
Gram Vikas - Millennium Mission

The Millennium Mission

The Millennium Mission of Gram Vikas is to enable a critical mass of the poor and marginalised people in the hinterland of Orissa - *adivasis*, *dalits*, marine artisanal fisherpeople, small and marginal farmers, landless, women - to empower themselves to achieve a better quality of life.

Values

Environmental sustainability, Social and Gender Equity and Sustainability of Peoples' self-governance institutions are values that drive this Mission.

Environmental Sustainability

Gram Vikas believes that empowerment of people should take place in consonance with sustainability of the natural environment. It envisages a society where people and nature exist in harmony, deriving benefits from each other. At the same time, Gram Vikas recognises that the inequitable distribution of environmental resources between urban and the rural, the ruling and the ruled that exists in today's India needs to be corrected.

Social Equity

Gram Vikas believes that all people have equal rights over resources that belong to the society, irrespective of class, caste, sex or religion. It considers its mandate to promote the cause of these equal rights. Gram Vikas will strive to achieve equitable distribution of all resources available in the public space.

Gender Equity

Gram Vikas believes that all men and women are created equal, and that social systems have created unnatural divisions on basis of prevalent dogma and beliefs. Gram Vikas considers it a moral responsibility to create awareness and sensitise all people about these unnatural divisions and work towards removing them.

Sustainability of Peoples' self-governance institutions

Gram Vikas believes that only institutions built, owned and controlled by people themselves have the scope to be sustainable mechanisms that can drive development processes for the rural poor. It also believes that the Constitution of India does provide necessary scope for the building of these institutions. As a facilitator and enabler of a positive development process, Gram Vikas believes that its role is to help people make use of these opportunities. It also recognises that only true and positive leadership from among the people can make these institutions sustainable. Gram Vikas also believes that to control the cancerous growth of corruption in the society a mass of aware and conscious people have to take control of governance processes at their levels.

Strategic Perspectives for the Millennium Mission

There are three important aspects to the strategic perspective required to actualise the Millennium Mission. These are:

- ⇒ Threshold level of Quality of Life
- ⇒ Critical Mass
- ⇒ Roles of Institutions

Threshold level of Quality of Life

Gram Vikas is of the conviction that for a people to take hold of their lives in an assertive manner, they have to achieve a minimum level of quality of life. The Threshold level of Quality of Life is the state at which their minimum needs are met and they are no longer abjectly poor and without alternatives. They have at least some control over their destinies and can build their future with certain amount of confidence and hope. Gram Vikas has defined the concept of Threshold level of Quality of Life from its two decades of experience in working with poor rural communities. The definition also accounts for what communities themselves have expressed as their needs. These needs are classified into five sectoral themes, to enable programmatic implementation in an efficient manner. The sectoral statements are as follows.

Education	Assured access to quality education for every child of school going age in the household up to the primary level, and further wherever possible
Livelihood and Food Security	Assured food and nutritional security and access to alternatives to ensure a secure and sustainable livelihood for every family in a village
Natural Resource Management	Ecologically sustainable, people-friendly management of natural resources - particularly land, water, forests and livestock.
Infrastructure	Availability of options to create infrastructure that is livelihood enabling and sustainable at the family and community levels, including access to affordable, sustainable and appropriate sources of energy
Health	Access to adequate health services for every member of the community

Given the diverse social and economic situation of the people, who will form part of this process, the relative importance of the five sectors will vary from one community to another. This flexibility while being a key design feature also necessitates broad-based competency structures among the facilitating and enabling organizations.

Critical Mass

A critical mass of people who have crossed the Threshold level of Quality of Life is required to generate momentum to achieve and sustain the Millennium Mission. The critical mass is presently being defined as 1% of Orissa's population - between 80,000 and 100,000 households from among the poorest and most marginalised sections. However, this is not to be seen as a monolithic mass. The critical mass will have to be achieved, first at the panchayat level, then at the block and district levels and finally in the State. At each level, the critical mass will be that minimum number of constituents required to force the prevalent governance system and

functionaries to respond to the needs of the poorest sections. This Critical Mass will also be able to influence resource deployment and mobilisation decision-making structures at the relevant levels of polity.

Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions

The structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions as defined by the 73rd and 74th amendment to the Constitution and the spirit of self-governance that they manifest are the keys to the actualisation of the Millennium Mission. Empowering the communities through strengthening Panchayati Raj structures and systems is a crucial result expected from the process. At the same time, these institutions will also play a crucial role in enabling the Threshold level of Quality of Life for the communities. They will become the democratic vehicle for delivery of services and in essence build and preserve quality of life of the people.

Role of Gram Vikas

Gram Vikas' role will be to enable this process through motivation, mobilisation and demonstration in a few areas. We reckon that, by ourselves and in collaboration with like-minded non-government development organizations, people's organizations and Panchayati Raj Institutions, we will be able to reach out to the 1% of Orissa's poor in the next 10 years. These communities will serve as a critical mass to demonstrate the efficacy of this development model.