

Involving Damodar Mahila Mandal Sangh (DMMS)- The Federation in SRI Promotion

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PRADAN, a national level NGO is working to organize women from the poor and underprivileged households into Self Help Groups (SHGs). PRADAN is working in Koderma district since 1992. Till today 480 SHGs have been promoted covering 7700 families. SHG has been a powerful vehicle for socio-economic change. All the SHGs do regular savings and credit mobilization and avail micro credit from the group for productive and consumption purposes. Issues related to women and society are normally discussed in the SHG meetings which encourages women to build solidarity among themselves. SHGs have developed a 3 tier system to monitor progress, cross learning and building forums at panchayat and district level to raise voice for due share to women in the socio-economic sphere in the society. At panchayat level normally 10-15 groups have joined to form a cluster. Two representatives from each group attend the monthly meeting in a specified place in a village to discuss matters related to SHGs like meeting regularity, savings regularity, repayment of loan and interest on time as well as social issues and other group dynamics of the group. The participants draw support from each other and in a collective way they also plan and undertake joint action whenever required for the betterment of their association. Again in the block level 2 representatives from each cluster meet once in a month to discuss cluster level issues. Over 480 SHGs have been formed. Damodar Mahila Mandal Sangh which is an informal association and it works, spearheading the movement of socio-economic empowerment of the poor and under privileged women. PRADAN as a professional organization facilitates and nurtures this movement by providing techno managerial support through direct hand holding support in a facilitative environment.

Strengthening the livelihoods of the poor families associated with the SHGs is PRADAN'S major area of focus. SHG members avail credit from the group to support their livelihood initiatives. In addition to various honeybee activities adopted by the families PRADAN has promoted sectoral activities like Tassar reeling, spinning and other hybrid interventions in agriculture like improving farming practices. Food crops and cash crops are the focus interventions. Under food crops paddy, wheat and maize are targeted. Under cash crops, vegetables like tomato, potato and creepers are grown which have good market in the local area. Under food crops mainly paddy is grown in kharif season under rain fed condition. The productivity of paddy is very low i.e. about 1-2 ton/ha under traditional cultivation method. PRADAN has successfully demonstrated to increase paddy production up to 9 ton/ha using the farming System of Rice Intensification (SRI) technique. SRI is a sustainable farming technology which involves raised bed nursery, transplanting 13-15 days old seedlings and weeding operation at 15 days interval at least 2 weeding operation. Other management practices are soil and water management. Manure and fertilizers are applied in split doses. There is no additional expenditure as compared to traditional practices. Only following some improved practices, production can be enhanced 2-3 fold. PRADAN, Koderma team decided in 2006 to promote SRI among the SHG members who happen to be marginal farmers having land holding 0.4-1 acre and 80% of land holding under paddy cultivation during kharif season. By adopting SRI from same piece of land we proposed that food sufficiency could be increased 2 times for a family. All most all the family grow paddy for consumption purpose, as they don't have surplus to sell in the market.

In 2006 PRADAN team comprising 6 professional decided that SRI should be promoted among SHG members on direct handholding, providing technical and motivational support at the door step. As 80% SHG members were not able to read and write, the team decided to adopt innovative and user friendly communication tools to disseminate information regarding SRI. PRADAN professionals directly worked with the farmer on one to one basis. 8 Community based field supervisors were selected for assisting professionals. In 2006 a total of 165 women cultivated paddy adopting SRI technique and the average coverage per farmer was 10 decimal. When the crop was in full grown phase, exposure of other SHGs from same and other villages were done (at least for 100 SHGs) so that they would visit the crops and get first hand information to share their feelings and thoughts. But next year when we planned for SRI, only 150 farmers showed interest and even when some farmers who had adopted SRI previous year did not show eagerness to do it again citing reasons like a lot of technicalities involved and it require more labour. So from 2006-2009 on an average we could continue SRI with only 150 farmers. This was high challenge for us how to increase families under SRI coverage. We used to talk on the issue in our team meetings, focussing different actors and factors and agro climatic conditions for SRI promotion. We discussed about our won planning process, implementation strategy etc. Inputs from experts on SRI promotion were helpful. This time we identified that Damodar Mahila Mandal Sangh (DMSS), the association of 480 SHGs could be of great help for SRI promotion. Its wide network and strong solidarity will be useful if we could jointly work with it for planning and implementation. In the month of March 2010 we called a meeting of DMSS leaders. In the meeting we shared our experiences of different livelihood promotion, particularly focusing SRI. We emphasized to respond to their queries and make them understand the basic principles of SRI and reasons behind why we were promoting it. This was a two day rigorous exercise. At the end of the meeting, most of the participants shared that principles of SRI were useful for the poor farmers as it is based on the concept of sustainable farming as well as optimizing production. Then the question was to check with all the SHG members their level of understanding of SRI principles. We conducted mock demonstrations how a leader would describe these principle among SHG members. Each leader targeted to talk to 10-12 SHGs in the villages. Village wise planning was made and professionals took responsibility of a cluster of villages to assist leaders during village level meetings. It took around 1 month for the whole exercise of 100 villages. In the month of April 2010 all the DMMS leaders and PRADAN professionals set for a two days meeting to share experiences of village level meetings, and plan for further action. In the meeting it was noted that through the month long exercise 50% SHG members could be interacted and there was a growing sense of acceptance of SRI principles. In the same meeting it was decided that effective communication tools using local language should be designed. Most of the SHG members responds to songs when some information is transmitted by song. So some DMMS leaders came up with songs on SRI which involved SRI principles, intervention points and its usefulness. 5-10 leaders composed the music. When they sang it was highly acceptable. Other audio visual methods like poster, placards and music system were also in place as effective tools to reach out to larger number of farmer most of whom were women and only 20% of them were able to read and write. 25 leaders showed their eagerness to visit to villages singing songs, gathering villagers, responding to their questions and demonstrating mock SRI techniques like nursery preparation, seed treatment etc. PRADAN professionals got highly motivated with the response of the leaders. For the whole month of May professionals and leaders visited village to village with very focused campaign strategy. By end of May, 3000 farmers reported to adopt SRI in kharif season. It was

satisfactory for both DMMS and PRADAN. In meantime, 64 service providers out of which 50 were women from DMMS and 14 men were selected to provide technical services at the door step. Field demonstrations for nursery raising was carried out for the whole month of June. South East monsoon which was likely to reach Koderma by 3rd week of June was delayed by more than 2 weeks. For the whole month of July there was scanty rainfall, not sufficient either for raising nursery or transplanting paddy. We all were expecting rain every day, but there was no desired rainfall. Out of 2300 nurseries raised, 2000 dried out. By August 15th only 264 farmers could transplant paddy that had either access to irrigation like homestead well, or to pond. After August the monsoon period was over. There was only 25% rainfall from June-August .The district was declared drought hit. In monthly DMMS meetings all these issues were discussed. We also organized two days meeting to discuss the whole experience. The support and the motivation that both PRADAN and DMMS drew from each other was very positive .A drought can't deter us to move ahead and plan for the next season and coming year. Out of 264 farmers who transplanted following SRI practices has started harvesting. A sample harvest data of 20 farmers indicates that there is average production of 8 tonn/ha. So far,three Kissan Mela (farmers meet) have been organized, where farmers have shared their experiences which have been highly encouraging for PRADAN, DMMS and other stakeholders.