



Mahakaushal Development Cluster (MKDC)

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Mahakaushal Development Cluster covers Maikal Hills region (Mandla, Dindori) and Chhattisgarh Plains (Balaghat) in the state of Madhya Pradesh. In MKDC, Gond and Baiga are the main tribes and about 41 percent of households in this area live below the poverty line. Balaghat district occupies a significant place on the mineral map of India. About 80 percent of India's manganese production comes from here. The recent discovery of copper deposits in Malajkhand is regarded as the largest in the country. Besides manganese and copper, the region has major deposits of bauxite, kyanite and limestone.

People inhabiting the area do not have access to quality health and education services. Moreover, lack of sustainable livelihood opportunities leads to mass migration, especially among the youth.

OVERVIEW OF PRADAN'S OPERATIONS IN MKDC

Particulars	DC Total	PRADAN Outreach
Districts	3	3
Population	3 million	206,210
Percent of Rural Population	89	100
Percent of ST and SC Population	57	76
Households	743,314	41,242

Particulars	Scale
Number of SHGs	3,468
Number of VOs	441
Households covered under Livelihoods	22,426
PRADAN teams	6

Themes	Community Collectives
Health and Nutrition	344 SHGs
Education	1 VO
Gender and Governance	1,190 SHGs

PRADAN started working in this DC in 2005. At present, we are engaged in the districts of Balaghat, Dindori and Mandla. We are directly working in 505 villages. We are also engaged in a partnership model with other CSOs to work with 4,000 households in Mawai and Bichhia block of Mandla district. Apart from significant work on livelihoods, we are working on gender, governance, health and nutrition issues in this region.

Engagement with Village Youth

The question often asked by the members of SHGs is 'what would our children become and what kind of life would they have?' It is evident that they are concerned about securing a bright future for the next generation. Youth has thus been identified as a key segment for

Mobilization & Registration



Mentoring



Re-imagining
future

Choice
making



Entrepreneurship



Youth Engagement Model: Yuwashastra

engagement. The intervention includes exploration of their aspirations and insecurities, and ways to a secure future for them and their families.

The program is currently spread across Dindori and Mandla districts involving 1,306 youth.

Program Key Outputs

- About 800 youth selected a vocation, and 162 youth participated in a recently initiated detailed mentorship program
- 27 mentors selected
- 300 youth successfully completed skill enhancement program

- 148 youth placed in jobs outside their villages
- More than 50 youth started self-enterprises in their area using their enhanced skills.

Program Impact

- Enhanced skills and confidence helped youth find employment
- Additional income of at least 6,000 (US\$ 92) per month
- Youth placed in the formal jobs covered under social security benefits
- They help their families invest in homes
- They make regular investments in farm inputs, land purchase, sibling education and other contributions

Stitching a New Future

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Parwati was bright in her studies. But after class 10, she had to drop out. The nearest college was far away; not that her poor parents could afford her higher education. Yet the dream of a better life stayed close to her heart.

Parwati distinctly remembers the day when she knew her educational journey was over. Being the daughter of marginal tribal farmers, there was no way she could continue. The college was 62 kms away from the village of Chubhawal in Mohgaon block of Madhya Pradesh. She was bitter with life.

“Mai kyun desh ki baki sari ladkiyon ki tarha padhai nahi kar sakti? Mai bhi koi ek company mein kaam karna chahti hun and mata-pita ka sahara banna chahti hun.”

“Why can't I continue my studies like so many girls all over the country? I too want to work in a company and support my parents.”

Years later, a friend introduced her to the Yuwashastra program, designed and organized by PRADAN. The key features of the program - counselling, training support, knowledge and linkages for jobs seemed promising to her. But she was still skeptical. Her dream as a young person had been dashed once. She gave it a good thought and decided to give herself another chance.

Parwati registered with Yuwashastra. She underwent a ten-day career orientation program where she got an opportunity to reflect on her strengths and areas of improvement. She came to know about multiple types of employment opportunities, several of which she had never heard of before. This was the first time she was



Photo: Balbeer Dhurve

seriously focusing on her future and felt ready to take up opportunities that lay ahead. She opted for a course on tailoring. Unknown to her, multiple avenues to employment opened up. An Indore based company called Pratibha Syntex offered her a job. Parwati joined as an operator of automatic sewing and embroidery machine at one of the Pratibha Syntex's sewing unit.

It was much more than a mere job. It was an opportunity that was offering on the job training, bearing living costs of the trainees and was inducting the trainees after successful completion of the program. Above all, it changed her life. And the lives around her!

It has been four years now that Parwati joined the formal employment sector. And the remarkable changes are visible. Her parents beam with pride whenever she comes home. Neighbors urge their daughters to study hard and she is surrounded by young girls eager to listen to her stories at work whenever she is home. The company has a policy of one month holiday every year; villagers are pleasantly surprised when she visits home on paid leave!

She has supported her parents repay an agriculture loan of INR 36,000 (US\$ 553), provided financial support for her elder brother's wedding and also bought him a motor-bike. During a visit home, she gifted her mother gold ornaments. There were tears of joy in her mother's eyes. And Parwati can't help blushing as she shows her gold earrings that she purchased with her hard earned money.