

NewsReach

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October 2001

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Learning Livelihood

Reflections on developing a training module to understand livelihoods from the point of view of the affected families

Dinabandhu Karmakar

THIS ARTICLE is an effort to organise my thoughts and experiences on conducting training modules to understand livelihoods. About 2 years ago I conducted an event at Gumla to understand the reasons for low cropping coverage of the lift irrigation (LI) command area. Our colleagues working with irrigated agriculture were concerned to find that poor families often failed to increase productivity despite irrigation support. The 11 participants were mostly from our Gumla team. At that time we had no output formats to capture data.

The day before the exercise we went on a field visit in the afternoon. In the evening we met all the family members of selected WUA (water users' association) members to ensure they were available on the next day. Our purpose was to conduct a dialogue with the selected WUA members to gather data on:

- ◆ The economic history of the families;
- ◆ Family resources such as

land, water, trees, livestock and family members and their present use and potential;

- ◆ Other income sources;
- ◆ Expenditure (including expenditure they wanted to but could not make) and annual income;
- ◆ Vulnerabilities of the sources of income;
- ◆ Priorities of the family to make investments and,
- ◆ Planning with the families to make changes in their economic situation.

We had to complete the event in one and a half days. I found that providing lunch could actually ensure attendance and involve people for a daylong intensive interaction with outsiders.

Working Hypothesis

I proposed a first exercise of exploring the economic history of the families as an icebreaker. The hypothesis was that it would help build a better rapport if we could genuinely convey to the participants that we are interested in listening to them. We thought it would help us to get into their frame of ref-

erence in an effective manner.

The hypothesis worked well. We got to know how a child grew up to take responsibility of a family. We learnt about the support system they had and how they overcame various odds. We found out about their natural proclivities and logic when compelled to choose a particular option in confusing situations. We also learnt how they spent their surpluses.

This exercise revealed their coping mechanisms and entrepreneurial abilities. It helped ascertain their capacity to generate resources in emergencies and clarified why they do not opt for a particular decision that seems obvious to us as outsiders.

I thought all this information could be creatively used later in the exercise. For instance, if we understood their proclivities, we would be in a better position to understand why they treat an available resource in a particular way. Also, attentive and active listening made the family enthusiastic enough to take us around their household and show us their resources, which was next on our agenda.

We also observed that the quality of data of those who did not go through this exercise was much poorer. Those of us who directly started to prepare an expenditure-income statement generated options which were often whimsical and not likely to be taken up by the families on their own.

The second exercise helped us to get an idea of their perception about the potential of their resources. We found how their perception of a particular resource influences the management of that resource. It also revealed all the factors they consider before they invest in a particular resource. We

learnt about the measures they undertook and the risks they anticipated. A visit to their resources along with family members clearly showed the priorities of the family.

The exercise of preparing an expenditure-income statement of the family helped us to look at how a family manages its cash flow. It provided insights on when they generate surpluses and when they regulate consumption or use buffers to manage deficits. The exercise also vividly revealed their standard of living and growth needs.

We have promoted LI so that farmers go in for intensive agriculture. But very few members of our WUAs considered land under the LI command area as a priority asset.

When we looked at the vulnerabilities of the resources and sources of income, we saw what happens to the family when primary sources of livelihoods fail to generate expected incomes. Generally people draw their picture based on the experience of a normal year. But the situation could be very different in an abnormal year. This also provides the magnitude of the problems we need to address in order to stabilise livelihoods.

Finally, when we looked at the priorities of the family in the context of enhancing or stabilising incomes, people clearly pointed out the activities they would opt for. At Gumla we could not conduct the planning exercise due to time con-

straints.

We had thought that each of us would try to develop a package for the families we interacted with so that a plan based on this analysis would enable those families in the WUA to farm successfully in the LI command area. This exercise remained incomplete because I had no time.

Voicing Concerns

At the end of the day, my colleagues in the Gumla team voiced a concern that the entire exercise was too time consuming and not practicable in our day to day work situation.

I requested that they continue the exercise. I reasoned that it might take longer but with practice we could develop the right tools to diagnose the situations. I was also not convinced that this could not be practised in our day to day work situation. What else do we do when we talk to our self-help groups (SHGs)? Is it not possible to pick up some family whenever we visit the community and talk to them in depth?

After all we have promoted LI expecting that anybody who has land under the command area would go in for intensive agriculture. But very few members of our WUAs considered land under the LI command area as a priority asset.

During the exercise our colleagues learnt for the first time many things about those families that actually affected command area coverage. For instance there were families who opted for wage employment despite having 2 *bighas* of irrigated land.

I discovered that our intervention was based only on the available physical resources and paper-based ownership of

the people. The assumption that anybody who has got land would practice agriculture does not hold true. Infrastructure development is only a part and is often inadequate and sometimes unnecessary when we target a specific group of people.

At the time, Pradan, as a member of Sa-Dhan (a network of community based micro-finance institutions of which Pradan is a founder member) was given the responsibility to offer something to the training programme it was going to conduct for some other organisations. My colleague Soumen asked me whether this exercise would help participants to understand the credit needs of SHG members. My response was in the affirmative.

Soumen then suggested that we conduct a trial once again with some of our more experienced colleagues before we involve participants attending Sa-Dhan's training programme.

Broader Agenda

Thus the second time I conducted this exercise was with a broader agenda of understanding livelihood and its linkage with credit. We conducted the exercise in a village at Karra in Ranchi district. Soumen, Manas, Satya, Ajit, Anirban, Sujata, Haldhar, Rajesh, Surjit, Yatesh and a few other colleagues participated in this event.

While introducing the exercise I delineated the 5-6 broad steps mentioned earlier. I requested everybody to interact with selected families and come up with alternative options as an output of joint planning. I assumed that the family could make a plan with necessary help from our colleagues.



I also shared a hypothetical expenditure-income analysis of a family. It was presented both in tabular and graphical formats. I pointed out that when we propose any change in the deployment of family labour, we must check its effect on other sources of income that might actually be using the same "family labour days" to ensure the present family income. The change ought to be positive.

I thought my responsibility was over with that. As most participants had spent an average 4-5 years in grassroots action, I assumed that they would carry out the exercise on their own and confirm the validity of the concept and the process.

But things were not so simple. Questions were raised about the expected output at every step of the exercise and on processes to follow to get the expected output. People wanted to know the kind of questions to ask in order to help villagers get to the real issues. I was at a loss. We spent about 3 hours to sort out the issues raised by my colleagues.

We then went to the village. The villagers welcomed us with tribal rituals. Not a single dancer was out of step, not a single guest was treated differ-

ently or left out. But I was unsure of my role. But the strength of Pradanites came to the fore. They immediately engaged the selected families in the exercise.

There were about 10 groups of 2 Pradanites and 2-3 families each from the village. I had thought that the groups should sit near to each other so that I could extend assistance in case they needed it.

The hamlet was about a kilometre long and at the end of the day I discovered I spent most of my time running from one end to the other. As a result, I could spend very little time with the groups to facilitate the 2-day exercise.

Differing Approaches

When we congregated at the end of the first day, I discovered that each one of us had followed their own way to look at the issues. Outputs varied from one group to the other. Most of it was incomplete even as far as the process was concerned. Some had spent all their time in preparing the income statement. Others did different things.

The next day we consulted some groups who felt it would be better if we sat with them in

People's responses may not be organised according to the required sequence but they should be organised while processing the data. Forcing people to follow the sequence may hinder the natural flow of interaction. It might even turn into an interrogation.

their homes to ensure privacy. I agreed, but remained undecided on the design of the training situation. The resource person needs to keep a close watch on how things are progressing. But at the same time, the concerned family may feel more at ease to talk in their house.

We spent some time to review the event at the end of the exercise. Most participants clearly conveyed that they would not encourage any colleagues to attend if the event was to be conducted in this fashion. But some said that they got a deeper insight in areas which otherwise would appear very simple.

Discouraged by the experience I thought I would not take any initiative to spread my "knowledge". But when Soumen asked the others whether they found any wisdom in the whole process, everyone responded positively. It helped to get my confidence back and I started to listen to them.

Design Formats

My colleagues suggested that I develop output formats to guide and capture the data of each exercise. It was a useful

suggestion. I came back to Purulia and spent a day to develop the formats.

Manas suggested that I use cards to capture the 'hopes' and 'fears' of participants at the beginning of the programme. Both Soumen and Manas went through the formats and suggested changes. The learning from our Field Guides Development Programme conducted by Sukhvarsha and Deepanker Roy, particularly the counselling skills and knowledge, was introduced as a part of the orientation.

On completing each format the trainees were expected to draw certain conclusions about their understanding of the subject. My assumption was that the level of understanding one reaches through this exercise would indicate how far one has understood the frame of reference of the individual families, which in turn would indicate "where they are".

Fashioning Tools

I followed a particular sequence to design the output formats. This sequence needs to be strictly followed. The responses of the people may not be organised according to this sequence but they should be organised while processing the data. Forcing people to follow the sequence may hinder the natural flow of interaction. It might even turn into an interrogation.

The sequence starts with family economic history (its story of good and bad days) after building rapport and ends with intervention plans. The final output is a plan jointly owned by the families concerned and the intervening agent.

Exploration of the family economic history helps us to iden-

tify the family in terms of motivation, entrepreneurial ability, proclivity in making choices, ability to generate resources in emergencies, vulnerability and primary coping mechanism.

This understanding helps us to look at the resources at the family's disposal. Families with similar access to similar resources may use them differently depending upon their identity established by the above exercise.

This is further confirmed when we take a close look at the human resources at the disposal of the family and its knowledge and skill base. This determines the family's priorities and choices when they start a new venture to improve their economic lot.

Expenditure First

The level of resource use is directly reflected in the expenditure and income of the family. There is logic behind expenditure coming before income. Economic behaviour of a poor family is rarely dependent on income. There are decisions made before any income is planned.

Certain decisions are made at the community level and families are expected to meet those expenditures independent of the income they may or may not have. There is a possibility of negotiation between the family and the community. But often families, as community members, decide to strengthen certain community norms. They are even willing to borrow money with heavy interest to fulfil these norms. We find that a family's decision on expenditure often determines the level of income it requires. It then decides

how best to attain it.

The primary purpose of looking at expenditure and income is not to acquire accurate information but to understand the unfulfilled gaps the family foresees in its growth needs. Thus we would like to look at income sources and their potential to meet the growing needs of the family. A family with a lower growth need would show a smaller gap between expenditure and income.

This is why we need not be worried if the expenditure-income exercise does not match at first go. We have to rather look at where the family is placing more emphasis to meet the gap. They may in the process go back to review their resources and add new ones or find new potential in the existing ones.

Brainstormed Inventory

Once the growth needs are understood properly, we need to help the families prepare a checklist or a kind of inventory of resources and income

sources (see box). This helps the family to review and discover new potential in their resources. Each and every resource is scanned to map its existing use, alternative use, inputs required to realise alternative uses and potential of alternative uses. This is a brainstorming exercise by the families, where the resource person plays an active role.

The ideas that are generated are then tested against the gaps identified by the families. They are expected to prioritise the resources and sources of income. This should finally be their decision and they should have a clear logic behind choosing a particular option.

The participant outsiders (who would actually be change agents back in their own organisations) should be able to establish the linkage between the family's capability, proclivity, risk-taking and entrepreneurial abilities, access to resources and linkages and their prioritising a particular option.

After this exercise the families are requested and helped to make and share detailed plans for the near future, including a timeframe; a budget; sources of funds for investment and anticipated returns. Once the plan is ready, we overlay it on the expenditure-income statement.

Experience of the 3rd Event

This event was organised as a part of Sa-Dhan's Micro-Finance Education Programme. Our Livelihood Linkage Module at Ranchi followed the Perspective Building Module. Most of the participants were experienced in their own fields. I was a little nervous because this was my first experience of facilitating an event where people came to spend time with us and paid money for it.

On the first day we responded to the participants "hopes" and "fears" cards. I introduced the formats and Soumen discussed the different skills the exercise would require.

In the evening we moved to a camp near Khunti, a beautiful Christian missionary campus 10 km away from the village we were visiting next morning. We reached the selected village on the second day. Mr. Titus, Executive Director of Sa-Dhan, delivered a speech requesting the participants to sincerely carry out the designed exercises.

From Pradan Rajesh, Ajit, Soumen and I worked as facilitators. We moved from group to group to help them interact with the families. Both men and women participated freely as we had arranged for lunch so that women were free from cooking. Also, just a week before most families had fallen ill with malaria. Our colleagues

Checklist

The following checklist sums up the exercise to see if any important area has been missed out.

- ◆ What is the entrepreneurial ability of the family?
- ◆ Major needs of the family.
- ◆ The most critical period of the year (months).
- ◆ The most reliable and often practised coping mechanism of the family.
- ◆ The most critical input the family is missing to enhance its income and livelihood.
- ◆ The relative importance of credit with respect to all the missing elements for a particular venture.
- ◆ The maximum volume of credit the family can handle properly.
- ◆ The minimum volume of credit the family immediately needs for what it thinks is a viable plan.
- ◆ The timings of credit. Does the timing ensure that the credit will not be used to meet some other emergencies of the family?
- ◆ Specific suggestions or venture the family should go in for.

at Khunti had invited doctors to treat the villagers and supplied medicine in time. This was very important. The tribal community was very co-operative for those 2 days.

The 4 Pradan resource persons were available whenever the participants needed us. We demonstrated how to keep the interaction going and how to get people to reflect upon and share their experiences in life. We helped them to look at resources. We explained the local practices. This created a good impact on the participants and they started to be at ease.

The basic focus of the exercise is to help people to understand and realise how a family perceives their situation in life. We might call it "getting into their frame of reference".

On the third day, we helped the participants process the data they had generated according to the formats. We seated them in a big classroom in the campus, helping them to work out their tasks. The completed formats were then presented before the group.

We asked the participants to present the process they have followed to arrive at the final output. About 5 groups came out with some plans. Some could not generate all the data required to support their plan. The gaps were clear in the process, which made them feel that if they could get some more time they would do the exercise again.

After the presentations we asked them to look for potential

and positive linkages among the generated options by different families that could be integrated at the community level. Although it was an intellectual exercise in the classroom with no involvement of the villagers, some participants could see potential linkages.

For instance, there was a well owner who was planning to produce vegetables with a person who was a vegetable vendor. In another example a carpenter was collaborating with a family planning to go for a timber plantation in their wasteland. Participants realised why the module was called livelihood linkages.

"Their" Frame of Reference

I think there is a danger in labelling an exercise. I am yet to find a suitable label that fully conveys the sense of this exercise. The basic focus of the exercise is to help people to understand and realise how a family perceives its situation in life. We might call it "getting into their frame of reference".

With this frame of reference, I expect development workers to initiate a process by collaborating with the family to help it to move forward. It is not just accepting what they say. There is scope of confronting them with their data.

It also involves sharing our knowledge with them to look at their resources to discover newer potential. We need to build mutual confidence and initiate joint action based on a family's original strengths, proclivities, growth needs, resource potential and capacity of the development worker. We as professionals are expected to add value to the process of change.

I will now attempt to look at

the various areas related to livelihoods. I would go by the sequence as proposed in the design.

How to initiate meaningful interaction with the family to explore past economic history:

The quality of the data generated through such interactive processes would depend much on the skills of facilitation. The first step is establishing a comfortable rapport with the family. They should feel comfortable to talk about themselves. Till they are easy and comfortable with the facilitator, they will not be able to concentrate on the process.

Some of the opening questions could be as follows. We should ask questions keeping earlier responses in mind.

◆ Tell me something about your family.

◆ Who else are there in your family?

◆ What about your parents?

◆ How far you could remember your childhood days? How were those days? (Such questions generally get a rich response).

◆ What did you do as you grew up?

◆ Have you ever migrated or been to distant places? What did you do there?

◆ Tell me something about your marriage. (Generating data on expenditure on marriage and its sources often gives good indicator of sources of fund on emergencies).

◆ Could you remember any incident that brought change in your family (either good or bad) or any incident that badly affected your family economy? How did you recover from that bad situation?

◆ Relate any incident that had positive impact on the family economy.

◆ Was there a year when the family had earned a lot? How

big was that earning and from what source?

◆ Did you sell or mortgage any assets? How large was the loss?

◆ Can you compare your past and present days?

During this dialogue the family may often mention 'what' they did in a particular situation. Asking 'how' may help us to understand the professional competence or support system and linkage of the family. Asking 'why' may help us to understand the inspiration or motivation working behind a particular action.

Active Listening

If someone already has some training in counselling she may use the skills of attending, active listening, responding and exploring to build a dialogue. In the absence of formal training, simply showing genuine interest to listen and appreciating their capacity to manage difficult situations helps the family open up and get involved.

Once they are involved and have showed a willingness to talk, we may gradually facilitate the discussion more on economic aspects instead of dispersing it on non-livelihood related issues. Picking up clues of economic importance and showing interest on those would steer the dialogue more on that direction. An example will illustrate my point.

One of my colleagues was carrying out the exercise with an elderly lady. She started narrating her childhood experiences and got lost in the sweet memories. She spent 2 hours telling how she enjoyed grazing goats and swinging from tamarind trees. My friend could not move forward to map the economic history of the family.

How to facilitate the dialogue under such circumstances?

There are lots of questions here. Did the lady receive the environment created for a serious dialogue and with clear-cut stated purpose? Was the lady otherwise a normal person concerned about family and its management issues? Could she perceive my friend as one with whom serious family issues could be discussed? If all those are affirmative then it is unlikely that the lady would behave the way she did.

Now considering that she was normal and in the right context, what kinds of question could guide the discussion to economic issues? We could ask how many goats were there. Did all the goats belong to her? Did she ever sell a goat? What was the price? What did they do with the money? Why do they keep goats? Why not cows? And so on.

There is every possibility that more economic data would have flowed in from such interventions. From there we could take it to explore the critical condition under which they had to make a distress sale. We could discuss the occasion they had to do so. Were there any other such events when they had to lose assets? I think such dialogue would help us to map family economic history.

How to find out about resources, past and present use, alternative use and potential for extending their use:

Once we have understood the economic history, we may gradually move to the present day situation. We may encourage them to compare the past and present and look for reasons for changes. At this stage families may mention their resources, particularly in the past. They may try to make us understand

Once we have understood the economic history, we may gradually move to the present day situation. We may encourage them to compare the past and present and look for reasons for the changes.

which asset provides what benefit.

This is the time we should show our interest to understand the resources better. We should let them know that it is difficult for an outsider to understand how they are qualifying and quantifying their resources without a direct look at the resources they have mentioned.

We may even request them to show us their resources. We have to be humble and request them with respect. They may hesitate if a proper rapport has not been built.

We need to be sensitive enough to pick up those signals from their body language. If required we may again need to restate our purpose of conducting this exercise. We have to create an opportunity to have detailed understanding about the potential and problems of their resources. We will not be able to move to the next phase of the exercise without proper understanding of this.

Land Resources

On the first day participants need to be briefed by the local resource persons about the basic nature of the land, its classifications, its local value, their names in local parlance,

its best potential use practised in that locality and potential use in case modern practices are applied. Average land holding may give an indication of comparative economic condition of the family. Understanding about local crops and their use are of immense help.

Showing complete ignorance and inability to confront when they casually make a statement may create great difficulties in generating quality data. On the other hand, the ability to confront could be of great help in making them take the exercise seriously. No confrontation sometimes makes the whole exercise a ridiculous one. Some smart villager may actually start playing with our ignorance.

I am suggesting the minimum areas one need be aware about. A good cultivated land where common field crops are grown (cereals, pulses and oil seeds) should be levelled and bunded, free from weeds. If the field is not ploughed, the thickness of the stubble of the previous crop may indicate the health of the previous crop. If the land is ploughed for sowing, the quality of soil preparation may indicate the ability and care in cultivation. It may also indicate their capacity to invest in land and indicate the health of animal power (bullock or other drought animal).

The use of tractor may indicate the degree of mechanisation and commercialisation of agriculture. The layout and making of irrigation channels would give an idea of how careful the farmers are in managing their water and crop.

We may dig the soil to ascertain topsoil depth. The nature of subsoil is important when we think of alternative land use by changing crops. An outsider

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may promote a new crop. Farmers may say it is not possible in their land. We need to understand the reasons.

Groundwater or access to other water sources is important when we analyse the potential of any land. The quality of available water and crops tolerance to that water is significant. Often deep underground water is salty and hampers crop growth.

Sometimes villagers fail to quantify their land. In that case we should keep in mind that one normal male (walking) footstep is generally 0.7 to 0.8 meter (2.5 feet) long. Converting footsteps into meters and multiplying length and breadth would give us area of the land in square meters.

Water Resources

We are primarily talking about irrigation and not drinking water. We have to quantify available water for irrigation and its duration. Then we have to relate it to its capacity to irrigate a crop till maturity. Although it appears to be basic often farmers fail to calculate this and invite crop failures.

We have seen in a village that everybody transplanted summer paddy because all of them had land below a tank where water can flow by gravity. They did not estimate the amount of water required. After 2 months of irrigation and good crop

growth with all other necessary inputs of fertiliser and pesticides everybody lost their crop because there was no water in the tank in the 3rd month.

Therefore when we look at water resources, we have to assess the total stock. We also need to consider any recuperation. We need to take into account losses from evaporation and deep percolation. We also need to know how much water is required for different crops in different seasons.

As a rule of thumb, a normal field may require 2-3 inches of irrigation water every week, which means 2 inches of standing water on a plot if there is no percolation. This is not always possible in a practical situation. The water could percolate down as soon as it reaches the field. But considering a properly managed irrigation system, 2-3 inches water is sufficient to irrigate 6-9 inches soil depth (root zone).

Crops with greener succulent herbaceous nature may need frequent irrigation and crops with woody stems and deeper root systems may need less frequent irrigation. A succulent crop might require 24-36 inches of irrigation. By quantifying the available water in acre-inch or decimal-inch or hectare-meter, we can estimate the potential of the water source. Any significant difference may help us to explore the reasons. There might be some local agro-climatically valid reasons. If there are no such reasons, then there is scope for improvement.

Sowing the crop in time might significantly increase the potential of water sources. In the eastern part of our country, where monsoon recedes by October, people grow paddy, which stays on the field till late November or early December. An early harvest of paddy may

significantly increase the possibility of a second crop by utilising residual moisture excess water available in this area.

Looking at Livestock

I would just like to narrate an example from Rajasthan. A family had a pair of bullocks, a cow, 6 goats and a couple of buffaloes. The family said that there were no buyers for either the bullocks or the cow during a drought situation. But the goats could be sold at Rs 1,500 each any moment. They were asked why they did not keep more goats instead of cattle? The feed consumed by those big useless animals could better be converted into valuable goats.

The immediate response was that goats do not eat dry straw as feed. They need green fodder, which is possible only through grazing. Also, to provide supplementary feed, they need to have 4 *kikar* trees for each goat. The family did not have that many *kikar* trees. The dialogue ended there. But we could have found out whether they had fallow land suitable for *kikar* plantation? Why are they keeping big animals, which compels the family to buy fodder when the stock at home is exhausted?

To get data on the expenditure on food (primarily staple), we should record the data (kind or cash) in their original units as used by the villagers. We can convert these into monetary terms when we process the data in the evenings.

To calculate cost of food items, we may ask a day's requirement in local units or kilograms and cost in Rupees for items purchased from the market. We can then multiply it by 30 to arrive at monthly food requirements.

For instance, a family may say every day it requires 2.5 kg of rice and Rs 15 to buy other necessities (oil, salt, vegetables, spices and fuel wood at the rate of one head load for 4 days). The food cost per day then adds up to Rs 45, which translates into Rs 1,350 every month.

For housing, we may ask how much they have spent last year. Farmers may reply in terms of timber, labour days and cash while building or repairing a house. We need to get this information even if the family had not repaired it in the current year but plans to do it soon.

Similarly, for clothing we can get lump sum expenditure for children and adults. Generally this expenditure coincides with some local festivals. We can identify those months.

For farming, the family may give us data on how many months they employ their family labour, how many persons they hire and what is the quantity of rice or paddy they spend for this purpose.

To get the data on income from farming, we should accept the language people use. Villagers may give amounts in terms of 'so many months food'. For example, paddy suffices for 6 months' food grain need and

maize suffices for one month. We then later get these clarified by local resource persons.

For vegetables we may ask whether they grow vegetables for selling or for home consumption. If it is for domestic consumption, getting an idea of the number of months they eat their own produce is sufficient. If they sell it, we need to ascertain the volume they sell in each market day and then find out how many such days are there in a season.

For livestock, we may ask them the number of particular livestock they have, when do they sale them and what is the average seasonal income. To assess income from migration, we may ask for the period of migration. We also need to know what do they bring from there and when.

Focus on the Family

There is nothing completely new in this exercise. All the components are included in our village study exercise, which we expect our Development Apprentices to undertake at the beginning of their exploration. Probably expecting participants to be with a family for 2 days under a training situation is something new for the people. Otherwise we already look at all the components expected in our village study exercise.

In the proposed training module I have just tried to draw our attention to the family. The assumption is that if a community development worker practises looking at the details of individual families of different economic strata and different caste, they will be in better position to understand a situation. They can then diagnose and develop more effective interventions. ■

The assumption behind this exercise is that if community development workers practise looking at the details of individual families of different economic strata and different castes, they will be in a better position to understand a situation.

Partners in Development

The collaboration between RGVN and ARIASP has emerged as an effective partnership

Alay Barah

THE WORLD Bank funded ARIASP (Assam Rural Infrastructure and Agriculture Services Project) has been under implementation since August 1995. Its main objectives are poverty alleviation with special emphasis on rural poor and women; improved nutrition; acceleration of growth in the farm sector and capacity building of state government implementing departments and other implementing agencies of ARIASP.

The project emphasises active participation of NGOs and beneficiaries in implementation. However the project did not have the desired impact in the past 5 years due to lack of NGO involvement and people's participation. Whatever activities carried out during this period were not sustained.

The World Bank review team found that unless people's participation was encouraged, it would not have any impact in alleviating poverty. This they felt was possible only by engaging NGOs in the project implementation stage. When the World Bank team was on its routine mission to review the project in February 2000, they visited Rashtriya Grameen Vikas Nidhi (RGVN) and explored the possibility of involving it as the apex NGO for ARIASP.

In May 2000, the government of Assam formally requested RGVN to submit a proposal to act as the apex NGO. RGVN was appointed for one year on an experimental basis from June

2000 to May 2001.

RGVN opened an ARIASP cell in its head office with a team of 4 members, including its director (operations) as team leader. It was a significant step towards building a partnership with the government for the first time in 10 years of its existence. The task before the team was challenging. Except the team leader no team member had any experience in working with government organisations earlier.

We were not particularly surprised to know from the people that they were not involved in the planning, implementation and sustaining of the deep tube wells and lift irrigation projects. None of them were aware about costs, amounts to be repaid to the government and other details of the schemes.

Starting Problems

The farmers were initially reluctant to co-operate with RGVN because they seemed to be confused about our role. Many officials too were not familiar with the concept of NGOs and what they could do. Nodal NGOs (partner NGOs of RGVN), whom RGVN wanted to involve as their grassroots contact point to involve people were not sure about their role. They did not want to be simply a government contractor after knowing that ARIASP projects were not doing well.

As a matter of strategy RGVN decided to restrict its role initially within 6 districts of Assam and take up irrigation projects as its major intervention. This was

done keeping in mind that the government had already invested lots of money in buying big diesel pumps for irrigation. The Rabi season was coming when farmers would need water.

There were about 40 schemes in these 5 districts, which were almost complete. The irrigation department had already formed and registered water users associations (WUAs). We had to start our work simultaneously with department officials, orienting the nodal NGOs and activating the WUAs through the NGOs. A preliminary survey and field visits established that the WUAs were not active. They were sometimes not interested in playing an active role to benefit from the pumps provided to them. The reasons included:

- ◆ The pump was not covering the command area of due to insufficient canals;
- ◆ WUA members were not aware about the cost of the pump, pump house and canal;
- ◆ They were not aware about their role and responsibilities to operate and maintain the pumps and the sharing of water;
- ◆ They were not involved in the planning stage;
- ◆ They knew of neither the repayment liability nor the basis of calculation.

It was therefore necessary that while motivating the farmers, the nodal NGOs themselves should have some firsthand experience of successful irrigation projects implemented by either the government or the NGOs. There was a provision in the ARIASP budget for an expo-

sure trip for WUA members, officials and NGO personnel. We planned 2 exposure trips.

The first exposure trip was organised in Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh. A team of about 65 people comprising farmers, officials and NGO representatives were taken for a 10-day trip to show how the Andhra government had implemented large successful irrigation projects for farmers. The exposure trip opened the eyes of the Assam irrigation officials who saw how their counterparts in another state have provided such services to farmers.

The trip did not help the farmers much in terms of maintenance and operation of schemes as the projects we visited were large and mostly government maintained. However they learnt how local farmers shared water. The first trip was co-ordinated by the irrigation department.

Learning from Pradan

The second exposure trip was co-ordinated by RGVN in February 2001 in collaboration with Pradan. Since we had some feedback from the earlier trip, we wanted to ensure that this time the farmers, NGOs and officials get ideas about how an irrigation project could be planned, implemented and run on a sustainable basis by the people themselves. We selected Pradan's Godda project for the exposure trip.

We learnt a lot from the Godda trip. It helped farmers, officials and NGOs to understand the entire process of minor lift irrigation (LI) projects. We at RGVN wanted to make sure that this learning were translated into action projects. We organised a feedback session with the project director of ARIASP where RGVN, irrigation officials, farmers and NGO representatives made pre-

sentations on their learning and emphasised that minor LI schemes could be tried out under ARIASP. They also justified their argument in the context of reducing project costs, maintenance, operation and water sharing by the farmers.

At the same time we also sought to revitalise the existing WUAs, strengthen their organisation, maintenance of accounts, roles and responsibilities of members and loan repayment. We organised training programmes for farmers where the farmers who had gone to Godda shared their experience visiting the Pradan project.

The local farmers were motivated to go in for minor irrigation schemes. However it was not possible to go back to minor schemes where pumps were already purchased. The ARIASP Society agreed to consider minor irrigation schemes for those schemes where pumps were not purchased.

We continued to persuade ARIASP that minor irrigation schemes (5-10 HP pumps) could be tried out as far as remaining new schemes are concerned. Nodal NGOs started organising people at the village level and people got interested in minor irrigation projects. The NGOs shared the experience of the visit in the monthly review meeting with ARIASP.

RGVN organised a workshop in August as a follow up of work done in the field. This was done to plan for minor irrigation projects along the lines of Pradan's model in Jharkhand. A resource person from Pradan, Saroj Mohapatra, came and helped nodal NGO representatives and department officials to chalk out an action plan.

We followed this with a field visit where the people in association with local NGOs identified poten-

tial minor irrigation schemes. We hope that by the end of this year new minor irrigation schemes will be implemented under ARIASP. It is a major policy shift for ARIASP and the whole process of our involvement has contributed to it.

For RGVN it has been a great learning experience. We have realised how important it is to collaborate with the government in terms of transferring resources to many poor people who would otherwise have no access to it.

Good Impact

Nodal NGOs too learnt that merely implementing a few income generating projects will not be sufficient unless they specialise in some field where they can create a good impact in their area of operation. The Assam government has been providing them operating expenses for taking up the assignment, which they will have to sustain themselves if they would like to continue the good work. They will have to find ways and means to mobilise resources so that they not only sustain the activities but also are able to transfer more resources to needy people.

The success of the first year's collaboration has made it possible for RGVN to continue to play a role of an apex NGO to another 11 districts apart from the 6 older districts. A new model of government-NGO collaboration has emerged where both RGVN and the government of Assam have realised that one cannot do without the other if we have to talk about partnership in development.

Editor's Note: In the next issue of NewsReach we will carry reports on the exposure visit to Godda and our resource person's visit to Assam. ■

A Pride of Women

Promoting area networks by organising large *melas* for representatives of self-help groups

Sejal Dand

WE BELIEVE that empowering women will lead to transforming fundamental inequalities in society. Organising women's self help groups (SHGs) around savings and credit is an effective tool towards this end. This could initiate a process of collective action that leads to significant changes in the life of poor women.

Initially, the facilitator plays an important role in this process by providing direction to the group and enabling women to analyse their situation. Yet, we see that many groups do not move beyond the agenda set in the beginning, that of savings and credit.

After initial mobilisation of women at the village level, there is a need to create a method of reaching out to a larger number of women and providing a learning environment. There is a need provide a broader vision and perspective to the women so that they can decide on their own paths of development. Promoting area networks could provide this space to women.

Networking through Events

The area networks could be built on events where women leaders and NGOs can come together. One such attempt, the Saurashtra Sahiyar Melo (SSM), was initiated in Saurashtra on December 4-6, 1999. Sixteen organisations collaborated to bring together over 600 women leaders from 211 SHGs and organisers working in the dis-

tricts of the Saurashtra and Kutch regions and ANANDI's field area of Panchmahaals-Dahod in Gujarat on a common platform to share experiences and learn from each other.

The seeds of the December 1999 *mela* were sown earlier. A *mela* in 1997 for elected women and leaders provided the first experience. When we mooted the idea in July 1999 to some of our partner village organisations (VOs), everyone was enthusiastic. The group expanded as many other NGOs from Saurashtra and Kutch joined in. Owning the idea and working together was important to us as a network. The wide range of options in an event like this allows cross learning and adoption of new ideas at a varying pace.

On the ground, the women were part of savings groups and were asking what next? Both women and NGOs were looking for ways to address other issues including livelihoods, health and basic services.

Purpose of the Mela

The objective of the gathering or *melava* (fair) was to highlight issues concerning women in Saurashtra, acknowledge the contribution made by SHGs in development, showcase positive trends and emerging role models, disseminate strategies used to address concerns and counter mainstream patriarchal stereotypes what constitutes women's development.

Above all, it was an effort to provide a platform where infor-

mation, experiences and perspectives of the SHGs combined to give them an enhanced understanding of their mandate. The *mela* was designed to provide a space where

◆ The women would share experiences of their journey of self development and community action;

◆ The women's collectives will be exposed to a wider range of activities towards securing basic rights and,

◆ The women would initiate a process of horizontal networking among rural women's groups.

The *mela* was linked to the networking process between NGOs and groups in Saurashtra. All the participating organisations were working with women on issues of income generation, education, health, rural development and water resources. The network was initiated to bring a change in the perspective of these organisations working with women. ANANDI (Area Networking and Development Initiatives) played a role of facilitator to the network to demonstrate another way of working with Mahila Mandals (MMs) that was empowering and addressed basic concerns.

Preparations for the Mela

An organising committee was constituted from representatives of the organisations, which met periodically over 3 months before the event. Each organisation shared strengths, identified SHGs to serve as resource groups and began preparations

at the *mandal* (group) level.

At the *mandal* level, discussion took place on identifying learning needs of the women, choosing representatives and preparing for the event. Each *mandal* brought a *toran* (a traditional art form where stories are depicted on a large piece of cloth), which recollected their history and struggles. These were used to fill in data sheets collated during the *mela*.

Various activities like theatre, films, posters and decorations were planned to assist SHGs to share their strategies and actions in an interesting manner to a large group of women. Student volunteers and others were identified to help run the event for 3 days.

Day One Theme: Problems of Saurashtra

Six hundred women belonging to 211 MMs gathered for 3 days at Rajkot for the *mela*. Volunteers registered the names of the participating women leaders, who were given badges with icon buttons on them. The icons represented activities and action undertaken by the *mandal*, which included savings and credit, water, nursery and plantations, justice and issues of violence against women, untouchability, education, micro enterprise and accessing basic amenities and services such as roads, transportation, electricity, PDS, health and donations.

We set up 10 stalls where each participant registered details of their respective *mandal* by using the tools available at the stall after discussion with a volunteer. The volunteer would note down details and use a highlighter to colour the respective symbol on the badge of the participant.

Tools were designed in a way so that the women could collec-

tively see the extent of their contribution in development. For instance, scoreboards were maintained for savings and credit where figures given by the *mandals* were added. A large tray of mud with paper trees were used at the forestation stall.

At the end of the exercise all participant were wearing the badges, now adorned in many colours, proudly. The cumulative figures were reported in the plenary. We learnt that 140 MMs saved Rs 9,00,389. They accessed credit to the tune of Rs 5,22,600 on the strength of this capital base and lent Rs 11,84,010 to their own members.

As these women start meeting regularly they start discussing problems they face in the community. One thousand three hundred fifty four women from 38 MMs raised nurseries for 5,69,916 saplings. Seventy MMs took up cases against injustice to women and ensured justice. One hundred and sixteen MMs broke the barriers of untouchability and now sit and have tea together in meetings. Eighteen MMs workers towards providing education in the village, while 83

MMs worked to ensure better healthcare and 96 MMs undertook some form of income generating activities such as nurseries, embroidery and producing organic manure. The women constructed a road map of their work and achievements as they shared their experiences.

The first day was also used to voice concerns and problems faced by women in local development. The participants represented problems they face by drawing a 2 dimensional graph with pictured icon stickers. Each representative came up to the graph and put stickers against the problems they were facing in their respective villages. A list was drawn up after consultation with field workers and secondary sources. It included

- ◆ Water: Contaminated source, no source, distribution, broken hand pumps.
- ◆ Health: Infrastructure, services- health workers in villages.
- ◆ Education: Infrastructure, attitude to girl child, irregular teaching.
- ◆ Fuel and Fodder: Diminishing commons, encroachment and industries.
- ◆ Violence against women.
- ◆ Alcoholism.
- ◆ Infrastructure: Bus, electricity, roads, transport.
- ◆ Employment: Lack of local opportunities, migration and inadequate returns.
- ◆ Untouchability: Discrimination based on caste.

When we included untouchability, alcoholism and violence against women in the list, it raised some debate amongst NGO representatives. Some felt that women would not list these problems as they belonged to new groups and would feel hesitant to share these. We also discussed the fears of NGOs and workers regarding these issues. Ultimately we decided that an

When we included untouchability, alcoholism and violence against women in the list, it raised some debate amongst NGO representatives. Some felt that women would not list these problems as they belonged to new groups and would feel hesitant to share these.

opportunity should be provided to the women and only then we would know if these issues concern the SHGs.

It is interesting that the large gathering brought out these concerns. Women almost never articulated this problem in SHG meetings. While prioritising common concerns, violence against women, alcoholism and untouchability were identified by a large number of participants. Sixty one MMs stated that they do not have access to proper health facilities, 60 MMs complained of lack of proper drinking water. Thirty percent of the MMs stated they still do not have access to basic services such as roads, bus, electricity and ration cards.

In the evening a tribal women's drama troupe performed 2 plays depicting actions taken by MMs in tackling problems. Women from all regions then joined in singing and dancing late into the night.

Day Two Theme: We have taken the first step

During the plenary Devuben, a veteran leader from Saurashtra, set the tone for the group discussion by recounting her early days in the MM, her fears and her struggles. Women split into ten groups of 60 each, which were based on the colour of their badges.

On the second day, women spoke about their struggles in the process of taking on new roles as community leaders. They described the struggles around stepping out and the first steps of working together. Apart from looking at the tangible achievements of the MMs, women also shared their journey of struggle, negotiation and triumphs as they stepped out of their homes into the MMs and then to government offices at

taluka and district levels.

Facilitators used charts during the discussion to document the fears shared by the women. At the end of the group discussions, women identified the fears they had to overcome and each woman wrote one fear on a gas balloon and gathered in the Mela Square.

To the sound of drums and slogans of "*Beek udadishu, himmat lavishu*" (we shall let our fears go and bring in strength), the women let go of the 700 balloons that symbolised their fears. It was a moment of rejoicing and great enthusiasm. The entire sky was filled with colour and the energy of the gathering ran high.

In the afternoon we facilitated interaction in the stalls designed around different issues.

In one stall we had gender panels, which were a set of 14 panels developed by Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghatan. The panel described the process of socialisation by which men and women are raised differently and how it leads to the subordinate position of women in society. The panels emphasised that since the process is carried out through socialisation, we can change some of the rules otherwise taken as "natural" laws of behaviour. We also held debates on various common sayings such as women are their own enemies.

In another stall a group of women from Dwarka presented a skit based on their own experiences. The skit depicted how within 8 months of initiating savings and credit activities, they started discussing the electricity problem of the village in their meetings. They solved the problem on their own.

The skit was followed by a discussion that highlighted that while a SHG may be started for savings and credit, it has to be strengthened to look at women's

lives totally so that they can use the collective strength to improve their overall living conditions.

Another stall held a panel discussion on linkages for savings and credit groups (SCGs). Seeing the potential of women's SCG, almost all programmes for women are being linked to SCGs. This is good for poor women as they can collectively access resources otherwise denied to them. Experts from NABARD, SGSY and FWFB were invited in the discussion to share their schemes with the participants and respond to the queries of the women.

Articulated Need

The women of Saurashtra have articulated their need for supplementary and alternative activities for income generation. There were stalls where women's groups that had successfully tried out such activities demonstrated how they started and how much income they were able to generate. The activities included nurseries, organic manure manufacturing, manufacturing soap and *agar-batti* (incense sticks) and screen printing.

Women's groups in Saurashtra have initiated action to reduce their drudgery involved in fetching water through various innovative methods. A short documentary depicting these struggles was screened to initiate discussion among women. Experts from PRAVAH, Utthan and Mahiti facilitated the discussion.

In another stall a large snakes and ladders board was devised on which women would position and move themselves according to the throw of dice. The snakes and ladders pertained to what a good *mandal* was and the rules

they should follow to keep it vibrant and active.

Women were walked through the stalls by facilitators. We also printed out a newsletter on the second day, where we put together all achievements of the women and listed the resources they had accessed.

Day Three Theme: Haaji to raasto baaki chhe

The final day was spent in providing exposure to new ideas and helping these leaders build a vision on how they could work in the future. This was consonant with the theme of the concluding day — looking ahead at strategies and issues that require mobilisation beyond the village level. In the plenary women shared experiences of forming *maha-mandals*.

There were also stalls that were set around interesting topics for the participants. In a stall on health we displayed panels and posters and gave live demonstratives to help women understand the importance of health issues.

A mock court was created with resource persons from Nari Adalat — an alternative forum for rural women that has been working in Waghodia to ensure rights of women in cases of injustice against them.

Women had also pointed out that despite Gujarat being a dry state, alcoholism is a major problem that leads to violence against women and economic ruin of a family. Groups that had worked on this issue shared how they had dealt with the problem and provided a direction to others.

Tree of Dreams

Towards the end of the *mela*, the participants were asked to write out a dream — personal or for the village or the community

Towards the end of the mela, participants wrote out a dream on a leaf that was then stuck on a panel. Once all the dreams were put up, a beautiful tree of the women's dreams of the future was created.

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All women had a chance to "shop" at the stalls. In the evening women from different areas put up plays, skits and songs that were both entertaining and educational. A tribal women's drama troupe depicted the story of women's struggles in India through the play "Stree-geeta". Another play depicted the power of MMs in dealing with corruption in government offices and services at local levels.

Women then articulated their vision for the next century. The huge tree of their dreams was exhibited. Every woman had added a leaf of her dreams. The vision was that of working together, meeting each other and ending the isolation we faced. The *mela* ended with women exchanging plant saplings between *mandals* of different areas with the promise that they would nurture the plant saplings just as they would nurture their dreams. One day they might grow into the kind of tree they had collectively dreamt up.

A note on ANANDI: Area Networking and Development Initiatives (ANANDI) is a non-political secular, organisation

registered as a society and trust. It works with poor rural women and tribal communities to establish a just and equitable society. ANANDI was founded in 1995 by 5 young women development professionals who had put in 4-5 years of work each with rural women in various parts of India, to work primarily with rural and tribal women's concerns in Gujarat. It has 3 distinct programmes. ANANDI has a large field programme to mobilise women's groups and form their collectives with various partnerships. It also conducts research studies based on their growing understanding of gender equity issues within different arenas. The third programme seeks to create area networking of rural women that would enable them to dialogue with the state and civil society.

The fieldwork of ANANDI is located in 2 different areas of Gujarat, the Saurashtra region and the Panchmahaals-Dahod districts. In the tribal belt of Dahod and Panchmahaals, ANANDI works with the poorest women of tribal and other backward communities.

It began work in 3 *talukas*, Devgadhi Baria, Ghoghamba and Shehera. In Saurashtra, ANANDI partners with local organisations that are keen on working with women along with other development interventions. The work is spread out in 5 districts where the 6 partner organisations are situated.

Editor's note: ANANDI has a video documenting a recently held mela. Those interested in purchasing a copy may write in to Sejal Dand at anandi@jindalonline.net. Those interested in participating in such a mela taking SHG leaders in their area along may also write to Sejal. ■

For the Love of Sal

A tradition of conservation is in the making in Sindri village of Sundarpahari in Jharkhand

Soumik Banerjee

SINGHA BASKE proudly showed me her grove of *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) trees, explaining how she had protected and sheltered them as her children since her childhood. Singha lives in the Sindri village of the Sundarpahari block of the Godda district in Jharkhand and is a member of the women's self-help group (SHG) in the village.

As the name suggests, SHGs are informal and homogenous groups of 15-20 women involved in the business of savings and credit. Pradan launched its savings and credit programme in Sundarpahari in 1994 to create platforms of exchange and create options for the community, especially women, to access credit against the backdrop of highly expensive and exploitative credit from local moneylenders. The SHG in Sindri was one of the first ones to begin savings and credit activities in 1995.

Singha has conserved 36 *sal* trees in her *tarn* land (flat uplands usually left fallow for grazing) for the past 15 years. When she was a child, she would often go to the nearby forests to collect wood for fuel, *mahua* (*Madhuca latifolia*), *sal* leaves and *datan* (for brushing teeth). She observed that the forest provided a bounty for domestic use as well as contributing to livelihoods in the region.

Singha saw that the huge *sal*

trees in the forest were chopped down and sold. Trees of other species were replacing the *sal* on a land that was once covered with dense *sal* forests. This systematic devastation happened over the years as the Santhal populations grew.

There was the perpetual lure of the timber market. This, combined with the lack of conservation and regeneration initiatives and the belief that there were enough forests, led to widespread destruction of the once dense forests.

Today, large parts of Sundarpahari are denuded and there are very little well stocked *sal* forests. The *sal* that survives here is largely stunted. Regeneration is poor because of repeated fires and overgrazing. *Sal* is also gradually being replaced by other succession species such as *Lagestromia parviflora* and *Croton oblongifolius*.

Wreath of Protection

In the face of the disappearing and stunted *sal*, Singha Baske's grove stands out as a proud patch of greenery. She wanted to save the regenerating saplings of *sal* in her *tarn* for her love for the *sal* trees, which she wanted to pass on to the future generation as valuable assets.

Singha would cover the naturally growing *sal* saplings with *poal* (wreath of rice hay) to indicate that these are marked for conservation. There is a

belief among local Santhals that you should not disturb things that are covered with a *poal* wreath as that would lead to public punishment.

A similar method is followed in agricultural fields where a bamboo pole crowned with *poal* indicates "no grazing". The Paharia tribals have a similar tradition where they tie the stem of a tree with a creeper to mark it for conservation.

The *sal* saplings matured under Singha's protection. When they reached a certain height, she helped their growth by thinning and pruning with help from her father.

This aided the trees grow straight and to have a clear bole. Although her *sal* trees are not technically perfect, they are easily of better quality than the *sal* of nearby areas.

Singha's trees have an average girth at breast height (GBH) of 95 cm and an average height of about 35 feet. This in contrast with the average of about 30 cm at GBH with a height of 12 feet of *sal* trees in Sundarpahari.

Will Singha cut down the trees she has nurtured so carefully over the years? She says that she would require about 3 trees to build homes for her children (3 boys and 3 girls).

The rest will stand as a valuable legacy for her grandchildren. Singha's love for the *sal* is already becoming a family tradition. She proudly shows 2 *sal* saplings that are being tended by her daughter Marangmoy. ■

Project Updates for April-September 2001

Kesla, Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh

THIS YEAR our team's focus in the mushroom programme was both on production and marketing. Production received more emphasis because we saw last year that the market for oyster mushrooms can be developed with concerted effort.

Keeping in mind the agenda of increasing production, we experimented on production technology in our campus after observing practices followed by successful producers. We also consulted experts. The results however have not been encouraging and we need to work further for a breakthrough. Modified shed design was also on the agenda. Out of the 46 trainees identified, 42 have completed their sheds with the new design.

The savings and credit activity in Kesla was initiated in 1998 with Ausaid support. We have formed 171 groups in 85 villages. The project works in three isolated habitations, with 2 dominant tribal communities.

Our team has been able to form 30 groups and 3 clusters during this period. We revised our plans due to a change in strategy by Mahila Arthik Vikash Nigam and a change in focus of Ausaid. Three groups have been linked with to banks and 4 with SGSY.

Livelihood patterns in our operational area is varied. Villages close to trading centres have predominant wage-based livelihoods. In more isolated areas the

people depend more on agriculture and fisheries. In the remote and isolated settlements livelihood is very fragile with major dependency on non-timber forest produce. Against this backdrop, the team has promoted small enterprises in its SHG groups. The activities promoted include lime orchards, semi-intensive goat rearing, diary, backyard poultry and mohua trading. We have also intervened in land and water development. We have completed installation of a lift irrigation (LI) project and identified 2 more sites.

Poultry Programme, Kesla, Madhya Pradesh

THE POULTRY programme in Kesla is now over ten years old. In the past 6 months our team was busy completing poultry sheds and registering the Kesla Poultry Samiti (KPS) under the Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies Act (MACS). We also worked with the government to actualise SGSY infrastructure commitments, identifying producers under SGSY, making Sarni (a nearby town where KPS enjoys a large market share in broilers) operations more efficient, initiating a marketing project in Bhopal and preparing the groundwork to initiate a new project in Siddhi.

Our team is going through transition with Deepak preparing to take charge of poultry operations in Kesla. The existing operation in Kesla is poised

to become a vibrant and profitable broiler farmer's co-operative. Marketing in Bhopal was rich in possibilities in the past 6 months. Most important, the Siddhi project presents an opportunity to test the possibility of replicating our poultry model in other areas.

The team had identified 20 BPL women SHG members for poultry under the SGSY scheme and 12 under WFP, who will be given producers' training. In our WFP project we have completed construction of the planned 86 poultry sheds where day old chicks (DOCs) have been placed.

During this period 193 producers reared 391 production batches. We are concerned with huge variations among producers. There is poor application of production technology and we intend to increase production efficiency.

An analysis of the business performance of KPS, now registered under MACS, indicates a seasonal decline in profit as a ratio over turnover. This means little internal accruals, increasing our working capital problems in a situation when more producers have been added. The sales growth however has been impressive. DOC placement has increased by 63%, which has also brought pressure on the system. We can arrest the decline with active effort.

The past 6 months have been good for the Sarni shop. A close look at the accounts of the shop in Bhopal also shows positive movement.

Alwar, Rajasthan

WE STARTED work in Kishangarh bas of Alwar district in Rajasthan in 1987 and then expanded into the Ramgarh and Tijara blocks. We concentrated our activities in Ramgarh by handing over SHG (self-help group) expansion in Kishangarh Bas to Sakhi Samiti, an organisation of SHGs promoted by us at the block level. Meanwhile we received funds from Canada for one and half years for land development activities. Since our major work was in Kishangarh bas, we decided to take up a few older groups to implement this project there as well as in Ramgarh.

Presently our team is involved in land development to support rain-fed agriculture under the government's employment assurance scheme (EAS) with additional support from Canadian funds. We are also promoting women-managed dairy cooperatives among existing SHGs.

For the land development project, 70% of the selected families are SCs. Most of them were allotted highly degraded land in 1976 that needs levelling and field bunding. We worked in the compact watershed of Bujaka in Ramgarh where only 40% of the work was done before we intervened. Bujaka is a closed watershed and is going to show results in the near future.

One of the primary objectives of our presence in Ramgarh is to establish dairies as a viable livelihood activity for SHG members. We made concerted efforts in last 6 months. We mobilised credit to buy buffaloes and carried out visioning exercises to promote the prospects of dairies among people we work with.

We are implementing the idea

of having feed depots as an entry point activity. We have established linkages with the dairy union supplying Saras feed to Pradan, which is then being distributed to village level depots managed by SHGs. We would also like to promote women-managed dairy coops (DCs) with women secretaries. Non co-operation from the union and corrupt secretaries of malfunctioning DCs is a major problem faced by us.

We are working with 1,000 families and will add another 200 members in the next 6 months. We will form dairy associations and coops, establish more feed depots and strengthen them further by widening their role and services. We will also train and promote self-employed AI (artificial insemination) technicians.

We need some seed money to experiment, initiate new systems and establish our programme. We are exploring possibilities with NABARD, DRDA and NDDDB.

RRC, New Delhi

PRADAN STARTED a Research and Documentation Resource Centre (RRC) in 1995 with financial assistance from the Ford Foundation. Its purpose was to document on-going project experiences for internal use and dissemination to outsiders and to develop systems and methodologies for expansion of matured projects.

At the request of the government of India's Department of Women and Child Development, Pradan commissioned a Hindi translation of the SHG Manual that was published last year. The Swa Shakti project has brought out a special edition of the manual.

Pradan has given Indira Gandhi

Open University (IGNOU) multiple telecast rights to the video film, "The Paal System", produced 3 years ago, which documented Pradan's efforts to regenerate traditional water harvesting structures in the Alwar district of Rajasthan for its various TV slots for 2 years.

We started documentation of the irrigated agriculture theme this year. The Irrigated Agriculture document brochure is in the final stages prior to publishing. We will also document all our best practices over time. These will help prepare training modules for newcomers and other practising organisations.

We have streamlined the editing and publishing of NewsReach as a mechanism for exchange and learning. It now has a readership of 300 and growing. We now plan to stabilise NewsReach as an in-house platform for exchange of views and news and initiate a quarterly journal addressing the issue of promoting livelihoods.

During this period we have embarked on producing a slide show about Pradan, its work and the kind of impact it has had. This seeks to address the long-felt need to share Pradan's work with interested outsiders. Available as a power point presentation and a separate slide show, this would also be helpful to introduce Pradan to others such as government officials, bankers and politicians.

In research we gave stress in studying the impact of our interventions and identifying thematic or sectoral issues that require systematisation in order to push the frontiers of knowledge in a specific area of development. It also includes developing creative methodologies such as participatory learn-

ing methodologies and internal learning systems.

We have initiated one such project during this period — to develop a set of methodologies for participatory learning for women's empowerment and for programme learning through SHGs in Pradan. An inception workshop was held to identify methodologies in current use. We plan to bring out a related publication this year.

Another area for research we identified during this period was with the 600+ water users' associations promoted by Pradan over the past 8 years. Our colleague on sabbatical with the International Water Management Institute based in Anand, Gujarat has done some work on this front. We hope to build on it in the coming months.

We have initiated 2 studies on the impact of the SHG programme. The first is an impact assessment of the SHG programme in Godda and Alwar, which is part of the larger IDS (Institute of Development Studies, Sussex) coordinated impact assessment project. The second is a study of the impact of SHG membership on the woman's "personality" and the psychological dimensions of her "empowerment".

BASIX and New Economic Foundation, UK have developed a livelihood manual. They recently organised a training of trainers to launch the manual in various organisations. Pradan sponsored 2 colleagues to participate. We would also initiate the process of identifying more Pradan-specific needs from a livelihoods manual and conceptualise its development over the next year.

The key problem faced all along is finding individuals, who would, in collaboration

with Pradan's project-based staff, research and document the experiences. We also need to take a larger view of the role of the RRC, as the integrator of "knowledge resources". This would require taking it to higher levels of effectiveness and centrality.

Godda, Jharkhand

THE GODDA project was started in 1987 to promote tasar as a new livelihood in non-traditional areas of 3 contiguous districts of Santhal Parganas — Godda, Dumka and Banka. Initially project activity started with promoting *arjuna* plantations in the wastelands of poor farmers and rearing *tasar* silkworms on them.

Later we organised women into small groups to raise nurseries for plantation that helped them to earn some seasonal income. The concept of saving this seasonal income and availability of credit among group members was started in plantation villages, which later took the form of women SHGs in 1989. The groups now act as the core community organisation to reach individual members.

We are working with 536 SHGs with members from 7,127 families. During this period the focus of our SHG programme was to give specific inputs like training along with setting up systems for improving the groups' performance and identification, study, experimentation and demonstration of IGA. We conducted awareness training for 11 groups, accounts training for 90% of the UNDP groups and membership training for 30 groups. We also did OTR (overall transaction rate) implementation in 62 groups. Audit was carried out in 25% of the groups and we collected reports from

63% of the groups. Fifty-eight groups were linked to banks. We aim to provide linkage to another 40.

In livelihood our intervention started with scanning various activities that are being practised in this area such as dairy, growing pigeon pea and trading. We conducted studies on the economic and technical feasibility for each activity and identified the types of interventions. The project will have concrete livelihood plans for about 150 SHGs by the end of the year.

We installed LI schemes funded by the district administration, dug wells and constructed pump houses. During this period, 20 pump operators from 18 sites were trained. Results will be visible in the coming Rabi season. Issues and concerns include revival of old LI sites and developing a more integrated approach for the LI programme so that people profit out of the intervention. Perhaps we need to shift our focus to technologies, markets and finance.

In the watershed programme, a small portion of the programme money is left to the watershed committee. So we shifted our focus from implementation of the proposed work to utilisation of the infrastructure created to generate income.

West Singhbhum, Jharkhand

OUR TEAM operates from 2 bases, Chakradharpur and Chaibasa with an office at Chakradharpur. We operate within 20 km from either operational base to promote new SHGs and to nurture old ones, while to complete old LI sites we have to go further. Our main challenge during this period

was regarding the incomplete state of a large number of old LI projects and non-settlement of accounts in the old 5% project and watershed villages.

Our LI activity is spread over 12 blocks, with distances ranging from 4 km to 120 km. There are 135 sites with incomplete infrastructure. Thirty nine sites need a pump house, 22 need pipe laying and accounts have to be settled in 88 sites. During this period we could help villagers to complete 14 LI sites out of the 21 sites where work has been initiated. Accounts have been settled in 27 sites. Work is in progress in 19 sites.

The utilisation of the LI command area was not satisfactory. Only progressive farmers are using the infrastructure and the poorest of the lot are lagging behind. We have identified timely credit as the missing link. We also need to transfer technology, provide training and follow up for the next few years.

This year we demonstrated round the year cropping system with bank loans in a LI village with 30 farmers. In the Kharif season, 18 farmers took up improved variety and cultural practices in 12 acres of land. The team expects to generate around Rs 6,000 as additional income to each family in this year.

In watershed we settled accounts with DRDA for a watershed against the target of 2 watersheds. In regard to the 5% module, we have settled accounts with DRDA for 3 out of 5 villages.

In our savings and credit programme we had 92 groups at the beginning of the period. We have formed 35 new SHGs, provided training and exposure and linked 3 groups to banks.

Our team has taken up the UNDP-sponsored *tasar* development and extension pro-

gramme, with support from our Godda team. This activity fits the local situation as an IGA for poverty stricken tribals. This district is very rich in forest resources. In fact, 60% of the total production of *tasar* in Jharkhand is produced in this district.

Having started *tasar* activity, we found that there's huge potential to go for this activity in a large scale in our operational area. This region is a seed zone. It is a good beginning for our team. We are optimistic about replicating this activity in a large scale.

Our team has had a difficult period, as our human resources still remain inadequate to attend to the work we have. Heavy workload and reluctance shown by bankers in financing big loans (one lakh or so) have meant slow progress on the IGA front.

East Singbhum, Jharkhand

OUR EAST Singbhum team started functioning from September 1996. We are presently working in 4 blocks of East Singbhum and in one block of the newly created Saraikela district.

We have formed 30 new SHGs during this period, taking our total up to 225. Eleven groups have been linked to SGSY. Our emphasis has been on strengthening group accountants, providing new books of accounts and implement OTR. We conducted 17 group accountant training, covering 182 participants. There was a lot of resistance towards OTR implementation.

We conducted a few visioning exercises. The prototype of this exercise is ready for a larger number of groups. We plan to use this process for more information, apart from encouraging

the women to look forward and plan credit. We have also conducted an expansion rally and tried forming new groups through group leaders.

As part of our livelihood intervention, we submitted 4 LI proposals to the district administration, which committed to provide grants from the EAS scheme. The same proposals were submitted with a few on dug wells to Tribal Welfare Commissioner. One proposal in Saraikela district has been sanctioned. We started intervening in agriculture in 3 villages in 3 clusters of 2 blocks.

Our team has experienced rather severe manpower instability in the past months, with 2 experienced members leaving. It has been difficult to manage work and meet commitments.

All updates have been abstracted from the Consultative Forum Reports by Smita Mohanty. ■

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Opening Doors to Development

The story of how Pradan started work on watershed development in Bere village in Alwar despite initial fears by the villagers

Yatesh Yadav

December 1998

PRADAN'S ALWAR project expanded its *paal*-based watershed development programme to the Ramgarh block in December 1995. *Paals* are earthen structures built across *nullas* (drains) to arrest the flow of rainwater. Otherwise this water would runoff, leaving the farmers' fields without moisture and carrying away the nutrient rich topsoil. The soils in this region are sandy, loamy and deep. Hence the water is absorbed quickly, recharging ground water.

The team is working in 4 macro-watersheds, which cover 15 villages in the block with a catchment area of 7,344 hectares. We are working in 8 villages and have formed groups there. In this article I will try to describe the process of setting up the first group in Ramgarh block. All our earlier work has been in the Kishangarh Bas block of the district.

The Bere village comes under Ramgarh Panchayat Samiti of the Alwar district. The village is inhabited by 72 families. Of these, 13 are SCs (Chamars) and 59 Meos (Meos are Gujjars who converted to Islam during Mughal times). It is one of the remotest and poorest of villages in the block.

There were 2 big *nullas* passing through the village. These *nul-*

las had fragmented the cultivable lands and made them highly undulating.

The Katnalli ka Nulla was causing severe damage to agricultural land in the village. It was eroding cultivable lands and causing floods in the village. Long ago, the villagers built a *paal* across the *nulla* and named it Dhan ki Mandin ki Paal (*paal* which produces paddy). However, with the passage of time, the *paal* was breached and was causing soil erosion. It festered like cancer in Bere.

Village Initiative

Villagers had raised a fund of Rs 30,000 on their own to construct the *paal*. Out of this, they paid Rs 5,000 to the Rajasthan State Electricity Board (RSEB) to shift an electric pole situated in the *nulla* at the site of the proposed *paal*. They gave the contract for construction of the *paal* to a tractor owner from a neighbouring village. Seven to 8 villagers decided that they would contribute their daily wages to construct the *nulla*. They then marked a point on the slope of the selected hill. The *paal* was to be built up to that height. The earthwork for constructing the *paal* was started.

Pradan intervened at this point in Ramgarh in watershed development. Our team went to Bere on January 9, 1996 to select the

site. There was tremendous enthusiasm among villagers. The whole village gathered on the *paal*. We first introduced ourselves to the villagers. We told them about our organisation and the nature and process of our work.

We decided to explore the possibilities of working on the watershed selected by the village. We told the villagers that they were doing good work. We said we would come to their village again and would let them know whether we would work in this watershed.

On January 16, Asif, Saddik and I went to the village. The villagers once again gathered on the *paal*. They sought our help in reviving the *paal*. We told them that we wanted to work in their village. We also told them that we work through a group of beneficiaries by improving the lands of poor farmers.

We informed the villagers that to start work in any village, we form a group of beneficiaries. We identify target beneficiaries and target land through the process of resource mapping (RM) on village revenue maps. We asked them to give us a particular date and time to conduct the RM exercise. They asked us to come in the evening of January 18. We decided that the resource mapping would be done in the night since all villagers would be available.

Saddik and I went to the village

After brief interaction, we parted and went around the village separately. We interacted with the villagers and informed them of our objectives. The villagers agreed to our plans.

on the appointed date. We had the blueprints of village revenue maps and a petromax on our motorcycle. We reached there at 4 pm. We put our materials and motorcycle at Samela's house. Samela was the Upsarpanch (deputy chief) of the Oontwal village panchayat. Bere village comes under this panchayat.

After brief interaction, we parted and went around the village separately. We interacted with the villagers and informed them of our objectives. The villagers agreed to our plans. We told them to bring their wives with them to the meeting so that they could also listen to us and if they wanted to form a self-help group (SHG), we would help them.

Initially we decided that the village school would be the venue for resource mapping. Later it was shifted to Deenu's house since it was very cold. We took our dinner (*roti* with *chatni* of chillies) at Samela's house. We reached Deenu's house by 7 pm.

We unfolded the maps and 4-5 villagers who were there started to read the maps to locate their fields. The women of Deenu's family also joined us. It was 8 pm by then and only 10 villagers had gathered. They wanted to know how we would assist the village. We once again explained to them our objectives and process of work and group formation in detail.

However, we did not tell them how far we would extend our assistance since it was an issue to explore through a process. We told the villagers that we would discuss it in the meeting during the resource mapping.

A few young boys enjoyed our process of exploring the economic condition of the villagers. We asked them what kind of livestock they kept, the average number of animals kept by each family, how they feed them and what income they earn out of it. We also explored other sources of income such as from agriculture and wage labour.

We provided information to the villagers regarding the SHG. We explained our activities in this programme along with the *paal* system.

It was 9 pm and most of the villagers had not turned up. We asked Deenu the reason behind their absence. He told us that the severe cold might have deterred the villagers from attending.

Those present suggested that we should do the mapping next morning at the school. The meeting ended and after the villagers left, we slept in Samela's place.

Next morning Saddik and I went to different hamlets separately in order to get a better opportunity to interact with different sets of people. We came back to the school at 9 am.

Morning Meeting

Much to our relief, we saw that villagers had started to arrive at the venue. After talking to them we found out that there were several reasons why they did not come for the previous night's meeting. Firstly, people did not like to come to Deenu's house. Secondly, they were reluctant to bring their women to the meeting and thirdly it was very cold.

We formed 4 groups and began the mapping process. Each group comprising 8-10 villagers conducted the different sets of the RM exercise. One group mapped land degradation, the second, water harvesting infrastructure, *nullas* and wells in the village, the third, caste-wise landholding and the last for land productivity. We explained the objectives of each type of resource mapping to the villagers and showed them how to mark and how to select different colours for different activities.

While the mapping was in progress, Kamar Singh came to the scene and started shouting. He said that these 2 outsiders have come to our village to separate the lands of the SCs and the Meos. They have the intention to cause fractions in the village. We tried to explain our real intentions to him but he was not ready to listen to us. He went away after some time.

By then the mapping process was nearly complete. The villagers started to leave and only 4-5 people remained. This was despite us telling them that after the completion of mapping we would discuss the status of their village and then form a group.

We shared the information from the RM exercise with the people who stayed back. We also asked them whether the villagers were interested in forming a *samiti* (group). The people requested us to stay and hold a meeting at night to ascertain the villagers' views.

We took our meal in the village. Then we went around to meet the villagers and get a pulse of their thoughts about forming a group. We also visited a watershed site at a neighbouring village to explore constructing a *paal*.

Night Shock

We ate our supper in different houses in Bere in order to build our rapport with the villagers. After that we went to the school where the meeting was scheduled to start at 7.15 pm. We carried our petromax. We waited till 9 pm but to our shock not a single villager turned up for the meeting.

We came back to Samela's house and joined a group of 6-7 people (mostly Samela's family members) who were sitting around a fire and discussing, among other things, the reason behind the villagers not attending the meeting.

Some said that the villagers are not responding because we wanted to involve the women. I told them we were not forming a women's group for the *paal* programme. Women would be involved in the SHG. These people then suggested that those who have understood the aims and objectives of the project could form a group. They said there were 15 such men who were ready to form a group.

We agreed to it but pointed out that we want to involve all the villagers. We wanted to interact with them regarding the *paal* project and then it will be up to the individual whether he wants to join the group or not. We decided that the group would be formed the next day at 9 am at the school.

On the morning of January 20, Samela, Resham Khan and Navi Khan went to call the villagers for the meeting. From 9 am onwards, the villagers started to arrive at the meeting. Through discussions with the villagers, we came to know about the reason for their not attending the meeting the night before.

They told us that they were not sure about our intentions and

they thought we had some ulterior motives. Some villagers had gone to Ramgarh and met the *patwari* (revenue department official responsible for maintaining land records and transactions at the village level). They asked him about Pradan and about the programme. The *patwari* told them that the government had not undertaken any such programme for constructing *paals*.

The villagers also said that Umaruddin, who belonged to Bere and is a local doctor practising at Sahdoli village, came to Bere at night and told people that these outsiders were trying to fool them. He said the Pradan wanted to take away the lands of the villagers. That is why we were categorising the land into good and bad, he warned the villagers.

We suggested that the villagers clear up the confusion. We asked them to meet the MLA, Tehsildar, BDO and Collector to make inquiries about us. We

We asked individually what the people wanted. The villagers said they were willing to form a group. Once again we briefed them about Pradan and its aims, objectives and activities.

also suggested that they send a group of 8-10 men to visit Khanpur watershed in Kishangarh Bas block, where we have already worked. The group could interact with the committees that were working there for the past 4-5 years.

Samela Khan then told us that the local MLA, Mr Zuber Khan,

told him about us and he has also visited Khanpur. There he attended a meeting of the Mewat Sahyog Sanstha, the apex body of the watershed committees promoted by us. He wanted to work with us.

Sitting in a Circle

We asked individually what the people wanted. The villagers said they were willing to form a group. We then asked them to sit in a circle. Once again we briefed them about Pradan and its aims, objectives and activities.

We asked them to share their views about the type of treatment that should be done to their fields. After intense discussions we decided to build *paals*, check dams, spillways, field bunds and *johads* (ponds). We also decided to level lands. We told them that 60 per cent financial assistance would be provided to farmers through the group for *paals*, spillways, field bunds and land levelling. For check dams, cent per cent financial assistance would be provided since they were to be constructed on the hills and not on individual property.

Five persons put up their applications to start the work of *paal* and field bunds in their fields. We formed a 15 member committee and decided the names of members. We agreed to meet again on January 25 at 10 am at the school. It also decided that each member would bring Rs 50 as entry fee and Rs 5 for savings.

On January 23, Saddik and I reached the village in evening with a theodolite. We wanted to start the work as soon as possible. We asked Mushra, a *samiti* member, to call the other members for a meeting. He suggested that we should hold the meeting in the morning since some members were not in the village.

Next morning members were called for the meeting but nobody turned up. We asked Samela and the others why villagers did not come. They said they would consult in the evening. In the evening we once again waited for the villagers but no one came. We could not understand the reason for their absence.

We stayed in Bere that night since the next day (January 25) was the actual date for the meeting. We hoped that the group members would come. In the morning, villagers started to gather near the village mosque, while we were waiting for them at the school. We went to the place of gathering.

The villagers asked Saddik to assure them that we were not planning to take over their lands. They said since Saddik was a Muslim, he would tell the truth standing in front of the mosque. Saddik said, "Yes, we will never take over your lands."

Then we asked each individual what they actually wanted. A few farmers said that they could not run the committee and that we must go back since they did not need our help. We told them that we were ready to go back.

We went to Samela's house and

shared the incident with him. We suggested to Samela that they have a meeting among themselves and discuss it thoroughly on January 26 since villagers would come to the school for the Republic Day ceremony. We then went back to Ramgarh.

End of Fear

On the evening of January 26, the villagers of Bere came to our office to invite us for *samiti* formation on the next day. I was quite surprised and asked them what led them to invite us for the group formation. They said they were clear about our motives and their fear is gone. They had come for Friday prayers and met the MLA, Mr Zuber Khan. He assured them of our credentials. Saddik was also present there and the matter was cleared up.

Next day we went to Bere to find that the villagers were waiting for us. They formed a group and named it Zameen aur Paani Prabandhan Samiti, Bere (Land and Water Management Committee).

During the whole process we realised that we were trying to move things too fast. The vil-

lage revenue maps created confusion among the villagers since they had not seen them before. Only the *patwari* possessed this map.

When we showed the map to the villagers their lands were marked on it. So they thought that we were planning to take away their land. We also talked to them about forming a women's group. The villagers apprehended that we also planned to take away their women!

Since we were new in the block, we initially did not have any credibility in the eyes of the villagers. By 1998, however, the group in Bere has revived 11 *paals*, constructed 295 loose stone check dams, constructed 2,500 meters of field bunding and levelled 12 hectares of land.

About 70 per cent soil-water conservation has been constructed with an investment of about Rs 8 lakh. The *samiti* has won the first prize for its performance in last year's Samiti Sammelan (meeting of groups) in Ramgarh. All the rainwater of the catchment area (465 ha) has been trapped this year. Not a single drop of rainwater has runoff.

People News and Events

◆ Caroline Banks, a volunteer supported by VSO, New Delhi, has joined us for a year. She is a textile designer as well as an experienced businesswoman in the UK. Caroline would work closely with our *tasar* programme to help our systems, processes and products achieve international standards.

◆ We welcome Phalguni Sahoo back to Baliguda after a long spell of leave. Phalguni was unwell with cerebral malaria

and was under medical supervision at home. She has recovered well. We wish her good health.

◆ The Consultative Forum met for a mid-term review from October 6-9, 2001 at Kesla.

◆ A group of 10 Apprentices and Field Guides participated in the third phase of the Process Awareness and Sensitivity Module from October 8-12, 2001.

◆ Out *tasar* marketing unit in New Delhi exhibited at a stall at the Dastkaar exhibition in Dilli Haat from October 18-25, 2001. Products on exhibition included yarn, fabric, loom products like stoles and dupattas and tailored products like salwar suits and saris.

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