



Strengthening people-led development

A joint effort of local communities, NGOs and donors to redefine participation

MISEREOR
● IHR HILFSWERK



Strengthening people-led development

A joint effort of local communities,
NGOs and donors to redefine participation

© MISEREOR e.V., Mozartstr. 9
52064 Aachen, Germany
September 2010
ISBN: 81-87293-07-1
www.misereor.org

Editorial Team

T M Radha
Jorge Chavez Tafur
Anja Mertineit
Emmanuel Yap

Layout and Design

Beluru Sudarshan, Bangalore

Printed at

Span Print, Bangalore

Publication coordinated by

AME Foundation
204, 100 Ft. Ring Road,
Banashankari, III stage
Bangalore – 560085 – India
www.amefound.org



INTRODUCTION

“We aim at empowering farmers...”

5



Promoting a diverse food culture through people's initiatives

Seema Prasanth

7



Learning exchanges leading to people's empowerment

Sukanta Sen

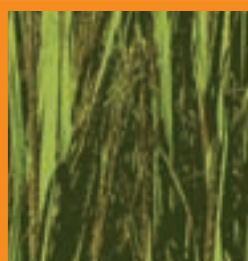
13



Strengthening people - led development processes: a donor's perspective

Anja Mertineit

17



Seeds of empowerment

Biswamohan

22



Staying local for sustaining beekeeping

Nurul Islam

27



There is so much to do!

Interview with Emmanuel Yap

31



Strong village institutions - key to sustainable development

Academy of Development Science

36



Struggle for protecting livelihoods and ecology

Duskar Barik

40



Sustaining participation and scaling up farmer empowerment

Elizabeth Cruzada

44



Sustainable agriculture: Farmers lead the way

Phanindra Sangma

48



Communities manage Orans for protecting their livelihoods

Aman Singh

52

“We aim at empowering farmers..”

One of the most interesting things about working on the documentation of field-level experiences is that you get to know about these experiences in detail. And then you get to see that there are many efforts going on, all over the world, to change the situation in which small-scale farmers, the rural populations, and the least privileged persons are found – and that these efforts are successful. In the media, we regularly hear negative news, and a visitor to rural areas in Asia or elsewhere can easily see that farmers do face many difficulties. But, as this publication shows, the work of many people and organisations is having a very positive impact. This is certainly worth sharing with others.

Positive results and impact, however, cannot be taken for granted. What is the best way to increase yields and incomes? How to improve the way that the world’s resources are managed? And how to ensure that rural communities can assert their rights and participate in local decision making processes? Scholars and practitioners have been struggling with these questions for decades, and new approaches have been presented regularly. Gradually, these new approaches have meant a change from a “transfer of technology” model to a growing number of “participatory” methods and techniques, responding to the general idea that sustainable results can only be achieved if the local population is involved in the process. The successes seen with Farmer Field Schools in different parts of the world, to name just one example, have proved the advantages of helping farmers to get together to discuss and analyse problems, and to come to potential solutions.

Yet “participation” is a tricky concept. Not only can different levels be recognised and described in theory; field practitioners can also see a clear difference between the theory and the practice. During the past few years, different organisations in India and Bangladesh have tried a different approach to development, by giving a new meaning to participation. These are organisations which had been working with the local population for many years, and had been following participatory approaches. Yet they all felt that they were not being as successful as they had expected to be. An analysis of their work showed that, in spite of their interest and commitment, their efforts to “be participatory” were limited to getting people on board of a project designed and approved. Not surprisingly, they were unable to get the results and impact they intended.

These development organisations realised that applying a set of participatory tools was not enough. They had to go through a real, and somehow painful, change, something that was even clearer when comparing their work to that of organisations like MASIPAG (clearly presented by Cruzada on p. 44). More than only a change of methods, this required a change in attitude and action. As donor to these organisations, MISEREOR played a key role in facilitating this change process, giving special attention to a reflection process and to a thorough analysis of the approaches followed in the field. This meant examining their work and the relationships established with the population, and helping them all share their experiences. This analysis helped the organisations involved to draw up clear lessons. But the process which started a few years ago was also one from which MISEREOR drew many lessons regarding their work and responsibilities as donors (see p. 17). The process helped them to see that the role of donors goes beyond providing financial support only.

Defining a new approach is never an easy process. As some of the articles show, team members had to start by unlearning what they had learned before, and to recognise the difference between being (and behaving like) an outside expert and a process facilitator (see, for example, Prasanth, p. 7). At the same time, they also had to assign sufficient time and resources to a process which was not sure to deliver measurable results. They all faced difficulties, ranging from high staff turnover rates to discrepancies (and serious conflicts) with the local authorities. Yet they have all been able to show the benefits of a truly participatory approach. In some cases, the results are evident in terms of food diversity and the reintroduction of local seeds, as is shown by Sangma (p. 48). A strong focus on the interests and concerns of the population with whom they are working led to many exchange processes between different groups. The exchange of seeds which takes place in the “seed fairs” described by Biswamohan (p. 22) led to “new” crops being grown in different areas – but, most importantly, they have led to a widespread exchange of ideas and opinions, directly contributing to the generation of new knowledge.

The pages that follow show the results of the documentation process that started in 2009, trying to capture the essence of the changes seen in these organisations, and of the impact this has had. Naturally, the following pages only show a small part of all the activities which took place during the past few years in different countries and districts, with different local groups and on different topics. Yet they all show how, in different locations and under different situations, development organisations can be more effective. They show the advantages of having a team that facilitates a process, or of organising farmer-to-farmer exchanges. They show that a people-led development process does not only help increase yields or conserve the local biodiversity; it can also help farmers to get access to the resources they need, and can contribute to strengthening local organisations, networks and alliances (as shown, for example, by Barik on p. 40). Most important of all, the work of the Indian and Bangladeshi organisations, and all of those who were part of these processes, has shown that it leads to empowerment.

JORGE CHAVEZ-TAFUR

ILEIA

Centre for learning on sustainable agriculture
Amersfoort, the Netherlands

Process behind the document

MISEREOR's Asia Department has been supporting partner organizations in South Asia in strengthening people-led development, since 2004. More than five years of supporting people-led development processes has many learnings. Partner organisations, both in India and in Bangladesh, have expressed great satisfaction in terms of enhanced staff capacities and, more importantly, in empowering the local communities. It was critical to consolidate learnings, enable reflection as well as share with others working on similar issues. For this purpose, MISEREOR collaborated with ILEIA (The Netherlands) and AME Foundation (India).

The process was initiated almost a year ago starting with two documentation workshops in Mymensingh (Bangladesh) and Orissa (India). The week long intensive and participatory workshops brought together field based practitioners from partner organisations Caritas, BARCIK, BIA, ORRISSA, DULAL and KIRDTI and a few farmers. The workshops were facilitated to enable partners reflect on their experiences in following a people-led development process. Two partner NGOs from India, KRAPAVIS and ADS, joined the process at a later stage.

Each partner had a lot to share. Though every bit of detail was interesting, it was practically impossible to include everything in this document. There was a need to build their capacities to prioritise, articulate and write what was necessary. Another round of visit to each partner, guided discussions and regular online support thereafter, helped partners prepare the draft documents. With these processes, the effort was to create a document which reflects the field perspective as perceived by the partner organisations.

A number of individuals contributed immensely in enriching as well as adding different perspectives to the document. While Anja Merteneit from MISEREOR's Asia Department provided the donor perspective, Emmanuel Yap, Consultant to MISEREOR, who has been guiding the process in the field, brought in a lot of process elements. Also MISEREOR, ILEIA and AME Foundation have contributed to the document by providing inputs and feedback.

An outcome of an elaborate participatory process, this document reflects the innovative spirit of the communities, the ability of the partners not only to facilitate such processes but share it effectively to help those interested in such people-centered processes.

T M Radha

AME Foundation
Bangalore, India

Promoting a diverse food culture through people's initiatives

The Campaign on Food Sovereignty in Mayurbhanj

Seema Prasanth



A woman displays stored maize seeds

Believing that people have knowledge, giving due recognition to that knowledge, creating platforms to share and strengthening their capacities is what DULAL has supported by facilitating a people-centered development process. Farmers with renewed confidence are going back to their traditional systems of farming ensuring food and nutrition security for the households. Empowered farmers, today, are in a position to lead campaigns, meetings, rallies and food festivals promoting the establishment of sustainable food production systems.



Displaying diverse millet seeds

Santal, Ho and Bhathudi, are three tribal communities of the Mayurbhanj district in Orissa, India which like many others depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihoods. Traditionally, farmers in this millet growing region have been practising traditional methods of agriculture. Millets are the major food source with wild foods collected from the adjoining forest area, adding to the food diversity of these tribal communities.

During the sixties, the government introduced high yielding varieties of paddy though the lands were not suitable for paddy cultivation. The lure of high yields and the subsidy component attracted a number of farmers to opt for paddy cropping. Gradually the millets were replaced. Over the years the paddy yields started declining. Also people started having easy access to 'hand-out' food from the Public Distribution System (PDS)¹ run by the central government. All this resulted in the neglect of locally grown food crops, the consequences being reduced diversity of food and increasing insecurity.

To help the local communities address their problems collectively, DULAL, a local development organisation, started working with these tribal communities since 1987. Informal groups were formed and some health programmes were initiated. Women came together to share their problems and find solutions and in the process also developed collective savings. Later some income generating activities were initiated with and without the support of the government.

Need for a new approach

In 2002-03 DULAL promoted fruit trees on the waste lands, popularly known as the Badi model. We were happy that the farmers willingly

¹ The Indian Public Distribution System (PDS) is a national food security system that facilitates supply of food grains to the poor at a subsidized price.

participated in the programme and also reaped good benefits. The programme was also rated as 'successful' in terms of its coverage and impact. But very soon we realised that the communities had merely implemented certain activities (like digging pits and planting) and they did so for receiving direct payments. As a result we found that the people had no sense of ownership for what they did and continued as long as the project support was provided. This set us to think and reflect.

We realised that in implementing programmes, we were focusing more on reaching targets and the organisation interests over- rode people's interests. The demands of funding agencies to see tangible results often resulted in focusing on achieving 'targets'. Often our reports had to bear the crude statistical achievements when the people had actually achieved a lot. The activity plans were prepared by the

Seed multiplication

In 2007-08, around 16 farmers started varietal trials on small patches of land. Uneven distribution of rainfall affected sowing and also yields. But the farmers were bold and experimental enough to continue trial cultivation (especially the older farmers). By 2009, already 155 farmers were cultivating several varieties of millet like Jowar, Khado, Gundulu, Mandia, and Kheri that had not been cultivated for over 20 years. The number of millet varieties being grown has expanded to nine, tubers to five, and 22 different leafy vegetables have been identified for cultivation. The practice of seed purification by seed selection, which was abandoned for more than two decades, was taken up again.



The process gave us the opportunity to be more aware and learn many things. We are inviting more people to join us in this process.

- Mr. Chotray Baskey, Dhobanijoda village.



technical people on behalf of the local communities and they were implemented as per the plans. Rigid plans and frameworks failed to foster people's participation and to nurture farmer innovations. Our staff was most often 'providing solutions' rather than understanding communities' needs and priorities. We were sure that we needed a shift in our thinking, strategy and approach.

We held a number of meetings and discussions with farmers as well as with our own staff. These reflection sessions, most often guided by Emmanuel Yap, Consultant to MISEREOR, helped us to arrive at certain agreements-that the projects needed to be built on community resources and should not be based on a typical development model; that it was not fair on the part of the staff or the 'experts' who had never done farming in their life, to have to 'advise' farmers; staff needed to be 'facilitators' instead of 'solution providers'. These discussions helped us to re-orient our work on the concept of development itself.

A series of workshops were held at different places in India and Bangladesh with a number of other NGO and with farmers, enabling deeper exchanges on the concept. In one of the workshops, we looked at the main issues and concerns related to the Badi model. For the first time, farmers' views on how to replicate and sustain the gains from this model were taken into account. Interestingly, farmers came out with a number of suggestions, mentioning, for example, that beneficiaries could become trainers; that they could develop a corpus fund to help members buy saplings, meet the training costs; and enable other farmers to raise vegetables and pulses to prevent grazing.

These ideas were integrated into the Badi model and the results were

Traditional food made from millets and yam is being shared during a food festival



A protest rally against BT Brinjal in Jashipur

Diverse foods and plants displayed in a village celebration in Biso



Local seed exchanges

Farmers are on the path of regaining many of the seeds that they had lost. Around 1020 seed exchanges have taken place at a village, district and state level since 2006, all of which have enabled farmers to get back some seeds that were lost from their area. Farmers also set up seed banks in the villages to conserve the traditional varieties. More than 1025 farmers initiated individual seed banks in 225 villages.

amazing. Farmers started intercropping tubers, sobai grass, paddy, pulses, vegetables, millets, and also oil seeds in the Badi. They started exchanging seeds and also collecting and cultivating lost food varieties in the area. This brought 'life' to the programme and farmers enthusiastically took care of their Badi plantations.

The success of the 'improved' Badi models instilled a lot of confidence in the staff to carry forward its new development processes. Staff members were trained to be 'facilitators'. More importantly, they were made to understand the village economy and the role of indigenous knowledge in day-to-day life. With this new orientation, the Food Sovereignty campaign was launched with the aim of empowering people to lead the process of attaining food sovereignty. With this campaign, DULAL initiated a genuine people-led development process (PLDP).

Regaining crop and food diversity

Farmers took the initiative to organise meetings at village squares. They started sharing what they were cultivating, the inputs used and the yields obtained. The farmers shared how they were compelled to use chemicals and more water to get good yields from the high yielding varieties of paddy seeds supplied by the government. They then analyzed the cost of cultivation, understanding how it was lower in the earlier days.

To have a better understanding of the people-led development processes, exposure visits were organised to farmer groups (women, elders, youth) in various places within the district and the state. Visits to farmer groups in Bangladesh and Thailand, where farmers have been through a similar process for a longer period, were also organised. All these events led to an increasing exchange of information and debates on traditional seeds, farming systems, diverse food and their cultural practices.

Farmer exchange sessions in the villages of the Kuliana, Bangriposi, Bisoi and Saraskana blocks helped in analysing various related aspects like the seasonality of crop production, the households' average income and expenditures, and the periods of food security and scarcity. As part of this process, people identified the resources available and also looked at how they were being used. Communities carried out seed mapping exercises. All members of the community were resource persons in the process: the young and old, the men

and women. They made a seasonal calendar. This analysis helped people to understand the 'busy periods' and the 'leisure periods' in cultivation, and led to a better time planning. The seed mapping exercises brought out that over a period of two decades the millets like Jowar, Khado, Gundulu, Mandia, and Kheri got replaced by crops like paddy. This meant that the village was losing its food diversity.

To bring back the food diversity farmers decided to include millets back into their cropping systems. But reviving millet cultivation was a challenge, since very few farmers were still cultivating these varieties, and it was hard to find the millet seeds. Farmers started collecting lost seed varieties of food crops from other farmers, sometimes travelling to remote villages where traditional cultivation was still alive. Some farmers collected seeds from fellow farmers during their exposure visits.

But the seeds of these traditional varieties were not many, so they had to be multiplied. Moreover, some desirable traits suitable to local conditions had to be integrated. All this meant that farmers had to start a seed selection and breeding process, and so they set up systematic field trials. This was supplemented by organising seed exchanges and setting up seed banks (see box, Page 10).

All these efforts yielded many positive results. Crop diversification increased. Farmers started cultivating different crop varieties on a single land. Farmers are following mixed cropping and rotational cropping methods, and some became really innovative: for instance, one farmer in the Kusumi block managed to grow 92 varieties of crops on his 1.5 acres land! Many farmers have totally 'brought back' the traditional farming systems and are offering live labs for others to observe. The cultivation of millets is providing nutritious food to the

Awareness rally on GM food at Bangriposi, 2009



Farmers presenting a petition to prevent cultivation of BT Brinjal to the Minister of Environment and Forests



households and also fodder for the cattle. Farmers have also started cultivating some wild varieties of food crops and have broadened their food basket. Seed storage systems that were limited to a few varieties of paddy grains have expanded too. Now, many varieties of pulses, millets, tubers and vegetables are also being stored in the seed banks. With the availability of local varieties, the number of farmers buying seeds of input-dependant, high yielding varieties from the market reduced considerably.

Communities take the lead

Initially, DULAL organised awareness campaigns on various issues like the impact of GM crops and the negative impacts of chemical use. Gradually, farmers started joining the process and began to take initiative in the organisation of sensitization campaigns, rallies, village food/seed analysis and crop planning. Farmer leaders in each of the 210 villages in the region organised farmers' workshops on the issue of food sovereignty. Communities organised nine pada yatras (Foot March) to sensitize the larger population on food sovereignty issues. Four role plays on the ill effects of modern seeds were organised in four villages. Many of the issues related to crop cultivation were discussed. All events were entirely organised by the local communities.

Linkages established with experienced advocacy groups at the regional level provided a better understanding of the larger issues. Communities started getting involved in protests and campaigns. Three major protest rallies against GM seeds were organised in the Bangriposi, Bisoil and Saraskana blocks by the women groups and farmer groups. The whole effort was conceived and organised by the



Bisoil women worship local seeds helping in their conservation

people. More importantly, the women took leadership in organising these activities. Such people-centered activities have resulted in wide spread awareness building on issues affecting the local communities.

Local communities have found different ways to celebrate and encourage traditional and diverse food habits. For instance, if a farmer cultivated millets and had a good harvest, he/she would organise a food festival in which many different dishes made from millets would be prepared and served to the villagers. Besides 35 village level food festivals, eight such festivals were organised at the district and block level during 2007-09. The food festivals have revived the celebrations of these customs with new vigour in the tribal villages.

Upscaling PLDP

People-led development processes are more empowering and inclusive. We found that there can be no limits either on the geographic coverage or in the number of people we could reach with this process. We see the 'food sovereignty campaign' which has spread to 57 villages across seven blocks in Mayurbhanj district as just a beginning.

Having got convinced with people-led development processes, we have been integrating this process in other donor supported programmes as well. For example NABARD, a premier financial institution supporting our programme, is convinced about this process. We have also been discussing with several government departments on the need to adopt this approach.

People empowering processes are often long drawn processes requiring support. MISEREOR has been very supportive not only as a donor but also as a facilitating partner. Moreover, our staff has been very supportive in helping us to integrate this approach smoothly. However, their understanding needs to go beyond promoting sustainable agriculture if this process has to become truly people-led.

We also recognize that the organisational policies and the time required for understanding the concept as well as its implementation are a few challenges in spreading this process. Also, in the absence of a widespread awareness on this approach as a means to facilitate people's empowerment, the chances of the movement being used as a political tool are very high.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper has been possible with the kind support of the adivasi communities of Mayurbhanj and the DULAL team. We gratefully acknowledge their support.

SEEMA PRASANTH

DULAL

Convent Road, Baripada P.O.

Mayurbhanj District, Orissa - 757001, India

Website: www.dulal.in

E-mail: dulalbaripada@yahoo.co.in
dulalorissa@gmail.com



Farmers exchanging experiences

Learning exchanges leading to people's empowerment

Sukanta Sen



A village seed fair

Supporting people-led development processes results in a truly learning experience not only for farmers but also the various stakeholders involved in the project. While knowledge exchange and reflection processes are the main strengths of such an approach, the flexibility in implementing the approach is all the more important for facilitating such a people empowerment process.

Traditionally, farmers in Bangladesh have been practicing a nature friendly and self sustainable agriculture. In spite of the Green Revolution which made farmers dependant on external inputs, we can still find many groups of farmers who are committed to conserving the biodiversity through their traditional wisdom. BARCIK, a community based organisation, has been working on this undying spirit of these farmers.

Agro-ecology, local biodiversity and indigenous knowledge have been the core issues concerning BARCIK's work since its inception in 1977. Also by promoting advocacy on rights of indigenous people and indigenous knowledge, BARCIK has been a committed partner in promoting environmentally sound sustainable livelihoods.

In 2001, with the support of MISEREOR, we started working on the field, directly with the local communities. We first wanted to know and understand the practices they adopted for using the resources, sustainably. We started discussing with groups of farmers about their agricultural practices. A number of micro-credit recipient groups, which had sprouted owing to microfinance programmes by other

organisations, came in handy for us to conduct our group discussions. Thus we documented a number of their indigenous practices.

Most of the group members were dependant on agriculture; as such the process gave us an opportunity to understand many issues revolving around agriculture-like issues of livelihoods, indigenous practices, land ownership, etc. More importantly, it helped us form a farmer centered perspective with farmer as an integral focus of all development interventions. With this perspective we decided to expand our activities to include field work.

Genesis of a people-led development process

Prior to actual implementation of our field work, we had discussions and deliberations on people-led development processes (PLDP) with a clear focus on sustainable agriculture, with MISEREOR and another partner, CARITAS Bangladesh, during a 3-day workshop. The workshop provided an opportunity to know about a number of people's initiatives across regions. Of them, the experience of MASIPAG, a Philippines based NGO, on farmer-led processes truly inspired us. And our subsequent visit to MASIPAG in Philippines helped us gain deeper understanding about people's empowerment process and the role people could play in conserving agro biodiversity.

In 2005, we started working with the farmers applying the learnings from the MASIPAG visit. We helped them follow agro-biodiversity conservation practices like breeding and multiplication of local varieties. Processes like participatory varietal selection (PVS), multiplication and breeding were taken up by the communities with BARCIK playing a facilitative role. We found that this process allowed the farmers take responsibility and control over the processes. It also enabled farmers to share, discuss and decide on their own what they wanted to do and also own most of the processes as well as the results.

For us, this process was more comfortable than implementing project bound activities. Also as an organisation working on participatory processes, we found this process much easier to facilitate. We also felt that by adapting this process, the dissemination of practices was much easier and faster, less expensive; and strengthened networking, building synergies among farmers.

Facilitating farmer to farmer exchange

Farmer to farmer exchange continues to be the most effective way of knowledge exchange, even to this day. This traditional way of exchanging information has helped many small-scale farmers, owning small pieces of land keep their farming going.

We facilitated this process in two ways. On one hand, we organised several exposure and exchange visits to our farmers to other areas. On the other hand, we invited many farmers and like minded NGOs from other regions to our area to learn. For instance, the BARCIK field sites were visited by MISEREOR partners like the NGO Forum, Samakal, Satkhira Unnayan Sangstha (SUS), Nabin Palli Unnayan Sangstha (NPUS), CARITAS Bangladesh, Society for Biodiversity Conservation (SBC), Bangladesh Institute of Apiculture (BIA), ROSA, Dipshikha, Uttaran, Bangladesh Nari Progoti Sangha (BNPS), ASOP,

Farmers select locally adaptable varieties



Getting trained in breeding rice plants

The vast area of the coastal belt covering Pirozpur and Barguna is characterized by frequent tidal waves increasing salinity in the region. Farmers in the region have no salinity resistant paddy varieties to grow. Farmers of Mathbaria conducted a varietal trial with 15 Aus¹ varieties. They observed that saline water intruded during the Aila cyclone and fields were with stagnated water for 15 days increasing the saline conditions. Only 3 varieties *Khaisa Binni*, *Puitta Eyejong* and *Bogi* survived. Of these three, farmers selected *Khaisa Binni* and *Puitta Eyejong* as the suitable varieties. And *Bogi* was not preferred by farmers as it was a lodging type.

¹ It is a pre-monsoon, crop growing season in Bangladesh.

Building self - reliance

In November 2007, farmers in the Pirojpur and Barguna districts were severely hit by the cyclone Sidr. A number of organisations started working with the communities providing relief. Along with their property, farmers lost several rice seeds. Large NGOs like BRAC, Proshika and Gono Sasthya distributed hybrid seeds for better production. We felt that we had to do something beyond providing relief and hybrid seeds, as these were only temporary measures. We were keen on rehabilitating the farmers by enriching their agriculture. We supplied local seeds and helped farmers to multiply them so that they did no longer depend on external sources for seeds. Within a year, 85 farmers in two villages shared their seeds among themselves. They became self reliant and did not need to buy seeds in the second year.

- I collected 10 kgs. seeds from BARCIK and planted in my land (66 decimals). I got 1050 kgs (28 mounds) and could share 10 kgs. of seeds with another farmer and am prepared to share seeds free of cost.

- Motaleb Khalifa, a farmer from Madartali village

- After Sidr, there were number of NGOs that came to support us, but I found BARCIK different. Whatever they said in the initial meeting they have carried out. Their work has been very beneficial to the farmers. I am really surprised, how an NGO within a short time can mobilise large number of farmers with only 2 staff and little funds.

- Shahjahan, member of Tikharkhali village

Sachetan, Unnayan Prochesta, Gandhi Ashram Trust from Bangladesh and SECARD and Lumanthi of Nepal. These exchange visits resulted in deeper understanding about people-led development processes within our own organisation. It also led to a firm conviction that 'people' are central to the development process and that they can lead the process, as well.

Field days, organised after each crop harvest, provide an opportunity for farmers to interact and exchange experiences. With enriched awareness, farmers try out the practices on their farms, making necessary corrections suitable to their locations. In our opinion, this adaptation done by the farmers is important as it reflects their interest and involvement in the farming process. Creating opportunities which foster such adaptations and innovations is crucial in instilling a sense of ownership in farmers and enable them lead the development processes.

Participatory processes leading to programme flexibility

Continuous participatory review processes in our programme have enabled people to identify strengths and gaps in the programme and act accordingly. It has given the space for making changes based on the programme development and people's needs at specific intervals. As people are involved in the review process, they also have solutions to address some specific problems with available local resources. This process therefore is constantly evolving and does not follow a rigid framework. For example, we did have some budget to provide seeds for the farmers in the Sidr cyclone affected area for the second year. But farmers did not need this support from us as they had shared seeds that they had produced during the previous year. People discussed and decided that the money allotted to seed could be used for a different purpose. With the consent from MISEREOR, we quickly reorganised the budget and they used the funds for strengthening farmer networking activities. The flexibility provided by the donor in reorganizing and readjusting the programme based on the needs

of the communities is one of the greatest gains of following a PLD process. In our opinion, this is an important contribution by a donor agency like MISEREOR, not forcing us to follow a rigid framework. And this type of support, in our experience, is much more sustainable.

Role of Donor - critical to process development

Donor supported projects and their outcomes are time bound. It is a common experience that the moment the donor winds up support, the project closes and the benefits are not sustainable. This is largely owing to a lack of emphasis on participatory processes, particularly by the donor agencies that are away from the field and more keen on the outputs.

However, the experience of working with MISEREOR has been different. MISEREOR has played a supportive role. It has been a facilitating partner rather than a donor. Being an active partner in the people development processes has enabled MISEREOR to be in constant touch with the ground realities providing flexibility to the implementation aspects. This, in our opinion, is most crucial for implementing agencies to perform effectively.

Way forward

People are the primary stakeholders and they have a better understanding and knowledge of their situations than most of us. A people-led development process is based on this philosophy wherein knowledge exchange and reflection processes are the main strengths. This process results in a truly learning experience - not only for farmers but also the various actors/stakeholders involved in the project.

The process, which is less resource intensive, is applicable irrespective of the development issues being addressed. A partner NGO implementing a micro-credit programme for a decade, which was earlier spending its energies in collecting repayments, is now spending more time discussing with the communities. We have



I have been working in this upazilla for the past ten years but have never seen people willing to speak to me. Instead they were afraid thinking that I was only there to collect their loan repayments. But after joining BARCIK in July 2008, and following a new approach, I see a lot of change in the way I am treated by the communities. They come to me as a friend and discuss their concerns. They call me a “brother” and I like it very much.

Md. Wahed, BARCIK staff, Netrakona.



Facilitating People’s NAPA

Along with a few more organisations, BARCIK initiated a participatory review of the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA). It was formulated and submitted to UNFCCC in November 2005 by the Government of Bangladesh.

Our review report was based on our understanding of the policy level issues as well as of the ground realities. Several strategic documents were studied. We made several visits to the field sites located in different agro-ecological zones in Bangladesh. We discussed about the local situation and the community practices with individual farmers, fishermen, traditional honey and crab collectors, members of local elected bodies, teachers, students, journalists, government departments and local administrators. The draft report on the local situation and people’s recommendations were made at the district level with multi-stakeholder workshops held in 7 field sites.

Upon this review we understood that the NAPA document was prepared solely by a group of experts and failed to consider the local communities understanding, their experiences and observations. No local level consultations were held with the user groups, and communities were considered as secondary stakeholders. The document had ignored the local adaptation and mitigation strategies of communities to climate change. While pointing out the gaps, we also demonstrated as to how to prepare a People’s NAPA involving multiple stakeholders (local elected bodies etc.). We brought out strongly the need to integrate people’s practices and initiatives in developing such documents.

Trying out different crop varieties

been instrumental in bringing about this change. The results are encouraging and motivate us to continue spreading the people-led development process.

SUKANTA SEN

BARCIK

House # 50, Road # 27, Dhanmondi R/A

Dhaka 1209, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Website: www.barcikbd.org

E-mail: barcik@bdonline.com

Strengthening people-led development processes: a donor's perspective

Anja Mertineit

Only self-reliant communities who control their resources and participate in local decision making process have the potential to create changes that go beyond the local project level. This can be best achieved by facilitating people-led development processes, which calls for a shift in the way development agencies address these issues. Open communication, peer learning and creating spaces for experiential learning are the important elements of such development approaches. And, MISEREOR has been supporting such development initiatives with tremendous impacts on the community level.



Visitors observing the trial fields of traditional varieties

MISEREOR was founded in 1958 by the German Catholic Bishops' Conference, with the clear objective of fighting the causes of hardship and misery, and to promote justice, freedom, reconciliation and peace in the world. Since then, MISEREOR has been supporting projects and promoting local initiatives in the partner countries, irrespective of ethnic origin, religion or gender. In our philosophy, people are in the centre of every development activity. We strongly believe that financial transfers alone do not guarantee development. On the contrary, subsidies might even hinder or destroy local initiatives, and can create dependency in beneficiaries' mentality and attitude. For MISEREOR, supporting development processes, therefore, means to invest in people - investing in the staff of our partner organisations as competent facilitators of development processes, and in the empowerment of local communities.

What does this mean in terms of our work in Asia? A great number of projects supported by MISEREOR in the different Asian countries either focus on sustainable land-use, or on integrated land-use components. By supporting sustainable land-use initiatives, MISEREOR and its partner organisations expect impacts at different levels:

- improved and sustainable agricultural productivity as well as income generation, as a means to achieve food security and sustainable livelihoods;
- sustainable management of natural resources as a means to protect and conserve biodiversity; and, last but not least,
- strong self-organisation and empowerment, as a means for people to (re)gain control over resources, to participate in decision-making processes, and to claim their rights.

The 'project business'

Project proposals and progress reports, in the same way as evaluations and field visits, often show that many of our partners attempt to implement a participatory approach to promote ownership and sustainability. But there is still scope for improvement. We see their difficulty to communicate in a spirit of respect and partnership with their so-called 'target group'. Sometimes development workers (and this is true for local and international staff) tend to see themselves as knowledge brokers, reflecting the mainstream thinking that underpins training, research and advisory services in many countries.

These days it is not uncommon that NGOs propose development projects - which are designed based on their understanding of development problems - to donors. Once these projects are approved and get funding, the NGOs try to get the local people on board. Projects often secure the participation of the local people by enabling their participation in training events or by providing subsidies. People participate in the activities proposed by the NGO and in many cases make even a financial contribution themselves in order to qualify for at least this kind of support. And, these subsidies too often divert attention from the genuine interests of the communities. Furthermore, these projects hinder the implementation of locally adapted solutions that are sustainable and replicable.

What is wrong with this kind of development practice? If we agree that commitment and a sense of ownership of local people are the

main ingredients for empowerment, sustainable development and up-scaling effects, it is obvious that the procedures described above do not bring about the expected results.

To address this problem, many development practitioners and social scientists have tried to develop tools and instruments to help NGO staff foster participation and local ownership. However, each participatory tool is not more than an instrument to catalyse reflection and discussion. If the person applying this tool does not have the necessary understanding or communication skills, this can lead to well drawn maps and charts, but does not lead to the reflection process, defeating the basic purpose of using these tools.

We realised that, by approving specific budget items for the projects (like seed money or equipment, one time training sessions or even training centres), MISEREOR has been helping our partner organisations operate in ways that do not always promote, and may in fact hinder, a real sense of ownership on the part of the communities.

MISEREOR's decision to focus on people-led development processes

Against this background, a reflection process on how MISEREOR and our partner NGOs can strengthen a people-led development became an important issue.

NGO driven agricultural training and extension

Many NGOs and farmer groups realised that the Green Revolution type of agriculture is neither ecologically sustainable, nor economically viable. Especially for landless and small-scale farmers, capital intensive agriculture almost always leads to indebtedness.

Most of the projects promoting sustainable agriculture changed to some extent the perception of agricultural production systems, but unfortunately they copied the extension and training approach which is based on external expert knowledge. Although the content of training and extension has changed, farmers in most cases are still treated as passive receivers of technology. In practice, NGOs promote what they think is 'sustainable agriculture', often as a package solution, and without understanding the actual land-use practices of the local farmers. Many provide short-term training on specific agricultural issues. Some offer subsidies for specific inputs (such as seeds and equipment), since they experience that the farmers are not ready to invest on their own in the activities promoted by the NGO. In some cases, they even establish well-equipped demonstration farms. Such a stereotyped training and extension approach, relying on scientific research and not being adapted to the local conditions and the needs and means of the farmers, generally results in low adoption rates and a limited understanding of sustainable agriculture.



Opportunities in strengthening people-led development in agriculture

People-led processes should begin with a local initiative, with the NGO serving as catalyst. In the beginning, the re-confirmation of traditional knowledge motivates farmers, especially women, since their knowledge is 'officially' appreciated. Informal gatherings often lead to enthusiastic discussions. In this way, working on traditional/indigenous knowledge of local biodiversity and technologies can be an entry point for people's empowerment, recognising and strengthening the identity of those who maintain that knowledge.

MASIPAG, one of our partner organisations in the Philippines, has shown that development processes can be led by the local people (see page 44). Supported by NGO staff and scientists, the MASIPAG farmers participate actively in the organisation's governance and programmes. Farmers are guiding the organisation's activities. They act as trainers, researchers, or facilitators. They do advocacy work and influence local politics. The sense of ownership of the organisation and the will to provide time and energy is very strong, based on a spirit of solidarity and commitment to the communities. We were therefore interested in sharing this approach with other partner organisations, helping to facilitate a joint learning and reflection process.

It was evident that MISEREOR cannot facilitate a dialogue on people-led development on the basis of e-mail communication and short on-the-spot visits. How could we acquire a well founded understanding of the field realities after a short visit on the site, if the communication between communities and NGO staff itself is already challenging? Establishing direct communications between MISEREOR and the local organisations was in most cases not an option either.

Since 2004 we have had the chance to co-operate with Emmanuel (Manny) Yap, our Belgian-Filipino consultant, an expert on grassroots-driven processes. The idea was to help MISEREOR partners to critically examine their own work and their role vis-à-vis the local communities, and together to develop new approaches where necessary.

Through discussions and workshops, Manny Yap started several processes of mutual learning and sharing of experiences among some of MISEREOR's partner organisations and the people they work with. He has helped our staff to acquire a deeper understanding and appreciation of participatory processes, and of the roles played by the local communities, the NGO staff and MISEREOR.

The partner organisations which have participated in the process are most diverse (small and large, Church-based and secular,

grassroots and intermediary organisations), and they work in various sectors (agriculture, apiculture, animal husbandry, etc.). For the overwhelming majority, the advisory process has been a key element in setting their work on a new course. This has all triggered dynamic local activities with great motivational thrust.

The main outcomes, impacts and lessons learned, elicited at evaluation workshops and discussions can be seen at different levels:

Changes in local communities

A dialogue between NGO staff and communities which is characterised by respect and partnership has enabled and motivated the local people to articulate their interests clearly, to become aware of their strengths, and to pursue initiatives spontaneously.

Traditional knowledge is generally a key factor in this respect. Valuing local knowledge, and recognising genuine expertise, makes more people participate more actively in the project's process, and these participants are also prepared to pass on their knowledge to other communities. It is important to emphasise the high level of participation by women and also by the deprived indigenous groups. These people are often the keepers of traditional knowledge, and through the process their expertise is valued once again.

People involved in the process have acquired confidence and are more aware of their own capacities. Participants have actively and constructively criticised projects and convinced MISEREOR's partner NGOs that low cost and locally adapted solutions on a modest scale



Today, people approach me because they are interested in my traditional knowledge. This is completely new for me, because in the past, we were considered as backward and our knowledge and customs were seen as old-fashioned.

An aged *adivasi* leader in Orissa





Farmer-led research is based on farmer-driven trials of low-cost, low-risk, yet profitable farming systems which will be most appropriate to the farmers' needs and interests. It is based on on-farm research and innovations (in farmers' landholdings). According to the results of their own learning and analysis, farmers themselves are proposing methodologies, collecting data and presenting the results of their research to fellow farmers in the community or even to the scientific communities and policy makers. In this way, farmers are able to influence scientists to make research relevant to the realities of farmers' lives, and to influence government policies in support of sustainable agriculture.

Farmers can either verify and localise sustainable agriculture systems and technologies learnt from others (farmers or scientists), or they themselves develop traditional systems further and come up with own innovations. The role of scientists and NGOs is the one of being a partner to a farmer, who is respected as an expert, too.

have changed completely. I had to un-learn what I had learned so far. I can now learn from the people. I do no longer have to explain and know everything. In a way, I am more relaxed now.'

Staff of an NGO partner in Bangladesh



are often more sustainable than those proposed and financed by the NGOs.

We feel that the recognition of people's knowledge should not lead to a devaluation of the introduction of new technologies, practices and knowledge. This can often provide new ideas for useful innovations. However, empowered people are confident enough to critically examine any new input and decide whether they can use, adapt or reject it. They no longer feel obliged to 'swallow' expert knowledge provided by external trainers.

Through the exchanges of experience organised within the process, some community members have been encouraged to act independently of financial and facilitation support. As a matter of fact, people in the different communities, especially women, have become very active and the level of initiative and empowerment is tremendous. They have, for example, implemented seed trials on their own. Furthermore, they have made contact with other groups and solved long lasting conflicts on their own. And they have organised and financed seed festivals that were previously staged and implemented by NGOs.

Changes in the NGOs

Taking a closer look at the staff of the partner organisations, we see that they also realise that they have to learn to play the role of a facilitator (involving a rethinking of their previous practice). This means: recognising the knowledge local people have, and forming an accurate picture of the life situation and specific potentials of the people; promoting the generation of knowledge instead of just transferring information (learning to learn); and thus developing solutions together with the community, instead of offering off-the-shelf solutions.

In the everyday work context, this 'new' communication process means entering into a dialogue in a spirit of partnership with the communities. At the same time, it lifts the burden of always having to have 'expert' answers at hand. Instead, it sharpens the skills of the communities in the area of observation and decision making. And it helps to develop their capability for critical thinking.

However, the many positive results should not deceive us into

thinking that this is an easy process for the partner organisations. The re-learning by individual staff members is just one aspect: they need the support of the entire organisation, for which all staff members have to be convinced.

The modified project architecture, which is linked to the changed role of the NGOs, leaves less room for NGO-centred services, and probably leads to less money and to a diminished influence of the NGO on the process. Instead of training and infrastructure, our partner organisations request funds, for example, for locally spearheaded advocacy campaigns, or for locally organised seed and biodiversity fairs.

The changes for MISEREOR

For MISEREOR staff, the changes seen in the attitudes of the NGO staff when dealing and communicating with communities, as well as their readiness to reconsider their role, has become visible in reports, project applications, joint workshops and project missions.

Obviously, our partners' focus on strengthening people-led development processes, rather than on implementing pre-conceived 'blueprint' projects, has a number of implications on our administration and on our daily work. A more process-oriented work needs flexibility on both sides: the actual project implementation may differ a lot from what was presented in the original plans, and the budget planning might need re-adjustment.

In order to create space for mistakes and failures as sources of learning and improvement, we have to build close relationships with

Farmer-led training and extension is based on farmers' capacities and skills: their experiences are shared from farmer to farmer or from group to group. Such a system is low-cost, recognises and encourages local and indigenous knowledge and is sustainable. The role of NGOs is that of a facilitator of experiential learning for farmers, and of merging farmers' experience in sustainable agriculture with science. Experienced farmers, men and women, act as resource persons in workshops or invite others to their fields for exposure.

the partner NGOs involved in the process, based on mutual trust and confidence. Through his confidence-building and supportive approach, Manny Yap has succeeded in creating a positive learning environment. This has allayed the fears of partner organisations and enabled them to address even sensitive issues. With his support, we have been able to establish a more open dialogue among NGO partners and MISEREOR staff.

Today, the process is well established with partners in Bangladesh and in some parts of India. It has already taken off in Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar and Kenya, and is planned for Cambodia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tanzania. It directly involves around 20 partner organisations and 3 partner networks. Indirectly, through the partners' networks, it reaches about 40 additional organisations. We are aware that engaging in such processes calls for rather long term partnerships. As a prerequisite, such a reflection and re-orientation process needs a full commitment of the partner NGO as well. The results of the consultancy are so exciting and convincing that we are all fully committed to the process.

Some conclusions and plans for the future

The promotion of people-led development processes promises best results in achieving sustainable impacts-not only at the economic and ecological level, but also at the socio-political level. Only self-reliant communities controlling their resources and participating in local decision making processes, as well as politically active farmer groups advocating for their rights on a national and international level, are in a position to create changes that go beyond the local project level. The reference to people's rights and state obligations fosters a rights-based approach which complements needs-based interventions. It strengthens the communities' right to adequate food, which adds to an improved food and livelihood security as aspects of sustainability.

Such development initiatives show tremendous impacts on the community level-and the contribution to these impacts is what those who support us (both private donors and the German government), expect from MISEREOR.

As already indicated above, support for people-led development processes calls for a real partner for the communities, who facilitates and creates space for experiential learning. In most cases, this involves a veritable change in attitude and needs social competences

and communication skills on the level of the NGO staff-something which is rarely taught in the universities or technical schools. However, our capacities to initiate and closely accompany such reflection and re-orientation processes by a consultant on a longer-term basis are limited. That is why we explore new strategies for mainstreaming and up-scaling the processes we have started.

One important aspect is a peer learning approach, where a number of partner organisations develop a way of sharing and observing each other's practices, and thus helping each other in the learning process. This can develop into sustainable networks which are not limited to NGO partners, but involve local communities who spontaneously join hands if they share a common interest.

Another important aspect is the support of strong NGO partners in their own up-scaling activities, either in their own networks or for other interested organisations. The key learning from this process again is that communication and facilitation skills must be further developed and strengthened.

Another possible strategy would be the exchange among donors to come to a common understanding of locally owned sustainable development processes and to avoid that 'easy money' for NGO driven projects is still available. Taking into account that in many cases MISEREOR is not the only donor agency, our partner NGOs expect assistance from MISEREOR, not only in supporting their own reorientation processes but also in communicating with other donors, so that their policies are also geared towards a grassroots approach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The co-operation of Manuela Ott, Corinna Broeckmann, Kesuma Saddak and other MISEREOR colleagues in preparing this paper is gratefully acknowledged.

ANJA MERTINEIT

MISEREOR

Rural Development, Asia Department,
Bischöfliches Hilfswerk, MISEREOR e.V.,
Mozartstr. 9

52064 Aachen, Germany

Website: www.misereor.de; www.misereor.org

E-mail: Anja.mertineit@misereor.de



The openness of partners to engage in this process is tremendous. We never thought that a change in mind-set would be possible even with 'old partner organisations'. However, the process will need a lot of follow up.

MISEREOR staff



Seeds of empowerment

Biswamohan

Adivasi communities in India are collectively working towards bringing back biodiversity and local traditional food production systems. While farmers are recognised as repositories of local knowledge, people's organisations are taking the lead in spreading sustainable development practices. ORRISSA, which has facilitated such a people-led development process, attributes the success to the opportunities created for knowledge exchanges, peer interactions and to the flexible support provided by MISEREOR.



A*divasi* communities like those living in the districts of Malkangiri or Kandhamal, in the state of Orissa, depend on the forest for most of their needs. The rich biodiversity and abundance of natural resources support the livelihoods of local communities to this day. However, over the years, owing to the restrictions by the government, local communities lost free access to the forest resources.

Furthermore, the government had to clear portions of forest to establish more than 400 settlements to house the Bangladesh refugees. These resettlers looked at farming in a different way. They started following modern ways of agriculture and this did have influence on the farming practices being followed by *Adivasis* in the region. Gradually, the traditional millet-centered mixed cropping systems, wherein up to twenty food species were grown, were largely replaced by paddy. All these practices had a serious effect on the availability of food.

Since 1987, the 'Organisation for Rural Reconstruction and Integrated Social Service Activities' (ORRISSA) has been working with the tribal communities in Kondhamal, Malkangiri, and in the remote areas of the Ganjam, Khurda and Cuttack districts, covering around 200 villages. Its mission is to empower and enable the disadvantaged communities - whether these are *Adivasis*, dalits, women, children or other vulnerable groups - to assert their rights over health, education and livelihoods. Over the years, the corporate access to forests, systematic marginalisation of traditional institutions and large scale corruption in the governance systems has seriously affected the livelihoods of the local population. In this context, ORRISSA's efforts have been directed at strengthening the local organisations and, through them, at promoting and bringing legitimacy to the local traditional knowledge and practices.

A new approach for empowering people

Even though we started our work with a clear interest in the empowerment of the local population, after several years, and in spite of the positive results we have seen, we felt that we were not really following the path that we had initially set out to do. In 2003, we realised the need to strengthen the local traditional institutions. In achieving this, what we did was linking these institutions to the government services and helping them to access the provisions earmarked for them. Also, working with women meant forming self help groups and linking them to the various government programmes. What we missed out was 'empowering' people, building on their knowledge and strengths. Our general approach of facilitating sustainable agriculture, for example, had not been an explorative process, and was not based on what was found in the field. We realised that, somewhere along the line, our programmes tended to introduce what we thought was the best option, instead of basing our work on people's needs and priorities. There was a feeling that, as an organisation, ORRISSA was probably only replacing the government initiatives with a few alternatives.

Back in 2006 we started a reflection process which we hoped would help us change our general approach. This shift in approach was to help us support these communities in terms of food sovereignty and governance rights. With the support of MISEREOR, and with

a thorough process facilitated by Emmanuel Yap, the MISEREOR Consultant for strengthening people-led development processes, we started to look in detail at the way in which we interacted with the local communities. More than just discussing with the local communities themselves, this meant focusing on their perspectives and priorities. We heard about the importance of traditional seeds, and also about land rights. We were told that as women manage most of the plant resources, they had to be directly involved in the process of ensuring household food security. There were also many voices calling for a stronger farmer-to-farmer network, and for promoting their own rights-based forums and organisations.

These concerns were shared in the workshop organised at Jashipur in Orissa in 2007, from which we drafted a plan of intervention for a people-led development process. In short, this meant taking different steps at the same time. We organised a reflection process within ORRISSA, by which our core group met twice a year. Teams at the district level had reflection meetings with all farmer leaders, while theme-specific workshops were organised by the local farmers' organisations. We also organised a series of exchange visits.

Learning on the field

Trying to change to a new approach was not easy. Owing to the charity-driven approach of many external agencies, farmers in this region had become increasingly dependant on outside support. Local communities developed a very low self esteem and lost the pride they used to have in their own knowledge and traditions. Enabling them to take responsibility and lead a development process meant that these barriers had to be broken. This required us to understand their conditions, their needs and priorities, and to give due respect to their knowledge. But, our staff was not equipped with this sort of facilitation skills. We had to change our way of working with farmers - basically changing from a role where we taught farmers, to one where we listened to them.

Another difficulty was that farmers were initially not openly sharing their traditional knowledge as they had developed a tendency to seek information on modern methods of agriculture from the government officials and NGOs. They were not even sure whether the knowledge they possessed was of any use. It was the first time that an external organisation was showing interest in their lives and concerns. Frequent interactions helped farmers to become confident and share their knowledge. We also organised visits to places where such people-led processes were already in place. Visits to the Deccan Development Society (DDS) in southern India and to Dindori and Beej Bacho Andolon in the north opened a Pandora box of examples, showing how a people-led process can enrich the biodiversity of the area and facilitate the creative pursuits of farmers to produce food with their own resources, knowledge and practices. The process helped farmers regain their lost self esteem.

The series of exchange visits and interactions which focused on the role and importance of farmer's knowledge and group participation also brought about a change in the ORRISSA staff. They not only helped in facilitating an in-depth learning process; they also helped us see, accept and understand the role of farmers in this process. Our team started giving importance and recognition to farmers



Adivasi woman addresses a gathering

with traditional knowledge on local farming systems. Also, the vast knowledge of the tribal women in selecting and breeding local seed varieties and their role in different stages of crop production started gaining due recognition. We understood that the local biodiversity and the local farming systems are inter-connected. As a team, we started to explore the potential of local knowledge systems for sustaining farming and to address the food security concerns.

Exchanging seeds, exchanging knowledge

The process of strengthening farmer organisations has been based on a series of village meetings and the preparation of annual action plans. Organising farmers to take control of the local food production systems on the basis of their traditional wisdom was not easy. But the generous leadership of the older farmers kept the processes moving. Women also played an active role in all meetings, highlighting the need for food crops which can be stored for a longer period and repeating the importance of millets in providing nutritious food to children. They brought into focus the rising depletion of the traditional crops and plant diversity. Communities participated actively in identifying the seed diversity through seed mapping exercises (see box Page 25). We also facilitated biodiversity mapping sessions to help farmers recognise the vast diversity of food and forest products available. These discussions motivated farmers to take the lead in multiplying the local seeds, exchange with fellow farmers and spread local food production systems. Additionally, food festivals were also celebrated to inculcate the interest in the younger generation on millet based foods. All these processes provided an opportunity for the communities to meet, discuss and exchange seeds and knowledge. More importantly, it helped in building solidarity among the tribal farmers.

Moving beyond food security issues, ORRISSA through its advocacy and networking programme, has helped farmer organisations to build linkages with other organisations and NGOs. Today, farmers are

not only aware of the issues beyond their control which influences their livelihoods but are also raising their voice against such developments-for example, campaigning in favour of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), or campaigning against GM seeds.

Positive results

Looking back at our work during the past few years, we can see many positive results in the region. Overall, there are six farmer organisations established in the region, with more than 5000 farmers as members. All of them are busy promoting farming systems based on traditional agriculture, and are managing different community fairs themselves (see box Page 25). Farmers have started growing different crop varieties under mixed cropping systems. They cultivate pulses like blackgram, arhar, kidney beans and runner beans with cereals like corn and paddy. Some farmers mix millets with vegetables and greens like bhendi. The revival of the millet-based farming systems enabled 739 small *adivasi* families (in 2008 in Malkangiri) to harvest at least two crops out of the 6 to 14 crops grown when most of the regular farms failed to produce any. The mix of crops helped in retaining soil moisture and yielded some returns even during the times of drought, thus emphasising the relevance of traditional systems of farming.

Along with farming, women have taken up several other supplementary activities to protect the biodiversity. Traditionally, every *adivasi* household has its own backyard garden which hosts enormous crop diversity. Such 'gharbadi' systems are being taken up again by these motivated women. Women have also raised nurseries of tree plants to promote plantations for checking soil erosion. In the nurseries, a variety of trees like fodder, fuel and fruit bearing trees are grown and distributed among the villagers who then actively participated in planting and protecting these trees.

With increased awareness on larger issues affecting their farming

livelihoods, the farmer leaders are actively participating in campaigns. They participated in the state level campaigns as well as at the national level public hearing on Bt brinjal conducted at Bhubaneswar by the Minister of Environment and Forest, Government of India. To spread the awareness further, they have taken up campaigns at the village, gram panchayat and district level against GMO seeds and Bt crops. The farmers of Malkangiri have repeatedly asserted their traditional rights over the village forests, actively protesting against the presence of outside companies.

This is all in spite of the lack of support from the authorities, or of the strong impact that some governmental programmes (which subsidise inputs) or input providers have. Needless to say, MISEREOR played a key role in the process, supporting ORRISSA with financial help (and also with their flexible budget lines), or with the possibilities they provided for peer interactions.

Challenges ahead

As we have opted for supporting a PLDP as our organisation's main way of working, we have to dedicate sufficient time to the training and preparation of our staff. Although we still suffer from a high turnover rate, we see that this may diminish, thanks to the interest and motivation we see in our colleagues. Even though in some cases we see some hesitation (especially because of our interest in 'de-learning' first), the new approach is accepted by all of us, and we are happy to see the results it brings. Most of us have now realised the need for learning from the farmers. Farmers are getting a larger 'space' in the decision making processes, and the team is now increasingly accepting their role at this level. As a team, we felt that there was no more pressure to achieve targets, but rather to understand farmers. Strengthening PLDP is now a part of all our activities, programmes and projects. It is also part of a few proposals we have recently submitted (for example, to the Centre for People's Forestry, in Hyderabad, or to the National Council of Rural Institute), so we expect to develop our work even further.

Looking into the future, a very important issue relates to our own capacities. The group reflection processes, and the exchanges we had with the other MISEREOR partners, have enabled the organisation and its staff team to improve our intervention process. We are equally interested in sharing and disseminating our results. ORRISSA has created a web-site of its own, where PLDP progress reports and activities are highlighted. We have produced a video documentary showing our work with farmers during 2008, while the half yearly



Local communities mapping seed diversity

More seed diversity

- **SEED DIVERSITY MAPS** - Our first step in promoting sustainable agriculture is in analysing the diverse seed stocks available with the farmers. Farmer groups took stock of the seeds available in their villages, describing their characteristics. Seeds were selected based on the household needs, land type and other farm realities. In the process we recognised that the tribal women had rich knowledge of local seeds. To enable this knowledge to reach the younger generations, the local organisations, or gram sanghatans, identified around 28 tribal women to play the role of Seed Mothers, also popularly known as Bihana Maa. The process yielded some interesting results. Even in villages where most of the millet varieties seemed to be lost, it was found that most women were still harvesting millet crops from small patches of land. In total, we were able to identify 102 varieties of traditional paddy, 18 varieties of pulses, 6 varieties of millet, 24 varieties of vegetables, 4 varieties of tuber crops, and 3 varieties of oil seeds.
- **SEED EXCHANGES** - Community seed fairs were organised to facilitate seed exchanges on a wider scale. These seed fairs were celebrated like the traditional festivals to attract as many farmers as possible. More than 20,000 farmers participated in the fair at Malkangiri, making it look like a state level event, where hundreds of traditional seeds were exchanged. Completely organised by the farmers themselves, the seed fairs of Malkangiri and Kandhamal were very successful. A total of 231 farmers, for example, exchanged local aromatic varieties of paddy seeds. These fairs were also used as a platform to sensitise people on the need to protect forests. About thirty *adivasi* women of Ranginiguda displayed 105 varieties of medicinal plant materials (crops, plants, leaves, roots, fruits, seeds, skin, wood & latex) along with 15 varieties of roots, 8 varieties of leaves, mushrooms, cashew, tamarind, mahua, and others.



Harvest of local variety of paddy

magazine titled 'Bihana Maa' is spreading the message of seed sovereignty among the members of farmer organisations and other civil society groups. The profile of *adivasi* seed mothers, with their stock and knowledge on seeds, are being compiled into a book which will soon be distributed.

Another remaining challenge is seen in our relationship with the government authorities. All too often, the rights of farmers are only seen in relation to their access to subsidies. In some cases where the government is convinced to invest on the local livelihood strategies, the government machinery is not willing to transfer its resources to the Lok Sangathans or to the farmer organisations. Rather, they wanted ORRISSA to channelise the funds. On one hand, we have been extremely cautious and tried not to accept this role as most of the local NGOs are treated as an extended hand of the government for service delivery. On the other hand if we do not accept this role, the communities might lose access to the government resources which they are due. We need to further debate on this before taking a clear stand.

All in all, we feel confident that the results we have seen will help

us convince the authorities and also motivate other organisations to follow a similar approach. The process of exploring the knowledge on local seed is already expanding in to the neighbourhood of our operational area. In Malkangiri, the process of multiplying the local seeds with high productivity traits is being taken up by four more organisations. Around 1,500 farmers (from six blocks of Malkangiri and out side) have exchanged seeds during the 2009 community seed festival in Malkangiri. More than one hundred *adivasi* farmers (brought by 10 different NGOs) from six districts of the state of Orissa participated in the Malkangiri Seed Festival of 2009, together with a group from Madhya Pradesh. These are very encouraging signs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The co-operation and support provided by the team and the farmer leaders in implementing the programme as well as sharing the results is gratefully acknowledged.

BISWAMOHAN

ORRISSA

40/570, Laxmi Vihar, Po. Sainik School, Bhubaneswar - 751 005. Orissa, India.

Website: www.orrissa.co.in

E-mail: info@orrissa.co.in





Staying local for sustaining beekeeping

Nurul Islam

Many people in the rural areas of Bangladesh are back into the beekeeping activity as a livelihood option. Promoting local species and enabling and empowering local beekeepers has led to a new interest in bee keeping in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Institute of Apiculture enabled people to solve local problems with local solutions and led to real empowerment.

The existence of several indigenous honey bee species and a favourable habitat in different agro-climatic zones has for generations popularised honey collection all over Bangladesh. Honey was sourced mainly from wild bee colonies. Rearing honey bees was not a common practice though some traditional honey gatherers practised simple forms of keeping bee colonies in earthen pots, in logs or in trees. With massive destruction of natural habitat and forest cover in recent years, together with increasing levels of pesticides being sprayed, the natural population of honey bees has significantly decreased. Even the traditional practice of feeding new born children with a spoonful of honey began to decline.

As a response to this dilemma and seeing the vast potential of honey production for rural livelihoods, especially for landless families, concerned apiculturists and development practitioners formed the Bangladesh Institute of Apiculture (BIA) in 1981. BIA pioneered the domestic rearing of *Apis cerana* in Bangladesh. This local species is easy to rear in the backyards, is not very laborious and needs low maintenance costs. These advantages make it easy for women to assume the responsibility of rearing bees as a part of their household duties. Through BIA training activities, the domestic rearing of *Apis cerana* spread in different parts of Bangladesh, even becoming a part of a number of NGO programmes guided initially by BIA.

During the 1990s, large number of bee colonies disappeared as a result of a widespread attack of a disease caused by the Thai sac brood (TSB) virus. Gradually, there was a decline in the numbers of *Apis cerana* bees. This resulted in the decline of honey production and of the income beekeepers were earning. There were apparently no solutions to overcome this disease, nor any government initiative to address this problem. BIA got in touch with some beekeeping organisations overseas and was instrumental in introducing the exotic bee species *Apis mellifera* in Bangladesh. *Apis mellifera*, which is not prone to the virus attack, is a very productive honey bee. But it turned out to be a cost intensive option, since it cannot feed on the local flowers throughout the year and needs migration and additional feed, resulting in much higher maintenance costs. Gradually the poor, especially women, got excluded from beekeeping.

As a strategy to keep the poor and women involved in the commercial production of *Apis mellifera* bees, BIA established its own apiaries in 2004 to supply lower cost colonies. BIA also formed the Beekeepers Cooperative Association (BCA). The idea was that a group of 20 poor households with about 2 colonies each would form one cooperative. Members of the cooperative would take turns in migrating these bees. However, building strong cooperatives was a great challenge for BIA and the high cost of maintenance discouraged many poor families and women. In spite of our support, a lot of beekeepers dropped out of the programme. Migration was especially difficult for poor families who rely on wage labour for their daily subsistence. This was practically culturally impossible for women to do.

Our shift to a beekeeper - led process

The appropriateness of *Apis mellifera* for poverty alleviation and women empowerment was ultimately challenged in late 2006 when BIA accepted MISEREOR's invitation to reflect with its beekeepers on its method of work to enhance beekeepers' participation. A series of

reflection sessions, guided by an external consultant, were organised. These sessions not only helped BIA in shifting its focus from *Apis mellifera* back to *Apis cerana*, it also encouraged BIA to collaborate with the beekeepers in an action research process to reduce the TSB virus infection.

During our first reflection session in November 2006, all the 40 beekeepers from Kishorganjh and Tangail districts were unanimous that despite vulnerability to TSB, *Apis cerana* remained the most appropriate bee species for resource poor families. The beekeepers who were earning very well from rearing *Apis mellifera* also shared this opinion. To respond to the TSB virus threat, we agreed with the beekeepers to collaborate in identifying bee management practices and an appropriate community response.

During early 2007, we organised field visits and had extended discussions with the beekeepers. During these visits, we realised that there were beekeepers who were rearing *Apis cerana*, the local species, and who were not suffering the effects of the TSB virus. Some of them had started with the exotic species for commercial purposes, but continued with *Apis cerana* because of its tastier honey. The presence of beekeepers who knew how to produce honey in spite of the virus was a great opportunity for reviving the local species. Our challenge was then to involve these knowledgeable beekeepers, not only for dealing with the disease in the region, but also to start a real empowerment process.

In April 2007, with the support of MISEREOR, we started a beekeeper-led development process for the promotion of *Apis cerana*, involving local beekeepers and building on their knowledge. Our objective was to identify, train and also motivate experienced beekeepers in order to scale up *Apis cerana* beekeeping, and in the process empower the poor beekeepers to become change agents in their regions. We thought of carrying out a research programme and then involve all beekeepers as extension agents and, most important, to change our own role.

Beekeepers lead action - research

A consultation meeting was held in April 2007 between the Executive Committee and the Advisory Committee members of BIA (the majority of whom are beekeepers), where we all agreed to involve local beekeepers in a programme to start in the area of Kishoregunjh. The diversified cropping system, the abundant fruit trees in the area, and - most importantly - the presence of enough beekeepers, made it an ideal choice. More than 25 senior and experienced beekeepers were identified and asked to look at the possibilities and problems of rearing the local species *Apis cerana*. We invited a bee expert with a lot of experience with the TSB virus from the Key Stone Foundation in India to share his experiences. A 3-day workshop organised during November 2007, where different ideas were presented and discussed, showed a possible way of rearing *Apis cerana*. Initially, the beekeepers started trying out the virus management practices which were recommended in their respective bee colonies. An assessment of the presence of TSB virus was made. It revealed that the disease was under control. There was a clear enthusiasm to spread this news across the region. Subsequently, the action research programme started.



We selected 20 beekeepers from 5 sub-districts in Kishoregunjh, with whom we discussed their role in the action research and the activities to be tried out. These beekeepers had the task of maintaining the temperature of the bee box by keeping a water pot in each box. A net at the bottom of the box ensured the free flow of air. The boxes were kept under the shade of a tree, and all of them were cleaned regularly. Bees had to be transferred when their numbers increased, and the queen bee had to be changed at regular intervals. Before the production of honey was to start, the queen bee (along with some more bees) was to be let off in the natural environment. Records on these changes were maintained by pasting a note on each box. Supervision and monitoring was done by BIA staff.

Demonstrating the honey extraction process during a training session

These local beekeepers, women and men, know the art of rearing bees. But their role as promoters or extension agents needed to be strengthened. BIA organised training events of 7 to 10 days, based on the convenience of the beekeepers themselves. Since November 2008, more than 50 beekeepers were trained as local extension agents in promoting bee keeping. But we wanted to make sure that training did not stop with classroom teaching. So trainees have also been provided with hands-on experience in training other beekeepers. Each participant trainee selected 3-4 adjoining villages, identified men and women who were interested and had the ability to carry out beekeeping activities. They, in turn, trained the local beekeepers in their region with the support of BIA. Beekeepers were thus trained as local extension agents to promote bee keeping. And the response to the trainings conducted at the village level by these local extension agents was very encouraging. Farmers have been very enthusiastic to be part of such a process.

The participatory research process resulted in a number of positive outcomes. The beekeepers were able to control the incidence of the TSB virus successfully. They are now very confident of their ability of rearing *Apis cerana* hives without TSB virus. By following improved management practices they are also capable of protecting their colonies from other diseases such as the wax moth infection. Not surprisingly, the number of bee colonies started increasing. While there were 142 colonies in the village before the process started, we were able to count 268 in our latest survey.

Beekeepers as extension agents

In our participatory action research process we discovered the knowledge and the competence of the local beekeepers. By the end of the process there were not only more beekeepers, but also a renewed interest in beekeeping as an income generating activity. This general enthusiasm motivated us to involve them even more in spreading the results and in spreading the bee keeping activity.

We are aware that the success of any training programme depends on the quality of follow-up that is carried out after the training. The local extension agents have been able to provide this regular follow-up. Their visits helped the beekeepers to (re-)start with their *Apis cerana* hives and continue the activity without any problem. The local extension agents normally visited the beekeepers once in a fortnight. But in case of emergency, he/she would attend to the problem immediately. This regular follow-up by the local beekeeper has had a great impact on the adoption of the activity. Earlier, while 40% of the trainees were taking up beekeeping activities, now, with this approach, 80% of the trainees are able to produce honey.

Another interesting result is that, of the 50 persons trained as local extension agents, 33 are women. The shift from *Apis mellifera* to



Inspecting the bee colony

Apis cerana motivated many women to take up beekeeping again. As mentioned, women find it easier if such an activity can be part of their household work. But these positive results are also related to our conscious efforts in involving women in the training activities. The training methods and the logistics were tailored to suit their needs, thus attracting many women to this training. In addition, the trainers generally contacted the women's husbands and convinced them of the importance of training. Thus, by involving men in the process, it has been possible to involve more women. By involving more women, we have had a multiplier effect in the community. With women trainers around, more women are showing interest to be trained. With improved skills, income earning and training abilities, the status of women has improved, both in the families as well as in the society.

Looking into the future

The bee-keeper led development process has resulted in increased honey production and in increased incomes. More importantly, it has empowered the local population. It has helped beekeepers get the status they deserve. It has not only resulted in reviving the

local bee species, but has also spread considerably well with the involvement of many other beekeepers. In the future, it is also possible that beekeepers will move on to the development of value chains, thus improving their incomes further. They are already thinking about a common brand name for honey and other by-products.

The approach involving local beekeepers has helped BIA staff recognise and respect the role of local beekeepers as trainers. They are getting involved in the preparation of action plans for BIA. This reflects the internalisation of the importance of local knowledge by BIA, which is seen as necessary for scaling up these efforts. BIA is planning to upscale this initiative in two more working areas. We feel that there are many

possibilities for this, given the fact that there is trained and motivated staff and that there are enough experienced beekeepers. However, finance may be a limiting factor for such an extensive scaling up.

The availability of *Apis cerana* and of enough sources of pollen, and the presence of a large number of men and women interested in beekeeping as a livelihood activity, are reasons enough to spread this activity far and wide. While the government support is needed, it is also crucial that the process is led by skilled and experienced beekeepers. Our experience has shown that they are there, and that they are willing to play a big role.

NURUL ISLAM

Bangladesh Institute of Apiculture
23/12, Khilji Road (2nd Floor), Shyamoli, Mohammadpur, Dhaka - 1207, Bangladesh
E-mail: bia@bracnet.net

There is so much to do!

Since 2005, Emmanuel Yap has been supporting MISEREOR's efforts to promote a people-led development process, working together with several of its partner organisations in India, Bangladesh and other countries. Born in the Philippines, he served earlier as co-ordinator of MASIPAG's national secretariat. MASIPAG is his country's network of farmers, scientists and NGOs. He currently lives in Belgium.

Jorge Chavez Tafur





What was the main reason for starting this consultancy?

Many donors and development organisations aim at human development and at the empowerment of people. But instead of bringing about self reliance, or the autonomy of communities, their support has been leading to a situation where people are more dependent, in fact making the situation worse. MISEREOR wanted to explore ways to overcome this through a collaborative process with its partners, also learning how to support partners in strengthening their work.

So what was your role?

I stimulated internal reflection of partners. As an outsider I served as a third eye, asking questions which somehow encouraged partners to see the local situation and their program intervention in a different and critical way. I also served as a medium for exchanging experiences among partners so they could learn from each other. I then helped pass on the lessons to MISEREOR for them to reflect on the processes.

But you presented a people-led development process as a new approach, when all partners have been talking about participation, and working with participatory methods, for a very long time.

I did not present people-led development process as a new approach. Participation of project 'beneficiaries' or 'targeted' communities is outlined as a key strategy in almost all partners' proposals, since years. They know this is a requirement of MISEREOR like any other donor. What I presented was the opportunity to enhance their practice of participation and the

chance to contribute to MISEREOR's own reflection of how it can better support people-led development. This has evinced interest and motivated partners to open up and join the process.

Using my NGO experience back in the Philippines, I openly discussed with partners the current programming reality which tends to limit community participation leaving the community agenda on the backseat. NGOs generally accommodate to donor priorities to qualify for funding. On their part, NGOs have their own priorities, expertise and institutional interests. These often bear more in defining NGO development activities. Many NGOs come to communities with pre-set notions of what are the causes and solutions to poverty and marginalisation. Local communities on their part accept what NGOs offer, they really have no choice. To secure support, communities have learned over the years of 'development cooperation' to say what the NGOs would like to hear, essentially similar to the way NGOs finally conform to donor priorities.

Additionally, NGOs have to describe a project and submit a proposal with clear targets within some kind of a blueprint to convince donors that they have a feasible program. Unfortunately many NGOs get trapped in their log-frames and 3-year plans. NGOs often stick to their plans and are afraid that any deviation is perceived as poor planning on their part. And finally, with the pressure to deliver results with a 3-year time frame, partners tend to provide project subsidies to secure participation and get quicker tangible results.

Is it that organisations are somehow 'forced' to follow a limited understanding of participation?

I am not sure if 'forced' is the appropriate term. I believe all development actors play their part in what is happening. I tell partners that MISEREOR acknowledges its accountability being the actor who ultimately approves or disapproves projects. But NGOs are equally responsible and to a certain extent the communities too. So I communicate to partners, both the NGO and the communities, that MISEREOR is serious in addressing these issues. It wants to provide partners some space to experiment and explore how they can do development differently and is willing to learn from it.



Interacting with the field staff and local communities

FOR COMMUNITIES, IT INVOLVES BUILDING CONFIDENCE TO ASSERT THEIR LOCAL SOLUTIONS AND FINDING WAYS TO BUILD ON IT.

You have been going through a thorough process with different organisations since 2005. Can you briefly describe this process?

We started all cases with a familiarization and exploratory visit, understanding the local situation and finding out if the NGO and the communities were interested to participate. During this visit, I usually spend 2 to 3 days with the communities, asking questions, focusing on the local innovations, the local initiatives, and on the villagers' general survival strategies. If possible I sleep in the villages. Then we have a reflection session with the villagers and the NGO staff followed by internal reflection and some kind of forward planning by the NGO on its own. These reflections usually take another day or two.

There was always a lot of information and insights gathered during these community visits, and also during the reflection sessions with the staff. During these reflection sessions, we tried to show that there existed many ways in which farmers and villagers are solving their problems. The driving point would always be - to evolve solutions that are more sustainable by building on the local solutions, rather than establishing something new that may even have a negative impact on the local population's survival strategies. The organisations then started planning new activities, taking into account what farmers and their communities were already doing. Our idea was not just to see what people are doing; we wanted to build on it, and at the same time help farmer innovators to become an agent of change. So when we visited one village, we invited farmers from another village. Farmers would start building on what the other farmers were doing, and this helped shape the NGO programme.

I will give you a very concrete example: I was recently in Kenya and we visited an area which had a big water harvesting project from another NGO, worth at least half a million Kenyan shillings. I slept in the village, and one villager invited me to come to his house, where he showed me a simple water harvesting structure he had built, asking me if this was not what we were talking about. The NGO then began organizing exchange visits to this farmer to validate the replicability of his water harvesting structure in other villages and encourage others to follow or to share their own water harvesting initiatives.

Besides individual reflections, we also organized joint reflections among partners. We started this in 2006 with four medium - sized NGOs from Orissa: Dulal, KIRDTI, ORRISSA and Jana Vikas. We found the peer - learning process most promising and cost effective. Since then, we have always tried to incorporate peer - learning exercises in our activities. We have encouraged partners to organize their own bilateral exchanges to learn from each other.



In addition, we had arranged exposure and exchange visits to other NGOs, even to non - partners of MISEREOR, to analyze and learn from their experiences. Being out of their local context, we found that NGOs were able to look at their own work, more critically.

An important point to highlight is that, in almost all these processes, we involved representatives from communities. This enabled the NGO staff and their partner communities to develop new ways of relating to each other, on a more equal footing as co - learners.

I never came with a presentation about participation, telling partners what participation is about. My main concern was triggering new relationship between the communities and the NGOs and likewise between the NGOs and MISEREOR . This often required unlearning on the part of NGO staff who see themselves as the experts and the trainers. It requires developing new attitudes and way of communicating with communities, better ways of probing. For communities, it involves building confidence to assert their local solutions and finding ways to build on it. This means getting out of the traditional mould as recipients into agents of their own development. For MISEREOR, it has meant giving more flexible funding and allowing for process - oriented implementation and encouraging transparency and supporting a learning environment.

For how long did this go on?

NGOs and communities generally experiment for one year and a half. This is the time period after which they start seeing results, all of which help convince both of the advantages of working differently. And then it is also time for a number of NGO partners to submit a new proposal to MISEREOR. They begin to incorporate successful piloting initiatives into their program and plan out ways to share this learning to the entire organisation to scale up.

I visited each partner or group of partners about three times during their piloting phase. After that, I have tried to go at least once a year for a reflection session, like a sort of yearly assessment. And every time a new partner joined in, I had an opportunity to meet the 'old' partners as I often invited them to join and assist me in introducing PLDP. This builds ties among partners and links up a new partner to the old partners in their learning processes.

What have been the main results of the piloting?

One can see more villagers opening up and talking about their initiatives and innovations which are being given importance. You could see farmers helping and learning from each other in increasing farm production and reducing their dependence on expensive chemical fertilizers and pesticides. One could also see people in one village helping one another and different villages coming together to defend their land rights. In these processes, the NGO take a supporting role linking communities and farmers from different places.

More people are coming to meetings, including those who were previously sidelined. As most partners are working with indigenous communities or Adivasis, one can find that the whole community gets mobilized, especially the community elders and the women. The Adivasis take pride in the importance given to their indigenous knowledge and culture.

So the results of such an approach are obvious...

They are obvious, which is why both farmers and organisations are happy. There is clearly more participation. And then there are also concrete economic results: when one farmer is able to share some seeds, and these are sown in the other communities, then the yields are better, and you can measure it easily.

But have you not been undermining the work the NGO was doing at first?

Actually we realized that, as a donor, MISEREOR has been supporting projects that may have been undermining local knowledge and local initiatives. And we are now interested in finding how we can promote a different approach and have better results. We made it clear that this was an experimental process, and that the organisations we were working with were chosen to help the donor see if this different approach is possible. If they considered that there is potential in a more participatory approach, then they were to try it with one village, then with several villages. After one year they have said yes, it is really working; the feedback has been very positive. They have even said that it is also easier!

Having been working with different organisations in the process, can you say something about the conditions which are needed so that you have positive results?

The first thing to consider is the internal structure of the organisation. If you have a very participatory organisation to begin with, with a leadership structure that lets field workers innovate, or which lets them try out ideas and not just follow the orders from the top, then there are better chances of success. Big organisations generally have more difficulties: they are more bureaucratic, they have to monitor more staff, they have strict rules on reporting, their staff have to fill in reports according to guidelines... The decision making processes are slower, so there is not really a learning environment. Staff turnover is also an issue in big organisations.

And can you say something also about the external context?

There are communities who have a long history of resistance and struggle for survival. Supporting PLDP in such an area is easy, as there is already a strong commitment to change and a sense of power in all villagers. This is important, even if it is hidden. Of course, this is not the same in every community; it depends very much on the situation each community faces. In one case, for example, the people had a serious conflict with the logging companies and the mining mafias. When they saw that they had an ally in the NGO being ready to recognize their issues, and willing to support them - and not just interested in involving them in their project - then they started joining. They saw that they had a chance to win, and they did win in many cases.

And what about the local authorities? What differences have you seen in the different places?

We are only beginning to experience this. Before, the local authorities didn't matter much. But once there is a strong organisation, you see that the local government can feel threatened. And when they feel threatened, you get situations where even staff members are imprisoned, with ridiculous accusations. Naturally, there are also cases where the local authorities are satisfied, and supportive. In Bangladesh, for example, the authorities have seen that the villagers have contributed so much in terms of local biodiversity, that they granted them a prize at a fair organised together with the agricultural university. The problems arise when the people are dealing with an issue which is of interest to the local politicians, or if people are challenging the benefits that these authorities receive from a given resource.

Now let us imagine that you don't go back to India or Bangladesh. Are these organisations going to continue with this approach?

I think so. They are so convinced, they are more popular with the people, they have more results, the donor is happy, so I think they will continue. In all partner organisations you have many people who are very sincere, and they say they see results taking place. Many of them have even been trying to get other donor agencies



Our idea was not just to see what people are doing; we wanted to build on it, and at the same time help farmer innovators to become an agent of change.





Facilitating a field session

to follow this approach, while others are actively sharing their experience with other NGOs. Of course, they have to incorporate it into their plans, which is why it is important to sit down with them, identify the main lessons learnt, and develop strategic plans.

All these positive results, is it not only something that they have been telling you to please you?

No, they have not been telling it to me. You can see it happening. There are many NGOs now coming to them, to learn from them, it is not something that they have been told to do or say, but something which is happening. Of course, organisations need to show their results. This is why we are trying to help the NGOs look at impact indicators, demonstrating that there are verifiable indicators for these processes, that this is not just conversations. It is important to show that talking about empowerment or helping farmers take the lead, also refers to concrete farming activities, looking at what is planted in the field. We are not only talking about one person becoming a leader, we are talking about farmers choosing and re-discovering their biodiversity, getting control of their biodiversity. So it is very concrete. When we are talking about *Adivasis*, we talk about their food systems and their forests. There are plenty of concrete indicators which can help us show results. We just have to use them.

Can you identify some of the threats to sustainability? What are the things which you think these organisations will face, and which may affect them negatively?

Well, money is an important issue. But in this case it helps to see that the donor is interested, and therefore, if an organisation can

demonstrate that it is possible to do development in a different way, that it is possible to build local knowledge, then the donor will be satisfied. But more important, perhaps, is that this process leads to a loss of control for the NGO, as control goes to the communities. And this is not easy. NGOs may feel threatened when people are doing what they want, and not necessarily following what the NGO wants. I see the NGOs as gatekeepers, and when the gate is opened, then you can expect anything to happen. So it depends on the NGO itself, and on their real motivations and value systems.

How do you plan to continue from now on?

I am beginning to phase out my support to 'old' partners. In these last two years I have been helping them to become effective in sharing their experience to other MISEREOR partners or other NGOs who come to them for assistance. We also began organizing thematic reflections of participatory processes in different context and concerns: on community forestry and NTFPs, sustainable agriculture, livestock management and pastoralism, etc. These discussions deepen partners' reflection and stimulate the formation of informal platforms where partners not only discuss about approaches to people empowerment but also come together to a common position on certain issues. Finally, we are trying to establish a learning platform among organisations in different countries and would like to link up and exchange learning with other similar initiatives such as the promotion of 'people-owned processes' by EED and from projects like PROLINNOVA. There is so much to do!

Strong village institutions - key to sustainable development

Academy of Development Science

Strong local level institutions with enhanced managerial capacities are ably tackling the problems they face, on their own. Community empowerment processes facilitated by ADS have enabled these institutions in taking greater responsibility in managing the development initiatives in the village.



Grain banks evolved as a means of food security for the local people

Thakar, Katkari and Mahadeo Koli are *adivasi* communities found in the Raigad district in Maharashtra, India. Most *adivasi* families are landless or own very small pieces of land. Their livelihoods are primarily dependent on forests, agriculture and wage labour. Alienation from land and forest resources has led to insecure livelihoods.

Academy of Development Science (ADS), a development education training center for village-level workers and rural institutions, started working in the *adivasi* villages in Karjat block during the early eighties. Established in 1981, ADS initially focused on applied research in science & technology (S&T) to feed into its teaching programme. In the last two decades, it gradually moved towards training local communities on various aspects related to income generating enterprises, education, traditional medicine, conservation of plant genetic resources, horticulture, etc. ADS demonstrated a good number of working models for initiatives like grain banks, food processing and plant conservation.

During the same period, *adivasi* communities were facing a number of challenging issues related to land tenure, land alienation and insecure livelihoods. With our focus on campus-based activities, we responded only partially to these challenges. We started building peoples' institutions in the villages. We helped them form a *Panch Mandal* or *Gavki*, a committee of 5 village elders, for managing the grain banks in each village. The *Gavkis* in turn were federated into a *Gavki Vikas Samiti*. We were under the impression that once the people's institutions were in place they would take care of the development concerns in the village. But, the role of the *Gavki* remained limited to the work of grain banks and did not move beyond. People still continued to rely on ADS for most of the decisions.

The problem was also with ADS, which had a huge number of staff. Thus, there was a tendency for intensive monitoring of activities in villages. Several ADS staff members would visit most of the villages continually, leaving little space or scope for the *Panch Mandal* members to act on their own. We realised that the process which we had initiated in the villages was community-oriented but was not people-centered.

Transition towards people - led processes

Most of the ADS activities continued to be campus-centric, requiring a large workforce to manage the activities. This consumed a lot of time, effort and resources not only to sustain the activities but also to manage the people working on the campus. This gradually led to various management and financial problems.

In 2005, we decided to undertake basic 'restructuring' and 'reorganisation' within ADS to deal with the internal problems and to respond adequately to external challenges. We moved away from huge campuses and set up small decentralised offices at Karjat and Murbad to enable us work closely with the communities. We cut down on surplus staff and focused on having a small team of local people who were field oriented. A large team of 110 was reduced to a small team of 12 people bringing up the challenge of covering larger areas with a much reduced staff on our rolls. We were left with only one option to address this challenge- 'to involve people in our programmes'. Also we had realised that results were better when people participated actively and owned the processes. All these led to a shift towards what became known as 'people-led processes'.

During this period, we got regular and critical inputs and a lot of encouragement from Emmanuel Yap, MISEREOR Consultant, all of which helped ADS make a real transition towards a people-led development processes. The opportunity provided for ADS during 2008-09, to interact with NGO partners like KIRDTI, ORRISSA, DULAL and Jana Vikas in Orissa and MPSSS in Madhya Pradesh, who were also making a transition towards people-led approaches, helped a great deal.

Initially, ADS staff members were skeptical about involving community members in development work. Years of working in the NGO centered mode had to be gradually changed in response to the dynamics of working with the community. Gradual changes came about in the staff's attitudes when they saw the sensibility, responsibility and ownership with which community members took decisions and implemented development activities in their villages. And all this

Fighting for land rights

Within a span of three years, a team of *adivasi* youth, land rights action committee members, *Gavki* members and local animators initiated the land rights process in over 200 *adivasi* villages. Proper documentation, the systematic approach and perseverance in the follow up yielded positive results as numerous land rights related issues started getting resolved. More than 150 *adivasi* families were able to obtain ownership rights over 250 acres of Dalli land (land on hill slopes) that had been transferred to the Revenue Department, while another 300 families were able to get physical possession of more than 400 acres of Ceiling Land. Several cases pertaining to other land rights issues were also sorted out.





What we learnt during the process

- Always think of people's priorities. Do not go by what you think is feasible and needs to be done.
- Build capacities of people on issues and let them take ownership for pursuing them on their own.
- Strengthen the hamlet and village level people's institutions and limit yourself to facilitate their work. This results in collective ownership and responsibility. People also feel accountable to each other.
- Enable local people to handle money openly and transparently.
- It is good to have team members belonging to the local communities. They have a better rapport with people in villages.
- Avoid charity. Let people contribute and repay. This gives them a sense of real ownership.
- As far as possible, work through regular government channels instead of trying to pressurise higher officials which results in friction.

happened not through planned and structured training events but more as a result of direct engagement with the community.

Having made a transition towards a people-led development process, we decided to focus on the issues and concerns of *adivasi* people. We found that issues such as insecure land rights, poor housing conditions, food insecurity, and a move away from land-based livelihoods towards wage labour were of high priority to the community. We decided to focus on these issues first.

Strengthening local institutions

We invested considerable efforts in making the process 'people-led' by forming and strengthening village level institutions. We mobilised people into forming groups around different issues. As such, *Panch Mandals*, *Gavki Vikas Samiti*, many land rights action committees and forest rights committees were formed in different villages, trying to address different issues. Further, we invested our time and efforts in building their capacities. For instance, in the lands rights issue, *adivasi* youth were trained in basic aspects of land rights and were motivated to assist other *adivasi* families. Simultaneously, land rights action committees and forest rights committees were formed and encouraged to take ownership of the land rights work in their villages.

Continuous efforts have resulted in the emergence of strong local level institutions. Grain banks which evolved as *Gavki* or village-level institutions are now playing a meaningful role in the development of the area. They have moved beyond issues of food security, and have started implementing and managing other village development initiatives. They are now managing the funds channelised through ADS. Initially there were some problems, for instance, with some members who were favoured with loans, or with some who were allowed to default on repayments. Collective pressure from villagers enabled *Panch Mandals* to correct themselves and prioritise the support to needy and deserving. With this, a strong level of social accountability also emerged and more and more members are availing interest-free loans for various purposes like building houses and the purchase of fishing nets, and are also repaying them promptly. The management of funds has not only increased their confidence in carrying out programmes but has also enhanced the sense of ownership and the trust levels between ADS and the communities, manifold. People are gradually doing away with the charity concept.

Fostering participation

A second line leadership was encouraged. Local and *adivasi* team members were given a more active role in the implementation of programmes. Each team member was made responsible for 30-40 villages and their continuous interaction and dependence on members of the *Panch Mandals* helped build a very good rapport with the community. The small, cohesive and strong ADS team was seen as much more reliable and trustworthy by people in villages as opposed to the earlier times when many ADS team members went to the same village and different team members told different things to the people.

For ADS, there seems to be an increased sense of responsibility and commitment among our staff members. With a clear mandate, the team has much more freedom in choosing ways for achieving the development objectives of the organisation. Being a small team, ADS started relying more on the communities for implementing activities, thereby, instilling a sense of responsibility and ownership among communities. The team now feels accountable to the village institutions and not to ADS alone. The changed role of ADS as a facilitator has helped the team earn respect from the villagers. Perhaps the most prestigious award for ADS was when people started calling ADS as 'Amchi Lalwadi' (Our Academy).

Challenges faced

The process of change and a shift towards people-centered approaches was not easy. The decision by ADS in 2005 to separate



campus-based enterprises and to remove surplus staff members was extremely difficult and it resulted in a whole lot of problems for the ADS core team responsible for managing the projects. The expelled staff threatened core team members, organised protests on streets in Karjat town, submitted applications to various government officials, seeking to reinstate them in their jobs, sought support from various political parties and political leaders to exert pressure, and even filed a case against the ADS core team members in the Labour Court at Thane. Some of the political parties and even government officials tried to use this opportunity to force ADS to close down. However, the members of the *Panch Mandals* in villages, the *Gavki Vikas Samiti* and a large number of *adivasi* people supported ADS through this trial. They wrote a letter explaining the meaningful role played by ADS and urged the government not to destabilise ADS.

The role of the government was anything but supportive during the entire process but the support from people helped us cope with the challenges. The efforts by political parties, politicians and government

officials served as a rallying point for *adivasi* people to come together and express their support for a favourable development agenda irrespective of their political affiliations. In fact, these events played an important role in strengthening the people-led processes.

The way forward

People-led development processes are now an integral part of all the development programmes carried out by ADS. Having seen the benefits of the process, ADS plans to further strengthen the process within the organisation and also promote it amongst other network partners.

People empowerment processes need support of donors and this requires deeper understanding on the essence of decentralisation and community empowerment processes by the donor. For ADS, the active support and encouragement we got from MISEREOR has been instrumental in strengthening the people-led processes.

ACADEMY OF DEVELOPMENT SCIENCE

A-108, Amira Status, Near Civil Hospital, At & Taluka Karjat, District Raigad 410 201

E-mail: ads@pn3.vsnl.net.in

rajeev.khedkar@gmail.com



Struggle for protecting livelihoods and ecology

A case of Juang and Bhuyan adivasis in Orissa

Duskar Barik

The Juang and Bhuyan communities today are an empowered lot, capable of addressing the main issues concerning their livelihoods and the environment. They have been successful in reviving their traditional agricultural practices and also in fighting for their rights over forests. KIRDTI's support to people-led development processes has enabled them to take the lead in organising meetings, learning and exchange programmes, rallies and seed festivals, successfully. It is this 'ownership' which has led to positive results, and which will ensure a sustainable process.

The Keonjhar Integrated Rural Development and Training Institute (KIRDTI), a grassroots level voluntary organisation, has been working with the *adivasi* communities in the district of Keonjhar in Orissa, India, since 1989, addressing their livelihood concerns. For more than 20 years it has been aiming at enabling and empowering the poorest of the poor to assert their rights, have better access to and control over natural resources, and actively participate in the grassroot democratic institutions. By promoting strong peoples organisations, KIRDTI presently reaches around 40,000 people in more than 260 villages of the Harichandanpur, Banspal and Telkoi blocks.

Understanding people empowerment processes

Having worked for two decades in the area, we started realizing that though our interventions did bring in some changes in the livelihoods of the tribal communities, it really did not make people self reliant. Local communities continued to depend on KIRDTI for different types of support- be it inputs, training or even for organising rallies and protests. We felt that we were failing in our efforts to facilitate people's empowerment in the true sense- in terms of farmers being able to exercise their rights on their own, be it on traditional seed varieties, farming practices, or in relation to the access to and control over the natural resources. We understood that this could not be achieved if we continued working in the same way we had been working with the communities over the years. A totally different approach was required- one which would help them take the lead in the decision making process so that they could attain food self sufficiency. The shift towards a people-led development process thus begun in the year 2006, with the support of MISEREOR.

A shift in approach meant that we as an organisation had to undergo a lot of reorientation in thinking, first, and our strategy had to change. Staff had to realise that people have specific needs, recognize that they have knowledge, and that they can take care of themselves. Visits to villages, discussions with local communities, followed by reflection processes, helped a lot in changing the attitudes of our staff. They also started knowing and respecting farmers' traditional farming systems, their knowledge, traditions, culture and practices. They started listening more and talking less- unlike before. They understood that facilitation was key in encouraging a true participation.

Exposure visits to different project areas also instilled confidence amongst the staff about the importance of involving farmers. For example, a visit to DDS, in Andhra Pradesh, in November 2006, was a real eye opener, showing them what women could do in order to



Adivasis block survey vehicle to stop mining at Revenapalaspal

preserve the local food diversity. A gradual shift from 'teaching' to a 'facilitating' mode happened over a period of time.

Facilitating participation

Meetings at the village level provided people with an opportunity to discuss important issues and concerns. In these meetings, people started discussing the main issues related to their social, economic and environmental situation, and the causes of deprivation and resourcelessness. Farmers shared their farming processes and practices, highlighting issues like growing costs, uncertainty, or their increasing dependency on external inputs. They talked about adopting 'modern' farming methods, as well as about factors beyond their control, like the introduction of genetically modified (GM) seeds. These awareness meetings brought in a new perspective: even those farmers who were claiming that 'modern' farming could lead to higher incomes realised that in fact it is highly expensive, causing extensive damage to soil health. During one of the visits to Bangladesh, organised as part of these exchanges, farmers learnt about the importance of biodiversity. They also learnt how to do rice breeding, and they also saw how the seed fairs there facilitated a wider exchange of seeds and knowledge.

Reviving traditional agriculture, reviving livelihoods

The slight change in our approach led to big changes in the communities. With an enhanced conviction and commitment, a few farmers decided to revive the traditional way of farming which their forefathers were following in the past. They first started addressing the issue of soil fertility by increasing the application of organic

Keonjhar is one of the poorest districts in Orissa state. It is characterized by dense forests and hills with a difficult terrain. The primary education and health services are almost absent, and the villages are not connected by a good road. Juang and Bhuyan are the indigenous communities living in this region. They mainly depend upon agriculture and the forest for their livelihoods. They have been practicing shifting agriculture for hundreds of years, relying primarily on local traditional knowledge. But the introduction of modern agricultural practices has resulted in farmers abandoning local traditional practices, even in these remote areas.

The region is known for huge deposits of minerals like iron ore, quartz, pyrophyllite, limestone, manganese, etc. Extensive mining activities have had a negative impact on the soil, water bodies and the forest, thus affecting these communities directly. Further, illegal land transfers, commercial plantation activities and extensive deforestation, have led to landlessness, environmental pollution and community displacements.



The People-led development process respects peoples' culture, beliefs, traditions and indigenous knowledge which are directly linked to their nature and food diversity.

Duskar Barik, KIRDTI



Notice board to prohibit people from felling trees

manure. On the basis of their own experience, and without external support, these farmers also started sharing the benefits of organic farming - and the harmful effects of chemical use - with other fellow farmers. Many of these discussions focused on the crucial and important role which the natural forest plays in traditional farming, and on how it helps farming by enabling the soil to hold moisture.

The farmers knew how crucial and important is the natural forest for traditional farming and how it helps farming by, for example, retaining soil moisture. With an increased awareness of the importance of local crop varieties, the communities decided to document what was available locally. They participated actively in the identification of all plant species. To their surprise, they found that several species which could be used as food and medicine were locally available. Many varieties of uncultivated foods, including roots, leaves, fruits, mushrooms, flowers and tubers were identified in 23 villages.

Farmers also realised that the new generation would not be able to appreciate and harvest these food crops from the forest if they did not know about them. This also meant that the forests had to be protected and conserved, and that they had to take up this responsibility.

Farmers actively participated in the learning exchange programmes through block level seed fairs and workshops. Farmers who were more articulate started getting involved in the policy advocacy campaigns and resisting negative farm policies of the government. For instance, farmers protested against the GEAC (Genetic Engineering Approval Committee) approval for GM seed field testing by staging a rally at the block and at the district level and submitted a resolution to the Chief Minister of Orissa, demanding the ban on field testing of GM crop in the state.

Moving beyond agriculture

Farmers did not limit themselves in improving their farming practices. They were enthusiastic to know more about other issues which affected them. Through a number of awareness sessions, KIRDTI helped people understand the laws and policies of the government with respect to their immediate rights and responsibilities. This awareness coupled with people's solidarity led to a number of instances where farmers raised their voice against practices that were affecting their livelihoods as well as the environment.

Some results, some challenges

The Juang and Bhuyan communities today are an empowered lot, capable of addressing the main issues concerning them. They are taking the lead in the organisation of learning and exchange programmes, of rallies, seed festivals, or of meetings in general, and have been successful in many instances. Equally important, they have been successful in reviving their traditional agricultural practices. The success stories seen in many local communities are being shared and have spread to neighbouring areas as well. Farmers in these neighbouring areas have shown interest to adopt sustainable agriculture practices. They have been interestingly participating in the seed fairs and other events at the district level. Local government officials have also shown a keen interest in this process, even if the government does not have a specific policy for the promotion of organic farming.

Conserving biodiversity



Madhu Munda in Bagira village grows vegetables following traditional methods

Farmers documented 46 varieties of paddy, 7 varieties of aromatic rice (like sankhachini, basmati, pimpudibasa, tulasiphula), 2 types of kalajira, 14 varieties of pulses, 13 varieties of oil seeds and 44 varieties of traditional plants. As these varieties of seeds were scarce, so they had to be multiplied to be grown on a wider scale. Farmers therefore set up 15 community based seed banks in 15 villages for multiplying and storing these indigenous varieties. Furthermore seed exchanges were organised by the farmers themselves, both at the village and at the Panchayat level. The seed fair organised in Harichandanpur by both men and women farmers, for instance, facilitated the exchange of seeds of 39 varieties of paddy, 11 varieties of millets, and 33 varieties of oilseeds. More than 500 farmers participated in this seed fair, coming from the Harichandanpur and Banspal blocks.

Fighting for their rights

Around 2,500 *Adivasis*, both men and women, demonstrated in a protest against the District Forest Department's decision to turn a 4588-hectare forest into a commercial plantation in 2007. Farmers demanded that the commercial plantation be stopped, and that records for the land they have been cultivating since their ancestral period be issued. These campaigns were run and managed by the *adivasi* leaders. Owing to the pressure exerted by the communities, the high level district administrative officers decided to stop the plantation. The whole campaign caught the attention of a large number of people as it was highlighted in most of the daily newspapers.

Farmers took a resolution and submitted it to the district administration, demanding the mining survey which was being carried out in different areas to stop. When the survey team entered their area, the farmers stopped them from doing the survey. This was followed by police complaints against 80 *adivasi* leaders and the arrest of three staff members, depicting them as maoist insurgents. The support of people from the surrounding villages forced this survey to stop for good. Also, illegal land transfers from the *adivasi* families to the non-*Adivasis* are very common in the area. With the support of KIRDTI and the district legal authority, 36 families filed legal cases, and as a result around 24 acres of land were released.



A protest rally by Juang tribes



Gouranga Dehury in Masinajodi uses bio-fertilizer for his crop

As an organisation, we have also changed, and these changes have equally contributed to the positive results mentioned above. As an organisation, we have shifted our role, changing from being a trainer and organizer and becoming a learner, listener and facilitator in the mutual learning process. The attitude of the staff towards the community farmers has changed, establishing an open communication system and mutual sharing of knowledge and experience by both farmers and the staff.

We feel that the interest seen among community leaders and among villagers in general is because they own most of the processes in which they have been involved. Most of the workshops, meetings and demonstrations at the block and district levels are being organised by

the farmers and the local organisations. *Adivasi* farmers have shown that they are able to effectively manage most of the tasks, whether this means obtaining a legal permit from the police administration, addressing the media, or ensuring the necessary resources for the local transport of people. It is this 'ownership' which has led to results, and which will ensure a sustained process.

But we are also aware of the challenges in promoting and sustaining people-led approaches in areas like Keonjhar. Nexus between the government and the industry in promoting industrialisation and mining is a great threat to the livelihoods of these *adivasi* tribal communities. Another threat comes from the insurgents present in this area. Farmers are not able to move freely, meet or organise training activities. These are the main issues to look at in the coming months.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The co-operation and support provided by the team and the farmers in implementing the programme as well as sharing the results is gratefully acknowledged.

DUSKAR BARIK

KIRDTI

Baldevjew colony, Behind Kashipur School

Keonjhar-758001, Orissa

E-mail: kirdti09@gmail.com

Sustaining participation and scaling up farmer empowerment

Elizabeth Cruzada

Farmer empowerment is one of the core principles of MASIPAG, the Philippines' farmers network, and is therefore the essence of its programmes, processes and structures. Guided by a 'farmer-led' or 'bottom-up' approach, its work puts farmers' needs, priorities and aspirations at the centre, and implies an underlying respect for farmers' diverse knowledge and capacities. What started as a small breeding programme is now a nationwide movement, and an example being followed in many other countries. It is based on the firm belief in farmers' potential to overcome cultural and social biases and to transform themselves into dynamic agents of development, capable of mobilising and transforming their communities and engaging directly with political and social institutions.



Collective work is an important practice by small farmers not only in agricultural production, but also to strengthen the organisation.

Photo Courtesy: IMASIPAG

MASIPAG started as a rice breeding project in 1986 and became an NGO programme on sustainable agriculture in the late 80s; it blossomed into a national network starting from 1993 and is now an emerging movement for farmer-led sustainable agriculture. Through these different stages, farmers have taken on breakthrough roles that continuously challenge modern agriculture's image of the 'traditionalist', 'backward', and 'ignorant' peasant farmer. In the process of asserting control over their agriculture and biodiversity base, farmers have become breeders, trainers, technicians and scientists in their own right. There are now more than 200 MASIPAG trial farms spread in 40 provinces, each of them holding not less than 50 rice varieties, both traditional and cross-bred, and including many popular farmer-bred lines.

On the other hand, farmers have also taken on different roles as social agents, accompanying the changes of their farms and agricultural environment. They became (or are becoming) better organizers and leaders of their own organisations; and also social entrepreneurs. Nowadays, more farmers are also overcoming their inherent shyness and becoming strong public speakers and advocates for sustainable agriculture and farmers' rights. Cross-cutting through these roles are the tasks of overseeing and managing the network and its programmes, tasks that are held by elected leaders at the provincial, regional and national levels of the network. This includes the planning, implementing and monitoring of all programmes.

Historical background

Back in 1985, a group of farmers came to the conclusion that there was a direct link between the problems that they were experiencing and the approaches modeled by the Green Revolution. Not getting support

from the government for HYV alternatives, they thought of developing rice varieties which would not depend on chemical inputs and other 'modern' technologies. So, they asked a group of scientists from the University to help them start a rice breeding programme. This resolve to 'breed rice like IRRI does', and to get scientists to support them was the farmers' first act of self-determination, the beginning of a farmer-led, bottom-up empowerment approach. A partnership ensued between the farmers, who donated land, labour and collected traditional rice varieties from rural communities, the scientists, who set up the variety adaptability trials

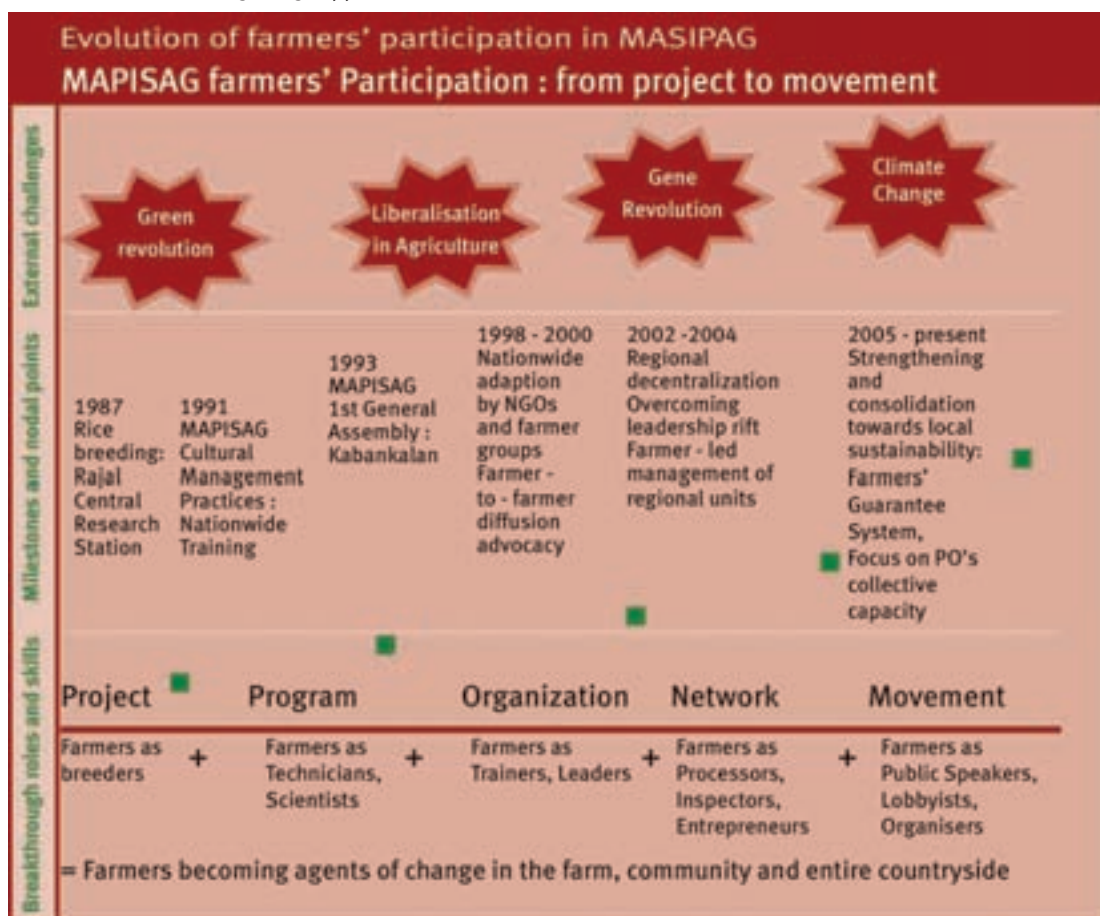
and designed the participatory research; and the NGO development workers (social scientists), who linked the farmers and scientists and who organised the entire project. This partnership formed the nucleus of the Farmer-Scientist Partnership for Development in Agriculture, Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-unlad ng Agrikultura, or MASIPAG. These roles are mainly pursued to this day, even if all activities have broadened substantially.

Today, empowerment is seen both as an end and as a process that begins with the farmers' needs, capacities and potentials. It implies at once the diverse economic, socio-cultural and environmental goals of food and livelihood security, control over land, genetic and other agricultural resources, and the creative assertion of farmers' rights. Of equal importance is the integration of dynamic processes of awareness-raising, confidence- and skill-building, of overcoming cultural biases and building collective efforts that target and mobilise farmers - not only as individuals but as a collective citizenry with the potential to re-make their role in history.

Empowerment is embedded in all the elements that make up the MASIPAG approach, integrated in all policies, programmes, projects and activities: the bottom-up approach, farmer-scientist partnership, farmer-led research, farmer-to-farmer mode of diffusion, systems thinking (or 'opposition to technological fixes'), and the promotion and assertion of the rights of resource-poor farmers (see box below).

Dynamic scaling up: quality and quantity

The MASIPAG approach works because concrete benefits are realised where they matter most: in the farm and household, and at



Elements of the MASIPAG Approach

- Bottom-up approach
Decision-making, planning and implementation within the organisation come from the membership. This is coordinated through farmer groups and a decentralised organisational structure.
- Farmer-scientist-NGO partnership
The organisation is run as a process of mutual, ongoing learning between farmers, scientists and NGOs.
- Farmer-led research
Research, including breeding of new rice varieties, is designed and conducted by farmer-members for farmer-members.
- Farmer-to-farmer mode of diffusion
Training in the network is largely conducted by farmer-trainers using a wide range of techniques including trial farms, exchange days and cultural activities.
- Opposition to technological fixes
Change needs to be understood in a holistic way including attention to farmer empowerment and farmer knowledge.
- Advancing farmers' rights
MASIPAG works within a broader commitment to farmers' rights. Farmers' rights include rights relating to land, seeds and genetic resources, production, biodiversity, politics and decision-making, culture and knowledge, information and research, and sociopolitical factors.

community levels. An impact study conducted between 2007 and 2008 in co-operation with MISEREOR, compared the work of 280 full organic MASIPAG farmers, 280 farmers in-conversion to organic agriculture and 280 conventional farmers as a reference group. The results showed substantial benefits for organic farmers in yields and incomes, food security and livelihood, social empowerment and adaptation to climate change.

According to the study, food security is significantly higher in the households of organic farmers, who eat a more diverse, healthy diet, have better health, and whose farms have a 'considerably higher on-farm diversity, growing on an average 50% more crops than conventional farmers, better soil fertility, less soil erosion, increased tolerance of crops to pests and diseases and better farm management skills-' Organic and in-conversion farmers showed higher average net incomes, and also showed increases in contrast to the stagnant or declining incomes of conventional farmers. Comparing the poorest farmers, 'the livelihoods (defined as net income plus subsistence) of the poorest quarter of organic farmers is one and a half times higher than the income of the poorest conventional farmers'. Further, 'net income plus subsistence value of crops calculated on a per hectare

basis also shows a clear, highly statistically significant advantage for the organic farmers revealing higher productivity in organic farms' (Bachmann, Cruzada, Wright, 2009: 'Food security and farmers' empowerment: A study of the impacts of farmer-led sustainable agriculture in the Philippines').

Today, across the country, more than 600 farmers' organisations from 47 provinces (out of the Philippines' 79) are formal members of MASIPAG. It is conservatively estimated that 35,000 farmer-households have been reached by its trainings, seeds and technologies; and there are currently around 200 farmer-trainers and 64 farmer rice breeders actively engaged in disseminating and improving farmer-controlled genetic resources.

Yet, as MASIPAG reaches its third decade, there are growing concerns about the continued viability of small-scale farming in the face of enormous issues: climate change, market liberalisation, and re-concentration of lands by agribusiness (local and international) and by large landowners; and also the commercialisation of genetically modified rice in the near future. The challenge for MASIPAG, as a network and as a farmers' movement, lies in ensuring the sustainability of small-scale agriculture, not only by spreading its seeds and technologies, but by working with farmers' organisations and also with local and national institutions for the protection of farmers' interests and the assertion of farmers' right to development.

Empowerment can also be seen in a rising scale of strategic goals-at the farm-household, community, and provincial-national levels. Scaling up occurs simultaneously in two ways-horizontally at each of the first two levels and vertically from the household to the national level. For the farming household, usually working on a less than a hectare plot which is almost likely to be owned by another, the immediate goals for engaging in sustainable agriculture would be minimizing production costs while increasing productivity in farming, for the family's long-term objectives of food security and the farm's stability amidst constant economic crises and climate unpredictability. The seeds and technologies in crop and livestock production and the overall organic and integrated farming systems favoured by MASIPAG, provide the tools, as well as the practice of the 'MASIPAG way of life'. This is a simple hardworking lifestyle where all members of the household cooperate with the different aspects and areas of farming.

Visible gains achieved towards food security and farm resiliency and stability are at the heart of scaling up-it moves the farmer to carry on, and moves other farmers to follow the example. Farmer-to-farmer diffusion occurs informally and daily in the fields and communities, not only during farmer-led trainings. For most farmers, their organisation (commonly called the PO, or people's organisation), works as a space where they learn about the MASIPAG rice (or corn and other crops) and its associated technologies, where they source and exchange seeds, share labour and new ideas, and create an alternative network of support that will replace the traditional economic dependence on trader-usurers.

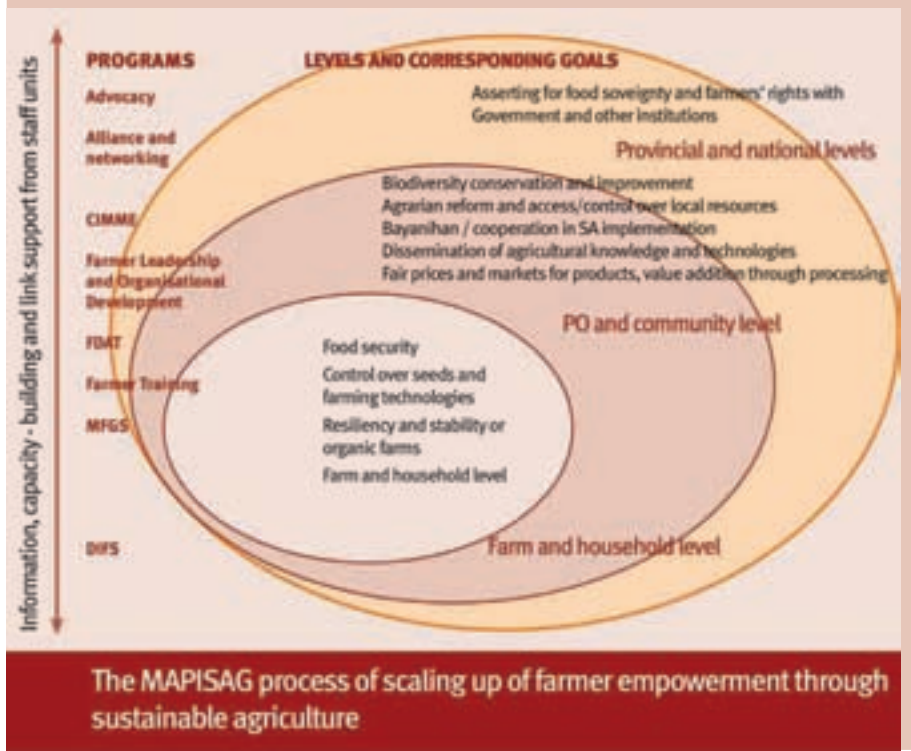
The most effective POs are those who are clear in their goals and who have created work-specific committees. A PO confronting regular flooding in their lakeshore rice fields in Camarines Sur, for example, has a seeds committee that tries to breed, access and make

available flood-tolerant rice varieties. Similarly, a PO engaged in the MASIPAG Farmer Guarantee System (MFGS) in Sultan Kudarat has organised 'work gangs' in schedules to efficiently implement the division of labor necessary in their 'bayanihan' (mutual exchange of labour for farm production) activities; they also have a grievance committee that accepts complaints common in these activities. Women's groups are especially creative: a PO engaged in the processing of granulated herbals in Misamis Occidental has a 'firewood committee', and a PO in Nueva Vizcaya, similarly engaged in MFGS, has a marketing team that identifies and befriends doctors as a direct market and endorsers of their unpolished organic rice.

It is at the community level where the larger goals can be realised through collective action: biodiversity conservation and improvement, improvement in land tenure, increasing the market access and value of farm products, disseminating sustainable agriculture knowledge and technologies, etc. POs are encouraged and guided in the making and monitoring of their structures and plans, and in the implementation of projects by provincial and regional leaders and staff.

Finally, at a national level, MASIPAG carries on advocacy activities for the advancement of sustainable agriculture that is pro-small farmer and towards the long-term goals of food sovereignty and farmers' rights. In the history of MASIPAG's advocacy work, it has presented the positions and demands of poor farmers to local and national government bodies on issues of GMOs and bio-safety, laws regarding the protection of plant varieties, the promotion of organic agriculture, agrarian reform, etc.

There are twenty provinces with organised PCBs (Provincial Coordinative Bodies), some of whom have functional advocacy committees, where farmers trained in advocacy lead public education, lobbying with local government units, and convening multi-sectoral forums or campaign coalitions. As a result, there is a growing number of local government units which provide ample space and budgets for the development of organic agriculture in their areas. The regional and national MASIPAG units provide information, a space for deliberations to arrive at a position on the issues affecting farmers, as well as offer trainings for speakers and campaigners. For providing support, there are programmes on networking and advocacy.



Conclusions

As MASIPAG endeavors to enhance farmer empowerment amidst increasing economic, social and political complexities, there is also an increasing need to link up with other like-minded groups to push farmers' rights and strategic interests forward. The pressures are mounting on small-scale farmers and their practice of subsistence agriculture, as well as their ways of life, by global food policies and the liberalisation of agricultural markets. Intensifyingly, there is lack of producer control over crops and crop varieties (as in the aggressive push for GM crops), over market prices, over large-scale land leases in agricultural nations, and across to issues such as fairly addressing climate change.

Small-scale farmers need to link with each other, at all levels - and MASIPAG is only too happy to offer its experiences for whatever learning can be shared, and to work together in creating a better Earth.

'For the harvest is great and the workers too few'.

ELIZABETH CRUZADA

MASIPAG

2611 Carbern Village,

Anos, Los Banos, Laguna 4030 Philippines

Website: www.masipag.org

E-mail: info@masipag.org

Sustainable agriculture: Farmers lead the way

Phanindra Sangma

Farmers around Mymensingh in central Bangladesh are attracting a lot of visitors to their farms as a result of their knowledge and experience in running their own crop breeding programmes. Sustainable agriculture practices are spreading through farmer to farmer exchanges, and farmers are able to make informed choices. This successful initiative based on local resources, local knowledge and local culture is being facilitated by CARITAS, Bangladesh.





Adivasi farmers in the region around Mymensingh, some 200 km north of Dhaka, face many of the problems which are common throughout Bangladesh. High-yielding varieties of rice and other crops, introduced during the last 40 years, have replaced many of the traditional varieties. Many farmers now depend on large quantities of external inputs, and these are not only expensive, but many times simply not available. These changes have been coupled with a general loss of soil fertility and of the local biodiversity. Agriculture has become cost-intensive and unreliable. Unable to meet the increasing farm expenses, small farmers started leasing out lands. In many cases they have also sold their lands.

CARITAS, a non-profit development organisation, started working in this region in July 1990, focusing on an integrated community development process. With a growing number of landless families, CARITAS started helping Adivasi farmers keep their lands through its Land Retention and Development programme. But in spite of the efforts, poor farmers continued to find it difficult to get a positive return from agriculture. We realised that farming had to become more self-reliant to make it sustainable. This also meant that farmers had to regain control of their farming activities, something that meant falling back on the local biodiversity and on their traditional knowledge.

Trying to be more effective in its efforts to promote sustainable agriculture among poor and marginal farmers, CARITAS decided to try supporting a people-led development process. We aimed at empowering farmers to adopt that type of agriculture which is self-sustainable, self-reliant, culturally acceptable and ecologically safe. On the basis of the local knowledge and experience, we wanted to help farmers make informed choices. In short, we wanted farmers to be at the centre of development - as the main actors, facilitators, planners and trainers.

The initiative

Although we were not new to participatory methodologies, a people-led development process was something we had not tried before. Most of our staff was used to seeing farmers as receivers of information, technology and inputs, and not as custodians of traditional knowledge. To promote a new approach, we first had to recognise and understand the role farmers play in preserving local knowledge and biodiversity. In various reflection processes, with the support of MISEREOR and with the convincing example of MASIPAG, the Philippine organisation where such an approach was followed, we thought of trying out a similar process in Mymensingh.

In the first meeting, farmers in the area got together to discuss the problems in agriculture, like rising costs and declining yields, and the growing risks of food insecurity. They also expressed concerns over the loss of the traditional knowledge. The discussions triggered the idea that farmers had enough knowledge to make agriculture both sustainable and profitable, and that they could positively contribute to ensuring food security in the region. A broad programme was therefore conceived to promote sustainable agriculture, including capacity building sessions, a farmer-run breeding programme, and also a series of demo farms (in a total of 2.6 hectares). This programme started on a pilot basis in the sub-districts of Modhupur, Nalitabari and Dhobaura in January 2005.

People-led development process is very effective in promoting Sustainable Agriculture. It highly respects the indigenous knowledge of the small scale farmers and their initiatives.

Mr. Asim Mankhin, Caritas Staff



Overcoming some initial challenges

Change in our approach required a change in our strategy and also in the attitude of the staff. Initially, some staff members expressed clear doubts about the benefits of sustainable agriculture, mentioning that there was little evidence of its benefits. We found that we did not have sufficient documented material to prove our point - neither internal nor external documents. Also, the staff members who were working as extension agents pushing technologies all these years had difficulty in accepting that their role had to be different. Instead they had to facilitate a process resulting in the empowerment of the local communities. A number of discussion meetings, orientation programmes and study visits helped staff to change their attitudes to some extent - and to stop seeing themselves as 'implementers' of a project.

Another challenge was the high staff turnover, and the consequences this brought. We had to invest an increasing amount of resources (and time) in internal trainings, and these were not always effective, nor well carried out, especially when they were not planned and budgeted in advance. We therefore started recruiting new staff, drawing people largely from the local communities.

Learning from each other

Our initial emphasis was on helping farmers regain control over seeds and motivate and enable them to spread knowledge to other farmers. This meant that farmers had to take a more active role in terms of seed production and conservation.

When we started the programme in 2005, we found that farmers were interested in developing a new variety of rice they could grow in the boro season, and which would demand less water and chemical inputs. But they were neither aware of the techniques nor had the necessary skills for doing this. Our colleagues also had a limited technical expertise and we felt we could not guide them properly. One way of providing technical skills could have been by engaging an external technical expert. But CARITAS had a strong conviction that effective learning could happen if these farmers learnt from the experience of fellow farmers who were already engaged in varietal development. We thought this was also a key issue for building confidence and self-esteem. MASIPAG was the obvious choice to

Spreading knowledge

Mr. Motindra Mankhin, a Mymensingh farmer, visited MASIPAG along with four project staff. They interacted with a number of farmers and institutions and got to know about organic ways of cultivation, varietal trials, and about gene pools. Along with acquiring breeding skills, Mr Mankhin's confidence levels also boosted as he saw that other farmers were successful in producing suitable varieties. Back home, the experiences were shared with the wider community. Mr. Mankhin trained 27 farmers on rice breeding techniques. An attitude of sharing and learning developed within communities, spreading knowledge and skills and empowering others in the community. At the moment, eight farmers, women and men, are breeding new varieties. Five are ready with the first generation (F₁), and one is growing the third one (F₃).

Varietal trials on farms

Based on the training and support provided by CARITAS in 2005, three farmers started varietal trials. Initially, they had some problems as quality seeds were not available. Lack of technical expertise hampered the process of selecting and segregating lines resulting from the crosses of two varieties. However, these problems were solved soon. Farmers started collecting local varieties and in some cases put together more than 50 rice varieties. Varietal trials were taken up on several 2m x 2m plots in rice farms. Organic methods of cultivation were followed. Another plot with a high yielding variety served as a comparison. More than 50 farmers have initiated trials in 22 villages. The best varieties were selected for mass production on an extended area (in 'verification trials'). In 2009, seven farmers from three agro-ecological zones took up verification trials using varieties like *Bashful*, *Chondoni Boro*, *Govida red colour* and *Puitta irri*. Verification plots have generally been larger (10 m x 5 m), but when the variety fared better than other varieties, the cultivation area was further increased. Along with it, attention was paid to improve soil fertility by organic ways, like applying biomass, cow dung, etc.

Seed banks

Farmer groups have also established seed banks to preserve the local varieties and also have access to them when required. About 15 community-managed seed banks have been set up in the three sub districts, where the seeds of trial farms are preserved. The farmers also started collecting seeds of local varieties from their relatives, the market and from other farmers, and added these to the seed bank. Presently, 84 rice varieties are conserved in the seed banks of Dhobaura, 69 rice varieties in the seed banks in Modhupur and 64 rice varieties in the seed banks in Nalitabari. With the establishment of seed banks, the access to local and quality seeds has increased considerably. Farmers who receive seeds repay double the amount to the bank so that there are sufficient reserves maintained. In the last three years, around 25 farmers have exchanged seeds from the seed banks. And the success of these seed banks is attracting a lot of visitors, including staff of the Department of Agriculture and Extension (DAE), who collected information from the farmers as well as seeds from the seed bank. Owing to their efforts in conserving seeds, farmers are being invited to participate in the seed fairs organised by the governmental agencies. In 2008, the already mentioned Mr. Matindra Mankhin received the first prize in the Agriculture and Seed Fair, for displaying about 120 local rice varieties.

learn from. Thus, the initiative started with a study visit to MASIPAG in September 2005. A farmer from Mymensingh along with four staff visited MASIPAG and interacted with a number of farmers and institutions. Back home, the experiences were shared with the wider community, something that motivated farmers to practice organic ways of cultivation, conduct varietal trials, and start seed banks (see box).

Considering that an exchange of opinions and ideas can have many benefits, a number of opportunities were created for farmer to farmer exchange. We organised a series of field days at the end of every cropping season, all of which enabled farmers to share their experiences. They have been able to show the results of the varietal trials, to jointly evaluate all trial farms and discuss the characteristics of rice varieties and their performance. More than 50 field days have taken place in the three sub-districts, resulting in seed exchanges and in the adaptation of traditional varieties.

We can now see a greater involvement of farmers in the programme. Having acquired the skills of crop breeding, farmers feel more confident. They are happy that they have begun to breed new varieties suitable to their local conditions, and although we still have to measure this more thoroughly, we see higher yields and outputs. Their knowledge and achievements have attracted a lot of visitors to their farms, with farmers working with other organisations visiting them and then promoting some of the breeding techniques in their working areas. Overall, we feel that farmers have gained a sense of satisfaction and pride in farming. They are confident with the skills and abilities they have gained during the programme, and proud of their knowledge.

Looking ahead

This new approach led to positive results in a relatively short period of time. While in some cases farmers started running their own breeding programmes, in others they tried new varieties, and selected the best ones for multiplication and conservation. The interest and motivation they all showed convinced us that we were on the right track. We saw that a programme which is based on local resources, local technologies and local culture has more chances of success. It was equally positive that all activities were properly planned and prepared, and that farmers played an important role in this. And one of the main reasons for success was that the programme created opportunities for farmers to interact and exchange ideas.

A people-led process recognises farmers as the key player in conserving seed diversity, in promoting eco-friendly agriculture and sharing of good practices. Having succeeded in achieving our objectives in the pilot phase, we are now keen to upscale it and also integrate it in other programmes. Through networking and building linkages, we also plan to continue reaching out to other development organisations and the government. But while CARITAS is keen on up-scaling the initiative, we are also aware of the challenges that need to be addressed-like the lack of awareness in alternative agriculture, the mindsets of farmers with a 'wait and see' attitude, and also the mindsets of staff who do not believe in participatory development processes. Most importantly, we feel that the policies of the government, many of them promoting use of external inputs,



Hermanson, a trained farmer, segregating lines for breeding

are a major challenge and a limitation in taking this initiative on a wider scale. We plan therefore to widen our efforts and reach out to the authorities at different levels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The support of team members, particularly, Francis Atul Sarkar, Md. Sirajul Haque, David Hembrom, Mamunur Rashid, Budhadeb Biswas, Abu Zafar Mohammad Sadeque and Augustin Baroi is gratefully acknowledged.

PHANINDRA SANGMA

CARITAS Bangladesh

2, Outer Circular Road, Shantibagh, Dhaka - 1217, GPO
Box. 994, Dhaka - 1000, Bangladesh

Website: www.caritasbd.org

E-mail: cbgeneral@caritasbd.org

sangmap@live.com

info@caritasbd.org

Communities manage Orans for protecting their livelihoods

Aman Singh



Pastoralists are actively contributing to a sustainable use of the forests and of the biodiversity in Rajasthan, India. Communities are now more aware of their responsibilities in managing the local resources. Having realised the benefits that networking can bring about, communities are collectively addressing issues concerning them, and also asserting their rights, wherever necessary.

Pastoralism is a key element in the livelihood strategies of the people living in the villages of the Alwar, Jaipur or Dausa districts, in the Indian state of Rajasthan. Orans, or the forests adjoining these villages, provide the necessary pastures for all animals. In addition to pastures, Orans are also a source of water during the whole year, and a source of fuel wood. Traditionally, Orans were managed by the local communities, the responsibility lying with the village institution called thain. These, however, have gradually lost power, and as a result, the local population has lost the responsibility and the possibility of managing their resources. This is having a serious impact in terms of production and incomes, and also in terms of the local biodiversity.

Krishi Avam Parishitiki Vikas Sansthan, or KRAPAVIS, is a voluntary organisation (NGO) based in Rajasthan which, since 1992, has been working at three levels: at the individual level by addressing the population's livelihood issues; at the community level, by helping restore Orans; and at the policy level, influencing the development of people friendly policies. During the last two decades, KRAPAVIS has been working with communities in approximately 100 villages.

Our way of working

As part of its work, KRPAVIS has been helping communities understand the need for managing Orans, considering the many benefits that these bring. We have helped communities get organised into committees or samithies; we have trained women and youth to disseminate information; and we have also ran awareness-raising campaigns, highlighting the importance of local management processes. In different ways, we have tried to get more and more people involved in these campaigns. The approach we were following, and the results we could see, gave us the impression that KRPAVIS was practising a people-centered and participatory process.

Hoping to increase the availability of fodder, in 2006 we started promoting the cultivation of an exotic fodder species called *deenanath* (*Pennisetum* sps.). This was expected to produce high yields, and thus help villagers have adequate feed for their livestock. The results of these efforts, however, were not what we expected. We rapidly realised that this grass requires irrigation, and that it is more suited for cut and carry systems. But livestock in this region is used to grazing, so villagers were not interested in growing *deenanath*. For the first time, we started thinking that perhaps we were not on the right path.

Deeper reflections enabled KRPAVIS to understand what was going wrong. We saw that our programmes were based on what we could offer, and not really on the needs of the community. What we saw as consultation, in fact meant that our staff was telling people what they needed to do. Participation was limited to attending meetings and contributing money and labour towards certain activities. Most of our time was spent negotiating financial contributions from the community for physical work (for example, establishing nurseries and plantations, the construction of check dams, land bunding, etc.), and not in understanding the villagers' concerns and priorities. Programme implementation was based on the strict and detailed log-frames formulated at the beginning of the project.

Realising what this all meant in terms of participation, we became very interested in the people-led development process (PLDP) which MISEREOR and some of its partner organisations in India were talking about - and gladly accepted the invitation we received to participate in meetings and to try it out.

Preparing for a new approach

During 2008 we organised a series of internal discussions in order to understand what a people-led development process meant. These were shaped by the examples presented by MISEREOR, and also by a series of consultations with other organisations and communities (with meetings taking place for several days, every three months). We then organised a number of field visits. Staff members visited 5 Orans in different villages (in Jugrawar Rundh, Meena-ki-Dhani, Kerawal, Bera, and Gujjarwas) and had long conversations with the pastoralists. These discussions helped us all get a clearer understanding of the way Orans were being managed, and of the knowledge people have and use to manage their resources. We learnt, for example, that villagers were well aware of the ecological consequences of over-grazing. Visits to other regions were also organised in order to see how other

organisations were promoting community forest management. In December 2008 we made an exposure visit to VIKSAT in Gujarat, an institution experienced in promoting community management of forests, especially by women groups. We discussed with the women self help groups and the tree growers cooperative societies about the community management of forests, and in October 2009 we made a four day exchange visit to Pune, where we met pastoralists from across the country.

These visits, and the resulting exchange of experiences, helped us see the possibilities for implementing a people-led development process. We saw that we could try something similar to what other MISEREOR partners were doing, even though our situation was different. Most important, perhaps, we got a more complete understanding of the local livelihood strategies. We saw that we had to go beyond forming samithies while working with people. We became sensitive to people's needs and priorities, and started realising how people negotiate rules. We could easily see which segment of the community was being excluded from participating in the collective initiatives. We also made efforts to create and strengthen local networks in an attempt to bring in everyone into the fold of the development process. Finally, we also understood the importance of communicating back to the communities. In short, we felt we could truly behave as community facilitators, and not as implementers of a programme.



Living beings in perfect harmony in a Oran

Found at the foothills of the Aravalli range, Orans are local micro biodiversity reserves, varying in size from a few hectares to hundred hectares. More importantly, Orans are a refuge for wildlife in an otherwise densely populated landscape. Most have sources of water, with either small springs or rivulets running through them, and a variety of ponds and nadis in their midst. In total, there are about 300 identified Orans in the Alwar District. In many cases, they are used for community gatherings during festivals.



Pastoralists lead mass campaigns

Completely led by pastoralists, in August, 2009, about 6000 pastoralists from the 300 villages in and around the Sariska Tiger Reserve, converged in Alwar to demand their historic grazing rights. Bera villagers, who were involved in the PLDP reflection process, took the lead in convening meetings in the affected villages and bringing them together to assert their historic claims over grazing. Grazing was severely affected by the transformation of Sariska into a tiger reserve and more recently into a national park.

Normally, before a national park is to be notified, the government is supposed to settle first any claims of affected communities in the area. But the records of the forestry department wrongly indicated that the pastoralist villages did not exist, even though people belonging to these villages have been paying taxes for their livestock. Both the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 and the Wild Life Amendment Act (WLPA) 2006 were grossly violated. KRAPAVIS helped people understand these procedures and facts, helping pastoralists believe that their claims were just.

Following this successful mass action, a number of parliamentarians have come forward to support the pastoralist cause. Kalpavriksh, a well known advocate for the environment has also extended support to the cause of the Gujjar pastoralists. KRAPAVIS has remained as a witness through out, helping communities with the documentation process. We see this as one of the most inspiring results of adapting a more people driven process.



Visible changes

Looking back, we see that the workshops and meetings we held have helped pastoralists try out and develop various forest management practices (including rotational grazing, or different lopping methods for different trees). These are complemented by many joint efforts, such as those of the women's association in Bakhtpura who, having been trained in nursery raising techniques, are currently producing more than 25,000 seedlings every year (and are reintroducing endangered species such as Jiyapota or Ajusta). In other cases, we have seen individual initiatives being followed by many other villagers. In the village of Gujjarwas, Mr. Sitaram took the initiative of replacing his goats with sheep, finding that they are far less harmful to the Oran. Other pastoralists gradually followed his example. In the village of Kerawal, Mr. Sohan Singh decided to go all the way to Basur, some 50 km away, to purchase seeds of mustard plants which were not available anymore in his region. These were rapidly multiplied and exchanged, and are now widely grown. It is clear that most communities have become much more aware of their responsibilities in managing the local resources, and of the benefits this brings.

KRAPAVIS continues to play an important advisory and organisational role. Local networks, such as 'Rajasthan Charwah Vikas Sangthan', have emerged as platforms for exchange of ideas and information on matters related to policy on Orans. The Oran Forum, formed by representatives of NGOs, government bodies, environmentalists and the local communities, has been meeting regularly and looking at the best ways of supporting the local management of all Orans. One of its most important results can be seen in the recently published State Forest Policy 2010 report, which includes the local population in the management of Orans. Considering that 'Orans are islands of good forests and repositories of rich biodiversity...' or that 'Orans are excellent examples of people's religious faith linked with conservation,' the state authorities acknowledge the ideas that KRAPAVIS has been advocating for long. This recognition has instilled a lot of confidence in the community and in our own organisation to continue with a people-led development process.

The staff's perspectives

Having worked with KRAPAVIS since 1998, Bala Sahay Tiwari sees a clear difference between his work back then and what he's doing today. Earlier work focused on forming a samithi, for which he felt he had to give instructions. When he learned more about people's traditional knowledge, he realised he should let them take the lead. At the start, Balasai saw himself as an *adhikari* (officer), whereas now he feels he is a *prerak* (facilitator). A similar opinion was given by Dasrath Yadav, who joined our organisation in 1997. Back then we were promoting the construction of check dams, or the renovation of ponds, and assistance was simply 'a question of visiting communities and asking them which service they required'. This was complemented by subsidies, something that is gradually stopping. Colleagues who joined the organisation recently highlight the emphasis given to community-planned solutions to livelihood problems.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The support of the team members, especially Pratibha Sisodia, H.C.Gupta, Tara Kasanwal, Balasahay Tiwari, Dasrath Yadav, Kamal Meena and Yogendra and pastoralist community leaders like Bodan Gujjar, Sitaram Gujjar, Ram Kunwar, Nanag Ram, Murti Mai and many others is gratefully acknowledged.

AMAN SINGH

Krishi Avam Paristhitiki Vikas Sansthan (KRAPAVIS)

5 / 218, Kala Kua, Alwar - 301001

Rajasthan, India

Website: www.krapavis.netne.net

E-mail: krapavis_oran@rediffmail.com





Strengthening people - led development

A joint effort of local communities, NGOs and donors to redefine participation

Only self-reliant communities who control their resources and participate in local decision making process have the potential to create changes that go beyond the local project level. This can be best achieved by facilitating people-led development processes, which calls for a shift in the way development agencies address these issues. Open communication, peer learning and creating spaces for experiential learning are the important elements of such development approaches. MISEREOR has been supporting such development initiatives with tremendous impacts on the community level.

Today, the process is well established with partners in Bangladesh and in some parts of India. It has already taken off in Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar and Kenya, directly involving around 20 partner organisations and 3 partner networks.

This document showcases the experiences of partner NGOs in India and Bangladesh in facilitating a people-led development process. These cases reflect that local communities, today, are more confident and are more aware of their own capacities. They are able to critically examine situations and provide local solutions.

This document is a joint effort by AME Foundation, Bangalore and ILEIA, The Netherlands. It is an outcome of an elaborate participatory process, with the active involvement and support of the local communities, partner NGOs and MISEREOR.

