



## Editorial

Dear Friends

As we enter 2009, the one thing that we all have to pray for is that it should be a year of peace. Too much violence has rocked the country and enough is enough. We have to all learn to shed our hatred and realise that there is so much more to be done rather than just fight each other to death. On that note advocating brotherhood, here is wishing you a very Happy New Year.

From this issue of WOTR's newsletter, we will be focusing on individual themes every quarter. To begin with, we have chosen to highlight how the empowerment of women has played a crucial role in finding solutions to what were deemed as 'impossible to solve' problems. Take, for instance, the case study of Parkhadvasti where the initiative of women helped mitigate the issue of a severe scarcity of drinking water.

Apart from the projects managed by WOTR, we have also chosen to highlight the work of other NGOs and this issue carries an interesting case study of how rural women in Andhra Pradesh have been trained to make their own films and use them as tools to spread awareness about a wide range of issues. What also re-affirms our belief in the fact that women have the power to create great turnarounds for the betterment of everyone is the real life story of a woman who once sold illicit liquor but has now been instrumental in creating a model village.

Indeed, women do have deep reserves of strength and commitment.

## Woman Power

### From Foe To Activist

Rekha Pawar of Seshnagar village in Nagpur district was once feared for her ferocious ways. Today, she is the forerunner of development projects



Now who would have, in the wildest dreams, thought that Rekha Pawar, once feared in Seshnagar in Hingana taluka of Nagpur district, would turn out to be such a role model? But this is a real life turn-around story and an amazing one at that. Seshnagar is a small village with a population of just 500 residents, almost all of whom are totally illiterate. They are known for their traditional occupation of robbery, dacoity and even killing. Belonging to the hunter community, they are also known for setting up illegal breweries for liquor and almost every person including very young people are known to be alcohol addicts.

When the team members of the Comprehensive Rural and Tribal Development Project (CRTDP) first arrived in this village, they were welcomed with stones and abusive language, led by the local bully Rekha Pawar whose primary occupation was to brew illicit liquor. Ironically, it was a business that kept her in a constant state of penury and she found it impossible to feed the 14 members of her family. Such was the pathetic condition of Rekha that her family had to often feed on leftovers.

By compelling every passer-by to consume alcohol and then snatching money from them she was used to hooliganism and abuse as a way of life and even the toughest of the community never bothered to lock horns with her. In fact, she was the social pariah, never invited to any function or event in the village. The CRTDP team was, however, made of stern stuff and they refused to be cowered by Rekha's missives. It did take a long time but finally they could bring about a drastic transformation in this fiery lady, showing her a more productive way of eking out a living through goat farming. This, surprisingly, brought forth in her leadership qualities apart from entrepreneurial capabilities.

Thus inspired, she aimed to become the 'sarpanch' of the village and even went on to win the elections without indulging in any pressure tactics. Feeling empowered and eager to do something for the village and her community, she went on to establish the Hunter Native Society to help the deprived and took on various projects such as building of roads, water tanks, a temple and a school with classes up to the fourth standard.

Her outstanding contribution in social work and development won her the prestigious Savitribai Phule Award in Mumbai in 1996 for working in areas like village development, child welfare, education etc. Most interestingly, Rekha has achieved alcohol prohibition of up to 95 per cent in the same village where once she forced people to drink.

## Case Study

# Making A Water Mark

*The transformation of Bhoire-Khurd village due to watershed development and the participatory role of women highlights the fact that nothing is impossible*

This article has been downloaded from : <http://www.tata.com/ourcommitment/articles/inside.aspx?artid=Kxi1wN71Mjo=>

## Shobha Ramswamy

Off the Pune highway, on a dusty route leading to the Bhoire-Khurd village, the view is of a typical drought-stricken landscape. There are vast tracks of dry, uncultivated land, hills with sporadic vegetation, and scraggly, far-flung mud homes with very few animals. Suddenly, as you enter Bhoire-Khurd, you need to rub your eyes to make sure what you see is not a mirage. The bare mountains give way to lush, green rows of trees. Onion, alfalfa and marigold crops stand tall in the scorching summer heat. Red-brick homes with animal sheds indicate rural prosperity.

The contrast is stark. More so because of the history of the village. Bhoire-Khurd, in the rain-shadow region of Ahmednagar, has suffered successive droughts, and the resultant poor crop had torn part the socio-economic fabric of this rural community. The villagers were forced to walk over 200 meters every day for a few pots of water. Agricultural production, even in a year of reasonably good rain, was sufficient only for three to four months. Labour opportunities were scarce and villagers had to migrate to resource-endowed areas to work seasonally at cutting sugarcane or for contractors of brick kilns. Even children were forced to tend to cattle and augment family income.

The village then vowed to chase the demon away. WOTR, along with Vithal

Gram Vikas Sanstha, their facilitating NGO, brought them the weapons. "We introduced them to watershed development and since then the village has undergone a massive transformation," Dr Marcella D'Souza, Executive Director of WOTR, points out. Says villager Bhagwan Ram: "Agreeing to implement it is the best decision we have ever taken. Despite last year's dismal rains, measuring just about 96 mm, our wells and taps have not dried up. The neighbouring villages employ tankers, but we don't need to."

However, what is important to note is the role played by women in bringing about the much needed relief in Bhoire-Khurd. Since watershed development brings into play shramdaan or voluntary labour, women acted as the key drivers to get the men of the village agree to the project as also understand that the availability of water would mitigate a majority of the woes. Today, taps in homes have made trudging for miles in search of water a memory. "We also do not have to migrate for work. Adequate food and financial stability are more common today. Instead of grazing cattle, our children attend school," says Shobhatai Gaiwad. Meanwhile, underground water has meant lesser chances of contamination and a lower rate of water-borne diseases.

"The representation of women in the WVCs and the village assembly was

“

We also do not have to migrate for work. Adequate food and financial stability are more common today. Instead of grazing cattle, our children attend school," says Shobhatai Gaiwad.



a major hurdle in the beginning. The women in our village were never a part of the decision-making earlier. It took six months of regular meetings with residents of Pimpalgaon and WOTR to motivate and convince everyone to pursue the involvement of the female population," one of the villagers recalls. "We have used a multi-pronged strategy for the effective and progressive involvement of women in family and village life. It is a consensus-oriented approach that seeks to involve men actively in the development and enabling of women," Dr D'Souza explains.

Currently, through the Samyukta Mahila Samitee, women are actively contributing to the development of their village. They have undertaken a number of activities to reduce the drudgery of their work and enhance the quality of their lives. They have been involved in the introduction of cooking gas, tractors, water supply systems, medical camps, and the construction of toilets and of secondary and primary schools. They manage their own savings and credit. The Samitee offers loans for needs such as marriages, medical expenses or children's education.

The village women have come out of their cocoons. Sharing the dais along with the men at the village gathering, they answer questions with pride and confidence. They voice their opinions. The sense of participation is palpable. Water has always had its cascading effect. But who could have imagined that it could be the catalyst for such a revolution.



# Yin And Yang

*Representation of women in village governance committees should not be a mere formality but should actually lead to real gender equality*

**Dr Marcella D'souza**

The last decade has seen a huge change in the lives of rural women. Even in the mid 90s, there would be just two of the oldest women of the village accompanying me as I sat together with my (all male) colleagues for the Gram Sabha. The rest of the women would peep from behind the doors and would chat with me later. We were introducing the topic of watershed development. How can women speak in public in front of their men folk (be it father, husband or son)? This was their major concern. Slowly we all graduated to women having a 33 per cent representation in the Village Watershed Committee (VDC), taking a cue from the mandatory 33 per cent representation in the Gram Panchayat.

The SHGs played a major role in giving the women the opportunity they required. It was an opportunity to hear their own voices making opinions, sharing their thoughts, listening to other women share their perspectives. Their male counterparts merely saw the SHGs as a necessary group as demanded by the watershed development project and as income pipelines for the household. The green signal was given. The women seized the opportunity.

## The Present Scenario

As women got engaged in watershed development, they began to assert themselves and consciously, even at a price. Proudly, women of many villages say (and this time in front of the men folk and in public), "This watershed project has come to our village because of us. We did the requisite 'shramdaan' that was the demand of the project." Today, they tell us of the cost of a drinking water project or a sanitation project and the cash equivalent of the amount they have contributed in kind, labour and cash. They talk of how they maintain records and accounts and collect the fees for any activity that is under their responsibility.

Their SHGs and the apex body of SHGs at a village – the Samyukt Mahila Samitee – is their space to come together to clarify

their goals, talk of solutions and address needs common to women, besides the thrift and income-generating initiatives. In some villages, the woman sarpanch has begun asserting herself and takes decisions, refusing to be 'subdued' even by the Gram Sevak. These examples, while giving us hope, are very few and far between. They, however, tell the tale of a woman's desire to be her own self to unleash the latent potential, to make her contribution to a better home and village for herself, her family and for the future of her children.

## Small Opportunities Make A Difference

This change has begun taking place because policy-makers, development agencies and activists have begun contributing from within their own space of influence. There are many policies put in place towards this end, and which are bearing results. Yet there are some small areas that still require attention. The term SHG has come to mean, 'Bacchat Gat' which, for most bankers, NGOs, government agencies and the women themselves, connotes 'savings group' that is only related to financial activities such as savings, credit and loans for income-generating activities. The bigger concept of the SHG as a 'self help group' is missed out.

If we give attention to empowerment in the bigger sense by putting her in the forefront of development initiatives at the village level, women will prove their worth. Village level activities that attract her include those with a direct link to her daily life, thereby reducing her burden and stress. Drinking water, child care, sanitation, clean energy for cooking and lighting are some of such activities.

Today, the PRIs are required to have a separate Gram Sabha for women one day prior to the village level Gram Sabha. While the intention is good, this in itself places women as a group apart and defeats the very purpose of mainstreaming women. Men and women too now feel that women's role in the village Gram Sabha is

of no consequence and hence issues that surface in the women's Gram Sabha are taken lightly and do not come up at the main Gram Sabha.

Gender issues are considered 'woman related' rather than looked at as a problem of cultural perceptions that affects both women and men. The perception of men towards women too has to be addressed and quickly. Input sessions too need to be regularly conducted at all levels of the PRIs so that men too begin to widen their perceptions regarding women and accept the latter for the contribution they can make. And insisting on meetings and Gram Sabhas where both women and men come together to discuss progress of their village is one small step.

We all need to realize that we are missing out on 'wholesomeness' if we miss out on the 'Yin and Yang' that both sexes bring to development and progress. We all need to begin this at home.

“

This watershed project has come to our village because of us. We did the requisite 'shramdaan' that was the demand of the project.”



# Letting The Camera Speak

*Dalit women farmers of Andhra Pradesh feel empowered with the 12 films they have made on a wide variety of issues*

## Huned Contractor

Masanagari Narsamma is a Dalit woman farmer from Andhra Pradesh. That, in itself, is nothing that can make her stand tall among others of her ilk. But what makes her special is her confident poise and the fact that she is also a filmmaker. That's right. Masanagari is among the many rural women farmers of Andhra Pradesh who have taken to the camera to document the experiences of their lives and the work they are engaged in. "I have made a film which shows the diversity of the crops we grow. I feel it is important to show this to others because it can spread awareness and help others learn," she says, during her visit to Pune. "The camera makes us feel empowered. It is as if we have found a voice that speaks directly to others without fear of anyone or any social obstacle," she adds.

These women have been spearheading a unique experiment of social change and empowerment. For the last 10 years, rural Dalit women farmers from Pastapur in Andhra Pradesh's Medak district have been making films documenting their struggles and achievements. They are members of the Community Media Trust (CMT) of Deccan Development Society (DDS), a 25-year-old NGO. The CMT is a novel attempt to encourage the women to handle and generate content for participatory media. The volunteers presently run a community radio centre in Medak district and have also made over a hundred documentary films on issues concerning them.

The 12 films produced recently deal with a variety of issues concerning the women's daily lives. These include agricultural diversity, food autonomy of Dalit farmers, the millet-based Dalit food system, the problem of Bt Cotton in Andhra Pradesh and the self-controlled markets managed by the 'sanghams' (self-help groups of these women) in 75 villages of Medak district. Speaking about the filmmaking initiative, DDS director P V Sateesh says, "The barriers between the urban and rural areas have to be removed using such participatory media. It is also the best way to educate the illiterate. Self expression through such media has

empowered them." The initiative is also out of the realisation that mainstream media has today drifted from grassroots level reportage. "Ground realities are not being given prominent mileage in the media. That is why there is a need to create a people's media that talks of real life situations," Sateesh adds.

Founded in 1983, Deccan Development Society (DDS) has around 5,000 women members from the poorest rural communities, most of them Dalits, in Andhra Pradesh's Medak district. The NGO's programmes, which have evolved over the years, mainly focus on food autonomy for the farmers, enhancement of natural resources, education and health. DDS encourages members to cultivate traditional crops, especially millets, using high-yielding age-old techniques. Millet cultivation is promoted as it requires very little water, which suits the local arid conditions. Every DDS member also has a seed bank with 20 to 30 varieties of millets. The accent, thus, is on diversity of agricultural crops.

Members are also encouraged to grow crops using organic farming techniques and homemade natural pesticides. It was while these programmes were being put into action that DDS felt the need to give the women a platform to express themselves. "Development has to be all-encompassing and a democratic voice is absolutely necessary for true evolvment. These films have helped women come out of their shells," Sateesh states.

In 2001, therefore, the Community Media Trust (CMT) was established. Later, thanks to Rs 25 lakh funding from UNESCO, the CMT acquired equipment for filmmaking. Today, the centre has ten cameras and around eight editing suites which have been used to produce the documentaries. "The films have ushered in a quiet revolution. For example, in 1998, we had expressed the need for night schools for adults. Today, because of focusing on this need through our films, there are 50 such schools," observes Bidakanne Chandramma, a member of DDS.

Interestingly, these filmmakers are now being commissioned by other organisations to make films on agriculture-related subjects. Now that's a real success story.

### Widespread Recognition

A CD with 12 of the women's films and a booklet were released in Pune in a programme jointly organised by the University of Pune's (UOP) Science and Technology Park (STP), Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth's Media Centre, ECONET, Kalpavriksh and the International Institute for Environment and Development, UK. The multi-media publication, 'Affirming Life And Diversity: Rural Images And Voices of Food Sovereignty In South India,' was earlier launched globally at the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity in Bonn, Germany, on May 19. This was followed by launches in Hyderabad, Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai. This makes the DDS members the first Indian rural women filmmakers to see a multiple launch of their work.



# In Quest Of A Solution

*The drinking water project of Parkhadvasti shows how the lead taken by women can help bring water right into homes which were hitherto dry*

**S G Palve**

## About Parkhadvasti:

The village Parkhadvasti lies to the east in Ahmednagar district and is located at a distance of 20 kms from Jamkhed taluka. Previously, the people in this village used to reside in Loni village. But the earthquake that took place at Killari in Latur district in 1992 caused severe damage to their homes in Loni and forced them to shift to Parkhadvasti. The population of the village is 700 which comprise 110 households. The main occupation of the residents is agriculture and sugarcane cutting. The village has four SHGs established through Sampada Trust and their viability and maintenance is looked after by the Samyukt Mahila Samiti (SMS). The village faced a severe drinking water problem and the women, including children, had to walk a distance of more than a kilometre each day to fetch water for the daily needs of the family.

## The Project:

The plan for solving the drinking water problem of Parkhadvasti was technically sanctioned by WOTR and Sampada Trust. A women's committee was established for the implementation of this project and an NGO called GARD from Ahmednagar was appointed to take on the responsibility of technical maintenance. In order to ensure that the project ran a smooth course, a meeting was organised by the committee to discuss the various parameters. It was decided that 15 per cent of local contribution would first be collected and deposited in the committee's bank account. The remaining amount was provided by WOTR. The committee satisfactorily fulfilled the responsibility of excavation for laying a pipeline, work of refilling, pipeline connection, installation of an electric motor and construction of a reservoir for supply of water throughout the village.

## Challenges & Solutions:

The work of installation of a new pipeline was, at one point of time, stopped by some of the farmers as the same was passing

through their fields. Later, the committee members convinced the farmers that this was going to benefit everyone in the village and work was then resumed and completed in time. A person from the village was appointed to supply the water to the village and also to look after the maintenance of the installation. A water supply charge of one rupee per day was collected from each household. With each household contributing Rs 30 per month, the collective amount is used to pay the salary of the appointed person, electrical bills and maintenance charges.

## Project Benefits:

The problem of drinking water faced by the villagers throughout the year was thus solved. Approximately a supply of 200 to 250 litres of water was made available to each of the households. The pipeline connection has reached to the doorstep of each household. Hence, women now do not have to walk long distances to fetch water from distant places. Plenty of water is available for livestock too. Each family uses chlorine and alum for the purification of water. This has also helped the village

to be free from water-borne diseases. The village has now planned to construct individual toilets. Students of the village can now regularly attend their classes instead of having to spend time fetching water. In fact, such has been the success of the project that residents of neighbouring villages have started visiting Parkhadvasti to see for themselves the benefits of shramdaan and development work.

*(The writer is associated with the NGO GARD)*

“

The village faced a severe drinking water problem and the women, including children, had to walk a distance of more than a kilometre each day to fetch water for the daily needs of the family.



# AP Minister Visits Darewadi

*An account of programs conducted from September to December 2008*

A total 12 training sessions and exposures were conducted for 276 participants between the months of September and November 2008. Out of these trainings and exposure programmes, three government training programs and exposures were conducted for 65 participants, five NGO training-cum-exposures were conducted for 115 participants and four internal training programs and exposures were conducted for 96 participants.

The major highlights of these programs include:

- A Logical Framework Analysis (LFA) session was conducted for 50 participants at Walmi, Bhopal from September 10 to 13, 2008.
- Minister for Rural Development, government of Andhra Pradesh, along with Commissioner of Rural Development and three senior officers visited the Darewadi Training Centre on October 6 and 7 to gain information about the social and technical aspects of watershed development implemented by WOTR. A total of five members were present for this visit.



- Twenty six NABARD officials from various districts and states attended the training-cum-exposure program on technical and social issues in watershed development conducted at Darewadi from September 7 to 10, 2008.

Meanwhile, the following forthcoming training-cum-exposure programs were scheduled for December 2008.

- A program for a team of 28 technical experts and social mobilisers from the Complementary Measure Program for IGWDP, Andhra Pradesh, who attended it in two batches at the Darewadi Training Centre from November 25 to December 5, 2008.
- A team of six officials from Outreach, Karnataka, visited WOTR to learn and

understand the social and technical issues in watershed development from November 30 to December 2, 2008.

- Villagers from Rajasthan visited the Darewadi Training Centre in order to understand the concept of watershed and livelihood. The team was at the DTC from December 28 to 29.

Apart from these training programs and exposures, four VWC melawas, five mahila melawas and two government workshops were scheduled at the Regional Resource Centre level.

## Opinions

### Fr Philip Nedumpuram

"This place is like an oasis in a desert giving not only water but also the wisdom of eco-friendly living. Congrats to Daate, his family and co-workers who maintain a family atmosphere, provide very healthy and nourishing food and keep the place very neat and tidy."

### Ms Shivani Gupta, Photographer

"This place is surreal. Great to be here again. The family is very loving. Will be here again soon."

### Ms Santhi Kumar, Commissioner, Rural Development, Hyderabad

"Thanks for exposing me to such a great experience. Training programmes and initiatives for increasing productivity are great. Wish you all great success."

### Mr P Ravindra, Project Director, Mehboob Nagar, Andhra Pradesh

"It is a wonderful experience to visit WOTR's work and see dreams turn to reality. I am pleased to see the people's participation, awareness, working structures, scenery and hospitality."

### Mr DV Raidu

"It is a good field visit. There is lot of good work being done. Nice to meet the field functionaries, oozing so much confidence and strong in conceptual clarity."

### Dr Chinna Reddy, Ministry For Rural Development, Government of Andhra Pradesh

"The visit to Darewadi watershed was highly educative and the interaction with trainees was excellent. The approach of the watershed involving five components i.e. jan, jal, janwar, jameen and jungle (life, water, fauna, land and jungle) is a very good concept. The work going on here is excellent."

### Mr Rajesh Sen, Manager (GNC), Ajeevika Project, Dehradun

"The programme was thought-provoking. The hard work of villagers and WOTR is clearly visible. The facilities at the training centre are excellent."

# Fruits Of Labour

*Sumitrabai Ghangav of Dongargaon village in Jalna district has shown what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur*

Dongargaon is a small village of a population of just 925 residents. Most of the families in the village belong to the impoverished section of society. Agriculture is the main occupation in the village and there is nothing else to substantiate this meagre revenue. In Dongargaon, WOTR has been implementing a watershed development program since 2005 using the 'Wasundhara' approach. There has been a good response towards this programme and has led to the implementation of varied activities.

The formation of community-based institutions is one of the major activities being implemented here. Women of the village have united themselves and formed self help groups. To monitor the work of the SHGs, the Savitribai Phule Samyukta Mahila Samiti has also been formed. Sumitrabai Ghangav, 38, is the president of this SMS. She is otherwise an anganwadi sevika in the village. She lives with her husband and two children.

Sumitrabai's family began to face hardships when the depletion of the water level in the well reduced the output from her field. She then thought of supplementing her agricultural income with another business and was therefore chosen by WOTR to attend a fruit processing training programme at Krushi Vidnyan Kendra. After the training programme, she decided start a production unit of banana chips in the village and sell the product in neighbouring towns and cities.

She undertook a trial production and checked the market response. It was tough in the initial stages considering that shopkeepers were not too enthusiastic. However, with the support her husband, she strengthened her marketing efforts and soon retailers began to stock her product. Within a short time she started receiving good orders from Jalna and other market places. The demand has been growing since then. Her husband now takes care of the marketing aspect while Sumitra looks after the production

unit. Her children help with the processing and packaging.

Unable to do everything by herself, Sumitrabai has appointed four women from the village, thus creating job opportunities too. She is today an icon of successful entrepreneurship. "We have a stable income now and have been able to save enough to provide for the educational needs of our children," she states. Meanwhile, she has also started another line of product viz. amla candy and syrup. Recently, the couple had been to Delhi to attend and participate in an exhibition where their products and efforts were appreciated. Sumitrabai has also received awards for her achievement. "It just goes to show that hard work and persistence does pay off," she states.



“

We have a stable income now and have been able to save enough to provide for the educational needs of our children", says Sumitrabai Ghangav.



# Equations Of Power

*Women In Politics: Participation And Governance*  
- R. Letha Kumari

Authors Press, 2006, ISBN 81-7273-288-0.

Women all over the world were kept out of the socio-political realm as a marginalised section of the society. They are still isolated from the mainstream and subjected to all types of discriminations. They are exploited economically, politically and socially and are excluded from the governance of the nation.

Women at every socio-political level find themselves under-represented in parliament and far removed from decision-making levels. While the political playing-field in each country has its own particular characteristics, one feature remains common to all: it is uneven and not conducive to women's participation. Women who want to enter politics find that the political, public, cultural and social environments are often unfriendly or even hostile to them.

Even a quick glance at the current composition of political decision-makers in any region provides evidence that women still face numerous obstacles in articulating and shaping their own interests. Increasing the level of female representation and participation in decision-making bodies requires well-developed strategies and information on which measures have worked successfully in different countries with different political systems.

This book give readers a powerful way to understand political socialisation of women, gender gap in political attitudes, women's political capabilities and patterns of women's political participation. It also provides comparative information on how women can enhance democracy and good governance, and how to promote the participation and representation of women in political life.



Editor: Marcella D'Souza

Published by: Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR)

'Paryavaran', Behind Market Yard, Ahmednagar 414 001, Maharashtra, India • Tel.: 91-241-2450188, 2451460

Email: info@wotr.org; pune@wotr.org • Website: www.wotr.org

For free private circulation only. The views expressed here may not necessarily reflect the official views of WOTR or any of its partners.

The Publication of this Newsletter and its contents are supported by the GTZ, the SDC and various other donors.



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC



If undelivered please return to:

Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR)

'Paryavaran', Behind Market Yard, Ahmednagar 414 001, Maharashtra, India.

BOOK-POST