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Dinabandhu Karmakar: Choosing the appropriate methodology for livelihoods enhancement, while keeping the targets and the desired impact in mind requires considerable thought and is often determined by the beliefs and assumptions of the intervening organization. Dinabandhu Karmakar is based in Kolkata, West Bengal.

PRADAN's Sericulture Programme in Bihar and Jharkhand: Impact Assessment

MANU SINHA

Commissioned by PRADAN to understand the impact of the sericulture programme on primary producers at different levels of the value chain and the value chain itself, this study covered primary producers from five districts (Banka, Godda, Dumka, Saraikela and Bhagalpur) of Bihar and Jharkhand and the key stakeholders from various government and non-government organizations. In this extract, the focus is on the impact on primary producers.

Initiated in 1987, the tasar programme of PRADAN has, over the years, been extended to every level of the value chain, from seed production to marketing of the fabric. The programme has established institutions at each level of the value chain, to cater to the needs of the participating families at that level and also to provide backward and forward linkages. The achievements of the programme, include, among others, the production of 57 lakh commercial disease-free layings (DFLs) 5.33 lakh basic dfls and 24.90 crore of cocoons (total production of cocoons: 31.5 crore, nucleus cocoon-272 lakh, seed cocoon-386 lakh and commercial cocoon-2492 lakh.) All these production data is between 2004 to 2010. In addition, there have been a number of technical interventions/innovations at different levels of the value chain such as the introduction of improved tasar eggs, (commercial DFLs, basic DFLs and nucleus DFLs) domestication of tasar hot trees and the improvement of reeling machines. There also have been a number of organizational innovations in the value chain such as the setting up of private DFL producers, who can maintain quality levels, and the development of yarn producer organizations at the village level.

PRADAN initiated a tasar sericulture-based livelihood programme after a study of the sub-sector. The key reasons for initiating interventions in this sector are:

1. The chain involves mainly tribal people; therefore, the development of it will benefit these disadvantaged communities.
2. Tasar can be grown on degenerated (waste) land and, thus, does not put pressure on fertile soils.
3. The tasar production cycle is complementary to the growing of main crops and adds to income generation.

4. There is a huge gap between the supply of tasar silk and the demand for it.
5. Tasar requires low investment from producers.

As a result, it was initiated in the contiguous districts of Godda, Banka and Dumka in the Santhal Parganas region of Bihar. Since 1987, PRADAN has worked on all the components of tasar sericulture. PRADAN adapted and developed technologies best suited to the local conditions; worked out appropriate organization and management systems for different components of the livelihood activity such as plantation, egg production, rearing, yarn production, fabric manufacturing and marketing of cocoons, yarn and fabric; and established linkages with major players in the sector such as the Central Silk Board and its affiliates.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PRADAN has established three kinds of institutions at different levels of the value chain. These institutions are the Tasar Vikas Samiti—TVS (the main institution for pre-cocoons is co-operative, that is, an aggregation of TVS), Masuta Producers' Company and Eco-Tasar. A brief about each institution follows.

Tasar Vikas Samiti: A TVS has 25–30 members; in many TVSSs, there is more than one grainage. There are about three to four seed crop rearers per grainage. One TVS ensures sufficient seed (DFLs) for all the commercial rearers, locally. It also takes advantage of the bulk buying of inputs and the aggregate selling of the product (cocoon).

The programme has established institutions at each level of the value chain, to cater to the needs of the participating families at that level and also to provide backward and forward linkages.

Masuta Producers Company:

Masuta buys cocoons from the TVSSs and undertakes reeling and spinning of these cocoons through women's groups, organized as a Mutual Benefit Trust. The reeling takes place at common facility centres whereas the spinning is done

by women at home.

Eco-Tasar: Eco-Tasar is a private limited company, with Masuta as a major shareholder. The company has been formed to deal exclusively with marketing the fabric. The company provides a market for the yarn produced at Masuta.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

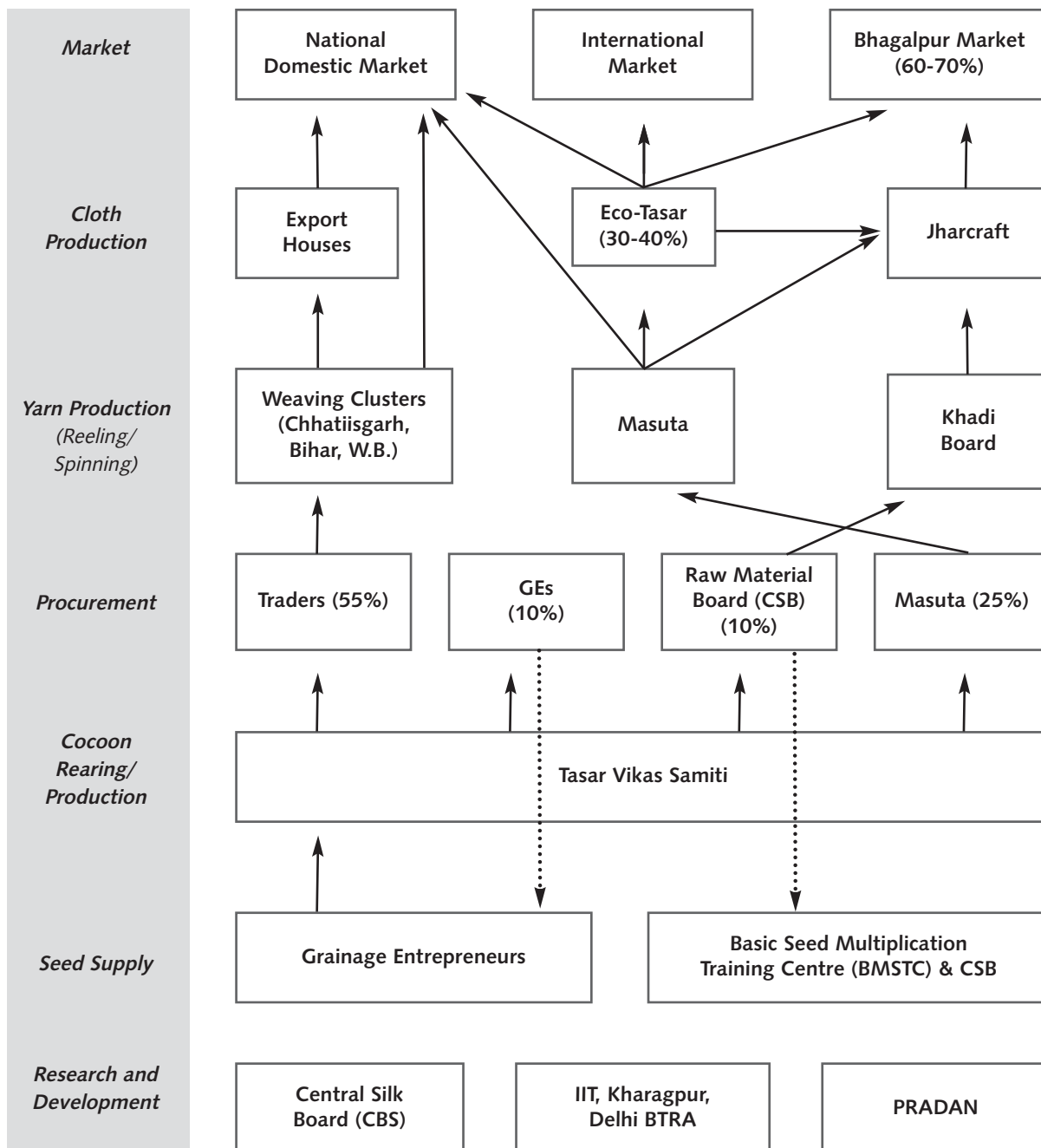
The findings of the study and its analysis have been presented objective-wise. The first sub-section deals with the socio-economic impact of the sericulture programme on the participating families, at different levels of the value chain. The impact has been captured, on selected indicators, across families participating at different levels of the value chain. The second sub-section deals with the impact of the programme on the value chain and the sub-sector as a whole. As PRADAN's intervention has mainly been in the pre-cocoon stage and reeling/spinning in the post-cocoon stage, the socio-economic impact covers the two stages in detail. PRADAN's initiative has also, to an extent, affected the weavers.

A. STATUS OF NON-PARTICIPATING FAMILIES

Family Size and Landholding

A majority of the non-participating families (that is, about 82 per cent) have a family

Indicative Value Chain of Tasar after PRADAN'S Intervention



size of less than seven members per family. Banka district has a substantial number of non-participating families, with five to seven members per family. Godda district has the most non-participating families, with eight to ten members per family. In total, about 9 per cent of the non-participating families have more than 10 members per family. In terms of landholding, Ninety per cent of the non-participating families belong to the marginal or small farmer categories. Only 2 per cent are landless and the remaining are medium to large farmers. Their primary source of livelihood across the four districts was agriculture, wage labour and Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP). Overall, agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for 53 per cent of the families, wage labour for 40 per cent and NTFP for 7 per cent.

MIGRATION AND FOOD SECURITY

The dependence on wage labour among the control families was found to be high with large-scale migration. About 71 per cent of the families migrate for more than three months in a year and 39 per cent for more than six months. Only 16 per cent do not migrate at all whereas 7 per cent migrate for more than 10 months every year. Families migrate to the nearest commercial centres such as Deoghar and Patna, and to as far as Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. The average annual savings during migration for these families, given that they have to pay for food, lodging, travel, miscellaneous expenses and the lean period, is between Rs 1,000 and 2,000. About 60 per cent of them save less than Rs 2,000 and about 34 per cent save more than Rs 2,500 during migration. About 35 per cent have food security for less than six months and 33 per cent have surplus in terms of food security. The remaining families have food security in the range of seven to twelve months.

DEBT AND CREDIT

About 70 per cent of the non-participating families had taken loans some time in the past. Of these, only 16 per cent repaid the loan in full whereas 66 per cent repaid it partially. The remaining 19 per cent could not repay the loan. Of the total number of families that had taken a loan, about 37 per cent had mortgaged their land. Of this, only 13 per cent recovered their land, 81 per cent recovered their land partially and 6 per cent could not recover their land at all. This subsection discusses the source of credit for both production and consumption. The source of credit for the non-participating families is primarily the moneylender followed by the Self Help Group (SHG). The interest rates charged by the moneylenders usually range from 3 to 5 per cent per month. Only 14 per cent of the families said they did not require loans.

B. STATUS OF PRIVATE GRAINEURS

Private graineurs across the four districts mainly belong to Scheduled Tribes (STs). In Dumka and Godda, and Saraikella, all the private graineurs belong to STs. Banka district has a small proportion of private graineurs, who belong to the OBC and the General categories.

FAMILY SIZE AND LANDHOLDING

Most of the participating families (that is, about 74 per cent) were found to have family sizes of less than seven members. Banka district has a substantial number of participating families, with eight to ten members per family. Dumka district has a majority of participating families, with five to seven members per family. In total, about 6 per cent of the participating families were found to have more than 10 members per family. In terms of landholding, 33 per cent of the private graineurs are marginal farmers,

26 per cent small farmers, 33 per cent are medium farmers and the remaining seven per cent are large farmers. Saraikela district has only marginal and small farmers as private graineurs whereas Godda district has medium and large farmers as graineurs. The primary sources of livelihood for the participating families, across the four programme districts, are agriculture and NTFP.

Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for most of the private graineurs. For some families, NTFP/ sericulture has become the main source of livelihood.

STATUS OF PRODUCTION AND EARNING

About 74 per cent of the graineurs have been running the grainery for less than 10 years, 63 per cent for less than seven years and 19 per cent for less than four years. Only 7 per cent of them have been running the grainery for more than 10 years. The grainery needs to be run for about two months that includes procurement of seed cocoons to the production and disposal of DFLs. A majority of the private graineurs (63 per cent) earned an income ranging from Rs 10,000 to 30,000. A loss was registered by 4 per cent of the graineurs and an equal percentage of graineurs earned an income of more than Rs 40,000. The main expenses for private graineurs are the procuring of the basic seeds, cocoons labour charges and chemicals. Thirty per cent of the graineurs undertook seed rearing all by themselves in the last season. Only 15 per cent of the graineurs were involved only in grainage activity. This implies that sericulture has provided primary producers with multiple sources of livelihood and income. Most of the graineurs said that

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during the period of their engagement in tasar activities, they would otherwise have been engaged in agriculture, labour and/or domestic work. The opportunity cost for this is between Rs 500 and 3,000 with an average opportunity cost of about Rs 1,500.

UTILIZATION OF EARNING AND ASSETS CREATION

As discussed earlier, the earning from the vocation comes the primary income besides providing a local source of livelihood for participating families. For a majority of the families (67 per cent), the key area of impact of the vocation has been on assets creation at the household level. About a quarter of the families also think that the primary impact of the vocation has been in providing an assured source of livelihood and, therefore, in reducing migration. A small fraction of the farmers think that the impact has been on making participating families debt-free and increasing the food security in the region. The participating families utilize the earnings from the vocation, according to their priorities or needs. About 50 per cent of the families utilized the earnings to buy food grains, and for health, education and home maintenance. A quarter of the participating families utilized the available money for repaying their loans whereas 48 per cent of them put their money in savings. About 78 per cent of the families invested the money in assets creation. The assets bought were based on individual family requirements. The priority area of spending has been on buying motor pumps for irrigation because agriculture is still considered to be the main source of livelihood in the area. About 22 per cent of the families invested their money in vehicles or animal/

livestock procurement. The participating families were found to be very sure of the earnings from the enterprise. They seem to have gained confidence in their vocation and are thinking beyond mere subsistence. When asked what they would do with the earnings during the coming year, most of them responded that they wanted to buy productive assets, to further strengthen their livelihoods. Savings and education were found to be the second most important areas in which they wanted to utilize their earnings.

DEBT AND CREDIT

About 81 per cent of the current private graineurs were under debt before they took up the activity. Of these, about 30 per cent of them had mortgaged their land to take the loan. At present, 93 per cent of the families have completely repaid their loans whereas the remaining 7 per cent have partially repaid their loans. All the families have regained possession of their lands. For most families, getting their land back was a priority. Some of the families, as discussed earlier, utilized their earnings to buy land.

The sources for credit in the 'before' situation were moneylenders and banks. The moneylender provides loans at rates as high as 5–10 per cent per month and with many other conditions stipulated whereas loans from banks are for very specific purposes. Applying for and getting a loan from the bank is a lengthy process. About 24 per cent of the families did not require a loan. Now, a major source of loans is the SHG. There is substantial decrease in the number of families taking loans from the local moneylender. Conversely, there is a considerable increase in the number of families taking loans from SHG.

All the participating families were found to be food secure, with 74 per cent of the families registering a surplus.

MIGRATION AND FOOD SECURITY

There was large-scale migration among the current private graineurs before they started the grainage. Those residing in Saraikeela and

Godda districts migrated to the nearby areas or to Mizoram. From Banka district, people migrated mainly to cities such as Patna, Delhi or Kolkata. Similarly, people from Dumka district went mainly to the northeastern states, West Bengal and the coal mines in the adjoining region. The average annual savings during migration for the families, given that they had to pay for the food, lodging, travel, miscellaneous expenses and the lean period, is between Rs 1,500 and 2,000. The average annual savings from migration in Banka and Dumka districts is more than double the savings in the Godda and Saraikeela districts. Given the above situation, only about 33 per cent of the current private graineurs did not migrate in the 'before' situation. After they started grainages in their homes, all the families associated with the enterprise do not migrate now. The food security of the families has also improved. About 34 per cent of the families are now food secure for less than six months and about 37 per cent are food secure for as long as seven to nine months.

Most of the families said that they would first buy food grain supply for the entire year and then think of spending the money elsewhere. Hence, all the participating families were found to be food secure, with 74 per cent of the families registering a surplus.

IMPACT ON WOMEN

Women are usually engaged in cleaning the premises of private grainages. This has to be

done regularly, to reduce any chances of infection to the grainery. About 56 per cent of the women said that their workload has increased and 40 per cent of them said that it has remained the same. The women of the participating families think that the income should primarily be utilized for health/education, savings and house repairs. Only 5 per cent of them thought that food and 2 per cent of them thought that repayment of the loan were priorities. This indicates a sufficiency of basic needs in the households. All the women surveyed said that they wanted to continue with the vocation, primarily because it provides economic stability and they can work from home. During meetings with members in the Inarabaran cluster of Katoriya block, the farmers said that the moneylenders usually charge up to 10 per cent interest per month, depending on the economic condition of the family. Usually, one has to pay Rs 150 for a loan of Rs 100 at the end of two months. For a loan of more than Rs 5000, they have to mortgage their assets as collateral.

C. SEED REARERS

A detailed analysis of the impact on the families participating in seed rearing is not being presented because the majority of seed rearers also participate in the grainage activity and/or the commercial rearing activity. This mix of vocations has a strong influence on the family. A majority of the seed rearers began rearing four to ten years ago. Only seed rearers in Banka have been rearing seeds for more than 10 years. The average income across the four districts varies between Rs 4,300 and 10,000, annually. The average income of seed rearers in Godda and Dumka districts was low at Rs 4,840 and 4,313, respectively, whereas the figures for Banka and Saraikela were Rs 10,077 and 7,300, approximately.

IMPACT ON WOMEN

About 80 per cent of the women said that their workload had increased as a result of the activity, primarily because they had to help their husbands with the rearing activity especially in managing tasar insects. However, almost all of them said that they would like to continue seed rearing because it provides a good income in a short span of time.

D. COMMERCIAL REARERS

Commercial rearers across the four districts belong mainly to STs. In Banka district, there are substantial number of persons belonging to OBCs as well.

FAMILY SIZE AND LANDHOLDING

Most of the participating families (about 74 per cent) had a family size of less than seven members per family. Banka district has a substantial number of them with eight to ten members per family. Dumka district has a majority of participating families, with five to seven members per family. In total, about 6 per cent of the participating families were found to have more than 10 members per family. About half of the participating families are marginal farmers whereas the remaining are small and medium farmers. There is a negligible proportion of landless farmers and a very small proportion of large farmers engaged in the activity. The primary sources of livelihood for the participating families, across the four programme districts, are agriculture primarily and then wage labour and NTFP.

E. TRADITIONAL REARERS

Traditional rearers of cocoons were found only in the Masaliya block of Dumka district. As a result, very few of them are covered under the study. Of the traditional rearers, 75 per cent were from STs and the remaining

from OBCs. All of them were marginal farmers, with less than seven members. Agriculture and allied activities, NTFP and wage labour are the main sources of livelihood.

Half the traditional rearers surveyed were more than a decade old in the trade whereas the remaining half were less than three years old in the vocation (these include the youth of the community, who have adopted traditional methods of cocoon rearing). Their engagement with the activity is for about two to three months in a year, beginning June/July. Domestic and agricultural work gets affected because of this involvement. The average income for the traditional rearers is about Rs 4,200 and varies from Rs 800 to 11,000 per year. Earnings from the vocation were utilized mainly for food, home maintenance, health, loan repayment and some savings. There were small investments in assets creation as well. Twenty-five per cent of the families invested in bicycles whereas another 25 per cent invested in livestock. About 50 per cent of the families said that they had taken loans from the moneylender without mortgaging their land. At present, they have no outstanding loans. Fifty per cent of the families said that they take loans from the moneylender whereas the others said that they do not need to take any loan. About 50 per cent of the traditional rearers said that they migrate for one to three months whereas the remaining said that they do not migrate at all. The average annual income from migration is less than Rs 10,000 for the participating families. The food security among the traditional rearing families was

The commercial rearers said that they prefer rearing because it is low risk, there is no need to migrate, in a short time the returns are good, and they get to stay at home and take care of the domestic needs. The key area of impact of the vocation for most of the participating families is an assured livelihood and the ability to repay debts.

found to be about seven to nine months.

STATUS OF PRODUCTION AND EARNING

About 93 per cent of the families have started rearing cocoons commercially within the last 10 years. Of them, 64 per cent started rearing in the last seven years. The net income of the participating families varied between Rs 5,000 and Rs 20,000. About 6 per cent of them reported a net income of more than Rs 20,000. The major expense in commercial rearing is with respect to purchase of DFLs and chemicals (pesticides), and labour. Eighty per cent of the families engaged in commercial rearing were involved in one activity only. Ten per cent of the families also engaged in seed rearing, 6 per cent in grainage and 2 per cent in reeling/spinning. Most of the commercial rearers said that during the months when the cocoons are reared, they were earlier engaged in agriculture, labour and/or domestic work. The opportunity cost for the period ranges from Rs 1,500 to 5,000, with an average opportunity cost of about Rs 3,000. The commercial rearers said that they prefer rearing because it is low risk, there is no need to migrate, in a short time the returns are good, and they get to stay at home and take care of domestic needs. The key area of impact of the vocation for most of the participating families is an assured livelihood and the ability to repay debts. A quarter of the families also said that the income has helped in the creation of assets. A small proportion of the families mentioned that there has been a reduction in migration and an increase in food security.

A majority of the participating families have utilized this income primarily for food, assets, loan repayment, health and education. About a quarter of the families put some earnings into savings and about the same number put some earnings into home maintenance. A small proportion of the families organized a marriage with the income earned. About 26 per cent of the families invested in buying livestock/animal (bullocks) whereas a small proportion invested in purchasing cycles, motor pumps, TVs/radios or a new piece of land. About 5 per cent of the families utilized the income to pay for mortgaged land. In terms of utilization of future earnings, a majority of the participating families plan to invest in a house/assets creation, followed by the education of their children and savings for the future. About 2 per cent of the families plan to utilize their earnings for loan repayment and 8 per cent for marriage. Only 1 per cent of the participating families are planning to put their income into buying food items.

DEBT AND CREDIT

About 84 per cent of the participating families were under debt in the 'before' situation. Of these, about 37 per cent had mortgaged their land to take loans. At present, 72 per cent of the families have repaid their loans whereas the remaining 24 per cent have partially repaid their loans. Seventy-seven per cent of the families have freed their land whereas 21 per cent have partially done so. For most of the families, getting their land back was a priority. The source for credit in the 'before' situation for participating families was the moneylender. The interest rate charged by the moneylenders is about 5 per cent per month, with conditions attached. About 24 per cent of the families did not require to take loans. At present, the major source of loans is still the moneylender; however, the

percentage of families availing of loans from them has come down to 54 per cent. There is substantial increase in the families taking loans from SHG. In addition, there is a change in the percentage of families not taking loans. The same has grown from 4 per cent in the 'before' situation to 10 per cent currently. About 50 per cent of the families in Sadalpur village, Saraiyahaat block, Dumka district, are involved in tasar rearing. The participating families think that their credit-worthiness has increased. Now, they are known as tasar farmers and, therefore, people believe that they have money. An example they quote is about the local medical practitioners (generally quacks). Earlier, the farmers had to go and look for doctors during the rainy season when it is common to fall ill. However, the situation has changed. Doctors are now willing to come home to the villagers, including homes in the forest area, and treat the patients, giving injections or setting up an intravenous drip, if need be.

MIGRATION AND FOOD SECURITY

There was large-scale migration among the participating families in the 'before' situation. Only 46 per cent of the families did not migrate then. In most of the tribal villages, where the community was secure about their basic needs because of tasar intervention, the families wanted to send their children to good schools. In areas, where there were missionary schools, the families preferred them over government schools and were willing to pay a higher fee. The average annual savings during migration for the families, given that they had to pay for the food, lodging, travel, miscellaneous expenses and the lean period, is between Rs 1,500 and Rs 2,000. The average annual savings from migration in Banka and Dumka districts is more than double the savings in Godda and Saraikeela districts. Given the above situation,

only about 46 per cent of the current commercial rearers did not migrate in the 'before' situation. Currently, 84 per cent families do not migrate. Only 1–2 per cent of the families still migrate for a varied period. Food security among the participating families in the 'before' situation was such that about 59 per cent of the families were food secure for less than six months and about 20 per cent were food secure for seven to nine months. Only 1 per cent of the families had surplus in terms of food. Currently, 31 per cent of the families are food secure for less than six months and 10 per cent are food secure for seven to nine months. About 29 per cent of the families are food secure for almost a year whereas 31 per cent families have surplus food. In Banka, the participating families were found to be happy to be participating in commercial rearing. This was mainly because although the paddy crop had been lost during the season because of poor rainfall, the families were food secure due to the income from tasar rearing. Another reason for their happiness was their confidence in the vocation because they knew that the tasar crop, if taken with the scientific package of practices, would never fail completely.

IMPACT ON WOMEN

Women usually have to help their male family members to manage the rearing process. In addition, because the male members stay in the forest for the entire rearing season, women have to take food and other necessary items to them. About 65 per cent of the women said that their workload had increased whereas about 31 per cent said that it had decreased. The women of the participating families thought that the extra income generated should primarily be utilized in savings, health/education and house repairs.

In addition, a few women thought that the income should be utilized to repay loans and buy assets. This indicates a move towards sufficiency, in terms of the basic needs of the households for a majority of the families. Of the women surveyed, 98 per cent said that they wanted to continue with the vocation, primarily because it provides economic stability and they can work from home.

F. REELERS AND SPINNERS

The reelers are mainly from the OBC and SC categories, with a small proportion of them being from the the ST and General categories. As far as spinners are concerned, there is an almost equal participation of families from the SC, the ST and the OBC categories. Most of the women participating as reelers have a family size of less than seven members whereas about 14 per cent have a family size of more than 10 members. With regard to spinners, the family size, for 70 per cent of the participants, is less than seven members whereas there are no spinners with a family size of more than 10 members. A majority of the women participating in reeling and spinning belong to marginal farmer families. Only a few participants belong to the small and medium farmer families.

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME AND STATUS OF PRODUCTION

Agriculture is one of the primary sources of income for both the reelers and the spinners. Wage labour is the primary source of income for a substantially large number of reelers compared to the spinners. A majority of the spinners have been engaged in the activity for less than three years and the remaining for four to seven years. A majority of the reelers have been engaged in the activity for four to seven years and the remaining for less than three years. A majority of the participating

women earn between Rs 1,000 and 2,000 a month. Approximately, 84 per cent of the reelers are only engaged in reeling whereas this is true for only 50 per cent of the spinners. About 30 per cent of the spinners are also engaged in commercial rearing in addition to 10 per cent each in grainage and seed rearing. Only 5 per cent of the reeler families are also engaged in grainage and 11 per cent in commercial rearing. Most of the participating members in both the vocations say that earlier they would have been engaged in agriculture, wage labour and NTFP collection activities. However, they do not think that the opportunity costs are very high and they take a break from these vocations during the peak agriculture season. The vocation provides a regular source of livelihood and income locally through the year; the key area of impact for them, therefore, has been an assured livelihood option. The vocation has contributed in a small way to other areas as well. As discussed earlier, the income from reeling and spinning is regular; it is utilized for monthly expenses at the household level, primarily for food, health and education. A small proportion of the families utilize their earnings for home maintenance, loan repayment and savings. In terms of assets creation, some reeler and spinner families purchase bicycles, recover mortgaged land, buy TVs/radios and livestock, etc.

DEBT AND CREDIT

About 93 per cent of the reelers and 80 per cent of the spinners were under debt in the 'before' situation. Of these, about 70–75 per cent from both the groups have completely repaid their loans. The remaining have partially paid the loans or are yet to start repaying the loan. About 63 and 70 per cent of the families from the reelers and spinners, respectively, had mortgaged their land to take

loans, and 80 and 72 per cent of the families from each group, respectively, have got back their land. This sub-section discusses the source of credit for both production and consumption purposes. The sources of credit in the 'before' situation for the participating families were moneylenders, or *mahajans*, and the SHG. There has been a slight decrease in reelers taking loans from *mahajans* and, consequently, a slight increase in their accessing loans from SHG and banks. There is a slight decrease in the number of families taking any loans. There is a substantial decrease in the spinner families accessing loans from *mahajans*. As a result, there are about 25 families that are now in the 'need not take loans' category. Friends and relatives have a negligible role in providing credit.

MIGRATION AND FOOD SECURITY

About 49 per cent of the families participating in reeling and 60 per cent of the families participating in spinning used to migrate in the 'before' situation. Given that it had to pay for the food, lodging, travel, miscellaneous expenses and the lean period, the average annual savings during migration for a family comes to between Rs 1,000 and 1,500. There is substantial change in the percentage of the participating families, who do not migrate any more, as compared to the 'before' situation. About 91 per cent of the reeler families do not migrate now as compared to 51 per cent of the families in the 'before' situation. Now only 9 per cent families migrate for various periods. None of the participating spinner families migrate now as compared to 40 per cent families in the 'before' situation. There is greater food security among the participating families in both the groups. Against the 86 per cent reeler families, who had food security of less than six months, only 2 per cent of the families fall into that category now.

Seventy-seven per cent of the families are food secure for more than 10 months. As against 80 per cent of the reeler families, who were food secure for less than six months, only 10 per cent families now remain in that category with about 70 per cent families reporting food security for more than 10 months.

IMPACT ON WOMEN

All the work in reeling and in spinning is done by women. It can be at one place and the women can decide the time. About 47 per cent of the reelers and 70 per cent of the spinners said that their workload has remained the same or has decreased. The women from both the groups think that the income from this activity should primarily be utilized for food, health/education and maintenance of the house and assets creation. A few women felt that the income must be utilized for repayment of loans or for savings. Because it provides economic stability and because they can work from home, all the women surveyed said that they wanted to continue with the vocation.

G. IMPACT ON THE VALUE CHAIN AND THE SUB SECTOR

The discussions with the different agencies point to varied perceptions of the impact of PRADAN's sericulture programme. About half the graineurs have established grainages of between 20,000 and 30,000 cocoons. About one-fifth of the graineurs have established grainages of more than 30,000 cocoons. A small percentage of the graineurs established grainages of less than 10,000 cocoons in the last season. Given the size of the grainages established, a majority of the graineurs produce between 4,100 and 8,000 DFLs. About one-fifth of the graineurs produce packets of 81 to 120 DFLs. Commercial rearers (about 81 per cent) procure DFLs from

private graineurs. Only 11 per cent of the graineurs procure them from a government agency. All the graineurs said that they were able to sell all the DFLs produced.

About 63 per cent of the graineurs said that the payment for the DFL is done immediately. Another 22 per cent said that the payments are made within a short span of time. The remaining 15 per cent said that the payments are made in parts, some immediately and the remaining after the harvest of cocoons. Almost all the graineurs (96 per cent) said that they got good rates for their produce and were confident that all their produce (DFLs) would be sold even if they were to increase their production. They said they have complete knowledge of grainages and that they follow the guidelines properly. About 98 per cent of the commercial rearers said that they bought the DFLs from private graineurs during the last season. The remaining said that they procure them from the government agencies. All the rearers said that they prefer to buy DFLs from the private graineurs and only go to the government agency if DFLs are not available with private graineurs. Seventy-six per cent of the rearers said that they buy from the private graineurs because of the quality, 21 per cent said because of easy availability and another 3 per cent gave reasons such as timely availability and credit facility.

There has been a major change in the production of cocoons from DFLs. This is primarily due to better quality DFLs and the adoption of a scientific package of practices by the rearers. All the rearers said that they were satisfied with the price of the DFLs. In the 'before' situation, about 96 per cent of the rearers produced less than 3,000 cocoons per 100 DFLs. In the 'after' situation, 79 per cent of the rearers produced more than 3,000

cocoons per 100 DFLs. About 53 per cent of the rearers achieved a production of more than 5,000 cocoons per 100 DFLs. Ninety-seven per cent of the commercial rearers said that they have complete technical knowledge about rearing; 90 per cent of the rearers said that they follow each technical aspect explained to them whereas 8 per cent said that they take care of the technical aspects partially. In terms of selling of cocoons, 98 per cent of the rearers said that they were able to sell all their produce. The remaining rearers were able to sell their produce partially. The major buyers of cocoons for the majority of the rearers were Masuta and traders.

CONCLUSION

The tasar programme is a good example of value chain integration and has been developed systematically over the years from interventions at the pre-cocoon and at the post-cocoon stages. The programme has faced many challenges—from taking tasar production to non-traditional areas to local seed production and developing local centres for yarn production. The programme also needs to be acknowledged for the self-sustainable institutions developed along the value chain, whether it is the TVS, Masuta Trust or Eco-Tasar. The success of the programme has improved the livelihoods of the participating families. The families participating as private graineurs, seed rearers and commercial rearers have benefited by the primary income from the vocation. Reelers and spinners benefit from a regular source of income every month, which they earn working locally/at home in their spare time. A substantial number of families participate in more than one vocation, thereby increasing their income from the value chain. The weavers, although not direct beneficiaries of the programme, benefit through the additional source of work orders; also, the

yarn provided by Eco-Tasar reduces their need for working capital.

The additional income of the family has had several direct and indirect impacts on its well-being. After taking care of the basic needs such as food and house repairs, the next target for a family is to repay loans and free their mortgaged land. This is followed by investments for creating assets, savings, marriage and education. The utilization of income, as discussed before, has direct relation to the amount of income and the felt need of the family. There has been a substantial increase in food security because of the programme and an appreciable decrease in migration. In addition to this, there has also been assets creation at the household level. The programme has helped them pay off their debts, increase their creditability and improve access to cheaper and fair credit sources. The programme has also had a very positive impact on the value chain and the sub-sector. The programme has ensured backward and forward linkages, at each level of the chain. In doing so, the programme has also impacted the value chain in other parts of the country (such as Andhra Pradesh).

In terms of the impact of the programme on the sub-sector, primarily a demonstration model has been developed. In addition to this, the programme has developed replicable models, has fine-tuned technology, developed improved prototypes and developed capacities of human resource to take it further. Given the programme and its impact, the model needs to be replicated in other regions that have similar potential. The study would like to recommend that the programme should initiate work with the weaving community because the handloom sector is facing tough competition from power looms.

Need for a Platform for Marginalized Families in Dholpur

NEERAJ KUSHWAHA

Creating a community of women through SHGs within a larger community proves immensely beneficial to the poorest of the poor; they find alternative livelihoods and are free of the persecution of moneylenders.

“Are they human beings?” I asked myself when I first reached Badaipura village in Bari block, Dholpur district, Rajasthan. It was December 2007. I had gone with Anguri *behenji* to her village. I saw an old house with a tall boundary wall. I entered the house and stood still, completely shocked. About 25 households lived within this house. Each family lived in a single room. There was a buffalo and some goats tied to the door of every room. The floor and the doors were covered with the dung of these animals. I sidestepped all of this carefully and finally entered Anguri *behenji's* home. It was dark inside although it was noon. I saw a seven-month old child in a traditional cradle made of a *sari*. It was attached to the roof by a hook. I could see some utensils arranged beautifully by the wall. The floor was plastered with mud but some of the excreta from the outside had found its way into the house when people walked in. The stench was so strong that I could not bear to stay inside for more than five minutes. I suggested that we sit outside.

By definition, 25 households comprise a hamlet in a *panchayat*. All these 25 households lived in similar conditions, completely hemmed in on all sides, with barely any space to move. Outside, I saw a single bore well—the only source of water for drinking, household use, bathing and even irrigation for all the 25 families! The villagers started the ‘engine’ and brought me fresh water to drink. There was no hand pump for drinking water in this hamlet, private or public. There was actually no place for me to sit. The villagers placed a *charpai* where they thought it was safest; but I found it to be too close to a buffalo. And, sure enough, about five minutes later, the buffalo started urinating. I sprang up, and jumped away to save myself. The villagers looked on helplessly.

ABOUT DHOLPUR

The district of Dholpur is located on the Agra-Gwalior highway, 60 km south of Agra. The Aravali ranges continue till Dholpur town. There are two main rivers in the area, the Chambal and the Parvati, separated by the Aravali hills. The Aravali ranges affect the topography, demography, resources and livelihoods of the region. The average rainfall is 500–650 mm, but it is very sporadic and area-specific. The lowest rainfall is in Baseri block and the highest in Rajakhhera block.

The district is divided into four development blocks—Dholpur, Bari, Baseri and Rajakhhera. Pradan operates in three of the four blocks. PRADAN does not operate in Rajakhhera where the incidences of poverty are relatively less. Eighty per cent of the total population of Dholpur is rural, spread over 809 villages. The male-female ratio is low (1000:827) compared with the national average. This is also evident from the low status of women across class and caste.

Because they are connected by good roads, the villages are densely populated. However, quality health services and education are totally absent even though a huge amount has been allocated for health by the government. Many people work as wage labourers in the local sandstone quarries; most of them are highly susceptible to asthma, silicosis, tuberculosis and other diseases. Although the government provides free treatment, doctors are usually unavailable; the facilities for diagnosis of diseases and conditions are poor at the public health centres, forcing the villagers to turn to quacks and incurring huge expenditure.

This is not the story of just one village in Dholpur.

In many villages of Dholpur, the distribution of land and water resources is highly skewed and is in favour of the upper caste. I saw that Ulavati village of Lakhepura *panchayat* comprised about 50 households, belonging to jaatav (Schedule Caste), and gurjar communities. The total agricultural land in the village is about 140 *bighas* (1 ha=4 *bighas*). Forty of the households in this village belonged to the jaatav (derogatively called *chamar* by the gurjars) community and the other ten households were gurjars. Forty-six per cent (that is, 65 *bighas*) of agricultural land was owned by the jaatavs and 54 per cent (75 *bighas*) by the gurjars. In effect, 20 per cent of the population owned 54 per cent of the land whereas 80 per cent of the population of this village owned only 46 per cent of the land. A jaatav family owned only half a hectare, which is insufficient to provide food for the family of 6–7 members for the whole year. There are families from the same community, who are landless and are dependent on daily wages or do share cropping on the farms belonging to the gurjar community. Do they not have a right to food? Is there anything that can make their life better or are they bound to struggle to feed their family for life?

In the village, I noticed that it was the gurjar community that owned all the four bore wells, depicting a kind of monopoly over the ground water! The agriculture of the jaatavs was totally dependent on the rains. As the monsoon had showed callousness (*berukhi*) to the farmers in five of the last seven years, it had resulted in the lowering of the ground water table. Given the monopoly of the

gurjars over the ground water resource, the privilege of irrigation was first given to the gurjars because they owned it; after that, first preference was given to their *bhai-bandhu* from the same caste. The jaatav families, were therefore, completely dependent on the gurjars for the irrigation of their land.

Timely irrigation and application of good quality fertilizers would improve productivity. The farmers told me that one *bigha* of land yields approximately 22 *monn* (2.5 *monn*=1 quintal) of wheat in the *rabi* season. In the same village, the *gurjars* get about 30 *monn* from a *bigha*. Similarly, there is a difference in the production of pearl millet in the *kharif* season; about 8–10 *monn* from a *bigha* for the jaatavs, and 10–12 *monn* for the gurjars. The villagers said, “*Agar hamare pas paisa hota, hum bhi bore karwa lete to hame unke pas nahi jana padta* (If we had the money, we would also dig a well and would not need to go them).”

As a development professional, I find that there is need for a platform for villagers to demand subsidy or even credit to dig wells. I was surprised to find, that they do not have access to banks. No one among the jaatav community had a savings account. Although the government claims to have initiated many programmes for marginalized farmers, the ground reality is very different.

The jaatav community is dependent on credit during festivals and marriages, for agricultural needs, and sometimes even for food grains and small house-hold needs. Dependence on the gurjar caste for credit in their time of need or even in emergencies leads and directs the

Dependence on the gurjar caste for credit in their time of need or even in emergencies leads and directs the jaatav community to accept the domination of the gurjars in the village.

jaatav community to accept the domination of the gurjars in the village. Nobody can go against the decisions they make for the village. Do the jaatavs not have the right to be a part of the decision-making about the village in which they live?

The position of the women in the villages in Dholpur district is also pathetic and the situation is worse in poorer families. I stayed for a few days in Athpariya village, Bari block. The village of about 52 households was about 6 km from Bari. One morning I woke up to some loud noises. I saw that Reshamdi's son was shouting and hurling abuses at her. He was about 21 years old and had come back home the evening before after four months at the stone mines. She was a widow. The provocation for the abuse was that she was late in milking the buffalo in the morning and the *dudhiya* (milkman) had arrived to collect the milk. To me it did not seem enough reason for her son to abuse her and shout at her.

That day, I discussed the setting up of a women's Self Help Group (SHG) with the villagers (both male and female). The men sat near me and all the women huddled together in the corner of the room. There were more women than men in the room but they remained silent and listened. They did not ask a single question even though I tried to interact with them and involve them in the discussion. During the conversation, I said that the members of the SHG would sometimes have to travel outside the village. Suddenly a man got up and said, “*Janani to bavari hain aur gaon ke bahar jayengi to kho jayengi* (Women are brainless and they will get lost if they go out of the village).”

Often in the SHG training programmes I have heard that the greatest achievement of the members is that they get a chance to move outside the village. Many women have shared this with me, "*Samooch ko ek fayada hate hai ki bari ghoom lai* (One of the benefits of forming the SHG is that they visited Bari)."

Members from the older (more than three years) SHGs shared, "*Ab to kitahu chod do apnea ap chale jayenge aur vapas a jayenge* (Now I can go anywhere and come back on my own)." Some also said, "*Vishvas to badho hi hai bhai sahib* (Confidence has increased, bhai sahib)."

I am reminded of Hansai village, also in the Bari block in Dholpur. PRADAN has been working in this village for the last seven years. As a PRADANite, I have been working in this village for the last three-and-a-half years. I have been told that earlier, before PRADAN entered the village, the situation in Hansai was the same as in the other villages of Dholpur. The villagers had no savings for small household needs and had to borrow from the moneylenders, sometimes at a whopping 60 per cent interest annually. The interest rate depended on the needs of the villagers and varied from 36 to 60 per cent annually. If the need was urgent, the rate of interest would be very high and the villagers would have no choice but to accept the terms. Leela, one of the members, told me that she and her husband had to beg for money from the moneylenders when her son fell into the bore well when working and was injured seriously. They needed money to hospitalize him. The moneylender gave them Rs 10,000 at an annual interest rate of 48 per cent. They had had to visit the moneylender's

Leela, one of the members, told me that she and her husband had to beg for money from the moneylenders when her son fell into the bore well when working and was injured seriously. They needed money to hospitalize him.

house five times to get this loan even though it was an emergency. They had no alternative except to borrow from the moneylender at that time. But now Leela is so confident; she says, "*Pichale char salon me hame kisi ke pas nahi jana pada, ab to hamare samooch me hi 1,40,000 rupaye hai aur ek-*

do mode, modi ki to sadi bhi isi se kar sakte hai (In the last four years, we have not had to visit any moneylender, and now in our SHG we have Rs 1,40,000. We can even afford one or two marriages with our own money)."

In Bakhtupura village, Mahadevi told me that last year she wanted to buy a buffalo by taking a loan. But the rate of interest charged by the *dudhiya* (milkman) was about 40 per cent per annum. She had then asked her SHG—Dudhadhari Baba *mahila* Bachat *Samiti*—and the group agreed to give a loan of Rs 10,000 at the rate of 26 per cent per annum. She saved 14 per cent of the interest and also her dignity in the village because she did not have to go to anyone's house for a loan. The interest that she pays to the SHG will come back to her because she is an equal shareholder in the group. She said happily, "*Ye byaj to meri hi jeb me aani hai, kisi dusre ke pas to nahi ja rahi* (Some of the interest I repay will eventually come to me)." Members of the SHG here are linked with the ICICI bank for their financial needs. Leela told me, "If we were not part of the SHGs, we would never have experienced such things in our lives."

Hansai now has 10 SHGs, eight of which were formed by the members themselves. The village itself has a cluster (group of 10–12 SHGs, formed in the same geographic

area). They selected a person named Naval and had him trained as a para-vet (a person trained under the guidance of veterinary doctors to provide first-aid and basic care to animals) for veterinary support in the village and nearby areas. Earlier, the veterinary services in the village were very poor. The villagers were dependent on a quack, who would not respond in time because he had a monopoly. The villagers would have to, in addition to his fee, pay for the medicine as well as his conveyance charges. Quacks have no education, merely some practice, and they are just compounders, who have started their own practice. The para-vet on the other hand is trained by the veterinary doctors and is in regular contact with them. Naval is trained under the guidance of veterinary doctors; he also practised subsequently with a doctor for a year. His presence in the village reduces the monopoly of other private (quack) practitioners and also provides the villagers timely and doorstep vet services at minimum costs.

The SHGs selected Manoj for agricultural support. They, with the help of their federation, provided him training and exposure. He worked under the guidance of agricultural scientists and he began helping the members of the SHG, to adopt improved agricultural practices and increase production. The SHGs call him *Krishi Sahyogi*. In many other villages with functioning SHGs, the villagers organized training for selected local persons for these essential services. The impact of having a *Krishi Sahyogi* is visible because improved practices are being adopted and these have increased the production in *rabi* and *kharif* crops. In *rabi*, the average production in wheat computed in the non-intervened and intervened areas

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was 36 and 38 *monn* per *bigha*. Interestingly, the production of the families included in the intervention increased from 30 *monn* per *bigha* to 38 *monn* whereas in the non-intervened areas, it increased just from 36 *monn* per *bigha* to 38 *monn* per *bigha*. The production of the poorer families increased substantially in comparison with the well-off and educated families. The increase was simply because of improved practices and timely plant protection measures. Manoj helped the farmers upgrade their knowledge and provided them field-level support to adopt improved practices. Many non-SHG families also come to Manoj for his guidance in crop practices and plant protection.

Members of SHGs in Hansai told me that till they started the SHG, they had never visited banks; now their SHG has a bank account and they put their extra savings in these. Many of the members were linked with the District Poverty Initiative Project (DPIP: a project of the World Bank) and many others linked their SHG with the Dewan Foundation through their federation for financial linkage. They took credit, purchased buffaloes and this opened up another source of earning for their families. At the cluster, they resolved to start a milk collection centre in Hansai. Leela *behenji* showed interest in the cluster; it provides her training and stock for running a collection centre. Now, Leela runs a milk collection centre and sells this milk to Mother Dairy, which pays for the milk on the basis of its fat percentage and CLR (Correct lactometer reading). The rate is far higher than what the *dudhiya* offers. For example, in Hansai, the rate of milk before starting the dairy was Rs 15 per litre whereas the milk rate

in Mother Dairy was Rs 18 per litre on the basis of 6.5 per cent fat. The price offered increases with an increase in the fat percentage in the milk. Within five days of setting up of the collection centre, the *dudhiya* also increased his rate by Rs 2 per litre. Now, the fixed rate of milk given by the *dudhiya* also began fluctuating with the season and the market. This rate had earlier stayed constant for five years before the centre began.

An SHG is a powerful platform for poor families to meet their savings and credit needs. It is also a platform for sharing their thoughts and feelings, joys and sorrows, developing emotional bonds and helping each other because they belong to the same socio-economic conditions, caste background and almost same life condition.

The presence of a collection centre has directly affected the livelihoods of buffalo rearers because they now have a better place to sell their produce. There is competition, which was absent earlier. The SHGs also expressed their need in the cluster and the federation for support in the linkages. This resulted in the federation helping to improve buffalo rearing practices. For this, the SHG identified Munki *behenji* for training in better buffalo rearing management practices. She also received training in the basic first-aid knowledge. Now she trains other SHG members and shares her knowledge with them.

An SHG is a powerful platform for poor families to meet their savings and credit needs. It is also a platform for sharing their thoughts and feelings, joys and sorrows, developing emotional bonds and helping each other because they belong to the same socio-economic conditions, caste background and almost same life condition. The forum also makes them confident to meet the demands of the world outside their periphery, which would not have been possible for them

to do alone. Once I asked Leela in Hansai, "When will you stop your SHG?" She asked me a question in response to my question, "*Jindi me khana peena, kabhi bund karte hai kya?* (Do we stop eating or drinking at any stage of life?)" I never asked her such questions again. Leela's answer also made me think that if this platform has helped the villagers of Hansai to change their lives, why should it not be introduced in other villages in Dholpur, and

help make a difference. Since then, SHGs have been set up in Badaipura and Athpariya villages. Anguri *behenji* began an intervention in agriculture in the *rabi* season of 2009 and the *kharif* crop of 2010 with the help of Rajveer a *Krishi Sahyogi* in her hamlet. We do not know the result of the *kharif* crop yet, but in the *rabi* season, the improved practice that she adopted increased her wheat production by 3 *monn* from a *bigha* of land that she owns. She happily shared with me, "*Bhai sahab ise bar sirf ek do mahine ka hi anaj bajar se kharidana padega baki sab ghar se hi ho gaya.* (This year, all the grain for home consumption will come from our own field. We may need to buy for just for one or two months.)" Earlier she had to buy a minimum of four months worth of food grains from the market.

To develop and support such platforms until these become productive requires heavy investment of financial and human resources and takes time. My learning from working in the development sector is that a slow and self-motivated development process leads to sustainable change.

Our Perceptions Shape Our Attitudes: My Experience at Sunderpahari

MEHMOOD HASAN

Realizing that our perceptions determine our approach to any person or situation, a Development Apprentice recounts how his negative impressions about the people of Sunderpahari marred his engagement with them and how change happened once he was willing to allow a shift in his perceptions about their innate nature and strengths.

When I joined PRADAN in Sunderpahari, my colleagues, who had been working there for many years, told me that the community in Sunderpahari was not an easy one to work with. The people were lazy, indifferent and unpredictable. I blindly believed this and formed a negative perception about the community. However, after working for almost two years, I have discovered that the people of Sunderpahari are not what I had thought.

Sunderpahari is one of the poorest, remotest, tribal-dominated blocks of Jharkhand's Godda district. It is a part of Damin-e-koh (the Rajmahal hills). It is home to Santhals and Paharias. Geographically, the block is divided into two parts, the hills and the plains. The Paharias reside in the hills and the Santhals mainly live on the plains.

PRADAN began work in Sunderpahari in 1989 by introducing Arjuna plantations for tasar (pre-cocoon) activity. The project further expanded to tasar rearing. In 1995, the women of the area formed a Self Help Group (SHG).

I joined PRADAN's Godda project in 2008 and spent the first few days visiting villages in the area such as Beldang, Salaiya, Dhenukatta, Harla, Kelawari and Bara. I saw the schemes that were underway—horticulture, paddy cultivation through System of Rice Intensification (SRI), dairy, reeling and spinning centres—and got a glimpse PRADAN's promotion of livelihoods for the rural poor. I reached Sunderpahari on 6 August 2008, and was told by the Team Leader of Godda and my Field Guide, Binod Raj Dahal, that I was going to be based in Sunderpahari.

This was the beginning of one of the most difficult times of my life. When I reached the office, I met Praveen, an accountant in the Sunderpahari block. He welcomed me warmly, showed me the way to the room that had been hired for me and

helped me settle in. The tradition in PRADAN is that whenever a new Development Apprentice (DA) joins, all the basic requirements are arranged for by the existing staff.

The first challenge I faced was that there was no toilet or bathroom facility in the room. I asked Praveen how he managed and he said that he used the fields just like all the other villagers because none of the houses in the block were equipped with toilets. I had never been in such a situation in my life and discussed this with my senior colleagues. They suggested that I use the office toilet. The distance from my room to the office was around 200 m. I felt odd but realized that that was the best possible solution, given the circumstances.

No sooner was this solved, I faced the next problem. I was hungry and I asked Anurag, the Project Executive, where the nearest eating place was. He said it was about 3 km away. I was shocked. He suggested that I take his bike. Unfortunately, I did not know how to drive one. He then asked Itwari, one of the staff members, to drop me to the hotel. These were novel experiences for me. I was amazed that there were no toilet or bathroom facilities in any of the houses in the block and that there was no *dhaba* close by. 'Where have I come?' I thought to myself and wondered how the people working in PRADAN, who were so qualified, stayed in this place.

Over the next two days, accompanied by my local Field Guide, Bikash Laha, I saw the villages, the people, the roads, the terrain, the forest, the houses, the market, etc. On the

They took so long to finalize an accommodation for me that I began to think that they didn't want to accommodate me. I even thought that these people were being selfish and rude to be so reluctant to do something for PRADAN when the organization was doing so much for them.

third day, I went for my Village Stay—the first task of a DA in PRADAN. Bikash made the arrangements for my stay. This was a long procedure, and the protocol had to be followed. I was introduced to the villagers at a meeting of the SHG. Bikash explained to them the purpose of my stay in the village. He asked the villagers for permission to stay and also where I could stay. They

took so long to finalize an accommodation for me that I began to think that they didn't want to accommodate me. I even thought that these people were being selfish and rude to be so reluctant to do something for PRADAN when the organization was doing so much for them. My belief that the villagers were selfish were only strengthened during my stay. One day, some members of the SHG came and requested that I share my 4 ft x 2 ft cot with a 15-year-old boy, reinforcing my thought that the villagers did not want to give anything in return for all that they received from PRADAN.

My second Village Stay was in a non-tribal village. After just four days in the village, I fell ill with brain malaria (Malaria PF). I didn't know what it was, however, until much later. It began with a fever, which I thought was because I had walked 5 km that day. But as the day progressed, I started to shiver and at night my headache was unbearable. Gradually, my hands and my legs stopped working and I thought I was going to die. I began to think of what would happen if I died; how my body would reach home; what would happen when my body reached my home; how my parents would react and how they would feel. All these thoughts plagued

me because I knew that the nearest hospital was 25 km away; the village and the nearby villages had no doctor. I didn't even have a mobile phone to call Sunderpahari.

I finally asked the family I was staying with to help me. They gave me two blankets but I continued to shiver. The lady of the house, Seema Devi, massaged some mustard oil in my head, and their 16-year-old girl, Anita, made a cup of tea for me. I started to pray, "Allah, forgive me for my sins, and I am coming to you. You gave me many chances for improvement but it is my mistake that I didn't obey you. Allah, have sympathy for my family. Give them the courage to face this situation." But the night passed and as the sun rose, so did my hopes of staying alive. I told Seema Devi that I wanted to go to Sunderpahari as soon as possible. She asked how I would get there because nobody in the village had a bike. I asked if anyone in the village had a cell phone so that I could make a call to Sunderpahari. Luckily, one person had a phone but he didn't want to make the call. He said that the battery was not charged. Seema Devi told me that he generally does not allow anyone to use his phone. I thought: 'Oh God! This is extreme. Here I am, dying and he says that the battery is not charged and I have come here to work for the development of people like him.' I went to his house and requested him to make a call. By that time I was unable to walk. I was breathing heavily like a TB patient and had to be supported by two persons to walk to his house. He gave me his mobile but there was no network in the village.

After these experiences I decided not to continue in PRADAN. But my colleagues in the organization, my seniors in the university and my friends in the NGO, sector with whom I discussed the matter, all suggested that it was too early to come to this conclusion.

I needed to reach Sunderpahari somehow, because I knew that I would survive if I reached there. I asked Seema's husband to drop me to Sunderpahari on his bicycle but he refused, saying he was not feeling well. I asked several people and finally I found a person who was ready to drop me to Sunderpahari. I almost felt like a beggar when I was

asking people to drop me to Sunderpahari and as more and more people were refusing to do so, my perception, that they were not actually human, became stronger. But one young man, Suneel, came forward to rescue me. He dropped me to Sunderpahari on his cycle.

After these experiences I decided not to continue in PRADAN. But my colleagues in the organization, my seniors in the university and my friends in the NGO sector, with whom I discussed the matter, all suggested that it was too early to come to this conclusion. They asked me to stay a few days more and then, if I was still not happy, I could leave.

I went for my next assignment, another Village Study. Here too I faced many problems. When I asked the villagers a question regarding their village, they would ask me many questions about myself before answering my question. I had to introduce myself over and over again. As the Village Study progressed, it seemed as if the villagers' mistrust of me increased. Some people started to say that I had come to their village for trafficking girls; some said I was collecting the data to capture their land, etc. I felt very insecure in the village. They mistrusted

everything about me—my name, my identity. It was a painful experience for me.

After completing the Village Stay and study, I went for Foundation Course I (a month-long programme for apprentices in PRADAN). It was like coming to heaven. I was dreading going back to Sunderpahari, to those selfish and unhelpful people. But I had no choice. I had to go back there.

On my return from the Foundation Course, I was assigned to work with the women's SHGs. There were 34 SHGs in 20 villages in that area. Of these, only a few SHGs were functioning well; some were functioning moderately, and a few were not functioning properly. I decided to focus on those SHGs that were not functioning properly. Wherever I went, I asked the SHG members why they did not run their SHGs properly. But they did not respond. I thought the problem was within the community, with the people. I thought of what a fantastic concept the SHG was and that these people deserved it and really needed it. Why then, I wondered, were they not running it properly?

There are two SHGs in Jogimarna village, the Kiskuchurabaha *mahila* Mandal, and the Maradbaha *mahila* Mandal. One day, I went to attend an SHG meeting of the Kiskuchurabaha *mahila* Mandal. I had sent a message to the SHG members that there would be a meeting on Thursday at noon. I reached the village and found only one SHG member, Karmi Murmu, there and she was also at home, I asked her about the other SHG members. Instead of answering me, she

I was not able to understand the people. In spite of my repeated efforts, I was not able to increase the number of participants in the training programmes. I was becoming certain that these people were not going to change and that it was a waste of time to be here.

ran away. I returned from the village wondering why this had happened. Out of frustration, I decided not to go to that village again, I sent a message to Manjiharam (the *pradhan* of the village) that both the SHGs of his village would be closed down.

I spent almost four months doing rigorous field work to improve the condition of the

SHGs. I went door to door gathering the members for meetings, asking them to run their SHGs properly, arranging accountants for writing their books of accounts and sometimes writing them myself when there was no accountant available. But there was little response from the people. I also organized various trainings but the villagers were not participative. Once I organized a training for accountants with the help of a senior colleague, Arunavo Ghoshal. He came to Sunderpahari to conduct the training but only five people came to attend the programme, and that also because I found them walking by and requested them to join. When I asked them why they had not come, they said, "*Hirhing kida, dada* (We forgot)." The next day, I asked the others, who did not attend the training, what had happened. They also had the same answer, "*Hirhing kida.*" It was an embarrassing moment for me. I had invited an external resource person for the training programme and the participants did not turn up. During that period I organized many training programmes, but the participation was low. "*Hirhing kida, dada*" was the response I got from them every time. I was not able to understand the people. In spite of my repeated efforts, I was not able to increase

the number of participants in the training programmes. I was becoming certain that these people were not going to change and that it was a waste of time to be here.

I also observed that the people of Sunderpahari had the resources and the structures. I also saw the pathetic condition of some of the schemes which PRADAN, as well as the government, had implemented, especially the land and water development-related schemes. I saw water in the wells, in the ponds, even in the summer, but the people didn't use the land for agriculture. I saw that the people's interest was in earning their wages through making wells, ponds, etc., but not in utilizing these structures for agriculture. I saw the micro-lift irrigation systems—one had been damaged by the elephants and another one was broken down but no one from the community had taken the initiative to repair these. Many of them were in good condition but were of no use, unless repaired. I saw the pathetic condition of the water pumping machines, which the villagers had got free of cost, but were not being used. Some of these were old, but some were absolutely new and the community had not used them even a single time. One SHG, the Rajbaha *mahila* Mandal, of village Damruhat, asked me to take back the pumping set, which they had got through one of the schemes of the Tribal Welfare Commission (TWC). They said that they didn't have space to keep the machine in their homes and it had never been used.

After 10 months in Sunderpahari, I faced the first and the most important livelihood season (after *tasar*), the *khariif*. I worked with the SHG members to plan the activity—how many acres would be under paddy cultivation, using the SRI technique; how many decimals would be covered with

vegetables (through improved techniques); etc. Once the planning was completed, I began work with the families (my target was to involve 375 families, but I managed only 204 families). I was way off my target—another embarrassment in front of all the team members, and in my first livelihood season when the first impression was important in PRADAN's livelihood mission's context.

But not meeting the targets was not all the trouble that I faced. Seeds and fertilizers were not available in the block. SHG members were to deposit money and PRADAN professional would make the necessary arrangements to procure them. Some of the SHG members paid their money whereas the others said that they would give the money at the time of delivery. I believed them and asked the suppliers to send the required amount of seeds and fertilizers. At the time of distribution of inputs, the seeds and fertilizers were in PRADAN's Sunderpahari office. I wanted to hire a vehicle to take these to the villagers but the *vehiclewala* was demanding huge hiring charges. I realized that if I pay this much for transport, the cost of inputs to the villagers would increase. Since I had to go to the villages to provide training to the SHG members, I decided that, wherever I went, I would carry the inputs with me and distribute them among the SHG members. In some cases, as in Towabaha *mahila* Mandal, village Bariyarpur, the SHG members started to bargain with me, as if I was a *beej-khad wala*. They said " *Hurhu itte do bang jarura, kareli itte emua tabe em main, bang khai do bang* (No need of paddy seed; give me bitter gourd seed if you want, otherwise not)."

I had worked so hard from planning to distribution—collecting money from every

SHG member, making packets for every SHG member, and delivering them at their door step. I had carried 50 to 60 kg of weight, that also in separate packets (one packet of seed, one packet of DAP, one packet of MOP, one packet of urea, etc.), on a bike on a *kachcha* road, full of small stones, in the heat of summer, in May and June, when I had just learned how to drive the bike. I remember falling down a couple of times, trying to balance the packets on the back seat of my bike, as I drove. Those three months of the *kharif* season were very difficult for me personally. The result was that I lost Rs 6,000, which the SHG members didn't give me.

I shared my stress with the senior colleagues, who had been working in Sunderpahari. They said that they also faced similar situations and problems, working in that area. My negative perceptions of the community crystallized. I began to think, "These people are really bad, and if somehow they become good, everything will become all right."

The intensity of my negative feelings for the community increased day by day. Whenever I thought of the people, it was on the lines of "Oh! These people, I am quite sure they will not come to attend the SHG meeting." "Oh! I have not gone to the last meeting; I know that they themselves must not have organized the SHG meeting etc."

With the passage of time, I also started to disbelieve the people. Whenever I tried to encourage or motivate them through meetings or through trainings, I myself didn't

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seem quite confident that they would do the task properly and on time.

Gradually, I started to lose interest in working with these 'type of people'. My enthusiasm for community development faded. I became irritable and began to believe that we lived in a hopeless world, and that every development professional

was a loser and I had joined a loser's club. I felt I was wasting my time and I had to leave soon.

After working for a year—a year full of frustration and suffering, I decided to quit, I reached PRADAN's Godda headquarters to tell the Team Leader that I was leaving the organization. This was the first time I was going to share something negative with the Team Leader. In my earlier meetings with him, I had told him that the community was difficult but I was planning to apply some strategies. I had never shared what was actually going on in my mind.

There was a horticulture workshop that I was attending and I decided that at the end of it I would tell him. But before I could share anything with him, he came up to me and said "Mehmood, you are the last professional in Sunderpahari. We are not going to deploy any more people there unless some transformation takes place. Many professionals have come to work in Sunderpahari but they were less interested in the development of the community and more in their own career growth. No change has taken place in the life of the people of Sunderpahari for a long time. It is you who can do that. I have full confidence in you."

His confidence in me stopped me from sharing with him what I was going through. I postponed the idea of quitting and started to focus once more on work with some new strategies and plans, but only half-heartedly.

Change is the rule of nature. In some cases, it happens in a fraction of a second whereas in others it takes millions of years. Similarly, change in perception can happen with just one incident or it can take months or years. Or, it may be possible that change in perception never takes place.

So, did a change take place in my perception of the people of Sunderpahari? I must say I had been so busy focusing on the negatives that I had not paid enough attention to the positives. For example, sometimes, when I went to organize a meeting of the SHG, it had already been held. Sometimes, when I said that an activity had to be done in a particular way, they had done exactly that and on time. During the *rabi* season in 2009, the people of Sunderpahari cultivated cauliflower, radish, wheat, etc. I worked on training them on how to cultivate these crops, especially cauliflower. I could not believe that in some of the villages, the farmers were cultivating cauliflower for the first time and because of that I gave more time to the cauliflower farmers. And they followed whatever I told them.

What happened during the *kharif* season in 2010 was not expected—either by me or by my team members and not even by my senior colleagues of Sunderpahari. Amazing results were seen: More than 500 farmers, a collection of Rs 1,47,000 and no bad debts!

His confidence in me stopped me from sharing with him what I was going through. I postponed the idea of quitting and started to focus once more on work with some new strategies and plans, but only half-heartedly.

Many questions arose: How had the people of Sunderpahari, who in the previous year had invested just Rs 32, 000 during the *kharif* season, suddenly this year invested Rs 1,47,000? How did the number of farmers increase from 340 last year to more than 500 this year? And most importantly for me, 'Who

were these people who had invested'? Was it the people of Sunderpahari? These lazy people had done that? Their achievement opened my eyes. I was not able to understand this? What was it that I had missed?'

That was not all. There was another miracle. All the work on the mango and timber plantations under the Special SGSY project, was done on time—from digging the pits and filling them, to fencing them—everything was done on time and within the given cost, without any fuss. My other team members were crying for the estimates of mango plantations but I was very comfortable because there was no issue of costing there. I had planned for just 3 ha because of my conservative thinking. Everyone asked me how this had happened. For me the question was not how but who? What had brought about this change in the people, who until a few months back, could not do anything and were now achieving some great things? I began to understand that the problem was not with the community, as I had thought, but within me. It was not the community who was the villain in this film; it was my thinking of them, my thoughts of the tribal communities of Sunderpahari, which were the villain.

After some of my doubts about Sunderpahari's tribal community were cleared, I felt the impact of my changed attitude in my working. Earlier I used to roam around in search of what the villagers were doing wrong, but now I began to search for the things they did right and did them well. For example, I began to appreciate their involvement in the highly technical activity of producing tasar, which needs microscopes for testing diseases in the eggs of moths. This testing was being done by the tribals of Sunderpahari and not by scientists.

Since 2004–05, the people of Sunderpahari have cultivated paddy, using the SRI technique. What is amazing is that these tribes of Sunderpahari cultivate more paddy through SRI than the non-tribals of Poreyhat block of Godda district, who are far ahead of Sunderpahari, in terms of agriculture. The people of Sunderpahari have welcomed and adopted this technique. And a majority of the families, using SRI, in PRADAN's livelihood intervention in Godda comes from Sunderpahari!

I introspected about what could have made me form such a negative perception about the community of Sunderpahari? The questions continued to trouble me: Why had the villagers taken so long to decide where I would stay during my Village Stay? Why had the women SHG members wanted me to share that small cot with a boy of the village during my stay? Why had that one SHG member run away when I went to organize the SHG meeting in Jogimarna village? Why had all these things happened?

After some of my doubts about Sunderpahari's tribal community were cleared, I felt the impact of my changed attitude in my working. Earlier I used to roam around in search of what the villagers were doing wrong, but now I began to search for the things they did right and did them well.

I needed clarity. Upon deep reflection, I realized that the answers were not what I had understood of the situation at that time. Let's see what the answers are:

Why had the villagers taken so long to decide where I would stay, during my first Village Stay? When my senior colleague introduced me to the villagers, he had said I was from Delhi. The villagers

thought that this new *dada* (new professional) must be an important person, if he has come from Delhi and he needs to be given the best place of the village to live in. And that is what they did. They gave me the only *pakka* house of their village, where I stayed alone. It had taken them some time to finalize that.

Why had the women SHG members wanted me to share the small cot with one of the boys of the village during my stay? The villagers were superstitious and believed that there were many ghosts in the village. They wanted me to be safe and the little boy was sent there for my protection!

Why had one SHG member run away when I went to organize the SHG meeting in Jogimarna village? That SHG meeting in Jogimarna village was not held because there was a festival in the village that day and everybody, including the women, were drunk at that time. Nobody had come out from their houses and that one SHG member, with whom I met, was also drunk and that was why she ran away. I had fixed the date of the meeting without consulting with the women. If I had asked the villagers before fixing the date of the meeting, they would have told me

that there was a festival that day and perhaps this confusion would not have happened.

Why had I formed such negative perceptions about the community of Sunderpahari? It just happened. I did not even know that I was forming misperceptions. I had just heard of some bad experiences from my senior colleagues in Sunderpahari and had made up my mind about the people there; their behaviour just seemed to fit in with what I had heard and this reinforced my perceptions.

When I changed my perception and started to think neutral, I realized that it was not the people's fault; it was my mistake. My perceptions were incorrect. They always wanted to say something to me but I didn't focus on that. For me, this was the root cause of all problems. The community was crying in front of me but instead of helping them I had added oil to the fire, as they say. During my dark era in Sunderpahari, I had closed three SHGs and stopped going to many villages. I now think that those SHGs need to be revived.

I have heard that Karan in Mahabharata was a great warrior and that he was even better than Arjuna at archery. But because of his negative thinking, he went with the wrong

The nazaria (perception) of a person plays an important role in determining his actions. After this experience, I realized that one person could be wrong but not an entire community.

side and hence was defeated by Arjuna. Similarly, my negative perceptions were responsible for passing almost one-and-a-half years in exile, full of suffering and frustration.

Of course, there are still various unresolved issues about the tribal communities of Sunderpahari such as are they really lazy or are they just indifferent? Are they innocent or just very shrewd? One thing, however, is very clear, that they are really lagging behind the rest of the world. Whether they are innocent or indifferent or lazy or unpredictable, I am not sure, but I do know that they are in need of our help. They are not as bad as I used to think earlier.

The *nazaria* (perception) of a person plays an important role in determining his actions. After this experience, I realized that one person could be wrong but not an entire community. The role our perceptions play is not limited to our attitude to the tribal communities of Sunderpahari but also influences our daily life, where we differentiate on the basis of caste, creed, class, race, and of course, religion. We make our perceptions the basis of stereotypes such as, "Oh she is doing that because she is a Punjabi or he is doing that because he is Muslim." We all need to rethink and re-look at our perceptions.

Learning to Dream Again: The Successful Implementation of MGNREG in Balimundi, Paschim Midnapore

SUKANTA SARKAR

With detailed planning of the processes of implementation of MNREGA, and collaboration among the people, the gram panchayat and PRADAN, the villagers are witnessing changes on different fronts—from an increase in assets and in knowledge about agricultural practices to enhanced production, leading to financial and food security.

Rajani Singh of village Baksa is a happy man. His daughter has just got married and the ceremony went peacefully without any financial hitch. “This has been possible because of my earnings from the MGNREGA work,” he says. Last year, Rajani Singh and his daughter earned Rs 14,000 as wage labour. His neighbour, Barju Singh, and his family earned Rs 17,000. He is now confident that his sons’ educational expenses can be met now. The stories of these families are not exceptions in Balimundi *sansad* of Arrah *gram panchayat* (GP). Ashok Kumar Rana, the *panchayat* Secretary, refers to the records of the *panchayat* and says that the families of this *sansad* have had, on an average, 98 days of work.

Balimundi *sansad* of Arrah *gram panchayat* is one of the remote pockets of the Nayagram block in Paschim Midnapore district. It comprises five villages with a total population of 1,212 families; more than 90 per cent of them belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs). Table 1 depicts the data of the

Table 1: Expenses of Balimundi *sansad* under MGNREGA in 2010—11

Name of the Sansad	No. of Schemes implemented	Total Expenses (Rs in Lakh)	Man-days Generated				Average Man-days Generated	Percentage of Total Expenses in the Panchayat
			SC	ST	Others	Total		
Balimundi	20	28.14	932	10944	217	12093	98	31.43

successful implementation of the MGNREGA. Approximately 31.43 per cent of the total expenses of the *panchayat* under MGNREGA have been utilized by the *sansad*.

In December 2009, the District Magistrate (DM) of Paschim Midnapore district, Narayan Swaroop Nigam, invited Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), a national level NGO, to work in this area. It was a collaborative project under MGNREGA. The main focus of this partnership between the district administration and PRADAN has been to help the *panchayat* in the large-scale planning required under MGNREGA and to motivate the villagers to participate in it, and make its implementation successful. Another area of focus has been to find a convergence between the MGNREGA work and the livelihood needs of the people.

To begin with, the *panchayat* members studied the successful implementation of land and water-based work in Purulia district of West Bengal. During the orientation, workshops were organized at the *panchayat* and block levels, to introduce the project to the people. The district officials, especially the DM and the District Nodal Officer (DNO), helped to bring all the actors on board and organized village-level planning. The families of each village participated and came up with a plan for the village for the next five years.

PROCESSES FOR PLANNING

The successful planning at the village level has helped the *sansad* to create large-scale demand for work. With guidance from the *panchayat* staff and PRADAN, the villagers identified their resources, analyzed the

The main focus of this partnership between the district administration and PRADAN has been to help the panchayat in the large-scale planning required under the MGNREGA and to motivate the villagers to participate in it, and make its implementation successful.

potential of various interventions and finalized the interventions. Each family of these villages has its own plan. "The most interesting part of this planning is the active involvement of the villagers—right from concept seeding of the work to its inclusion in the annual action plan of the MGNREGA," says Devendra Singh, Secretary of Balimundi

Gram Unnayan Samiti (GUS).

The planning was conducted in stages.

1. **Socio-economic survey:** A survey was conducted to assess the socio-economic situation of the families, to learn about the existing resources of the villagers and to estimate the availability of human resources in the area, in order to carry out the activities of the programme. The data also forms the baseline for this watershed area.
2. **Orientation meeting at the *panchayat* level:** A meeting was organized to involve the *panchayat* bodies in the project because these bodies are one of the major stakeholders in the programme. Besides appraising the *panchayat* members and the staff about the programme, discussions were held about the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders and the processes to be followed for planning and implementation of the project.
3. **Exposure of the *panchayat* members and villagers to successful watershed areas:** An exposure visit was then organized for the *panchayat* members and two or three opinion leaders of the village, to give them more clarity about

- the concept and to help them understand the potential of the approach.
4. **Concept seeding at the village level:** In these meetings, the programme was introduced to the villagers and they were familiarized with PRADAN. The *panchayat* members and the village opinion leaders, who had gone for the exposure visits, played an important role in helping the villagers understand the concept. A short documentary film on the Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM) approach was screened at every hamlet for the villagers.
 5. **Resource mapping:** Next, the villagers identified the resources of their village on a revenue map of the village. This exercise helped create awareness among the people about the existence of the different resources and helped them look at their villages from the perspective of 'resource-resource' relationships and 'resource-people' relationships. This proved to be a valuable amazing learning experience for the villagers as well as for PRADAN, which facilitated the process.
 6. **Ownership mapping:** The villagers then mapped the ownership pattern of the various land classes, to identify the patch-wise ownership of the village.
 7. **Identifying and mapping problems:** Once the ownership map and the resource map were finalized, the villagers visited the land. PRADAN professionals facilitated the process. The problems on each kind of land were identified so that different options could be explored to make the land more productive in a sustainable way.
 8. **Generating options/ solutions:** Brainstorming sessions were conducted at the site to generate ideas to improve the land. Various options were explored, thus, increasing the probability of arriving at a better solution.
 9. **Making an activity plan:** Hamlet and village meetings were organized where the best solutions were identified, based on their probable social and economic/financial impact.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The following process is being adopted for the implementation of activities:

1. Facilitating Self Help Groups (SHGs) to work as supervisors of the activities,
2. Giving training to the SHGs on:
 - a. Learning about individual application procedures
 - b. Giving the field layout
 - c. Monitoring implementation
 - d. Filling up job cards and learning about muster rolls
 - e. Measuring the area of work
 - f. Understanding the fund-flow procedure
3. Submitting of plans by the SHGs to the GUS for approval.
4. Decision-making by the GUS about:
 - a. Whether to approve the plan or not
 - b. How to allocate supervision of activities of the different patches to the SHGs
5. Submitting the approved plans to the GP. The activities are grouped in such a way that the total amount of a proposal does not exceed Rs 2 lakhs so that the plans can be implemented by the GP and do not have to go to the *panchayat samiti*, thereby saving time.
6. Making of an estimate of all the plans on an XL sheet by a GP engineer (trained by PRADAN).
7. Approving of the plans by the GP *pradhan* and issuing of a work order to the SHGs.

8. Making four copies of the sanction orders.
 - a. The original copy goes to the selected SHG (addressed to the president of the SHG).
 - b. One copy goes to the GP office.
 - c. One copy is for PRADAN.
 - d. One copy is for the GUS.
9. Implementing the work and maintaining registers of work progress by the SHGs.
10. Organizing a weekly meeting of all the supervisors (SHGs) under a GP, the GP engineer and the *panchayat pradhan*. In the meeting:
 - a. Work progress reports are reviewed.
 - b. Muster rolls are verified.
 - c. *Nirman sahayaks* do the final verifications.
 - d. Blank muster rolls required for the following week's work are handed over to the supervisors.
 - e. Indents are generated for the coming week.
 - f. Plans are drawn for the following day's field verification by the GP engineer.
11. Making of field visits by the *nirman sahayaks/gram rozgar sahayaks* for verification.
12. Releasing of payments the following day to individual bank accounts.

The families of Balimundi sansad have witnessed a change in their expenses as well as their assets portfolio. In Baksa village, a sprawling mango orchard of 13 ha has replaced what was just fallow land a year ago.

spawning mango orchard of 13 ha has replaced what was just fallow land a year ago. All 63 owners of this patch are tribals. Sukhlal Singh and his two brothers are now proud owners of around 275 mango plants in their patch. Surya Singh has 148 plants in his patch. An irrigation infrastructure is in place and

the farmers are confident of their plants surviving the dry spells. All 63 owners meet fortnightly to discuss the management of their orchard. They take care of their orchard intensively. At present, the survival rate of this orchard is 91 per cent. The villagers are very happy with the growth of the plants. More interestingly, they have ploughed their mango orchards for intercropping on their own.

Dudhiasol village has a similar story where an 8 ha cashew orchard has been developed by 32 tribal families of that village.

Gura Dhal of Purba Baksa village is not worried even though there has been no rain for the last 15 days. Asked if he was worried about the dry spell, he said, "I have enough water in my tank now. I have already irrigated the land twice, and will be able to irrigate it twice more. By that time it will rain."

The scenario was just the opposite earlier when it was a common phenomenon for the paddy crop to be destroyed because of scarcity of water.

CONVERGING NREGA WITH LIVELIHOODS

The families of Balimundi *sansad* have witnessed a change in their expenses as well as their assets portfolio. In Baksa village, a

Small water harvesting structures (WHS), which were excavated under the MGNREGA, have led to these success stories. Almost all

the farmers with these small WHSs have been able to save their paddy even in the drought conditions that prevailed in the earlier year. Some of the farmers have chosen fish rearing whereas some have opted for vegetable cultivation and have earned as high as Rs 15,000–20,000. These tanks have not only been a source of income for the people, but have also helped to recharge the ground water. Till date, in this *sansad*, 24 WHSs have been created.

ENHANCING KNOWLEDGE

The creation of assets, coupled with enhanced knowledge in agriculture has become a boon for the farmers of this *sansad*. The farmers are not only able to save their paddy from drought but also to increase its production. Jawaharlal Singh of Balimundi was surprised when he was asked to transplant one seedling instead of the seven or eight as per the traditional method. He followed the practice against the wishes of his family. They named him a villain especially because for the first 15 days the paddy land looked completely fallow. The scenario, however, began changing then. Within a month, he saw the tillers and, to his surprise, he found that the whole land was covered with an average number of tillers ranging from 40–45. The farmers of Balimundi experienced a miraculous shift in their paddy production when they adopted this new process of paddy cultivation called the System of Rice Intensification (SRI). Their yield almost doubled. About 40 families have adopted this practice in this *sansad*.

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PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN SHG MEMBERS AND PANCHAYAT SUPPORT

Women members actively participate in MGNREGA work and supervise the entire work. Eight SHGs of this *sansad* received training and continued support, to perform their role as supervisors. By design, women were given more space to exercise their choices. As a result, their interaction with the *panchayat* and government officials has increased. They now shoulder their responsibilities with ease. Women members of the SHGs in Balimundi *sansad* often accompany visitors to explain their work confidently.

“Initially we were quite nervous about taking on the responsibility of such a large volume of work. However, with active support from the *panchayat* and the PRADAN staff, we are now able to perform our roles satisfactorily. In future also, we are ready to take up more such work,” say Latika Singh and Ahalya Singh of Maa Lakhshmi SHG of Baksa village.

The *panchayat* members as well as the staff have come forward to implement the programmes successfully. Systems have been set up for a weekly review, regular monitoring of the work and regular payments. The *panchayat pradhan* and the secretary have taken a lead role in the overall supervision of the work. They have ensured smooth implementation of the schemes. “We are proud that we have been able to make labour payments within 15 days in all the schemes,” says Dhirendranath Singh, *pradhan* of Arrah *panchayat*.

LOOKING AHEAD

The increased earnings from MGNREGA, coupled with the convergence in livelihoods, have ushered in a new ray of hope for these tribal people of the remote villages of Balimundi *sansad*. They have begun dreaming of a better future. Seeing the result,

the *panchayat* is also confident about bringing more areas under similar interventions. Brimming with confidence after utilizing Rs 97 lakhs last year, the Arrah *panchayat* is looking forward to spending around Rs 2 crores for similar interventions under MGNREGA in this financial year.

The Changing Face of Dhaka and Diggal Pahadi Villages

RAJESH

Known for its soil erosion during heavy rainfall, the infertile lands of Dhaka and Diggal Pahadi have been converted into green fields through tasar plantations and other agricultural interventions, ensuring food and financial security for the villagers.

People invest their time and labour on a resource only if the benefits from it are pre-determined and assured. The villagers of Dhaka and Diggal Pahadi in Jharkhand were no different. They believed that their 62 acres of uplands that stretched across the villages were not even suitable for maize cultivation, let alone yielding an income of a lakh of rupees. However, the introduction of tasar plantation and agriculture through an intervention has transformed the land over the last four years. The area that was not even giving them Rs. 100 now yields an income of Rs 5 to 6 lakhs and has become a symbol of prestige and prosperity for them. This is a vibrant example of the fulfillment of a dream visualized by the farmers. I never thought that my idea of tasar plantation and agriculture would yield such wonderful results so soon.

In 2006, the Department of Social Welfare, Government of Jharkhand, sanctioned a scheme for Arjuna plantation on private land for tasar farming. The programme was meant for tribal families only. PRADAN got an approval for two units of 85 acres each for tasar plantation. Ten to twelve villages in the Kathikund and Shikaripara areas were chosen for the plantation. It was a challenge for me, personally, because I had very little experience with such an intervention. Another challenge was to find land suitable for the Arjuna plantation in nearby villages.

There was a large stretch of unutilized uplands in Dhaka and Diggal Pahadi villages, which I had seen during my field visits. Initially, when I discussed this with the villagers, I found them very apathetic, and this was discouraging. They thought that nothing could be done in these uplands and, therefore, there was no point in having a discussion on the issue. I learned that the land belonged to tribal families, who made their living by working in the lowlands as labourers in other farmers' agricultural plots. When I told them about tasar plantation, the people's first

reaction was to reject the proposal, saying that about 10–15 years ago, *madua* and *gonduli* used to grow in this patch of land but now even those had dried up and the land was uncultivable. It was disheartening to learn that there were even rumours that PRADAN would take away the land. But I decided to give it one last try.

In February 2006, with the support of the local leaders, I organized a meeting in the village. I requested the villagers to come with me to see a tasar plantation before taking a decision. In March 25–30 villagers from Dhaka visited Chandubyan village, to interact with the villagers and to see for themselves the Arjuna plantation and the tasar rearing activities there. This had a very positive impact on the visitors. They had detailed discussions with their hosts and understood many aspects of tasar rearing. On their return to Dhaka, the villagers decided to try out this source of livelihood and formed a village-level committee for the management of the activities. They named their committee 'Aatu Utnav Vikash Samiti', which means to work for the development of the village. We then began our intervention in the village in earnest. In the first year, 40 ha of land were covered with Arjuna plantation and the whole patch of land turned into a green field. When they saw this, the people of Diggall Pahadi called for a meeting in their village and decided to introduce tasar plantation in their patch of 20 ha as well. They sent a letter to PRADAN regarding this. After getting the sanction order, they formed the 'Lahanit tasar Vikash Samiti' in the village and by 2007, the plantation was operational.

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The maintenance of the Arjuna plantation by both the *samitis* became an example of the high quality of management skills amongst the villagers. The maintenance of plants, their timely pruning and their protection from grazing were carried out very

professionally. Strong laws were formed for the protection of the plants and the villagers adhered to them. By 2009, their dream of a tasar plantation on this vast tract of land came true because of the hard work of the villagers. All government officials ranging from the Block Development Officer (BDO), the Deputy Commissioner (DC), the Deputy Development Commissioner (DDC) and the Secretary came to see the plantation. A team of trainee IAS officers also came to understand how the plantation works. The confidence level of the villagers grew because of the appreciation they received from all quarters. Hundreds of villagers from the neighbouring villages came to Dhaka and Diggall Pahadi villages to see the plantations.

Before initiating tasar rearing in this village in 2009, the farmers were trained for two days. This training programme increased their confidence and, for the first time, 20 farmers started tasar rearing on the Arjuna plantation. To begin with, the commercial crop was introduced with 2,000 disease-free layings (DFLs). In this crop, 2,23,360 quality cocoons were raised that could be used for tasar seed production. The total cost of this crop was Rs 3,40,000 and, on an average, a family earned an income of around Rs 17,000 in cash on an investment of Rs 800. These cocoons were bought by 'Abhen tasar Kitpalak Samiti', Saharitola, Kathikund, for the production of high quality seeds. With an increase in income, there was excitement

among the villagers. Once the villagers began earning some money, the migration to West Bengal for earning their livelihood dropped and the villagers became food secure for at least one year. Family members began to stay at home and the children were sent to school instead of to the fields to work.

What was once the most infertile land of Dhaka and what was known for soil erosion during heavy rainfall has now been converted into green fields. The villagers, who are earning large sums of money for the first time, are now beginning to think of how to invest their money to ensure a secure future. Stephen Marandi has invested in life insurance policies; Jetha Murmu has bought agricultural land; and Marhsal Tudu has bought a cycle and a mobile phone. Joel Hasda, Prem Murmu and many others replaced their thatched roofs with tiled ones. Agnesh Marandi, Menesal Tudu, Sushil Soren and Parmeshwar Tudu have invested in light-weight pump sets for irrigation whereas Usha Kiran Murmu and Budhin Hemram have opened bank accounts and are saving their money so that they can spend it on marriages and other family requirements. There was a wave of social and economic change in the village in 2009 and it motivated 50 more farmers to take up tasar rearing in 2010. Other farmers began looking after their

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Arjuna plantations so that they could also be associated with this form of livelihood in the coming years. In 2010, 5,000 DFLs were used for raising the tasar commercial crop. This produced 3,54,000 cocoons of high

quality that could be used for the production of the tasar seeds, and 3,000 tasar reeling cocoons were produced. The total income for the year was Rs 5,88,226. With an average investment of Rs 700, a family was able to earn around Rs 11,000 to 12,000 in a span of 45 days. Within two to three years, earning their livelihood as labourers in agricultural plots became a secondary option, their first became tasar rearing. According to the villagers of Dhaka and Diggal Pahadi village, "The plantation will be a constant source of income for us for the next 50 years. We can now work with respect with this livelihood."

The women of this village are also very happy because they are respected now just like the men are, owing to their involvement in the work. They have greater confidence levels and consider themselves at par with men. They are also happy because people from nearby villages come to them with proposals of marriage for their sons and daughters, in the hope that the youth of Dhaka and Diggal Pahadi will carry their culture of awareness and hard work with them and help transform those villages as well.

Learning through Failures and Successes

MITALI

Every failure provides opportunities for learning and growth and can be stepping stone for development professionals endeavouring to bring about a change in the field.

What is more important, I would like to ask—our village and society or our self-interest and because of it envy and conflict? If the answer is the latter, there is no more to say. However, if the answer is our village and society, I would like to ask why people do not come together and have a shared dream for the development of their village? Is it not possible to think of the well-being of others?

A village is made up of many hamlets (*tolas*) and many people live in a hamlet. Some of these hamlets have Self Help Groups (SHGs) but not everyone is part of these groups. Some people have chosen to be associated with SHGs but not to belong to them. Why is this so? Why do they only want a tentative connection with the SHGs of their areas? There are many such unanswered questions.

In Godda district, Jharkand, there is a village called Barmasiya in Poriyahat block; it has many small hamlets, including one called Pandit *tola* where all the potters live. The people of this hamlet have adopted another profession, leading to improved living standards. Two SHGs (Laxmi and Maa Kashi), promoted by PRADAN, function in this hamlet. I worked on a development scheme with these villagers.

Before my first meeting with the people, I was apprehensive about the dynamics of the group. But I found that the women discussed many topics, including some developmental schemes. I thought that if the group members themselves were so enthusiastic and wanted to implement some of the programmes, PRADAN could also think of promoting some development schemes through the Swarnajayanti *gram* Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) Special Project. Keeping this in my mind, I called for a meeting in the village in which some women, who were not members of the SHG, also participated. They expressed their desire to form a group for themselves. I was in favour of the idea and suggested that they form a new group. So the Maa Durga *mahila* Mandal was formed in Pandit *tola*.

The SGSY Special Project was then introduced in the village. A combined meeting of three SHGs was called, which was attended by the men of the village too. People participated in a detailed discussion about the SGSY Special Project, the difficulties that might come in the way of its implementation and how the members could contribute in its execution. The men and the women both agreed that they would help to implement the programme and would participate in the development process so that their village could prosper.

I was delighted to see the active participation of Sarita Devi, Manju Devi, Geeta Devi, Samri Devi, Sadanand Pandit, Prakash Pandit and Bisheshwar Pandit in the discussions. A hamlet-level *sabha* called *Barmasiya gram Samiti* was formed and a day was fixed for the preparation of the detailed implementation plan. We visited the plots and fields in Barmasiya village, to assess where the structure (for example 5 per cent model, water harvesting tank, irrigation tank, field bunding, etc.) could be prepared so that all the villagers could reap its benefits. We reached the uplands near the village, owned by 18 to 20 villagers. Six or seven people used to cultivate potatoes, *kurthi* and maize on this land whereas the rest of the land lay fallow. During the discussions, the landowners began talking about planting mangoes on this patch of land. They thought that if they planted mangoes on those five acres, it would gradually develop into a forest and would be beneficial for them. The villagers were enthusiastic and unanimously decided to go ahead with the plan. Radha Devi, Poonam Devi, Sulochna Devi and Jyoti

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Devi were very excited with the idea of a mango orchard; Jyoti Devi especially so because she owned most of the land. Some problems did arise when selecting the schemes and structures but these were settled peacefully. Bisheshwar Pandit was selected as the accounts keeper of the *samiti*, and was made responsible for completing the paper work for the project on time. We completed the preparation of the detailed implementation plan through this exercise.

Up until then everything worked out well; however, after this, internal conflicts began to surface. The first problem was that the book-keeper did not complete the paper work on time. The bank account, therefore, could not be opened and this delayed the transfer of money for the project. The season for planting mangoes set in and the villagers had to dig pits for this. The expenses for digging the pits were discussed with the villagers. Unfortunately, people's perception began changing. Money became their first priority. Because the soil was very hard, the villagers thought they would have to employ labourers and would have to pay them more money. This was a bad beginning. Somehow, we managed to persuade them to complete the digging of the pits. One family, however, was not at all affected by these disturbances—Ashok Pandit and his wife Jyoti Devi completed all the pits in their plot. Ashok was then chosen the new book-keeper by the villagers. Some villagers, who were related to Bisheshwar Pandit, were not happy with the selection of Ashok Pandit, and resentments began to surface.

The *tola* gradually became divided into two factions and more and more internal conflicts surfaced. With the arrival of fertilizers and medicines for the pit, the conflict among the villagers grew. Quarrels broke out over small things, including the distribution of the fertilizer. The book-keeper was labelled as dishonest and I spent a lot of time intervening in their quarrels. Somehow, in spite of the difficulties, we completed the process of filling the pits.

When the saplings had to be planted, disputes once again cropped up because the villagers present when the saplings arrived in the village chose thick and healthy plants for themselves. This led to serious quarrels with the other villagers, who thought they had been cheated. Further, six or seven plants were stolen from the village, leading to another dispute in which the villagers blamed each other. A *tola sabha* was called, which only a handful of villagers attended.

The villagers engaged in mango plantation believed that there was a lot of cheating so did not want to participate in the meeting. The villagers, who were not engaged in the activity, did not feel the need to participate in the meeting. I began to wonder how the people who were earlier talking of development and prosperity in their village had lost their enthusiasm so completely. These signs were disturbing. I met the members of the *sabha* individually, to convince them to plant the saplings in their plots. Finally, the planting was completed; the mortality of the saplings, however, was high because of the delay in planting.

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Fencing the orchard was another struggle. Initially, I had suggested to the farmers that they should fence their individual plants. The villagers rejected this saying that they would not be able to plough the rest of the field. All of them then decided to fence all the mango plants in one patch. Soon they began to argue because they thought that the landowner, who had more plants than

the others, would get more money than them. The farmers with fewer plants questioned why they should fence the plot when they had only 10 plants. All the responsibility of fencing, therefore, was left to the book-keeper because he had the maximum number of plants. From then onwards, the people did not work together as a team at all. When the bamboos were brought to the village for fencing only the book-keeper did the fencing. The other farmers only fenced their plots after his work was complete.

I held several meetings with the villagers but they were not interested in fencing their plots. In almost every meeting, money became an important issue for discussion. I became very annoyed with the villagers when on every issue they started discussing money as if that was the only important thing in their lives. The bickering continued. Some of the villagers did fence their plots and when the bamboo finished, the book-keeper was asked to get more. The bamboo was procured but with it came another point of contention and endless quarrels. The book-keeper, it seems, had got rotten bamboos for fencing.

The selfishness and pettiness of the people also stalled the activities of the village. The villagers who were earlier resentful of the book-keeper now became very angry with him. At every opportunity, they highlighted his dishonesty. The villagers were now not ready to fence their plants, even with good bamboo. They began to blame me because they thought that I was supporting the book-keeper. I became frustrated and even began to question myself on whether I was right to trust the book-keeper blindly. I remembered, however, that the SHG members had selected the book-keeper. I called for a meeting immediately; as usual, only 8–10 villagers showed up. I forced all the villagers to participate in the meeting. It was decided in the meeting that the book-keeper would not be changed but would compensate for the loss. The money for filling the pits was also discussed, but the villagers were adamant—the book-keeper should pay for that too. It was decided in the meeting that the villagers would do the fencing.

The decision taken at the *sabha* did not seem to be of any relevance because even six months after the plantation, the fencing was not completed. During this period, I went to the village a number of times. The SHG also held several meetings. The plantation of the saplings was discussed at all the meetings but there was no resolution to the conflict. The saplings of many of the farmers, especially Ashok Pandit, were stolen over and over again. The villagers began complaining about each other openly. Some of them threw away their plants in anger. Nobody cared for the remaining plants in the plots. Inputs such as fertilizers,

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medicines or water were not provided to the plants. Gradually, people became apathetic to mango cultivation. On an adjacent plot, a farmer working under another scheme had completed the levelling of his

land without any disturbance because there was no collective work involved.

On the mango plantations of Pandit *to*la, on the other hand, animals were allowed to graze, and all the leaves were eaten and only the stems remained in the field. But three farmers among the fifteen—Ashok Pandit, Prakash Pandit and Tribhuvan Pandit—understood the importance of the plantations and tried to save the plants by fencing them. The results were promising and their plantations were very healthy and green.

Amidst all the bickering, the SGSY Special Project lost its importance. It became limited to the mango plantation only. Work began on other projects but was stalled midway. For example, the construction of a small water structure was initiated but the work stopped after only two feet of work; the villagers had initially shown an interest in vermi-composting but this community activity too could not be carried out because of quarrels over trivial issues such as the distribution of bricks, cement or the cost of labour. Each time the issue involved was money.

The villagers, when I had first met them, said there were no developmental schemes in their village and had enthusiastically agreed to the formation of the *sabha* and the implementation of programmes through the SHG. Sadly, they were not able to reap the benefits from the schemes introduced because of petty conflicts and quarrels.

Instead of supporting each other and working towards development, their competitiveness and selfishness took priority. I have spent a lot of time introspecting on the mistakes I probably made. I wondered where I had gone wrong and what I could have done differently. When I went to Pandit *to*la, I had no idea about the community I was going to be working with. Gradually, I got to know them and also came to understand their internal issues. I got an opportunity to know what people think of each other. I also realized that I had made several mistakes and that these have paved the way for my further learning.

During my career as a developmental professional, I have resolved many issues and gained confidence as I have gone along. The mango plantation in Barmasiya village became a big source of learning for me. My greatest learning was that initiating any

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activity without knowing the villagers well leads to many problems. I was not able to develop five acres of mango orchard in Barmasiya. This was my dream. This is just one example. The dream could belong to any development professional who wants to get results and who faces such hurdles along the way.

In the end, I reasoned that even though I did not get optimum satisfaction during this intervention, I was happy that at least two *bighas* of the total plantation were safe and healthy. After the mango plants grew, some more people became interested in mango plantation; even if a few become motivated, nothing else is important.

Success and failure are two faces of the same coin. We need to remember our learning from our failures after we become successful. After all failure is the mother of success.

Approaches to Livelihood Planning

DINABANDHU KARMAKAR

Choosing the appropriate methodology for livelihoods enhancement, while keeping the targets and the desired impact in mind requires considerable thought and is often determined by the beliefs and assumptions of the intervening organization.

There are several ways to promote livelihoods. Accordingly, there are many different methodologies that are based on factors such as the existing capabilities of the targeted people, the resources and linkages available in their environment, the capabilities of the change agent and the priorities set by the promoting organizations. Each of these factors is founded on some assumptions and decisions made by the implementing organization such as PRADAN.

We also have to keep in mind that, in a given situation, in which targets and the desired impact are clearly defined, the output and impact would vary with the methodology used to implement changes. Therefore, formulating a methodology is important if we are to arrive at consistent results. In order to do so, we need to define factors that include:

- ♦ Our target people in different locations
- ♦ The desired impact we want to create
- ♦ The resources and linkages in the environment
- ♦ The professional capabilities of the intervening teams
- ♦ The organization's commitment to human resource development (whether we will accept variance in the capabilities of the teams).

In PRADAN, we have agreed that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of women will be the starting point of our interventions. We have also decided to promote livelihoods by following an area saturation approach. We have already moved a long way in standardizing the SHGs in our project areas. We have tried to gear up our internal HRD, to address the capability gaps of our professionals, with respect to SHG promotion across the organization.

One of our colleagues is working on an SHG roadmap and the Internal Learning System (ILS), developed by Helzi Noponen. When the ILS becomes a compulsory tool for capability building of SHGs, it will create demands for another round of capability building across the organization. These tools are being tested in various teams and will have direct bearing on the processes to be followed for livelihoods promotion. There is, thus, a strong need to integrate these tools with our livelihoods planning methodology.

The SHG roadmap and the ILS will, in a way, determine the methodology we follow in livelihoods planning. For instance, the underlying assumptions in ILS will significantly influence how we go about livelihood planning exercises. The assumptions based on the 'they know' principle will be qualitatively different from the assumptions derived from the 'they do not know' principle.

In the first case, our role will be to supply what our targeted people demand. In the second, we have to follow processes that will help people realize how their lives are affected because of inadequate knowledge and skills and then help them equip themselves with new knowledge and skills. Those of us facilitating livelihood-planning exercises with the 'they know' assumption will come up with a list of ideas as articulated by the people. So far, our credit planning exercises with the SHGs are of this nature. Others, with the 'they do not know' assumption, may look at each and every element of the environment and subsequently come up with ideas that may or may not confirm what the people shared.

Let us consider the ILS in which there is a module on livelihoods. In this, families are expected to take stock of their resources such as land, labour and livestock. The role of a professional is to introduce the tool so that the SHG members can take stock of their resources based on their own perceptions about the potential of each resource. What happens when these perceptions differ significantly from that of an expert on those resources? How are we to plan our interventions?

ASSUMPTIONS DETERMINE ACTION

We must also keep in mind that our assumptions and beliefs play a big role in how

we intervene. Let us refer to the experience of promoting SHGs as micro-finance institutions to strengthen people's livelihoods. The first-generation proponents of the idea identified credit as the missing link that affects livelihoods. This assumption was strong enough to influence national policies. This idea was tried in areas where the missing inputs were more than just credit. The changes brought about by savings and credit groups were, unfortunately, not significant.

Many of us considered that credit generation and repayment in time were the most important characteristics of a good SHG. We developed our evaluation parameters accordingly. Later, when wider experience revealed that credit alone does not enhance livelihoods in many situations, our belief changed and led to subsequent changes in our approach.

Our experience with lift irrigation (LI), one of PRADAN's most successful livelihood interventions, is also a case in point. We initially promoted the LI infrastructure on the assumption that irrigation was the only missing input that affected improved agriculture. Some families did benefit but others did not because of factors such as market orientation and access to credit. These examples clearly illustrate that we were guided more by our core competencies and by what we could deliver, rather than by an objective analysis of the situation.

We cannot say that one assumption will work and the other will not. Each is effective within a given context and each has its limitations. It is, therefore, important for each team to delve into the assumptions and beliefs underlying its work to promote livelihoods and then to share these with other teams in different locations. We will then be in a better position to decide about the methodologies

that we require to adopt, to promote livelihoods effectively.

In the meanwhile, it would be instructive to consider the methodological options that we could choose from. In order to do so, we need to define the nature of our interventions to promote changes and produce developmental outcomes. To define our interventions, we need to take a stand, articulate our beliefs and describe the inputs to these in order to produce some definite outputs.

Let us first look at the various basic beliefs and approaches to promote livelihoods. It may make sense to first look at these independently and understand their potential and limitations.

'START WHERE THEY ARE' APPROACH

The first approach that we could consider may be called the 'start where they are' approach. This is variously termed the 'minimalist' or 'trickle up' approach. This approach and its associated beliefs presume that livelihood promotion is an incremental process. Being external facilitators, we as change agents, have to learn to be with the identified families and communities and understand how they look at their problems and how they treat those problems.

For example, our interaction with a farmer, who carries water from distant tanks to her vegetable plot, may reveal that she has been thinking of digging a well in her own plot for the past five years but has not been able to do so because she could not mobilize the required credit. The nature of this demand will be qualitatively different from a demand generated in a meeting.

In this approach, we need to know the capabilities of the people intimately, the

reasons they fail despite possessing some knowledge and skills, and the issues they are ignorant about. The process demands that a professional be with the people for a fairly long period, to arrive at a fuller understanding of their way of living.

Livelihoods generation behaviour is displayed in everyday work situations. We need to stay with the villagers to observe these behaviours; one Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or one credit-planning meeting will be inadequate to understand where they are or where they could be. The developmental outputs will come in terms of comparatively 'smaller jumps' at this level. If it makes a significant impact, it will then enthuse the entire community to meet the higher order challenges, for which 'bigger jumps' may be designed.

Extension of support, in this case, will mean helping them to do better what they are doing. To change agents, this will also mean 'walking one step behind the community'. Following the principles of counselling, we will not take the risk of moving faster than the client. It demands working with patience till the people discover their own potential and move forward faster.

The associated belief in this approach is that it is not our problem that we have to solve. We have to recognize that it is their lives and their problems, and we can only make our presence available to them. They will confide in us only if they want to. Professionals need not move in with a baggage of developmental programmes. The process involves getting into the people's frame of reference, helping them articulate their plans and translating these plans into action.

How do we enter into their frame of reference? When can we be sure that we can

get into their frame of reference? How can we be sure that the plan they have shared is actually their plan and not a reflection of external influences? For example, a particular demand could be influenced by some government poverty alleviation programme or by some promises made by the political leaders before the elections or, simply, it could be a repetition of ideas or demands of another person (a neighbour or a friend).

The safest way is to observe their daily decisions, how they allocate family resources, for a year or so. There is continuous stocktaking and review by a family on its livelihood practices. It identifies its resources and gaps regularly, and makes contingency plans. Such close observation will help to understand the family's experience in the previous year and its plans for the next year. This understanding will help us realize our role in livelihoods generation and we can then intervene meaningfully. For instance, if we are to intervene in agriculture, we need to explore the cultivation practices and yield, take a look at the cattle sheds, know the size and health of the cattle, their capacity to plough lands per day and so on. This is what I mean by getting into their frame of reference. The focus is on making detailed observations, presenting the data to them and checking with them for any inconsistencies.

As groundwork for large-scale livelihoods promotion, each professional should systematically pass through this phase before she thinks of taking up large-scale programmes. This may help reduce failure rates. Often, PRA experts make village plans that can never be implemented; young professionals make credit plans without knowing how long the gestation period of a goat is and without looking at the capacity of

families to rear goats. These are unfeasible plans, without proper references.

In this approach, it is difficult to quantify outputs. The process will yield 'increase in confidence of the people' as the primary output and 'increase in family income' as the secondary output, in terms of sequence and not value.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY APPROACH

The second approach arises out of the belief that we have the social responsibility to pull people out of poverty. Development professionals need to take stock of the available resources (both human and material) in any selected area and identify the potential of those resources, using the best available knowledge and technology of the communities to realize this.

In this approach, the development professional is more central as an actor than the people living in a particular area. The poverty of the area is more central than the people. People are to be evaluated first as factors of production while we assess all their growth and developmental needs as challenges to be addressed through planned interventions.

The irrigation schemes PRADAN promoted in the Chhotanagpur plateau or flow irrigation schemes in Keonjhar are examples of this approach. In these cases, our hypothesis was that there were poor farmers with cultivable land and the only missing input was access to irrigation water. Thus, providing irrigation would strengthen their livelihoods. The hypothesis held good to a fair degree.

We did not look at how people viewed their agriculture, how they used the existing irrigation sources, who used these and what was the level of efficiency of the resource use.

If we had included the skill, credit and motivation gaps to make our intervention more effective, such analyses would have helped formulate a more comprehensive hypothesis.

There are certain advantages of the social responsibility approach over the 'start where they are' approach. This approach can be scientifically converted into projects with definite quantitative outputs and corresponding designed inputs. Most government-sponsored, poverty alleviation programmes are of this nature. However, in most cases, the quality of analysis looked at before formulating the hypothesis is inadequate to account for the wide variations in our country. Often, oversimplification of issues in order to come up with mass-scale, standardized schemes reduces efficacy.

The social responsibility approach would yield faster results than the 'start where they are' approach. Theoretically, it demands that all the missing inputs be mapped out before planning interventions. It demands a high order ability of resource potential analysis because time is limited. This approach inherently believes that if all the factors of production of livelihoods are scientifically identified, there is no reason why livelihood promotion will not be ensured with a certain degree of predictability.

The social responsibility approach requires the change agent to be capable of doing justice to all available resources and their linkages in developing the project. The approach draws its strength from the standardization of the intervention package for a faster spread. In doing so, it accepts that it cannot reach everyone. Without standardization, it cannot move fast and it will, therefore, lose its strength and identity. There will be a segment

of the poor community, as factors of production (not as consumers), who may fail to prove themselves as potential resources within the projected time, and will, to that extent, adversely affect project outcomes.

SECTORAL APPROACH

A third approach could be called the sectoral, or sub-sectoral, approach. This involves developing a prototype and aggressively selling the idea. In this approach, prototype development is the critical task. Once a prototype is developed, it starts attracting people and adds to the growth of the sector, benefiting a large number of people who fit in the sector along various points of the sectoral chain.

Let us take the example of PRADAN's tasar project in Godda. We started with host tree plantation for the first couple of years. It seemed more of a wastelands development programme than a tasar project then. The same project took a very different shape when we started working more seriously with the traditional tasar rearer. With the identification of the grainage as the most critical missing factor, we could standardize the package for successful grainages. The package then became a successful prototype.

The sectoral approach is different from the social responsibility approach in the sense that the latter has the breadth to accommodate more than one sector and could thus address the needs of a geographical area better. For instance, the social responsibility approach could intervene in agriculture and livestock rearing simultaneously.

In the sectoral approach, the professional's role is critical in identifying a sector and generating an idea that would be pro-poor in nature. The more pro-poor elements there are

in the chain, the more the possibility of the poor benefiting from the intervention. Any innovation in the sector that fits with the better-off people would mean that the better-off would replace the poorer in the process chain.

We may refer to *The Forgotten Sector*, written by Thomas Fisher, Vijay Mahajan and Ashok Singhal to understand this approach better. It makes sense to follow scientific processes to choose a sub-sector before we engage ourselves in actual intervention. The opportunity costs in this approach could be high because various livelihood interventions and the different ways of implementing these have to be tried out before a prototype takes shape.

ECO-DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

A fourth approach called the eco-development, or natural resource management approach, comprises just developing the basic natural resources such as land, water and vegetation. A change agent could overlook short-term ownership of resources. This approach is based on the belief that if all the available resources are developed and managed in a sustainable way, it benefits everybody, including the poorest. Watershed development generally follows this kind of an approach. The eco-development approach is based on the belief that if all the available resources are developed and managed in a sustainable way, it benefits everybody, including the poorest.

This is a comparatively simpler approach. Here, the focus remains primarily on increasing the carrying capacity of the natural resource base on a sustainable basis. Issues such as soil loss (physical erosion, biochemical factors, etc.), water conservation, plantation, promotion of sustainable

agriculture and animal husbandry, anchored around people's ownership of those resources, are taken up. Because these are basic resources for producing the primary commodities for society's consumption, any loss of these resources affects everybody's lives in the long run.

A large majority of the people of our country directly manage their livelihoods with these resources. They are also the generators of primary surpluses. But issues such as who gets a greater share of the benefits of such natural resources may make this approach complex. Poorer people have lesser access to land; therefore, they do not benefit, in terms of assets created for further income generation whereas the landed families get such benefits by using the labour of the poor. Options to reach poorer families with meaningful activities, following the basic principle of watershed development, are limited.

The biggest advantage of this approach is that various tested tools and techniques are available that could be further simplified and transferred to the common people, thus significantly reducing the demand on professionals. The benefits of resource conservation and development are measured with references (such as water and vegetation) that are very basic to our life; therefore, it is easier to ensure the production of those outputs when the resources required for investment are not limited. Complexities arise when the approach is used to address the needs of the resource poor and the less skilled people. The benefits are then largely limited to wage labour. Each of these approaches indirectly determines our role in development.

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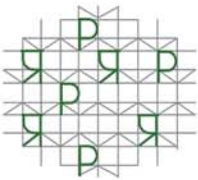
The Tasar program is a good example of value chain integration and has been developed systematically over the years from intervention in pre-cocoon to interventions in post cocoon. The program has created many challenges for itself, right from taking Tasar production to non-traditional area to local seed production and developing local centers for yarn production.



Pradan is a voluntary organization registered in Delhi under the Societies Registration Act. Pradan works through small teams of professionals in selected villages across eight states. The focus of Pradan's work is to promote and strengthen livelihoods for the rural poor. It involves organizing the poor, enhancing their capabilities, introducing ways to improve their income and linking them to banks, markets and other economic services. The professionals work directly with the poor, using their knowledge and skills to help remove poverty. NewsReach, Pradan's monthly journal is a forum for sharing the thoughts and experiences of these professionals working in remote and far-flung areas in the field. NewsReach helps them to reach out and connect with each other, the development fraternity and the outside world.

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