

Enhancing Livelihoods and Household Security in Rural Jharkhand

Project coordinator: Sujeet Bari

Funder: Jharkhand Tribal Development Society

Dates: 2003–2011

Background

In the predominantly rural state of Jharkhand, villagers have historically eked out a living with almost no reserves, so that in case of drought or other natural disaster their only recourse is for male family members to migrate elsewhere to find work. In addition to living a marginal existence, members of these extremely backward and deprived tribal communities are also resistant to change and therefore not receptive to intervention by outsiders. Against this backdrop the Jharkhand Tribal Development Society (JTDS) came into being to try to raise living standards in a lasting and sustainable way.

Scope of the Project

Initially IDF received funding from JTDS, with additional backing from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), to develop a pilot project in five villages over five years (2003–2008). In 2007 eight more villages were included in a full-fledged four-year project, covering West Singhbhum, Seraikela, and Ranchi.

Goal

The overall goal of this program was to ensure household security and improve livelihood opportunities among the tribal population in the target areas, based on the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources.

Objectives

- To empower tribal grassroots associations and user groups to become capable of planning, implementing, and managing their own development.
- To promote activities that generate sustainable increases in the production and productivity of local land and water resources.
- To generate alternative sources of income beyond agriculture, particularly for the landless.

Activities

After overcoming initial resistance, IDF staff were able to build a rapport with the villagers and work cooperatively with them through a number of different activities.

Formation of community-based groups

Integrated Development Foundation

Maurya Path, Khajpura, Patna - 800014, India

Phone: +91 (0)612 258-8682 / 258-1553, 326-4089 • Email: idfpatna@idfngo.org

Self-help groups. A women's self-help group (SHG) was formed in each village. SHGs met weekly to collect money for loans and develop the capacity to provide micro-credit systems for their members so that families could borrow money to pursue income-generating activities. The SHGs became the main platform for the project's implementation.

Common interest groups. As another way to build the communities' economic capacity, common interest groups were established for individuals interested in starting a particular business, for example, aquaculture. These groups also arranged micro-finance for their members.

Capacity building for livelihood enhancement and food security

Agricultural improvements. IDF staff focused on specific aspects of agricultural cultivation to help villagers increase their incomes, introducing them to improved cultivation of pulses and vegetables.

Land and water management. Better watershed treatment methods, including installation of farm bunds, were introduced to regenerate the soil and improve agricultural output.

Livestock management. The project introduced villagers to the practice of vaccinating their cows, oxen, and goats to prevent disease and thus improve their yields.

Aquaculture. IDF taught villagers the concept of fish farming and provided specialized training to common interest groups that decided to enter this new business, including two women's groups.

Forestry protection. The project introduced programs to build awareness among the rural community of the need to protect trees and forests and the government's responsibility in that regard.

Capacity building for leadership development

All villagers were exposed to village-level meetings of the Project Executive Committee, and trainings were conducted to build awareness of gender equity and women's legal rights. Women began participating actively in these meetings, and all community members increased their awareness of local government processes.

Outcomes

Following is a selected list of outcomes of the intervention for the reported years:

- 170 out of 255 households achieved food security for four to five months.
- Migration was reduced from 40 to 30 percent.

- Women's participation in village-level meetings increased to 50 percent (equal with men).
- 20 fish ponds were introduced.
- Three acres of fields were planted with wheat and pulse crops.
- Between 500 and 600 animals were vaccinated.
- 450 community members benefited from health camps in three watershed areas.

Achievements and Challenges

IDF's wide-ranging intervention planted the seeds—literally, in the case of expanded vegetable cultivation—of much-enhanced livelihoods for these rural community members. As sustainability was a prerequisite of all the efforts toward greater production, the success of these improvements is expected to continue. SHGs gave women the opportunity to borrow money to engage in agricultural businesses for the first time, but also allowed them to increase their capacity to take an active political role in their communities. Both men and women became aware of their political as well as economic rights, and some became community leaders. Having witnessed the effectiveness of the innovations the project introduced, community members also began to take the initiative themselves to plan future endeavors. A further benefit of the villagers' improved economic status and opportunities was a significant reduction in migration for work.

Unfortunately, the project was not successful in helping landless community members to develop nonagricultural activities, and despite IDF's painstaking efforts to build rapport with the community members, about 20 percent still resisted outside intervention.

Case Studies

Village clothing merchant

When Urmila Mahato decided to sell clothes along with her husband, she took out a loan of Rs 10,000 from her SHG to start the business. Her husband played a critical role by taking all the clothes in a bicycle carrier every day and going from village to village selling them. One day the women of the watershed area SHGs gave him a bulk order for saris and blouses. Fulfilling this order was a huge undertaking for Urmila, and she didn't have enough money in hand. However, her SHG again helped her financially, and she was able to deliver the whole clothing order on time to every SHG. Her acceptance of this challenge benefited both parties enormously: SHG members had their saris delivered to their own village at a cheaper rate, and Urmila's confidence—and income!—received a big boost.

Entrepreneurship in action

Motay Bandra, a member of *swastha yuva sahyog samiti* (youth health assistance committee) was very ambitious and wanted to do something different. As soon as the SHG was formed, he took out a loan and started a variety of income-generating activities, but his dreams were not fulfilled. Then one day he received approval from the bank for a loan of Rs 300,000 and decided

to open a photo and photocopy shop in Sonua block. But the manager at the Bank of India told Motay he had to provide a guarantee for the lease of the shop. He didn't have enough to put down money for the lease, and although he approached many people, no one was willing to help him because the business idea seemed too risky. Finally, he approached his SHG again, and the members supported him with a loan of Rs 10,000. Motay was then able to submit all his documents, fulfill the bank requirements, and open the shop. He is now realizing his ambitious dream project and making all the members of his SHG proud.