

DHAS GRAMIN VIKAS KENDRA
ALIRAJPUR, MADHYA PRADESH
ACTIVITY AND IMPACT REPORT 2007-08

- 1. Summary :** The Dhas Gramin Vikas Kendra through its trade union wing, Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath, initiated an intervention in the area of migrant labour in Alirajpur District of Madhya Pradesh over the period from May 2008 to March 2009. The important outputs of the intervention were seminars, training workshops and mass rallies held on the issue of migration, a migration mapping survey of 2528 households spread over 15 villages of the three blocks of Alirajpur Tehsil, identity cards for the migrant labourers and a Hindi version of the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act. The most important outcome of the project was the increase in employment generated under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. The project efficiency was quite high as the issue of migration was brought to the forefront of discussion at the village level, at the level of the district administration and also in the media. Apart from this by generating upwards of 100000 extra man days through the NREGS by helping people who had earlier never done so to fill application forms demanding employment an extra income of Rupees One Crore has been generated for the people which is almost 18 times the project grant for the whole year. The legal and mass organizational interventions have been very effective as they have raised awareness levels all round and forced the district administration to take action. Given the severe lack of livelihoods of the Bhil adivasis the interventions have been extremely relevant too and brought about an increase in the well being of the people.
- 2. Background of Project :** Alirajpur district is situated in the southwest corner of Madhya Pradesh (21.3 - 22.55 N & 73.3 - 75.01 E, Ht above MSL - 317m) bordering the Vadodara district of Gujarat. It is predominantly inhabited by Bhil adivasi marginal and small farmers and has no industrialisation. The large forest area is stocked mostly by degraded forests. Due to this lack of sufficient incomes from their primary occupation of agriculture, the lack of adequate forest resources and the absence of alternative livelihoods from industries the people have to migrate to Gujarat and other areas to make ends meet. The district administration does not provide the support that it is mandated to do under the provisions of the Inter State Migrant Workers Act. Thus the migrants mostly have to work under disadvantageous conditions in Gujarat. The various characteristics of Alirajpur district are as below -

 - a. Total Area - 3011 sqkm, Agricultural Land - 1701 sqkm, Non-agricultural Land - 692 sqkm, Forest Land - 425 sqkm, Waste Land - 193 sqkm
 - b. Minimum Temperature-8⁰C, Maximum Temperature-43⁰C, Rainfall-1100mm
 - c. Irrigated Area - 13.8%, Area under Maize - 19%, Area under Sorghum - 9%, Area under Wheat - 5%, Area under Rice - 5% Area under Gram - 4%, Area under Redgram - 2%, Area under Blackgram - 22%, Area under Cotton - 2%, Area under Groundnut - 10% and Area under Soyabean - 1%.
 - d. Population (2001) - 522804, Decadal Growth Rate - 26.5% Sex Ratio - 998, Scheduled Castes - 5.6%, Scheduled Tribes - 87.1%, Literates - 28.5%, Rural Population - 92%, Working Population - 53.8%, Agricultural Livelihood-90%
 - e. Marginal Farmers - 38% of farmers and 11% of agricultural land.
Small Farmers - 30% of farmers and 24% of agricultural land.

Semi-medium Farmers - 22% of farmers and 32% of agricultural land.
Medium Farmers - 9% of farmers and 28% of agricultural land.
Large Farmers - 1% of farmers and 5% of agricultural land.

The objectives of the project are to improve the employment opportunities and the working and living conditions both in the source areas and also at the points of migration through surveys to determine the status of the people, capacity building, legal and policy intervention.

3. Program Findings : The major findings of the programme with respect to the objectives, project design and implementation, outputs and dissemination and capacity building are as follows -

- i. Objectives** - The intervention in the migration destination areas was postponed till a detailed survey could be conducted of the migrants at their source place so as to get a good idea of the problems that have to be tackled. The intervention in the source areas through the generation of employment under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes was extremely satisfactory. Village workshops were organized continuously and in the course of these it came to light that payments for work done by the villagers under the NREGS in 2007 – 2008 were still pending. The Sangathan organized these villagers to make mass representations to the administration in Sondwa Block and as a consequence as many as a thousand labourers received their backlog wages of about Rs 30 lakhs. This action was widely covered in the local press and caused considerable embarrassment to the administration. In one village Anjanwara the people had to be paid unemployment allowance as the administration failed to provide them with employment. The process of application for work for the current year was then started so as to ensure that many more works were opened this year. An interesting incident happened in this connection. When the people of Kansalwai village went and submitted their work demand forms to the Sarpanch he shouted at them for doing so saying they were unnecessarily burdening him with more responsibilities. After that the next time a Sangathan activist went to the village the Sarpanch accosted him and after scolding him took away the keys of his motorcycle. The activist, not to be outdone, threatened the Sarpanch that if he did not return the keys then he would ensure that the latter could not enter Alirajpur again. This made the Sarpanch backtrack and return the keys. Though exact estimates are not available more than 100000 mandays of employment have been created in over twenty villages due to the intervention of the Sangathan leading to the payment of over Rupees One Crore.
- ii. Project Design and Implementation** - The intervention was mainly designed around the village level meetings that were to be held regularly. It is these meetings that threw up the problems with regard to NREGS implementation which then led to very good mass remedial action. They also revealed the extent to which the local leadership in the Panchayats and the bureaucracy is averse to implementing the NREGS and the provisions of the ISMW Act. The other aspect of the project design was the conduct of a baseline survey to determine the actual situation prevailing among the migrants. This too was successfully completed and has provided crucial data on the basis of which further action can be taken. The third aspect of the project design was to conduct capacity building workshops of the project activists and also of the people. One capacity building workshop for village level workers and migrants was organised in village Vakner in Sondwa Block on

29th August 2007. Eightyfive men and women from sixteen villages of Mathwar, Vakner, Akria, Sakarja, Karajvani and Keldi panchayats participated. The three main conclusions reached in the workshop were -

- a. A reliable support system has to be developed in the migration destinations for taking advantage of the provisions of the ISMW Act.
- b. A process of lobbying with the district administration for implementation of the provisions of the ISMW Act must be initiated culminating in a public rally. However, the public rally would be held only next year after the legislative assembly elections.
- c. The Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath always holds public meetings prior to the elections where all the candidates for the assembly elections are invited to speak about their manifestoes and also respond to the demands being made by the people. It was decided that this time the issue of the implementation of the ISMW Act would be raised at these meetings and pressure would be put on the candidates to work in this area and also aid in the efforts being made by the KMCS.

The workshop was covered by representatives of the local print media and it received good space in all the major newspapers thus aiding in the lobbying process by creating some preliminary awareness in the administration over the issue. Thus the conduct of workshops too was accomplished very successfully. The fourth aspect of the project design was the holding of mass rallies to put pressure on the administration for implementation of various laws and policies. A big rally was held in Alirajpur on 29th September 2007 on the twin issues of non-implementation of the Interstate Migrant Workers Act and the Scheduled Tribes Recognition of Rights Act. Both these acts are crucial to the right to livelihood of the tribals and the government has been consistently ignoring them. A memorandum in this regard was submitted to the District Collector at the Collectorate after the conclusion of the rally. The final aspect of the design was to undertake legal action in favour of the migrants. While the case being fought in the Supreme Court for compensation to the victims of the stone crushing units came to a successful conclusion with the Court ordering that they be given proper medical treatment cases were also filed under the Workmen's Compensation Act in the Ratlam Labour Court. Thus in the legal sphere too success was achieved.

iii. Project Outputs and Dissemination - The first major output of the project was the Hindi translated version of the Inter State Migrant Worker's Act. It is an indicator of how little interest the Government of Madhya Pradesh has in the issue that there is no Hindi version of the Act available either with the government or in law book stores. So the Act has been translated into Hindi for publication and dissemination. The other major output was an analysis report in Hindi of the migration mapping survey conducted among 2528 households of 15 villages in the three blocks of Alirajpur Tehsil. A seminar was held in Akria village on 25th February to discuss the points emerging from this survey which were as follows -

- a. The average family size is 6.57 which is quite high as compared to the available livelihood resources and this is one of the major reasons for people having to migrate to supplement their incomes.
- b. The proportion of unitary families is 52% and the sex ratio of the sample is in favour of women.

- c. The male literacy rate in the sample is 20.93% while the female literacy rate is 14.08%. As many as 55% of the families did not have even a single literate member. This is a cause for concern as in the absence of education and other skills most of the people are just agricultural workers or unskilled workers.
- d. The proportion of families who migrate for work is as high as 85.2%. While 53.2% of the adult male members of the sample migrated this proportion was only 36.27 % for the adult female members. Of the male adolescents 39.4% migrated and this proportion was 32.3% of the female adolescents. 4% of the male children and 3.7% of the female children also migrated. As many as 44% of the families had 30% or more members who had migrated for work. This is a clear indication of the extent to which the families are dependent on the income from migration for their livelihoods.
- e. 59.49% of the families migrate only once a year and 60% of the families migrate for a period of three months or more in a year. 70% of the families migrate in the winter season from October to February. 21% migrate twice a year while 4.8% migrate thrice a year.
- f. The highest proportion of 45% of the families migrate to Surat and Navsari while the proportion for all the 11 districts of Gujarat to which people go is 85%. The highest proportion of migrants within Madhya Pradesh of 12% go to the adjoining Dhar district.
- g. The proportion of people migrating to work in agriculture is 55% while 42% work in the construction industry. 55% of the migrants earn Rs 100 or less per day as wages. The highest average daily wage is in Sural district where it is Rs 120.

The survey has clearly established the great extent to which the people of Alirajpur are dependent on migration as a source of livelihood. The stage is now set for interventions in the destination areas also. In this context the importance of the issuance of photo identity cards becomes paramount. Some time was required to finalise the helpline numbers in Ahmedabad and Surat and so there was a delay in the preparation of these cards. So far 135 cards have been issued and the process is in full swing.

- iv. **Capacity Building** - Great Stress has been laid from the beginning on capacity building of the staff and the people. The following activities were undertaken during the year for this purpose -
 - a. The full time workers of the project - Khemla, Veena and Retli attended a training workshop conducted in Vadodara by Prayas from June 9th to 11th 2007. They learnt about the methods of grassroots mobilisation of migration workers at this workshop and were considerably benefited from the exercise.
 - b. Khemla, Shankar, Bina and Retli attended the second training programme organised by Prayas in Udaipur from September 15th - 16th 2007.
 - c. Shri Sudhir Katyar and Shri Ashok Khandelwal from Prayas paid a visit to Alirajpur on 14th and 15th of November 2008 to interact with the Dhas staff and also with the people in the villages. Later a team of activists from Dakshini Rajasthan Mazdoor Union and Khetihar Khan Mazdoor Sangh also paid a three day visit in December 2007. Meetings with the people were organized on both

occasions and this led to a very fruitful exchange of information and experience between the hosts and the visitors.

d. Shankar took part in the National Level Workshop in Delhi from 22nd-23rd March 2008 on the Protection of seasonal Inter-State Migrant Workers organised by Prayas in collaboration with Shruti.

e. The capacity building workshops and meetings conducted for the people have been detailed earlier. Thus there is a continuous process of reflection and training to increase the knowledge and the action skills of the people and the staff with regard to interventions in the area of migration.

f. A detailed survey of the living and working conditions of the migrant labourers in Surat and Navsari district has also been launched in an effort to make a decisive intervention in the South Gujarat region.

4. Project Management - The project is being implemented with a very small band of full time paid staff as the stress is on utilising the voluntary efforts of the members of the Sangathan. This modus operandi not only keeps the costs of implementation down but also ensures that the people themselves learn how to negotiate with the administration and so in the long run, the sustainability of the intervention is guaranteed. Khemla is the full time coordinator of the project. However, since he does not have the capacity to take care of the report writing and planning aspects he takes only the half salary of the project coordinator that has been sanctioned in the budget. The report writing, planning and account management functions are undertaken by other staff of Dhas Gramin Vikas Kendra who are not paid workers of this particular project but are also involved in other projects. Retli and Bina are the two female full time field workers of the project. The work of the male field workers, for whom there are no budgetary provisions is done by the male members of the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath on a voluntary or contractual basis. The organisation has been able to perform very efficiently and effectively through this modus operandi and has not only delivered the goods in the field but also been punctual in filing its narrative and financial reports. Continuous review meetings are held every month to plan the activities of the project. This is necessary because new situations arise continually from the village meetings requiring the reorientation of goals and strategies.

5. Impact - The work of the Sangathan over the past year has antagonised the sarpanches and the corrupt local bureaucracy and there have been a number of instances of threats to the activists and members of the Sangathan. This is in itself an indication that the project has made an impact and in many places people have been empowered to fight for their rights. There is a heavy demand for photo-identity cards and the people are readily paying Rupees twenty to get these cards. They have said that for the first time they have an institutional framework to which they can turn in case of problems in the destination areas. That is an indication of the credibility that the Sangathan has been able to build up among the people. The media has responded positively to the work of the organisation and all its activities are well reported. The media even publicised that the plight of migrant tribal workers was a major election issue in Jhabua and Alirajpur districts in the recently concluded Vidhan Sabha elections and focussed on the work of the organisation. The district administration too has had to take note of the issues being raised by the organisation and has adopted a pro-active role in at least ensuring that employment under NREGS is provided on time to the people.

PROJECT ACTION PLAN APR '08 - MAR '09

- 1) **April - May 2008** - Issuance of photo identity cards to continue. Baseline migration mapping survey in the Jobat Tehsil to begin. A public rally to press for the implementation of the ISMW Act, NREGA and the Scheduled Tribes Recognition of Rights Act to be held in Alirajpur. Follow up on cases filed under the Workmen's Compensation Act in the Labour Court in Ratlam.
- 2) **June - July 2008** - Day long legal workshops to be held throughout the source villages to acquaint the people with the provisions of the ISMW Act and other statutes that protect the rights of casual workers. Baseline survey to continue. Pressure to be mounted for opening new works under NREGS after the conclusion of the Lok Sabha elections.
- 3) **August - September 2008** - Planning to be done for implementation of sustainable natural resource management projects through NREGS. Baseline migration survey of Jobat Tehsil to be completed. A detailed review and capacity building workshop to be held to analyse the experiences of the summer migration season.
- 4) **October - November 2008** - Legal and policy support work to be begun in Surat on the basis of insights gained from the survey of migrants in the South Gujarat region conducted during summer. Conduct of a seminar to review the results of the survey.
- 5) **December 2008 - January 2009** - A detailed workshop to discuss the analysis and review of the baseline survey conducted in Jobat Tehsil and preparation of action plan for intervention with migrants of that area.
- 6) **February - March 2009** - A public rally to be organised to highlight various issues with regard to migration that had come up during the year's work.