

## **Community development in OTELP**

OTELP is being implemented in four tribal districts of Orissa since its inception. The State government has attached high degree of priority in implementation of OTELP. Suitable officials with adequate knowledge, expertise and requisite motivation for effective implementation of programme have been selected and posted to the Programme Support Unit and ITDAs at the State level and District levels respectively. Realising the strength of non-government agencies (NGOs) in the area of community mobilisation, well-reputed NGOs with similar experience in the programme villages have been identified as programme partners. This is the first time that the State Govt. has entered into a full-fledged partnership with NGOs in a community based development programme.

OTELP is being implemented in very remote tribal villages with the basic objective of addressing the needs of the poorest of the poor and vulnerable communities. The areas are extremely difficult to work in with reference to poor infrastructure; no proper communication facility and some of the villages are situated in remote hillocks without any motorable roads. Nearly 40% of the programme areas are subject to Maoist activities posing a real challenge for any Govt. run scheme to be implemented. Very low level of literacy, particularly with the women folk and lack of general awareness stand in the way of institution building process, which is the building block for carrying out any development activities with genuine participation of the communities. These remote villages are always deprived of the benefits of different rural service delivery systems giving rise to a sense of apathy in the minds of the villagers towards Govt system. This has also resulted in the poor communities falling victim of exploitation by certain voluntary organisations / agencies / middle men thus making them loose both financially and in terms of their land holdings and other resources as well. Even in such very difficult development conditions that exist in the programme areas, the project personnel from PSU, ITDA and the F-NGOs have been able to successfully establish a real demand driven development mechanism, the credibility of which has geared the neighbouring villagers to demand for inclusion in OTELP. Strong dedication, high level of commitment and sincerity of the programme staff and effective facilitation by the FNGOs are the critical factors behind this success.

Today OTELP is operational in 396 villages from 136 micro watersheds of 10 blocks in four districts. Twelve FNGOs have signed MoU and they have been assigned 136 micro watersheds. These watersheds cover an area of 62,861 ha of non forest land and about 30,000 ha of forest. Within these watersheds, a total of 396 natural villages are now participating in the programme. To date 136 Village Development Committees (VDCs), 120 VDAs have been registered, 1024 SHGs (382 new SHGs) and 144 VSSs have been established. The Baseline Survey and has been completed and Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) have been conducted in all programme villages. Work has commenced on the formulation of Village Development and Livelihoods Plans (VDLPs) in all micro-watersheds. A total of 418 Entry Point Activities have been implemented in 356 villages. Vana Samrakshana Samitis have been constituted and 17 Participatory Forest management Plans have been prepared, out of which 12 have so far been

approved. Watershed treatment works and agricultural/horticultural development activities have commenced. Farmers have been provided with high yielding varieties rice, fruit-tree seedlings, and vegetable seeds and this has enabled them to increase their production on both irrigated and dry land and to intensify and diversify their production. Early indications show that vegetables are providing a new source of income for many households. Where irrigation has been improved farmers are recognizing that water will be sufficient to plant a second crop rabi (winter) season. The construction of godowns (warehouses) has allowed communities to store NTFP and other produce in order gain higher prices in the off-season. A pilot project on marketing, organized by MART, a Resource NGO, has already shown an impact by reducing exploitation by traders and enabled the communities to receive fair prices for their products and add value by simple processing techniques. Rural infrastructure has been upgraded with the construction water storage structures and watershed treatment works, and drinking water facilities, storage warehouses, feeder roads and multi-purpose halls. Through project interventions have generated a demand for labour and paid labour is providing increased incomes in Programme villages – and in some locations this is reducing distress migration. Because payment are made through the VDCs all participants receiving the minimum wage - not sub-standard rates normally paid by unscrupulous agents and contractors. Women and men are also being paid at the same level. Putting the payment process in the hands of the community is a major tool for empowerment of the community as well as providing better returns to the labourers. The WFP food support has also proved to be very popular.

Women's Empowerment. OTELP has succeeded in creating the first necessity for women's empowerment- a platform and space for women to participate and bolster their confidence in themselves. The programme currently reaches out to 1024 self help groups, 382 of which have been initiated by the programme. Women constitute close to 50 percent of the membership of the 136 Village Development Committees that have been formed so far. More than 60 percent of the Community Mobilisers are women. Most of the village nurseries set up by communities is being managed by women. With the help of MART, , women in 50 odd programme villages have enhanced their incomes through better processing practices and collectivised sale of Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) such as Siali leaf, mango jelly and cashew. The payment of equal wages to women and men is being to have a salutary effect locally. Through these and other measures, women are gradually being enabled to become active participants in their development and that of the community.

Thus OTELP has set an example of an excellent Govt. – NGO partnership resulting in a synergetic effect in regards to establishment of a true participatory process in implementing community based and demand driven development mechanism, where the tribal communities are not the passive recipients of the benefits, but the actual executers of the activities there by owning the institutions responsible for making it sustainable.

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