

DHAS GRAMIN VIKAS KENDRA

Annual Report of Activities 2008 - 2009

The action plan decided for the year 2008-9 was as follows -

- 1) Issuance of photo identity cards to continue.
- 2) Detailed household consumer expenditure and income survey to begin.
- 3) Mobilisation on the non-implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Recognition of Rights Act to be continued.
- 4) Follow up on cases of death during work in migration destination areas.
- 5) Seminars on the ISMW Act.
- 6) Village workshops on Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forestdwellers (Recognition of Rights) Act implementation.

The work done was as follows -

1. The issuance of identity cards is continuing. This work has picked up pace in the newer villages. Four hundred and seventyfive people have become new card carrying members of the organisation. They are from the villages of Baldala, Kharkua, Ambari, Rordha and Malwai. These are the villages which have borne the maximum brunt of the silicosis affliction due to work in the quartz crushing factories of Godhra in Gujarat.
2. A one day seminar of educated youth was held on 7th May 2008 to discuss the various issues relating to the migrant workers. A critical study was done of the ISMW Act and it was concluded that it needs to be amended to deal with the new situation in which workers migrate on their own without the help of a contractor to the destination areas and seek employment there. The lack of proper institutional support in case of occupational hazards leading to disability or death was focused on.
3. Some interventions were made in cases where migrants had died in Gujarat as follows -
 - a. Chamaria s/o Esria of Darkali village died by falling from a multistoreyed building in Surat. The contractor gave his family Rs 30000 and sent them home with his dead body. The KMCS intervened and suggested filing of a case in the court. This led to the contractor paying another Rs 20000 to the family and the latter decided not to press for a legal case thinking that it would involve much trouble.
 - b. Jhinla s/o Nandubhai of Kundwat village aged 25 years died when he fell from a building in Amreli. His family did not receive any compensation apart from money to bring his deadbody home. An RTI application was filed with the Amreli Police Station for details regarding the case. The Police Officer in Charge sent

copies of the case papers. These have now been forwarded to the Ahmedabad office of PCLRA for further action.

- c. Indersingh s/o Gelsingh of Darkali village fell from a building under construction in Silvassa and died. His family was given Rs 25000 by the contractor and sent home with the dead body. Once again KMCS intervened and this resulted in another Rs 25000 being paid to the family by the contractor.
4. The detailed consumer expenditure and income survey of twentyfive households is being conducted. The survey has been completed and data entry is going on. The aim of this survey is to concretely establish the dependence of the migrants on their migrant income and the extent to which they get subsidies from and pay taxes to the government.
5. A two day workshop was held in the village of Burgaon on 16th and 17th of June 2008 to decide on the course of action regarding the administration's non-performance with regard to the implementation of The Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Rights) Act. Over the past few months a series of RTI applications had been filed with the panchayats, the Subdivisional Level Committee and the District Level Committee which had all established that the procedures laid down in the Act and the Rules had not been followed in either accepting or rejecting the applications and so the whole process was violative of the Act. It has been decided to file a comprehensive appeal against this to the State Level Committee and if that too does not improve matters then to file a petition in the High Court.
6. The work of the organisation has now expanded to all the tehsils of Alirajpur district. There are clear violations of the ISMW Act, the Forest Rights Act, PESA and NREGA in all the new areas. Thus a campaign is being run to mobilise people to demand their rights under these acts. The a rally cum demonstration was organised on August 9th 2008 in Alirajpur as that is the International Indigenous Peoples Day.
7. Tribal Women's Empowerment through MGNREGS - "Our men were habitually into looting and murdering each other till we women decided to do something about it. We went and spoke to Retli Ajnaria, the activist of the organisation and she said that there was a new government scheme for work that could keep everybody busy and satisfied", said Jashmabai, a Bhilala tribal woman of Darkali village in Bardala panchayat of Alirajpur district of Madhya Pradesh when asked about how they had all suddenly decided to initiate the building of a large earthen dam in their village. Darkali village is typical of the Alirajpur area where the land is of low soil depth and quality without irrigation and fragmentation of landholdings so that most tribal families are not able to make ends meet. The area has a surfeit of Mahua trees and Toddy palms which provide the men with ample liquor. Thus poverty and alcohol form a lethal cocktail that manifests

itself in crime and violence. The women are the worst sufferers but till recently there was very little they could do about it. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has now provided the hitherto hapless women of Alirajpur with a "weapon of the weak" against both economic marginalisation and patriarchal oppression. The greatest advantage of the MGNREGS is that any group of jobcard holders can prepare a scheme of work and present a demand for that scheme of work to be implemented to the Panchayat. If the Panchayat does not accept this application then the applicants can go to the Janpad Panchayat office and deposit the application there and take a receipt. After this it becomes mandatory for the work to be started within fifteen days and a total of 100 days of work has to be provided to each of the applicants at the daily wage rate of Rs 100. Moreover, the stress in the guidelines of the scheme is on the employment of women in works that contribute to the augmentation of the natural resource base. The organisation which is a trade union of tribal peasants and workers has actively mobilised people in Alirajpur district to demand work over the past two three years ever since the MGNREGS implementation began. Retli Ajnaria who gave up her job as an Anganwadi worker under the Integrated Child Development Scheme of the Government so as to work full time as an activist of the organisation has made special efforts to mobilise women to demand work under MGNREGS. Initially before this admirable scheme came into force Retli would devote her energies to organising women in Self Help Groups of ten or twelve women and introducing them to the habit of small savings and linked micro-credit from banks. However, given the extreme poverty of tribal households this is not a very effective solution to the problems of poverty and patriarchal oppression. Thus when the MGNREGS was launched Retli became very active in its implementation because as she says, "This scheme allows women to apply for work in a group of their own and then the payments are made directly into their bank accounts. With one stroke women get work that they want and also the money without any intermediaries. This gives them a tremendous feeling of power". The creation of water and soil conservation structures has resulted in higher agricultural productivity and also more work for the men and women in agriculture apart from the work of MGNREGS itself as Gamti bai of Darkali village says, "In our village the biggest advantage has been that our men have now got work to occupy themselves with and they are not fighting and looting each other. Only last year there was a major murderous fight between two groups in our village and many men from both groups got seriously injured and landed up in jail. But now they are all working together happily on the same earthen dam". The path to this relatively hunky dory situation that prevails now has, however, been a difficult one. Says Retli, "The Sarpanches and the Panchayat secretaries actively dissuade people from making applications as this makes them responsible for opening work schemes. In one case in village Anjanwara we have managed to get the mandated unemployment allowances payed to the applicants because no work scheme was opened despite several reminders." Jashmabai of Darkali says, "The

Sarpanch Ugarsingh refused to take our application for work as did the Panchayat secretary Chandarsingh and then with Retlibai we had to go to the Janpad office and file our application there." Even after the work was sanctioned by the Janpad CEO the Sarpanch refused to initiate the work. Then Retli went to the work site with the women and started the work herself carrying the dug soil on her head along with the other workers. After three days of working like this the Sarpanch had to bow down to the wishes of the women. Now everything is proceeding smoothly as two instalments of payment have already been made into the bank accounts of the workers. Retli has even succeeded in getting the provision for creches for women workers' children implemented in the Darkali work. Two women workers are paid to look after the children of the other women workers. Rural development works have long been a casualty of corruption as funds are regularly siphoned off at various levels by the bureaucrats and politicians. The MGNREGS with its stringent checks and direct payments into the bank accounts of the workers provides an opportunity to the poor and especially the women to bring about genuine development. However, the corrupt politicians and bureaucrats are reluctant to implement it and try their level best to sabotage the scheme in many ingenious ways. Since the stipulation is that a minimum of 60% of the funds have to be spent on wage payments there is a tendency to sanction projects that have 40% material components like road making and building construction and more labour intensive natural resource management works are generally discouraged. The evaluation of the work done is also delayed by the sub-engineers in order to extort money. In many cases the work is under evaluated leading to lesser payments. Thus, what is of utmost importance is that there should be good civil society organisations like the organisation motivating the poor and especially the women to demand work under the MGNREGS for regenerating the natural resource base and improving agriculture and also ensuring that their demands were being met in accordance with the provisions of the scheme.