ECOLOGIES OF HOPE & TRANSFORMATION

Post-Development Alternatives from India

Edited by:
Neera Singh, Seema Kulkarni, Neema Pathak Broome

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Ecologies of Hope and Transformation presents initiatives that advance alternative practices that challenge the dominant development paradigm. Engaging with rich experiences across sectors (water, agriculture, forests, ecotourism, and education) and geographies (the Banni grasslands to Bengaluru), this book hopes to advance quest for alternative ways of being that are ecologically sustainable and socially just.

The case studies in this book were written as part of a research and documentation project undertaken by Kalpavriksh, a Pune-based environmental organization. The case studies were written in 2014-2015 and revised in response to the editors' and peer-reviewers' comments in 2016-17. This documentation is part of a larger process called VikalpSangam or 'Alternatives Confluence' (described in detail in Chapter 2). The VikalpSangam process was started with and continues to be driven by the question, 'As the world hurtles towards greater ecological devastation, inequalities, and social conflicts, are there alternative ways of meeting human needs and aspirations, without trashing the earth and without leaving half of humanity behind?'

Through a set of nine case studies, the book seeks to document and make visible different initiatives towards

advancing local wellbeing and practicing'development' differently. After the case studies were written, Kalpavriksh invited Neera Singh, Seema Kulkarni and Neema Pathak Broome as editors for the book-project. In an attempt to understand these emerging alternatives, the editors convened a reflection workshop in August 2016 that included key local actors from the case-study sites, case-study authors, and two peer-reviewers. In this reflection workshop, the participants discussed overarching themes and questions for alternatives discourse and practice.They emphasized that the process of reflection on local initiatives and writing of these case-studies in itself was an important action. As MalikaVirdi from Maati Sangathan put it, "it (the process of documentation)helps us visualise our lives as others perceive them. This helps us reflect (on what we do) better. It also helps politically to place our struggles on the mapand connect with other communities". It is our hope that the documentation of these case studies through this book will help fulfill this expectation to a certain extent. We also hope that this will be inspiring and empowering for others who are engaged in similar struggles and re-visioning of the world, and those who wish to support such endeavours.

This book would not have been possible without the support of many people. First and foremost, our deep gratitude extends to all the local actors, village women and men involved in these alternatives and to those in leadership roles. Thank you for all that you do to make alternate worlds possible.We would particularly like to thank Prayaag Joshi, Sumi Krishna, Joseph Mathai, Priya Ramasubban and MalikaVirdi for their valuable comments before, during and after the reflection workshop. We highly appreciate the commitment of all the case study authors and their patience for working on the case study drafts multiple times. Our thanks to Sucharita Dutta-Asane for language editing the

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Many thanks to Ashish Kothari and Sujatha Padmanabhan, the coordinators of the project, for inviting us to edit this book. Neera Singh wishes to acknowledge comments from Kundan Kumar on drafts of chapter 1. Neema Pathak Broome and Seema Kulkarni want to thank colleagues at Kalpavriksh and SOPPECOM respectively. Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF), Action Aid India and OXFAM-India supported field research for case studies. OXFAM-India also provided funds for the publication of this book. Our thanks extend to these organizations.

Learning with and through each of these case studies has been a very rewarding experience for us. It is our hope that these case studies will inspire and foster discussion on the conditions for emergence of such initiatives and their sustenance. With this hope, we dedicate this book to similar initiatives to create a 'world where many worlds can fit' – around the world.

Neera Singh
Seema Kulkarni
Neema Pathak Broome

God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip off the world bare like locusts.

— Mahatma Gandhi

If some of these answers seem radical or far-fetched today, then I say wait until tomorrow. Soon it will be abundantly clear that it is business as usual that is utopian, whereas creating something very new and different is a practical necessity.

— James Gustave Speth

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Ecologies of Hope and Transformation:
Post-development Alternatives from India

Neera Singh, Seema Kulkarni and Neema Pathak Broome

We live in times characterized by growing socio-ecological and economic crisis. Each day brings new evidence of the planetary crisis that is upon us. Scientists warn that we have already overstepped several planetary boundaries[1] for our safe existence on the planet and are fast approaching others (Rockstrom et al., 2009). We are already on the brink of the sixth mass extinction event (Barnosky et al., 2011, Ceballos et al., 2015) and human action threatens to change the earth's geological structure and climate and make the planet less hospitable for life (Crutzen, 2002). To highlight the geological significance of human actions, there is a move to term the current era the *Anthropocene* (Crutzen, 2006). However, others suggest that it might be more

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1.   Rockrom et al. (2009) outline a set of nine planetary boundaries within which humanity can continue to thrive. They say that four of these boundaries have now been crossed. Of these four — climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land-system change, altered biogeochemical cycles — two (climate change and biosphere integrity) are what the scientists call 'core boundaries'. Significantly altering any of these two core boundaries could drive the Earth System into a new state.

appropriate to term this era the *Capitalocene* (Moore, 2017) or *Industrialocene*, given that not all humans are equally responsible for the current planetary crisis that has been ushered in due to the actions of capitalist economic systems and industrial-era production processes. In these times of ecological crisis and precarity, emancipatory politics is no longer limited to equitable distribution of resources, it now relates to sustenance of life and survival of the majority of the world's population.

The world has shifted in unprecedented ways in the last two decades. The benefits of a modern economy are enjoyed by only a small minority while the costs of this economy will continue to be borne by the majority of the world's population, especially the poor living in the Global South, who have contributed the least to the problem. This conjuncture of ecological and socio-economic crisis is driving home the reality that fossil-fuel based development is not sustainable and that limitless economic growth is no longer feasible in a carbon-constrained world (Meadows et al., 2004). It calls into question not only the dominant ideas of development but also more fundamentally human ways of being and our ways of organizing our political, economic and social lives. Regardless of the name that we choose for this era, it is clear that 'life as we know it' might not continue on earth unless we reconfigure our ways of relating to the world around us. This challenge was aptly summed up by feminist eco-philosopher Val Plumwood (2007: 1), 'If our species does not survive the ecological crisis, it will probably be due to our failure... to work out new ways to live with the earth, to rework ourselves... We will go onwards in a different mode of humanity, or not at all.' The calls for rethinking human ways of being and relating are coming with increasing urgency from various contemporary thinkers and resonate deeply with Mahatma Gandhi's prescient words in the opening epigraph.

Unfortunately, despite these calls for a radical rethinking of our social and economic systems, the global political and development leadership continues to rely on the same notions, tools and institutions that have led to the current situation. For instance, the preamble to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) says: 'We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equity and non-discrimination. A world, in which consumption and production patterns and use of all-natural resources are sustainable. One in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected'. It remains unclear, however, how the existing economic order, and corresponding model of 'economic growth', can achieve these objectives without fundamental transformations in its foundational assumptions, including its dependence on centralized governance, market mechanisms, and utilitarianism..

Scholars, activists, and locally rooted cultures in the Global South have long questioned growth-based models of development and its foundational assumptions. Moreover they have highlighted the inherent violence against women and nature that lies at the centre of the current models of development. Drawing from Rosa Luxemburg's work, Maria Mies (1986) has shown that capital thrives on the exploitation of women (and the poor in the global south) as colonies. Processes of exploitation have only accelerated in recent years and not only are the poor dispossessed of their resources, their bodies and labour is rendered surplus by the modern economy. The hope that modernization and industrialization would lead to dismantling of patriarchy and other forms of oppression has not been realized, rather social inequality, discrimination and violation of human rights have intensified. Feminists and dalit activists in the

Indian context have been at the forefront of challenging growth-based development whose benefits trickle down even less to tribal and dalit women and men. They have specially questioned dominant models of development that rely on community-based interventions without paying sufficient attention to the problems of exclusion within communities.

As an alternative to exploitative growth-based development, Vandana Shiva (2008), in *Soil Not Oil*, has called for a shift from oil-fuelled economies towards economies rooted in the care of soil and nurturance of ecological relations. Similar calls are coming from Indigenous people around the world for example in the often-cited example of the Zapatista vision of a pluriversal world, 'a world in which many worlds can fit' (Escobar, 2015). In fact, Indigenous peoples and subsistence economies around the world offer examples of other-than-capitalist ways of being and are important sources of inspiration for post-capitalist, post-development futures.

Despite the mainstream discourse about the triumph of neo-liberalism, in practice, citizens in different parts of the world are engaged in practices of resistance and creative re-imagination. They are rallying around calls for alternatives and justice for the dispossessed 99 percent and are beginning to articulate local ways of being and explore 'alternatives' to the current model of development. These include the widespread Occupy movements that sought alternatives to the 'There Is No Alternative' discourse and to alienated forms of existence. Prominent among inspiring alternatives are Indigenous visions of 'living well' through a co-flourishing with others expressed through *sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir* in Latin America (Gudynas, 2011); the ideas of inter-dependence expressed as *Ubuntu* in South Africa; the Gandhian vision of development and *swaraj* (self-

rule) or the numerous Indigenous resistance movements in India, and the movement for de-growth in Europe (Kothari, 2014; Kallis and March, 2015). In addition to offering conceptual resources for rethinking development, these movements provide opportunities to learn about the conditions that foster the emergence of such alternatives to the hegemonic development model and other hegemonic powers of social injustice.

This book explores the emergence of such alternatives in various settings in India and illustrates how each of these alternatives offers a different vision for social transformation. Using nine case studies of 'alternatives' to mainstream political and economic systems and destructive development, the book explores how these emergences aspire to meet local needs differently and articulate visions for post-capitalist economic systems. Before turning to these case studies, we would like to briefly talk about the overall context of development in India and how India's marginalized people have fared in the face of India's quest for modernity and development.

India's Story

'India is a nation of million mutinies as has been stated by V.S.Naipaul'. Post-independence, as India's political elite sought to rebuild India into a modern, developed nation, the price was paid by the more marginalized sectors of the population. The Gandhian ideas of *swaraj* and village republics were ignored in preference to the Nehruvian model of state-led and private-capital-supported industrial development, which created India's modern temples in the form of its dams, steel plants, and other infrastructure. Millions of people were displaced from their homes in the effort to modernize India and make way for a form of 'development' whose benefits hardly ever trickled down.

The oft-promised private land reforms did not materialize substantively and the reform of public lands was not even attempted. In the absence of meaningful private and public land reforms, tribals, dalits, rural women, agricultural labourers and marginal peasants who had little access to or rights over land and other natural resources paid the price of state-led development. Tens of millions of people were displaced and dispossessed–the majority comprising adivasis and the rural poor (Fernandes, 2008).

The process of dispossession of the poor continued and indeed has accelerated with the liberalization of India's economy in the 1990s. Private sector investment and foreign direct investment (FDI) replaced the State as the engine of growth. The era of neoliberal development has intensified the unbridled exploitation of natural resources and grabbing of land and other natural resources for private gain.[2] The State has become an enabler of private capital in a process that David Harvey (2004) refers to as 'accumulation by dispossession' – a process that leads to accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few by dispossessing the common people of their land, forests, and other commons with far-reaching detrimental effects on critical life-support systems (Kothari and Srivastava, 2012). In the past few decades, the agricultural sector has been in deep crisis, evidence for which can be found in the hundreds of thousands of farmers committing suicide in the past decade alone (Stephenson, 2014). The Indian State has been largely apathetic to the plight of farmers. These dispossessions have been justified by the promise of

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2. At the time of writing this, a conflict database, landconflictwatch.org, includes more than 470 ongoing conflicts over land and natural resources across India. Almost all of these conflicts are linked to the takeover of land, forests, and other commons by the state or by private capital, and they affect millions of people.

high-growth-rate 'development', the creation of jobs, and a better life for everyone. However, it is fast becoming clear that India's impressive growth rate of 7 percent[3] has been a jobless growth, with jobs growing at barely 1 percent (Thomas, 2014). The beneficiaries of the economic growth are the rich and powerful, while the cost in terms of polluted life support systems, displacement, and the erosion of existing livelihoods is borne by the poor. As a result, India has become one of the most economically unequal countries in the world, with the top 1 percent owning 58 percent of the wealth. Shockingly, the top 57 billionaires in India have the same wealth as the bottom 70 percent of the population of the country[4]. The current model of development promoted by the Indian state and the corporate media has thus failed the vast majority of the Indian people, whose survival and subsistence has been threatened due to the grabbing of their resources and the destruction of ecological life support systems (Kothari and Srivastava, 2012).

None of this has gone uncontested. India's post-colonial history is rich with resistance against development-induced dispossession and displacements. Starting from the Hirakud Dam to the Narmada Struggle to Nandigram, communities have struggled for justice and dignity (Swain, 2013; Parasuraman, 2016). Issues of livelihood, land, and place-based connections have been central to these struggles to defend local ecologies. For peasants, pastoralists, and forest dwellers, ecological issues have been inseparable from issues of livelihood and social justice, spurring 'environmentalism of the poor' (Guha and Alier, 2013). The Chipko movement

3.   At this time of writing this, the economic growth rate is said to have dropped to 5.7%, and even this growth rate is contested.

4.   "Richest 1% own 58% of total wealth in India: Oxfam" http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/Richest-1-own-58-of-total-wealth-in-India-Oxfam/article17044486.ece

became world famous, as peasant women linked issues of forest conservation and livelihoods together. Movements such as Narmada, Niyamgiri, or POSCO are as much an effort to protect local ecologies as they are struggles for land, livelihoods and dignity (Kumar, 2014). In addition to these movements of resistance against socially unjust and ecologically destructive development, there has been an upsurge of alternatives specifically premised on valuing the integrity of life on earth that are challenging the dominant development narrative.

At the same time, in India and in other countries of the Global South and North, an alternative scholarly discourse has emerged over the past few decades. Scholars in India and other countries have questioned the idea of development as a linear process equated to modernity and westernization (Kothari, 1990, 1995). Moreover, these post-development theorists critique the ideas of rationality and universalism that underpin the mainstream conceptions of development. They call for alternatives to mainstream development rooted in local autonomy, culture, and knowledge systems. The indictment of 'neoliberal' development - based on globalized flows of capital, trade, and resources, and an irrational faith in markets - has been even more severe, both in India and abroad. The looming threat of climate change and the sixth mass extinction, already manifested in South Asian countries in diverse ways, further undermines promises of 'development' more fundamentally, both in practice and theory.

At this time, India is at an impasse with respect to 'development discourse' – the old ideas have failed but the new ones have yet to gain ascendancy. On the ground, there is clearly a bubbling up of experiments and a quest for alternative ways of being and relating to the rest of the

world. This book turns to these examples in the hope of finding a way out of the current impasse. Drawing on nine case studies, we explore their emergence in various settings across India and illustrates how they articulate visions of alternative futures and ways of organizing society and human economic activity.

The Vikalp Sangam Framework

The case studies that make up this book are all part of a larger, more comprehensive process of exploring alternatives, called Vikalp Sangam or Alternative Confluence[5] undertaken by Kalpavriksh, a Pune-based non-profit organization. This larger project seeks to explore alternatives to capitalist and extractive development by documenting a multitude of initiatives that advance human wellbeing and the health of natural ecologies. These alternative initiatives challenge the current 'development' practices that are threatening the planet and human survival. The vikalp sangam process, explained in detail in Chapter 2, describes alternatives this way:

Alternatives can be practical activities, policies, processes, technologies, and concepts/frameworks. They can be practiced or proposed/propagated by communities, government, civil society organizations, individuals, and social enterprises amongst others. They can simply be continuations from the past, re-asserted in or modified for current times, or new; it is important to note that the term does not imply these are always 'marginal' or new, but that they are in contrast to the mainstream or dominant system.

The vikalp sangam process also identifies the following

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5.   Many of these cases are documented and showcased on the Vikalp Sangam website: http://www.vikalpsangam.org/

interconnected spheres of concern that an alternative strives to address:

1. Ecological integrity and resilience, including the conservation of nature and natural diversity, maintenance of ecological functions, respect for ecological limits (local to global), and ecological ethics in all human actions.

2. Social wellbeing and justice, including fulfilling lives (physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually), equity between communities and individuals, communal and ethnic harmony; erasure of hierarchies and divisions based on faith, gender, caste, class, ethnicity, ability, and other attributes.

3. Direct and delegated democracy, with decision-making starting in spaces enabling every person to participate meaningfully, and building from this to larger levels of governance by downwardly accountable institutions; and all this respectful of the needs and rights of those currently marginalized.

4. Economic democracy, in which local communities and individuals have control over the means of production, distribution, exchange, and markets, based on the principle of localization for basic needs and trade built on this. Central to this would be the replacement of private property by the commons.

5. Cultural diversity[6] and knowledge democracy, with multiple co-existing knowledge systems in the commons, respect to a diversity of ways of living, ideas and ideologies, and encouragement to creativity and innovation.

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6. 'Culture' here is used to mean ways of being and knowing, including language, rituals, norms, ethics and values, worldviews and cosmovisions, lifestyles, links with the rest of nature, and knowledge.

The authors of the case studies in this book explore how these alternatives (vikalp) challenge different forms of inequality and injustice and offer diverse ways of organizing economic, political and social action and pathways for more humane, just and joyful living. The cases represent concerted efforts to find better ways of being and of valuing based on different metrics of valuation than those promoted by neoliberal economics. The case study authors have used the vikalp sangam framework (see chapter 2 for details), which emerged through extensive and widespread discussions, as a lens to understanding and analyzing these alternatives, without necessarily 'judging' them. The emphasis is on learning from the lived experiences of people and places involved in these exciting and inspiring emergent processes and to broaden and enrich the evolving framework and discourse around alternative transformations in India.

The Case Studies

The Niyamgiri Story: Challenging the idea of growth without limits - Niyamgiri gained global acclaim as an example of resistance against extractive development. 'Save the Niyamgiri' movement — the Dongria Kondhs' long and well-documented battle to protect their sacred mountain — was successful in stalling a bauxite mining project. In Chapter 3, Tatpati, et al. explore the Dongria's visions of development and conceptions of 'living well'. The Dongria's vision of a 'good life' includes the ecological integrity of their landscape and the cultural integrity of the Dongria Kondh as a people. For them, diversity is a core value that is aptly reflected in the fact that they nurture more than twenty varieties of millet on their *podu* (mountain slope) fields. In their cosmology, the mountain belongs to their deity Niyamraja, who is a legitimate claimant and 'right-holder' of the territory. In contrast to the modern conceptions of property and claim-

making processes, the Dongrias believe in kin-based relations with spirits, plants, and animals. According to this view, humans do not have a privileged position as right-holders. While the mining company's threat to the local ecology and culture was unambiguous, the Dongria Kondhs have also suffered at the hands of the development agencies. Tatpati, et al. describe how the Dongrias are at the receiving end of a 'top-down' model of development that is insensitive to their particular cultural context. Disregarding their culture, the Dongria Kondh Development Agency (DKDA) has been seeking to assimilate them into the 'mainstream' by imposing an alien worldview, ignoring the cosmovision in which their relationship with land and territory plays a key role.

The Dongrias seek change rooted in their own understanding of wellbeing and seek to set the terms on which they interact with the global and national economy; in the process they assert economic democracy. Our first case illustrates brilliantly the principles and values of vikalp sangam, as communities with unique culture and deep ecological knowledge struggled, using direct democracy, against extractive development, which would have destroyed their ecological and cultural life and worlds.

Imlee Mahuaa: Learning in freedom, the democratic way-
The next case we turn to is that of culturally appropriate education in a tribal setting. Imlee Mahuaa School, named after the locally abundant tamarind and mahuaa trees, is a learning community comprising 63 members: 60 children, ages 3-15, and 3 adult teachers. The school was set up in 2007 for the children of adivasi communities in and around Balenga Para, a hamlet in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh. Imlee Mahuaa strives to create a joyful and rich learning experience for children in a non-hierarchical setting that draws on the children's rich ecological and cultural

environment. Nyla Coelho and Sujatha Padmanabhan's description of the daily schedule and rhythm of the school presents the picture of a learning environment filled with joy and laughter driven by a culture of cooperation and sharing instead of competition and individualism.

In their efforts to create a joyful learning environment for the children, the school's founder Prayaag Joshi and his two colleagues responded to the local parenting style and the children's need for more autonomy and less supervision. The school is an innovative experiment in curiosity-driven, student-led learning based on the principles of respect for diversity, freedom and autonomy, democracy, and environmental and social sensitivity. The school evolved its unique pedagogical approach through adaptive learning and experimentation over the years, taking into account the cultural context and students' needs. This unique pedagogical approach includes direct democracy and a governance system in which the school community decides their curriculum and schedule democratically.

Imlee Mahuaa chose to remain non-residential because it recognized that an important complement to learning in a school setting is the learning that takes place within families during the everyday activities of growing food, foraging and hunting, among others. The authors remind us that the original meaning of 'school', from its Greek and Latin roots, was 'leisure', a meaning that Imlee Mahuaa School is helping its members to recover.

Seen within a broader context, wherein residential schools in tribal areas of India continue to unwittingly promote cultural genocide in the name of assimilation[7], Imlee Mahuaa School

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7. Although the national policy on education emphasizes imparting education in the children's native language, that is often not the case.

is a heart-warming example of a learning environment that is responsive to cultural context and the values within which the children are embedded. It is one of the many similar initiatives around the country embedded within the larger context of children's exposure to violence and mass media promoted consumerist culture. The Imlee Mahuaa School raises questions about how such initiatives can lead to rethinking the dominant approach to education.

The Timbaktu Collective : Very much on the map -
Located in one of the dry districts of Andhra Pradesh, close to the town of Penukonda, Timbaktu Collective (TC) is an initiative to empower villagers (particularly the poorest amongst them) to take charge of their own future and the future of their land and natural resources. This case, covered in Chapter 5, began as an effort by Mary Vattamattam and C.K. ('Bablu') Ganguly, a couple who wanted to move away from the constant mode of agitation in which they were involved as part of the Young India Project (organizing farm labour), to doing constructive work in a few villages. Their desire was to not only demand change, but to actively and practically facilitate such change. They realized that, given the predominant dependence of rural India on land and agriculture, one way to facilitate change was to address these issues. In 1989, the TC acquired a small area of barren and unproductive land near Chennekothapalli village and started working to regenerate the land. From this initial creative engagement, TC has organically moved on to organizing women's collectives for savings, self-help, and mutual aid; sustainable, organic agriculture, rural enterprise and marketing co-operatives, community led regeneration of landscapes, etc. These areas of work have emerged through a constant engagement with their core mission, and now TC interventions are spread over more than 172 villages.

In this case study, Ashish Kothari discusses TC's initiative in organic farming and farmer' producer cooperatives and how these reflect an institutionalized process of participative economic democracy. Crucial institutional innovations of Brundams (groups of 5 farmers each) and Sanghas (groups of 15 farmers) form the structure of participation. TC has also initiated a farmers' marketing organisation, the Dharani Farming and Marketing Mutually Aided Cooperative, which buys the organic produce at a slightly higher than market rate and sells it with profits shared back among the farmers (http://www.timbaktu-organic.org/). By 2013, TC facilitated organic agriculture for 1620 families spread over 43 villages and 8700 acres, comprising 118 sanghams.

TC provides critical learning for alternative models of development. The initiative started with an attempt to regenerate degraded ecologies and expanded into organizing economic democracy and social wellbeing. The collective has been able to leverage local agro-biodiversity and knowledge into institutional processes for economic democratization. The case shows how economic democracy can be fostered through proper institutional design and the possibilities of upscaling organic agriculture based on local agro-biodiversity, thereby breaking the trend of increasing use of chemicals and resorting to monocropping. The initiative is attempting a transformation towards resilience and sustainability of agro-ecological systems, while promoting direct democracy and collective governance with greater inclusion of marginalized sections. Their efforts to foster economic democracy through co-operative structure and engagement with the market as collectives have been successful, though the question of scaling up to larger areas and numbers remain. TC's work displays some of the values and principles of a collective, commons-based, equitable, diverse, and just society, one that respects the dignity of labour and our place in nature.

Kachchh : Strengthening local livelihoods with ecological considerations - The next two cases are based on work done in the Kachchh region in Gujarat. Kachchh district has diverse landscapes and ecosystems. This is the only arid ecosystem in the world that is accompanied by a marine mangrove ecosystem along its coast. The Rann, with its unique ecosystem – inundated with flood water for part of the year and dry for the rest – is the only flamingo breeding site in the country and the only refuge on the planet for the Indian Wild Ass. The diverse landscape supports 38 distinct communities that depend on various livelihood strategies including rain-fed farming, pastoralism, fishing, saltpan work (*agariyas*), and a range of crafts.

Shiba Desor and Vinay Nair discuss different initiatives that emerged in the region following a series of natural disasters. The earthquake of 2001 provided the impetus for NGOs to come together to coordinate disaster relief by forming the Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan (referred to as the Abhiyan). The Abhiyan continued to work after the immediate relief needs were met to develop long-term alternative livelihood options. The Abhiyan now includes 38 organisations covering more than 650 villages in the district and focuses on the management of natural resources, watershed development, animal husbandry, health, drought-support, crafts, and micro-credit. The case study discusses diverse initiatives by the Abhiyan to secure sustainable ways of living guided by the belief that local livelihoods can only flourish if they are in consonance with ecological and socio-cultural systems.

The authors focus on initiatives undertaken by two member organisations: Satvik (on rainfed and organic agriculture) and Sahjeevan (on animal husbandry and pastoralism) and their collaborative efforts with two other member

organisations: Setu and Saiyaren Jo Sangathan (SJS) – a women's collective within Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) that works on economic, social, and political empowerment of women of Lakhpat and Nakhatrana blocks. The case study also delves into initiatives by another member organization, Khamir, to develop crafts in an effort to strengthen the craft-ecology linkages. These initiatives are rooted in an in-depth analysis of historical linkages amongst rain-fed farming, animal husbandry, and crafts and how the breaking of these linkages has led to ecological degradation.

Shaam-e-Sarhad, Hodka - A community-based tourism initiative - Seema Bhatt discusses the case of community-led tourism by looking at an eco-ethno-tourist resort, Shaam-e-Sarhad, that was set up as a way of engaging in endogenous development building on local skills and fostering pride in local culture and ecology. The idea was initiated by the KMVS, a women's organization working in the Kachchh region. This community-led tourism project was taken up on an experimental basis in 2004 as a way of responding to strain on the livestock-based local economy due to degradation of the grasslands.

In a context where conventional mass tourism is creating havoc for local ecologies and cultures, this case study represents a distinct alternative: by providing urban folk an experience of rich cultural life in diverse ecosystems, the project opens up a more experiential and less ecologically damaging form of tourism, one that provides an opportunity to bring about transformative change, including an appreciation of living lightly on the planet. The case study also shows how initiatives like this help rural people, especially youth, to see their own culture in a new light and to develop a sense of pride in their rich cultural heritage. The initiative has adhered to the vision of using

local architectural designs and materials for construction and has refused to grow beyond a scale manageable by the local community. While the long-term effect on the community and local gender relations remains to be seen, the initiative has led to improved local incomes and revival of the local ecology as well as an outlet for local crafts. These initiatives from Kachchh illustrate the principles of economic democracy and sustainable livelihoods in articulation with principles of ecological integrity, cultural diversity, and social wellbeing.

Kuthumbakkam-Re-embedding economy in society - In Kuthumbakkam, a village on the outskirts of Chennai, a dalit engineer named Elango Rangaswamy is at the centre of the change process, and the focus of Ch 8. In this case study, Adam Cajka traces the process of change initiated by Elango after he gave up an urban career and returned to his village in 1996. Elango began his experiment as a response to concerns about caste and gender discrimination. One of the main innovative experiments in this case is a social housing project aimed at addressing caste-based discrimination by creating opportunities for people from different castes to live together as neighbours. Elango draws inspiration from the Gandhian concept of village economies and roots his work in dialogue and participatory planning; he also uses local resources to generate employment opportunities. At the centre of this initiative is a striving to uphold dignity for all, especially the poor dalit community. Elango mobilizes the Panchayat Raj system and works on an alternative local economy based on solar energy, rice and dal mills, and local producers' organisations. The Kuthumbakkam experiment highlights the important role of democratic processes and dialogue and the critical role that dedicated individuals can play in bringing about transformative change. A key lesson to be learned from the Kuthumbakkam story is the need for

a continuous process of dialogue among various contesting ideologies and groups. The story tells us about the struggle of a marginalised group for inclusion on its own terms, an experiment in empowerment, economic democracy, justice and social wellbeing.

Maati - Nair and Desor describe the emergence of the women's collective Maati in the Munsiari region (2,200 m) of Gori Valley in Pithoragarh district, Uttarakhand, across from the west face of the Panchachuli mountain range in the Greater Himalayas. Maati (Hindi for 'earth' and 'soil') is an autonomous women's collective of mountain farmers, weavers, milk producers, vegetable vendors and self-employed entrepreneurs.

The Maati collective emerged in the mid-1990s to address the linkage between alcohol consumption and domestic violence. Its immediate genesis was in an especially distressing incident of violence against a woman from a nearby village. Starting with just two women —Malika Virdi of Sarmoli village and Basanti Rawat of Shankhadhura — it slowly attracted other women from neighbouring villages and started responding to a variety of concerns pertaining to women's everyday lives. These included issues related to a ban on liquor sales and local control over the commons, including forests, as well as addressing issues related to '*jal*, *jungle* and *zamin'* (water, forest, land) more broadly. Over the years, Maati has taken up income generation activities, such as the sale of red beans and locally knitted woollens as well as women's health issues, strengthening of local democracy, soil restoration, responsible tourism, and nature-based education. Maati has also taken part in social resistance movements against a large series of hydropower projects that are being proposed for the 100 km stretch of the Gori River.

This case study highlights some of the various local traditions and value systems that guide this initiative. It demonstrates how the traditions of *alto-palto* (helping each other - a form of work sharing within the community), *sukha-dukha* (being together in joys and sorrows), and *phuldai* (a traditional festival of collecting community resources for community welfare) are all central to the philosophy of this collective, which offers alternatives to the patriarchal institutions of the state, market, family, religion and caste system. This is a case where women practice direct democracy based on care of each other and the environment. In an interview[8], founding member Malika states that the inspiration for this initiative is best captured in the words of an old women's movement song: 'We fight, so that love may live on this earth'. This struggle for life and liveliness reverberates not only in this case study but also throughout the other alternatives documented in this book.

Restoration of Kaikondrahalli Lake in Bengaluru : Forging a new urban commons - In Ch. 10, Nagendra describes a case of collective action in an urban setting to restore and rejuvenate Kaikondrahalli Lake in Bengaluru, an extraordinary feat of recovering urban commons in a fast growing city where the communities that live around the lake are constantly in flux. The lake had degraded into a polluted, swampy wasteland due to unplanned urban development. The case study illustrates how a dedicated group of people were able to revive the lake, even with the challenging context of reviving urban commons in the absence of stable, face-to-face communities, a culture of selfishness, and difficulties in monitoring and sanctioning rule breakers.

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8.   http://www.posterwomen.org/?p=5919

The Kaikondrahalli Lake restoration is one of the few reported successes against the overall backdrop of ecological degradation in Bengaluru. The success of the lake restoration has inspired a number of other community activities in this area, yet local residents face constant challenges in their efforts to maintain the lake. A key issue that has been raised by the collective citizens' forum is that of the exclusion of the marginalised communities in the lake restoration process and the unwillingness of the authorities to include the concerns of the poor in their plans. The case holds out significant lessons for others working to protect urban commons in cities across India. It also highlights the complexity of managing urban commons under multiple legal jurisdictions. The Kaikondrahalli case illustrates how collective, democratic processes can be mobilized for ecological resilience in an urban setting.

The initiative has faced several challenges. This includes the interest and participation of right-wing groups in the initiative and their use of the space for organizing cultural events relating to only certain religious beliefs, and the associated dilemma about whether to exclude those groups on the grounds of their ideological stance. Another set of challenges has been around the question of class. In particular, who uses the urban commons, the urban poor or the elite? The polluted and uncared for urban commons disproportionately benefitted the poor and met their sanitation needs, provided fodder for the cattle of the peri-urban villagers and shelter for the homeless. However, after rejuvenation, the urban common of the lake has been increasingly gated and less easily accessible to the poor. What are the implications of the rejuvenation of urban commons for equity? The author comments that addressing concerns of rejuvenation, sustenance of the initiative, and

equity and social justice simultaneously has not been easy for this citizens' initiative.

Kudumbashree : Collective farming in Kerala and lessons for Maharashtra - In our final case in Ch. 11, Seema Kulkarni discusses a collective farming experiment initiated in 2010 by the Kudumbashree programme of the Government of Kerala. In 2011, in response to an agrarian crisis in Kerala that arose due to a shortage of labour and large-scale fallowing of agricultural land, the Government of Kerala decided to lease out fallow agricultural land for farming to women's collectives comprising of women from marginalised sections of society. Five years later, by 2016, the collective farming programme covered a total of about 44,000 hectares of land across 14 districts of Kerala. More than 50,000 women's neighbourhood groups have been organized into farming collectives and more than 25,000 are linked to banks with more than ₹ 3410 million loaned from the banks. This collective farming initiative is a story of bottom-up women-driven agriculture revitalization and women's empowerment process.

This case illustrates the potential of the state to usher in transformative change by working together with marginalised citizens and support them in furthering local economies. Seema Kulkarni discusses how women's neighbourhood groups were inspired by the need to ensure 'good, poison-free' food for their families and undertake organic farming on lands that were lying unutilized due to the agrarian crisis. Collective farming activity initiated by women has become a familial activity, which Kulkarni says has given new meaning to their lives through 'newfound happiness in growing crops' and in the satisfaction of being able to provide healthy food for their families. Some of

the neighbourhood groups have expanded their economic activities to form a producers' company to market locally grown organic rice and also opened Kudumbashree markets and cafes. They have also linked to efforts by environmental groups to conserve paddy lands and to other innovative initiatives to form a 'green army' or pool of skilled agricultural workers, and a food security army. In this case, the initiative by the Government of Kerala and the political economy of the state has allowed significant upscaling of the initiative. The case illustrates the power of collective action based on common economic interests, affective relations, and material needs of 'poison-free food' for their families and consumers, supported by institutional support for access to credit and markets.

Of all the cases discussed, the Kudumbashree case shows the possibilities for extensive upscaling. By providing policy and budgetary support, the state played a critical role in scaling up these efforts. While additional research is needed to understand the long-term sustainability of the initiative, the case provides a glimpse of how a multi-scalar intervention linking neighbourhood groups to different scales of local governance focused on issues of food security and sovereignty can provide viable alternatives to the dominant, neoliberal development.

Alternatives: Elements, values, principles and visions for transformative futures

Energy and laughter were the currencies of this new land, and the beat of a drum its pulse. Not many recognized the worth and genuineness of these currencies, tested by time.

—Madhu Ramnath,Woodsmoke and Leaf Cups

The real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new lands but seeing with new eyes[9]

—Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past

Responding to the challenge of seeing with new eyes, we seek to explore how these emergences embody alternate ways of being, thinking, and doing as they strive to meet local needs and aspirations differently. How are issues of sustainability being addressed and reworked? How do these case studies reflect the alternative futures being imagined by vikalp sangam? In this section, we reflect on the values and principles that these alternatives articulate.

The process of reflecting on the case studies included a two-day reflection workshop during which all the case-study authors, the local actors, and two of the editors met to deliberate on the lessons these alternatives offer (as described in the Preface). The editors included inputs from this reflection workshop to synthesize the findings and identify the emerging themes of the case studies. Working collaboratively over a two-year period, we focused on the values and value regimes (what is valued and how) emerging from these cases.

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9.   While the actual quote is slightly different, we use this more evocative and popularly used version.

It is important to emphasize that these cases do not represent isolated initiatives for social transformation; they are part of a larger body of emergent initiatives and struggles against oppressive power structures, all of which endeavour to offer alternative paths to a more socially just future. Moreover, these initiatives are often connected to larger social movements and mobilisations. The Maati collective, for example, is connected to a network of movements for women's empowerment and women farmers in India, and these movements inform one another. The Niyamgiri case is one of the many place-based Indigenous people's struggles taking place in India and is connected to similar struggles to defend and assert Indigenous peoples' sovereignty over their territories in other countries. Ecotourism in Hodka emerges out of the context of mass tourism that is devastating certain sites of attraction and local cultures, and it is linked, as well, to similar efforts in other parts of the country. The Imlee Mahuaa School is one among numerous efforts to challenge the mainstream education system that is alienating and does not value local knowledge systems and children's need for freedom and happiness. Finally, the Kudumbashree and Kuthumbakkam initiatives represent a search for local economies that are designed to place those who are socially discriminated against, such as women and dalits, at their centre.

In these initiatives, we see resistance and re-imagination coming together. While resisting dominant conceptions of development and the structural roots of inequality may have been the initial motivation for these initiatives, they, in turn, also present alternate ways of thinking and being. They are often organic responses to a specific context of economic, political, social, cultural, and/or ecological injustice, but they do not remain limited to resistance or critique alone and articulate alternative ways of organizing social and economic

lives. Such alternatives may or may not aim to, or be able to, address each of the interrelated aspects of ecological integrity, social wellbeing, political, economic, and/or cultural democracy as articulated in the vikalp sangam framework (refer to Diagram 1: Spheres of alternative transformation in Chapter 2), but they embody many of the values and principles underlining them. The reading of the case studies by the authors and interactions with some actors from these sites leads us to observe that within these cases some radical rethinking is taking place regarding the conception of being human, of work, and of value regimes.

The following two sections attempt to underline the major elements and values and principles that distinguish the efforts at the case study site as 'alternatives'.

Elements of Alternatives Initiatives

Some elements make the initiatives that we call 'Alternatives' stand out. These relate to the situations, causes, conditions and factors under which they emerge; motivations, visions, values, principles, structures and processes with which they progress; strategies and processes by which they address inequities and constraints that they come across.

Organic emergence, holistic approach – The inter-connected spheres: Diagram 1: Spheres of alternative transformation in Chapter 2 indicates the various spheres of life are interconnected and hence transformative initiatives often cannot stay with the idea, approach or issues that they started with. As the interconnections unfold, the approaches and strategies change, evolve and modify. In many of the case studies presented in this book, an organic progression is observed, the emergence of holistic thinking and practices – even if they initially started with addressing one aspect of life. In most cases, picking up one strand meant seeing the

connections with others and holistic solution would mean addressing many issues and aspects simultaneously.

Maati, a women's collective that emerged in response to violence against women, realized that domestic violence was integrally linked with the easy availability of liquor. This was linked to corruption involved in electoral politics and an invisible nexus of politicians and liquor barons, impacting state's policies supporting foreign liquor sale. This realization led to a women's movement against liquor sale as a political issue, bringing out its links with unemployment and social and political disempowerment, among others. The movement led to unfolding of and attempting to address a whole gamut of ecological-livelihood-soil restoration-reclamation of commons – and eventually even making community-based tourism through home stays as part of the repertoire of actions. As the members of the collective put it, the collective understood that women's issues are not independent of other issues relating to local livelihood and ecological security – and the centrality of issues of decision making powers and control over 'jal, jungle and zamin' (water, forest and land) – to achieve security of livelihoods. Similar is the case in all the case studies documented in this book.

Causes and conditions of emergence: Resistance and alternative initiatives often emerge from an expression of dissatisfaction and the attempt to address one or more situations of conflicts. These conflicts are sometimes direct and visible and sometimes indirect and not so visible. Conflicts could be local or with external actors, policies, processes, notions and other similar impositions. Seemingly local conflicts could also have deep roots in global economic, ecological and political policies and processes (Rodriguez, 2016). Conflicts could be as a result of newer factors or because of deeply entrenched socio-

cultural practices. Invariably, it is a combination of factors coming together at a particular point in time that leads to emergence of a resistance movement or an alternative. In the case of Niyamgiri it was a direct conflict which resulted from the permission granted by the state to mine bauxite from the sacred forests of the Dongria Kondhs. A close association and strong sentiments towards the hills and socio-cultural practices related to them led to the elders in the community coming together and forming Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti (NSS). The catalyst here was a sharp divide between the manner in which human development and growth is viewed by the state and state mechanism to meet those goals (through mining or through welfare schemes promoted by Dongria Kondh Development Agency) and notions of wellbeing that the Dongria Kondh themselves have. The motivation, values and principles in this case emerge from the worldview of the Hill Dongria Kondhs as also the Marxist-Leninist ideas which were brought in through some actors who belong to political formulations with those ideologies. The NSS, with support from the Dongria Kondhs and a number of external actors, remain the drivers that have sustained the movement for over two decades.

In Kuthumbakkam, the cause was caste and class discrimination and the condition was created by reservation policy which provided an opportunity to local dalit youth for education, exposure outside and later to stand for panchayat elections. The drive came from Elango, who was deeply influenced by the ideologies of Kumarappa, Ambedkar, Marx and Gandhi and emerged as a leader for the dalits and non-dalits in his village.

Similarly, the deep seated patriarchy leading to domestic violence and lack of dignity for women was the condition

under which Maati collective was born. Even though an outsider, Malika became part of the community; she herself came from a strong background of social movements, and her energy and leadership along with that of others in the village became the immediate cause for the movement and subsequent processes.

In the case of Kaikondrahalli and other such lakes in the city, change was possible because of an active citizens group that came together for restoration and creation of a commons for the lake and spaces around them. In Timbaktu, the drive came from two activists in search of solutions for issues faced by the arid areas and people inhabiting them, in an environment in which government policies were clearly not the solution. They saw the need to go beyond agitations and demonstrate by action on the ground and alternative to the current ways of doing things. Similar quest for alternatives and need to demonstrate on the ground that such alternatives are possible were also the drivers behind the initiative in Hodka, Kachchh, Imlee Mahua, and Kudumbashree.

Role of the leadership: One important factor among others that makes these initiatives stand apart is perhaps the leadership by an individual or group of individuals within the initiative. Often there is a discomfort among those involved in these initiatives and also others to emphasise and highlight this role. This is justifiably so as over emphasis on leadership has its pitfalls; the relationship of a leadership and process is extremely delicate. The leadership as seen in these initiatives is that of powerful actor/actors which provide enthusiasm, energy, direction, vision and ethical moral platform without concentrating power in themselves. The leadership is not authoritarian but strong and guiding.

Catalytic inputs and/or leadership for a movement or an initiative can come from diverse actors and in diverse

situations as explored above. In Kuthumbakkam and Niyamgiri, the initiating agents are within the community. Elango Rangasamy, the initiator of local economies experiments in Kuthumbakkam, was trained as an engineer and worked in a formal setting in different parts of India till he decided to return to his village. Instead of seeking a job in Chennai, the neighbouring city, he opted to use his skills for local employment generation. In Niyamgiri the traditional leaders who are part of the NSS are deeply rooted in the traditional worldview of the Dongria Kondhs. In Maati and Timbaktu, people who went from outside after being involved in various social and political movements in different parts of the country are now part of the community. In Imlee Mahua, the founder was disillusioned by the lack of freedom, love and joy in the educational institutions. Many of these change agents are people who chose different ways of being. What sets this kind of leadership apart, however, are the values and principles with which they function, the overall vision and how it develops, the spirit of collective, the process of making decisions and implementing them. This came up as a reflection during the workshop mentioned above, 'Right leadership is a difference between leadership (netritva) and control (netagiri). Right leadership creates a dialectic space for open, inclusive and transparent discussions and debates for collective and informed decisions to emerge'.

Experimentation/Learning by doing: What comes through very clearly in the case studies is a spirit of experimentation, openness to changing strategies, constant efforts at a better way of doing things, constant innovations and adaptations, learning from experience as well as from the local wisdom and ways of doing things. At the root of these innovations which remain unchanged, however, are the fundamental visions, principles and motivations. For example, in the case of Imlee Mahua School, the founder and teachers have

been constantly innovating. Even though they started with a pedagogical approach that drew from Gandhian Naee Taleem, Montessory model and J.D. Krishnamoorthy's approach – they soon developed a pedagogical approach that was unique to Imlee Mahua and to which the children and their parents also contributed. This pedagogical approach emerged from the local culture and followed the parenting model of the tribal parents (Gond people). At the root of this remained the overall vision of providing an environment of learning by making the children happy at school and instilling a sense of responsibility based on freedom. An open-ended space for regeneration and for allowing things to emerge has been important for the initiative. Similarly, Kaikondrahalli has innovated and experimented with a number of approaches and processes while keeping constant their vision of sensitivity to the eco-system and its diverse uses. Maati collective, while addressing various aspects of life, enlarged its vision from a life free of violence for women to respect and dignity for human life and nature; all its innovations and efforts have ensured the implementation of this fundamental vision and the same is true of all the other cases documented in the book.

Institutions, processes and their approach: In all of the alternatives we observe a conscious effort on the part of the leadership to build a non-hierarchical, democratic institutional space that nurtured collective decision making, dialogue and discussions. Such an environment allowed a voice to the groups that have historically been excluded from the dominant economic and centralized decision making processes. One of the important aspects of this process has been to work out a useful balance between the revival of the traditional practices and knowledge systems while weeding out the feudal and exploitative elements that were part of it. Each of the initiatives discussed in this book has struggled

with whether to formalize the institutions or let them remain informal. Is the laying down of rules and regulations better for sustainability or is a more flexible arrangement better for democratic functioning? Some of the most contentious questions that the teams had to deal with were related to engagement with the State, with markets, political parties and in general the mainstream institutional spaces with which each of them was interfacing. For example, in Kaikondrahalli the activists often were in a quandary as to whether to engage with political parties and if yes then to what extent and how. Eventually, they felt that the best role for them would be to work from outside to ensure accountability in those elected to power.

In the case of Kachchh, while Kala cotton revived the local livelihoods for the citizens, success was largely determined by where the market was. How do alternative efforts deal with the contradiction if the markets are outside of the country and within the capitalist spaces? While in some cases these discussions continue, in others some kind of a solution is available. For example, Maati attempted to resolve this to a great extent by deciding that they would sell their produce locally and produce only as much as is required for secure livelihoods. Malika, one of the key actors in Maati, says, 'We are looking at vyavastha parivartan (systemic change) and not merely satta parivartan (political change or power change).' In Kuthumbakkam the success of the alternative depended on a creative engagement with the spaces provided by the state machinery. In this case it was the three tier system, i.e., the panchayat; the leadership had to struggle with the state, engage with it continually in very creative ways and negotiate that space for alternative ways of doing the economy and addressing caste and violence against women. In Kudumbashree, the State is the actor and has provided the space for evolving local ecological economies

through several policy and programmatic mechanisms. With all its limitations, Kudumbashree shows the way for what the state can do if there is political will on the one hand and civil society push on the other.

Impacts, limitations and sustainability: Evolving these alternatives has been an experiential process and a lived reality for the actors involved. Each of them was thus fully aware of the limited spaces available for them for any radical transformation. All of these alternatives have contributed in significant ways to challenge the mainstream institutions and their practice. Each of them has also strived to instil the values and principles that have been discussed in detail in the next section.

They have demonstrated the potential of a) democratic thinking, creative engagement with state and markets; b) power of collectives to address questions of ecology, caste and patriarchy and assert rights over forests and other livelihood resources to be able to create a pathway for alternative ways of living and doing. While doing so, they have struggled with notions of local economies, democracy, equity, sustainability and have found answers in their own contexts within their own set of limitations. Not always have they been satisfied with the answers and recognized well that negotiating the mainstream has also meant making some compromises. It is the transparency in raising these questions and collectively moving towards alternative ways of knowing and doing that set these initiatives apart, and that, according to us, is the measure of their impact.

Here's an example of how the different actors understood and negotiated sustainability. The initiator of the Imlee Mahuaa School believed that replicability could not be a measure of sustainability for an initiative. Contexts vary as do the ideas of the carriers of these initiatives. What

sustains in one context is less likely to do so in another. For Kaikondrahalli, sustainability, according to its initiator, will depend on how citizen participation would increase through increased membership to the institution created by the initiators. In most of the cases, strengthening local collectives was seen as important for sustenance. Financial sustenance has also been a concern for all the initiators, especially where the activities have scaled up considerably and people are needed to run the institutions. These are important questions that certainly need collective thinking for workable solutions, which the actors involved in these cases and other such efforts across the country continue to explore. These questions are also being deliberated upon at regional and national levels at various sangams being organised as part of vikalp sangam process as mentioned in Chapter 2.

Ethics, Values and Principles

As is now well-known and well-critiqued, the dominant notion of being human that underpins development and modernity is that of a rational economic actor trying to maximize utility. This conception, including the ideas of rationality and self-interest maximization as the primary drivers of human action, has been challenged in multiple disciplines (Singh, 2015). For example, Jeremy Rifkin's work (2009) shows that co-operation and empathy are important evolutionary traits, and Frans de Waal's (2009) work shows that empathy and preference for fairness and justice are prevalent not only in humans but also in other species (also see Brosnan and De Waal, 2003). In the field of behavioural economics, a large body of literature establishes that emotions and the subconscious realm also play an important role in human decision-making (Norton et al., 2012) and that we are often 'predictably irrational' (Ariely,

2008). Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's work (2000, 2003) shows that emotions and rationality are intermeshed and that our ability to make decisions relies on and mobilizes our ability to feel. Furthermore, thinking and feeling happens not only in our brains but is also connected to embodied ways of being and making a home in the environment (Ingold, 2000; Singh, 2015). As we observe at the case study sites, a different conception of humans as relational and empathetic beings emerges and is mobilized to design economies at a local scale, with less alienating modes of production. While the dominant economy is based on the principles of a sense of scarcity, competition and efficiency, we notice that the underlying principles at the case study sites appear to be that of a sense of abundance, cooperation and solidarity.

Moreover, in these initiatives, 'the environment' is not understood as the global environment or as nature separate from humans but as lived ecologies whose degradation is intricately linked to everyday life and livelihoods. Although not clearly articulated in all cases in these local ecologies, the world is seen as alive and interconnected, and instead of being organized along the principles of economics, that is, scarcity, competition, and efficiency, imposed onto nature, there is an attempt to think and work with the principles of abundance, cooperation, solidarity, and fairness/justice. Some of the additional values that we observed in these cases — which both supplement and are intertwined with the principles of the vikalp sangam framework — are as follows:

Cooperation and Solidarity: Instead of accepting the dominant conception of humans as rational economic actors driven by the need to maximize self-interest, these alternatives draw upon and promote a spiritual and cultural conception of humans as relational, empathetic beings driven by the need to care for, reciprocate, and be valued

as givers. Even within economic activities, the qualities of caring, solidarity, and reciprocation are prioritized over profits and competition. In the case of Maati, for example, the opportunity to host guests in homestay facilities is distributed equitably amongst available homes, and the households most in need are given priority. The principles of co-operation and solidarity also inform the pedagogical approach adopted by the Imlee Mahuaa School. In the Timbaktu collective, values of cooperation and solidarity underpin the local women's groups as well as the labour and producer cooperatives that were set up.

Local Diverse Economies: Our case studies revealed that several of the initiatives worked steadfastly to promote decentralized, diverse economies that are seen as embedded within the local social and ecological spheres (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Gibson-Graham and Miller, 2015). In these cases, the economic activities are rooted in the principle of need satisfaction and driven not by the imperatives of profit maximization but by values of care and reciprocity. For both Maati and Hodka, instead of trying to scale up to meet market demands — for knitted woollens in case of Maati, or for the expansion of tourism in the case of Hodka — the members of the collective chose to keep their activities at a manageable scale driven by the principle that 'having enough' was good enough so as to use their leisure time for other creative engagements.

In the state-initiated Kudumbashree programme, economic activities are redefined in relation to the environment. The government of Kerala has enacted a law for the protection and conservation of wetlands (paddy fields) to prevent the rampant transfer of these lands for real estate development. It has made available these lands for collective farming initiatives that benefits poor women instead of real estate

developers. In Kuthumbakkam also diverse economies are explored through local enterprises that meet local energy needs through development of solar energy. In the Kachchh initiative, local livelihoods are closely sought to be integrated with ecological needs of diverse crops, fostering of relations among farmers, livestock owners and artisans. Similarly, concerns for saving local ecologies shaped the 'Save Niyamgiri Movement' and economies in Niyamgiri.

Collectively, these case studies help us to move beyond placing the sole emphasis on economic livelihood, an emphasis that pervades so many development interventions, and to instead emphasize the entirety of one's life and lived experience within local ecologies. None of these initiatives exist entirely outside of the mainstream markets and capitalist economy but they are able to shift their ways of organizing their economic lives in consonance with local social values driven by different principles of sharing the surplus generated from their economic activities.

Conviviality, liveliness and joyful space: Most of the initiatives discussed in this book are characterized by valuing conviviality, liveliness and a stance of joyful engagement with life. As Nyla Coelho and Sujatha Padmanabhan describe in the case of Imlee Mahuaa, lunchtimes are teeming with this very spirit. In the case of Maati, despite a grim situation characterized by gendered violence, the women seek joyful respite in knitting woollen crafts and hosting short-stay guests or in cultivating organic vegetables and crops. Similarly, in the Kudumbashree case, women farmers expressed a sense of joy in restoration of paddy lands and growing of fruits and vegetables and in coming together as a community to gain some freedom over their food consumption and to heal local economy and ecology. The Kaikondrahalli Lake rejuvenation initiative

shows a vibrant citizenry participating in the restoration of its neighbourhood eco-system. In the Dongria culture, joyfulness and conviviality are built into their cultural life. **Dignity of all life forms:** The actors that are involved in all these alternatives share a respect for life in its entirety, which includes a desire to forge a respectful relationship with 'nature' and with the more-than human world. Dispelling dualities that characterize modernity, especially transcending the human-nature or nature-culture hyper-separation, the cases articulate an ethics of care animated by a love for other life-forms seen as an extension of the self rather than as something separate.

Conclusion

All these initiatives are embedded in and deal with oppressive power structures of state, capital, markets, patriarchy, caste, and religion even as they create new visions of being and thinking. Their everyday struggles, or resistance strategies, against these power structures cannot be separated from the constructive or rebuilding strategies. The tension between struggle and resistance (sangharsh) and creativity, re-imagination, and visioning (nirman), as has been well articulated by Shankar Guha Niyogi (Sadgopal and Bahadur, 1993), is visible in many of these cases as a ground for productive openings.

In 'reading' and analyzing these initiatives, we have followed what Gibson-Graham (2008), following Eve Sedgwick's work, terms as 'weak theory', and we have read the emerging initiatives not from a 'discerning, detached, and critical' perspective — looking for possible ways in which these initiatives fail or hardly make a dent in the capitalist structures — but from a stance of hope and possibility. In this, too, we follow Eve Sedgwick, who invites us to be

open to the possibility that the goal of theory (or analysis) is not to extend knowledge by confirming what we already know, that is, that the world is a place of domination and oppression. Instead, we ask of theory that it helps us to see potential openings and to provide a space of freedom and possibility. While many challenges remain, an important one for us is whether we can, as carriers of these stories, and as theorists, become a condition for their possibility instead of their impossibility (cf. Gibson-Graham, 2008). In describing them, we have sought to open up a space for them, a space where we might listen to potentially new ways of being and relating that emerge from these initiatives. We have sought to understand how these initiatives challenge the hegemony and excesses of the 'One-World World' and to create space instead for other visions, particularly the 'Zapatista' vision of a world that can hold many worlds. These questions have been central to the vikalp sangam process, and the book hopes to contribute to this discussion.

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2
Alternative Transformations and the Vikalp Sangam Process in India[1]

Background

Of late, the quest for alternatives is no longer posited as a quest for development alternatives or alternative ways of doing development but as alternatives *to* development, rejecting the idea of 'development' itself. Many communities and peoples involved in resistances against patriarchy, capitalism, statism, casteism, racism, centralised governance, nature destruction (some having roots in current models of development and others with a longer historicity) have also been attempting to envision an alternative world within their context. Such alternatives are emerging from individual and

1. This chapter has been paraphrased for this book largely based on two documents: The Search for Alternatives: Key Aspects and Principles. The document was first prepared in 2014 to stimulate dialogue in the Vikalp Sangam process. This has subsequently evolved as a Framework for Alternative Transformation through subsequent discussions during Vikalp Sangam meetings.
http://www.vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles/
Alternatives Transformation Format: A Process for Self-Assessment and Facilitation towards Radical Change (2017). Prepared by Kalpavriksh for ACKnowl-EJ.

collective quest to understand and articulate what kind of future visions society needs. What answers could there be for questions of poverty, hunger, inequity, energy insecurity, and other deprivations?

- Could there be a collective search for paradigms and pathways towards a world that is sustainable, equitable and just?

- Can collective conceptual frameworks, visions and narratives be built on an existing heritage of ideas, worldviews, cultures, past or new grassroots practices, and resistance movements?

- Could such visions and narratives be fundamentally different from the current dominant economic and political system which has brought the world to the brink of ecological collapse and the depths of socio-economic inequalities and despair?

- Can these narratives and visions skilfully respond to the worsening situation of social tension and conflicts, the resurgence of regressive right-wing forces and the suffering caused by environmental damage?

All resistance movements and initiatives mentioned in chapter 1 and case studies presented in this book have been trying to address such questions.

Moving Towards Vikalp Sangam

Kalpavriksh[2] is one among a few other organizations in the country exploring these questions after over 30 years of direct and indirect association and engagement with many such resistance movements and alternative initiatives.

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2.   Kalpavriksh Environment Action Group (www.kalpavriksh.org)

In 2014, Kalpavriksh initiated a brain storming meeting involving participants of such movements and alternatives. The group discussed objectives and possibilities of creating a common platform to explore these questions collectively and a proposal was made to initiate what was called the Vikalp Sangam (VS) process[3] or the process towards Confluence of Alternatives.

The VS process had four broad objectives:

1. To help document such alternatives where they have not been documented and to enhance visibility and critical understanding about them

2. To create a platform for people working in such movements and initiatives in different sectors and spheres to come together for sharing, learning, and collaborating. (Lack of such a collective vision and learning among different movements and alternatives was identified as one of the weaknesses.)

3. To attempt a collective vision of a better future and pathways towards it

4. To move towards the possibility of a critical political mass that could challenge and change the system(s) or systemic forces behind social and environmental injustices.

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3. http://kalpavriksh.org/index.php/alternatives/alternatives-knowledge-center/353-vikalpsangam-coverage; Daga, Sweta. 2014. All the way to Timbaktu. Anveshan, 28 October, http://projectanveshan.com/timbuktu/
Kothari, A. 2014. Radical Ecological Democracy: A path forward for India and beyond, Development, 57(1), 36–45, http://www.palgrave-journals.com/development/journal/v57/n1/full/dev201443a.html. Thekaekara, Mari Marcel. 2015. What an idea! The Hindu Sunday Magazine, 28, March, http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/what-an-idea/

Documenting alternatives

Since its inception in 2014, as part of this process, movements and initiatives towards alternatives continue to be documented (www.vikalpsangam.org). Some of the case studies described in this book were among the very first cases to be documented as part of the process.

Platform for confluence of ideas, experiences and practices

The more active and interactive part of this process which involves direct sharing and collaboration are the actual Sangams - physical confluences or gatherings of people in different parts of the country. Vikalp Sangam is a platform for networking of groups and individuals working on alternatives to the currently dominant model of development and governance in various spheres of life (http://kalpavriksh.org/index.php/alternatives/ alternatives-knowledgecenter/353-vikalpsangam-coverage).

Since 2015 till the time of writing this book in mid 2017, 10 Sangams have been organised, each lasting for three to four days and involving 50 to 100 people from alternatives, movements, civil society groups and individuals. Sangams are organised thematically or geographically and focus predominantly on alternatives with a mix of serious discussions on key topics relevant to the region or theme, practical activities (such as theatre, art, weaving, mud block building, learning crafts and so on), displays and sales of alternative products, exhibits, and trips to relevant alternative initiatives in the area. Sangams are structured to encourage cross-sectoral exchange and sharing.

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4.   http://www.kalpavriksh.org/index.php/alternatives/alternatives-knowledge-center/353-vikalp-sangam-coverage

Understanding alternatives and alternative transformation framework

For the third major objective of a collective vision, Kalpavriksh prepared an initial draft conceptual framework of transformative alternatives called 'In Search of Radical Alternatives: Elements and Principles'[5]. This framework was subsequently discussed in all the Sangams between 2014 and 2017 by about 10,000 participants, in different languages and from different sectors and backgrounds. As Ashish Kothari, one of the foremost proponents of this framework states in his essay[6]:

> It is during these exchanges often that the conventional ideological barriers have become porous, as the experiences from the ground are impossible to silo-ise into ideological or sectoral boxes. The experience of dalit women farmers breaking out of caste and gender and class barriers and achieving food sovereignty lends itself magnificently to holistic, out-of-box ideologies. She would much rather not be classified into being part of a Marxist, or a Gandhian, or an Ambedkarite revolution, but perhaps all rolled into one and beyond.

On the basis of these discussions, Kothari proposed a definition[7] of an alternative, which continues to evolve

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5. The Search for Alternatives: Key Aspects and Principles. A document first prepared in 2014 to stimulate dialogue in the Vikalp Sangam process. This has subsequently evolved – through subsequent discussions during Vikalp Sangam meetings – as a Framework for Alternative Transformation. http://www.vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles/

6. Reproduced with minor alterations from Kothari, A. (2017). The Search for Radical Alternatives: Key Elements and Principles. Counter Currents.Org. 3rd November 2017.

7. Reproduced with minor alterations from Kothari, A. (2017). The Search for Radical Alternatives: Key Elements and Principles. Countercurrents.org. 3rd November 2017.

as more such discussions take place, even as this book is being written. This definition assumes that there is a broad consensus on the root causes of social and environmental injustices; in suggesting pathways away from the problems (and their root causes) it states that

> … alternatives can be practical activities, policies, processes, technologies, and concepts/frameworks. They can be practiced or proposed/propagated by communities, government, civil society organizations, individuals, and social enterprises, amongst others. They can simply be continuations from the past, re-asserted in or modified for current times, or new ones; it is important to note that the term does not imply these are always 'marginal' or new, but that they are in contrast to the mainstream or dominant system.

The definition is open ended and non restrictive as it ought to be given the diversity of alternative visions and approaches. However, it is proposed here that alternatives are built on the following inter-related, interlocking spheres[8] seen as an integrated whole:

a. **Ecological integrity and resilience** includes maintaining the eco-regenerative processes that conserve ecosystems, species, functions, cycles, respect for ecological limits at various levels (local to global), and an ecological ethic in all human endeavour.

b. **Social wellbeing and justice where** lives are fulfilling and satisfactory from physical, social, cultural, and spiritual perspectives; where there is equity between communities and individuals in socio-economic and political entitlements, benefits, rights and

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8. The term is used here both as imagery as also in its meaning as areas of activity, interest, or society.

responsibilities; where there is communal and ethnic harmony; where hierarchies and divisions based on faith, gender, caste, class, ethnicity, ability, and other attributes are replaced by non-exploitative, non-oppressive, non-hierarchical and non-discriminatory relations.

c. **Direct and delegated democracy**, where decision-making starts at the smallest unit of human settlement, in which every human has the right, capacity and opportunity to take part, and builds up from this unit to larger levels of governance by delegates that are downwardly accountable to the units of direct democracy; where decision-making is not simply on a 'one-person one-vote' basis but consensual, while being respectful and supportive of the needs and rights of those currently marginalised (e.g., some minority groups).

d. **Economic democracy**, in which local communities and individuals (including producers and consumers, wherever possible combined into one as 'prosumers') have control over the means of production, distribution, and exchange (including markets); where localization is a key principle, and larger trade and exchange is built on it on the principle of equal exchange; where private property gives way to the commons, removing the distinction between owner and worker.

e. **Cultural[9] diversity and knowledge democracy**, in which pluralism of ways of living, ideas and ideologies is respected, where creativity and innovation is encouraged, and where the generation, transmission and use of knowledge (traditional/modern, including science and technology) are accessible to all.

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9. 'Culture' is used here to mean ways of being and acting, including language, rituals, beliefs, norms, ethics, values, worldviews, cosmologies, lifestyles, and links with rest of nature.

These five spheres overlap in significant ways, as illustrated in Diagram 1 below. They are also based on, and in turn influence, the set of values that individuals and collectives hold (see section 3 on Worldview below).

Diagram 1: Spheres of alternative transformation

(*Note*: the topics mentioned in the overlapping areas are only indicative, not exhaustive)
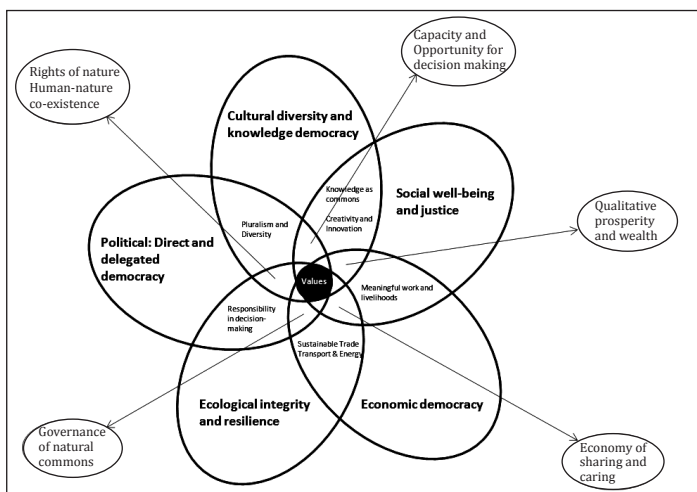
A crucial outcome of such an approach is that the centre of human activity is neither the state nor the corporation but the *community* – a self-defined collection of people with strong common and cohesive social interest. The community could be of various forms, from the village to the urban neighbourhood to the student body of an institution to even 'virtual' networks of common interest. It is acknowledged here that the 'community' as traditionally conceived is not homogenous, and may contain levels of hierarchy, exploitation, and marginalisation; it would therefore be important to consider the sphere of social justice as being crucial in such situations.

Alternative Transformation Format

In the course of discussions around the Alternatives Framework, a number of participants at the Sangams began to ask how a Framework like this could be used to understand or self-assess whether an initiative is an alternative, and if so, how holistic would it be. How many of the five spheres does it work towards? What values and principles are emerging from it? In order to address this need, Kalpavriksh worked on a Format which elaborates the five spheres into a series of elements, and possible indicator questions that could be asked as part of an assessment or understanding of an initiative[10]. This process resulted in the Alternatives Transformation Format (http://acknowlej. org/understandingtransformations/#section-alternatives), which, as of mid-2017, was being considered for testing at various Alternative and Resistance sites in India and a few other countries such as Bolivia.

Some of the main objectives of the Format are:

• to help distinguish transformative initiatives from reformist initiatives as well as false solutions, i.e. those that claim to be transformative but are only strengthening the status quo, such as predominantly market-based or technology-based mechanisms (pl see box 1 below on what are not considered as Transformative Alternatives as per this Framework)

• to help gain in-depth understanding of the process of transformation

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10. This work was done in association with partners of a project that Kalpavriksh is co-coordinating (2016-2019), the Academic-Activist Co-generation of Knowledge for Environmental Justice (ACKnowl-EJ, www.acknowlej.org).

- to help understand if there are internally contradictory trends in transformation, and

- through all this, to enable the actors in the initiative to take steps towards a more comprehensive and holistic transformation

Many or most current initiatives described in this book and others may not fulfil *all* the five spheres discussed above. Considering that each one of these attempts to address specific situations of injustice, it might not be even an overt objective to consider other spheres. However, the Format proposes that these may still be considered transformative alternatives if they address at least one of the above spheres (i.e., actually help to achieve them, or are explicitly or implicitly oriented towards them), and do not violate other spheres, or if inadvertently do so, then are open to changes towards adopting other spheres[11]. For instance, a producer company that achieves economic democracy but is ecologically unsustainable (and does not care about this or only pays lip service), and is inequitable in governance and distribution of benefits (and does not care about this or only plays lip service), may not be considered as an alternative. Similarly, a brilliant technology that cuts down power consumption, but is affordable only by the ultra-rich, would not qualify (though it may still be worth considering if it has the potential to be transformed into technology for the poor and non harmful for natural and physical environment).

The above is offered only as a rule of thumb to the discussion on what could be considered fundamental alternatives to the current system.

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11. This is a slight rephrasing of the original Format Note

Values and principles integral to alternative transformations

The way alternative transformations are attempted by the actors concerned, and observed by others, is based on their worldviews. These encompass spiritual and/or ethical positions regarding one's place in the universe, relations with other humans and the rest of nature, identity, and other aspects. Initiatives towards alternatives espouse, or are based on, many values and principles that emanate from or are encompassed in such worldviews, keeping in mind also that even within single communities there may be more than one worldview, with differences emanating from how members are placed regarding gender, class, caste, ethnicity, age, and other considerations.

Listed below is an initial set of values and principles (not meant to be exhaustive), which has evolved through the Vikalp Sangam process (Some terms from different parts of India are given in brackets; these can be replaced by other equivalent terms found in other cultures and traditions within India and around the world). In Diagram 1 above, these values are placed at the centre, representing the core space where all spheres meet.

In addition to the spheres and elements of alternatives listed in Table 1 below, the initiative can also be assessed or understood on the basis of whether it displays (or leads to the enhancement of) these (or other related) values and principles. The caveats regarding methodology for assessment or understanding these are the same as given below in Table 1, except that given their more abstract or philosophical nature, they are by definition hard to assess in a quantitative manner (and some may indeed be severely distorted if this were attempted).

- Self-governance/autonomy *(swashasan/swaraj*)
- Cooperation, collectivity, solidarity and 'commons'
- Rights with responsibilities
- Dignity of labour (*shram*)
- Work as livelihood (integrating pleasure, creativity, purpose, meaning)
- Livelihoods as ways of life (*jeevanshaili*)
- Respect for subsistence and self-reliance (*swavalamban*)
- Qualitative pursuit of happiness
- Equity/justice/inclusion (gender, caste, class, ethnic ... *sarvodaya*)
- Simplicity / sufficiency/enough-ness/living well with less (*aparigraha*)
- Respect for all life forms
- Non-violence, peace, harmony (*ahimsa*)
- Reciprocity and inter-connectedness (*vasudhaiv kutumbakam*)
- Pluralism and diversity

This set of values is not a prescriptive regime; it has emerged through the processes of individual and collective reflection and internalization by actors involved in resistance movements and alternative transformations. Their further spread, modification, and enlargement also therefore needs to happen through such processes of reflection and internalization and not through imposition. Such processes would need enabling environments and spaces for discussion, dialogue and reflection, both individual and collective. These processes could be conscious, subconscious or intuitive – the individual and collective processes would

be complementary and mutually facilitative towards radical transformation. Differences within and amongst collectives and communities would also play an important role in the evolution, absorption and modifications in this set of values.

Who will apply this Format?

It is important that this format is used by or with the central involvement of the actors in the initiative, with the explicit aim of enabling greater understanding and improvement. *It is absolutely not for use as an external or top-down assessment by those outside of the initiative, without the core involvement of those within it.*

How will the Format be applied?

This format does not contain *methods* for assessing or understanding the transformation, which need to be developed based on the context. Some pointers:

1. Methods can range from the use of basic rules of thumb (e.g. for conservation of species, simple observations regarding numbers of key species; for wellbeing, a broad-sweep observation of whether people seem happy and satisfied), to more systematic, long-term 'scientific' studies. The use of a diversity of knowledge is crucial.

2. As mentioned above, *who* makes the assessment is crucial. Is the Format being used by the actors in the initiative (and even within them, by whom?) or by others? It is important that in all situations, the methodology is fully participatory and inclusive of various sections of the initiating community or organisation.

3. It is assumed that there is some baseline understanding (oral or documented) of the situation that is being

or sought to be transformed, including of the issues, problems or conflicts being addressed.

4. Some elements below are highly site or community-specific, while others are more general or universal, so that not all elements are relevant for all situations, and methods of understanding and assessment will differ accordingly.

5. The Format is intended to be comprehensive, and it is most likely that only a part may be relevant to a specific initiative being assessed, or that its users may want to focus only on a part of the format. Indeed, an in-depth assessment using the entire format would take significant time and resources; given the context and availability of time/resources, users should be clear about what is possible and necessary. However, even if only a part is used, being aware of the rest of the Format may be helpful; if you are a big enough team or have enough time, you may choose most or all!

6. Wherever being used, the Format should not be presented as a rigid, 'pre-chewed' form that has to be filled in, but introduced at an appropriate pace with its background explained and consent sought on whether and how it should be used, and indeed modified as appropriate, including through the introduction of new elements and indicators.

7. The above would also include the flexibility of taking into consideration different interpretations of the terms used in the Format, including the elements and the indicators. It would be important to reach collective clarity on the meanings and interpretations before it is applied, especially in multilingual scenarios.

8. The indicators are not meant to be solely or even predominantly quantitative. Transformations are qualitative and process-oriented; they are typically difficult to articulate merely in an outcome and/ or quantitative-oriented manner; indeed, their understanding may be distorted by such an attempt. Ideally the assessment would be a mutually reinforcing mix of qualitative and quantitative, as appropriate for the element being assessed; in all cases the observations of the actors themselves would be crucial components.

Additional considerations

The Format does not explicitly cover issues of the following three types or levels of scale, but these could be brought into the assessment:

• Temporal scale: transformations take place over time, so there will be a past, present, and future for each element. To some extent this will automatically get built in when one assesses the changes taking place, but from the start the time horizon for the assessment (short-term or long-term) should be clear.

• Geographic scale: transformations can occur from micro to macro scales, e.g., from a hamlet or neighbourhood to a nation or continent. The scale at which the assessment is being carried out needs to be made explicit. The elements below are not all at the same geographic scale, and therefore some may not be relevant to the particular situation being assessed.

• Human/nature scale: transformations can be from a single individual to the human species as a whole (or indeed of all of nature!); again, the scale being addressed needs to be made explicit.

It may be useful to discuss the implications of restricting the assessment to specific scales.

Another issue that will come up is the balance or potential tensions between different elements and indicators given in Table 1 – e.g., between individual autonomy and collective interest, between rights and responsibilities, etc. Processes of dealing with these tensions may be part of the initiative, or could be initiated; this aspect is not contained in the note.

Finally, while the format below is a table, the key spheres and elements may be more accessible if represented in illustrative forms, such as overlapping circles; however this is a separate exercise and left to the users to find their own creative ways of depiction!

Table 1: Spheres, elements and indicators of alternatives transformation[12]

Alternatives sphere	Element of circle/sphere (subject to modifications and additions from local actors)	Understanding of local actors (to be filled for each case)	Explanation	Indicators of +ve transformation[13] (subject to modifications and other indicators emerging from local actors)	Comment	Challenges[14] (to be filled for each case)
Ecological	Conservation (species and ecosystems)		Sustenance of viable and resilient populations of native	Are the key elements of the ecosystem sustained (if already present), or being restored (if in decline or disappeared)	The term 'native' may be hard to define in practice, some widely acceptable thumb	

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12. A shortened version of the original table has been reproduced here, only as a sample. To see the detailed Format, http://acknowlej.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Alternatives-transformation-framework-Final-Ver-for-public-revised-20.2.2017.pdf

13. This is not to deny that there could also be negative transformations taking place; however, this format is not designed to look at those; trends and processes that are blocks or challenges to positive transformation should be noted in the relevant column. Secondly, it is important to note that these are process indicators, not necessarily outcome indicators, in that many or all these transformations may be taking place and not have concluded.

14. These could be challenges encountered in the process of assessment, or challenges in achieving the kind of changes listed in the indicators.

		species, and of integrity and resilience of natural ecosystems	-- (e.g., a wetland, connections with inflow and outflow)? Is the viability of taxa sustained (if already viable), or being restored (if in decline)?	rules may need to be applied; plus some 'naturalised' elements may also be important
Social	Equity	Fairness, equal opportunity, etc., across gender, class, caste, age, ability, sexuality, generations, ethnicity, etc	Is the culture and practice of equity (if existing) encouraged/ maintained? Are inequities and binary and divisive views (e.g., on sexuality and gender) being reduced progressively?	Needs to be disaggregated into various kinds of inequities/ equities
Political[15]	Capacity	Ability to meaningfully and equitably take part in	Is the ability to meaningfully and equitably take part in decision-making, and	

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15. This can be seen along three dimensions of power (relational, institutional, and discourse), which users will need to integrate if found useful and appropriate; see 'Socio-Environmental Conflict Transformation: a framework for analysis and action', available upon request from the authors (Iokiñe Rodriguez: iokirod@gmail.com)

Economic	Self-reliance and open localisation	Capacity and means to fulfil basic needs locally	to 'make a difference', enhanced amongst marginalised or 'weak' sections, and sustained and spread equitably where it already exists?	
			Is self-reliance and open localisation sustained (where existing) especially in case of 'informal' economy based on local resources (natural, human); being established or re-established or enhanced where weak or non-existent (especially relevant for globally integrated economies highly dependent on exports/imports)?	'Local' can be defined contextually – could include several settlements, rural and urban; linked to security and sovereignty of basic needs in Social sphere above; closed, xenophobic or 'anti-outsider' localisation could violate social justice elements

Cultural	Knowledge commons		All knowledge and information democratically produced, held, transmitted, and equitably accessible	Have privatised IPRs been reduced or eliminated? Is there an increase in creative commons & other open source systems? Are decentralised repositories of knowledge being made accessible to all? Is participatory research becoming the norm?	

Alternatives in various sectors in India[16]

The Framework also gives examples of what kind of actions and processes could count as alternatives as briefly described below:

Society, culture and peace

Initiatives to enhance social and cultural aspects of human life, such as sustaining India's enormous language, art and crafts diversity, removing inequalities of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, literacy, race, religion, and location (rural-urban, near-remote), creating harmony amongst communities of different ethnicities, faiths and cultures, providing dignity in living for those currently oppressed, exploited, or marginalised, including the 'disabled' or differently-abled, and sexual minorities, promoting ethical living and thinking, and providing avenues for spiritual enlightenment. For example,

- the work of Bhasha in documenting and sustaining language diversity (http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/the-language-of-diversity/)

- the initiative to educate young women in West Bengal about their right to inherit property along with their brothers and teach them the hands-on skills necessary to be food-secure (http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/how-to-teach-a-girl-to-farm-and-transform-her-life-in-the-process/#VgZ7WPntmko)

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16. Reproduced with minor alterations from Kothari, A. (2017). The Search for Radical Alternatives: Key Elements and Principles. Countercurrents. org. 3rd November 2017. http://www.countercurrents. org/2016/11/03/the-search-for-radical-alternatives-key-elements-and-principles/. This section within the original paper is adapted from broad guidance used by the website www.vikalpsangam.org. and does not claim to be a comprehensive list of alternative sectors.

- attempt to revive and sustain the culinary art of tribals in Maharashtra (http://vikalpsangam.org/article/food-fest-to-revive-tribal-cuisine/#Vic-wH7hDIU)

Alternative economies and technologies

Initiatives that help to create alternatives to the dominant neo-liberal or state-dominated economy and the 'logic' of growth, such as localisation and decentralisation of basic needs towards self-reliance, respect to and support of diverse livelihoods, producer and consumer collectives, local currencies and trade, non-monetised and equal exchange and the gift economy, production based on ecological principles, innovative technologies that respect ecological and cultural integrity, and moving away from GDP-like indicators of wellbeing to more qualitative, human-scale ones. Examples of some such initiatives include:

- a move by women in Chennai to replace plastics with environment-friendly products such as palm plates, cloth bags, paper and jute and recycled products (http://vikalpsangam.org/article/two-women-engage-in-battle-against-plastic/)

- localised manufacture and the ideas of regional self-reliant economy initiated by the village Kuthambakkam's ex-sarpanch Elango Ramaswamy (see chapter 8 for the case study)

- several producer companies of farmers, fishers, pastoralists, crafts persons and others, such as Dharani set up by Timbaktu Collective(see chapter 5 for a detailed case study)

- the NGO Goonj's attempt to create a parallel cashless economy around cloth (http://vikalpsangam.org/article/cloth-as-currency-how-goonj-is-creating-a-parallel-cashlesseconomy/#Vgoyvvntmko)

Livelihoods

Linked to the search for alternative, localised economies, this includes initiatives for satisfying, dignified, ecologically sustainable livelihoods and jobs. These could be a continuation and enhancement of fulfilling traditional occupations, including in agriculture, pastoralism, nomadism, forestry, fisheries, crafts, and others in the primary economy; they could be jobs in manufacturing and service sectors that are ecologically sustainable and dignified. Examples of such livelihoods include initiatives such as:

- the revival of sustainable, organic agriculture by dalit women members of the Deccan Development Society in Telangana (http://www.vikalpsangam. org/article/cultivating-biodiversity-peasant-women-inindia/#VgTVlMvtmko)

- by small farmers associated with Timbaktu Collective in Andhra Pradesh (see case study 5 for details)

- initiatives supported by members of Kutch Navnirman Abhiyan Sahjeevan (see 6 for detailed case study)

- innovations in Malkha cloth to empower weavers and artisans through stable livelihoods (http:// vikalpsangam.org/article/the-key-to-the-handloom-crisis/#ViYyCH7hDIU)

- unionising waste picker women to gain more secure, dignified ways of doing their work through SWaCH in Pune (http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/picking-a-brighter-future/)

Settlements and transportation

This involves the search to make human settlements (rural, urban, rurban) sustainable, equitable and fulfilling places to live and work in, through sustainable architecture and

accessible housing, localized generation of basic needs as far as possible, ecological regeneration, minimisation of waste and its recycling, reduction in elite urban resource use, replacement of toxic products with ecologically sustainable ones, sustaining and reviving the urban commons, decentralised, participatory budgeting and planning of settlements, and promotion of sustainable, equitable means of transport (especially mass, public, and non-motorised). Examples of such initiatives include:

- in Bhuj town, the 'Homes in the City' programme by several NGOs that empowers poor citizens to either self-provision or get access to decent housing, water self-sufficiency, waste management, open spaces, and other services

- the revival of wetlands in Bengaluru as urban commons (see detailed case study 10)

- urban farming such as widespread rooftop gardening in many cities

- the waste cooperative KKPKP and union SWaCH in Pune

- participatory budgeting in Pune and Bengaluru (http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/participatory-budgeting-in-pune-a-critical-review/)

Alternative politics

Alternative politics involves initiatives and approaches towards people-centred governance and decision-making, including forms of direct democracy or swaraj in urban and rural areas, linkages of these to each other in larger landscapes, re-imagining current political boundaries to make them more compatible with ecological and cultural contiguities, promotion of the non-party political processes, methods of increasing accountability and transparency of the

government and of political parties, and progressive policy frameworks. Examples include, among others:

- the 30-year history of villages like Mendha-Lekha that have taken control over their commons and declared that for their settlements, they are the government (Pathak and Gour-Broome, 2001; http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/mendha-lekha-residents-gift-all-their-farms-to-gram-sabha/)

- a decade-long experiment at eco-regional decision-making in the Arvari basin in Rajasthan (http://tarunbharatsangh.in/river-arvari-parliament/)

- movements at gaining citizens' right to information, independent oversight of governance through lokpals, public audits (e.g., for the National Employment Guarantee Scheme)

Knowledge and media

Initiatives use knowledge and media as tools for transformation, including processes using modern and traditional, formal and informal, and urban and rural spheres of knowledge equitably, attempts to make knowledge part of the commons and freely accessible, and alternative and innovative use of media forms for communication. Examples include:

- the Urban SETU programme in Bhuj town that uses communication (including a website 'Bhuj Bole Chhe', meaning Bhuj talks) to bridge the gap between citizens and government (http://vikalpsangam.org/article/a-bridge-not-too-far/#VgUFNMvtmko)

- CGNetSwara, using mobile and radio technologies to make governance more accessible to adivasi villages in Chhattisgarh (http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/cell-phone-based-networking-system-in-the-forests/)

Environment and ecology

Initiatives promote ecological sustainability, including community led conservation of land, water and biodiversity, eliminating or minimising pollution and waste, reviving degraded ecosystems, creating awareness leading to greater respect for the sanctity of life and biodiversity of which humans are a part, and promoting ecological ethics.

- There are thousands of examples of community conserved areas across India (see case studies at http://www.kalpavriksh.org/index.php/conservation-livelihoods1/community-conserved-areas)

- Many initiatives at creating localised curricula and extra-curricular material on biodiversity for children and young adults;

- Revival of rural and urban ecosystems such as the lakes of Bengaluru (for details see chapter 10 on Kaikondrahalli);

- Efforts at creating 'zero-waste' settlements or tourism (e.g., the work of the Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee in Sikkim – http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/conserving-sacred-spaces-kanchendzonga-conservation-committee-sikkim/)

Energy

Initiatives encourage alternatives to the current centralized, environmentally damaging and unsustainable sources of energy, as also equitable access to the power grid, including decentralized, community-run renewable sources and micro-grids, equitable access to energy, promoting non-electric energy options, such as passive heating and cooling, reducing wastage in transmission and use, putting caps on demand, and advocating energy-saving and efficient materials.

- Examples include a large number of decentralised renewable energy projects such as Dharnai micro-grid in Bihar (http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/energy-empowerment-the-story-of-bijli-and-dharnai/#VgaQefntmko) and SELCO's work in southern India (http://www.selco-india.com).

Learning and education

Initiatives in this area enable children and others to learn holistically, rooted in local ecologies and cultures but also open to those from elsewhere, focusing not only on the mind but also the hands and the heart, enabling curiosity and questioning along with collective thinking and doing, nurturing a fuller range of collective and individual potential and relationships, and synergising the formal and the informal, the traditional and modern, the local and global. Examples are aplenty in India, though still marginal compared to the soul-deadening and status quo reinforcing mainstream education; these include

- The Ladakhi learning centre SECMOL, which runs an energy self-sufficient campus (http://vikalpsangam.org/article/secmol/#VgTg5Mvtmko)

- Adharshila in Madhya Pradesh, where adivasi kids and a couple of activists co-create study materials and the curricula is a mix of local knowledge based activities and inputs from outside (http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/the-school-on-the-hill/#V6tfnmVkTSo)

- Imlee-Mahua in Chhattisgarh with a completely unstructured learning environment for adivasi kids (see chapter 4 for details)

- Several shalas in Kachchh where community experts in music, traditional architecture, farming, fishing and other subjects mentor young people in ways that

can nurture traditional skills and knowledge and also provide livelihood opportunities in the current economic context (e.g., Karigarshala for building and architecture; https://issuu.com/hunnarshala/docs/newsletter-vol-1)

Health and hygiene

Initiatives ensure universal good health and healthcare through the prevention of ill-health foremost by improving access to nutritional food, water, sanitation and other determinants of health, ensuring access to curative/symptomatic facilities to those who have conventionally not had such access, integration of various health systems, traditional and modern, bringing back into popular use the diverse systems from India and outside including indigenous/folk medicine, nature cure, Ayurvedic, Unani and other holistic or integrative approaches, and community-based management and control of healthcare and hygiene.

- Examples of such initiatives are growing in India, and include Swasthya Swara in Chattisgarh (http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/swasthya-swara-a-unique-community-health-solution/#V6tiv2VkTSo) and Tribal Health Initiative in Tamil Nadu (http://www.tribal-health.org).

Food and water

Initiatives here are directed at security and sovereignty over food and water by producing and making safe and nutritious food accessible, sustaining the diversity of Indian cuisine, ensuring community control over processes of food production and distribution and commons from where uncultivated foods are obtained, promoting uncultivated and 'wild' foods, making water storage, use and distribution decentralised, ensuring ecologically sustainable, efficient

and equitable producer-consumer links, advocating the continuation of water as part of the commons, and promoting democratic governance of water and wetlands. Examples abound in India, including:

- Deccan Development Society and Timbaktu Collective that are mentioned above

- community supported agriculture in and around Pune (http://vikalpsangam.org/article/placing-faith-in-the-farmer/#VhYMxvntmko)

- hundreds of local water harvesting initiatives in rural and urban India (such as by Sahjeevan, ACT and other groups in Kachcch, see chapter 6 in this book and http://act-india.org)

Global Relations

This involves state or civil society initiatives that, in the words of the Framework, 'offer an alternative to the prevalent state of dog-eat-dog, belligerent and hyper-competitive international relations fuelled by geopolitical rivalries'. These include cross-national dialogues among citizens and diplomats, moratoriums on increases in military, surveillance and police spending, bans on 'harms' trading (e.g. arms, toxic chemicals, waste), and even re-examining notions of 'nation-state' and emphasising relations amongst 'peoples' of the world.

- Examples of this include the several people-to-people dialogues between citizens of India and Pakistan, and the positive (mostly in the past) advocacy of disarmament, non-alignment, environmental sustainability, and other such global policies by India.

Box 1:

What is not an alternative?

The Vikalp Sangam process has also discussed in detail what does not constitute an alternative. The Alternative Transformation Framework points to a caution that is important in the current context of an increasingly right-wing agenda, that initiatives which appear to be alternative in one dimension, e.g., conservation, or sustaining appropriate traditions against the onslaught of wholesale modernity, would not be considered so if they have casteist, communal, sexist, feudal, or other motives and biases related to social injustice and inequity, or those appealing to a parochial nationalism intolerant of other cultures and peoples. Also, what may not constitute alternatives are initiatives that include predominantly market and technological fixes for problems that are deeply social and political, or more generally, 'green growth'/ 'green capitalism' kind of approaches that only tinker around with the existing system, without fundamentally impacting or attempting to impact the root causes of such injustices.

It does not consider initiatives which are attempting to create livelihoods, traditional or modern, where non-workers are in control and profiting (monetarily or politically) from the exploitation of workers; this is especially relevant in the current context where many capitalist or state-run corporations are claiming to be eco-friendly, but in the way they treat workers or deal with profits, remain essentially exploitative. The Framework points out that, elitist, costly models that appear to be ecologically sustainable but are not relevant for or affordable by most people, may not fit

into alternatives. Superficial solutions to ecological problems, such as planting trees to offset pollution and carbon emissions rather than reducing the emissions, may not be considered alternatives. More often than not, such plantations create greater injustice by dispossessing voiceless communities of their lands and resources. Expensive, elitist technologies and processes that have no relevance to the majority of people, or perhaps even large-scale centralised renewable energy projects built by private corporations and with the same problems of access for the poor that fossil-fuel based grid systems have. Purely elitist food fads even if they pertain to healthy or organic food and expensive technological water solutions that have no relevance for the majority of people, are unlikely to be considered as alternatives. In terms of global relationships and policies, what would not count as an alternative is the attempt by India and other emerging powerful economies (the BRICS nations) to provide a counter to the power of the USA and Europe, for even as it does so, it follows the same neoliberal, state-corporate dominated policies that the industrialized countries have done so far.

Long term goal

The Vikalp Sangam process has, as one of its long-term objectives, the creation of a political mass of people who can affect larger change. It is too early in the process to say whether it is moving in this direction. The Framework described above could be one basis for an alternative, grassroots-up vision of the future of India; however, much more churning and dialogue is needed and greater work on creating peoples' agendas in every sector or field of

endeavour. As a follow-up to the Energy Vikalp Sangam, for instance, there was some discussion on whether a citizens' roadmap towards alternative energy for India can be developed as a counter to the State's continued focus on fossil fuels to help influence future policy directions, and to give a holistic context to peoples' own efforts at resisting dirty energy and tapping clean, decentralised sources. Similar processes could happen around food, learning and education, youth, the arts, cities, and other thematic areas around which Sangams are likely to be organised in combination with similar networks and platforms that bring together other kinds of interest (writers, academics, workers' groups, resistance movements).

As Turner (1978) says, 'the ultimate stakes of politics is not even the struggle to appropriate value; it is the struggle to establish what value is.' This perhaps is the objective of the political journey of Vikalp Sangam.

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The Niyamgiri Story: Challenging the Idea of Growth without Limits?

Ashish Kothari

Young boys and girls dancing at a village feast

Ashish Kothari

A pre-wedding ritual underway

Ashish Kothari

Women carrying wood to sell in Muniguda market

Ashish Kothari

The Niyamgiri hills

3
The Niyamgiri Story: Challenging the Idea of Growth without Limits?

Meenal Tatpati, Ashish Kothari and Rashi Mishra

The decade long struggle of the Dongria Kondh, a small *adivasi* [1] community of about 8000 people residing in the Eastern Ghats of Odisha, India, has been held as an organic grassroots resistance movement of a people and their way of life pitted against a model of exploitative development in the form of a major multi-national extractive corporation. The struggle gained enormous international attention and reflects many such contemporary struggles including the Kalinga and Bontok peoples against the Chico River Basin Development Project in the Philippines (Fiagoy, 1988); the Wet'suwet'en Nation against the tar sands and gas pipelines project in British Columbia (Hill, 2011); the Guarani peoples against commercial plantations on their territories in Brazil (World Rainforest Movement, 2006); the Wajan and Jagalingou peoples against coal mining in Queensland, Australia, and several others.

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1. 'Adivasi' literally means first settlers and is the term used to describe India's indigenous groups. They are classified as Scheduled Tribes in the Constitution of India. The Government of India does not consider any specific groups as 'indigenous' since it claims all citizens to be indigenous.

The current demand for industrial growth and development, based primarily on the extraction of minerals, water and forest resources, is obliterating indigenous communities and their habitats (UNDSPD, n.d; UN, 2011). The model of 'economic development' being followed worldwide has resulted in glaring inequity. It is entrenched in structural violence against certain communities and the natural world and is slowly obliterating the diversity of societies, cultures and livelihoods around the world. Many indigenous peoples and other communities have already pointed this out through their resistance struggles and are beginning to articulate their responses to local and global crises. This includes responses like the articulation of *Kametsa Asiki* ('living well') by a federation of Ashainka communities in the Peruvian Amazon (Sarmiento Barletti, 2011), *Sumak Kawsay* ('fullness of life' or 'well being') from the Ecuadorean Andes (Pachamama Alliance, n.d.), Ubuntu in Southern Africa (Manda, 2009) and Swaraj in India (Kothari & Das, 2016) (Pachamama Alliance, n.d) , the southern African notion of *ubuntu* (Manda, 2009)*,* or the Indian concept of *swaraj* (Kothari & Das, 2016), among others. These concepts are rooted in the relation of indigenous communities to their natural environment and the ways in which they perceive the world. They are explained through community perspective about what 'living well' means for them and how they wish to pursue their relationships with external actors – including the government – who have the power to support or undermine them and their natural environment through unwanted interventions. These communities have also started the processes towards self-determination of the future that they want for themselves, their territories, resources and culture through 'vision documents' and 'life statements' like the *Plan de Vida* (life plan) of the Columbian Misak community (Watts & Marti, 2015) and Bio-Cultural Protocols (Bavikatte & Jonas, 2009) developed by communities across the world. Such

plans help them to communicate their vision of not only what they want for themselves, but also lay down the guidelines of engagement for external actors. In more recent or 'modern' contexts, alternative frameworks such as de-growth in Europe, solidarity and social economy in northern America and Europe and radical ecological democracy in India (Kothari (a), 2014; Kothari, Demaria, & Acosta, 2015; Kothari (b), 2014) are also emerging. Thus, together with resistance struggles on the ground, these ancient and new concepts and visions are offering a strong counter to the rapacious economic development model.

Much has been written about the Dongria Kondh community's struggle against the destruction of their habitat in the Niyamgiri Hills due to bauxite mining by the powerful Vedanta Alumina Ltd. Their articulations about the sacredness of Niyamgiri, their culture and identity have been well documented and hailed by environmentalists and human rights defenders, but there's little on how this reflects on their notions of 'development' and 'wellbeing'. There is a need to gain a preliminary understanding of and document what the Dongria Kondh think of these notions, through their inherent socio-cultural, economic and livelihood practices and through facilitating discussions with community members about what they perceive as development and well being.

The current study was undertaken so that these observations could be taken back to the Dongria Kondh and the activists supporting the struggle to:

a) Facilitate fuller articulation of the Dongria Kondh's worldview of 'wellbeing'

b) Construct an alternative framework/s of 'wellbeing' within India with the consent and full involvement of communities such as the Dongria Kondh[2], which can

present an alternative view from the current dominant economic and governance models

c)   Facilitate exchange amongst similar indigenous and other community worldviews and civil society visions around the world, feeding into movements to present a global alternative view vis-à-vis the dominant political economy

As part of the study, we visited Dongria Kondh villages in Rayagada and Kalahandi districts three times between December 2014 and December 2015[3]. General, non-structured conversations were carried out with the Dongria Kondh about their struggle, life in the hills and their vision of development, guided by a rough draft of questions put together for the study. These were:

a)   What do the Dongria Kondh think of the 'development' they see around them or as it has been explained to them? What immediate and perceived threats does this pose to the community?

b)   If they are not in favour of such 'development', do they have alternative visions of wellbeing which will help them maintain or achieve the security of livelihood, food, water, health, learning and other basic needs? Are ideas like autonomy, self-sufficiency, self-rule part of this?

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2.   Kalpavriksh hopes to carry out similar exercises in one or two other locations, possibly in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra with Gond adivasis, and in Medak district of Telangana with dalit women farmers.

3.   Kesarapadi and Serakapadi villages of Sivapadar gram panchayat, Merkabondili, Sakata, Gorota, Troholi, Bododenguni, Sanodenguni, Dhamanapanga and Monda villages of Munikhol gram panchayat; Khambesi village of Kurli gram panchayat and Bariguda village of Hata Muniguda panchayat in Rayagada District. Lakhpadar village of Bhimkela panchayat and Phuldumer and Palberi villages of Trilochanpur panchayat in Kalahandi District.

c) Are there new aspirations amongst the young people, which clash with the above? If so, how do they deal with these?

d) Are they considering articulating their worldview in some way, or do they want to be left alone? In that case, do they also not want state welfare services?

e) Apart from the immediate motivations of saving the ecosystems on which they depend for livelihood sustenance, are there underlying cosmo-visions or worldviews that are fundamentally different from the way in which the modern 'developmental' economy looks at nature and natural resources? Clearly, spiritual or religious motivations were important. Are these embedded in the larger worldview?

Based on their responses after the first visit, the team spoke to the non-Dongria activists guiding the struggle about the articulations of the people and their reflections. We also interacted with members of the Domb community who co-inhabit Niyamgiri hills and with officials of the Dongria Kondh Development Agency, Chatikona, about the schemes currently in place for the community. Thus, the study primarily draws from the Dongria Kondhs' own articulation about development along with insights provided by activists and co-inhabitants, counter posing these with the narrative provided by the official welfare agency and supplementing it with secondary literature.

Language was the major limitation. Both Kui and Odiya were unfamiliar languages and the team relied heavily on the accompanying Odiya speakers. Moreover, due to paucity of time and resources, and hesitation to impose on the community, we were unable to spend more than a few hours in each village. Though we conversed with a few Dongria Kondh elders and leaders who were vocal about the

struggle and what they perceived would be the ideal future for Niyamgiri and their community, we could not carry out in-depth conversations with youth, women and religious and spiritual leaders such as *bejunis* and *janis*. While discussions reveal glimpses of a uniquely Dongria Kondh worldview, we have been unable to fully articulate it due to these limitations. However, we have been able to record (from the limited scope of discussions around formulated questions) our understanding of their articulations about the current process of 'development' and their vision for the future.

This case study is therefore a preliminary overview of the articulation of the Dongria Kondh on the current concept of 'development' and what it means to them as a community, their reflections on the kind of outside interventions that the community thinks are both needed and inimical to their socio-cultural, political and economic self-sufficiency and the natural environment of Niyamgiri hills. The case study is therefore to be approached as work in progress and will be enhanced only when it is taken back to the Dongria Kondh for critical review, reflection and evaluation.

The Dongria Kondh of the Niyamgiri Hills

The Niyamgiri hill range is spread over 250 sq. km in parts of Rayagada and Kalahandi districts of Odisha. It is part of the Karlapat and Kotagarh biodiverse landscape. The rich deciduous forests are a habitat for several endemic and threatened flora and fauna. It was declared as an Elephant Reserve by the State of Odisha in August 2004. The rivers Vamsadhara and Nagavali originate in these hills (Vasundhara, 2006).

The *Kondhs,* a tribal community with several sub-groups, inhabit hills tracts of Odisha and parts of Andhra Pradesh. Each sub-group like the Dongria, Kutia, Desia, etc., has a distinct identity. The name *Kondh* is said to be derived from

the Telugu word *Ko* or *Ku,* meaning 'mountain'; thus, a Kondh is a 'mountain dweller' (Shodhganga, n.d). Their native language is *Kui*, which has no written script. The Dongria Kondh have inhabited the Niyamgiri hill range for centuries. They believe in Niyamraja (the King of Law), the Supreme deity who is also their ancestor. The Niyamgiri hills are thus 'the hills of Law', the abode of Niyamraja who rules the hills in accordance with these laws, along with other deities closely associated with nature. Along with the Dongria Kondhs, the settled Scheduled Caste *Domb* community in the hills and some Kutia Kondh and Desia Kondh (groups inhabiting the Lanjigarh plains who have themselves developed a close association with the forests and the fertile soil accumulated at the foothills) have been part of the Niyamgiri landscape. The customary occupations of the Dongria Kondh are agriculture (of the shifting cultivation/ swidden type)[4] and collection and sale of minor forest produce. They practice a complex agro-forestry system, cultivating patches of land cleared from the forest in rotation, rearing livestock for meat and ritual sacrifices, and collecting various minor forest produce for sustenance and medicinal purposes (Saxena, Parasuraman, Kant, & Baviskar, 2010).

The structure of the Dongria Kondh society is linked to the sacredness of the mountains and the laws prescribed by Niyamraja. The community is organized into several clans or *kudas* (at least thirty-six have been identified) with each clan possessing certain customary territories (distinct geo-cultural

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4. In this kind of agriculture, a patch of forest is cleared, the undergrowth burned and this patch is then cultivated for a few years (the Dongria Kondh refer to the patch as podu), after which another patch is cleared and the previous patch left fallow for several years. Thus, patches are cleared and used in a continuous cycle, ensuring forest regeneration in the unused patches and availability of enough forest produce. This kind of agriculture allows the Dongria Kondh to grow a variety of millets, grains and pulses in the fields which provide them sustenance throughout the year.

landscapes) called *padars*, which usually consist of several hills[5]. The clans are exogamous and each clan territory has a dominant clan group as well as groups who have migrated to the clan over a period of time through marriage or kinship. The Dongria Kondh have more than 300 settlements or hamlets across the Niyamgiri hills. These settlements are not permanent, and sometimes communities abandon them in search of new ones, but the new settlements are always located within their clan territories and habitat. A settlement is almost always built on gentle slopes with the traditional adobe houses constructed in parallel rows. The houses have wooden foundations and posts and thatched roofs made from a locally available grass. The roofs reach close to the ground on either side. Since the region experiences heavy rainfall and winds, the sloping thatched roofs prevent heavy winds and rains from entering the houses.

Traditionally, the socio-political decision-making body of the Dongria Kondh is known as the *kutumba* (Jena, Pathi, Dash, Patnaik, & Seeland, 2002). The *kutumba* functions at the level of the clan *(kuda kutumba)* and at the level of a settlement *(nayu kutumba).* To manage the religious and political affairs of each clan, four functional groups or *punjas* have been formed – *jani, pujari, bismajhi and mandal*. The *kuda kutumba* presides over the *matha mandal* which manages the affairs of a particular clan in a cluster of villages[6]; it presides over inter-village matters and inter-ethnic disputes of the same clans in different villages.

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5. Some of the elders we met say that there are more than 112 such padars spread across the hills.

6. In a single village, besides members of the dominant clan, several members from other clans may also be present. All members of a particular village are presided over by the nayu kutumba. The mutha mandal represents a single clan from a cluster of villages, which presides over matters related to its clan organization.

The *jani* is the religious and secular head. He usually influences political decisions. The *pujari* assists the *jani* in performing sacred rituals and ceremonies. At the settlement level, the *kutumba* usually discusses and deliberates marriages, issues related to property, distribution and arbitration related to swidden sites, cooperative labour, inter-personal relationships and other intra-village affairs. The *mandal* is the political head of the *matha.* The *bismajhi* assists the mandal in political affairs, and acts as a treasurer for festivals and other occasions. Besides these posts, the traditional society also consists of *desari* (traditional healer), who is also the astrologer and religious head, and the *bejuni* (female shaman). Traditionally, women do not usually attend these meetings, except as a victim or perpetrator of a serious dispute. The *kutumba* discusses community issues and decisions are taken for the benefit of the village.

The *Dombs* are an integral part of the social and political life in the Niyamgiri hills and are important as communicators between the Dongria Kondh and other communities and traders in the plains. They do not own much land but act as traditional messengers or *barika.* They control much of the trade of palm toddy *(salap)* in the hills.

The fields and forests of Niyamgiri hills have been the traditional educational grounds of the Dongria Kondh. For long, they have practised a system of imparting cultural and social values to their adolescents and youth through youth dormitories. Young unmarried boys and girls from the villages leave their parents' homes to stay in village dormitories in the evenings where they are taught by the older youth, thereby gaining insight into the philosophical and practical aspects of life within the community and the natural environment. They are taught about culture, territory, marriage, economics and society. In Niyamgiri, the dormitories for girls were referred

to as *daaska hada or dhangadi basa* and for boys as *dhangda basa.* However, the Dongria Kondh are gradually rejecting this unique cultural institution under the influence of outsiders who have tried to shut down what they see as being morally objectionable (Hardenberg, 2005); (Jena, Pathi, Dash, Patnaik, & Seeland, 2002).

The 'development' agenda of the State

Independent India's policies have often viewed adivasis as 'beneficiaries' of state welfare schemes designed especially for their 'economic upliftment'. While there is no doubt that many of these communities face problems of land and resource alienation, indebtedness, exploitation, dispossession, and lack of meaningful education, efforts have been channelled towards raising their standard of living by merely distributing state largesse, thereby linking them with the market economy, or in other terms, 'mainstreaming' them (Gill, Rajesh, & Snehashish, 2015). On the other hand, there has been a gradual rise in dispossession of adivasi communities in India through colonization and forceful acquisition of land, territories and resources for 'large-scale' development projects. These contradictory state arms work in tandem as they seek to lay the foundations of the current economic growth and homogenous globalisation model. We observed a similar trend in the relationship of the State with the Dongria Kondh community.

The panchayat system

Odisha established the Panchayati Raj[7] system in the Rayagada and Kalahandi districts after independence. In

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7.   This generally refers to the political system of India introduced by the 73rd constitutional amendment of 1992, where a three-tier governance system has been established in the villages.

1968, the first Panchayat was established at Kurli, in Bissam Cuttack block of Rayagada district. The Niyamgiri hill range has politically been divided into the Rayagada and Kalahandi districts; the Niyamgiri hills are further divided into the Muniguda, Bissam Cuttack and Kalyansingpur blocks in Rayagada and the Lanjigarh block in Kalahandi district. Rayagada and Kalahandi districts belong to Schedule Five[8] areas. The Dongria Kondh villages have been divided into panchayats consisting of non-Dongria Kondh populations from the plains as well. Many schemes like the State Public Distribution System for securing food grains and other material for poor families at fair prices, the Indira Awaas Yojna (a scheme for providing lower income families with funds to build houses), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (which provides assured 100 days of work with minimum wages to lower income families) and schemes for agricultural development, road construction, water conservation and others are planned and carried out through the *gram* panchayat.

Dongria Kondh Development Agency (DKDA)

The Dongria Kondh community has been classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG)[9]. The PVTG status entitles them to special welfare schemes and enjoins

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8.   The fifth schedule of the constitution of India guarantees the Scheduled Tribes the right to land over which they live. Schedule V areas are those areas which have a large population of tribal groups and are notified as such by the President of India. They are governed under special laws like the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996.

9.   Identified in 1973 by the Debhar commission as Primitive Tribal Groups and renamed PVTGs in 2006, these were communities who were thought to be less 'developed' than other tribal communities due to their homogenous, stagnant or declining population, relative physical isolation, use of simple technology primarily for shifting cultivation and gathering forest produce, and very low literacy.

upon the state a special responsibility for protecting their interests. The Dongria Kondh Development Agency was set up in 1964 to launch 'developmental' programmes in Niyamgiri (Nayak, 1988). The agency was set up with funds from the Tribal Sub-Plans[10] of the Central Government with the primary objective of 'accelerating the economic development' of the Dongria Kondh through execution of schemes (Aparajita, 1994). The Agency has its field offices in Chatikona village of Bissam Cuttack block and in Parsali village of Kalyansinghpur block of Rayagada district. In the initial years it promoted the development of horticulture over swidden cultivation, established Purchase and Sale-Fair price Shops to purchase produce from the Dongria Kondh and sell items of daily necessity to them at affordable prices, established primary schools in several villages and coordinated all state level and central welfare schemes to build essential infrastructure like roads, conduct health camps and revive traditional weaving skills. It also had a small team of multi-purpose workers who stayed in different Dongria Kondh villages in the project area.

As of today, the DKDA covers only 101 Dongria Kondh villages. The Chatikona agency has sixty-one villages in Muniguda and Bissam Cuttack blocks while the Parsali agency has forty villages in Kalyansinghpur block of Rayagada district. Officially, the DKDA maintains that there are no Dongria Kondh villages in the Kalahandi district[11]. The agency prepares a micro-plan (a five year plan) according

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10. The sub-plans were introduced as a strategy to develop the socio-economic status of scheduled tribes in India. The plans channelize the flow of funds and benefits from central ministries and departments for the development of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

11. In conversation with Bhagirathi Sahoo, Welfare Extension Officer of Chatikona DKDA. According to him, the Kutia Kondh Development Agency becomes operational in the Kalahandi district.

to which developmental activities are carried out in the project villages. The Welfare Extension Officer stressed that activities to be taken up for the following year are decided at *palli sabha*[12] meetings of the villages. The DKDA then coordinates with different state departments to plan out the activities on the ground. The plan is sanctioned through the District Collector.

Currently the DKDA is carrying out extensive horticultural expansion by providing seedlings of pineapple, orange, turmeric and ginger. The Welfare Extension Officer emphasized that most Dongria Kondh villages in the Bissam Cuttack block have giving up swidden cultivation to take up horticulture plantation, an 'achievement' for the DKDA. It also helps women Self-Help Groups – mainly engaged in the making of hill brooms and collection and sale of Non-Timber Forest Produce like *Siali* (*Bauhinia Vahili*) leaves, tubers, etc. – by financing these efforts through subsidized loans and by linking them to markets. Through the Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation of Odisha, it takes up occasional activities like training for weaving traditional shawls, etc.

In its initial years, the DKDA had started primary-level schools in a handful of Dongria Kondh villages in the hills. According to the District Collector of Rayagada, twenty-eight of these schools are still functioning with more than 800 children enrolled[13]. Both in Chatikona and Parsali, the

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12. Also the gram sabha, this is the village assembly consisting of all adults within a village. However, at times the gram sabha consists of an assembly of several villages. Here it means the actual meeting of the assembly to discuss matters of importance to the village.

13. Information provided by Shri Jagannath Mohanty (District Collector and District Magistrate of Rayagada) in reply to a petition (No. 5506 of 2015) filed before the Odisha Human Rights Commission by Dodhi Pusika, Secretary of the Niyamgiri Surakshya Samiti, regarding violation of the human rights of the Dongria Kondh by Rayagada Police.

DKDA funds residential schools for Dongria Kondh girls run by the Odisha Model Tribal Education Society. The schools function till class nine and have enrolled around 250 girls in each. The proposal to open similar residential schools for boys has been approved[14]. In addition, the DKDA and other departments also claim to be conducting regular health camps in some villages.

The mining proposal

In 1997, the State of Odisha signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Sterlite Industries (now Sesa Sterlite, the Indian arm of the global mining behemoth Vedanta Corporation) for setting up an aluminum refinery in Lanjigarh block of Kalahandi district and opening up of the Niyamgiri hills for mining to supply bauxite to the refinery[15]. By June 2002, the first phase of land acquisition for the refinery had already started and by mid-2006, the refinery started functioning. The opposition to the factory began almost immediately. Despite this, the refinery was built illegally, circumventing various environmental laws as well as laws for the protection of these communities (Amnesty International, 2010). At the same time, many activists continued the struggle by filing writ petitions in the High Court and Supreme Court against the project, which played a role in deferring the forest clearance required for the mine (Amnesty International, 2010).

The struggle against the refinery and the mine resulted in the Supreme Court judgment of April 2013, directing the state government of Odisha to hold gram sabhas in the

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14. Ibid
15. The Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC) and Vedanta Alumina Ltd (VAL), a subsidiary of Vedanta Resources signed a joint memorandum to develop the mine.

Niyamgiri hills to decide if religious rights were held over forest areas being diverted for the mining project (Supreme Court of India, 2013). The state government identified twelve villages from Rayagada and Kalahandi. At meetings held in July and August 2013, all the twelve gram sabhas rejected the proposal for mining in the region. On 9th January 2014, the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) rejected the final forest clearance to the mining project (Shrivastava, 2014).

However, there have been repeated attempts by the state government to reintroduce the proposal and start mining in the region. Recently, the state mining corporation filed a petition in the Supreme Court to reopen the mining. The Supreme Court has refused to admit the petition and has asked the government to make the twelve gram sabhas that had rejected the mining, parties in the petition.

Articulations and responses of the Dongria Kondh

Although the Dongria Kondh way of life has been experiencing changes due to increasing interaction with the outside world, the market economy and state-led interventions through the DKDA, the onslaught of the threat of an extractive industry has brought about stark change in the Dongria Kondh world. Discussions and conversations with them have revealed a sharp understanding of their changing society, culture and their natural environment. They also acknowledge that while they have been successful so far in keeping the 'company' in the form of VAL away from mining the Niyamgiri hills, there are other similar forces that are rapidly changing their way of life. We have attempted to articulate these changes and their effects on the Dongria Kondh society, culture and interactions with their natural and spiritual environment.

On Nature, Culture and Identity

> *Niyamraja created fruits in the hills, grains in the plains. He is the first of the Dongria Kondh*
>
> *No one knows his story, lakhs of people are unaware I will sing, I will sing why the outsiders must spare our land*
>
> *After making pineapple, mango, jackfruit and grains Niyamraja said to us 'live on what I have given you' Niyamraja decided where there would be fruits and grains*
>
> *Which seed will be soft and which one would be hard.*
>
> *What will we do without the fruits, grains and buffaloes,*
>
> *What will we do without Niyamgiri...*
>
> *What will the animals do without the big forests,*
>
> *What will we do without the plants that save lives.*
>
> *-From the lament of Niyamraja, sung by the late Dambu Praska*

All the Dongria Kondh we spoke to reiterated that *everything* within their world belongs to Niyamraja, and Niyamraja *is* everything. Throughout the long struggle, they have been articulating their interdependence with the Niyamgiri hills. Several reports show that they consider their way of life allied to the 'sacred law' as prescribed by Niyamraja, which disallows greedy, unsustainable exploitation of the forest and the land; theirs is what Padel calls an 'economy of restraint' (Survival International, n.d).

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(http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/57/The-Lament-of-Niyamraja)

After 10 years or more, I see us as what we are today. We don't want change. Change will mean that everything will be lost - our culture, our language. Some people are stepping out to study, but when they come back they've lost everything. What is a man without an identity?

See what has happened in Lanjigarh. When the company (VAL) was not there, the *'Kui'* folk (Kutia and Desia Kondh communities inhabiting the foothills of Niyamgiri) were like us, we lived like brothers. You could identify them as *Kandha* (Konds). But when the company came, everything changed. Land was lost, culture was lost, and identity was lost. Now, they are labourers. They were kings, owners over their own land before. Now you cannot make out who is *pano*, who is *kandho*, everything is mixed. What is the use of that kind of development? We will at the end become labourers. Now, they are opposing us Dongria. The brother is opposing the brother.

- Lado Sikaka,
(Lakhpadar village, Leader, Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti)

- Lado Sikaka, on being asked
"How do you see yourselves in the future?"

They refer to Niyamraja as provider and keeper of the forests. Alongside Niyamraja, the most important deity is *dharani penu* (earth goddess). The primary occupation is swidden cultivation, and the entire cycle of sowing and harvest is controlled by *dharani penu* who is to be revered before and after the farming season. Natural elements, water, stones, rocks, animals are all thought to have a soul, which is to be revered. Thus, the polytheist, animist belief is guided by the proximity to the moods and rhythms of nature, commanding respect for and co-operation with

natural forces. This is reflected in the way of life practiced by the community and in their socio-cultural relationships. The Niyamgiri hills, abode of Niyamraja, are thus sacred, and the daily practices of life, habitation and subsistence deeply integral to the sacred life-giving capacity of Niyamgiri.

Losing Niyamgiri has been likened by many Dongria Kondh to losing their *identity*. The Dongria Kondh culture and identity is intricately linked to them being Niyamraja's kith and kin. The name *Dongri*a is an Odiya term for *people of the hills*, but the Dongria identify themselves as *Jharnia*, protectors of the many streams of Niyamgiri. This deep belief of being guardians is manifested through their unique forest management techniques in agricultural practice. The trees at the top of the hills are never cut; they consider these to be the abode of their gods and goddesses. They are also the origins of streams and protect the loss of soil and water during the monsoon.

While we were at Niyamgiri, we were told that besides lentils and oilseeds, they also cultivate over twenty varieties of millets on their *podu* fields. In the 1970s, they were introduced to horticulture and have started growing pineapple, oranges, lemons, and bananas on a large scale, which they sell in the markets (Nayak, 1988). They believe that this bounty is provided by *dharani penu*, the earth goddess, who must be worshiped before sowing and after harvesting the crop. Before sowing, all the villagers bring their seeds to a *kutumba* gathering where the *bejuni* offers these to *dharani penu.* They also collect a variety of forest produce including *siali* leaves *(Bauhinia vahlii),* bamboo shoot, wild ginger and turmeric, mushrooms and tubers, a variety of green leafy vegetables and fish and mollusks from the numerous streams; this included, till recently, several hundred wild foods (see 'On changes in the way of life'

below). Some of these are sold. The community practises traditional forms of healing, with herbs and other substances available in the forests. The community has traditional healers who have a deep knowledge of nature cures. In Niyamgiri, as is the case in almost all tribal tracts, culture and livelihoods are thus intricately linked to and are inseparable from nature – a trait of their submission to and management of their natural terrain.

On Territory

The Dongria consider the whole of the Niyamgiri hills to be their territory, presided over by Niyamraja. Traditionally, the Dongria Kondh territory was divided into distinct geo-cultural landscapes called *padars* belonging to each clan. However, with independence, much of the area of the Niyamgiri hills has been classified as reserved forests, without the actual process of 'settlement' of rights being carried out. Due to this, there are no clear tenurial rights over the forest. In this context, juxtaposed with the struggle against the mining of the Niyamgiri hills, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (Forest Rights Act or FRA)[16] emerged as a strong tool with which the community could articulate their identity and way of life as being inextricably linked to Niyamgiri and its forests. In the landmark

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16. The FRA was enacted to address the longstanding need to recognise and vest rights over forest land in forest dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers whose rights over their land, livelihoods and territories were severely curtailed as a result of increasing state control over forests as well as developmental and conservation activities. The Act recognises a range of forest rights over individual and community occupation of forest land for habitation and self-cultivation and collective rights over forests. For groups classified as particularly 'vulnerable', like the Dongria Kondh, it reserves the habitat right provision, through which communities' rights over a habitat can be recognised.

judgement of April 2013, the Supreme Court hailed the provisions of the FRA and upheld several constitutional provisions regarding the protection of scheduled tribes. The court pointed out that the religious and cultural rights of the Dongria Kondh (as recognized under the FRA) over the land to be mined for bauxite were not put before the community for their 'active consideration'. Thus, it ordered the state of Odisha to place these issues before the Dongria Kondh (Supreme Court of India, 2013). In July and August 2013, the state organised gram sabhas in twelve villages of Rayagada and Kalahandi districts; all the twelve villages rejected the mining proposal. Prior to the *palli sabhas*, in 2013, the Odisha state government illegally[17] prepared a report of the community claims over minor forest produce, grazing land, *podu* fields, etc. When the reports were placed before the villagers during the *palli sabhas,* they rejected the idea of community and individual claims over the resources as these had been divided, classified and measured into categories like grazing land, sacred spots and streams (Bera, 2013).

> 'If the government was ready to give rights to the company over the mountain, then why not to Niyamraja? We want the title to the entire Niymagiri hill ranges, spreading over Kalahandi and Rayagada, to be in Niyamraja's name. And all our villages should be collectively given a title over the entire Niyamgiri range.'
>
> *- Dodhi Pusika, Gorota village*

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17. Claims towards forest rights are to be made by the village gram sabha by electing a committee within its members.

In 2010, just after the Saxena Committee visit[18], some individual titles were distributed in the villages through the DKDA[19]. However, titles shown to us in Gorota and Sanodenguni villages were over a mere 2.4 acres of land and had a 'provisional' stamp on it, showing that the titles distributed were not final. At Gorota, the elders and community members expressed their dissatisfaction with the individual and community claims put forward by the Government on their behalf and at the extent of land over which they were given titles. Receiving titles over parcels of land and resources in the name of individuals or villages is in contrast to the way Dongria Kondh view the hills and resources. The relevance of such titles for their swidden cultivation practice is also questionable, for the practice requires access to large areas over which the *podu* cycles can be carried out and small plots of fixed land would force them to convert to settled agriculture. Additionally, providing individual rights over the *podu* fields might also lead to individualization of an essentially collective practice, since *podu* patches are periodically assigned through the *kutumba* and belong to a clan, not permanently to a family or individual. Further, in Gorota, one of the leaders also claimed that Niyamgiri belonged to Niyamraja and not to the Dongria Kondh alone. Other communities also depended on the resources (Tatpati, Nayak, & Mishra, 2015). The Domb community that co-resides in this habitat has actively joined the Dongria Kondh community and are part of the Niyamgiri Surakshya Samiti (NSS). Although most do not own land

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18. A four member committee headed by Dr. N.C. Saxena, constituted under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, set up to investigate the ecological and social costs of mining in the Niyamgiri hill ranges, investigated the progress of recognition and vesting of rights under FRA and the impact of mining on wildlife and biodiversity in Niyamgiri.

19. Interview with DKDA officer and discussions with community members

or practice swidden, they are an integral part of the socio-cultural fabric of the Niyamgiri hills. The plains-dwelling Kutia and Desia Kondhs also use the forests of the foothills.This shows that the Dongria Kondh are aware of the dependence of other communities on the forest resources in Niyamgiri and therefore claiming community rights for individual Dongria Kondh villages could lead to tensions with other communities.

In February 2014, meetings were held with Dongria Kondh elders and community leaders about the provisions of the FRA for a study commissioned by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the nodal agency for the implementation of the FRA[20]. In these meetings, as articulated before, the community asserted that the entire hill range belonged to Niyamraja and any title over the territory should be given in the name of Niyamraja.[21]

On 'Development'

Apart from the DKDA, governmental schemes like the low-cost rice distribution under the Public Distribution System (PDS), the *Indira Awas Yojna* for housing, women self-help groups and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) have also been operational in the area.

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20. The meetings were held by a civil society group called Vasundhara with the community elders.

21. Recognising that the protection of their land and resources is critical to the survival and dignity of PVTGs, Sec 3(1) (d) of the FRA provides for 'recognition of rights over community tenures of habitat and habitation for primitive tribal groups [Sec 3(1) (e)] and pre-agricultural communities'. The Act recognises the traditional institutions belonging to these communities and the diversity of their land use practices. The recognition of rights over the customary territories used for habitation, livelihoods, social, economic, spiritual, cultural and other purposes will therefore allow these communities to manage and plan for the areas under their customary habitation.

However, as the Dongria Kondh revealed, and our preliminary observations indicated, the conceptualization and implementation of these schemes and developmental plans have been at odds with the community's way of life. The works are coordinated by the *gram panchayat;* one *gram panchayat* consists of several Dongria Kondh villages and other villages from the plains. The post of the sarpanch (elected head of the panchayat) has mostly been occupied by members of other communities from larger villages. This is primarily due to the fact that the Dongria Kondh rarely attend panchayat meetings where they are in a minority. Traditionally, the *kutumba* within the village functions as an institution that decides and regulates almost all matters of the Dongria Kondh life. They also revealed that the elected sarpanches yield considerable political clout and control the funds and decision-making process. The NSS has been successful in gathering enough support to politically assert their rights and elect some people from the community as sarpanches in a couple of gram panchayats. However, for most in the community, to engage with the gram panchayat is to interact with corrupt officials who may not have the community's interests at heart.

Most Dongria Kondh the team met were critical of DKDA's role. In most of the villages, the schemes carried out by the DKDA are not done in consultation with the village. It distributes solar lamps, seedlings for horticulture, and builds concrete roads but not in all villages; moreover, there is no follow up regarding these 'distribution' activities once they are done. At Sakatta village, we spoke to a few women about the role of the DKDA in 'enhancing' their livelihoods. They revealed that the DKDA had conducted training and provided the women with threads to weave the traditional shawls but the training was left incomplete and the scheme folded up in six months.

DKDA officials claim that they have helped the Dongria Kondh with several livelihood activities, including enhanced incomes from shawl-making and horticulture. We were able to take a look at a draft plan for the Dongria Kondh's development for the years 2015 through 2020, which the officers said was prepared in consultation with the adivasis at *palli sabha* meetings, a claim that the Dongria Kondh elders outrightly disputed.[22] DKDA officials admitted that they had no plans for enhanced use of or building on the adivasis' traditional medicinal knowledge, or encouragement of traditional crop diversity; they did however want to help in "conservation of culture" which for them meant making a traditional puja place, cementing the mud structures and providing an asbestos roof. In the plan, shifting cultivation has still been described as ecologically damaging that needs to be stopped and regular fixed farming needs to be fully perpetrated, completely undermining the nutritional benefits of the crops cultivated on the *podu* fields as well as the natural regeneration of forests that takes place, which according to the Dongria Kondh provides for lean months due to the availability of other edible forest produce and food for wild animals like elephants that occasionally pass through the fields.

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22. When we asked for a copy, we were told it is a draft still to be approved by the District Collector, and not yet available for public distribution.

Box 1

The Domb view

The Domb community is as critical of the government and as unwelcoming of 'the company' (VAL) as their adivasi co-residents. Boli Karkariya, a member of the youth-wing of the NSS, also told us of the time he was jailed on false charges while protesting against the mining proposal. However, they are more in touch with the outside market, their cultural values and aspirations tuned more to the external world, and are thus somewhat more welcoming of state welfare activities. This could be due to, as the community revealed through discussions, a sense of being neglected by the State in providing meaningful welfare schemes and employment opportunities to the community. Their articulations on development are fairly similar to those of the Dongria Kondh, but with subtle differences. The community usually played the role of middle-men between the Dongria Kondh and plains settlers, selling produce from the Dongria Kondh to outside markets; they also controlled the *salap* (palm-toddy) trade. However, with the Dongria Kondh increasingly interacting with the outside market, the means of livelihood in this community is changing. There has been large-scale migration of youth from the villages to cities to earn a living. Some have purchased land from the Dongria Kondh but are unable to meet the annual requirement of food grains.

These articulations need to be considered by both the communities for a sustainable future in the hills.

Source: Authors' field notes

The Dongria Kondh women, youth and elders are vocal about the need for education. At Niyamgiri, we observed school rooms in Gorota and Dhamanponga villages that were built by the DKDA nearly twenty-five years ago but are no longer in use. In Dhamanponga, the community revealed that the school was operational till about two years ago but was shut down when the school teacher, a non-Dongria, left. This refutes the charge made by the District Collector that twenty-eight schools are operational inside the Niyamgiri hills. The Dongria Kondh believe that many of these schools remain non-functional due to the lack of dedicated teachers who are unwilling to stay in 'remote' locations inside forests.

There are state government schools and DKDA run residential schools in Chatikona and Parsali, but very few children go to school. From the children that do go to the schools, the community revealed that many literally 'run away' because they do not like being away from their parents and Niyamgiri. They do not understand and cannot relate to the syllabus since the medium of instruction is Odiya as opposed to Kui, the Kondh language. The parents feel that education and literacy would help them in their dealings with the world outside Niyamgiri but sending the children away for school would also mean that, alienated from forests and their parents' livelihoods, an entire generation of Dongria Kondh would not learn their way of life. They were quick to point out that they would prefer if schools were located at central locations inside Niyamgiri which children from the surrounding villages could attend. They would prefer schools to have Kui as the medium of education, the curriculum more suited to the way of life at Niyamgiri, and teachers to be Dongria Kondh or other *adivasi* teachers familiar with their ways and everyday struggles.

Most young Dongria Kondh men the team interacted with were vocal about the need for energy. The Dongria Kondh use kerosene to light lamps at night. They realize that kerosene is becoming increasingly expensive and they do feel a need for street lights and lighting in their houses. However, they are emphatic about using solar and not grid electricity. This, they say, is due to the fact that high-tension wires are hazardous in the dense forest around Niyamgiri. They are also fearful that electric poles would mean big vehicles cutting roads into the forests to ferry the poles, which would in turn make it easy for the state and the company to enter the forests.

The elders were emphatic about large, tarred roads being disastrous to the Niyamgiri forest and their culture. As Lado Sikaka said, 'We don't have cars. Why is the government so hell bent on giving us roads? God has given us two wheelers - our legs. We can walk and bring whatever we want from our *haats* and forests. Why should we need roads? With a 10-15 feet road, outside people will come in and spoil the jungle. In our villages we don't lock our doors, we don't have locks, our girls roam around freely.'

Others told us that if at all roads are to be built they should be narrow, used only for access by the locals.

The community members we spoke to were of the opinion that soil and water conservation structures that could be used for forest conservation, expansion of solar electricity, day schools inside the hills with both Kui and Odiya as the medium of teaching, rather than community halls, temples and other constructed structures would be of immense help for the community. It is clear that government schemes have perpetually been at odds with the way of life of the Dongria Kondh due to the lack of consultation and monitoring of these schemes by involving the community in decision-making.

On changes in the way of life

The Dongria Kondh are aware that to a large extent money has become a necessary factor to live in the Niyamgiri hills and interact with the outside world. Their need for money some years ago was only for a few essentials such as cloth, salt, oil, marriages, community festivals, etc. Over the years dependence on money has increased largely owing to the inflated prices of cloth and other commodities. In some cases, to keep up with the increased need for money, young men have started to migrate in search of employment. Need for money has also led to increase in cultivation of cash crops and horticultural produce, and sale of firewood in nearby towns.

Another aspect of the challenges they face comes from the influence of the outside culture and 'modern' living which is increasingly alluring the youth. As discussed earlier, the increasing inroads of the monetary economy have created needs that were not significant earlier. The Dongria Kondhs have a complex system of marriage, where bride price plays an important economic and cultural role – it could range from a variety of practices including actual exchanges of valuable commodities from the groom's family to the bride's family to service that a prospective groom would provide in the form of working the bride's fields (Hardenberg, 2005). As money has slowly begun to replace many valuable commodities, many Dongria Kondh youth, especially men, feel that their families are incurring large debts to pay the bride price. In a marriage ritual we attended, we also saw the reverse practice of the bride's family giving dowry. Some members of the NSS are of the opinion that the practice of give and take must stop and marriages should be arranged to stop practices of bride price or dowry to prevent the cycle of debt.

> I see several young men among us who are giving up carrying the axe. The axe is a part of our identity as Dongria. It is a part of who we are. That is how the world recognizes us.
>
> - *A Dongria Kondh youth in a meeting of the NSS in Gorota village*

There is an increased indulgence in liquor (supplied by outsiders, which is cheaper and often spurious) affecting their health. When we were in Niyamgiri, the NSS was organising a series of anti-liquor meetings in which Dongria elders and youth stressed upon several aspects of the loss of cultural values, the need to revive and stay true to their culture and the need to protect forests. These anti-liquor meetings were spearheaded by the women in Niyamgiri who had already started making connections on how money that the family earned was gradually being spent more and more on liquor from outside (mostly distilled *mahua* and country liquor) and how friction was being caused by alcohol abuse within the family.

The traditional knowledge of medicines is now slowly being eroded as more people depend upon outside medical institutions, themselves rather unreliable (and often exploitative). In one village we visited, a rabid dog had bitten a boy, and for a long time the villagers were simply waiting to get a doctor or take the boy to the nearby town. When we asked elders in another village about this, they said that traditionally they would have had a cure for most illnesses and injuries, but this was no longer available in every settlement. Also, since the intake of outside food (grown using pesticides and chemical fertilizers) has increased, such as the PDS rice, their bodies have, to some extent, become impervious to the traditional natural medicines. According to one source, allopathic medicines have played an important

role in doing away with, to an extent, serious diseases like diarrhoea and some pregnancy related complications. In pregnancy and childbirth women are being encouraged through the *Janani Surakshya Yojna* (Scheme for the Safety of the Mother) to deliver in government hospitals. However, that also means that traditional midwives have been replaced, as also the wealth of knowledge that they provide.

The effects of the bauxite refinery in Lanjigarh have also begun to be felt in the Niyamgiri hills. The Dongria elders believe that the smoke spewing Lanjigarh refinery is affecting the local climate. Elders complained of streams drying up and pollution affecting the region's weather patterns. Earlier, swidden fields would be on hills some distance away from the village, but insecurity and harassment at the hands of security forces (who regularly 'comb' the area using the pretext of 'naxalite' activities) has to some extent derailed their traditional patterns of agriculture; since they are now loath to wander far, they have had to increase cultivation of hills nearer the village, in turn leading to large-scale deforestation. Locals also admit their helplessness at the large-scale felling of trees for sale by outsiders and the Dongria Kondh themselves in nearby markets to meet the need for money. Elders informed us that some years ago there was an attempt to prevent tree felling by outsiders by creating protection teams from different villages, but the immediate need to prevent the mining from taking place did not allow the community to take this forward.

> We're worried about the forests. We see that they're decreasing. But we also need money and if we don't sell wood, how will we get money? That is why people are selling more wood in Muniguda. We're worried, yes.
>
> *- Kochadi Sikoka, Denguni village*

Easy access to certain 'goods' and 'services' through government schemes has begun to change their way of life. Rationed goods, especially rice through the Public Distribution System, have shifted their food consumption pattern from millet production and consumption, in which they were self-sufficient.

> Government rice is changing people. It is making us greedy.
>
> *- Mandi Kadraka, Jani of Dhamanpona village*

According to one source[23], the Dongria Kondh once had 45-50 varieties of millets. Now they are down to less than 10 due to completely stopped or reduced cycles of shifting cultivation, increase in cash cultivation, and partial replacement by rice. This and a gradual reduction in consumption of wild forest foods could also be leading to nutritional deficiencies, which are becoming apparent in villages closer to the towns compared to those deeper in the forest.

Several elders and community members told us that ever since the refinery went into operation in 2002, the active local opposition to the refinery and the mines has heightened the presence of para-military and police personnel. They say that the Central Reserve Police Force has been playing a major role in intimidating the community, restricting its members' movements and disrupting the communities' way of life. Such threats are intertwined with all aspects of their lives. Since early 2015, the government of Odisha, under the agenda of anti-Maoist enquiry, has been using the para-military and the local police force against the Dongria Kondh.

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23. Personal conversation with Susanta Kumar Dalai from Vasundhara, Odisha.

Three serious cases of police atrocities and unlawful arrests have emerged.

- On the 28th of November 2015, Drika Kadraka of Dhamanponga village, a member of the NSS, committed suicide after being repeatedly picked up and tortured by the local police.

- On the 27th of February 2016 during the annual gathering of the community to celebrate the Niyamraja *parab* (Niyamraja festival), Mando Kadraka, a twenty-year old student was murdered in cold blood, allegedly in combat with para-military forces. The state of Odisha is yet to provide any evidence of Mando being involved in any Maoist, anti-state activity.

- On the 7th of April 2016, Dasru Kadraka of Gorota village was arrested from Muniguda town on charges of arson, murder and attacks on para-military forces during combing operations[24].

Such threats and coercion of the community with a population of less than ten thousand people raises serious doubts as to whether it is being purposely done to break their continued resolve to oppose the mining of the Niyamgiri hills and fragment their movement.

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24. While this report went to print, there is no evidence against the alleged involvement of these three members of the community in any of the activities for which they were harassed. Dasru is still in custody. See http://www.countercurrents.org/cc281115.htm; http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/Tribal-Death-in-Encounter-OHRC-Seeks-Report/2016/03/04/article3309170.ece, and http://www.kractivist.org/tribals-pitted-against-mnc-in-odisha-branded-maoists-intimidated-abducted-killed/ for information on these cases.

Conclusion: Moving Towards Facilitating Informed Pathways into the Future

There is no doubt that the Niyamgiri hills are alive and verdant today because of their wise and restrained use by the Dongria Kondh community. The reverence towards their natural surrounding is evident in their livelihoods, practices, culture and identity. The values of solidarity and sharing in human relationships, of restraint and self-regulation in relations with the rest of nature, are still evident. However, the welfare state and the market economy (often intertwined) are slowly creeping into the Niyamgiri hills, with a host of impacts that could undermine the way of life, without necessarily providing a viable alternative. The Dongria Kondh are beginning to perceive these threats; in the face of the growing pressure for reopening the mining proposal and the continuation of culturally inappropriate welfare schemes, there is a sense of urgent need within the community for dialogue on the implications of 'development' and on possible responses to it, including alternatives for wellbeing. As of now the community does not have too many of its own sources of information on the choices available to it and their implications.

If the government is serious in its commitment to protecting the interests of *adivasis* and in particular PVTGs, as it is constitutionally mandated to do, it is imperative for it to support the community in asserting its rights over the hills and in enhancing livelihood options based on their ecological, cultural, and knowledge roots. The Niyamgiri Surakshya Samiti too needs to engage itself in facilitating such a process, in addition to the immediate (and obviously still critical) role of helping to resist mining proposals and state repression. There is a need to provide the Dongria Kondh with information needed for an exploration of alternative, more locally appropriate modes of learning and education,

healthcare, communication, and livelihoods, building on their own practices and knowledge. It has thus become important, at this juncture, for the government to stop police repression, review inappropriate welfare schemes, announce a permanent halt to mining bids and create an atmosphere in which the community can articulate and assert its worldview and accept or reject changes to its way of life on its own terms with full knowledge of the consequences.

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Imlee Mahuaa:
Learning in Freedom,
the Democratic Way

Sujatha Padmanabhan

Spinning yarn on the Charkha

The slide, an all-time favourite

Like mother, like daughter_ learning through imitation

Song and music sessions

Harvest from the school garden

4
Imlee Mahuaa: Learning in Freedom, the Democratic Way

Nyla Coelho and Sujatha Padmanabhan

For the past several centuries, the tribal communities in the Indian subcontinent have been at the receiving end of a dominant worldview. The remnants of their way of life, linked closely to nature and forests, are in danger of being smothered by current development paradigms. Imlee Mahuaa School serves as a small attempt, a beacon showing how learning can be different for Adivasi communities and their children, especially given modern India's rush towards modernity and the haste to homogenise its diverse traditions of living and learning. It is a school for the children of Adivasi communities in and around Balenga Para, a hamlet in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh and presents a novel endeavour in the field of education.

Background

Our contemporary mainstream lenses are ill-suited for understanding the Adivasi view of life, their rich traditional wisdom, and their worldviews. It is this misconception and domination by powerful forces like

the State and large corporations that have largely led to their alienation and humiliation. In recent years, physical and psychological torture has also been inflicted on them with State sanction through operations like Salwa Judum. The situation has been compounded by the steady erosion of overall community control over their environs and natural resources brought about by the State's short term developmental goals, its pandering to corporate interests and inability to address the angst of the Adivasi people through peaceful dialogue.

Further, there is the matter of education itself, a vexed issue that the British steadily usurped and supplanted from the mid 19th century onwards with a system of schooling designed to equip their subjects with skills to help the colonizers administer the Indian subcontinent – a diverse land, with numerous ways of living, parenting, learning, teaching and training their young, was destined to be homogenised. Thankfully, it met with only limited success and even less acceptance.

Very early in the day, beginning with Tagore and Gandhi, serious attempts were made to realign education to suit the needs of the people. Bold and radical alternative initiatives were proposed and experimented with. The government's National Curriculum Framework, 2005 reflects an essence of this understanding.

In India, though state governments hold the portfolio of education, it is the Union Government that crafts major policy directives and guidelines for implementation. Since independence, the focus has been on higher education but school education, the foundation for higher learning, has been weak and continues to be so – this despite every village having a primary school.

For Adivasi children, their integration into the education system has largely been a traumatic experience. The 'One Size Fits All' model of education is ill-suited to meet the educational needs of the children of a large nation such as ours with its geo-physical, ecological, socio-cultural diversity. The inconsistency is sharper when thrust upon a people whose worldview and civilizational moorings go back to a time before settled agriculture became the bedrock of human 'progress'.

The state of Adivasi school education is beset with complex issues. There has been no serious attempt by the education departments to understand the Adivasi worldview, delve into how education for Adivasi children should be designed such that they retain their unique culture while helping them acquire the skills needed to deal with changing realities. There are issues regarding the language of instruction, textbooks that portray little of Adivasi life and inadequate physical infrastructure and teaching material (Veerbhadranaika et al. 2012).

If education for Adivasi children is to be placed on a par with the rest as is their right by virtue of being citizens of a democratic country, it becomes necessary that their integration into the mainstream, as different but no less equal, be directed by them and only if they wish it. They will need to be equipped and supported to direct the change that they desire on their terms.

There are independent attempts by individuals and institutions in the Adivasi belts to engage children in an educational experience suited to their needs. Imlee Mahuaa School for Adivasi children in the Bastar region is one such that this study attempts to understand. With this purpose, a field visit to the school was undertaken in October 2015. This document is based on interviews with the adults and

children in Imlee Mahuaa School, parents, staff of SAATHI a local NGO, and close observations made during a week spent in the school

It is hoped that this document would be useful to anyone interested in children, education, Adivasi communities and those wanting to engage with children of Adivasi communities in particular. We also hope there are useful pointers in this document for those who engage with or wish to start a school and especially for the members of the community where the school is located.

The Setting

Imlee Mahuaa School (Imlee Mahuaa for short) is situated in an Adivasi hamlet, Balenga Para, in Kondagaon district in the Bastar area of Chattisgarh. Sixty children, aged three to fifteen, participate in various activities throughout the day, academics being one of them.

Balenga Para is a small, single-tribe Muriya Gond Adivasi village with fifty-five households and a population of about 350. Twelve children from here study at Imlee Mahuaa; the rest of the students come from three villages in the neighbourhood – Kokodi (27), Kodagoan (8) and Jagadhin Para (13), which are at a distance of three to four kilometres from the school.

About three fourths of the children belong to the Muriya Gond tribe. The rest belong to Schedule Castes or Other Backward Castes (Kalaars, Gaandaas and Pankaas). 90 percent of the students of Imlee Mahuaa are first generation school goers. All except for two children belong to families in the BPL (Below Poverty Line) economic strata, four families are landless and in a few families, one of the parents has salaried employment.

The Beginnings

When Akanksha Public Charitable Trust (APCT) decided to start a school in a rural area, its search led to explorations in Gadchiroli District in Maharashtra and the Bastar region in Chhattisgarh. Through friends at Paramdham Mudranalay Ashram in Paunar in Wardha District, the trustees met members of SAATHI (Saathi Samaj Sevi Sanstha) in Kumar Para near Kondagaon. SAATHI had been working in Bastar for many years in the area of livelihoods through support to local crafts, health, education, and forest rights. Its founders, Bhupesh Tiwari and Hari Bharadwaj, helped APCT to identify a location for the school, to liaison with the local community, and supported APCT in every possible way.

For the identification of a village to locate the school, APCT's criterion was a rural location where government infrastructure and amenities such as roads, healthcare, electricity and bus services were not in place. Bhupesh and Hari added two more criteria: a village with a single tribe (essentially for cultural and language uniformity) and a village within a distance of ten to fifteen kilometres of the SAATHI office so that they could be of assistance whenever needed. Of the 100 villages in which SAATHI worked, the team visited ten that met the criteria. Finally, they chose Balenga Para, the very first village that APCT visited.

At the first meeting (summoned by the beating of drums), Prayaag Joshi, one of the trustees of APCT, presented a brief idea of the school. The residents of Balenga Para unanimously decided to allow APCT to set up a school in their village. The use of the ghotul[1] building was suggested as a make shift arrangement until the school classrooms were

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1. Ghotul is a traditional institution of learning for Adivasi adolescent youth. For more information see box 1

built. The only question the villagers asked Prayaag was whether the children would be taught English, to which, his measured response was, 'Yes, as one of the subjects.'

The early days

The school began in 2007 with three teachers and two students – Heeralal, a local school dropout and Anamika, the postman's niece from the neighbouring village of Kokodi. Over the years, the number of children who joined the school increased with admissions from Balenga Para as well as the three neighbouring villages of Kokodi, Kodagaon, Jagdhing Para. The Trust set the admission limit at a maximum of sixty children so that quality would not be compromised with a big number. This also happened to comply with the requisite teacher qualification laid down by the National Council for Teacher Education, 2010 after 'The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009' was passed. According to it, a school of up to sixty children has to have two teachers with a B. Ed degree. Admission of children to the school now takes place only to fill the occasional vacancy.

Freedom from any one particular ideology or pedagogy

Prayaag admits that initially the school was influenced by Gandhiji's *Naee Taaleem*, Maria Montessori's learning methods and J. Krishnamurti's educational philosophy. The school began as **Imlee Mahuaa Naee Taaleem Centre for Learning**[2]. Every attempt was made to work with the pedagogy such a name implied. Children were engaged in 'productive' hand work, the hallmark of Naee Taaleem, and engaged in trying to understand curricular linkages

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2.   No child was able to say this name correctly as it was too long for them to remember. The name was changed to Imlee Mahuaa Vidyalaya (in Hindi) and Imlee Mahuaa School (in English). The children were involved in deciding the change in the name.

to science and social science topics. Soon it was clear that this approach was lacking on two fronts: the adults did not have enough insights into the linkages and the children got bored learning about these linkages, although they enjoyed working with their hands.

Though the children appeared unhappy, they were hesitant to express their displeasure (as is the practice in Adivasi communities). The adults in Imlee Mahuaa realised that the 'happiness' of the children was of utmost importance. As they considered the changes needed to make the children truly happy, they observed that the children were the happiest when unsupervised. Adivasi children have a lot of freedom at home. Would freedom in school be the right approach? Eventually, the school moved from an adult directed school to one led by the children.

Over the years, the school has undertaken a journey where at every step changes have been made in every aspect of its functioning to ensure children's happiness. The school operates largely by taking cues from its current situation and from what provides children an enjoyable childhood. Today, Imlee Mahuaa is a bubbling and joyous place teeming with life and energy.

The school today

The school community today has sixty-three members, of which sixty are children and three adults[3] including Prayaag. Milan Baghel, a trained potter, joined the school in 2009. Gautam Sethiya, a post graduate in economics and currently pursuing a B. Ed, has taught at the school for seven years.

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3.   The words 'teacher' and 'principal' are used only when a designation is needed (like when signing a form) for the outside world; within the school it is a community of children and adults.

The school has students ranging in age from three to fifteen years. It has four groups in a vertical grouping structure: Sapri, Semar, Seethaphal and Soorajmukhi. A few students from Soorajmukhi have opted for vocational cum entrepreneurial projects as part of their school work. These are: pottery and ceramics; library and book shop; school teaching and entrepreneurship.

Table 1: Numbers and age ranges of children currently in Imlee Mahuaa

Name of the Group	Number of Children	Age Range
Sapri	14 (6 girls, 8 boys)	3 to 5 years
Semar	13 (8 girls, 5 boys)	7 to 12 years
Seethaphal	15 (8 girls, 7 boys)	8 to 10 years
Soorajmukhi	18 (13 girls, 5 boys)	11 to 15 years

The weekly routine

The school works Monday through Saturday from 7.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. for all the twelve months of the year[4]. Each day of the week unfolds differently on the basis of a rota of duties and a loosely held timetable that accommodates the necessary departure when the situation demands. Certain daily activities like attendance, cleaning, fetching water, gardening and shared mealtimes are fixed.

Academic and skill based learning include English, Hindi, mathematics, science, environmental studies cum social science, yoga, music, singing, storytelling, reading, *charcha*, pottery, drawing and colouring, indoor and outdoor games,

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4. The entire school took this decision in early 2016. Till 2015, the school worked for eleven months with one month as vacation. A small group of children who decided to try the National Open School Secondary Level examinations come to school at 7.30 am.

embroidery and spinning. A common hour-long library class takes places three times a week and is also open to the children of the nearby government school.

Charcha sessions (periodic open discussions where children can ask any questions) are a reflection of the thinking that goes on in the young, curious minds. Questions vary and cover a vast range of subjects – Why do we dream? Why does it rain only when the clouds are black? In a corn plant, why are the flowers above but the corn below? How long does it take for rain to reach the earth? Why are goat droppings so small? Why are bubbles round in shape and not square?

There is a lot of indoor and outdoor play throughout the school day. Board games, chess, carom and cricket are played with great gusto. Younger children also play with blocks and Montessori material. Many play traditional games such as kabaddi, namakchor, coconut, billa, readyeee, lupachuppi, ek do, sisal patti, gharghar, baati (marbles). Swinging from the rafters or improvising locally available materials such as leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, twigs, insects, stones, pieces of tile, etc., into 'toys' keeps the children engaged for hours on end.

Friday begins with a group singing session for all children who wish to sing. Then it's time for school cleaning, repair, maintenance and stock-taking when the brooms, buckets, tubs, mugs and dusters are counted. Ceilings are cleared of cobwebs, minor repairs of toys and learning materials undertaken, floors given a fresh coat of cow-dung. All the hectic housekeeping is rewarded at about 10:30 a.m. with puffed rice, roasted black gram, a seasonal fruit, dry dates and any goodies a visitor may have brought for the children.

Friday being the weekly haat day, a couple of children from the pottery class along with Milan head to the market to

sell their wares; a few others on rotation will also go along to shop for the weekly stock of green rations and necessary supplies. The younger ones stay back to play or catch up on backlogs if any. It is also the day when all the recyclable and non-biodegradable garbage is loaded on to a scooter to be taken to Kondagaon, the nearest town 13 kms away.

Everybody looks forward to Saturdays when the entire day is spent outdoors. The two junior groups take off separately on a picnic to the hill or jungle, walking, talking, playing, climbing, swinging, exploring, experiencing, observing, playing a round or two of board games, tasting seasonal wild fruits and berries, collecting things of interest such as a pebble or a flower or a seed. They return after a picnic lunch. The older ones go on a short or long cycle trip that may take them to a nearby village/town, a place of historical, cultural or civic significance or to a natural landscape. A round trip could involve riding their bicycles for 20 to 50 kms. Sundays are to rest, reinvigorate and prepare for the week ahead.

With a constant stream of visitors, regular school excursions, the abundance of library books and the keenness shown by the children to read them, the school has ensured that they are exposed to a different reality that goes beyond the 3 'R's of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Adivasi life in Balenga Para and its surroundings[5]

Here one can still observe a way of life that is closely connected to nature and the forest, and, to an extent, one that is detached from a monetised economy. A combination of foraging, hunting, trapping, fishing, farming and animal rearing helps meet the Adivasi's nutritional needs.

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5. This section is in brief and contains mainly those aspects of life in these villages, which could have a bearing on school education.

Almost every home has a yard, a shed or pen for animals (cattle, pigs and poultry are reared), a dedicated space for simple tools and equipment, a storage space for grain and food stocks. Pumpkins and gourds, tubers, banana, custard apple, papaya, lemons, guava, curry leaf (*kadi patta*), a variety of beans, roselle (*gongura/ambadi*), chilli and even sugarcane are grown around the home. Paddy, millets, black gram, horse gram are also grown. The diet gets a further nutritional boost from forest foods – mushroom, tender bamboo shoot, seasonal wild berries and fruits, honey (collected by smoking out the bees), a variety of edible leafy greens, tamarind, many types of insects, red ant larvae (*chapoda*) and grubs.

Foraging and gathering is supplemented by hunting small prey such as jungle birds and fowl, frogs, field mice, snakes, monitor lizard, hare and occasionally other small mammals such as monkey, wild cat, wild dog, fox. With ponds dotting the landscape and rivulets criss-crossing the countryside, water chestnut, fish, crabs, shrimp, snails and other molluscs are part of the regular diet. Any surplus, especially mushrooms, fish, meat, chilli is smoked over the kitchen fire on a suspended bamboo platform and stocked either for personal use, sharing or for sale when cash is required.

The flowers of the fabled mahuaa are gathered, dried and stocked for a year round supply of home brew, the heady sacred drink *mandh,* as well as for sale to traders. The date palm is tapped for its *seendh salphi* while the fishtail palm yields *rukhsalphi*. Beer made from rice powder from germinated paddy (known as *landa*) is brewed in most homes. All these mildly intoxicating drinks are consumed at home, at community events and festivals near places of worship or at the weekly *haat* (bazaar) for good health and good cheer. Interestingly, cattle are reared as farm animals

mostly for their dung. Adivasis believe the milk is for the calf, a reflection of their innate sensitivity and wisdom.

Not all relationships of exchange are monetary in nature; barter of goods and services still exist. For example, there is no monetary exchange for the services rendered by the blacksmith. After the harvest, the blacksmith and his wife travel to all the villages where his services were rendered. They visit each home where they may be invited to a meal besides being given some paddy and black gram lentils.

Likewise, a special day is held for the *guniya* (the medicine man who treats ailments with traditional herbs) or the *sirha* (shaman who calls on spirits). The villagers whom either of them treated bring whatever was promised to the spirit at the time of the treatment. If these are animals, they are sacrificed and the entire community partakes of the feast.

Co-operation amongst families is very strong – they help one another during births, marriages, deaths, etc; families contribute paddy, black gram lentils, and some *mandh*, as well as assist with making plates and cups with the leaves of the sal tree.

The Adivasis of these villages are warm, and are courteous and shy with visitors. Voices are rarely raised except to herd animals or to call out to someone at a distance. Adults treat children with respect and individuality is respected. Parent-child interactions are largely egalitarian in nature; Adivasi children are brought up in a family and community atmosphere of sharing and co-operation.

Children are not coerced from an early age into doing anything, not even helping in the home. Young children learn by observing adults around them and by participating in activities in playful ways such as fetching water from the

hand pump with their mothers, neighbours or older siblings, attending to household tasks and repairs around the house, tending the garden, attending to animals, collecting mahuaa flowers, fuel wood, dung, etc.

As an egalitarian community, the power structures are minimal, the headman hardly distinguishable by dress and conduct from the rest of the community. Women enjoy equal rights as men and their wishes are respected, especially with regards to alliances and separation. Although the older generation still continues to drape in traditional ways, the younger generation has switched to contemporary ways of dressing in the now familiar salwar-kurta and shirt-trousers common across India.

Box 1

Ghotul: Requiem to a learning tradition lost

Until 2009, late evenings in Balenga Para would find a small group of adolescent girls head towards a prominent structure opposite Imlee Mahuaa, quietly clean the premises and head home, only to return after dinner in larger numbers with bedding, comb, *datun* (a twig toothbrush) and some sal leaves for rolling a tobacco *beedi* for their male counterparts. Some time prior to this, young unmarried men from the village would have arrived with their musical instruments and other essentials.

This was the ghotul, an ancient Adivasi institution of which every young non-school going and unmarried adolescent or young adult was a member. It was run by the young, for the young on terms of operation that were handed down from generation to generation with

suitable amendments. Attendance was compulsory for all; girls were excused on menstruation days. There was dance and music every evening, allowing the younger members to learn from the older ones. The members were also responsible for partaking in a host of community activities (like weeding the fields, house repairs and construction, cleaning and repair of roofs; organising supplies, fuel wood, leaf plates, and cooking for festivals, marriages, funerals). If a member wished to leave the village for any purpose, the ghotul's permission was necessary.

It was a place for safe and sanctioned physical exploration. There was the unwritten rule that emotional involvement was strictly prohibited, any sign of which attracted stern reprimands and even banishment from the ghotul. Only in the rare case of a pregnancy were relationships sealed in marriage. All slept in the ghotul; girls departed much before sunrise and the boys headed home around dawn.

However, this traditional institution soon became a casualty of the intrusion of the external world and its pressures in Balenga Para[6] and eventually closed down. This has meant the loss of a known and tested avenue of learning relevant skills. The youth are now tempted to leave the village, and the community support role that the members played is now largely diminished.

Source: Author's field visit notes

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6.   At the time of finalizing this report, the authors were informed that the ghotul in Balenga Para was restarted in March 2016 after a gap of six years. The reasons stated: the community realized that the support from the ghotul had diminished, the young boys who left the village seeking daily wages were cheated, and the quality of song and dance skills (something Balenga Para was known for) had deteriorated.

Laughter seems to have a special place in the Adivasi life. Adults and younger members laugh and tease each other with equal gay abandon and companionship. It appears that they are a happy and satisfied people, even if, by conventional standards, they appear to be poor.

> Energy and laughter were the currencies of this new land, and the beat of a drum its pulse. Not many recognized the worth and genuineness of these currencies…
>
> (Madhu Ramnath in *Woodsmoke and Leaf Cups* – autobiographical footnotes to the anthropology of the Durwa).

Special aspects of the school

Reflections of the Adivasi way of life

As a reflection of the Adivasi way of life, many aspects of Imlee Mahuaa are in consonance with the kind of life and upbringing the child has within its family.

Freedom at home, freedom in school: Children are free from coercion. How they spend their day, what they do is met with very little supervision. Children take their own decisions. However, the adults in the community keep an instinctive eye on them so that they are safe from physical harm, particularly near the village pond, streams or lonely stretches in the village.

One may infer that this subtlety and tentativeness comes from being comfortable with one's inner self, largely as yet uncorrupted by the world. It could be an indication of an approach to life based on the conviction that actions are aligned to one's innate nature. In the absence of duality, freedom and responsibility become second nature.

The children in Imlee Mahuaa are free to decide how to spend their day. They are not forced into any activity, academic or otherwise. A child may spend the entire day in free-play or in playing local games, outdoor (cricket, volley ball) or indoor games (chess, carom, knots-and-crosses), or they may spend it observing other classes or others at play/work. Children decide what they would like to study and when. They decide if they need the assistance of an adult, or an older child or a peer. All learning is self-motivated and self-directed.

The older children write their own appraisal reports. All children decide what grade book of a particular subject they would read for the year (which may or may not be uniform), to which grade they would like to promote or demote themselves and whether to spend another year with the same books. This aspect of having the children decide their own academic advancement is a special feature of the school – it trusts in the children's ability to take such decisions.

Freedom to spend time at school as per one's wish was first given to Soorajmukhi. Subsequently, in late 2015, children from the other groups expressed their wish to have the same freedom. During a school meeting to discuss the issue, Gautam and Milan expressed their

> 'We like this freedom. That children study when they want to. There are no exams, but these days even the government schools don't have exams.'
>
> > - Gunuraam Netaam,
> > Jamuna's father

doubts that the younger children might not know how to use this freedom. However, after a lot of discussion, the school decided to extend the freedom to all and review it after a period of six months.

The concept of freedom in school is one that the three adult members of the school don't fully agree on. Milan thinks freedom at school may be their undoing when they grow up. "I am not for it. The children play now but it will be difficult for them when they grow up**."**

Gautam, on the other hand, has tried to assert his stand in some ways, clearly noticeable in his didactic approach. "Initially, I too thought it was *ajeeb*, this freedom, especially when one thinks from parents' point of view, but actually this freedom is good, and needs to be there. But from parental expectations' point of view, it is different. Sometimes, though, I wonder if in the future children will regret having spent their time in school playing and not studying. There are about four to six kids in my group of fifteen who ask for classes. The children in my class did struggle initially to read and I took classes for them and now they can read a bit on their own..."

"I feel the girls in Soorajmukhi have progressed, they are doing well and are responsible. There is a difference with the boys. Not sure if the boys would have done better with some structured classes. Girls have a lot of responsibility at home, so maybe it is a habit that they have developed. But the boys at this age don't have that much home responsibility**."**

Bhupesh Tiwari of SAATHI, who has worked with the adivasis of bastar for decades, believes, "It is not necessary that you learn only within the four walls of a classroom. Once you allow the child to do whatever he or she wants to do, and then you teach something, the child will remember that better. If the child's mind is outside the boundary of the classroom, and you are trying to teach something to the child, the child will not learn**."**

Says Prayaag, "Freedom is a given for all of us here, we thrive in it and suffocate when it is curtailed. So is collective and consultative decision making."

At the time of writing this report, the children decided to have the freedom to choose their teacher, who could be any of the adults, older children or educational resources in the school. The understanding is that if children ask for a certain class, it will be accommodated if the individual concerned has the time and is interested.

Anyone can offer to teach something new; others are free to sign up for the new class.

Box 2

Reflections on how freedom based education can lead to creating responsible individuals and responsible members of the community

What kind of a person is a responsible individual? In my view it is a person who holds herself fully responsible for her own state of affairs including the state of affairs around her, and she takes action to change the state if need be. She does not see herself as different or separate from the world around her. Many of us blame external factors for our state and shy away from taking the necessary action. Thus we fall short of being responsible (to ourselves and to the community).

An individual, who grows up in (total) freedom, enjoys in that freedom total responsibility for all her actions and a non-judgemental attitude from the persons around her. Taking decisions for herself, being responsible for them and their outcomes (desirable

and undesirable), allowing freedom to others and being non-judgemental about others are a way of life for her. In my view, such a person is less likely to blame others for her state of affairs. It is more likely that she will take intelligent action to change if there is a need. In this way she will be responsible – to herself and to the community.

At Imlee Mahuaa, children enjoy freedom; they don't seem to be conscious of the responsibility that goes with it but do know about it, and we try to be as non-judgmental about one another as we can. I do hope that we have the quality of freedom, responsibility and non-judgmental attitude at Imlee Mahuaa that is needed to enable responsible living. **Prayaag Joshi**

Democracy, a way of life: In a democratic country it would be imperative that its citizens are imbued with democratic values like equality, acceptance of differences, co-operation, and justice. Homes, neighbourhoods and schools are places where children can find opportunities to imbibe and practice such values. Unfortunately, in India, most schools find it convenient to continue with archaic hierarchical autocracy. Democratic functioning is hardly practiced even though the National Curriculum Framework, 2005 advocates it.

In Balenga Para and its neighbouring villages, in keeping with Adivasi culture, the entire community comes together to take decisions that have a bearing on life outside the family. When such a gathering takes place, no one is excluded from

So many schools flirt with democracy… a little bit. But for me democracy is like pregnancy… you can't be a little bit.

- Daniel Greenberg, Sudbury Valley School

attending these meetings. When the village community at Balenga Para met to discuss the proposal of a school way back in 2007, the group consisted of not just adults; children and the elderly were also present.

In keeping with this spirit of collective decision making[7], all decisions pertaining to the school operations in Imlee Mahuaa are taken by the entire school community of sixty children and three adults. When a decision has to be taken or an issue is to be discussed, a meeting is held with all the children and adults. Every individual has a vote. If there is no complete agreement then one of the following is attempted: discuss it for consensus; postpone decision if the ones in the minority are not happy with it; take the decision for a limited period of time to see how it works. Decisions taken are periodically reviewed by all the children and adults.

The decisions cover all school operations like setting up timetables, reviewing holidays, rotation of school duties, subjects of study, deciding which children would go on a long educational trip, etc. The children's decisions are taken seriously, and underlying this is the trust that young children can take responsible decisions for themselves.

Flexibility with school absenteeism and timings: Children of Adivasi families learn from their parents, siblings, other relatives and community members. This happens naturally through imitation, observation, participation, and trial and error. Recognising this fact, Imlee Mahuaa was planned as a non-residential school, unlike the government Ashram Shalas or private residential schools where the children live away from their families. There is also great flexibility in a number of aspects as compared to other schools.

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7.	Collective decision making may not happen within the home.

Sometimes a child does not show up at school because s/he did not want to attend school. There is no parental pressure to attend if a child does not feel like it; at most, a parent may inquire casually why the child is at home.

At Imlee Mahuaa there is no reprimand for absenteeism. During attendance, a child may provide the reason for another's absence. Children may be absent for a number of reasons.

Both men and women are involved in agricultural work. While men usually do the ploughing, all other tasks like sowing, weeding, application of manure, harvesting, etc., are done by either or both. Children help in agricultural activities (especially pre-sowing, weeding, harvesting) and little children as young as nine years deftly use the sickle to harvest paddy.

Intermittent breaks in farm work are spent hunting, which is undertaken by the males in small groups. Young boys often accompany their fathers on these expeditions. House construction, repairing roofs, pig slaughter, tree cutting are male activities; female work includes collecting fuel wood, cow-dung for maintenance of floors (both as coat and antiseptic), minor repairs to walls and parapets, creating decorative motifs in and around the house. Brick making is an activity in which the entire family gets involved.

> The school is after all an artificially structured learning environment. Therefore, it must assume only a subsidiary role in comparison with a naturally available and more robust learning space such as the home.
>
> - Prayaag Joshi

Gathering mahuaa flowers, keeping vigil to guard the flowers from being eaten by animals, collecting *tendu* leaves and tamarind are undertaken collectively. Women collect various grasses and reeds for making brooms, mats and baskets while men bring in the bamboo. Children pick up all these life skills from their adults.

School timings in Imlee Mahuaa are flexible. No bells are rung and no gates closed. Children are free to come to and leave school at any time of the day. This means that the boys could help with farm work or even with cooking at home. The girls could help to fetch water from the hand pump or cook the morning meal. When the female member menstruates, the family's older children or the husband takes up these tasks.

The fact that the school is not inflexible and accommodates different situations and needs makes the school an attractive place for the children.

However, attendance is important for the annual APCT scholarships paid to every child into a Public Provident Fund account started by the Trust. The child's mother is the joint holder of this account into which a stipulated amount is deposited, the total amount decided on the basis of the class in which the child studies. The amount deposited is linked to the child's attendance (a minimum of 90 percent for full scholarship). While there may be a seeming anomaly in the flexibility with attendance, the monetary benefit is available to the child on the same lines as the other benefits (books, milk, fruit, etc.) if s/he attends school. The scholarship has not been a motivation to attend school; attendance is decided by other factors and primarily by what the family is involved in at that time.

The rules for adults too are minimal. Salary is linked to the hours that one commits to school and not to any formal degree or skill sets. They understand that a leave of absence would be availed only when needed and that at any given time at least two of them would be present in the school.

Co-operation, not competition: Since the Adivasi way of life is one of sharing and co-operation (Nandini, S. 2009-2010) with families getting together to help one another on various occasions, the same spirit permeates the school. Imlee Mahuaa has consciously stayed away from participating in any competitive event like inter-school sports competitions; even within the school, no activity is competitive in nature.

The spirit of helping was evident when the school moved from two shifts to a single one. In the former, all children were given lunch at school, but when everybody attended school at the same time, it became difficult to simultaneously cater to all sixty children. The issue was discussed. While most children agreed to bring their own lunch, a few indicated that it would be difficult for them. Many children and adults offered to bring a little extra every day. The extra meals cooked at school also take care of those who are not able to bring their lunch.

Box 3

Mealtimes at Imlee Mahuaa

The entire school eats together. They gather around their lunchboxes either in a classroom or in the central open assembly space. There is much informal chatter and bustle at this time. In the morning, junior students fill two large aluminium vessels with water and place them near the washing area. The senior group busies

itself in the kitchen, filling the exact number of tall steel glasses with pasteurised milk out of tetra packs. The exact number of seasonal fruits is given a thorough scrub in water a couple of times and carried in a steel bucket or plate to the dining area. Sometimes there may be a green salad or a pickle. The jar with dry dates goes along, as do the pressure cookers with rice and dal and the wok with the vegetable, all prepared by Milan and the resident members.

Lunch time sees all lunch boxes open with everyone seated on the floor in a large circle. Siblings may sometimes sit side by side to share a common lunch box. The children's lunch boxes almost always contain rice with spicy vegetable gravy of greens, tubers, potato, tomato, gourd, pumpkin, beans, mushroom, etc., with or without a lentil but always with a dash of tamarind.

The children examine the containers with the veggies with a variety of expressions flitting across their faces, and then it is time to either help themselves to as much as is required or make a great pretence of serving (in deference to their mothers' efforts back home), pushing the container towards their neighbours and waiting in hope that something more appetising will come their way. Lunch boxes go around. This way everyone gets a chance to sample a bit from one another's lunch, and there is a good chance that what was not particularly exciting for one would be finished by the time the container shows up in front of its owner again.

Everyone has to have the daily quota of milk, fruit and dry dates. However, the seniors may face anxious moments if a fruit or two or a couple of glasses of milk are left unclaimed; they are so sure of having got the

numbers right that this could happen only if somebody has not got her share or deliberately avoided it. It's no mean victory to find the culprit, who, in all innocence, may be attending to a pressing task on campus.

The children clean their own lunch boxes and glasses in the courtyard, using mud from under the banana plants to scrub them, merrily helping one another. The popular scrubber is a small strip of banana leaf or a bit of dry hay, which works better than readymade scrubbers from the market. The boxes and glasses are rinsed twice in the huge water tubs and put away. The younger lot goes back to play or to relax and the older children tidy up the dining area, replenish the water and put away everything before going back to their respective activities. The neighbour's brood of fowl also keep to these meal times as do a couple of dogs that are ignored or allowed to have their pick at the degradable garbage heap.

Learning skills and gaining knowledge in school relevant to adult life

Skills that link with basic needs: Imlee Mahuaa decided to have activities that relate directly to one's physical needs of food (*roti*), clothing (*kapada*) and shelter (*makaan*).

For roti the children are involved in shopping for kitchen supplies, kitchen gardening, pickle making, and cooking. Some activities like gardening are done every day by whoever chooses to do it and some like shopping are done weekly at the village *haat*. Cooking and pickle making happens once in a while. Cooking may also happen spontaneously, like the day when everyone decided to make

kheer out of the three gigantic gourds that were harvested from the school garden.

Children learn to spin the takli and charkha from Gautam. Boys and girls routinely mend their clothes, usually in one of the classrooms or in the store room, in pairs or small groups. They have even tried their hand at embroidery which one sees on their school bags and handkerchiefs.

Children also assist in minor construction work, carpentry, painting, repair and maintenance of the roof and other chores pertaining to the school. In the future they may take up the carpenter and mason on their offer to train those who are interested.

Vocational cum entrepreneurial programme: Some students of the Soorajmukhi group have chosen to undertake a vocational project in addition to their school work. The options currently available are:

- **Pottery and ceramics**: Milan, a traditional potter who honed his skills by undergoing a training programme offered by SAATHI, teaches pottery to two children who have signed up for the vocational class. Under his guidance, the children are involved in all tasks right from bringing the clay in a tractor to school to preparing the clay, making the items, firing, sales as well as deciding on pricing and keeping accounts. The children are learning to make a number of items, some linked to what families buy during festivals: *diyas* for Diwali; *kalash* for Navratri; small bull figures with wheels attached to the legs for *Nava* (a local festival); *gamlas* and *handis*. On Fridays, he accompanies the children to the *haat* to sell whatever is ready. According to Milan, both the children have the potential to become potters later in life.

- **School teaching and entrepreneurship**: Four students have opted for this. These student-teachers help the children of Sapri and Semar in their academic work. The little children are comfortable in their presence as they converse and explain in the local language.

  There are daily reviews with the vocational students and a monthly review of the progress made and also for building specific subject skills. The student-teachers are given a free hand in their work with the younger children.

  The students are also exposed to some aspects of running a school. In early April every year, two students accompany Prayaag to Delhi to NCERT to obtain the needed school textbooks, and then on to Chennai to be part of the annual audit of APCT. They also go to Kondagaon on Fridays to familiarise themselves with banking and other procedures involved in running a school.

  When we interviewed the children, many of them said they would like to be teachers when they grow up. Dulaari, one of the student-teachers, said that she would like to teach in Imlee Mahuaa.

  The team's long-term plan is to run Imlee Mahuaa till 2030 when the informal lease of the land will expire, but Prayaag feels that it is possible that some children like Dulaari (who has a passion for learning and teaching) may take over the running of the school even earlier.

- **Library and book shop***:* Four students have opted for this. The library is open from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. three times a week for all children, including children from the neighbourhood government school. This class is very popular with all, and the children in charge handle the work with professional efficiency – mending damaged books, sorting, grading, maintaining records of issue

and return. Children read for an hour in the room and regularly issue books to take home. These four children have independently worked out all systems in the library, including how to keep track of borrowed books. Currently there are about 200 books for issue and about 100 to 150 books in the reading room. Of the 500 books still to be systematised, about 50 are introduced into the library or reading room each month.

Bhaiya read out parts from a book on Miss Moore, a librarian. He read out what was on the cover page to us. The blurb said that in America there were no libraries for children in olden days. Ms. Moore thought that children should read books, and that they should have a separate room, and chairs and tables their size, the room should be warm, and that they should be able to take the books home. Those days, people felt that children should not read books, especially girls, and that children will not handle books properly.

(Translated from Hindi from a group interview with Mamta, Ranoti, Sandaay, Nehaa, Simran, Dulaari, Bindeshwari, Aseetaa, Jamunaa, Seemaa, Chandrikaa)

- **Learning from excursions.** The students undertake a variety of trips that provide learning experiences for

> Over the last seven to eight years we can see the confidence of the children increase. These were children who ran away earlier on seeing people from outside. (**SAATHI staff**)

life. To understand issues related to their villages, the older children have visited the panchayat office twice for discussions with the panchayat members. On some Saturdays, the older children go on cycling trips, travelling away from their village to neighbouring areas.

Besides a trip to Sevagram that every child will make once during her or his schooling years, the older students go on an annual two to three week excursion accompanied by a couple of teachers and one or two parents. This is seen as valuable exposure as children get to experience life in a big city, see places of educational, cultural, natural and recreational interest, negotiate with strangers as they travel, live in apartments, learn to operate gadgets commonly used in urban households, see how children live and learn in other parts of the country and in other geographical regions like the Himalayas and Rajasthan. This exposure helps them learn to negotiate in other social and economic realities and be assertive when the situation demands it. These are subtle ways of learning, which could stand them in good stead in their adulthood. The current experience of adults who leave the village for work outside is one of being cheated in various ways. Hopefully, these children will be better equipped as adults to handle the outside world.

While we were at Imlee Mahuaa, we happened to visit Golawan, where a network of farmers works to save traditional seed varieties. We suggested that the older children in the school could benefit from exposure to this work. Within two months of our visit, the older children had cycled to Golawan and spent two days interacting with the members of the network.

Box 4

No Easy Answers!

How can this kind of education prepare these children to deal with the aggression of the outside world, especially since their ways of being are so different? Also, how does it prepare them to handle the changes that TV and mobiles could bring about, changing attitudes and relationships between genders?

Television and the aggression of the world outside Balenga Para are very powerful forces. Television (and the cultural brainwashing that comes with it) is being unwittingly welcomed with open arms by the people of Balenga Para. In this light, it would be foolhardy to say that anything in the Imlee Mahuaa experience can possibly help its members to deal with such powerful forces. Besides, that is also not an objective of the educational experience at Imlee Mahuaa (for it would lead to another kind of brain washing!).

Freedom and the responsibility that goes with it is a way of life for the members of the school. During their excursions they get to see the miserable contrasts and inequalities that exist in the outside world. The movies that they watch at school and the discussions they have with other members, with visitors and with their excursion hosts are often thought-provoking and informative. I think these experiences will prepare members of the school to deal more confidently with people from the world outside their villages, and to make bold, independent and discerning choices about their vocations, life styles and partners. **Prayaag Joshi**

Source: Discussions with Prayaag Joshi

The School's link with the community

Sensitive to local events and needs: Imlee Mahuaa is closed if there is a death in Balenga Para. The members of the school feel that the 'school is a riot of happy activity' and that it would be insensitive to keep it open when there's a death in the village. The village is a close-knit community. The adults and most students of the school understand that if there is a death in the village, the joyous sounds that emanate from the school through the day may be jarring to the bereaved family.

Imlee Mahuaa functions for half a day on Friday to allow children to go to the weekly *haat*. This is a day when all families make their way to the market, either to make purchases for the week or to sell raw, semi processed or processed edible items, pottery, handy tools, brooms, mats, baskets, poultry, eggs and sometimes even larger animals. In government schools, children are often absent on *haat* days. In recognition of the importance of the weekly market and the ties it has with families, the school functions only for half of the day.

Community outreach: Imlee Mahuaa offers basic medical care for minor ailments to all in Balenga Para and surrounding villages. Cases needing professional medical treatment are addressed at Jagdalpur under APCT's sponsorship. For instance, Shankar, a student of the school who lost his leg in a freak accident, got help from them to obtain a Jaipur foot (artificial foot).

Imlee Mahuaa also supported the repair of the village hand pump and the roof of the bathing facility. It provided all children and every home in Balenga Para with a solar powered lamp; this was before the area received electricity in 2014.

Children conducted an awareness campaign on the ill effects of chewing tobacco and offered gum substitutes to kick the habit. The intervention met with modest success.

The most significant contribution to date to the community seems to be the extension of the library facilities to the children of the government school in Balenga Para. When the children of the school learnt that the government school children couldn't arrive early, they shifted the library's timing to afternoon. Imlee Mahuaa students have also gone from home to home to encourage the children from government schools to visit their library.

This initiative is a great success. There are children from the government school who regularly visit the library. The opening up of doors is also significant because it is not a one-off activity but one that is ongoing and which could make some of the children not only love books but also help broaden their horizons through reading.

Prayaag feels that the community outreach needs more work. He feels the need to address issues on a long term (e.g. addressing the garbage issues at the *haat* or in Balenga Para). He also sees the importance of interacting more with the government school in the village. One way of doing this could be by extending invitations to some children when Imlee Mahuaa plans an excursion or a cycling trip.

Inculcating a concern for others less privileged: The excursions undertaken with the older children have always included attempts to raise awareness about environmental and or social issues. Trips have so far included visits to Bhopal where they interacted with groups that work with the Bhopal Gas Tragedy victims; Barefoot College in Tilonia and MKSS (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghatan) in Rajasthan

and to Delhi where they interacted with groups working with children of commercial sex workers, runaway children and homeless people.

Instilling a sense of self worth and confidence: Adivasi children in India face a number of demeaning experiences from the time they enter school. The head master or the class teacher often changes the names of the children. Adivasi names sound strange to non-Adivasi teachers who are usually from outside the region, and rather than respect this diversity, the teachers often humiliate the children by assigning new names to them. This is exactly what happened in colonial India, when many British nuns refused to call Indian children by their Indian names and changed them to English ones.

> The non-Adivasi teachers here (government run institutions) often call tribal children Muriya or Bastariya, implying "foolish person". (**SAATHI staff**)

After being stripped of their identity, Adivasi children continue to face retorts about their language and their so-called backwardness. Their mainstream school experiences have led them to believe that they are inherently stupid, resulting in great diffidence (Ramdas, B. 2013).

The Article 350 (A) of the Constitution declares,

> It shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups and the President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities.

The National Curriculum Framework (2005) states,

The first concern of the school is on the development of the child's language competence: issues related to articulation and literacy, and the ability to use language to create, to think and to communicate with others. Special stress is needed to ensure that there are maximum opportunities for those who wish to study in their mother tongue, including tribal languages and linguistic pockets, even if the number of students is small.

Even though a decade has passed since the development of this framework document produced by the NCERT, very little or nothing has unfortunately changed on the ground. In their early years children learn best in their mother-tongue but our educational institutions blatantly ignore the fact. There has been no effective policy on multi-lingual instruction and no model of language instruction that helps a child cross the barrier from the Adivasi languages spoken at home to the dominant state language chosen as the medium of instruction.

What compounds the language problem is the fact that the teachers recruited to ashram shalas do not speak the Adivasi language. They are mostly non-Adivasis recruited from outside who cannot communicate with the children in their classrooms in a language that is understood by the child. So when a little child first enters school, the child is bewildered and scared as s/he does not understand what the teacher says. The National Focus Group on Indian Languages recommends that it is "essential to engage teachers who know the tribal language as well" (NCERT 2006).

Chhattisgarh, with over 30 percent tribal population in the state, has had some experiments with producing text books in Adivasi dialects. These text books have serious limitations,

with depictions in them being urban and non-Adivasi (Veerbhadranaika P., et al. 2012).

Languages in use in Imlee Mahuaa. The families of the children of Imlee Mahuaa speak Gondi or Halbi or both. Halbi is the language of the Halbas, a scheduled tribe that is often mistaken as lower-caste Hindus. It is an Indo-Aryan language and very different from Gondi which is a Dravidian language spoken by the Gonds. There seems to be a hierarchy of languages of the four that are used in this region, and in decreasing order of importance subscribed to them, they are Hindi, Chhattisgarhi, Halbi and Gondi.

The children from Kokodi village do not speak any Gondi. The children from the other villages may speak Gondi at home or with one another. However, all children speak Halbi. It is a language that is relatively easy to learn, so even the occasional child who has not spoken it before coming to Imlee Mahuaa is able to learn it soon. Halbi and Gondi do not have their own script.

In the initial two years, driven by the expectations of the parents, the school had enforced a rule about speaking only in English while in school. Very soon, however, the adults realised their mistake, especially noting that the children did not look happy. From then on, Hindi and English were used. However, the adults realised that language remained an issue, so the children were allowed to use any language they wished to.

Assemblies were held in local languages and children sang songs and told stories in them. Prayaag learnt both the languages, often with help from the children. Since student-teachers teach the Sapri group, the little ones do not face a language issue.

The children of Semar and Soorajmukhi write their own bi-annual appraisal reports. These are in the form of a letter to their parents, explaining what they have done in school in the last few months. The reports are written in Halbi and children decorate their cover pages with their art work. A photocopy of the letter remains with the school, while the original is kept at home in a plastic file given by the school. The adults write the reports of the other children. All reports are written in Halbi and this enables parents to understand them.

At the time of finalising this draft, we heard that Imlee Mahuaa School is considering registering itself as a Halbi medium school in the Education Department's Office records.

Learning not a demeaning experience: The adults in Imlee Mahuaa accept the different learning abilities of the children with no extra attention or praise for anyone who may excel in academic work. The children are first generation school going learners, and there is full acceptance of the child if s/he is not enthused by academic work. There is no pressure to perform well, no exams, no experiences of failure and no labelling. This is in keeping with the Adivasi way of life where co-operation and not competition is the norm.

In many ways, Imlee Mahuaa has lived up to the original meaning of the word 'school', which means leisure, a meaning that has been lost over centuries of rigidity, discipline and didactic instruction. Schools now are singularly focused on academic achievement at the cost of every other aspect of a child's lived experience, robbing them of a normal, happy, healthy, safe, secure and care-free childhood.

Ecological sensitivity: A school that is so far removed from almost all forms of so called progress and development leaves negligible ecological footprint. Water is used sparingly

as it is carried to school in buckets from the village hand pump. Electricity came to the school only in February 2015 and is minimally used when available. All children either walk or cycle to school.

Even so, there is still an attempt to minimize Imlee Mahuaa's impact on the environment. Dishes are cleaned primarily with mud, detergent being reserved for oily utensils or the large pressure cookers. The water that drains from the washing area leads to a small patch of plants. School purchases are made in bulk to reduce packaging material in an attempt to reduce non-biodegradable waste. The village does not have a waste disposal system, so the waste generated is taken once a week to Kondagaon.

As attendance of adolescent girls drops during menstruation, the school made sanitary napkins available for those girls who wished to use them. We suggested replacing the regular sanitary napkins procured from the market with reusable cloth ones. The school promptly acted on the suggestion and replaced them with reusable cloth ones, eliminating the recurring issue of disposal.

There was also a brief discussion with the adults on the Forest Rights Act[8] and the importance of introducing the older children to some of its provisions. It was decided that as soon as the children are ready for this, sessions would be held with the help of people working on these issues.

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8.   Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, popularly referred to as the Forest Rights Act

Conclusion

In its functioning, Imlee Mahuaa has tried to adhere to the Adivasi ethos. They are constantly questioning what happens in school and looking for instances that may, in any way, compromise the children's desirable experiences at school. For the adults, it is the children's happiness and their security while in school which is of paramount importance.

Although the school is eager to receive feedback, take cognizance and act on suggestions like in the case of sanitary napkins, the visit to the seed conservation endeavour or the intended discussion with the children on the Forest Rights Act, it may like to consider a few points for future action.

Adivasi communities are a repository of traditional knowledge. A conscious effort to keep this wisdom alive and include it in the curriculum could be made. The ghotul in Balenga Para closed down for six years and has recently been restarted. In most Adivasi villages in Central India these ancient institutions of learning have been shut down. It was at the ghotul that the Adivasi youth picked up the many skills required for adult life. Given that school going children are not allowed to be members of the ghotul, and also given the fact that one does not really know for how long this tradition will continue in Balenga Para, it is even more important that other learning avenues such as Imlee Mahuaa meet some of these needs to whatever extent possible.

The adults are all male. This may not be intentional; however, growing children, we believe, need the influence of both genders in their time spent at school. Remote areas have their limitations and young women teachers among the Adivasi community are difficult to find. The balance seems to be tilted unfairly, which one can hope will be corrected when one or more of the senior girl students return to the school as adult members of the school.

In conclusion, one can say that the school is attempting to find that fine balance between life as it is today in the villages where it functions and equipping children with the necessary skills for an unknown tomorrow. Any organisation, individual or government department working in the interest of Adivasi children would benefit from the experience of Imlee Mahuaa.

Beyond that specific relevance, its principles and approach (of respecting diversity, democratised functioning, freedom with responsibility, environmental and social sensitivity, community-learning) are some of the foundations to a more just and equitable society.

Imlee Mahuaa is a bold experiment befitting our times and the community it serves. This community of sixty-three people is showing us that there could be a different way of doing things, and sometimes these risks are worth taking. The journey is its own justification; any goal achieved will only add value to the experience.

Acknowledgements

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Very Much on the Map:
the Timbaktu Collective

Ashish Kothari

Kondakindapalli, AP

Kondakindapalli residents, Andhra Pradesh

Dharani products

Lakshmi Narasimha & Matyalamma, Kondakindapalli

5
Very Much on the Map:
the Timbaktu Collective

Ashish Kothari

Beginnings

Located in the Ananthapuramu district of Andhra Pradesh, close to the town of Penukonda, the Timbaktu Collective is an initiative to empower villagers (particularly the poorest amongst them) to take charge of their own future and the future of their land and natural resources. It began as a tiny effort by Mary Vattamattam and C.K. ('Bablu') Ganguly, who wanted to move away from their mode of constant agitation as part of the Young India Project (organizing fa rm labour), to doing constructive work in villages. Their desire was to not only demand change towards justice, but to actively and practically facilitate such change. They realized that one way to do this was to address the issue of land and agriculture, given rural India's dependence on these. In 1989, aided by a few other individuals such as John D'Souza (one of the founders of the well-known Centre for Education and Documentation), they bought thirty-two acres of land near Chennekothapalli village, in an area where deforestation and land mismanagement had converted the hills into barren rock and unproductive soil. It was a bold, almost foolish

attempt at doing something in an area that had been given up as lost, both by the government and by many of the villagers themselves.

While land and agriculture were primary concerns for Bablu and Mary (to this end they initiated the regeneration of their own barren area), they quickly realized that the social dynamics of women's marginalization were crucial to any understanding of how change could take place. Thus began a process of mobilizing women to form collectives for savings, self-help, and mutual aid. As described below, the move towards sustainable, organic farming was an outcome of learning from this initiative.

From a tiny start in a handful of villages, the Timbaktu Collective (TC) is now spread over 172 villages; its more than 120 full-time employees spearhead a variety of rural reconstruction initiatives (www.timbaktu.org; http://tc-ckp. blogspot.in). These include:

- Women's empowerment, rights and welfare activities such as livelihood and welfare cooperatives, thrift and credit groups, legal aid and support for women in distress
- Rural enterprises including a farmer producer company, livelihoods for the landless and training courses in enterprise management
- Children's rights and welfare activities, including a resource centre for rural children, advocacy for rights, and quality improvement of government schools
- Ecological restoration and conservation, including the regeneration of a vast grassland (Kalpavalli) and the forests around the main TC campus, water harvesting and conservation, and organic farming to revive biodiversity and the land
- Advocacy and activities in support of children and adults with disabilities

While TC's efforts are on a variety of fronts, this case study focuses on two related aspects: organic farming and farmers' producer cooperative.

'This case study was done as part of the project 'Alternative Practices and Visions in India: Documentation, Networking, and Advocacy', sponsored by ActionAid. The methodology for the case study included (a) field visits involving personal observations and discussions with villagers, (b) perusal of existing material by the Timbaktu Collective or by independent observers and (c) discussions with a range of staff of the Timbaktu Collective. During the project period, a visit was carried out in November 2013, but notes from a previous visit (February 2012) have also been used. A draft of this report was sent to Bablu Ganguly of the Timbaktu Collective for comments and additional information. The report was finalized in 2014; subsequently, pursuant to comments received from the editors of this volume, in mid-2016, some additional inputs were obtained on email from Bablu Ganguly, and a new study report he sent was also referred to. This should be considered work in progress.'

Institutional Structure and Vision

The specific work on farming and marketing described in this case study, as well as other activities of TC, are carried out within an institutional structure that attempts to be fully participatory and democratic. The staff (about 120 in mid-2016) form a *panchayati* that meets once in two months to share experiences, for decision-making, practical work, and, to quote Ganguly, 'fun, games and movies'. There are several working groups (such as those related to the work with women). The coordinators of these groups form a core group that meets regularly for operational discussions and

decisions. Committees on ethics, gender, sexual harassment and other aspects work to ensure that basic standards of human rights, legality, etc., are maintained. The approach is to find interested people to take responsibilities of various kinds and follow a broad framework that enables flexibility and encourages people to devise their own operating procedures.

A part of this participatory process is also vision-building. In Ganguly's words:

> None of what has happened can happen without vision building exercises with the people. That's what community mobilisation is about. Actually it's far more than just vision building, it's all about building social capital, it's about bringing in new concepts, about making people think, stretching their capabilities, learning how to cooperate, etc.

> For instance, we had a series of meetings with the farming families before the sanghas were formed. Then we had a series of meetings with the sangha and other leaders before Dharani was registered. The rules of Dharani and organic farming were developed along with the leaders, some of who became the promoting directors of the cooperative. Member education remains a very important element in the work so that every member understands how the cooperative works. All decisions are made in the director meetings and then disseminated through the leaders' meetings and sangha meetings, and this is a continuous process.

The above is also significant considering that the vast majority of the TC staff consists of local people (of 120, less than 10 are from outside). There is also an attempt to make groups independent and autonomous, which I will return to in the conclusion.

Towards an organic future

TC's initial work on financial empowerment of women through thrift societies and self-help groups has had a number of interesting offshoots, one of which is in agriculture. Several of the women's thrift groups realized that amongst the most common items for which loans were taken expensive inputs (fertilizers, pesticides) that farmers needed for cultivation. In the mid-2000s, TC started conducting annual seed festivals and showcasing demonstration plots to prove the potential of organic farming. Women asked for help in experimenting with organic farming on their own land. Thus began a major programme to promote sustainable agriculture.

It is important to understand the difficult context in which this process had to work. Ananthapuramu is amongst India's driest areas, with an average rainfall of 380 mm, and regular droughts. Traditionally, the farmers adapted to this with innovative dry-land techniques including the extensive cultivation of millets (jowar, bajra, ragi, and others) and predominant concentration on food crops.[1] Government programmes over the last three decades pushed groundnut cultivation as it brought good economic returns, to the extent that at one stage about 90 percent of the cropped area in the district was taken up by this one crop (the country's largest mono-crop groundnut growing district)![2] When successful, this gave the farmer good returns, but if it failed due to drought or pests, the result was economic devastation. Additionally, the cultivator was locked into a vicious cycle of increasing input costs (especially pesticides), growing dependence on government and corporate entities, and declining soil fertility, reducing productivity. Farmer distress

1. 70 percent of the area under cultivation was for food crops till the 1960s, according to Rao (2016)

2. Rao (2016) reports the coverage now to be 71 percent.

has become all-too common. Also, groundnut reduces the relative control of women over agriculture and food, as it is a commercial, market-oriented, and heavy-technology crop more amenable to men's control.

The small dry-land farmer in the region has had a tough task just surviving. Economic forces and official attitudes militate against them, and increasingly it is drilled into their heads that they are simply not viable, especially if they don't adopt new technologies and methods including irrigation, chemicals, and hybrids. TC's initiative on sustainable farming is aimed at showing that the small farmer can indeed not only be viable but thrive, and that too in ecologically sustainable ways.

In the early years, TC supported farmers with millet seeds, regeneration of land, soil fertility enhancement using natural inputs, biomass improvement and enhancement, sprayers for natural pesticides, and other such inputs. Farmers were required to contribute 15 percent of the costs in cash or kind. More than 1000 farmers were also given Halikar cattle, the local sturdy breed that had begun to disappear from the area; thus far, over 1000 pairs have been given and are doing well with numbers having multiplied two-three times. They are especially important because they are drought resistant, useful as draught animal, an asset that can be rented out, and for their dung and urine. In subsequent years, major inputs by TC have been training, sangha formation (see below), and Farmer Field Schools (enabling decisions at field level).

Transforming this scenario has been a slow struggle, but the demonstration effect has won over hundreds of farmers. Villages like Brahmanapalli, Kondakindapalli and Hariyancheruvu, amongst the first to try organic techniques, are now almost 100 percent converted (Brahmanapalli did go 100 percent, but of late a few large farmer families have reverted to chemicals)[3]. Many farmers have added (or

brought back) millets, castor, corn, red gram, green gram and other pulses to groundnut, using only locally produced organic inputs. They report no loss in yield if one measures what is finally available to consume along with a substantial reduction in financial costs; several report an increase in yields even from a conventional, grain-only count.

In the most recent study, Shylaja Rao (2016) states:

> Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of farmers opting for millet cultivation since gross profit margin percentage from groundnut cultivation was a mere 5% (Rs.450/acre) while profits from millet cultivation were a high 45-50% (Rs. 3500-4500/acre). Also the cost of cultivation of millets is significantly less (about 50%) than cultivation of groundnut primarily due to reduced seed cost. In the event of crop failures farmers are able to manage the losses incurred without undue stress/indebtedness. The assured market for millets through Dharani at pre-fixed prices which is usually about 25-50% more than the open market price for millets and the patronage bonus issued by Dharani has been an additional incentive for farmers to adopt millet cultivation.

There is reportedly also an increase in home consumption, as food crops like millets make a comeback, thereby reducing their need to buy foods from the market. The long-term nutritional benefits of this should be substantial (though not currently measured). Enhanced incomes have also been reported by the farmers, as have substantial improvements in soil quality. A recent independent assessment confirmed many of these results (see Box 1).

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3.   Reasons for this were not made clear to the author

Box 1

Results of organic initiative

A detailed assessment of TC's organic initiative, carried out in 2013, came up with the following results:

60 percent of the study group recorded an increase in yield, 21 percent did not record any change in yield, while 19 percent recorded a decrease in yield.

61.1 percent of the farmers say that they have had increased household income, 78.6 percent farmers say that they have been able to actively participate in thrift and savings programs, 64.1 percent are able to meet the family's requirements without borrowing, and dependency on money lenders has gone down by 73.8 percent.

70.9 percent of the study group have seen an improvement in the soil quality since the beginning of the organic program, 54.4 percent of the population feel that their plants are able to withstand longer periods of water stress than before, while 84.7 percent have recorded a decrease in chemical use since the start of the organic program.

75.5 percent of the group have observed more interaction among family members and collective decision-making is the norm in about 69.9 percent families. About 63.1 percent of the study group have recorded reduced migration of men to urban areas in search of livelihoods, while about 64.3 percent are able to better manage the food and nutritional needs of the family. As a direct consequence of the program the farming families now include millets, pulses and milk in

their diet, contributing to food and nutritional security of the households. At the community level, 87.4 percent feel that there is increased participation of women and youth in discussions/decision making; interaction among community members has increased by about 65 percent. As a result of this program 55.3 percent are aware of the power of collective bargaining.

Source: Rao 2013.

Two crucial institutional innovations have made this possible. At the village level, farmers are organised under sanghas, which assume a kind of mutual aid and collective action function. Though initially the farmer sanghas formed in each village comprised between 20 and 80 members, it was subsequently decided to standardize this to about two sanghas of fifteen households (HH) each in every village. In about forty-five villages, such sanghas are divided into three groups of five farmers each, called *brundams*, which perform the essential functions relevant to the Participatory Guarantee Scheme (see Box 2 below). In the newer villages, five-member sanghas (those with adjacent plots, to aid in peer pressure and support) can be formed. These meet twice a month; leaders of all sanghas meet once a month. There is also one organic field worker, employed by TC, to support about 100 farmer members. Each sangha maintains records and accounts. Three adjoining villages form a 'constituency', and one Director is appointed for each of these, elected from amongst sangha leaders. The TC field workers assigned to help the sanghas are trained in organic techniques, book-keeping, etc., including at institutions like Centre for Sustainable Agriculture and Agriculture Man Ecology Foundation.

According to Rao (2016), 'This decentralization of functions and activities has achieved transparency as well as greater involvement and participation of the local communities in project activities.'

Box 2

Participatory Guarantee Scheme (PGS)

TC has been one of the pioneers of the Participatory Guarantee Scheme (PGS) for certification of farmers and their produce as being organic. Groups of five farmers (called brundams) with adjacent fields keep a watch on one another (for anyone not following organic principles could endanger the organic status of the others); neighbouring groups of farmers do the same. Organic field workers and TC coordinators keep a check. Inspection sheets are filled up by brundam members and given to the sangha with the recommendations for approving or denying certification. Usually sheets of all farmers are put in sangha meetings and discussed case by case. The approved list of farmers for PGS certification is then prepared and sent to TC, the regional council. Any farmer found defaulting is debarred from being a member. However, depending on the situation and sincerity of the farmer, s/he may be given a chance to continue in the group on the promise that s/he will not use chemical fertilisers again, or s/he could be asked to come back after practising organic for three years. There is twice a year (pre and post-harvest) inspection at the 1st stage. All this is in line with the national PGS Organic Council guidelines.

All the documents utilised in the process are in Telugu, which enables the farmer members to participate.

> Training programmes have been organized for the farmers on certification and methodology under PGS system. They are all given a copy of Indian Organic Standards in Telugu. The standards are also printed in flex poster and displayed in the sangha offices.
>
> The consolidated data is sent to the Secretariat of the PGS Organic Council every year. The certificates for the approved sanghas are received from the PGSOC and the certificates are displayed in the sangha offices. In the first three years, the farmer's produce is treated as 'organic-in-conversion'; from fourth year it is certified organic.

Source: http://www.pgsorganic.in/

There is a second, equally important innovation. Traditionally, farmers have been systematically cheated by traders buying their produce at low rates (or using faulty weighing machines). TC initiated a farmers' marketing organisation, the Dharani Farming and Marketing Mutually Aided Cooperative. It buys the organic produce at a rate slightly higher than the market and sells it, with profits coming back to the farmers after cutting expenses (http://www.timbaktu-organic.org/). Dharani is explored in greater detail below.

The initiative has also helped to revive agricultural biodiversity, which was being lost in the government and market-led drive to grow groundnut. So far TC has been able to document and collect twenty-eight varieties of rice, thirty-one of millets, eighteen of pulses and seven of oil seeds. The farmer sanghas are constantly trying out these for local adaptability, productivity, soil health, consumption preferences, and other factors that are important in farmers'

choice of the crop mix. However, the results are uneven and a lot more will need to be done to promote biodiversity (see issue of rice diversity in Kondakindapalli case study below). TC also introduced proso millet and other native crops like kodo millet and barnyard millet, which was welcomed and cultivated by more and more farmers over the last three years.

By 2012, after 7 years of work, TC had facilitated about 1050 families in thirty-four villages spread over 3000 to 3500 acres, to go organic. In 2013, it decided to expand substantially and over the next three years it brought into the fold a total of 1620 families spread over 43 villages and 8700 acres, comprising 118 sanghams.[4] This includes irrigated land (1700 acres) as the government has begun providing sprinkler and drip systems and several farmers are employing them. Such land is an extra challenge as it is more prone to mono-crop of groundnut, and harder to retain or convert to millets.

Yet another issue being faced is change in rainfall patterns, perhaps linked to climate change. With increasing unpredictability, groundnut could no longer be dried out in the fields, it had to be brought home and stacked up, difficult for those with small houses.

Another recent challenge is the government's promotion of millet hybrids with a package of chemicals for high

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4. Rao (2016) reports that by 2016, TC was working with 1632 families in 45 villages over approximately 9000 acres. The caste/social break-up is 76 percent Backward Castes, 12 percent Scheduled Castes, 11 percent General, and 1 percent Scheduled Tribes. The gender break-up of registered members is 28 percent women and 72 percent men (However, the latter could be misleading, since only one farmer per family is registered as cooperative member, though apparently, most of the time husband and wife actively participate in sangha activities).

productivity; in order to counter this, there is need for research in increasing productivity of the traditional varieties.

As of mid-2016, about 900 farmers were certified as being fully organic and 642 more members have completed three years in conversion and have applied for organic certification from PGS Organic Council. For a brief period, the PGS certification was being supplemented with an IMO certification, partly because TC and Dharani themselves wanted a third party check or audit, and partly because bulk buyers required it. However, the IMO process was expensive and was discontinued.

Given the serious challenges organic farming posed, in most villages the share of farmers which has converted to fully organic is small; only in a few villages they are in the majority.

Kondakindapalli (Yerajinanagaripalli): Towards 100 percent organic

A village of about 100 households, all belonging to the Boya caste (technically, BC status), Kondakindapalli has rapidly adapted to organic farming and is now almost 100 percent free of chemical use.

Till about five years back, several farmers in the village were using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. While TC staff began to talk about organic farming, several villagers were also beginning to question their use of chemicals due to health problems and growing costs. They were also witness to the positive experience of nearby Venkatampalli (which began organic farming in 2005) and requested TC to introduce organic techniques in 2008. They had seen TC's work through the Adisakthi Mutually Aided Thrift

Cooperative Society of women (with 5910 members and a capital base or ₹ 6.98 crores) and trusted the organization. Also, many farmers had not converted to 100 percent chemical and a number of cultivators were still using organic techniques, especially for millets. A gradual conversion was therefore possible. The formation of sanghas helped in mobilizing people and providing support.

Over the first five years, nearly all the households of the village turned to organic with only three families holding out because they didn't want the hassle of attending frequent meetings and the pains of conversion from chemical to organic. So far, the experience is that yields are the same as when they were using chemicals; even when it's less, the economics works out better due to minimal input costs. Moreover, with mono-cropping, a single failed season was disastrous; now with multi-cropping, even with less rain or disease and pest attack, some crops succeed. A number of traditional or new pest control techniques are employed, including organic sprays of 5-10 ingredients each ('panchapatra' and 'dasapatra' kasayams) in the fields, and the use of plants like *jilledu* (Calotropis) for stored crops (instead of the hazardous Gamaxene).

Box 3

Farmer stories from Kondakindapalli

Yashodhamma has an eight-member household. In her dry fields, she grows korra, jowar, green gram, red gram and cowpea mostly for home consumption and sale to Dharani. Her irrigated fields grow paddy, chilli, vegetables and flowers. She has always practised organic. Now, with Dharani's support and buy-back arrangements, she is encouraged to continue doing so.

Suryanarayana and Nagaraj Bogga, sons of Lakshmi and Lakshmana Narsamma, grow a mix of fruits, vegetables and flowers on what was previously fallow land. Some is for home consumption, some for the market. They initially got the idea of doing mixed organic cultivation from a training programme at TC and subsequently developed their own ideas of what kind of mix could be tried. On some dry land, they also grow millets, groundnut and pulses. Till about six years back they used chemicals for groundnut; now it is organic. Anand Boggu grows paddy (only one variety); even though he knew its negative impact on health and soil, he used chemicals till 2008 because he did not know of alternatives. When TC offered an alternative, he decided to experiment and is quite happy with the yields – about 30-35 bags (approximately 22-26 quintals) per acre and high economic returns with minimal input costs. Earlier, he used to spend about ₹ 5000/- on DAP/urea per acre, and about ₹ 20,000 for pesticides in a season. The physical labour is greater in organic farming but worth it. Last year his organic tomatoes got the best rates in Kollar market, earning him ₹ 2 lakhs (this year he hopes to make ₹ 3 lakhs).

Source: Author's field visit notes

Several farmers have either retained millets in their dry land or brought them back into cultivation. However, rice and groundnut remain dominant in the irrigated lands. Traditional varieties of rice are not being grown because seeds are not available, but if TC could reintroduce them and offer to buy back, some farmers might try re-growing. According to TC members, it is unlikely that there will be significant conversion since most people seem to like the new varieties for their taste and marketability.

Women report that while earlier a lot of cash was needed to keep up agricultural operations, now the cost is less and there's more nutritious food at home. Some families have reverted to drinking ragi malt instead of Boost!

While thirty farmers started with two sanghas in 2008, by 2013 this increased to sixty farmers in four sanghas (Vinayak, Jawaharlal, Lakshmi Narasimha and Sanghameshwara). The earlier sanghas are 100 percent organic; the new ones have applied for certification.

Farmers are relatively happy with the fact that they can sell their organic produce at good prices, much of it purchased by Dharani (see below). By eliminating middlemen, Dharani released farmers from exploitative conditions and malpractices such as the use of faulty weights. The elimination of chemicals has also meant improved health for both humans and other animals. It has also led to an increase in bird populations, which in turn help to control pests.

Kondakindapalli's success with organic has reportedly had repercussions in neighbouring villages, with Pallenagaripalli wanting to experiment (some big farmers already trying it), and Puletipalli already about 50 percent organic.

Box 4

Gramasiri (labour) sanghas

> TC organized the landless families in the village into Labour Sanghas under the Gramasiri Livelihoods and Marketing Cooperative. Fifteen households in Kondakindapalli are part of this. The cooperative gives loans to purchase livestock (mostly goat or sheep) and the families use these as revolving asset. From an initial

set of 75 animals in 2008, the population had been built to 364 by 2013, with families earning several thousand rupees per year in the sale of their surplus stock.

Narsimhulu Bariperu Chinnaka and Chinamma, a couple with almost no assets, were started off with five animals in 2009. Today they have twenty, having meanwhile sold about twenty-five and through this, managed expenditure related to a wedding, food, clothes and house improvements.

Across TC's functioning area, there are about 927 landless families in 47 villages that have benefited from this programme. All the sanghas have also started thrift activities, and TC helps with training for additional livelihoods and entrepreneurship, handling accounts, etc. In 13 villages (not including Kondakindappali) the sanghas also manage common pasture land development.

Source: Author's field visit notes

Gramasiri is now a producer owned, livelihood cooperative with 927 share-holding landless labourers with a capital base of ₹ 1.21 crores. It now plans to explore the meat industry as a collective business.

Dharani: Towards producer control

The idea of forming a cooperative arose out of the experience of farmers getting low returns when selling individually to traders and having no say in the prices. The Adisakthi women's cooperative was registered in 1997-98 as a thrift cooperative; in 2005-06, with the Timbaktu Collective's support, it started an organic marketing wing to help market the produce of members who had turned

organic. This wing was called Adisakthi Dharani, and in 2008, the *Dharani Vyavasaya Mariu Marketing Paraspara Sahayaka Sahakara Sangham Ltd* (*Dharani Farming and Marketing Mutually Aided Co-operative Society Ltd.*, or Dharani FaM Co-op Ltd.) was registered under Andhra Pradesh Mutually Aided Co-operative Societies Act, 1995. Adisakthi Dharani's balance sheets were transferred to it. Initial capital was raised from well-wishers of TC in the form of low-interest social investment loans and membership fees.

Farmers are ordinary members of Dharani, with a share capital of ₹ 1000 each. Every five farmers make a unit (brundam), and three brundams make a sangham (approximately 15 farmers). Every village has an office for these sanghams, and one to two people to assist in bookkeeping, office maintenance, etc. Two leaders from each sangham come together at the mandal level, forming a leaders' council that meets once a month at TC. Three villages form a constituency, and members elect the constituency director. The Board consists of 12 such directors and 3 nominated members (CEO Dharani, Chairperson TC, and Board member of Adisakthi). The Board meets monthly, while the General Body meets once a year.

Membership of Dharani is close to 1650 (from 1100 in 2012), with a total share capital and deposits of over ₹ 27 lakhs. However, given constraints of storage and processing, thus far only about 500 farmers can be supported with 100 percent purchase of their produce.

Box 5

Basis for the Dharani initiative

When the Timbaktu Collective (www.timbaktu.org) initiated its organic farming project in Ananthapuramu district, there were certain areas that required immediate attention in order to relieve the farmers from their distress situation. The Collective felt that a producer-owned processing and marketing venture would be able to address the following major issues.

1. **Unavailability of credit**
   Due to recurring drought conditions, most of the borrowers in rural areas of Rayalaseema cannot repay loans. Financial institutions keep them as de-faulted borrowers, included in the black list, ceasing their chance of borrowing again. This was a stumbling block to most of the rural households in the state, particularly in Rayalaseema, with the consequent dependence on moneylenders and private financiers leading to increase in the cost of production, unprofitable cultivation and increased indebtedness.

2. **Exploitative trading**
   An entire district of farmers specialising in one crop had also significantly increased market risk for farmers. Private traders and groundnut processing mill owners, whose pricing and weighing methods are unfair, control much of the local market. Often, they are also the suppliers for farm inputs such as seed, chemicals and credit to farmers. The relationship is exploitative and often leaves the farmer at the mercy of the trader/mill owner. With the local system tuned and built to support only

groundnut in terms of marketing, credit, insurance, inputs, production know-how or social support, the farmer is forced to continue growing groundnut, but only to further sink in the mire.

3. **Trade policies and increased market risk**
   The purchase price of groundnut has also been affected by policies relating to oil imports and trade. Imported palm oil is sold at much lower price than that of groundnut oil. The local groundnut purchase price was affected by the situation in Maharashtra-Gujarat (the other major groundnut producing regions) and bigger traders up the value chain, which only further exposed the Ananthapuramu farmer to greater market risk.

4. **No access to growing organic food market**
   The organic food market is growing at a healthy rate of 15 to 25 percent worldwide. In India too, the awareness for organic and healthy nutritious food is on a constant rise. Much of the organic food grown today in India, as well as the organic guarantee systems developed, are focused on export markets in European Union, United States and Japan. The focus on export allows nutrition to 'leak out' from the country. Small-holder farmers have no direct access to this growing market and neither do they benefit from its added margins for lack of proper infrastructure and the requisite technical and marketing ability.

Source: TC's note on Dharani

Dharani offers a guaranteed price for millets – bajra (pearl millet), jowar (great millet), ragi (finger millet), korra (foxtail millet), and sama (little millet), arika (kodo millet), bariga (proso millet), oodara (barnyard millet) – which is higher than the market (on average by 25 to 33 percent), and has offered to purchase all the millet that members can provide. It also purchases groundnut and paddy, but at market prices. There is a deliberate attempt at promoting millets, which has led to a gradual revival in cultivation (as mentioned above) and an increase in purchase. From an earlier 80-20 groundnut-millet purchase proportion, it is now 60-40. Millets also get farmers a bonus of ₹ 5/kg; if there is surplus, it can be distributed to members; groundnut bonus is only ₹ 1/kg, and paddy ₹ 2/kg. Other crops purchased include pigeon pea, green gram, and cowpea.

At present, about 50 products are sold under the brand Timbaktu Organic. Dharani keeps 20 percent of final sale for organizational expenses and overheads of the rest, 65 percent goes to farmers and 15 percent into direct costs (packaging, transport, grading). Dharani stores after purchasing from farmers do not use preservatives to increase shelf life. Some processing units have been bought but with the significant increase in procurement, these are not adequate. Future plans include expanding the processing capacity. However, the processing does not include any mixing of sugar or other additives, which some other groups do.

Dharani has tied up with about 240 dealers who are somewhat discerning and not whole-sale, mostly from Bengaluru and some from Kurnool, Ananthapuramu, Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Vishakapatnam, Mysore, Coimbatore, Salem and Chennai.

Dharani's financial status has been steadily improving. In 2010-11, it broke even for the first time (for the year's

expenses). By 2011-12 with sales of ₹ 56 lakhs, it had recovered cumulative losses from the past and therefore fully broken even. In 2012-13 sales increased to ₹ 98 lakhs, and it could distribute bonus to members for the first time. By 2015-16, it has distributed over ₹ 15 lakhs as bonus over four years with the annual sales revenue crossing the ₹ 2 crores mark during the year.[5] 7 out of 14 of the Dharni team is now paid fully by the Cooperative itself, while the Timbaktu Collective pays the remaining.

To get here, Dharani had to diversify its products, including some value added ones that fetched good revenues. It also had to increase storage and processing capacity, and add one more cycle of procurement to the two per year so far. To the earlier list of products like millet flour, ragi malt, rice, honey, millet biscuits, peanut powder and laddu, and table peanuts, it has added various ready-to-make mixes including pongal, ragi dosa, ragi laddu, multi-millet laddu, and payasam, as also snacks like three kinds of murukus. It has also set up a distribution point for consumers in Bengaluru (not a retail shop, only a pick-up point) and is considering collaboration with online retailers.

Have market-based opportunities through Dharani motivated a shift away from household consumption, inadvertantly reducing the availability of nutritious foods in the home? This may be happening with pulses, but in the case of millets, home consumption may be on the rise due to Dharani's efforts combined with TC's organic initiative and general awareness programmes. This needs to be assessed, especially from the perspective of the farmer household's nutritional and food security independent of the market.

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5.   Rao (2016) reports significantly enhanced monthly sales, up to ₹ 21 lakhs in January 2016.

Analysis

In the right direction, but some way to go. From available indications, the TC initiatives on organic farming and the producers' cooperative have yielded several positive results:

- improvement in food security and sovereignty through both increased local availability and enhanced incomes

- the spread of organic cultivation methods and thus healthier soil and environment

- the revival of millets in cultivation and in people's diets

- the empowerment of women in the governance of agricultural and other operations

- greater economic returns for smallholder farmers showing that economies of scale can work for them also

- enhanced livelihoods for the landless

- the regeneration of commons, and others

The work of groups like TC is also crucial to demolish a perverse myth sustained for the last few generations in India that dry-land farming is unviable. Given adequate access to diverse, appropriate, and good quality seeds (especially millets), decentralized water harvesting and conservation, membership of collectives where members can help each other, the ability to combine the best of traditional and new knowledge, greater decision-making to women, and other such factors described in this report, there is every possibility of dry-land farming being not only viable but able to provide food and livelihood security. Where it can be based predominantly on local inputs, it can also be a pathway to food and natural resource sovereignty. Examples of such viability are found in many parts of India,[6] but submerged

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6. See for instance, Kothari 2016.

under the blitzkrieg of misinformation fed by the agricultural establishment.

TC's use of PGS is also path-breaking, for it shows the potential of cheap, democratic forms of certification that consumers and official agencies find acceptable. Several other farmer groups in India are now using it and it would be interesting to see if it is relevant to other sectors too, for instance in certifying community-based home stays or crafts.

Equally important is TC's stress on creating institutions that could last longer than project periods and become a fulcrum of processes of change. In the case of agriculture, which is the focus of this case study, the farmer sanghas (or sanghams) and the producer company Dharani are the relevant examples (though in other fields TC has created other institutions also). Its own *panchayati* of the staff is also an interesting innovation as an attempt at democratic functioning that involves all the workers of TC, reducing arbitrary or solely top-down decision-making.

However, serious challenges remain. With a significant expansion of organic practices, the infrastructure of TC and Dharani to manage procurement, storage, and processing has fallen behind, resulting in occasional frustration for farmers whose produce has not been procured or has been procured late. At Kondakindapalli, farmers complained that their produce had not so far been procured (the delay was clarified by the TC staff member present). The TC staff is stretched to its limits, given especially the significant expansion of membership after 2013. This has necessitated investment in establishing two more processing units in two mandals. There is urgent need to increase staff from amongst the members or other youth from the villages; TC could also ask to run a new or existing Krishi Vigyan Kendra where further training and orientation could be given to create a bigger cadre.

Though the spread of organic cultivation and the membership of Dharani have been impressive, in a large number of villages, those who have registered or are known to have switched to organic practices, remain a minority; they are in a majority in only a few villages. However, there is apparent demand from many farmers to make the switch if they could be adequately facilitated. Here too a bigger cadre of resource persons is needed.

While there has been a stress on increasing crop diversity and bringing back into cultivation traditional varieties of millets and rice, this aspect remains weak in some areas. In Kondakindapalli, for instance, there was no farmer growing traditional paddy varieties, and it did not appear that TC had tried to promote them. This is not an easy task, given the prevailing market trends and the cultural changes relating to food preferences. One good practice found in some other initiatives is seed or grain banks in the villages, from where farmers can access seeds when they don't have enough, or access varieties they want to try out. Local production of seeds for local sale can also be encouraged to reduce dependence on the market or on government agencies (which has started as an integral part of the programme from 2016 kharif season).

TC has not paid substantial attention to formally linking with constitutionally mandated bodies like panchayats, but does recognize the need to do this if the gains from its work have to be further internalized and sustained by the communities. A number of women and men who have gone through TC's programmes have stood for and gained seats in panchayats, but this does not necessarily translate into its activities and approaches becoming more central in their functioning. Some political issues are sporadically taken up by various sanghas when necessary, but a more systematic engagement may be worth considering.

In fact TC has also not focused much on policy work, given the effort and time taken to achieve on-ground transformation. However, both the organic farming and millet revival work, as also Dharani, have become examples for government agencies and other civil society groups to come and see. According to Ganguly, 'We are flooded with requests for exposure visits, trainings, etc.' In this case study it was not possible to examine whether this has policy level impact at state or national levels. The government has started the 'Initiative for Nutritional Security through Intensive Millet Production (INSIMP)' scheme, with a budget outlay of ₹ 300 crores under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (Rao 2016), but it is not clear if initiatives like Timbaktu have been a catalyst in this.

Another interesting aspect that could be systematically studied is the nutritional and home consumption changes that may have occurred, especially of millets, in the villages where substantial switch to organic cultivation and millets has taken place Rao's 2013 report has the beginnings of such a study, and her latest (2016) report mentions that there is substantial millet consumption, so it should be possible to see if there has been significant nutritional and health improvement.

An aspect that is worth examining is whether there is continued heavy dependence on outside funding for the organic initiative (substantial grants from Sir Dorabjee Tata Trust and the European Union/EED/BfdW), and if so, whether this is problematic from the perspective of long-term sustainability. Dharani's experience suggests that it may be possible to become self-sufficient in the not-so-distant future, in so far as its membership is concerned. But expansion to a much larger set of farmers may continue to require external funding. In 2015-16 it has again requested

low-interest investments from supporters and staff, and is also getting some support from Rang De. How much is it possible to get such funds from the government, which is anyway supposed to facilitate such processes? It is worth noting that so far TC has not received any government support in this regard.

One strategy being actively pursued is to make several of the groups independent and autonomous as cooperatives, and to federate them. The women's thrift cooperatives are already financially independent, and Dharani hopes to be within a few years.

Along with financial sustainability is the issue of institutional sustainability; there is heavy dependence on the founders of TC, and while a second line of leadership in activities like Dharani seems to be emerging, this is not so evident for TC as a whole. With almost three decades of work behind them, this is a matter of active concern and discussion in the group.

TC works within a context of serious traditional and new inequities (which affect much of India), including those of gender, caste and wealth. These issues get discussed regularly, not only in the formal institutional structures of TC but also in the various activities in the villages. How much they are internalized in community dynamics and what change has been actually affected to reduce inequities and injustices, would need to be studied; considering the levels of confidence of women in interaction with outsiders like myself and the relatively independent activities they are able to carry out, it could be said that at least on the gender front significant changes may be taking place.

Finally, and this may be the most serious challenge, it does not appear that any of the villages TC is working in, has moved towards holistic transformation. Such a change

would have to be on economic, social, political, cultural and environmental fronts (referring to the key elements of the Alternatives Framework mentioned below), tackling inequity and unsustainability of various kinds. The diversity of sectors in which TC works covers quite a range of these fronts, but it does not seem that they have been consolidated into a holistic transformation in any village. A question that TC founders Bablu and Mary ask, for which there are no easy answers, is whether to continue expanding geographically or focus more on deeper engagement in existing villages. This would also entail, among other methods, further democratization of panchayat raj institutions through a more sustained engagement with such institutions than has been attempted so far, creation of livelihood options and removal of social exploitation and inequality such that outmigration is reduced or eliminated. None of these are easy or short-term, but it appears to me that a deeper, more long-term engagement needs to be initiated in at least a few villages, to show the potential of comprehensive rural transformation.

Applying a framework of transformation

A number of aspects of TC's work point to an alternative worldview that challenges the present dominant system. A framework for such an alternative vision, being evolved through the Vikalp Sangam process, puts forth five crucial pillars: ecological sustainability, direct political democracy, economic democracy, social justice, and cultural (including knowledge) diversity.[7] It further lists a set of ethical values and principles that could be the foundation of transformation towards these pillars, including collective living, sharing and

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7.   See http://kalpavriksh.org/images/alternatives/Articles/ Alternativesframework3rddraftVSprocess20mar2015Eng.pdf; see also chapter 2, Kothari 2014.

caring, diversity and pluralism, respect for nature, social equity, human rights, dignity of labour, respect for creativity, and non-violence.

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of how TC fares along these lines, and not everything will be visible through the limited lens of this particular case study which has focused only on some parts of TC's work. Moreover, such an analysis is best done in a participatory manner with the actors in the initiative, rather than as a purely external evaluation. Such a process was not possible at the time.

However, some general observations using the framework can be made, including some aspects of TC's work that have not been the focus of this study but with which the author is familiar:

- On the **ecological** front, TC is clearly attempting a transformation towards resilience and sustainability through its focus on reviving soils through the promotion of organic farming, decentralized harvesting and careful use of water, bringing back agricultural diversity, regenerating grasslands and forests (the former at a fairly large scale), and paying attention even to non-human species (for instance through studying, celebrating, and creating public awareness of the grassland wildlife species that have recovered in Kalpavalli).

- On the **social** front, TC is perhaps most strongly focused, given that the motivation for its creation was to facilitate transformation in the lives of the marginalized. Its attention to women and children, to landless, and to small peasants is helping create such change; it is perhaps weak in dealing with issues of caste.

- On the **political** front, TC has elements of transformation towards more direct democracy and collective

governance, especially through empowering women and other marginalized sections to be part of decision-making. However, it remains weak regarding processes to transform the more formally institutionalized political institutions such as panchayats. In the long run, this could be a serious hurdle towards sustaining and spreading the other aspects of transformation.

- On the **economic** front, there is certainly considerable positive change in the livelihoods of farmers and the landless, with greater economic control through Dharani, as also enhanced economic empowerment of women. However, there remain major areas of work such as greater self-reliance for villages and for TC itself, and of course like any other organization, it remains constrained by the much larger forces that control India's (and global) economy. Also needed are more explicit discussions and decisions on the limits of economic activity, on consumerism, and other issues that often bedevil successful community enterprises and over-ride other crucial pillars of transformation (mirroring the ills of mainstream economic growth oriented businesses and lifestyles).

- On the **culture and knowledge** front, TC's work is resulting in changes in traditional norms that discriminated against women while reinforcing those that celebrated people's links to the land and biodiversity. It has brought back respect for local (traditional and new) knowledge, attempting to combine it with outside formal knowledge. Its work in schools appears to be bringing these and other aspects of cultural and knowledge transformation, though at a very initial stage.

Underlying the above, and not necessarily explicitly articulated in its messaging, TC's work displays some of the values and principles of a collective, commons-based, equitable, diverse and just society, one that respects our place in nature, and the dignity of labour. These and other values of the kind articulated in the Vikalp Sangam note mentioned above could perhaps be more explicitly discussed within TC and indeed in the various groupings it has helped set up at the village level.

Like any other initiative that attempts to tackle multiple challenges in India, TC has its successes and failures or strengths and weaknesses. No single initiative can possibly work on all fronts of transformation at the same time, nor achieve them over two to three decades, especially given both the long history of some problems like gender and caste inequities and the road roller effect of the modern economy.

Notwithstanding the weaknesses, though, the TC initiative shows the potential of a constructive rural revolution based on principles of ecological sustainability and social equity. It demonstrates that localized, democratic economies in the hands of ordinary citizens are worth exploring as alternatives to globalised economic growth controlled by powerful corporations. Today's dominant 'development' paradigm has created a series of crises (not the least of them climate change) that are affecting hundreds of millions of people and has left over half of humanity struggling with poverty, hunger, or other deprivations. TC's initiatives have shown that it does not need to be like this.

Acknowledgements

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Strengthening Local Livelihoods with Ecological Considerations in Kachchh

Vinay Nair

Part of Sahjeevan's efforts in supporting local livelihoods has been to conserve 'Kankrej', the local breed of cattle that is both ecologically and economically sustainable.

A farmer of Satvik shows tufts of 'kala' cotton – an indigenous variety of cotton that copes well in rain-fed conditions. Satvik works with the objective of mainstreaming ecologically sound farming practices and promotes seed conservation practices and organic agriculture.

Typical riverbed in Kachchh, with ancient mineral depositions

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Strengthening Local Livelihoods with Ecological Considerations in Kachchh

Shiba Desor and Vinay Nair

The district of Kachchh in Gujarat has a diversity of landscapes – to the north are the Banni grasslands and the salt plains (the Rann) and straddling the district from east to west is the 400m Bhuj Ridge. This is the only arid ecosystem in the world that is accompanied by a marine mangrove ecosystem along its coast. The Rann has a unique ecosystem – inundated for a part of the year, it is a vast dry expanse for the rest, with the only flamingo breeding site in the country and one of the last refuges on earth of the Indian Wild Ass. The Bhuj Ridge, with its thorn forests, has the densest population in the district. With 38 distinct communities co-existing and a diverse ecosystem, people in Kachchh have traditionally adopted different livelihood strategies like rain-fed farming, pastoralism, fishing, saltpan work (agariya) and different kinds of crafts.

In the past few decades, social and economic changes in India and in larger government policies have had growing impact on land use-land cover and on livelihoods in Kachchh. Some of these recent changes are:

- Water-use and water-exploitation: In post-independent India, the predominant discourse of development focused on irrigated agriculture and the need to bring water to Kachchh from various rivers such as Indus (Pakistan), the Indira canal (in Rajasthan) and most recently, from the Narmada. The drinking water-schemes, funded through global projects such as World Bank, also focused on tapping into deep groundwater reserves and introducing bore-well technology.

- Spread of invasive *Prosopis juliflora*: An important change in recent times was the spread of *Prosopis juliflora*, or Gando Bawal (mad bush), a shrub that has very quickly taken control of the scrub forests and grasslands, changing the way animal husbandry is practiced in the region and leading to a shift towards buffalo-keeping. Charcoal-making from its wood has now become an illegal but significant source of livelihood for many people living in Kachchh.

- Land for industrialization: Kachchh witnessed one of the largest de-reservations in the country – of Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary, for a cement plant – and later the demarcation of the little Rann for the Wild Ass and Salt Industry. The post-1990s focus on industrialisation led to exploitation of resources, especially through open cast mining that affected water resource, the laying of port lines that are destroying mangroves, and use of local ground water. After the 2001 earthquake, there was a tax relaxation for further promoting investment in industries. The next big change is being witnessed now, with the promotion of large port-based industries under a Special Economic Zone along the southern coast.

The transformation in response to these changes has been both social and ecological – the growing importance

of money and exposure to opportunities and threats; exploitation of water resources, and destruction of mangrove forests, desert and grassland ecosystem. It should be noted that most of these changes (development solutions) of intensifying irrigation-based inorganic agriculture and developing industries for regions such as Kachchh were being steered by individuals with little orientation to ecological and socio-cultural aspects. The solutions were expensive, short lived and neglected the ecological value of Kachchh's ecosystem and local livelihoods; premised on the land being 'unproductive', they ignored the negative consequences of the destruction of this arid ecosystem and the possibilities of developing local solutions, building on local knowledge and skills and ecological conditions.

Yet, there have been attempts at a different approach. In 1985-87, Kachchh faced three consecutive years of drought that greatly affected livestock, livelihoods and the landscape. This period saw distress selling of traditional embroidery items, exploitation of crafts persons by middle-men and also emergence of a few embroidery based enterprises. In this context, a women's group called Kachchh Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) emerged to focus on empowerment and livelihood security of women through crafts, especially embroidery. While the Sangathan began in 1989 with a focus on alternative livelihoods through embroidery, it was soon obvious that the urgent need was for village-level ecologically sustainable livelihood security through agriculture and related works such as livestock keeping. As other issues and needs became apparent, KMVS's work slowly diversified into many other areas.

In 1992, the women's group became involved in eco-restoration work through watershed development and created a unit called Janvikas Ecology Cell. Its objective was

to demonstrate that water needs could be met at the local level and did not always require dependence on bore wells or on water being externally diverted through canals (during that period Narmada water for Kachchh was being promoted as a 'development solution'). Water conservation and eco-restoration efforts cannot succeed when there is a parallel shift towards, or a continuation of, inorganic and water-intensive agriculture. With this understanding, simultaneous attempts at promoting organic agriculture began. This led to the formation of a forum of farmers promoting organic farming across Kachchh, which formalised into Kachchh Sajeev Kheti Manch in 2000 and later became Satvik. By 1997, the Janvikas Ecology Cell evolved into an environmental group called Sahjeevan to focus extensively on livestock (banni buffaloes and camels) and restoration of grasslands. Meanwhile, the embroidery focused group within KMVS became an independent unit called Qasab in 1997 and was registered as a producer company in 2010.

In June 1998, when the district was hit by a cyclone, lack of synergised efforts during disaster relief between various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) had led to instances of duplication for some sites and omission for some others. To synergise these efforts, twenty-two local organisations (including KMVS and its offshoots) came together to form an informal network called Kutch Sankat Ane Punarvasvat Abhiyan. Even after the rehabilitation work was over, they felt that an umbrella organisation to collectivise and synergise the efforts of various organisations towards a common vision was necessary. Thus KSAPA was subsequently renamed as Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan (or Abhiyan). For coordination and collective action as a part of Abhiyan, information centres called Setus ('bridges') were established for clusters of villages for knowledge exchange, mediation among government agencies, NGOs and local communities, and

advocacy based on needs and issues raised at the local level[1]. Abhiyan has grown into thirty-eight organisations covering over 650 villages of the district and working on issues such as management of natural resources, watershed management, health, drought-support, crafts and micro-credit.
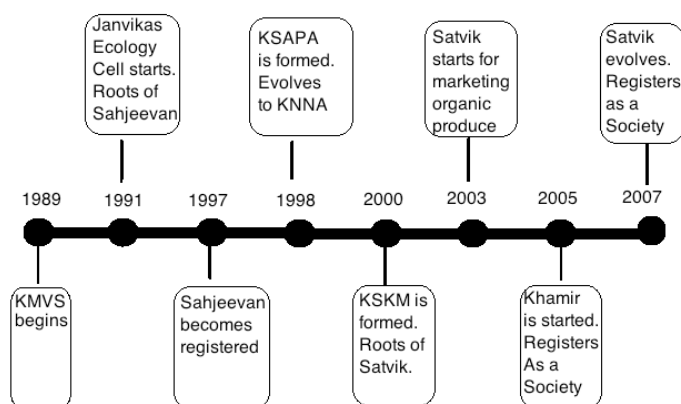
Many of the KMVS offshoots have become independent organisations with specialised interests in organic agriculture, pastoralism, urban governance, women's empowerment, crafts, etc. KMVS has also evolved from a single women's collective to a network of seven[2] women-based organisations, supported by knowledge resource units for capacity building, legal support for domestic violence, and outreach[3].

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1. As per information provided on http://www.kutchabhiyan.org/ for Abhiyan, and http://kutchabhiyan.blogspot.in/2011/04/what-is-setu.html for Setu.

2. Saiyaren jo Sangathan, Ujjas Mahila Sangathan, Qasab, Sushasini, Sakhi Sangini, Soorvani and Dai Sangathan.

3. http://kmvs.org.in

As is evident from the way in which these groups evolved, these share common roots[4] and similar ideologies, even though the activity-focus and approach varies. Because of this, there are many inter-linkages and connections among them. Thus, they represent a synergistic network working in one region with a common focus of evolving and strengthening means of livelihood. What distinguishes their approach is their focus on local and contextual solutions that bear the ecosystem in mind.

About the Study

This case study discusses a set of initiatives in Kachchh which attempt to secure local ways of living (through animal husbandry, agriculture and crafts and strengthening the linkages between these) with a core belief that local livelihoods can only flourish if they are consistent with ecological and socio-cultural systems. The initiatives documented in the case study form a subset of the above-mentioned Abhiyan which is a larger Kachchh-level endeavour working on social, economic and environmental aspects of wellbeing in Kachchh both independently and through collaborations. While the range of activities undertaken by the Abhiyan is immense, this case study focuses on the initiatives undertaken by three member organisations – Satvik (rain-fed and organic agriculture), Sahjeevan (animal husbandry and pastoralism) and Khamir (craft-ecology linkages) independently, in collaboration with each other or with other member organisations such as Setu and Saiyaren Jo Sangathan (SJS). SJS is a women's collective within KMVS working on economic, social and political empowerment of women of Lakhpat and Nakhatrana blocks.

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4. With founder-members or leaders from one, taking crucial initiatives in many or most of the other groups

This case study will describe:

- How the initiatives attempt to secure local livelihoods with ecological considerations
- The challenges that remain
- Emerging core values
- The larger implications of such an initiative in adopting more environmentally and socially sustainable ways of living

The study is based on three field visits to Kachchh and review of secondary information.

The first field visit (for nine days) was in September 2012 by Ashish Kothari and Shiba Desor. This was helpful in getting a broad overview of Abhiyan's initiatives through brief visits to some of the sites as well as interviews with individuals from member organisations including Sahjeevan, Satvik, Khamir, Setu and Saiyaren Jo Sangathan (SJS).

The second field visit (for 25 days) was in February 2014 by Shiba Desor and Vinay Nair. This was helpful in getting in-depth information on initiatives by Satvik and Sahjeevan. With Sahjeevan's support, field visits were undertaken to villages in Banni grassland and the community centre of Banni Breeders' Association at Hodko, camel-breeders in Lakhpat and SJS office in Nakhatrana. With Satvik's help, field visits were undertaken in Anjar (to visit Maganlal Ahir and Castor Produce Company), in Bachau (to understand seed conservation work done in partnership with Setu of Kabrau block), in Adesar (to interview farmers engaged in rain-fed cultivation of cotton), and in Abdasa (to visit VRTI Naliya - a partner organisation of Satvik for seed conservation work). Apart from the field visits, there were interviews with individuals from Sahjeevan, Satvik, SJS, Setu and Khamir.

The third field visit (for a week) was in September 2014 by Shiba Desor and Adam Cajka. This was helpful in the follow-up interviews with Sahjeevan and Satvik and to understand the craft-ecology linkages through Khamir's initiatives. A field visit was undertaken to village Mota Jamthada where Khamir has engaged weavers for weaving Kala Cotton[5] cloth. Apart from the field visit, interviews were conducted with persons from Sahjeevan and Khamir involved in coordinating or carrying forth these initiatives.

The secondary data reviewed included organisational annual reports and publications, shared project proposals outlining organisational understanding and approaches, information available on websites, newspaper reports and articles.

This study is based on limited field work, a few site visits and discussions with some key individuals from the organisations. This could be further deepened with a detailed literature review and a deeper analysis of what could be supportive policies to strengthen this approach. This could also benefit from more in-depth interviews with government agencies and partner organisations to get their views on agriculture, animal husbandry, crafts and their linkages. Information and analysis of initiatives related to crafts could be particularly enriched.

Another limitation was the authors' lack of knowledge of Kachchhi, the regional language. Although there were facilitators and translators, the authors feel that there may be gaps in understanding due to this inadequacy.

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5.   Kala Cotton is the word given for short-staple rain-fed varieties of cotton that do not require any chemical inputs for cultivation.

The Approach of the Initiatives

This section describes how the initiatives (in agriculture, animal husbandry, pastoralism and crafts) attempt to secure local livelihoods with socio-cultural and ecological considerations in Kachchh.

About the initiatives

At a landscape level, there have since long been relationships between extensively ranging and mobile pastoralists and settled agriculturalists, with agriculturalists allowing livestock of pastoralists to graze in their fields during fixed seasons because of the value of animal dung as manure. Most farmers practised animal husbandry with cultivation. Traditionally, the connection between rain-fed agriculture and animal husbandry made economic sense and ensured an organic cycle – rain-fed agriculture provided fodder and feed for cattle while cattle provided manure to keep fields fertile. Both activities provided marginal surpluses in crop, milk and cattle heads for local sale in local markets.

Cattle and craft have for long been important mediums of maintaining barter and trade inter-relations between communities. For instance, traditional weaving in Kachchh was originally done with sheep wool sourced from the Rabari pastoralist communities. The woollen shawls traded back to the Rabaris, whose women would embellish the pieces with embroidery or Bandhni (tie-and-dye art). There was also a relationship between farmers and weavers. The farmers of Makhel Village in Adesar growing rain-fed cotton recall that Harijan Gujar weavers, who resided in this village, made cloth from the cotton sourced from the farmers in exchange for grain.[6]

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6. Shealy S 2011, Documentation- Kala Cotton Initiative of Khamir and Satvik, July, Khamir

With money becoming more important and an emerging market for cattle-feed in other applications, cluster bean and cotton began to be sold to distant markets directly. This affected the choice of cattle feed, which now had to be purchased. This broke past linkages and made the connection between rain-fed agriculture and animal husbandry economically unviable and livestock-keeping more expensive. Consequently, the shift to irrigated chemical agriculture became not only desirable but also essential. This further broke the linkages by making manure insufficient for crop production, thereby rendering pesticides and fertilizers important, and leading to more investment in irrigation and the growing of crop varieties that were irrigation dependent and less drought-tolerant. While it makes narrow, short-term economic sense (incomes), this resultant system does not seem to have the robustness of secure sustainable livelihoods. Not only is it environmentally destructive (depleting soil fertility and ground water), but also leads to loss of crop types and varieties suited to an arid ecosystem. This has also impacted pastoralists through reduction and contamination of water sources for livestock.

With the socio-economic and ecological changes of the past few decades, artisans engaged in various crafts such as pottery, block-printing, weaving, lacquer work, leather work and metal-bell-making have also been facing many challenges in eking dignified livelihoods. It is increasingly difficult to source customarily used raw material for various reasons. Many steps in the existing process chains are dropping out of local production or consumption; for example, local spinning of sheep wool or rain-fed short-staple varieties of cotton are no longer available to weavers. Difficulties in procurement of raw material could also be due to environmental degradation. For instance, indigo, used for natural dyeing, has become rare. The water-holes for dyeing

cloth have dried out or are polluted such that they cannot be used. For potters, clay and white mud have become rare and water has become such a scarce commodity in some areas that it has to be bought. With farmers and pastoralists now selling cotton and wool to factories, the past relationships of trade and barter with weavers have also broken down. In some cases, entry of cheaper substitutes for their products or technology such as screen printing (instead of block-printing), mechanised looms (instead of handlooms) have created economic challenges of eking a livelihood out of continued practice of the craft.[7]

The initiatives try to focus on supporting livelihoods based on local skills and resources by strengthening social and ecological cross-linkages.

In agriculture, the initiatives have focused on seed conservation of numerous varieties of seven traditional crops and on creating beneficial market linkages through organic certification. They have set up producer companies and micro-finance loan groups in order to engage with markets on more equitable terms and ensure continued practice and participation when the intervening organisation leaves. Where the shifts to inorganic have occurred, the initiatives have attempted to provide training and encourage practices for improving soil conditions in order to return to organic practices.

In animal husbandry, the initiatives have worked on conservation of local livestock breeds, particularly Banni buffalo and Kharai camel, securing and managing grazing resources, facilitating links with dairies, providing health and veterinary services, and creating micro-finance groups.

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7.   http://www.khamir.org/crafts/

In crafts, apart from strengthening local entrepreneurship, the attempt has been to sustain pride in the crafts as a way of living and in acknowledging crafts-ecology linkages (through initiatives such as Kala Cotton, described further on).

Detailed Description of the Initiatives

Agriculture

Satvik ('true' or 'pure') focuses on supporting rain-fed agricultural practices, conservation of traditional seed varieties and keeping agriculture organic (see Table 1).

Table 1: Satvik's approach in agriculture

Focus areas	Approach
How to keep rain-fed farming alive amidst market instabilities, crop-failure, and temptations to shift to green-revolution farming practices that are water and chemical-intensive	Work on seed conservation and keeping seed variability alive and simultaneously make rain-fed farming economically viable through means such as organic certification (details in 2.2.1a)
How to check high demand of ground water and high use of agro-chemicals in irrigated farming	Training and research in organic farming to make the shift desirable for farmers practicing irrigated farming (details in 2.2.1b)

Rain-fed farming

Seed conservation: In Kachchh, where more than 75 percent of agriculture is still rain-fed, it is important to support and strengthen agriculture. Since 2006, Satvik has been engaged in seed conservation of numerous varieties of seven traditional (commonly referred to as *Ram mol- God's food*) rain-fed crops – cluster bean (guar), sorghum (jowar), pearl millet (bajra), castor (arenda), sesame (til), moong, and dew bean (moth*)*. Satvik's seed conservation programme, called

*Anmol (*meaning priceless)*, attempts to keep seed variability alive. The idea is that in case of crop failure, farmers should have sufficient quantity of seed to grow the next crop. The principal belief is that seed conservation has to be achieved through propagation rather than preservation in seed banks.

The process involved identifying seed breeder farmers (who have traditional varieties of seeds), collecting these varieties of seeds, supporting seed producer farmers (who can ensure multiplication through production of these seeds in a conducive environment) and facilitating distribution and sale of these seeds through partners and producer companies.

We spoke to Jesa bhai, a breeder of old seed varieties from Ner village, Kabrau region of Bhachau block, who has been associated with Satvik for seed conservation work since the onset of the program in late 2005. He grows cluster bean, green gram, moong, sorghum, matt, castor and sesame. His field has organic certification (see below); this helps him get a better price for some of his crops, in particular, castor. His support to Satvik has been crucial in gaining trust of most villagers. When asked about what he feels regarding the value of such work, he replied, 'The taste of desi moong or bajra is much better than of the newer varieties. What is good must go back to the earth. That is the only way that taste and health can be restored.' He also commented on the role of information-exchange among farmers, 'I gained this understanding regarding seed because before TV came, it was a ritual to come together and exchange information about what works in farming and what doesn't.'

Jesa Bhai has been connected to Satvik through a partner organisation, Kabrau Setu, that includes twenty-one villages and seven wards. The Anmol program on seed conservation, for which Satvik collaborates with Setu, has been ongoing since 2005 in eight villages. There are village level farmers'

committees of four to five farmers, and cluster level meetings of leaders from each of these committees with each other and with Setu. Setu works on the dimensions of creating awareness regarding organic and rain-fed farming (through creation and dissemination of outreach material), engagement at political level (by working with panchayats) and engagement at market level (facilitating organic certification). The work on organic certification, now carried out by Fasal Producer Company (which also charges a fee), was initially being done through Setu.

The process has been successful in terms of identification of seed breeders and production but filled with challenges in terms of procurement of produced seed varieties. Lack of seriousness in buyers led to a shift in the model from an initial direct linking of buying farmers with producing farmers, to having a channel of partner organisations that buys from seed producer farmers and distributes or sells in their work sites. Partners have been selling seeds informally for some time, but from 2014 onwards have started formally selling seed. The extent to which these traditional varieties are now being used at the level of a village/village-cluster has been dependent on leadership and priorities of the partners with varying success in different areas.

Till 2013, the seed conservation work focused only on rain-fed crops, but now it also focuses on varieties of crops used in irrigated farming (requiring irrigation up to 1000ppm) like wheat, groundnut, and cotton (organic, non Bt varieties). Focus has also grown on developing plant breeding tools for genetic purity and keeping unwanted varieties out of the field.

Initially production (multiplication) of these varieties was being done on rain-fed farms but due to risks of crop failure, they shifted to irrigated conditions. Although Satvik acted as technical facilitator in production for a long time, the

organisation has recently started engaging directly in seed production on an irrigated organic farm of Manoj Solanki to ensure that the valuable seed varieties procured and multiplied do not get lost. Satvik is also considering direct involvement in selling of seed (after a better understanding of The Seeds Act, 1966).

Organic certification: In 2006, Satvik, along with Kabrau Setu, initiated facilitation for organic certification of fields of rain-fed farmers. The certificate was issued through Abhiyan. After the first two to three years, which were a struggle in terms of marketing, they have been particularly successful with organic certified castor. Their main role has been in establishment of channels such that a farmer gets a good price and does not get exploited. The pricing formula has been fixed by Setu, Satvik, farmers' committees and the main buyers and involves averaging out the minimum and maximum Agricultural Produce Market Committee-Bhuj (APMC) price for the week and adding a 13 percent premium to that. Initially, organic certification was free but since Setu has started charging a fee of ₹ 75 per month, there has been a drastic reduction in the number of farmers seeking certification. At present, around 200-250 farmers are involved in this, with around 150 regular members. As the need for a separate entity for marketing was realized a producer company of involved farmers called Fasal Producer Company was created, which now handles organic certification more or less independently.

The major connection that has been established for rain-fed farmers is with Castor Produce Company (see Box 1) which produces oil and exports to Waala, a German company. The question is whether such dependence on exports is ecologically sustainable in the long term or there is an important need to shift to localised consumption. Another concern would be the possible large scale conversion of

diverse agricultural fields to castor. Satvik feels that in the present situation when markets become important, this connection (even if it is going out of the local loop of consumption) has its significance in making rain-fed agriculture financially viable; Satvik feels that a complete shift to castor is unlikely, and the conventional pattern of three divisions in fields (cash crop, food crop, fodder crop) will continue.

Box 1

Castor Product Company (CPC): a link in organic certification

CPC is a small company in Anjar block of Kachchh that procures and exports most of the organic-certified castor from the surrounding areas. While most of the total procurement (around 400 metric tonnes) is from farmers doing irrigated organic farming, it also procures 50-60 metric tonnes (per year) from rain-fed farming organized into small grower groups. Thus, it has played an important role in connecting the castor growing (rain-fed) farmer with the market in a way that supports his finances. Oil cake is a by-product of the process and farmers engaged in irrigated farming buy it for the soil.

Castor is highly cross-pollinated, requiring an isolation distance of 1000 km. In case Genetically Modified (GM) varieties of castor are introduced, it will be very hard to prevent them from mixing with organic castor varieties. With their economic viability being largely dependent on demand for organic produce, the company and the castor-growing farmers become stakeholders in policy decisions relating to GM field trials.

Source: Authors' field notes

The Kala Cotton initiative: Kala Cotton is a term being used for rain-fed organic varieties of short-staple cotton that have been traditionally grown in many parts of Kachchh. In a wider collaboration between Satvik, Setu and Khamir, there was an attempt to capture different steps of making cotton cloth – from the time of growing to the point of marketing – in such a way that farmers and weavers are also benefited by the process.

There has been an overall reduction in area under Kala Cotton cultivation because of frequent incidences of crop damage by bluebull. In the earlier years of experimentation with the process (2006-7), 700-800 farmers were involved. Presently Khamir procures Kala Cotton from 160 farmers in five villages in Makhel pocket of Adesar through Rapar Producer Company.

Rapar Producer Company, registered on 14 February 2014, includes twenty-two to twenty-three families engaged in Kala Cotton cultivation. The company has ten directors, out of which three were earlier in Fasal Producer Company. Each director has twenty shares, with a total capital of ₹1 lakh (each share of ₹ 500). It plans to focus on marketing of Kala Cotton and castor. Of the 18 percent premium usually received on organic castor, 13 percent goes to farmers, and 5 percent to accountants and office expenses. It is hoped that the Producer Company (PC) will eventually be financially robust enough to support the regional Setu, which has been constantly involved in facilitation for the process. It will also carry out the certification process for organic produce, earlier undertaken by Abhiyan. It is also promoting moong and bajra and plans to be involved in livestock related activities including veterinary services, awareness creation regarding role of traditional varieties like buffaloes, bulls, *kankrej*, initiating dialogue on concerns related to the on-

going complete shift towards tractors in agriculture, and fodder storage issues. It also plans to provide inputs, both organic and chemical, for fertilising the fields.

Attempts at organic cattle feed and organic milk: Sahjeevan and Satvik together have tried to work towards exploring possibilities of organic milk and are still grappling with challenges in making it a reality. In 2012, Satvik attempted and conducted a phase of documentation, monitoring and auditing related to this and realised that there are many challenges before organic milk can be ensured and marketed in Kachchh. A major difficulty is in ensuring organic fodder and feed.

Earlier, Kala Cotton and cluster bean (guar), both rain-fed crops grown in most parts of Kachchh, were used in cattle feed. This was viable in the economy of that time. KC seeds are now lost because they are left at the large ginning unit sites. Earlier, smaller ginning units made cotton seed locally available. Guar seed has now found other uses. Because of this, cattle feed has to be bought from outside and is mostly composed of wheat bran and irrigated Bt cotton cake. In such a scenario, an organic, reliable source-feed would have great demand. There are attempts to recreate one based on Kala Cotton cake and guar but main challenges at present are technological and economical (feed crop may have other uses that give higher financial value, or may turn out to be too expensive). There are also challenges of lifestyle changes and a demand for ready-made feed options. 'In a society where kitchen for humans is slowly becoming extinct, what place can we find for a kitchen for animals?' asked Shailesh Vyas of Satvik, explaining that the slow transformation of society has made it difficult for such solutions to work which require people to spend lots of time preparing cattle-feed at home.

The issues are not just related to organic cattle feed and fodder, but also to difficulties in ensuring that there is no contamination at any level (in terms of mixing with water, or inorganic milk). Also, the official standards of certification are stringent and require not just certification for chemicals in milk but also for the land (85 percent needs to be organic for all sources of fodder) which becomes difficult to ensure. Such a condition is easier to resolve if the fodder source is determinable, as in the case of milk procured from banni pastoralists, most of which is from banni grassland. However, even there it becomes difficult to meet some specifications. Official standards demand that the exposure time of cattle to shade and sun should be fixed, require there to be no dung on the cattle while milking, etc. Such standards are hard to adhere to in the customary cattle-rearing practices of the region which have different notions of hygiene and care. Satvik feels that apart from the larger challenges of procuring organic feed and fodder, for organic certified milk both standards and cattle-keeping ways will have to alter, meeting each other half way.

Irrigated agriculture

Facilitating the move in irrigated agriculture towards organic: It is Satvik's understanding and belief that rain-fed farming in Kachchh is by default organic since the type of crops that can be grown in a place like Kachchh without water are the ones that do not need chemical inputs. Further, the farmers engaged in rain-fed farming can seldom afford inorganic inputs. For Satvik, it is the irrigated farmer who needs to be sensitized regarding organic farming methods. This is especially important since many rain-fed farmers also have a tendency to emulate irrigated farming practices and may move towards water and chemical-intensive farming. The approach is of organizing training programs for larger

dissemination of organic farming practices and of supporting farmers in terms of access to information and technologies to enable a move towards organic.

With time there has been change in the focus of their dissemination – earlier, it was on marketing organic produce, now on how to enhance agricultural sustainability scientifically; earlier, the focus was on crop selection, now there's an increased focus on soil issues and water. An important consideration is selection of the kind of seed that gives good output with low input.

Earlier, training used to be for a day only. Now there are choices - one day (focus on benefits and methods of organic farming, including market inputs for organic farming); three days (focus on method, philosophy and experience-sharing related to organic farming); one month (most thorough). The last is held annually while the others are held two to three times a year.

Satvik also plans to collaborate with Sahjeevan to encourage irrigated organic farming among resident agricultural communities in the area by beginning the work with 10 panchayats in Abdasa. Work has already been initiated with five to six panchayats on developing a People's Biodiversity Register.

Experiments in organic farming: Maganlal Ahir, in village Ningal of Anjar taluka, began conversion of five out of twenty acres of his farm into organic in 2007. By 2011, his fields were fully organic. This was at a time when his family was apprehensive of the shift because of what they felt was foolhardy risk-taking while expenses rose. His determination was reaffirmed when his younger daughter said to her friends, 'My father doesn't quit when he decides on something'. He uses compost, tank silt and green manure

for the soil. Crops cultivated include cotton (non-BT Deviraj), castor, bajra, til, ground nut, wheat and cluster bean. As a rule, he always uses green manure in one plot. His organic farming technique is not about letting land be. There is a great role for labour, seed, factors like pH and moisture, application of mind and experimentation. Influenced by the Swadhyay movement, he feels that it is important to accept truths revealed by nature instead of ignoring them, learn from other farmers with humility, learn from non-farmers and share what one learns with selflessness and love.

Satvik provides technical support to people like Maganlal Ahir in their experimentation with seed and has partnered with him for their seed conservation programme (to serve as seed producers). Another such associated farmer is Manoj Solanki who is an organic farmer with a firm belief in the significance of livestock in farming. These farmers also serve as resource persons for the organic farming training sessions (mentioned above). The objective is to better understand different ways to make organic farming sustainable.

Discussion on the overall approach in agriculture

In initiatives related to agriculture, broadly, the following has been achieved:

- Market creation for rain-fed farmers
- Seed conservation through propagation rather than preservation, thereby keeping seed variability alive
- Achieving seed security at farmer level and at producer company level
- Sensitisation regarding organic farming practices for irrigated farmers

Some characteristics of their approach:

- Not setting objectives or changing plan of action based on fund-availability
- Not giving monetary incentives for participation in training programmes, seed initiatives
- Forging an informal relationship with SBFs and SPFs
- Decentralizing approach through partners and producer companies and encouragement for limiting the scale of the producer company so that there is visibility at the village end

Remaining Challenges

At present, the approach is to focus on bringing the irrigated farmer towards organic farming, assuming that the rain-fed farmers are 'by-default' organic. While this may be a practical approach, it was also observed that many rain-fed farmers don't have a strong resistance towards pesticides or fertilizers and may adopt these if they get irrigation, since most practitioners of irrigated agriculture are using these. In such a scenario, placing information about long-term impacts of presently practised irrigated agriculture, and also on the value of rain-fed agriculture practices becomes important. Satvik admits that there is not much documentation or information on rain-fed farming practices. This is a gap that has persisted and causes concern.

As the actual impact and on-ground implementation becomes partner-dependent and person dependent, there are instances when this work (of seed conservation, organic agriculture) is not given enough focus by partners or else may be carried out more as a programme rather than a value. A case in point is the example of VRTI Naliya where two

parallel seed programmes continue – one with traditional seeds (with Satvik) and another with chemical-intensive improved varieties (with Care Cargil) – with different villages in the same area.

There are also concerns related to prime dependence on external markets for the organic certification program. While this dependence may make economic sense, it moves away from a robust, local, ecologically viable economy. With this realisation, there is a simultaneous attempt (which continues to remain a challenge) at creating organic products such as organic cattle feed or organic milk for local consumption.

Animal husbandry and pastoralism

Sahjeevan (co-existence) strongly believes that livestock sustainability is essential. The objective of these initiatives has been on how to revive traditional animal-husbandry economy from the perspective of gender and conservation. The approach with time has evolved to include different facets and solutions. Primarily, Sahjeevan's work is described by its team as forward and backward linkages (see Table 2). The forward linkages pertain to making livestock-keeping economically sustainable by helping in linking villages to the dairy and also facilitating creation and marketing of other products (experiments for sheep wool, camel wool, camel milk, cow-milk ghee/clarified butter are ongoing). The backward linkages pertain to strengthening the resources (grazing resources, local breeds, traditional knowledge, community-relations and interactions with others) that indirectly but significantly feed into sustainability of livestock-keeping.

Table 2: Sahjeevan's approach towards livestock-keeping

Objective	Approaches
Making livestock keeping economically sustainable (forward linkages)	Facilitating linkages with dairy, women's collectives for milk and associated products, promoting sheep-wool and camel wool products
Strengthening the base essential for livestock keeping (backward linkages)	Breed conservation, grassland conservation through collaborative research initiatives, participatory resource mapping, access and management rights, advocacy with government, support for veterinary services

Forward linkages

The dairy story: In 1981, the government started a Kachchh dairy in Bhuj. It had to stop operations in 1997 after which, for many years there was no government-supported milk marketing system in Kachchh. As a part of the Drought Proofing Program initiated by Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) in collaboration with Abhiyan, the role of livestock was highlighted. The National Dairy Development Board was requested to evaluate the situation and bring dairying into Kachchh. After their initial reluctance, NDDB started investing by 2004-5. Sahjeevan did a pilot demonstration in Nakhatrana and prepared a training module on milk collection, marketing and enhancement.

Saiyaren Jo Sangathan organised women groups for implementation by forming doodh sangathan or milk collectives (see Box 2). Through Abhiyan, replication of the system was ensured and para-vet trainings conducted.

Box 2

Doodh Sangathans (Milk Collectives) and associated services in Saiyaren Jo Sangathan (SJS)

Spread over 80 villages with 4500 members and 217 SHGs, this sangathan arose from KMVS to give an identity to women in agriculture and animal husbandry along with environmental consciousness. The women also operate a community radio. Overall, they have a three pronged approach - financial (support and empowerment), social (raising issues and concerns of health and violence) and political (interacting at panchayat level). After beginning work on crafts, at the time of drought, women decided to start saving money. As explained by Hakimaben, 'We thought, our properties are in the name of men, so let us make a fund for ourselves.' There were high costs of agriculture and no channels for milk. A savings (*bachat*) group was registered in 2008 as Shri Paschim Kachchh Bachat Widhi Mahila Sahkar Mandal. There are fixed rules on savings (minimum of ₹100), monthly cluster-level meetings (four clusters), loans for different products at different rates (with limits on wedding loans and priority given to rain-fed agriculture related loans over other kinds). Most members associated with the Savings Programme (Bachat Karyakram) are also connected to one or more of the other groups related to agriculture, animal husbandry, crafts. This program gives need-based loans for agriculture and animal husbandry. Khattaben, a trustee of KMVS, who has been involved with SJS for fifteen years, sees the role of SJS in empowerment, freedom from exploitation at hands of money-lenders and self-identity for women and feels that this has given her a sense of independence over

her life. SJS partners with Satvik and Sahjeevan in seed conservation and milk marketing respectively.

Saiyaren Pasupalan Ane Khet Utpadan Producer Company focuses on sale of agricultural produce and milk. It has 10 directors, 1 CEO and 225 shareholders. Their journey has had both successes and failures. The company tried to produce and sell cow ghee (clarified butter) to prevent distress sale of cows but incurred losses of around ₹ 3 lakhs in this because of difficulty in marketing and high costs of making good quality ghee.

Source: Authors' field visit notes

Between 2008 and 2010, Sahjeevan handed over the milk economy work to the women collectives and began to focus more on breed conservation. When it began in 2007, hardly forty villages were connected and milk supply was 220 litres. This has increased to 3.5 lakh litres from 700 villages (80-90,000 households). The network of dairies and chilling plants has provided a source of livelihood that has replaced distress migration to towns and cities. This could be observed in villages like Sambwar in Lakhpat. After seven years of drought, it emptied out 20 years ago – only thirteen of the original eighty families remained. Since the past few years, after the dairy has been established, families have started coming back, with around forty families living in the village at present. Sawabhai Rajabhai, one of those who returned home, had left fifteen to sixteen years ago to work as a daily-wage earner in construction. He has three buffaloes now with the milk going to the dairy (with the prices of ₹ 30-32 per litre and around 25 litres per day). While dairy is not the sole reason for his return, it was a major attraction. He also practices rain-fed agriculture, growing mostly castor.

Dairy has provided livelihood to the migrating youth in Banni as well, as witnessed in Adhiyan village, Goriveli panchayat, where a dairy was established in 2008-2009. After ten years in Mumbai, Dilthar Maulana Mutwa came back with a single buffalo in 1995. Now he has 15 or 16 buffaloes and sells on an average forty litres of milk to the dairy, leading to a substantial increase in income. He recalls selling milk to Bhuj earlier at ₹ 10-11 per litre and also incurring transport costs. He feels that if the dairy had not come, the dependence on sale of charcoal for livelihood would have been much more and many more youth would have migrated out of the village. Hajigul Mohammad Siddhi of Hodka agrees that the dairy intervention since 2010 has helped in the Banni. Earlier he had to go to Bhuj to sell milk and work as a labourer.

Keeping the camel and sheep economy alive: The dairy helped households keeping cows and buffaloes but camel and sheep were neglected. Camel-based pastoralism is especially threatened. Dairies do not take camel milk. Before mechanization, camel was used in draft, for ploughing, and for travelling, but these uses are declining. Their grazing resource is also under attack, being diverted for industrialisation. As per figures with Sahjeevan, the camel population has dropped from 17,000 in 1997 to 8,000 in 2007 (with only 250 households keeping camels now). For instance, in village Sambwar of Lakhpat, camel maldharis talked about the sharp reduction in the number of camels they keep due to lack of economic viability. Sawabhai Rajabhai is a camel maldhari who used to have 50 camels earlier and now has only 8-10 camels (having sold most, and bought goats instead). Mamubhai Pabawe Rabari had 60-70 camels but sold them 15 years ago, buying sheep and goats instead.

Sahjeevan's approach has been to focus on checking reduction in camel numbers and also giving attention to the grazing resources. For checking reduction in numbers,

the group has been involved in advocacy for camel health services, and promoting utility as a source of livelihood in the present scenario. For the promotion of utility, there are ideas of marketing camel milk and of creating camel wool products. Both are, however, still at the planning stage. In marketing camel milk, challenges remain in fixing a pricing policy (cannot be fat-based, has to be based on medicinal value) and in checking chances of adulteration at collection points. As per Indian Food Standards and Safety Authority, camel milk is not considered a food item, so a license will have to be procured. Sahjeevan has started the process for it, partnering with Gujarat Animal Husbandry and Natural Research Centre. A project on creating and marketing camel wool products to support camel-based livelihoods in Kachchh has been initiated in collaboration with Khamir but is still at the planning stage.

Backward linkages

Work on conservation and recognition of breeds: During the dairy intervention, Sahjeevan realized that traditional livestock-keeping systems were more alive in some places than others. This led to interest in breed conservation work. The local livestock breeds are categorized as 'non-descriptive', so they are kept out of various governmental or NGO breed improvement programmes. There was a need for government recognition of breeds and mobilization of breeders. The work began with focusing on the buffalo breed kept by maldharis (pastoralists) in banni grasslands. In January 2008, the first pashu mela (animal fair) for banni breeders was organized. Till October 2008, an adhoc committee worked on the sangathan structure, functions and membership. In 2009, the Banni Breeders Association (BBA) was registered as a society. In April 2010, the banni buffalo was registered. The idea was that breed conservation in Kachchh cannot be by simply introducing crossbreeds such as Jersey and Heifer. A

pilot study on breed conservation was done involving 100 buffaloes. The process included community registration, planning by local experts, work on dairy, on health and pashu melas. The BBA has later been crucial in raising issues of community-involvement in grassland planning and also in attempts to claim access and management rights over their community resource (see Box 3).

The work on camel breed conservation was started with government aid. To collectivise camel maldharis of Kachchh, an association or collective by the name of Kachchh Unth Ucharak Maldhari Sangathan (KUUMS) has been formed and the first pashu mela was held in 2014. During work on surveying camel maldharis, it was realized that there exists a separate unregistered Kharai breed, more adapted to the mangrove regions of Kachchh. This breed has now been registered. The work on camels is new and they are still grappling with how to conserve traditional knowledge, prevent habitat loss and make the livelihoods of camel pastoralists viable amidst present day challenges.

Biodiversity protocols of Banni buffalo maldharis and camel maldharis have also been drafted. These are documented articulations by local communities of their ways of life, systems of stewardship and engagement with their ecosystems and serve as a platform for laying out terms of engagement with external actors such as the government, NGOs, research organisations, etc. Sahjeevan's focus has now shifted to grassland conservation and securing rights over access and management of customary grazing resources by pastoralists, while the work on breeds is being taken forward more by the partnering breeders' associations.

Management of grazing resources: This includes conducting participatory mapping exercises, advocacy for access and management rights (see Box 3 for information on claims

of community forest rights in Banni) and also conducting collaborative research such as the initiative called RAMBLE (Research And Monitoring in the Banni LandscapE) coordinated by Sahjeevan that does a large part of this work as a facilitator with the maldhari collectives (BBA and the KUUMS) as active contributors and participants in the process.

Box 3

Claiming community rights on grazing in Banni

Pastoralists have been recorded as having come to graze fields in Banni from Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan for the past 700 years; around 500 years ago, they settled in the Kachchh region. In the 1880s, this land was recognized by the erstwhile Maharaja as their grazing resource. It had four streams running through it (now most of these have been destroyed by salinity or shrunk because of the many small dams upstream). After India gained independence in 1947, the status of land and settlements in Banni remained unclear. It doesn't come under revenue land; yet, in 1965, 13 panchayats and in 1998, 19 panchayats within Banni were recognized. In 1955, the Forest Department recognized it as a Protected Forest. In 2001, industries started creeping in. In 2003, a working plan was formulated by the Forest Department based on the 1955 map. In 2008, maldharis formed the Banni Breeders' Association to stabilize pastoralism in the Banni grassland as a sustainable livelihood. In 2009, when implementation of the working plan began, BBA sought information on its details: 'We realized the threats as well as the lack of acknowledgement of the maldhari existence and role within the plan.' In 2011, a mass rally of around 10,000 persons with the cry of 'banni ko banni rehne do' ('keep banni as it is') gathered attention in Bhuj.

In an unprecedented exercise in February 2014, around forty-six villages in the banni grassland claimed community rights over the 2400 sq km area of Banni under the 'The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Rights) Act 2006'. This is the first known claim by a pastoralist community on any grassland in India. The claimants have viewed the banni as a whole (rather than village-level plots). They maintain that mutual understanding and customary use has been in relation to the entire banni and any disputes that may arise are resolved internally.

Source: As told by Isa bhai Mutwa of Banni Breeders' Association, BBA

The participatory resource mapping for biomass, water and biodiversity is taking place for two landscapes – for the Banni grassland with 19 panchayats of BBA and for camel grazing resources over Kachchh landscape (with KUUMS). At panchayat level, a participatory conservation and management plan is being developed. At cluster level, multiple ecosystems are being included based on seasonal dependency of resources. Panchayat level exercises are to understand the carrying capacity of the grazing resource, and to identify of composition and distribution for preferred grasses. Using georeferenced Google imagery and focus group discussions, a map of the community grazing resource is being prepared with the help of K-link foundation, another member of the Abhiyan which focuses on use of technology for communities. The intention of the mapping process is to make a biodiversity plan based on the understanding of geology, biodiversity, ecology and traditional knowledge, to eventually come up with landscape level plans. For Banni, an objective of this plan is to also present an alternative to the current Forest Department working plan, based on comprehensive knowledge. Pankaj Joshi of Sahjeevan feels

that stall feeding and ploughing can destroy banni through habitat conversion and destruction of food webs of a grassland ecosystem, and under working plan of the forest department that is exactly what is planned. The mapping exercise for camels has helped identify 13 grazing routes and clusters. During this exercise, issues of industrialisation, and inter-panchayat conflict over water resources were raised. This has led to advocacy for small water structures in some of the areas lacking water-holes, such as Balesar. Diversion of grazing land remains a persistent concern with jetties and power plants in Mundra, industries in Bhachau and coastal areas, and mining in western Kachchh.

Discussion on overall approach in animal husbandry/ pastoralism

Within animal husbandry, Sahjeevan's approach (directly or through collaborating institutions) has been on:

- Facilitating dairy linkages supporting local livelihoods, helping reduce migration

- Supporting veterinary services and micro-financing livestock-keeping

- Working on local breed conservation

- Looking at grazing areas and water sources together with an overall landscape-management approach

- Learning from traditional knowledge

- Initiating efforts to secure the livelihoods of camel maldharis

- Advocacy with the local government for focus on grazing resources, decentralized management [e.g. through Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs), under the Biological Diversity Act 2003], community forest resource governance through FRA, etc.

- Initiating participatory ecological research with collaborating institutions

While Sahjeevan acts as a facilitator, the activities are mainly being carried out through local community associations and collectives. The approach has been essentially multi-pronged, creating linkages within communities, with research organisations, with other members of Abhiyan, and with the government.

In achieving its objectives, it still faces several challenges – battling the neglect of grassland in official conservation policies and departmental attitudes, breakdown of pastoral economies and technological and procedural challenges in re-initiating them, and threats to the grazing resources and the pastoral way of living from the industries (detailed in the section on larger challenges). There is also an ecological concern, recognised by them, but not yet tackled, of the societal shift towards a fat-based dairy leading to sale or abandonment of cows and a disproportionate increase in buffalo-keeping which is more water-intensive. The attempt to make ghee (clarified butter) from cow-milk (mentioned earlier in Box 2) was in response to this concern. However, it was not economically sustainable because of the lack of willingness of customers to pay a higher price for the product.

Initiatives in crafts

Embroidery launched KMVS' work in the craft sector, both for women's empowerment and to promote embroidery as a skilled art. This evolved into Qasab which has had a significant contribution both in community building and in providing dignified livelihoods to many artisan women. For embroidery, various other models are also present in Kachchh (Srujan, which has a philanthropic client-sponsor approach; Kalaraksha, which is very preservationist in its designs; KMVS, which has a feminist approach).

Khamir (Kachchh Heritage, Art, Music, Information and Resources) was created in 2005 through a partnership between Abhiyan and the Nehru Foundation for Development. The idea behind starting Khamir (the word means 'pride' in the local language) was to strengthen and support continuation of crafts (especially other than embroidery) as a lifestyle, keeping in mind the socio-cultural and ecological context. Six threatened crafts, including block-printing, pottery, lacquer-work, metal-bells, weaving, and leather-work, were prioritised, and the initial focus was to build entrepreneurship. It also helped in provisioning of raw materials where needed, and in creating market linkages. In the context of changing social dynamics and linkages between communities and aspirations for life, Khamir is slowly getting away from the front-end of design and marketing towards understanding and working on the relationship between craft and ecology.

For the purpose of our case study, the focus in crafts is primarily on discussing the approach being taken by Khamir. This is because their approach seems to be the most in resonance with the perspective of building linkages between culture and ecology which is the thread being followed in this case study, and because of the direct linkages of their work with agriculture and animal husbandry. Also, rather than working with a constituency of artisans as is seen in most other craft-related initiatives (which no doubt have had a significant role in supporting crafts like embroidery in Kachchh), the objective here is to influence the crafts sector as a whole. The idea is to build upon and work with the values of environmental sustenance, community practice, sustenance of knowledge systems and a sustained pride in craft.

Khamir's approach

Their approach is to intervene at the following levels:[8]

- **Engagement:** creating a dialogue on the value of crafts and also opening out local narratives of artisans through exhibitions, schools and university visits to the centre and encouraging research and documentation

- **Trade facilitation:** connecting artisans with markets and facilitating fair trade while emphasizing the importance of trust and relationship-building

- **Artisan services:** identifying critical needs within each craft area, followed by a series of interventions to address them – raw-material procurement, credit, social security, appropriate technologies, skill development and offering a crafts studio

- **Innovation:** devising innovations in raw materials, processing techniques and products, while trying to be conscious of environmental impact. The three current innovation programmes relate to Kala Cotton, sheep wool products and plastic recycling through woven products.

Levels of interaction

Following are some of the main levels of interaction within their work (as understood from conversations with the Khamir team):

Craft and ecology: It is felt that both in terms of raw materials and in implications of the craft itself, there are intricate links with the surrounding ecosystem which cannot be ignored. Work on these is in collaboration with other

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8.   http://www.khamir.org/work

organisations. For understanding issues related to access to soil for traditional potters, Khamir, with K-link and Setu, did a mapping exercise of sites which served as clay and white mud sources, and are currently being threatened by change in land-use, especially the growth of industries. This exercise has been followed by advocacy for reclaiming these soils as customary resources of potters. They have also been working with another Abhiyan member, Arid Communities and Technologies (ACT), on issues of potential water scarcity and water pollution related to block-printing. It also links with KMVS's groups of women garbage collectors (Sakhi Mandals) to create a local supply chain for Khamir's Plastic Recycling Project. This creates woven plastic products such as bags and wallets out of waste.

Craft and culture: For artisans, craft is a way of life, so the relationship between craft and culture is constantly explored and highlighted through exhibitions and workshops. Khamir collaborates with KMVS-supported Sur Vani, an association of Kachchhi folk musicians for organising cultural events. In collaboration with Sahjeevan, historical and present socio-cultural connections between pastoralism and crafts are being explored through a long-term research and documentation project which culminated in an exhibition in 2016.

Craft and economy: The initiatives in sheep and camel wool and in Kala Cotton are trying to support connections between craft and economy but with an ecological perspective.

Sheep and camel wool: As mentioned earlier, Khamir is collaborating with Sahjeevan for facilitating livelihoods based on sheep and camel wool. The traditional linkages of sheep wool weavers have been broken so that today Kachchh weavers buy sheep wool from intermediaries in Bikaner;

spinning its thread is no longer locally practised in Kachchh. Khamir is working on reviving the sheep wool economy and is still grappling with the procurement of appropriate quantities for weaving. There is also interest in promotion of camel wool products. The front end responsibility related to working with maldharis on how to shear and clean, getting sufficient volume and making it viable, lies with Sahjeevan. A pilot project for this was undertaken in 2013, procuring 140 kg of rough wool, and ending with 3 kgs of fine wool after processing. Efforts at fine-tuning the process for implementation are ongoing.

Kala Cotton: This was the product of collaboration between Satvik, Setu and Khamir to create Kala Cotton cloth out of rain-fed organic cotton and attempt to capture all steps of the process. Some part of processing (spinning) is still out of the local loop, but other steps have been substantially integrated. The cotton is procured from some pockets of Adesar through the Rapar producer company, and after creating the yarn, it is given to weavers in some parts of Kachchh for weaving cloth (see Box 4). Khamir is now selling high quality cotton yarn across the country. The process has led to indirect support to the weavers by establishing a benchmark for weaver artisan wages and has provided them a rallying point to demand better terms of services from other traders.

Box 4

Weaving again with organic cotton

> Narayan Walji Bunker is a traditional weaver living in Mota Jamthada (the village Jamthada has 300-400 families of weavers living in Mota Jamthada, while Chhota Jamthada has agriculturalists). He gave up weaving Kala Cotton decades ago – when demand from

the Khadi Bhandar stopped coming because of a change in policies – but has recently restarted. The labour wages received for weaving a Kala Cotton shawl are much more than what they get for their woollen shawls. Weaving Kala Cotton requires great skill. He says, 'Thread is hard to weave, an amateur cannot do it. You have to be skilled. In us, weaving is in the bloodline.' Most of the other weavers, except for a few associated with Khamir who use Kala Cotton, continue to weave with wool using fine thread sourced from Ludhiana.

'In earlier times, the status of weavers was better, and the relationship of farmer-weaver was on more equal terms; sometimes we would loan them cloth out of kindness and they would only pay us at harvest time later. Now, they are richer, whereas we are poorer.'

Source: Personal conservation with Narayan Walji Bunkar

Discussion on overall approach in crafts

As evident, the approach of Khamir in crafts has been at one level to create local entrepreneurship, and at another to support and strengthen linkages of crafts with ecology, economy and culture. The work has been through collaboration with different organisations and individuals building on synergies and strengths. A range of stakeholders exchange ideas and collaborate under a common roof. It also works to shift consumer perspectives and raise the cultural value placed on crafts. The vision is of a vibrant, sustainable Indian craft sector in which crafts and artisans alike are highly valued by people worldwide.

In terms of achieving their objectives, they feel that they are still at a stage of learning and grappling with many

challenges, both at a technical level and the level of influencing overall social perceptions of value of craft.

Larger Challenges

Following are the major challenges encountered by the initiatives in realisation of their key objectives of socio-economic, ecological and cultural sustainability of local livelihoods in Kachchh:

Education: According to Shailesh Vyas and Ramesh Mukwana of the Satvik team, education has an important role in how we perceive things. Our present predominant education system thus becomes a great concern, being geared, as it is, towards maximising material gains over a short period of time. This short-sighted materialism has become so ingrained in our attitudes that mere availability of information on points like judicious use of water or safe-keeping of soil fertility may not change our behaviour. This is seen in the tendency and aspiration of farmers practising rain-fed farming to adopt green revolution farming practices wherever possible. To retain farmers in organic agriculture, non-economic motivations such as the ethics of respecting the soil, or of ecological sustainability play a role; this seems challenging. Academic research scarcely aims to be accessible to the small-holding farmer. Moreover, our present approach in education is to devalue physical labour as something that needs to be reduced at all costs (if not eliminated).

Predominant policies: The policy framework needs to support decentralisation and environmental sustainability. In animal husbandry, Sabyasachi Das of Sahjeevan pointed out that rather than having schemes for huge investment in bore wells and fodder-plots, smaller investments and

successful conservation of the present grazing resources would be possible if the intention had been to focus on the latter. Instead, government policies have a limited focus on livestock, barely any on grazing land management, and view water and livestock as separate issues under separate committees rather than an interconnected whole. The arrival of the dairy has increased overall livestock numbers without a concurrent effort in commons' management. Within this livestock increase, disproportionate increase in buffalo numbers because of the higher fat content in milk could have implications on water conservation.

In agriculture there are many policy level challenges that are preventing farmers from using resources judiciously, or staying or becoming organic. Water costs are not accounted for in agriculture. When we export crops (especially irrigated crops) we are exporting our valuable water resources. Shailesh feels that if we start getting charged for water use in agriculture, organic farming will indeed flourish. At the policy level, there is a lack of focus on efforts like drip irrigation, and more on promoting cash crops such as castor and Bt cotton. Government policy is also not sufficiently talking about seed conservation or developing seed varieties with unique charcteristics (except production geared, irrigation geared) to suit local environments. The efforts of the State are very few, and focused more on the ex-situ conservation approach of seed banks. While urea and DAP subsidies have led to a huge shift in practices towards inorganic, there is insufficient attention paid to non-pesticide management. Government subsidies have for long been linked to companies selling huge tractors even though such high powered tractors are not technically required for Indian soils, where a 10HP tractor is adequate. The approval for field trials of GM crops by Genetic Engineering Approval Committee or GEAC in July 2014 is also a cause of grave

concern. Allowing Bt trials in 70 crops (including traditional crops) will be devastating, particularly for cross-pollinated crops as it will become difficult to keep traditional seed away from Bt contamination. The argument is not that Bt necessarily destroys soil fertility, but to have an environment where diverse varieties can thrive and decision-making is informed.

In crafts, Meera Goradia of Khamir pointed out that government support to handloom has actually reduced over the decades, with the earlier rules being more supportive of small enterprises.

Forces of industrialisation: During discussions with Sahjeevan, industrialisation and its associated concerns were often expressed. After the earthquake in Bhuj, Kachchh was opened up for industrial development, particularly through tax-holiday. Factories have been set up with lax environmental regulations, often causing air, soil, noise, and water pollution. Traditional grazing routes of camels and common grazing lands for cattle are also being threatened by the Adani port in Mundra. Industries started creeping into the banni grassland as well, beginning with Thapar-Solaris in Khavda in late 1980s, then Agrocell in1992, and Archan around four to five years ago. The promise each time is of providing employment to the local youth but the Banni residents have realised that the disadvantages (including pollution, health hazards) outweigh the benefits (see Box 5). The BBA has decided that they would not let any more industries come inside the grassland. 'People got attracted by a promise of 240 livelihoods by Archan and opened their grazing resource for exploitation. Why do we not think of the many more livelihoods being provided by the land on its own?' asks Isa bhai Mutwa of BBA.

Box 5

Industrialisation in Kachchh

Hira Bamu Rabari talked about the dust that is spread all over the land, animals and humans in his village Jhandwa in Lakhpat since the past 20 years because of Sanghi Cement factory. The factory has also dried up the village water resources by cutting off its connection to the stream (a recent fine of ₹10 lakhs has been imposed by the government on the factory in this regard). Factories of Jaypee and Birla are also enclosing the village at present.

Source: Personal conversation with Hira Bamu Rabari

While local resistance to future industrial growth within Banni exists, the issue of industrialisation and its associated socio-ecological costs in Kachchh remains a persistent challenge.

Market forces: Present choices of ways of living and doing things have a deep connection with market forces. In agriculture, as highlighted by Satvik, the overall trend of rabi wheat, summer groundnut and green fodder in rabi season and summer is increasing while in Kharif, focus is on Bt cotton and castor (rabi and kharif refers to the dry season and monsoon cropping season respectively). This implies increased water use in agriculture for growing these crops. While predominant market forces encourage a certain kind of crop pattern, they discourage agriculture using traditional seeds by decreasing their availability and accessibility. It is difficult to find traditional seeds in the market. People are reluctant to buy unpackaged seeds as these have less credibility and more chances of failures since characteristics are not mentioned. Also traditional

seeds are often small whereas people's demand is often for large-sized seeds (without there being much rationality behind it!).

Another incidence of market influencing crop-pattern was when, a few years ago, because of high prices being offered for cluster bean abroad, there was an increase in export to Gulf countries for fracking which is an environmentally destructive activity, instead of its customary use as fodder and feed for their livestock.

Yet, within the market, there is also some hope as urban demand for traditional crops and their products (such as pearl millet (*bajra*), brown rice, etc.) is increasing, leading to an increase in their prices. Satvik feels that farm-saved seed will slowly gain preference as seems to be happening in the case of groundnut.

A larger challenge is of keeping cycles of production and consumption local or regional when organic crops and agricultural products are having a larger market demand in other countries or in a few urban pockets of the country.

Emerging values

Advocacy and work on organic farming, traditional seeds and seed diversity, grazing resource conservation, conservation of local livestock breeds as well as work on crafts-ecology linkages points to an attempt to achieve financial and resource security with environmental consciousness and through empowerment of local institutions. It can also not be forgotten that the initiatives began as a means of empowerment of local women through crafts and their meaningful participation in decisions and directions pertaining to land, water and soil issues.

In these initiatives (be it natural resource management, marketing or social consciousness), the focus for implementation has primarily been at cluster-level through setus, sangathans, breeders associations, and producer companies. There has also been a noticeable transformation of knowledge centres or servicing units into separate small and several independent institutions over time. Yet these independent units not only share ideas and updates but also seem to share many common principles and values. From discussions with the various organisational teams, field visits and a review of secondary data, the following core values common to these initiatives seem to be emerging:

Decentralisation: As articulated by Sahjeevan, decentralization is the key to sustainable, uncomplicated solution finding. So any management system or technology that solves a problem at the nuclear level need not be pursued at a village or cluster level. This has also been maintained by Satvik, where the belief is that the future of these initiatives lies in effective and responsible producer companies which will only work if they have a visibility at the end point.

Rights with responsibilities: Rights come with responsibilities. In Banni grassland, while there is advocacy for recognition of grazing rights, there is also an effort to formulate a participatory conservation plan. In crafts, block-printers are encouraged to be responsible for treatment of the water resource which may be polluted by the dyes.

Practices informed by environmental concerns:
Saleem Desar Node from Sargu village, of Banni Breeders Association, asks, 'To build our houses, we turn mountains into dust, but who among us can turn dust into mountains?' In the initiatives discussed, solutions that are tried out and practices that are encouraged are informed by environmental concerns. Therefore animal husbandry must find solutions

for increasing grassland cover in Kachchh, fisheries cannot be promoted without mangrove conservation and water exploitation must combine with recharging. In agriculture, soil and water have to be respected before finding any seed or crop related solutions.

Context and diversity: The initiatives try to work out local solutions to local problems. The attempt is to build upon local strengths of the district in order to build livelihoods on local seeds, breeds and skills rather than try to implant solutions from outside. There is also respect and appreciation for diversity in knowledge, in ways of living and in the value of physical work.

Wellbeing rather than economic growth: The focus has been on social wellbeing and justice rather than economic and structural development. Along with 'rights with responsibility' is the value that while there is engagement with markets because of present needs and aspirations, economic growth cannot be pursued at all costs, especially environmental and socio-cultural costs. As articulated by Ramzanbhai Halepotra of Banni Breeders Association, 'We must not destroy our hut looking at another person's palace.'

Larger implications

The connecting thread in these initiatives seems to be the realisation that there are serious problems with our present predominant way of living, its consumption patterns and its lasting impact on our environment. These initiatives have questioned and raised consciousness on the model of industrialization vis-à-vis the environment, water and traditional occupations of Kachchh. They have suggested that instead of considering dry land as wasteland, investment of time and effort in the dry land using an ecosystem approach and supporting marginalised communities can create a sufficiently viable economy.

Can this consciousness in approach regarding industrialisation, environment, water and traditional occupations develop into an alternative vision? While not articulated, a practised vision seems to be emerging, as described in the previous section, of respecting the interconnectedness amongst culture, economy, politics and ecology. Linkages between agriculture, animal husbandry and pastoralism are being strengthened to revitalise socio-cultural, economic and ecological relationships. The collectives of women, pastoralists, farmers and artisans are simultaneously engaged in struggles to protect and defend their commons. As articulated by Ramzanbhai Halepotra of Banni Breeders Association, 'Our traditional livelihoods cannot go hand in hand with the present form of industrialisation. If the attack of industries continues, nothing will remain. My vision is that in the time to come, we need to be prepared for poverty. In that world, there may not be money but there will be peace.'

Acknowledgments

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Shaam-e-Sarhad, Hodka

A Community-Based Tourism Initiative

Seema Bhatt

Tradition of embroidery passed on from mother to daughter

Seema Bhatt

A sense of pride when her handiwork is displayed

Seema Bhatt

Shaam-e-Sarhad

Seema Bhatt

Traditional 'Bungas' as accommodation

Seema Bhatt

The Dining Space

7
Shaam-e-Sarhad, Hodka
A Community-Based Tourism Initiative

Seema Bhatt

Tourism is recognized today as the world's fastest growing industry and in recent years has established a significant role in the economies of developing countries. According to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer,[1] international tourist arrivals globally grew by 4.4 percent in 2015 to reach a total of 1.2 billion. Tourism has the potential to provide economic, environmental and social benefits. However, recent trends within tourism development globally, and specifically in India, raises several concerns about its adverse impact.

Tourism destinations are facing increasing pressure on their natural, social and economic environments. A large percentage of economic benefits from tourism tend to be garnered by people away from the destination and only a fraction trickles down to local communities. Studies carried out show that on an average, of every US$ 100 spent on a vacation tour by a tourist from a developed country, only around US$ 5 actually stays in a developing country

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1. http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2015-09-10/21-million-more-international-tourists-first-half-2015

destination's economy (Bhatt and Liyakhat, 2008). A study of tourism 'leakage' estimates that 40 percent of all money spent by tourists ended up leaving India[2]. Tourism is thus characterized by a high 'leakage' rate of tourism receipts. Unregulated tourism is also known to degrade habitats and cause pollution of land and water. In coastal Goa, the water table has fallen below the level of village wells as a result of deep wells dug by large hotels (Bhatt and Liyakhat, 2008). Mass tourism has often caused the exploitation of women and children as also the privatization of common resources and displacement of people to make way for hotels and resorts.

The growing realization of the ill effects of mass tourism has led to a conscious effort to look at alternate models of tourism. One such is community-based tourism (CBT) that has become popular over the last three decades. CBT pays attention to community development, poverty alleviation and conservation of natural and cultural heritage. In developing countries, it tends to focus on rural and biodiversity-significant areas. According to Scheyvens (2002), CBT's ultimate goal is to empower the host community at four levels – economic, psychological, social and political. Brohman (1996) provides perhaps the most comprehensive definition of CBT:

> Community-based tourism development would seek to strengthen institutions designed to enhance local participation and promote the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the popular majority. It would also seek to strike a balanced and harmonious approach to development that would stress considerations such as the compatibility of various forms of development with other components of the local economy; the quality of development, both culturally and environmentally;

2.   http://www.leaplocal.org/leakage-from-tourism.html

and the divergent needs, interests and potentials of the community and its inhabitants.

Perhaps the most successful community-based tourism initiatives in India are the community home stays in the Himalayan region (Bhatt, 2012). The concept of home stays is based on the age-old practice of having 'house guests'. The accommodation is simple but comfortable with basic furniture and clean bedding in a room kept aside for this purpose. Tourists experience the local culture and cuisine and interact with the community at a reasonable price. Communities benefit financially and are encouraged to showcase their cultural heritage. The success of homestays, particularly in the Himalayan region, is reflected in the fact that there is now a website (http://www.himalayan-homestays.com/) promoting home stays in the region.

However, studies that show the impact of this kind of tourism on communities and conservation are relatively few (Goodwin et al, 1998; Goodwin, 2000; Walpole and Goodwin, 2001; Goodwin, 2002).

The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Endogenous Tourism Project (ETP)

India's 10th Five Year Plan accorded priority to village or rural tourism showcasing rural culture and bringing economic benefits to the communities. One of the relevant initiatives was the Endogenous Tourism Project (ETP), a joint venture between the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT, GoI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The term 'endogenous' means 'originating from within'. This four-year project (2003-2007) involved the selection of 36 rural sites across the country as pilot projects for rural destination development. Poverty eradication, one of the objectives

of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) was also the guiding principle for this initiative. UNDP funded the capacity-building component while the rural infrastructure improvement was supported under the Government of India's Rural Tourism Scheme.

The *Incredible India* marketing campaign launched in 2002 by the MoT and GoI successfully catapulted India into the global tourism market. To take this further, the ETP project was established with the objective that it would help open up the rural market and also benefit rural communities. As the then Secretary of Ministry of Tourism said, 'Special thrust should be imparted to rural tourism, where sizeable assets of our culture and natural wealth exist.'

It was envisaged that women and unemployed youth could leverage their skills towards income generation with the help of the panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Further, by showcasing local culture and the surrounding environment, tourism would enhance community pride and revive dying cultural traditions. The underlying principle was that 'creating income generation strategies that leverage pre-existing local skills is… "endogenous" in nature. Thus, both rural communities and tourists would stand to benefit from the initiative.'[3] Endogenous or 'transformative' tourism aimed to broaden the traveller's horizon by transforming perspectives and promoting a mutual environment of appreciation and learning between the local community and visitors.[4]

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3. Balasubramaniam, M. (2008). Endogenous tourism for sustainable rural livelihoods. Retrieved from Changemakers wesbsite: http://www.changemakers.com/node/23911

4. Pro-Poor Tourism Development - The case of Endogenous Tourism Project, India. May 2012 11:30 | Written by Sudip Duttagupta at http://scstsenvis.nic.in/

Under the ETP, significant emphasis was given to community owned and managed tourism. The key stakeholders were meant to be community members including women, youth, and artisans. Village-level institutions consisting of these stakeholders were to play a key role in decision-making and project implementation. External support of the state and national governments, NGOs, and the travel trade was considered crucial for the implementation and sustainability of the project. The role of the MoT and GoI was to facilitate linkages between various sectors and partners with state government assistance in the initial selection of rural locations and maintenance and development of infrastructure at selected locations. Specific NGOs were selected to help with capacity building based on their presence at the local level, acceptability by the local community, skills and field experience. Tour operators were seen as key for the marketing of the sites and facilitating package tours to the rural destinations.[5]

One of the projects was established in the Banni area of Kachchh in Gujarat. This case study provides an overview of the context of the project, reviews the process, progress and outcomes of the initiative, and examines it particularly as an alternate model to mass tourism.

The Banni Area of Kachchh[6]

Banni extends across an area of 3847 sq. km. covering about 8.4 percent of total geographical area of the Kachchh district.

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5. Mott MacDonald (2007). Evaluation study of rural tourism scheme. Retrieved from http://tourism.gov.in/survey/ruraltourism.pdf

6. Background material about the region has been taken from the brochure on Hodka, Kachchh brought out under the UNDP project. Compiled and written by Mansi Anand. Documentation support by Pachchham Setu

The following lines written by the famous Kachchhi poet Duleray Karani aptly portray the region:

> *The lush green Banni*
> *Skirting the Rann of Kachchh*
> *Where wells burst with water*
> *Green grasses bloom in heavenly gardens*
> *Robust, muscular are the cows and buffaloes*
> *No dearth of milk and butter*
> *Where the sun rises*
> *With the churning of buttermilk*

The pastureland of Banni, located on the northern border of the Bhuj district was once believed to be a part of the great Rann of Kachchh. The name 'Banni' is said to be derived from the Kachchhi word, *Bannai* that means 'made up'. Banni has been formed by the sedimentation of alluvial soil brought by the rivers flowing from the north during the monsoon floods. Over two-thirds of Banni have high levels of salinity.

> It is said that Dhoramnath, a great rishi, meditated on his head for 12 years on the Dhinodar Mountain of Kachchh. The gods then granted him the ability to burn and lay waste whatever he sighted. He turned north towards the shallow sea and Rann (salt desert) and burned it with his gaze; it resulted in fertile land on which rich grass began to grow. Pastoralists from as far away as Baluch and Haleb in Afghanistan came in search of the famed grassland called Banni – 'Rann se banni hui' (made from the Rann).[7]

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7. Adapted from Virmani, S., S. Das and R. Bhatti. 2010. Pastoral Lifestyle in Banni Region: A Case of Conservation of Banni Buffalo, Grassland Ecosystem and Utilisation of Commons. Proceedings of International Buffalo Conference, 1 – 4 February 2010. New Delhi.

At one time, Banni was considered one of the finest and largest grasslands in Asia with more than 40 species of grass. However, over time this diversity has been reduced to only about 10-15 species, but Banni continues to support a range of flora and fauna. Wild animals of Banni include, blue bull, chinkara, Indian hare, jackal, grey wolf, caracal, hyena, fox and jungle cat. There are historical accounts of blackbuck being present in Banni, but it is not seen anymore. Seasonal wetlands in the area support a large number of migratory birds. The avifauna of this area includes, flamingos, great indian bustard, houbara bustard, white winged black napped tit, stoliczka's bush chat, grey hipocolius etc. A total of 207 bird species were reported from Banni, which include 100 resident and 107 migratory species. During good-rainfall years, the water bodies of Banni provide significant foraging areas for thousands of migratory and resident birds including flamingos, ducks and several species of wading birds. Luna village in western Banni has a fifty-year old reputed heronry where approximately 7,900 nests of several species of birds have been recorded.[8]

Surrounded by the Rann and sea, Kachchh unites two regions (Sindh and Saurashtra/Kathiawad), homogenizing cultures (pastoral and agricultural/trade) and religions (Islamic and Hindu). Within Kachchh, the east is predominantly Hindu and the west Islamic; the regions were ruled by separate dynasties until the sixteenth century when the Jadejas brought them under common rule by one Jadeja brother converting to Islam. Banni is the heart of the region and has attracted several pastoral (*maldhari*) communities from as

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8.   Tiwari, J.K. (1997): Avian profile of Chhari-Dhand, Kutch, Gujarat, India. Newsletter for Birdwatchers 37 (91): 1-4.

far as Haleb in Afghanistan. The *Jats* themselves divided with the *Kanthi Jats* traversing the coastline of Kachch with their camels, the *Fakirani Jats* with smaller ruminants in the scrub forests and the *Daneta Jats* with their cattle in Banni feeding off the rich grasses. Several other Islamic communities set up semi-permanent settlements or *Vandhs* in the Banni region. These include the *Samas, Nodes, Halepotras* and *Mutvas.* Each *vandh* has one or several *falias* of Hindu Meghwals who provide services such as help in building structures in return for leather from dead animals and milk (Virmani et al, 2010). Banni has 52 settlements spread over 19 *panchayats* inhabited by approximately 40,000 people.[9]

The philosophy of the Banni pastoralists is best portrayed by this quote popular amongst the *Maldhari Jats*, 'Dudh me nu makhan kadnu nahi; gaghe ke vaknu nahi; ne pakhe kech adnu nahi. Jade he thindo, kayamat aanjena jeekaahe!' – 'Do not remove the butter from milk (it is the primary source of nutriton); do not sell the gaghe (an intricately embroidered cloak worn by women and shared by families, a symbol of social relations); do not stop your nomadic lifestyle (in temporary homes, which means grasslands recuperate behind you). The day this happens, remember doomsday is close!' (Virmani et al, 2010).

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9.   http://www.bannigrassland.org/AboutBanni.htm

Box 1

Kachchh's rich livestock diversity

Kachchh, with Banni as one of the largest natural grasslands in Asia, is home to a considerable diversity of livestock that is uniquely adapted to its harsh living conditions. Some of the key breeds are Kankrej Cattle, Banni Buffalo, Kachchhi Goat, Kachchhi Camel, Marwari and Patanwadi Sheep. Livestock holds a key place in the economy of the region since it provides milk, milk products, and meat, wool and draft power. In 2010, the Banni Buffalo was registered as India's eleventh buffalo breed, a significant achievement, since this is indeed the first time that a breed developed and conserved by a local community has gained national official recognition.

Source: www.sahjeevan.org and www.bannigrassland.org

Banni: Changing lives, livelihoods and landscapes

Banni has been formed from sediments deposited by the Indus and other northwards-flowing rivers over centuries. Several factors affect the Banni grasslands. Although the sediments made Banni one of the finest grasslands in Asia, the region is now drought prone and pastoralists need to move out their cattle each time drought occurs (Bharwada and Mahajan 2012). The main source of income for the pastoralists comes from the sale of livestock, milk products, and handicrafts. With the arrival of dairies, the pattern is slowly changing from dependency on sale of animals to sale of milk.

The invasion of *Prosopis juliflora* has considerably changed the landscape. The Gujarat Forest Department had planted this non-native tree to combat salinity ingress and aridity in

the region. A ban was actually imposed on the cutting of this tree in the 1980s. At the time it covered about ten percent of the land area; by the 1990s, it had spread over forty percent of the land. Concerned that the tree was destroying local vegetation and degrading the grasslands, the state Forest Department lifted the ban in early 2004. *Prosopis* was used to make charcoal locally; the hope was that besides clearing the area, cutting of this tree would enhance local livelihoods. Unfortunately, the decision backfired. Trees were cut down indiscriminately, resulting in severe habitat degradation. The ban was re-imposed in 2008 (Bhatt et al 2011).

The earthquake of 2001, with its epicentre in Kachchh, changed the landscape. There was tremendous global support for rehabilitation and reconstruction, several organizations were established and many innovative approaches adopted towards the restoration of Kachchh. Consequently, local communities were exposed to a range of outside agencies and this changed the perspective of these communities, both positively as well as negatively.

There are also several social factors that determine the access and use of these grasslands by the pastoralist community. Over the years, institutions established by the 22 Maldhari pastoralist communities have regulated the access and use of the grasslands. However, there is continued ambiguity over access and use among the Forest Department, the Revenue Department and the Pastoralist Association. Conflicting issues on the use of this grassland include: conserving the grasslands for their unique biodiversity; an area for the production of charcoal that feeds the power plants that have come up in the region and sustainability of the area for livestock breeds and resulting use.[10]

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10. http://www.bannigrassland.org/

The village of Hodka[11]

It is believed that Hodka Jheel (village by a water body) was established about 300 years ago by what is called the 'Halepotra' clan. Halepotra quite literally means the son or descendant of Halaji who is supposed to have migrated from Sindh. He is said to have had seven sons. The descendants of the son Dero are believed to have settled in the villages of Hodka and Dumado. Hodka represents the heart of Banni and showcases the art, architecture, culture and lifestyle of the region. Hodka Jheel has 13 hamlets (*vandhs*) with 399 resident families and a population of 2132 (2011 census). The architecture of this region is represented by the local structures called *bungas* where people live; these are circular mud structures with thatch roofs that are said to be the most appropriate for the harsh conditions in this region. The two dominant castes in Hodka are the Islamic Maldharis (Pastoralists) from the Halepotra clan and the Hindu Meghwals. The village comes under the Hodka Gram Panchayat.

Some of Gujarat's finest embroidery and leatherwork comes from the Banni area and is showcased in Hodka. In contrast to the stark landscape, or perhaps to compensate for it, the embroidery is in bright vibrant colours and extremely intricate in nature. Women embroider for themselves and for the market; it is a family tradition passed on from mother to daughter. Women from Muslim and the Meghwal Hindu communities are involved in embroidery but each distinctly representative of its culture.

The lifestyle (particularly of the Meghwal community) is intricately entwined in cattle and leather craft that is

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11. Brochure on Hodka, Kachchh brought out under the UNDP project. Compiled and written by Mansi Anand. Documentation support by Pachchham Setu.

essentially a male craft. Music is an inherent part of the culture of Banni; traditional folk songs and the playing of traditional musical instruments is an important part of the Banni lifestyle.

The genesis of Shaam-e-Sarhad at Hodka

In 2004, the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS), along with UNDP, shortlisted Hodka for the proposed project, selecting it for its location and inherent hospitality, and to use tourism as a medium or catalyst to strengthen people's perspectives on conservation of their ecological and natural resources; thus emerged the idea of establishing a community-managed tourism initiative with KMVS as its nodal agency. This was a four-cornered partnership between GoI-UNDP at one level and KMVS-District Collector at another. In essence, GOI supported the District Collector with funds for supporting infrastructure and UNDP supported KMVS with soft funds for capacity building. In turn, KMVS made this a collaborative initiative by involving other civil society organizations with relevant strengths. Both organizations believed that the idea could be implemented only if the local community was agreeable to it.

Box 2
Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghatan

> The Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) was established in 1989 with the primary objective of empowering rural women in the region. KMVS's mission was to achieve this through awareness raising and supporting local collectives. As KMVS grew, its mission broadened to include areas of ecological restoration, livelihood access and diversification, violence against

women, reproductive health and the strengthening of local governance through Gram Panchayats. From a single collective of rural women, KMVS has evolved into a network of seven grassroots level organizations across the Kachchh district. This network includes women pastoralists, farmers, artisans, fisher folk, wageworkers and musicians, elected women representatives, traditional birth attendants, and also single self-employed women.

Source: http://kmvs.org.in/

KMVS had no previous experience with tourism. However, there was a strong feeling that such an initiative could potentially help revive in the local community a sense of pride for their culture and environment. Hodka was chosen as the location of this experiment for a number of reasons. The grasslands and the livestock for which this area was famous were on the decline and was a cause for concern amongst the local community. More importantly, the people of Hodka had worked with KMVS and there was a sense of trust and openness to new ideas. Hodka (particularly the Meghwal settlement) had just been rehabilitated with support from KMVS after the 2002 earthquake.

When the initiative was proposed, there was a meeting with the Gram Panchayat. The original idea was to support the community-based homestays in Hodka. However, this idea was neither culturally nor socially acceptable. As per traditional norms, any guest visiting the village was given a room (*utak*) outside the household. There were intense discussions among the stakeholders to see if something on these lines could be worked out. There was considerable scepticism and it was suggested that initially tented accommodation on a small scale should be tried. After the

earthquake of 2001, Hodka had received a lot of tents that were lying unused; these would be used for the initial phase. An old dried-up pond that belonged to the Gram Panchayat (representing all the 13 villages of the area) was selected as the site for this initiative. This would be a trial run since the community was not completely convinced that this would work. The resort was named Shaam-e-Sarhad – 'Evening at the Border'. The responsibility of the participatory design and overall construction was given to Hunnarshala, with the objective of reviving and upgrading the traditional building material and artisanship of the region.

Box 3

Hunnarshala

> Hunnarshala came into being as a result of associations established after the earthquake of 2001 to help with reconstruction of habitats. The post-earthquake reconstruction saw the emergence of some remarkable knowledge of traditional building systems. Hunnarshala was an attempt to capture this knowledge and experience not only for the reconstruction process but also for long term sustainable development of the area. Registered as an organization in 2003, three themes are core to Hunnarshala's work:
>
> i)   how people are empowered to shape their own habitats
>
> ii)   how habitat solutions can become more environment friendly, sustainable and disaster safe
>
> iii) how local artisanal knowledge and skills can deliver high quality products.

Source: http://www.hunnarshala.org/

The initial concept, still in the testing phase, was to create a place for people to stay and serve them local cuisine. While tents were agreed upon, there was the issue of how they should be furnished. Hunnarshala discussed the concept of using earth and mud with the Panchayat members. There were artisans in the village who were comfortable building with mud. So the first step was making mud beds. The reaction of the local community was interesting. While they were comfortable with the idea of beds in mud, the concept of mud toilets was alien to them since they did not have toilets at all. The compromise solution was quite remarkable. Toilets were designed tastefully and were almost as luxurious as at any high-end resort, but built in mud. This took tourists by surprise as well– they did not expect luxury toilets in tents!

As Shaam-e-Sarhad opened for tourists and became popular, the general feedback was to make available more permanent structures for accommodation. While considering the demand, the villagers were very clear that these structures should blend with the landscape; from this emerged the idea of permanent construction in mud rather than in concrete. This was appropriate in a region known for its unique home dwellings, the *bungas*. Because of the way they are constructed, b*ungas* were some of the few structures that withstood the 2001 earthquake. There is a sense of pride within the community for having this traditional knowledge and using it to combat natural disasters. *Bungas* were also ideal structures to combat the extreme temperatures in the desert without the use of air-conditioning. The community was also cognizant of the fact that tourists would actually come all the way specially to see these unique dwellings. There was consensus within the community that these were the structures they wanted to build for the permanent construction at the resort :

- They were practical to construct and would give tourists a feel of how it would be to live in one

- The structures should be easy to maintain and repair by the local community without outside assistance.

- The mud structures have to be redone every year. This community activity gives people a chance to showcase new art while redoing the walls; each mud wall is adorned with traditional paintings and artwork.

- It is an encouragement to the artisans to use their skills. Traditionally called '*lipan*', the mud plastering is done by a group of women led by Ramaben who are called upon every year to carry out this task.

- The display of art on the walls of Shaam-e-Sarhad encouraged the local people to be more innovative and many wanted to try some of the new art forms used here in their own *bungas* (EQUATIONS 2008).

Once the accommodation was in place, other elements for a successful tourism initiative were identified – building local capacity in the hospitality sector, training in management, finance, sanitation and hygiene, etc.

Capacity building: KMVS understood that for such a venture to take off and to be sustainable there was need for considerable capacity building, particularly in hospitality, sanitation and hygiene. There was a conscious effort to find an enterprise that operated in a similar environment; they contacted Desert Coursers, a tourism establishment in the Little Rann of Kutch that had been operating successfully in the area since 1984. After discussions with Dhanraj Mallik, the owner, who was familiar with KMVS's work in Kachchh, it was decided that his manager would train the local youth for one season. However, he stayed on at Shaam-e-Sarhad until he felt that the initiative was ready to start operating. His salary for that duration was paid out of the project funds.

In the local dialect '*Bhumiyas*' are people well acquainted with their '*bhumi*' or land. Youth were trained as interpreters and guides to accompany tourists and were appropriately called '*Bhumiyas*'. Training is an ongoing activity and continues with each new season. While this was a collaborative process between organizations, initially the District Collector deputed one person to work with the team.

Management: The Gram Panchayat set up a Tourism Committee directly responsible for the management of the resort. The committee has representatives from all the 13 villages of the Panchayat and holds regular meetings to discuss pending issues. Shaam-e-Sarhad opened for tourists in 2005 with considerable hand holding through 2006 and 2007, both by KMVS and UNDP.

Until 2012, there was a coordinator from KMVS available for support and meetings were held at the end of every season for feedback, evaluation and adaptive management. In the early years, the community owned the initiative with help in the management. Since 2012, it has owned and managed Shaam-e-Sarhad on its own. The resort has 14 full time employees who are local, including the manager. The resort season is from October to March but employees continue to receive 50 percent of their salary even during the off-season. Local youth employed at the resort go back to their traditional occupation as Maldharis during this time.

The first amount earned as profit was ₹ 75,000; it was used to invite Sharafat Khan, the renowned musician from Rajasthan to sing at the resort. The suggestion to call him came from KMVS and was agreed upon by the community. The income from Shaam-e-Sarhad has grown from ₹ 100,000 in 2005-2006 to ₹ 45,00,000 in the year 2012-2013. The Tourism Committee decides how this

income should be spent, much of which goes towards maintenance of the resort and salaries. Money is also spent towards need-based development within the villages. For example, if one of the villages needs pipes for water supply, funds from tourism are utilized for the purpose. Funds are also directed towards the cattle fair (*Pashu Mela*) held in the region. From the income earned in 2015, ₹1,00,000 was set aside for the construction of three new rooms in the resort. In 2014, ₹ 5,00,000 was given for a range of development related work in two villages. The labour employed for regular maintenance is only from villages under the Hodka panchayat. This is additional income for the community members, other than those who are employed at the resort.

Shaam-e-Sarhad: Showcasing Banni

Shaam-e-Sarhad has been successfully running for over ten years. At present, there are six two-person tents, four *bungas* and two family rooms, all with attached toilets. Three meals are part of the tariff. All meals feature traditional local cuisine. Banni is the land of milk and milk products and meals are replete with milk derivatives, including local clarified butter (*ghee*) and buttermilk. A specialty is the pearl millet roti (*bajara no rotlo*) with *ghee* and *gud* (jaggery / molasses). Evenings at the resort resound with live traditional music performances by local musicians that perform under the open sky.

Box 4

How Bajro got its name

> Legend has it that pearl millet or *bajro* came to Kachchh
> around the 10th century but was used only as horse
> feed. The Sama Jadejas ruled at that time and their
> most revered monarch was Lakho Fulani. Lakho felt
> that pearl millet could be used for human consumption
> as well. He ordered *rotis* to be made and these were
> fed to an old ailing woman. The woman ate the *roti* and
> not only did she relish the taste, but it also made her
> feel better. Pearl millet was thus given the name *bajro*
> meaning '*Ba*' as in old women and '*jaro*' to digest.

Source: Brochure on Hodka, Kachchh brought out under the UNDP project.
Compiled and written by Mansi Anand. Documentation support by
Pachchham Setu

Shaam-e-Sarhad is ideally located as a tourist destination.
Villages surrounding the resort are repositories of different
arts and crafts including beautiful embroidery, leather, clay,
metal, mud and woodwork. The resort organizes tours to
these villages to see people work on their crafts and also to
get a feel of their lives and livelihoods. A unique structure
to capture and manage rainwater can also be seen here.
Called '*virdas*' in the local language, these are shallow pits
dug by the Maldharis after studying the flow of water during
the monsoon. These depressions are located just above the
salty groundwater but are dug in such a way that the saline
water does not contaminate the sweet water. A mere ten
inches of rain is adequate to provide sweet water from these
structures for two to three months after which the water gets
saline with the steady rise of ground water.

For the naturalist, this area presents unique biodiversity. The 'white desert' is a sight worth seeing as is *Karo Dungar* (Black Hill), the highest point in the region. The resort facilitates visits to Chhari Dhand, the largest seasonal wetland in the area with an area of about 10 sq km. It supports a rich bird life and over 50,000 birds of 55 different species have been recorded from this wetland.

Outreach: Shaam-e-Sarhad is being marketed through a dedicated website (http://www.hodka.in/) designed with the help of KMVS. There is also a tie-up with tour operators in Ahmedabad to further help with the marketing. Shaam-e-Sarhad is now well known through word of mouth. There are several tour operators (many from overseas) who have been bringing groups for several years now. There is also a dedicated person in Bhuj who manages reservations for the resort.

Shaam-e-Sarhad is the winner of the 2010 Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Gold Award for Best Rural Tourism Project.

Tourists visiting Kachchh, particularly Shaam-e-Sarhad, are interested in the culture of the region. The resort does not have a fixed itinerary; it is designed as per the needs of the guests. Tourists normally stay for two nights. They arrive towards the evening in time for dinner accompanied by local music. They visit the white desert in the morning followed by a visit to the nearby villages. Guests love the local warmth and hospitality along with the fact that the local community maintains a balance with nature. According to a guest's entry in the visitors' book, 'If barren land can be so beautiful, it is up to us to maintain it. People here live with nature and are careful enough to preserve it.'

Impact of the Hodka Initiative: The Larger Context

The establishment of Shaam-e-Sarhad and its management has given the local community confidence to own and manage a tourism initiative. The success of this tourism enterprise motivated the people to engage with other livelihood related activities as well. One of these was the formation of the *Banni Pashu Uchherak Maldhari Sangathan* (BPUMS) or the Banni Breeders' Association formed in 2008 with support from Sahjeevan, an NGO that had been working in this region since 1991, earlier as the Janvikas Ecology Cell. Sahjeevan works closely with KMVS. The primary objective of the Association was the conservation and improvement of the Banni breed. This includes the conservation of the grasslands where the animals graze and the establishment of an organized milk market for the region. The wider objective was to ensure the availability of water and animal feed, support for systematic animal marketing under the overarching principle of the preservation of local culture and tradition. The Breeders' Association also initiated the process of characterization and developing the breed descriptor for the Banni breed with help from the local NGOs and the Agricultural University. These efforts resulted in the recognition of the Banni Buffalo as India's 11th breed. A key activity of the BPUMS is the annual cattle fair or the *Banni Pashu Mela* held primarily to provide a system for animal trade at the local level. The *mela* also provides a platform for all discussions relevant to the Banni region. The Breeders' Association is now involved in fostering a partnership with the Government to support the conservation and community management of the Banni grasslands.

In 2005, the year that Shaam-e-Sarhad opened, Shri Narendra Modi (then Chief Minister of Gujarat and now Prime Minister) visited Kachchh. He felt that this region

could be promoted in a big way for tourism. This was the origin of the Rann Utsav or the Desert Festival held in the White Desert of Kachchh every year from December to March. A tented city of over 500 tents is set up especially for the Rann Utsav. While Shaam-e-Sarhad has set the trend to showcase the culture and traditions of the Kachchh region, the Desert Festival has taken it to a larger scale. The campaign for promotion of tourism in Gujarat with Amitabh Bachchan as the brand ambassador and his statement, 'Kachchh nahin dekha, toh kuchchh nahin dekha', has added to the visibility and popularity of this region.

The Rann Utsav now extends to five months and has brought a large number of tourists; subsequently a number of resorts have also come up. Shaam-e-Sarhad has been a pioneer in using local architecture with the building of *bungas.* Though this continues, the *bungas* in other resorts are built of concrete. In this expanding concrete jungle of *bungas*, Shaam-e-Sarhad still holds its own – it has not yielded to the pressures of air conditioning and satellite television and still serves local vegetarian cuisine.

More significantly, Hodka has inspired 'community ownership' or Banni would have been taken over by the hospitality industry with the local communities working only as staff. The region now has six to seven community resorts, four run by the Meghwals.

Challenges

Setting standards: As of 2012, Shaam-e-Sarhad is completely community-owned and managed. However, the scale of operation is still fairly small owing to limited accommodation and thus a limited number of tourists. Interestingly, this has made the initiative sustainable with relatively less use of water and electricity. The success of

this initiative can be gauged by the fact that it is completely booked for the season many months in advance. However, the region is now opening up for tourism in a big way and with the Rann Utsav, the number of tourists visiting the area has grown exponentially. This is going to put a demand on Shaam-e-Sarhad for more accommodation. Two family rooms have already been added and there is now discussion about more *bungas* replacing the existing tents. In case of expansion in scale and activity, there is always the fear of compromising on standards unless there is a strict code of conduct. For example, in times to come it is possible that the completely mud architecture could get replaced by concrete.

The success of Shaam-e-Sarhad has also spurred many other similar initiatives in the area. Unfortunately, not all follow the same parameters that Shaam-e-Sarhad has set. A classic example of what could happen is the resort of Dhordo, adjacent to the tent city of the Rann Utsav. Inspired by traditional architecture, this resort has rooms styled as *bungas* but equipped with air-conditioning and flat screen television sets in each room. A total of fifty rooms are now available in Hodka that may not have the same standards. It may be hard to ensure standards in the entire Kachchh area, but it is possible for Shaam-e-Sarhad to take the lead and set standards for tourism in Hodka. This is going to be a challenge, but if worked upon now, this will be indeed a first for the country.

Women's involvement: One of the key objectives of UNDP's ETP was the empowerment of women. This aspect has been a challenge in the Banni, particularly given the social and cultural context. KMVS had been working in regions further to the north (Pachcham). One of the reasons KMVS had earlier suggested other villages to UNDP for initiation of this concept was because it was aware of the huge challenges

in involving women in this region, and without this, KMVS was hesitant to get involved. So it was actually entirely in the spirit of experimentation that KMVS began this project in Hodka. Women were in fact part of the Tourism Management Committee in the initial stage but were gradually phased out. Initially, food at the resort also came from household kitchens. This changed once the resort got its own kitchen where men do the cooking. A group of women (Ramaben and her team) come every year to re-do the mud plastering at the resort, a highly specialized skill that only they possess. Also, all the exquisite embroidery that is sold at the resort and in the surrounding villages is done by the Hindu Meghwal women but sold by men. The income from products, however, goes back to the women who were responsible for the embroidery. According to Khetaben of village Hodka, 'We love doing this embroidery. This is part of our culture. We also like to know that our embroidery is being appreciated by so many outsiders. We save the money to buy jewellery for our daughters.' Women thus remain an invisible component of this initiative. This is not from lack of trying but because social norms are strong and rigid.

Key factors for success/core values

Shaam-e-Sarhad stands out as a successful initiative even among the 36 projects that were supported through the UNDP/MoT projects. This is despite the fact that tourism was a new concept introduced to the local community. This can be attributed to several factors, the primary one being the presence of effective local NGOs (KMVS and Sahjeevan) that had been working in the area for several years and the trust placed in them by the local communities. This was a crucial element. It is because of the rapport that these organizations have had with the community that they were able to introduce the idea of tourism. ETP projects were

routed through the District Collector, who was extremely supportive and dynamic. He was able to support the project here despite the fact that the community had rejected the idea of homestays and opted to have a resort away from the villages. It is evident that the Collector understood the local context and was able to defend this decision. The success of this initiative must also be attributed to the local community that was open to experiment and take this forward. However, this would not have been possible without the many discussions that both the NGOs as well as the District Collector had with the community. Importantly, there was a feeling of inclusion since community views were heard and also implemented.

The gradual success of the project reiterated in people the pride in their local culture and traditions. What was commendable was the fact that at no point, despite contrary feedback, did the Tourism Committee and the community at large feel the need to dilute or change anything in what was being served or practiced at the resort. For example, the food served continues to be local and vegetarian and tourists seem to relish it without feeling the need for anything different. It should be noted that the vegetables, cereals, etc., are sourced from Bhuj since there is not much agriculture in the vicinity of the resort.

It is unreasonable to expect any community-based tourism endeavour to succeed without adequate training and capacity building. This is one aspect that was addressed at the very beginning and played an important part in setting the standard. However, such training needs to be an ongoing activity and refreshed at the beginning of every new season.

For any tourism initiative it is crucial that standards of cleanliness, sanitation and hygiene are maintained. It is creditable that Shaam-e-Sarhad has been able to do

this, thanks to the vigilance of the Tourism Management Committee and the training imparted to the employees.

Equally important for any community-based tourism initiative is financial support. As part of the ETP, Shaam-e-Sarhad received substantial finances. ₹ 20,00,000 was allocated for each of the 36 sites (EQUATIONS 2008). How these finances are managed and expenditure made accountable is crucial and the Tourism Management Committee is responsible for this aspect. It also determines how the income accrued should be spent after paying salaries and maintenance of the infrastructure.

It is clear that the community's vision for Hodka has gone beyond just tourism. The success of tourism at Hodka has empowered the community and urged them to use the same cohesiveness in a larger context of livelihoods and natural resource management – thus the emergence of the Animal Breeders' Association and the fight to maintain the Banni area as it is. Extraneous factors such as the aggressive marketing of Kachchh as a tourism destination and the Rann Utsav have also helped bring Hodka into the limelight as a rural tourism destination.

Towards Radical Ecological Democracy

Traditionally, tourism has been predominantly associated with places of historic or cultural interest or of natural beauty. The attempt of the ETP was to consciously move away from the traditional tourism model to an experiential one. It attempted to highlight the fact that there was more to tourism than five star hotels. The international traveller now wants to experience and give back to the destination more than she takes from it. In India, what better way than to focus on rural India that has much to offer in terms of art, culture and heritage? This was the idea that the ETP

took forward. However, in India, this is still a relatively new concept so adequate infrastructure and capacities are needed if rural tourism has to be promoted in its true form. The ETP was also a major paradigm shift from the kind of tourism projects generally supported by the Indian government's Ministry of Tourism. MoT's focus in the past has been on support to infrastructure in the form of building hotels and resorts. The overall framework of the ETP project that focused on processes rather than on products, and that placed communities at the helm of management and decision-making in tourism, is in itself a digression from the norm (EQUATIONS 2008). The ETP further links tourism to development. Shaam-e-Sarhad has very appropriately shown how community-based tourism can empower people to take further the agenda of conservation and livelihoods.

The dominant model of tourism in the country is one where outsiders (be it small entrepreneurs or large hotel chains) build, own and manage enterprises. Local communities are rarely made part of these initiatives or benefit from them. The Shaam-e-Sarhad model is unique in many ways, primarily because it is community-owned and managed. There are examples in the country where tourism is community-based, but the enterprise may not necessarily be owned by the community, only managed by them. What has made a difference in Hodka is the fact that communities think of Shaam-e-Sarhad as its own. It is this ownership that has enabled the community to plan for a wider context and be able to direct funds from tourism in supporting the unique grasslands that are home to them.

It must however be emphasized that Shaam-e-Sarhad is a small enterprise, promoting niche tourism as opposed to mass tourism that focuses on the heritage of the Banni area. It will appeal to the tourist who wants to have a first-hand

experience of rural life. Its success can be partially attributed to the fact that it is small in scale and operation and can thus operate at the level of each individual tourist. If this is scaled up to cater to mass tourism, there is the risk that it will lose its exclusivity and unique selling point.

Shaam-e-Sarhad could be considered a 'high end' resort. The tariff is ₹ 5,200/- for two persons inclusive of all meals for the *bungas* and ₹ 3,200/- for two persons and all meals included for the tented accommodation. This is creditable because over the years the community has been able to maintain the standards and attract tourists. Rural tourism does primarily attract more foreign tourists wanting to experience 'first hand' rural India. However, one bad experience can result in the loss of credibility for the initiative. Many tourists today seek to try community-based tourism destinations and most of them access places through 'word of mouth'. To this end, Shaam-e-Sarhad seems to have established its credibility, which is further evident from the fact that many of the same foreign tour operators bring new groups of tourists here every year. Several foreign tourists feel that visiting Shaam-e-Sarhad has given them a flavour of rural India and exposed them to some of the region's art and culture.

In terms of being considered an alternative, the project has helped bring social wellbeing through the promotion and sale of handicrafts and income from the resort itself, but the question remains as to how much transformation a project such as this can really bring to deep-rooted social inequities. While the youth in this case have found a new livelihood opportunity, women continue to remain invisible though they earn from the sale of the embroidery that they exclusively create; this is because the larger social context does not allow them more visibility.

It is crucial to point out that the project has brought to the community a sense of ownership and pride in something they consider their 'own'. They are indeed proud to be able to make decisions as to how the income from tourism should be spent and also in the larger context make decisions on how to manage the local ecosystem. Indirectly, the project has also helped address the issue of conserving the Banni grasslands as also the indigenous cattle breeds, thus helping to bring ecological stability in the region.

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Kuthumbakkam: Re-embedding Economy in Society

Ashish Kothari

Samathapuram integrated caste housing, Kuthambakkam

Elango R. with Trust employees, Kuthambakkam

Grain processing units, Kuthambakkam

Manufacturing unit, Kuthambakkam

8
Kuthumbakkam: Re-embedding Economy in Society

Adam Čajka

It takes an hour by bus from the Broadway–Chennai main bus station to Kuthumbakkam, a village located on the outskirts of the capital of Tamil Nadu. The Kuthumbakkam panchayat comprises of seven hamlets. Even though these are located quite close to each other, they are characterized by different conditions. Around the hamlets of the north western part, agriculture is still practised on rain fed lands; however, from the hamlets of the south eastern part one can observe the construction of high-rise buildings and other signs of proximity to the rapidly encroaching Chennai city.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Kuthumbakkam did not have roads or infrastructure, livelihoods were insecure and cases of domestic violence against women and children were reported. The area was a major regional hub of illicit arrack brewing and the black market.

It was in such a scenario that Elango Rangaswamy quit his city-based job and returned to his village. In 1996, he decided to contest the panchayat election as an independent candidate. Elango won and as the sarpanch, he came up

with an ambitious vision for village development. He introduced grassroots level planning, tried to mobilize the local people and create emergent responses to the problems of the village. His initial aspirations were to address illicit liquor production, violence against women and caste discrimination; the larger vision was to provide decent housing for all, form more self-help groups, create employment through panchayat activities, create livelihoods based on local resources, and build an economy on the principle of abundance instead of scarcity.

Being an engineer, Elango started working on energy saving solutions for both the public space and households. A project called the Panchayat Academy was started in order to spread good practices and to educate and build capacity in panchayat leaders in Tamil Nadu. Though Elango was the only initiator, the Kuthumbakkam experience is based on values of dialogue and consensus building.

Methodology

This report is based mainly on a four-day visit to Kuthumbakkam between August 25th and 28th, 2014. In order to accommodate as much information as possible, the report also draws upon two earlier visits - on 24th January and 5th March 2013 – and existing material on Kuthumbakkam (Rangachari, 2009; Subramanian, 2013). An additional visit was made between January 18th and 20th, 2017 to update some of the data as well as to speak a little more in detail with the women who were employed at the small scale units. An effort was also made to have a more focussed conversation with Elango on his ideological journey on the follow-up visit.

During our stay, we had a chance to visit the Kuthumbakkam hamlets including the integrated housing project

Samathuvapuram. We saw several manufacturing units and talked to people working there and visited a few neighbouring villages influenced by the model of development in Kuthumbakkam. We interviewed workers, residents, and people involved in local politics.

The aim of this case study is to carry out an analysis of various activities and development projects in Kuthumbakkam which were initiated by Elango Rangaswamy. For this analysis we have used the alternatives framework (Box 1) developed by Kalpavriksh. Our approach is also inspired by the concept of Radical Ecological Democracy[1] (RED). In order to understand the larger picture of the initiative, we also use the diverse economies framework of J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006).

Elango's Journey

Elango Rangaswamy was born and grew up in Kuthumbakkam. His advanced studies took him to Chennai where he studied at the Institute of Chemical Technology (ICT). After completing his graduation he was employed by Oil India as drilling Executive Engineer and continued to visit his village during the weekends. The people in his village respected him for his achievements and he too felt a strong connection with them and the urge to improve living conditions in his native village. In 1994, when he was transferred to Assam, he decided to quit his job and return to

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1.   RED is an evolving framework of governance in which each person and community has access to decision-making forums of relevance to them, and in which the decisions taken are infused with ecological and cultural sensitivity, and socio-economic equity. The RED focuses on human wellbeing which can be achieved without endangering the earth and ourselves, and without leaving behind half or more of humanity. For more information see http://radicalecologicaldemocracy.wordpress.com.

Kuthumbakkam. His father gave him an acre of land and for his livelihood Elango conducted research for industries.

As a young boy in a village with a large dalit community, he was very affected by the violence he witnessed against women and the discrimination against dalits. He too was a dalit, but in some ways a 'privileged' dalit as he belonged to the Pallar caste - considered to be higher up in the dalit hierarchy, mainly because they do not eat beef; moreover, his father, a Vaishnavite, was educated and a school teacher. When Elango left his village for higher education, he was attracted to movements and initiatives that addressed issues that were of immediate concern to him - domestic violence, caste discrimination and poverty. In his initial years he was deeply inspired by dalit and leftist movements. He felt a need to change the social situation and to bring the development which was for him represented by big roads and a gamut of industries.

Elango was aware of the problems facing his village and was eager to return. 'I was keen on finding solutions for rural problems like wife-beating, illicit arrack distillation, drunken men disrupting the village, exploitation by politicians, poverty, caste-based differences, enmity among village communities, and general backwardness in the village.' He was also worried about the growing migration towards cities (which he was a part of) and which had a negative impact on village life. He realized that there was a need to develop a viable local economy: improving the quality of life and providing meaningful employment would help address the needs of many people at the local level.

Adigalar of Kundrakudi[2] village was of particular importance for Elango. So he went to Kundrakudi village in Madurai

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2. Bangaru Adigalar is a South Indian spiritual guru. Elango calls him a *leftist saint.*

district, Tamil Nadu to understand the processes in what was being hailed as a model village and was deeply inspired by Adigalar who, according to Elango, was a leftist saint. In Kundrakudi, Elango witnessed and learnt how dialogue could bring together different sets of people to resolve the problems of poverty and unemployment. He realized (and we also notice this in his practice as the Panchayat president later) that he valued dialogue, participation of the local poor in their development process and also the need for developing local skills and materials for poverty elimination. The actual amendment to the constitution, popularly known as the 73rd Amendment came up in 1992 under the Narsimha Rao government. Elango saw in this a huge opportunity given by the system to emulate participatory development, which Adigalar had achieved in Kundrakudi through an informal institution.

Elango also studied the Kerala Sashtra Sahithya Parishad experiments[3] in Kerala, especially the People's Planning Campaign which had gained ground after the 73rd Amendment. The transformation of the village, as described in subsequent sections, was a slow struggle, but the demonstrative effect of community work attracted more and more people as well as media attention. This helped overcome some initial resistance from the district administration also. However, none of this would have been possible without a dialogue between the dalits and the non-dalits whom he took along with him in the journey of development through the various strategies. The process was

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3. KSSP (*Kerala Science Literature Movement*), founded in 1962, is a voluntary organisation which aspires to popularise science, oppose the abuse of environment and propose and help with implementation of alternative modes for development, with emphasis on equity and sustainability. More can be found at http://www.kssp.in/ or through the Centre for Development Studies: http://www.cds.ac.in/

not easy and it took a while to convince the non-dalits that development is only possible by first uplifting the dalits in the village.

Elango is often considered a Gandhian. However, he disagrees with this categorization and only states that he has 'found many of Gandhi's ideas, especially in *My Experiments with Truth*, to be a source of strength and inspiration for my work.' He thinks that many of the problems which the village faces can be solved by applying Gandhi's way of thinking. However, he has also drawn inspiration from a number of other thinkers and political theories. For example, J.C. Kumarappa's[4] work influenced the economic model of village networking that he supports. Marxism was among the first political theories that influenced him.

Elango's journey suggests a process of learning across ideologies and practices. A wall on his house is a perfect reflection of a diversity of influences on his political, social, and philosophical ideologies, suggesting his post-ideology position. He has Vivekananda and Ramkrishna Paramhansa on his wall sitting comfortably with Marx, Periyar, Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi and Rajiv and Indira Gandhi, as well as and of course Nammalvar, the organic farming guru in Tamil Nadu.

Elango as panchayat president (1996-2006)

When elections came in 1996, Elango was hesitant because he, as an educated person, 'didn't want to beg for votes'; nonetheless, he was able to raise significant support thanks to his active involvement in village affairs. He also benefited from

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4.   J. C. Kumarappa (1892 – 1960) was an Indian economist and a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi. A pioneer of rural economic development theories, Kumarappa is credited for developing economic theories based on Gandhism – a school of economic thought he coined 'Gandhian economics' (Govindhu, Malghan 2005).

the reservation system for dalits (the pattern of shifting of the village leadership between the dalits and non-dalits), won the elections and became sarpanch for two consecutive terms.

As the sarpanch, Elango decided to experiment with the newly formed local self-government system which came into practice after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1996. His first term (1996-2001) as a sarpanch was marked by his effort to address issues that concerned him the most - alcoholism leading to violence against women, caste discrimination and poverty and unemployment. In his second term (2001-2006) when Elango was elected unopposed, he completed the unfinished tasks, spent a lot of time in developing the Panchayat Academy and placing the village as a model village on the map of India.

Addressing violence against women and banning illicit alcohol

Elango was sure that he wanted to weed out alcoholism and illicit brewing, which according to him was the main reason for violence against women. He believed that violence against women and caste discrimination did not provide an atmosphere conducive to innovations. As sarpanch, he decided to change the status quo and put an end to the alcohol black market. Illicit arrack brewers perceived Elango as someone who was out to ruin their business and threatened to kill him. He overcame this difficult period with the people's support. He also felt more secure thanks to the presence of his parents and the good position of his father who was a government employee.

Liquor dens were banned but this too was done through a process of dialogue with the poor people who were running the shops and brewing the liquor. If the main source of income of this section was to be taken away

then an alternative had to be provided. Elango ensured that employment opportunities were provided to those households that had been engaged in the liquor business. With infrastructure development, a lot of employment opportunities came up in the village and Elango ensured that this stayed in the village, particularly for the rehabilitation of those involved in the liquor business.

Addressing unemployment

After addressing alcohol addiction and related social problems, unemployment became the most pressing matter. This was the time when small production units were introduced. For instance, village women became gainfully employed in putting together spare parts for larger manufacturers or in producing building tiles. The main objective of the village was to develop industries in order to employ people. One more important initial step was the improvement of the infrastructure and construction of concrete roads for the entire panchayat. Elango and others realized that the ideal construction material was available from the waste resulting from the local industry. For instance, instead of the prescribed rubble, waste material (e.g. granite, gravel, rock) was used to make the storm drains. The policy helped the village save a few lakhs of rupees.

From the late 1990s, Elango travelled across the country and studied several experiments in rural development. It reinforced his conviction that community-based economic activity would be the backbone of changes in Kuthumbakkam. The Trust for Village Self-Governance was founded in 2001 and continues to be an active platform for interactions even after Elango stopped being a village leader in 2006. The Trust has been the main platform for dialogue and learning. Various economic activities were explored - units that manufacture or process pulses, dairy, groundnut,

coconut, jute, leather, handloom textiles, bakery goods, low-cost building materials, kerosene burners, hammocks and a variety of soaps.

Elango's projects enabled more households to get jobs in local activities. Out of 1,050 households in Kuthumbakkam, around 140 have at least one member in the manufacturing units. On average, the income per family rose to ₹ 20,000 - 25,000 per month (big jump from ₹ 3000 - 4000 in the late 1990s). Out of 150 persons directly employed in production, around 120 are dalits and 112 are women. According to Elango, more people became more confident and are able to get jobs in other local firms and activities.

The question of employment was always central to Elango's work and the panchayat used local labour whenever it was possible. Next was the challenge of providing dignified housing to the poor.

Innovative construction and housing: Addressing caste discrimination

Elango was very concerned about the treatment meted out to dalits and other so-called lower castes. However no solution was possible without a dialogue between the dalits and the non-dalits. Using various strategies, he took the non-dalits along with him on this journey of development; he convinced them that dalits would not be as 'rowdy' (a term used routinely to describe social nuisance) and violent as they were if there was no poverty and discrimination. The process was not easy and it took a while to convince the non-dalits that development was only possible by first uplifting the dalits in the village. This also meant that a substantial part of the panchayat fund would have to be invested in this process. His first focus was to improve housing and infrastructure such as water, drains and schools in the dalit colonies and in

banning illicit liquor. This was strategically a very important move and also one which risked his position as a president favouring a certain constituency.

In 1997-1998, deepening of water bodies and water de-silting was organized in Kutthumbakkam with financial contribution from the government. Storm water drains were also constructed. All of this supported the village capacity to harvest and store water during rains.

Searching for innovative solutions rather than follow top-down schemes became common practice in Kuthumbakkam; construction methods and housing schemes were no exception. Alternative construction methods and materials were used starting with the production of cement stabilized compressed mud blocks. The simple technology was not new, only rediscovered. New houses in Kuthumbakkam were built using compressed mud blocks, because the local soil was suitable for this use. In other places, stone may be more easily or cheaply available. The drains were built using regular bricks and mortar and also using hollowed-out tree trunks. Granite waste was utilized in rubble for masonry construction. Using these simple techniques, the village saved money as well as provided work to the local people. As Elango says, dignity starts with decent housing and a decent toilet. New houses were mostly provided with brick toilets. One of the current projects of the Trust is to design a simple prefabricated toilet which is very easy to install for a price of less than ₹ 12,500.

Elango is of the firm opinion that caste discrimination too will have to be addressed through a constant process of dialogue. The unique experiment on integrated housing is evidence to this belief. In 2000 a project of integrated housing or rather equality housing called Samathavupuram was started. It resulted in the founding of a new seventh

hamlet of Kuthumbakkam which was conceived as a mixed caste residential colony. Walls of the houses were to be shared by households belonging to different castes. The housing colony has dalits and non-dalits sharing walls and living together now for several years. The new houses were constructed using mud block technology and a variation of local materials. Around 160 families were employed for a year of construction. Several of them became experts in ferro-cement panels and joists, mud blocks or cost-effective windows.

There are 50 twin houses in the hamlet, each shared by lower and upper caste families (around 52 percent of the population of Kuthumbakkam are dalits). Elango personally contacted most of the 100 families who were given the houses. This personal involvement probably played a major role in the sustainability of the project. Now people from different castes live together, with even a few cases of inter-caste marriages. The facilities in Samathuvapuram include a community centre, playgrounds, a library, an anganwadi and a youth club. There is no temple in the hamlet because its presence might create divisive dynamics. Some disputes were recorded – for instance, one upper-caste family complained about their neighbours cooking non-vegetarian food. Elango visited both families and helped resolve the issue by moving the kitchen to another corner of the house. This case again shows that personal involvement was crucial. Today people live together and many of them shared several stories of intercaste marriages, sharing of food and supporting one another in different ways.

This housing model was subsequently adopted at many other places in Tamil Nadu under the so-called Samathuvapuram scheme of the state government but without much success. According to Elango, initiators sometimes placed random

families together without having sufficiently counselled them into what this new habitation might entail. After seeing the hamlet and talking to several inhabitants of Samathuvapuram we got the impression that the integrated housing idea was working well. The only regret they expressed was that the public space (community hall, youth centre) was not being fully used.

By 2005, 100 percent of families in the village had proper houses. In 2008 Elango was one of the finalists of the UN Habitat Award. As part of the UN Habitat Forum, he visited countries like Germany and Cuba to study housing practices there. In Cuba, he was amazed to learn about the transformation of Cuban economy and localisation of production after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990. After being cut off from imported oil from USSR, Cuba had to boost local agriculture and manufacturing; the island's limited resources had to be used in a sustainable manner. Meeting people who were involved in the agricultural restoration programme in Cuba gave him a lot of new insights into self-sufficiency and the idea of meeting people's needs locally without being part of the global capitalist system inspired him greatly.

Solar Energy Projects

An Indian village can be self-sufficient only when it is self-sufficient in terms of energy. Being an engineer, a great part of Elango's passion lies in designing and manufacturing. An example of this can be found in CFL-based energy lamps which are able to save more than two-thirds of electric power. The production of lamps took place within the village with only the bulbs outsourced. There are 320 such streetlights in Kuthambakkam, which resulted in savings of ₹ 15,000 per month on electricity.

Among the various devices in the Trust main office is a fan running on solar power with consumption capacity of 23 watts; even the most efficient electric fan in the market requires about 75 watts. Recently Elango designed a family package of electronic devices for households. The kit includes one solar panel, one fan, four bulbs and a recharger. The total cost is ₹ 22,000, and in 2014 there were already more than a thousand orders for these kits. Elango has several more ideas such as solar-powered rickshaw or spinning and weaving machines.

When talking about energy, Elango does not emphasize its environmental perspective (which is strongly present); rather, he emphasizes the rationality and enjoyment which an engineer has in saving resources, helping people and designing smart devices. According to the people from the Trust, 'If a village can be self-sufficient, a town can be self-sufficient as well. Moreover, if energy requirements are met on local levels, there will not be a need for nuclear power plants.'

The spread of renewable energy is just one example of how sustainability is incorporated in Kuthumbakkam experiments. These initiatives (e.g., family packages) also provide local employment under the Trust.

Panchayat Academy

Ever since 2003 when Elango felt the need to spread good practices, he has launched the Panchayat Academy, a project of regular meetings and trainings for people involved in community politics and economy. The Academy is supposed to be a storehouse of alternate approaches (see Box 2). One more important focus area was the awareness of the panchayat system itself. Elango said that he had benefited greatly from knowing the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, because he could quote from it when his authority was questioned.

As more panchayat leaders become aware of the laws and the authority they wield, change can start to happen. The Panchayat Academy is a tool mainly for spreading this knowledge. Today, there are around 150 panchayat presidents, 600 women SHGs and 140 youth who have been trained by the academy.

Elango finds the panchayat a good system for local decentralisation when it functions with principles and values. The principles which needed to be practiced are for instance open and regular dialogues, all dialogue based consensus decisions, transparency of financial and decision making processes, gender, class and caste equity.

Box 1

Subjects of the Panchayat Academy

1. Planning process of the Panchayat and practical knowledge of the Constitution

2. Planning purpose – simply how to make it

3. Social initiative – women, social justice

4. Sustainable technologies – building materials, efficient energy, construction

5. Village-level disaster management – floods, cholera

6. Government schemes and finances – what is available, how it should be used effectively

7. Gender – sensitivity to gender

8. Sanitation and water

9. Village economy as a whole

Source: Author's field visit notes based on conversation with Elango

Network growth economy: Future plan

In his second term (2001-2006), Elango introduced another idea for discussion to the panchayat – J.C. Kummarappa's idea of network economy. Kumarappa had spent his life working with Gandhi and trying to develop the idea of a network economy, or what he referred to as the *economy of permanence*. This idea is also very close to what Gibson-Graham call *community economies* which are environmentally attuned and socially oriented (Gibson-Graham, 2011: 1).

One of the greatest challenges for a village is to mobilize funds for development. Based on these ideas, in the 1990s, the panchayat commissioned a door-to-door survey, which found that Kuthambakkam consumed goods and services worth ₹ 60 lakhs every month. Surprisingly, it also showed that the village had the potential to produce goods worth ₹ 50 lakhs every month. This provided a macro picture of the village economy. Elango realized that clusters of villages could become economic powerhouses less dependent on the urban, national or global market. This approach was named as the Network Growth Economy. 'The Network Growth Economy concentrates on prosperity creation rather than poverty eradication. This initiative focuses on evolving self-dependent economy in the rural areas rather than worry about their place in the global market,' he says. This approach is based more on the principles of abundance rather than scarcity. Considered from the perspective of the diverse economies framework (Gibson-Graham, 2006), this economic activity is based on alternative capitalist or even non-capitalist enterprise using alternative market transactions (Gibson-Graham, 2006:71).

In theory, six villages can form a cluster and become a kind of a free-trade zone. The Trust for Village Self-Governance is working towards networking the member villages of the Panchayat Academy, e.g., Koduveli, Adigathur and Kondancheri. Regarding the conception of the village clusters, these villages will identify and produce a range of goods and services without any two of them necessarily producing exactly the same. They will consume their own produce, supplemented with the produce of other villages as needed. The money will rotate within the villages and it will not leave the region because it will be invested back within the cluster.

The network villages are supposed to share their produce and supplement each other's production and processing. The excess will be sent to the outside world - other village clusters or towns – for money, which in turn can buy products and services not available in the villages. A network may contain 15-20 villages with a population of 50,000-60,000.

Typical village consumption consists of 40 items including rice, dal, oil, baked foods, vegetables, cereals, soaps, detergents, clothes, etc. The production of these items is not meant for sale outside the region. The idea of Network Growth Economy counts on support of all villages in creating local market. Even if a series of experiments with networking and exchanging goods was made, Network Growth Economy is still on the level of theory and preparation (See Box 3).

Box 2

Network growth economy
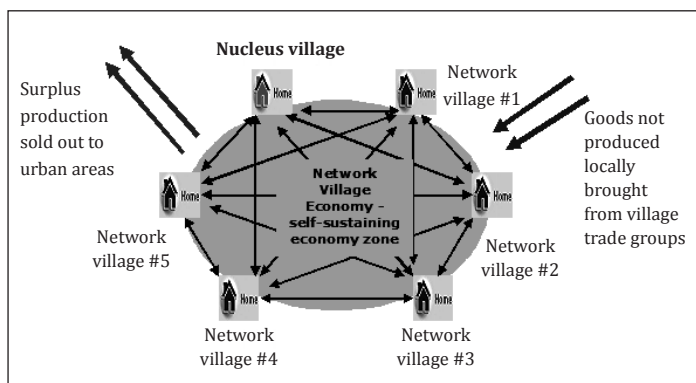
Source: Model village Presentation

The key role in the networking is played by the Panchayat Academy. Thanks to this platform, the neighbouring villages are inspired by Kuthumbakkam and vice versa. Koduveli, Adigathur and Kondancheri are some of the panchayats in the network. The positive impact is observable for instance in Adigathur village. K. Chidambanadan, the ex-sarpanch of the village and C. Sumathi, the current sarpanch (the two are married), were inspired especially by the model of housing. Currently they are working on sustainable construction of houses and have come up with their own prototype of toilets. Chidambanadan admits the Academy has had significant impact on him because it helped him to find practical solutions. His own passion is organic farming. We saw his natural paddy cultivation and together we visited Jagan, another farmer working on organic cultivation and local food links (Box 4).

One of the future plans of the Trust is to establish an investment fund for farmers. However, the future of farming in Kuthumbakkam itself is uncertain (see Section 4) and the village will need the support of other farmers in the region.

Box 3

Nalla Keera – Good Greens

'We are normal people who are trying to bring fresh organic vegetables to our customers and bring profit to farmers by reducing the gap between farmer and consumer' says Jagan, the initiator of the project Nalla Keera (http://nallakeerai.com) and a friend of Elango. His village, Pakkam, where he owns a few acres of land, is located around 20 km from Kuthumbakkam and 40 km north-west from Chennai.

A few years ago, when employed in the IT sector, Jagan thought about the dangerous impacts of pesticides and chemical agriculture, and he decided to preserve the virtues of high-quality vegetables to serve the Chennai city customers. His aim was also to encourage the local farming community to take up this organic cultivation not as an experiment but as a kind of lifelong experiential association. And so he started Farm to Customer Private Limited.

The motto (and a part of the logo whose design reminds one of the IT sector) of Jagan's company is 'Farm to Consumer'. They deliver the results of their production to Chennai every day. Their customers are often from the IT sector. Given the initiator's background, a part of the production was sold directly to IT companies. Nalla Keera also supplies around 60-70 shops selling organic food.

> Apart from selling vegetables, Jagan has been involved in mobilizing the farmers. Concerning the wider farmer community, Good Greens Farm used to host the regular Mutual Learning Sessions which helped to enrich organic methods of agriculture. These sessions used to be held by the legendary local farmer Late Namallwar before he passed away. Jagan identified a transition period of three years as the biggest obstacle for a farmer's transition to organic production. He does research in certain types of crops which are beneficial for quicker soil regeneration.

Source: Author's field visit notes

Learning and Challenges

Many of the constraints faced by Kuthumbakkam arise from the fact that it is geographically located very close to Chennai city and facing an immediate social, cultural, ecological and economic threat from the expanding urbanisation.

Resistance against becoming a waste dumping ground

Kuthumbakkam and other villages on the outskirts of growing Chennai will probably undergo a transition towards more and more urbanized areas. A large number of polluting industries have already set up their factories nearby (e.g. Coca-Cola Company, Marine Blue). Also, in 2007, more than 100 acres of grazing land was proposed for a solid waste management plant. Five Municipalities – Ambattur, Maduravoyal, Tiruverkadu, Poonamallee, Valasarvaakkam and Porur Town Panchayat – planned to dump their waste there. The Gram Sabha of Kuthumbakkam passed a resolution against the project.

In 2009, the villagers filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Madras High Court as the waste was supposed to be placed at the catchment area of Chembarambakkam Lake, the major water source of Chennai city. The court hearings went on for a year and the judgement directed the Panchayat and concerned municipalities to approach the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) and to substantiate their claims. The judgement also directed the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) to conduct a public hearing to register the views of the people affected. Panchayat approached the SEIAA and gave all the documents to substantiate its claim. In the public hearing held on September 21st, 2010, people registered their claims and also pointed out the shortcomings in the project's (Rapid) Environment Impact Assessment Report. But the officials turned a deaf ear and maintained their stand that no pollution will ever affect any natural resources at the site.

A seminar was subsequently held at IIT Madras in January, 2010, where eminent scientists and environmentalists condemned the proposed solid waste management plant as this is being planned at the catchment area of Chembarambakkam Lake. They expressed their concern that Chennai citizens would not get good drinking water if the proposed project was to come through. At present the decision on the proposal is still pending with TNPCB.

Impact on agriculture

The area is not able to contain the expansion of the capital. The government declared 70 percent of Kuthumbakkam as residential zone. One of the major challenges is agricultural sustainability. Because of the city's influence, traditional paddy or millet cultivation is decreasing. It means that agriculture might disappear in another decade, which is why Kuthumbakkam will have to rely on farmers from different villages of the cluster if localisation comes true.

Heavy dependence on Elango

Elango went through more than a year of heart problems during which time, he was unable to be always present in his village. This resulted in the closure of a few small enterprises (e.g. hammock producing unit) and computer classes for children. This is an indication of the high dependence of experiments on their initiator and also the fragility of the effort. In 2014, we found a team of people managing the campus, but in terms of welcoming visitors, keeping an eye on everyday production and decision-making, Elango still plays an undoubtedly crucial role. Since it seemed that the activities of the Trust and Panchayat Academy depended solely on Elango, the question of succession becomes important.

After 2006, Elango has played an important role as the leader of the Trust, which remains a centre of manufacturing and other experiments. It became an advisory body and it has always been in active relation with the panchayat.

Urbanisation and industrialisation impacting local cohesiveness and future economic model

Some villagers are employed by external units (Coca-Cola) and this may reduce the unity of the village in pursuing an alternative pathway (towards the Network Growth Economy). Hence creating fundamental alternatives in the face of powerful corporate forces seems to be very difficult. There is also the challenge of people's consumerism which took up much of the extra earnings resulting from manufacturing units.

The products made in Kuthumbakkam units largely go outside and are produced for the mainstream industrial units. So in a way this model is a small informal unit which has been outsourced by the larger industrial unit. Thus

many of the issues related to occupational security, pensions, other social security benefits, appropriate salaries, etc. are not addressed effectively. The economic model and its institutional base too need to be discussed in this light. All these units function as activities under the Trust and therefore cannot be only profit making activities. Elango and his team have been pondering this issue and are of the opinion that registration, either as a cooperative or as a company, might be essential to find a way out of this crisis.

Analysis

The Kuthumbakkam story begins with identifying the main problems of the village. Goals achieved are stopping the alcohol market, addressing violence and supporting social cohesiveness across gender and caste. The unique example is a Samathavupuram housing scheme. The crucial tool of people's participation in politics has been the panchayat. The belief in regular dialogue has influenced many aspects of life in the village, such as:

- Informed decision making
- Integrated housing
- Panchayat Academy
- Transparent functioning of the Trust
- Process of local planning
- Resistance against the garbage dump

In view of the four 'alternative' criteria (Box 1), the model has been especially successful in strengthening of economic democracy. The localization of production has been a key principle in Kuthumbakkam and larger trade and exchange are built on it as well as giving the local community control over the means of production and distribution.

The initial interventions to improve the local economy were not necessarily guided by environmental concerns or by concerns related to ownership of the production process or the nature of production. Thus he did not necessarily take on the issue of organic or low external input agriculture, or providing alternatives to fossil fuel based energy for production process or to producing for an urban consumer or for a macro enterprise. However, increasingly he started initiatives that not only created local employment for people but also, in small ways, supported local economies along with giving due consideration to the environment. Though ecological sustainability and sensitivity towards nature were not part of the initiatives at the beginning (mid-1990s), this aspect has gradually seeped in, e.g. in the move towards energy saving solutions based on solar power, the use of alternative or recycled construction material, the general focus on localization (reducing the 'product miles' of things coming into the region), and in neighbouring villages (though not Kuthambakkam itself), the spread of organic farming.

Conclusion

Despite serious threats to its continued existence as a village, Kuthumbakkam, already widely considered a 'model village', can be seen as an experimental laboratory, an example of viable local economy.

Elango says, "Our national rulers plan development from top to bottom. But it has to be vice versa, in the way Kumarappa and Gandhi dreamt about." When you ask him about his vision of the future world, he gives you this answer: 'The new world order would become possible with independent and strong self-sustaining village-based local economies. The bargaining power of the villages will be rejuvenated by strong village-centred economies and ecologically sound sustainable growth would be the order of the future.'

What could be the larger benefits of the Kuthumbakkam experiment? The panchayat succeeded in addressing violence, caste oppression and in completely stopping urban migration. Even some women who married out, ended up coming back with their families. There is the hope that it could have a snowball effect on surrounding villages. The experiments with solar power encourage saving in energy and energy resources, and local control over this is important part of human life. Through the Academy, knowledge and experiences are shared, which may lead to higher confidence among village communities. An empowered and confident village people might start to assert themselves in the local and national affairs. The people governing themselves could truly bring democracy to the grass-roots and take a significant step towards reviving the village economy.

Elango attributes this success to the power of the panchayats. He is a firm believer in the panchayat system and feels that ideologies or politics (he was clearly referring to the present day party politics) could become unnecessary if people participate in their planning processes and make the powerful Panchayat Act work. Elango believes that decentralized planning through a bottom up approach and giving power to the people has the potential to truly change the system. The Panchayat Act is a tool to empower Indian villages for a pro-people development.

No single village or community can change the larger economic and political structures of exploitation, domination and destruction; it has to work with others as part of a larger political movement to do so. However, even a single settlement can become a locus of resistance and reconstruction, a nursery for experiments and innovations from which others can learn, providing the base for larger linkages towards building critical political mass. Kuthumbakkam's successes and failures should be seen in this light.

Acknowledgements

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Maati

Vinay Nair

Maati women dancing to inaugurate the annual Mesar Forest Festival of 2014, in Munsiari, Uttarakhand. Among other things, the gathering serves to make women more visible in a traditionally patriarchal society.

Pushpa weaving a rug – Maati offers space to women to create a livelihood through diverse means.

A Maati member illustrates the sheer diversity of indigenous kidney beans – just one crop among many that are grown locally on the terraces of Munsiari.

9
Maati

Vinay Nair and Shiba Desor

Maati Sangathan is a women's collective located in Munsiari (2,200 m) in Gori valley, Pithoragarh district, Uttarakhand, across from the west face of the Panchachuli mountain range in the Greater Himalayas.[1]

Maati (Hindi for 'earth' and 'soil') is an autonomous women's collective of mountain farmers, weavers, milk producers, vegetable vendors and self-employed entrepreneurs. As a name Maati is a symbol for what is one of their primary areas of concern – the soil – which conserves their water and from which they grow their food, but Maati as a sangathan (collective) goes beyond meeting the basic subsistence needs or management of commons. Its origins and evolution owes much to the context of where it is situated and the society that it inherited.

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1. For this case study, field work was done in May 2014, which built upon documentation conducted in November 2013 (supported by Action Aid). Notes from a previous visit in 2012 by Ashish Kothari, and a write-up about Maati by one of its members (Malika Virdi) were also used. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Within Maati, those interviewed primarily were Malika Virdi, Basanti Rawat and Rekha Rautela. Extended discussions were held with Malika in May 2014 to clarify aspects that emerged from the first study report in addition to a group discussion where all Maati women were present.

That society was, and in many ways still is, deeply patriarchal – women cannot inherit land and take the majority of the burden of sustaining a household, from collecting wood and grass from forests to agricultural farm work and child care. Women are often treated as second-class citizens, both in public life where they are traditionally restricted from participating in political processes, and in private life where they may have to bear physical and psychological violence, which is often exacerbated by the consumption of alcohol by men.

Maati was a response to this very link between alcohol consumption and domestic violence. It began in the mid-'90s' with just two women, Malika Virdi of Sarmoli village and Basanti Rawat of Shankhadhura, in the aftermath of an especially vexing incident of violence against a woman from a nearby village. Malika and Basanti mobilized other women and slowly gathered support in the villages of the Gori valley (Jainti, Nanasem, Nayabasti, Darkot) and across the valley. This facilitated the holding of meetings and sending of postcards to people's representatives in several villages around Munsiari, resulting in a memorandum to the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh that called for a halt to the sale of alcohol. Though the government had banned the brewing and sale of home-made liquor, it stopped short of closing the shops. This was not surprising; in the decade between 2000 and 2011, Uttarakhand made up to ₹ 733 crores from the sale of liquor.

Within this environment of indifference and antagonism towards women's issues, Maati took up Sharaab-Bandi Abhiyan (campaign for closure of liquor brewing and shops) as an economic and political cause, not a moral one, by highlighting the fact that alcohol was used as leverage during local elections. This pragmatism is evident time and again in

Maati's responses to a variety of issues of male and political hegemony. Yet, within Maati, the moral dimension burned strongly back then, as it does now, of a life free from violence.

A life free from violence

As mentioned, Maati came together after an especially stark instance of violence against women. Their approach in tackling this was pragmatic rather than only emotional, but there is a wide recognition within the sangathan that alcohol-related violence against women is more a symptom than a cause. The ultimate cause, they felt, is the very structure of patriarchy that is deeply entrenched in their society's psyche, beyond the reasons from which the system originated. Historically, a woman would marry somebody from a distant village and move to the place where her husband owned land, to help tend it and to have children. If she were given some land back in her own village, it would not really be possible for her to take care of it where distances between villages were considerable and the only means of transportation were on animal-back or on foot. This is also probably the origins of dowry, where instead of land the departing woman would be given some possessions for her use and security. In modern times, that too, is often appropriated by the groom or his family.

Patriarchy impacts the everyday lives of women. A typical day for a woman begins before dawn and ends much after dusk; in between, she must obtain fuel for the household, tend to cattle and to farms, take care of children and cook multiple times a day. In addition to this, to quote Malika, a woman's bodily integrity may be threatened by the person she is sleeping with, or by the person who gave birth to her, or by a person higher up in the caste hierarchy or even by the state that is complicit in its silence.

Maati's strong and articulated stand is to break this complicity of silence not only of the State, but within the region, the community and the family. They seek to put a stop to the culture of *chalta hai* (let it be) – the complicit silence of even sympathetic and liberal elements within society; instead, they strongly articulate *nahi chalta hai* (no, it can't be). Their ideology is informed by feminist theory but not handed down or confined by feminism. They recognize that beyond the issue of gender equality, there are problems of differences in caste and class among women, and of competition among men. For instance, a woman oppressed by gender within her caste and class may oppress a woman of a lower caste or class. According to Malika, Maati does not tag itself as socialist feminist or anarcho-feminist or as any of the various other schools of thought within feminism. She admits that those thoughts and concepts do inform their way of living and working; they do not deny the relevance of feminist thought and politics, but above all – and this they repeatedly articulate – it is life itself to which they respond.

Responding to life and its myriad complexities implies that even without the tools and words of formal theory, a woman with the experience of being oppressed attempts to fight back and to reclaim her dignity and her space. It also implies the recognition that power relationships between men and women are real, and one's gender deeply impacts their life. As a collective, Maati does not work with a set theory or ideology; it picks up the strains in these power relations, in the inequality within them and brings them out into the open.

It may be tempting to think that with such widespread gender inequality within society, women would be eager to join a collective like Maati. However, experience indicates otherwise. Women tend to approach Maati mostly at a time of crisis. For the most part, the majority of women are

content with maintaining status quo and getting on with work and child-care. It is only when notions of 'normality' are threatened, at an especially serious point of crisis or episode of violence, that women seek help. At such times, Maati responds by offering advisory support or by building group pressure. Preference is always given to consensus building and strengthening informal community ties and to keep matters within smaller units of the household, the panchayat or the Mahila Panchayat. The collective has also built alliances with other community groups and elected representatives; over time, just invoking the name of the collective has become a sufficient deterrent in some situations. Another strong ideal that emerges from this is of local self-governance that is both democratic and gender-equitable.

On Maati's part, the women who approach at a time of crisis – and they may be from far away villages – are not expected to meet repeated demands on their time for attending meetings of the collective. However, the expectation and hope is that in turn they support other women in distress and evolve from being victims of violence to women with agency. Because of this principle of reciprocity, the process of membership to Maati has become self-regulated and only those willing to participate in issues on a long-term basis become core members. In addition, selection as a core member requires a minimum of six months of volunteering in meetings, campaigns and protests. Over time, the core group has grown from six to eight members; its composition is heterogeneous in terms of age, experience and caste groups.

As of December, 2016, there are seven members in the core group. Maati's local network of women in Gori valley is larger, spanning over fifty villages.

Most of the active members come from nearby villages – Sarmoli, (which includes the hamlets of Shankhadhura and Nanasem), Jainti, Darkot, Nayabasti, Boonga, Ghorpatta, Suring, Barnia, Jalath, Dumar Talla and Malla, Quiri, Jimiya, Paton, Bangpani, Shilling, Khartoli, Sela, Madkot. The collective understands that women's issues are not independent of other issues inherently present in a context such as Munsiari. In fact, for women to be active as citizens, it is critical that they have a degree of economic independence. To this end, they must first have a secure livelihood which in turn is closely linked with food and ecological security.

For livelihood security, there are fifty women involved in creating and selling woollen and other products, another fifty in providing raw materials for them and fifty more in a farming group (more on these in section 3). Out of these, about twenty-five are engaged in a homestay program originally begun in 2004 (more in section 3). There is one office/sales room in Sarmoli, taken on rent.

Livelihood (Ecological + Food + Entrepreneurial) Security

Traditional livelihoods in the region were primarily transhumant mixed with supplementary agriculture. Munsiari lies on the ancient trade-route from Kumaon in the Indian Himalayas to Tibet; trade-related seasonal migrations from the highest plateau in the world were common. However, this was disrupted during the 1962 Indo-China war when the border was closed. Since then, the transhumant and pastoral lifestyle has shifted towards a lifestyle based predominantly on settled agriculture. Some people chose to migrate to cities in search of newer livelihoods, but for those who chose to stay back forests have always held critical

importance since forests provide the resources vital to sustain life and agriculture on rugged mountain soil.

Since the shift to a settled lifestyle, similar to other agro-communities of the country, women go into the forests to collect wood for fuel, grass as fodder and leaf litter for manure. Use of local resources requires foresight; wood and grass have to be harvested in the dry periods of the year and stored for use in the monsoon and when it snows in the winter whereas leaf litter is taken when it falls, which, in this region, is most of the year except the monsoon. Hence, forests are central to livelihoods – no matter the extent of supplements like tourism or migrant labour – because they provide water and food.

Also of historic importance is the founding of the Van Panchayats, an institution specially tasked with the management of forest commons. Van Panchayats are bodies with nine panchs (or elected representatives), with one elected by them to preside as sarpanch. These came about as a result of massive state-wide protests in the 1920's and 30's against the control of local resources by the British government that was plundering them for revenue and railways (the Van Panchayat of Sarmoli-Jainti was constituted in 1949). The Van Panchayat is constituted for each village or sometimes a group of smaller villages and forest area is demarcated for each.

In the 21st century, the challenge of commons management is further complicated with the multiple pressures of growing tourism in the region, climate change and the growing importance of and need for money within the community itself. Given such a context, it is futile to categorize food and livelihood security as separate from ecological security. This fact is reflected in Maati's approach to securing livelihoods in how closely they link women's economic independence to natural resource conservation.

Ecological security: If there were to be a pyramid of priorities for Maati, ecological security would be at the very base that links *Jal* (water), *Jangal* (forest) and *Zameen* (land). Forests provide two things vital for human survival – water and resources to sustain agriculture. The forest complex of this region has oak species at a lower altitude and species like rhododendron at a higher level. Both provide leaf litter that forms excellent organic fertilizer when mixed with cow-dung and urine. In addition, there is a body of literature,[4] both oral and scientific, that suggests that an oak ecosystem is generally favourable for stopping water runoff, keeping moisture within the system and supporting a larger diversity of floral and faunal species.

Elsewhere in the state, the Van Panchayat management of these vital ecological resources has often run into problems of free riding that turns them into an open-access regime. Again, literature[5] has documented the weakening of Van Panchayats across the state by a combination of power politics within the community, the selling off of resources to distant markets and a gradual reduction in resource quality[6] due to patterns of usage and demographic transformations. Moreover, even though women are the primary users in terms of access to forest resources, they are not considered right holders[7], primarily through association with their families. This, along with the fact that women do not own any agricultural land essentially reduces their role to one of unpaid labour without significant control on the management of their commons. Clearly, the users of forest resources and the producers of food are alienated from managing the link between the two.

Maati's approach was to have more direct participation in commons management, especially for women. In 2003, Malika was elected as sarpanch (head) of the Sarmoli-Jainti Van Panchayat despite her being an 'outsider'.

In truth, the position came to her mainly because nobody wanted to take on the complex and onerous responsibility of heading a Van Panchayat. During her tenure, by-laws were made for dual right-holder status; it conferred right-holder status to the woman head of the household along with the male head. In addition, all permanent women residents of the village, regardless of their marital status, were accorded right-holder status. This enabled women's active participation in conservation of commons as primary owners, beyond their status as users.

In the decade and a half since, women have taken the lead in the larger effort to check free riding and prevent the descent of the commons into an open access regime. Rules concerning forest litter directed removal only after the 17th of November every year to prevent complete removal and keep enough left over to ensure equitable distribution for all stakeholders. Rules concerning wood harvest require that only dead twigs and branches be lopped or removed from the forest floor. Harvesting of dead or live trees, considered on a case-to-case basis, would require explicit permission from the Van Panchayat governing committee of the pancha *mandli* and the sarpanch. When offenders were caught, their tools were confiscated and a fine levied. As a result of these multiple factors, the members of Maati, together with other stakeholders, successfully managed to replant and restore the Van Panchayats forest to a state of health with equitable distribution of the benefits. These benefits include greater and more consistent availability of grass for fodder, fuel-wood and leaf litter. Since 2011, while no Maati member has been a part of the Van Panchayats Committee, they have continued to keep an eye on their forest commons and raise issues of concern as and when required.

Beyond their forest commons, Maati has also been active in the Munsiari Van Panchayats Sangathan till 2011 and has been part of groups that have effectively questioned state-led models of development like the eight large, ten medium and ten smaller hydropower projects that were/are being proposed for the 100 km stretch of the Gori River. Implementation of these projects would have caused/will cause large scale displacement and significant destruction of forest and hydrological resources. Women in large numbers have supported and joined in public protests by the project-affected people and against the state's land acquisition attempts at the behest of companies. Finally, in 2010, one of the planned projects, Rupsiabagar-Khasiyabara project (for 261MW) of National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), was rejected by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). The topic is deeply political with differences within the community – a section believes that the project should have been cleared as it would create employment opportunities. This segment also has connections to powerful political leaders at the state level that have an interest in seeing this and similar projects go through.

According to Malika, the process of this mobilization and politicization within Sarmoli and other villages has been significant in two key ways. First, for more effective commons management, it was essential that right holders were active citizens in a direct democratic model, as opposed to a representative one. The representative model of democracy has inherent vulnerabilities to private and state sponsored large capital. To combat this, each right holder must have the moral authority to continue to conserve and regulate use of forest resources, which can only come from having actual rights over using and managing those resources. Secondly, this use of forest commons must be to support a non-extractive form of livelihood that is local with

a low footprint. These forms of livelihood do not have to be necessarily on a scale of subsistence (as we shall see), but must hold, most importantly, the continued availability and sustainable use of forest resources to meet that subsistence at the very least.

Food security: Maati's philosophic stand on agrarian land and food security is similar to their stance on commons management – to have a more direct say in land management, especially for women, and to keep the loop of production and consumption local. Maati has strongly campaigned for the transfer of agricultural land titles to women within households. It's difficult to make headway in this as the idea confronts deeply held patriarchal and property regime beliefs. Although few women have actually got land in their names, Maati believes that the idea has taken root and will grow.

In addition, to make farming a more viable option in the longterm, it is critical that the link among food production, soil fertility and forest management is revitalized. Like in most other parts of India, a shift away from traditional ways of farming to market seed and government-subsidized fertilizer is visible in Munsiari as well while the consequences of decreasing soil fertility and productivity are not immediately apparent. To further reduce risk, local seeds must be conserved not in a bank, but through constant circulation of planting and harvesting each season. The preference is also to stay organic to maintain soil fertility.

Since women do not own the land that they work on, they are not recognized as farmers and cannot avail of the financial and technical inputs that the state may provide. So Maati decided to create an identity for women farmers and dairy workers to form their own agricultural and livestock self-help groups (SHGs). As a result, collecting, procuring and

sharing of seeds is done within these groups and that helps with revitalizing traditional agricultural knowledge systems of maintaining productivity and controlling pests. After self-consumption, the surplus of food is marketed in local markets and to the local tourism industry.

Experiments have also constantly been afoot with small-scale sale and self-consumption of different forms of cooked food - be it celebrating old traditional foods that are slowly getting lost by cooking these during local events or cooking and baking using solar cookers, or preparing sun-dried foods for sale for trekkers. Maati women have been involved in preparation of these as well as other food items like jams, rhododendron juice, and snacks such as khajure, shakarpare and namkeenpare.

Livelihood diversification: As mentioned earlier, Maati strongly believes that economic independence helps women to be active as citizens. Though effective, strengthening the natural resource base in their forests and pursuing an organic and holistic way of farming is in itself insufficient where money is important for a gamut of necessities – from being able to send children to school to miscellaneous expenses. Hence, Maati attempts to compliment income generation through various other means. First, it does not seek funding for its activities because of the possible danger of interference. Instead, Maati relies on help from a body of supporters contributing small cash donations. Each member of the collective has an equal responsibility for obtaining donations. At present they receive donations from about 150 people, ranging from community members, kin and friends, that amount to ₹ 80-85,000 per year. This is used for covering working expenses of the sangathan including the office rent.

A nominal fellowship from SRUTI (approximately Rs. 17,000) is split as honoraria among the five core members of the

group. The other two members receive a stipend from the surplus from sale of wool-work; homestay enterprises and act as the coordinators for the two respective activities; wool-work is mostly marketed to visiting tourists as well as exported. Maati has a small shop where these products are stored and sold.

Second, Maati organizes women in their capacity as primary producers, and provides marketing support to obtain better and more consistent prices for their produce. Their produce ranges from wool products (obtained from local sheep) such as sweaters, caps, scarves and blankets; tailoring services such as school uniforms; spices and herbs to other agricultural produce. Raw material is sourced locally from fifty women in about twelve villages. Maati has a small shop where these products are stored and sold. The buyers are mainly tourists, particularly the ones coming through the home stay program, but also include local people, especially for food products. It is in the process of registering itself as a cooperative.

Importantly, and unlike other livelihood-supporting initiatives in Uttarakhand, Maati consciously limits its personnel-to-production ratio. They have rejected orders because the scale would be too demanding for the limited number of people who work with them and the amount of time that they believe those people ought to put in. The idea of limiting its own scale is to prevent working people from becoming just workers, the quintessential nine to five factory producers. Specialists are absent and not encouraged; everyone must participate in seed conservation, in organic farming, in Van Panchayats management and in putting up the political front. Because of this self-imposed limitation, the enterprise as a whole lowers its profit-making but this is accepted as necessary. Surplus time, if any, is spent in other ways of being creative.

Maati has also actively taken up work on seed conservation through a SHG called Maati Vanya Samooh. The attempt is to revive traditional seeds such as *bhat, masur, daal, jaun, rajma* and *madua*. There is also work to support existing organic agriculture. Maati Krishak Samooh, another SHG, avails of a subsidy for organic pesticide from the horticultural department and also a veterinary scheme which subsidizes livestock care (through schemes for fodder, water trough, etc.). The only reason that these informal groups had to be organized as self-help groups is the government's refusal to recognize individual women as farmers.

The third significant supplement to incomes is the homestay program which is run through a sister business entity, Himalayan Ark. Extra rooms in houses can be rented out to tourists/paying guests. This first began in 2004 through the Sarmoli-Jainti Van Panchayats. Since then, it has moved out of the Van Panchayat and has become a freestanding enterprise managed by Maati women. Tariffs (as of December, 2016) amount to ₹ 1250 to ₹ 1600 per person per night which is comparable to or cheaper than what hotels in the Munsiari town area charge.

On average, those letting out rooms to tourists would have occupancy of about 100 days and up to fifteen families a year. Of the amount charged, 2 percent goes toward a conservation fund administered by Maati, 3 percent as savings for future home improvements and 20 percent toward managing the entire operation. Himayalan Ark also gives loans to member families on a nominal interest rate to upgrade and improve homes and facilities. Since the village is located on a scenic route, the homestay program has become a considerable source of earning for the participating villagers. Those women who do not have a room to spare participate in nature activities for tourists as

guides. So far a total of twenty-five families have participated and hosted guests from twenty countries. As of late 2014, there were twenty homestays that are within Maati – fifteen in Sarmoli, three in Paton, and one each in Khartoli and Shilling.

It is important to note that the tariff is primarily for urban visitors – who usually belong to the middle class and are able to pay – and not for other villagers or those who arrive for various camps from other organizations. Such visitors pay according to their capacities or are often accommodated for free across members' homes.

Within Maati, the arrangement for homestays is informally regulated; members don't get guests in a regular periodic cycle and instead, depending on one's financial condition at a certain point of the year, one may step back for another member who might be in greater financial need. Those with alternative sources – pension, salary or the ability to find work – are generally given lower priority. Essentially, the members look out for one another.

An important criterion to be a member of the home-stay program is to adhere to the basic principles and philosophy of Maati. Members are persuaded to reiterate their commitment to conserving the forest, participating in voluntary work to protect the forest, to vow not to sell locally brewed liquor and to take a stand against domestic violence.

Transformations in social relations have been significant in those households where women are part of the home-stay program in particular and Maati in general. Hosting strangers in one's house was at best an alien idea, especially for male visitors. In the beginning, some men would hesitate to even let women go for Maati's general meetings, let alone host guests. In time, husbands and families of the core

members of Maati have come around, not least because of the income generated by the homestays. It is hoped that economic independence will, in the long run, bring about attitudinal changes. In some cases, it already has, as is evident in the fact that women are now getting into positions of power like in the panchayat. Bina Nitwal, a core member, who runs both a homestay and knits products for the Maati shop, is also a ward panch of her village *gram* panchayat.

Yet another dimension is the increasing interaction between the hosts and the guests who are on opposite sides of the urban/rural divide. In this author's personal experience at a core member's house in Shankhadhura, the model works well. All too often, the tourism experience for a traveller visiting hotels in places such as these is of scenic places but with little or no contact with the lives of local people. In contrast, a homestay gives the distinct impression of establishing a more real connection with people, if only a little and only briefly. The visitor is drawn into the lives of people who live close to the land and the natural resource base around them and is cajoled, depending on his/her willingness, into discovering a little of where the water and food comes from, how much waste is generated and where it is going. Little of it could actually be seen generated, as what is served is seasonal house-hold produce. Contrast this to the tourist centre of Munsiari which is increasingly, though on a much smaller scale, heading the way of Almora – a cramped shanty-like appearance of concrete shops, dusty roads and expensive hotels with everything on the menu. In the departing traveller's mind a homestay is associated with people and culture, not just the scenery.

It would be too idealistic to assume that the cultural exchange through the homestay is able to surpass the

various layers of the rural-urban and class-divide. It depends on the individuals involved to transcend these categories and limitations, and Maati's platform is much more conducive than the average relationship in conventional tourism that is based purely on receiving services in exchange for money.

Box 1

Focus areas of Maati

> **Ecological security**: The struggle to establish people's right over their natural heritage and resources - Jal, Jungle, Zameen
> **Food security and land stewardship**: To make farming a more viable option and to revitalize its dependence on land and forests
> **Livelihood security**: To secure and promote both agriculture and wool based cottage industry
> **Life free from violence**: To support women in crisis, mobilize public opinion in favour of women in distress and create an enabling environment for them
> **Self-governance**: To support elected women representatives in their mandate for people-centred economic development and social justice
> **Networking and building alliances**: To work with women and democratic village and Panchayati Raj organizations as well as through alliances with state, regional and national level women's groups, civil society organizations, campaigns and movements

Source: Discussion with Maati Activists

In concluding this section, it is important to offer some criticism on the aspect of architecture. The families that run homestays create structures and furnishing according

to their own aspirations and that which they think would provide comfort to their guests. These often follow along lines of urban trends and are not necessarily locally relevant. Traditional dwellings in the area are made of stone walls, slate roofs and mud floors; the new structures are plastered cement and often have tin roofs. From the point of view of insulation against both heat and the intense cold of the winter, the new material offers a poor choice and is based on a mixture of limitations and assumptions. Stone is not as abundantly available locally as before and slate is banned; however, the use of cement involves mining of limestone somewhere else and the associated costs of transport. Perhaps this gap could be filled in time, with collective discussion leading to a blend between the old and modern architecture that keeps the ecological footprint minimal.

Maati (or Himalayan Ark) has also been a part of the Munsiari Union for Sustainable Tourism and is trying to re-invigorate the platform to ensure focus on responsible tourism in the Munsiari area as a whole. This attempt is yet another example of looking beyond one's enterprise at the cumulative impact of tourism on the region and seeking collective action to address it.

Beginnings of an alternative education

Since late 2012, Maati, along with Himal Prakriti (a trust for nature that has been working on environment issues in the Himalaya), has begun an initiative on local education through an informal gathering called Jungli School and a library and resource centre called Prakriti Kendra. The school currently has about forty members between the ages of six and sixty. It is important to clarify here that Jungli School is not a school in the conventional sense of the word. This means that the children who are members of this group also

go to regular schools. The school does not have a physical campus; it resides more in the heart of the people who consider themselves as members of this group. The Kendra (informally referred to as the Jungli School Library) is at present situated in Sarmoli village and members often visit on Sundays to read, write or play.

The origins of the Jungli School lie in the belief that conventional state education leaves important voids by not being sufficiently local and connected to nature. Instead, the school and the Kendra attempt to bring context to what people learn through mediums in addition to reading, such as photographs, walks to connect with local nature and the land, games, art and craft activities, story-telling, etc. At the same time, it familiarises them with how local issues build up into global ones. Teachers change depending upon need, interests and availability. They could be village elders, visitors from another city or country, or simply a young or old member of the school. The vision is to give each other confidence in being able to think both small and large at the same time.

The Jungli School initiative is an important effort of Maati, especially at a time when children are exposed to mainstream culture both in conventional schools and through advertisement-drenched television where competitiveness is supreme. Instead, the school imbibes values of consensus building, curiosity as pleasure, and the equal importance of experiencing and knowing. There is the belief also that to effectively question threats from within and outside society, confidence has to be given to children at a young age that learning is possible anywhere as long as curiosity and certain minimum tools are present.

In a very real way, the Jungli School feeds into the larger efforts of Maati that tackles the issue of migration. An

important distinction is made between two kinds of migration – distress migration when people are running away from bitter realities (e.g. due to subjugation by gender, caste, class or landlessness) and migration because of aspirations forged through a variety of influences. Maati's political involvement seeks to transform the first kind, to make the region conducive for traditionally subjugated groups to thrive. Here their slogan has been '*sirf satta-parivartan nahi, vyavastha-parivartan*' – not just a cyclic change of political guard but transformations at the systemic level. The Jungli School, on the other hand, is a more subversive attempt at creating a discourse on development, progress and wellbeing. Maati does not discourage dreams that may be forged out of their region and in the city but attempts to give children a platform where a more informed decision can be made.

The question of leadership

Malika, as mentioned earlier, was not originally from Sarmoli. She first came to Munsiari in 1992 with her partner and their six-month-old son and for various reasons decided to stay on and bought some land. Malika's acceptance into the community was gradual, based much on her slowly acquired prowess as a farmer, a primary producer. She represents a unique part of Maati in the skills and insights into feminism and market mechanisms that an urban middle class woman can bring. Whereas producers of knit and other products were competing with each other in local markets, she pointed toward the benefits of collective production in which the individual producer was protected by set prices and consistent sale/income. When it came to political problems, her urban awareness of bureaucracy must have been essential and useful, simply as a confidence building measure and as articulation in dealing with the state. Even there, she

says, she always chooses to be in the 'middle of a march, neither at the front nor at the back' – the person/party most affected should be in the lead. It is a political necessity also to be not seen as an outsider who spearheads. Her role within the sangathan is similar to that of Maati within the larger community reflected in their motto – '*hum naitritva karte hain, netagiri nahin*' (we act with leadership, but are not political leaders).

Yet, would it be inaccurate to call her the founder or the leader of the collective? Was her initial role not absolutely indispensable in getting and keeping people together, by providing an opportunity to create a more reliable source of income? In a conversation where these questions were put to her, she agreed and said that she had no illusions or self-deprecation about her place in the collective. However, she clarified that the sangathan is based on trust and an honest appraisal of each member's strengths and weaknesses; whatever authority exists grows organically and is malleable. Leadership is only relevant as far as it brings together diverse people experiencing similar problems and can work collectively to attempt to find solutions and not to solutions given from the outside.

Malika recounts Saraswati Thakuni, an elderly friend of the sangathan, and her subtlety when dealing with political issues and her awareness of the nuances of how people would react within a group. This too is a form of leadership; the diversity in people's responses when situations present themselves makes a group stronger.

Box 2

What does being a part of Maati mean to me?

Basanti Rawat: 'We fight against any kind of injustice - be it connected to violence, jal-jungle-zameen, education or agriculture and seeds. The collective gives us unity. What none of us can do separately, we are able to achieve by coming together. Initially, there was also family pressure to limit self to domestic work and farming, but I have always stubbornly insisted on doing everything - domestic work, work in the fields, as well as work for the collective.'

Kamla Pandey: 'The meaning of maati is to create social- awareness while keeping people together. It is important here for people to work with the sentiment of "us" rather than "I".'

Rekha Rautela: 'As women, it feels important to come together to help other women in crisis, which is something we are able to do through the collective. Any of us can suffer the same situation at any time in future, and if we don't help others, who would help us?'

Pushpa Sumtiyal: 'Being a part of the collective, sharing joys and sorrows with other members and being involved in something larger than oneself helps in making us forget our own sufferings.'

Mohini Devi: 'It feels good to be connected to the sangathan because it feels good to know that we are doing something about the injustice around us.'

Bina Nitwal: 'It has made me informed about diversity of issues and to know people from different parts of the country and the world. Being a part of the collective has also given me a strength I wouldn't feel if I was alone.'

Malika Virdi: 'Society can sometimes make us feel very helpless about being able to change a situation. Through the collective we were able to realise that many of us were thinking the same thing, just hesitating to say it out loud. When one or two of us attempted to articulate it, we realised that we were not alone.'

Source: By members of Maati, in their own words

Challenges

In the context of the region where Maati is situated, the significance of money for buying necessities and desirables, sending children to schools and colleges and having a more comfortable material life is increasing at more or less the same pace as in any urban centre of India. A significant part of the younger generation, notwithstanding the recent efforts of the Jungli School, does imagine a future life in a city, aided with visions from the ubiquitous television and popular cinema.

Even for those who escape this marketing onslaught, land and opportunities for local diversification are limited. Some people will need to migrate, if only to make a living and not just to follow their dreams; opportunities that await them in cities are of a distinct urban flavour.

Perhaps an error made often when we look at initiatives like Maati is that we examine them alone, as separate from distant urban centres that have their unique problems and threats. In fact, Maati and similar efforts are seen as setting an example from which not only other villages but also cities can learn. Maati certainly sets examples with its integration of social, ecological, political and economic dimensions in approaching issues, in stark contrast to dominant policies of the country

which are geared toward increasing economic growth at severe environmental and social costs. But urban life – so long separated from thoughts of food production and land management – is increasingly parasitic on its surrounding areas and efforts to transform it are few. More importantly, urban middle class life is also lulled into a sense of helpless complacency driven by markets and fuelled by popular culture with its aural and visual elements of entertainment. There is an urgent need to examine these visions of a dream life being fed to each household and to society at large across urban/rural divides through television and movies. The sense of complacency that popular culture engenders prevents widespread contemplation of what certain policies imply for places where initiatives like Maati are situated.

Shortcomings

The gaps in the present study are a result of sampling technique (mentioned in Box 1), which was partial toward those members who were articulate and used to answering questions about the collective. Second, as a related point and as borne by the documentation, these women are quite busy with the work of the collective and of their families. For better sampling, the authors feel that much more time has to be spent in the field (of the magnitude of months), to document stories of each member of the collective. In addition, it would be helpful to understand more the history of land-use change in the region, the impact of tourism, and the ultimate causes of alcoholism in men – for a more holistic insight into the context within which Maati is situated.

Maati is aware of its precarious situation. As Malika says, 'We are being buffeted from all sides. We might get squished out anytime. When we protest against a *sharab ka thekha* (liquor booth), people want to arrest us. The struggle is so fragile,

the voice is so fragile, it's not because we are so small, but because of the scale of what we are up against.'

Conclusion

For two decades now, Maati Sangathan has made a sustained effort to work with social, political and environmental issues in a model that is sustainable and that works on principles of equality and direct democracy. They began with a vision of a life free from violence for those oppressed by inequitable gender relations – women, and for those oppressed in other ways of caste and class. In battling these problems, they have been pragmatic and revolutionary. While they have taken advantage of the market to give women economic independence, they have also imbibed strong values in all their work.

The strongest value is to have a more direct participation in decision making across varying levels – within the family across differences of gender and age, within the community across differences of caste and class, and within regions across differences of rural and urban. Hence, the woman in the family who gathers forest resources and who works the longer shift in the farm must have a say over the governance and management of both forests and seeds. Amongst the members of the collective, the principle of solidarity and reciprocity (or *dukh-sukh ka saath*) is also real and connected. Similarly, the community must have a say in the governance and management of its commons against narrow private interests from both within and outside the community. Finally, the exchange between the urban and the rural – as expressed by tourism – must be mutually non-exploitative, beneficial and enriching. Such an articulation is also immediately against the representative model of democracy, where some individuals are chosen to make

decisions for others. This has been shown to be beset with problems, not the least of which is to amplify already present inequalities in power relations within communities.

In turning the table over long present hegemonies, however, Maati is also careful to give the individual and the community the moral authority to question them. This is through the attempt to holistically revitalize the links between commons management, livestock keeping and traditional ways of farming. They checked free riding in forests to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources, and mixed with the by-products of livestock keeping, they obtained abundant organic manure for their fields. They took charge of the seed of their harvest in a dynamic bank of exchange and selection through hands, thereby, at least partially closing the loop of production and consumption.

Their involvement in the resistance against dams is an important part within the larger effort to challenge mainstream notions of development. Their argument has been for collective good over narrow individual interests and for a democratic model based on participation, not merely representation.

Lastly, Maati's initiative for an alternative education through the Jungli School is an attempt to transcend their values beyond their own generation, by rejecting notions of competitiveness and embracing values of holistic learning.

Therefore, it can be said that Maati has an alternative vision that is being practiced in an organic manner. Grappling with issues of patriarchy mainstream development, and local politics, it has sustained its work for more than two decades. Whether Maati inspires initiatives that emerge organically and which together will point toward an alternative vision for society at large, is something which is beyond their

own reckoning. What is certain is that an imprint of the sangathan's work will remain in the lives of the many women it has strengthened and drawn strength from, and perhaps in the lives of the people who visit and interact with them, or learn about them from networks.

Acknowledgements

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Restoration of the Kaikondrahalli Lake in Bengaluru: Forging a New Urban Commons

Harini Nagendra

The lake provides a scenic location for evening walkers, joggers and visitors

Harini Nagendra

Despite the presence of nearby apartments and a busy high-traffic road, bird diversity flourishes in the lake

Harini Nagendra

Children and parents working on flower and leaf art at the Kere Habba of 2015.

Harini Nagendra

Kaikondrahalli lake in polluted condition in 2009, prior to restoration

10
Restoration of the Kaikondrahalli Lake in Bengaluru: Forging a New Urban Commons

Harini Nagendra

The processes of urbanization have generated large scale global and local sustainability challenges across the world. Bengaluru, India's third largest city provides a typical example of the sustainability challenges confronting many Indian cities. The landscape around Bengaluru has been populated for millennia but the city traces its history to the creation of a market town in 1537. With a population of over ten million compressed into an area of 709.5 km^2, the city has gone through a massive growth spurt in recent years, increasing its population by 38 percent between 1991 and 2001, and again by 49 percent between 2001 and 2011 (Patil et al. 2015). Bengaluru lies in the rain shadow of the Deccan hills, relatively distant from large rivers that can provide fresh water. The undulating topography of the landscape around Bengaluru was effectively utilized by local rulers and communities, who dammed a series of small, mostly seasonal streams, to form a multiple series of tanks throughout the larger region – a practice followed across much of peninsular south India (da Cunha and Mathur, 2011). These reservoirs,

called tanks or lakes locally, recharged the ground water supply and provided the city with much of its water supply until the late 19ᵗʰ century, when Bengaluru began to import water from distant reservoirs and rivers, signalling the decline and decay of many of these lakes (Nagendra, 2016).

Historically, lakes were managed by surrounding communities, sometimes with administrative and financial support from local rulers (Rice, 1897). Specific kin-groups were in charge of activities such as the maintenance of lake canals and bunds; other groups were permitted to use the lake for specific activities such as fishing, collection of fodder, or agriculture. The princely state of Mysuru and the British Government agencies replaced these seasonally prescribed, specialized roles with imposed, formal governance structures. Now, lake management is the responsibility of a confusing mix of government departments with overlapping jurisdictions including, but not limited to, the Department of Minor Irrigations, Department of Fisheries, Ecology and Environment Department, Karnataka Forest Department, Lake Development Authority, Karnataka State Pollution Control Board, the Bangalore Development Authority, and the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) (Nagendra, 2010). Public interest litigations, active engagement by civic action groups (among which the Environment Support Group has played an especially prominent role) and action by the Karnataka courts have been critical in the remaining lakes of the city achieving legal protection from encroachment and development.

Over the past eight years, a group of local residents living in the south-east part of Bengaluru has engaged with the BBMP, to rejuvenate and maintain one of the lakes in the city, the Kaikondrahalli Lake, now maintained by the BBMP and a local trust, Mahadevpura Parisara Samrakshane Mattu

Abhivrudhi Samiti (MAPSAS). The process of people coming together in a city to work on an issue of public interest has been a difficult one, yet the overall experience of the group has been positive despite a number of persisting challenges. The focus of this narrative is on these experiences that provide insights that can help us understand the challenges and possibilities of urban collective action for other Indian cities.

The author has been involved with lake mapping, assessment, restoration, and monitoring in Kaikondrahalli Lake and the surrounding area since 2008, engaging closely with the informal, collaborative network of local resident associations, researchers, and government organizations that worked on restoration and later engaging with MAPSAS that now maintains the lake. This report draws on her observations and records during this period, as well as research that includes analyses of satellite remote-sensing data sets and maps, personal observations and discussions with other local residents (as described further in Nagendra, 2010; Nagendra and Ostrom, 2014; and Nagendra et al., 2014). This was updated with observations of visitors to the lake during lake events including lake walks, the Kaikondrahalli kere habba (lake festival) in January, 2015 and 2016, and discussions (between December, 2015 and February, 2016) with active residents engaged in lake and neighbourhood social activities.

The Lake

Kaikondrahalli Lake is located in the south east of Bengaluru on Sarjapur road in the Bellandur ward of Mahadevpura constituency – one of the new wards formed during the expansion of the city in 2007. This ward has experienced one of the most rapid phases of growth in Bengaluru.

Between 2001 and 2011, Bengaluru's population increased by as much as 49 percent. The peripheral areas of the city experienced much of this growth and doubled in population during the same time period (Patil et al., 2015). In a relatively small area of 26.4 km^2, Bellandur contained a population of 80,180 (census 2011) with substantial growth since then. The ward has 11 lakes, many of which are polluted or dry, with several currently under restoration. The rapid growth of the city took place in a fertile agricultural area, as evident from the number of lakes in this ward. Thus urban expansion, as occurs in many parts of India, resulted in the city swallowing up a number of villages, some of which have a recorded history of settlement stretching back over several centuries (Nagendra, 2016). The residents around the lake form a heterogeneous mix, living in slums, wealthy apartment complexes and erstwhile villages. Livelihoods have undergone a marked change in recent years, with a decrease in farming and in natural uses of the commons such as grazing, fishing and fodder collection.

The area surrounding the lake has experienced a multi-fold increase in real estate value in the past decade. Sarjapur road, which runs past one edge of the lake, is congested with traffic, while the lake itself is surrounded by dystopian elements of modern Indian cities – malls, apartments, and IT companies along with shanties and tented slums. Older residents around the lake remember a different landscape. As recently as 2000, the lake was filled with fresh water, surrounded by groves of fruit trees and frequented by birds, foxes, and snakes. By 2003, the lake began to dry up and the incoming channels were blocked by construction and the dumping of debris and garbage. By 2007, the lake bed was a slushy malarial bed of sewage and waste. On a memorable walk around the lake in early 2008, we came across an illegal and disused bore well, a recently dug grave, a number of

broken alcohol bottles, a discarded pack of playing cards and a tarpaulin sheet, the carcass of a dead pig, and a breathtaking swarm of iridescent dragonflies.

Lake rejuvenation

In 2008, a local resident and documentary filmmaker, Priya Ramasubban, who had recently moved to live close to Kaikondrahalli Lake, saw a short report in the newspaper about a proposed government (BBMP) initiated rejuvenation programme for the lake. She and Ramesh Sivaraman, a social activist who also lived close to the lake, had been concerned about the deteriorating condition of the lake and saw this as an opportunity to do something 'positive'. However, they also knew of many similar projects of lake rejuvenation in Bengaluru that had proved unsuccessful because of corruption, bad design, and lack of long term maintenance. They formed a small core group of local residents and invited other members with technical expertise in specific aspects of planning relevant to the rejuvenation, including ecologists and architects, to join them. The process of lake rejuvenation has been well documented in a video documentary *Kaikondrahalli Lake: the Uncommon Story of an Urban Commons*.[1]

At the time the group contacted the BBMP and asked to be involved with the lake rejuvenation, the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for rejuvenation had already been prepared and was ready to be advertised to procure tenders. Members of the group, many of whom had very limited experience with the technical terms used in the DPR, had to hit the ground running, talk to technical experts and familiarize themselves with the jargon. They were closely involved in

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1.   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAN4IGZi3pI

the process and could change key elements of the ready DPR, in part due to Mr. B.V. Satish, the Chief Engineer of the BBMP Lakes Division, who strongly believed in the merits of working with a responsive group of local residents. This informal collaboration was a key factor in the quick progress of the rejuvenation effort.

The existing DPR had a detailed technical plan for rejuvenation, which involved draining the lake to let out the polluted water, dredging the accumulated silt to deepen the lake bed, utilizing the silt to create an island in the centre of the lake, creating and reinforcing a raised lake bund, forming channels below the bund for entry of rain water then enabling the lake to fill with rain water again. The group scrutinized ecological and social aspects of the rejuvenation which needed modifications to fit local needs. An important alteration, suggested by Dr. S. Subramanya, an experienced naturalist and ecologist who provided extensive inputs to the plan, was to change the pattern of dredging from the typical 'soup bowl' pattern followed by the city government in other lakes, to the traditional sloping approach where the inflow of water was at the shallow end, and the outflow at the deeper end. Other changes were made as well. For instance, the initial DPR included plans for an expensive, large ornamental garden landscaped with exotic flowering species. The group felt that money could be better utilized and had the plans removed from the DPR. Local residents contributed funds and collected hundreds of saplings of native species for plantation in the lake premises. The original DPR planned to convert large parts of the lake into wooded areas. The area around the lake is dependent on ground water and the group felt it was more important to preserve the lake's original water-spread area. The DPR was redesigned to retain as much area under water as possible.

Another challenge was the needs of an adjacent aided school for low-income children. The play area of the school was on lake land; the original DPR had plans to fence off the lake from the school. The children would lose access to their play area and to the scenic open spaces adjacent to the lake. The group redesigned the DPR using inputs from a local architect, so that access was provided to lake visitors as well as to the school children. Washroom facilities were provided (through donations from a corporate organization located close to the lake), designed such that they could be used by the children of the school, especially the girls, who lacked access to secure, clean bathroom facilities. For Ganesha idol immersion and for other religious festivals which involve use of lake water but which could also pollute the lake, a separate enclosure was formed at one corner of the lake.

Other efforts at social inclusivity and cooperation were less successful. Getting the heterogeneous population of local residents together to discuss and collaborate on lake management has not been successful. While many local residents have involved themselves in aspects of lake management at different times, it has been difficult to get the participation of the majority. Some high-end apartments, commercial establishments and local residences upstream discharge untreated sewage into the lake; averting this requires close monitoring and concerted action by the lake management group.

Taking into account the requirements of cattle owning households from the nearby peri-urban villages, the core group of residents working with the BBMP had requested a separate cattle entrance at one end, and a small enclosure that could serve as cattle wash area. They also requested that a small enclosure be set aside to serve domestic needs, such as washing of clothes, for an adjacent slum dominated by

migrant labour that lacks access to water. The BBMP was not willing to concede to all the requests of the group, especially these, citing anticipated challenges of lake maintenance. In many ways this led to the lake being an ecological commons but with the curtailment of important extractive uses of the lake on which marginalized residents, including migrant labour, depend.

Another historical use of the lake bed area was for cattle grazing. Here, a partial solution was worked out. Local residents were allowed to harvest grass from the marshy edges of the lake, which they could take back to feed their cattle, without payment. Fishing continues but is given out on contract to fishermen who bid for the rights to use the lake; angling for personal consumption is not permitted, nor is the contract specifically awarded to local residents. This is not unique to Kaikondrahalli Lake; the Department of Minor Irrigations is in charge of granting fishing rights to the lake, and to all lakes in the city. While the preference of the local resident group would have been to grant fishing rights to local fishermen, who would be involved stakeholders in maintaining the lake, they lack control over these decisions.

After rejuvenation: Challenges and opportunities

Rejuvenation was completed in two phases, between 2009 and 2011. After rejuvenation, some members of the core group, including Priya Ramasubban, joined by others such as David Lewis, a retired senior citizen who contributes much of his time to overseeing daily activities, and Rajesh Rao, another local resident who oversees the management of the neighbouring Ambalipura Lake, formed a trust, the MAPSAS. MAPSAS entered into a tri-partite agreement with BBMP, and a corporate funding body United Way, to manage Kaikondrahalli Lake.

Over the years, local residents have witnessed the ecological recovery of the lake. A year after restoration, the lake was found to attract over fifty species of birds, and a rich variety of butterflies, frogs, toads, and snakes. The variety of animal and insect biodiversity around the lake has grown substantially since then, with many more bird species added to this list. A large and growing number of people living around the lake frequently visit the lake and have participated in a number of activities associated with lake restoration, maintenance and fund raising over the years. No fees are charged for entry, and the lake is maintained using donations and funds from local individuals and organizations.

The importance that the lake occupies in the Sarjapur area is clear from a casual visit. People visit the lake in large numbers, often with cameras and binoculars in hand, with young children on cycles or in prams; groups of senior citizens gather around benches on the side. An amphitheatre near the lake has hosted a number of community events that are free and open to all, focusing on the broad theme of sustainable living, within which they have covered the screening of nature films, talks on recycling, readings of children's books, training on the making of eco-friendly Ganesha idols, nature photography, yoga, and organic composting.

A kere habba (lake festival) held in January, 2015 attracted over 3,000 visitors on a single day, while a follow up event in January, 2016 had close to 4,000 visitors. Children from the international schools in the neighbourhood and from the slum adjacent to the lake have participated in these festivals, painting stones and leaves and creating temporary art installations (rangoli) with flowers and grasses. A tree near the gazebo, planted by Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom

in 2012 in honour of the restoration of this urban commons through efforts of local residents, is a regular attraction and inspiration for casual visitors.

This idyllic scenario has not been achieved without a number of challenges, some of which relate to regular maintenance while others include complex persistent long term issues. A frequent problem is when neighbouring land owners and residents let sewage into the lake, typically in the middle of the night when it is most difficult to monitor. While the lake has been fortunate in having a large intact wetland upstream, which helps to clean up the sewage and recharge the lake in the monsoon, a number of buildings are slated to come up in this wetland in the coming years, which will severely impact its long term sustainability. Though this construction violates environmental norms, efforts by MAPSAS to halt it have failed to make headway so far. Drastic changes in the socio-economic and cultural composition of the residents around the lake, rapid fluxes of population and a high rate of inflow of people from other parts of the city and country, and the decrease in livelihood dependence on the lake have led to the decreased involvement of the original village residents in lake management.

Economic sustainability is another long term challenge. For several years, the lake restoration project was funded by a corporate donor, United Way, but with the donor now slowly decreasing funding support, the Trust has struggled to raise money for regular maintenance of the lake. While many residents have been willing to contribute to activities of lake protection, there remains a constant challenge of fundraising which is time and effort-intensive, and fatiguing for the people working on this.

Overall, perhaps one of the most important challenges is the constant commitment of time and energy it demands

from a relatively small group of people who spend the most time working on the lake. One such is Priya Ramasubban. 'We had a set of people who got together initially. Over the years, some stayed on and some started working on other issues. But the baton keeps passing to new people who care about taking things forward. We have a new core team and more volunteers on board to keep this lake the valuable community resource that it is,' she says. Finding sustained support from new volunteers is a constant challenge. As Priya says, the true sustainability of this work will be demonstrated when lake maintenance reaches the stage that it can be completely handed over to another group that could work on this with renewed energy and a fresh vision for future activities, enabling the current group to move on towards other, larger-scale city-wide issues such as working to revise city administration's policy on the governance of environmentally sensitive areas.

For sustainability, the group has steadily been increasing the number of people in the Trust. Gradually, certain activities are being dealt with at the community level. However, even when local residents look after their local resources, the broader challenges (e.g. of pollution or encroachment) lead to situations that involve political decisions. What are the foundational elements which will sustain the initiative here? According to Priya, 'People like us are committed to processes, but there have to be democratic structures to sustain the process.' An important role of the Trust and associated citizens, as envisaged by MAPSAS is to act from the outside, putting pressure on elected representatives to fulfil their tasks.

MAPSAS has served as an important node in generating a number of other collective activities. As a consequence of the group's efforts, the BBMP, which approached the

restoration of lakes in a piecemeal manner without taking into account the interconnectivity of lakes, initiated a programme to restore a set of seven connected lakes (of which Kaikondrahalli forms a part). Restoration work on a few of these lakes – Haralur, Kasavanahalli and Soule Kere (downstream and upstream of Kaikondrahalli Lake) is proceeding well, though MAPSAS has had mixed success in locating local residents who can take up the activities of fund raising and lake maintenance. MAPSAS has also worked with a local non-profit water research group (BIOME) and a corporate (WIPRO), to examine and identify biological options for sewage treatment that can be applied in the sub-chain of lakes around Kaikondrahalli. The goal of this exercise is to identify low-cost, simple, ecological/biological approaches to deal with the problem of cleaning up the increasing volumes of sewage that are anticipated to flow into lakes in this fast growing peri-urban area in the coming years and decades. The technical knowledge and social experience that MAPSAS has gained as a consequence of the restoration and maintenance have proved helpful for other local groups working on restoration of a number of lakes in the adjacent areas of Halanayakanahalli, Mahadevpura and Whitefield.

An unanticipated but very welcome outcome has been the use of the rejuvenated lake as a collective node where people from the neighbourhood can meet and organize to work on other local problems. For instance, an initiative called "2 bin 1 bag" formed by a core group of local women residents has worked to develop approaches to deal with solid waste management challenges in the Bellandur ward – this initiative has recently gained significant city-wide momentum with the High Court urging that it be applied across Bengaluru. Other informal local groups that met during various lake-related activities now work

on issues as diverse as that of local traffic and greening the neighbourhood. While some of these efforts have been relatively restricted to middle-class and wealthier residents, others have worked with school teachers, migrant workers and residents of the urban villages who live in this formerly rural area. The availability of the lake as a place for regular meetings fosters a sense of inter-personal relationships that help to form social bonds and foster a sense of belonging (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) – a fundamental requirement for forming new collectives that can tackle the range of urban challenges that exist in any neighbourhood. The restoration of the lake as a place for regular recreation and interaction has played an important role in forming and strengthening inter-personal relationships that are essential components for social capital and ultimately for collective action around the commons (Ostrom, 2008). Social capital is located not in people themselves, but in their *bonds* with other people and these bonds need to be maintained through periodic renewal (Adler and Kwon, 2000). Having a neighbourhood location such as Kaikondrahalli Lake creates a powerful locus for such opportunities of human interaction and renewal of bonds that is otherwise rare in the fragmented urban neighbourhoods of peri-urban Bengaluru where the lake is located.

Challenges and opportunities for collective action in an urban context

Although lake restoration programmes have been conducted in many lakes in Bengaluru, in many cases local community involvement has been lacking and lake condition has deteriorated soon after. Part of the challenge is the piecemeal restoration of lakes. Although lakes are known to be interconnected, restoration often overlooks this fact. Thus, after a lake is rejuvenated, the lake upstream may

continue to discharge sewage into the rejuvenated lake, such that it returns to its original polluted condition fairly soon. The social challenge of lake rejuvenation in cities has been the difficulty of developing collective action in the Indian urban setting, with its high levels of diversity and inequity, constant change in the socio-economic and cultural backdrop, and the apathy of real estate developers and many residents who, despite benefiting from living in high income neighbourhoods around these lakes, and visiting the lake frequently, are not willing to contribute time, effort and/or money towards lake maintenance and funding.

Further, maintaining the lake has required the regulation of access to this commons. A challenge familiar to other commons in the city is that some level of regulation is required for ecological protection, but regulation often means the exclusion of the poor and marginalized. This can mean the gradual transformation of lakes to urban commons meant for the urban middle class. It is especially challenging to consider incorporating the interests of many transient marginalized groups in this dynamic peri-urban setting. For instance, migrant labour working at construction sites around the lake or living in shacks near the lakes are highly transient, often moving every few weeks to a new location. Such transient groups cannot be included in decision making. It is not easy to envisage how to balance the need for ecological protection of the restored lake with the fact that former spaces for washing and defecating for the poor have been taken over – a challenge faced by urban commons initiatives in cities across India (Baviskar, 2011).

Further, although the task of lake restoration brought together many local residents on a common platform, a working consensus on specific issues has sometimes been difficult to achieve. On occasions, political contestations

between different parties have threatened to enter the domain of lake protection efforts. Despite a number of challenges, MAPSAS steadfastly maintains its position as a non-partisan, apolitical actor engaging with the context of urban restoration. A recent study by the author and Elinor Ostrom, using the Ostrom Social Ecological Systems framework, examined the conditions that seemed to have facilitated successful collective action in the context of a set of lakes in Bengaluru (Nagendra and Ostrom, 2014). This study identified a specific set of facilitating variables in the context of Kaikondrahalli Lake. Dependence on the lake emerged as a strong motivation for collective action. Rapid construction and excessive extraction of ground water in the peri-urban surroundings of Kaikondrahalli Lake have resulted in severe scarcity of ground water on which these communities depend. There has been tremendous recognition of the importance of the restoration of this lake and the need for the restoration of other lakes in this neighbourhood in order to restore ground water levels.

In addition, what seems to have set apart the Kaikondrahalli Lake (and another restored lake in Bengaluru, the Puttenhalli Lake in JP Nagar) is the success of networking with government agencies, in this case the BBMP. As mentioned, in the case of Kaikondrahalli, this was greatly facilitated by Mr. B. V. Satish and his team. In other lakes in Bengaluru, where support from government agencies in charge of specific lakes has not been as forthcoming, restoration projects have struggled to get off the ground. A number of lake groups have formed in the past four to five years in Bengaluru, of which many – though not all – interact under the broad umbrella of the Save Bangalore Lakes initiative, receiving inputs from the experiences of MAPSAS and the Puttenehalli Neighbourhood Lake Improvement Trust (PNLIT). In large part, these groups have not been able

to successfully restore their lakes (although some efforts such as the restoration of Mestripalya lake in Koramangala have moved farther along than others), due in large part to the lack of responsiveness of government agencies and officers in charge. A contrasting problem also persists, of several lakes where restoration efforts are underway, initiated by various Government agencies, yet where local resident support has not been as forthcoming. Based on past experience, the long term sustainability of lake restoration is unlikely unless there is serious, committed engagement from local residents, with close monitoring of the lake and quick action to prevent reversals in lake condition as in the case of Kaikondrahalli.

When local actors and government agencies cooperate, the chances of long-term success of lake rejuvenation are greater. Understaffed government agencies such as the BBMP now routinely outsource the task of developing lake restoration project reports to consultancy agencies. Unfortunately, such agencies mostly provide identical, shoddily prepared proposals for rejuvenation that fail to take into account the unique social-ecological context and requirements of each lake. Citizen groups such as the earlier informal group working on Kaikondrahalli Lake, on the other hand, have the local knowledge of social needs, and can work closely with technical, ecological and engineering experts to draft restoration plans for each lake, taking into account specific requirements, as did this group.

Due to their presence near the lake, local residents are in a position to undertake challenges of monitoring – to identify problems such as land encroachment, blocked water channels, dumping of solid waste or inflow of sewage and industrial effluents. Yet, it is well beyond the scope of residents to tackle these problems unaided. In contrast,

government agencies have the legal authority to prevent unwanted activities and harmful use of the lake but rarely have the required information about what goes on at different locations. Thus, monitoring and maintenance of urban lakes requires the collaboration of local groups and government agencies. An illustrative example of this is an instance in the early days of lake protection – Kaikondrahalli was being polluted by the nightly release of sewage by a neighbouring under-construction apartment block. Local residents were unable to deal with this issue alone. Eventually, they used various means, including staging a protest and attracting media attention to the issue, and put sustained pressure on the Pollution Control Board to serve a notice to the apartment. The interactions among local residents, government bureaucracy, elected representatives, corporate bodies and the media is complex, but the MAPSAS experience indicates that links between these different groups need to be carefully and strategically used in order to achieve change in the desired direction.

Urban commons are central to the question of urban governance. The sheer scale of urban communities leads them to be very susceptible to tragedies of the commons (Hardin, 1968) – converting areas where limits of extraction could be enforced by enduring, long term communities of local residents into open access areas that lack norms of sustainable use, and where rules limiting use and degradation are difficult to collectively decide, let alone monitor or enforce (Ostrom, 2005). Unfortunately, urban commons are completely excluded from the urban planning process for most cities, globally as well as in India. Bengaluru is no exception – neither the Bangalore Development Authority Act of 1976 nor the Bangalore Metropolitan Rural Development Agency act of 1985 mentions urban commons. From being a common pool resource, a productive ecosystem

that supplied services such as food, fodder and water, the urban lake (across Bengaluru) is being re-visualized as a pristine ecosystem, a public good, to be mainly used for recreation and nature watching, and perhaps ground water recharge. There are severe limitations of such an approach, which reframes and reshapes the nature of the lake from an extractive common pool resource to a protected public good, but the experiences of the Kaikondrahalli lake restoration indicate that these are not limitations that can be combated on the local scale; they require larger interventions in city planning and policy.

Overall, the experiences of MAPSAS and the communities involved with the restoration of Kaikondrahalli Lake indicate that there is hope for urban collective action of a new kind, via sustained engagement by an assorted group of heterogeneous urban residents. Coordinated action by a number of diverse groups, including the government, citizens, civic organizations, schools, non-government organizations, and business has been challenging. It has also been extremely difficult to bring together local residents, given their diversity, on a common platform – their needs and priorities are different, not to mention their cultural perceptions of what a lake ought to be. While the progress achieved may not be optimum or ideal, it does represent a major step forward from the situation where all local residents were excluded from the process of planning and restoration; a bright spot in an environment that seems to be otherwise deteriorating on all fronts. The social capital and potential for collective action that has been built through this work seems to have been important in catalyzing other urban initiatives.

Concerns of equity remain important. Research indicates that citizen groups that organize activities such as lake restoration

can often exclude practitioners of traditional livelihoods such as fishermen and fodder collectors, and restrict uses of the lake that may be extremely difficult for the urban poor, many of whom depend on lakes for daily domestic activities. Despite the efforts of the group working on Kaikondrahalli, many of the interventions they originally envisaged, such as the provision of an area for cattle washing and for the use of the neighbouring slum, could not be implemented because of city-wide policies of the BBMP. Concerns of equity should be pre-eminent while working to protect and restore the urban commons, and these deserve greater attention from planners, activists, judiciary, and citizen movements than is currently the case. Issues of urban equity and social justice constitutes one challenge to which upper and middle class citizen movements have largely failed to respond, and indeed have exacerbated via collective action in many Indian cities. Viewed from the perspective of the "Right to the City" (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2008), this case study, while it presents a step forward, also exposes the deep problems of operating the right to shape city planning in Indian cities, especially for marginalized residents who are unable to engage in planning interventions on an equal footing.

Despite the challenges that persist with respect to the restoration and maintenance of Kaikondrahalli Lake, this effort has played an important role in throwing light on innovative approaches to reconcile urban growth with protection of ecological commons via knowledge-based intervention and a partnership between citizen groups and the government. The effort is also significant in a larger sense. The challenges of collective action in a city are severe; making spaces for nature in the city as well as for collective action in the city requires thinking in new ways and the demonstration of initiatives that inspires hope in others.

The experiences of the restoration of Kaikondrahalli Lake in Bengaluru is a small step that inspires hope, and is part of a new conceptualization of urban growth in a manner that gives nature as well as people their say and space in a frenzied city. When viewing the long term sustainability of the initiative through the framework of the 'five pillars' – key principles envisaged in the Vikalp Sangam's search for Alternatives. (http://www.vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects and-principles-4th-draft/) The initiative does well on the principles of ecological sustainability and direct and delegated democracy. While the group has been constantly concerned about issues of social wellbeing and justice, some progress has been made, but the extreme inequities of the peri-urban growth process make it very difficult for a single group working in isolation to make meaningful headway in such processes. The group has been unable to achieve the last two pillars of economic democracy, or cultural diversity and knowledge democracy, due to the limited scope that resident groups have in an Indian city, where larger economic forces of capitalist growth and extreme cultural fragmentation due to very rapid social change create extremely difficult conditions for local efforts.

Nevertheless, as the Vikalp Sangam framework indicates, it is not possible in most instances for groups working on alternatives to achieve progress towards all five of these aspects. Achieving progress on two (ecological sustainability and democratic principles), while remaining aware of the need to address the other challenges by maintaining conversations about these in various public and Government fora, the Kaikondrahalli lake restoration initiative has made significant progress to our understanding of how to rejuvenate the currently inhospitable living conditions of most Indian cities.

In summary, one of the most important lessons from the story of Kaikondrahalli Lake is that ordinary citizens can make a difference, without necessarily waiting for perfect knowledge or perfect solutions that achieve all goals. As Priya Ramasubban says,

> "We tend to think that once a problem is highlighted it will be solved. But even if it is sub-optimal problem solving... it still is progress in the right direction. Most people who are hesitant to get involved should realise that even without domain knowledge or because of the fear that they may not do the perfect thing, they should come forward to help... otherwise the rich plethora of experience the lake can offer will soon pale to become a 'once was nice but now kinda passé place'. We do not want to glorify a simple effort. This is an effort by common citizens with no background of activism. If we can do it, anyone can."

Acknowledgements

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Collective Farming in Kerala and Lessons for Maharashtra

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Collective farming group

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Collective Farming in Kerala and Lessons for Maharashtra

Seema Kulkarni

Kudumbashree[1] has been an inspiring story of women's collectivization and empowerment. Success stories and critiques have dominated the discussions on Kudumbashree for over a decade or so, but all the voices agree to the fact that Kudumbashree made a huge impact on women's lives and brought them out into public space. This story is not about the Kudumbashree programme of Kerala, which has been well documented, discussed and debated. It is about the collective farming programme of Kudumbashree which was initiated in 2010 and which has ramifications for rural women's farm based livelihoods, and perhaps, in the long run, for farming itself.

In January 2016, the collective farming programme covered a total of about 44,000 hectares of land across the fourteen districts of the State. Ernakulam topped the list with cultivation in 7,847 hectares (http://thekudumbashreestory. info/index.php/programmes/economic-empowerment/

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1.   Kudumbashree is the Government of Kerala's flagship programme for women's empowerment. Details can be found on www.kudumbashree.org

farming-programmes/jlgs). Paddy has been cultivated in about 12,000 ha, banana in 11,000 ha, vegetables and tubers around 9,000 ha. The total active groups – or Joint Liability groups (JLGs) as they are called in the state – are 59,478 and those with active bank linkages are 27,381 with a linkage amount of ₹ 341 crores (http://kudumbashree.org/sites/all/themes/kudumbashree/uploads/downloads/1166639539_Collective%20Farming%20Details.pdf).

Collective Farming

In the last few decades, Kerala has seen a downward trend in the agricultural sector. More and more land is lying fallow, rice production has declined and the state's dependence on import of food from other states has increased. The inevitable effects of this, among other things, have been male outmigration, diversification into horticulture and reduction in paddy lands. This means that women bear the brunt of this by having to stay back and support livelihoods.

The initial efforts of the government at improving paddy cultivation through collective farming did not yield very positive results for various social and legal reasons that included shortage of labour, leasing in land, and availability of low interest credit. It was only when Kudumbashree launched a massive programme in collective farming in 2010 with women's groups leasing in land that there was progress. An earlier experience of women's collective farming had also acquainted the government with the constraints regarding land titles, poor access of women to land, credit, skills and markets. Thus the 10th plan (2007-2012) onwards – the focus of which was on agricultural production, local economic development, poverty eradication, and social equity – a systematic effort was made by the government to ensure that they addressed these constraints meaningfully.

Notes from the field

Kudumbashree is part of the local self government department and closely works with the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI). It is structured in three tiers --

- Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) at the panchayat level
- Area Development Societies (ADS) at the ward level
- Community Development Society (CDS), a registered entity, at the municipal/district level

Each tier works closely with the PRI for village development plans with specific involvement of women.

A Joint Liability Group (JLG) is along the lines of the group concept promoted by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). Introduced in 2009 in collective farming, JLGs are a group of five to ten women who come together as a collective for an economic activity and avail a loan for the same. Loans to JLGs are at 7 percent interest but NABARD's interest subsidy scheme reduced the burden of interest and brought it down to 2 percent which, in several cases, was reduced further, effectively making it interest-free.

We were told that the NHGs identify fallow land along with the panchayats. All such land is listed out and different NHGs then approach their owners. Negotiations around rent and signing of agreements take place in the presence of the panchayat president. The agreements are made on a simple piece of paper; if the owners agree, smaller groups called the JLGs are formed. With some variations, this is the process followed across the state where groups have come together for collective farming.

We came across several examples of women across the social spectrum coming together to cultivate paddy, fruits

and vegetables. Here we discuss only a few collectives which we could visit and which, we think, broadly represent the spectrum.

Landless dalit women in the Chatanur Panchayat of Trivandrum district have formed a JLG. Sunitha, its leader, is convinced that the future is in farming, especially organic farming. She was so inspired by some of the training sessions where she learned about the extent of poison on their plate that she mobilized a group in her village to initiate collective farming. A group of seven women from the NHG approached the panchayat president and with his help identified about 80 cents (0.8 acre) of private fallow land in the village. An informal agreement was signed in front of the panchayat president and a small rent amount too was decided between the parties. Since the JLG is too small to draw on its own resources to cultivate the fallow land, the panchayat put up a proposal to provide MGNREGA support. The proposal was accepted and a large team of women joined the JLG to prepare the land. Vegetables and tubers were grown on this plot and a water sharing agreement was developed with the school adjacent to the plot.

We walked with them to see the three acres of paddy fields they had leased in not too far away from the school plot. For the landless dalit women, this activity has provided them with daily wages as well as organic food for home consumption.

In Aloor GP of Thrissur district, we met a very different group – here, homemakers had come together to form a JLG. There are numerous such examples of homemakers coming together and forming JLGs for collective farming. Many of these become family enterprises where children and the men of the household also participate. It ceases to be an economic activity alone and women say it has given new meaning to

their lives. According to one of them, 'I feel happy that we are now eating good food and not chemicals.'

The plot on which they are doing collective farming is about one acre and fifty cents and they are growing different varieties of pumpkin and gourds. They have a provision for water that lasts until summer. The produce they grow is mostly sold in the local Kudumbashree market and they have their own vehicle for transporting the produce to the markets. Since the plot is adjacent to their home, like in most places in Kerala, farming becomes a familial activity. Children return from school and participate in sowing seeds, weeding and harvesting.

In the **Alamkode Panchayat**, motivated by the good food movement gaining ground in Kerala, a school teacher convinced her group of friends, all immediate neighbours and mainly homemakers, to lease in land and form a group. The group leased Tarawad[2] land in the vicinity and now grows fruits, flowers, spices and vegetables in that plot. The Tarawad woman who owned the land also joined the group. The family's young daughters too support the activity in different ways. One of them is studying to be a journalist and plans to write about this initiative. The main motivating factor for these women is the newfound happiness in growing crops and consuming the good healthy food they grow.

Mary's group in the Aloor Panchayat is a mixed group of five women – OBCs, Christians, open category Hindus and tribals. They started out small with a land lease of just 3.5 acres of paddy and for the last five years have about twenty

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2. Tarawad is the matrilineal system followed by the Nairs in Kerala. The Tarawad was a family home with property attached to it, which was enjoyed by the female lineage.

acres under cultivation. This land belongs to seven different farmers so they have a different set of lease arrangement with each of them – only one has been done on a stamp paper of ₹ 200/-; the rest are on plain paper. For different patches of land they pay different amounts towards rent ranging from ₹ 2000/acre to about ₹ 4000/acre. They are part of a twenty-member NHG formed in 2002. The JLG was formed later and received a loan of ₹ 6 lakhs. They have been extremely happy with this group activity and will continue doing this as long as they get land on lease and the support to cultivate them.

All these groups found reasons to collectivise and promote paddy and vegetable cultivation. The reasons varied from finding gainful employment, meaningful participation in production to ensuring poison free food for their families and for society at large.

While collectives in farming were growing in numbers there were also other kinds of collectives coming up to support the women farmers. One such group was Alamkode Agro Producers Company in Alamkode Panchayat of Thrissur district. The group started out as an NHG in 2002 as part of the Kudumbashree programme. Most of them are part of the CDS, the district level tier of the Kudumbashree. While preparing a plan for the panchayat, the members made an assessment of market availability for women's collective farms and realized that there was none. They started as a farmers' club but then grew into a producers' company which buys paddy from the women's collectives, pays them a better price and in a timely manner and sells it to consumers within and outside the panchayat, thereby supporting almost 350 JLGs. The agro producers company is yet to find a bearing in terms of profits, but the unstinted support of the Kudumbashree programme and NABARD has given them the

space and time to learn from their mistakes. They now sell thier Alamkode brand of rice in five and ten kilo packages. They are considering raising financial resources through shares from JLGs. However, what keeps them going is the need to contribute to the revival of paddy in Kerala.

Sindhu, the chairperson of Community Development Society[3] (CDS), felt something had to be done. The inspiring moment came when she visited Tamil Nadu as part of a state delegation. She met very educated farmers who shared their experiences. One of them shared his story of moving to organic paddy for self consumption and continuing with chemical cultivation for the market. Sindhu was not convinced about the market receiving chemical paddy and hence, as a CDS chairperson, she decided to work on this. She discussed the idea of growing organic paddy with the members of the agro producers company; in turn, they decided to encourage the women farmers from whom they procured paddy to grow organic food for their own consumption as well as for the market. There has been some awareness regarding this and the number of paddy cultivators growing organic paddy is growing.

Kudumbashree shops and cafés

One of the unique aspects of the Kudumbashree programme is its local shops and cafés. Although the local Kudumbashree shops are not able to fully absorb all the produce, they are making their presence felt and increasingly people have started coming to these shops to buy a variety of products that range from food grains, vegetables, soaps, oil, seeds and saplings to organic manure and pest repellents. The shops are not yet able to give higher rates for the organic produce.

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3. Community Development Society (CDS) is the uppermost tier in the three-tiered system of Kudumbashree.

The Kudumbshree shop we visited in the same panchayat was interesting. On the ground floor of the shop was the Kudumbshree café where the women's groups served local Kerala meals. The shop was located on the first floor and had a wide range of products from seeds, grains and compost to various other processed products as well. Kudumbashree shops do not have much purchasing power, so many of the JLGs have to sell their produce in the open markets. A part of the profits from the shop is reserved for the CDS while a part is given towards salaries of women who manage the shops.

Making Collective Farming Successful

Each of these stories is unique but what makes it more interesting is the way the pieces fit together to make a perfect jigsaw. There were unanswered questions with regard to the economics of the initiative and also the nature of decision making processes between and within different departments and the community as well. However, the impact on women was commendable and so was the commitment of the state to combine the goals of women's empowerment with those of revival of paddy and agriculture in general.

Environmental, human rights and dalit and feminist movements have a strong presence in Kerala and, through their struggles, have informed several government policies and programmes. Kudumbashree is one such programme that has continuously reshaped itself.

Environmental concerns and concerns of health and human rights were important issues for the Malayali society. Simultaneously, concerns related to pesticide use, chemical fertilizers and the realization that they were eating poisoned food was growing. This led to the 'good food movement' gaining ground and the growing demand for organic food.

While this history played a critical role in the success of the programme, there were several other factors that contributed to its success.

Overcoming the legal constraints

Reclamation of paddy wetlands and converting them to real estate had started becoming a norm in Kerala and this prompted the LDF government to bring in the Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act, 2008. Conservation of paddy fields thus became legally binding and the government too provided various incentives to paddy farmers to continue paddy cultivation. However, as recently as in 2015, the UDF government made an amendment to the act to allow for regularizing the wetland conversions prior to 2008. Environmental activists have criticised it saying that many such conversions to real estate done after 2008 too are being regularized since there is no available data base on wetland conversions. However, it is noteworthy to see various positive impacts of this decision in the period immediately after 2008 until most recently.

The other legal constraint for collective farming was the ban on land leases in Kerala by the 1970 Tenancy law. This made leasing in and out of land for farmers very difficult. Although there is no foolproof legal solution yet, Kudumbashree programme ensured protection of women's rights through the participation of both the local self government as well as Kudumbashree's three-tier structure. Panchayats and the Kudumbashree groups at all the three levels help identify fallow paddy land, list them out and then approach groups who can enter into an agreement with the owner for cultivation. This transparent and participatory process has helped secure women's rights over uncultivated lands.

Green Army: Skilled agricultural labour banks

Labour shortage and thus high labour costs, low market prices for paddy and resistance to mechanization by unions led to the decline in paddy lands. However, the primary reason farmers cited was labour shortage. Anup Kishore, then panchayat president of Wadakenchery in Thrissur district mooted the idea of the Green Army. He moved ahead with the introduction of machines by employing farmers trained by the agricultural university. These were mostly women and they performed all the agricultural operations very efficiently. Gradually, they developed a large pool of skilled workers – both men and women – who could offer a package of services from preparing the seedlings to transplanting, weeding, and harvesting. The Green Army or labour bank thus managed to green large tracts of land. It was finally registered in 2010 with both men and women as its members but was largely dominated by women.

Anoop Kishore told us that the important feature of the Green Army was that it did not have a wage differential between women and men. Women are represented very well across the different committees that exist. It provides labourers with social security and other employment benefits. In fact, the day we visited Anoop Kishore, there was a large annual general body meeting of the Green Army where they were collectively deciding on wage rates, employment benefits, etc. There were a large number of women in the meeting.

Food Security Army: Skills and capacities

The Food Security Army, a powerful idea developed and implemented by U. Jaikumaran at the Agricultural Research Station at Mannuthy in the Agricultural University in Thrissur, contributed well to the Kudambashree collective farming efforts. It has a cadre of trained farmers or what

they call the master farmers, most of them women, to take on the challenge to revive paddy land. These master farmers are trained to use machinery for paddy cultivation and harvesting. It is this army of trainees that provides the cadre for revival of paddy and other forms of farming in Kerala. Women are taught to use and maintain the machinery. The food security army operates as a service provider to different farms where all the agricultural operations are required. The army thus moves from one field to the other ensuring food security to thousands.

Convergence: Pooling financial and institutional resources

One of the most important aspects of the programme is the convergence with the PRIs to include both institutional and programmatic convergence as well as sharing of resources.

This is one of the few examples of complementarities between two arms of the local self government – one which provides autonomy in decision making for women and the other which incorporates the decisions and the plans into its governance. The relationship between Kudumbashree and the PRI is thus one which has contributed significantly to the success of both and especially brought out women into public and political spaces. Sarada Muraleedharan (2014), the most remembered IAS officer, in charge of Kudumbashree until 2012, says that the PRI and the CBO are contested spaces and argues using the Kudumbashree example to show how both are needed and can complement each other provided there is transparency and role definition of citizen and governance space.

Kudumbashree provides the Interest Subsidy Scheme or the ISS and the area and production incentives given for bringing fallow land under cultivation and for achieving higher

productivity of the crops respectively. A 5 percent interest subsidy is provided on farm loans borrowed at 7 percent interest and sometimes over and above that a 2 percent further subsidy for prompt repayments, thereby making the loans effectively interest free. This has contributed significantly to the economic viability of the programme.

Along with the agriculture and rural development departments, Kudumbashree has made a significant headway in the collective farming programme in Kerala. Support has been pooled by way of MGNREGA for employment and skills, through Mahila Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) for capacity building and through the agricultural department for provision of seeds, other inputs and technical guidance. Kudumbashree's concept of women's labour groups and the NHGs forming labour collectives transformed the implementation of MGNREGA in the state. Significantly, Kudumbashree realized that there were wage differentials not only between men and women but also among women of different castes. The SC and ST women grouped together to form labour collectives and began to use the MGNREGA effectively and enjoy their work.

An added pool of resources came by way of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) which was launched in 2011. Every state had to implement this programme through a registered state agency. Kudumbashree used this resource for advancing its collective farming programme. The MKSP, launched as a subcomponent of NRLM mainly to increase the visibility of women in agriculture, focuses on strengthening of women's groups engaged in farming, thereby enhancing productivity, improving the livelihoods of the members, and ensuring food security. Skill development programmes are at its core with several trainings organized for master farmers, exposure visits, financial support for buying equipment and

tools, supports in marketing of produce, capacity building in organic cultivation and setting up of farmer facilitation centres.

The Agriculture Department added its own resources through the crop insurance schemes, technical advice on crops to be grown, water requirements of different crops, etc. provided by the department staff also available at the Panchayat level, working in close coordination with the Kudumbashree groups. The only agricultural university in the country to have a gender studies department is at Thrissur and it provided the much needed feminist agenda to the collective farming programme.

Lessons for Other States

It goes without saying that the strong support of the Kerala Government was necessary to promote the collective farming initiative in Kerala. The unique positioning of Kudumbashree and its ability to draw on different resources across departments has helped in strengthening an unprecedented institutional and programmatic convergence. Kerala's social, political and cultural histories are of course evident in this story. The broadly progressive ideology of the left, feminist, environmental and other social movements that have countered the practice of political parties in power, have set the backdrop for the positive outcomes of the programme. The lessons and possibilities for other states such as Maharashtra-where I am based are many and Kudumbashree as the National Resource Organisation (NRO) for NRLM already has a presence in the State.

Maharashtra is rapidly becoming an urban and capitalist state, so it is important to note that about 40 percent of its population still depends on agriculture. More than 75 percent of the state is classified as drought prone and only 18

percent of the crop area is irrigated. With climate variability and flawed policies around water and agriculture, droughts are becoming recurrent with the impact being most severe on women (http://scroll.in/article/808302/drought-and-debts-the-plight-of-bharat-mata-in-marathwada). With little or no ownership or access to land, water and forests, women are forced to make ends meet in rural Maharashtra. Many of the central government programmes are also being implemented in Maharashtra, but there seems very little effort towards the scale of convergence evident in Kerala. Efforts of Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM) which are commendable in the state, need to be scaled up to cover the entire state and need to be supported by the different departments as seen in Kerala.

Acknowledgements

Last but not the least is a deep acknowledgement to all the women across the several collectives we met in both Trivandrum and Thrissur districts.

The weeklong visit was possible because of unstinted support and prodding by Chhaya Datar, a friend and teacher, and I thank her for that and also for hours of discussion before, during and after the visit.

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Notes on Local Actors and Organisations

The Niyamgiri story: Challenging the idea of growth without limits?

The Dongria Kondh Adivasis have been struggling against the mining proposals of Vedanta in the forests of Niyamgiri Hills. The movement against Vedanta was led by the local tribes, but it also gained massive support from other national and international communities. Late Bari Pidikaka of Throhli village, Dodhi Pusika of Gorota village and Lado Sikaka of Lakhpadar village of Niyamgiri hills have been among the lead farmer activists involved in the struggle.

Very much on the map: the Timbaktu Collective

Mary Vattamattam and C.K. ('Bablu') Ganguly initiated the Timbaktu Collective in 1990. After finishing their studies they worked as political activists with the Young India Project (organizing farm labour). Tired of the constant mode of agitation, they wanted to do constructive rural work – not only demand change towards justice but actively and practically facilitate such change.

Bablu Ganguly studied commerce at Bangalore University, and worked as a political and theatre activist for 12 years. His work in theatre brought him into close contact with people in the rural areas. His ideas on the Collective emerged from interactions with and learning from villagers, and from sources like Masanobu Fukuoka's One Straw Revolution and Bill Mollison's approach of permaculture. Bablu has also been one of the joint conveners of the Jan Vikas Andolan, and founding member of the Andhra Pradesh Federation of Agricultural Labourers' Unions.

Mary Vattamattam holds a Masters in Social Work; after working with CROSS, an NGO working in Telangana region of A.P., till 1980, she founded her own organization named Samajika Vikasa Kendram

in Srikakulam, to work among the Savara tribal communities. From 1986, she worked with the Young India Project for five years, and with Bablu, she helped found the Andhra Pradesh Federation of Agricultural Labourers' Unions in 1985/86. She also co-founded Mahila Aikya Vedika (District Women's Forum).

Timbuktu Collective works in 172 villages of Chennekothapalli, Roddam and Ramagiri mandals of Anantapur district, reaching and serving about 21,000 marginalised families. The Collective works with some of the most affected by chronic drought, unproductive land, unemployment and poor infrastructural facilities in the region, among them the landless, small and marginal farmers with special emphasis on women, children, youth and dalits.

Strengthening local livelihoods with ecological considerations in Kachchh

Kachchh Nav Nirman Abhiyan, better known as Abhiyan, is a collective of Kachchh based development organizations with a strong local presence. The objective of the network is to synergize human knowledge, physical and financial resources to collaborate towards a Kachchh which is governed by community initiatives. Associated groups discussed in the chapter:

Sahjeevan has been inspiring and supporting marginalised communities for the past 25 years to revive their traditional ecological knowledge systems, engage with relevant technologies and scientific methods to conserve their ecological resources, and strengthen their livelihoods.

Satvik works towards bringing ecologically sound farming practices into the mainstream and promoting seed conservation practices and organic agriculture.
Setus, set up initially as information centres, have evolved over time to playing a facilitation role to mobilize communities to realize their development concerns and needs through self-help and self-governance mechanisms.

Saiyere Jo Sangathan or the Collective of Women Friends is a federation and a community based organisation set up with the mission of economic, social and political empowerment of rural women in the Nakhatrana and Lakhpat blocks through a range of capacity building initiatives and development programmes.

Khamir is a platform for the crafts, heritage and cultural ecology of the Kachchh region of Gujarat. Instituted after the earthquake of 2001, it is a space for engagement and development of Kachchh's rich creative industries.

Shaam-e-Sarhad, Hodka – A community-based tourism initiative

Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) and Hunnarshala were two organisations that came together to develop the Shaam-e-Sarhad initiative. KMVS was established in 1989 with the primary objective of empowering rural women in the region. Its mission was to achieve this through raising awareness and supporting local collectives. As KMVS grew, its mission broadened to include areas of ecological restoration, livelihood access and diversification, violence against women, reproductive health and the strengthening of local governance through Gram Panchayats.

Hunnarshala, registered in 2003, came into being as a result of associations established after the earthquake of 2001 to help with reconstruction of habitats. In 2004, KMVS, along with UNDP, selected Hodka for the proposed Shaam-e-Sarhad project for its location and inherent hospitality, and to use tourism as a medium or catalyst to strengthen people's perspectives on conservation of their ecological and natural resources. Thus, the idea of establishing a community-managed tourism initiative with KMVS as its nodal agency and Hunnarshala supporting the design and construction component was implemented.

Kuthumbakkam: Re-embedding economy in society

Elango Rangasamy was born and brought up in Kuthambakkam

village in Tiruvallur district near Chennai in Tamil Nadu. After completing his B. Tech in Anna University, he joined Oil India and shifted to CSIR as a Scientist. However, he returned to his village soon after to reform it and rid it of caste discrimination and violence against women. Inspired by Gandhi, Kumarappa and Ambedkar among several others, Elango started with these goals and eventually also worked on an environmentally sound economic model for Kuthumbakkam. He had strong faith in the decentralized Panchayat Model and used the 73rd constitutional amendment most effectively. He started a Panchayat Academy in the village to scale up this work; to date the academy has trained at least 150 panchayat presidents and 600 women's self-help groups in India.

Maati

Malika Virdi made Sarmoli her home 25 years ago and has since been learning to be a part of the fabric of mountain community life. She is a subsistence farmer, a primary producer and an active citizen of this remote Himalayan region. She served as the Sarpanch of the Sarmoli Jainti Van panchayat from 2003 to 2010. Malika is a co-founder of Maati, along with Basanti Rawat who was born in this village. Basanti is also a farmer and is now the coordinator of Maati. Her strength is her rootedness and sense of place, from where she engages with social and political issues that impact the everyday lives of mountain communities.

Imlee Mahuaa, learning in freedom, the democratic way

Prayaag Joshi, one of the trustees of Akanksha Public Charitable Trust (APCT) works with children to explore ways to enable them to be increasingly self reliant while going about their lives.

When he presented the idea of the school before the residents of Balenga Para in Bastar, Chattisgarh, the people liked the idea and unanimously decided to allow APCT to set up a school in their village. Imlee Mahuaa – a school that believes in learning in an environment of freedom – was thus started in August 2007 and is run by APCT, Chennai. It is a registered centre of the

National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) as well as a registered unaided school under the Department of Education of the state of Chhattisgarh.

Restoration of the Kaikondrahalli Lake in Bengaluru: Forging a new urban commons

In 2009, Priya Ramasubban and a team of volunteers (later formally registered as Mahadevpura Parisara Samrakshane Mattu Abhivrudhi Samiti - MAPSAS, a not for profit trust, in 2011) took up the challenge of reviving Kaikondrahalli Lake. Defying several odds, they successfully completed the task of reviving the lake in 2011; since then, it has become a major attraction for birds, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, and of course humans. This story with happy ending showcases what meaningful partnership between government agencies and communities can achieve. The successful execution of Kaikondrahalli Lake rejuvenation and its transformation into a model lake for the city encouraged the BBMP (city municipality) Lakes Division to entrust MAPSAS with the custody of three more lakes in the vicinity. Through its work, MAPSAS has demonstrated its capability to interact and coordinate with various government agencies and engage the local community and its network of volunteers to impact the community in an environmentally sustainable manner. MAPSAS hopes to inspire communities in other parts of the city also to start something similar as healthy lakes, along with their accompanying ecosystems are critical for the continuing health and vitality of Bangalore, especially given the development trajectory that this city has seen in the recent past.

Collective farming in Kerala and lessons for Maharashtra

Kudumbashree, translated as prosperity of the family, is the poverty eradication and women empowerment programme implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala set up in 1997 following the recommendations of a three member Task Force appointed by the State government. Its formation

was in the context of the devolution of powers to the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Kerala and the Peoples' Plan Campaign, which attempted to draw up the Ninth Plan of the local governments from below through the PRIs. It has a three-tier structure for its women community network, with Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) at the lowest level, Area Development Societies (ADS) at the middle level, and Community Development Societies (CDS) at the local government level. Kudumbashree community network was extended to cover the entire State in three phases during 2000-2002. By 2010, Kudumbashree had actively started its programme on collective farming with its NHGs. In 2011, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India recognised Kudumbashree as the State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM).

Notes on Authors

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Meenal Tatpati: Meenal worked as an intern in various projects for the Conservation and Livelihoods team before she became a member of Kalpavriksh in 2013. She has a Masters in Environmental Science from the University of Pune. She works on advocacy and research on Community Forest Rights (CFR) under Forest Rights Act, and is currently also involved in the team looking at worldviews of local communities on wellbeing and development. She likes to travel, take pictures and collect people stories.

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Seema Kulkarni: Seema is one of the founding members of Society for Promoting Participative Eco-system Management, Pune (SOPPECOM). She is presently working as a Senior Fellow in SOPPECOM, Pune and co-ordinating the gender and rural livelihoods activities within the organisation. She has co-ordinated various studies and programmes around decentralisation, gender and land, water and sanitation. She has published several articles/book chapters around issues of gender, water, sanitation and rural livelihoods. She has been associated with Stree Mukti Sangharsh Chalwal, the movement for the rights of single women in Western Maharashtra and is actively involved in the Coalition of women's groups in Maharashtra, Stree Mukti Andolan Sampark Samiti. She is also the National Facilitation Team member of MAKAAM, Forum for Women Farmers' Rights, and anchoring the network at the Maharashtra level.

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Sujatha Padmanabhan: What Sujatha loves the most is being outdoors, especially in the mountains and in forested areas, watching birds, butterflies and other insects and listening to a bubbling stream. However, since she lives in Pune, she spends some of her time working in the field of environment education. She has authored four story books for children, writes occasionally

for magazines and newspapers, and has developed localised environment education handbooks, games and resource kits for children and educators. She is a member of Kalpavriksh, an environment action group.

Vinay Nair: Vinay's writing explores experiences and identities at the margins of opposing narratives. It attempts to hold steadfast onto lived human reality amid talk of systems and big data, and while sympathetic, views 'alternatives' with as much scepticism as the 'mainstreams' they seek to replace. Having worked for multiple NGOs in the field of environment and development, he considers them to be as complex and fascinating as the campaigns and causes that are close to their hearts. Coming from a literary background, he finds that an exposure to the arts could aid in their understanding and objectives. Lately he finds that his exploration is best served within the form of fiction writing. Telling Lies to Tell Truths.

Notes on Editors

Neera M. Singh is Assistant Professor at the Department of Geography, University of Toronto, Canada. Her academic scholarship on the commons, nature-human relations and conservation derives from longstanding and ongoing work on community-based forest governance in India. She founded Vasundhara, a Bhubaneswar-based non-profit organization and led the organization for 13 years prior to entering academia; she continues to serve on its governing board.

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Neema Pathak Broome, has studied environmental science and completed a postgraduate diploma in wildlife management. She is a member of Kalpavriksh, coordinating their Conservation and Livelihoods Programme. She is part of the team monitoring implementation of conservation laws and policies, in particular the Wildlife Protection Act and the Scheduled Areas and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006. Her main area of interest is conservation governance, particularly Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs). She has been involved with documentation, research, analysis and advocacy related to inclusive conservation governance and ICCAs in India and South Asia. She has been part of the team coordinating the National Community Forest Rights Learning and Advocacy Process (CFRLA) since 2011 and also coordinates a local process of participatory conservation governance in Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary in Maharashtra.

Notes on Publishers

Kalpavriksh (KV) is a voluntary group based in India, working on environmental education, research, campaigns, and direct action. It began in 1979 with a students' campaign to save Delhi's Ridge Forest area from encroachments and destruction. Starting with these roots in local action, KV has moved on to work on a number of local, national, and global issues. Its activities are directed to ensuring conservation of biological diversity, challenging the current destructive path of 'development', helping in the search for alternative forms of livelihoods and development, assisting local communities in empowering themselves to manage their natural resources, and reviving a sense of oneness with nature. The five main activity programmes in Kalpavriksh include, Conservation and Livelihoods, Environment and Development, Environment Education, Urban Greens and Alternatives. www.kalpavriksh.org and www.vikalpsangam.org. For other Kalpavriksh publications see http://www.kalpavriksh.org/index.php/publications.

Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM) is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation working primarily in the rural areas on Natural Resource Management (NRM) since 1991. It is committed to sustainable and rational use of natural resources and its equitable access to the disadvantaged/marginalised sections like Dalits, landless and women through a democratic and decentralised governance of these resources. It insists that reform in the water sector must address class, caste, ethnicity and gender discrimination. Hence it believes in partnering with social movements and civil society organisations that engage with these issues and extends support to them through training in resource literacy and participatory planning, and research and policy advocacy.
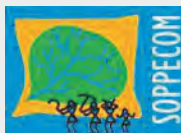
As the world hurtles towards greater ecological devastation, inequalities and social conflicts, are there alternative ways of meeting human needs and aspirations without trashing the earth and leaving more than half of all humanity behind?

Polluted air, dirty water, chemically destroyed agricultural lands, depleting populations of wildlife and degrading biodiversity has left the earth on the verge of a climate disaster. Mounting disparity across caste, class, gender and ethnic groups, increased psychological and physical violence to include state sponsored violence across various socio-economic groups, conflicts over natural resources, attempts at resource grabbing by large corporations has led to protests by the marginalised whose survival is dependent on these resources. Such is the reality of the current times forcing us to question the idea of development, in particular the overarching focus on economic growth.

Ecologies of Hope and Transformation brings together powerful stories of local efforts towards ensuring human wellbeing and health of natural ecologies in a mutually synergistic fashion as alternatives to the current model of development. It seeks to explore the lessons that these examples of everyday practice of people in different parts of India from diverse social and ecological settings offer for challenging the dominant model of development.