

Culture Building for Nurturing Institutions

Theme : Working with Panchayats



Annual Report 2005

DHAN Foundation

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Madurai

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DHAN Foundation initiated another new theme “Democratising the Panchayat” in the year 2003. Though the 73rd Constitutional amendment focused on promotion and active functioning of the Panchayat Raj Institutions as a third layer of Government, Panchayats have till now failed to emerge as a third layer of Government even up to the minimum expected level. The first year of experimentation was in 12 Panchayats in three districts. The main objectives of the new theme in the experimentation phase are i) Promoting and strengthening of village level institutions as functional groups in the Panchayat to ensure people’s participation ii) Sustaining the Panchayat institutions to access resources and reduce its dependence on the State and iii) Integrating the existing traditional systems with the Panchayats to enhance the participation of the people and achieve synergy.

Progress

The Panchayat experimentation was extended another three Panchayats covering 17 villages / hamlets taking the total Panchayats covered to 15 and villages to 65. The people in the selected Panchayats who are above 18 years old were organized into 194 Panchayat Development Groups (PDGs). About 203 Kalanjiam groups are already functioning in these Panchayats.

The Village Development Committees were promoted at village level with all the Panchayat Development Groups as members. This committee is instrumental for integrating the PDGs at the hamlet level and to work for the development of the village. Working Groups were promoted at Panchayat level to undertake specific activities and give space for the village experts to participate in the Panchayat activities. The Panchayat Act has given provision to promote up to seven working groups consisting two ward members and 2 -3 other relevant persons in each working group.

The Panchayat experimentation took several new initiatives to intensify its work. Significant among them are preparation of micro plan for 11 out of 12 Panchayats for development of the Panchayat, efforts to generate own source of fund to Panchayat by introducing income generating activities like goat rearing, updating the voters lists and preparation of songs related to the Panchayat concept to create awareness among the public. Many community initiatives were taken up both at village and Panchayat level. The team helped to ensure that Grama Sabha meetings were conducted regularly in all the Panchayats.

An advisory committee was set up to guide and help the team set the future direction of the theme. The team had launched a Diploma in Panchayat Management as a distance

education programme in collaboration with the People Academy. The team was involved in preparation of the study materials for the course. A publication “Panchayat – 100 Questions” was brought out in Tamil as a reference handbook.

Interventions in Tsunami affected areas

In India tsunami hit the coastal parts of South India, particularly in the states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. According to official reports nearly 9,775 people are killed by the tsunami in India of which 7,932 deaths were reported from the coastal villages of Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, Chennai, Kancheepuram and Kanyakumari districts of Tamil Nadu.

Disaster mitigation measures in terms of immediate relief and restoration by the Government, NGOs, Corporate agencies and individuals were undertaken in a big way. Although a lot is being done, the extent of the tragedy is such that there is a greater need for many players to work together to rebuild the affected communities and restore their livelihoods. This need had made DHAN Foundation to intervene in the tsunami relief and rehabilitation activities.

There was a spontaneous response from the members and leaders of federations of ‘Kalanjams’ and ‘Vayalagams’ promoted by DHAN Foundation. They mobilised truck loads of relief materials containing rice, grocery items, clothes, bedding items etc. DHAN Foundation ensured the involvement of the community in the process of identification of beneficiaries, their needs and in the distribution of relief materials.

Five teams with senior staff of DHAN Foundation undertook an assessment of the situation RADAR (Rapid Disaster Assessment for Reconstruction) in the major tsunami affected areas of Cuddalore, Nagapattinam, Kancheepuram, Pondicherry and Ramanathapuram in order to decide the nature of the intervention that DHAN Foundation should take up. Based upon their report the intervention strategy was formulated.

DHAN Foundation has taken up tsunami relief, restoration and rehabilitation works in 10 affected districts in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. DHAN Foundation is committed to work with these communities on a long-term basis and help them rebuild their lives and livelihoods in collaboration with other agencies. The aim is to create access to basic services for the community while retaining its focus on rebuilding the livelihoods of the community. This initiative is expected to reach out to about 40-50 thousand families in the selected regions and promote around 20-25 federations. They would include fishermen, farmers and women.

The initiatives of DHAN Foundation in disaster-affected areas would be undertaken in three distinct phases. The first phase was on strengthening and supporting the relief operations involving the local community and is almost over. The affected communities in each of the selected areas were organised to take care of the immediate relief measures and to help the families return to some semblance of normalcy. This helped ensure that the most vulnerable among them such as widows, children, aged, disabled were not left out. The affected community played an active role in accessing the required relief materials and ensuring its equitable distribution.

The work on the second phase of Restoring Livelihoods through collective action was also initiated simultaneously. Some work on the third phase of Restoring Habitats was also taken up such as provision of temporary shelters, repair of houses, etc. This work would continue for another 2-3 years. This phase would help the community to come to terms with its losses and begin to rebuild their lives. New themes like Panchayat, Rainfed Farming and IT were also introduced as a part of the tsunami initiatives in the locations of affected districts.

A central coordination cell has been setup and is operating from Madurai and Chennai. A pool of resource persons are involved to provide guidance and support the work. Tata - Dhan Academy students as a part of their field assignment had done studies in the tsunami affected areas. The regular tsunami area co-ordination and review meetings for discussing and brain storming on various issues related to tsunami operations and reviewing the activities of the teams were organised. The location team with the inputs received in the meeting would prepare an action plan and work accordingly.

Two policy level round table meetings were convened in Chennai to discuss about the policy level intervention. DHAN Foundation has developed two policy papers for enabling livelihood restoration in the tsunami-affected areas. They are 'Enabling Convergence at the Grassroots' and 'Restoring Livelihoods: Sectoral and Conservation Perspective'. Two policy dialogues were convened in Chennai for shaping the perspectives on Enabling Livelihood Restoration. The policy level issues and possible interventions were discussed in detail.

The scale of the devastation experienced by the people would require long term and continuous support to restore their livelihoods and habitats. The People Organizations promoted would provide the base on which this support can be provided and also for taking care of the needs of the community on their own without depending on others in due course. Thus investing on building the capacity of the community to handle its needs with a lot of support initially will build the self-reliance of the community and also its preparedness to manage any other disaster in the future.



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