

Rural Health and Environment Programme

Gram Vikas is a non-partisan, secular, voluntary organisation working in partnership with tribal, *dalit* and other poor and marginalised communities.

Gram Vikas is registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860. Today Gram Vikas directly reaches out to over 25,000 families in 14 districts of Orissa.

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Donations to Gram Vikas are exempt under Section 80G of Income Tax Act, Govt of India

In over a 100 villages across Orissa, poor communities have come together to establish, operate and manage their own water supply and sanitation systems. While doing so, they have created financial and institutional mechanisms that will ensure that these services and facilities are available for all times to come, most importantly, to all families in the village without exception. The facilities were created with their own efforts and resources, with some assistance from external agencies. The Corpus Fund of 105 villages, raised entirely by contributions by each family in the villages, amounts to Rs.11 million. Own funds of the 257 Self Help Groups is Rs.2.3 million and they have accessed in excess of Rs.1 million as loans.



▲ *More than just toilet and bathing room. Waste water from the bathing area tends kitchen gardens. Banana and papaya grown near soakpits to keep the pits dry – Asuramunda, Bolangir*

Sanitation infrastructure and supply of piped drinking water all through the year to all houses are the entry point and the core rallying element to bring people together, cutting through barriers of patriarchal systems, caste, politics and economic differences.

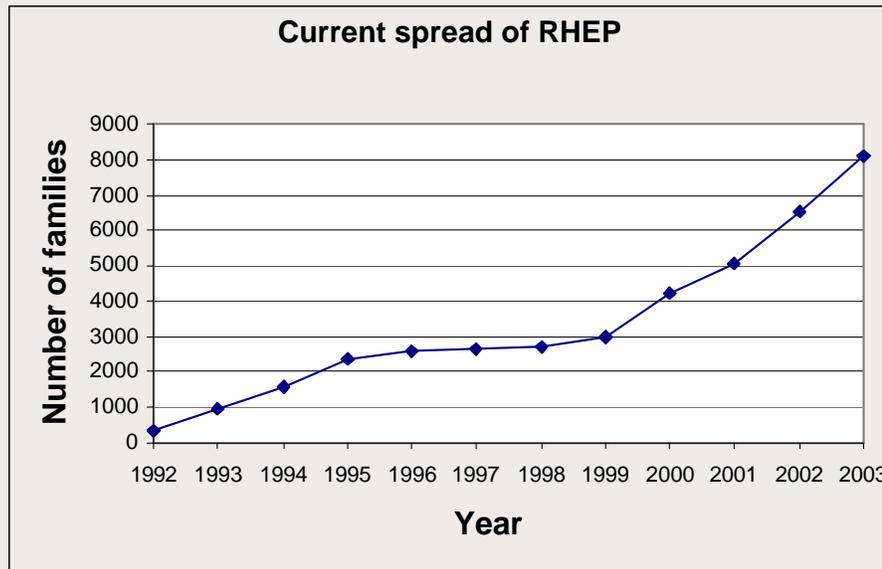
'All or none', 'pay for use', 'taking responsibility', 'participatory management' and 'in-built financial sustainability' are key elements of the project's approach.

All adults in these villages have now begun to play an influential role not only in their own villages, but also in the Panchayats that they are part of. They have also been able to access government funding and resources from financial institutions for other development activities as well, like building of community halls, roads, pond development, etc. Together these communities have also been working towards effective functioning of schools and health services in the villages. Over Gram Vikas has been facilitating these processes under the umbrella of the Rural Health and Environment Programme (RHEP).



▲ *The water tank is a symbol of dignity and pride. Piped water is available to all families all through the year.*

RHEP was initiated in 1992 with 336 families in five villages in Ganjam and Bolangir districts. It spread to 3,000 families in 40 villages by the end of 1998. Currently the coverage extends to 8,114 families (~46,000 people) in 105 villages across 12 districts of Orissa.



The programme directly influences women's lives, reducing drudgery in daily chores. More importantly it 'creates spaces' and builds capacities for women to participate at the community level. Gradually empowered they are able to work with men in areas hitherto considered to be in men's domain.



◀ Women training as masons alongside men. With new skills they are able to earn better.

Key features of RHEP

Social aspects

- § Participation of 100% families in the village, cutting across social and economic barriers as a mandatory precondition
- § Equal representation of men and women in village committees; as well as proportionate representation of all sections of the village
- § Women are organised into Self Help Groups which creates a platform for shared concerns, and leads to social and economic empowerment.

Financial aspects

- § Creation of a Corpus Fund in each village with contribution from all families, at an average of Rs.1,000 per family. Richer families subsidise poorer families to achieve this, or else support is extended from community funds
- § The corpus fund is placed in a fixed deposit and the interest earned is used only for extension of facilities to new families. This ensures 100% coverage at all times in future.
- § Clear-cut contributions and responsibilities of the communities at every stage of the intervention. Over 50% of project costs for water and sanitation infrastructure are contributed by the people.
- § Mechanisms for maintenance of systems established by rejuvenating village commons (ponds, common forests, etc) and strengthening community incomes, ensuring 100% sustainability at all times...

Physical aspects

- § 100% coverage : Individual toilets, bathing rooms constructed by all families and supply of protected "piped" water to all.
- § Effective monitoring systems to ensure effective usage of facilities. Penalties are imposed on families violating norms.
- § A process of development of other aspects the habitat is triggered – including construction of disaster-proof houses, community hall, drainage, roads, livestock sheds, etc.

Multiplication factor

- § The intervention is time bound and has clear mechanisms of withdrawal of Gram Vikas in a phased manner
- § Each village has a formal registered body which takes over responsibility of the development process
- § Linkages with government schemes and Panchayats encouraged from the start. Community based organisations and Panchayats have become vehicles for expansion of the programme
- § Livelihoods and governance systems are rejuvenated in each village and an enabling environment is created for development processes to take off