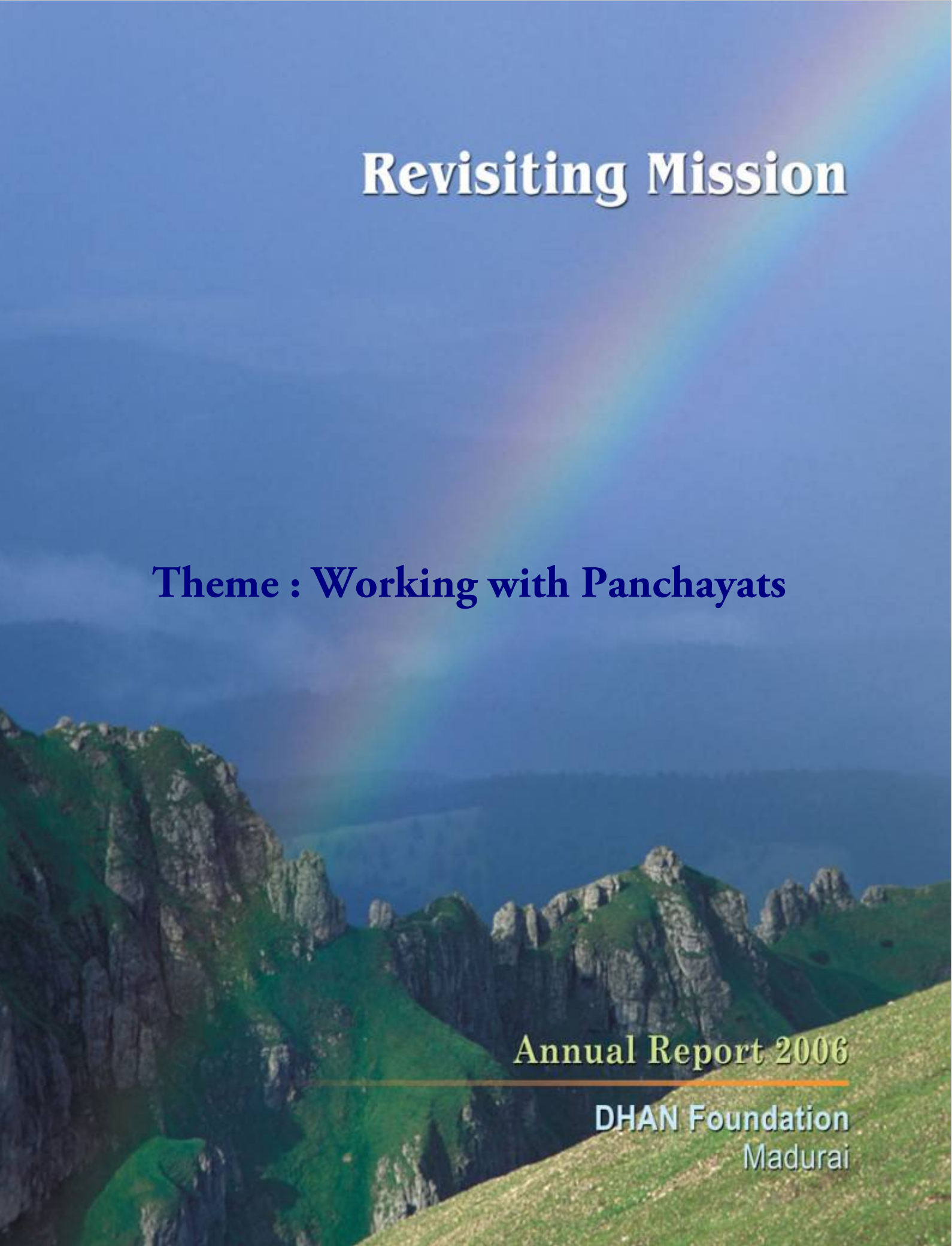




Revisiting Mission

Theme : Working with Panchayats

Annual Report 2006

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WORKING WITH PANCHAYATS

DHAN Foundation initiated a new theme on 'Working with the Panchayats' 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 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.

The Panchayat experimentation was extended to another ten Panchayats covering 25 villages / hamlets taking the total Panchayats covered to 25 and villages to 87. The people in the selected Panchayats who are above 18 years old were organized into 1386 Panchayat Development Groups (PDGs) with a membership of 24,877. It includes 1106 functional groups organised by other NGOs with 20,025 members. They constitute about 40 % of total voters. So far 38 Village Development Forums (VDF) have been promoted. VDF is a forum constituted at the hamlet level; it guides and mobilizes the people to take part in the Panchayat activities. In 17 Panchayats Working Committees (WC) have been promoted. WC is a mandatory forum legally promoted at Panchayat level. Five committees are envisaged for each

Panchayat namely Appointment committee, Works committee, Development committee, Watershed / Agri committee and Education committee. These committees are empowered to implement the work and monitor the work within their Panchayat boundary.

During the year, new idea of Panchayat Parliament was tried out in four Panchayats namely Manikkampatti, Sekkapatti, Mandhisunai and Kameswaram. The experience was enriching both for the community as well as the team. The local community participated enthusiastically in it. Some operational issues were solved there itself. Also the people could realize the practical problems of Panchayat administration through this exercise; it also demonstrated the procedures and process of Parliamentary system to the community. The Panchayat Parliament would become a strong support forum for Gram Saba.

In many places Gram Saba meetings are not conducted in real spirit. Representatives and Government officials are not fully aware of the functions of Gram Saba. The team had the same experience with Panchayats where it has been functioning. With the intervention of the programme team, the quality of the process enhanced considerably over the years. The team also came out with a Model Gram Saba in each location.

In reality the local body does not have much information related to its own Panchayat anywhere. Initiatives were taken to collect and consolidate household information for the Panchayats and to use it in planning process, development work implementation and Household data at hamlet and Panchayat level were collected and consolidated manually. Efforts were also put for computerizing the household data.

The rolling plan for Panchayats, which other wise called Multi Year Micro Planning was made with maximum community Participation. All the Panchayat representatives were involved in the plan process. Specific activity wise planning was done for each sector and they were integrated with communicating with District / Block

administration. *Namathu Gramam* scheme of the government for resources.

After the workshop on Panchayats during the Madurai Symposium 2005, the need and demand for operating at macro level was felt strongly. More over, the need for advocating policy changes for tangible development at grassroots level was felt by the team. To serve those purposes at program level a Centre for Panchayat Affairs and Development (C - PAD) has been initiated. The primary activities of C - PAD is building leadership in PRI, promoting Panchayat representatives networks, conducting workshops, bringing out sectoral publications mainly for policy advocacy.

The programme team could conduct two workshops for facilitating policy advocacy with Panchayat presidents, with representatives from all over the state. The first workshop was organized as part of Madurai Symposium 2005 on four areas Micro planning for Panchayats, towards financial Self-Sufficiency of Panchayats, Integration of Traditional System with formal system, Women & Panchayat leadership. About 300 participants attended and shared their views on these areas. Another workshop was organized on sharing the best practices and issues related with *Namathu Gramam* Scheme, Right to Information Act and National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and this workshop was also well received as it facilitated to position the Panchayat theme at state level.

Considering the nearing Panchayat election in Tamil Nadu, the team prepared a comprehensive training module for educating voters on Panchayat. This training was given for about 400 voters on pilot basis. For the voters in the tsunami affected area six exposure visits were arranged to better performing Panchayats for awareness.

Diploma in Panchayat Management (DPM) course materials were developed in collaboration with the People Academy. Drought mitigation fund mobilized from NOVIB was used as revolving fund in the Panchayats. Under this fund support about 7.5 Lakhs were invested in various income generation / service creation projects in 15 Panchayats. The average return on investment was found to be 15 - 25% every year.

Under restoration of livelihood initiatives in the Tsunami affected locations, Panchayat theme started experimenting in two districts, namely Cuddalore and Nagapattinam. Ten coastal Panchayats were selected and intensive institution building activities were taken up in the last year. With tremendous team efforts, the new locations were able to establish well and the existing activities were brought to mainstream. The team could establish good rapport with external resource institutions.

RESTORATION OF LIVELIHOODS IN TSUNAMI AFFECTED LOCATIONS

DHAN responded immediately after tsunami and took up relief work in 10 affected districts of Tamil Nadu. To identify and address the specific needs of the people, the local community was involved and the implementation was done through them. The efforts taken up by DHAN's teams reached about 29,000 families in one or more ways. The first phase of relief was completed by March 2005 and the livelihood restoration phase started from April 2005 onwards.

The prime objective of the second phase in the tsunami-affected villages was to restore and rehabilitate the livelihoods and habitat of the affected communities as soon as possible. All the livelihood interventions were routed through the people institutions that were promoted. The communities in the coastal area have been organised based on their livelihood activities into three types of people institutions. The affected and poor families, involved in fishing using Catamaran, backwater fishing, FRP labourers, and hand fishing were organised in the fishermen groups. The affected and poor farmers were organised in the Vayalagam groups. Affected women from the different communities and vulnerable people were organised into Kalanjiam groups.

These community organisation activities were taken up in 26 locations clustered under five regions for the livelihood restoration programmes. So far 56,276 families were organised in to 3,241 groups. Of the total families reached 23,892 were fishermen, 10,255 were farmers and 22,129 were Kalanjiam

women. Finance played a crucial role in enabling the people to take up livelihood activities. All these groups have saved collectively Rs.364 lakhs. They have taken loans for various purposes, primarily for initiating or reviving their income generating activities.

The focus was on the fishing community as the damage was direct and high to the fishermen. Through repairing of FRP boats, Catamarans, nets and engines 1,900 families were benefited, by providing Catamarans, and *Thonis* 350 families have been benefited, through providing fishing equipment such as nets, ice boxes, etc. 12,400 families have been benefited. Apart from the fishermen involved in marine fishing, the fishermen involved in backwater fishing were also given attention. So far, 81 backwater channels were desilted and the fishermen were supported for the purchase of the fishing equipment. Through this intervention 91 families involved in backwater fishing have got benefited and about 250 families got employment as wage labourers at the time of desilting of the channels.

The sea water inundation affected the coastal agriculture lands. This damaged the crops cultivated and resulted in increase of salinity in the cultivable lands. As a result, the farmers lost their standing crops. The field teams in the location supported and guided the farmers for the land reclamation. The interventions in the agricultural sectors were on two major areas, such as land reclamation and cropping support to the farmers. In addition to the livestock activities were promoted as an additional income generating activity. Through these interventions 3,000 acres of land were reclaimed benefiting over 3,500 families. Through the livestock and other income generating activities 370 families have been benefited.

The sea water inundation not only damaged the land but also damaged the small and large water bodies in the coastal areas. The sludge carried by the sea water got deposited in the water bodies. The DHAN team identified the water bodies affected by Tsunami and took up the renovation work through the people institutions. 294 small and large

coastal water bodies were renovated. Through this intervention 7,400 families have been benefited and after renovation these water bodies are irrigating 7,260 acres of land. About 3,000 families are getting access to drinking water facilities from renovated ponds. So far 2,540 farmers were supported through providing farm implements.

All the restoration measures were carefully planned in such a way that it suits the context and the peoples' needs. In the entire restoration process as a principle all the livelihood supports were extended with the contribution of the members. So far 14,647 fishermen families, 13,444 farming families, and 11,995 women have been benefited through the intervention. In total 40,000 families were supported for their livelihood activities. To support the livelihood activities in the coastal area, DHAN promoted the integrated service centres. These service centres provided service to the fishermen at a cheaper price. So far nine service centers have been promoted. In due course these service centers will be managed by the community.

The next major area of concentration after livelihood was health. Each region has been provided with a health associate for organizing health related services such as health camps. Until now 42 health camps have been organised through which 11,360 people have been benefited. The orientation on health was given to 5,200 members. Through group counseling so far 1,270 people were counseled and through one to one counseling 72 members were counseled.

In the affected area, to improve the education and to provide a conducive environment for the students, 202 tuition centers have been promoted. About 6,000 students are getting benefited through these centres. To support the school children, additional teachers have been provided wherever there was a need. Till date 80 additional teachers have been provided. The Village Information Centers promoted are supporting the students in the affected areas by offering computer education at a lower cost. According to the current statistics about 1400 students have taken up short courses at these centres.



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