

EMPOWERING MOVEMENTS

Stories of People's Resolve
from Jeevan-EA Programme



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Caritas India and her partners gratefully acknowledge
the financial cooperation of Misereor to Jeevan

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Message



FR. (DR.) POLY VARGHESE

Executive Director
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Ownership has centrality in the discourse on sustainability. Externally driven development seldom gains foothold in a community. For development to become sustainable and rewarding, the quotient of people's ownership needs to be high. 'JEEVAN-Empowering Animation' programme of Caritas India in Maharashtra was a novel and hugely beneficial initiative to help communities take control of local development in an environment of empowerment and unbridled self-expression.

The distinctive beauty of Empowering Animation, the strategy that shaped the contours of Jeevan programme, is illustrated in the way it brought people together and helped them build community perspectives that united everyone. Empowering Animation, as a philosophy of working with the community, creates spaces for traditional, locally acceptable and sustainable peoples' institutions to be an integral part of the development agenda. Empowering Animation generated solutions in a different way – it enabled and gave confidence to people to make use of their wisdom, knowledge, practices and skills for solving their development challenges. Caritas India is convinced that Empowering Animation strengthens local knowledge and it leads to greater self-reliance of communities. More importantly, Empowering Animation contributes to increasing the self-esteem of communities which in turn manifests as the confidence of communities to launch powerful movements.

Caritas India pursues Empowering Animation as an initiative for the transformation of society and for bringing the community to the centre of empowerment process. With the help of Empowering Animation, JEEVAN programme in Maharashtra succeeded in initiating hundreds of grassroots level movements. 'Empowering Movements' is a selection of ten impact stories that represent the numerous grassroots level movements triggered by JEEVAN-EA. I am happy to dedicate this compendium of impact stories which is a loud statement of the empowerment that rural communities in Maharashtra have achieved progressively with the help of JEEVAN-EA.

I, on behalf of Caritas India and her partners, gratefully acknowledge the funding and accompaniment support that Misereor has offered to three phases of JEEVAN in Maharashtra. I also thank the eleven Caritas India partners in Maharashtra for demonstrating the devotion to the cause of fostering people's movements.

MESSAGE



FR. (DR.) JOLLY PUTHENPURA

Assistant Executive Director
Caritas India

The social ministry of Caritas India has its underpinnings on the conviction that communities need to be recognised and respected as subjects of change with substantial wealth of will, wisdom and resourcefulness. The JEEVAN programme in Maharashtra, in many ways, represented Caritas India's beliefs and perspectives on development and empowerment.

JEEVAN has been an equally rewarding journey for communities, Caritas India and facilitating partners. In the process of helping communities achieve creditworthy successes in the areas of good governance, sustainable agriculture and community identity, Caritas India and her partners refined their strategies of working with communities. For Caritas India, JEEVAN was not just a community level programme, but it was also a fountainhead of new perspectives and experiences that continue to inform and impact her other programmes.

The impacts that JEEVAN had created in communities are truly gratifying because those changes helped communities present a unique empowerment narrative. JEEVAN programme was also special because it stayed clear of typical development stereotyping and straightjacketing and did exactly what community wanted us to do. This way, JEEVAN was a programme shaped by the 'bottom-up' force of communities and not a conventional 'top-down' development dole-out.

'Empowering Movements' is a compilation of a few impact stories of JEEVAN which reflects the aspirations of the community and the desire of Caritas India and her local partners to help communities regain their voices. I am glad to present this compendium of impact stories that showcases the positive and affirmative actions of capacitated and organised communities.

Communities Take Campaign to Chief Minister

Communities of five backward villages in Nagpur scripted illustrious success in bringing development to their villages by running a tenacious and concerted campaign that culminated in the chamber of the Maharashtra chief minister himself!



01



Deoli, Amgaon, Morzhari, Bhivgad and Khairi villages have been beset with several development challenges related to education, education, agriculture, electricity, and transportation. Children of these villages could not travel to school and farmers could not transport their produce to market because there was no proper road. Infrastructure of schools was rickety, drinking water supply was non-existent, electricity supply was erratic, irrigation facility was scant, and teachers in school were irregular. Since the challenges were huge, village communities decided to join hands.

Village mobilisation happened immediately after the commencement of Jeevan-EA programme of Nagpur Multipurpose Social Service Society (NMSSS). Jeevan-EA envisaged empowering communities by organising them and informing them about their rights and entitlements. Jeevan-EA organised community meetings to prioritize social issues and identify solutions that communities collective can pursue. Jeevan-EA also launched citizen education programme under which communities were informed about the powers that grassroots democracy endows upon them. Community leaders were trained on issue representation and application processes. Jeevan-EA also created a solidarity platform for the five villages to converge and discuss their issues.

The first concrete step to development advocacy started when leaders of the five villages visited local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Sudhir Parve. Community leaders invited his attention to the poor development of five villages and submitted a memorandum seeking government intervention. The MLA expressed helplessness on the ground that local development fund at his disposal was too small to address the problems of the five village communities. He suggested to take a delegation to the chief minister Devendra Fadnavis for presenting their demands. The community action group, consisting leaders of five villages, started preparations immediately and prepared a memorandum

that could be passed in the local panchayat before it is submitted to the chief minister.

With the support of Jeevan-EA team, the community action group prepared a detailed agenda for the special Gram Sabha meeting and organised it with the participation of a large number of people. As promised, MLA Sudhir Parve participated in the Gram Sabha and appraised himself of the severity of backwardness of the panchayat. In the special Gram Sabha, the community passed a resolution to submit a composite memorandum to the chief minister on the issues of the community.

Within a week, a community delegation, accompanied by the MLA, reached chief minister's office to submit the memorandum. The MLA organized the meeting of the community with the chief minister Devendra Fadnavis. The delegation discussed their demands with the chief minister and submitted the memorandum. The usually slow administrative machinery sprang into action immediately.

Road construction started in Khari village and it was connected with the neighboring villages. School in Khari was renovated and facilities in school were upgraded. The community pond in Jambalapani was deepened for increasing irrigation capacity. As a result, villagers could start cultivating vegetables during summer season. Road was constructed to establish connectivity between Deoli, Tambekhani and Aamgaon and electricity connection works were started in all villages. Several more development works were started for creating community assets. More importantly, panchayat started taking notice of the collective strength of the community which until recently shied away from attending Panchayat meetings.

The success spurred the community to do a lot more. Ever since, the community has visited the offices of district collector, MLA office and other government offices for demanding benefits of government welfare and development schemes.

An Adivasi Village Wins Community Forest Right, A First in the Region!

For the Adivasi community of Mahapandarwani, the Republic Day in 2019 was a day of jubilation. On that day, their persisting campaign yielded result and they won community forest right – a rarely heard feat for the economically and educationally backward tribal community.



02

Mahapandarwani is a remote tribal village with 78 families, all belonging to the Gond tribe, nestled in the forests of Jiwati block of Chandrapur district. For livelihood and food, the village community relies on seasonal wage labour and farming on their small pieces of land that they own on mountain slopes.

One of the focuses of Jeevan-EA programme of Loksamgraha Social Service Society (LSSS) was to increase the livelihood security of tribal households by helping them win rights on the forest. Whenever the community members went to forest to collect forest produces, forest officials would chase them away on the reason that the community did not have any right over forest.

LSSS conducted several awareness sessions on community forest rights under the PESA Act which is a landmark constitutional amendment that bestowed ownership rights to Adivasis. LSSS also organised leadership development programmes, rights and entitlement literacy programmes and trainings on Gram Sabha and its functions. These trainings and awareness sessions prepared the community for the long-drawn campaign.

With the guidance from LSSS, the tribal community collected all documents required for moving a claim on forest land rights. The community action group of the village launched a signature campaign to prepare a memorandum and collected signatures of the entire village. The community action group then submitted the memorandum seeking forest rights to the Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) of forest department. This was the first step of the spirited community campaign.

The village community knew that it had to do a lot more to build pressure. A delegation of the community then submitted the memorandum to the local MLA and visited the district headquarters to submit the memorandum to the forest department officials. During this time, the village community also formed a Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC) for spearheading the campaign. As expected, the memorandum evoked no response from the district administration.

The JFMC intensified the campaign and travelled again to the district headquarters to present their demands before the MLA, district collector, SDO of forest and other officials. JFMC also submitted another memorandum demanding convening of a



special Gram Sabha to discuss forest rights for the village and to pass a resolution to this effect. After persisting for three months, the Block Development Officer (BDO) budged and organised a special Gram Sabha which passed a resolution demanding community forest right for the village.

The community persisted with their demands and sent more delegations to officials demanding community right on forest. Finally, on 26 January 2019, the government granted community forest rights on 380-acre forest land to Mahapandarwani community. The Community Land Rights certificate was subsequently handed over to the village community. "We were happy that we received the right over forest after prolonged campaign. With this we got not only the right to utilise the forest resources but the right to conserve the forest as well", said Mr. Isaru Ale, the government appointed village sentry.

Ever since the village community has instituted a committee of 20 villagers to conserve forest resources, to regulate the collection of forest produces and their marketing, and to ensure the benefit of forest rights, in terms of livelihood, is equitably available for all community members. The Adivasi community also drew up a plan to plant bamboo on a large scale for protecting the forest and to increase livelihood potential for the village community.

■

Community Campaign Wins Right on Lake

Dobanbarda village community of Amravati district had not realised the potential of the lake within the village limits until outsiders started earning profits by fishing from it. Soon the village community realised the livelihood possibilities of the 12-acre lake but they could not benefit from the opportunity. They had no right to fish from the lake and they had to fight a police case that was slapped on them by outsiders.



03



Dobanbarda is a tiny tribal village with around 80 households located on the drought prone Melghat region where communities earn livelihood with migratory work and small-scale farming. Vishnu Kale, a villager, was the first one to notice that outsiders were earning good income by selling fish from the lake. “We did not realise the potential and value of the lake which is a big gift of nature to the village. The lake could potentially give livelihood to many of us if we could properly utilise the opportunity”, Vishnu Kale said.

“Instead of using this benefits of lake, we were going for daily wages. Villagers despite having the collective ownership of the lake were ignorant of the ways to utilise the lake”, Vishnu added. The community soon learned that outsiders were catching fish from the lake and earning good income. Groups formed by Jeevan Vikas Sanstha (JVS) under Jeevan-EA programme organised several community consultation meetings on the ways to utilise the benefits of the lake and to prevent outsiders from catching fish from the lake. Community group took the decision to collectively oppose all outsiders who fish from the lake.

Group members swung into action immediately and stopped outsiders when they came for fishing. A heated argument ensued and the outsiders filed a police complaint against the villagers who resisted fishing. Local police summoned the villagers for settling the issue and the community presented their case strongly before the police. The community also argued that the fishing rights on the lake should be with the community because the lake is in the civil boundary of the village.

Community members were told that they will have to get the ownership right first and only then they can get the fishing right over the lake. They held a meeting with the Sarpanch and other Panchayat office bearers who asked the community members to get fishing permission from the Department of Fisheries. They held discussions with the officer of the department of fishery but the discussions yielded no success. The community did not lose heart and sustained its campaign. A delegation of the community met with Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) demanding ownership right over the lake. With the backing of the SDO, the community returned to the village and met the Sarpanch Satish Chimote and demanded passing of a resolution granting fishing rights to village community.

Eventually, the Panchayat passed a resolution conferring fishing rights to the village community. The campaign succeeded but the community faced more challenges. The village community could not afford the investment required for fishing and marketing. During the discussion of the community, it was unanimously decided to engage a contractor for fishing. Subsequently, the village community identified a contractor who agreed to pay Rs. 50,000 for a two-year lease. Fishing rights helped 25 households of the village to get livelihood. More importantly, the community won the fishing rights as a reward for their collective campaign.

■

Adivasi Community Adopts Innovative Strategy to Claim Caste Certificate

Caste certificate is a treasured asset for the impoverished Adivasi Thakur community because it is the basic eligibility document for accessing benefits of several welfare and development schemes. Communities can receive several entitlements related to food supplies, housing, land, education, and agriculture subsidy only if they possess caste certificate. Even though caste certificate is a right of Thakur community, seldom community members get it easily thanks to the complex administrative processes.



04



Karunya Trust Kalyan, as part of the Jeevan-EA programme, has been working with several village communities to help them obtain caste certificate. Karunya Trust had organized several trainings and awareness campaigns in Kelni, Mhasrundi, Bangarwadi, Kunde, Dahivali, and Thakurpada hamlets in Thane district which had sizeable Thakur population. All these Thakur households belong to below poverty line and rely on wage labour and selling of forest produces for livelihood.

Since most of Thakur households did not have caste certificate, their children were unable to get scholarship and the educated youth were not getting jobs. "Twelve children of my village were deprived of scholarship and opportunities for higher education because they did not have caste certificate," said Ganpat Hindole a community leader of Thakurpada hamlet. Ganesh Waghmare a Thakur community member of Mhasrundi hamlet also voiced the same concern. "Since last 6 years we were unable to submit caste certificate in Gram Panchayat office. Thirty-three families including mine could not get the benefit of government housing scheme". He further said that the community filed applications seeking caste certificate every year but every time their applications were rejected.

"We were alarmed when so many of our children dropped out of school because they did not get scholarship. We decided to work collectively", Ganesh added. "We organized a community meeting and requested Karunya Trust to attend the meeting to help us find a way. During the meeting Karunya Trust team educated us on the government schemes and the eligibility for accessing the scheme benefits. Karunya Trust team also motivated us to form a block level action committee for taking the campaign forward", Ganesh said. Communities of the six hamlets formed a block level committee with representation from all hamlets. Besides, the communities raised a

study group to obtain updated information on government schemes.

"On 13 December 2018 the entire community visited tahsildar office and submitted 396 applications for caste certificates, but the office of tahsildar has passed only 36 applications and others were rejected. We did not lose our hope and decided to personally meet the tahsildar to present our case", said Ms. Payal Bartad a member of the block level committee. "We knew that the tahsildar would seek the evidence for our claim to be tribals. So, 156 of us dressed up in traditional attire of Thakur community. It worked. Of course, the tahsildar asked several questions about our background, which we answered satisfactorily", Payal said. After the community had successfully convinced the tahsildar, the administrative process of issuing caste certificate started. "24 May 2019 will be etched in golden words in our history because 362 caste certificates were issued. All Thakur households now have caste certificate", Payal said with pride and confidence.

"We feel proud and happy about the success of our patience and collective efforts. Now we get benefits of government schemes. Our children are getting scholarships, drop-out children have returned to schools and educated youth are getting jobs. All because of caste certificates", said Ms. Barkabai Fasale, another active Thakur community member who participated in the campaigns.



Tribal Community Wins Right on Forest Land

Forest has traditionally been a source of livelihood for the sixty-five Katkari families of Tharmari hamlet of Shiravli panchayat. The other sources of livelihood for the impoverished community are migratory labour and wage labour in brick kilns. Their dependence on forest was understandable because just 35 households of the village had some land to claim as theirs.



05

The landlessness of Katkaris, one of the three Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Maharashtra, has historical roots. Katkaris are forest dwellers who were not proactive enough to formalize their land ownership in the form of 'Patta' or land deed when delineation of forest was done. Since they did not have 'Patta', they were conveniently denied of their rights on the forest land that they cultivated for ages. Katkaris call the forest land that they traditionally cultivated as 'Dali'. The rights on Dali land was rarely awarded to Kakaris and they were gradually dispossessed from their land. This is despite the recognition of rights of Adivasis on their traditional holding in the forest limits under the Forest Rights Act (FRA).

“Until 2019, we did not have enough knowledge about Dali rights”, said Manik Thakre, a Katkari who was member of the Gavki which started the campaign for claiming forest rights for Katkaris. Centre for Social Action (CSA) started Jeevan-EA programme in Raigad district and strengthened Gavki, the traditional form of governance of Adivasi Katkari community. “During Gavki meetings, forest rights of Katkari community was discussed and we decided to pursue it because most of us were landless”, Manik said.

CSA educated the community about their rights on forest land under the provision of 'Dali' and encouraged them to work collectively for winning their land rights. During the community reflection, it was informed that earlier generations of nine families of the hamlet had Dali land rights but they could not transfer the rights in the absence of records.

Jeevan-EA programme raised and strengthened Gavkis in the region and sensitized Katkaris on their land rights. After the necessary paperwork which CSA helped the Katkari community to complete, community finalised 84 claims. CSA along with the Gavkis further scrutinized these claims and the proofs and finalised 64 claims as valid claims. Gavki of the Shiravli panchayat held several meetings to strategize their campaign to pressurize the forest department to grant Dali land rights to Katkaris.

The Gavki decided to send a delegation to the forest department to press for their Dali demands. “The forest department after our prolonged demand, agreed to give Dali rights to the nine families that once had Dali land. But they straightaway declined to give Dali rights to other families”, said Kusum Thakre another member of the Gavki. The Gavki held more rounds of discussion and decided not to back out until Dali claims of the remaining 64 families are granted. The community held meetings with Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) and Tehsildar and raised their claim on forest land.

Finally, the administration relented and granted Dali rights of 65 acres to 64 eligible families. It was not only a big achievement of Gavki but a recognition of the power of Gavki which were revived as the traditional local governance organisation.

Immediately after the Dali right was granted, Katkari households cleared the forest and demarcated their land parcel. They also successfully demanded cashew saplings from the agriculture department and planted 1300 cashew saplings. They dug trenches to demarcate their land and to protect cashew trees from forest fire. For the 64 households it was a promising step to livelihood security and for the Katkari community it was a realization of the strength of their unity.



Berhampur Community Forces Administration to Start Bus Service

People cheered and shouted in joy when a red public bus steamed into the village on its maiden trip traversing the boulder-strewn road of Berhampur. The newly started public bus service to the village was a huge success for the community which had doggedly campaigned for it for over four months.



06

Berhampur, a village of 400 households, despite being just ten kilometers away from Beed city, was not connected with a bus link and people either had to hire auto or walk several kilometers to Beed city. Students who attend school in Beed city were forced to walk some kilometers to the highway for catching buses. The difficulties of the community would aggravate in the rainy season when they had to wade through slushy track. The elderly of the village seldom ventured out due to lack of transport facilities. Travel during the night hours, especially for women and the elderly, was risky since the approach road passes through snake infested fields.

Community held several meetings to discuss how they can pressurize the administration to start a bus service to Berhampur. Women and youth of the village led the campaign and worked with the local panchayat to write an application on behalf of the community and submit it to the District Transport Officer (DTO). However, when no positive response was forthcoming from transport department the initial enthusiasm of communities gave way to disappointment.

The small group which had started the campaign, however, continued to persist and held several meetings with the officials at the office of the DTO. Jeevan-EA field worker also assisted the community in its campaign. Despite the persistence of the community, the DTO declined to start the bus service and cited some flimsy excuses not to start the bus service.

When the patience of the community ran out due to the inordinate delay in starting the bus service, the community decided to take out a rally to the DTO office. When the community informed the DTO that a big rally demanding the bus service will arrive the DTO office soon, the administration swung into action. The DTO, after four-months' spirited campaign of community, announced the commencement of bus service to Berhampur.



Narrating the success of the campaign, Mr. Sakharam Bhagat who was one of the organizers said, ***“Kadhi vatla nahi ki he kaam honaar, pan aata khoop bara vat the ki amcha kadun hee kam zaali”*** (We never thought that it would succeed but we are now proud of our success).

The bus connectivity not only helped the community travel safely to neighboring villages but it was also a symbol of the power of people's solidarity. Mrs. Ranjan Rathod who had joined the campaign at the insistence of Jeevan-EA animator said this while holding the hand of the facilitator, *“Jeevan EA animator ne amhaala khoop madat kele mhanun ha kaam zaale, nahi tar amhi apeksha sodli hoti”* (The Jeevan-EA animator helped us achieve this success. We at one point had lost hope).



Organised Campaign of Women Wins Water Connection

Tambekhani village has always been in the grip of water crisis which would aggravate during summer season. *"For the last fifteen years, we have been experiencing acute water shortage. We do not get even sufficient drinking water during summer. We had no other way other than surviving for 3-4 days with the small ration of water that administration supplied"*, Jaswanta Gajbhiye a home maker of Tambekhani narrated the travails of the community.



07



Tambekhani is a tiny village of 60 farming households in Nagpur district which often slips into water crisis. Due to water shortage, farmers of the village could cultivate only during the rainy season. They would migrate to adjacent towns and cities for wage labour after the monsoon crop season.

Nagpur Multipurpose Social Service Society (NMSSS) had started Jeevan-EA in 2018 to empower communities and to help them participate more assertively in grassroots governance processes. NMSSS raised and strengthened Village Development Committees (VDCs) in the villages for initiating collective action around issues that connect the community. "In the meeting of women group of our village, we discussed the issue of water shortage and decided to work together for finding a solution. Since water shortage affects the women most, we decided to work collectively until we get a solution from the government", Ms. Jasvanta, a VDC member, narrated how the women started organising themselves around the issue of drinking water.

After the women's group informed NMSSS about their decision to work on the water issue, NMSSS trained the village women on writing memorandum, special Gram Sabha and presenting agenda in Gram Sabha meetings. With the newfound confidence and skill, the VDC drafted a memorandum and submitted it with Deoli Panchayat demanding deepening and repair of wells and piped water connection to all households. The women also demanded the Sarpanch to organise a Gram Sabha to discuss drinking water issue. Though the Sarpanch accepted the memorandum, he declined to organise Gram Sabha citing the dangers of the pandemic.

"When the Sarpanch refused to organise Gram Sabha, we insisted him to organise the Ward Sabha in our village. But even that demand was not considered. Then we decided to organise the Ward Sabha on our own",

said Annapurna Kukadker another leader of the VDC. Eventually the women of Tambekhani organised the Ward Sabha on 9 September 2021 with the participation of 180 villagers including 90 women and passed a resolution, which the Sarpanch had to accept. The Sarpanch assured the community that he would present community's demand before the local MLA.

The Sarpanch along with the ward member and VDC members met the MLA on 10 September 2021. The MLA handed over the memorandum to the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) and asked him to start pipeline work and the work of connecting households with piped water connection started in the first week of October 2021. "Every household of the village now has piped water connection. We are so delighted over our success in obtaining water connection. We solved our water problems by working collectively and persistently", Ms. Manisha Aade, another VDC member, said jubilantly.



Adivasi Community Successfully Campaigns for Road Construction

Aloofness was a painful everyday reality for the forty-two Katkari families of Bangarwadi thanks to the inexistent road connectivity of the hamlet. Since all households were poor and had no political connections, the hamlet did not find a place in the road network. The woes of the impoverished community compounded during the rainy season when they had to wade through flooded fields and roads to go to market or to hospital. School going children of the hamlet had to carry schoolbags on their head while walking on the road which would turn into a rivulet during monsoon season.



08

Shivaji Bhala, a community member recalled, "Some leaders of our hamlet in 2012 had raised the demand for road construction. But no one listed to us then. We left it because we had no hope that the road will be constructed". However, community raised the demand for road once again in 2019 this time with support from Karunya Trust which had started Jeevan-EA programme in Bangarwadi hamlet. Karunya Trust mobilized communities around issues and helped them identify solutions that they could collectively pursue.

Karunya Trust also revived Gavki, the traditional governance system of Katkari tribal community. Gavki is a representative body of Katkaris which is akin to panchayat in terms of composition except that the members of Gavki are informally elected. The Gavki held several meetings to discuss and identify ways to persuade the administration to construct a road. The meetings were usually held in the night so that even people who travel outside village for work also could attend the meeting. "All households of the community agreed to contribute Rs. 100 each so that all documentation works could be done, and a delegation of the community could travel to meet the officials", Shivaji said.

Even though there was a government order in 2013 for construction of road, implementation could not happen because the land was not demarcated and made available for road. "Government officials visited the hamlet a few times, but powerful landowners declined to give land for the road. So, the process hit roadblock", Shivaji said. However, the community was persistent and decided to submit applications in the Gram Panchayat for road construction. The community also passed a memorandum in the Gram Sabha and submitted this memorandum in the offices of block panchayat and the tehsildar demanding construction of road.

When the community found no progress in terms of decision to construct road, community leaders decided to agitate at tehsil office. "We protested at tehsil office, but it did not succeed in persuading the administration to start work. Then we invited the media and got the issue published in five newspapers. Still things did not work", said Ms. Sunita Kandavi, a community leader who was groomed by Karunya Trust. "We decided to further intensify our campaign. We collected all documents including Gram Sabha resolution, visit report of Sub Divisional Officer (SDO), report of meeting with tehsildar and the road sanction letter



that was issued in 2013 and submitted all these along with the memorandum to the district collector on 10 March 2021", Ms. Sunita narrated how community scaled up the campaign for road. Finally, the administration responded by completing the land demarcation and within two months road construction started.

"Finally, government completed the construction of concrete road to our hamlet. Our children can now go to school even during rainy season and villagers can move about freely" Sunita said with satisfaction. The new road connects Bangarwadi with neighboring villages where community members often travelled for work and shopping. "We didn't give up despite the stiff challenges. We had decided to fight together until the road is constructed. Whenever government officials visit our village, they appreciate us for our persistent efforts", Sunita added.

■

Community Campaign Helps Village Overcome Water Scarcity

Umrad Jehangir, a small village with three hundred households in Beed district, has often been haunted by severe water shortage. Livelihood and food insecurity often loomed large since farming options of the community were curtailed by the acute water shortage.



09



Aurangabad Diocesan Social Service Society (ADSSS) started Jeevan-EA programme in Umrad by mobilizing communities on issues and helping them work together to address these common issues. ADSSS also helped communities with literacy programmes on grassroots governance, panchayat, and schemes. In many meetings, community members raised the issue of limited agriculture options due to water shortage, but no solution emerged because the community was splintered and the Sarpanch was indifferent to organized community action.

ADSSS started working with the women of Umrad by helping them access benefits of government schemes. One of the methods adopted by Jeevan-EA for the democratization of local governance system was organizing demo Gram Sabha which not only oriented the villagers about panchayat processes but equipped them with skills to present their cases in Gram Sabha. In one Gram Sabha meeting, the issue of water shortage was discussed and the community suggested the solution of deepening and widening the river that flows through the village. The idea impressed the Sarpanch as well.

The Sarpanch immediately convened a Gram Sabha in April 2021 and a proposal to deepen the river was presented and it was unanimously approved. Though deepening was accepted by all, not everyone was pleased about the widening as some community members would lose some land. The plan of widening the river was shelved for some time. Communities again came together in July 2021 after they experienced severe water shortage during summer. However, this time they converged with the commitment to offer land for the river widening. A general appeal was made to the community to contribute with cash and labour because the panchayat did not have the resources to complete the entire work.

The community took the decision that they would not plead for help from anyone, including government, and was determined to complete the river widening and deepening on their own. On 15 August 2021, the Independence Day, the entire village community assembled for the flag hoisting and started Shramdaan or the voluntary contribution of labour. They brought along with them the implements to deepen and widen the river and the entire community worked for more than a week. The community planted carpet grass along the banks for checking the land cutting due to waterflow and planted bamboo on the banks for checking soil erosion.

Within fifteen days, monsoon arrived in full force and filled the river and the check dams that the village community had constructed across the river. The fully replenished water storages along the river recharged all wells of the village. Umrad community this time was confident that they will get sufficient water for cultivating two crops. The village community came together yet again to develop plans for regulating the water use so that everyone can cultivate two crops.

The outcome of community's endeavor was impressive. Not only the community of the village, but adjoining villages that were connected by the river, had sufficient water to cultivate two crops. The farmers had bountiful harvest of maize, groundnut, sunflower, soybean, pearl millet and sorghum. Some farmers managed to double their harvest because of the availability of water for irrigation. For the first time, farmers could cultivate vegetables during the summer. With the increased availability of water, villagers increased their income by Rs. 25,000 – Rs. 50,000.

■

Community Campaign Persuades Administration to Construct Road

The remoteness of Koshegavhan village of Ahmednagar district was made even more painful because of the lack of road connectivity. Most of the 224 families of Koshegavhan depended on agriculture for livelihood; hence, the community desperately needed access to market which unfortunately was not there.



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Koshegavhan community found it exceedingly difficult to travel and transport farm produces due to the poor condition of road. The community in the past had made feeble attempts to persuade the panchayat and government departments to start road construction but none moved.

Bosco Gramin Vikas Kendra (BGVK) started Jeevan-EA programme in Koshegavhan which mobilized communities on issues that equally affect communities. BGVK organized communities into action groups and educated them on the powers of Panchayat and Gram Sabha. Jeevan-EA programme also helped communities with information on government schemes that could be beneficial for creating community assets and for the welfare of communities.

In one of the community meetings organized by BGVK to discuss issues, community raised the issue of road connectivity to the village. The organized village community yet again decided to work collectively to demand road construction. The community decided to send a delegation of its leaders to the local panchayat to present their demand of road construction. The delegation impressed upon the panchayat to accept the issue of road connectivity as an agenda of the next Gram Sabha meeting.

Koshegavhan community made a good representation of the road issue and the Sarpanch assured to help the community by moving the application to higher levels. In

the Gram Sabha meeting held on 26 January 2019, Koshegavhan village community submitted a memorandum to Sarpanch, deputy sarpanch and the village development officer demanding construction of road. After submitting the memorandum, Koshegavhan community started constant follow up of the memorandum with the panchayat and the concerned government departments.

The community also started demanding the road construction work to be started with MGNREGA so that the village community gets wage labour from the road construction work. Koshegavhan community however knew that it was not easy to convince authorities get the road work done under MGNREGA. Authorities at times are reluctant and, in some cases, non-corporative at initial stages. However, the community was confident that they will succeed because they were waging a collective campaign.

After several rounds of discussion and follow up with various officials, road construction was approved under MGNREGA on 4 February 2020. Koshegavhan was linked with the nearby Takali town with an 8-kilometer-long road. The road construction also helped the community get wage labour. “Now we have a road which will define a better tomorrow for us. We do not need to now worry about our safety when we travel”, said Pushpa Deshmukh one of the women leaders who spearheaded the campaign.





EMPOWERING MOVEMENTS

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