Development Sector: Increasingly Contaminating!

Development action in India is taking shape of corporate characterized with entry of more and more corporate organizations into voluntary sector and extended NGO-industry partnerships. This is not matter of worry. What panic us and other concerned is the retired bureaucrats or the next-of-kins of bureaucrats and officers who have been shaping new culture of NGOs. NGOs (not voluntary organizations) headed by such powerful and resourceful persons are necessarily to replace or threat the value-based voluntary organizations that are committed to social change. At times when there is dearth of voluntary and action groups that dare to challenge or address the inequitable social and power relations in unjust world, the new breed of NGOs anchored by elites add to those who work in line of state’s agenda and, sometimes, aid to government’s misdeeds. Day by day the space is dwindling for those who work towards changing the status quo.

Worse, competition for resources necessary to operate and deliver the social good to the client communities impels the value-based organizations into war-like conditions, as they fight with adversaries to survive in the falsified world of NGOs. It is not simply the matter that major chunk of resources is won by corporate NGOs, but it is the matter beyond that. If change-seeker voluntary organizations will either wipe out or become rare (as many at last adopt malpractices to survive), who will talk about changing the status quo, who will challenge the bourgeoisie of the society, who will address the inequities in the democracy practices, who will fight for poor’s interests, who work on the grassroots? This is the point which every one of us has to think on today or tomorrow.

At the same time, the voluntary organizations performing in difficult conditions and are committed to transform the society at local level, tend to neglect the sheer needs of communication and image building in the competitive world. Communication and outreach are critical nowadays to keep an organization alive and survive. But the grassroots organizations do lack the skills, capacities, resources and time to communicate their organization as well as the people’s issues in the external world; rather they spend most of the energies in winning the projects and managing it.

In this inaugural issue of GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY, we have covered several stories from grassroots depicting struggle of people or the impacts of development interventions. News of different activities reflect our sole efforts made from April 2006 to December 2006. In the next issues of this newsletter we will cover the news or stories representing January to March 2007. We solicit the suggestions to improve the content, format or appearance of this newsletter.
Artisan Children’s Gurukul to Preserve Indigenous Craft

Hasrat Arjjumend

“Equal education to all” is a dream in India, and it will perhaps remain the dream ever. Rural children attain inferior education compared to their urban counterparts. In urban areas too, the poverty-stricken zones do avail substandard education. Giving better education to the rural children is an issue; but more crucial question is whether the education provided is compatible to the communities especially traditional communities. The children of farmers after getting education distance themselves from agriculture and search employment in sectors other than farming. Similarly, the child of carpenter does not know the carpentry and later spoils the life in search of employment. Ancestral occupation, local culture, traditional art and community environment become outdated and useless once the child of traditional or indigenous communities is educated. It all backfires the communities already facing the pressure of globalization. The rich technologies, innovations, art, craft, culture and traditions that require improvement to compete the changing world actually get neglected and slowly die as the new generations don’t pay adequate attention to.

Saathi, a voluntary organization working for decades amid the artisan communities in Bastar, after having elevated the livelihood and life standard of artisans in over 200 villages organized the children of artisan communities. These children, over 200 in number, have formed a platform of receiving education under the jungle trees. This free school they call it is gurukul. Gurukul for ‘creative education’. Saathi, which is in facilitator’s role, has vision to integrate rituals, art, craft, indigenous cultures and traditions, traditional technologies and vernacular methodologies with the regular course curriculum.

The children themselves have fixed the days for learning the regular curriculum while three days have been fixed for practical education in the jungle where children are left free to examine the objects, create whatever they imagine, damage whatever they like and ask the questions freely they want. In the jungle the children straightaway see how the termite makes the hive, they learn what use the wild plants have, they make figures and sketches of trees, fruits and animals. Right in the jungle, they draw images of worldly things such as trees, animals, rivers, huts, bridge, train, helicopter, house, cutlery, table, chair, television, antenna, bird, snake, loudspeaker, deity, hand pump, tube well, tractor, truck, and so on. Whatever they see in daily life and whatever they imagine they draw, sketch and paint. And, significant is, they are not dictated to make anything specific as their imagination is given space and horizon to travel heights. Articulating the advantage of gurukul over sarva shiksha abhiyan model of government, president of Saathi, Bhupesh Tiwary, opined, “About 95 percent parents are not able to afford expenses of higher education. If any family dares to spend heavy, none guarantees the job to their ward. So in such uncertain situations, why can’t the child become self-reliant and confident man or woman seeking no external assistance in shaping the future? In Gurukul the children learn the craft their parents augment livelihood from. They can not only make their future in craft and art but also diversify it to make more market compatible.” Initially, only 27 children came to form the gurukul in 2004. now their number has increased to 205. They all come from Kumharpara and Jondrapadar villages. Children from many other villages have forwarded their requests to join the group of free gurukul.

Less a teacher, more a friend, Mr. Shekhar adds to the innovative experiment by saying, “We wish to strengthen the natural learning of the children necessarily not to suppress the expressions and mind of the girls and boys. We simply give colors to the children to paint or to throw: this is tolerance to let the child think boundary-free. We discourage the pre-defined tasks viz. make the elephant or horse. Why should we
dictate the children to make them confined to what we wish them to do? We give open tasks to the children till 2nd year and observe what each individual child makes. Based on the observed interests of the particular child we design the tasks accordingly to be given to them in 3rd year. We constantly appreciate and help shape up the creativity of each individual child in gurukul." Saathi has the planning to mainstream the folklores, storytelling, local music, songs and dances and drama into the education system at gurukul.

Most important is that the children organize time to time stage shows in cultural festivals of Bastar where through drama and folk they raise the issues of artisans community. In these voices they explicitly assert for rights of artisans community (as the global market annexed the local artisans and government provides no cushion for this neglected community) and express concern for their own future. They argue that the modern education can not only detach them from ancestral occupation but also leaves them nowhere. They can secure their future by getting education revolving around ancestral craft and improving it technologically.

They now want to mainstream their voices into government’s policy on artisans. To succeed this endeavour the children have been planning to start their own newsletter. Grassroots Media Initiative will provide capacity building support to the children in preparing and publishing the children’s own newsletter. The children are of the opinion of sustaining the newsletter by raising subscriptions from district/ block offices and panchayats of the area.

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### Trainings Completed

#### Process Documentation and Writing for Outreach

Grassroots Institute undertook training on ‘Process Documentation and Writing for Outreach’ at Lucknow during 22-26 May 2006. In the training about 36 representatives of NGOs from different districts of Uttar Pradesh participated. The training was supported by Church Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA). Among the participants were the partner NGOs of CASA in Uttar Pradesh. 5 days training covered more practice sessions apart from lectures.

#### Staff Orientation at PARA

People’s Awareness for Rural Action (PARA) is a grassroots organization working in remote villages of Mandi and Kangra districts of Himachal Pradesh. The primary focus of the organization is on health, gender, income generation, and panchayati raj. The Grassroots India Trust entered into partnership with PARA in mid June of 2006. In order to strengthen the understanding, action strategies, impact monitoring and community outreach at PARA, the GIT held a staff orientation from 10 to 12 October 2006. Over 8 persons underwent this orientation.

#### Media Writing Skills Development of Rural Youths

Rural youth of Bharatpur district in Rajasthan had been given training of how to write news, features, letters to editor, news story, etc. for the print media. By Grassroots Media Initiative, they were also told how to prepare a newsletter of their own villages. Designing and computer composing was also one of the contents of the 4 days training held on 9-12 September 2006. This training of rural youths including women was hosted by Women’s Action for Development (WAFD), Delhi.

#### People’s Access to Livelihood Resources under PESA

Grassroots Institute imparted training to about 42 NGO workers at Raipur on ‘People’s Access to Livelihood Resources under PESA’ during 5-8 June 2006. The training was supported by Church Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA). Among the participants were the partner NGOs of CASA in Chhattisgarh. 4 days training covered more practice sessions apart from lectures. Emphasis was on the legal aspects of tribal self-governance related to natural resources and livelihoods of poor people in 5th Schedule areas.

#### Honing of Writing Skills of Children

With the support of Plan International, the Grassroots Media Initiative organized a workshop for children at SBMA, Gairsain of Chamoli district in Uttarakhand. The 5-day workshop was focused on practical skills of writing varied types of features, news, news stories and interview, and imparted the perspective building skills. In the workshop, 8 children from the surrounding villages participated. It was finished between 18 and 22 December 2006.
Detribalise Them, Grab Their Lands

Hasrat Arjjumend

Administration at local level in India never favored tribes. If it ever did, it did under a pressure. It is because the majority of the administrators, officers or staff in offices are chiefly the non-tribes, and, often than not, belong to upper castes. And, hence they usually internally support the anti-tribal forces and act thereby aiding to onslaughts on tribes, their exploitation, annihilation and marginalization. The district, block administration colludes with non-tribes against tribes, and with upper castes against dalits, and with powerful against weak. Such implications may be sighted when an adivasi complains against a non-tribe; action either is not taken at all or suppressed. On the contrary, if a non-tribe complains against a tribe, the administration turns brutal.

Law prohibits purchasing the lands of tribes by non-tribes because in the past countless tribes were dispossessed of their lands for just pennies or bottle of liquor. The legal restrictions in some areas definitely panicked the non-tribes as they cannot snatch away tribal lands, or buy tribal lands for pennies. Yet, the non-tribes are clever enough to discover the ways for grabbing tribal lands. They collude with the administration in such conditions and get favor of local government to denotify the tribe. Once the tribe is listed off the scheduled tribes list of government, the non-tribes may easily take away tribal lands. Agaria (not Agharia, who are OBC) community had to make best quality of iron from iron ore and the agricultural implements from iron. Agaria were in the list of scheduled tribes. Non-tribes lobbied to denotify them from scheduled tribes to Lohar caste, the OBC. Lohars also practice black smithy, but they don’t make iron from iron ore. Agaria, who inhabit Sarguja and Jashpur districts of Chhattisgarh, could not fight for their rights. Resultantly, they were not only deprived of their rights they might have practiced being scheduled tribes but their lands were also became alienation-prone. If the denotification of entire community and its lands is not possible, the individual families are kept prey. In Khukhri village of Sarguja, Bhumia Vikas Bank auctioned the lands of Lalu Agaria. Bank Manager was belonging to Yadav caste, and sold tribal land to Yadav landlord of same Khukhri village. The surviving son of Late Agaria went mad after the incidence and his wife left home. Collusion of Yadav landlord and government servant thus spoiled the entire tribal family.

One more aboriginal of north Chhattisgarh, the Bhumia, is in making of denotification. Bhumia is fast dwindling tribe found in Chhota Nagpur plateau in Jharkhand and districts of north Chhattisgarh. Bhumia is identical to Korwa, the co-existing primitive tribe. Bhumia is still listed as scheduled tribe in president’s list, census of 2001 and lists of state government. But the district and block administrations have created conspiracy by putting Bhumia families in all the social categories: ST, SC, OBC and general or nowhere. While releasing Antyodaya Yojana cards, some families of same village have been put in ST, some in OBC, some in SC and some in general. At the same time, some families have not been allotted any of the categories by leaving the option unchecked on cards. This deliberate misdeed of the administration has caused immense confusion and worries among the families of Sidhma and other villages where Bhumia have been living for a time immemorial. This is nothing but an irony that fathers Bikul Sai and Sadhu ever enjoyed ST status, but their children have been excluded for being STs. After being so excluded, the Bhumia families are deprived of benefiting from various tribal development schemes and privileges. United for the cause, over 100 women and men met the district collector of Sarguja on 29 March 2006 in Ambikapur, who simply gave promise to correct the records. But he did not apologize on this deliberate exclusion mechanism employed against Bhumia. This conspiracy created in the greed of tribal lands, if not resolved, may lead to serious repercussions as the Bhumia tribes of the area are organized under the umbrella of Gram Shakti Sangathan, and have mood to agitate at large scale. Community leader, Bikul Sai, said that they would litigate and agitate appropriately if this unholy game of administration and powerful non-tribes does not stop.

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**Partnership**

Rights of the children in Indian context have become crucial as the economy in the country became globalized and free. Fighting for the rights of the children especially those engaged in labour works, the Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL) is a national movement comprising operations in a number of provinces in India. Grassroots Media Initiative (GMI) has become the member of CACL and will look after time-to-time the media advocacy on girl child rights. GMI will report directly to National Secretariat of CACL at PECUC in Bhubaneswar (Orissa).

**Health: A Distant Dream for Bonded Tribals**

Sunil Salve

Albeit, urban life is undergoing an amazing metamorphosis from conventional wisdom to rapid modernization, the some of the tribal people of Madhya Pradesh still live on the mercy of sick health delivery system of the government. Tribal families living at every uphill and down dale in Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh keep body and soul together on the wages seldom given by local feudal lords. Tribal community I question is the ‘Kol’. Majority of the members of this community are bonded labour under the grip of landlords. Both women and men have to work for the landlords to the detriment of their health.

Huts of the tribals in the hills of Kaimur on border of Rewa and Sidhi district are located far away from road head connecting district hospital. The tribal families in this area face abysmal ignorance of state’s health delivery system, and women are bound to undergo deliveries of births at high risk. Notwithstanding, the technology and medicines have transformed the experience of pregnancy for rich and middle class urban women, while on the other the women of the tribal community don’t access the government hospital.

The women perform all household chores and wage works during the pregnancy. As and when they fall sick they rely on local quacks that play upon the lives with wrong medicines. Deprivation is posing a serious threat to the existence of pregnant women in the district. A 25 year old woman, Kalpana, from Nandanpur village in Mauganj block is about to deliver baby but had not been undergone any medical examination. She complained of weakness and body pain. Kalpana also complained as she was losing eyesight due to weakness. Another tribal woman, Nisha, has not got medical tests done despite having conceived a baby for 7 months. Likewise, Anita has 3 years baby who born at home, and she never seen any medical facility. On the contrary, the women of Latiar village say that they don’t derive medical facilities because of the lack of transportation service. Shanti Bai says that the patients have to die at home as there is no medical facility in this area.

**Exploitation for Salt Stopped**

Sabiba Haleem

It was 1997 when Vanya, a voluntary organization based in South Bastar, started to look into the economic exploitation of tribes that was on climax. The livelihood of the tribes had been dependent only on the forest products. Several non-timber forest commodities were sold for buying the basic things like salt, kerosene, fish or fruits. It was not at all a non-monetized economy. The traders supplying such basic thing were clever not to disclose the rates of the items they brought to sell in the villages. They had to exploit the innocent tribal women
and men by simply bartering the commodities. For example, they had to sell a paili (1.9 kg) of salt in exchange of one paili (1.9 kg) mahua. Mahua had to cost Rs.7-9, while the salt to merely Re 0.80. The practice of such exploitation continued till 2001 when the government commenced supplying the salt through PDS cooperatives. The practice of such sheer exploitation is still continuing in the villages 50 km far off from main Dantewara town.

This process of exploitation would have continued in village close to Dantewara also if Vanya had not intervened. Vanya when realized the intensity and process of exploitation began educating the people about market rates of different local and external commodities. The volunteers of organization asked the tribal families not to sell mahua, one of the important NTFPs in Central India, in exchange of salt. In about 40 villages in the vicinity of Dantewara, Vanya educated the villagers to sell their NTFPs after storing for few weeks and after knowing the competitive rates in different markets. As a result of awakening, the tribal people ceased selling their product to hawking traders; rather they started selling in local haat bazaars only. In the haats of Metapal, Pondum, Bhansi, Dantewara, Gidum and Barsur, one may observe that local tribes sell their NTFP materials there only. Nobody sells their produce to hawking buyers. Now the traders who had to buy forest produce in villages stopped buying through hawking in the villages. If they buy they sit in the haats and give market rates to the sellers.

Bartering the forest produce in exchange of salt did not finish abruptly. It took long time and wanted extra efforts. Mr. Jai Narayan, the head of the Vanya, remembers, “we convinced a bank manager, Sinha Rao, whose trucks had to transport goods outside Dantewara. So we started bringing salt in trucks, which had to cost 25 paise per kg. We supplied it in 40 villages for 40 paise per kg. Erstwhile SDM, Mr. Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, supported the initiative of Vanya heartedly.

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**News of Food and Democracy Campaign**

Article-21b of the Constitution of India guarantees food for life of every citizen of the country. In the rural areas, the governments have been operating various schemes for food security of rural poor. Yet, the problem of hunger and food scarcity is multiplying day by day. So in a bid to sensitize and hold accountable the government and administration towards the hunger, malnutrition and poverty of tribes and weaker sections in villages of Sarguja district of Chhattisgarh, India, the ‘Food and Democracy Campaign’ is co-organized by Shri Gandhi Seva Ashram Sarguja (SGSA) and Grassroots India Trust.

**CYCLE RALLY: 1-5 December 2006**

The rally began from Aara Balrampur village of Rajpur block in Sarguja district. During 5 days long journey the Rally passed through 56 villages, and ended at Ambikapur, the district headquarter. Two groups consisting of 25 persons each moved on two separate routes. The issues that were raised by the rural people during the meetings in villages have been made public in Satyagrah Rally on World Human Rights Day (10 December 2006) at Ambikapur.

**SATYAGRAH RALLY: 10 December 2006**

On 10 December, nearly 1000 people gathered in Ambikapur for a Satyagraha rally and mass demonstration on the occasion of World Human Rights Day. Marching from Sanjay Park to Vivekanand Chowk, the people expressed their discontent with the present situation regarding food and livelihood, and with the provisions from the government to solve these problems. Participants from all over Sarguja gathered for the event, most of them belonging to the most deprived parts of society such as adivasis, dalits and poor. All the issues addressed in the rally and the demands connected with them were collected in the Memorandum, which was submitted to the Honorable President of India.

* 2 Program Interns (Ms. Jana Wendler and Mr. Bartosz Arabik) from Germany and Poland, respectively, have been working for the Campaign.
Project Launched

Children while sunken in all adversaries or otherwise want to express their feelings, views, opinions, experiences, knowledge, and solutions. As the children are not allowed to speak at home in front of elders, as the children are disallowed to even sit in gram sabha meeting, as the children’s views are disregar ded in the matters predominantly controlled by elders, the voices of the children are discarded/ disrespected/ excluded or undermined in the mainstream media including newspapers, magazines, TV, radio. If the children are given space, they are being merely used/exploited by advertising industry — be it television or newspaper. Moreover, the children appearing in advertisements do not represent suffering majority of the poor/rural children; they rather belong to minority class enjoying wealth.

The children not only speak and express their own issues (exploitation, abuse, exclusion, beating, trafficking, torture, hunger, violation of rights, illiteracy, sexual abuse, neglect, discrimination, poverty, victimization, work load and violence against them), but they also express their understanding/feelings about the surrounding they live in. They express about poverty in family, worse health situation, loss of livelihood systems, migration and its causes/effects, polluted/contaminated environment, degradation of forests, conditions of women, status of education in schools, agriculture, governance system, development of villages/mohalla, and so on. They also offer solutions of the problems. But all this remains unheard, un-surfaced, un-incorporated.

The voices of the children do not get adequate space in mainstream media as the media infringes their rights to be published. Resultantly, it backfires the children as their voices are kept out of public domain, which otherwise would have been taken into consideration by society in general and policy makers in particular.

Building upon the above background, the Grassroots Media Initiative has launched a project “Mainstreaming the Children’s Voices in Media” by November 2006. Supported by Plan International the project includes the publication of Children Press Service Bulletin and Journalist Alert, honing of writing skills of the children of Uttarakhand, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, interface of children with media persons and institutionalization of press service. Till December 2006, workshops with children have finished in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand and in Delhi.

Pilot Study on Status of Dalits

Dalits in mountains of Himalayas have socially, economically and environmentally deprived. They cannot enter the house of upper castes, nor they are given food in common utensils. Drinking water sources and temples/deities are also separate. Villages or habitations of dalits exist more on south-facing slopes, on wastelands, or surrounded by scarce natural resources. On the contrary, upper castes villages mostly enjoy plenty of natural resources including water and biomass. Dalit families have scanty landholdings. For time immemorial, dalit community in mountains has silently accepted subjugation avoiding any violent conflict (inter-community). Economic deprivation of dalits is coupled with ‘environmental injustice’. Majority of the families usually depend on NTFPs collection for bare survival. In a bid to organize dalits, Grassroots IndiaTrust (GIT) has commissioned a pilot study on dalits in 20 villages of Banjar block of Kullu district. The report is due in January 2007.
Events Calendar 2007*

- Regional Consultation on People’s Rights to Food and Accountable Governance
  3 February :: Raipur, Chhattisgarh

- South Asian Thematic Workshop on Organic Farming in Mountains
  5-9 March :: Bajar (Kullu) and Jogindernagar (Mandi), Himachal Pradesh

- Training on Advocacy on NTFP Issues
  12-15 March :: Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

- Training on Process Documentation and Communication
  27-31 March :: Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

- Training on Project Planning, Proposal Writing and Resource Mobilization
  8-12 April :: New Delhi

- On Field International Practical Training on Social Development in Mountain Areas
  5-31 May :: Seraj Valley, Kullu (Himachal Pradesh)

- On Field International Practical Training on Environmental Management in Mountain Areas
  3-28 June :: Seraj Valley, Kullu (Himachal Pradesh)

- Training on Case Story Writing Skills
  2-3 July :: Kondagaon, Bastar (Chhattisgarh)

- Journalists’ Institute on Dalit Human Rights
  9-21 July :: Patna (Bihar)

- Legal Discourse on Tribal Land Rights
  17 December :: Ranchi (Jharkhand)

- Training on NTFP-Based Micro-Entrepreneurship Development (Market Interventions & Processing)
  18-21 December :: Bhubaneswar (Orissa)

- Colloquium on Transhumance, Graziers Rights and Sustainability: Issues and Challenges
  23-24 December :: Pantnagar (Uttaranchal)

* Subject to changes in the schedule or the program.

Organizations in Spotlight

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- RURAL TECHNOLOGY & DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (RTDC)
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- SAMVEDNA INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (SIDA)
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- PEOPLE’S AWARENESS FOR RURAL ACTION (PARA)
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