

And What Exactly is Gram Vikas?



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Gram Vikas is a rural development organisation working with the poor and marginalised communities of Orissa since 1979, towards making sustainable improvements in the quality of life of the rural poor.

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And What Exactly Is Gram Vikas

I. A Shared Reflection :

Man's progress through history is primarily the result of a continuous quest for improved area of utilizing the resources around him. This quest, carried out at different places and in different times-one individual or group taking over where another left off-has made the world smaller, improved life expectancies and enabled and to withstand the onslaughts of nature on his survival. Modern man has added at least ten years to his life, procedure better crops in half the time taken earlier, travels into space and back in a couple of days. Now how many of the human race have benefited from this tremendous progress of science and technology? Indeed, how many are even aware of the possibilities that exist?

While the fortunate few can get their hearts transplanted or live on borrowed lungs for decades, millions die of treatable diseases like tuberculosis and malaria. When some flit from continent to continent in a matter of hours, it takes the better part of a day for most people to reach next to village. A model farm with the best inputs yield three bumper crops in a year for some. Yet, the poor tribal with his primitive tools, burns the forest and reaps a merely pittance, just once a year, why?

Most of the people who are deprived of these benefits in our country live rural, and particularly tribal tracts. The reasons for their deprivation are historic, cultural and to an extent, geographical. Ignorance, poverty and exploitation of man, form a vividly cycle to stall their progress. To lift them a step higher towards the mainstream is the

responsibility of the conscientious among those who have had the benefits of progress. Constructive people-oriented measures to improve the quality of living in these sections is a field where voluntary action is essential. There is a crying need to help these people awaken to their right stand-up with dignity, confidence and work unit to better their lot. A small group of motivated purposeful volunteers can effectively play this catalytic role. Necessarily, such efforts cannot be a part time job.

II. Who We Are?

In 1969-70 a group of student activists at Madras University, decided to avoid the rat race of job seeking and status climbing. We formed the Young Students Movement for Development (YSMD), a registered organisation, based at Madras and committed to social change on the regional and national level. Following a massive cyclone and tidal wave which hit coastal Orissa in 1971, YSMD became involved in relief operations in Cuttack district. After the emergency assistance efforts, a few of the initial volunteers opted to remain in the area to initiate a border based development program to help the people rebuild their lives.

Our work here was mainly in the agricultural field. After four years in the area, we gained a lot of insight into the life and thought processes of the people and practical aspects of voluntary development work. We moved to Ganjam District in 1976, on the operative Bank and the then project director, small

Farmers Development Agency, Shri S.R. Patnaik.

The core group was joined by three locals of educated young men, who had smaller ideas. Here in Ganjam, we formed ourselves into Gram Vikas, which was registered in January 1979. Today besides the core group, we have 15 animators and a large group of volunteer workers from among the people, with whose aspirations and struggle for a better life, we have identified ourselves. (Annexure I)

III. What We Are Not

We are not a charitable organisation, mere charity believe, cause dependency and retards self-reliance. We only aim at people to help themselves. We are not missionaries. Our group has members of different religious, castes and languages. We do not have any political affiliations. We believe only in two parties-the have and the have not. Our mission is to convert the have not to have.

IV. Where We Are

We are located at Narasinghpur, Mohuda 10 kms. off Berhampur, which is the leading commercial town of south Orissa. Not many of the town people are aware that this hilly region is the home of a few thousand Khond tribals. The composite area is known as the Kerandimal. Besides the predominantly tribal population, there are also mixed community villages with plainsman who settled there for generations.

Communications within the Kerandimal is primitive. There is no regular bus service even to Berhampur. The contrast in life styles and physical surroundings between the two places is striking.

Firewood, fruits trees and subsistence food crops are the basic sources of income for the people. The abundant fruit yielded-tamarind, jack fruit and mango is sold in the neighboring towns, through middlemen. Usury has been a part of tribal life for generations. The consumption of liquor was widely prevalent and alcoholism was a major problem among the tribal – a reason why they could not break away from the stranglehold of their backwardness and powerlessness. Educational levels are deplorably low, despite tuberculosis are major health scourges. Since the tribal live in small. Scattered hamlets of 10 to 30 houses on the hills,

unconnected by roads of any sort, except a maze of jungle paths, existing governmental schemes and services have generally not reached the people.

Besides the tribal, we are also in contact with some not tribal villages on the plains, many of which have a large, landless popular of backward and scheduled castes.

V. What We Do And How

We first became aware of the tribal in the summer 1977. As perceived by us, their main problems seemed to be of 'identity', 'acculturation', 'integration', 'exploitation' and 'lack of organisation'. We began to ask ourselves if there was not something, which could be done to revitalise these people, to support them in an effort to integrate themselves into the life of the district.

Our first contact with the people was through primary health care. There was no established health centre in the vicinity- (the Block Primary Health Centre is at Kukudakhandi)- and treatment at Berhampur was beyond the means of the majority. So, when medical aid reached their doorsteps through a qualified doctor (Dr. Sarat Patnaik) and a graduate nurse (Anthya Madiath), an immediate rapport was established.

Starting four years ago with 11 villages and health as a point of entry, the program has evolved rapidly to include the present number of 91 villages and are a comprehensive scheme covering a wide spectrum of activities ranging from health, social education, agriculture and animal husbandry to the formation of village organisation for self-reliance.

Our goal is to secure the liberation of all people who are weak and powerless (in one way of another), from the increasing impact of grinding poverty.

We believe this growth of people can only take place through full involvement of the people themselves, both organization and functionally. Hence, every program or activity that is irritated is based on the aspirations, needs and capacities of people to participate.

Our role is to act as facilitator and catalyst, to link the indigenous people's organization with government and private sector services.

Our over riding strategy for development programs in the area has been a phasic, progressive, and

directed expansion. Building upon successes through linkage and coordination of activities, the programme has evolved into a broad based, integrated development effort which can be broadly divided into two categories, economic and socio-cultural development.

(Annexure II)

A brief description of the nature and impact of some of the major programme thrusts is given in the following paragraphs.

SOCIO-CULTURAL PROGRAMMES

Community Health Care and Education

Following several discussions with the people we initiated, a low-key, health programme, the short-term aim of which was to meet immediate curative needs and on a long-term, search for a way in which people could live healthily.

A basic concept of the programme is that health education is the most important means of improving the health status of people, since a change in attitude, in the long run would be more effective than the participation and involvement of the people themselves from the very beginning of the programme, is crucial for its ultimate success.

i. Health Education Programme :

Subjective factors such as traditional understanding of illness, superstitious beliefs, coupled with objective facts such as lack of education, poverty and an expensive health system make common cause for the very low level of health consciousness of the people and the tribal in particular.

ii. Village Health Workers Training:

Each village selects a woman who is then trained by us to give simple curative treatment and preventive health education we began with a batch of eight illiterate tribal women. Today this group of village workers has expanded to seventy and doing village work in their villages. We see them as our biggest investment and hope for the future in bringing a change in health consciousness among the people.

iii. Health Service Scheme:

The medico-technical aspects of this programme include

1. Simple curative services through a basic clinic at Narasinghpur and through regular village visits of the health team.
2. Maternal and Child Health Services, antenatal and post-natal care, under fives care, immunization, monthly follow-up by VLHW and Health Assistants, nutrition education.
3. Leprosy-education and treatment.
4. Tuberculosis-detection and treatment.
5. Providing drinking water.

STRUCTURE OF THE HEALTH PROGRAMME:

Level I ----- Village -----
VLHW's

Level II ----- Sub-centre -----
(a group 6-12 villages) Health Assistant

Level III ----- Base Health Centre ----

(Narasinghpur) 1. One qualified Doctor

2. Trained nurses.
3. Health Assistants.

Social Education

We in Gram Vikas, do not see education as an end in itself, but rather as a means for self-consciousness, awareness and total development of man. Hence, the educational component is an extremely strong element in all our activities. The main thrust of all our efforts towards community education, whether non-formal adult education or primary education, has been towards raising the people from depths of hopelessness, and apathy to an awakening of their own dignity, confidence and latent strength.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Initially extension education channeled through village meeting and training programmes. Gradually, however, it was felt that a more permanent and continuous effort was essential. The adult education program acquired a more directed orientation towards the end of 1976, when a decision was made to choose and hire outside cadres. Young men called 'animators' were selected for specific criteria of background, experience and motivation. Their responsibility involved educating and motivating. Their responsibilities involved educating and motivating the village members

while providing a dynamic feedback mechanism between the area leadership committees and the Gram-Vikas core group. The animators through a continuous training process have been equipped with technical knowledge and information, as well as appropriate teaching methodologies to get their message across.

We realised that literacy for adults was not as important as information and knowledge about society, government institutions and their role, citizenship rights and responsibilities and other such subjects, which are relevant to their lives. A process of dialogue and informal exchange of ideas is adopted combined with need-based and consciousness level based syllabus in preference to institutionalised classroom training. It is gratifying to note a change in attitudes, increased used awareness and confidence as a result of this programme.

Through the animators and some literate tribal youth, we are running severe informal village schools. Children study for an hour before and after the day chores are done.

Through many children are receiving an elementary education this way, the task at hand is beyond the scope of a voluntary organisation like ours, with its limitation of manpower and finance.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Our greatest hope for positive change and movement towards a happier, equitable, co-operative-self-reliant and well integrated community lies in the exploitation of highly potent youth resource.

We began with a group of 13 young tribals in 1979. Today there are regular groups, total 60 youths who meet thrice a month at three different village centres.

The youth recently celebrated 'Orissa Day' on April 1st at Mahuri Kalua. More than 300 young tribal from the Kerandimals participated in a one-day programme of culture entertainment and sports.

MITIGATION OF SOCIAL EVILS:

The use of liquor forms an integral part of the social life of the tribals. Exploiting this tribal dependence on liquor is the particular avocation of Sundi entrepreneurs, who hire the tribal as wage

labourers.

The KGS has taken a series of action to confront the problem of growing addiction to liquor among the people and the role of the Sundies in controlling this illicit and debilitating trade. One cannot say that the liquor problem has been fully solved but it has certainly been in large measure.

PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION

THE KERANDIMAL GANA SANGATHANA (KGS)

While the core group plays a role as bridge facilitator, a necessary but temporary posture, people's participation and self-management is ensured through the Kerandimal Gana sangathana. The KGS was also registered in January 1979. This is a people centred, community-based and controlled organization which is rain forced through leadership committees and regional coordination of activities. Principles open and equal membership (men, women, and youth) after innovative democratic decision making at village level, and provide equal opportunities for participation.

The tribal's own capacities to manage their affairs, represent their grievances and fight for their rights without depending on outside help are basic functions of this organisation. One of the early results was their emancipation from money lenders and liquor-vendors. The KGS is growing into a vibrant, healthy organisation of dignified, self-confident tribals.

KSG ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

Level I Village Every family is a member, village leadership committee.

Level II Micro Area (Geographical proximity)Area leadership committee comprising all village leadership committees.

Level III KSG Board Elected people's representatives

Vested interests explosion the tribals in multifarious ways. Disputes involving land, property and the forest are most common. Knowing fully well the frustrations of going to a court of law, an attempt is made through the KGS Leadership committee to settle all disputes at the village level. In those

cases, where disputes cannot be settled amicably outside the law courts, we help by putting the tribals into touch with reliable and honest lawyers.

REMOVAL OF INDEBTEDNESS FROM MONEY LENDERS

Land and trees are instruments of production and gainful economic activity among the tribals and other backward classes of the area. Prevalent in the area was an outrageous system of mortgage and money lending, whereby the ownership of the best property has been slowly but steadily passing out of tribal hands. As part of the non-formal education programme, this glaringly unjust system of usurious exploitation was discussed in every village and people were enlightened of the moratorium on rural indebtedness, a highly publicized and praiseworthy programme of the government, to free rural people from indebtedness and human bondage.

The people organization, the Kerandimal Gana Sangathana took this up as an issue. Through the united and courageous action of a newly awakened and self-confident people, the clutches of the moneylenders could be effectively weakened in all the villages currently covered by the programme.

SMALL SAVING AND CONSTRUCTURE CREDIT SCHEME

The tribal philosophy has been to live from day to day and there is seldom a question of surplus money to meet unexpected expenditures-illness, death-or even anticipated expenditure like marriage, social feasts and festivals. Loans for these purposes are commonly contracted from moneylenders the interests rate ranging from 60 to 150%. Since these loans contribute nothing to production. It becomes impossible to provide for their repayment and the tribal is trapped in an ever-widening circle of exploitation. A small savings scheme was started around February 1978 as a possible solution to the problem of indebtedness.

Through the whole concept was completely new to the tribals, the small savings scheme is operated in collaboration with the United Commercial Bank, Mohuda, Branch, Presently there are deposits totaling over Rs. 1lakh, against 1367 operating accounts. Small savings has been linked to the availability of loan for consumption an individual

has been eligible to a loan four times common village savings could be used to finance consumption needs through institutional sources. So far, these loans for non-productive purposes have been given from a revolving of Gram-Vikas. The repayments of these loans recycled into the fund. While the interest of 4 % goes into the common account of KGS, helping this body to become financially viable.

Encouraged by the timely repayment of productive loans and the regular savings deposit of the people. This is certainly a novel scheme for any bank and we look forward to the smooth-functioning of this scheme.

ECONOMIC PROGRAMMES

AGRICULTURE AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

As the basic source of livelihood for virtually all families in the region, agricultural development posed strong challenges. Largely subsistence farmers, the tribals were subject to extreme physical, technical, and economic constraints. The highly seasonal, and unpredictable climatic condition of the semi arid environment, severely restricts the cropping of the semi arid environment, severely restricts the cropping season, while traditional beliefs and practices, the cultivation of comparatively low market value crops, and non-existent credit services presented additional obstacles. The subsistence nature of the economy translated into a general inability to purchase the technical inputs necessary for a more productive farming system.

Our approach was to work through village leadership committee to organise meetings, discussions and training programmes. Through contact with outside technical organisations, including AFPRO (Action for Food Production), MOTT (Mobile Orientation and Training Team). And local government agencies (the Block, District Agriculture Development Office etc.) training programmes were arranged. The work shop and training sessions were important occasions to impart specific skills sought to be taught, but also served as forums for the exchange of ideas on agriculture and related problems.

Lack of credit was perhaps one of the strongest factors in limiting progress in the agricultural sector. Access to the means of production and

the inputs necessary for improved cropping systems (irrigation, seed, fertilizers, pesticides, etc.) are purchased inputs which places high seasonal demands on the farmer. We have acted and continue to act as a catalyst in bringing credit facilities to the people. Through links with local banks, the United Commercial Bank in particular, the small farmers Development Agency (SFDA), and Block Programmes, tribal farmers have been able to obtain low interest loans (at 4 % interest, under DIR scheme) to finance agriculture, livestock and related enterprises.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

Land development has been given the highest priority because of the realization, that this is basic to agriculture. This is especially important in a place where the little and that is available is crisis crossed by hills, rocks, and thorny bushes.

IRRIGATION:

Irrigation facilities are practically nonexistent in the area. Crops depend entirely on rainfall.

While developing irrigation facilities, emphasis is given on construction of small, (inversion weirs, on the many streams that flow down the hills, Since these are easy to manage, maintain and benefit more than an individual farmer. Five such crossbund projects have been completed to date. Several such projects have been further identified but cannot be taken-up due to non-availability of cement.

The availability of credit has encouraged many farmers to apply for dug well loans. Thirty dug wells have been completed and several more are being taken-up this year.

SUBSIDIARY OCCUPATION

Vigorous attempts have been made to promote subsidiary occupations such as goatery, piggery, dairying and pisciculture none of which require large capital investment or sophisticated knowledge and equipment in order to augment income from small, lowly productive land holding and generate family employment.

The scrub jungle covering the hills is ideal browsing ground for the goats, several hundreds of which are now being kept by individual families.

Recently, a Fisheries Cooperative Society, covering the Panchayats of Sahala, Ehonthapalli, Nohuda and Konkiya has been registered in order to make the best use of the existing ponds in the area exploit the potential of the existing governmental scheme will be used by the KGS to meet general development needs of member villages.

Dairying started with the ideas of improving the stock of cattle in the area, by introducing cross bred milk cattle. Given the high cost and non-availability of good cross-bred, animals locally, we decided to go in for selective upgrading of existing animals by crossing them with exotic milk breeds. With this end in view, we are staging of planning an artificial insemination scheme using frozen semen technique. It is proposed to extend the coverage of this scheme to all the large non-tribal villages of Mohuda, Sahala and Bhonthapalli Panchayats where animal husbandry is already a long established occupation of the people.

DEMONSTRATION FARM AT NARASINGHPUR

This comprises 30 acres of what was once almost scrub jungle and a part of the farm property of the Berhampur Milk Produce Cooperative Society. Today this functions as a base for our extension programmes as well as a central demonstration farm where various experiments, in the development of orchards for production, dairying, piggery, pisciculture, gobar and bio-gas construction, are carried out before introduction to the village.

WHO ARE WITH US

We have been able to do what little we could, primarily due to the native intelligence of the common people and their eagerness to improve their lot. This would not, however, has been possible without the sympathy active environment and useful help of a number of organisations and individuals.

The Berhampur Milk Producers Cooperative Society (BMPCS) the President of which, Sri Ramanath Dash, has helping us from the beginning by leasing us 30 acres of land for a demonstration farm and other activities and continues to be involved in some of our projects.

The United Commercial Bank came forward in a big way to finance the tribals with only 4% interest, and

was instrumental in giving the financial substance to many a scheme. Now, we have a regular branch of this Bank at Narasingpur itself, which is the local point for all financial activity in the area.

The Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) and agency of the government hither unknown to the people, has legitimately subsidized most of the bank loans given to the people and shares the credit with that of the United Commercial Bank for the fast changing productivity of the land and development of the people.

Various other Government departments, special mention of which are Health, Revenus, Agriculture and Veterinary have helped in giving shape and substance to many of our schemes.

The RaboBank, Holland, a leading Co-operative Bank of Europe, met a difficult situation by creating a revolving fund for consumption loans at time when no local organisation could provide this assistance. It was this fund, which acted as an alternative to the traditional moneylender.

Bread for the World, West Germany, has been largely responsible for the support of personal and all other non-viable aspects of the programme in the last four years.

We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to all those sincere friends, well wishers, supporters and collaborators through whose assistance, understanding and expression of solidarity, we have been strengthened.

AN INVITATION

We perceive that a lot of curiosity is aroused and many an eyebrow raised, in Berhampur and elsewhere, at the changes taking place in the Kerandimal. A number of students of sociology and related faculties from India and abroad have come here to study the peaceful transformation at work. Yet, there are many people who would like to know more about this work. But had no direct contact us. We believe (as you do) that uniformed public opinion based on hearsay could be unhealthy and harmful. If you are interested, we welcome you to come and see for yourselves and share in our experience. Our work may not be unique; nonetheless, it is an authentic response of a group of young people of the path to the true development of the people it seeks to help our compatriots help themselves.



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