



Role of Cooperatives in Rural Development: A case study of Shramajivi Janata Sahayak Mandal, Satara

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Abstract

Cooperatives play a vital role in rural development. Cooperatives and rural development is two sides of same coin. Cooperatives not only helped to improve the family's economic condition but also helped for overall village development too. As far as Maharashtra state is concerned cooperatives have contributed at large scale in rural development. The present paper is about various cooperative enterprises established by an organization Shramajeevi Janata Sahayak Mandal (SJSM) from Patan taluka of Satara district of Maharashtra state. SJSM has become a movement of rural development. SJSM has not only contributed in economic empowerment of people but also intervened in various social issues like child marriage, superstition, alcoholism etc. with the help of people from various cooperative enterprises. The people's organizations which were established by SJSM at the initial stage are now been handed over to villagers. The basic aim of SJSM was of sustainable rural development which is been achieved and now SJSM is playing a major role of consultant and guide. The paper deals about the journey of SJSM from cooperative enterprise to sustainable rural development.

Key words: Cooperative enterprise, sustainable rural development, SJSM

INTRODUCTION

Shramajivi Janata Sahayak Mandal (SJSM) is NGO working since 1977, for rural development and empowerment of socially and economically backward communities residing in the remote, inaccessible areas of Western Ghat region including Satara and Raigad district of Maharashtra. The work was initiated in the backwater region of Koyna catchment area, where people were facing many



problems like displacement caused due to construction of Koyna Dam in 1962, followed by the grave incidence of massive earthquake in 1967 and declaration of sanctuary in 1980. The Koyna region is hilly, remote and inaccessible. The villages are far- flung and are totally cut off from the surrounding world where people were lacking the basic facilities like education, transportation, communication, health etc. The communities living in the area are mainly shepherds, cowherds and few are neo-buddhists with the traditional occupation of farming, wage labour and cattle rearing. The remoteness of their habitat and peculiar pastoral lifestyle imposed a kind of social exclusion on them. The community was a victim of age-old superstitions, illiteracy and exploitation at the hands of traders and moneylenders. In all the communities were socially and economically backward.

Hence, for the development of these rural poor people and to bring out them in the main stream of development Mr.Balasaheb Kolekar hailing from the Koyna valley founded Shramjivi Janata Sahayyak Mandal.

VISION

A sustainable gender just society where people manage their own natural resources and development process through cooperation and involving themselves actively in self governance

MISSION

To assist the rural poor in the acquisition of basic rights & facilitate promotion of peoples organizations such as cooperatives, village development committees, SHGs with a view to help them manage their own development process and programmes.

WORK AREA

519 villages from remote, inaccessible area of Satara and Raigad districts of Maharashtra

STRATEGIC INTERVENTION

People's Organization a Sustainable Rural Development:

Right from the beginning, the emphasis of the SJSM was on developing people's own organizations and institutions. SJSM realized very early that no process of development would be sustainable unless it is taken up by the local people themselves. Hence, the approach of SJSM was to motivate the people, help them



with knowledge and information, establish linkages with external institutions and facilitate an equity oriented, gender-sensitive and inclusive development process.

The first phase of work (1977-1990) aimed at awareness raising and social organization. SJSJ started with education and energized more than 150 primary schools in the area. Then they initiated a campaign to eradicate the practice of child-marriage among the Dhanagar Gavlis. This was spread into the entire mountainous region covering more than 75,000 families. They also curbed out various other superstitious practices and made girls' education as the main rallying point.

Cooperation as a Model of Rural Development

1. Milk Cooperatives

For livelihoods development, SJSJ effectively used the medium of 'cooperation'. SJSJ had correctly gauged the transformative potential of the 'cooperative movement' for initiating economic development among poor peasants, pastoralists and agricultural laborers. SJSJ started with milk cooperatives as this was the traditional occupation of the Gavlis. The Gavlis were rearing Indigenous cows and Goats. The major product which they were selling in the nearby market during weekly market day was Butter because selling milk daily to the market was not possible due to lack of transportation means and whatever amount they earn were used to purchase house hold requirements. They were selling gold in iron rate. Few bhaiyyas were exploiting this poor rural people they were going with iron Karahi and spoon to convert milk into Khoya. These Bhaiyyas were collecting fire wood from villagers in free of cost since it was available in abundance. They were purchasing milk from people with minimal charges and were producing Khoya. Looking at this rate of exploitation SJSJ has started a launch to connect the villages at the banks of Koyna River. People were motivated to establish milk cooperatives. Initially two milk cooperatives were established which has resulted a huge network of milk cooperatives throughout Patan Taluka.

Fisheries and Cane Bamboo Cooperatives

Fisheries and Cane-Bamboo Cooperatives, Katkari community is originally Scheduled Tribe dependent on forest to fulfill their basic needs, after losing their perennial source of income of producing Kaat from Khaira trees which is basically used to manufacture color and also consumed with Bittle leaf have joined a fishing



business. Katakari's basically collect fish from river and small dams and sell in the local market with very cheap rate. Since their needs were very much minimal just to fulfill the basic need of food and katchha shelter hence whatever they earn was sufficient for them, they never thought of improving their standard of living they think of fulfillment of today's needs never bothered about tomorrow. Their principle of life is to earn for today and spend for today. SJSM intervened to help this community with a school and mid day meal project, gradually after developing rapport and confidence with these primitive community fishery cooperatives were established they were allotted with Dam back water area for fishing. Fish culture and technical support were provided by SJSM through Fishery Ministry. In both the working area Raigad and Patan fishery cooperatives have been established basically for Katakari tribal community. Similarly Cane Bamboo Cooperatives have established in Patan which has provided a good income source to rural poor.

Women Industrial Cooperatives

Women's industrial cooperative for processing of locally available grains and fruits to produce remunerative food products, collection of non-timber forest produce, herbal medicine and processing of agricultural commodities. In the course of next ten years, they established 36 cooperatives of various kinds benefitting more than 9,200 families. The basic approach behind this was to make use of the locally available natural resources, harness the traditional skills of people and enhance employment and income generation opportunities.

The idea of developing the natural resource base of people has remained a dominant theme in all the work of SJSM, but most prominently during the second phase from 1991 to 2005. Following this, multifarious activities and programs were undertaken. A central government assisted, watershed development project covering more than 5,000 hectares was implemented in a neighboring drought prone taluka called Man. Another watershed project in the same taluka under the Indo-German Watershed Program was undertaken for 1300 ha. Under the Vasundhara program of water conservation supported by the Government of Maharashtra, 7,398 ha in 15 villages were treated. A social forestry project was undertaken on a 500 ha area in the hill region of Satara. Agro-industrial vocational training was imparted to about 450 youth in collaboration with the District Rural Development Agency. Self-help



groups of women were started which culminated into five savings and credit cooperative societies. Collectively they have financed 5,650 persons for self-employment.

In the third phase (2006-2012), SJSM expanded its work in the tribal area of the neighboring Konkan region. The most distinguishing activity was the organization of Katkaris. The Katkaris are recognized as a primitive tribal group in Maharashtra and is one of the most subjugated and exploited communities. SJSM not only enthused them with self-confidence but also rejuvenated their livelihood options through inland fisheries. At present 18 tribal cooperative fisheries societies have been started and 31 water-bodies have been taken for fisheries development and management, benefitting 1,825 tribal families. Considering the dearth of fish-seedlings, a comprehensive hatcheries production unit has been started with an annual capacity of 50 million fish spwan. To replicate this work in the entire Konkan region, a network of 22 like-minded organizations has been started. More than 120 self-help groups have been organized involving around 2,500 tribal women. All of these have resulted into significant gains in income and livelihoods.

The work which was started in five villages in 1978 has now spread to more than 500 villages and encompassing more than 35,000 families. A large network of people's organizations and institutions has been created. Lately, SJSM has entered into an institutionalization phase and have made collaborations with the agricultural universities. The Department of Bio- technology, GOI has sanctioned a collaborative research and development project involving SJSM and the Konkan Agricultural University on inland fisheries which would be pioneering and path-breaking.

SJSM has encouraged several youth to join social service and has also built a cadre of grassroots social workers. The work of SJSM stands apart not just because of devotion of the activists and commitment but also because of the methodology. SJSM's distinguishing mark is the faith in people's latent capacity. The basic aim of SJSM has been to develop people's own genius. Over the course of last 35 years, SJSM has demonstrated the methodology which could be easily replicated into any part of the country. This methodology not only emphasizes the productive and sustainable use of natural resources but also relies on forging effective linkages with state, market and universities. The work is imbued with the broader ideals of equity,



prosperity and gender justice and has made an enduring impact on the lives of thousands of people.

Ongoing activities

Sr. No.	Activity	Beneficiary	Support
1	Rural Women Technology Park Patan block, Satara District	60 Villages, 1500 Women	Dept. of Sc. & Tech., Govt. of India
2	Propagation of culture based capture fisheries in selected reservoirs of Konkan & western Ghat regions of Maharashtra for livelihood security of rural fishermen.	95 Tribal Villages in Mahad 1825 Families	Dept. of Biotech., Govt. of India
3	Diploma in Agriculture Polytechnic	192 students per year	Mahatma Phule Agri. Univ, Rahuri,
4	The Construction of Training & Activity Center for Rural Communities in Satara District, Maharashtra State.	Satara Dist.	The Consulate - General of Japan
5	Watershade development Goshatwadi Tal. Patan, Dist. Satara	9 Villages, 4250 H land treatment	CSR Fund. Indian Tobacco Corporation Ltd. (ITCL)
6	Watershade development Dhebewadi, Tal. Patan, Dist. Satara	9 Villages, 4772 H land treatment	CSR (ITCL) & Govt. of Mah. (Vasundhara)
7	Watershade development Dhebewadi, Tal. Patan, Dist. Satara	5 Villages, 3337 H land treatment	Govt. of Maharashtra (Vasundhara)
8	Watershade development Mhasala Dist. Raigad	9 Villages, 4396 H land treatment	Govt. of Maharashtra (Vasundhara)
9	Organic Mango Production Devrukh Dist. Ratnagiri	15 Villages, 1764 Families	CSR Fund. Indian Tobacco Corporation Ltd. (ITCL)
10	Implementation of Community based Inland Fisheries Programme, District Palghar	83 Villages in Palghar Dist.	UMED, Maharashtra St. Rural Livelihood Mission, Govt. of Mah.
11	Watershade Development Prog. In Man	4 Villages, 5224.42 H	CSR Fund, Bajaj Auto, Pune
12	Livelihood empowerment of Tribal women through the SHG.	540 women members of 45 SHGs from 30 tribal hamlets	Asia initiatives, USA



At present SJSM is implementing as well as resource Organisation. SJSM organizing various types of development trainings for the staff, individuals, CBOs, GOs as well as NGOs to share the vast experience in rural development.

Appreciation

Sr. No	Name of Award	Organization	Year
1	Rajivsheth Sabale	Rajivsheth Sabale Foundation, Sasvad.	2000
2	Equal opportunity	Sarada Foundation, Nashik.	2000
3	Vanashri	Government of Maharashtra.	2000
4	Vasant rao Naik	Government of Maharashtra.	2001
5	Shikshan Yogi	Respective Mama Kshirsagar Shikshan Pratishthan, Amaravati.	2002
6	Mahadev Balwant Natu	Natu foundation, Pune.	2003
7	Shri G.M. Vidhayak Kritishilata Puraskar	Manus Pratishthan, Pune.	2010
8	Shivajirao Sawant smurti Samajkary Puraskar	Mrutunjay Pratishthan, Pune	2010
9	Mahatma Phule Samata Puraskar	Mhatma Phule Samata Vicharmanch, Andori, Tal. Khandala, Dist. Satara.	2012
10	Best Innovation in Livelihood	Maharashtra Rural Livelihood Mission (MSRLM), Govt. of Maharashtra	2014
11	Biotechnology Social Development Award	Department of Biotechnology, Min. of Science & Tech., Govt. of India	2015

Conclusion:

Shramajivi Janata Sahayak Mandal, Satara has become a role model to many organizations working in the field of Cooperation and Rural Development. Within a short span of time it has achieved sustainability in the rural development.

References:

Personal interview with Mr. Balasaheb D. Kolekar founder president (SJSM)