

## VOICES FROM RHEP VILLAGES

A visit to the RHEP villages makes three things clear: one, the people are really proud of their achievements; two, they have a clear vision for the future; and three, the process of change once begun, gathers momentum and affects several different aspects of the villagers' lives. In Ganjam, from Samiapalli (an RHEP pilot village) to Kusagumma (where piped water and toilet units were inaugurated in February 2001), there is a widespread belief that united community action can make a huge difference.

In Samiapalli, villagers proudly display their well-arranged houses and sanitary blocks, the neat drainage lanes, the social forestry patches, village pond and so on. The constant comparison is to the nearby Berhampur town. Annapurna Reddy in Mathamukundapur says, "We used to step out of our houses into six inches of muck. Now look around. Everything is so clean. There's running water in the house." In Samantrapur, the villagers show off their 1300 sq ft community hall. In this village, the executive committee has started steering government programmes. "Now even the government wants to invest in our village. They have invested Rs 300,000 in building the school building and the village road," the villagers say. The most talked-about change in the villages is women's participation in community affairs. Annapurna Reddy is convinced that the fact that women have access to their own money through the savings scheme has changed the social equation. In Samiapalli, Malla recalls how the women organised against liquor merchants and got them permanently out of the village premises. She is also sure that if and when the need arises, they will be able to stand up against domestic violence or other such atrocities against women. Women in these villages are still expected to be in purdah. But even that is slowly changing in RHEP villages. In Suryanarayanpur, both men and women will tell you that purdah not only covers the face but the mind also. The women in Kusagumma, however, are not yet convinced. They still think that the younger women, the daughters-in-law, need not step out of the house 'unnecessarily'. But village meetings are already seen as 'necessary' outside appearances and it is only a matter of time before other events are also seen as necessary for women to attend. The Kusagumma women are happy about the fact that they are able to save a lot of time now that water is available easily. They used to spend a large part of the day in fetching water and other chores dependent on the water source. Now they are using their spare time to learn to read and write and to participate in community work.

(2001)

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## Women's Commitment – A Road to Rural Prosperity

*"If the men do not co-operate in the implementation of RHEP in our village, we will employ labourers from outside for the construction of RHEP infrastructure and will go for an indefinite kitchen strike to ensure their co-operation."* Suprova Mahakur and Pravati Kampo, Mohakhand women's committee members.

This is the story of a village called Mohakhand of Godabhaga panchayat in Bargarh district. Mohakhand has 158 households, in which the majority are engaged in agriculture and allied activities. This village had many problems, such as the common practice of defecation on the sides of the road and near water sources, a general lack of awareness regarding health and sanitation and the scarcity of safe drinking water.

The villagers invited Gram Vikas to discuss the possibility of implementing RHEP as a way to eradicate these problems. Initially many people in the village were very interested, but there

were a few families who were not ready to participate and hence 100% consensus could not be reached. The villagers did not give up and sometime later they again approached Gram Vikas, but a consensus could still not be reached.

In the meantime RHEP was successfully implemented in the adjoining village of Karnapalli. Karnapalli originally had all the same health and sanitation problems, but gradually the situation had changed. Each family in the village had contributed Rs.1,000 to a village corpus fund to initiate RHEP. Additionally each family contributed labour and raw materials to construct individual toilets and bathing rooms and establish the water supply system.

Water from a deep borewell was pumped to an overhead watertank and supplied through pipes to individual households, with connections in the toilets, bathing rooms and kitchens. The villagers had worked collectively to make this happen. The women of Karnapalli no longer had to trudge to the pond to fetch water everyday. They had more time for productive activities and leisure. Over time, there was a noticeable drop in diseases as well.

Witnessing the dramatic improvements at Karnapalli, the villagers of Mohakhand, especially women, were inspired once more to facilitate the implementation of RHEP in their village. In October 1999, on knowing that the RHEP Manager, Sojan Thomas, was visiting Karnapalli, a delegation of spirited and energetic women from Mohakhand village marched to Karnapalli to express their desire to improve their living conditions, the way the people of Karnapalli had through RHEP.

Sojan was reluctant at first, as twice before the villagers had not been able to come to a consensus. The women were insistent, assuring that things were different now. Sojan experienced a situation which made him feel confident that the village was finally ready to undertake RHEP. The women's commitment was overwhelming and it was agreed that RHEP should be implemented. As the economic standard of a few families in the village was better than the rest, they were motivated to contribute bricks for the water tank. They soon had the same facilities as their neighbours in Karnapalli.

The women realised their collective strength and have continued to play an important role in their village. With Gram Vikas' support they formed 14 savings and credit groups with 205 members. The groups have saved about Rs.500,000 through monthly collections of Rs.10, of which 30% is given out as internal loans. They have been discussing the idea of forming a federation of all groups in the village, as they feel it will make them stronger. They would like to take up activities like pickle and *papad* making, and calf rearing.

The women are leading the way of rural development, proving that participation, co-operation and determination can bring about incredible changes in any community!

(2001)

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## Unleashing social change

A few years ago the 172 families of Kholo Samantarapur were full with divisions – political, caste, economic. Not even 10 households could bring themselves to agree to do something constructive together. However, the secretary of the Village Committee, Kora Bisoi, is a progressive man. When he learnt that Gram Vikas was working with a neighbouring village to construct an overhead water tank, toilets and bathrooms which would all be supplied with running water, he approached us to know more about the programme.

The Rural Health and Environment Programme of Gram Vikas is about toilets, bathrooms and running water, but it does not end – or even begin – there. Before agreeing to take up work in any village, we insist that the entire village community reach a full agreement on implementation – every single household must participate in the programme as equal partners. Through our years of experience in the field, we have found that all too often, development schemes address people selectively. The people who can make use of them are often the economically stronger section of the community, and when they draw exclusive benefit from a scheme, this effectively widens the economic divide within the community. Even worse, such interventions tends to confirm certain regressive mindsets, where the haves are confirmed in their right to dominate, and the have-nots further lose belief in themselves as equal citizens.

Most village communities are divided, as Kholo Samantarapur was, and to achieve the 100% inclusivity required by our programme they usually have some hard work to do. Before any construction work can start, the programme requires the formation of a corpus fund, from which the interest will be used to ensure that any households added to the village in future are also given access to the standard facilities. The rule is that each household should contribute Rs.1,000 to the corpus fund; in effect, this is open to mutual adjustments within the community, and often the richer households agree to pay more and the poorer households pay less. The construction of the toilets and bathrooms is the next step. The cost of each unit, between Rs. 6,000 and Rs. 7,500, is borne by the individual households, with a subsidy of Rs 3,000 from Gram Vikas. The subsidy goes toward meeting the costs of external materials, typically cement, steel, toilet pan seat, etc. For the water supply, the RHEP generally tries to link the people directly with Swajaldhara, the government rural water supply programme, which bears 90% of the cost of the tank and pipe network. Families may pay some share of the costs in materials and labour. If a family is really too poor to be able to afford these costs, the community has to come forward to help them. Sometimes spatial rearrangements are called for, in order to make suitable space for the new constructions. To achieve all these things, the village community has to overcome divisions; it has to get together and talk.

In Kholo Samantarapur, as in other villages, there were many hurdles to be crossed. They held 162 village meetings in the span of a year (apart from individual household interactions), before 100% consensus was reached and the village could say ‘Yes’ to the programme with one voice. In the process, the village went through a curious transformation. Earlier the village was deeply divided on political lines. There were accusations of misappropriation of common funds by the village leaders. 30% of the families are scheduled castes, and they suffered the usual segregation and disregard. Above all, the women were deeply sequestered – their faces covered to well below the neck every time they stepped out of their houses, they exemplified the belief that women should be neither seen nor heard. They could never think of sitting in a mixed gathering with men, much less giving voice to their thoughts in a place where their family elders might be present!

In the course of the meetings all this changed. It took time, but gradually the people settled their differences and were able to look forward, to new ways of thinking. Today the villagers will tell a visitor that there are no differences and they are all united. Yes there were political quarrels earlier, but they firmly refuse to talk about them – they think that these things belong to a dead

past, and it is better so. They will recall how they organized a feast for the whole village – men, women, children – and everyone ate together before they started pouring the concrete for the roof of the community hall. The women are now seen as well as heard. They are a vocal presence in the meetings, and even insist that they actually outnumber the men, since many of the younger men are away as migrant workers in distant places. As the women were brought together to form the savings and credit groups that are a critical feature of the programme, they discovered a new solidarity among themselves. At one point when squabbling was threatening to throw the construction work out of gear, the women (- “172 of us from 172 houses”) put down their ultimatum – “*Resume work immediately or face a kitchen strike.*” The work was resumed without further delay.

In a village where the RHEP has its full effect, it creates a strong and united village community, which is more progressive in its thinking, and is better placed to benefit from government funding for further developmental efforts. However the maximum benefit of this programme goes to the women, and it is by eliciting their fullest response (as it did in Kholo Samantarapur) that the RHEP achieves its true potential. When there is a toilet and bathroom with running water in the backyard, for the men this is just a facility that they could, at the limit, do without. For the women it is something that has brought a fundamental change in their lives, and they would not give it up for anything. After all they were the ones earlier subject to all the pressures and inconvenience of bathing and answering the calls of nature in public. And they were responsible for fetching enough water for the household needs (“maybe 20 trips a day”) from the closest available source. There was the village well, and when in summer that dried up, there was the pond beyond the village boundary, and if that was dry...that was *her* problem!

As the women begin to “wake up”, the other features of the RHEP are brought into the closed circle of their lives – health awareness, immunization, vaccination and antenatal care, community sanitation and hygiene, primary education for children, women’s savings and income generation groups. The village today has five savings groups with 97 members and over Rs.120,000 of their own funds. They have also leveraged support from government schemes like DWCRA and SGSY. From these achievements, the spiral moves on outwards to features that are common to both men and women, such as adult literacy, optimum use of community assets and livelihoods assistance. Three ponds have been developed for community pisciculture, and this yields a regular income for meeting recurring expenses. Training of youth in masonry, and support to farmer groups for irrigation and livestock have helped improve and secure livelihoods in the village.

The effort ultimately is to make the community institution – the village-level committee – responsible for the continuation of these various efforts, so that the people do not slide back into the old pattern of apathy and despair. It is recognized today, that by releasing the stifled potential of the community and involving everyone in the process, the programme is capable of unleashing a powerful force of social change.

(2003)

## Changing Dimensions: The After Effects of RHEP in Kusaguma

Kusaguma in Dharakote block of Ganjam is a village of small farmers. Education was never important for the people. Infact, to them it was a waste of time and energy. RHEP was implemented in this village in 2000 and the village has seen some changes since then. As the government school does not function effectively, the villagers decided to appoint a tutor for sixty school going children. Not only that, the children were motivated to save as well. On a hot afternoon the room below the water tank fills up with friendly chatter, as the children of the

village gather for a meeting. They are in their best attire and very prompt with their greetings. The meeting starts with songs sung with shy reluctance.

The children in Kusaguma have three savings groups—Rajlakshmi, Jayganesha and Khambeshwari, who have saved Rs.2,700, Rs900 and Rs.1,600 respectively, and deposited it in the bank. They save Rs5 every month out of their pocket money, which is collected at monthly meetings. Each group has a president and a secretary, chosen by consensus. The president summons meetings, presides over them and ensures attendance, while the secretary manages records. They charge a nominal fine for late payment, and an interest of 1 to 2% on loans extended to people. In case of disagreements, they believe in negotiating to settle differences. However the children have few disagreements in their groups and do most of their quarreling outside it.

The children say that they save because it is a good habit, they can help their parents in times of need, they can use it for their own education and of course to extend credit to people. They seem sure they don't mind sacrificing some goodies to save up. As an organised children's group they also supervise personal hygiene, check to keep the toilets clean and undertake to keep their streets and surroundings clean. In the near future, they want to invest their savings in vegetable cultivation, on leased land. They suggest growing brinjal, cucumber, potatoes and bitter gourd. They want to sell some of the vegetables, eat some of it and give some to the Gram Vikas supervisor there.

The children are very enthusiastic and bright. They all seem to enjoy studying. The parents have appointed a village youth to tutor their children, since they feel they do not learn much at the government school. Over 60 children are enrolled for tuition. The children say they study because it makes one clever, they learn how to calculate and keep accounts, some want to write letters, some to read the newspaper, and many want to go out to work. The girls seem particularly bright. They started saving much before the boys, who followed suit after they saw the girls succeed.

But their future may not be as bright as they are. Most girls will be taken out of school after ninth or tenth grade, to be married off or because of financial constraints. Because of a lack of role models, the children have very humble ambitions. Most of the boys want to set up shops or work in Surat, and most girls want to stay at home, just as they see their elders do. Some girls quip that they want to be engineers and doctors and then laugh with embarrassment at the perceived impossibility of their dream.

(2001)

## Women's Empowerment in Kusaguma

The women of kusagumma were in no way different from other rural women folk of southern Orissa. Age-old traditional conservatism had made them shrink into the walls of their dwellings. Neither were they educated nor was any opportunity available to them for expressing themselves. Except taking care of the family and assisting in agriculture, they had no other opportunity in community decision making.

In this backdrop the RHEP of Gram Vikas was initiated in the village in the year 2000. The village has only one scheduled caste family out of the total of 80. During execution of the programme the women were non- participants. The reason was that, they were not organised.

Thus arose the need for organising and insisting them. Gram Vikas initiated the promotion of savings and credit groups of women in the village. Soon four savings groups were formed in the village. Since the last one and half years these groups have stabilised and have shown

remarkable improvement. The monthly group meetings have provided a platform to the members to discuss various aspects of their opinions and concerns over education, maternity and childcare, immunisation, health and sanitation etc. They are able to take care of all aspects of their group activities. No more are they dependent on the men for management of their affairs.

They now participate in the decision making in the village meetings. They are able to discuss their programme with visitors. Recognizing the importance of education they have enrolled in adult literacy classes.

Having recognised their potential, the Gram panchayat has leased the village pond to them, in which Pisciculture has earned them substantial profit. All the activities of netting, selling and keeping accounts has been done by the women themselves. No doubt they have come a long way but there are still miles to go.

(2001)

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## Maa Thakurani Mahila Samiti, Kusaguma

80 families inhabit Kusaguma a village 17 kms from Aska. This village is known for its unity and has shown substantial progress within a short time. An important landmark in this progress, is the efficient organisation of women and a consequent increase in the levels of their confidence.

The women came together to form the Ma Thakurani Mahila Samiti in May 2000. It has 80 members, covering every family. They have four savings groups of 20 members each, who save Rs 10 a month per head, for the purpose of advancing loans. Earlier they were driven to the mahajan in times of need, who lent money against a deposit of gold jewellery and charged exorbitant interest. These women have saved Rs21200 in the bank and loaned out Rs1600 at the rate of 2% per month.

They collect another Rs2 a month for a committee fund, which has Rs 6000 presently. They have taken a loan of Rs12000 from the Block for stitching leaf plates and to grow vegetables like bitter gourd, lady'sfinger and brinjal. They want to sell the produce, repay the loan and keep the profit. However the decision to spend that money is mainly taken by the men, with the women's consent. Apart from this, they supervise cleanliness of toilets, immunization and antenatal care and the working of children's savings groups. They want to start a balwadi and ensure that all children attend school. They are also engaged in pisciculture in one village pond and have applied for a five years lease to start the same in another. They are contemplating building a boundary wall around the water tank and also a TBA room in the near future.

The women have come a long way, fighting criticism from men and women alike. In fact, now, most people have been won over. They all admit that Gram Vikas' initiatives have changed their life. Earlier they stayed indoors, covering their faces behind veils, unable to speak up for themselves. Now, they share the same platform with men, make decisions and implement them, which has given them the ability to not just help themselves but others as well. It has also changed the attitude of the men. Men now encourage this endeavour on the part of the women, treat them with more respect and realise the importance of educating girls.

Although they continue to face apathy and ridicule from some, they do not care, because they have earned the support and confidence of most village members through their action.

(2001)

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## Partners in Development

The village Kusaguma, about 17 kilometres from Aska, has 80 households. Its basic sources of livelihood are agriculture and wage labour in textile mills in Surat. The village is characterised by its active people's organisations and its unity. In this village lives a middle aged couple, who have set an example through their efforts to help the village community.

Sri Gobinda Chandra Sayi, a respected figure in the village, is a man of few words, but of concrete action. He is a member of the Village Committee, in capacity of which he is in-charge of all the construction in the village. As a member of the Health Committee and the Drug Distribution Centre in-charge, he makes affordable medical aid available to the village, with government help. Besides, he is a member of the Panchayat Samiti Sabha, supervising the functioning of all government schemes in his village and making proposals to it through the Palli Sabha, as well as a member of the Pani Panchayat, collecting funds for, and supervising all irrigation programmes in the village.

This exhaustive list of responsibilities is, on account of his abilities and his own desire to help the village prosper. Soft-spoken Sri Sayi, believes in unified action and democratic decision making. "I see all as equals, economic status and caste notwithstanding", he tells us, and gives each and every village member, credit for achievements in the past.

In future he intends to have a high school built in the village, for which he is already in touch with authorities in Bhubaneshwar. This will make education accessible to the girls who can't go out to study. He is very supportive of the self- sufficiency that women have acquired in the recent years in Kusaguma, and sees a bright future for the new generation. He is quite happy in his present capacity, despite the demands it makes on his time, and infact, is also willing to take up more responsibility at the Zila Parishad level, if the need arises.

The accomplishments of his wife, Srimati Tanu Sayi, are equally impressive. She is the trained Traditional Birth Attendant of the village. She supervises the progress of all antenatal cases, provides them with basic medical and dietary advice, and accompanies them to the health centre in case complications arise. She has been trained by Gram Vikas and has also attended a short government training workshop.

The people of the village chose her for this job, because she had already done four deliveries without training. "But training has made me confident and better equipped", she contends. She claims that when the whole village depends on her, she is not left with much of an option. But we know that she chose to do what she does, and does it with a remarkable unconsciousness of doing a good deed. It comes naturally to her. The women's group is planning to get a TBA room built soon.

This couple, very proud of each other, has enthusiastically taken up responsibility to improve their village, and have become a source of inspiration for others.

(2001)

## Vikas Mahila Samiti, Nandiagada

Nandiagada, 10 km from Aska, has 272 families, most of which derive their income from agriculture or wage labour. This village boasts of an extremely active and efficient women's group—the Vikas Mahila Samiti, which started in October 2000, and has 220 members.

The Samiti has 17 active savings groups and two more are in the making. Earlier, in times of need, they had to approach the mahajan (moneylender), who lent money against a deposit of gold jewellery and charged a high interest. Gram Vikas' motivation to save changed the pattern. They save Rs 20 a month, and have roughly Rs 94,500. They want to advance loans to people to meet expenditure incurred on agriculture, education, marriages or illness. They charge an interest of 2% per month and have already loaned out Rs.28,205.

As part of the Mahila Samiti, they supervise cleanliness of toilets and the surroundings, motivate children to study, and advise on antenatal care and immunisation. They have recently taken a loan of Rs 50,000 from the Block level MASS. Presently they are engaged in supervising the construction of drains for which they have received a grant of Rs 14,000 from the Panchayat.

They also canvassed for a woman in the Panchayat elections, who won to become the Sarpanch. A woman Sarpanch, they feel, is more approachable and sensitive to the needs of women, besides being capable of doing everything that a man can do.

The groups continue to face problems of non-payment and the indifference of some. Recently they also faced obstructions because of a difficult and particularly dominating office holder, who was promptly removed from her position through a unanimous decision taken by the rest, but not allowed to leave the group. They say that such incidences do not introduce any bitterness in personal relations, outside the Samiti.

Forming the Mahila Samiti has brought substantial changes in the lives of the women. They now have the confidence to take up any amount of responsibility, to deal with officers at the Block level, handle loan transactions with banks, work such as they never imagined they could be doing. It has evoked respect from the men too, and changed their mindset. They treat women's point of view with respect, both within and outside the family, which the women confirm, is a new development.

Presently, the women are concerned about problems the village continues to face — erratic electricity and water supply, the lack of roads. For the future they have planned income generation activities like making *papad*, pickle, candles and even a dairy farm. The village committee has purchased a three phase voltage stabiliser for Rs.24,000 and they plan to purchase a generator as well. The women also plan to start a balwadi and have already initiated an adult literacy programme. A number of achievements have been made, and a lot more remains to be fulfilled, but their resolve is strong and their enthusiasm unmistakable.

(2001)

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## Savings & Credit: Women in Sunamuhi

Sunamuhi Village in Dhaugaon Gram Panchayat under Dharakote block in Ganjam district one and a half KM away from the road connecting Digapahandi & Aska consists of 229 families, five of whom belong to the scheduled castes. The village has two streets, the old and new sates, divided by a canal.

RHEP was started in the village in 1995 and was completed by the end of the year. Even though all families of the village were involved in the programme, yet women were never given any opportunity to participate the community decision making, nor did the women express any desire to involve themselves. Like in any other agricultural village of south Orissa, the women were ignorant of their inherent potential and capability, beyond the periphery of their families.

After implementation of the water and sanitation programme in the village, Gram Vikas took the initiative of forming women's savings and credit group in the village. 177 eager women joined to constitute the groups in 1996. For smooth functioning and coordination they were sub-divided into several sub-groups. Each member deposited ten rupees per month in her group, from her personal income. Every group had its president, secretary and executive committee. The members met every month. Along with their group affairs, these monthly meetings gradually become forums of discussion on health, education, family problems and women of the village discovered that they had quite a lot to say on the matters affecting them.

All group members came to realise the necessity of their savings activities when the husband of one of their members fell seriously ill. The poor lady did not have any money to treat her husband. She approached her group for help. As by then the groups were only saving and had not started any lending, all members gave a month's contribution, and she was able afford treatment for her husband. He was cured. The lady thereafter repaid the entire amount advanced to her, from that day all the groups resolved to be of assistance to each other in times of need. They found that, this was a much better than running from pillar to post and mortgaging all their assets for loans.

It was unanimously decided that members should ask for loans only when they have a genuine need. A written application is to be submitted to the secretary of the group. The time frame for repayment ranged from five months to one year. All loanees were notified before one month of expiry of their repayment dead line. In case of default the loanee is penalised one rupee for each hundred rupees of loan per day. Office bearers of all groups and the village committee are required to be present at times of disbursement and repayment of loans. The total amount of the group savings has exceeded Rs.100,000.

Mostly loans are taken for treatment of illnesses, agriculture, etc. In a significant development the members registered under two SHGs at the block level government office. Each member contributed two rupees per month to the SHG, thereby creating the fund of the SHGs. This was necessary to avail Govt. assistance. Each member would work collectively with others and the profit would be distributed equally among all. These SHGs after two years have accumulated Rs.8,000 rupees. They have withdrawn Rs.7,000 for a poultry farm and banana plantation. A villager has been engaged to look after the poultry. He is to be remunerated Rs.600 per month.

Some of the members had earlier had bitter experience in rearing ducks. They felt that without proper knowledge, the poultry would also fail. Therefore, the President, Secretary and the person appointed to look after the poultry were deputed to seek appropriate information from a professional. Accordingly, they visited "Eastern Hatchery" at Berhampur and after obtaining all information placed order for 152 chicks. They got the chicks on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct 01. Each member now takes keen interest in rearing them in the firm. The chicks are regularly vaccinated. After a

month 150 chicks have grown above 1kg each. 100 banana trees and 35 coconut trees have been planted and are duly looked after. The venture is heading towards success.

(2002)

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## An Example of Collective Effort

Dengapadar in Ganjam district of Orissa is a large village with 252 households. When RHEP was initiated by Gram Vikas in this village in late 1994, it had 236 households. The community consists of predominantly marginal farmers, with nearly 50% of the households below the poverty line. Prior to the implementation of RHEP, the failure of government tube-wells resulted in acute water scarcity in summers. The absence of protected drinking water resulting in recurring incidents of diarrhoea, gastro-enteritis, etc, had made the villagers eager to participate in a community managed water supply and sanitation programme. When the issue of collecting a corpus fund for RHEP was put across to them, the villagers wondered how each family would be able to contribute Rs.1,000.

After much debate and discussion, they decided that each family would contribute Rs.500 to the corpus, and the balance would be paid out of the common fund of the village. This was not a problem since the village common fund had a sizeable amount of money from the income generated by fish stocks in the 15 acre community pond. The fish are a rich source of income earning nearly Rs.80,000 - Rs.100,000 every year.

What was significant about this decision was the fact that the fund had till then been used for a *jatra* (religious procession) each year, in the month of July. Whatever remained was used for building and renovating the village temples. The villagers collectively decided that sanitary infrastructure and access to safe drinking water should get predominance and the *jatra* was discontinued for three years.

In this manner a sum of Rs.236,000 was generated for the RHEP corpus fund. From the community fund they also paid a portion of people's contributions towards construction of the water tank.

The electrical transformer in their village also needed upgradation, and they spent nearly Rs.40,000 for procuring a new one, and for additional electric wires and poles. They have also built a community hall of 100 sq.m. plinth area, of which Gram Vikas contributed support of Rs.40,000, Rs.80,000 was drawn from the community fund and villagers voluntarily provided labour.

Over the next three years, sixteen more households came up in the village. As per the agreed norms, the community could draw upon the interest from the corpus fund for extension of the sanitation and water programme in the village. The village committee decided that they would not touch either the principal or interest from the corpus. Instead, Rs.1,300 would be given to each new household out of the community fund, and the balance would be generated by the individual households concerned

The village committee additionally decided to deposit Rs.60,000 from the community fund in a fixed deposit, of which neither the principal nor interest would be disturbed for 5 years. This was to ensure a backup fund to meet unforeseen contingencies - technical faults, repairs and replacement in the water supply systems, etc. In 2001, they used part of this fund to buy a standby generator to ensure continuous power supply.

The community has registered a society, Bishwanath Gramya Unnayan Samiti, is be the legal forum to negotiate with the government for directly securing community development funds.

The village library is one of the few in the region with active membership and a good collection of books and journals. There are eight savings groups of women with 141 members, who play an active role in community development as well.

Much of these actions of exceptional financial and institutional planning have been possible because of the strong leadership provided by Laba Biswal, the traditional leader of the village, well respected by all the villagers. He kept the village together and also encouraged and nurtured younger leaders to take charge.

Dengapadar is a visible example of strong leadership, collective decision making, and prudent management. Developmental efforts in Dengapadar have the promise of sustainability, even after Gram Vikas withdraws support totally. In 1998, Nandiagada village in the same panchayat, with 274 families came into the RHEP fold. Together the two villages cover 44% of the population in the Panchayat. Their unified stand makes them a powerful force to reckon with.

Over the years Dengapadar has changed in various aspects. Earlier they were free to catch fish when they wanted from the pond. This practise has been stopped now. But each time the fish is harvested, every household gets 1 kg of fish free of cost, while the remainder of the catch is sold and the proceeds deposited in the community fund. Significantly, they have not been able to organise the yearly religious procession on the same scale as previous years. That for the villagers is a small sacrifice, given the strides they have made in realising a better quality of life.

(2000)

## A Panchayat with a Difference

Angarapada is an important node for the cluster of villages in Angarpada panchayat of Mayurbhanj district. Angarapada's water tank is a landmark visible to all villages in the area and has become a symbol to emulate. All villages in the panchayat are being initiated into the RHEP; they are Tulsipur, Galusahi, Kalonda, Jhadipada, Chiruhatu, Janika and Baunsapur. All seven villages in this panchayat will thus have the same facilities as Angarpada – individual toilets, bathing rooms and piped water supply to all families. Angarapada will then be the first panchayat in Orissa covered wholly under the Rural Health and Environment Programme of Gram Vikas.

The village of Angarapada is distinguished by a weekly Sunday *haat*, or market, which is also a melting pot for the exchange of ideas and information between the villages in the vicinity. This *haat* is unusually large - the physical area earmarked for it is huge. With livestock trade being the most prominent, it is a steady source of revenue for the panchayat. It has put the revenue to good use, establishing a primary school in Angarpada, a college in Raruan and recently after motivation by Gram Vikas, a pre-school centre was started in Angarpada. The Panchayat gave funds for construction and also plays an important role in the management and running of these institutions.

When RHEP was initiated in Angarpada village, Late Sri Khetrāmohan Mahanta, then President of the village committee and Secretary of the Gram Panchayat, used his influence to utilise the panchayat funds to part finance the programme. Rs. 150,000 from the Panchayats revenue was earmarked for the programme in Angarapada. Of this, Rs. 100,000 was used to supplement the Rs. 70,000 raised for the corpus from village contribution and the remaining Rs. 50,000 was used to pay for the additional pipeline needed to supply water to the village *haat*. Having set a precedent for Angarapada, the Panchayat board was now obliged to pass a resolution to make proportionately the same money available to the other villages in the Gram

Panchayat. Hence RHEP is now part of the panchayat mandate here. With partial support being available from the panchayat funds for the RHEP, many more new villages will be availing of the scheme. Gram Vikas believes that the villages must raise the money for the corpus by themselves in order that they feel a true sense of ownership for the programme. Hence although money flows in from the panchayat, this money is presently being used to subsidize the construction of toilets and bathing rooms, in addition to people's own contributions and Gram Vikas' support.

Angarapada is a large, well-laid out village of 176 households. The *dalit* and *adivasi* clusters are separated from the rest of the village, but everyone has the same facilities. The per capita water requirement in this village was assessed, and a tank with a capacity of 78,000 litres was constructed. However, the water pressure was soon found to be insufficient for a group of 24 *adivasi* families and a new tank of 12,000 litres was constructed.

The primary occupation here is agriculture with a majority of the land-holdings being over 2.5 acres. This village has about 86 unemployed graduates. Brick-making and wage labour are also common. A successful poultry farm in this village, seeded by Gram Vikas' support, is the pride of the field supervisor. The presence of such a large market in the vicinity has resulted in a spirit of enterprise not seen in many other places. Purchasing paddy and reselling it after processing it into rice is a thriving business, especially among the women's groups initiated through with Gram Vikas' support. It is earning them on average, a profit of Rs.25 per 100 kg of rice. The women's group in Angarapada has taken a loan from the bank for pisciculture. A working capital loan of Rs.250,000 was also availed through the Government's Swarn Jayanti Swarozgar scheme.

There is a cement tile manufacturing unit within this village, the know-how for which was procured from the neighboring town of Raruan. A local carpenter makes the mould, and the rudimentary tile-making machine is often copied and self fabricated. This enterprise is only seasonal but provides quick returns as a local market exists for the tiles. There are also grocery and fertilizer shops in the village.

Harvesting of Sabai grass is another livelihood activity commonly pursued in many of the villages. The rope is purchased by middle-men and sold to traders in Calcutta. The villagers have been able to negotiate better prices for the sabai grass with the guidance of Gram Vikas and working collectively.

A group of 20 farmers have together accessed a loan of Rs.50,000 with a 75% subsidy component, and installed a 10-hp pump set for irrigation. About 250 hectares of Eucalyptus and Acacia trees, have been planted in Angarapada, under the social forestry programme. A watch and ward society has been formed within the village for this social forestry patch. Clearly, the initiative, confidence, and entrepreneurial skills of the villagers are striking features in this village today.

Gram Vikas has over the years leveraged the initiative and enterprise of the Panchayat leaders and helped build a stronger and more democratic community, where the fruits of development percolate to everyone in equal measure.

(2000)

## Leading The Way to Sustainable Development

Nestled in a valley 30 kms from the block headquarters of Thuamul Rampur in Kalahandi, Madanguda is a home to forty Paraja Khond families. The village has a committee responsible for all development activities and subcommittees for health, education, and sanitation. Madanguda stands apart from other villages in the region – every family has a *pucca* house, a toilet and bathing room and piped water supply. The difference, this has made to the village is visually powerful, and at the same time, the dignity and pride among the people is obvious.

In 1997 all forty families of the village were motivated to build *pucca* houses (of 45 sq.m. each). Loans ranging between Rs.12,000 to 15,000 were accessed from Housing Development Finance Corporation and routed through Gram Vikas. The village area was divided into two settlements, as the original site of the village was too small for the housing programme. Land was given for fifteen families to relocate a small distance away, thus allowing everyone more room. Later with assistance of Rs.40,000 from the ITDA and Rs.3,000 per family from Gram Vikas, they also built toilets and bathing rooms, and separate livestock sheds. They have also created a corpus fund of Rs.40,000 so that any new family in the village can build their own toilet and bathing room as well, with assistance from the interest earned on the corpus. Running water supply to the village has been established by diverting water from a nearby permanent spring to an overhead water tank near the village. This ensures supply of water to their houses through pipelines all the year through. For construction of the toilets, bathrooms and water supply systems, the cost was around Rs.7,000 per family of which each family contributed 40% by way of labour, local raw materials like stone, sand and aggregate. Gram Vikas provided support for the remainder of the cost.

Another significant change, which has a very strong impact on their situation and sense of security, is the cessation of exploitation by moneylenders, police and forest guards. During the lean periods people used to be forced to take loans at exorbitant rates of interest from these outsiders. Now they can take a grain loan from their own grain bank or arrange for cash loans through the common village funds. The ITDA later used the Madanguda model to start grain banks in the entire panchayat, wherein grain stock and small support for storage was provided to help communities establish a similar system. The successful grain bank project has been highlighted at the state level, as well.

Gram Vikas' intervention in Madanguda in 1990 emphasised non-formal education and organising the community to undertake development activities. Women were to play a key role in the development process, and the savings and credit groups were the route to build their confidence. There are two self help groups with 19 and 20 members respectively. In 1999 several members of the groups decided to take a loan of Rs.27,000 from the bank to purchase goats. However after some time they decided to pay the loan back to the bank and secure funds through the SGSY programme. Five beneficiaries funded through SGSY each purchased ten female and one male goat. When the goats were purchased vaccination was carried out, however disease still killed 26 goats and there was no insurance. After this set back the number of goats has slowly risen again to approximately 50.

In a region where the primary sustenance is drawn from shifting cultivation (*dangar*) there are other aspects that stand apart in Madanguda. Twelve persons trained in masonry during the construction of the houses, toilets and bathing rooms, now find steady employment in neighbouring areas. Fifteen families undertake large scale vegetable and banana cultivation and produce a double crop of paddy which meets their own needs and leaves adequate

surpluses for sale. Vegetable and banana cultivation is undertaken by all the other families in the village, on a limited scale as well, supplementing their nutritional intake and reducing their dependence on *dangar* for food. The villagers have rights to over 120 acres of land, but most of this is on the hill slopes, which they have been attempting to protect by making terraces for cultivation. A large area of hill slope is being protected as well, with 36 acres under horticulture plantations.

The village committee of Madanguda also purchased a tractor in 1997, through a bank loan at an interest rate of 14%. One person in the village was given training to drive the tractor. The village hires their tractor to people in the village and the surrounding area for a fee of Rs.900 per day. From this, they have been able to earn about Rs.6,000 per month, which has gone to fully repay their loan.

The illusion that Thuamul Rampur is the “poverty basket of Asia” is wrong. Madanguda demonstrates how through collective action and will, sustained and significant improvements can be made in people’s lives.

(2002)

## Cashew and Rheap in Latigaon

Lattigaon, a village about a kilometer from the Anandpur project office, has thirty-three Saura families, which have been keeping rather busy of late with the construction of toilets and bathing rooms in their village under the RHEP initiatives of Gram Vikas.

Lattigaon is the story of some poor tribal landless families whose lives have been altered tremendously through the reasonably large-scale cultivation of cashew. These families, traditionally dependent on ‘bogodo’, relate how in the past they put in six months of hard labour in the forests to manage their bare subsistence. Large portions of their crops would also be destroyed by wild animals.

Gram Vikas gave them the idea of planting jack fruit, lemon and most significantly cashew in the forest lands around their village, and also provided saplings. In five years the trees were ready and were yielding five to six Kgs of cashew each, which sells at Rs. 35 a Kg. Currently each family has between 200 to 600 trees of its own.

It has not been an easy journey for the villagers. Forest officials in the past, demanded extortion money off them for encroaching on forestland. When the villagers refused, they went ahead and booked cases against a few of them. A long sustained struggle, frequent trips to the court and support from Gram Vikas, the people contend, has finally settled the cases in their favour. Now there is a Forest Development Association where the villagers, officials of the forest department and Gram Vikas work together to protect the forests.

These cashew plantations have supported and improved the life of this village, which is extremely interested in and enthusiastic about working collectively towards developing their village. The village boasts of two active women’s SHGs and the housing programme was completed here two years back.

Under the RHEP, Gram Vikas has identified a nearby stream and pipes have been laid by villagers and a well dug to access water supply through gravity flow. Villagers tell us that the hard work they have put in to organize this water supply system will pay off in the near future when they’ll only need to turn the tap to access water, right through the year. It will put an end to the water problems of the dry summer months that they faced in the past. As the bathing rooms and toilets are on their way to completion, it is heartening to see people rattle off the advantages of using them, even if tutored by Gram Vikas.

This village also seems to think ahead. It has a community cashew plantation covering twenty-five acres of land, off which they earned a profit of Rs. 28,000 this year. This community fund has been saved in the bank to be used for the maintenance of the water and sanitation facilities in future, and also for the electrification of the village, which seems to be next on their list of things-to-do.

(2004)

## RHEP in Chhanabogad

Chhanabogad bears all the signs of a village that has successfully implemented the Rural Health and Environment Programme (RHEP). Since November last year, all twenty households in the village enjoy 24-hour water supply and a private toilet. Particularly innovative has been the set of solar panels that is being used to pump the water. Situated above Gram Vikas's multi-purpose cyclone shelter, the solar panels have been used to solve the problem of pumping water in this village.

Before the interventions of Gram Vikas, the villagers of Chhanabogad had to get water from a spring quite some distance away from the village. Gram Vikas had then helped the villagers construct a sanitary well. About two years ago, when the groundwork for RHEP was being done, the possibility of gravity flow supply of water was successfully explored.

The solar pump was built on the basis of a government loan. The villagers had deposited a corpus of Rs. 50,000, which earned them the right to receive a loan of Rs. 5,50,000. Rs.1,00,000 was used to create the gravity-flow supply of water for the tank, towards which the villagers contributed all the unskilled labour.

Chitrasena Mallik, President of the village committee, points out that the village is especially proud to have completed the RHEP before the neighbouring villages. He notes the significant decline in the incidence of diseases like diarrhoea. He has also observed an increasing sense of unity among the villagers in the process of implementing RHEP.

Chitrasena recalls the difficulties he and the Gram Vikas staff had faced in motivating the villagers to implement RHEP. Though everyone was prepared to spend money to have a supply of running water, it was particularly difficult to convince people of the importance of latrines. Some meetings would even come to blows. However, since the village has started receiving a piped supply of water, opposition has died down. Now, Chitrasena believes, villagers have become amenable to suggestions for other improvements.

Today the village committee, and especially the youth within it, is active in implementing the initiatives of Gram Vikas. There is also a confidence that they would be able to manage the development of the village even if Gram Vikas were to withdraw.

The village has sought out, under the guidance of Gram Vikas, ways of financially sustaining developmental activity in the village. Particularly profitable this year has been the pisciculture the village committee has begun. After a struggle with the government, a lease was taken for the reservoir of the nearby Minor Irrigation Project for Rs. 12,000 per annum. However, last year, they had sustained a loss of Rs. 30,000.

Their determination to continue with the project in spite of Gram Vikas refusing financial support, gives weight to their confidence in themselves. Indeed it has yielded rich benefits this year. They expect business of about Rs. 1,00,000 out of which recovery from the losses of last year should not be difficult. They are also determined to renew the lease on the reservoir once it lapses.

Initiatives like this, and the social forestry undertaken by the women's Self Help Group, mean that the village can easily the loans it has taken. It also means that Chitrasena Mallik's dream of having an, "ideal village", is not an idle one. He spells it out for us, "In the short run, a cement road. In the longer term, a peaceful life with all the people working together."

(2004)

## RHEP in Munising

Munising is a hilltop village in the Koinpur Cluster, with thirty-three households. Most of these families belonging to the Saura tribe, earn their livelihood from their horticultural patches on the slopes of the hills. The village boasts of a reasonably successful housing project and the newest excitement here are the water and sanitation initiatives that are underway.

The overhead water tank has been built and it is expected to draw its water supply from a well on a stream, about a kilometer downhill. The connecting pipeline has been laid by hired labourers. Toilets and bathing rooms for each of these houses have also been built. Although fifteen households in the village enjoy electricity, a connection to run the pump set has not been obtained yet.

The building of a toilet and a bathing room entails a total expenditure of Rs. 7500. Gram Vikas has paid Rs. 3000 and the remaining amount has been arranged for by each beneficiary household. The villagers' contribution besides some amount of money, includes the supply of free unskilled labour and stones to line the soak pits. The cost of the tank and pipeline has been borne by agencies funding Gram Vikas, but the Central Government under its 'Swajal Dhara Scheme' is expected to reimburse portions of it if not the entire expenditure.

As young men and women gather to talk, it is not difficult to sense the relief that easy access to running water has meant for them. They recount the troubles they previously faced in carrying water from the well far below. The problem worsened on social occasions and festivities.

They also recount their initial skepticism when Gram Vikas first spoke of this programme. They believed and were told by others that it was impossible to pump water to such a height and that Gram Vikas was out to cheat them. Repeated meetings with Gram Vikas staff and an exposure to trip to Anandpur, served to gradually make them optimistic, and paved the way for the collective success that we see today.

Although only some people have started using the toilets, breaking through generations-old habits, people seem to be generally convinced that their life will be simpler now, than having to brave stormy weather and snake bites to venture into forests.

People also seem to have some ideas to start a fund to organize for the maintenance of these facilities, which they propose to collect at times of harvest. An erratic supply of electricity notwithstanding, people seem proud of what their village has achieved. In fact, four villages in the vicinity have already approached Gram Vikas after their success in Munising.

(2004)

## RHEP In Deula

The village Deula located a couple of hundred metres from the project office at Anandpur has fifty-two households. If one passes by this village, it is difficult to miss the flurry of activity generated by the ongoing construction of toilets and the water tank, as part of the RHEP, with assistance from Gram Vikas.

The bathing rooms and toilets will cost each household Rs. 7500, out of which Rs. 3000 will be provided by Gram Vikas. The state government under its 'Primal Yojna' will also provide Rs. 500 for every household. Six households in the village, which are very poor owing to the absence of young earning members, have been unable to contribute to the corpus fund, or to build their toilets. This has created a problem as regards the 100% coverage, which is a prerequisite for the implementation of the RHEP. The Gram Vikas co-coordinator has been trying to arrange for some funds from the government, to at least be able to build three toilets for these six houses.

The Zila Parishad has contributed Rs. 70,000 towards the building of the water tank and the Central Government's 'Swajal Dhara Yojna' has sanctioned, though not yet released, the remaining amount of Rs 1,30,000. The people's contribution for every lakh is to be Rs. 10,000, out of which Rs. 5000 will be paid through free unskilled labour.

Two proposals are being considered with regard to the source of water supply – a bore well and gravity flow supply. The government seems keen on the latter as the bore well would also require a reasonably regular supply of electricity.

Sugya Sabara, the Village Committee president remembers how initially villagers had been unconvinced about the need for toilets, although they wanted piped supply of water. Repeated meetings, exposure visits to other villages and the active interest shown by the village sarpanch have changed attitudes for the better. The people tell us of the problems they faced to venture into forests in the monsoons and also seem to understand that diseases like diarrhoea will be checked through sanitation facilities.

Gram Vikas seems to have had directed its efforts first and foremost towards winning over the women, who seem to be extremely active in the village development committees. They were also understandably more enthusiastic about the prospect of accessing piped water supply in their homes.

The villagers seem aware that Gram Vikas plans to withdraw in the future. They have planted 2000 teak plants in 2003 and have a community cashew plantation extending over ten acres, for the maintenance of the RHEP initiatives and for the education of their children.

The Gram Vikas coordinator admits that the most difficult task in the RHEP is implementation and to put into practice the verbal consensus reached at meetings. But he is optimistic because the village has shown enthusiasm and there are also plans of starting a youth committee to involve them in working for the community in future.

(2004)

## Badaputuka: Strengthening Self-Governance

Badaputuka is a village of predominantly Santal tribals (75 of 81 households), in Mayurbhanj district of Orissa. The village did not have any representation in the Gram panchayat for nearly 30-40 years. When Gram Vikas encouraged the formation of village committees and the election of an Executive Committee with a President, Secretary and the other office bearers, the villagers were enthused. Gorachand Murmu, 37 years, became the President. The villagers then decided that they would support him if he put his candidature forward for the Gram panchayat. This was significant because the villagers earlier owed allegiance to nearly five different political parties. Gorachand Murmu, with the united support, became the Sarpanch (Gram Panchayat leader). After assuming responsibilities, he began to look at ways, which would improve the lot of his community. Near the village, there is a water harvesting structure, which was auctioned each year by the Minor irrigation department for a seasonal lease for

fishing. This lease could be obtained by satisfying the criteria of either being professional fishermen, or fishermen by caste. The tribals of Badaputuka were neither. They had thus neither bid for nor secured the option to use the structure.

Gorachand Murmu suggested to the villagers that a Pisciculture Society should be formed by the village, to participate in the auction as professionals. The members of the society contributed to participate in the auction, which they eventually secured. While the members also contributed an initial amount for purchase of equipment, they have now applied for a loan to expand their equipment, build small boats, etc. The villagers have thus shown great promise in generating alternate livelihoods to enhance their incomes. Gorachand Murmu did not stop there. The government had, a few years earlier supported social forestry on 10 acres of land near the village, through the Integrated Tribal Development Agency. Selected households were given maintenance responsibilities and subsequent usufructory rights to the forest. Through hot summer months, these villagers carried water up the hilly tracts, to preserve the saplings. The patch has blossomed with impressive growth today. Gorachand Murmu approached and negotiated with ITDA to take up social forestry in an additional 150 acres (out of the total of 500 acres of wasteland). Today almost all the households of the village are involved in this activity, and have thus obtained the security of their patch of forest to meet their livelihood requirements.

A natural forest in the village has also been brought under Joint Forest Management. The villagers decided not to cut trees/ branches from this forest, as it has many varieties of indigenous species, which would fetch a good price in the market. Every 5 years, pruning would be conducted, and the quantity required for household needs distributed among villagers. The remainder would be sold, and the proceeds from the same will be deposited in the village fund. It was decided that cutting of trees will be undertaken only with community consensus, and only for community development initiatives. However, residents of nearby villages, in connivance with the forest guard, continued to fell trees in the forest. The villagers of Badaputuka got together and rounded up the offenders, and presented them before the District Forest Officer. Subsequently, all illegal trespassing in the forest has been effectively curbed. These actions of the villagers of Badaputuka, with the dynamic leadership of Gorachand Murmu, demonstrate the initiative and the enterprise of the villagers in protecting the environment to complement and enhance their livelihoods.

(2004)