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Shimla: Madhyanchal Forum and Mountain Forum Himalayas organised a two-day workshop in March at PRTI Mashobra to create awareness among the women panchayat representatives about the roles and functioning of gram panchayats and gram sabhas.

Twenty eight participants who belonged to five districts of Himachal Pradesh-Shimla, Sirmour, Kinnaur, Solan and Mandi-took part in the workshop. These women leaders who reached out to more than 48,000 people in various regions were oriented about the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and the participation of rural masses in the development plans.

Mr. Kewal Sharma, the Additional Director, Department of RD & Panchayati Raj, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh, emphasised on the role of CBOs, SHGs and the communities for all the development plans, their implementation and monitoring. He said that the GPDP had been launched in all the 12 districts of the state. Mr. Madan Sharma, the President, Mountain Forum Himalayas, said that



Women panchayat
representatives oriented
on local governance

GPDP speaks about the participation of rural people in the development plans. According to him, 154 tribal panchayats of HP will be covered with V-sat system.

All the Gram Panchayats in HP have received first two financial instalments under GPDP. The department has released the book **"Hamari Panchayat Hamara Vikas"** and has already trained all the

elected representatives at district/ block level. The main components discussed were-paper less GPs, sanitation (H.P. Declared ODF State), low cost material used for toilets construction, polythene and smokeless state and Involvement of GPs in making the state drugs free.

Mr. Navneet Yadav of DOERS oriented the

participants on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in the mountains where the weaker sections, the disabled, children, pregnant women, the elderly, socially deprived/ disadvantaged classes and illiterate persons are most vulnerable during calamities.



Searching for

Identity

By Surendra Panwar

At a time when most of us are crying hoarse over casteless society in public discourse, Pardhis (nomadic tribe) who constitute a significant chunk of Chhattisgarh's population are struggling to affiliate themselves to one caste or the other to get access to government schemes and other benefits in education and jobs for their children.

As you enter Dokralana, a tribal village in Kanker district of Chhattisgarh, you can see a bunch of children playing under a tree in the village. These children include those who either go to the village primary schools or are school dropouts. Forty-five year old Sadaram Netam said

that 12 Pardhi families came to Dokralana in 2003 and started living on the outskirts of the village. Initially, these families were dependent on forest produce, but gradually started farming on the forest land. The community people were also engaged in hunting.

“But we were always looked down upon as outsiders and criminals. There had been attempts by the people from the nearby villages to drive us away. The villagers with the help of forest guards even destroyed our huts and poultry units and snatched our cattle”, he said.

“These Pardhis families are in perennial conflict with the gram sabhha and this is proving to be a major stumbling block to their claiming pattas (land ownership) under Individual

Forest Rights (IFR) as the later does not approve their applications”, said Agnu Ram Sahu of Kanker based organisation Parivartan.

“Not only this, most of the Pardhi children are school drop outs as the school authorities demand caste certificates which are refused by the gram sabhas. The caste certificate is essential for getting benefits in higher studies and claiming reservations in government jobs”, he added.

Pardhi community in India has a long history which dates back to pre-independence. They are historic tribe belonging to the hinterlands/jungles of central India. Unfortunately, the British government branded 150 tribes including the Pardhis as 'criminal tribe' in 1871 and even

accused the community of rebellion against its regime. They remained under the Criminal Tribes Act for the next eighty years resulting in their isolation from mainstream society. This compelled them to live in peripheral areas, mainly on the outskirts of the villages facing discrimination at socio-economic level. The Act was finally withdrawn in 1952, and they were denotified in legal parlance. However, this failed to end their plight and they continued to carry the 'criminal identity' with successive government failing to improve their lives. Their return to the mainstream has been further hampered by their nomadic lifestyles and lack of social connections.

In Chhattisgarh, Pardhis are spread across 94 villages of six districts

including Kanker in Madhya Pradesh. According to one estimate, there are 350-400 Pardhi families living in the state. Parivartan which is working for the cause of Pardhis in four districts of MP, has decided to help the community get access to government schemes, claim land under individual and community forest rights, and encourage them to learn community owned forest conservation practices.

“In Dokralana all the 29 application for pattas were rejected on account of lack of documents. The chief reason for this is conflict between the villagers and the Pardhis with the former treating the later as encroachers”, said Mr Sahoo.

The situation is not much different in village Khalari which has two Pardhi settlements with first few families coming in 2008. Out of 28 Pardhi families, 16 got pattas with the majority given only 35-40 decimal of land which

was much less than they applied for. The 12 families are still struggling with the IFR issue. Claim for community land remains a distant dream for them.

But here too, education continues to be a dismal indicator in overall socio-economic realm. Most of the children are class 7 or 8 dropouts. But the Pardhi community in the village has something to be proud of. Seventeen year-old Sita Shori is only the second Pardhi girl in Kanker to have reached the graduation level. Sita is a BSc. first year student. She fared well in class 10 and 12 exams scoring more than 70% marks. But that has not been without humongous struggles as she would walk almost 12 km every day since class five to reach the school.

Ghotia is the only village where all the 35 Pardhi families got the pattas under IFR but are still fighting for community forest land. Fourteen families came here in 1990.

Fighting for the cause of Pardhis

A 12th pass Suman who is in her mid 30s, has been instrumental in spreading awareness among the Pardhis about their rights. Pardhis who are spread over many states of central and western India are still struggling to get



access to rights and entitlements which other notified tribes enjoy. They live in small settlements around the villages amid never ending conflict with villagers and the gram sabhas.

Hailing from a small village called Byaskongra in Kanker district, Suman developed interest in social work listening to conversation between her elder brother and the director of Parivartan Late Mr Ratneshwar Nath who would frequently visit each other's houses. She participated in a long march inspired by renowned social activist Mr Rajgopal. It gave her a good perspective of the need for strong social mobilisation and unity among the civil society organisations to address the issues confronting the tribes. She joined Parivartan in 2005. That was also the time when Forest Rights Act was about to be enacted.

“It was after the completion of the march that I realised how important the issues of water, forests and the land for the tribal communities are and how these could be addressed by working collectively”, she said.

Almost 14 years on, she takes pride in admitting that she has been instrumental in helping 22 pardhi families in Ghotia village get the individual land rights. Ghotia is perhaps the only village where all the pardhis got the individual land titles under FRA. “Now we are making efforts that they get involved in community managed forest conservation plans which would ultimately lead to their access to community forest rights”, Suman said.

A majority of Pardhis are struggling to get access to government schemes and other rights and entitlements as they have not been recognised as notified tribes.

She said that Ghotia should be a reference point and inspiration for other civil society organisations and Pardhi communities who are still waiting to get individual and community land rights. And for this, many more community leaders like Suman need to come forward and fight for their cause.





Almost all Pardhi children drop out from the schools after class 7 or 8

The number has risen to 40 now. The real issue is the absence of documents which could give some authenticity to their identity. “ Now who would give the authorities records of 50 years of our existence”, said 50-year old Tikha Ram Netam.

“My grandfather fought this battle, now we are fighting it”, said Ramesh Netam, a 25 year old unemployed youth who is a class 7 dropout. So far, no gram sabha has been organised in Ghotia as Pardhis have always been discriminated against by

other communities. As other villages where the Gram Sabha is held are far off, no body from this village is able to attend it.

But in the recent past, things have moved for the better. The villagers with support of Madhyanchal Forum's partner Parivartan

is planning to work on forest conservation on 1000 hectares of land which includes plantation of trees . Before this, a forest microplanning will be done to measure the status and varieties of the tress. Apart from this, there are plans to build new check dams to prevent soil erosion. This will be a pilot project which would be implemented in other villages too.

For this, the focus is being laid on the capacity building of youth of these villages. This includes training them on Community Forest Rights (CFR), resource rights and mapping through GPS. They are being oriented on the conceptual understanding of FRA, community based conservation, regeneration and protection of forests and sustainable use of forest produce.

Despite numerous challenges, there is hope that Pardhis would get their due and live a dignified life. But there is long way to go before it really happens.

*With inputs from
Priyanka Saha*

The 17-year old Sita Shori from Khalari village is a BSc first year student and is only the second girl in the Pardhi community in the entire Kanker district to have reached the graduation level. His father who owns a small patch of land is also a bamboo craftsman. But the income is not sufficient to sustain the family. Every day, while going to college she recalls how she would walk almost 12 km to reach her school. Her father is unable to bear the expenses of her education. He feels that the money he is spending on her education could instead be spent on her marriage. But he relented after some persuasion by her. She wants to become a teacher and spread awareness about education in her community. She has been identified by Parivartan as a potential youth leader to help the community.



Capacity building training held for VOs, CBOs, Women Federation



Dharchula: A three-day capacity building programme for executives of the Panchachuli Swayatt Sahakarita, VOs, CBOs and the women federations was conducted by Apaar in

collaboration with Madhyanchal Forum and its lead partner Dhara. The programme held in mid-April under the Resilient Himalaya Network campaign focused on climate change and its impacts on

the agriculture, horticulture, natural water sources, human and wild life.

Addressing the gathering Mr Subhash Chand Joshi said that there was a need to work collectively on the local issues, particularly the climate change so that a joint strategy could be chalked out for permanent solution to this issue.

Mr. Govind Pant lamented that the youth were decamping from the region due to unemployment and this could be stopped through an effective and climate change centric strategy on agriculture. He said that there should be greater focus on the organic agriculture and conservation of the water sources at

the village level. He also emphasised that the local spices should be sold in the local markets under “**APNI UPAJ-APNA BAZAAR**”.

The Chairperson of the Panchachuli Swayatt Sahkarita, Ms. Poonam Verma suggested that conservation of the forests must be taken up on priority basis and that the villagers should also focus on dairy farming to improve their livelihoods to set off the impact of the climate change on the agriculture.

Fellows briefed on “Hamari Pehchan, Hamara Adhikar” initiative

Lucknow: Samvad Samajik Sansthan and Madhyanchal Forum held a two-day orientation programme in March for fellows who would be a part of initiative to help certain deprived communities in Uttar Pradesh such as Pathar Kalwa, Musahar, Nut and Chamarmagta. For decades, these communities have been living in the state without legal documents which could prove their identity as Indian citizens. As a result, they are not able to get access to various government



schemes.

The purpose of this programme was to orient these fellows on the upcoming research study on the socio economic

conditions of these communities. The study will be supported by Madhyanchal Forum. They were briefed about the project and the situational analysis of the

deprived communities which number around 1.5 crore in UP alone. Mr Atul Tiwari of Samvad Samajik Sansthan interfaced with the participants through various stories, experiences and ice breaking exercise for common understanding and clarity about the beneficiaries or target groups of the project area.

Kamal Kumar, the chief guest, said that this project “**Hamari Pehchan, Hamara Adhikar**” would be a campaign for the cause of these deprived communities.



Compost demonstrations held in six districts of MP

63 farmers oriented on organic farming

Indore: Madhyanchal Forum conducted composting training programmes in six districts of Madhya Pradesh. They are-Dhar, Khargone, Indore, Vidisha, Alirajpur and Niwali-Sendhwa. The initiative is part spreading awareness about sustainable or organic farming which is one of the focus areas of MF. So far, 63 farmers from these districts have been oriented on composting using locally available organic waste in the last three months.

According to Mr ML Yadav, Madhyanchal Forum Secretary and an agriculture expert, the sole aim of the project is to enhance the knowledge and skills of the farmers and youth on sustainable agriculture practices. During composting demonstration, these farmers were made aware of systematic and organised method of composting, use of bio waste by converting it into organic manure which increases the soil health resulting into enhanced crop productivity.

During these training programmes farmers were also oriented on benefits of composting, such as best management of waste, good quality manure at low cost, use of locally available resources- cow dung and urine and other agri waste- and minimum use of chemical fertilisers which not only reduce the soil fertility but are also responsible for various health hazards. Farmers were encouraged to gradually move towards organic farming as in long terms it would lead to more profit and protection of soil.

A workshop-cum training program was also organised in Vidisha district for a large group to propagate organic farming through campaign.

Scientists exhort farmers to adopt organic farming, use resources collectively

Dehradun: Him Yamuna Swayata Sahkarita Samiti KALSI organised a field exposé visit for 26 farmer leaders from different villages at Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Dakrani, under the Kalsi Block of district Dehradun. The purpose of exposure visit was to equip the farmers with new farm techniques. The two scientists from the KVK addressed the beneficiaries.

Dr. R. P Singh exhorted the farmers to treat agriculture as their livelihood option. He said that with shortage of labour becoming acute in agriculture sector, farmers must use machines and other resources collectively to increase productivity. He also emphasised on vermicompost as a viable option for organic farming, use of green house, poultry, mushroom, fruits and vegetable farming and goatry to promote household income and optimum use of land and other resources.

He said that while use of good quality and hybrid seeds can boost farm production, promotion of organic farming can be a good source of livelihood.

“The collective agricultural production can enhance opportunities for sustainable employment in agriculture”, he said.



Benedict Damor **Member, Governing Board** **Madhyanchal Forum**

Benedict Damor has been working for the integrated development of tribal community in the Madhya Pradesh for the last 22 years. He worked tirelessly on many issues which are core to the marginalised, especially the tribes. Some of these issues continue to pose stiff challenge not only to the government but also to the civil society. They are-effective implementation of PESA (1996), MGNREGA, Forest Right Act (FRA) 2006, Panchayati Raj Adhinyam 1992, proper implementation of other government livelihood schemes for the poor community and education. Mr. Damor's contribution in all these areas has been immense and has rightly earned him the place he deserves.

If one talks about his achievements, the list is endless. He established Adivasi Chetna Shikshan Seva Samiti, Jhabua (M.P.) , a community based organization being run by tribal for the tribal. He is running a High School Level Residential Academy for Tribal Children, where 5000 poor tribal children are provided primary and higher education with skill development programmes. He is also instrumental in setting up a free of cost gender separated hostel which is home to approximately 3000 boys and girls.

Apart from this, he is involved in many initiatives related to tribal population, such as land, water, FRA , MNREGA based rural livelihood programs and advocacy in Jhabua and Alirajpur district of Madhya Pradesh. This has resulted in 3000 people getting access to livelihoods opportunities. It was his efforts that 2000 applications were submitted for entitlement of forest land pattas under the FRA.

In all these years he held several important positions in different organisations. He is founder secretary of the community based organization Adivasi Chetana Shikshan Seva Samiti, Jhabua, and founder and promotor of community based (Tribals) Agriculture/Seed Cooperative Societies Limited in Jhabua and Alirajpur districts of Madhya Pradesh. He is also a founder/promoter of Tribal Woman's Micro-Finance Cooperative Society Limited (SHG Federation), Founder Chairman of Young Men's Chritian Associatuion of Jhabua. affiliated to YMCA New Delhi and Founder Treasurer of Jai Bhim Jagriti Samiti of District Jhabua, M.P.

His immense efforts earned him several accolades. Some of them are- Chetna Parva by Central Social Welfare Board, Madhya Pradesh, Life Time Social Development Award by Health and Education Development Association New Delhi in 2009, Indian Achievers Award by Shastri Foundation and TATA Institute in 2010, Rastriya Vikas Ratan Award by Economic Growth Society of India, New Delhi in 2011 and Gold Star Asia International Award by Economic Growth Society of India in 2011.



Community leaders get training on FRA



Raipur: A three-day training cum awareness programme on forest rights was held in Mainpur by Kanker based organization Parivartan in collaboration with KAAJ in the last week of April. This was a part of initiative by Madhyanchal Forum to help the marginalized, especially the tribes to claim entitlements under Forest Rights Act (FRA) through dialogue with the government agencies. Thirty three community leaders (21 M, 12 F), mainly

youth, participated in the event.

The objective of the workshop was to equip the participants with the knowledge of their rights under the FRA, so that they could share this knowledge with their peers and fellow villagers.

The participants were oriented on the functioning of Gram Sabha which plays an important role in strengthening the FRA at the grassroots. They were also briefed about the role of Forest Rights Committee



(FRC), its structure and process of formation. Apart from this, the participants got exposure to process and procedures of

implementation of the FRA and rights it guarantees to them.