

STITUTE OF

WORKING

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

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,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Field Notes
2. NABARD Project Documents