

Changing Face of Sishaput Village

History & Background of the Village and people

Sishaput is a small village with 11 tribal households in Badel Gram Panchayat of Nandapur Block in Koraput district of Orissa. As told by the villagers, the village was established in 1986 when only 8 families from a nearby village called Kareiput came over to settle there. They did not have even a home stead place to live there in. They did not feel at home with the community already living in the village. Hence they decided to leave the place and start a village of their own.

By the time the village was established, there were dense forests with diversity of tree species starting from fire wood, fruit bearing and non timber forest produces. There were three streams, water from which was used for drinking purposes. By the end of 2000 all these streams dried and the villagers requested the Panchayat to make provision of a well for drinking water. The community dug a well in 2000 with support of Rs 6000/- from the Panchayat.

The villagers depend on farming for their livelihood. They can be categorized as small and marginal farmers with an average of 1 to 3 acres of land holding per family. They cultivate paddy, Ragi, minor millets, Niger etc. They are dependent on monsoon rains for their agriculture activities. But the yield they got was not adequate to feed them through out the year and hence they used migrate out to towns within the state as well as to Andhra Pradesh. Some of them had to borrow from nearby villagers to tide over the periods of food insecurity.

The villagers are deprived of basic amenities like education, health services, communication and safe drinking water. There is no school in the village, even the small children have to walk nearly a distance of 1 km. for attending primary classes. Because of their living conditions, they live in and especially during rainy season, the children suffer from cold, fever, diarrhea and skin diseases. Only when their state of health is precarious, they go to the nearest health unit, which is located in nearly 15 kilometers away. Being a small village it has no identity of its own and the villagers cannot access the government schemes.

Impact of Climate Change on lives and livelihood of villagers

During the later part of nineties the village lost its forest cover due to indiscriminate tree felling by the villagers themselves as well as people from nearby villages. The immediate result of deforestation was drying of streams. All the three streams totally disappeared by the end of 2000. The biggest crisis that followed was non availability of drinking water.

The villagers now feel the inconsistency of the climate. The villagers say “Earlier the rains started during end of May and beginning of June and continued till the end of September and it stopped by the time people start harvesting. The rains are now inconsistent and asymmetrical; sometimes it rains too much and at times too little. You start sowing or planting of paddy crops and then it doesn't rain, the soil dries up. Sometimes there are heavy showers by the time crop is ripe and ready for harvest, and all this is affecting us a lot. With this kind of inconsistency of the

climate we are completely helpless, we can't do anything." All this has affected crop yield as well as diversity of crops which earlier added to the food basket of the people. The same has happened with other staple foods like Ragi and other minor millets which further worsen their situation of food insecurity. "Now the summer season has longer stay and heat has started increasing," recall the elderly people.

The villagers also feel that use of chemical fertilizers is also one of the causes that have affected crop yield and soil fertility. Of course it was promoted by government, but over a period of ten years the use has increased almost four times in the same land without any comparative increase in productivity and on the other hand it has increased the cost of production.

Interventions for Natural Resource Management

Pragati, Koraput started intervention in the village in 2003 under Community Development Project with support of Trocaire. A Village Development Committee has been formed in the village with 12 members out of whom 6 are women. With the support under Project interventions the community has become more conscious to identify the problems and better equipped to draw strategies to overcome the same. Besides formation and strengthening of civil society the project also strengthen the capacities of communities and also facilitates activities on protection, utilization and management of Natural resources especially land, water and forests.

The community now feels that the natural environment continues to deteriorate and they must continue their efforts for protection and conservation of forests, retention of soil fertility through organic practices and take better care of existing water resources. They have identified the activities for natural resource management, improvement of agriculture and organic farming. They are conscious of the fact that the climate has changed lately and that these changes are affecting the lives and livelihoods of community. Perhaps they aren't much aware that the work they are doing to improve their situation of poverty, vulnerability and food security is helping them to mitigate the effects of climate change and to adapt better to the climatic variations.

Due to the facilitation and capacity building initiatives the villagers have been able to solve one of their critical issues of drinking water. They have mobilized a bore well from the Panchayat and able to solve their problem of drinking water.

During resource mapping with villagers it was observed that there was a perennial water source in the bottom end of the village which has the potential to be used for irrigation for agriculture activities but it wasn't possible as the villagers did not have resources to invest for lifting the water to irrigate their fields. In 2006, a lift point was installed in the village under project interventions that now irrigates 10 acres land of all the 11 families in the village. The villagers are now growing vegetable crops during both summer and winter seasons which has added to intake of vegetables in their diet through out the year and also each family earns an average of Rs 2500 /- to Rs 4000/- per season(two times during a year besides the monsoon crops). The villagers have started adopting organic practices like vermi compost, pot compost and farm yard manures. The most important change that has occurred in the village is that now the villagers have engagement throughout the year in their own village and they have stopped migrating. They

have formed a grain bank in the village by raising community contribution that caters to the need of vulnerable families during periods of food scarcity.

The villagers now feel that they have an identity of their own and they have developed confidence to negotiate with Panchayat and line departments for solution of their problems. The women of the village have formed a self help group for small savings and taking up income generation programmes that further adds to enhancement in living standard of the people.

Case study of Sonu Sisa

Sonu Sisa and his family, like the other families of Sishaput village suffer from the brunt of poverty, food scarcity and the impacts of climate change. His family consists of his wife Kuji Sisa, three daughters, three sons and his old mother. Two of his daughters are married and staying with their in laws family in different villages. One of his sons got married in 2007 and staying separately. The family owns a small house with tiled roof. Two children are now studying in primary classes and a son has passed Matric this year.

The family owns 3 acres of land which is the only source of their livelihood where they grow paddy, Ragi, minor millets and Niger (a kind of edible oil seed). The children also assist their parents in farming activities. The harvest they get, support the consumption needs of the family for 8 to 9 months and for the rest part of the year they have to depend on wage labour. Sonu as the family head has the responsibility to look after the family, thus he has to go out to work as a wage labourer to different places and sometimes to the nearby state of Andhra Pradesh.

Sonu is now a member of the Village Development Committee that has been formed in the village under the Community Development Project implemented by Pragati with support of Trocaire. His wife has also been a member of Panchayat level federation.

Sonu like the other families of the village has been using the water through lift irrigation to raise vegetable crops since last two years. He has been raising different vegetable crops like onion, garlic, potato, brinjal, tomato and other seasonal vegetables. He has also established a vermi compost unit from which he extracts an average of 5 quintals of compost per year. The compost is also shared with other farmers of the village. Besides consumption for his family through out the year, he sells the vegetables and earns an average of Rs 3000/- to 5000/- per season.

There have been visible changes in the living standard of the family since last two years. They are now able to consume vegetables through out the year with their regular diet like rice and Ragi gruel which was quite impossible before two years as they did not produce it, neither had they the purchasing power to buy and eat. Sonu has been able to construct a new house for his son with an investment of Rs 18000/-. He has also purchased one bi-cycle for his son and purchased gold with an investment of Rs 3000/-. He could spend Rs 1500/- for his daughter's marriage last year. Now he is able to send three of his children to school. This year he has decided to send his son for higher education after he has passed in the matriculation.

The family is now able to earn a livelihood in the village. Sonu has now stopped migrating since last two years.

Case study of Bhaktaram Sisa:

Bhaktaram Sisa, aged around 30 years is a poor man of Sishaput village. His family consists of his wife and three sons. His parents had come from a nearby village called Kareiput twenty years ago, purchased a small plot of land and constructed a hut and settled in the village. Bhakta has one acre of land in his share. However he cultivated only half of it which he ploughed using a digging axe or sometimes with help of other's bullocks. The other half was left fallow as he did not have bullocks to plough the entire patch.

He raised only staple food crops like paddy and Ragi. The harvest was 2 to 3 quintals that sustained the family for only six months and for rest part of the year there is no other alternative except to look out for wage employment. As wage employment is not available in the locality he has to migrate out to the towns nearby and sometimes to the nearby state Andhra Pradesh leaving his family in the village. He went out to work at different places mostly to towns of Andhra Pradesh. With whatever little amount he earned the family could manage hand to mouth. Every year the family used to borrow food grains from nearby village for which they have to repay with heavy interest (for every ten kg. they have to give an interest of 5 kg.).

In 2006 the Village Development Committee of Sishaput selected Bhakta as the beneficiary to receive support of a pair of bullocks under Shakti Sahaya Scheme. Since then his living condition has improved considerably. The bullocks have been a boon for him. He has participated in trainings for cattle care and management and System of Rice Intensification (a kind of paddy cultivation technology that produces higher yield with less seeds, water and organic practices).

Bhakta now raises two crops in a year. After getting the bullocks in Kharif 2007 Bhakta cultivated his entire patch of land and harvested 5 quintals of paddy, 4 quintals ragi, and also vegetables like potato, tomato and chilly. Besides using vegetables for consumption he has earned Rs 900/- by selling the surplus. "Prior to this we have never consumed vegetable curry regularly with our staple food except once or twice in a year during festive occasions." Says Bhaktaram. He also raised summer paddy through SRI method by which he could harvest 5.5 quintals of paddy. He takes his bullocks to plough in other's land for which he gets some rent.

Bhakta has thus been able to feed his family throughout the year. He is able to purchase clothes for his children and also decided to send them to school. He has no more need of borrowing from outsiders. On the other hand he has started saving a little bit from his income and now having Rs 2252/- in his savings account.

This year Bhakta has raised crops in 3 acres of land, one acre his own and another two acre he has kept as mortgage from a nearby villager for Rs 2000/-. Life has changed for Bhakta as he has also stopped migrating out to work as a wage labourer and instead he is now engaged in agriculture activities throughout the year.