nal Bauns), *Thyrsostachys regia* (Lathi Bauns), *Dendrocalamus giganteous*, *Bambusa striata* (Champa Bauns), and *Bambusa wamin*. Bamboos that are grown on farm are *Bambusa nutans* (Sundarkani), *B. vulgaris* and *B. tulda*; where as *B. balcoa*, *D. gigantius* and *D. longispathus* are the species introduced in the state.

Bamboo forests are a major source of revenue to the State, provide employment, income to many households in the remote backward tribal districts, meet the subsistence / household need of the forest dependent tribal, forest fringe rural poor, farmers, artisans and provide the commercial/industrial bamboo to the trade and the industry. Bamboo is used as the principal construction material in more than 5.5 million of house structures in Orissa (Census of India 2001) which need about 22 million bamboo clums every year for repair. Two major paper mills in the State receive their supply of bamboo from Govt. forests (about 2 Lakh tones per annum).

Availability, Quality and Cost of Bamboo

In Orissa there is heavy shortage of bamboo for artisans and handicrafts. There are

approximately 30,000 artisans residing in Orissa. To engage them for at least 9 months (the bamboo working period in Orissa when bamboo is available from forest) in a year, at least 8.1 million bamboos are required (1 bamboo per day). But in 2005-06, Orissa Forest Department has produced only 1,36,150 numbers of commercial bamboo which includes bamboo for other purposes also. Because of shortage of raw material, both from within and outside forest, the cost of bamboo is higher and the profit margin in the final product is less.

Agro-climatic Conditions for Bamboo

In Orissa, climate is characterized by hot summer and cool winter. Annual rainfall ranges from 1000-1600 mm. Mean annual soil temperature > 22°C, length of growing period varies from 150-210 days. Soils are fine to loamy clay, non-calcareous, lateritic in some parts, slightly to moderately acidic and have relative low cation exchange capacity. This climatic conditions are suitable for bamboo cultivation.

Demand and Supply of Bamboo

The paper mills have been the major consumers of bamboo on a regular and large scale basis. A decade ago, when all the four paper mills in the state were operational, the demand of industrial bamboo (long or commercial bamboo) was about 4.3 Lakh MT, which has reduced to about 2 Lakh MT due to closure of two mills.

The Empowered Committee formed by the government on bamboo observed in 1995 that the annual consumption of commercial bamboo in the state was around 1732 SUs (Sale unit; Under standard conditions, one SU is roughly equivalent to one MT) as against a likely production of 2,59,900 SUs. Various estimates are available regarding the current

demand of Bamboo in the state. About 70 percent of the total bamboo produced in the state is said to be consumed by paper mills as against 20 percent in construction sector and 10 percent by the artisans (*BamFest Orissa 2000*, p.13). The official annual production potential has been estimated conservatively at about 4 Lakh MT.

Bamboo-based livelihood in Orissa

While approximately, 5.5 Lakh people in the state are reported to depend partially on bamboo for their livelihood (Mohanty D. 2004). Some like bamboo cutters and artisans, who chiefly depend on this resource and are estimated to be about 1 Lakh.

About 20,000 to 30,000 bamboo cutters mostly from the marginalized section find employment for about 6 months (October to June) during the working of bamboo forest in Orissa. About three months of additional work is available in the depot. But the unavailability of work in the bamboo forest have resulted in the disinterest of the cutters and lack of other viable options in the immediate neighbourhood has forced many cutters to migrate to other areas in search of work, or else resort to illegal activities like timber smuggling. The average monthly income of cutters ranges from Rs.1200 to Rs.2000 depending on the capacity. The bamboo operations in 2005 reportedly generated about 7.9 Lakh man days of work.

Bamboo artisans in Orissa

About 30000 and more number of bamboo artisans have been identified in various districts of Orissa; Boudh-2000, Sambalpur-5000, Nuapada-2160, Kalahandi-600, Nayagarh-2400, Keonjhar-2863, Mayurbhanj-5366, Sundargarh-3302, Ganjam-1722 are the listed figures and figures for Bolangir, Bargarh and Koraput are not available though there is

confirmed presence of the artisans. However, this estimate is not consistent with some of the other estimates primarily due to the definition of the term 'artisan'. However, a reasonably estimated of artisans (fully and partially engaged) in Orissa is about one Lakh in numbers. Most of the artisans in Orissa belong to the schedule caste community (like, the Doma, the Pana, etc.) though tribal artisans do exist such as the Paharias of Sunabeda plateau (sanctuary), Kolha and Kandha, the Juangs of Keonjhar-Pallahra region and the Paudi Bhuyans of Deogarh. The artisans are not organized in most of the areas, and only 15 clusters are said to be present in the state (*BamFest Orissa 2000*, p.14). The average monthly income of artisans is meagre in most of the cases ranging from Rs. 600 to Rs. 1000 per household and almost all are below poverty line.

Boudh district has a rich tradition of bamboo handicrafts and has a large population of bamboo artisans. About 2000 artisans live in 25 villages. Their products have a good market in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Nayagarh and Berhampur. They are landless, live close to forest; face myriad of problems, no access to green bamboo and manage to get green bamboo clums even on payment of high price. 41 families, member of *Betera* community, have constituted a Cooperative Society (the only society in the district); find difficulty in getting green bamboo; RF is 100 km away and they collect bamboo illegally, pay a fine Rs. 3 per clum costing Rs 20 per clum and the return is very meagre; In absence of other occupation they continue with their traditional occupation.

Key Issues in Promoting Bamboo Based Livelihoods in Orissa

Availability of Bamboo for Artisans

The traditional Bamboo artisans in Orissa

mostly depend on essentially *Dendrocalamus strictus* (Salia) because of the strength of the latter in comparison to that of other available species. However, Salia (forest bamboo) is difficult / impossible to be sourced in several areas and *Bambusa vulgaris* (Sundarkani) is used as a substitute if available. The poor availability of the preferred specie for artisan has been due to several reasons; preference for the production of industrial bamboo (low priority to artisans requirement, as artisans prefer 1-2 year old green bamboos, but the harvesting of less than 2 year old clums is not allowed), location of bamboo depots, scarcity due to unsustainable exploitation in certain areas, natural calamities, flowering and other natural reasons. The supply of bamboo under Artisans Supply Rules, 1980 provides for making provisions of bamboo on a subsidized basis. However, the supply under the rules has in reality stopped after the nationalization of bamboo in Orissa. The artisans are no longer allowed to collect from the forests and have to depend on depots or illegal collection from forest. The study indicates that the access to raw material by artisans is poor as the bamboo depot are not located in close proximity to artisan clusters and quite often do not have desired quality of bamboo (matured or dried bamboo due to overstay in depot). The restriction on artisans in procuring their choice of bamboo seems to have impacted their livelihood (besides other reasons) and the bamboo is quite often procured illegally directly or through intermediary operating. In contrast the access to Bamboo in North East, for example states like Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and Assam is relatively easier and in spite of permit and transit system in most of the NE States the people are allowed to collect bamboos from forest freely.

Example:

In Balani village in the Lathikata block of

Sundargarh district, there is a small hamlet of Kandhas known as Kandha basti, this hamlet of about 10 households is claimed to be the only bamboo-ware production centre in the Lathikata region till 6/7 years ago. The Kandhas had been doing bamboo work since generations and this was their chief means of livelihood. Salia was not available in the immediate neighbourhood, and they had to arrange it from the Tamda forests. Unsustainable exploitation led to the scarcity of the resource in the collection area, and they did not find it feasible to go far away (Majurdima) to access the bamboo forest on a regular basis. As a result, they abandoned bamboo work. Now wage labour is their main source of income though they are still attached in their hearts to bamboo work.

Traditional Skill of Artisans

The bamboo artisans (essentially basket weavers) in Orissa are almost entirely a traditional profession (weaving community) and probably a dwindling occupation. The products are essentially low value household items such as Jhudi (used for earth work), storage basket (Dala), Kula, Kulei (small kula), bamboo mats (chattulu), Marriage basket (for carrying sweets), carrying baskets (Gampalu), Fish carrying basket (Khaloi/Gumpa) and other small household items. The items produced are normally not standardized, designs are traditional, lack finishing, prepared using rudimentary items such as knife and sickle and are locally consumed. The business dimensions necessary for a bamboo based handicraft industry require different skill sets in product design, finishing, standardization, use of technology and other market based requirements, which is quite different from the traditional skills of artisans.

Capacity Building

The artisans have low bargaining power due to extreme poverty, they lack collective bodies

like Self Help Groups (SHGs), federations, they are mainly traditional communities, and access to micro-credit to procure material or tools also depends upon the artisans coming into groups. Information and technical knowledge sharing becomes easier in a situation of unity. Utilisation of Common Property Resources like the use of community land will be possible if they come together. There are success stories like Larki village in Turekela where people have been able to use the community land.

Product development and diversification

The bamboo based products by artisans are in general inexpensive utility products. The returns are abysmally low (estimated income of Rs.20-30 per family per day) and newer product development and diversification has not happened for variety of reasons. Decorative items like flower vase, pen stand, table mat, bulb holder and show pieces fetch much higher price than the traditional items. To produce such items, information regarding product and technology are the key factors. The artisans without external help lack the capacity to pursue such product development and diversification strategies. In contrast, the bamboo handicraft industry in NE is better developed and the use of bamboo based articles is quite common in households (including urban areas), which is led to newer product development and diversification. In fact bamboo based articles and artefact can be found in almost all households in NE.

Market Access

Poor market linkage is one of the serious bottlenecks faced by bamboo craft artisans in Orissa. The market is largely unorganized and the final products are sold locally. The product is usually sold in weekly *haats* and in other days artisans travel far and wide to villages to reach the customer directly. Since the artisans prefer to stay adjacent to the bamboo forests for raw material, they remain

remotely located away from the urban markets. The NE market in contrast is relatively well developed domestic markets and bamboo based products are culturally accepted as useful household items. The market channels are well established as the bamboo based handicrafts is one of the major industries in NE.

Poor market access to urban market coupled with popularity of plastic / other substitutes besides seasonality in demand leads to non-remunerating prices for artisans in Orissa. The poor off-take of current product set in urban market is another important factor. Decorative items and other non-traditional items need different marketing channels as the demand for such products is more among urban consumers. Such non-traditional items are usually sold in exhibition. The artisans are invited by the Development Commissioner, Handicrafts to attend such exhibitions with a facility of free-stalls, but not many artisans can avail this opportunity as the Govt of India has withdrawn its scheme for providing support to the participants unless they belong to the KBK districts. Affording travel and other related expenses, particularly for exhibitions outside the state, is not easy even for skilled artisans.

Land Tenure Security of Artisans

A sizeable section of the bamboo artisans are landless and stay in temporary settlements near bamboo forests and sometimes near peri-urban market without adequate tenure security of the land they occupy. These artisans do not have any tenure security and are almost at the mercy of the host community or the Government. There are number of instances where the host community (Kolha artisans of Bartia hamlet in the Barpali village of Rengali Panchayat, Bolangir) have evicted them or are under constant threat from them or from Government if the area happens to

be forest land. This also reduces the opportunity for growing bamboo by the artisans for their own use, which otherwise can be possible with land tenure security.

Bamboo Policy

In spite of the tremendous potential of enhancing lives of artisans and promoting bamboo based handicraft industry that can potentially create significant livelihood opportunities for poor, no concerted efforts have been put in that direction. Some of the NE States, in particular Tripura has a very pro-poor/artisans bamboo policy (free excess from forest and others) with significant departmental and financial commitment with a clear industrial status to the bamboo based handicraft sector. A similar approach may be necessary for Orissa for promoting the sector.

Suggestion and Recommendation

In the broader context of promoting livelihood from Bamboo sector in Orissa three mutually exclusive approaches can be taken; promoting bamboo based handicraft industry, promotions of small and medium bamboo based enterprises and promoting large industrial users in Orissa. But, promoting bamboo based handicraft industry would have significantly higher livelihood gains for poor in Orissa and can effectively built on knowledge and skills of rural artisans.

Strategy to promote handicraft industry

Promoting bamboo based handicraft industry would require assured raw material, market linkage, financial support and upgraded tools and technology.

Centric to this strategy is the need to address the raw material requirement of the artisans to ensure assured and self sufficiency in meeting such demand locally through plantations in village areas. The bamboo

species those are free from government control like *Bambusa vulgaris*, *B. nutans* and *B. tulda* should be promoted for plantation in larger scale in Orissa. These three species are traditionally cultivated species of Orissa and are preferred by the people. The commercial and scheduled Banks are also promoting cultivation of these species by providing loans. The experience and work of Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) in designing a complete cultivation package for these species and the Model Bamboo Plantations undertaken by them can also be used to create awareness and exposure among people.

Collaborative Approach for the Sector

The bamboo workers would require training on designing standard products, quality finishing, and treatment of bamboos, value addition and entrepreneurship development. For this, a collaborative approach between the Government and Civil Society may be necessary. Similarly, the Centre and State Governments would have to jointly provide necessary policy and financial support on a medium to long term basis to the sector as it was done for NE states.

Sustainable Harvesting of Bamboo

In Orissa, presently there are about 1.7 mha of bamboo forests excluding the bamboo areas outside the forests. Out of this 0.78 mha comes under Treatment-A areas, having best potential to produce easily harvestable quality bamboo as identified by the forest department. During the year 2006-07, 0.38 mha of land has been proposed for bamboo plantation in the state and that is expected to yield 1.59 Lakh MT of industrial bamboo and 1.3 million commercial bamboos.

The current potential for bamboo production from forest is estimated at about 4 Lakh MT out of which 2.5 Lakh MT is meant for paper.

If about 0.5 Lakh MT of bamboo (about 12.5 million bamboos) can be reserved for the sector, it can meet the requirement of about 50000 artisans (1 bamboo per day for 9 months). Further, it is estimated that the demand for bamboos for about additional 20000 artisans can be met from bamboos currently grown in private land. Clearly, the current bamboo stock can be harvested on a sustainable basis to meet the requirement of about 0.75 Lakh artisans (Other experts suggest that requirement of 1.5 Lakh artisans can be met with the bamboos in forest and private land). To meet the demand of additional 1 Lakh artisans we would approximately require 0.2 mha to be brought under bamboo plantation (At a yield of about 0.5 MT per ha. Each MT about 250 pieces of bamboo). A vibrant handicraft industry in Orissa is expected to generate employment for about 5 Lakh artisans and that would require about 1 mha of bamboo plantation in private land, which can entirely meet the demand for the industry from private land. In fact the demand for about 5 Lakh artisans can entirely be met from forest in Orissa if we can explore the entire bamboo forest available in Orissa (except in national park and sanctuaries). However, in the interest of reserving bamboo forest for the future, promotion of bamboo plantation in private land to meet the demands of the handicraft industry would be prudent strategy.

Promoting New Bamboo Species in Orissa

The agro-climatic condition of Orissa is suitable to accommodate more bamboo species in the state. However, introduction of new species on commercial scale can be made after conducting the trials and developing suitable cultivation package for a particular species. To boost bamboo based handicraft industry in Orissa, some commercial bamboo species like *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii*,

Dendrocalamus brandisii, *Bambusa polymorpha*, *Bambusa pallida*, *Bambusa membranaceus*, *Bambusa balcooa*, *Dendrocalamus calostachyus* and *Dendrocalamus asper* can be tried.

The introduction of new commercial species will definitely provide additional opportunity for bamboo artisans in Orissa. However, bamboo sector in general and artisans and handicraft industries in particular can be improved even with available species of bamboo in Orissa. The available species, particularly *Dendrocalamus strictus* (natural growing in forests) and *Bambusa vulgaris* (cultivated) has the potential to meet the major part of the demand. However, concerted efforts are required by all concerned to enhance the production and productivity of these species.

Opportunities and Strength

- Bamboo is found in almost all parts of Orissa in all types of land including commons and revenue lands, (28 percent is in the NE States; Orissa has a share of 8.7 percent area of total area under bamboo forest); NE States have a share of 66 percent of the total growing stock of bamboo and Orissa has a share of 7 percent, Assam 16 percent, Manipur 14 percent, Arunachal Pradesh 12 percent); such rich resource need to be protected, conserved and sustainably managed through intensive management regimes/ partnership arrangements with VSS and strong technological/ financial support and appropriate tenurial/ institutional mechanisms;
- Cultivated bamboo is found in Orissa as in NE States; Agro-climatic conditions are suitable for cultivation of bamboo in home-stead and on farms

as in Assam to increase its share in total bamboo production in the state; Orissa has a strong agricultural tradition; this should be taken advantage of to aggressively promote bamboo cultivation in bamboo-deficit districts and where bamboo artisans live and practice their craft; there is a strong case to aggressively promote bamboo cultivation in the state as an alternative to secure bamboo from forests to ensure easy access, create alternate resource base, alleviate poverty, promote livelihood, micro-enterprises in rural areas and promote trade and commerce led by bamboo like other agri-commodities i.e. tea, coffee;

- Orissa has a significant population with skills in bamboo working; About 25,000 bamboo artisans are identified engaged in the trade and more than 60,000 people were engaged in bamboo operations in the forests; their livelihood would be secured by paying attention to bamboo sector development; by imparting training to them with better skills and use of better tools and techniques, their income and employment status can be improved; some of the artisans could be sent to Tripura for training and acquiring new skills; Orissa has a tradition of handicrafts and handlooms, such traditions could be developed and pursued in bamboo sector as well
- Adequate degraded forests and community land are available for restoration and for improving agricultural production/ productivity and securing income and employment to poor people below the poverty line; bamboo plantation raising could be taken up in a big way as a poverty reduction strategy and securing and

improving livelihood status of 17 million poor in the districts;

- Orissa is relatively peaceful and civil unrest, strife and insurgency is unknown; (unlike NE region states); bamboo led growth opportunities in rural areas benefiting rural poor and marginalised will further strengthen the economic base in backward districts where occasional Maoist activities are surfacing;
- Orissa does not suffer from geographical isolation, remoteness, lack of infrastructural facilities, absence of economic opportunities like the NE region contributing to its backwardness and developmental lag; Orissa's high level poverty incidence, low HDI, developmental lag are due to other reasons being separately addressed; bamboo plantation raising, bamboo harvesting, and bamboo micro-enterprises in the districts will be an effective poverty alleviation strategy and counter environmental degradation benefiting the rural poor;
- In Orissa situation, there is good access to market, upswing in tribal way of life and entrepreneurship, easy access to technology input, low wage rate and abundant readily available skilled and unskilled labour.
- Orissa has a bamboo -mat factory like the Cosmcraft Industries of Meghalaya, which needs support and regular supply of bamboo
- Orissa Government and the people of the state, like some of the NE states must accord a priority to bamboo which is a rich resource having very high potential for promoting pro-poor growth and improving rural economy and as a industrial high-value product linked to export. Orissa has a long coast-line and

many ports; Orissa has a maritime tradition and now exports mineral ores and fishery products; bamboo and high-value products can be exported as well;

- Orissa Government must show commitment to this sector by enunciating a State Policy on Bamboo to guide the development of this sector; (like Mizoram)

Building Strategy for Bamboo based Livelihood

It is found from existing bamboo practices, strategic interventions can be made at three levels of use of bamboo: handicrafts for home use, in small and medium enterprises, and then in industrial activities. In order to make it a commercially viable activity, all these stages need to be looked into. However, given the existing situation, where bamboo activities are mainly craft based, the scope of this exercise is to cover bamboo crafts for livelihood generation. Obviously, sustainable livelihood requires graduation from craft to industrial activities. But industrial development in bamboo sector, or for that matter any traditional sector will depend upon the following factors:

- local initiative and will to work along new lines;
- commercial know-how
- capital/money

In rural Orissa, all those factors are scarce, one can mobilise capital, but the rest have to be local, or else, the local poor will be alienated from the industrial process which will not link to their livelihood generation. In order to make a dent in poverty, industrialization is the obvious route, but to look for opportunities for industrial activities, will mean initially to at least look for activities in which there is some tradition or learning, and to build on them. Therefore the three

stages need to be covered in a progressive order. First, to find out what people are already doing to earn their livelihood (handicraft), help them do those better to meet their needs which means to help them to advance from material production into the successive stage of processing. Second, introduce new skills, and tools to upscale the activities and upgrade the products for better income, and the third, introduce technology in order to produce new articles (industrial material) for market beyond them.

However, the strategy being suggested here covers bamboo crafts at the primary level with direction to graduate to industry sooner than later. The bamboo craft based livelihood is complex. In order to untangle the complexity, the strategy needs to be three pronged:

- At community level - handling issues of raw materials, capacity building, skill up gradation, product development, appropriate technology, local organisations, and so on.

- At government level - Defining and refining policies to tackle issues of plantation, infrastructure, institutionalisation, supply of bamboo.
- An interface level - Establishing CBOs to link the community with the government schemes, to create awareness and opportunities, to disseminate appropriate knowledge, to promote market linkages until the clusters/SHGs mature into self-reliant units.

Conclusion

With unlimited horizons and promising avenues bamboo challenges organisations like Pradan to collaborate with organisations like National Mission on Bamboo Applications, International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) and Orissa Bamboo Development Agency (OBDA) to promote sustainable livelihoods for the target communities

A Different Learning Experience

Sumanta Adhikari

A tentative beginning becomes a fulfilling and rewarding journey of empowering the community.

Making the right move

I belong to Midnapur, a district town of West Bengal. My father works as a clerk with the Midnapur Collector's office and my mother is a housewife. I have a sister, who is pursuing the first year of her B.A. programme, and a brother, who is in Standard 10. I graduated with a Masters degree in Botany and Forestry from Vidyasagar University in 2007. I was recruited by Pradan from the campus. At that time, I did not know much about Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), what they did or their ways of working. The first time I heard about Pradan was when it was to come to our college campus for recruitment. I surfed through the organisation's website to learn more about it. My maternal uncle had heard about Pradan from one of his relatives at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, and encouraged me to give it a try. I decided to join Pradan but was not too sure what to expect and had my doubts if I would continue there for long. My parents had given me the freedom to choose my own path, and, when I decided to work with Pradan, my family supported my decision.

On 2 November 2007 I started my journey from Midnapur to Dumka, Jharkhand, where I was to be posted. On the way, when we stopped at the Durgapur bus stand I realised that two of my bags containing my original documents were stolen. I felt lost and did not know what to do. The place was unfamiliar and the people were strangers, but I had to get my documents. All my hard-earned certificates, accumulated over several years, were in the lost bags. I ran from pillar to post asking everyone possible if they had seen my bags, but all in vain. I went to the police station to lodge a complaint against the theft.

Then I called Pradan's Dumka office. I spoke to Mr Jibdas Sahu and he suggested that I get to Dumka immediately. I was not expecting such a composed response. I had expected him to be enraged with me for losing such important documents. Instead, the manner in which he spoke to me over the phone helped calm me down. Though I had just lost some of my valuables, I was happy to have made the right decision and was getting an opportunity to meet and work with genuinely kind and gentle people.

Being a part of Pradan

During my first few days, I visited a number of villages where I attended Self Help Group (SHG) meetings and witnessed the functioning of lift irrigation projects and watersheds. I also observed other activities such as *tasar* plantation, pre-cocoon and post-cocoon activities related to *tasar*, integrated natural resource management-based activities, land and water development, orchard plantation and so on. The first SHG meeting that I attended was with the members of the Beliphool *Mahila Mandal* at Baskia. I was amazed by the fact that the women had around Rs 20,000 in their group's bank account and that they had achieved this by saving just Rs 10 each week. The previous year, they had even repaid a loan of Rs 22,000 to the bank. After the meeting, they sang a song in *Santhali* that they had composed themselves. I could not understand the words but the tune was very melodious. Later, they explained to me that it was a song of gratitude composed for Pradan for all the support and help that they had received from it. I saw the women actively participate in their group meeting, during which they discussed their savings, loans and other issues that concerned them. Each woman

expressed her views and opinions. I had never expected tribal women to be so vocal and knowledgeable because I had carried my own prejudices about them. I was amazed to see the kind of respect they gave to the Pradan professionals, and the way Pradan's staff worked to support these women. I began feeling proud to be a part of the organisation.

Pradan's objective of grooming young people and motivating them to engage with poor rural women is noteworthy. The whole process has imbued me with a lot of energy and enthusiasm to work at the grassroots. I find the SHG programme and working with tribal communities, especially women, the most interesting. It is a learning experience to see how small groups of women in villages can help each other overcome economic and social problems. During my first few days at Pradan, I visited Raneshwar with one of my senior colleagues to get orientated with SHGs. I was amazed to see the excitement of all the women there who had gathered to form a *mahila mandal* of their own. To facilitate this process, a few women from the older SHGs from the nearby areas also assembled there. These women shared their experiences as SHG members and explained the benefits that they have derived by being a part of such women's collective. They said that their SHG, or *mahila mandal* as they call it, had helped them take care of their household needs, children's education and overcome the exploitation by rich moneylenders. As the women discussed their concerns in *Santhali*, I sat listening to them quietly. Though I hardly understood their language, I sensed the energy and excitement that they felt within on coming together as a collective and deliberating on issues that concerned them. These were rural poor women in the most remote areas of Jharkhand, for whom hoping for a better way of life had always seemed a distant dream.

However, with support from neighbouring women and guidance from Pradan, they now felt that they could overcome all odds. At the end of the meeting, the members of the newly formed *mahila mandal* said, "If Pradan and all our fellow women are with us, we can surely solve our problems." It gave me immense happiness to know how much they respected and looked up to Pradan.

Pradan has been working in Dumka since 1995 to promote better livelihoods amongst the rural poor. The formation of women's SHGs is central to its approach. Promoting and nurturing them, linking mature SHGs to banks for providing livelihood related credit, designing systems and processes for livelihood planning and helping in the implementation of these are part of Pradan's livelihoods promotion strategy. Pradan works with 348 SHGs in 36 clusters across 4 blocks. The team is engaged in *tasar* sericulture, horticulture, agriculture, and land- and water-related activities. At present, I am engaged in nurturing SHGs and in other livelihoods-related activities such as cultivation of *kharif* paddy and vegetables, promoting cultivation of paddy by the system of rice intensification (SRI) method, activities related to *tasar* cultivation, including basic seed grainage, seed crop rearing, commercial rearing and nursery preparation of Arjuna trees. I am working with 19 SHGs spread over ten villages in two clusters – Dhankutta and Jhikra. The Dhankutta cluster had 8 SHGs and the Jhikra cluster had 11 SHGs. Most of the groups I work with are around two to three months old, though some of them were around six months old.

Earlier this year, I was asked by my team to promote new groups in and around Butberia village. Butberia is situated 17 km away from Kathikund Block and is popular as an

important seed crop zone for pre-cocoon activity. From 2007 onwards, the villagers have been engaged in *tasar* activity promoted by Pradan, but even till March 2008 there was no SHG there. People here mostly belong to the *Santhal*, *Paharia* and *Lohar* communities. The area is underprivileged and no other NGOs have initiated any intervention here.

Facilitating a Process

For the first time, I was stepping forward to form an SHG. In early April 2008, I called for a meeting in the village so that I could give the villagers some idea about SHGs. They seemed excited even as they patiently listened to the ideas that I shared with them about SHGs, their functions and the possible benefits they could derive from them. I shared with them the fact that being a part of such a group would enable them to support each other in times of crises. It would also allow them to meet their financial needs by enabling them to make regular savings, practise inter-lending and form links with banks. In turn, the villagers responded by saying that an SHG in their village would create emotional support and build solidarity among them. In order to give them some exposure to SHGs, I took them for a visit to the Cluster Shivar at Manjla Sarwapani, 7 km away from Kathikund block. Twenty-four women and five men from Butberia village accompanied me. Around 350 women from the Cluster Shivar put up cultural programmes for the people from Butberia and also shared their experiences with them. The visitors from Butberia saw how vocal and confident these women were. As they recounted incidents from their lives, they expressed how the formation of SHGs in their village had helped them overcome a lot of difficulties. They now had their own savings, from which they could easily take loans in times of need and plan their livelihood activities in a more organised way. On returning home, the people of Butberia too

decided to bring about changes in their lives by forming an SHG in their village. I felt very happy that, as a development professional, I was able to facilitate a process of change and well being for the rural poor of Butberia.

By mid-April 2008, *Gulabi Phool Mahila Mandal* was formed in Butberia with 11 members. Around the same time, I planned a training programme at Butberia to make the SHG members familiar with model group behaviour and meeting processes. I planned to focus mainly on three concepts:

- Significance of sitting in a circle during group meetings
- Responsibilities of every member
- Speaking one at a time

Through my various experiences of attending and facilitating SHG meetings, I realized that these concepts were pertinent to the members to enable them to manage their group. With help from Manishankar, Arpon and Shreesh, my colleagues, I designed a training module for which I also drew from one of Pradan's training modules for SHG members called Membership Training. I was keen on using games and other such methods by which they could 'learn by doing'. This would enable the group members to grasp the messages I wanted to convey more easily and it would also have a long lasting impact on their memory.

In the first session, I made the group members sit in a circle and then rearranged them in a manner whereby some members were facing the centre of the circle and the others sat facing outwards. I made a few women sit in the centre of this circle. Then I instructed the women sitting inside the circle to execute their meeting and carry out their regular savings related activities. The other women had to watch and listen carefully. After a few minutes

the women who were facing outwards said that they were unable to see any of the processes, such as the collection of money, happening within the group. Through this exercise, the women understood that unless they could all view the proceedings there would be no discipline and they would not be able to participate effectively. However, if they were to all sit in a circle, facing inwards, discussions could take place and decisions could be taken more effectively. Each member of the group would be able to witness the group activity and participate. This process would also enable each member to be aware of all financial transactions being carried out within the group.

In the next session, I asked the group members to stand in a circle and hold hands. One member was made to stand inside the circle and another member outside the circle. The member standing outside was to try and catch the one inside the circle, while all the others were to save her from being caught. During the discussion that followed this session, we likened the person outside the circle to moneylenders who were always trying to catch hold of people and harm them by enforcing high rates of interest. However, if a group of women got together to form an SHG they could protect each other by generating savings and giving loans at low interest rates.

In the next exercise I asked for three volunteers and instructed them to speak on three different topics. They spoke at the same time without heeding the other two. The rest of the members were asked to listen to them carefully. After a few minutes, the group members responded by saying that they could not understand a word of what the three women were saying. This was the first time the women had raised their views on their own without my facilitation. I realized that

the members of this SHG were now taking action as a group, without my help. It was a moment of sheer satisfaction for me. Ending the exercise, I explained that a group meeting is more effective when one person speaks at a time. This enables everybody to understand each person's views and opinions. Thus, each person can participate in the discussion without getting into unnecessary quarrels.

The training generated a lot of discussion among the women. They reflected on some issues that were pertinent to them as a group and as members. Later they expressed their gratitude to me for helping them understand their SHG better. They assured me that this would help them carry out their functions as SHG members in a more efficient manner. For me, it was a learning experience. I had wanted to take on a new challenge and, with the support from my team mates, had successfully done so. This experience gave me a lot of confidence and feeling of achievement. By the end of April 2008, the *Gulabi Phool Mahila Mandal* had generated savings of more than Rs 900. Now, its members have already started discussing the possibility of linking their group with a bank. Since most of the groups that I am currently engaged with are relatively new and in their initial stages, it is too early to boast that they are running smoothly or that they have taken charge of themselves. However, I am certain that in a year or two I will surely see these groups taking charge of their own development, functioning as well-managed, self-governed collectives. Till then, I shall commit myself to nurturing them and giving them all the inputs which will enable them to become well-performing SHGs, which will serve as models for other groups in the area.

Moving Forward

Having studied Botany and Forestry, I was not sure when I joined whether I would be able

to contribute much to Pradan or to the rural poor of Dumka. During my initial days, whenever I went to attend a meeting in any of the villages I used to keep quiet, not knowing what would be the right thing to say, or fearing that I would say something wrong. However, now I feel confident about the work that I am doing, and during meetings I communicate comfortably with all. Moreover, I am also making progress day-by-day with the Santhali language, and some of the SHG members have told me that I am picking it up quite well. These are moments of pleasure

that help keep me going and keep me innovating new ideas. The work environment in Pradan is another motivating factor for me. I get immense support from all my team-mates and as well as the space and independence to do new things. With confidence thus gained, I plan to expand the SHG programme within Jhikra cluster and also form a new cluster in this area. Being part of Pradan allows me to contribute both qualitatively and quantitatively to the deprived and marginal communities, and this gives me a much-valued sense of achievement.

The Early Days of Pradan

T.K. Mathew

Since its inception, Pradan has enlarged the scope and potential of the NGO sector.

In the late 70s, I worked with ASSEFA (Association for Sarva Seva Farms) at their Executive Coordinators' office at Gandhi Smarak Nidhi in Delhi. The office initially functioned from a garage. One day Kamala Chowdhary, an advisor to the Ford Foundation, braving heavy rains, visited me at my 'garage office'. I remember, she virtually jumped out of her chair when she saw a rat, which had scampered in from the outside to escape the rain. We coexisted with wildlife and nature! After all, the programme we were pursuing focussed on *bhoodan* and *gramdan*, and the poor and illiterate landless, who survived in adverse conditions and deprivation.

Kamala Chowdhary had been briefed by Dr. M.S. Swaminathan about land under *bhoodan*. The purpose of her visit was to assess the potential of using *bhoodan* lands and *gramdan* villages for the greening of India, with which ASSEFA had been working in these areas in cooperation with the Bhoodan Boards. At that time, she was trying to establish, or had just established, the Wasteland Development Society.

Through this visit, ASSEFA became connected with the Ford Foundation, and through Kamala Chowdhary with Deep Joshi. We got to know Vijay Mahajan, a graduate of IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) and IIM (Indian Institute of Management), who was disillusioned with the corporate sector, after a commercial stint with Philips, and felt an urge to do something different—not just for his sense of personal satisfaction, but also to legitimize the state's expenditure on him at IIT and IIM. He felt the poor of India had a stake in the state's investment in making him a technologist and manager.

To Serve the Poor

At the very same time, Deep Joshi, who was then working at the Ford Foundation, had encountered the Sukhomajri project and was nursing a desire to engage himself in the larger interest of the poor of India, albeit in a professional environment. It appeared, Deep and Vijay shared some similar thoughts and had met, discussed and planned a strategy to provide young professionals and managers an alternative career path, which would not only give them job satisfaction but also give them an incentive to reach out and serve the lowly, needy and deserving poor of India. This would save these young professionals from the frustration and disillusionment of being in the corporate sector and not serving the national interest adequately.

If I remember right, the first meeting took place between Vijay, Deep, S. Loganathan and me at the office of M.C.B. Nath of Foundation to Aid Industrial Recovery (FAIR). At this meeting we discussed the potential of ASSEFA playing host to young professionals, with a view to phase them into the social sector. ASSEFA would be supported by Ford Foundation in this innovative approach.

In principle, this was acceptable to ASSEFA, which had begun to expand beyond Tamil Nadu with support from the European Commission (EU). Professionalism was becoming a prerequisite in the management of the EU-funded projects, as also for the growth, development and diversification of ASSEFA. We were, however, undecided as to how young professionals, with better remuneration packages and different styles of functioning, were to be integrated into NGO structures, which are largely governed by a

set of charismatic persons and are on a totally different plane of ideology and approach.

Although this issue remained unresolved, a proposal was submitted to the Ford Foundation to engage young professionals in a three-year experiment at professionalizing NGOs. ASSEFA was chosen as a pilot, entrusted with providing young professionals the experience of working in an NGO and the NGO an opportunity to understand their professional needs and accommodate them.

The Ford Foundation required clearance from the Union Ministry of Rural Development to provide the grant for the pilot project. The ministry did not show great enthusiasm in clearing the proposal because some of those under investigation by the Kudal Inquiry Commission were the board members of ASSEFA. Hence, the Ford Foundation diplomatically withdrew from the project to avoid possible embarrassment, should the ministry not clear the proposal. The project was thus delayed. ASSEFA then offered Vijay a chance to join ASSEFA and work with it in North India along with me, the Executive Coordinator, Delhi.

Pradan Established

While Vijay was working at ASSEFA, the idea of forming a platform for young professionals in the social sector was being continuously deliberated. Consequently, PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) was established and registered as a society under the Societies Registration Act.

Since there were no resources to fall back on, and the Ford Foundation grant was not immediately forthcoming, alternatives had to be resorted to. I offered my residence as the registered address to enable Pradan to be registered as a society. This I did in my personal capacity. I also drafted the initial

bylaws, though these were improved upon before the application for registration was submitted to the Registrar of Societies.

ASSEFA provided a free space for Pradan to establish itself in Delhi and also extended a loan of Rs. 45,000 to meet the initial establishing expenses and other needs, which amount was later returned.

In the meantime, three more IIT graduates, M.P. Vasimalai, Achintya Ghosh and Ved Arya, showed their inclination to join the social sector under the flag of Pradan. All three were absorbed by ASSEFA, in its outfits in Tamil Nadu, Bihar and Rajasthan.

Once the Pradan Society was registered, the Ford Foundation was approached for support again. This time the scope of the project was expanded to include placing 'action consultants' in Mysore Rehabilitation and Development Association (MYRADA), ASSEFA and India Development Society (IDS).

As Pradan was awaiting approval from Ford Foundation, those who were working for Pradan continued to be enrolled as ASSEFA staff. The founding members of Pradan were Aloysius Fernandes (Chairman), S. Loganathan (Vice Chairman), T.K. Mathew (Treasurer) and Col. B.L. Verma, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Ravi Zutshi and Vatsala Nagarajan (members).

The Ford Foundation initially extended support to Pradan for three years, and extended for a further three years. Over time, Pradan extended its reach to other NGOs in Karnataka, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Beyond Action Consultancy

In the first phase, Pradan's action consultants were placed in various NGOs. Among them Ved Arya was with ASSEFA in Rajasthan; Teji Bhojal with Mahiti in Kutch, Gujarat; Chittaroopa

Palit with Mahila Jagaran in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh; Raja Menon with Central India Initiative CINI; and Neelima Khetan with Anand Niketan (later known as Seva Mandir) in Rajasthan.

The concept of Pradanites working as action consultants in various NGOs caught on and Pradanites found the number of hosts increasing. However, something was bothering them. Their dream for their profession was not becoming a reality. The professional space and recognition they desired was not forthcoming since Pradanites were not structurally infused into the NGOs. They felt like aliens and this was reflected when they met and discussed their career paths. There was not much opportunity or freedom for innovation or experimentation. This was largely due to the make up of the NGOs, their dependence on charismatic leaders and, perhaps, the conservative outlook of social service providers.

The professional growth of Pradanites and their career paths within other NGOs became an issue of discussion and debate. The subservient role they were forced to play, the lack of opportunities to lead, or to become the Head of a NGO as a natural course of growth were not acceptable to the enthusiastic Pradanites. Moreover, except for two to three large NGOs, the other hosts were small and of recent origin. The differing cultural background and the unipolar structures of single person-led NGOs did not offer scope for the professional growth of Pradanites.

Independent Operator

In the second phase of Pradan, therefore, it gave up its initial pursuit of placing people to work in NGOs as action consultants and became an organization operating independently. We debated extensively on

issues relating to Pradan's identity and capabilities and on the factors that were in Pradan's favour. It was finally concluded that Pradan should establish itself as an independent operator, as there was plenty of scope for the same, especially in the sphere of livelihoods generation.

The NGOs had been viewing Pradan as an agency supplying professionals and were happy with this role. However, real professional integration was not taking place. Pradan's vision was not fructifying in the affiliated NGOs. When Pradan did not respond adequately to the NGOs demands for more professionals, they started directly recruiting professionals from the same source from where Pradanites were being recruited.

At this stage, a policy decision was taken to launch an independent mode of functioning without completely severing connections with the NGOs so as to test the waters and experience the changeover. This resulted in James (Jimmy) Mascarenhas, Neelima and Raja staying on with MYRADA, Seva Mandir and CINI, respectively. Vijay Mahajan, Ved Arya, M.P. Vasimalai and Achintya Ghosh moved out to operate independently under the Pradan banner. Pradan's first project was at Kesla, Madhya Pradesh in the year 1985. The leather tanning and *tasar* silkworm production projects came next, both of which focused on generation of livelihoods in the non-farm sector, a pet idea of Vijay Mahajan, who was leading Pradan as Executive Director. A project involving working with the government and capacity building of *panchayat* officials was launched in Alwar, Rajasthan. Lift irrigation projects were introduced in Bihar and West Bengal.

A decade later, women empowerment programmes were launched that promoted empowerment through self-help groups

(SHGs), thrift and credit, micro-finance and micro enterprises. These were initiated, to begin with, in Tamil Nadu and later in all geographical areas in India. A programme for village tank renovation and community mobilization was also launched in South India.

Over the years, some Pradanites have moved on and are leading well-known organizations. These include Vijay Mahajan (who is with BASIX); Vasimalai (the Development of Humane Action (DHAN) Foundation); Ved Arya (Srijan); Biswajit Sen (involved in a number of ventures in Lucknow); and Pramod Kulkarni (with Prerana in Raichur).

Outcomes of the Pradan Experience

There were several outcomes of the Pradan experience. Initially, the NGO sector gave the much needed platform for Pradanites to launch themselves. Pradanites learnt about

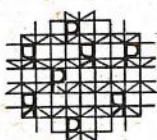
community mobilization and project administration from the NGOs. At the same time, the NGOs got an opportunity to become more professional in their approach. Interventions in the non-farm sector and collaborations with the government and community-based credit institutions enlarged the scope and potential of the NGO sector.

Pradanites found their vocation in serving the poor in their habitat so that the latter could earn a decent living without being subservient to any NGO or corporate structure. Pradanites could now pursue their own careers without the frustrations associated with the corporate sector. They could also contribute to nation building, returning to the nation, in ample measure, the investment made by the state on the training of professionals.

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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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