

# Letters



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July-September 2017

Participatory Ground Water Management: need of the hour



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Self-Reliant Initiatives through Joint Action

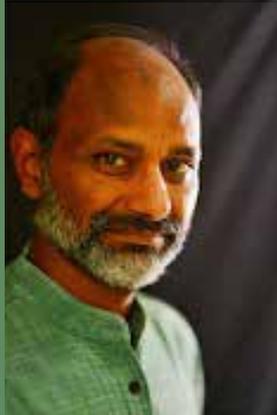
LETTERS is a quarterly periodical for bringing out the emotions and real time experiences of SRIJANITE's working in grassroots for bringing a ray of hope and change in Rural India.



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## Wisdom's Corner

“I recall Robert Chambers’ clarion call to the practitioners to share their experiences. It was in 1980’s. He called them field notes. Letters is in the same tradition. The idea is to share your raw practical experience, rather than waiting to make some erudite contribution.

This is matter of immense pleasure to me that Souvik, Naveen, Nitesh and Kamlesh have joined in the effort to revive **Letters**. They have made your job easier. You write your experience as it is and they will take it from there. They deserve our heartfelt commendation.

What makes me even happier is that they are the next generation in SRIJAN. They are carrying forward our mission of building knowledge in the development sector.”

## From Grassroots Desk

It was a splendid opportunity for us to restart our “LETTERS” a quarterly periodical capturing the emotions and real time experiences of SRIJANITE’s in grassroots of rural India. The journey of SRIJAN has indeed been inspiring right from its beginning. The platform provided by it attracted lots of young talented minds from across various reputed Institutes who had denounced their materialistic life for bringing about a change. The stiff challenges of social evils or infrastructural difficulties never dampened their spirits.

What kept them going? SRIJANITE’s give a voice to the downtrodden, sensitize the marginalized sections to the essence of collectives, empower the deprived sections to fight for their ‘rights and entitlements’, break the shackles of moneylenders and middlemen and many more things.

The purpose of “LETTERS” is to capture the true feelings and lessons of SRIJANITE’s who are fighting the very odds to empower the community to bring some real change in the grassroots. It will give them space to highlight the actual challenges that SRIJANITE’s face in the field and their innovations or solutions to overcome such hurdles that they may face. We believe, we must announce the outcomes even as there are failures in endeavouring.

It is a space where everyone can share their views, thought process, lessons, achievements and discouraging facts, in a transparent manner. This would certainly enrich the knowledge for the sector which one should be happy to contribute for. We expect every one of you who wholeheartedly will use the platform will contribute your valued lessons in the field for future generations to look up to and enhance the cross learning atmosphere within the organization. We request everyone to bring out your emotions and lessons through effectively contributing in it without any hesitation so that everyone can grow from your wisdom.

# Letters: Learn, Share and Grow Together

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# Participatory Groundwater Management in Chhattisgarh: Conserving today for sustainability in future

Akhilesh Patel

## Concept

Aquifer based Participatory Ground Water Management is certainly an innovative concept for managing depleting groundwater resource of India. Groundwater is a common pool resource but due to excessive use in many areas, it is facing severe stress. So the conceptualization of Participatory Groundwater Management (PGWM) begins with the resource-centric approach of understanding the aquifers then shifting to business. It starts with the approach of focusing on sources of groundwater such as wells, springs and finally focusing on the people-centric approach to collectively managing groundwater.

The concept was totally new to use so we approached Advanced Center for Water Resources Development and Management ACWADAM in Pune to understand what type of data we have to collect like underground geology, rainfall data etc for future analysis. We organized the capacity building training for our village resource persons so that they too can get sensitized about the whole concept, thus transfer of knowledge is ensured.

Thus after understanding the project, the team decided to carry out the pilot in Koriya District of Chhattisgarh. For selecting the village we used the criteria of one micro watershed, complex geography, water scarcity, health issues etc. We identified the village Padewa where our team planned to carry out the pilot study. In the initial phase, we did the baseline of the Water Sources available in the village. The survey revealed that out of 45 households in the village only 6 households had individual wells while the rest of the families used community owned structures. These structures included 6 hand pumps and 1 solar pump which were constructed by District Administration and Forest Department respectively.



The survey highlighted that the villagers used groundwater for the domestic purpose, while the crops were mostly dependent on monsoon. Thus, before the pilot intervention of PGWM, villagers were using their traditional knowledge and would go for high-yielding varieties of crops to enhance farm income. Paddy and maize were their main crops while hardly anyone grew vegetables in their lands.

### Process

SRIJAN Koriya team initiated the pilot process of PGWM by organizing a meeting with the villagers. One of them, Dol Singh, when asked about the groundwater resources, shared that "It is God's gift, so it can never be exhausted nor can we change the quality of Groundwater". The reply was not something that the team had not anticipated and challenges were something real as the traditional belief was certainly more. Even some cited that wells wouldn't go dry as they are connected to rivers and God will take care of their lives as he has given birth, so they don't need to worry.

In next phase, we focused on training of the farmers as we realized that until community understands the whole process, the pilot wouldn't be sustainable. So we organized regular fortnightly meetings with the community to transfer the knowledge. To carry on the good work, we need to ensure proper mechanism of monitoring, so we formed Village Level Monitoring Network comprising of local village resource persons and other active members who would monitor the whole process and act as a bridge in programme implementation.

In the next phase, we moved out to do a detailed data collection from the field such as the social status of the village, hydrological data, geological data, well inventory, groundwater table, cropping pattern, rainfall data, land use pattern etc. These data were presented in front of



the villagers in meetings and they understood the significance of each parameter in their lives. Though initially, some were reluctant but with gradual process everyone felt positive about bringing a change for the village as a whole.

### **Impact**

Thus, after the intervention, today the community has understood its own role in preserving groundwater unless being totally dependent on God. The Village level committee decided to implement Natural Resource Management activities and thus treated 75 hectares of land out of which 42 hectares were converted into double cropping. The villagers also had discussed about the solar pump which was established 10 years ago and whose resource was not judiciously utilized. So they approached the Forest Department Committee and got sanctioned for an underground pipeline for getting a direct line of water in 16 households. Thus, those families started backyard kitchen garden with extra water and thus nutritional intakes of the family too rose. Today, these tribal villagers in Padewa have understood the importance of groundwater and are taking judicious steps in crop selection and water usage keeping in mind the importance for groundwater resource which they have to conserve for their future generations to survive.

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# What's the bigger challenge: Doubling the farmer's income or sustaining it?

## The Debate

Souvik Dhar

India today is no more a land of Snake charmers. We have moved ahead of that tag with biggest IT industry and telecom market which brought a good amount of money and hence raised the lifestyle of a large amount of population. The purchasing power of people has significantly increased a lot along with the rise in GDP. Our country today is not celebrated for being an agrarian economy rather highlighted as a Service based economy. However, we still have more than 70 % of the country's population dependent on Agricultural income and therefore, we ought to think of their aspirations. Growing disparity between agriculture and non-agriculture income is certainly very high. Low and volatile growth along with lack of adequate infrastructure to mitigate the risk and crop loss has further shifted the aspiration of rural youth away from agriculture.

The government speaks of doubling the farmers' Income by 2022. It is certainly a positive step towards the agriculture sector but there are many challenges on the ground which needs to be considered. The real challenge for a farmer is that their crop is neither covered against the natural uncertainty during production cycle nor they are assured of getting a good price for crop post-production.

Therefore, the real challenge for a tribal farmer of Koriya District of Chattisgarh, who has borrowed money from money lender (but not a bank) at an exorbitant rate of interest, has to face the wrath of climate change as he is not lucky to get covered in Agricultural Insurance Schemes. Similar is the case of a marginal women farmers in Bundi, who have enhanced the productivity of their lands in Urad crop but sudden price fall in the Mandi has dashed all their hopes of a better return. The stories and struggles are never-ending but a bigger challenge for all of us is to find out a solution so that even though we can't make farming a glamorous livelihood option but at least can find



steps to minimize the risk associated with it.

The newly launched crop Insurance scheme - Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana is certainly a good option but the real extraction of benefits are not being enjoyed by the small tenant farmers due to lack of awareness and complexity of documentation process. The Government machinery saved their faces by covering largely the loanee farmers where the banks automatically debited the insurance premium from their loan account. Be it loan waivers or Fasal bima, due to our operational in-efficiencies the target beneficiaries are still out of reach for these schemes. Similarly, in the commodity market, the price hedging facilities are available through NCDEX Future platform, where the farmer can hedge its price before its harvest comes. However, it's not the farmers who are actually utilizing such platforms but some well offs who are controlling it all.

The government has to think of more proactive steps, where not only we make good schemes but also ensure such schemes are properly implemented for the target beneficiary, so that at least risk coverage can be ensured for the farming community. We have to first think of creating a robust platform where all the farmers can enjoy the right price for their hard work rather being exploited in every corner. "Once this exploitation is stopped, we can next dream of fulfilling the vision of doubling the farmer's income."

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# More options for the rural poor through MGNREGA

## Do the rural poor have options to choose?

Nitesh Kumar

The Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is one of the major schemes in India for strengthening rural livelihoods in the country. Statistics of the last two years show that the scheme became a savior in stabilizing rural economy when the country was facing severe drought. Average person-days generated in the last two financial years i.e. (2016-17 and 2015-16) all over the country were 235.28 Crores i.e. 142% increase in comparison to the person days generated in 2014-15. Particularly in the state of Rajasthan, the person-days generated increased from 16.86 Cr. in 2014-15 to 23.41 Cr. in 2015-16 and 25.97 Cr. in 2016-17. The data itself reflects the orientation of Government, with respect to scheme and ground level efforts being made, to make it more reliable and successful on the ground.

Inclusion of role of CSOs as Cluster Facilitation Team (CFT), in fifteen backward blocks in Rajasthan, supported to bring more quality in the implementation of MGNREGS works. Although, experience of CSOs working with Government functionaries was not very smooth and rigidity in working style of the government has been a major obstacle for the implementation team but Kudos to the state government MGNREGS officials and SRLM officials who supported CSOs at every step. The collaboration between MGNREGS officials, SRLM officials and CSOs certainly has brought the desired results especially in these fifteen blocks of Rajasthan although not in terms of numbers but quite well in terms of quality till now.

Self-Reliant Initiatives through Joint Action (SRIJAN) is CFT partner of the state government in Rajasthan for Niwai (Tonk) which was listed in SECC survey (2011) as one of the 250 most backward blocks in India. SRIJAN has already advocated for assets construction for individual poor families in rural areas through publishing a user manual named as 'Building Sustainable Livelihoods of the Poor through MGNREGA' with the support of UNDP and Ministry of Rural Development. Even in



the overall idea referred as MGNREGA 2.0, the collaboration as CFT partner brings opportunity for the implementation of the same on the ground from December 2014. But certainly, the road ahead was not as smooth as expected. There were number of challenges like resistance of PRI members in terms of sanction as well as start of individual works without any penny, delay in every step due to their slow working methodologies, less awareness of community in terms of individual works through MGNREGA, community mindset of getting benefits without working hard infield, modernization, resistance from block as well as district administrations, irregular fund flow for CFT projects etc.

It took one year at least for CFT team working in Niwai block to build the reputation with PRI members, to get them know the roles of new functionaries as CFT, to build a system of data collection and generating an MIS for the Category B works in all over the block taking the responsibilities in hand. Orientation program in village level helped the community to know more about individual works through MGNREGA. The major focus in the second-year term for the CFT was to make maximum sanctions for the SC/ST/BPL families in the block. With the support of Block Development Officer (BDO), who certainly supported to remove hurdles, the team could make sanction of more than 3500 families in a year in a single block. Meanwhile, in the financial year 2016-17, the strategic changes in policy by the state rural development department certainly brought more focus in the implementation of the sanctioned works under category B. These changes boosted the sanctions made in a year in the block. Another important change was the inclusion of self-help groups (SHGs) in the loop. SRLM as a partner, focused sanction of SHG members associated with them and as they were in the process of sustainability for Cluster level federations (CLF), here they come up with another great move with support of rural development department in Rajasthan, CLF as Project Implementing Agency (PIA) for Cat-



egory B works implementation for SHG families under  $\text{\$RLM}$ . Although the move has not been appreciated by number of stakeholders as MGNREGS is not a simpler scheme to handle without expertise and also it is an act which is based on rights and entitlements for the rural population. At the same time, CLF was newly established and recruitment of expertise was at the initial level of pilot; so, it had been so expensive and not feasible. Another important aspect of the move was the least dependency on PRI members in terms of policy for the implementation of Category B works by CLF as PIA.

This move certainly brings opportunities for CFT and CLF functionaries for a common goal of assets construction through MGNREGS as durable assets for poor and marginalized farmers in Niwai block. Nevertheless, the block administration and CFT personnel supported CLF functionaries to know the different aspects of the category B works and also supported for more works to start in their area of implementation. The support system certainly boosted CLF functionaries to meet their targets as well. Secondly, CFT also used CLF analytically to publicize the way to start the works as it has the least hindrance from PRI members and thus, become able to create a model focusing on the field where SHGs are more active; these Panchayats were Siras, Bassi, Bahad, Jamdoli, Khidgi, Bharthala and Nohta. SHGs in this area (formed by SRIJAN and RRLP), having most of the families belonging to SC/ST/B-PL families, acted as change agents. As it is mentioned earlier, one of the challenges in the field was the mindset of the community of getting benefits of MGNREGS without actually working in the field. To get rid of the above problems, the orientation of SHGs women regarding 'JITNA KAAM UTNA DAAM' and intensive monitoring in terms of works in field and payments, helped the team to remove the film of negative thoughts from their mind. At the same time, these SHG groups acted as a labor group for the start of works of their members whose works have



been sanctioned. Implementation of MGNREGA works has been a major agenda in SHG/Cluster/Federation meetings and thus, a sense of sustainability and idea of getting benefit from being a member of SHG grew up intensively.

Till date, in Niwai block, more than 2.67 Crores have been spent on labor part for individual works and around 14.8 Lakhs have been spent in the material component. Around 838 sanctioned beneficiaries' works have been started and a huge number of works to be started in third-year term of CFT. This led to treat more than 1300 Hectares of land through field bunding activity as it is a major activity adopted in last two financial years i.e. 2015-16 and 2016-17.

But still, long way ahead. The picture seems quite fruitful but many challenges still exist. The scales of works need to increase i.e. the model of SHG as labor group needs to scale up in all over the block. Several questions raised during the experience of collaboration are: Is it possible for the rural population to have options to choose from welfare schemes of Government like who could serve them? What would be the future of CLF as PIA? Will the future be sustainable or might also be influenced by the interest of politicians or different stakeholders in future which being a major reason for the collapse of the co-operative movement in Maharashtra? Can strong federations promoted by CSOs be PIAs for the implementation in future with the same flexibility as CLF been promoted? Overall it could not be denied that the assets construction movement through MGNREGS could certainly lead to support the several initiatives taken by several agencies to improve the livelihood of rural poor and marginalized farmers if intensively implemented.

# Inspiring for Change: A young SRIJANITE's journey A Lifetime opportunity to make changes

Richa Sachan

The social inequality which existed in my surroundings always inspired me to bring a change in someone's life. Right from Caste-based discrimination, Child marriage, women behind the veil, the patriarchal mentality was not new as I used to see from my childhood. During my school days, I always felt that when I would become financially independent, I would try to do something for downtrodden sections of the society especially those who even can't afford their medical cost during illness.

As time passed by I got more information about the developmental sector and how professionals from various fields are contributing their little bit to bring a sustainable change in the rural parts of our country. I instantly decided to join the sector and after appearing for the entrance exams got selected for the Rural Management Course in one of the reputed Institutes in the country. During the study period, I got inclined towards livelihood sector and my field studies in reputed Livelihood agencies like PRADAN and SRIJAN further motivated me. The enthusiastic professionals across various fields working with full dedication in rural areas without the basic amenities for bringing a positive change in the lives of poor villagers had impressed me a lot to join the sector. I was lucky to be selected in SRIJAN which played a pivotal role for me to enhance my learning's and overall positively refining my skills. The atmosphere in SRIJAN was different where our colleagues not only motivated us for enhancing our learning but also acted as mentors while we were facing any challenge in the new environment. The culture of openness and innovation provided enough flexibility to not only think of something new but with constant guidance and encouragement from seniors just enhanced my risk-taking ability.

In SRIJAN, I got involved in various activities across various themes from Community Institutions to Horticulture. In Annapur District of



Madhya Pradesh where I was working with tribal families, I noticed that child marriage was a normal prevalent phenomenon which existed there. The tribal girls were leaving their studies mostly after 8th Standard and were married at a very tender age of 15 to 16 years. I decided to do something to bring a change and discussed the issue with my team members for effective suggestions. The team too gave me full support and suggested that Community should be made aware of its ill effects to remove such social evils. So I started discussing this issue in our Cluster meeting where I sensitized our Community Leaders about the opportunity that they had lost when they were young and whether they want the same for their daughters too. The gender sensitization training certainly had its effect gradually though initially most of them resisted citing that it was their cultural practices. One day, when I was taking an SHG meeting and one woman asked for the loan for marrying her minor daughter I was amazed to see that other SHG women protested and refused to give her the loan. They even made her realize that SHG won't promote such social evils and thus they themselves made a rule that from that day onwards no loan will be given for child marriage.

To other young champions, who either want to join or continue in this sector, my simple message is that experiencing the change in rural area is a lifetime opportunity which I came to know after joining SRIJAN. Each day some new learning awaits, even those things I considered challenges yesterday have today become my strongholds. After two years of my journey in SRIJAN when I look back what I was earlier, I certainly find myself more confident, stronger and empathic woman. Here I got an opportunity to live a life that is very different from others and it makes me different.

# The Changemakers: Essence of collectiveness Glimmers of light shaping into collective power: Muskaan

Souvik Dhar

Manbhar and Mamta of Muskaan Cluster in Kodkiya village of Bundi District (Rajasthan) are doing something that they would have never dreamt off before they started their own Self Help Group in the year 2009-10. Steadily climbing step by step, they realized that although from individual level they have grown into group, they need to get stronger to be vocal for their rights in their village. So the journey of Muskaan Cluster started where 7 SHGs collectively formed the village level Cluster. Initially, Muskaan Cluster activities were to initiate savings in larger groups, establishing coordination among the members of the SHGs, discussing societal challenges etc.

One day, SRIJAN professionals were conducting training in Muskaan Cluster on producing good quality Soybean Seed from their respective fields. During the session, a discussion started about various factors which affect the prices of Soybean and grading came out to be an important feature. The utility of spiral grader was shared and women were amazed to see the effectiveness of it. The price of the spiral grader was around Rs 6,500 and it was not possible for every individual to purchase it and only big traders in Kapren possessed such utility machines.

After the training session got over, Manbhar and Mamta took the lead and shared the idea with other women whether they could use their Muskaan Cluster savings to purchase the Spiral Grader. Initially, other women were reluctant to invest their hard-toiled money to purchase the grader as they were not sure of its utility and thought it would be a loss-making proposition. The point was discussed again during next meeting and SRIJAN professional facilitated the discussion by sharing instances of farmers in Madhya Pradesh where they purchase machinery in collective basis and rent them to the members for maintenance, like a custom hiring. Finally, the members decided to collectively pur-



chase one Spiral Grader for the Muskaan Cluster.

They fixed the rate of utilization of Spiral Grader for grading 100 kg of Soybean at Rs 25. It really helped them as graded Soybean started fetching more prices in Mandi. Their customer base started to increase from the SHG members' households to other farmers in the village. Within 1 year of purchase of their Spiral Grader, they recovered the base price of the machine. The next year, they purchased five chargeable spraying machines, weeding machine etc, which they are operating in revenue model basis. Muskaan Cluster took its first step in understanding the utility of using collective ownership for business operations.

Last year in 2016-17, Samridhi Mahila Crop Producer Company Limited (SMCPCL), which is the District level Producer Company of SHG women, had faced a cash crunch. During one of the Board of Directors meeting, it was discussed to resolve the crises. One of the ideas was to pool funds from different village level clusters for purchasing the inputs and in return sharing revenues with them. Manbhar shared the idea with the other members of Muskaan Cluster and they readily agreed to it and they collectively purchased a total of 400 bags of fertilizers from the saving pool of Cluster. They had purchased it from the SMCPCL at Rs 285 per bag and sold it at Rs 310 per bag which was still below the market price i.e. Rs 320 per bag. With this, Muskaan Cluster did the turnover of selling fertilizer of 1 lakh within one crop period and has not only earned a good profit for the cluster but also passed benefits to the individual members by providing them quality input at the right time in right price.

This is just a beginning of the journey for members of Muskaan, who have found out the scope of Collective power to bring smile and hope



in Kodkiya as it is shared by Manbhar Bai in her own words "

*We never had a say in the decision-making in our family. But today things have changed as our husbands and villagers keep on enquiring about quality seeds, fertilizers etc. from us and purchase from our Cluster on our recommendation"*

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### **SRIJAN's Vision**

An Organization of Excellence recognized as a resource agency for developing and replicating unique and innovative community owned sustainable livelihoods models leading to dignity for all.

### **SRIJAN's Mission**

To empower 100,000 rural poor families by increasing their annual income by Rs. 50,000 by 2020, through SRIJAN's unique livelihoods cluster approach, and by enhancing their capacity to demand and access public resources they are entitled to. SRIJAN has already reached 50,000 families as on June 1, 2017.



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**SRIJAN is a public charitable trust registered in National Capital Territory of Delhi**

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