

NewsReach

Pradan, 3 CSC, Niti Bagh, New Delhi 110 049, India
Tel/Fax: 011 651 8619/4682. E-mail: pradhanho@ndb.vsnl.net.in

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Organic Overture

How villagers of Bamerjhanti discovered the benefits of organic farming while implementing a watershed programme

Maniruddin Farukki

SANTHAL PARGANAS forms the northeastern part of Jharkhand. It is an administrative division comprising the 6 districts of Dumka, Jamtara, Sahibgunj, Pakur, Godda and Deoghar. The topography is undulating with the Rajmahal hill range straddling the division north to the southeast.

Santhal Parganas is characterised by large areas of degraded lands, unprotected and overexploited forests and a high concentration of tribal population. It receives over 1,200 mm of rainfall, mostly during the monsoons. But due to the near total lack of water conservation measures, runoff is as high as 90%.

Agriculture is the main occupation for majority of the population. The single paddy or maize crop is entirely dependent on the monsoons. The crop is often subjected to extreme water stress due to erratic rainfall, drastically affecting production. Crop failures are frequent.

The produce caters to the food requirement of an average

household for not more than 6 months. Other livelihood sources are dependent on forests. However, due to the rapid degradation of available forests, such sources are drying up. As a result people migrate seasonally in search of livelihood.

Thematic Restructuring

During its thematic restructuring in 1994, Pradan decided to expand rain-fed agriculture activities. The Kathikund block of Dumka, being extremely poor (98.4% families are below the poverty line) and dominated by SC and ST communities (70.13%), was selected for our activities.

In the same year, the National Watershed Development Programme (NWDP) was launched. The government decided to implement NWDP in Dumka, as it was drought-prone. Pradan was selected as a project-implementing agency (PIA) in 1985.

We started implementing watershed programmes in the Sova Sangam and Panchgachhia watersheds of Kathi-

kund. Bamerjhanti was a village coming under the Panchgachhia watershed.

Picture of Underdevelopment

Bamerjhanti is situated in the Kathikund block, 36 km from Dumka at the northeastern side of the Dumka-Pakur road. It is a typical example of a poverty stricken village in the region. Bamerjhanti lacked all basic amenities of modern life.

The 15 Ghatwar families in the village depended wholly on agriculture. Although average land holding was about 5 acre, a large part of it was uncultivable because of the undulating topography and soil erosion on the upper ridges. Almost 70% of the village land was infertile and degraded. Except a few plots, no land had access to irrigation water and was totally dependent on rainfall.

The average cultivable land holding of individual households was about one hectare (ha), where mainly local varieties were cultivated. There was only one annual crop (mostly paddy) during the monsoons. The average paddy production per ha was 1.12-1.6 tonnes. In most families the produce from agriculture could barely meet food requirements for more than 6 months in a year.

Surrounding forests had also been rapidly denuded, resulting in severe shortage of firewood. More than a decade ago the forest department had conducted a timber collection drive in the Bamerjhanti forest area. All *sal* trees on 40-50 acres were cut. The forest was also severely exploited by villagers and outsiders. Even the seasonal coppicing could not

regenerate the forest due to the scale of exploitation. In 1996, the forest department planted trees in 10 ha of the degraded forest patch at the foothills near the village. Heavy cattle grazing and over-exploitation by villagers to meet firewood needs affected the new plantation.

Forest Resolution

The Bamerjhanti Seva Samity (BSS) was formed in 1996. When the samity met regularly to save money for a village development fund,

When the villagers decided to protect the forest we suggested that they create proper management systems to ensure protection of the trees. This was considered as an important step towards conservation of village resources through community initiative.

members discussed the condition of their forest and firewood problems.

When they decided to protect the forest we suggested that they create proper management systems to ensure protection of the trees. This was considered as an important step towards conservation of village resources through community initiative.

The samity then organised a general meeting in their village and informed everybody of their initiative of not cutting trees in the forest. They divided the entire forest area of

about 20 ha of *sal*, *gamar*, *eucalyptus* and *arjun* trees into 15 segments. Each family in the village was responsible for protecting a segment.

Watershed Orientation

In the same year Pradan organised a 5-day orientation camp in the nearby village of Makrachapar in which 3 representatives of BSS participated.

Samity members were introduced to the concept of watershed development. They learnt about the need for community organisation in conserving and developing available natural resources and improving the hydrology of the area, development of appropriate technologies based on their traditional wisdom, improving biomass productivity, need for participatory planning and creation of cost-effective implementation mechanism.

They also learnt about the rules and procedures of NWDP and how they could draw upon support from the district under this programme. They learnt how to delineate watershed boundaries on village maps after conducting land and drainage transect surveys.

Resource Mapping

After this camp we organised a similar event in Bamerjhanti to carry out a village-level survey. We visited every plot in the village and gathered information such as status of the soil and present use. The villagers then drew a resource map based on this information.

The exercise was extended later through a series of meetings to look into the prevailing livelihood systems. The same participatory process was fol-

lowed. Since the village was homogenous we did not face much difficulty in involving everyone.

As in the rest of the region, agriculture here was the main source of livelihood and was completely dependent on the rains. Even in normal monsoon years, the harvest from paddy and maize could offer an average family sustenance for barely 6 months.

Initiating the Programme

The information generated through these processes created a strongly felt need among BSS members to systematically intervene in the conservation and development of existing natural resources.

Bamerjhanti came under the demarcated Panchgachhia micro-watershed area in which Pradan started working as a PIA. Being a part of the micro-watershed Bamerjhanti saw the possibilities of addressing its needs under the newly launched watershed development programme.

After prioritising their needs, the community formulated their work plans based on the following criteria:

- ◆ The work plan needed to address food security.
- ◆ It should be low-cost.
- ◆ It should improve the condition of natural resources.
- ◆ Majority of the families should get a share of benefits.

Root Cause

The community saw lack of irrigation as the root cause of their poverty. Agriculture was highly vulnerable to erratic rainfall during the monsoons. Despite the availability of land, people could not grow any crop after the rainy sea-

The productivity of the land changed dramatically. Without even using a single dose of chemical fertiliser, paddy production shot up to 3 tonnes per ha. This compared with the usual harvest of 1.6 tonnes per ha.

son. This lack led to wastage or under-utilisation of resources, including manpower.

The rainwater in the upper reaches was allowed to runoff due to the poor canopy cover. We explained to BSS members the urgent need to follow a "ridge to valley" treatment approach in order to conserve and improve the soil and water balance.

The villagers planned to construct small earthen dams to conserve water during the rainy season to provide irrigation. They identified a continuous stretch of land from the ridge to the valley to construct a series of small dams in order to ensure irrigation for everyone.

There was already pressure on cultivable land due to population increase. Lack of soil conservation in the upland areas resulted in heavy soil erosion, which also affected lowlands through gully formation and deposition of sand. They planned to improve the uplands through plotting, levelling and bunding to make these suitable for cultivation.

The identification of problems and solutions prepared the ground for formulating an action plan for the village based on the concept of watershed development. Pradan facilitated the community to

do this for 4 years.

Dramatic Learning

There was a patch of 11 acre of agricultural land below the new plantation of 1996. Because of heavy vegetative cover, the soil in the new plantation had become rich in decomposed organic materials. BSS constructed a thin trench of 1,400 ft to take that soil-water suspension mixed with organic material to the agricultural fields below. Almost all the fields were fed with the organic-rich suspension.

The productivity of the land changed dramatically. Without even using a single dose of chemical fertiliser, paddy production shot up to 3 tonnes per ha. This compared with the usual harvest of 1.6 tonnes per ha. To reach high productivity, some farmers in distant areas were using 30 kg of di-ammonium phosphate and 15 kg of urea per acre.

Now the farmers plan their crop based on the organic suspension flow to their fields. This is active from June-July at the onset of the monsoons to September-early October.

The water retention of the land has increased. Farmers now grow a second crop in winter by using water from ponds constructed under the watershed programme.

We have also noticed that farmers of adjacent villages exchange paddy from Bamerjhanti farmers because of fine taste of the rice produced in these fields. The farmers do not apply pesticides because the crops do not require it. There are few insect and pest attacks.

To achieve this organic success villagers had selected a

continuous patch of land for treatment. The forest area above it was about 10 ha. There were cultivable lands from the foothills down to the valley.

The 5 ha of arable land at the top were undulating. It had shallow soil cover and moisture retention of the soil was extremely low. People were growing minor oilseeds like *niger*.

The next level had several *bunded* paddy fields with a total area of 4 ha. The soil depth at this level was relatively more. But due to poor soil texture, moisture retention at this level was also low. People were growing short-duration paddy varieties on this land.

The next level down to the valley comprised 2 ha of *bunded* paddy land with better soil depth and moisture retention. Farmers could opt for long-duration paddy varieties here.

Checking Runoff

The villagers felt that the condition of the forest cover

The overall improvement in soil moisture regime and texture has prompted farmers to cultivate paddy on uplands that earlier only grew minor oilseeds. The upland paddy fields that could earlier support only short-duration paddy varieties are being planted with long-duration varieties.

needed to be improved in order to check runoff and soil erosion on the upper ridges. They felt that there should be complete control over grazing and firewood extraction from the forest for at least 2 years required to regeneration the forest.

They decided to build an earthen dam just at the foothills in 1997 to harvest water from the upper ridges, with the forest patch as its catchment area. Seeing the potential of irrigation, villagers also started developing 5 acres of uplands by terracing and *bunding*.

A narrow, 1,400-ft trench was dug to partly divert the water flow from the forest catchment area that could bring decomposed organic matters directly into the uplands. The earthwork started by the end of 1997 and was completed in May 1998 before the onset of monsoon.

The villagers also agreed not to release their cattle in the forestland. They also took stringent measures to prevent grazing by cattle from surrounding villages. BSS also requested its fellow villagers to stop cutting twigs from plants for a year.

Since then BSS has been carefully monitoring the growth of forest cover. After 2 years, it allowed its members to collect leaves and firewood from the forest in 1999.

For the earthwork, BSS received financial support from the DRDA under NWDP. BSS contributed almost 25% of the cost through labour.

Impact of Treatment

Soil erosion has been checked as a direct result of land development on the uplands and by

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restricting runoff.

The soil texture has also improved significantly with plenty of decomposed organic matter from the forest being deposited on the *bunded* uplands. The coarse and sandy upland soil has received plenty of humus and turned into a sandy loam texture.

The nutrient status of the soil has improved considerably. This contributed greatly towards increasing the crop production. With the change in soil texture, soil depth as well as moisture retention has also seen marked improvement. The moisture regime at all levels has now stretched to February.

The overall improvement in soil moisture regime and texture has prompted farmers to cultivate paddy on uplands that earlier only grew minor oilseeds. The upland paddy fields that could earlier support only short-duration paddy varieties are being planted with long-duration varieties.

In almost 60% of the treated cultivable patch people are growing wheat as a second crop during the Rabi season. Overall production has

increased significantly.

The entire cultivation is done without applying chemical fertilisers. People are now finding out that the organic matter deposited in the fields is the single most important factor that has improved and stabilised their crop production from 1.6 tonnes per ha to 3 tonnes per ha.

They now plan to use the excess organic matter available in the forest to make compost pits all around the village. This would enhance the fertility status of adjoining lands. In about 60% of the total area, cropping intensity has gone up to 200%.

Increase in soil fertility has resulted into an exponential increase in the paddy production in the past 2 years. The production has gone up from a mere 1.2 tonne per ha to 3 tonne per ha.

There is an additional tonne of processed rice available to most families. The production of wheat has also contributed greatly forwards ensuring food security round the year in 90% of the families.

Another dimension of attain-

ing food security is the near-complete check on distress selling of harvested cereals, earlier a regular phenomenon in this village.

Significant Benefits

There have been other significant benefits as well. Women can collect firewood from the village forest itself. They can also bathe in the pond in reasonable privacy. Village livestock have ample drinking water.

There is potential for more benefits. Fish can be cultivated in the pond. Farmers can add vegetables to their repertoire. Field dams can be planted with trees.

There is also some cause for worry. As the villagers do not have any kind of entitlement or rights over the forest plantation, the forest department may give contracts for cutting and felling of the trees. This might completely destroy the entire ecosystem.

But on the flip side, it is likely that villagers will resist the felling of the forest through united action. They might even demand reasonable entitlements over the plantation through bilateral negotiations.

Looking Ahead

The villagers of Bamerjhanti are now looking ahead. Eight farmers have opted for the Pradan-promoted and UNDP-supported *tasar* sericulture programme. The Phul Kumari Mahila Mandal has twice mobilised bank loans worth Rs 20,000 approximately to procure agricultural inputs.

The situation offers a number of yet untapped opportunities to villagers. Fish may be grown in the ponds, vegetables may be grown in fields and

There are challenges ahead as well. Eight wells constructed under the Jal Hai Jahan programme of the government require repairs and are held back due to lack of resources. A much required check dam in the forest offers another challenge to the community.

plantations on *bunds* could be supplementary sources of livelihoods.

There are challenges ahead as well. Eight wells constructed under the Jal Hai Jahan programme of the government require repairs and are held back due to lack of resources.

A much required check dam in the forest offers another challenge to the community and us. No construction work may be undertaken on forestland but the villagers have received support from the District Collector of Dumka to address the issue.

The issue of rights over the forest plantation is most critical at this point. The villagers have no rights over the forest. The forest department can anytime give out a contract to cut and fell trees.

This would not only destroy the entire ecosystem in the area, but also the lives of those living in Bamerjhanti. Is resistance the only course of action? Or are there ways in which villagers might now demand reasonable entitlements over the plantation through bilateral negotiations? ■

The villagers now plan to use the excess organic matter available in the forest to make compost pits all around the village. This would enhance the fertility status of adjoining lands. In about 60% of the total area, cropping intensity has gone up to 200%.

The 6 R's Approach

Using gender analysis to provide a better perspective on development interventions

Helzi Noponen

THE 6 R's of gender analysis is a simple teaching and conceptual thinking tool. It is a summary of the key research or investigative steps in undertaking a gender analysis of proposed development interventions or critiquing existing ones. It is an easy-to-remember guide for thinking about the special needs of women in development plans and programmes (see diagram).

Although we often equate the word gender with women, it also includes men. Gender is a lens or a way to look at the world and observe different roles for women and men in society. These roles are not biologically determined. They are

socially constructed and can therefore be changed.

Roles

Women play more different roles in society than men. Poor women too have multiple roles. Traditionally, women have been considered to primarily play a reproductive role as child bearers and homemakers.

They have also traditionally played a productive role working in key stages of production on the family farm or business. They gather important consumption items such as food, fuel, herbs, medicines from the natural environment and produce useful household goods which saves the household from having to purchase them

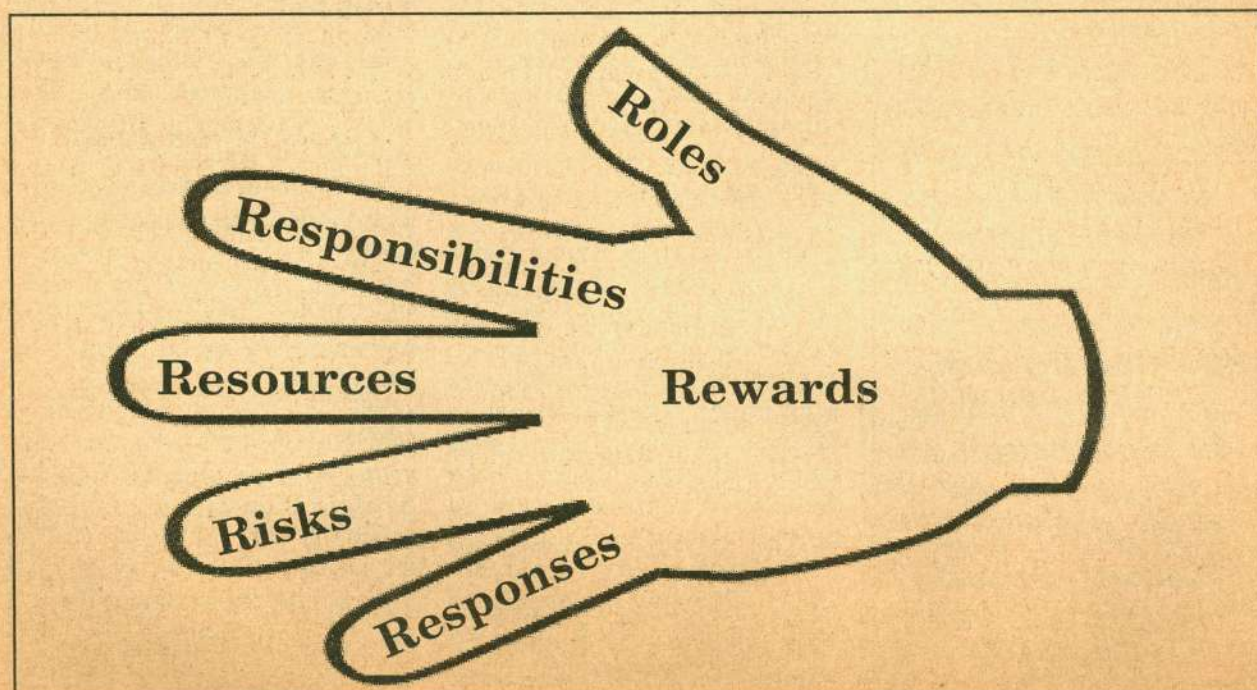
in the market.

Increasingly, women must also work to earn cash in the market economy. The problem is that we often view their reproductive roles and fail to recognise, value or support their productive roles.

Responsibilities

The multiple roles mean that women have many responsibilities and labour tasks to perform. As caretakers they must shop or gather food, process it, cook it, collect water and fuel, clean, take care of children, nurse the sick and teach the young.

These tasks become more difficult in environmental conditions that lack basic services or



in degraded natural environments that face recurring disasters.

As producers they must also help in family economic activities or earn their own income. Here women face a lack of adequate work opportunities and low incomes.

Resources

Access to resources stems from how one's role in society is valued. Women have less claim on resources than men do because it values the role of the male "breadwinner" over the female "caretaker".

Resources include not just money and material wealth, but also access to educational resources, legal rights and mobility in society, influence and decision-making power in the home and the community.

Given their multiple roles and responsibilities, women lack the scarce resource of time. They are poor in time. They are the last to rest, the last to recreate.

Risks

Women face considerable risks in life because of their

The multiple roles mean that women have many responsibilities and labour tasks to perform. As caretakers they must shop or gather food, process it, cook it, collect water and fuel, clean, take care of children, nurse the sick and teach the young.

lack of access to resources. Women, especially poor women, face the risk of overwork, poor health, low education, lower earnings, greater poverty and exploitation. The declining male to female sex ratio reveals that women are failing to survive in many societies, dying prematurely in every age group.

Responses

Women may have perverse or unexpected responses to development projects if those projects have been designed without proper consideration of their roles, responsibilities, resources and risks.

If we design a micro-credit programme that demands too much of the women's time or schedule group activities when other tasks must be performed, women may fail to participate. If we design a centralised woman's bank, women with less mobility in society may be unable to access its services.

If we expand women's income earning activities, women may withdraw their young daughters from school to carry out these tasks because of their multiple tasks and time constraints. A perverse or unexpected result of our programmes could be a decrease in girls' education.

If we fail to see the women's lack of access to productive trades, adequate supplies or profitable product markets, we may see that over time micro-credit services have decreasing impact on increasing women's productivity.

Rewards

Rewards are the benefits or lack of benefits for women. It is sometimes the leftover when

Women may have perverse or unexpected responses to development projects if those projects have been designed without proper consideration of their roles and responsibilities.

development officials either succeed or fail to do a proper gender analysis before designing their projects and programmes.

If we design programmes well by considering women's roles, their responsibilities, limited resource base, heightened risks in life and how they might respond to our interventions, women will reap the intended rewards. It means that we do our gender analysis well. ■

Write in NewsReach

Confused?
Caught in a dilemma?
Want to share your questions?
Done something differently?
Found a new solution to an old problem?
Used a known solution to solve a new problem?
Write in NewsReach.
Did an article strike a chord within you?
Do you disagree with something you have read?
Would you like to share your experiences with the writer?
Or ask her or him a question or two?
Send your responses to the articles in this issue to promote the exchange of views.

Letters to the Editor

Developmental Questions

Dear Editor,

FIRST LET me congratulate the editorial team at NewsReach for reviving and regularising the magazine. In an organisation that is so far flung as Pradan, a magazine like this plays the crucial role of keeping us in touch with each other.

After the numerous ups and downs in the past several years, the resurrection has been spectacular. Let us all hope that the momentum is maintained. Let us try to make it a forum for free-wheeling discussions of all kinds that will add value to us as development practitioners and to the communities that we work with.

One immediate purpose for writing this letter has been to respond to an issue that I thought was being alluded to in the write-up by Bijay Swain in his travelogue, more specifically his reflections on the work of ASA (NewsReach April 2001).

On the whole I have found the 2 instalments that I have read quite instructive. I have not seen ASA myself but have seen similar Grameen Bank replicas and have been awe-struck by their efficiency, the clarity of purpose at each level, the tightness of the systems, the clockwork operations and the strict financial discipline, all so critically important to a micro-finance delivery organisation. I am sure it is the same strictness and discipline that we need to instil in our own groups to make them excellent micro-finance organisations.

I am not so sure of the way out he suggests or rather hints at. I agree with the proposition that an efficient accountant contributes to the sustainability of an SHG. But as Bijay's line of

argument tries to prove that not having an efficient accountant can lead to reduction of participation in group meetings and disappearance of confrontation then I will say that as facilitators we are not playing our role.

A micro-finance delivery organisation is built around its staff and they have total control. A self-help group is built around its members and they are supposed to have total control. It is their breadth of vision, their perceived stake and their ownership that makes the group a vibrant and robust institution.

Systems have to be maintained by them. They have to demonstrate the requisite discipline. If the accountant does not perform, it is for them to display the management capabilities to take corrective measures or hire a different one or at the worst learn to live with it. But if the group withers away due to this, what they are displaying is neither vision nor wisdom but a total passive dependence on the outsider.

I know what Bijay says is true in many of our groups. The question we need to ask ourselves is why is this happening? Why are we not playing our role in transforming a collective of illiterate poor women into a strong development institution? Is it because of lack of knowledge and skills? Or is it because we believe it is not possible in the context that we work in?

The answer to a developmental question of this nature cannot be as simplistic as hiring a cadre of field workers. Inquiry needs to be at more fundamental levels and our whole group promotion methodology needs to be revisited.

*D Narendranath
Jaipur, Rajasthan*

Useful Suggestions

Dear Editor,

Thanks a lot for sending the February 2001 copy of NewsReach. I got much pleasure going through the second part of Vijay Mahajan's article regarding the evolution of BASIX.

Our NewsReach is full of quality material. It is now very informative and useful. Its layout and printing style is quite good. I am happy that NewsReach is now published regularly and goes to various organisations and people besides Pradanites.

I have certain suggestions for NewsReach. When a reader (development professional, student, teacher or administrator) reads it for the first time, he or she would like to know more about Pradan. It would be nice if you can add a paragraph about Pradan in each issue of NewsReach.

I also think you can add more value to NewsReach by gradually including new sections. They could include information about various institutes and organisations (teaching, training, research, resources, funding and networking) directly or indirectly linked to the development sector. This will improve readers' knowledge base. We can draw support from these institutes and organisations related to our work.

There are various newsletters and magazines related to the development sector, which are circulated free of cost by various institutes and organisations. You could publish the names and addresses of these in NewsReach for the benefit of readers.

*Bishnu Parida
Karanjia, Mayurbhanj, Orissa ■*

Out of the Cocoon

Our *tasar* exhibition at Crafts Museum in New Delhi was a success

Khitish Pandya

THE TASAR Development Centre (TDC) of Pradan organised an exhibition of photographs, *Out of the Cocoon*, by Margriet Smulders from August 1 to September 30 at the Crafts Museum in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi.

It was the result of collaboration between Pradan and ICCO of the Netherlands to photographically document the entire process of *tasar* sericulture — from cocoon to fabric. The Union ministry of textiles under the UNDP programme to promote *tasar* sericulture also supported the exhibition.

The exhibition, inaugurated by textile secretary Mr Anil Kumar, attracted more than 5,000 visitors. Many of them were boutique owners and fashion trackers who shape fashion trends in the realm of traditional fabrics.

We were able to generate some business from specialist boutiques, which might be sustainable, as they are regular purchasers of *tasar* and other natural fabrics. The event was also extensively covered in the national English and vernacular press.

Smulders, a professional photographer from the Netherlands, spent over a month capturing the entire process of *tasar* sericulture in Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand. The 52 photographs exhibited were mounted in specially designed frames to make them suitable for exhibition in various places. The exhibition was extended for a month on



At the inauguration: (from left to right) Khitish Pandya, Satyabrata Acharyya, textile secretary Anil Kumar, joint secretary Kiran Dhingra and Achintya Ghosh.

popular demand.

While inaugurating the exhibition, Mr Kumar stressed upon the importance of collaborative efforts between the government and NGOs. He also showed an interest in comparative costs between village-level and government grainages.

The photographs and the fabric were greatly appreciated by the visitors. Henriques Da Silva of

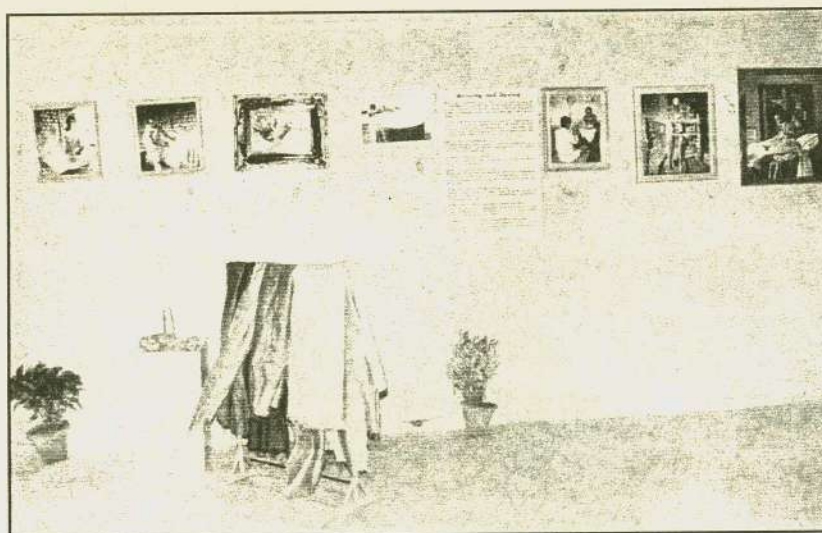
the Portuguese Embassy said, "Very interesting exhibition and nice photographs. It's a shame there's no silk on sale." According to Melinda Pilling of the US it was a good demonstration of an empowering project.

"Nice display, peaceful setting, good background info. Well done," said Eddieen Nandini of Amsterdam. Said Anjali Sawant Mumbai, "Till today we wore a *sari* without knowing about the hard work. Thank you for providing us the insight." "An excellent project of self-help," said Par Battams of the UK.

According to Marta Pene of Spain it was the best exposition she had seen in India. "Holding a cocoon was a marvellous experience for my children," said Vinod Anand of the US.

"The *tasar* project of Pradan has many possibilities," said

While inaugurating the exhibition, textile secretary Anil Kumar stressed upon the importance of collaborative efforts between the government and the NGOs.



Uzamma of Hyderabad-based Dastkar. Ashok Chatterjee of Crafts Council of India, Ahmedabad also found the exhibition impressive.

The response of visitors to our displayed products was so enthusiastic that we had to hasten the opening up of the office-cum-showroom to entertain interested buyers. We were not allowed to sell within the premises of the exhibition as per rules of the Crafts Museum.

The overall demand for silk is increasing steadily in the domestic and international markets. The Indian silk market is growing at 5% per annum. This offers opportunity for growth for the *tasar* sericulture. For the poor families engaged in the activity gain from this opportunity would require concerted action of various stakeholders.

Apart from the development of robust programmes in the field and promotion of people's organisations, it also requires support through policies, research, extension and market development. We had embarked on this photo exhibition project keeping this mind.

Public awareness about the various aspects of *tasar* sericulture remains limited. Detailed

information about the life cycle of the silkworm, processes of silkworm rearing, yarn production and weaving, the product range and the profile of people involved in *tasar* sericulture are not easily available.

The availability of such information can enlighten concerned quarters about critical issues and encourage informed policy making. Such information could also raise awareness among different players in the market. It might generate an interest among segment that influences fashion trends.

It could help to educate the new generation about *tasar*. This increased awareness would lead to greater acceptance and regular patronage. It might even

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catch the fancy of the media, which could result in favourable public opinion due to greater media coverage.

There was a spate of newspaper reports on the exhibition and we were able to get coverage in both Hindi as well as English national dailies such as the Hindu, the Indian Express, Asian Age, Jansatta, Rastriya Sahara and others. There was a regular stream of visitors. A lot of them also came to visit our showroom.

Besides the casual visitor, we were able to attract a lot of boutique owners who have already started booking orders with us.

Overall the exhibition has served our need to promote *tasar* by Pradan among consumers as well as opinion leaders. It has helped to associate us strongly with *tasar* in the trade.

The exhibition also invoked an interest in the textile minister. Minister Mr Kashi Ram Rana has asked to visit our project sites in Godda in mid-September. This has lent a lot of credibility and publicity for *tasar* and Pradan's effort to rejuvenate this sector among local officials in Jharkhand as well officials in the textile ministry.

The exhibition has helped us on various fronts. It has made the bureaucracy more aware. Lots of art and crafts as well as fashion students have visited the exhibition and hopefully are more enthused by the fabric. Boutiques specialising in ethnic and natural fabric have got to know us.

The media coverage will definitely help to establish *Tasar* by Pradan in the minds of consumers, trade and government officials. In fact, the National Institute of Fashion Technology now plans to host our *tasar* in their resource centre and to cover *Tasar* by Pradan in their fashion magazine. ■

Institutional Maturity Index

A tool used by Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India) for participatory monitoring of the maturity of village institutions

Debdoot Mohanty

THE AGA Khan Rural Support Programme (India) – AKRSP (I) — is a non-profit, non-communal organisation working in 3 districts of Gujarat for the past 15 years to empower rural communities, especially the women and the underprivileged.

We recognise the role of women as equal partners in natural resources development and management. We have focussed on them by creating an enabling environment for them to participate on an equal footing with men in the decision-making process. We support programmes on forestry, soil and water conservation, small irrigation projects, biogas, agriculture development and savings and credit.

Why Participation?

People, particularly the women and the poor will participate in any development work only when they feel that the initiative is focussed on them. They will take an interest and will participate actively if the programme objectives are aimed at their livelihoods. Micro-credit is one such programme that aims at improving their economic status, thereby increasing their social status.

India has a population of about 170 million living below the poverty line. They are deprived of access to resources. Out of

the total poor, 50% are women, who are the most disadvantaged. Unless we address this disparity, there will be conflict over the ownership of access and control over natural resources and the consequent rights.

The Institutional Maturity Index (IMI) was originally developed by AKRSP (Pakistan) and then modified and customised by AKRSP (I) according to specific needs.

It is basically a simple index chart with a set of necessary, sufficient and weighted parameters to gauge the maturity of any village institution. Each parameter is scored on a scale of 0 to 4. Each point on the scale indicates a particular type of situation based on that parameter. A score of 4 implies ideal situation attained on that parameter and a score of 0 implies worst scenario.

Each of the parameters are

People, particularly the women and the poor will be interested in any development work only when they feel that the initiative is focussed on them. They will then take an active interest in the programmes.

required to reach a minimum desired score (MDS). On a scale of maximum 4 points (8 points in the case of parameter that is weighted), the MDS could be 3 points. The scores attained against each of the parameters are then totalled and equalised out of 100 points.

It must be noted that the parameters and the 5 different situations described against each parameter are representative of the region in which the NGO is operating and its socio-economic characteristics. There is nothing sacred about these parameters, which should be evolved jointly by the community and the NGO.

Evolution of IMI

AKRSP (I) started to use IMI in 1993. Our Surendranagar programme area staff first laid down the parameters. These parameters were evolved as a result of discussions with village institution (VI) team members on what constitutes a good VI. In time, staff interaction regarding members' perception of a good VI and values that the staff would like to inculcate in VIs were added to prepare a set of parameters based on which VIs could be evaluated regarding their performance.

In 1995 the Bharuch district team developed the tool for their programme area. They took a step forward by linking parameters with proper weigh-

tage. They also laid down few more parameters for each VI to fulfil, leading to a withdrawal from the VI as far as AKRSP (I) was concerned.

The Junagadh district team also laid down its own parameters. A relative index was developed ranging from poor to good, based on the performance of their VIs.

Key Parameters

The key parameters are equity, participation, management, finance and sustainability. Based on these parameters, sub-parameters to attain the main parameters were developed. Then a detailed index chart is prepared. The index chart has parameters on the Y-axis and weightage on the X-axis.

Although the parameters have been changing, making a trend analysis impossible, AKRSP (I) has constructively used IMI for locating the overall weakness of VIs in general. By using the IMI major weaknesses in each SHGs were found and taken care of in the next year's plan.

A good number of VIs had become defunct in the

Surendranagar programme area due to irregularity of accounts in 1994. We took the following steps after identifying the problem from the IMI:

- ◆ Impart training to committee members and the chairperson to check books of accounts. This helped in widening the accountability of the secretary and establishing a checking mechanism from within the VI was established.

- ◆ We also made it compulsory to read out the books of accounts in the monthly meeting of the VI. This made the accounts system more transparent. It also forced the secretary, who was also the group accountant, to finish writing of accounts before the meetings.

User Evaluation

In the beginning IMI was used by the AKRSP (I) VI team members and the weaknesses were incorporated in the MBO (management by objectives) of the concerned community organisers. It is a self-evaluative exercise to be done by the community or the VI.

Within the VI, either the committee or the executive body of the VI or the general body may do this exercise during any of the regular weekly or monthly meetings.

The NGO staff should not be involved in the evaluation and should limit its involvement to the extent of providing clarifications on the parameters. Since the situations against each parameter are fairly objective, it is not likely to create much ambiguity.

Started on a yearly basis, we subsequently ranked performance on half-yearly basis. Not that AKRSP (I) expects major changes in the ranking in just 6 months, but at least it gives

Since 1998, the idea changed to the process of joint IMI, where our staff facilitates the process and helps the village institution members realise their own weaknesses and prepare an action plan for the whole year. This also helped staff members to plan for the year.

some indication of the lacunae in the activities undertaken.

Since its inception in 1993, AKRSP (I) has been using IMI as a tool to monitor the progress of VIs. The staff of AKRSP (I) did the monitoring.

Since 1998, the idea changed to the process of joint IMI, where AKRSP (I)'s staff facilitates the process and helps VI members realise their own weaknesses and prepare an action plan for the whole year. This also helped staff members to plan for the year.

With this participatory monitoring process, IMI has now become a tool for internal learning, for empowering VIs, rather than merely an external monitoring tool.

Field Experiences

Gram Vikas Mandal (GVM), Gajargota

The process of joint IMI led to the village planning for year 2000 in terms of MBO of the VI at Gajargota village of Dediapada Taluka.

The process helped them to realise that the VI hadn't gone beyond the boundary of natural resource interventions and had

The NGO staff should not be involved in the evaluation and should limit its involvement to the extent of providing clarifications on the parameters. Since the situations against each parameter are fairly objective, it is not likely to create much ambiguity.

not moved to village-level issues.

This actually broadened the vision of collective strength of the VI. They had not thought in that direction. Soon they were ready to seek opportunity where they could build up linkages with the government.

An opportunity arrived when the GVM realised that road works by the contractor appointed through the Taluka Panchayat was of bad quality. It took up the matter with the Panchayat and got the work stopped. The contractor admitted his mistake and work restarted under GVM supervision.

Lift Irrigation Societies (LISs) of Kabaripathar and Koliwada

The LISs of Kabaripathar and Koliwada of Dediapada Taluka are functioning quite efficiently in water distribution and repayment of loan to AKRSP (I).

However, the IMI process revealed that the groups had never done financial planning. Confronted with this weakness, the LISs started doing financial planning and realised the importance of advance payment of water charges, as well as the value of people's contribution.

Gram Vikas Mandal, Khedipada

During the Joint IMI exercises with the members of Khedipada

village of Dediapada Taluka, the weak areas identified included no voluntary savings, very little external linkages and low attendance in meetings.

As a result the GVM started voluntary savings, linkages with government agencies increased independently and committees became very active in undertaking savings-credit-input supply activity.

Benefits of Joint IMI

- ◆ Increases the vision of the Village Institution members.

- ◆ Increases the sense of responsibility of the committee members and also of the general members.

- ◆ Facilitates the process of analysis of weak areas and planning to address these areas.

- ◆ Monthly review of plans set keeps the committee active.

- ◆ Drives the effort to always do the best.

- ◆ Reduces AKRSP (I)'s role to a great extent: MBO of AKRSP (I) staff then becomes MBO of the VI.

AKRSP (I) has been using the IMI for the past 7 years. We have developed the range of parameters further to cover different types of VIs we were working with such as gram vikas mandal, mahila vikas mandal, self-help groups, irrigation societies, users groups and watershed groups.

Its range of indicators has been extended from those covering purely physical management aspects to those covering social aspects such as gender and equity.

While AKRSP (I) found evaluating the institutional maturity of its partner VIs to be a worthwhile exercise, the IMI did not assist it in systematically guiding VIs towards maturity and

We have been using the IMI for the past 7 years. We have developed the range of parameters further to cover different types of village institutions we were working with such as gram vikas mandal and mahila vikas mandal.

independence.

It was from the recognition of the gap that we developed the LOGFID (logical framework for institutional development). This is intended as a tool to systematically plan for and monitor the enhancement of human capacity, through the creation of sustainable people's organisations.

Editor's note: This paper was presented at our inception workshop on grassroots learning and participatory methodologies held in New Delhi on September 12 and 13, 2001. The November issue of NewsReach would carry a write up by Debdoot Mohanty on the LOGFID. ■

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Attention Readers

We understand that some NewsReach readers are not receiving their copies. If you have not received issues from January to August, please let us know and we will send you photocopies.

Editor

Updates on Projects

HRD Unit

*Contributed by Smita Mohanty,
New Delhi*

SINCE ITS inception in 1994, the HRD unit focussed on recruitment, induction and early training of young professionals at the entry level. Now a more urgent HRD agenda is that of on-going professional development.

Twenty-two recruiters visited 28 campuses and made over 125 offers of apprenticeship in the past months. They visited 13 campuses during January to March 2001. We made a total of 150 offers. We expect a turnout of 33%. During this period 42 apprentices have joined and 15 are expected to join by November 1, 2001. Following dropouts, 26 apprentices remain on board.

The quality of the apprenticeship programme has had a fillip with the process awareness and sensitivity module taking root. The demand for focus on thematic issues has been partially met by introducing a training module on the SHG programme from the 23rd batch of apprentices onwards. The village study workshop has also been enhanced with the inclusion of a PRA module.

In a major step forward the apprenticeship design has been shared with all those with 3+ years experience within Pradan. The programme design would now be frozen for the coming 2 years. We would shortly circulate a booklet on the programme.

The Field Guide-Apprentice relationship is the backbone of the apprenticeship programme. All field guides have now been through a 4-phase Field Guides Development Programme and our focus in the past 6 months has shifted to the post-training phase. A field guide's learning

forum has taken root over the year and we hope that more such learning forums would grow within Pradan.

Ongoing professional development is now the most important agenda before us. We are currently in the design phase and have simultaneously initiated 3 new programmes during the last 6 months. They included the training of trainers for entrepreneurial motivation training, in collaboration with NIESBUD (National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development). The first of this 2-phase programme was conducted for our teams in Vidisha, Raigarh and Kesla. The next programme in December is scheduled for the Purulia, Jamshedpur, Keonjhar and Chakradharpur teams.

Outreach of Bangalore is helping us develop a pool of internal resource persons in who would, once fully trained, run the PRA module for apprentices in the longer term. The first programme has already been conducted and an advanced programme is scheduled for November 2001.

Bringing a large number of apprentices on board who would ultimately opt for a long-term career goal in Pradan remains a major concern. We have the capacity to guide at least 60-70 apprentices a year and need 30-35 Executives to join Pradan regularly. We are working out strategies to facilitate 60-70 apprentices to join Pradan's apprenticeship programme.

Khunti, Ranchi district, Jharkhand

*Abstracted from the
Consultative Forum Report*

IN 1994, our team shifted from Silli in the Ranchi district to the

tribal dominated Khunti subdivision to mainly promote community managed irrigation systems. We are now reorganising to focus our efforts in the blocks of Torpa, Karra and Khunti.

The first task during the past 6 months was to identify potential pockets and develop a team strategy. We decided to focus on 2 large pockets in the operational area. The selection criteria were extreme poverty and no NGOs working in the pocket.

One pocket comprises Torpa and adjoining areas of southern Karra. The second pocket includes Magangada in north-east Khunti and adjoining areas of Arki and Bundu blocks. But after Dhiraj Horo went on leave, we postponed plans for the second pocket and concentrated exclusively on Torpa.

From April to September we aimed to complete and close all lift irrigation (LI) schemes and 2 watersheds, including infrastructure; review and consolidate existing self-help groups (SHGs); promote 46 new SHGs; pilot a few income generating activities (IGA); intervene in the Kharif crop, and reorganise placement of professionals to focus team efforts in contiguous poverty pockets.

We have been able to complete 90% of the work. Thirty eight SHGs were formed. Implementation is complete in all pending 29 LI schemes except Bara Juri in Khunti. All LI accounts have been checked. The last part of the closure — transferring the assets to the community and formally closing the schemes — will be completed by the end of September.

The watershed programme has not received any fund in the past 2 years. Payments are still due to

some villagers. There seems to be no hope of programme resumption in the near future. We plan to wind up the programme after submitting details of assets created and transferred to the community.

Looking back at these 6 months, it seems that most of the team's efforts went in clearing pending issues. Consolidation and stabilisation of the scattered SHG project took more time than expected.

Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts, Orissa

Contributed by Sibabrata Choudhury, Keonjhar and Bishnu Parida, Mayurbhanj

OUR TEAM in the northern hilly tracts of Orissa operates in the 3 blocks of Banspal, Keonjhar Sadar and Patana in Keonjhar district and in the Karanjia block of Mayurbhanj district. We also initiated a development project for rural women in Mayurbhanj district in August 2000 on the invitation of World Food Programme (WFP) Bhubaneswar.

In Keonjhar we have installed 31 micro-irrigation schemes in 29 villages and have formed 52 savings and credit groups. Our team has seen some changes, too, with our team leader Ranjan Mohapatra leaving Pradan. He is in the process of setting up an organisation. On the plus side, Aparna Dash shifted here from the Barhi team and Bijay Swain from the Lohardaga team plans to shift here in October 2001.

In the first quarter we consolidated accounts of existing SHGs; interacted with block and bank officials; conducted training for 5 group accountants, and implemented projects funded by the IGSSS (Indo German Social Service Society) in 2 villages.

We are concerned about the slow growth rate of the groups. Also, the SHGs are yet not ready to take loans from banks and initiate income generating activities. Wild elephants are causing havoc in our project villages. They are destroying crop and houses and have even caused casualties.

Our objective in Karanjia is to organise SHGs around savings and credit; collaborate with mainstream banks, and enable women to develop skills to manage micro-enterprises and sustainable livelihood activities.

We began this period with 43 women SHGs promoted by us in 22 villages in 3 panchayats of Karanjia. A total of 553 women are members of these SHGs, who saved Rs 71,405 and rotated credit of Rs 98,760 among themselves.

From April 2001 we have focussed on experimenting with various livelihood activities with women SHG members to develop robust investment opportunities.

We initiated an improved maize demonstration programme to increase productivity of uplands and add cash incomes to the families. This year we have promoted Navjot maize seed. In some cases we have promoted inter-cropping with *arhar*. The people are contributing 50% of input cost to their SHGs. Maize demonstration was done in 12 villages with 116 families in 20 acres of land.

We also intervened in improved backyard poultry. We have undertaken this programme in 13 villages with 20 women SHGs. A total of 139 families are participating in this experiment.

SHG Thematic Unit

Contributed by D Narendranath, Jaipur

NARENDRANATH BEGAN integrating the SHG theme from June 2001. Many tasks remain ahead. Documentation initiated

in the previous phase needs completion. Software developed for SHG accounts is to be launched. Professionals implementing the newly developed training modules for SHGs need systematic preparation. And we need to develop a methodology for impact assessment of SHGs. Most of these will be integrated with the HRD unit and the RRC.

There has been considerable demand from the teams for the setting up of systems for SHGs. The standard operating procedures for promoting SHGs and the accounting system for groups and the training modules have been used by most teams. The modules need revision based on feedback received.

On the impact assessment front, IDS, Sussex, has approved the proposal submitted by Pradan for the impact assessment programme we are participating in. Our focus is now on developing a methodology, which integrates women's learning as well as provides a basis for impact assessment and programme learning. Our Godda and Alwar teams have initiated a benchmark study.

We have also introduced a thematic training for all new apprentices.

Dholpur, Rajasthan

Abstracted from the Consultative Forum Report

WE STARTED our development intervention in Dholpur nearly 19 months back. The team supports poor people to enhance their income mainly through SHGs and watershed development.

Our team is working in 3 watersheds spread over 18 villages and 1,445 hectares (ha). These watersheds were transferred from the panchayat *samity* to the team as the project implementing authority. Out of the 3, 2

schemes end in October and the third next year.

We have completed all physical activities in one watershed while 70% and 50% is completed in the second and the third watersheds respectively. We will facilitate the construction of 3 small ponds in the next 6 months. More than 60 ha of land in the operational areas are affected by the problem of alkalinity and salinity. Farmers are growing *dhaincha*, a leguminous crop, to reclaim these lands.

Out of the 17 water users groups in 3 watersheds, 8 are involved in savings and credit activities. Two groups of 26 families are rearing goats. We have sought technical help from the Central Institute on Goat Research in Maghdoom, Mathura. We have organised a training programme and few families were taken for an exposure trip to Maghdoom.

We had planned to promote 3 user groups — one group has been formed for land development in the Nangla Bhagat watershed. We had also planned for 6 vision building exercises but have not attended to it yet as our focus was on completion of the infrastructure work. We conducted agro-horticulture training for farmers from the Nangla Bhagat and Bhilgavan watersheds.

In the first half, our team did not take fresh initiatives in the SHG programme as Mukta left, as planned. We are currently working with 35 SHGs, of which 10 were formed in the last 6 months. Only one SHG has yet linked with a bank. The SHGs have generated savings of Rs 1,56,310 and cumulative loans of Rs 4,25,399.

The team has set itself the task of promoting dairy co-operatives by forming village level federations in at least 5 villages in the coming months. We have devel-

oped a strategy to intervene in dairy and livestock development, which are major sources of income of the poor families in the area.

Barhi-Koderma, Hazaribagh district, Jharkhand

Abstracted from the Consultative Forum Report

BARHI IS located at the junction of the Delhi-Calcutta and Ranchi-Patna roads in Hazaribagh district. It is about 145 km north from Ranchi. We have worked here from 1990, in 5 blocks in and around Barhi. The 3 blocks of Barhi, Chouparan and Padma are in Hazaribagh and the Jainagar and Koderma blocks are in Koderma district. Promoting SHGs is the core activity in all these areas. There are 491 SHGs at present.

We divided the project work during this period into different activities. We planned to promote 65 groups during these months, of which we promoted 59. Professionals in the team took direct responsibility in new areas, whereas the cluster organizations and leadership took care of new groups formed in the Barhi and Chouparan clusters. Demand for forming SHGs has increased in the past 6 months.

During this period 156 accountants were trained in 17 accounts training programmes of different phases. We had been meaning to introduce examination systems to identify accountants of different capacity. We have now finalised such a system of examination and evaluation. We also conducted 7 membership training programmes in which 158 members of 32 groups participated.

We have decided to form new clusters with groups when they

are 6-8 months old. Only 2 of the 3 new cluster organisations were formed. Seeding the cluster concept in the new areas of Jainagar and Koderma was a challenge. Strengthening existing clusters has also remained an important agenda. We identified important roles that a cluster should perform and used these to assess performance — 21 out of 29 clusters are functioning well.

Linking groups with banks remained a top priority and our target was to link 100 groups to banks, paying more attention to the Padma and Jainagar areas. We assumed that in the existing Barhi and Chouparan areas SHGs would come up with a audit demand on their own. We planned to link 42 groups, but managed to link only 25, mobilising Rs 9.15 lakh from banks.

During this period we have also streamlined the MIS data of 400 SHGs. This was done as a part of the impact assessment work. We have also conducted PRA exercises in some groups.

Another critical task was to work closely with 200 families in 3 clusters of scheduled caste and OBC families in Chouparan, Jainagar and Padma—to design and develop an appropriate livelihood intervention. We have now decided to first focus on improving existing livelihood practices before introducing any new ones. Three broad areas identified for improvement included improvement in paddy cultivation, introduction of improved vegetable cultivation and papaya cultivation on homestead land and protection of the existing animal pool.

Based on prior groundwork, the intervention with poor OBC families in the same cluster focussed on increasing milk production. Lack of veterinary support was the major cause we identified behind people not opting for dairies. To address this

problem 16 persons who were earlier given training on veterinary practices from the Birsa Agriculture University agreed to meet once every month to review the progress of their work.

Sironj, Vidisha district, Madhya Pradesh

Abstracted from the Consultative Forum Report

WE STARTED our Sironj team in Vidisha in August last year at the request of the state government to operate under its District Poverty Initiative Programme (DPIP). Ashok Kumar from Chaibasa, Jharkhand and Sulakshana Nandi from Alwar, Rajasthan shifted there and initiated activity.

We have identified Sironj and Lateri, two adjacent blocks of the Vidisha district, as DPIP blocks. While the overall plan is to work with approximately 8,000 families from 150 target villages over 5 years, we have begun work in 48 villages of Sironj. We are also negotiating with DPIP for allocating the identified villages of Lateri so that we can work in a geographically compact area in the long term.

The team's plan was moderate in the first half of the year because of the monsoons and the problem of visiting the villages. While we are promoting SHGs in all the target villages, we have also initiated irrigation, soil and moisture conservation, drainage structures, goat rearing and vegetable cultivation in 4 villages. DPIP provides a grant of Rs 20,000 per family through common interest groups (CIGs). As this is a new project with a big budget, the fund flow from the DPIP has been smooth to the families.

The team has focussed on livelihoods of marginal cultivator families, to provide necessary help to farmers to ensure substantial increase in income. Our irrigated agriculture activity package consists of creation of wells, installing pumps, providing agriculture training and consultation from Krishi Vigyan Kendra, exposure to shops and markets for procuring seed and other inputs and market exposure for selling produces.

We formed 13 new self help groups over the past 6 months. We have also implemented one irrigation system. Land levelling work has been done with 20 families. We promoted goat rearing with 21 families in one village. We have also helped a few villages construct rainwater and soil conservation structures.

The main challenge facing us is to develop systems to effectively and efficiently implement activities undertaken on a large scale, where professional time is the scarcest resource.

Balliguda, Kandhamal district, Orissa

Abstracted from the Consultative Forum Report

PRADAN HAD placed a team in the Bhanjanagar sub-division of the Ganjam district to promote community managed irrigation schemes. Taking note of the acute poverty in the adjacent Kandhamal district, our team spread similar activities in the Daringbadi block of the district. In May 2000, we withdrew from our operations in Ganjam and moved to Balliguda, one of the sub-divisional headquarters of Kandhamal.

The area selected by the team to work in the coming 3 years comprises 14 contiguous panchayats with a base at Balliguda

and within a radius of 30 km. The district HQ of Phulbani is 80 km away.

The objective of our team is to bring social and economic development in the lives of the poor Kandla tribals through enhancing their income by setting up sustainable livelihood generation systems. Our main activities include promoting women's self-help groups and irrigated agriculture as a source of livelihoods.

In the past 6 months the team has organised a SHG federal get together, which was attended by 800 women and 200 men. We have strengthened the groups through group assessment, tightening of norms and systematising processes. We have also been successful in finding wider acceptance in the area.

We have systematised accounts of the groups and have started data collection from them. We have also initiated cluster-level meetings. Formats have been developed for monthly monitoring and performance review of individual work. We have also finalised a group accountants' training module.

In our irrigation programme, we have physically implemented 8 schemes out of a targeted 10 and carried out agricultural training and demonstrations in 6 schemes against a target of 10.

We have started 15 new SHGs, which brings up our total to 60. Additional savings mobilised during the period were Rs 92,000 against a target of Rs 3.2 lakh. PRA exercises for credit appraisal and for 15 groups helped the team to understand the annual credit need of the members.

Recently NABARD has approached the team to take up a watershed project in our working area as an experimental collaboration. ■

Capitalising Labour

Conceptualising the idea of a Shram Bank

Dinabandhu Karmakar
1990

THE CONCEPT of Shram Bank (SB) has evolved to meet the needs of landless families covered under NWDP (National Watershed Development Programme). This is an often-neglected segment as there are hardly any ideas that could be designed based on their potential.

The NWDP provides for land-owners and poor women under the self-help group scheme. Wage earners are left out. There is no scope for 'capital formation' for an unskilled labourer.

For wage earners their body and ability to do hard labour is their capital. With the passage of time, they lose their physical strength, which directly effects their income in old age. You cannot save labour when it is in surplus. It has its maintenance cost which is almost constant. In fact it is costlier than idle money. Is there any way out?

The Purulia district of West Bengal suffered a bad drought this year. The paddy crop was lost. The difficulties of small farmers and their families will increase until they have a good harvest next year.

But in the meantime, they have to carry out farming operations to ensure that the next year's crop does not suffer due lack of inputs. These include preparing the land, transplanting, intercultural practices and timely sowing.

The requirement of manual labour for these purposes is met either by mobilising family labour or by buying labour. To buy labour, farmers often offer rice instead of cash. This year farmers

will not be able to offer grain since production was low. We therefore fear that crops will not get the required inputs in time.

Labour requirement for paddy cultivation is about 120 man-days per acre. In most cases farmers cannot invest the required labour due to lack of funds. Low investment in labour is an important factor that leads to low average yield of paddy in Purulia, even in years when the rainfall is normal.

People do not transplant to save on labour, which ultimately restricts production. The ideal practice would have been to borrow money and invest in the required inputs. They can then harvest a good crop and pay back the loan.

Limited access to formal credit, high interest rates charged by local *mahajans* (moneylenders) and high risks of crop failure inhibit farmers from taking sufficient loans to practice better and more effective agriculture. This is one of the major reasons for low job opportunities in this area.

The concept of SB has emerged from the need to invest more labour in local agriculture and to prevent the surplus labour from migrating elsewhere in search of jobs or from taking up work at low wages.

Labourers will have to commit certain days of their labour to the SB. The SB will then make an annual plan based on the availability of total labour. This is the labour capital available with the SB to loan to the market.

Then the SB will collect applications from the farmers and other customers seeking labour for a particular season or day. The labourers will work in the field of the applicants. The farmers will

pay wages to the SB after a scheduled time along with the interest fixed by the SB.

In the context of the watershed programme, it is suggested that an amount could be allocated to the SB to pay part wages to the labourers to meet their daily needs. For example, if the wage during the season is Rs 30 per day, they could be given Rs 15.

Thus, Rs 15 is their investment in the SB. After the farmers repay their dues to the SB, the labourers will be paid the balance Rs 15 along with some interest.

The difference in the interest earned from the farmers and that paid out to the labourers would be the earnings of the SB. This amount could be distributed as dividend to the labourers, in proportion to the amount of labour invested by them.

The control of the SB should be with its shareholders who are the labourers who commit and invest their labour in the bank.

We require a study to know how much labour is hired in a particular year and how farmers meet the payment for labour consumed. We would then share the data with the wage earning communities to test the ability of the labourers to take risk.

The SB could lead to several benefits. Small and marginal farmers will be able to buy labour in time. The labourers will not be forced to sell their labour in distress. This will help the labourers to organise themselves better for their own interest.

The SB may invest for the development of its shareholders in terms of imparting new skills, which could be sold at higher wages. ■

Realigning Society with Nature

Soumik Banerjee

ECOLOGICALLY FRAGILE environments like the dry tropics and the mountains are a world in themselves. They have their own and unique set of people and their traditional ways of managing natural resources and evolving strategies to mitigate risks.

A number of times development efforts overlook these subtle adaptations and fail to realise the ecosystem strategies of the people in these areas. In such cases good intentions become misguided and result in more problems than the intended solutions.

This collection of essays by N S Jodha, the celebrated social economist who introduced the importance of common property resources (CPR) in poverty alleviation programmes, effectively portrays the use of natural resources and its effects in ecologically fragile mountain regions and dry tropics.

Social Responses

The essays are grouped under 3 sub-themes. The first 4 chapters look at the interaction between nature and society or social responses to environmental imperatives by focusing on the agricultural uses of natural resources in fragile zones and their implications in terms of risk mitigation strategies of farmers.

A particularly important part is the chapter on food security

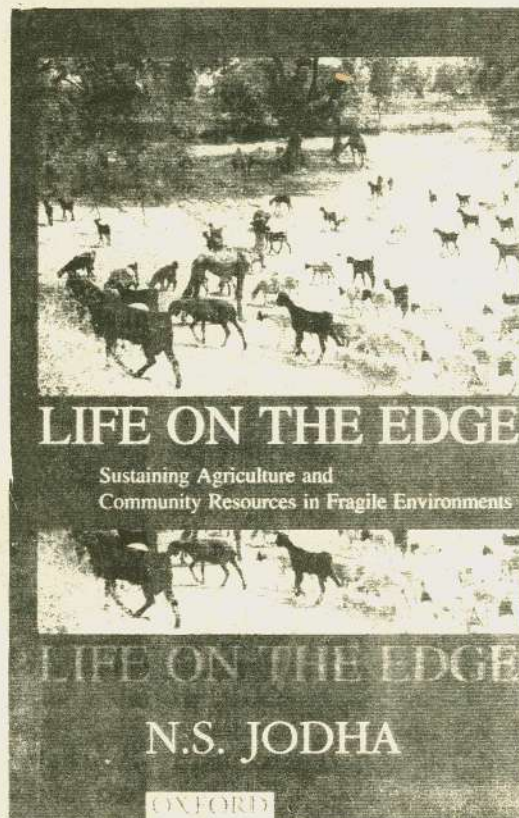
where the stress is on maintaining food diversity. Jodha describes the results of modern interventions in the form of "improved agriculture" that undermines the importance of crop diversity, especially the so-called coarse cereals. This often reduces the indigenous abilities in risk mitigation.

Jodha also opines that the increased role of the state in providing relief measures during droughts is largely misguided. Many times this brings about significant changes in the farmers' orientation towards drought, making him more vulnerable and dependent on external support at the cost of ignoring and divorcing his traditional belief systems.

Coping Mechanisms

The next part elucidates the coping mechanisms of farmers against environmental constraints. It emphasises the links and complementarity of natural resources and farming, especially in respect to CPRs.

It also tries to establish a



relation between environmental and economic stability. This is particularly important for us as we sometimes work on livelihoods while ignoring the environmental stability aspects. He raises the noteworthy point that crucial linkages are often overlooked in the interest of raising livelihoods.

The concluding section examines the present situation in respect of the changing socio-ecosystem linkages of population, disintegration of social capital, collective stakes and decline of social market penetration. These factors have imparted primacy to short-term socio-economic concern

over long-term ecological concerns of the society.

Diverging Goals

It raises an important point about the diverging goals of the market and the community within the essence of sustainability. Market forces promote selectivity and narrow specialisation in the choice of production activities and encourage indiscriminate resource use. It results in intensification and over-extraction of niche opportunities, with little concern for their social or ecological consequences.

These orientations are in direct conflict with the imperatives of specific conditions of fragile areas rooted in high

degree of marginality and diversity. These specific features create objective circumstances that favour diversification of resource use and production activities. They also require the balancing of intensive and extensive use of land resources as well as of production and protection needs.

Questioning Established Views

The author questions the established view that poverty and population are the prime movers of environmental degradation. He highlights the relevance and usability of links between society and nature that can offer insights for designing and implementing

development programmes.

He also talks of initiating action by mobilising the community's experience to protect their productive environment and livelihood against mainstream thrusts promoted and supported by global processes.

While promoting livelihoods we should try to understand the importance of the relation between communities and nature that has evolved over hundreds of years. It might lead us to rethink many of our ways and approaches.

Life on the Edge

By N S Jodha

Oxford University Press

Pages: 327 (Hard Bound)

Price: Rs 595

People News and Events

◆ Bijay Swain has shifted from Lohardaga in Jharkhand to Karanjia in Mayurbhanj, Orissa.

◆ D Narendranath has shifted from Jaipur in Rajasthan to New Delhi.

◆ Smita Ray of Kesla, Madhya Pradesh has resigned from Pradan. She has recently got married and would shift to London, UK. We will miss you, Smita.

◆ We organised an Inception Workshop on grassroots learning and participatory impact assessment methodologies in New Delhi on September 12 and 13, 2001. The 30 workshop participants included 15 Pradan professionals, representatives from CARE India, DHAN Foundation, ANANDI,

ASA, NIESBUD, AKRSP, EDA, and Udyogini.

Bina Agarwal, Professor at the Institute of Economic Growth and member of Pradan's Governing Board, attended on the first day. Helzi Noponen and Linda Mayoux, independent consultants, facilitated the process with us. Nelleke van der Vleuten of ICCO, the Netherlands, was also present in some sessions.

The result has been the outline of an integrated methodology for grassroots learning and impact assessment that Pradan will develop over the next 8 months. The work will be done in collaboration with Helzi Noponen. We also plan to bring out a publication following the workshop, edited by Linda Mayoux.

◆ Eleven Apprentices attended the third phase of the Process

Awareness and Sensitivity Module on September 21-25.

◆ Eighteen Apprentices joined the 23rd batch in July. Nine of them went home to discuss their choice of grassroots development with their near and dear ones and returned to participate in a Joint Orientation and Orientation to Village Study at Kesla. Achintya Ghose and Asif Zaidi were resource persons.

◆ Eight Apprentices continued in Kesla for a newly introduced training module on Pradan's self-help group programme. D Narendranath and Madhu Khetan anchored the programme.

Contributions to this column may be sent by email to pradan-ho@ndb.vsnl.net.in or by post to Pradan, 3 CSC, Niti Bagh, New Delhi 110 049.