

People, Communities & Development
in Rural Orissa: A compendium of case
studies from Gram Vikas



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Gram Vikas is a rural development organisation working with the poor and marginalised communities of Orissa since 1979, towards making sustainable improvements in the quality of life of the rural poor.

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Prologue

This compendium of case studies stems from a desire to share some of our experiences in the development journey with a wider audience. While we have regularly shared our work through Annual Reports, these do little justice to the dynamic processes that underline our work. Through these stories of people and communities, we attempt to present a more human face of our work.

At the root, we are dealing with people, and attempting to bring about changes in their quality of life. This change is measured in very tangible terms, at the same time has a very ephemeral quality. Our work involves realising these changes through creating 'critical consciousness' and engendering 'self-reliance' and 'self-esteem' among the people we engage with. The processes of such change are slow and often imperceptible, requiring enormous amounts of patience, at the same time caution, in that success does not get measured by the number of toilets built, but by the change in people's attitudes in the process.

The tangibles matter, of course - safe water, disaster-proof housing, forests and plantations, schools and medical facilities, etc. These are essential ingredients to achieve a 'threshold level of quality of life' and bring about a sense of dignity among the people we work with. Dignity - in our view - is a key constituent of human well-being. The realisation of 'dignity' and 'self-worth' is essential to spin

out of the 'orbit of poverty' and launch into a spiralling process of sustainable and self-perpetuating development.

Another key aspect of our work is 'inclusion' of all and creation of a level playing field for development processes to take off. This reflects in our engagement with 'entire communities' as a means of bringing about collective and individual gains. It is common knowledge that a majority of the fruits of development initiatives are cornered by the more enterprising among the poor. The 10-25% at the margins get little or no benefits from these schemes and projects. Gender, caste and class differences typically define contours of 'exclusion'. This has happened over such a long time that the 'excluded' people have internalised a low image of themselves and almost believe and behave as if they were sub-human. We believe that any development effort in a village has to be one of 100% social inclusion, taking special care to consciously create spaces and nurture confidence of the previously excluded.

We have tried through our work to demonstrate innovative, context specific and alternate models of development - in social mobilisation, resource mobilisation, environment management, appropriate technology, habitat development, education, etc. Many of these have been demonstrated on a scale which matters and have emerged as replicable

models of development, based on community action, social and gender equity. In a small measure, we can also claim that we have influenced policy and programme design of mainstream government sponsored interventions. Above all we believe we are playing a key role in instilling among communities a high level of initiative and confidence to engineer a process of functional grassroots democracy through active people's self-governing institutions.

The case studies in this compendium reflect some of these aspects and aspirations. They are arranged into six sections, loosely demarcated by differences in focus of work. The case study of the Kerandimals movement in the first section takes us back to the genesis of Gram Vikas in the late 70's. Reading it today and relating it with the present context of the communities involved, we notice that there have been many positive strides. There will always be an element of subjectivity in assessing what part of these changes are driven by their association with Gram Vikas. However, the case study at its core remains relevant in setting out the challenges in working with adivasi communities and Gram Vikas' responses and interventions.

The second section relates to interventions in renewable energy and alternative technologies. Once known as a 'biogas organisation', promotion of biogas came to dominate our work and consciousness for over a decade from 1984-1994. Making technologies work for poor communities, and using it positively to improve their lives and livelihoods, has been a passion with Gram Vikas. We believe that technologies, demystified and applied on a large scale, are a key ingredient to improving 'quality of life'. The case study of the biogas programme illustrates this. Technologies can also be used to strengthen people's livelihoods. Gram Vikas transferred the Vertical Shaft Brick Kiln technology to a traditional brick making community in Bolangir, who migrated each year for work and for survival. The villagers in Asuramunda demonstrate how 'sellers of labour' can become 'owners of capital'. Today they are an inspiration for other similar communities.

The third section focuses on how women have taken the lead to spearhead development processes, and how they have gradually emerged from behind closed doors to create their own spaces within their households and communities. Widespread

alcoholism is a social problem which afflicts many rural communities, and is often the first hurdle in gaining total community participation. Realising the benefits of development, women in many villages have come together to fight this problem. The taste of success has given them the courage to continue their involvement in community development. It has been our experience that the process of social change unleashed in rural communities is often more dramatic where women take the lead.

The fourth section traces Gram Vikas' work in education. Starting with the first school in 1992, the four residential schools for adivasi children have emerged as a core component of our work. The students that have passed out of our schools have filtered back to their communities, and we are beginning to see some of them emerge as youth leaders. Since 1998, when the first students graduated from Gram Vikas High School, over 65 children have stepped out of the portals with a High School certificate. Fifteen of them have received appointment as Shiksha Sahayaks from the government. This has spurred greater interest for education among the adivasi populations. Several children are continuing their undergraduate studies as well.

The fifth section relates to the current spearhead intervention of Gram Vikas, innocuously termed RHEP. The Rural Health and Environment Programme (RHEP) was born in the early 90's from a distillation of our experiences and learnings over fifteen years in development. Now a decade old, the programme continues to evolve even today. The crux of the case studies reflects how something as basic as drinking water and sanitation is able to coalesce and bind divergent strands within communities and create new relationship dynamics between men-women, different sections of the communities, and triggers the aspirations and dreams of 'poor' people.

Section six relates to another key facet of Gram Vikas' work – livelihoods, linked to natural resource management. Interventions in effective management of land, water and forests have been core to efforts in establishing sustainable and secure livelihoods. The decade from 1985 marked a period of large scale social forestry in collaboration with the National Wasteland Development Board. We have worked in land development, water harvest-

ing, improvements in agriculture, promotion of horticulture, etc. One of the biggest challenges in our work has been in countering the practise of shifting cultivation on hill slopes. Two case studies in this section relate to how horticulture has come to provide an effective solution to curbing this practise.

It has been an interesting exercise putting this volume together. There is however a feeling of inadequacy, as Anthya Madiath records in the introductory case study "It is difficult to recapture on paper the fire and spirit..." the highs and lows of the interventions, and the processes involved.

We hope this compendium will trigger the interest of people in this field, and inform about the transformation processes underway in several villages of rural Orissa. To quote Joe Madiath, Executive

Director, Gram Vikas, from a document titled '..And what exactly is Gram Vikas (1981)' - "We perceive that a lot of curiosity is aroused and many an eyebrow raised at the changes taking place among the communities we work with..... If you are interested, we welcome you to come and see for yourselves and share in our experience. Our work may not be unique; nonetheless, it is an authentic response of a group of (young) people on the path to bring about development of the people in its true sense. It seeks to help our compatriots help themselves."

Jayapadma RV
Manager PMED

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1 The Kerandimals struggle

Exploitation, even in its most oppressive form is part of history both in India and elsewhere. In our own country it has been legitimized more than elsewhere in the name of the caste hierarchy, which considers those at the bottom of the social rung inferior beings. Though adivasis do not belong to the caste hierarchy as such, the dominating groups continue considering them inferior. The oppressed groups in their turn have internalised this low self-image and find it difficult to organize themselves in order to demand their rights. The existence of internal collaborators of the oppressors in the group of the oppressed makes any movement much more difficult.

That is where the role of a group from outside come in awakening adivasis or other oppressed to the reality of their exploitation and denial of human rights. If not on its guard, such an outside group, while freeing them from their present oppressors easily makes them dependent on themselves. No community can grow unless animation comes from within. This case will study the action of one such group that acted as facilitators of a movement. They used health as an entry point but were always clear that it was to be only a tool for education.

The area and the people

A mere 10 kms outside Berhampur in Southern Orissa and you are at the foothills of the Kerandimals. Not many of the townspeople are aware that this hilly region is the home of a few thousand

Khond adivasis. Long long ago, several small kingdom flourished in these hills - the Chikiti the Mahuri the Khemandi Raj - to whom these adivasis had served as their subject people. In course of time, the kingdoms disappeared due to various legislations enacted by the legislature pursuant to a state policy known as the socialistic pattern of society, but the adivasis continue to live on in neglect and isolation, on the memories of their past glory.

The Khonds live in small scattered villages on the hill slopes unconnected by roads. They speak Kui, which has no written script. Oriya is used for communicating with outsiders. It is also the medium of formal education. These adivasis depend largely on the forest for their livelihood and theirs is in fact a firewood economy. Most men and women go daily to the jungle to cut firewood which is then dried, cut to equal size, tied into neat bundles and carried down long and winding hill paths to be sold to the firewood sowcars who wait with their bullock carts at the foot of the hills. The exchange is usually to the advantage of the sowcar - a low price for the wood and a high price for the poorest quality of rice etc.

Besides cutting firewood, adivasis spend the rainy season in their bogodo cultivation i.e. hillside shifting cultivation of several indigenous grains and vegetables which on an average feeds a family for two or three months. In general, adivasis are poor agriculturists and there is a definite under-utilization of existing resources of land, water etc.

The forests yield an abundance of fruit. Many of these - mango, tamarind, jackfruit, etc. - have either been planted by adivasis or they have been enjoying their fruits from times immemorial. Petty non-adviasis traders invade the villages seasonally to purchase the produce of these trees. Paradoxically, while these petty traders in forest produce depend on adivasis for their livelihood, in reality they have become the masters and adivasis, their easy victims.

Despite the existence of several government primary schools in the adivasi villages, the level of literacy is as low as 3%. This is because hardly any of the teachers attended the schools. Almost all the other government schemes and infrastructural institutions function in the same way. On the map this area has been outlined in red and noted as 'risky'. This is discreetly understood by all functionaries to mean that no government servant need risk entering the area.

Unlike the Khonds of Phulbani and Koraput district who have a rich culture heritage of song and dance, the Kerandimal Khonds are conspicuous by the absence of these culture forms. Generally speaking, adivasis of Kerandimal reveal a marked dilution of the intrinsic adivasi character. This 'acculturation' may be because of the proximity to Berhampur, geographical isolation from the main body of Khonds, ethnic penetration etc. 'Collectivity' and 'co-operative effort' are low-key though a limited form of common ownership does exist in most villages in the institution of the 'kotho' which may be in the shape of trees, land or money. The leadership of the village has by and large exercised full control over the 'kotho' with very little accountability to the rest of the village. A few adivasi leaders are themselves the biggest enemies and exploiters of their people.

In years gone by, adivasis brewed their own mild liquor from 'Mahua'. Today the 'manufacture' of liquor is controlled by a small group of non-adviasis called 'Sundis'. Adivasis have become their 'wage labourers'. Ammonium sulphate is used to prepare this illicit poisonous liquor, which is then supplied to Berhampur and also sold among adivasis. Today alcoholism is a major problem among adivasis-that being one of the reasons why they cannot break away from the stranglehold of their backwardness and powerlessness.

The role of the women in the adivasi society is important. She is really the backbone of the family. It is she who brings home the day's food while the man often relaxes at home. Adivasi women generally enjoy greater freedom of movement and expression than their non-adviasis counterparts. But despite these concessions, they receive a poor bargain. They are often subject to the barbaric behavior of an alcoholic husband who is still the head of the family and the main decision-maker, though not necessarily the breadwinner.

Shaping and controlling the lives of the adivasi people is a powerful force, black magic. So steeped are they in their superstitious beliefs, that introducing them to a rational system of thinking is often impossible. Adivasis of the Kerandimals are doubtless a fascinating combination of simplicity and complexity, of strength and weakness, of selfishness and integrity.

Besides adivasis, we are also in contact with some of the non-adviasis villages in the area. These villages, which are all on the plains, tend to be large and heterogeneous. Many of them have a very large landless Dalit population.

In the summer of 1977 Gram-Vikas first became aware of these adivasis who lived in the Kerandimals. As first perceived by us, their main problems seemed to be of 'identity', 'acculturation', 'integration', 'exploitation', and 'lack of organization'. A decision was taken to find out more about these people who lived in obscurity. Our initial contact was with 11 villages at the foot of the hills.

A simple socio-economic survey was made more with the purpose of establishing a friendly rapport than for the efficient collection of cold statistical data. On these visit we carried with us a medical kit for treating minor ailments. The immediate relief that we brought to many, especially those suffering from malaria (and there were many) was the main reason for our quick acceptance among adivasis. However, it took quite some time for us to gain their full confidence.

What struck us early in our contact among adivasis was the complete absence of a functioning health service to meet even their basic curative needs. Malaria and tuberculosis appeared to be rampant, and accounted for the loss of many work-days, when in the case of the former just four tablets of

chloroquin could have brought great relief. So we decided to begin an awareness building process using 'health' as an entry point until other avenues of need and involvement, which were as yet unknown or controversial, could be more carefully explored. After several discussions with the people, we initiated a low-key, health programme to meet what we observed, and what adivasis also voiced, as their foremost need.

The technical aspects of our health programme included simple curative services, mother and child health services, chronic disease control and environmental sanitation. Its non-technical aspects centred round community participation and control of the whole programme. With this in view, we concentrated on village health workers training, formation of village committees and a health insurance scheme. Every one of the eleven villages as a whole participated in the scheme. We visited all the villages daily.

The basic condition for working in a village was the formation of a 'village committee' that would function as the leadership group. This was done to reinforce the vital aspect of community participation and control and also with the long-sighted intention of developing a grass roots organization among adivasis. Ultimately, what we had in mind was the unionization of all adivasis living across the Kerandimals.

People begin to act

The entire village met once a month with some of the volunteers of Gram Vikas. Besides the village level meeting, all committee members came together every month to determine the needs of each village and to work out a plan of action with the resources available within and without the community. This was the beginning of their effort to acquire their rights that have been denied to them.

Perhaps the people had so far viewed the sarcar (government) as the benevolent sowcar who bestowed a few favours on them such as an occasional sanctioning of a well. They had, also in the past, put in many applications for the 'favour'. But now they began to see themselves as human beings and realized that their humanity gave them a natural right to clean drinking water and that such a right did not have to be bestowed on them by a benefactor.

Historically, credit and government subsidies have always been appropriated by the rich and the powerful. We found this to be the case in our area as well. Except for a few who had taken loans from an almost defunct, corrupt co-operative society, the majority of the people had no access to fair credit.

One of the reasons for under utilization of existing land and water resources was the lack of viable credit facilities for agricultural development. We recognised economic development as a support and as a foundation for democracy itself. We further recognised the need for adequate agricultural credit inputs as a stimulus for increased agricultural activity. So we decided to act as a catalytic agent in bringing credit facilities to the marginalised sections of society.

The adivasi philosophy is to live from day to day and there is seldom a question of surplus money to meet unexpected expenditures-illness, death, or even anticipated expenditure like marriage, social feasts, festivals etc. Adivasis therefore bring loans from the moneylenders to meet these consumption needs. Interest usually ranges between 66% and 150%. Since these loans contribute nothing to production, it becomes impossible to provide for their repayment and the adivasi is further entrapped in an ever-widening circle of exploitation. A small saving scheme was started around February 1978 as a possible solution to the problem of indebtedness. However, from the beginning it was clear to us that a bank account was not an end in itself but only a means to help the people free themselves from the money lender and get from the commercial institutions loans that are their right.

The emergency of people's power

Something has already been written about the exploitative system whereby a non-adivasi group called the Sundis manufacture illicit liquor in the depth of the jungle using adivasi labourers. Working for the Sundis is apparently a good job - Rs. 4 per day plus a free meal and liquor. But this seemingly rosy job carries with it several hidden risks and evils, which are not immediately perceived by adivasis. Illness, addiction to the alcohol, police cases, mounting debts to the Sundis gradually saps every drop of the man's mental, physical and economic strength.

Despite our awareness of the problems of alcoholism and Sundi exploitation, we reasoned that time was not ripe for any direct action. However, by around December 1978 we were more or less forced into confrontation with the Sundis.

On December 11th 1978, an adivasi of village Baniamari was assaulted by the Sundis because he had dared to ask his Sundi sowcar for the wages that were long due to him. The day following this incident, the Sundis further beat up his mother and wife and took away his goats. In the village meeting that night every adult member of the village gathered for the meeting and not one was drunk. It is difficult to recapture on paper the fire and spirit of that meeting which continued late into the night. For the first time, the people began to unravel the intricacies of their exploitation by the Sundis. The mystifying veil of adivasi exploitation through liquor was demystified. A unanimous decision was taken to drive all the Sundis out of the village. Besides this, no member of the village was to be allowed to harbour materials or equipment of the Sundis in their homes nor would the Sundis be allowed to distil alcohol anywhere within the boundaries of adivasi land or to sell it in the village. Wisely, a decision against police action was taken, adivasis knowing better than us the futility of such recourse.

The young men of the village took it upon themselves to spread the news of the Baniamari incident to all the other villages and ask for the support and co-operation of every adivasi, for what had happened in Baniamari could well happen elsewhere. One week later, an area meeting was called. All the villages except one adopted the resolution of Baniamari. Eventually, this village was also made to toe the line by a group of young, newly awakened adivasi men.

During the initial period of the boycott, various meetings took place to strengthen adivasis in understanding the process that was taking place, of their strength in unity and determination to end what was being newly understood by several adivasis as an exploitative system. It was a busy period - alternative work had to be found for those who had been working for the Sundis. The Orissa Forest Corporation, which was cutting down trees in the area, was contracted for giving employment to adivasis. The Corporation was only too willing to

absorb adivasis in their felling operation because they needed people to work for them.

Underneath the apparent calm prevailing was a smoldering tension, especially in village Purunapatna - the hornet's nest as it were. The Sundi of this village, Gopi Sahu, who was also running a commodities shop refused to stop selling liquor. One evening, some young men of the village seized his liquor and deposited it with the local sarpanch. The Sundi daringly beat up one of the young men before the stunned village.

Following this incident in village Purunapatna, another big meeting was held at which nearly 200 people were present. It was decided at this meeting to give Gopi Sahu 24 hours to make a public apology and should he refuse to apologise, the people proposed to go on a mass protest at Berhampur to make known to the authorities the violence perpetrated against adivasis and to ask for protection and redress. Gopi Sahu refused to apologise.

On 8th February 1979, the adivasi leaders called on every adivasi family of the area to be represented in a procession that they would take in silent protest to Berhampur. On the 9th morning, near about 600 people collected at Narasinghpur from where they marched 15 kms to Berhampur. They presented a memorandum to the Revenue Divisional Officer and to the Sub-divisional Officer (SDO). In the memorandum they alleged that Gopi Sahu and his brother Paramananda Sahu virtually kept adivasis under perennial bondage. They reminded the officials that the road linking the adivasi lands with Berhampur and other cities was in such a state of disrepair that not even jeeps could pass through it. Wild elephants were causing degradation in the area. But all their representation had been useless.

The SDO at first refused to appear before the people to hear their complaints. So the people decided to sit in the courtyard till they were heard. The SDO eventually promised an official enquiry into the harassment of adivasis and legal action against those Sundis involved in illicit distillation of liquor. The walk back to the village was hard and exhausting. Most reached their villages around midnight. But the adivasis were triumphant. For the first time they saw proof of their hidden strength through collective action. Never before had the town of Berhampur witnessed such a well organised mass of

protesting people and adivasis at that! Many local newspapers carried news of the unusual procession of adivasi men and women whose proximity to Berhampur was hitherto unknown to most. The All India Radio also carried a broadcast of the events.

The official action that followed is another story. What was significant was the emergence of people's power among adivasis - the emergence of a new consciousness-precisely what adivasis were supposed to lack.

Movement to redeem mortgaged adivasi property

Land and trees are the instruments of production and gainful economic activity among adivasis. An outsider who can take over the ownership of these means of production can slowly take total control over the life of adivasis. As in many other parts of India, prevalent also in this region was an outrageous system of mortgage, whereby the ownership of the best adivasi property has been slowly but steadily passing out of adivasi hands.

Around the summer of 1978, faced with this glaring injustice of usurious exploitation, the team decided to take this up as an issue of education and liberation through collective action by adivasis. Not one of adivasis knew of the existence of the moratorium on rural indebtedness. This ignorance speaks for itself of the effectiveness of so many government policies and the state of their implementation. This one was a highly publicised policy to free rural people from indebtedness and human bondage. A campaign to mass educate and conscientize the people of the existing and flourishing system of usury was begun around September 1978.

This was the core issue of every meeting – big, small, personal, casual. And gradually they began to understand the social and economic order that exists in the exploitation of man by man. The people's response was weak - "What can we do to free ourselves? We are after all only adivasis." This was a genuine challenge. They had come to think of themselves as 'only adivasis'. They had internalised the low self-image that had been imposed on them by their exploiters and had come to consider themselves as people that cannot do much.

This self-image had to be changed if they had to

become agents of change and not merely passive sufferers of events imposed on them by others. They took time and finally the people's council decided to take this up as an issue and accordingly plans were made. Right from the initial stages, adivasis insisted that justice and fairness should weigh in their approach to this issue. This is because of the inherent adivasi quality to honor all debts and obligations. The movement was to take the following shape:

Survey of the amount of indebtedness in each village and preparation of the people and leaders to face the sowcars

Area wise meetings with the sowcars - something like a "People's Court" where adivasis themselves would be just and impartial.

Utilization of collective strength of the people to physically protect the property of adivasis in cases where the sowcars refused to acknowledge the judgement.

In those cases wherein the sowcars had to be compensated monetarily, a loan would be made to the individual adivasi if he himself could not pay this amount.

Every adivasi whose case was arbitrated by the Court would have to give in writing to the village committee that henceforth he would strive not to remortgage his property and if in times of dire need where this could not be avoided, the committee first would be consulted.

Those adivasis who received monetary assistance to compensate their sowcars would declare in writing that the village had control over the land until such time as the loan was repaid. Repayment of the loan would be made by giving half the value of every crop received from the property that had been released, until such time as the loan was repaid.

No adivasi whose land had been released, would be allowed to keep his land fallow. If in season he could not cultivate any part of his land, the committee would have the right to lease his land out for that season to the landless families of the village on a share cropping basis.

With this as the matrix of the strategy for releasing mortgaged land and trees, the movement took off. The sowcars tried their best to tempt key leaders

and witnesses with bribes, other inducements and with persuasive arguments aimed at touching the intrinsic adivasi loyalty. Several of them threatened adivasis with dire consequences if they persisted in their pursuit for liberty from bondage. Knowing that a few of us in the group were Christians, they circulated a rumour that we were in fact Christian missionaries in the garb of social workers with the ulterior motive of mass conversion of adivasis and appropriation of their property at an appropriate time.

These rumours were meant to produce confusion in the minds of adivasis who trusted us as their friends. The money lenders could not succeed because the relations of power had changed. Our years together had produced a broad based organisational structure and alliance between Gram Vikas and the people on the one hand and the people among themselves on the other. A new people's organization had grown with its 'cadre' of 'workers' at every level, among women and men of every village. Of the greatest importance was the existence of some strong and determined leaders whose presence was crucial in resisting the exploiters and preventing them from penetrating the collectivity and breaking it up.

Those sowcars who refused to accept the arbitration of the people actually approached their lawyers who seemed to have counseled them against such a step and told them that their case was hopeless and could even boomerang on the complainants. This forced them to come to terms with the 'People's Courts'. They attempted to bring their written documents, to exaggerate loan claims and under estimate the amounts of interest enjoyed by them in the form of cash or use of land and trees. But these were harshly dealt with.

Initially, cases pertaining to mango, jack fruit and tamarind trees were taken up because of their approaching fruit-bearing season. After they were declared released with or without compensation, the most important period was in physically protecting them from the vengeful and angry sowcars. And

this, the people did thoroughly. With the exception of a few cases, no sowcar has enjoyed the fruits of tropical trees on the area since then. Following the release of trees came the release of land. Nearly 60 villages were covered by this movement. This has been one concrete issue and struggle with the greatest learning value for us and the people. It has given adivasis tremendous confidence in themselves.

We have been partially successful in our work and have set a process in motion. We were successful initially because of the choice of the entry points and our work could spread to a bigger area because of the proper choice of issues. Our point of entry into the adivasi society of the Kerandimals 3 years ago was 'health' in a very modest, subdued manner. We were not highly target and programme-oriented at all. Today we feel that we succeeded with the entry point activity because it was board-based and brought us into close contact with all sections of the village community; the strategy was non-aggressive and kept pace with the people's acceptance of us.

The reason as to why our involvement spread so rapidly i.e. to 100 villages in a span of 2 years is mainly because of certain definite issues that we got into (1) release of mortgaged property; (2) implementation of institutional credit schemes for adivasis; (3) support to individuals and groups of adivasis in various cases of naked exploitation and injustice. In these issues we took a clear stand whereby we apparently gained the confidence of adivasis. We do not think that our people have reached the stage where this could be called a 'people's movement'. At this rudimentary stage we realised that we are still more 'powerless' than 'powerful'. We need wider linkages, but with whom - a political party, adivasi movements elsewhere, a support group of likeminded friends and supporters? We do not know. All that we know is that movement for social change cannot survive in isolation.

(1984)

Section II : Improving lives and livelihoods through alternative technologies

2. The Biogas programme - fuelling an alternative

Gram Vikas' brush with renewable energy began in 1977, when its first biogas plant of 8 cubic metres capacity was constructed for the organisation's own 'farm campus' at the Mohuda headquarters. This was used by the staff for cooking and lighting purposes as the area was unelectrified till 1982. This was followed by a 15 cubic metres Janata model plant, also built at Gram Vikas head quarters.

In our initial years in the Kerandimal region, we noticed the forests were receding by about half a kilometre every year. Logging was rampant, with contractors working in collusion with the Forest Department, selling valuable timber at throwaway prices. The villagers often worked for the contractors for a small remuneration. They also used to fell trees to meet their fuel needs. Indiscriminate felling, without distinguishing mature and tender trees caused greater damage. Deforestation was a problem, not in the Kerandimal area alone, but also in the rest of Orissa.

Our reaction to the prevailing situation was - could Gram Vikas intervene in a small way to meet fuel needs of the people, and to that extent, stem deforestation? Orissa having a sizeable cattle population, plus our hands on experience in operating the biogas plants made us consider biogas as a viable alternative. In a cautious manner we said that we'd propagate biogas, and in 1981 installed the first community biogas plant in a small inaccessible village called Toda, located on a

hilltop in Kerandimals. Soon, community plants in nine other hamlets were set up.

When the National Project for Biogas Development (NPBD) was nationally initiated, being among the few organisations having demonstrated the working of plants, we were drawn into the vortex of the programme. At this time, the general feeling among bureaucrats, multilaterals, bilaterals and the public was that NGOs cannot undertake large scale and technology based interventions. Their efforts would at best be localised demonstrations. There were also questions raised on whether such efforts, if at all undertaken, would be cost-effective or efficient.

Having gathered some initial experience, we decided to take up the challenge and scale up to operate at the State level. We started working simultaneously in almost all districts of Orissa, since the need for alternate fuel was universal. Gram Vikas adopted a broad-based strategy for it's biogas programme:

- Construction of family size plants
- Construction of night soil plants
- Construction of institutional plants
- Construction of large size community plants
- Training of biogas engineers, technicians a managers
- Training of biogas masons and promoters

- Training of women in the use of biogas
- Training of farmers in the use of spent slurry
- Practical research and experimentation with different type of plants in varied conditions and with varied biomass inputs.

From 1984 the programme extension was intensified. For the first 2-3 years, there were intensive campaigns undertaken by our staff to motivate rural communities to take up the construction of biogas plants.

Mode of operation at the field level

The biogas supervisors when entering a new block, usually picked a village within the target area on a random or convenience basis. In this village, they interacted with the people at their conventional meeting places like tea shops or under a tree. Discussions covered various aspects of biogas i.e. the many benefits, the various pre-requisites, the procedures involved in constructing the plants, the subsidies and loans available, the cost of the plant, and so on. Several visits were usually made before prospective users showed interest and a desire to construct a biogas plant. Next, a feasibility verification was performed, involving a visit to the person's house, to count the cattle, to check the availability of land to build the plant, etc. If all the necessary conditions were satisfied and the person had enough motivation to go through with the process, the supervisor then helped the beneficiary to organise a bank loan. This involved considerable red tape, like acquiring no dues certificates from other banks, all cooperative societies and credit societies in the area, and several visits to the bank.

Once the first installment of Rs.500 was released to the beneficiary, the site was demarcated by the supervisor and pitting began. Simultaneously the supervisor explained to the beneficiary the various materials required, and ensured that the required quantities of materials of the proper grade were arranged.

Once the pitting was completed, the second installment was released to the beneficiary, which was used to pay for the materials. The supervisor checked the grade of the materials and ensured that the beneficiary paid a fair price for the material purchased. After all the materials were received, the

mason was sent to the site, along with any trainee masons they may have had, and the construction works began.

At critical stages in the construction, like the casting of the dome, the inside plastering and the casting of the expansion chambers, the supervisor was present to ensure that the work was done properly. The plant cured for twenty days, during which time the third installment was negotiated and a plumber sent to the site to install the necessary piping and fixtures. The supervisor then ensured that the cement was cured properly, that the plant was covered with earth, and that the expansion chambers were covered with slabs. The supervisor was present when the plant was charged, to check the mixture and after some days to check the gas build up. The supervisor was always present for the first lighting of the biogas unit. They then tested the plant for leaks and verified the proper functioning of all appliances, carrying out remedial work wherever necessary

Gram Vikas personnel did not handle any of the cash spent on the plants, the dealings were directly between the beneficiary and the other parties i.e the bank. This increased the involvement of the beneficiary in the whole process, and his/her commitment to the plant. This was compatible with the role Gram Vikas chose to adopt, that of a facilitator and not a contractor.

The effort invested to build a biogas plant was considerable. In some cases, the supervisor needed five or six visits to confirm the procedure, and several more were then required to facilitate the purchase of materials, etc.

Consequently the expenditure in time was very high when considered on a per plant basis. This is in stark contrast to some other states where people queued up to have plants built, and the implementing organization's role was restricted to certification and inspection.

The government of India offered a turnkey fee of Rs.300 to the implementing organization irrespective of the size of the plant or the particulars of the beneficiary. The amount was uniform all over India. This fee was intended to finance turnkey operations for plant construction and includes two year maintenance and guarantee clauses. This fee, taking into account the remote areas where Gram

Vikas operates, was woefully inadequate.

After the initial successful demonstrations in each area, there was a definite shift from the 'push' factor to a 'demand pull'. Between 1984 and 1994, 54,047 plants were constructed in over 6,000 villages across Orissa, including the adivasi dominated districts such as Ganjam, Koraput, Sambalpur and Mayurbhanj. These plants accounted for about 80% of the biogas plants in Orissa and about 4% of the plants in India. In the process we had trained from among the rural youth, over 6,000 masons and 600 technicians across the state, and demystified a sophisticated precision technology. We demonstrated that grassroots NGOs can effectively undertake large scale programmes, and at a fraction of the cost that the government would have incurred in doing the same.

Around 1992-93, when we were at the peak of the programme, constructing between 7-10,000 plants/year, discussions intensified on diversifying the base of the programme to adopt a more integrated approach towards rural development. As a development organisation we wanted to touch poor peoples lives in more ways than one. The Rural Health and Environment Programme (RHEP) was born out of the experiences of working closely with rural communities in the biogas programme, an understanding of the factors of poverty and backwardness and the belief that the poor can work together to change their destinies.

From 1994 the catalytic process of spinning off the biogas programme began, and our supervisors, technicians and master masons became turnkey operators, and over 100 organisations were born, working with the same guiding philosophy as Gram Vikas, of improving the quality of life of poor rural communities. Two cases to illustrate this process are narrated below:

From a Master Mason to Social Entrepreneur

Manoranjan Jena worked on Gram Vikas' biogas programme for eight years before leaving in 1994 as a Master Mason. He was confident and eager to set out independently as a Self-Employed Entrepreneur (SEE). Jena set up his own organisation, Panchalingeshwar Palliseva Kendra with the money he received from his provident fund,

coupled with some funds he obtained from the Prime Minister Rozgar Yojana. He did not require any further training in the construction of biogas plants, in fact he conducted a Mason's Training programme which was organised by OREDA in 1996. Through this training programme he trained another 50 masons: 20 of OREDA's and another 30 of his own staff.

Jena has constructed about 900 biogas plants in four blocks in Balasore district. In the Nilgir block, where his native village also lies, he has constructed three 1 cubic metre night-soil biogas plants whose gas is used for lighting purposes only. Of the 900 plants that he has constructed, approximately 80% are self-financed and the remaining 20 odd per cent have been bank-financed. Jena claims that 90% of his plants are functional and that the remaining 10% are non-functional because of poor maintenance of the plant by the beneficiaries (outside the guarantee period), sale or death of cattle etc. but not due to any technical problems with the plants.

Jena has received training in the construction of smokeless chulas and sanitary latrines and the installation of solar lights and is currently working on these programmes as well.

A skill put to good use

Alfred Morea, a mason, received training in the construction of biogas plants in a masons' training programme organised by Gram Vikas. He worked for a one year as a mason (helper) with Gram Vikas before starting to work with Y S Raju (an ex-sub-divisional co-ordinator with Gram Vikas' biogas programme who has set up his own organisation, Palli Vikash) in 1993 where he received further training. He works for Palli Vikash on a contractual basis and receives Rs 500 for each biogas plant that he constructs. In a month he is able to construct 4-5 plants (Rs 2000-2500 / month). During the off-season he does other masonry work with petty contractors and cultivates his piece of land. According to Alfred, he earns a lot more by constructing biogas plants than by the masonry work that he does during the off-season and says that the biogas programme has boosted his income substantially.

In 1997, Gram Vikas conducted a survey of the biogas plants constructed. The results of the survey showed that 82% of the plants constructed by us were still in operation. A simple technology has made remarkable changes in the lives of the rural poor, especially women, as Udayanath Goudo explains.

Satisfaction of a continuing user

Udaynath Goudo of Bagalati village, Ganjam district remembers, “people from Gram Vikas used to come regularly to our village. They must have tried to explain and convince me at least 10 times why it would be useful for me to construct a biogas plant before I finally agreed.” Udaynath constructed a 2 cubic metre Deenbandhu biogas plant in 1992 and to date it has functioned without any problems. He received a subsidy of Rs. 2600 and contributed Rs. 1200 and his labour towards the construction of his biogas plant. Udaynath is glad that he did construct a biogas plant. He says, “there are five members in my family and all our meals are cooked using biogas. As we no longer require much fuelwood, considerable amount of my wife’s time and labour is saved. She is happier now.”

(2001)

3. People thought they could not do it, until we said “Why Not?”

In 1995 when Gram Vikas workers first came across Asuramunda, a village with fifty families, there was complete absence of hygiene and sanitation, and no source of clean and safe drinking water. Using health and hygiene as an entry point to improve the lives of the people, Gram Vikas presented a proposal for proper waste disposal, effective sanitation, drainage systems and safe drinking water involving 100% of the families in the village. Success in the field of health and sanitation soon led to demands for other changes and eventually to people’s involvement in a multitude of development activities, such as savings, community infrastructure, education and livelihood programmes.

In the course of our work in Asurmunda, we noticed that people were engaged in a range of livelihood activities including agriculture, and collection of

forest produce. However, for most families, land holdings were meager and there was a dearth of adequate employment throughout the year. Therefore, most families worked as labourers in other’s fields and doing local construction work. The situation was particularly grim for ten families in the village who moulded bricks for a living and lived at kiln sites far from their the village for six to eight months each year.

This situation is common to several villages in the districts of Bolangir and Boudh in Western Orissa, which are chronically prone to drought. Efforts at irrigation have been largely futile. After harvesting a single crop at the mercy of the truant monsoon, the villagers face nearly eight months of unemployment, privation and hardship. In dire straits and struggling for survival, a large number of them are forced to migrate to neighboring states, often with their entire families and all their possessions, to work for wages in brick kilns. The abandoned villages with their locked doors are a development nightmare. For eight months of the year the migrants live in poor conditions, with poor housing, substandard food, and no schooling or healthcare. Their meager wage is often written off against a loan taken in the previous season. In the struggle for subsistence, these families are caught in a vicious circle of poverty and indebtedness. Yet they have over the years cultivated a skill for moulding bricks – the so-called ‘green bricks’, which have to be sundried before they can be fired.

When Gram Vikas undertook to implement the Vertical Shaft Brick Kiln (VSBK) technology (as part of the India Brick Project initiated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), it was to promote and upgrade rural entrepreneurship in general, but particularly keeping in mind the needs of the distressed section of the population. The VSBK technology is new in India, and when Gram Vikas set up a VSBK in 1997 as a technical trial, this was only the second such kiln in India. Originating in China in the 1960s, the VSBK gradually evolved as an energy-efficient technology particularly suited to the needs of brick production in developing countries: small-scale, non-mechanised and accessible to rural entrepreneurs.

Simply put, the VSBK is a continuous firing process in which bricks loaded at the top of a vertical shaft pass downward through a static firing zone, to

emerge, after cooling, at the bottom of the shaft. It is characterized as an updraft system – the draft of air rising from the base of the shaft cools the fired bricks, and is itself warmed before reaching the firing zone. This hot air together with the products of combustion then rises to preheat the green bricks passing down from the top, before they are fired.

Our first kiln, established at Konkia (close to the Head Office), was a trial in technical feasibility with the local climate, soil and fuel. We had our teething problems, and learnt from them. The VSBK in Asuramunda village in Bolangir district, however, envisaged a new phase of the work. This was an experiment for the transformation of social and economic roles. Our plan was to make the moulders, firemen, the brick transporters the joint owners of capital, the managers of the enterprise.

It took time – this was a task without precedent. There are currently nearly 40 VSBKs operating in India today, many of them initiated and supported by NGOs, but the Asuramunda kiln is the only one which is paid for, built, owned, managed and operated by the community.

The Asuramunda community has borne the full cost of the technology through a loan extended by Gram Vikas. The contractually binding agreement regarding distribution of profits states that 25% shall be set aside for dividends; 5% as a contribution to the Village Development Fund; 50% to the Project Fund; 10% to Equipment Fund and 10% to a Development Reserve. On initiation of the project, each family was made a shareholder receiving 100 shares. Green brick moulder families receive extra dividends dependent on brick production.

VSBK Asuramunda was built at a cost of Rs. 1 million. It has a production capacity of 7,000 bricks

per day. The VSBK provides regular employment to 30 persons for a minimum of 250 days a year. Kiln workers receive a minimum of Rs. 30-45 per day. Each brick moulder family earned Rs. 8,300 in the last year, and this is expected to rise to Rs.10,000 by the tenth year of operation. Earlier their average income was well below Rs. 6,000 per year.

With the stabilization of kiln operations, the local community of green brick moulders no longer migrates in search of employment. Educated youth from the village who were previously unemployed, now work as supervisors, firemen, kiln operators and labourers. The community has developed robust systems of management and accountability through active learning and doing. The people have become wise to issues such as leadership, collective decision-making, distributive mechanisms, framing of rules and regulations, conflict resolution and crisis management. They are beginning to understand finance strategy and action impact assessment. These people now have a confidence, a belief in their own abilities, and a whole new way of looking at the world.

The Asuramunda kiln offers benefits to a whole community, surpassing simple economic gains with a conscious focus on the environment. Other kilns are in the business of increasing profits. Together with profit generation, the Asuramunda project gives an equal weightage to community capacity building, employment opportunities, development of skills, education and provision of basic services to its workers. The Asuramunda kiln is a social experiment which demonstrates that suppliers of labour can effectively become empowered owners of capital.

(2003)

Section III : A silent revolution - where women take the lead

4. Women's Commitment – A road to rural prosperity

"If the men do not co-operate in the implementation of RHEP in our village, we will employ labourers from outside for the construction of RHEP infrastructure and will go for an indefinite kitchen strike to ensure their co-operation." Suprova Mahakur and Pravati Kampo, Mohakhand women's committee members.

This is the story of a village called Mohakhand of Godabhaga panchayat in Bargarh district. Mohakhand has 158 households, in which the majority are engaged in agriculture and allied activities. This village had many problems, such as the common practice of defecation on the sides of the road and near water sources, a general lack of awareness regarding health and sanitation and the scarcity of safe drinking water.

The villagers invited Gram Vikas to discuss the possibility of implementing RHEP as a way to eradicate these problems. Initially many people in the village were very interested, but there were a few families who were not ready to participate and hence 100% consensus could not be reached. The villagers did not give up and sometime later they again approached Gram Vikas, but a consensus could still not be reached.

In the meantime RHEP was successfully implemented in the adjoining village of Karnapalli. Karnapalli originally had all the same health and sanitation problems, but gradually the situation had changed. Each family in the village had

contributed Rs.1,000 to a village corpus fund to initiate RHEP. Additionally each family contributed labour and raw materials to construct individual toilets and bathing rooms and establish the water supply system.

Water from a deep borewell was pumped to an overhead watertank and supplied through pipes to individual households, with connections in the toilets, bathing rooms and kitchens. The villagers had worked collectively to make this happen. The women of Karnapalli no longer had to trudge to the pond to fetch water everyday. They had more time for productive activities and leisure. Over time, there was a noticeable drop in diseases as well.

Witnessing the dramatic improvements at Karnapalli, the villagers of Mohakhand, especially women, were inspired once more to facilitate the implementation of RHEP in their village. In October 1999, on knowing that the RHEP Manager, Sojan Thomas, was visiting Karnapalli, a delegation of spirited and energetic women from Mohakhand village marched to Karnapalli to express their desire to improve their living conditions, the way the people of Karnapalli had through RHEP.

Sojan was reluctant at first, as twice before the villagers had not been able to come to a consensus. The women were insistent, assuring that things were different now. Sojan experienced a situation which made him feel confident that the village was finally ready to undertake RHEP. The women's

commitment was overwhelming and it was agreed that RHEP should be implemented. As the economic standard of a few families in the village was better than the rest, they were motivated to contribute bricks for the water tank. They soon had the same facilities as their neighbours in Karnapalli.

The women realised their collective strength and have continued to play an important role in their village. With Gram Vikas' support they formed 14 savings and credit groups with 205 members. The groups have saved about Rs.500,000 through monthly collections of Rs.10, of which 30% is given out as internal loans. They have been discussing the idea of forming a federation of all groups in the village, as they feel it will make them stronger. They would like to take up activities like pickle and papad making, and calf rearing.

The women are leading the way of rural development, proving that participation, co-operation and determination can bring about incredible changes in any community!

(2001)

5. Alcohol turns sour in Amthaguda...

Never before was alcohol sour in Amthaguda, an adivasi village in Thuamul Rampur block of Kalahandi district, until a group of women decided that they needed an end to this menace. For too long they had experienced beating, wastage of land and labour, and above all social disruption in their community. Mukta Dei, 35, the leader of the movement against alcohol in Amthaguda says, "now we've got the power, the power of togetherness of women".

Each day, Mukta Dei and her children were victims of abuse after her husband's daily alcohol consumption. Their land was gradually mortgaged, acre-by-acre, and every night her drunkard husband demanded saris, pots, and anything that was valuable in the house to pay for his habit. Once he even tried to snatch her nose-ring. She was forced into menial labour to feed her two children.

The change began when Gram Vikas established the Self-Help Group (SHG) of Amthaguda. In the SHG meetings the women shared their personal problems, developing an intense bond among themselves. Mukta Dei found that she was not

alone in her predicament; there were others who faced the same problem. They also discovered that the problem of alcohol was not just in their own village, but that the women of other villages had also begun to struggle against this evil. The women in Amthaguda got in touch with the women in Kuang, a nearby village and the movement against alcohol began!

Together the women organised to discuss with the men-folk the disadvantages of drinking. They destroyed all the local alcohol making apparatus in the village and those men who continued to get drunk were caught, tied to a tree and made to give a public apology along with a fine of Rs. 51, as decided by the village committee.

The movement against alcohol has been very successful and the women now enjoy the fruit of their labour. Almost 80% of the villagers have left the habit of drinking. Mukta Devi is now happy, and her husband is a transformed man. They are recovering their lost land acre by acre.

As co-ordinator of this successful movement against alcohol, Mukta Dei is now an icon in the village. When I went in to meet her, her daughter called 'ma... ma...' When there was no answer she called 'co-ordinator, co-ordinator...' and there came Mukta Dei.

(2002)

6. A bloodless revolution, but with lots of guts!

Was it really just one and a half years ago?

It does not seem even that long since I was interviewing one of the first groups of trainee women masons. I remember being impressed with Shashi Nahak's statement about how she and the other women braved ridicule, to be the first in their village to join the training programme. I was impressed, but I still had reservations. As they talked, doubts began to form in the back of my mind... was this really going to work? What was worrying me most were statements such as "Things are better for us now, but what we are doing is still not fully accepted".

Where was this programme going when the women

were adamant “we will not have an opportunity to take up work outside our village if it requires us to be absent overnight... this would not be acceptable to our families or the community”. Gram Vikas could not supply work locally forever, so what was going to happen then? I tried raising this point with the women, but they did not seem to want to face it, and replied with great certainty that Gram Vikas would just have to keep employing them at Mohuda and that was all there was to it.

I went away reminding myself that change does not happen all at once and something like this would take time. In this area there are many women who remain behind closed doors, not able to mix in public places for fear this will bring shame on their families.

The first positive step was the women agreeing to join the programme...the next sign that change was really on the way, came soon after, when the women used their income to buy bicycles and learned how to ride. One day you passed a group of women scurrying along the road on foot so as not to be late for work, their tiffin carrier in hand or on head, while men swished by on bicycles. Then the next thing you knew you could see bunches of women brightly clad in their sari's hurtling confidently towards you on their new bicycles, sometimes even giving the men a lift on the back. The effects of this development impacted on other women in their villages, women who had worked as labourers in Gram Vikas' farm and nursery for many years, saw these young masons and their cycles and the next thing you knew, they too had bought bikes and were riding to work. A precedent had been set and the wheels were turning.

Then last night I learned something that really made me smile. A group of women from Tamana had agreed to go and work 15 km away on a site in Berhampur. Gram Vikas organised accommodation for them to stay together. Now these same women, who are much in demand for their fine pointing work, have moved further afield and are working on-site in the neighbouring district of Gajapati, some, 100km away from their village. It made me stop and think; an amazing thing has happened here and we have hardly noticed... it has been a bloodless revolution! I wait now to see how long it will be before these women forge the final frontier and are engaged for equal wages for work outside Gram Vikas.

(2002)

7. Spiraling aspirations of adivasi women

Thirty families of the Saura tribe inhabit Latigaon, some distance from the Gram Vikas project office at Anandpur. The village which comes under Gandahati Gram Panchayat of Rayagada block in Gajapati district is situated on the foothills of the Mahendra Giri range of mountains.

The women in this village are kept occupied by their savings groups and flourishing horticultural patches, and continue to aspire to better their efforts.

There are two women's savings groups— Jayantimala and Banashree. Jayantimala group has 15 members. The government has sanctioned them a loan of Rs.290,000. Of this Rs.65,000 has been withdrawn and invested in the production of jhaadu (broomsticks), tamarind processing and plates made of sal leaves. This was not very successful.

Banashree, a group of 16 members were inspired by the large finances loaned to the Jayantimala group. They have been saving Rs.10 a month since August 2000. In 2001, they took the village cashew grove on lease for Rs.6,000, which yielded a profit of Rs 23,000. The amount was deposited in the bank, and they planned to invest it in cultivation of seasonal crops. They have already planted radish, tomato and leafy vegetables this year, marking a beginning.

Seeing this success, Jayantimala group decided to bid for the village cashew grove as well in 2002. Strife and bitterness ensued between the two groups. Gram Vikas field supervisors intervened to motivate the women to jointly take the grove on lease. The two groups jointly took the lease for Rs 10,000 and made a profit of Rs 36,300. They divided the profits between them and deposited it in their respective savings accounts.

The two groups have prepared their action plan for the coming years. Each group will invest at least Rs 80,000 to purchase the whole stock of cashewnut from their village, which traders from outside used to buy. The required amounts will be taken as loan from the group savings so that the savings amount will grow.

The women declare that they are free to use this money as they please, and it makes them happy if they can help their husbands with it when required.

They admit that their lives have changed for the better, after their association with Gram Vikas. It has given them the confidence to interact with outsiders and give up their self imposed seclusion. Without the income from cashew, they had to venture into forests to collect wild potatoes and mohua seeds. Now they have more time for sewing leaf plates and other activities. One woman says that venturing out in the sun was a nuisance and that they are much happier spending time at home.

Loud laughter and vehement and unanimous approval follow this remark.

When asked, what other improvements they intend to bring about, amidst shy smiles and an initial hesitation, suggestions pour in—piped water supply, concrete roads, electricity...These are however not merely suggestions but occupy a large part of the discussion in their meetings — a first step to concrete action. Their enthusiasm shines forth as they take us around their acres of cashew plantation with obvious pride.

Section IV: Educating the next generation - building a new future

8. Gram Vikas Residential Schools

A majority of adivasis live in remote hill areas and have had limited access to formal education. The government system does not adequately cover these areas, and even where schools do exist, they are plagued by irregular or absent teachers and poor infrastructure. Private education is not cost effective in remote and isolated adivasi villages/habitations. Gram Vikas is currently running four residential schools to enable children from such villages/habitations to be educated.

In 1982, only one year after Gram Vikas become involved in education, the people began to express a desire for a school that catered to the needs of their communities. With the people's support of time, materials and whatever they could spare from their own homes, Gram Vikas built the first residential school out of mud and thatch in Konkia village, at the foot of Kerandimal hills in Ganjam district. For the first few years this two roomed building acted as both classroom and sleeping quarters for 30 students and two teachers. From these humble beginnings the first school has grown to cater to over 300 students each year. Earlier, only boys attended the school, while now 34% of students are girls.

The simple mud huts have been replaced by brick classrooms and separate hostel facilities for both students and teachers. A middle and a high school now run side by side. Children aged eight to fifteen attend classes from standard one to the high school level. Studies in English, Oryia, Hindi, Science, Mathematics, Geography, History

and Sports form part of the curriculum. Another integral component is the inclusion of vocational training and land based activities. Older children are given the option of receiving training in masonry, tailoring, electrical repairs, plumbing etc, along with their formal classes. This ensures they have skills which they can use to earn a living if they do not continue with higher education. Gram Vikas encourages children who do well to study beyond high school level. In fact, of the 65 graduates from Gram Vikas High School, several children are presently continuing with their studies in colleges. Fifteen graduates from the High School received government appointments in 2003 as Shiksha Sahayaks.

The cost of education at the residential schools is about Rs.6,000 per child per year. Parents pay a portion of this to cover tuition and clothing. They also donate a certain amount of rice and pulses from their crops to contribute towards food cost. In total parents are asked to contribute to the value of about Rs.1,200 each year. Gram Vikas bears all other costs through donations by staff and other well wishers. Although it is a struggle, many families want to send their children to school. As understanding regarding the importance of education increases, so too does the demand on the residential schools. In response three more residential schools have been established by Gram Vikas at Koinpur – Gajapati, Thaumul Rampur – Kalahandi and Rudhapadar - Ganjam. Over 700 students are currently enrolled in Gram Vikas residential schools, with a teaching staff of 32.

Children take an active role in the running of the school, maintaining vegetable gardens, collecting firewood and helping to keeping their school premises clean. Children also take part in activities which promote a sense of community service and educate others, such as spending a few days cleaning a village and performing role plays and songs on hygiene and sanitation, encouraging and inspiring communities to take responsibility for these issues. Education in these schools is more than teaching children reading, writing and arithmetic. It helps to shape children to make a significant difference in the lives of their communities.

9. The stories of Rajendra and Ujjala

Rajendra's story - Realising a dream

Rajendra is 16 years old and comes from Mareibadi village in Kerandimal, home to 30 households and a total of 150 people. The village is 45 km from Kerandimal Middle Education School (KMES) and Gram Vikas High School, at Konkia, Ganjam. Rajendra's brother (Purna Mallik) is the night-school teacher in Mareibadi village. He is married and has one daughter. Rajendra is his only sibling. Purna went to a local government school, for his early school years, and then went to a school in Berhampur, up to 10th standard. When Purna was a teenager his mother died, and his father got remarried leaving Purna and Rajendra to fend for themselves. Purna supported his brother. "I think of him as if he were my own son" said Purna Mallik passionately. In addition to teaching at the night-school in the village, Purna also participates in cultivation and selling firewood in the local markets.

Purna initially sent Rajendra to the local government school, but Rajendra wasn't learning anything because the teachers rarely turned up for the classes. He had heard good reports of KMES through other families in his village, so decided he would trial it. Purna now clearly recognises the benefits of sending his brother to KMES over government schools.

"KMES is specifically designed for adivasi students. It takes into consideration their culture, and includes their own cultural traditions/activities in its curriculum. The teachers organise various festivals for the children, and are greatly concerned

about their health, ensuring they always eat good food. The teachers are particularly helpful in teaching the children academic subjects in a way they will understand. The children also learn arts and crafts, which does not happen in the government schools" said Purna Mallik.

Purna said, Rajendra changed significantly after attending the school. He became very well behaved, spoke better, was particularly concerned about his health and cleanliness, and very co-operative in cultivating and cleaning in the village when he came home for holidays. He also encouraged the younger children in the village to go to school. "The people in the village really look up to him, and admire his behaviour" said Purna.

If Rajendra hadn't gone to school he would be working on the land with his brother. Purna is hoping that when Rajendra completes school, he will start his own business. "The residential school has given him great scope to learn these skills. Having his own business will provide life security for his future family" said Purna proudly.

Purna does not find the expenses he pays towards the school fee a problem, in fact he is very impressed. "It is such a small amount that everyone in our village should be able to afford the cost" said Purna. Although Purna can afford to send his brother to school, a lot of adivasi families are still struggling to afford the Rs.1200 per year. However, the villagers are beginning to notice changes in the children attending the residential school, when they come home on school breaks. "They see how well the children are looking after themselves in terms of health and mental stimulation, compared to other children in the village. This may slowly motivate all parents in the village to send their children to school" said Purna. Rajendra has done very well at school. He has excelled in sports, and has won a few prizes in sports competitions he has participated in.

Purna signed off saying "More than anything I wish I could have gone to Gram Vikas' school. I would have prospered so much, learning so many interesting things, and I would have been given an opportunity to obtain a good job. I would be a completely different person today".

Rajendra enjoys studying and is hoping to go to college when he completes High School. He

especially enjoys Mathematics, Oriya and cricket. He has also become competent with fitting electrical parts in the school. Whenever there is an electrical problem the teachers ask for his assistance. When he completes his studies, he is hoping that he will get a job as an electrician. "KME school has given me opportunities and opened out a new world, which I would never have dreamed of in my tiny village", said Rajendra.

Ujalla's story – an inspiration for others

Ujalla comes from Dhamanapadar village, which is situated 35 km Southwest from Konkia. There are 35 families in his village, a total of 190 people. Ujalla has one sister, Sujata who has studied at KMES up to 4th standard - then failed. She is hoping to go back to KMES, but is presently studying in a nearby government school, where the teacher rarely turns up for classes. In 2000 Ujalla completed high school.

Ujalla's father, Kalu Mallik, believes that if Ujalla hadn't gone to school he would have been helping him do agricultural work on their land. Kalu has had no formal education, and did not want his children to be in the same position when they were older. "I wanted them to be educated, and have a secure future financially" said Kalu proudly.

In the initial days, when KMES first started, staff from Gram Vikas visited the village and suggested to the parents that they send their children to school. Kalu was very interested to send his son, but many of the other villagers were quite wary. After sometime, their attitudes changed when they saw the positive impact school was having on Ujalla.

Ujalla was an exceptional student. He obtained very high marks in English and Mathematics when he graduated in 2000. He was admitted into a college in Chikkiti. Throughout college his parents paid Rs.700 per month towards his fees, which is quite steep for a poor adivasi family. Kalu said their family was only just managing by selling vegetables, paddy and firewood. "I knew there would be great benefits to our family when my son completed his degree and obtained a good job. So I tried to not to let the immediate monetary problems bother us too much," said Kalu.

Living up to his father's dream Ujjala completed college and secured a job as a Shiksha Sahayak under the government's education guarantee scheme in 2003. He is an inspiration to younger people in his village today.

(originally written in 2000; updated in 2003)

Section V: Spurring collective action through water and sanitation

10. Unleashing social change

A few years ago the 172 families of Kholo Samantarapur were full with divisions – political, caste, economic. Not even 10 households could bring themselves to agree to do something constructive together. However, the secretary of the Village Committee, Kora Bisoi, is a progressive man. When he learnt that Gram Vikas was working with a neighbouring village to construct an overhead water tank, toilets and bathrooms which would all be supplied with running water, he approached us to know more about the programme.

The Rural Health and Environment Programme of Gram Vikas is about toilets, bathrooms and running water, but it does not end – or even begin – there. Before agreeing to take up work in any village, we insist that the entire village community reach a full agreement on implementation – every single household must participate in the programme as equal partners. Through our years of experience in the field, we have found that all too often, development schemes address people selectively. The people who can make use of them are often the economically stronger section of the community, and when they draw exclusive benefit from a scheme, this effectively widens the economic divide within the community. Even worse, such interventions tends to confirm certain regressive mindsets, where the haves are confirmed in their right to dominate, and the have-nots further lose belief in themselves as equal citizens.

Most village communities are divided, as Kholo Samantarapur was, and to achieve the 100%

inclusivity required by our programme they usually have some hard work to do. Before any construction work can start, the programme requires the formation of a corpus fund, from which the interest will be used to ensure that any households added to the village in future are also given access to the standard facilities. The rule is that each household should contribute Rs.1,000 to the corpus fund; in effect, this is open to mutual adjustments within the community, and often the richer households agree to pay more and the poorer households pay less. The construction of the toilets and bathrooms is the next step. The cost of each unit, between Rs. 6,000 and Rs. 7,500, is borne by the individual households, with a subsidy of Rs 3,000 from Gram Vikas. The subsidy goes toward meeting the costs of external materials, typically cement, steel, toilet pan seat, etc. For the water supply, the RHEP generally tries to link the people directly with Swajaldhara, the government rural water supply programme, which bears 90% of the cost of the tank and pipe network. Families may pay some share of the costs in materials and labour. If a family is really too poor to be able to afford these costs, the community has to come forward to help them. Sometimes spatial rearrangements are called for, in order to make suitable space for the new constructions. To achieve all these things, the village community has to overcome divisions; it has to get together and talk.

In Kholo Samantarapur, as in other villages, there were many hurdles to be crossed. They held 162

village meetings in the span of a year (apart from individual household interactions), before 100% consensus was reached and the village could say 'Yes' to the programme with one voice. In the process, the village went through a curious transformation. Earlier the village was deeply divided on political lines. There were accusations of misappropriation of common funds by the village leaders. 30% of the families are scheduled castes, and they suffered the usual segregation and disregard. Above all, the women were deeply sequestered – their faces covered to well below the neck every time they stepped out of their houses, they exemplified the belief that women should be neither seen nor heard. They could never think of sitting in a mixed gathering with men, much less giving voice to their thoughts in a place where their family elders might be present!

In the course of the meetings all this changed. It took time, but gradually the people settled their differences and were able to look forward, to new ways of thinking. Today the villagers will tell a visitor that there are no differences and they are all united. Yes there were political quarrels earlier, but they firmly refuse to talk about them – they think that these things belong to a dead past, and it is better so. They will recall how they organized a feast for the whole village – men, women, children – and everyone ate together before they started pouring the concrete for the roof of the community hall. The women are now seen as well as heard. They are a vocal presence in the meetings, and even insist that they actually outnumber the men, since many of the younger men are away as migrant workers in distant places. As the women were brought together to form the savings and credit groups that are a critical feature of the programme, they discovered a new solidarity among themselves. At one point when squabbling was threatening to throw the construction work out of gear, the women (- "172 of us from 172 houses") put down their ultimatum – "Resume work immediately or face a kitchen strike." The work was resumed without further delay.

In a village where the RHEP has its full effect, it creates a strong and united village community, which is more progressive in its thinking, and is better placed to benefit from government funding for further developmental efforts. However the

maximum benefit of this programme goes to the women, and it is by eliciting their fullest response (as it did in Kholo Samantarapur) that the RHEP achieves its true potential. When there is a toilet and bathroom with running water in the backyard, for the men this is just a facility that they could, at the limit, do without. For the women it is something that has brought a fundamental change in their lives, and they would not give it up for anything. After all they were the ones earlier subject to all the pressures and inconvenience of bathing and answering the calls of nature in public. And they were responsible for fetching enough water for the household needs ("maybe 20 trips a day") from the closest available source. There was the village well, and when in summer that dried up, there was the pond beyond the village boundary, and if that was dry...that was her problem!

As the women begin to "wake up", the other features of the RHEP are brought into the closed circle of their lives – health awareness, immunization, vaccination and antenatal care, community sanitation and hygiene, primary education for children, women's savings and income generation groups. The village today has five savings groups with 97 members and over Rs.120,000 of their own funds. They have also leveraged support from government schemes like DW CRA and SGSY. From these achievements, the spiral moves on outwards to features that are common to both men and women, such as adult literacy, optimum use of community assets and livelihoods assistance. Three ponds have been developed for community pisciculture, and this yields a regular income for meeting recurring expenses. Training of youth in masonry, and support to farmer groups for irrigation and livestock have helped improve and secure livelihoods in the village.

The effort ultimately is to make the community institution – the village-level committee – responsible for the continuation of these various efforts, so that the people do not slide back into the old pattern of apathy and despair. It is recognized today, that by releasing the stifled potential of the community and involving everyone in the process, the programme is capable of unleashing a powerful force of social change.

(2003)

11. An example of collective effort

Dengapadar in Ganjam district of Orissa is a large village with 252 households. When RHEP was initiated by Gram Vikas in this village in late 1994, it had 236 households. The community consists of predominantly marginal farmers, with nearly 50% of the households below the poverty line. Prior to the implementation of RHEP, the failure of government tube-wells resulted in acute water scarcity in summers. The absence of protected drinking water resulting in recurring incidents of diarrhoea, gastro-enteritis, etc, had made the villagers eager to participate in a community managed water supply and sanitation programme. When the issue of collecting a corpus fund for RHEP was put across to them, the villagers wondered how each family would be able to contribute Rs.1,000.

After much debate and discussion, they decided that each family would contribute Rs.500 to the corpus, and the balance would be paid out of the common fund of the village. This was not a problem since the village common fund had a sizeable amount of money from the income generated by fish stocks in the 15 acre community pond. The fish are a rich source of income earning nearly Rs.80,000 - Rs.100,000 every year.

What was significant about this decision was the fact that the fund had till then been used for a jatra (religious procession) each year, in the month of July. Whatever remained was used for building and renovating the village temples. The villagers collectively decided that sanitary infrastructure and access to safe drinking water should get predominance and the jatra was discontinued for three years.

In this manner a sum of Rs.236,000 was generated for the RHEP corpus fund. From the community fund they also paid a portion of people's contributions towards construction of the water tank.

The electrical transformer in their village also needed upgradation, and they spent nearly Rs.40,000 for procuring a new one, and for additional electric wires and poles. They have also built a community hall of 100 sq.m. plinth area, of which Gram Vikas contributed support of Rs.40,000, Rs.80,000 was drawn from the community fund and villagers

voluntarily provided labour.

Over the next three years, sixteen more households came up in the village. As per the agreed norms, the community could draw upon the interest from the corpus fund for extension of the sanitation and water programme in the village. The village committee decided that they would not touch either the principal or interest from the corpus. Instead, Rs.1,300 would be given to each new household out of the community fund, and the balance would be generated by the individual households concerned.

The village committee additionally decided to deposit Rs.60,000 from the community fund in a fixed deposit, of which neither the principal nor interest would be disturbed for 5 years. This was to ensure a backup fund to meet unforeseen contingencies - technical faults, repairs and replacement in the water supply systems, etc. In 2001, they used part of this fund to buy a standby generator to ensure continuous power supply.

The community has registered a society, Bishwanath Gramya Unnayan Samiti, is the legal forum to negotiate with the government for directly securing community development funds. The village library is one of the few in the region with active membership and a good collection of books and journals. There are eight savings groups of women with 141 members, who play an active role in community development as well.

Much of these actions of exceptional financial and institutional planning have been possible because of the strong leadership provided by Laba Biswal, the traditional leader of the village, well respected by all the villagers. He kept the village together and also encouraged and nurtured younger leaders to take charge.

Dengapadar is a visible example of strong leadership, collective decision making, and prudent management. Developmental efforts in Dengapadar have the promise of sustainability, even after Gram Vikas withdraws support totally. In 1998, Nandiagada village in the same panchayat, with 274 families came into the RHEP fold. Together the two villages cover 44% of the population in the Panchayat. Their unified stand makes them a powerful force to reckon with.

Over the years Dengapadar has changed in various aspects. Earlier they were free to catch fish when they wanted from the pond. This practise has been stopped now. But each time the fish is harvested, every household gets 1 kg of fish free of cost, while the remainder of the catch is sold and the proceeds deposited in the community fund. Significantly, they have not been able to organise the yearly religious procession on the same scale as previous years. That for the villagers is a small sacrifice, given the strides they have made in realising a better quality of life.

(2000)

12. A Panchayat with a difference

Angarapada is an important node for the cluster of villages in Angarpada panchayat of Mayurbhanj district. Angarapada's water tank is a landmark visible to all villages in the area and has become a symbol to emulate. All villages in the panchayat are being initiated into the RHEP; they are Tulsipur, Galusahi, Kalonda, Jhadipada, Chiruhatu, Janika and Baunsapur. All seven villages in this panchayat will thus have the same facilities as Angarpada – individual toilets, bathing rooms and piped water supply to all families. Angarapada will then be the first panchayat in Orissa covered wholly under the Rural Health and Environment Programme of Gram Vikas.

The village of Angarapada is distinguished by a weekly Sunday haat, or market, which is also a melting pot for the exchange of ideas and information between the villages in the vicinity. This haat is unusually large - the physical area earmarked for it is huge. With livestock trade being the most prominent, it is a steady source of revenue for the panchayat. It has put the revenue to good use, establishing a primary school in Angarpada, a college in Raruan and recently after motivation by Gram Vikas, a pre-school centre was started in Angarpada. The Panchayat gave funds for construction and also plays an important role in the management and running of these institutions.

When RHEP was initiated in Angarpada village, Late Sri Khetramohan Mahanta, then President of the village committee and Secretary of the Gram Panchayat, used his influence to utilise the panchayat funds to part finance the programme.

Rs. 150,000 from the Panchayats revenue was earmarked for the programme in Angarapada. Of this, Rs. 100,000 was used to supplement the Rs. 70,000 raised for the corpus from village contribution and the remaining Rs. 50,000 was used to pay for the additional pipeline needed to supply water to the village haat. Having set a precedent for Angarapada, the Panchayat board was now obliged to pass a resolution to make proportionately the same money available to the other villages in the Gram Panchayat. Hence RHEP is now part of the panchayat mandate here. With partial support being available from the panchayat funds for the RHEP, many more new villages will be availing of the scheme. Gram Vikas believes that the villages must raise the money for the corpus by themselves in order that they feel a true sense of ownership for the programme. Hence although money flows in from the panchayat, this money is presently being used to subsidize the construction of toilets and bathing rooms, in addition to people's own contributions and Gram Vikas' support.

Angarapada is a large, well-laid out village of 176 households. The dalit and adivasi clusters are separated from the rest of the village, but everyone has the same facilities. The per capita water requirement in this village was assessed, and a tank with a capacity of 78,000 litres was constructed. However, the water pressure was soon found to be insufficient for a group of 24 adivasi families and a new tank of 12,000 litres was constructed.

The primary occupation here is agriculture with a majority of the land-holdings being over 2.5 acres. This village has about 86 unemployed graduates. Brick-making and wage labour are also common. A successful poultry farm in this village, seeded by Gram Vikas' support, is the pride of the field supervisor. The presence of such a large market in the vicinity has resulted in a spirit of enterprise not seen in many other places. Purchasing paddy and reselling it after processing it into rice is a thriving business, especially among the women's groups initiated through with Gram Vikas' support. It is earning them on average, a profit of Rs.25 per 100 kg of rice. The women's group in Angarapada has taken a loan from the bank for pisciculture. A working capital loan of Rs.250,000 was also availed through the Government's Swarn Jayanti Swarozgar scheme.

There is a cement tile manufacturing unit within this village, the know-how for which was procured from the neighboring town of Raruan. A local carpenter makes the mould, and the rudimentary tile-making machine is often copied and self fabricated. This enterprise is only seasonal but provides quick returns as a local market exists for the tiles. There are also grocery and fertilizer shops in the village.

Harvesting of Sabai grass is another livelihood activity commonly pursued in many of the villages. The rope is purchased by middle-men and sold to traders in Calcutta. The villagers have been able to negotiate better prices for the sabai grass with the guidance of Gram Vikas and working collectively.

A group of 20 farmers have together accessed a loan of Rs.50,000 with a 75% subsidy component, and installed a 10-hp pump set for irrigation. About 250 hectares of Eucalyptus and Acacia trees, have been planted in Angarapada, under the social forestry programme. A watch and ward society has been formed within the village for this social forestry patch. Clearly, the initiative, confidence, and entrepreneurial skills of the villagers are striking features in this village today.

Gram Vikas has over the years leveraged the initiative and enterprise of the Panchayat leaders and helped build a stronger and more democratic community, where the fruits of development percolate to everyone in equal measure.

(2000)

13. Leading the way to sustainable development

Nestled in a valley 30 kms from the block headquarters of Thuamul Rampur in Kalahandi, Madanguda is a home to forty Paraja Khond families. The village has a committee responsible for all development activities and subcommittees for health, education, and sanitation. Madanguda stands apart from other villages in the region – every family has a pucca house, a toilet and bathing room and piped water supply. The difference, this has made to the village is visually powerful, and at the same time, the dignity and pride among the people is obvious.

In 1997 all forty families of the village were motivated to build pucca houses (of 45 sq.m.

each). Loans ranging between Rs.12,000 to 15,000 were accessed from Housing Development Finance Corporation and routed through Gram Vikas. The village area was divided into two settlements, as the original site of the village was too small for the housing programme. Land was given for fifteen families to relocate a small distance away, thus allowing everyone more room. Later with assistance of Rs.40,000 from the ITDA and Rs.3,000 per family from Gram Vikas, they also built toilets and bathing rooms, and separate livestock sheds. They have also created a corpus fund of Rs.40,000 so that any new family in the village can build their own toilet and bathing room as well, with assistance from the interest earned on the corpus. Running water supply to the village has been established by diverting water from a nearby permanent spring to an overhead water tank near the village. This ensures supply of water to their houses through pipelines all the year through. For construction of the toilets, bathrooms and water supply systems, the cost was around Rs.7,000 per family of which each family contributed 40% by way of labour, local raw materials like stone, sand and aggregate. Gram Vikas provided support for the remainder of the cost.

Another significant change, which has a very strong impact on their situation and sense of security, is the cessation of exploitation by moneylenders, police and forest guards. During the lean periods people used to be forced to take loans at exorbitant rates of interest from these outsiders. Now they can take a grain loan from their own grain bank or arrange for cash loans through the common village funds. The ITDA later used the Madanguda model to start grain banks in the entire panchayat, wherein grain stock and small support for storage was provided to help communities establish a similar system. The successful grain bank project has been highlighted at the state level, as well.

Gram Vikas' intervention in Madanguda in 1990 emphasised non-formal education and organising the community to undertake development activities. Women were to play a key role in the development process, and the savings and credit groups were the route to build their confidence. There are two self help groups with 19 and 20 members respectively. In 1999 several members of the groups decided to take a loan of Rs.27,000

from the bank to purchase goats. However after some time they decided to pay the loan back to the bank and secure funds through the SGSY programme. Five beneficiaries funded through SGSY each purchased ten female and one male goat. When the goats were purchased vaccination was carried out, however disease still killed 26 goats and there was no insurance. After this setback the number of goats has slowly risen again to approximately 50.

In a region where the primary sustenance is drawn from shifting cultivation (dangar) there are other aspects that stand apart in Madanguda. Twelve persons trained in masonry during the construction of the houses, toilets and bathing rooms, now find steady employment in neighbouring areas. Fifteen families undertake large scale vegetable and banana cultivation and produce a double crop of paddy which meets their own needs and leaves adequate surpluses for sale. Vegetable and banana cultivation is undertaken by all the other families in the village, on a limited scale as well, supplementing their nutritional intake and

reducing their dependence on dangar for food. The villagers have rights to over 120 acres of land, but most of this is on the hill slopes, which they have been attempting to protect by making terraces for cultivation. A large area of hill slope is being protected as well, with 36 acres under horticulture plantations.

The village committee of Madanguda also purchased a tractor in 1997, through a bank loan at an interest rate of 14%. One person in the village was given training to drive the tractor. The village hires their tractor to people in the village and the surrounding area for a fee of Rs.900 per day. From this, they have been able to earn about Rs.6,000 per month, which has gone to fully repay their loan.

The illusion that Thuamul Rampur is the "poverty basket of Asia" is wrong. Madanguda demonstrates how through collective action and will, sustained and significant improvements can be made in people's lives.

(2002)

Section VI: Managing natural resources – a road to sustainability

14.1 Community driven development

A silent revolution is happening in Kondhabanta and Talataila villages in Jagannath Prasad block of Ganjam district. Gram Vikas has been working in the villages since the early 1990's. Of the two villages, Kondhabanta comprises 20 families of Kondh adivasis, while Talataila has 12 families of which three belong to the general caste, and the rest are Khonds. The critical issues in these villages were identified initially as illiteracy, poor health and a vacuum in government services. The villages are over 20 km from the block headquarters. There is no road to the villages and they are inaccessible in the monsoons. The block itself being at the border of Ganjam and Nayagarh districts does not get attention.

The initial interventions of Gram Vikas were therefore in education, awareness building through information dissemination and provision of health services. The traditional practices of grain banks and a village fund were revitalized. Women were also brought together in a thrift programme for regular savings and credit. Dependence on collection of forest produce and bogodo (shifting cultivation) form the basis of livelihoods and sustenance. Gram Vikas introduced cultivation of vegetables to increase nutrition and cash incomes. The enthusiasm of people was however limited, and driven by individuals and not the entire community.

In March 1999, led by the women and youth, villagers of Kondhabanta and nine adjoining villages, including Talataila, pledged not to consume, make, or allow the sale of liquor in the region. That heralded

a turning point in Kondhabanta. Soon after, the villagers built a community house of 75 sq.m. to run the school, conduct village meetings, for women to carry out collective production activities (making mats, sal leaf plates, etc) and for storing grain. All families contributed stone, aggregate, sand and free unskilled labour, while Gram Vikas provided the cement, steel and masons wages.

These two events made the village prominent in the region. Talataila was watching all the while, but at the same time not clear what they could do to improve their conditions. A few people in the village tried to harness the stream flowing close to their village. They approached the government for assistance, but were given no support for their idea, as the project was considered technically unviable.

Things went on at a leisurely pace till the cyclone struck in the night of October 17, 1999. The bogodo crop was razed to the ground, tamarind and mango trees were shorn of foliage, and their mud and thatch houses were destroyed. The villagers of Talataila were devastated, but got together and started thinking of ways to face the days ahead – there would be no crops, and yield from the trees for the next 2-3 years would be substantially less. For their own survival they would have to use whatever land they had and grow something; the land had to be irrigated to grow crops; the dam they had dreamt of had to be built.

In January 2000 all families in the village got together and for twenty days worked relentlessly to build an earthen dam. News reached the Gram

Vikas project office in Rudhapadar and the field supervisor Abhimanyu Mohanty rushed to the village to see what was happening. The people made it clear that this time they would build the dam, whether or not they got any external assistance. They were forsaking wage labour, and in their houses they had little to eat that month.

Seeing that the villagers were determined, an agreement was reached to build an earthen dam of estimated width of 100m and height of 4m. Gram Vikas would provide technical assistance and Rs.40/person/day for the days worked. The dam would irrigate over a 100 acres of land. The people are quick to point out that it will be used for pisciculture as well. The women added that their problems of water would be permanently solved, since they would no longer have to trek over a kilometre in summer for water.

In the summer of 2000, villagers could cultivate vegetables; paddy cultivation was done for the first time in the village, though the region was affected by drought. They bought a pumpset with a loan of Rs.20,000 from Gram Vikas to take up large scale cultivation from the coming year. They have already decided how the water is going to be distributed and which land they will cultivate. The community leaders are confident that they will be able to manage equitable distribution.

Meanwhile, the news and excitement of the earthen dam in Talataila spread to Kondhabanta. They thought that if a small village like Talataila could do it, so could they. The stream was a little further off, but that did not deter them, after all they had their lands around it. Around March 2000 they too started a similar project of 'damming' the waters. The project here will irrigate around 200 acres of land. Pisciculture may not be possible since it is far from the village. Yet, they too are buying a pumpset with a loan from Gram Vikas.

The events have led to the two villages coming together on common issues. With Gram Vikas' help, families from both villages have filed a case against non-advasis from Oriya Banta who have usurped their land. This has spurred other villages in the area to make attempts to recover their lands as well.

Recently the women from the two villages came together to deal with the non-functioning

of the tubewells in their villages. They gave a memorandum to the Block Development Officer threatening that if the tubewells were not repaired immediately, they would do a matia rally (a rally with earthen pots), break pots in front of his office, and agitate. Within a week the tubewells in both villages were repaired. Villagers of Kondhabanta and Talataila are now lobbying with the block for a pucca road to their villages. They also have plans to start collective income generation activities like manufacture and sale of sal leaf plates for which they are trying to get assistance from the government. They also plan to build houses with loans from Gram Vikas. Kondhabanta and Talataila are simply unstoppable today as they travel on the development path.

(2001)

15 . Reaping the fruits of labour

The village Jhulasahi, part of the Koinpur project in Gajapati district, is inhabited by people from the Lanjia Saura tribe. A village with 37 adivasi families, it has a day school and a concrete road running through it. All families of this village have horticultural patches, which forms their basic income.

Shyam Sundar Bhuiyan, the Secretary of the village, leads this village effort. He has a number of such horticulture patches, roughly of half an acre each, on the hill slopes. He grows oranges, pineapples, mangoes, jackfruit, bananas, lemon, coconut, date palm, pomegranate, custard apple and cashew. The centre of the patches is for turmeric, ginger, pepper and bay leaves. Besides these, he grows flowers like dahlia and jasmine and even herbal plants. He now does his own grafting after he received training at the government horticultural farm in Udaygiri.

Like the rest of his village, his dependence on bogodo or shifting cultivation is now so minimal that the practice has almost come to an end. He used to earn profits of Rs.2000 a year from the surplus produced from the bogodo cultivation. He now manages to earn between Rs.30,000 to Rs.40,000 from his plantations. He recognizes that bogodo aggravates soil erosion, and has built stone bunds and terraces to prevent erosion within his garden.

He has no land to grow paddy, as all such land belongs to the non-advansi people. But he seems well off with the returns from his plantations. Taking to horticulture has improved the condition of his daily life. He has spent lavishly on building a pucca (permanent) house, and people joke that the remaining income he spends on hospitality to visitors! Like other families in his village, he is also constructing a toilet and bathing room, and is happy that they will soon have piped water supply to their houses.

Gram Vikas as part of its livelihoods programme, started motivating people to take to horticulture in this area in the early '90s. The beginning was gradual but it has picked up in the last 4-5 years, replacing bogodo as the basic means of survival. Presently, Gram Vikas' role is limited to providing loan assistance and technical and marketing support where necessary. The people manage this venture all by themselves.

In fact, the improved lifestyle is noticeable in almost all the village households. With augmented incomes, loan repayment has become easier. "The produce is sold to merchants, who can now come to the village itself, on account of the concrete road built with Shyam Sundar's initiative", people tell us, as trucks rumble in, and leave the village laden with pineapples.

We leave the village, an obvious success story, and our hands full of mangoes, bananas and pineapples from Shyam Sundar's garden—a delicious proof of his prosperity and reputation as a good host.

(2002)

16. Obolonga's success story

Tumbo village, inhabited by members of the Saura tribe, is located roughly one and a half kilometers from the Gram Vikas project office at Koinpur in Gajapati district. As one approaches the village, the stretches of horticultural gardens come into view, fenced in by stone bunds. Obolonga Sabar's horticultural patch, located on a slope behind the village, covers approximately five acres and is a great success story.

Agile and surefooted, Obolonga spends a great portion of the day in his garden, where he grows a wide array of trees - cashew, pineapple, lemon, jackfruit, mango, banana, sandalwood, bamboo, orange and tamarind, among others.

The mixed cultivation helps him reap substantial income throughout the year, since most fruits are seasonal. The weather and soil in the area are suitable for growing fruits, and there is little need for irrigation or the use of fertilisers. The only additional requirement is pesticides.

Before he took to horticulture, Obolonga earned a meagre Rs.2,000 to Rs.3,000 a year from bogodo (shifting cultivation). Horticulture has substantially augmented his income and now he earns close to Rs.30,000 annually.

Obolonga's and his wife Kusum's income from horticulture is supplemented by their son, who undertakes masonry work in nearby towns. This year their son carried pineapples to Berhampur, which fetched him a higher price. Otherwise Obolonga sells his produce to merchants from Andhra Pradesh who come to his village.

Obolonga's increased income has enhanced the quality of his day to day living. He received Rs.22,500 as a housing loan from Gram Vikas, but he has been able to spend close to Rs.70,000 to build his pucca house. He also has the resources and time now, for an occasional outing with his family.

As a result of Gram Vikas' motivation and its demonstrated success in some neighbouring villages, Obolonga took up horticulture in 1991-92. Gram Vikas' provided initial help for developing the nursery and procuring saplings. Presently its role includes, periodic supervision of plantations, accessing good quality seeds from government horticulture department and other agencies, and training from horticulturists.

Obolonga hopes to earn up to Rs.70,000 per year from his horticulture patch, and build one house each for his grandsons. One can sense his satisfaction when he tells us that he plans to give up bogodo for good and look after his gardens.

(2002)

Epilogue

Many people have contributed the case studies featured in this compendium. A large number of the cases are drawn from recent documentation by volunteers and interns. Most cases have put transformational aspects of the community at the fore. The tireless efforts of the project teams and field level workers of Gram Vikas in making this happen, perhaps more difficult to capture, have been downplayed in the case studies. The selected cases are also largely 'celebratory' in nature, concluding Bollywood style – '...and they lived happily ever after'. In reality there are often setbacks, but in Gram Vikas I have seen these viewed as challenges which can be overcome. As Sojan Thomas (Manager RHEP) once remarked – "where the seed of development falls, it is bound to germinate one day...".

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Section I - The case study is drawn from a more detailed document prepared by Anthya Madiath in 1984 titled "When tribals awake: The Kerandimals movement".

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Section III - The Mohakhand case study was written

by Jayapadma RV in 2001. The other case studies in this section have been contributed by volunteers and interns at Gram Vikas in 2002. Kylie Mc Evoy (Australian Volunteers International) wrote about the masons training programme. Maju Verghese (Intern, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai) developed the Amthaguda case study and Deepasri Baul (Intern, National Foundation of India, Delhi) wrote the Latigaon case study.

Section IV - Natasha Litchfield (Australian Volunteers International) has been the key contributor to this section, especially for the stories of children. Originally written in 2000, the case study has been updated.

Section V - The case study on K Samantrapur is drawn from an article written by Mina Mishra in 2003. The cases of Dengapadar and Angarpada were written by PMED team members Jogy T Joy and Bipin Menon respectively in 2000. The Madanguda case study was written in 2002 by Jayapadma RV and Kylie McEvoy (AVI)

Section VI - The case study on Kandhabanta-Talataila was written by Jayapadma RV in 2001. Deepasri Baul (intern, National Foundation of India) wrote the cases of Jhulasahi and Obolonga in 2002.

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Glossary

Adivasi	Indigenous people, designated as Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution of India
Bogodo	A form of shifting cultivation practised by adivasi communities in Orissa
Dalit	People who were termed 'Untouchables' in the Hindu Caste system. During the freedom, Gandhiji called them 'Harijan' or Children of God. Their own leaders called them dalits or bahujan, in a people's movement for rights, in the 80's. They are designated Scheduled Castes under the Constitution of India
Kotho	Belonging to the Community
Ma	Mother
Pucca	Of permanent nature
Papad	Dried lentil wafers, which are fried or roasted and eaten
Panchayat	Panchayati Raj Institutions are a part the constitutionally empowered local self-government system. At the lowest tier are Gram panchayats which represent a cluster of villages. At the next tier are Panchayat Samitis, based at a Block or Taluk level, and finally District Panchayats, covering all villages in the district.
Sal	A forest species common across Orissa (Shorea Robusta)
Sarcar	Government
Sowcar	Traders / Moneylenders
Sundi	Liquor merchants
DWCRA	Development of women and children in rural areas
RHEP	Rural Health and Environment Programme
SGSY	Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana



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