

# THE FOOTPRINTS OF SELF-RELIANCE: GRAM VIKAS KOSH SAMMELAN, GIRWA

The Gram Vikas Kosh - Village Development Fund (GVK) *Sammelan* (congregation for experience sharing) was organised by Seva Mandir, Girwa block at the training centre in Kaya village on January 7-8, 2001. The objectives of the *Sammelan* were:

- ◆ To discuss the present status of GVK in the block
- ◆ To share the experience of working with the programme
- ◆ To build a strategy for the future

The participants of the *Sammelan* were members of all the 24 elected village level GVK committees and Seva Mandir staff from the block. In all, more than 190 people participated in the two-day *Sammelan*.

## Gram Vikas Kosh: the programme

Seva Mandir initiated Gram Vikas Kosh (GVK) Programme or the Village Development Fund in the mid-1990s. The purpose of creating village level fund was to bring people around a Common Property Resource (CPR) for community action. In the absence and degeneration of natural CPRs it has become critical to create an artificial one. The programme aims to transfer the responsibility of development to the village institutions thus created. By helping to create a fund by the people, of the people and for the people, the idea was to shift the locus of authority from outside the community to within the community. Thus GVK since its inception has been seen as an important platform to raise common concerns and to strengthen the village institutions.

In the long term, the desired outcome is to bring a village institution to a level at which:

- ◆ The village group is able to identify with and come around this artificially created CPR.
- ◆ The forum thus formed, with the help of systems in place, is able to discuss village level problems and arrive at solutions.
- ◆ Villagers are able to formulate their own agenda for development.

- ◆ Villagers are in a better bargaining position with respect to interventions taken up in their village.
- ◆ The leadership developed in the village is local and accountable to the villagers.

In essence, the focus of the programme is to take village institutions to levels of autonomy and responsibility higher than they are at present. The idea is to create a village fund and institutionalise its creation and utilisation by the local people. This would reduce their dependence on external agencies for development, hence build their own capacity for governance.

The GVK programme has been designed to install certain form (structural) and substance attributes in a village institution.

## Gram Vikas Kosh *Sammelan*

The introductory session on experience sharing by members of GVK committees brought out the variance among the committees. This variance was manifested in several ways. Some of the recently elected members were not even able to recollect the positions they held in their committees, while others spoke of their experience of successful project implementation. The women in most of these committees were shy to come up and share their experience, except the committees that are composed exclusively of women.

This was followed by a presentation of activities which had been monitored and supervised by the village committee. Given below are stories from the ground - stories of success as well as failure. While it is important to analyse situations at a programme level, one should not lose sight of the reality at the ground level. These stories, straight from the people who we work with and for, provide a rich source of learning to practitioners of development. Practitioners, by their grooming, tend to dissect a situation in a manner that is usually very useful from a theoretical point of view. When a researcher experiences a field level situation, s/he experiences it from a perspective that has been groomed over

fund, in lieu of the investments made by Seva Mandir on the project would be collected on a family basis rather than deducting it from the wages paid to each labourer working on the site. We had cautioned the villagers that it would not be an easy thing to do as the occupation pattern in the village necessitates seasonal migration of the majority of the men folk from the village. Interestingly, most of this migration is not stress migration. Thus, we did not foresee this migration to stop in near future. However, we were quite excited about having started on a higher level of mutual understanding amongst the villagers. In the meeting of the villagers it was decided that only those families who contributed to the village fund would have usufruct right in the pastureland. It was assumed that no family would like to be excluded. However, when the time for the payments came, contribution to the village fund could not be collected on a family basis.

People might have thought that the *Samuha* had no legal authority to exclude those not contributing to the village fund. Secondly, by then it was clear that leadership in women's group has been concentrated in one person and the general level of awareness of the women of the village is not so high as to enable them to bargain co-operation of men folk in the community work.

Learning a lesson from this we have postponed our plans to undertake watershed programmes in the village for at least a year, so that the village group can mature enough to take on the responsibilities.

## Conclusions

From the case-studies presented above, it is clear that there can be no tailor-made procedures or methods

in working on community based natural resource management. With a proper understanding of the nuances of community dynamics efforts can be made in the direction of achieving the non-tangible objectives behind undertaking community based natural resource management programmes.

It also becomes somewhat clear that even the development interventions focussed on physical work can act as laboratories for letting people come together and develop their capabilities as an aware community.

More importantly, the interventions pertaining to the development of private resources can also trigger the processes in community institution building and strengthening these institutions, provided the processes of the selection of beneficiaries, basis of selection and the monitoring of the development work is centred in the institution rather than individuals. Similarly, to some extent, the village level development workers can also be made answerable to the village group, if the village group is allowed to take important decisions regarding their honorarium, performance appraisal, etc. This should go a long way in ensuring better performance of the village paraworkers and better monitoring of their work by the village committee.

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<sup>1</sup> All the 'community-based' initiatives need not be the interventions pertaining to the communal resources. As we would find in this paper, even the interventions pertaining to private property resources could have a communal face.

numerous years of classroom education. This difference of perspective can be a major source of aberration in the analysis that one finally comes up with. If an environment can be cultivated, where theory can be supplemented by real life experiences of real people, it would be of great help to the process of development.

◆ *Kaliwas village:* Though the village falls by the road, the villagers were facing difficulty in installing hand pumps and transporting heavy equipment into the village because there was no link road reaching inside the village. To take care of this problem the village group came up with a proposal of a kilometre long link road from the bus stand to the village interior. In its negotiations with Seva Mandir, the committee decided to shoulder the responsibility of monitoring the work. The estimated project cost was Rs 28,300. The Gram Kosh contributions were fixed at 30% of the total project cost. The work on the link road started on June 1, 2000. The village committee monitored the work, made wage payments well in time and maintained all the records of expenditure. This was disclosed to the satisfaction of the village group in a public hearing held in August, 2000.

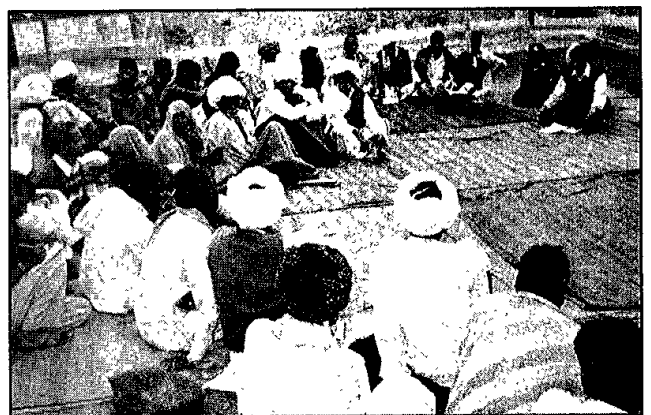
◆ *Kegraphala village:* The village committee had undertaken the construction of a link road in 1999. The experience gained from this project instilled a sense of confidence in the group and they came up with a proposal for construction of a *talai* (earthen dam) to harness water and take care of its shortage in the village. The village committee monitored the work. However, due to unexpected excess rains in a short span of time, the dam collapsed. This led to tension in the village group and a brief period in which the committee president was absconding. At the same time, there was some tension in the village due to *Panchayat* elections on the lack of consensus in the village about the nominations for the post of *wardpanch*. The post, reserved for women candidates, had two nominations, one was a village level worker of Seva Mandir and the other was the wife of the secretary of the village committee. The latter lost the election. This resulted in tension within the committee and the secretary staying away from village meetings. The village committee, today, has agreed to resolve these issues and go ahead with the *talai* project.

Meanwhile, the committee is regularly monitoring the work of village level workers and making their stipend payment.

◆ *Suro Ka Guda:* It was apparent from the presentation that there is considerable involvement of the committee in village level affairs. One of the significant achievements is transferring of amount generated by *Jati Panchayats* (traditional caste council) to the village GVK. The group had carried out the construction of a boundary wall for the village *Anganwadi*. The village committee had worked on every detail regarding the implementation of the project. It decided to sub-contract masonry work, since the objective of the project was not to generate labour. The project was completed well and in time. The records of people's contribution and material purchase were maintained and will be disclosed to the village group in the public hearing.

◆ *Katiya village:* The involvement of the village committee in village affairs is very high, despite the fact that it has been elected only recently. The committee, however, shared its hesitance about taking up a project under its supervision. It did not feel very confident about handling it. They had, therefore, declined the offer. However, after listening to committee members of other villages they did feel confident and at the end of the *Sammelan* put up a proposal for a link road.

◆ *Jhabala village:* The village lies 12 to 15 kilometres interior of Highway No. 8. It has six hamlets housing around 350 households. The committee recalled the changes in the village group resulting from association with Seva Mandir. As a



**Sharing experiences**

result of its association, regular village have been held and have become a forum for villagers to discuss issues and identify development projects that should be taken up. The village group regularly monitors the work of village level workers and evaluates their performance in village meetings.

◆ *Aad village:* The committee of Aad was ranked the best at one time. The decline in its performance and decreasing involvement in village affairs is a matter of concern. to Seva Mandir. The committee members agreed that the main reason for the village group being unable to come together is the tension resulting from differences among a couple of committee members. The committee will take a call on the problem.

◆ *Awaphala village:* There is ensuing problem in the village because of the inability to arrive at a consensus on the issue of encroachment on land in the village. While they agreed that the encroachment issues related to commons often becomes a cause of conflict among the best of village groups, the committee was trying to arrive at a consensus to resolve the issue and hoped for an early solution to the problem.

◆ *Kaliwali village:* The group of Kaliwali had decided to change the committee president. The committee shared the reason for this decision. It came out that the previous president was not showing adequate concern about village development affairs. He had, infact, been the cause of problems at various points, including having left his cattle to graze in enclosed land. The village committee is actively pursuing a Lift Irrigation project.

◆ *Raita village:* The association of this group with Seva Mandir is recent and began with a proposal to enclose a piece of community pastureland. The initial phase of the involvement was smooth, but soon there were obstacles resulting

from common property resource utilisation. The committee members shared candidly with the participants, the reasons. It came out that the village group has never been involved with implementation of the projects and that the Seva Mandir procedure demands involvement and responsibility of villagers at every step. It is becoming difficult to convince the group (plagued with problem of alcoholism) of the importance of village meetings and sharing of issues related to development.

The *Sammelan* was intended to provide a forum where there could be intra-committee, inter-committee, and committee-Seva Mandir communication. All these possibilities were exploited at the *Sammelan*. There was flow of ideas in the opposite direction, that is, from Seva Mandir to the committees. This flow was channeled through various functionaries of Seva Mandir, who have been involved in the programme, either directly, or indirectly through other interventions of Seva Mandir. The panel of functionaries from Seva Mandir spoke on the envisioned objectives of Gram Vikas Kosh and the importance of GVK in the present socio-political milieu. The concept of GVK in Seva Mandir has matured from being an instrument to take care of variable benefits at village level<sup>1</sup> to a tool around which social cohesion and autonomy of a village group can be realised. The panel also shared with the participants the possible sources of revenue<sup>2</sup> to village GVK and importance of shaping it as a village programme as against a Seva Mandir run initiative. Recapitulating the two day function, the panel placed the initiative of village development in the hands of village committees.

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1 The concept of GVK had originated to take care of differential benefits that Seva Mandir programmes extended to village communities. Because Seva Mandir was providing financial assistance to build private assets, it decided to make increased assistance contingent on the people transferring a part of the support assistance to a common village fund.

2 At present, the largest source of income to GVKs is contributions from Seva Mandir supported programmes.