


CHALLENGING CHALLENGES...

Short narratives of big achievements, in facilitating inclusive development for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and rural poor, from two of India's remotest districts



TOWARDS INCLUSION

PIC - Ranjan Panda

**Aina**

ସମ୍ମାନ ଅଧିକାରୀଙ୍କ ସହିତ ମିଳିତ
PACS
Our rights • Our voice

Challenging Challenges...

Challenging Challenges...

Short narratives of big achievements, in facilitating inclusive development for Persons with Disabilities(PWDs) and rural poor, from two of India's remotest districts

Ranjan Panda
With
Ajit Kumar Panda

PREFACE

Aaina with the support of DFID-PACS took up a project "Towards Inclusion" in 6 blocks of Kandhamal district and 1 block of Boudh district covering 350 villages. The focus of the project was on two aspects of livelihood and education for the persons with disability. The approach was to build the confidence, form groups and advocate for their rights and access it. Getting jobs under MGNREGS and going to school under compulsory primary education were fundamental objectives of the project.

Kandhamal is a forest covered tribal dominant sparse district. 56% of the population belongs to the scheduled tribe. And its population density is 98 persons to a square kilometer one of the lowest in the country. The livelihood is purely forest and agriculture based.

Disability as usual was mired with myths, false beliefs, lack of knowledge and moreover lack of access. But then the individuals were strongly spirited. The community and other functionaries were reluctant and skeptical which was not that surprising. On the other hand the administration was quite supportive of the endeavours.

The project team was a bunch of young and energetic personnel, ready to stretch that extra bit to achieve the objective of the project. They were consistently motivating and supporting the persons with disability to unite, form groups, build leadership, advocate and achieve.

There were the Children's Clubs, self help groups of persons with disabilities and the Sramika Sanghas - the foundation units for the inclusion process. The groups were built at the village level, and gradually federated upwards to the district level.

There are many individual and collective achievements by the persons with disability through this process. Within a projected time frame the outcome may not be pure guild and relative to expectations. Yet it has definitely made an impact and initiated the change towards inclusion in the community.

We have collected case studies highlighting this aspect of the project for dissemination and posterity. Some of them are presented here for better understanding of the administration and development professionals.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of DFID-PACS, members of Aaina, project management members and last but not the least the energetic and enthusiastic staff of the project for their contribution to achieve the project objective, My sincere thanks to all the children, parents and community members those took Aaina into confidence and cooperated with the initiative. Thanks are also due to the documentation team lead by Mr Ranjan Panda for capturing and presenting the stories for others, an effective step "Towards Inclusion".



Mrs. Sneha Mishra
Secretary, Aaina

Challenging Challenges...

CONTENT

SI No	CONTENT	Page No
1	Potential redefined...	4
2	Rights at right place: Jagan's childhood restored...	7
3	Organise, act and prosper...	9
4	Nabajini's new found identity, of dignity and substance...	11
5	Back to the school and happy ...	13
6	Fighting exclusion, the self-help way...	15
7	Caste away: children's way to unite and ensure child rights...	18
8	Small and effective: the story of Tana Penu village...	20
9	From ignorant labours to aware leaders...	23
10	The real vision...	26

Potential redefined...

Jugal Digal (47) of Bhuktakanali village in Kandhamal district never thought that he would be allowed to work under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guaranty Scheme (MGNREGS). Believing that People with Disabilities (PwDs) like him have no right to work, he never applied for job card under this employment guarantee scheme. But his notion totally changed when he became a part of the process called PACS initiated by Aaina - one of the state level CSOs in Odisha.

Jugal is an orthopedically and partially hearing impaired person belonging to a dalit caste. He lives with his wife Rebat. They do not have any child. Bhuktakanali is a small village in Balaskumpa Gram Panchayat of Khajuripada block, which consists of two hamlets - Adivashi Pada and Harijan Pada, with 104 households. "Harijans are untouchables for the tribals in our area, so we have grown up with this since childhood," says Jugal. Bhuktakanali was divided in caste lines since long and there was no social linkage between the two hamlets. Even the children were restricted to play with each other in the village prior to PACS intervention.

Children pave the way to end untouchability -

Aaina started addressing the untouchability issues through Children's Clubs by initiating interactive games, cultural activities and learning sessions among children. Gradually the clubs became inclusive platforms for adults, who came together and interacted with each other to address various problems of the village. They identified 8 Persons with Disabilities (PwDs); 3 from Adivashi Pada and 5 from Harijan Pada, through this interaction process. A Self Help Group (SHG) was formed. Two persons (one Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe) of the village provided handholding support to the SHG. The members contributed fifty rupee each per month for creation of a group fund and deposited that in the nearby Utkal Gramya Bank.

Being a member of the SHG, Jugal felt confident. He applied for a job card in the Gram

Challenging Challenges...

Panchayat office and was issued one immediately. When he knew that it was necessary to open a bank account to get job under MGNREGS, he rushed to the Bank to open one. He felt proud when he got hold of these two documents. Subsequently, he applied for job in the Panchayat office and got that in due time. After working for a week, he knew that the wage has been deposited in his bank account. He has completed 16 days of work under this scheme and is still working. Jugal is now happy that he is taking the responsibility of his family and overcoming economic challenges despite being physically challenged. He is also now allowed to work in other schemes like Pradhan Mantri Sadak Yojana in the village, and a happy bread earner for his family.

SHGs as lifelines -

A small step by Aaina has opened up a great opportunity for the PwDs. The SHGs have become their lifelines. Recognizing their active involvement in self help activities, the district administration has extended them financial support. They have been awarded ten

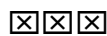


Challenging Challenges...

thousand rupees from Government under Mission Shakti Scheme to use that as revolving fund. "We are planning for a small business with the same in the village," says Anadi Biswal, President of Omm Namah Bhagabate Basudebaya SHG. Currently they are thinking of changing the name of the SHG as it is not representing both the communities (Hindu and Christian). That will take them to another step towards inclusion. The Bank Account has been opened in the above mentioned name along with a suffix "BIKALANGA SHG" which they feel is undignified. They are planning to raise this issue with the bank authorities and change their bank account name. Awareness shows!

"We have our Disability Certificates and are receiving rupees three hundred each under Madhubabu Pension Yojana every month. Prior to Aaina intervention, we had not met each other even though we were staying in the same village. Now we have come together as a group and sharing our sorrows and happiness in every meeting. A feeling of unity has ushered in. We are happy that the community members now recognise our efforts to attain social and economic independence," shared the SHG members.

A small endeavor has brought big changes for sure. The PwDs have found a new hope to live with dignity. This has enhanced the scope for freedom and social inclusion. Other such PwDs in neighboring villages would also benefit from this example.



Rights at right place: Jagan's childhood restored...

Jagan's birth brought immense happiness to the family, but that was short lived. When Jagan grew, the family members realised that he would never be able to walk in his life due to problems in his legs. Knowing the truth, they plummeted into grief, but gradually came to term with that reality and tried to help Jagan to grow with the other abilities which he had. Jagan showed much interest in his study. However, the main problem was the community, which always showed negative attitudes to the problems of Jagan. "We were very much disturbed by thinking about the future of the child" say Jagan's parents. "Even though the peers were interested to make friendship with our son, their parents were not allowing. Thus Jagan became lonely without friends," Jagan's parents add.

Jagan was identified by the Aaina team in the year 2011 and the process of change in the village started. The team discussed with the parents and Jagan regarding his schooling. The problem with Jagan was totally related to the attitude of the society, which instead of recognising his ability, was obsessed with his inabilities. Thus, for Aaina, it was necessary to create an



enabling social environment for this differently abled boy. As a part of the regular activity a Children's Club was formed in this village and efforts were taken to make Jagan an active participant in all the activities of the club. Continuous sensible efforts brought a sea change in the attitude of the children. All of them realised the problems and needs of

Challenging Challenges...

Jagan. They realised that Jagan's rights as a child are as important as the rights of the other children. The change in the immediate environment enhanced the confidence of Jagan. He was admitted in the village school for pursuing his study.

Positive change in attitude -

During 2012 Jagan was provided with Banishree scholarship and disability pension by the block administration. Jagan is now attending the school regularly. Financial benefit from the government helped him fulfil his educational needs and encouraged his parents for his schooling. The most important achievement in this process was that, the attitude of the community members took a sea change. Teachers became very much supportive. All these supports resulted in good academic achievements for him. His achievements did not limit to academics only but spread out to extracurricular activities. He has been awarded at block level for his better performance in drawing competition. Jagan has also been selected as a member of the School Management Committee (SMC).

Through this initiative of Children's Club and Child Protection Committee (CPC) the discrimination towards children with disabilities is decreasing day by day and now everybody thinks that Jagan has equal rights like other children.

Increase in awareness level on child rights has resulted in inclusion of all the children with disabilities of the village in schooling programme. The children and the parents are frequently discussing issues of child rights violation.

Right spread -

The effort has spread. Children's Clubs have been formed in 48 other villages of Harabhanga block of Boudh district. They have taken on board 927 boys, 863 girls and 81 children with disabilities as members. All the 81 identified children are studying in the schools, out of them 71 students are availing Banishree scholarship, and also covered under Madhu Babu Pension Yojana.

☒☒☒

Challenging Challenges...

Organise, act and prosper...

Badamaha village is located in Raikia block of Kandhamal district. The main sources of livelihood for the people here are agriculture and forest produces. None of the villagers had any idea about Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and its benefits, nor were they aware of other poverty alleviation programmes run by the government agencies. Located in a remote forested area under the Manikeswar Gram Panchayat in Raikia Block, the villagers had never had an opportunity to visit any government office to discuss about their problems with the authorities, leave aside raising questions of any sorts. When this was the situation for the general and able public of a village, the situation of the socially excluded and vulnerable groups could be well imagined.

Aaina organised several consultations with the community people in the operational area, including village leaders and other stakeholders and grassroots level workers to update the people regarding the



PIC- Basanta Patnaik

importance of Community Based Organisations(CBOs) in the community and information regarding different schemes and facilities, and also educated them as to how they can access the schemes. A common consensus regarding formation of CBOs as a result was reached and Jivan Jivika Shramika Sangha was formed. In the beginning it was a small group consisting of 10 members, but later on 112 people became the members of this organisation.

Awareness, key to action -

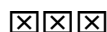
Awareness generation programmes were conducted for the people in the village on MGNREGS, which helped them to demand jobs. They are now regularly working under MGNREGS. Gradually the people have taken initiatives for village development and also sharing the problems, requirements with each other.

One of the important achievements of this Shramika Sangha is that, about half of the job card holders in the village completed 100 days of work under MGNREGS in the financial years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. Four of the villagers who are Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) have also benefited in this process. They have even completed 100 days in this financial year and are entitled for availing houses under Indira Awas Yojana(IAY). The following table describes the details.

100 days of job assured to PwDs -

SI NO	Name of the PwDs	Age/Gender	Scheme Availed	No of days work in MGNREGA (2014-15)	Type of work got
1	Sanuja Sahani	36/ Male	ODP, IAY, Individual Job card	100 days	Road construction work
2	Madav Pradhan	42/Male	FRA, ODP, Individual Job Card	100 days	Road construction work
3	Sukanti Digal	37/ Female	ODP	100 days	Water provide to labourer, fast aid
4	Upesena Pradhan	32/male	ODP, Individual Job Card	100 days	Road construction work

The Shramika Sangha is now accepted at block level as a pressure group for the socially excluded and now they are actively participating in all the advocacy works.



Challenging Challenges...

Nabajini's new found identity, of dignity and substance...

Fifty-eight-year-old Nabajini Digal lives with her husband in Gadingia village of G. Udayagiri block of Odisha's Kandhamal district. She has Locomotors Disability. Before the intervention of Aaina in 2012, she was depending on her husband's income for almost everything. It's not that in this part of the country women don't depend on husband's incomes. However, she was not feeling comfortable being a mere dependent. She always wanted to do something of her own but lacked the self-confidence as well as interest. "I wanted to do something of my own, to earn a livelihood of my own," said Nabajini. Things



took a positive turn for her and a hope emerged in her life when she came in touch with Aaina. "Life brought in new hopes as I became member of the Shramika Sangha of the village," she added.

Nabajini attended meetings of the Shramika Sangha and listened to the discussions very

Challenging Challenges...

attentively, which covered a variety of topics like schemes & facilities, Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), different kinds of work facilities under MGNREGS for PwDs etc. She was astonished to know that there are opportunities for people like her. She gathered a lot of confidence and showed interest to work under MGNREGS. She demanded job cards for her as well as for her husband. Her demand was honoured by the government authorities. Both of them were provided job cards and regular employment. It was a great victory for Nabajini. She has been an active member of the Sharamika Sangha since 2012.

Job at village -

Nabajini, due to her personal limitations, could not go outside her village to work. The authorities accommodated her needs. She was allowed to work in her village. She got job under MGNREGS and was distributing water to the labourers. She also could do some minor earth works. She could not believe that she completed 100 days of work in different projects of MGNREGS, which she did in the financial year 2013 to 2014. She earned a decent wage at par with other workers, which made her feel dignified.

The Sharamika Sangha became the source of her inspiration and confidence. In addition to MGNREGS works, she also got job in various other government projects run by the agriculture and forest departments.

Happiness is when you have a house of your own -

Nabajini applied for a house under the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), which was sanctioned by the district administration. With this additional achievement, Nabajini is now a proud woman who could not only earn a good livelihood but also a dignified life with a safe habitation.

For Nabajini, working under MGNREGA proved to be the turning point in life. From a woman with doubts about her own abilities, she has travelled to being a woman of substance. Success through determination and hard work has helped her achieve what she considered almost impossible before this intervention. She is all praises for Aaina and the Shramika Sangha.

☒☒☒

Back to the school and happy ...

Sangeeta Behera, a fourteen-year child with speech & hearing impairment, lives with her parents in Tentuligarh village of Tikabali block. The only daughter in the family, she had been educated upto standard 4th from the Tentuligada primary school. The school was a kilometer away from her village and schooling environment there was not very encouraging for her. She loved extra-curricular activities like dance and sports but was never allowed to participate. This was not the only thing that disappointed her. Schoolmates and even teachers used to taunt her for the disabilities she is born with. Sangeeta could not bear the humiliations anymore and complained before her parents, who then decided to discontinue her education. Depressed, she confined herself to the house. The family never tried to bring her back from this condition. They neither encouraged her to go back to the education, nor helped her get out of the confinement.

Children as social change agents -

When life seemed completely hopeless, times started to change around February 2012 with formation of a Children's Club (called 'Sishu Dala' in the local language) in Sangeeta's village. This club facilitated by Aaina started to bring back some enthusiasm in her. She heard about it but could not express her willingness to participate initially. The Club started with 26 children of the village in the beginning. The children were educated about the aims and objectives of the club, and then made aware about their rights. Gradually they understood that, all children are equal and every child has equal rights to live with dignity. The children realized that children with disabilities do also have equal rights like them and there should be special efforts to include them in all activities. It worked well and the children then started mixing with Sangeeta to motivate her so that she join the club. They also convinced her to pursue her education.

Sangeeta, now a member of the Sishu Dala, joined the school. The story of her joining back school goes like the following. In the club, her friends assured her that she would

Challenging Challenges...

not be left alone at any circumstances and that no one will taunt her or feel are excluded. The members also discussed with members of Child Protection Committee (CPC) and staff of Aaina about the problem. Then the CPC members along with staffs went to the school and discussed about Sangeeta with the teachers. The teachers agreed to enroll her in class VI as per her age. Now Sangeeta goes to the new school regularly and is continuing her study. She is studying in class VIII now.

Aspirations unleashed -

Sangeeta is not only back to the school, but her aspirations to participate in extra-curricular activities too have been materialised. She is a regular student and participates in every extra-curricular activity like dance, sports and creative activities like clay art, paper mask etc as well. She has also been participating in programmes organized by Aaina. Sangeeta's competence has broken the barriers that were put by the physical and related social challenges she faced. Now she is an active member of the Sishu Dala and a happy girl.



Challenging Challenges...

Fighting exclusion, the self-help way...

The Raghunath Vinnakshyama Swayang Sahaka Gosthi, a SHG of differently abled persons of Bisipada village in Phulbani block of Kandhamal district, was formed by Aaina 3 years ago. It has five members. "It was impossible for us to think about forming a group. We were not even considered as individuals by the community members. When Aaina conducted meetings and organised us, we got courage to speak" say the members of the group. Formation of the group itself was a great achievement for them. "Those who thought us as disabled and burdens to our families have started seeing us in a different eye, they are recognising our contribution to our families as well as to the community" they express with happiness. Pitambar Sahu (35), who claims to have 40% disability, is the President of the SHG; and Manoj Mishra (32), claiming to have the same 40% disability, is the Secretary of the SHG.

The group members, after the formation of it, decided to create a group fund through



PIC- Ajit Panda

Challenging Challenges...

regular contribution of membership fees. Each member contributed fifty rupees per month. They have a fund of more than forty thousand rupees at present which includes a support of ten thousand rupees provided by the Mission Shakti programme of Odisha government. They continue to pay the monthly fees, mostly from the pension they receive.

The members of the SHG found it convenient to run an egg shop in the village from the amount they have generated in their common fund. This shop, run on the veranda of the grocery shop of Manoj Sahu, sells eggs to general public in addition to supplies it makes to schools and Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) for Mid-day Meal(MDM) scheme and nutrition programmes respectively. They keep a margin of fifty paisa per egg as profit and, by supplying six to seven hundreds eggs per week to the AWS and the schools, earn a profit of about fifteen hundred rupees per month. "The schools and the AWCs cooperate with us so well, they make prompt payment," inform the group members. The profit is distributed among them every month. The group fund is also utilised to extend loan to the members at a very marginal rate of interest.

Considering the active involvement of the group members in business activities, the government has also extended financial support to individual members from Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF). Manoj Kumar Sahu, a member of the group received ten thousand rupees from the CMRF and has invested in a ration shop that provides space for the egg shop of the group.

"The whole village now appreciates our efforts," say the members. Trilochan Mishra, father of one of the group members, helps the group to manage their accounts and registers.

Supporting Malati -

Fourteen-year-old Malati Bisoi is one of the members of this group having 45% disability. Her efforts to pursue her study is praiseworthy. The wage Malati's parents earn from labour work does not suffice to support education of their daughter. Malati does not get any support from the government either. The group has helped her with a loan of two thousand rupees for



Challenging Challenges...

her to purchase books and other study materials. She studies +2 arts (higher secondary) in Phulbani college. She cycles her way to the nearby bus stop at Kasharaghati every day to catch a bus to the college. The group members want Malati to complete her college education and get a good job. Malati appreciates the moral and other support she gets from the members. Her parents inspire her a lot.

Miles to go -

The group meets regularly to discuss about their problems and write to appropriate authorities for necessary supports. The members were not included in the ration card survey under National Food Security Act (NFSA), so they have taken the matter to the block administration. They have been assured that the cards would be given to them after verification. The members assert, "due to their engagement in financial as well as organisational activities, the villagers no more look at them as disabled."

The group members feel they have a lot more task at hands. None in the group has been provided with work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). They have taken up the matter with the Panchayat office and have got an assurance from there as well. "The financial support given by the Mission Shakti is not sufficient," they complain. They need a little more financial support either to the group or to the individual members. They are a member of the district level federation of SHGs of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). The group believes that the federation will be able to help them in pursuing their cause further.

☒☒☒

Caste away: children's way to unite and ensure child rights...

Nediguda village is located at a distance of 22 kilometres from Phulbani, the district headquarters of Kandhamal. The village is inhabited by people of both tribal and dalit communities. The village has a primary school and most children go to school. All the kids below the age of three go to the Anganwadi Centre. The village has seen sharp divisions among people along caste lines. Things however started to change from the year 2012 onwards. The story of transformation goes like this.

Aaina initiated its activities in the village in the year 2012. The main objective of the involvement was to develop awareness among the people on child rights. After discussion with the parents and the teachers of the school, a Children's Club was formed. Weekly meetings with the children were conducted regularly to discuss about their rights.



PIC- Ranjan Panda

Going back to their homes, the children were sharing with their parents and elders about what they learnt in the Children's Club. In addition to their rights, they also learnt dance, song, drama, storytelling and writing poem from the volunteers of Aaina. Involvement increased and caste barriers started to break among the children. The villagers, who were not even interested to see the children of different castes play together, started to recognize the positive change.

Divided by caste, united by children -

"Our village was divided on caste lines, which was reflected in the school also. The dalit students were sitting there separately. Feeling of untouchability was very much prominent at the time when children used to eat Mid-Day Meal (MDM)," reveal the children. "But, now we have overcome that completely with the help of Aaina, we realise that every child

Challenging Challenges...

irrespective of caste or gender has equal rights," they add with confidence.

The Children's Club of Nediguda village has a long list of achievements. They have become instrumental in raising awareness among the villagers on child rights. They work against child labour and infanticide. Their visit to district headquarters and state capital on various occasions helped them change their outlook, which was reflected in the school and class rooms. There is no discrimination on the basis of caste or religion in the school. Effort of children in school in this respect created impact in the village. The villagers gradually overcame their inhibitions on caste system and allowed their children to play and interact with each other even beyond school hours. However, the most important of all their achievements was the admission of Ankita in the local school.

Ankita's right to education ensured -

Ankita has difficulty in seeing due to problems in her eyes and that became a cause of her disqualification for admission in the local primary school. It always hurt her when she listened to village girls sharing their learnings in the school and in the Children's Club.

As soon as the children of the club realized that even the differently abled children have right to admission into schools, they advocated the case of Ankita with the teachers. They requested the teachers to permit her entry. Ankita got admission and within a very short time she reached the level of normal students of her class, something no one had ever imagined. Due to her achievement, she was made the Education Minister of the school. "It was a great victory for us," said the children.

The children have then never looked back again. They have been successfully running the Children's Club activities. They have written for the "Ama Swara" magazine published by Aaina, participated in district level competitions and won prizes, so on and so forth. The children group also monitor MDM in the school. Whenever there is a problem that needs to be taken to the higher authorities in the education system, they drop complaints in the complaint box placed in the school. One such complaint on lack of toilet facility was taken up seriously by the authority and a toilet was constructed in the school. The children are certainly an enthused lot, and the villagers have cooperated well.

Small and effective: the story of Tana Penu village...

Majaganda village in Phulbani block of Kandhamal district is a tiny and non-descript one by its size, but has made some good strides in so far as achieving village unity and prosperity are concerned. Only 25 tribal families housed in 17 huts stay in this village located on a small hillock terrain. Agriculture is the mainstay of the village that is supplemented by income from non-timber forest products such as kendu leaf and mahua.

Enter the village and you find a fine coordination among the people. Small and indigenous villages often have better cooperation among the households, organizing the people through awareness drives seems to have worked further good for this village. Awareness drives by Aaina has been helpful, as one can see.

2012, the turning point -

Aaina started PACS programme in this village in the year 2012. Training programmes were conducted to motivate the people to form a labour organisation. The villagers were reluctant to believe Aaina staff initially. They had been cheated in the past by some external agencies who came here, promised them help and finally evaded. However, Aaina staff successfully motivated the people and won their confidence.

"People have come to us in the past with such promises and deceived us" they said. "But after a few months of interactions we understood that Aaina is different and decided to listen to them," said the villagers. The labour organisation named 'Tana Penu Shramik Sangha' was formed by involving 32 persons of the village as members. Babubhai Mallik and Manjulata Mallik were selected as the President and Secretary of the Sangha respectively. The villagers already had a community savings worth ten thousand rupees which was then transferred to this newly formed Shramik Sangha. "People were all convinced and there was no objection at all by anyone about transferring this fund into the Sangha accounts," said the representatives.

Challenging Challenges...

Formation of the group immediately brought a lot of change in the village. The first change was in the confidence level of people. They could visit the government offices to discuss about the programmes and schemes. "We got an identity and appreciation, the government offices recognised us", they say with an enthusiastic tone.



PIC- Ajit Panda

Many ways to empowerment -

With the help of Aaina, the group involved itself in various activities. They applied for job cards and subsequently demanded employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Scheme (MGNREGS). Activities like road construction and land development were initiated under this scheme by the concerned departments after the intervention of the Sangha. As a result of awareness drives, people's knowledge on the scheme has increased. Two differently abled persons have also got work under the

Challenging Challenges...

MGNREGS. Sudhakara Mallik (45) having polio in one leg has worked as a mason in the construction of concrete road, guard wall and Anganwadi Centre. Likewise, Suryakanta Mallik worked as a wage labour in those works.

The labourers got registered with the District Labour Office (DLO) and 16 persons have got labour insurance cards from the office. The villagers were informed that, to get registered for labour insurance with the DLO, it is mandatory for the workers to work under MGNREGS at least for 100 days. Due to cooperation of Aaina, the people have got more than 100 days of work and subsequently got registered for the labour insurance card.

The Shramik Sangha helped the Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) of the village to form a Self Help Group (SHG) named Bajarangi Bhinnakshyama Swayang Sahayak Gosthi. The group conducted regular meetings and created group fund through monthly contribution of fifty rupees by each member. Subsequently they were affiliated to the Mission Shakti programme of the government and got financial support of ten thousand rupees. This amount is utilised as a revolving fund for lending to its members. They have a balance of four thousand rupees in the account at present.

☒☒☒

From ignorant labours to aware leaders...

Barada Balunkeswara Workers' Group of Dangulo village located in Keredi Gram Panchayat of Phulbani block consists of farmers, agricultural labourers, MGNREGS workers and construction workers. The group which was formed in the year 2013 has 120 members. When Aaina started motivating the people to form the group, villagers did not come forward easily. People were initially sceptical. It took about three months for the people to



PIC- Ajit Panda

understand the purpose of Aaina's activities in their village. After a number of general meetings and focussed group interaction sessions, the nut was cracked. "We had been cheated by outsiders previously; they took money from us promising they would register us in the labour office and did nothing," complain the villagers.

Challenging Challenges...

After the formation of the group the people have reaped several benefits. "We have solved a number of problems of the village. Job cards under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREGS) had not been allotted to the people prior to the formation of the group. We motivated people to apply for that and 200 households were allotted job cards," the members say. Since the formation of the group the demand for job under MGNREGS has increased and activities like plantation of fruit bearing trees, construction of roads and land development activities have been taken up.

The group has also taken steps to register workers with the District Labour Office, as a result of which 90 persons have got the cards.

People's advocacy -

The villagers under the banner of the Shramik Sangha gheraoed the District Collector's office demanding posting of a teacher in the village school, which has only 3 teachers for 8 classes at present. The teacher has not yet been posted as assured by the official after the demand, but the fact that they are now united on such issues and have found ways to take up their concerns with the authority is a visible change in the village.

The Self Help Group (SHG) has also taken efforts to form group of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). There are 12 PwDs in the village and 5 out of them have (only women) formed a group. The Shramik Sangha has facilitated tailoring training for one of the members, Sasmita Bhukta. Liti Mukhi, another PwD has been provided a wheel chair with efforts taken up by the members of the Shramik Sangha. The group also helps the PwDs in getting pension from the government. Kanhu, another PwD was not allowed by the Panchayat to work under MGNREGS, but the Shramik Sangha took up the matter with the Panchayat and succeeded in getting the job of supplying water. Kanhu has completed hundred days of work till now.

Challenging Challenges...

Organised, we win -

The Shramik Sangha has a working committee to look after the activities of the group. Indramani Barik, who works for a bamboo company is the President. Bimbadhara Bhukta, a daily wage labourer, is the Secretary. Meeting of the working committee is conducted once in a month. They discuss about labour insurance, land development and benefit for PwDs etc. The group members also visit the panchayat and block offices as and when there is need to inquire or pursue something. Recently, they have visited the Panchayat office seeking expedition of payment of MGNREGS wages.

The group has a cultural troupe that has visited the state capital Bhubaneswar to perform in various competitions. Asked about their confidence to continue with the activities if in case Aaina withdraws from this area, they confidently say, "Aaina, literally meaning mirror, has shown us the real mirror of our cooperation and strength. We were in dark earlier and it is because of them that we are now aware about many schemes that the government has for us. They have also taught us how to assert our rights. We can take it forward." That statement sums it up all, so well.



The real vision...

Ananti Bhoi (33) lives in Gudari village of Khajuripada, Kandhamal district with her widow mother and two college going younger brothers. After the death of her father, she is the lead bread earner for the family. The family has less than half an acre of agricultural land, which is not sufficient to provide even food to the small family. But, she has to look after most of the expenses including study costs of her brothers.

Ananti studied upto class tenth in Maa Barala Devi High School at Kaladi. "I used to walk ten kilometres every day to go to school. However, I had to discontinue as had to help my mother in looking after the family and daily chores," says Ananti. After dropping out of the



school, she has been working as a daily wage labour in her village.

Ananti suffers from blindness in one of her eyes and she has been issued a certificate of disability from the government. "But the percentage of disability is only 30% which does not allow me to get pension," she rues. This has however not stopped her from trying

Challenging Challenges...

something of her own. Instead of running after people to seek a pension, she has always tried to take up some work which can make her self-dependent.

A quest that led to transformation -

Both Ananti and her mother do wage labour to manage the family. But, her preoccupation in day to day life does not deter her to look forward to know more about the problems around her, in the village and society. "I agreed to become the ASHA of our village to help women and children get better health services," informs Ananti. Her quest to become a good Samaritan led her to associate with Aaina. "I saw a meeting going on in a conference hall at Phulbani, when I was passing by that place and entered the venue to know about the purpose of meeting. I was told that the meeting was being organised by Aaina with a purpose of motivating people to form Shramik Sanghas. I got curious and asked them if we could form an organisation like this in our village. They not only encouraged me but also agreed to support in the formation," recalls a happy Ananti.

Ananti, upon returning to the village, took the lead and discussed about it with the villagers. They cooperated well and a Self-Help Group (SHG) for the PwDs was formed. The 'Jagat Janani Vinnakshyama Swayang Sahayak Dala' was initiated with four PwDs as its members. Each member of the group contributes a monthly fee of fifty rupees which is saved in the group. The Mission Shakti has provided them with an assistance of ten thousand rupees, which is used as a revolving fund by the members for taking loan at the time of their need.

In the last seven to eight months, the group, under Ananti's leadership, has brought in many benefits for its members. The most important of these has been the availability of job cards and employment under MGNREGS. Three of the members have now got job cards. They apply for job regularly. Ananti does earth work and two other members (with locomotors and orthopaedic problems - who cannot do physical work) are engaged in Muster roll maintenance and providing drinking water. Three members of the group are receiving a monthly pension of rupees three hundred each under the Madhu Babu Pension Scheme.



Challenging Challenges...



70/3530(Ground Floor), Jahadev Vihar,
Bhubaneswar-13, Odisha
Phone: 0674-2360630
email: info@aaina.org.in
Web: www.aaina.org.in



Aina

70/3530(Ground Floor), Jahadev Vihar,
Bhubaneswar-13, Odisha

Phone: 0674-2360630

email: info@aaina.org.in

Web: www.aaina.org.in

Layout & Designing- Basrta ku Patnaik