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South Odisha Development Cluster (SODC)

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South Odisha Development Cluster comprises of eight districts - Malkangiri, Koraput, Nabarangpur, Rayagada, Gajapati, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, and Nuapada in the southern Odisha.

Almost half of SODC's landmass is under forest cover. Seventy percent of the DC population lives below the poverty line and 68 percent women are illiterate. Except Kalahandi and Nuapada, other six districts are among the poorest in India². More than 60 percent people belong to SC and ST. The region has large diversity of tribal groups. The major tribes are Kandha, Gond, Paroja, Saura and Gadaba. The region is also home to PVTG like Kutia, Dongaria Kondha, Bonda, Hill Khariya, Bihor and Mankiria.

The region is resource rich with large deposits of bauxite, chromites, graphite and manganese. Displacement due to mining has caused havoc for the local inhabitants. The massive mobilization of Dongaria Kondhs to preserve Niyamgiri hills exemplifies their desire to assert their tribal identity against all odds.

OVERVIEW OF PRADAN'S OPERATIONS IN SODC

Particulars	DC Total	PRADAN Outreach
Districts	8	4
Population	7.6 million	275,055
Percent of Rural Population	97	100
Percent of ST and SC Population	67	78
Households	1.7 million	55,011

Particulars	Scale
Number of SHGs	4,871
Number of VOs	433
Households covered under Livelihoods	36,725
PRADAN teams	6

Themes	Community Collectives
Health and Nutrition	800 SHGs
Education	2 VOs
WASH	1,712 Households
Gender and Governance	1,817 SHGs

In SODC, PRADAN is currently working in four districts, i.e., Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Koraput and Rayagada. We started engaging with the community in South Odisha in 2000 on irrigation. Later the engagement expanded to other themes such as community institution building, livelihood improvement, gender, land rights, WASH, nutrition and grassroots governance.

² With reference to HDI of Human development report 2004

Bringing Market to Doorstep: The Agriculture Production Cluster Way

Given the context of endemic poverty and hunger in South Odisha, one of our core areas of engagement has been intensifying agriculture interventions. However, agriculture as a livelihood from small land holdings is not sustainable. Therefore, this year, SODC strengthened the concept of Agriculture Production Cluster (APC). The core of APC promotion is that the farmers in a contiguous geography coordinate production among themselves to attract market players to their villages. Critical to this is crop selection based on a tripod of small holder suitability, agro-ecological suitability and market attractiveness. We prioritized the following specific elements for APC:

- Focusing on one or two vegetables each season, based on regional market demand, yield, farmers know-how /confidence, competitiveness, and agro-climatic suitability
- Covering most of the farmers in an area to intensify vegetable cash crop cultivation on 0.1 hectare of land per family
- Synchronized cropping and production based on time and market and ecological suitability

- Using mechanized equipment like power weeder, sprayer, etc., to help members manage practices at scale
- Developing entrepreneurs at village or APC level to support and aggregate small farmers
- Building linkages of traders with entrepreneurs and realizing better price through market exposure and study

This year, SODC promoted 28 APCs. Through these interventions, the income level of families increased substantially from INR 20,000 (US\$ 307) to INR 70,000 (US\$ 1076) in one crop season. Centralized production of vegetables like tomato, brinjal, cauliflower and cabbage and direct market linkage to cities like Vizag (Andhra Pradesh), Barhampur (Odisha), Raipur and Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh) has shortened the value chain and helped better price realization for farmers.

Women farmers are now better aware of the market dynamics. The drudgery involved in carrying headloads of vegetables to nearby markets has also reduced substantially.



Photo: Debendra Negi

A Vibrant Lifeline for Small Landholders

More than 80 percent farmers in India are small landholders and they account for 70 percent of food supply in the country. Yet they are the most vulnerable.

The landscape of Koraput district in South Odisha is dotted with small landholders. The diversity of contexts and high fragmentation has often been the barrier for modernization of their farms and processing technologies. The adoption of an appropriate package of practices (knowledge, inputs, technology etc.) can help farmers break the cycle of poverty and bring them prosperity through better price realization for their produce. However, without a channel that collectivizes smallholder farmers and creates marketable surplus at the farm-level, the business case for such packages of practices cannot be created. As a result, for farmers in Nandapur block of Koraput district, there was low price realization.

To address these concerns, PRADAN professionals introduced the Agriculture Production Cluster (APC) concept in the area and women farmers were facilitated to:

- Identify crops such as tomato, ginger and pigeon pea for large-scale cultivation
- Generate indent at SHG level for inputs like seeds, fertilizers and services
- Select entrepreneurs for backward (input related) and forward (market related) linkages
- Collect money at SHG level for procuring inputs
- Fix a time period for synchronizing nursery bed preparation

Ninety-seven families from three villages came together for collective farming. Women farmers, once collectivized, began negotiating with various market players for better pricing.

During the process, 200 packets of tomato and cabbage seeds and 50 kg of pigeon-pea seeds were procured. It covered 50 acres of land for tomato and cabbage crops and another 50 acres of land for ginger intercropping with pigeon-pea. Introduction of electronic weighing machines, receipt system and uniform crates ensured transparency and developed trust among the farmers and traders. On an average, the incremental income from this intervention was about INR 50,000 (US\$ 690) per family for the 2017 Kharif season. Moreover, increased incomes and enhanced access to markets have given women farmers a new sense of confidence and a desire to bring change in other spheres of their lives.

SMALL-HOLDERS' JOURNEY TOWARDS PROSPERITY ACROSS PRADAN LOCATIONS

APC model that has been developed for commodities like tomato, mango, cauliflower, brinjal and chilli in the states of Jharkhand and Odisha showed per acre productivity growth of 173 percent during the monsoon and 137 percent during winter harvest in this year. PRADAN partnered with Intellectap to develop approaches and steps to improve farm productivity for farmers with small landholdings. Riding on this success, we are planning 400 APCs in Odisha in the next three years in collaboration with the government and several other CSOs.

On the whole, across our locations, we launched a number of livelihood improvement interventions for communities that perennially suffered from

food insecurity, distress migration, low access to irrigation, and unproductive farming. All our endeavors are primarily focused on creating an environment of remunerative livelihoods in villages to check distress migration. The effectiveness of our innovative practices has supported small landholders with sustainable incomes giving them new hope from farming. There has been a gradual build-up to achieve scale and momentum in agriculture with focus on building an eco-system of linkages that support market-led farming.

This year, we supported 385,765 families for enhanced livelihoods. This is a jump of 37 percent compared to farmer engagement in the previous year.



Photo: Md. Meraj Uddin

Right to Inherit - Asserting Land Rights in South Odisha

Women constitute 43 percent of farmers worldwide. In India more than 60 percent women are engaged in agriculture. They play a critical role in producing food, but the prevailing laws and customs in most parts of India undermine women's ability to own, manage, and inherit the land they cultivate. Assured land rights provide women with the necessary incentive to improve their land leading to better agricultural production that improves their lives. Without land rights, they often cannot access formal credit, agricultural training, and other programs. Women work in the fields as agricultural laborers rather than as owners or managers who would invest in tools and other inputs to maximize output over the long-term.

We did a situational analysis of land rights in Odisha, Bihar and Jharkhand. Pilot studies were taken up in Kolnara block of Rayagada, Balliguda block of Kandhamal, and Karanjia and Jashipur blocks of Mayurbhanj district. We concentrated our efforts on demonstrating a step by step collective led facilitation

process to enhance women's access to revenue-land and forest-land. To secure women's land rights, we worked with communities:

- On forest-land under the Forest Rights Act
- Homestead land allocation (with special focus on single women)
- Title transfer (name as joint holders)

The other priority was to enhance women's participation, understanding, decision making and ownership in the process of securing land rights.

As an outcome of the intervention:

- About 3,000 Individual Forest Right plots were recorded and distributed
- Seventeen claims were submitted with all required documents for Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR). Work is in progress in 60 more villages; on an average per village area under CFRR will be 200 hectares benefitting 60 households
- Around 1,800 families have submitted claims for availing homestead land, out of which 662 have received their land-title

Golden Harvest

Every morning Sua walks up to her paddy farm; she pinches herself wondering if this is all a dream. This landless widow from the Kandha tribe is now a land owner!

The only worthy possession she had was a single silver bangle that her mother gifted her many years ago. To actually own a piece of land in her own name, was beyond her wildest dreams.

Sua Mallick, from the far flung Balakia village of Kandhamal district in south Odisha, survived on wage labor and by collecting forest products to provide for herself and her two children. Survival for her meant many half or skipped meals. Situation had worsened over the past seven years after her husband passed away. She still flinches remembering the last few years.

*“Mu kana karibi? Mu jane gariba bidhaba.
Dina Majuria mu, kemiti moro samasta jarurata pura karibi?
Mu bhabili ehahi moro bhagya”*

(“What could I do? I am a poor widow. How could I meet both ends on my own working as a wage laborer? I thought this was my fate.”)

Sua is a part of the SHG promoted by PRADAN in this village. She smiles as she talks about her group.

*“Mo dalara bhauni mane mo sangare achhanti. Mu kamare jangalaku gale,
semane mo chhua manaka dekharekha karanti”*

(“The sisters of my group have stood by me all these years. If I was away for work in the forest, they would even look after my children.”)

However, it was the land literacy training conducted by PRADAN that truly changed her life and the lives of many like her. She learnt that any single, widowed or deserted woman could reclaim her legitimate rights on the land from encroachers who had taken advantage of her condition and occupied it.

Sua never knew where the lands possessed by her in-laws were located. It was difficult indeed. The plots of the family were all scattered and it was difficult to identify hers. Cadastral map and Record of Rights (RoR) were used. The plot was eventually identified. To everybody's astonishment, it was found that the land was being cultivated by another farmer from a neighboring village. He was unwilling to return it to Sua. A collective struggle began as other women of Sua's SHG joined hands with her. Relentless negotiation and pressure by the SHG worked. The man gave in.

During this monsoon, Sua was busy transplanting paddy using SRI method. Not on someone else's land as labor but on her own land.

*“Eei barasaru mote chhua manaku adha petare suibaku padibani”
she proudly remarks.*

(“From this year onwards I don't have to put my children to sleep half-fed”)

Silver is no longer her most prized possession. It will be the golden harvest from her own land.

