

Gram Vikas' contributions to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Water and Sanitation Consultation on stigmatisation and wash

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Introduction:

Gram Vikas is a non-governmental organization that has worked with Indian rural and tribal communities since 1979, helping them achieve a dignified quality of life. Gram Vikas means "village development". Gram Vikas builds partnerships with rural communities in order to address the critical needs of potable water and adequate sanitation, in a manner that is sustainable, socially inclusive, gender equitable, and empowering. Through these partnerships, rural and tribal communities learn how to solve their own development needs through democratic and inclusive self-governing institutions. This approach is called MANTRA (Movement and Action Network for the Transformation of Rural Areas.) Using water and sanitation as an entry point, Gram Vikas works to promote sustainable, gender equitable, and socially inclusive solutions in the areas of education, livelihood and food security, self-governance, natural resource management, infrastructure, and education.

1) Which groups and individuals experience stigmatization?

Gram Vikas' experience in rural Orissa has shown us that **five** groups of individuals can be identified who are directly affected by stigmatization in the implementation of water and sanitation policies. These groups are: the collective poor and marginalised (including tribals, dalits and bonded labourers), children attending school especially adolescent girls, women, the physically challenged and the elderly.

2) How are different groups and individuals affected?

[a] The poor and marginalised in rural areas remain today the victims of the inequitable implementation of water and sanitation policies devised by the Government as well as other agencies. Despite claiming to reach out to the poorest of the poor with multi-crore investment, marginalised villagers are the recipients of only the poorest solutions. A mentality persists whereby the rural poor, who in-fact urgently need a solution to the dire consequences of open defecation and inadequate water supply, are perceived as only deserving of sub-standard services.

Facilities provided by the Government and other agencies are clearly in breach of the minimum standards defined by the UN and place no emphasis on values of dignity, sustainability, equality and usability. Gram Vikas' solution to this is to work with 100% inclusion of all villagers to facilitate the construction of an adequate solution which reflects the real needs of the people.

[b] One responsibility of women, as dictated by rural Indian society, is to haul water for the needs of the family and to cook. If the existing water and sanitation (WATSAN) policies continue to be poorly implemented, women will continue to have to travel long distances for many hours each day to collect water.

The water pumps provided by the Government are inadequate for the population of villages, are often placed still far away from the demand or are completely absent in isolated villages where the need is greatest. The existing schemes and interventions claim to reach out to these communities but experience shows that the most isolated villages remain the most deprived of services.

The drudgery of collecting water for drinking or cooking is prevented when Gram Vikas provides '3 taps' in each home (toilet, kitchen and bathroom taps), supplying water from a locally constructed water tank or well. If a woman is spared this task, she can get more time for leisure and also to undertake other activities, for instance to increase earnings or become active in Self Help Groups. Therefore, the Government's policy implementation is also having an adverse effect on the development of the village unit, with women remaining oppressed, unable to take up leadership roles and help the village in addressing the issues they face.

[c] Children attending schools are also the beneficiaries of sub-standard sanitation facilities and water supply. Toilets units are rarely gender segregated meaning children often are forced to revert to open defecation or wait long hours before relieving themselves. Adolescent girls in search of privacy and dignity drop out at high rates and studies have shown this is a direct consequence of lacking adequate toilet provision. The units themselves in schools are also poorly constructed and once broken, simply remain that way.

Children consequently prefer to defecate outside and no shift in mentality to change such a practice takes place. Such a mind shift takes years of motivational work by NGO's like Gram Vikas so this poor implementation on the behalf on the Government is maintaining the status-quo preventing children to adopt proper sanitation and hygiene habits.

In addition, the GOI's School Sanitation Hygiene Education program (SSHE), which is an integral part of their WATSAN policy, is also poorly implemented rendering the parents and communities in rural areas unable to question the school authorities.

[d] Obvious in all schools and villages is a complete lack of provision for disabled users. This is again in breach of the UN and the GOI's stated minimum requirements. As in schools, disabled facilities remain to be insufficient in number and of inadequate quality. A consequence of this is that disabled users continue to openly defecate in village areas or drop out entirely from education.

[e] The same applies for elderly users of sanitation and water facilities as there also exists a complete lack of provision to meet their needs. Even the basic provision of hand-rails and stools is non-existent so elderly users may stop accessing these facilities and open defecation continues. Communal water sources are polluted and diseases continue to spread.

3) How is stigmatization relevant to access to water and sanitation?

The need for access to water and sanitation in rural areas of Orissa is undervalued by decision makers as villagers in these areas are unable to access or to utilize facilities provided by the GOI's Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC).

With this demand being underappreciated, there is no possibility of improving access beyond what is already available or changing water and sanitation behavioural practices (open defecation in fields

and the utilization of unsafe water). Consequently, villagers continue these practices and the illness rate and death rate, resulting from water borne diseases and poor sanitation remains high.

When the Government or other agencies implement in rural Orissa, the neediest villagers continue to be stigmatized, with the result being poorly constructed, degrading toilet units which villagers do not use. These one off interventions are a quick and easy method for the implementers to claim it is supplying the rural poor with services and to adjust its publicised success rate accordingly. In reality, a much longer term, community-led solution is required. There is no impetus for villagers to take pride in or ownership of these assets and infrastructure falls rapidly into disrepair.

Villagers already of a low social standing, such as tribals and dalits, have been stigmatized and denied of their rights. Thus, the existing strategies by the Government as well as other agencies further alienates them from accessing their right to utilize water and sanitation facilities provided to them, making it even harder for them to actively involve themselves in development processes or demand their rights and entitlements.

4) What measures are being taken to address and overcome stigmatization?

Gram Vikas has pioneered an independent model of implementation referred to as MANTRA (Movement and Action Network for Transformation of Rural Areas). Anything less than 100% consensus, regarding the communal need to transform water and sanitation practices, is achieved the poorest layers of society continue to be stigmatised and WASH related problems continue to hamper development. 100% involvement of each village household, regardless of gender, caste, religion or socio-economic standing, is Gram Vikas' precondition for facilitating its WATSAN program in that location.

Gram Vikas' experience has shown that this is the prerequisite to any effective community work in Orissa and has had great successes in involving all members of a village, with the united community contributing to the success of the program. All villagers contribute either money or labour to the project, thus generating a real sense of ownership and pride in the final construction. Even the poorest members of society are able to pay for the best possible quality solutions. Each village also sets up a corpus fund for regular payments and the generated interest from that fund also creates a static pool of funding for maintenance and future expansion projects. This also gives the project long term sustainability, a quality otherwise overlooked in the WATSAN intervention by the Government or other agencies.

Case Study – 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 Kholla 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 DWCRA 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.

(Other case studies are available in the Annexure)

Gram Vikas targets areas where the need for WATSAN provision is greatest and at the same time the communities are hard-to-reach. The organisation is experienced in mobilising staff that are adept in motivating marginalised communities in highly isolated tribal as well as rural areas which have been left out of mainstream development interventions. Gram Vikas therefore avoids stigmatizing isolated villages by prioritising work in these areas, despite the difficult working conditions and long-term effort required to mobilise and motivate tribal communities.

Gram Vikas' MANTRA programme relies upon the involvement of effective women leadership. By promoting the establishment of SHG groups and ensuring equal representation of men and women in all levels of village decision making, women in all Gram Vikas implemented villages are able to start the process of emancipation and begin to liberate themselves from their traditional responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and hauling water. Due to the provision of 24x7 piped water supply in each household, these activities lose their relevance and women get time to undertake leisure activities and also play a much greater role in the socio-economic development of the village.

Case Study – 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.

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

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.

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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!

(Other case studies are available in the Annexure)

When motivating new villages Gram Vikas conducts detailed needs assessment surveys to identify the specific requirements of each household. Part of this survey includes the identification of disabled users. Gram Vikas helps facilitate a process whereby disabled villagers can attempt to leverage funds from GOI departments and schemes so that water and sanitation facilities can be adapted to their needs. In addition, due to Gram Vikas' 100% inclusion policy, a sense of unity and communal responsibility for addressing the sanitary needs of elderly villagers can be created. Households are capable of cost sharing so that wealthier families can contribute funds to households with elderly members so facilities can be adapted to meet their needs.

Gram Vikas also conducts its own sanitation and hygiene training sessions in government schools, often located close to operational WATSAN villages. Recently, Gram Vikas conducted an action survey to analyse the standard of the GOI's WATSAN provision in Orissa with the goal of using this evidence to advocate change and emphasise the consequences of poor sanitary conditions in schools. Included in this survey were focus group discussions with adolescent girls to further pin point the reasons for the high drop out rate in the state.

Gram Vikas has also established four residential schools in tribal areas where sanitation, hygiene and adolescent development education are given a great emphasis. The water and sanitation facilities provided by Gram Vikas in these schools are in tandem to the needs of the children. The student's academic success and zero drop-out rate amongst adolescent girls is a direct consequence of Gram Vikas' intervention.

Annexure of case studies

1) Overcoming stigmatization in regard to the rural poor/marginalized

Case Study: 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, to be 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.

Case Study: 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 Angarpada. 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 Angarpada, 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.

Angarpada 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 Angarpada 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 Angarpada, 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.

Case Study: 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 set back 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.

2) *Overcoming stigmatization in regard to rural women*

Case Study: 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 Devi.

Case Study: 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.

Case Study: Spiralling 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.