

BAIF Helps Tribals Overthrow The Shackles of Poverty

It had been a hard day tending to the Orchard of mangos, cashews and custard apple plants and the two cows. Thirty year old Rajenbhai, a tribal, now sat comfortably on a chair on the verandah of his four roomed house overlooking his orchard and cow shed.

His wife was busy in the kitchen preparing the evening meal. There was to be some fish in the meal something, that was very, very rare ten years ago. The children, a boy and a girl, were in their room busy doing their homework. Rajenbhai was at ease with his life and family. They had come a long way since the days of struggle and deprivation.

About ten years ago his economic condition was below poverty line. The orchard was nothing more than degraded land worth almost nothing. The small plot of agricultural land he owned produced little. The output was not even sufficient to meet the requirements of the entire family.

Almost all the villagers faced the same economic problems. Lack of sufficient food and the below poverty line existence drove many of them to drink only to forget the pang of hunger and the misery of their existence. Year after year, after harvesting the meagre crop and celebrating Diwali, Rajenbhai, along with his family, like the other villagers would trek to distant towns in Gujarat, to seek employment at construction sites.

Very often they would leave behind the children with the old along with the cattle. Returning in June they would start cultivation during the monsoon season. Despite the toil and struggle the land produced little and Rajenbhai and his fellow villagers had almost reconciled themselves to a life of want and poverty.

Things however changed when an official from the BAIF Development Research Foundation came to the village. The Foundation, the brain child of the late Dr Manibhai Desai, a staunch disciple of Mahatma Gandhi started work in the village after holding discussions with Rajenbhai and other villagers.

They were asked what they wanted for themselves and their village. Almost in one voice

the villagers said they wanted to have the same type of economic activities other progressive villages had. Most of them said that they wanted to improve agriculture and increase their output. Above all they wanted a settled life so that they did not have to migrate to the urban centres year after year in search of employment.

To break the cycle of starvation, malnutrition and migration, BAIF launched the Comprehensive Tribal Rehabilitation Programme in the village. The programme focused on



Left: Mango orchard one year after plantation Top: Tribal family outside their hut

the integrated development of the village.

Under the programme the core activity was the development of orchards, locally known as wadis, on the degraded land. Other components of the programme include women empowerment, community health, drinking water supply, hygiene, sanitation and capacity building.

Those interested were encouraged to set up orchards with drought resistant fruit crops like mango, cashew, Indian gooseberry, tamarind, custard apples and ber on their degraded land. Interspacing was used to cultivate traditional crops. Hardy scrubs and trees useful for use as fodder, fuel and timber were planted along the bunds and borders of the orchards. Thorny species were planted on the outer edges to serve as a hedge-cum-wind break.

A typical Wadi has about 60 fruit plants and about 450 forestry species. These together provide adequate income and livelihood security under climatic vagaries. Fruit plants begin to generate an income only after about 5 years. In a period of five years a village with about 100 families has orchards

covering about 150 acres producing several hundred tonnes of mangoes/cashew/amlam etc.

Along with creation of orchards water resource development was undertaken for the use of human and cattle and for watering the plants. The availability of clean drinking water within the village helped reduce the drudgery of women who had earlier to walk long distances to fetch water for the family.

To improve the productivity of the farm land the farmers were encouraged to use improved seed. They were provided training in eco-friendly agricultural practices including, the use of green manure, vermicomposting and mulching to improve the productivity of the soil. Integrated pest man

agement was introduced alongside the traditional knowledge of crop protection.

Early in its intervention BAIF realised that women could play a major role in bringing change in the family and community. Among the tribals, under the traditional Wavli system, women enjoyed exclusive right over the income generated through backward vegetable cultivation.

Bearing in mind this unique tradition the Project included a programme to encourage vegetable cultivation as intercrops. Alongside nursery raising was also introduced. Along with ensuring regular maintenance of the orchards the women were able to earn substantial income from their vegetable production. Most of this increased income was spent on household expenses including food, clothing, kitchen utensils and the purchase of some jewelry.

With money at their command the women soon formed Self Help Groups through which they were able to secure micro credit for both consumption and productive purposes. Women groups soon started training in fruit and forestry management, mushroom

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production, vermi compost, vegetable production, sericulture etc. They were also trained in food processing and oil processing.

Health and sanitation activities were introduced in the villages under the programme. Particular attention was paid to the health needs of the women. Local Dais (midwives) and health workers were given training in modern techniques. The local Bhagats (traditional medicine men) were encouraged to join in the community health care programmes. The women SHGs took upon themselves the responsibilities of running Anganwadis. Local girls who had studied upto the secondary school level were training to run these centres.

According to the project authorities special attention was also given to the needs of the youth belonging to landless families. Groups of these youth were provided training in employment oriented trades like carpentry, masonry, smithy, processing of fruits and vegetables and marketing. These skills have helped the youth to secure gainful employment.

The success of the programme has been largely due to the fact that it was projected as a people's programme. It was sold to the farmers as a programme of the farmers, by the farmers and for the farmers. Emphasis was placed on the participation of the people throughout the implementation process.

To start with village level peoples organisation called Village Ayojana Samitis (VAS) have been created for the planning and execution of the programme. The implementing agency Dhurva identifies the participants. Help is sought from the village youth to mobilise the farmers.

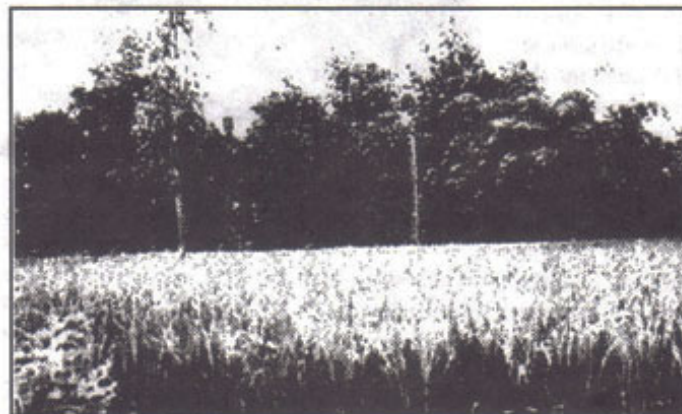
A member of the VAS is designated as the Field Guide (FG), who is provided the necessary training to be part of the Wadi management team. Another VAS member is trained as a Bare Foot Accountant to look after the accounts.

Dhurva selects the planting material and other inputs. It makes an assessment of the funds required and offers technical assistance and knowhow, ensuring its quality. The VAS is responsible of implementation at the field level starting from the identification of the participants to the procurement and processing of the produce.

A unique feature of the programme is the blending of grant with credit in an effort to

ensure the participants stake and involvement in the programme. Participants build a corpus by regularly saving small amounts. They also contribute 25 percent of their wages from the soil conservation work undertaken on their Wadi to the corpus

With the introduction of income generating projects participants felt the need for additional financial support. A credit programme designed to support income generating activities, micro enterprises, water resources development was implemented through Dhurva, VAS and the SHGs.



Lush green fields herald economic prosperity

The Wadi concept has had a major impact on the lives of the villagers. With the improvement in their economic condition villagers like Rajenbhai no longer need to make their annual trek to the urban areas in search of employment. The land, once barren with low productivity is now glowing green with crops swaying to the wind. Terrains which once accelerated spoil erosion and floods have been converted into terraces of orchards.

The fruit trees, about 60 mango plants per acre, are heavy with fruit every season. The sale of these fruit gives the farmers a regular income. Rajenbhai, like other farmers in the village, is happy. He is now economically much better off than he was about a decade ago.

Success has many followers. In the initial years there were few among the villagers who were willing to participate in the programme. The success achieved by fellow farmers has encouraged many more families in Rajenbhai's village to

join the programme.

As the trees start bearing fruit families are able to improve their incomes to almost Rs 25,000 per acre of orchard within four to five years. Earlier the families were unable to scrap together even Rs 5000 per annum.

The first five years after the start of the programme were difficult both for the farmers and the implementing authorities. To sustain the interest of the farmers during the gestation period the farmers had to be provided supplementary income. This was made available through intercrops, sale of fruit and forestry plants, vermicomposting, mushroom production, sericulture and the production and processing of medicinal plants. Micro enterprises were also set up.

The participating farmers have also been encouraged to rear cattle for milk. To ensure adequate availability of feed for the cattle cultivation of good quality forage has been encouraged.

For the farmers it has been a win win situation. The days of drudgery and suffering have become a distant memory. There has been an increase of happiness and a complete elimination of addiction to alcohol and other similar evils. In fact one of the conditions for inclusion in the programme was the willingness of the farmer to refrain from alcohol.

The success of the Wadi concept has resulted in the establishment of a large number of cooperatives to process fruits and vegetables. The oldest such cooperative the Vrindavan Fruit Processing Cooperative, in Vansda, established in 1989. In 2004-2005 it recorded a turnover of over Rs 2.50 crore.

As many as 12 cooperative societies are in operation in these villages doing a total business amounting to over Rs 30 crore annually. They

are mainly involved in the processing and marketing of farm produce, oil extraction, agro-service centres and trading in household goods.



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A major role in the development of the community has been played by women. With empowerment women have begun playing an active role in the economic, social and cultural life of the villages.

It is because of the women that children are now attending school regularly. Several girls and boys from these villages have completed education till the graduation and post graduate level.

The Wadi concept has gained national and international recognition. It was showcased at the EXPO 2000 in Hannover in Germany and presented as a Replicable Model for Poverty Alleviation at the UNDP Forum of Ministers for Poverty and Environment. These recognitions apart the concept the Wadi experiment has brought about dramatic changes in the lives of tribal farmers.

Like Rajenbhai, 35 year old Manibhai from Nilosi village is savouring the sweetness of success. He was among the first to join the movement and is now reaping the benefits of the scheme. Till 1997 he and his family had made the annual trip to the urban centres in search of employment.

The Wadi concept has enlightened the lives of over 50,000 families in over 200 villages in five states of the country, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Wadis have been established on over 32,000 hectares of land in these states.

An important element in the programme is the processing units which buy mangos and cashew from the farmers. A marketing unit ensures the sale of the produce in markets in Gujarat and even Mumbai. The products are sold under the brand name Vrindavan.

Karjun village in Valsad district of Gujarat is one of the villages which has adopted the Wadi programme with great interest. The



cashew process unit located in the village processes about 50 tonnes of raw Cashew.

The unit boasts of well ventilated halls where about

25 women process

cashew Raw cashew is sun dried in summer and stored. They are then steamed in order



Tribal women sorting cashewnuts in a processing unit in Valsad district.

to soften the shell and the kernel. The nuts are cut and dried over woodfire, peeled and finally graded.

The women are paid at the rate of Rs 7 per kilo for peeling, Rs 6 per kilo for cutting and Rs 50 per day for grading. With money in their hands the women have started a Self Help Group to pool savings. There is already demand for loans from members to buy land.

With increased productivity land prices have increased. In Karjun and neighbouring villages the price of an acre of unirrigated land has gone upto to Rs 50,000. For irrigated land the price has gone up to Rs1 lakh per acre.

While credit for the initiative belongs to the BAIF and its staff there have been critical inputs from other organisations as well. The KfW, a German Development Bank, has pitched in with financial support amounting to Rs 55 crore for ten years starting from 1995-96.

The programme is being implemented by Dhruva, with the support of BAIF Development Research Foundation. The Village Ayojan Samities (People's Organisations) are involved in the ground execution work. Monitoring and evaluation work is being done by NABARD.

The KfW funding has two components with free grants forming 75 per cent of the cor

pus and credit the rest. KfW offers funds free to Nabard, which levies an interest charge of 9 per cent on the credit component passed on to Dhruva. In turn, Dhruva passes on the funds to Village Ayojan Samities at 12 per cent.

Villagers can access funds for laying pipelines, equipment and other items at interest rates ranging between 15 per cent and 18 per cent. Loan recovery is 98 per cent. Villages taking loans have to be part and parcel of the Wadi adventure.

The interest earned are brought back into the system. The 9 per cent charged by Nabard is deposited into the Adivasi Development Fund Account operated by the refinance body in mutual consent with KfW.

After seven years, the villagers are made to run the show on their own with Dhruva standing by to provide some help. "Seven years are sufficient for the Wadi programme and its adjuncts to be managed by the tribals. Spoon-feeding is not encouraged," says a Dhruva staff member -Suresh Kr Pramar

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