



The Focus

Forest of Hope



Village Narayanpur of Rajnagar Block in Birbhum of West Bengal, where even dogs are afraid to travel long distances during summer due to dried fallow land without a single tree to rest under a shade. Narayanpur Sishu Samity (NSS) was formed in January 2008. It took control over 40 acre of fallow land with red lateritic soil permanently rejected as uncultivable. Before that it was utilized as a land for grazing livestock. NSS organized a group consisting of 12 landless and 4 marginal farmers, most of them tribals. In a bid to regenerate the fallow as a permanent asset for the village, they planted fruit, fodder, firewood trees and grew short-term seasonal crops as an intercrop.

The agreement with the owner of the fallow over which the activity was made was – 50% of the sale proceeds of the mature tree would go to the owner and the balance would be the share of the protecting group. The intercrop would be shared equally among the group members. The group started their work in April 2008 by raising seedlings in the



nursery. 36 tree species were selected by applying the participatory tool called Social Analysis System (SAS). Out of a total 26000 saplings, 19150 saplings were planted, 4000 sold and the rest were distributed among the local people.

By the next rainy season, this soil water conservation initiative improved soil health. Grass and weeds started growing naturally. Trenches around the plot with 4 ridges, 50 semi-circular bunds and 5 stone bunds were made. The work generated 1342 mandays.

The work was started with planting intermediate crops like maize, bottle gourd, kidney bean etc. and long term crops like pigeon pea, sabai grass, roselle etc. Pond slime, compost and neem cakes were applied in the field as fertilizer. For protection, living fence was created with palm, date palm, pigeon pea, roselle etc. Social protection was also organized by the members in turn.

The end of Khaif season saw harvest of 150 kg of vegetable, 15 kg maize, 200 kg

roselle and 250 kg of fodder, which were mostly used by the families. Some weeds and grass brought some extra income as raw materials for producing handicrafts and medicine.

The initial investment was about Rs.2.5 lakh, including 30% local contribution in terms of labour.

16 families, on an average, got 155 days of work. Seasonal crops fulfilled the basic vegetable needs of the families. A good quantity of fodder could be produced. Near-extinct trees could be regenerated which increased biodiversity. Income generation possibilities could be created through broom making, roselle jam making. People from 3-4 adjacent villages got interested in undertaking similar activity in their village.

The activity was supported by Christian Aid.



A garden by children changing the face of the village



Baliaghati of West Medinipur is a tribal village inhabited by people belonging to very low income group with lack of basic facilities like health and nutrition. NPMS, a local organization has been fighting for long to change the scenario. Since 2006, DRCS started working with NPMS involving children in the age group of 12-15 on Ecology and Natural Resource related learning and experimentation activities.

Baliaghati is an area, where flood and drought, the two most destructive and atrocious forms of nature, are a common factor and the poorest of people living

here have no option but to accept these vagaries of nature as part and parcel of their lives. Vegetables have never been a part of their staple diet.

In June 2008 about 200 packets of vegetable seeds were distributed among 30 children. 18 of them could raise garden within their homestead. Initiatives of others in the group were washed out by the flood waters. The packets contained the seeds of swamp cabbage, snake gourd, ridged gourd, bottle gourd, sweet potato, cowpea, yam bean, soybean, cucumber, bitter gourd, okra, Indian spinach, *tarukala* etc. They were reluctant to eat some of these vegetables as they had never seen them before. Later, NPMS took the initiative to cook and serve these less known vegetables in a bid to popularize them. Compost and vermicompost prepared by the children themselves were used for enriching the soil. On an average each of them received about 150 kg of vegetable within 3-4 months.

The children kept a detailed record of the activities undertaken, changes observed,



processes undergone, incidence and nature of pest attack, lifecycle of the plants, rate of germination and the quantity & quality of produce. These records gave the children an idea of the science behind it. Parents also showed considerable interest in the entire activity.

Apart from the eco-group children and their parents, now the other villagers are also getting an opportunity to eat these vegetables as the children have shared the surplus with them as a part of their awareness campaign so that all villagers could know the benefits of raising a garden in their backyards.

The activity was supported by Indienhilfe.



Announcement

- District conference on RTI Act and its implementation in North Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri with its various stakeholders in May. Contact 9433801622 (RTI helpline).
- 2 workshops in South 24 Parganas and Purulia on NGO and PRI collaboration for sustainable development in May.
- Training of the trainers on Social Analysis Systems from 1st - 4th May at Bolpur.



- Seeking case studies/write up on climate change adaptation strategies or climate change witness for the next issue of Debaacle.
- DRCSC is looking for organisations in Hooghly and Nadia district for extension of Ecology and Natural Resource Education Programme.
- DRCSC will hold 2nd Core Committee meeting of RPAPCC on 23rd April.

Happenings

- Anshuman Das represented DRCSC in 3rd International conference on Community based adaptation strategies to Climate Change in Bangladesh, with presentation on Integrated farming as a CC adaptation strategy.
- Nandini Basistha represented DRCSC in a national seminar on Democracy in India, where she presented our experience on RTI in West Bengal.
- A national level consultation on dryland small farmers was organised by DRCSC. 30 participants from all parts of the country participated.
- DRCSC hosted the Kolkata launch of the avid main-



stream film-maker Mahesh Bhatt's newly-shot film 'Poison on the Platter,' a documentary on the dangers of genetically modified (GM) food and crops by Ajay Kanchan on 27th March.

New Productions

Debaacle

Vol. X No. 1 has been published. This issue of the English quarterly focuses on medicinal plants, its production, conservation, business etc.



Diary

A Diary has been published with case studies on climate change adaptive sustainable agriculture models.

Posters

A few posters were designed and printed on contract farming, genetic food, bio-fuel and climate change.



Mandari Ka Khel

A video based on a street play on Right to Information Act, 2005 for mass awareness.



For information, training, ideas, books, films, techniques on alternative development through natural resource management contact

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