

VAAGDHARA



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Voluntary Association for Agricultural General Development,
Health and Reconstruction Alliance

3/153, Khandu Colony
District Banswara, RAJASTHAN

VAAGDHARA- An Organisation for Rural Reconstruction and Empowerment

Vision: Creating socially just, technologically improved and empowered rural communities, and taking development to the most marginalized groups of the society.

Vaagdhara- Its Genesis and Commitment

Voluntary Association of Agriculture General Development Health and Reconstruction Alliance (Vaagdhara) is as the name implies a multi-dimensional not for profit organisation working with rural and tribal communities in Rajasthan. It is committed to the empowerment of most deprived and vulnerable groups of the society, in particular the indigenous population of South Rajasthan, an already exploited and excluded group, which has been further marginalized over the past fifteen year when market economy has started pervading all spheres of governance and civic life. What began as relief work as a response to the crisis situation created by successive droughts in the Ghantol Tehsil of Banswara district in 1986-87 continued as a long term endeavor by this committed group of intellectuals, social workers, farmers and health professionals. During their work this group realized that only through sustained development activities could the needs of the farmers be addressed and hence were drawn into a long struggle for sustainable development, social justice, and human dignity. In terms of practical programmes, this meant a variety of interventions, however, supporting people's livelihoods and restoring their entitlements was the central strategy.

Banswara, core constituency of VAAGDHARA is one of the most inhospitable tribal districts of southern Rajasthan. Having an area of 506, 279 hectares it has a population of 1,500,420 (2001 census) and population density of 298 persons per sq. km. the district is predominantly inhabited by tribals, the indigenous communities, including Bhils, Bhilmeenas, Damor, Charpotas and Ninamas. These tribals make out their living by engaging in primitive agriculture and cultivate maize, what, cotton and gram. These ethnic groups mainly live in small one room house known as "Tapras", which lie scattered all over the area. Other major constituents of the social composition in Banswara are Patels, Rajputs, Brahmins, Mahajans and Muslims. The dialect spoken is called Vaagri which is a mixture of Gujarati and Mewari.

Due to the inhospitable terrain, the farmers face great hardships in agriculture. Some parts of the region are precariously dependent of rain water and highly prone to drought. Wherever, the water scarcity is not so acute, the irresponsible and ineffective water management practices have led to significant contributions to successive famine in the area. Thirteen out of last 25 years have faced severe famine. The severity of the famine can be gauged by the fact that almost 85% of the population is dependant on the rains. The only dam Mahi irrigates just about 15% of the arable land of the region.

Located in Banswara town of Rajasthan, Vaagdhara focuses its efforts in the districts of Banswara, Dungarpur, Udaipur, Pratapgarh and Chhittorgarh. Vaagdhara aims at promoting and facilitating development processes in these water and resources scarce region through investing in human and technological development and augmentation of natural resources towards long term well being of its partner communities, i.e. women,

children, peasants and deprived tribal population. With such a challenging task of ensuring livelihoods, management of natural resources and also countering the market forces due to which these very efforts are threatened Vaagdharma has to consistently work from the community levels to the national, from development programmes and activities to advocacy for the rights of the communities.

Vaagdharma's Multi-Dimensional Interventions

Starting with delivery of agriculture inputs such as seed and fertilizer distribution for 15 farm families, the scope and work area of Vaagdharma has expanded exponentially. In an effort to counteract the severe impact of droughts in future Vaagdharma moved forward with the aim of augmenting livelihood sources and options through improving traditional agricultural practices among the tribal population and other marginalized groups. Several activities are being undertaken in continuum which includes capacity building on irrigation management and use of appropriate fertilizers, seed production, on-farm training, vermi-composting, seed and medicinal plant production. All these activities are the key to the food security and livelihoods promotion for the local population which predominantly comprises of tribals, the indigenous people. The interventions in primary education and health services, women empowerment and income generation are a logical corollary to the efforts to improve life and living standard of rural people.

Ensuring Food Security-The World Food Programme

Food for Human Development (FFHD) has been an initiative undertaken by United Nations to develop and catalyse those communities which are excluded and impoverished and most of all suffer from food deprivation. Vaagdharma is partnering with the UN World Food Programme and aims at developing those tribal pockets in Banswara district which have been completely neglected and excluded from mainstream interventions. Vaagdharma in the process has been activating as well as catalysing tribal people of the 30 identified villages to access food and livelihood resources. This journey started with a baseline survey of the socio-economic as well as health status and gender relations in January 2006 in selected villages of Banswara district. On 1st May 2006 a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed with the UN-WFP and the legal formalities were completed. The project partners include the **Government of India and the functionaries of the Integrated Child Development Scheme and Forest Department**. Project staff was recruited by the second week of May. They were oriented towards project objectives and the main features which FFHD aims to strengthen in the tribal pockets. A work plan for the entire project was planned, framed and sent to World Food Programme (WFP). Awareness building camps were organized in all the 30 villages where project had to function. After the selection of Village Animators, Health Motivators in all the 3 blocks a District level Workshop for training them was organized. To get a comprehensive picture of the areas where the programme was to be launched a baseline survey was initiated

The key issues which this programme plans to address are to reduce gender disparity through involvement of women and their capacity building, increase literacy rates and awareness levels, improve the health and sanitation status of the communities in these areas and distribution of grains as an incentive for villagers to participate in all the project activities and take ownership.

The programme started with the formation of new Self Help Groups (SHG) as well as mobilising the existing groups to work for the betterment of their own village. Due to the active participation of Women's Self Help Group members various kinds of service delivery activities in the field of health, nutrition, sanitation and education was initiated slowly but steadily. This holistic approach involved numerous meetings and training sessions which involved the cluster co-ordinators, health workers, SHG members and ground level workers in the presence of master trainers to give FFHD an impetus. The whole process geared up in the month of August where new SHGs were formed in all the three blocks. The work of FFHD was initiated by the formation of 7, 2 and 11 WSHGs in Ghatol, Sajjangarh and Peepalkhunt blocks respectively. The number of WSHG members who were involved in training process was 671, 156 and 281 in Ghatol, Peepalkhunt and Sajjangarh blocks respectively during the month of August. The scene of development has changed dramatically since then and at present 62, 105 and 44 WSHGs are functioning in Ghatol, Peepalkhunt and Sajjangarh blocks respectively with a cadre of 2580 number of ground level worker



An Awareness Camp as Part of FFHD



Distribution of Food Grains by Women

Health and Gender Programmes

Vaagdhara has learnt through its work that for any programme to achieve its objectives there needs to be a strong gender component and hence in all its work women have been consciously approached and involved. It provides regular training of the SHG members as well as the Health Workers like the ANMs and Anganwadi Workers. Several health camps were organised to disseminate information on infant and maternal health, immunization and safe deliveries.



A Health Camp in Progress

The ASHA-Training Programme was also held to train the women to deliver appropriate health services to the remote tribal areas.



ASHA-Training in Progress

A six-day training programme was organised at Anandpuri for the ASHA women, who were going to spearhead the health programme for the National Rural Health Mission. In a typically Rajasthani ambience participative techniques were utilised to inform the women on numerous health and sanitation issues, including immunization, contraception, handling safe child birth and other such topics. Music, dance and cultural breaks added interest and colour to the entire programme and ensured complete involvement of the women during the sessions. An evaluation both written and verbal was conducted on the concluding day.

Similar regular training programmes were organised for Women's Self Help Groups to foster skills on managing resources, organising group activities and participating in the FFHD. Vaagdhara has been able to make a team of partner NGOs and Government organisations whose WSHG members are actively participating in the process of development. New relations have been established with other organizational departments who are constantly cooperating in FFHD project which is guided by mutual understanding. The core objective of FFHD is to enhance capacities of women in tribal areas. At present 865 female SHG members are functioning in the 30 identified villages.



How to Get Organised-SHG Training Programme

The WSHG members have engaged themselves in various types of social delivery activities in villages which comprises of escorting children to AWC, women and children receiving nutrition, sanitation work, preparation of mid day meal, making new enrolments in schools, to bring ladies and children to AWC on health days etc.



Coming Together-SHG Training Programme

Improving Livelihoods

Vaagdhara's experience in the field and its firm belief in the capacities of the people with whom it works get reflected in its consistent efforts to improve the livelihood options for the communities. Vaagdhara has been through several activities and programmes tried to improve existing skills and occupations as well as introduce new and relevant options for

livelihoods as has emerged through extensive scientific surveys of the region. Some of these efforts are in varying stages of development but peoples' participation forms the underlying theme throughout these activities.

Goat Rearing

Goat Rearing as an income generation activity to ensure food security of poor and Scheduled Tribe communities was introduced in seven villages namely Khuntichandna, Chayna, Badliya, Dhodhiya, Rohaniya, Barkota, Chaja in tehsil Bagidora of Banswara district in Rajasthan. About 100 families are targeted to benefit from this project. The major efforts of this project will be directed towards identification and standardization of new innovative technologies in animal husbandry and mobilization of the communities for establishment of training cum resource center to be used by the SHG's even after completion of the project. This programme is supported by CAPART.



Learning by Doing-New Breeds of Goats

Stone Sculpture and Carving

This project was conceived of after initial discussions and individual visits to the homes of traditional workers to motivate and mobilize them. Discussions revealed the need for information on new and modern techniques, training on modern art, design development, easy access and availability of raw materials, financial support and credit facilities and modern and better tools for improved finished products and the setting up of a Help Centre. Efforts were directed towards the formation of 6 Self Help groups culminating in the election of office bearers and opening of Bank savings account.

Some of the major achievements of this project so far has been the confidence building and mobilization of the artisans, an exhibition of their products in "Urban Haat" at Talwada, finalization of modern tools required by artisans and selection of trainees.



Motivational Camp

Jatropha Plantation



Among one of the many efforts of VAAGDHARA is promotion of the production of the medicinal plant Jatropha and its clean fuel options. Jatropha serves both ends as it has immense medicinal values and it is also a soot free clean fuel thereby saving the environment from pollution. A training programme was organized for the project team to develop Jatropha nursery. Theoretical and hands on training was provided on raising Jatropha which resulted in VAAGDHARA developing in house expertise in Jatropha plantation. A nursery has been prepared and it raised more than 50,000 Jatropha plants which were distributed among the villagers. In April 2006 another training programme was also organised for Jatropha Plantation. 10 lakh Jatropha seedlings were planted in a

nursery based in Banswara which was later on distributed at panchayat levels to other villagers to begin their own plantations.

Networking and Advocacy

Networking and advocacy seeks to provide a synergy between the efforts of voluntary and non-government organizations for optimizing the impact of their work for regional and community development by bringing the relevant issues of the area on the larger forums, coordinate the non-institutional efforts and seek the redress of genuine needs and demands of the region from the administrative machinery. Considering the rapid onslaught of the globalisation processes and the relative lack of skills, preparedness and understanding of the market economy of the rural and tribal communities for Vaagdhara it become urgent and imperative that it participates and informs itself of the larger national and international developments. At the same time it realizes the need to link up and present the marginalised voices of the communities with whom it has developed an intimate relationship so that advocacy for the promotion their rights becomes a intrinsic part of its work and agenda. Vaagdhara therefore utilised the larger platforms like the India Social Forum, the World Social Forum and World trade Organization for presenting the concerns and problems of the areas and communities with whom it is working.

Vaagdhara Board



Mr Narendra Nath Joshi, Chair Person: Mr. Joshi is an Agriculture Economist. He has specialization in rural finance, cooperative and farm management. He has 5 published works in his credit. He is widely traveled in connection with different studies to Thailand, Japan, South Korea and Sri Lanka. He undertook rural credit studies on behalf of state Government in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, M.P., U.P., Punjab, Orissa, West Bengal and Kerala. He is Ex General Manager of Rajasthan State Cooperative Bank, Jaipur. Currently he is working as Managing Director of Sikkim State Cooperatives Bank, Gangtok.



Mr Jayesh Joshi, Secretary: Mr Jayesh Joshi is a Development Analyst & Practitioner and a social worker of “Vaagar” region of Rajasthan. He has been associated with VAAGDHARA from the last 8 years.



Miss Josphin Joshwa, Treasurer: Miss Joshwa has specialization in education and did her masters in arts and education. She is Ex-Deputy Director (Education), Govt of Rajasthan.



Mr. Brij Mohan Dixit, Member: Mr. Dixit is an Agriculture Economist with 34 years of experience. He received “Gold Medal” in his Post Graduation. He has 12 research papers in his credit. He underwent technical & management training in India & USA. Considering outstanding performance throughout his service carrier, Agriculture Department, Government of Rajasthan appointed him on highest post for a technical officer i.e. Additional Director. He is also Ex-Managing Director of Rajasthan State Seeds Corporation Ltd. Preparing draft seeds policy for Government of Rajasthan is also in his credit. He has vast experience of working in the field of Environment, Bio-diversity, Agriculture, Sericulture, Animal Husbandry and Irrigation Management.



Ms. Sachi Bhatt, Member: Ms. Bhatt is a gold medalist of master’s qualification in Social work. She has specialization in Health.

Dr. Meeta Singh, Member: Dr. Meeta Singh is a qualified medical doctor having long experience of working on gender and women reproductive health. Currently she is the State Director of IFES, an international support organization.



Dr. Anchala Chaturvedi, Member: Dr. Anchala Chaturvedi has her doctorate degree in Sanskrit. She is an independent educational consultant.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

FFHD	Food for Human Development
WFP	World Food Program
SHG	Self Help Group
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
WSHG	Women Self Help Group
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
AWC	Anganwari Centre
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services