



Community vegetable cultivation by a SHG

National Panchayati Raj Day Celebration
At- Konabira, Block- Komana



Linking Swaraj and Sustainable Development

**Protecting Livelihoods,
Promoting Self Reliance**

**Efforts of Sahbhagi
Vikash Abhiyan in
Kalahandi Region**

● Bharat Dogra





Bhaja Sabar and his wife Savitri Sabar of village Reng in their vegetable field

Haladhar Majhi with Wife Dasse Majhi with their child in their Orchard, village Haldikhol



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• Bharat Dogra

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Linking Swaraj and Sustainable Development

One of the most important priorities in India is to protect and promote the sustainable livelihoods of small farmers. This can even be called the most important challenge of our economy, as well as the economy of South Asia and many other developing countries. Agriculture is the most important livelihood in India and the overwhelming majority of farmers are small farmers. On the one hand there is the question of their sustainable economic well-being based on ecologically protective farm practices which protect the basic resource base including soil, water, seeds, biodiversity and knowledge. On the other hand there is the related question of the sustainable production of adequate, nutritious and healthy food for all.

While several groups have been working on various important aspects of these issues, one group which stands out due to its down-to-earth understanding of the problems of farmers and efforts for solving these problems based on enthusiastic involvement of farmers is S.V.A. (Sahabagi Vikash Abhiyan). The fact that this work is based in and around the sensitive Kalahandi region (West Odisha) and touches the lives of several tribal communities (apart from dalit and other communities) further increases the significance of the efforts of the S.V.A.

Taking an integrated approach to many sided problems of farmers the recent work of SVA has included diverse issues like proper implementation of forest rights legislation, improving income of non-timber forest produce gatherers, access to safe drinking water, promoting self-help groups and cottage enterprises including agro-processing, publication of development literature, strengthening panchayat raj with em-

phasis on 'gram swaraj' approach. However in the middle of many commitments, the one overwhelming urge of the SVA has been for strengthening the sustainable livelihoods of small farmers.

SVA (Campaign for Participatory Development) started as a collective of several concerned individuals and community based organisations in the year 1993-94. This network of community organisations has grown steadily with increasing members, most of whom are small and marginal farmers, also middle-level farmers, farm workers, tribals and dalits, OBCs etc. - on the whole linked more to the weaker sections.

However the activism of many of SVA's leading members (including its founder President Jagadish Pradhan) goes back to much earlier days than its formal formation. They had been active in many struggles and campaigns on behalf of farmers, forest produce collectors and other villagers. Jagadish Pradhan in particular had emerged as a community leader capable of in-depth understanding and effective articulation of the needs of these communities.

At a very early age, in his twenties, he had been involved in grassroots struggles and challenges of this area as a student, political activist and then as a field officer of OXFAM. He could clearly see that the problems of his home-region were either (initially) neglected, or else carelessly misrepresented. The result was that while people suffered from genuine problems, these were frequently diagnosed/represented wrongly and so the solutions based on wrong diagnosis were also highly distorted ones.

For example, it was frequently highlighted that the problems here were related to the area being very drought-prone, while the reality was that in most places water in this region

(in and around Kalahandi) was available at a depth of just six feet or so, and the average rainfall was on the whole not less than that of Orissa. At the same time, there were genuine problems. Due to the neglect of the rich traditional irrigation system, during the last fifty years or so, the area under irrigation in a substantial part of the region had gone down from 48% to about 11% or so.

This decline of traditional irrigation, increasing exploitation by traders and moneylenders, denial of remunerative price to farmers and forest produce gatherers, denial of minimum wages and rapid spread of liquor vends created extreme hardships for many people. Poor accessibility meant that distressed villagers could not get timely help in times of adversities, including adverse weather conditions.

Close Links With People and Community Organisations

SVA works in parts of 4 districts of Odisha (Kalahandi, Nuapada, Bolangir, Bargarh), covering a total population of about 15 lakh people and having direct links with about 16000 households. These include members of its various co-operatives, self-help groups, farmers' clubs, producer companies, Udyan Vikas Samitis (Orchard Development Committee) etc.

Self-help groups of women have made an important contribution to economic security and reducing dependence on usurious moneylenders. These groups have contributed to increasing income by taking up activities like agro-processing, small shops, vegetable vending etc. Several self-help groups have been linked further to bigger cooperatives. Producer companies have been set up to take on more commercial work such as processing and marketing of spices.

So problems were real enough but had to be diagnosed carefully to find out actual causes and effective solutions. This is where the administration seemed to be stumbling and at one stage an action plan prepared after much consultation appeared to be neglecting most crucial issues like sustainable livelihoods of small farmers. At another level there were proposals for giving away huge access of land to big corporates.

At this stage Jagadish Pradhan played an important role in challenging some myths and presenting an alternative vision for people-based development of Kalahandi region in a much-discussed paper titled 'Drought in Kalahandi - The Real Story' published in the Economic and Political Weekly, May 29 1993. A more detailed version was also circulated widely. Specific issues like depletion of traditional irrigation and cottage industries were highlighted, and it was explained how expensive recent interventions had failed to make up for these losses. Specific alternative lines of action were suggested.

In the context of irrigation, this paper stated, "A rough estimate shows that to develop micro watersheds in the non irrigated areas of Kalahandi, to provide protective irrigation to about 80 percent of the cultivated land in the district, an amount of Rs. 5000 million will be required which is about half the cost of the Indravati Irrigation Project. This can be spent over a period of 10 years. This will also create additional employment for 3 lakh people every year. Food production can be multiplied by four or five times and the returns will be enormous."

A great asset of this approach was that it emphasised not just the problems but also the potential. The emphasis on the potential and specific suggestions and alternatives which

appeared credible brought a new sense of hope. Some senior officials who were themselves uncomfortable with the unrealistic plans prepared earlier by distant researchers found more truth and hope in Jagadish Pradhan's ideas even though these had no official backing. Jagadish Pradhan did not just plead for more resources for the region and its vulnerable people, he also argued how the available funds could be put to much better use.

Above all, Pradhan placed more emphasis on the capabilities and potential of the people themselves. He and the SVA emphasised again and again that the real solution above anything else is for the people of villages to get united and play a more active and stronger role with unity in making the best use of natural resources to improve their livelihoods, income and also social structure, in a sustainable way and with dignity. This of course included many ecologically protective tasks from protecting forests to water sources to soil fertility. Improvement of resource base has to be accompanied by assertion of the rights of rural communities to plan and make the best possible use of these resources for their welfare. All this was possible only if the villagers reduced needless dependency and rural communities became more self-reliant, meeting more of their needs from their own resources and efforts, in line with the Gandhian concept of 'gram swaraj'. In fact 'gram swaraj' became more and more the defining slogan of SVA which was also linked to the genuine strengthening of Panchayati Raj.

But these ideas of course clashed with the views of some senior officials who did not like any questioning of some of the corruption ridden government programmes. So one collector in particular tried his best for extradition of Pradhan from the main area of his work, although he didn't succeed.

Several other activists faced beatings and arrests. Despite this, many campaigns of Jagadish Pradhan and the SVA started finding more backers and were also successful.

For example they initiated a strong campaign to end monopoly rights of a leading trader for several types of non-timber forest produce. Due to monopoly rights obtained in dubious ways from the government, this trader was able to earn massive profits while forest produce gatherers (most of them tribals) got very low rates. Pradhan with other activists not only campaigned against this, but exposed how the trader was depriving the government of royalty. When the media also took up this issue in a big way, the government cancelled the monopoly rights of the trader so that the forest produce gatherers were now able to get substantially higher rates by selling their forest produce to other buyers.

Farmers were unable to get better rates for their produce due to unjustified restrictions placed on inter-district movement of food grains. Another well-argued campaign resulted in the removal of these restrictions, leading to higher rates for the farmers.

Paddy farmers felt the need for small-scale rice-mills nearer to their home, so that they could be saved from the harassment and exploitation of processing their produce in big mills located far away. However such smaller mills could not be set in the village due to highly time-taking, bureaucratic and corruption-ridden procedures for obtaining a licence for setting up a new rice-mill.

After struggling for quite some time with the existing procedures, Pradhan took the issue to a veteran Gandhian leader Manmohan Chaudhary who in turn approached public spirited lawyers to explore the possibilities of a PIL in this

matter. Finally legal orders could be obtained to make the setting up of rice mills much easier. This had all-India impact to improve possibilities of small scale rice mills set up by village entrepreneurs and groups. SVA made use of the new possibilities to set up several cottage scale rice mills in villages. This makes rice milling much easier for paddy farmers, and in addition they are also able to get the rice bran for use as cattle feed.

Such campaigns which were taken up usually without any significant financial support were able to bring relief worth tens of crores to farmers, forest-produce gatherers and other villagers. But an even bigger achievement has been made by the most sustained campaign of SVA for self-reliant, low-cost, ecologically protective and organic agriculture. Considering the intensive work of Pradhan with the farmers and the down-troddens as well as his understanding of the issues concerned with the agriculture sector in India the union Government nominated him to be one of the members in the eight member National Farmer Commission.

It is now well-recognised that even in the so-called most successful 'green-revolution' states like Punjab, the spread of HYVs dependent on high doses of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and weedicides had many adverse long-term impacts, leading to serious health and pollution problems as well as very high costs and indebtedness for farmers. Closer to Odisha, in parts of Andhra Pradesh where heavy reliance was placed on chemical pesticides and other agri-chemicals, sharp rise in economic tensions, indebtedness and suicides among farmers was reported widely.

SVA repeatedly gave a timely warning against such chemical-intensive, polluting, hazardous and expensive tech-

nologies which also made farmers highly dependent on purchasing seeds and other inputs. However, it is not enough just to give a warning against what not to do. Farmers also need to know what alternatives they have for increasing productivity and income as like other sections of society their cash needs are also increasing.

It is here that the SVA has made its most important contribution of constantly engaging in, experimenting with, evolving and extending those farming patterns, methods and technologies which can increase productivity and income in ways which are low-cost, ecologically protective and self-reliant, as close to the concept of gram swaraj as is possible in these times. The practices recommended by the SVA are suitable for small farmers as these don't demand high cash investment (which the small farmers cannot provide) but require careful cultivation (which the small cultivator can provide).

One of the important aspects of this technology is to combine the cultivation of cereals, millets, legumes, vegetables, fruits and spices with animal husbandry (with special emphasis on cows and bullocks) in such a way that various parts can be complementary and supportive to each other. It is common for 2 to 3 acre farmers using this technology to grow over 20 mixed and diverse food crops within a single cropping year. Some of them grow over 30 food crops.

Attempts are made all the time to improve the mutually supportive role of various crops. A cereal crop is likely to be followed by a legume crop. Turmeric and ginger are likely to be grown under the shade of mango trees to avoid exposure to excessive heat.

Secondly, attempts are made to improve storage practices (particularly for onions) so that a better price can be

obtained at a later date and damage to crop can be avoided.

Thirdly, attempts are made to add value by providing increasing facilities for agro-processing such as small and cottage-scale rice mills, cottage-scale locally fabricated improved oilmills and grinders. Extensive facilities for marketing of spices like coriander, chilly and turmeric have been created including packaging under the brand name of gram swaraj. Now that mango trees are coming up fast in many villages of SVA's work, at an early stage preparations are being made for processing of mango such as pickle, juice, jam etc. These efforts help to improve returns of farmers while also providing good quality, ready to use products to local people based on organic produce.

Food crops are emphasised in the cropping pattern helping to improve the nutrition of rural households. There is a clear improvement in nutrition (particularly with the availability of many types of vegetables) in these households which have followed the SVA pattern.

As organic crops are highly prioritised, there is much greater availability of organic food both in rural households and in the local markets. Farmers growing organic products say that retail customers as well as traders are eager to buy their organic produce and it can be sold very quickly.

Traditional seed varieties are valued and prioritised. SVA conducted and published a study on traditional rice varieties in Bolangir in 1998. This study listed 112 traditional varieties and 13 improved and high yielding varieties cultivated by the farmers of Nuapada, Kalahandi and Bolangir districts. Attempts to collect improved seeds based on selection method and establish seed banks are encouraged.

Farming methods which minimise purchased inputs are

prioritised so that farming costs can be kept very low. Hence chances of indebtedness are reduced. Some expenses can not be avoided (such as in the case of borewells) but attempts are made to make good use of existing government schemes to reduce expenses for farmers as much as possible. At present a programme supported by NABARD and implemented by SVA has helped many small farmers to reduce expenses of irrigation, soil-conservation, fencing and pit-digging significantly.

The important contribution of women farmers is respected and encouraged.

Efforts are made to avoid over exploitation of water by emphasising water-harvesting and construction and deepening of tanks alongside wells including tubewells.

Improvement of soil quality is given very high importance. Composting and vermicomposting are emphasised again and again. Farmers are encouraged to start or increase composting well in time to meet likely future needs. They are encouraged to be self-sufficient and in villages with excess bio-mass even surplus in meeting manure needs.

Farm animals particularly cows and bullocks are emphasised, alongside sheep, goats and ducks where suitable. Poultry birds are not suitable everywhere particularly in farms where many vegetables are grown. Instead ducks are favoured here. SVA has played an important role to conserve and popularize the famous Khariar breed cattles in the region.

The overall approach is optimistic, assertive and innovative 'can do' approach. This is reflected in many fields considered barren being turned into highly productive fields. This includes SVA's own small campus in Belanjore village. At a time when government experts ruled out mango orchards in

certain areas, SVA could successfully demonstrate their luxuriant growth. SVA and related organisations were also pioneers in introducing SRI technology in Odisha which has helped to improve rice productivity significantly in many villages of its work area.

Combination of all these factors has enabled SVA to provide very good results within a short time of less than 2 years of WADI Project taken up with the support of NABARD in Sinapali block. This project has emphasised mango and lemon orchards with vegetable farming, but integration of this with other assets of SVA approach has proved very useful. In the first two years itself nearly 600 acres of fallow land and wasteland could be used for growing diverse crops. Now after soil conservation measures and advent (or planned advent) of irrigation farmers here feel that some of the most degraded and neglected land of the area can turn into highly productive land. Many of the beneficiaries have built temporary thatched houses in their WADI plots so that they can spend more time here. Already there is better income and nutrition in these households with hope of this increasing significantly with the fruiting of mango trees.

SVA and its members made very strong efforts under the Forest Rights Act to ensure justice to tribals. The result of their hardwork was that most of the claims of tribals in the work area of SVA were accepted. Hence their land rights and livelihood security have been improved significantly.

In this work as well as village planning work SVA was helped to a significant extent by special grants received from the Prime Minister's Office when Sh. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister. This helped the SVA also to take up very detailed village planning work with the involvement of rural

communities. These village plans include all the essential details of the socio-economic profile of village, a careful listing of problems, resources as well as possible solutions, all of this based on extensive consultations with villagers. Nearly 500 such detailed plans have been prepared in Kalahandi, Balangir, Nuapada and Bargarh districts during 2003 to 2008.

This has added greatly to the knowledge base which is so essential to take forward the various ideas and programmes of gram swaraj and strengthening of panchayat raj. SVA has also deliberated in detail on possible reforms of Panchayati raj resulting in an important document called A Proposal for Reorganisation of Gram Panchayats in Odisha. Some of its proposals like panchayats at the village level (instead of grouping together some villages) have been widely appreciated (even at the government level) and it is hoped that it'll be more possible to organise gram sabha meetings effectively in the smaller panchayats.

SVA has been regularly bringing out such publications on various important aspects of agricultural and rural development, environment, governance and mobilisation of rural communities including newsletters, journals and booklets. These have played an important role in focusing public attention on several important issues and inspiring more people with several success stories and achievements of ordinary people. In addition Pradhan has written extensively in newspapers on these issues.



Need-based Initiatives and Linkages

Apart from the more regular activities of SVA relating to sustainable livelihoods of people, SVA has also been involved with several initiatives taken in response to emerging urgent needs.

SVA's close contacts with people and their problems made it aware of emerging serious health problems due to the presence of high levels of fluorides in water in many villages. SVA initiated an extensive campaign for drawing attention to this problem and pressurising the administration to take remedial action. This campaign created greater awareness of this problem, and it is hoped that this will lead further to more effective remedial action on an urgent basis.

Responding to other state-level needs the SVA has been involved also in activities relating to communal harmony and mobilisation of voluntary organisations on this issue. It has also been involved in wider activities relating to disaster mitigation and relief, in the context of droughts, cyclones and other disasters.

For state level mobilisation of voluntary organisations, Jagadish Pradhan has played a leadership role for several years in creating and maintaining important linkages and networks.

Case-Studies of Model Farmers

1. Suresh Mallick and Shobhavati Mallick (village Chhata, Komna block)

In India the number of farmers who've just about two acres of land is very large. If even such a small plot of land can be used in such innovative ways as to provide adequate income, then this is a matter of great hope indeed.

This hope increases further if such success is achieved on farmland which earlier was known to be low yielding or infertile. In the case of Suresh Mallick and his wife Shobhavati, this success is even more remarkable as this has been achieved on what was earlier considered to be the lowest category land on which hardly anything was likely to grow. Today this land once considered barren is smiling on almost every inch with greenery brought by highly diverse plant species. This is surely a message of great hope for the country's agriculture.

The harbinger of this great hope in a short, slightly built but very alert and innovative farmer named Suresh who has been exposed to many adversities and injustices in life. These adversities and injustices could've broken the spirit of any other man, but not Suresh. He has emerged from these injustices to become a symbol of hope for India's small farmers.

Earlier Suresh had an opportunity to be a Gandhian social activist working with senior Gandhian leaders like Narayan Desai and Manmohan Chaudhary. Perhaps it was the spirit of optimism and working for a wider social cause which he imbibed from here which later enabled him to overcome many adverse situations.

Suresh has a very innovative mind which could think of many brilliant applications of the technology of organic farming propagated by the SVA, the organisation with whom he is closely associated now as a leading member of its farmers' club in Chata village (Naupara district). He has also been helped by the considerable grafting skills he acquired in the course of his earlier training in Gujarat. At the same time he gives equal credit to his wife Shobhavati who works equally hard with him on their farm.

Suresh believes firmly in organic agriculture. This is an essential principle of this farm which also helps to reduce the farming costs. A lot of attention is given to preparing adequate compost, vermi-compost and organic sprays which help to keep away pests and diseases while also helping growth of plants. The use of plentiful, high quality composts has made the once unproductive land so fertile now.

Suresh places a lot of emphasis on growing a very wide diversity of food crops and plants including cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits and spices. As all these have to be grown within a small plot of land, a lot of emphasis is given to making the best possible use of scarce land and water. Ginger and turmeric are grown under the shadow of mango trees to protect them from heat stress and also make good use of available space.

On their two acres Suresh and Shobhavati have been able to grow paddy, pulses, mangoes, oranges, bananas, papayas, coconut, lemons, jackfruit, anjli, beans, bitter gourd, carrots, sugarbeet, onions, turmeric, ginger, chilly, coriander, supari, pomegranates and other crops.

Mangoes and lemons will soon be in plentiful supply

as many mango and lemon trees have been planted in recent times.

Suresh is an expert grafter, and his grafting skills are very evident in his farm. Grafting has been used to improve the strength and yield of mango trees.

2. Bhaja Sabar and Savitri Sabar (Reng village, Komna block, Nuapara district)

Bhaja and Savitri cultivate their 4-acre farm on the outskirts of the village in such a productive way that it not only provides highly nourishing and healthy food to the 5-member family but also fetches a net income of over Rs. 15000 a month.

Earlier Bhaja and Savitri used some agri-chemicals but now they've shifted entirely to organic farming on their farm. As Savitri says, "Organic food is definitely more tasty and also more healthy. There is more demand for organically grown produce."

Organic farming has enabled this Sabar household to reduce its costs. They make compost and pest repellent liquid on their farm using largely the resources available free on their farm or in the village.

Another reason of the improvement of their net income is the diversity of crops and animals on their small farm. On their 4-acre farm this Sabar (tribal) family grows paddy, moong (a pulse), onion, tomatoes, sugarcane, pumpkin, maize, coriander, blackberries, lemons, mangoes, tamarind, papaya, bamboo, subabool (for fodder), radish, beans, belfruit, aamla, bananas, mustard, turmeric, local green leafy vegetables and several other produces. This farm gets dry fruit from chiraunji, oil from karanj oilseed (also from mahuwa seeds), medicine

from bahera and other plants and toothbrush from babool trees. They have 3 cows, 2 bullocks and 2 calves.

Introduction of S.R.I. technology for paddy cultivation has helped to improve yields.

Irrigation is available from well as well as a farm pond.

Bhaja has been an active and respected member of the farmers' club associated with SVA.

While both husband and wife work very hard on their field, Bhaja says that his wife Savitri's contribution is even higher than his contribution in making this such a productive farm. "She works even more than I do", he says with respect.

They've four daughters among whom one is married. They used their improved earnings to provide good education to their daughters, one of whom is in college in a graduation course.

However excessive spending on daughters' weddings is still a problem that can be and should be avoided. This expense forced even the sabars to borrow from their relatives at the time of their daughter's wedding.

3. Habelal Majhi and Hemlata Majhi (Haldikhol village, Sinapali block, District Nuapara)

They have one plot of land in the village interior and another one on the outskirts - about 3.5 acres - on which they are growing more vegetables and fruits. Many mango trees have been planted in this plot recently and they hope to start getting fruits from next year.

Hemlata is the main farmer as well as the manager of the small farm. Her in-laws help mainly with marketing of vegetables while Habelal is more of a social worker, as he is very

active with the farmers' clubs and other activities of SVA.

Hemlata says that now she is fully following organic agriculture. No chemical fertilizer and pesticide is used on this farm, she says. Compost and organic pest-repellents are prepared on the farm.

This farm has many diverse activities in a small piece of land (3.5 acres) including over 100 poultry birds, 4 bullocks, 2 cows, 6 sheep, mango and lemon orchard, banana and guava trees. This year many vegetables have been grown including cauliflower, beans, okra, bitter gourd and local green leafy vegetables. Onions are grown on a larger scale, and coriander to a lesser extent.

Hemlata says that she grew cauliflower on just five decimals of land (one-twentieth of an acre) and cauliflower worth Rs. 33000 was marketed within 3 months or so.

She says that organically grown vegetables are more tasty and nourishing. She says that she can testify to this by comparing the vegetables grown on her field with those grown in her mother's home using chemicals.

4. Santosh Majhi and Sano Majhi (Haldikhol village, Sinapali Block, Nuapara district)

Santosh Majhi, a tribal farmer, cultivates about 5 acres of land, including some land settled recently under the Forest Rights Act. Apart from cultivating paddy and millets, he has taken up horticulture in a big way in recent times, thanks to the help received from the SVA under a NABARD supported project. He has planted 42 mango trees. In addition he has taken to growing vegetables in a big way. During recent months he has grown beans, radish, brinjals, onions and green vegetables. In addition he is growing spice crops like turmeric,

chilli and coriander.

He is devoted to organic farming. He prepares compost, vermi-compost and organic pest repellent on his fields.

He says both he and his wife equally work hard. His elder son is good at ploughing. When we meet his son he is wearing jeans and a t-shirt with a message 'Get in tune - Art is a form of Catharsis'. Despite wearing city clothes, he is skilled in ploughing work and helps his father.

Santosh is enthusiastic about the new opportunities arising as a result of the work of SVA. Like several other farmers in the village, he now spends a lot of his time in the outskirts of the village where once barren or poor-yielding land has been improved by soil-conservation work and irrigation. Santosh gets irrigation from a borewell. All this has given him a new optimism and he is keen to work hard to improve his family.

5. Haldhar Majhi and Dasse Majhi (Haldikhol village, Sinapali block, Nuapara district)

Earlier agriculture opportunities were very limited for Haldhar in his native village. So after growing some paddy and millets in the rainy season he and his wife Dasse used to migrate, mostly to brick-kilns near Hyderabad. Their life was very hard. "We often had to work till 12 in the night," says Dasse.

Now this drudgery of migrant labour appears to be over as Haldhar and Dasse have more opportunities of growing vegetables and fruits on their fields, thanks to the initiatives supported by a recent project of NABARD.

The terms of this project are very favourable as he gets

help for land development and horticultural activities. A strong fence could be created and soil erosion work was taken up. Encouraged by this Haldhar has grown okra, chillies, brinjals, beans, tomatoes and green leafy vegetables, apart from planting 45 mango trees and 12 lemon trees. He prepares compost and vermicompost on his land and uses organic methods of cultivation.

He has been able to grow and sell significant quantities of onions as well as onion seedling recently. In addition he gets some income from mahua and chiraunji trees in his farm.

However the irrigation available from a well is still very limited and so some brinjal plants have dried up.

Nevertheless his overall livelihood conditions have improved significantly and Haldhar as well as Dasse have many hopes for the future. Both wages received under NABARD's Wadi project and sale of farm produce have enabled them to avoid migration this year and pay full attention to improving their own farming. Their two children are now able to attend school regularly.



Case-Studies of Villages

1. Haldikhol village, Sinapali block, Nuapara district

Haldikhol village is a remarkable example of a village which is rapidly reducing its dependence on forced migrant labour due to increasing prospects and hope for improving land and farming based livelihoods within the village.

Earlier many families were forced to migrate for toiling

in brick kilns where they often worked till near midnight. Now they have opportunities of devoting their hard work for improving their own village and their own village based livelihoods on a sustainable basis.

The improved farming and even higher hopes for future have been brought to a significant extent by the encouragement of people's initiatives received from SVA. This organisation has helped farmers to realise their immense potential.

Two opportunities further helped to strengthen this helping hand of SVA. The first opportunity was provided by special assistance provided to SVA by the Prime Minister's office when Sh. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister. Thanks to this, the SVA was able to obtain the help of more activists to prepare village level micro plans with the participation of villagers. In this village as well as in other villages, these plans as well as the planning process, discussions which took place in the many group meetings organised for this purpose, helped the villagers to improve their common understanding of the potential which existed for improving their sustainable livelihoods by tapping the many possibilities that existed in and around their villages.

Secondly, new hope appeared in the form of project support given to SVA by NABARD. This project called 'WADI' was based mainly on horticultural developmental. As a part of this villagers got a lot of help to improve their land, take up soil-erosion and land-levelling work, increase their irrigation and above all prepare the base for many sided improvements in horticulture and agriculture.

As a lot of land considered barren and unproductive

now started becoming productive and there were increasing opportunities for horticulture, villagers became very enthusiastic about improving their farming. They started devoting more and more time to their fields to improve them and to protect them from wild animals.

Their hard work, creativity and enthusiasm as well as the extensive support given by the SVA has led to significant improvements in income and production in a short time. Many farmers have been able to make significant increase in income by selling vegetables. This is likely to increase further when mango trees start yielding fruit, hopefully next year.

The SVA and its volunteers also worked hard for the settlement of claims under the Forest Right Act so that many tribal farmers in this and neighbouring villages have been able to get secure rights over their land, thereby also improving their dedication to improving this land and making it more productive.

The SVA has also provided an onion storage facility to this village so that farmers can store their onion crop for some time and obtain a better price.

The SVA has also provided this village with cottage scale agro-processing units in the form of a small rice-mill, Maize Sheller, Oil expeller and other implements.

It has also started planning for setting up a mango-processing unit so that the expected mango harvest can be used for value added farm products like pickles, jams and juice.

SVA has taken care to spread organic farming. As a result many farmers have turned entirely towards organic farming in recent times.

2. Chatta village, Komna block, Nuapara district

This village (population about 1700) has about 300 households. About 40 percent are tribals, 30 percent are dalit households and the remaining 30 percent are OBCs. This village was earlier known more for poverty and migration, but in recent years all this has been reduced to a considerable extent (although some migration still continues due to the lump sum payment at the beginning of the work-period which helps villagers to meet some urgent expenditure). This improvement has taken place to a considerable extent due to the activities of the SVA, the farmers' club and self-help groups associated with this organisation as well as sister organisations like Banabashi Sangha and Sarvodaya Relief committee had also been active in this village.

SVA has emphasised organic agriculture with preparation of compost, vermi-compost and organic pest-repellent sprays in the village. This has helped many villagers to obtain healthier food while also reducing costs.

Villagers feel strongly that earlier chemical-based agriculture led to worsening of health problems in their village. There were 10 paralysis cases in the village within two years or so. Other health problems also increased. Villagers feel that shift to organic farming and food will help them gradually to improve health and nutrition.

Enterprising farmers like Trilochan Kanta have taken up new activity like pigeon farming and he has also won several awards in farming and competitions and fairs for his high quality vegetables. His real show-piece is a pomegranate farm grown in green-house conditions subsidised by the horticulture department of the state government. However other vil-

lagers feel that this is an unnecessarily expensive technology and the SVA instead emphasises low-cost and self-reliant farming methods which are also environmentally protective.

Village women are also enthusiastic participants in the many-sided development activities of SVA including self-help groups and cooperatives. It is also encouraging to see that villagers are helpful and supportive towards more vulnerable families. Panamati was deserted by her husband and later also became partially disabled due to some disease. However due to the help and encouragement she gets from other villagers, she has been able to overcome several problems.

There are several farms in the village which are good examples of low-cost, organic, mixed farming practices leading to high productivity and income using environmentally protective and sustainable methods. The farm of Suresh Mallick and Shobhavati Mallick is most remarkable from this point of view. Such farms are an eye opener for many villagers regarding the sustainable progress they can make using low-cost methods which even a small farmer can afford.

3. Tarapur Village - No Dependence on Migrant Labour Now

Tarapur village (about 155 households) is located in Boden block of Nuapada district. Till just 5 to 6 years back this village was known for its poverty and dependence on migrant labour. Today this village has several success stories of high productivity, high income agriculture and its dependence on migrant labour has been checked.

The first yearnings of this change came to this village in 2009-10 when activists of SVA entered into an agreement with the villagers to prepare a micro plan. Over 40 meetings

were held over a 15-day period as a part of this process of preparing a micro level plan. This led to a lot of rethinking among the villagers. In the course of these meetings they could realise the importance of concentrating on sustainable agriculture practices as the main long-term solution of solving their problems instead of merely seeking some short-term earnings from migrant labour. Also the potential of agricultural development in the village became apparent to them in the form of the possibilities of tapping the abundant reserves of groundwater as well as utilising the existing government schemes for helping and subsidising farmers.

Soon a farmers' club was formed and 29 farmers deposited the margin money for borewells. With 90 percent of the costs borne by the government, 26 of the 29 borewells proved highly successful. Again going back to the micro plan, farmers realised the benefits of opting for low-cost, self-reliant organic farming methods and worked hard to prepare compost. Many of them adopted the SRI technology for paddy cultivation. Several farmers have also taken up horticulture successfully. From a state of near hopelessness, this village has reached a stage where several initiatives are brimming with hope and confidence.

Contribution of women farmers is well recognised. About half of the members of farmers' clubs are women.

4. Bikrampur's Choice Is Organic Farming

Bikrampur is a village in Khariar block of Nuapada district. Following the organisation of a farmers' club and training as well as exposure visit on organic farming with the support of SVA, this small village has made a firm choice in favour of organic farming. Composting work has been taken up

with a lot of enthusiasm. Bikrampur is also careful about conserving traditional varieties of paddy.

Villagers here are also committed to protect the nearby forest of Chandel hill with its diverse species of valuable trees. A survey conducted by SVA in 2011 revealed that each household in this village on an average is able to earn an annual income of Rs. 7500 from non-timber forest produce collected from the Chandel forest.

A community saving fund has been mobilised to reduce the dependence on moneylenders.

Dependence on migrant labour here also has reduced significantly.

5. Limursinga's Journey From Food-Deficit to Food Surplus

Limursinga village of Narla ago was known a decade back as a food-deficit village. Most of its 120 households belong to weaker sections and had to go out in search of livelihood.

In 2006, SVA took the initiative to organise a farmers' club and prepare a micro level plan with the keen participation of the villagers. This helped to unite the villagers to realise the hidden potential of the village. Thanks to the micro plan they now had specific ideas in mind and also knew how to utilise government schemes to take forward these ideas. One by one three lift irrigation points were taken up to utilise the water of a nearby river for bringing greenery to the village and its fields. Introduction of SRI technology helped further to improve farm productivity and income. Apart from paddy, production of oilseeds, vegetables and pulses has also been taken up. Apart from income, nutrition has also improved significantly.

A distillery was gifting Rs. 20000 to keep down the resistance of villagers, while calculations revealed that Rs. 4 lakh were being drained out of the village economy in a year due to buying liquor from its illegal outlet. Villagers got organised to shut down this liquor outlet and brought peace and savings to the village.

Self-help groups have also been organised to promote savings and check exploitation by moneylenders.

6. Jagannathpali Village - Woman Farmer Shows The Way

Lalita Hans is a farmer of Jagannathpali village of Komna block (Nuapada district). She has made excellent use of a half acre plot near her home to grow a diversity of vegetables. Another patch of one and a half acre of land is used to grow paddy, followed by pulses. The border of this field has been planted by sweetlime, banana, coconut, jackfruit and mango. She has not only provided adequate food for her family but also earned impressive income from her small plot. She has been involved with SVA's farm club and cooperatives.

7. Jhenganadihi village - Learning From Mistakes

When an irrigation project brought water to Jhenganadihi village of Paikual block (Bargarh district), many farmers thought it was a good time to go in for lots of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. But soon they could see adverse impacts on soil fertility and also on their net income. At this stage trainings organised by SVA on organic farming and SRI technology helped several farmers to correct their mistakes before it was too late. Later one of the farmers of this village, Siba Narayan became quite famous for his organic agriculture and higher yields from SRI.

8. Lamsingha - Village Unity Key to Success

Till about 15 years back most people of Lamsingha village (located in Narla block of Kalahandi district) were working on the fields of others in nearby villages. Now they are proudly identified as some of the most successful vegetable cultivators of the area.

One of the main barriers was the animosity between two hamlets of the village. People living here could not work together. In the course of a micro-planning exercise conducted by SVA people could see how united action was most important for realising the development potential of the area. They started working together to get irrigation coverage. One success led to another. The availability of water paved the way for high value vegetable cultivation. Even small plots owned by most villagers became so productive as to make them economically independent, ending their dependance on daily wage labour in other villages. One survey revealed that 280 quintals of vegetables were being sent for sale from this village every week and many farmers were earning Rs. one lakh or more annually from vegetable cultivation.

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Suresh Mallick with wife Sobhabati Mallick village Chhata

Habelal Majhi & Hemalata Majhi with their child
in front of their Vegetable garden, village Haladikhol

