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Reaching out to the Tribal communities in India, The European Commission's experience



Community Participation and Empowerment

Alternative for India Development

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1

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Background...

- Jharkhand has a big population of Tribals.
- It is the home to many predominant tribes such as Santhal, Ho, Munda, Oraon, Chero, and Kherwar
- Even after unlawful destruction of large tracts of forests in the recent past, it has still sizeable tracts of forest zone.
- The state is rich in minerals such as coal, iron ore, bauxite, copper, uranium, mica and many more.
- This led to rampant industrialization.
- While unprecedented industrialization led to manifold growth of the economy both for the centre and for the state, the lives of the natives have been impoverished.



2

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...Background

- Industrialisation also had led to large scale of displacement, destruction of Tribal lands and destruction of forest covers.
- In the absence of modern skills, the Tribals were able to get only menial labour works.
- After a struggle of more than 50 years, the dream of the natives to have a separate state of their own became a reality in 2000.
- But due to poor governance, the state lags behind in all the social parameters namely Basic education, Health and Infrastructure development.
- Whatever little development had taken place, it is confined to the urban regions only.
- Rural regions still neglected totally.
- Still large number of villages is not electrified.



3

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Tribal Ethos...

- The Ethos of the tribal societies revolves around community participation.
- The Tribals still have community cohesiveness in their governance systems with the participatory nature of decision making.
- The tribal societies always enjoyed independence.
- They don't endure external rule on them.
- Tribals even waged intense battles with the British, when their land and forest were under stress by them
- The British enacted Acts like Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNT), Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act and Wilkinson rule to restore the rights of the Tribals on their forest lands.
- These rules remain intact in the legal books even in the Post Independence era but its interpretation is not clear and varied.



4

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...Tribal Ethos



- The community cohesiveness is expressed through music and dance where all the members of the clan participate – young and old - children, men and women.
- In the beginning of the 19th century, Bira Munda, a revolutionary, revolted against the British who tried to occupy the tribal lands.
- He is even now regarded as the tribal god and all the political parties lip service to him.
- Sidhu and Kanho were the Santhal revolutionaries.
- Neelambar and Pithambar for the Kherwar tribes.
- In most of the tribal regions, the economy is depends on the forest and its resources.
- In many regions barter system still exists. They barter the forest produce for the edible items of daily need.
- Most often they barter items such as lac for common salt though the market value of lac is 100 times higher.



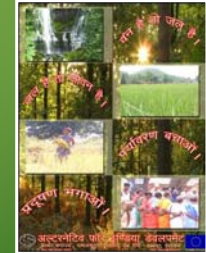
5

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AID and its association with various Tribal Forums in Jharkhand



- AID has been associated in Jharkhand since the past two decades when the state was a part of Bihar state.
- AID has been associated with the various movements of the tribals such as displacement due to big dams, industrialisation, field firing range, etc.
- Apart from the tribal rights, there was a need to work out on the development issues of the region.
- AID, thus, started programmes for education, health, the need for securing rights over the forest produce through better price, informal co-operatives and restoration of self-governance system in their respective regions.
- AID's guiding principle has been to work with local forums, take up their issues and interests forward.
- AID has not thrust any issues from above or outside and thus has been successful in its initiatives in the region.



6

7/20/2006



Protection and Promotion of Forestry in Ranchi Region



7

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Tribal governance and forestry



- Munda tribe is the second largest tribe of Jharkhand state.
- The Munda tribes are predominantly concentrated in the Ranchi district of the state.
- Though Arki block is just 1½ hour's drive (about 80 kms) from Ranchi, the State Capital – the status of this block is much below the desired level of parameters of development.
- The area is covered by dense forests and the various forest produce makes the life line of the Munda tribes in the region.
- These forest produces ensure 8 months of food security to the tribes in the region.
- It is in scientific terms a region where biodiversity is in perfect balance with rain-fed agriculture and supplemented by the seasonal forest produces.



8

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...Tribal governance and forestry...



- The Mundas have a unique system of governance called as Khutkhatti system. This system is in vogue till date.
- The forests in this region are also under the control of the community.
- They have an inbuilt system of weekly meeting which takes place every Thursday of the week when all the households come to a common platform and they discuss various issues, disputes and settle them.
- From generations, majority of them are illiterate.
- They are totally shielded off from development programmes of the government.
- The young and current generation is alienated from their traditional systems slowly.
- The reasons are the proximity to the towns such as Khuti and cities such as Ranchi, exposure to outside world, mainstream education which deals totally with subjects with no co-relation to their lives/traditional values and religious conversions.
- History is hearsay and there is no written literature available in the region and it is only the elderly Munda leaders who have the love and passion for their systems.



9

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...Tribal governance and forestry



- Since the rights of the forest vests with the Mundas, there are no forest development programmes in the region.
- Many a time the forest department tries to encroach into the rights of the tribals and such villages are under conflict as both the forest department and the Mundas lay claim over the forest rights.
- Land survey was carried out by which many of the community common lands were brought under the control of the government and hence there is opposition to the survey work as well.
- With the formation of the new state of Jharkhand – the state amended and to great extent diluted the central amendment of PESA act
- Hence, there have been several court cases and the local body elections have not taken place in the last 30 years.
- There is also no clear answer in sight, if the election takes place, the Mundas will remain only a traditional head and the all the power will be vested with the panchayat elected leader.



10

7/20/2006

Mundas and Education



- Education had been in doldrums as majority of the government teachers were non-tribals and the basic language used in the schools were Hindi.
- The Munda tribes and their children are conversant only in Mundari language and hence they felt alien and did not attend the schools.
- AID had identified a few Munda youth who were conversant with both Hindi and Mundari and trained them to be the volunteers in the schools so that they could bridge the communication gap.
- Thus the children attending the schools increased and this tempo is maintained.
- With the change in the policy of the government and with the recruitment of teachers coming from the home block, the issue has, to an extent, been resolved.
- AID had also ensured that in the weekly community meetings, apart from the village issues education and health also would be added to their agendas so that they could focus on these common issues too.



11

7/20/2006

Mundas and Forest protection



- This region was once thickly forested and there were several inbuilt mechanisms for safeguarding the forests.
- The livelihood of the tribes was fully dependent on the Non-forest timber produce in the region.
- Lac cultivation was one of the main occupations through which the forests were safeguarded and as well as it gave them livelihood.
- In any emergencies, Lac is sold and that money is used.
- With the influence of the traders, the local self governance system came under strain and the tribes started felling the trees for cash offered by the traders.
- As forest has been their main source of livelihood sustenance, the depletion of the forests led to loss of their livelihoods.
- AID's association in the region and micro studies conducted by AID revealed that the traditional system of governance was under severe strain.
- The young generation were alienated from the system and the good nuances of the system were being lost.



12

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...Mundas and Forest protection...



- It was felt that for protection of forests and for revival of livelihood, it was utmost important to re-strengthen the governance system with active involvement of both men and women.
- Most often the illiterate Munda heads were easily bought over by traders with small sums of money or alcohol.
- Apart from the Munda leaders, the elders in the community and those who were active were identified and through them the revival of original governance system was addressed.
- Thus the Khutkhatti Raksha Manch had emerged in the region in which the youth and the women are the active members.
- The need to revive the traditional livelihood practices of lac was deliberated and series of trainings and visits to the Lac Research centre in Ranchi were organised for the lac farmers.



13

7/20/2006

...Mundas and Forest protection...



- Micro credits were organised to the farmers to revive their traditional practices which yielded increased forest protection, better yield of lac and the revival of the lac cultivation in the region.
- The collection of the Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) such as ber, tamarind, mahua and karaunji, and fruits such as amla and jackfruit in large quantities during the season and selling them at better price during the off season was made possible through credit support.
- Godowns were made available for the collected produce.
- They were also exposed to various markets in the region so that they could sell their produce at higher rates directly.



14

7/20/2006

...Mundas and Forest protection...



- The tribal women never participated in the traditional system of governance and in the village meetings.
- With the emergence of the micro-credit and the market co-operatives, their participation has become inevitable in the weekly meetings.
- Now their weekly meetings have become more broad based taking into account the issues of governance, revival of the khutkhatti systems, protection of the forests and livelihood improvement issues.
- The forest protection mechanism has been strengthened at the village and panchayat level by active participation of all the villagers in their weekly meetings.
- The emergence of the youth forums and SHG has further boosted this phenomenon.
- The shift has been not just on protecting the existing forests but by increasing the forest cover by planting new trees in the region.



15

7/20/2006

...Mundas and Forest protection



- The local villagers have been trained for nursery promotion and for multiplying the species specific to the region and utilising these saplings at their lands and the village common lands.
- The traditional chow dance in the region used to concentrate on the mythological events which are the main source of entertainment to the people in the absence of electricity in the region.
- These dance groups have now been trained and tuned to showcase the issues of forestry in the region which has become an instant hit.
- The message is given very clearly and acceptance among the community has been high.



16

Lessons learnt



- Without community participation, any planning made for their development will flop as there will be no ownership of the issues.
- It is important to thoroughly understand the local dynamics and any programme should be in line with the same.
- There is a need to build upon the local wisdom and give due importance and respect to the local ethos.
- Any change should be within their cultural parameters. This has positive acceptance and better impact in the region.
- In this region the whole focus has been on reviving the participatory approach which was already present in the tribal governance system but which was waning away due to many external factors.
- The sustenance of the programmes is well ensured and assured as the people are involved in every aspect of the programme.



Advocacy through Community radio...



- Language barrier has been one of the factors for the underdevelopment of the region.
- The local officials are Hindi-speaking and they could never convey their messages effectively in the region.
- The locals never understood what programmes were allocated to their region, their status and why they were not reaching them.
- There was a big gap and only those who were fluent in Mundari were able to effectively communicate to the locals.
- In the absence of electricity and roads in the region even the mainstream entertainment has not reached the region.
- Their only link with the outside world has been the humble radio.
- But as all the programmes at the region level were also broadcast in Hindi it generated little interest and the issues were never local and language alien to them.



...Advocacy through Community radio...



- There is no programme aired by AIR in Mundari language.
- The issues of this region are now being taken up and recorded in Mundari language. These are played in the villages and at the village markets.
- These programmes are going to be broadcast covering wider range of geographical region shortly.
- The Mundas are very happy to primarily listen to their voices coming up in the record players.
- Secondly they are developing ownership as it is their issues, being played in Mundari and a broader platform can be created for the common issues concerning them.
- The issues on forestry, tribal governance, the policies and programmes of the government, the existing gaps are going to be taken up in a large way through the community radio.
- It would bridge the gap between the community and the government as the villagers are getting an opportunity to air their opinions and directly dialogue on the issues affecting them and their development.



...Advocacy through Community radio



- The community radio also gives boost to the traditional cultural troupes in the region by giving them an opportunity to showcase their talent to wider audience.
- AID have created an ambience and laid a strong foundation for the community to steer ahead their issues with full leadership, enthusiasm and renewed vigour.
- Though community radio is in its nascent stage in the region, it has already built up the environment.
- The Community Radio would be a very successful venture as it is a programme for the people and by the people.



Thank You