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**Inclusive Development and Temporary Organizations: Field Notes from a Changing
Landscape**

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INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT AND TEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS:

FIELD NOTES FROM A CHANGING LANDSCAPE¹

ABSTRACT

Public projects related to economic and social development are supposed to create public wealth in terms of common resource assets such as common property like forests, local ecosystems like watersheds, and public infrastructure like roads and schools for inclusive growth. Often, however, while the material fruits of development like income opportunities and wealth creation are focused on, scant attention is paid to identity formation and change, a key dimension of inclusive growth. Through field-level studies of a spectrum of development projects that the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is associated with, we try to understand the context of the project over and above its tangible targets, to explore whether being included in the benefits of growth also bring about obligations to nurture a sense of belonging to the mainstream of civil and political life, and whether the interventions are ecologically sustainable.

This working paper is an interim deliverable of this project, which documents experiences in a micro water-shed project in an arid village of West Bengal, an eco-tourism project in Sikkim, an Umbrella Programme for Natural Resource Management UPNRM project in Andhra Pradesh and a Women's Self Help Group movement in Himachal Pradesh. We identify noticeable similarities and differences with respect to inclusive growth for these disparate projects in an effort to validate our analytical framework and identify new data needs as we continue our study.

Introduction

Inclusive growth is a term much in vogue in the vocabulary of policy makers and international development agencies. The wisdom is that for the impact of economic growth to be enduring in a heterogeneous sub-continent like India, it must have two distinct but interrelated dimensions. First, the material fruits of development like income opportunities and wealth creation must be widely distributed especially in favour of those whose capabilities to avail of opportunities opened up by economic growth is severely limited. Second, inclusion is also about identity formation and change. From the point of nation building, it is important to explain whether being included in the benefits of growth also brings about a sense of belonging to the mainstream of civil and political life. This second aspect is no doubt as important as the first.

Most economic investigations studying the impact of development projects focus on the material aspects of inclusion much more than on the identity creation aspect. When a project is conceived and structured for delivery many different stakeholders come together for social intercourse creating a temporary organization. The project succeeds or fails (there could be different grades of success or failure) and the temporary organization is disbanded. Most stakeholders (administrative/bureaucratic or development agencies) move on. The local people remain (both the beneficiaries and the non-beneficiaries) and their aspirations along with the

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way they relate to one another in the local community are likely to have changed considerably. What do these experiences reveal about the bigger question of identity creation and nation building?

Since economic liberalization began in 1991, the nature of government (both national and provincial) intervention in the economy has undergone a distinct shift away from the big public sector projects in industry or infrastructure to a varied range of projects which are micro economic in nature aimed often at a single household or a single village. The list of such projects is astonishingly long as is the variety of ways they get implemented. The combination of agencies ranging from local administration to central agencies, to state governments to NGOs and financial institutions varies from project to project and state to state. The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD²) is one institution that oversees many such projects. NABARD is wholly owned by the Reserve Bank of India and the Government of India. Though development banking is not the primary activity of the organization, it implements many projects on behalf of the government such as projects under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) as well as initiates some new projects of its own like the Umbrella Programme for Natural Resource Management (UPNRM).

This paper is based on the preliminary notes from some of the scheduled field visits to study NABARD projects as a part of a larger project to understand and explore the process and outcomes of development projects. The purpose is not to evaluate NABARD, but use NABARD to gain access to data and facilitate field visits. The purpose as mentioned earlier was to look at both outcomes and processes that bring about those outcomes. Most of the micro projects on economic development focus on the environment as well as on creating alternate livelihood opportunities. Hence the field studies tried to understand the processes through which the environmental, economic and human factors interact to create development outcomes, and the nature of the outcomes themselves. This first round of field studies included a micro water-shed project in an arid village of West Bengal, an eco-tourism project in Sikkim, a UPNRM project in Andhra Pradesh and a Women's Self Help Group movement in Himachal Pradesh.

In the four sections that follow I document the observations and learnings from each of the four field visits followed by an attempt to draw broad inferences from them in the conclusion.

Watershed in Bardhamaan: from Public Good to Private Gains

Bhalki is village in Bardhamaan district of West Bengal. Though Bardhamaan is generally a prosperous district in the state with a lot of paddy cultivation as well as lot of industries such as coal and steel, Bhalki (located on a relatively higher altitude with unfavourable terrain) was arid and rural and hence very poor. There was a clear and imminent need to manage water as a resource and then to leverage the resource to create economic opportunities in terms of livelihoods and augment the stock of natural assets. This would be possible only if collective

² <http://www.nabard.org/>

action was forthcoming from the villagers to manage the creation and accumulation of public goods.

The trigger, according to the villagers of Bhalki, came from two change agents who worked with great patience and effort to convince the people that it was worth doing. One was a local district level politician from the CPI(M) and the other was a bureaucrat, the local Block Development Officer (BDO). Both were convinced of the possibility of transforming the village. The local villagers were asked to attend frequent meetings in the evening to discuss the necessity and also to find the ways and means to build a water-shed. It is claimed by the villagers that the two men would invite the villagers to attend meetings but only enter the room if they were ready to “leave their clothes behind”. This was a metaphor used to indicate that whatever political “colours” people wore would have to be discarded when they came for the meeting. This would ensure (in an area where political polarization is widespread and deep) that political differences would not stand in the way of asserting the interests of the village as a community.

Ultimately, their efforts paid off, and the local people formed an NGO to create an institutional platform through which the District Development Manager of NABARD could provide resources and knowhow to build the water-shed. NABARD was brought into the picture only when the NGO was formed. The NGO has always been controlled by relatively well-to-do villagers who came from upper castes and other backward castes, but not from the tribal people or minorities living in the village. They had land that could be donated to the community to build an office or plant trees. Even now the village has three distinct spaces where Muslims live (the *Kaji para*), where the adivasis live (the Bengali word used for the identification was “*asabhya*” or uncivilized), and where everybody else lives.

The original watershed committee (NGO) has 13 members including two women. While an officer of the Grameen Bank piloted the setting up of a cooperative that cut across political party lines, this was made possible by Mr NK Barman, “*Bhagaban*” (the BDO) and the local village development officer(VDO). They believed that in matters of development political strife does not have a place. Mr Barman remained a bachelor, wedded to his work, who was at Bhalki to neither give nor take, but to talk of developmental schemes and involve all the people at the grassroots.

The initiation of the water shed development where (according to the scheme’s conception) a lot of “*shramdan*” (labour) would be required necessitated the formation of Self Help Groups (SHG) who could help clear the terrain and plant a large number of “*sona jhuri*” trees. This led to the formation of many women’s SHGs that were mixed in terms of caste, religion and economic position. The project had a planned target of Rs.2 crores worth of social forestry. The success of the initiative is evident from the outcome that the water shed area covers approximately 950 hectares where a large percentage of the land is private. The water table rose from as low as 307 feet to as high as 60 feet, so that submersible pumpsets for 24x7 water availability in richer households is a common phenomenon. During the watershed project implementation there were around 60 SHGs and 600 families. With an average size of 8-12 members per SHG, almost all families in Bhalki village were involved in at least one SHG. Since watershed development, tree plantation etc are activities with long gestation periods, in the first 2-3 years,

other schemes such as planting kitchen gardens etc were also initiated. Moreover, now there is no money lending in the traditional sense of usurious activities. For social exigencies like weddings, people prefer leasing their land to the SHGs to selling it and plan to use the proceeds from their land for repaying loans that they take from the bank or from SHG funds. One of the best outcomes of the watershed project is evident in seeing the way the NREGS is executed in Bhalki village as compared to other villages. While in other villages people tend to shirk work and just collect the wages as dole, in Bhalki, people understand the value of shramdan in creating a tangible public asset – hence people work conscientiously and results are there for all to see.

The process was to take privately owned fallow or uncultivable/ unusable land (which was most of the land in Bhalki village) on lease for public tree plantations and/ or as ponds to be refurbished for watershed development (ground water recharging) coupled with pisciculture. This was a little difficult at first but once the benefits were demonstrated, land owners rushed to the watershed development committee offering their land. To start with, all demonstrations were done by picking up the worst pieces of wasteland. The sharing protocol followed is that of the proceeds from the economic activity carried out on leased land, the owner gets 25%, the SHG who has conducted the activity gets 70%, 1% goes to the Panchayat Samiti, 2% to the Panchayat and 2% to the watershed committee. Once NABARD adopted Bhalki, a plethora of projects suddenly descended on the area; the pisciculture department and horticulture department took keen interest although not all interventions of theirs were successful. Swajaldhara (a drinking water project) was commissioned in 2005/06, and when the pipelines cost exceeded the sanctioned amount by around Rs 2 lakh due to the delay in execution, the watershed committee loaned money from the SHG funds for an electrical transformer for running three pumps – now this loan is being gradually repaid. And as the watershed project started showing shades of success, private landowners were keen that their land be used for plantations too, with several of the rich landowners happy to donate land to set up an office for the watershed committee.

Not all watershed interventions were success stories. In the production of corn, an instantiation of organic farming, villagers were sold seeds to produce corn and they produced large and juicy cobs of corn. The buyers (who were also the seedsellers) kept deferring their plans to buy the corn while the SHGs, being contract bound to these buyers could not sell the corn outside, leading to the corn rotting in front of their very eyes. Medicinal plant cultivation, a stated objective of the watershed project, also did not work out primarily because the firms they had tied up with who supplied seeds and promised to buy the produce reneged on their agreement after collecting the monies for seed supply. The watershed committee members did attempt to identify markets on their, but their lack of networks and exposure and inability to deal with suave “English –speaking” men, meant that they could not penetrate the medicine plant “huge market mafia”. Such “spurious” plans have left them quite dejected, and have added to their frustration of not being able to achieve much more simply because they are not “smart or networked” enough.

Another voice that was frequently heard was that if this watershed exercise is to lift one out of poverty on a sustainable basis then some basic capabilities are required - “*nirakkhar meyeder*

chetanar abhaab" (the uneducated woman is not aware enough) – education is key. The SHG movement has definitely empowered many relatively educated women; there are 10-12 SHGs in Bhalki with turnovers of over Rs 2 lakhs each. Yet it is observed that SHGs formed between women who are not educated are usually the ones where the loans of Rs 3000 are never repaid and the women don't come back after a one time dole. This is especially true in the tribal settlements of the village which forms 55% of the population. There is some improvement, however. Now, it is safe to venture into the tribal settlements in the evening. The roads connecting the tribal settlement to the Muslim and Hindu settlement are well used with some of the tribal girls coming into these settlements to learn non tribal dance and song. Health awareness among the adivasis has gone up with them being educated about the problems associated with eating dead cattle. However, the adivasis still burn forest land (belonging to the forest department) to smoke out wild boar and rabbits which they hunt as an elaborate ritual – a practice that is yet to change. They are yet to understand that the natural capital is theirs to use and preserve (*"nijer bhaba ebong daytyo neowa"*). Some evidence of the adivasis gradually getting integrated in the village can be seen by their increasing presence (*kapor porey*, wearing regular clothes) in the Shiv Ratri festival and feast that takes place in the Hindu settlement area.

As NABARD has withdrawn from the project, a lot of the good from the past is becoming undone (*"kaaj dhoshey gechhey"*). Within the SHGs several factions have formed, as all of a sudden, there are many grants and resources available and everyone is competing for the easy resources. Politicization, greed and jealousy are sounding the death knell of the social capital that was formed through the SHG formation. The zilla parishad, DRDC etc have been giving cash resources which have become a bone of contention. What was good about NABARD was that they did not give out money directly, they were politically neutral and their monitoring was detailed, hands on and systematic. After a while, however, some of the training and awareness programs were repetitive and useless. The politically unstable condition in the village will take at least 10 years to resolve. At present the Trinamool congress is strong and there are so many factions that it is impossible to form tight groups like the SHGs that were formed in the past. With the different kinds of funding, *"NGOder khamata shorkar kerey niyechhey"* the government has usurped the authority of the NGOs – the NGOs have to help form the SHGs, who get the funds, while the formation, mentoring and monitoring costs of the NGO are not reimbursed. This system is not sustainable (*"tikiye raakha shombhob naa"*).

With the last phase of NABARD's involvement over, the committee is thinking of newer proposals to submit to NABARD, one being that of village tourism as there is a successful commercial venture in the neighbourhood. A suitable area, adjoining forest land where there are sal plantations, has already been identified for such a project. There is a need to complete the water and soil conservation activities. However, as things stand now, the watershed committee's activities are not sustainable – they have been hungry for funds since January onwards, they have done far more than their mandate (15 ponds as against 9 ponds, for example), but it pains them to see their efforts crumbling. For example, with the lack of rains this summer(2010), farmers have been taking short term measures to divert water to their farms from the watersheds by breaking some of the bunds. As private interests take over, one can already see the watershed project disintegrating.

While the ability of water and trees to turn around the physical neighborhood and create opportunities for livelihoods was like a revelation to the villagers and they were quickly able to translate the natural assets into income flows by accessing a fairly well organized market in the Durgapur-Bardhaman belt, when they tried to go beyond that market into markets in Kolkata, they were unable to do so. Not only that, in instances they were rudely shocked and distressed by losses they had to incur in trying to gain access. The changing landscape and related activities brought about greater visibility, new projects from different government departments and even greater social dignity, as one gentleman put it quite succinctly, that Bhalki daughters were getting better grooms and marriage proposals with the advent of greater water and hence greater prosperity.

Bhalki is a good example of how political differences could be shelved for a tangible developmental project. However, the leadership, after the galvanizing role played by one or two change agents, was appropriated by the well to do people in the village who also happened to be Hindus. The Muslims and Adivasis were at the fringe. The Muslim women who were leading many active SHGs were certainly feeling more empowered. The adivasis were obviously outside the loop of change. They were modernizing in terms of going to cities and doing work as construction labour, and had moved from consuming country liquor to Indian made foreign liquor. But their persistence with the traditional practices of hunting had left the watershed committee worried. The construction of nature in the adivasi community and the vision contained in the developmental ideology of the NGO were different and apart, not really mutually understood and assimilated.

With the completion of NABARD's involvement in the project, which was perceived by one and all as the "NABARD water shed", the ability to keep the even the original NGO together may become really difficult. A number of individual interviews with members revealed that the time has come to take the aspirations of the village (read the people who were controlling the water shed) required a stronger institutional set up. With NABARD going away they were already thinking about their original political roots. West Bengal's deep polarization in politics, and a completely fluid political atmosphere may have contributed to this attitude. The temporary organization is slowly disbanding and without the collective action of all sections of the village, the water shed and the other natural assets created may be hard to retain. Already there are offers that the relatively well to do residents are talking about – to cut down trees violating the sustainable felling norms to gain liquid cash before political and organizational uncertainties set in. The cooperative mentality that had marked the origins of the water shed is being eroded without a central (non-political) agency like NABARD providing the gel to glue it together. The relative inequalities are showing up, the caste/community divides are coming to the fore, and individual's are seeking political support and refuge as they try to usurp the common properties and natural assets created for individual gain. Perhaps access to markets and the plethora of opportunities and funds available have bred a raw mercantilism among the beneficiaries. The greed associated with mercantile capitalism is eroding the initial *shramdan* centric cooperative, trans-political mental frame that the two change agents had weaved together in constructing what was viewed as a common good.

Eco-tourism in Sikkim: Natural Assets for Development, or Developing Natural Assets?

The lush green hills of Sikkim with the Teesta winding through the gorges and valleys attract tourists from all over India and the world. The verdant hills of Sikkim are in sharp contrast to the unkempt denuded patches of neighboring West Bengal's Darjeeling district. The large dumpsters and the dusty rockslides on the banks of the Teesta in certain places seem to be the only telling sign of the march of development in terms of the new hydro-electric projects being built.

The timber is rich and abundant. Merchants located in Siliguri are all too eager to access more and more of the resource. Sikkim did provide some supply, and most people depended on forests for their livelihood. In many parts cardamom was a major commercial crop, followed by oranges. Four or five years ago cardamom was struck by a mysterious disease that reduced productivity by 95%. Productivity of oranges also declined. This uncertainty coming from a supply shock, forced many villagers to meet the demands for timber from the plains. Felling trees for timber became much more common and based on individual needs. There was no coordinated effort to go for sustainable forestry. Government jobs were scarce, and apart from forestry, agriculture and tourism there were few opportunities to turn to. The state government realized that this was a problem.

The responses of the government were two fold. It planted China teak trees under the Brahmaputra watershed programme which are now about three years old. Most trees, even in the interiors of Sikkim (in the area we visited) are 16-18 years old and trees more than forty years old have all but vanished. It is difficult to convince people to not cut trees when they are compelled to do so to earn their livelihood. So the government decided to encourage, through local institutions and NGOs, the promotion of eco-tourism, where tourists would be encouraged to stay in village homes and get acquainted with the flora and fauna of the region, hike and climb trails and soak in the local culture and the cuisine. If this fetched revenues, then people would quickly learn that conserving the forest was important since it was a natural capital asset that could provide a flow of income. Local financial institutions could provide some micro finance to create the minimal assets required for tourism – like a designated bedroom, a clean toilet, and a hygienic kitchen. In looking for alternative livelihoods villages already had been experimenting with handicrafts and new crops through new organizations such as Farmers' Clubs and Multi Product Cooperative Societies. NGOs would have to play a pivotal role in providing training and also bringing in the tourist traffic through marketing the concept and the locations.

We visited two villages where eco-tourism is an established activity – Pastanga in East Sikkim and twin villages of Lingee-Payong in South Sikkim. Pastanga is a village dominated by the Rai community, while Lingee is dominated by Lepchas and the Payong village has a majority of Chettris (Brahmins). While the business models envisioned in the two sites were similar, the process and power structures were quite distinct.

In Pastanga an old informal organization was registered as an NGO called KEEP. This was initiated by the efforts of the Director of Village Health Services who first mooted the idea of village tourism. Initially 40 rooms in different homes were earmarked for hosting tourists. The

price was settled at Rs.500 per night. A fairly big and organized NGO called ECOSS based in Gangtok stepped in later to assist KEEP in attracting tourists and in capacity building. The villages of Lingee and Payong are supposed to work under a similar business model, and was nurtured and supported by ECOSS. The initial fund was created from voluntary donations to create the facilities for home-stay visits. The business model was cooperative in the sense that the maximum daily revenue from 40 guests, estimated to be Rs.20,000 would be divided equally amongst the members. At both sites, other members of the village who could not keep a guest for lack of facilities would still have an opportunity to earn something by supplying services to the households that kept guests. For instance it would be possible for one household to do the cooking for the host family or provide trail guide services for taking tourists on a hiking trip or nature appreciation tour. Cultural programmes could be provided for entertainment as well as sensitizing tourists to local practices and traditions. These services could be priced separately or built into the tariff, with sharing done later internally within the village. Prices have been revised and different models of sharing have been tried. The state government has provided soft loans to build a small house with an attached bath for exclusive use for eco-tourism; NABARD has provided assistance in both capacities building as well as providing some finance for setting up of a communications centre in Pastanga. This communications centre with internet facilities would help the village directly access the tourism market and improve the logistics of bringing the guest to these remote villages (as compared to the towns that are on the regular tourist beat). ECOSS enables better coordination and expansion of eco-tourism services such as conducting complementary training for spoken English or handicraft production alongside training for eco-tourism services. The NGOs, village communities and the village panchayat all jointly take ownership of the concept. Financial institutions like NABARD and the State Cooperative Bank are also eager and available for provided banking linkages and the future ability to draw credit and facilitate larger working capital use. During the field visit the General Manager of the Reserve Bank of India and the District Development Manager of NABARD held a meeting with the villagers of Lingee and Payong to encourage and enable banking habits and talk of joint liability groups and their advantages.

In the nascent and evolving eco-tourism market there are a number of constraints that may prevent the scalability of the model to include more homes and families within a village in participating. Training villagers requires special attention to home stay basics like hygiene, sanitation and basic utilities like hot water and clean sheets and electricity (and its standby alternatives). Over and above, language becomes a problem where most tourists (especially the potentially high value foreigners) would be comfortable in English and would be quite unfamiliar with local dialects. Language training in spoken as well as written English can be a critically important input in the creation of assets. Physical communication can also be a constraint, especially the quality of the connectivity from the vehicular road to the actual village house where the tourist would be staying. This trail or pathway has to be reasonably comfortable and easy to negotiate. This would have to be true for all houses chosen for home-stays. There was, for instance, an occasion in a village when more than 30 guests of a single group came for a home-stay. Their home-stay locations were not exactly contiguous. Having come in a group the members naturally wanted to at least have their meals together, but the

village was unable to organize a venue big enough. A village is not exactly a planned cottage resort.

We found the business model somewhat nebulous and ad hoc in character, but all seemed to be aware of the need to have printed receipts and registers. The pricing model and the revenue sharing arrangement were not transparent. While price differentiation is a distinct possibility in such an activity (the environmentalist's argument about the willingness to pay for enjoying natural amenities) non transparency could lead to conflicts in revenue sharing arrangements.

Though the advent of the concept of eco-tourism all over the world (Sikkim is not an exception) was centered around the need to conserve nature both for instrumental as well as intrinsic reasons, our experience in Pastanga as well as Lingee Payong was that the instrumental reason for eco-services as a source of livelihood far exceeded the concern for the intrinsic worth of Nature. Compiling local knowledge about natural assets and creating an inventory of flora and fauna and a comprehension of the local eco-systems were accorded low priority when compared to the more short-run revenue stream that a home-stay with local food and quick hike for a view of snow-capped peaks could provide. There was also an eagerness to use the opportunity to acquire physical capital assets like improved sanitation or a better kitchen that would remain as personal wealth even if eco-tourism did not provide adequate income.

Another significant issue that was plainly evident was the degree of unease displayed by people in the village who were not being included – they were poor in the sense that their house could not be chosen to house guests, their kitchens could be inadequate on a hygiene benchmark, their ignorance of English would prevent them from providing services as a tourist guide. They were not clear where exactly they fitted in, in the new activities that were being organized. The poorer a household was in the village, the lower was its ability to be included in eco-tourism activities.

This differentiation was not limited to economic assets alone. In Lingee and Payong there was a major disagreement between the Lepchas of Lingee and the Chettris of Payong when, despite the initial understanding that the twin villages could leverage a synergy by jointly promoting eco-tourism, the NGO registration initiated by Payong residents did not mention Lingee in the name. This was corrected later after a lot of efforts at reconciliation. The Lepchas are still not as active and visible in the project as the Chettris of Payong. Not only that, some educated residents of Payong (we talked to two graduates in Law and Political Science from North Bengal University) felt left out and slighted because despite having played a role in mooted the idea of eco-tourism, and campaigning for support, they had no role in organizational or operational matters. The village panchayat had, in their view, taken over. The caste/community/class differentiations continue to act as a drag on greater inclusion and greater momentum in scaling up the activity.

A positive feature at both ecotourism sites was the almost universal recognition of the importance of education, including education for women. A middle aged illiterate lady proudly told us about her two daughters studying in college and junior college respectively. Mixed with her pride was just a tinge of despair when she told us that she wished she had been born a few years later than she did, so she too would have had the opportunity to be educated. Aspirations of the younger people were universally focused on becoming urban and seeking the “good life”

in the city, a feature that was common with Bhalki. It was indeed quite revealing when we appreciated a traditional song and dance performance by a young Lepcha boy as part of a cultural programme to entertain the guests. He told us that he could do Bollywood numbers and the light in his eyes was sufficient to indicate that that was the real stuff, even if his village elders might think otherwise. His ambition it turned out was to participate in the TV talent show 'Dance India Dance'.

When we were walking back to the car on our trip back to Gangtok, the NGO executive accompanying us told us about their campaign to encourage villagers who were interested in constructing a new house, to keep to the traditional Lepcha design and architecture. It would create a cultural ambience that was more traditional. With a wry smile he pointed out a small but very smart looking modern western style bungalow. The owner had refused to build according to Lepcha designs; he had said all his life his ambition was to build a house like the ones well to do people from the cities did in the hill stations. Ambitions and their symbols of success were far removed from the idyllic concept of a cultural tradition that the government or the NGOs (or perhaps even the potential tourists) had in mind.

UPNRM in Chittoor: Private Property, Public Eco-systems and Sustainability

Chittoor district lies at the southern tip of Andhra Pradesh between Chennai and Bengaluru. The region is rocky and hilly, a part of the Eastern Ghat mountains. The elevation of the district is up to 2500 feet. It is considered to be a depressed district as its per capita GSDP is less than the average of the state of Andhra Pradesh. It has dairy, sericulture, poultry and mango production and processing as its main economic activities supporting the rural population. Apart from mango, groundnut, sugarcane, banana, tomato and paddy are also grown. The district is prone to drought and water is a scarce resource. Animal husbandry is a major activity in addition to agriculture and horticulture. The district's milk production and manure and cattle sales are estimated to be around Rs.1500 crores annually. Blessed with excellent roads and transportation networks, milk is marketed in Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and goes even up to Delhi, with demand for milk steadily rising. The district rural development authority (DRDA) has established 51 bulk coolers in the district that procure about 1.5 lakh litres per day. There is an agreement with Balaji Dairy for supplying chilled milk. Since animal husbandry is the most important supplementary activity that rural farmers take to, it can assume critical importance in an area where the possibility of drought is high and productivity of agriculture is low.

It was against this backdrop that NABARD thought of improving the animal husbandry sector and integrating some activities that together could complement agriculture in a major way. The scheme that we studied was called Umbrella Programme for Natural Resource Management (UPNRM). This was supplemented by NABARD's efforts to facilitate bank linkages for poor marginal and landless farmers through Self Help Groups and Joint Liability Groups.

The conception of the programme was to facilitate the breeding of hybrid cattle like Jersey and Holstein cows through artificial insemination. Financial assistance in the form of loans would be provided. Individuals who bought the animals would have to have some land in their

possession so that they could make provision for growing fodder, which is expensive and adequate supply has to be ensured. Infrastructure support like veterinary services for both animal health and breeding would be provided. Farmers without land could be encouraged to rear sheep and poultry. The greater spread of animals would open up the possibility of using the dung for producing bio-gas which in turn could be used by the households as a cooking fuel.

Under UPNRM, groups would be encouraged to use public lands for horticulture, especially mango, amla, sapota and groundnut in the villages where animals would be reared. There were large markets for these crops and often for mangoes (the local variety is well known) the processing units would send their own men and equipment for plucking and packing so as to ensure that the fruits are not damaged. Milk cold chain is well developed and would develop further when good quality assured supplies would be forthcoming from the district.

NABARD identified a local NGO called Mitra Association for Social Service (MASS) for providing the organizational structure through which to coordinate the programme. MASS was already operating in the poor tribal belt of Chittoor in NABARD's Integrated Tribal development Project covering 1038 ST families of the Yanadi tribe in the Palamaner region. It involved work in soil conservation, horticulture, and education and health along with credit provision and capacity building. The UPNRM would give the NGO a natural fit as well an advantage in terms of the experience of working in the region. Hence UPNRM in the Palamaner region could be dove-tailed into the tribal development activities, obtaining a synergy through convergence.

Thus the programme targeted tribals as well as other farmers in the adjoining areas. The area chosen was a contiguous region of tribal hamlets in Palamaner, Baireddipalli and Bangarupalyam Mandals. In the chosen area the majority of the population came from SC, ST or OBC backgrounds, and was generally very poor. It was decided that the beneficiaries would be at least 50% women and at least 50% tribals from the Yanadi tribe. It is interesting to note that the Yanadi tribe hails originally from the state of Tamil Nadu. they were resettled in Andhra Pradesh in the 1960s and given individual plots of land. Many of these plots were unsuitable for cultivation, and many were literally allotted on almost vertical slopes of a hilly terrain!

The project activities were proposed to allow integrated usage of natural resources on a sustainable basis with a focus on dairy farming. The individual farmer would be given two cross bred milch cattle for milk production and calf rearing, fodder production would be expected to take place on a 20 cent (area unit) plot. Each farmer would be encouraged to have a bio-gas unit of one cubic metres and a vermi-composting unit of two tanks with a capacity of 5 tons per year. The NGO would ensure a feed mixing unit and fodder cutting units in common places in the village, make available a mobile veterinary unit. The NGO would also facilitate *azolla* (an algae that grows very rapidly and a small dose added to the feed for the cow increases the protein intake of the animal and raises the quality of the milk) production units for farmers and provide exposure, knowledge and training as and when necessary.

Farmers without land would be provided a local variety of sheep for rearing in the commons. Unlike goats they do not destroy the tender shoots of grass, keeping the commons intact. There is reportedly a large demand for mutton that could be met with these sheep. The project

had also originally included the construction of a modern abattoir in the region to facilitate the slaughter of sheep.

Alongside this project was a horticulture project already in operation for the tribals that was using village commons and some land not suitable for paddy or other crops to grow mainly mango plantations. MASS was supposed to integrate both into a truly sustainable natural resource management project.

Marketing of mango or other horticultural products along with milk is not a serious problem, both product categories had unmet demand. The cold chain developing in the district was a distinct advantage. Regular returns from the sale of milk were expected to give around Rs.4,000 income per month per family. The credit line for buying animals of proper quality would be provided by MASS through the Grameen Bank and the individual taking the loan would share the liability as a group. MASS was also mandating that at the time of purchase the animal was insured through a nationalized insurance company. The other advantage, over and above the income supplement was the boost it would give to the cross bred germ plasm for better calf rearing.

The mini bio-gas unit conceived could provide quality cooking gas to a family of four or five. The construction would be subsidized under NEDCAP (a state government scheme) and the slurry obtained from it could be used for vermi-composting. A lot of laborious effort would be saved for women who were expected to procure and use firewood. Cooking gas would also reduce health costs and improve the quality of life. Vermi-compost would save farmers the cost of inorganic fertilizers and could be used for enhancing horticultural productivity and spreading the use of organic farming.

The project also envisioned the positive impact such activities would have on the environment where conservation of natural vegetation (reduction in the use of firewood) would be helped with the installation of bio-gas units. Similarly the release of methane (a GHG) would be reduced with the use of the dung for making bio-gas, the use of inorganic fertilizers would be reduced with the help of vermi-composting and above all the provision of sustainable livelihoods for the tribals would reduce the exploitation of forests and degradation of the eco-systems.

In this project the ability of the NGO to mobilize support and trust is of paramount importance for the success of the project. MASS has a lot of local experience and commands respect among the local residents, especially in the villages where it operates. MASS provides the reputational collateral that allows the Grameen Bank to lend to groups with joint liability. It was stated that without MASS (and its secretary Ms. B. Sunanda) loans would never be forthcoming.

In the region, water is at a premium and the water table is going down. However, the UPNRM is making resources available for individuals to pool together Rs.50,000 for buying and installing a bore well. The AP Government has a policy of providing free electric power to farmers for seven hours a day. Those with submersible pumps draw water for seven hours a day even if they do not need the whole amount since the marginal cost of pumping is zero. Water is certainly not being seen as a common resource worth looking at as a public management issue.

Rather the project as well as government policy looks upon it as a private resource and subsidizes its use.

Indeed, the privatization of what could have been publicly pooled for greater efficiency has been a distinguishing feature of this project. Starting from the history of the Yanadi tribal settlement from Tamil Nadu, the individuation of property has been an integral of the development process. The mini bio-gas plants are another example of what could have been pooled into scalable units providing gas for even people without cattle, perhaps at a nominal cost. The state's fixed costs of making mini plants would have been reduced in the aggregate, as would the operational costs for reliable gas supply.

The additional income that the project generates is clearly beneficial only to people with some property. Sheep rearing as an alternative has not been as popular as the demand for cross bred cows. The public land is increasingly being used up for horticulture as are private plots where paddy or food grains are not being grown. Hence grazing opens are diminishing, leading to a slack in the demand for sheep rearing as an alternate livelihood.

The broader environmental canvas in and around Chittoor paints a dismal picture. The mountains all around are being quarried for granite which is a very big industry which leaves the hills destroyed and valleys full of stone dust that removes many nutrients from the soil as well as destroys saplings. To prevent this latter possibility there were many fields that we saw where stone fences were put at the bottom of the hill to prevent dust pollution in the soil. When asked about it, the tribal villagers said that it was too big a problem for them to tackle as the owners had political connections. The local people were not even offered employment in the quarries, where migrant workers from other districts were brought in on the claim that the locals did not possess the requisite skills for employment. The NGO and NABARD turned a blind eye to the destruction of the eco-system as it was not part of their domain of operations.

The tribal people were mainly from four different tribes: Yanadis, the targeted tribe was the poorest and in the majority, the others being Erugula, Sugali and Chenchu. The Sugalis were supposed to be (according to the NGO and NABARD officials) the most energetic and hard-working while the Yanadi was the most difficult to deal with. The NGO officials never visited Yanadi villages after sun down because of cultural differences. Alcoholism was a major problem as was the rising incidence of AIDS. Their drinking habits and sexually promiscuous practices did not allow them to integrate with the rest of the local communities. They did obtain work but were mostly trucked out into the cities for construction work. The NGO had a few tribal activists who were familiar with tribal practices and mores. Even then, we witnessed a particular incident where a meeting with the NGO officials was being prefaced with an activist's song about the need to preserve the environment. A local tribal (who had sung the welcome song a few minutes before that) was asked to join in but he refused. When pressed to do so, he shut up completely and soon left the meeting. In all the meetings there were hangers on who were not the beneficiaries and were asked to go about their work and not loiter near the venue.

The overall environmental picture was not sustainable. The livelihoods aspect was very promising because of the locational advantage of the region and the presence of a very strong demand for milk as well as horticultural products. Those left out were the poor and the culturally

different. Between granite and milk and the mango trees, something would have to give way soon. Those included were happy with the developmental interventions, at least for the time being.

Once again as in Bardhamaan, and in East and South Sikkim, in Chittoor too, the dream of the “good life” lay in urban living and education that offered one a passport to it. The aspiration to send even girl children to school and college was certainly to be lauded. Women’s self help groups were confident about their empowerment and took great pride (even if they took too long) to be able to sign their names in the minutes book of the NGO. Men did not mind their women folk being the instrument through which loans and access to the financial world or loan and projects could be accessed. When asked, most seemed very comfortable with this fact.

SHGs in Solan: A Tale of Two Movements

Himachal Pradesh (HP) has been ahead of most other states of India in terms of human development indices like education and health. It also has a good record of addressing gender balance in the indicators of health and education. Solan is a sprawling district in Himachal with the headquarters located in a town with the same name. It is a congested market town handling a lot of business as well as tourist traffic.

Himachal, quite expectedly, was active in the formation of women’s self help groups as early as 2000. Solan too had its share of the movement through which women organized themselves for accessing credit and doing productive, income generating work. Empowerment and the questions of women’s leadership would inevitably emerge from such social changes. The story of Ms. Kiran Kaundal is one of a leader emerging from the momentum of the SHG movement.

Kiran is a middle aged woman from the Baura village of Solan who had been married off by her parents at the young age of sixteen. Having a strong personality and intelligence, she too joined the movement with the thought that she could, along with other women do something productive in the search for self realization. By the time she formed her own SHG she was already a mother of three. She had moved out of her in-laws house and started living in her parent’s house. Her husband works for BSNL and is posted in another town of Himachal.

Kiran and her group decided to avail of the Doodh Ganga Project of the Government of HP. The project was about dairy farming and milk production. Kiran realized the benefits of scaling up her project and began to take her own initiative in forming a loose (informal) federation of women’s groups across the entire district that could pool their resources and energies to expand dairy activity as well as look for other income supplementing activities and acquiring new skills. She began to seriously organize these SHGs travelling tirelessly across a large district and convincing women about the gains from working together.

We met Kiran at her home where she had called about thirty other women who had been working together in a federation that enabled Kiran to scale up her dairy by being able to brand her product, packaged and processed cow milk (*Gau Amrit*) with a large market. She was collecting milk from around 150 groups of women who were working with her. She had obtained

loans from NABARD and a cooperative bank to fund a pasteurizing and packaging machine, and added four mini trucks for collection of milk and reaching the packaged products to market outlets.

Since she was commercially successful, (although she had not yet been able to pay off all her business debt) she saw a clear case for expansion. She had begun to build political connections too. Her brand of milk apparently reaches the house of the state's Chief Minister. It was claimed that she has political links with the district BJP and was offered a ticket to run for the state assembly. Her self confidence was apparent and her ability to network remarkably strong.

Her business model was simple but strong. She would collect milk from her "federation" of SHGs. It would be brought to her pasteurizing unit in cans. The milk would be tested and the price fixed according to the quality and the fat content. She would pay immediately. The milk would then be pasteurized and packed. Then later in the day the mini trucks would move to markets in the neighboring towns for delivery. She had the capacity to process about 500 litres of milk a day. Formally, the *Gau Amrit* processing unit employs 10 people of whom 3 are women. She faces a skill constraint and is on the lookout for people with managerial skills who are also trust worthy. She has asked her brother to give up his little business and help her in marketing the product.

Kiran claims she pays between Rs.15 – Rs.18 per litre, (depending on the quality) she collects, compared to the government run dairy, Milkfed's rates of only Rs 10-12 per litre. The wholesale price is around Rs.22 per litre and the retail price fetches around Rs.28 per litre. The daily gross revenue is around Rs.10-12 thousand rupees. Kiran's margins are lower as her overheads must be lower than the state run Milkfed. *Gau Amrit* is also trying to reach as many relatively inaccessible areas for collection to compete with Milkfed. Kiran claims, however, that she now has to cope with excess supply of milk that she cannot pasteurize and market as fast. The local market is limited and there are competitors too. So, Kiran's next phase of planned development is to produce ghee and paneer with the excess milk that she could market locally. Her brand is already known to people in her district. She is mulling for a capacity expansion to diversify into milk products.

Kiran's business model is certainly scalable and she has ambitions of becoming as big and well known as Amul. She also knows that to realize her ambition she has to work hard, and perhaps face stiffer challenges in the process than if she had been a man. She related with a tone of satisfaction her story of how she had persuaded the wholesaler in Solan to take her product. It took time, patience and a lot of persuasion to gain entry into the closed circle of a dealer and his suppliers. She quickly realized that political friends do come in handy and worked with local politicians and was soon even able to persuade the CM to inaugurate her unit. She has the courage and confidence to walk into any IAS officer's room in Shimla if the need arises.

With her brand of milk gaining in strength and visibility, she was approached by Reliance Fresh to buy out her business. There were pressures on her to yield. She stood firm and refused. It was not quite clear whether her political friends came in handy in this instance. She wants to keep growing and then if she becomes like Amul she may one day decide to leave it and go for

newer ventures. When asked whether she would take up politics as a career she smiled enigmatically and replied: 'not immediately'.

In the meeting (focus group interview) with Kiran's friends who were also associated with the loose federation of suppliers for *Gau Amrit*, the women were remarkably quiet, and any comment or response to a question would be either prodded by Kiran, or the responder would make eye contact with Kiran looking for approval. It was only after explicitly requesting Kiran to let other people answer that she took the cue to let others speak. It was clear that Kiran towers and dominates over most of the women. Not all would be beholden to her, nor appreciate the propensity to control. However, most of the women were aware of Kiran's political connections and were never openly confrontational in their attitude. After the meeting where the NABARD DDM for Solan was present observing our conversations, she remarked that not all is as well as it looks. There are a lot of women who dislike Kiran's overbearing nature and think that they could have got a better deal had they had more power vis-à-vis Kiran. The DDM was hoping that the business would thrive and grow because of NABARD's interest in it, but was quite aware that one day there could be a rebellion against Kiran and her style of operation. Kiran must have been aware of it too. She was confident to handle the business if a problem arose; she had enough support networks too. Were there any serious contenders to her position as the leader of the 150 SHGs? It did not appear so, despite there being talk of disgruntled members.

Far away from Kiran's village, but in the district of Solan in the village of Rauri there is a giant Ambuja Cement plant that has been there for the last 15 years. Large tracts of land had been acquired for the construction of the cement plant. The land had been privately acquired and the landowners had been paid "well" according to the company. Those who wanted to hold out or those who thought the compensation was inadequate were promised jobs in the plant if they had the requisite education. For those who did not make the mark, they would be offered transport contracts for supplying trucks for transporting the cement.

Gradually, it was perceived by the land sellers that jobs were scarce, and they could have had pressed for a better deal. More people wanted a trucking contract than were available. There too, it was found that the rate was lower than that offered by another company's plant in the vicinity. In fact, the day we went to Rauri village, there were hundreds of trucks lined up on the approach road and the parking lots of the factory premises as the truckers were on an indefinite strike for a better rate contract. The overwhelming majority of the truck operators were local people who had sold their land to the company.

Ambuja Cements, being a large company, was quick to realize the potential for conflict that local disgruntlement would bring. Ambuja Foundation, the CSR wing of the company set up office in the plant and started to organize the local people into SHGs. There were some SHGs which had already been formed, but the Foundation took care in extending the number of groups who could be organized under their care. The Foundation took up education, health, alternate livelihoods training, coordinated state government projects in the area, ensured the execution of Rural Infrastructure Development Fund projects under NABARD's coordination for sanitation, piped water and paving of hilly pedestrian pathways.

In our meeting with a group of representatives from various SHGs in the region there were voices raised against the company. Problems in compensation for land, problems of inadequate employment offers and the whole issue of the truckers strike came into the conversation. There was disappointment and despair against the company, but the SHG members were supportive of the Foundation's activities. They knew the identity of the Foundation, but they made a clear distinction between the company and its CSR role. This was not surprising since Ambuja Cements had been able to drive a wedge between its corporate and its social identity. The work done by the Foundation was clearly inadequate in terms of offering actual livelihood opportunities, and most of the infrastructure work was done by coordinating other agency's projects. We saw a group of very articulate women who were clearly stifled by the presence of the Foundation, and they continued to live in the understanding that life could have been better but for the company. It was like a colonial relationship in a microcosm. The general feeling was that they would perhaps have been worse off without the company, but the company gave them a not-so-good deal after all. In such a setting, just like in Kiran's region of the district, there is was a movement to get a number of SHGs together to coordinate their activities and form a federation. But here the potential Kiran Kaundals of the world would not find the space to develop and grow, and would remain in the shadow of the company and the Foundation.

When the meeting was over, a middle aged man approached us and asked about what transpired in the meeting and who we represented. It was about noon, and he was completely inebriated. We muttered about an academic exercise and we were making no promises to the villagers. He was not fully convinced, and kept on saying in a loud voice that the company keeps making false promises and nobody cares about the villagers. He was gently led away as we drove out of the village.

Some Observations on Trends

In all the four states where we did field work there were noticeable differences in the local communities ability to pull together a range of government initiated developmental projects and avail of the opportunities that could provide for improving the economic condition of the members. It is also true that a village is hardly a homogeneously bonded community with close ties. There are economic and social schisms that can be significant determinants of developmental processes as well as outcomes. Politics in the traditional sense of the processes by which a nation state functions differs in each state. So does the power structures within a village and even within a community in a village. The wide range of processes through which change is refracted is as varied as the physical landscape of the districts we visited.

However, there are strong similarities too in some outcomes. In all the projects studied it was obvious that the income of the beneficiaries were in general increasing, at least in the short-run. However a number of questions could be raised about the sustainability of the intervention, especially when the support of the developmental agencies like NABARD or even the implementing NGO is withdrawn. What may seem to be a good example of collective action may turn out to be marriage of convenience to ensure support of the intervention agencies.

Individual interests can (even in a myopic way) trump the concept of the collective welfare. Many of the interventions are far from scalable since many of them are conceived as supplementary to some primary agricultural income.

In each of the interventions the creation and protection of natural assets along with the generation of a flow of income from them have been a characteristic property. Our field studies reveal that while almost everyone (beneficiaries as well as agencies) is aware of the instrumental value of natural assets as a potential source of livelihood, there was a lack of understanding about the bigger question of eco-system management and the intrinsic worth of natural assets. Natural assets would be more likely to be stripped if the uncertainty of incomes of marginal and landless farmers increased sharply.

The nature of the interventions was conceived of as supplementary to a main income. The beneficiaries were in most cases those who did have some property like land or some cattle. Voluntary participation in these micro projects would raise income of those beneficiaries with some property and hence also contribute toward increasing the degree of economic inequality prevalent in the village.

The differences in gender and caste power relations were, in our opinion, not substantially altered. Women certainly felt more empowered in the sense that women SHGs were becoming the accepted norm of accessing developmental projects and micro credit. This empowerment was instilling a lot of confidence in their ability to take decisions. However, the men folk were always in the background. Their quiet acceptance of the formal change in the gender balance was indicative of a feeling that nothing had changed (yet) in substance, and formal alterations could be accepted as a tactical measure. In a similar fashion, the politics of caste and community differentiation was ubiquitous. The old power structures were being contested but had not altered in any substantial way.

Aspirations and ambitions appeared to be surprisingly uniform. The image of the “good life” was always perceived to be urban, with a formal sector employment and the way to ensure this was getting proper education. The importance of education for the younger generation was keenly felt and ably expressed by almost all of those interviewed. A large percentage of children from the village go to high school and college away from their homes, sometimes quite far away. The importance of education as an investment and the perception that educated women are likely to acquire greater instrumental value in accessing scarce resources ensure that girl children are going to school (and when they are not, there is a sense of failure or guilt).

Aspirations to be educated and ensure that the next generation is at least assured of a better material life are clear. People make efforts to realize the wish. Not all are capable of doing so, and in the growing inequality within the village community, inclusive growth may be illusive after all.

References

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