

Review of Progress on Projects

A. Action Research and Policy Advocacy Project

This project is now in its third and final year and the emphasis is on completing the action research component and starts drawing policy lessons and engages in advocacy with relevant decision makers. Here is a summary of the various sub-projects:

1. *Chenchu: Action Research summary, findings and emerging lessons for policy Context and the Problem:*

A major problem confronting the particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) in India is low level of participation in local governance which directly affects their level of development. Though Panchayat extension for scheduled areas (PESA) exists, Panchayat Raj Systems are hardly effective particularly when it is a non-PESA area, when tribal groups are a numerical and political minority and when devolution of powers to PR system is weak. Hence policy gaps exist in relation to inclusiveness of tribal in decision making in non-PESA areas.

Tribal groups particularly PVTGs can be trained to become active participants in the development process if constraints affecting their participation in local governance are addressed. Normally they do not prefer to interact with modern institutions and prefer to stay on their own. While their access to modern institutions may be limited, it is important to create forums which build a bridge between modern and traditional. Understanding their traditional systems of participation and building over that can enable them to come into closer contact with modern institutions of governance and development.

Action and Results:

Under the present AR, formation of VDCs was done with this purpose. It was to act as a bridge between traditional systems of Chenchus with the modern PR institutions. VDCs are acting as training forums for Tribal groups to discuss their inherent development issues. They are also acting as a bridge for interacting with the modern institutions. Critical consciousness on the linkage of non-participation and exclusion leading to lack of receiving of entitlements and development benefits is being built up. The development of critical consciousness is gradually giving way for the tribal groups to discuss their inherent development issues, visit institutions and demand their entitlements and development benefits. However, it is to be noted that the level of accessing entitlements is too limited to make strong claims about the same.

Policy lessons:

- Level of benefits that are received by tribal groups through PRIs is ultimately dependent upon the level of devolution of 3Fs (functions, functionaries and finances).

- Limited benefits can still be received in absence of all the three – but there is a limit to the same. The potential solution lies in a higher level of devolution of 3Fs among the panchayati raj institutions
- In places where marginal groups such as PVTGs exist as a minority, habitation level panchayats need to be encouraged which need to discuss and bring out issues affecting their habitation and community. Habitation level issues need to get represented during GP meetings. Habitation leader (elected or non-elected) should be provided an opportunity to represent their issues and could officio or ex-officio member
- While habitation level forums of PVTGs could influence the decisions of gram panchayats, it is important that that larger forums of marginal groups at mandal and district level with representatives of habitations need to be created at mandal and district level to influence mandal and zilla panchayat.
- Moreover, in absence of devolution of 3Fs to Panchayats, accessing benefits and entitlements demands influencing the development bureaucracy usually at mandal and district levels. These larger forums at higher levels can help in achieving the benefits.
- For higher benefits to be realized there is a need to move from demand of 'welfare' based entitlements approach to 'rights' based approach.
- Hence based on the AR the policy suggestions include: (a) formation of habitation level sabhas (even in non-PESA areas) particularly where marginal groups exist; (b) habitation level sabha issues to largely feed into core Gram panchayat agenda; (c) representatives of habitation level sabha of marginal groups to be part of mandal and zilla level sabha to influence the respective levels.

2. Musahars: Action Research summary, findings and emerging lessons for policy Context and the Problem:

A characteristic defining the marginal groups (Maha-Dalits such as Musahars) is abject poverty, deprivation and low levels of human development. Marginalization from times immemorial among other things shapes their self-perception. Social causes of marginalization leading to deprivation and poverty has been extensively studied by Sociologists.

Various measures have been taken by the state for the welfare and development of marginal groups. There are also special programs for development of maha-Dalits. Positive and affirmative action has also been in place. A missing element however seems to be lack of focus on psychological and counseling support for the marginal groups.

While marginalization shapes their self-perception and self-worth, there are also examples where members from Dalit or marginal communities have been able to break from their marginal social identities and emerge successful as individuals. In this context, it is important to understand factors of marginalization shaping low self-worth of Musahars and come out with counselling techniques which helps them to emerge out of the same. The success of the action research may throw up the need before the state to provide importance to psychological approaches for the development of marginal communities.

Action and Results:

The action research conducted extensive consultations with Musahars, a baseline survey was conducted and developed a tool for measuring self-worth of Musahars. Various psychological tools were explored and came out with the adopted version of Rosenberg tool. The administration of the self worth tool was to provide baseline scores on current self worth of individuals. Based on the administration of the tools, a counseling tool was to be developed and administered. An awareness building of selected households was also being carried out. While the self-worth tool is yet to be administered, the expected results from the tool are information on the current self-worth, self-satisfaction, current strengths, and expectations on entitlements and hope for future among the Musahars. (b) Identification of selected members from Musahars community who would be targeted through counseling technique.

The counseling technique is expected to (a) help Musahars to identify their low self-worth creating behavioral blocks, b) help in identifying their marginal identities shaping their attitudes towards self, c) helping them to change their self-worth and acquire new behavioral patterns and d) motivating them to take positive action towards their future. The awareness building exercise is expected to achieve (a) higher level of awareness among Musahars on their rights and entitlements and b) actions taken to avail of the rights and entitlements.

The action research has also started looking into new approaches that lead to long lasting changes in socio-psychological dimensions among marginal groups. Going beyond individual focused psychology, it has started exploring the dimension of community psychology. The approaches under 'Liberation Psychology' through works of Ignacio Martin Baro, Fanon's 'Psychology of oppressed' are being used to understand community psychology. Factors leading to acceptance of 'psychology of oppression' and actions leading to breaking the same are being explored. Work in Psychology based approaches with Musahars by others such as Peoples vigilance committee for Human Rights (PVCHR) of Lenin Raguvanshi is being explored.

Policy lessons:

- Self-worth measurement tools that exist as of now are hardly adoptable to marginalized groups. They hardly have integrated dimensions of power relations which exist in community. Measurement tools need to be adapted to situations of marginal communities. They need to draw from writings from people such as Paulo Freire, Ignacio Martin Baro. This is also equally true with the counseling techniques.
- The action research aims to prove the need for policy reforms that could include the following: (a) provision of emphasis on psychological counseling as an approach for development of marginal groups by the state; (b) integrating 'empowerment' and 'liberation' dimensions into the counseling based approach (c) supporting NGOs and government departments to adopt the psychological counseling approach drawing from works of liberation psychology; (c) setting up block / district level counseling centers attached to the Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribe welfare department.

Overall the Action Research would aim to prove and establish the point that psychological approach for development of marginal communities is a necessary but often a neglected aspect. This needs to be integrated.

3. Lac: Action Research summary, findings and emerging lessons for policy Context and Problem:

A large number of Adivasi and forest dwelling households are dependent on lac as part of their livelihoods. Despite the potential of lac for income generation, it continues to be a secondary source of income for primary growers due to low exposure with scientific methods of cultivation, scarcity of good quality brood lac, fluctuation of market price and sensitive nature of lac towards change in weather conditions. There is lack of proper social and market mechanism to yield optimum returns.

Low productivity is due to non-access to large number of host trees, low awareness on pest control and management and unawareness to avoid predator attacks. Frequent price fluctuation and long supply chain as a result of presence of large number of middlemen, inadequate extension support, lack of access to brood lac and insurance products are also some reasons.

The action research intends to find if availability of extension services to improve productivity and business development services for upcoming entrepreneurs as well as formation of a producer company will help in accessing market for realizing optimum returns. The action points include identification of local resource persons and promoting nodal entrepreneurs, capacity building of lac growers through training, exposure visits and hand-holding, promotion of producer company, input and output linkages, testing semialata as host trees with both rangini and kusumi, exploring insurance products and pooling resources.

Action and Results:

The action research project started in six villages with 100 farmers at Karra block of Khunti district (Jharkhand) with Indian Grameen Services (IGS) as partner organization. The LRPs equipped themselves with knowledge of scientific cultivation and alternate markets namely lac mandi at Balrampur and Shellac factory. There is more focus by implementing agencies on increasing production but low focus on value addition and market.

The emerging issues include inconsistency in deciding MSP and insufficient funds for the same, lack of convergence among stakeholders, insufficient skills among lac cultivating farmers, difficulty in accessing established markets and shellac factories. Most farmers are unwilling for collective selling as they want immediate cash realization.

Policy lessons:

- In the absence of an assured market for the produce with immediate disbursement of cash and assurance of minimum prices for the lac produced, efforts at productivity enhancement and collectivization is less likely to succeed.

- Productivity enhancement and collectivization by itself does not incentivize the lac farmers unless supported by an assured market and a minimum price
- Demand driven production processes with an assured market rather than supply driven production in search of markets may be the means to attract lac farmers
- None of the departments dealing with lac either related to extension, production or market (forest department, IFP, JHASCOLAMF, JSLPS, NABARD) can ignore the dimension of markets in its lac promotion program.

4. FRA Jharkhand: *Action Research summary, findings and emerging lessons for policy*

Context and the Problem:

FRA was an historic act as it recognized the customary rights of adivasis over their land. This in turn had huge potential to transform livelihoods of adivasis if the lands are put to productive use. However, there has been slow implementation of FRA due to poor awareness about the FRA within community as well as within Forest Rights Committees (FRC), general apathy within the state machinery towards FRA specially for empowering the forest dwellers, passive role of Tribal Welfare Department (TWD) with the lead being taken by the Forest Department (FD) thereby leading to rejection of a large number of claims and inordinate delays in settlement of claims. Another reason for the poor response from community towards FRA is due to the perception that FRA is not valid due to Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act (SNTA) and the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA).

Action and Results:

The action research aimed at increasing the pace of acceptance of land title deeds and usage of lands for better livelihood outcomes. This was to be implemented in Thethaitangar and Simdega blocks of Simdega district. The action elements included sensitization workshop, baseline study, FRC formation, awareness generation, facilitating claims settlement and convergence efforts. The action elements were based on the understanding developed that to make dent in implementation of FRA in the state, ground level needs to be strengthened, government functionaries need to be taken into loop, for awareness creation and addressing gaps like necessary govt. orders/ directives for speedy settlement of claims.

Member education at FRC level and facilitation support at SDLC and DLC level was done. FRC level intervention resulted in increased claim applications. Member understanding on FRA applicability in SNTA and CNTA area reduced. The facilitation at SDLC and DLC level also resulted in increased claim settlements.

Policy lessons:

- Recognition of rights by itself does not translate into benefits for the community. For it to benefit the community, the practice needs to be improved. Introduction of bottom up processes for community activism and participation and top down facilitation from above towards convergence helps in ensuring that both ends meet.

- The action research threw the need for: a) Operationalization of strategy for claim generation and settlement at the Panchayat level; b) Enhanced claim generation at the panchayat level; c) Improved procedural guidelines for claim generation and settlement process at the state level and d) Community planning mechanism for convergence of government schemes for land development in assigned land.
- The learning's include that the strategy used for individual lands hasn't worked for community lands and needs a different strategy; giving rights to community is seen as jeopardizing forest land; it shows the need for maintaining project management approach; there is need to learn from Gadchiroli which has highest number of community forest right claims
- Oxfam report observes that formation of FRCs being influenced by block level officers and dominant groups and elite dominating within panchayat has prevented individual villages in claiming CFRs at Panchayat level. Dominance of forest department instead of welfare departments has also resulted in denial of CFRs at District level.
- Building community activism from below and creating processes for FRA settlement at various levels (SDLC, DLC) helps in improving the claim settlement process.

5. FRA Odisha: *Action Research summary, findings and emerging lessons for policy*

Context and the Problem:

As per the provisions of the FRA, Adivasi's and forest dwellers can hold individual or community land. Despite the act, the claimants in Odisha were found to be few and short. Amended FRA rules mandate state government and schemes including those relating to land development, land productivity, basic amenities and other livelihood measures, are extended to the individuals and communities whose rights have been recognized under the Act through its various departments.

Despite initiation of convergence programs by Government of Odisha since 2009, absence of a proper convergence framework and relevant state-level guideline have been found to be limiting factors for converting the rights recognized under the FRA into sustainable livelihoods. It was also found that the efforts towards achieving convergence were also top-down approach which hardly yielded results. It was realized a proper implementation of the convergence program would need structured and planned interventions to ensure adequate post-claim support and handholding to the rights holders under the FRA. However, this had to be a bottom up approach.

Action and Results:

The action research sought to know constraints and barriers to achieving convergence, coming out with a convergence framework and measuring if the convergence models results in achievement of better livelihood outcomes.

A consultative process was taken up from below. It had components of a) Gram Sabha based convergence planning; b) consultative processes with respect to the relevant stakeholders; and c) a constructive yet critically informed partnership with the government. The results achieved include increased awareness and participation of community, regularization of meetings between FRC and Gram Sabha, increased community assertion of right of livelihood plan preparation by Gram Sabha.

Policy lessons:

- Grassroots convergence planning process brought the need for work on land development, irrigation facilities, NTFP storing house, fire management equipment for managing forest fires and promotion of traditional millets and vegetables. This was shared at the district level committee and district administration.
- The action research strengthened the view of the need to strengthen the need for Gram Sabha based convergence framework. This will build understanding of policy level loop holes and institutional roadblocks. Importance of Gram Sabha as a 'pressure group' to monitor and making governance machineries accountable has been realised. A more structured institutional mechanism is required for the implementation of the convergence program.
- There needs to be a bottom up processes of livelihood planning for usage of individual and community lands provided under FRA. Village level planning exercises for land utilization by community should form the basis for convergence. This can feed into block, district and state level plans. This can form the basis for dedicated allocation of resources / budgets for the convergence programs from relevant programs and schemes like MGNREGA budget, Tribal Sub Plan, Land productivity enhancement etc.

6. FPO: Action Research summary, findings and emerging lessons for policy Context and the Problem:

Fragmentation of land holdings, reducing size of land, poor investment capacity of small and marginal farmers are reasons for low productivity in agriculture. Farmer participation being limited to only lower end of the agri-value chain further adds to the list of reasons for poor returns on produce. Absence of processing and post-harvest technologies adds further to their problem.

Efficient linkages between producers and consumers through better marketing mechanism can yield better returns. Producers can undertake value addition and meet consumer requirements. For higher level participation in value chain, they need to form into a collective for accessing mainstream financial sector. They also need to buy in wholesale and sell in retail to get higher margins. An aggregation model which brings farmers into small and larger groups will be a useful model.

Pro-poor value chain development around FPOs is being seen as a solution. The factors contributing to effectiveness of FPCs is considered due to internal factors (member involvement, capital collected, good governance, and farmer aligned business strategy). The external factors are considered to be capital generation from open market, facilitation of input and output linkages and non-conductive policy environment.

FPCs are seen to be lacking farmer owned and managed governance characteristics and also not acquired business characteristics. The action research aims to see if it is able to ensure active participation of member farmers in governance system and processes, superior alignment of incentives including addressing issues of farmers, access to mainstream finance and adoption of market oriented business strategies.

Action and Results:

The action points included training of BoD on governance processes, generating capital through internal and access to external mainstream capital, scanning opportunities and facilitating business strategy and development. Institutional developmental processes introduced in the initial years of FPO promotion were crucial to determine member participation in governance. Diversification of capital sources through internal mobilization and external access determined the level of business that the FPO could take up. Sometimes, failure of FPO business occurred due to factors beyond the good governance practices. It also occurred due to premature decisions by the FPO leadership. In one FPO, premature decision to go for seed production without adequate building of internal capacities resulted in failure of business. It also occurred due to erratic rainfall, poor prices and lack of infrastructure within the PC for an FPO. The business strategies also fail due to inadequate ground rootedness.

Policy lessons

- Adequate investment on institutional development in the initial years is crucial for grounding of strong governance processes within FPO. This requires adequate investment of financial and human resources for capacity building in governance and leadership.
- Monitoring and follow up support by promoting agency is crucial to overall development of FPO. Support extended by promoting agency should be for a longer duration with adequate resources.
- A visionary leadership of FPO is necessary for success in business. While it needs to be open to emerging opportunities, the entry into business and determining the level of business should be based on the needs of the members. Otherwise, it can lead to a failure of business.
- Tax reforms can enable in widening the available capital base of FPOs. Liberalizing legal compliances for reduced start-up costs and time are required for access of FPCs to finance and higher markets.

7. Agri-technology: Action Research summary, findings and emerging lessons for policy

Context and the problem:

Agricultural mechanization in farm operations can lead to greater efficiency, productivity and profitability by achieving timeliness in farm operations, precision in metering and placement of inputs, reducing available input losses, increasing utilization efficiency of costly inputs (seed, chemical, fertilizer, irrigation, water etc.), reducing unit cost of produce, enhancing profitability and competitiveness in the cost of operation.

Despite benefits of agricultural mechanization, its adoption by small and marginal farmers has remained a challenge for scientific community as well as implementing and promoting agencies, both government and non-government due to multitude reasons. This is particularly in the case of marginalized and displaced communities. Adoption of such new technology for a small farmer can bring substantial change in his livelihood.

This Action Research looks into details of how the combination of agricultural technology along-with best management practices (BMPs) for small and marginal farmers of tribal community living in remote forested villages affects their livelihoods. The AR was taken up in Bandavgarh tiger reserve area inhabited by Gond and Baiga tribals. Penetration of technology was found to be low with 10% using tractor for tillage. Intercultural operations are performed by hands or tools. Reconnaissance survey in Badari and Damna villages revealed that agricultural technology is unknown, hiring of tractor for tillage was expensive for small farmer and poor agricultural extension work. Affordability, low technological reach out was the primary reasons for the same.

Technologists approach was towards push of technology without taking into account the community dimensions. This was being tried out with Gonda and Baigas. Baigas are known for traditional agricultural practice though it has come down now. This was due to their earlier exposure to IGS intervention where SRI cultivation, modern agricultural implements, organic farming, herbal farming and information of SHG, Federation and FPC was provided.

Action and the Results:

In this Action Research, ILRT promoted small farm tools for small and marginal farmers. The tools are: *High carbon steel sickle, hand hoe, maize-sheller, cone-weeder, wheel marker, drum-seeder, seed-drill, micro-irrigation – drip and sprinkler and also vermi-composting*. Through government scheme (customer hiring agency) 35 implements can be made available to the farmers. Exposure visits to CIAE was conducted. About 142 implements or good agricultural practices were adopted by farmers. Good agricultural practices include: SRI (37), Drip irrigation (10) and Sprinkler irrigation (10). The households which purchased tools included, CIAE sickle (7), Hand hoe (11), Cone weeder (28), Wheel marker (28), Maize sheller (7). The farmers purchased the tools by themselves and through subsidy from agricultural department.

Policy lessons:

- Creating access to technologies needs Social and Institutional solutions
- Promotion of agricultural technologies has to be need and context based. They need to be customized to the local needs.
- Affordability, user friendliness based on current agricultural practices, factors like willingness to adopt the technology is necessary pre-conditions for technology providers in deciding on technologies to be promoted.
- For better adaptation of agricultural technologies, they should be designed according to the need of the local community.

- Exposure visits and technology demonstrations while they are necessary in creating necessary desire and demand for technologies, they should be supported with subsidy cum loan support for their actual adaptation.
- Social mechanisms for Collective ownership and usage of technologies are necessary for deeper penetration of technologies.

8. Fisheries: Action Research summary, findings and emerging lessons for policy Context and the Problem:

There are 254 government and 250 private ponds in the action research blocks in Bihar which provide a source of livelihood to fisher community. The government ponds are taken care by fishermen. Despite presence of ponds and access to ponds socio-economic position of fishing community remains low. Among reasons include short-term (one-year) tenure of water bodies lease renewal which deters investments by the communities that not only leads to low productivity but also leads to fisheries and aquaculture being treated as a secondary source of livelihoods.

Sakhi is working since 1990. The project was aimed at empowerment of fisherwomen through enabling their access to government ponds on lease, equipping them with technical and managerial skills, providing start-up capital support to them and consequently contributing to a steady enhancement in their income levels. Despite the mobilization of fisher communities the short term lease tenure is a hindering factor for the community to invest in the pond and take better returns.

20 treatment ponds and 20 control ponds was sampled. Data was collected on number of pond lease holders, area of pond, annual expenditure in the pond, annual harvest of fish (and type of fish) and market rate of fish.

Action and the Results:

The action points were to include gaining extension of pond lease, linking with formal financial sources for implementing pond development, increasing technical capacity of fisher farmers, encouraging convergence of schemes for pond lease holders.

After discussion with fisheries department, it was agreed that pond lease will continue for the 20 ponds. Pond development plan was developed with pond lease holders. Training of local fisher community was organized and an exposure visit was done. Farmers are willing to invest 30% of the cost and Sakhi linking them with fisheries credit card scheme.

The anticipated outcomes included communities approaching financial institutions for accessing funds for pond development and converging with government schemes. Efforts of approaching banks for raising additional funds for pond development did not yield adequate results, as banks did not show willingness to provide loans for pond development. Even the efforts to avail fund through fisheries credit card also could not yield result. The team has approached NABARD for support and the response is awaited.

Policy lessons:

- Provision of longer term lease tenure is a necessary but not sufficient condition for investments flowing into fisheries activity.
- It does incentivize the fisher community to invest. However, in the absence of adequate resources they are dependent on bank loans or schemes to raise resources for investing
- Credit provision by Banks for fisheries activity needs to be eased to ensure that fisher community is able to raise resources for investment in ponds.