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■ Editorial Team: *Ashendra Singh, Christopher Connolly, Leonoor Wijnans, Sabiha Haleem*

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## Landing onto Disquiet Land

Hello friends, my name is Chris and I am from the United States. For five months I reported on the human conditions in rural areas of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. I would like to share with you some of my experiences in these harsh environments. My second trip to the field was to Madhya Pradesh and began in Anuppur, a city to the east. As with the other states, this journey was full of excitement. Whenever I went to the field, I would generally stay for 2 to 5 days for each story. In that amount of time I was to research the relevant subjects, choose the exact topic of the story, conduct the appropriate interviews, and write the story. Then, I would move on to the next location. After Anuppur I was supposed to go west to Jabalpur, but the meeting was canceled due to conflicting schedules. This was another part of the job, working with so many schedules. My schedule, their schedule, train schedule, bus schedule, sleep schedule, etc. On more than a few occasions I found myself finishing a story, getting on a night bus (a less than comfortable mode of transportation often disallowing any sleep) and arriving early the next morning only to go directly into the field for interviews. Instead of Jabalpur, I continued further west to Sohagpur (Hoshangabad) where I stayed with an organization involved with the Dalit community. This was one of the more interesting stories because it was concerning the plight of the lower caste; a topic usually heard of by foreigners, but rarely understood. The story specifically had to do with ineffective government schemes implemented to relieve the burdens associated with the lower caste. The organization was able to put me up in a hotel; a welcome accommodation considering past experiences sleeping on the ground in offices. This was another realization along the way; some organizations have the resources to make such expenditures, while many do not. I was always at the mercy of whatever that particular organization was able to offer. After Sohagpur I stopped in Pachmarhi. Pachmarhi is a beautiful hill-station known for its trekking, deep canyons and incredible waterfalls. It was a welcome break considering most of the stories were at least a half-day travel from each other. If I was not working, I was on my way to the next story, almost always at the discretion of my hosts - an appreciated and helpful relationship until it seems incessant. Probably the most stressful times were when I would finish work at one organization, and then make a long journey to the next location, only to arrive to a less than comfortable accommodation and be expected to immediately jump into the next story. Often organizations would not realize that I had been working or traveling non-stop for weeks. However stressful, to get through these tough times and come out with a finished product I was proud of were some of the most rewarding moments. After Pachmarhi was a story to the south in Tamia (Chhindwara) about a primitive tribe. There my accommodation consisted of a mattress on the ground in the office. I slept there along with three employees of the organization. After Tamia I moved west to Baihar (Balaghat) to do a story on the Baiga community and the effect a national forest has had on their livelihoods. In this area there was, and still is, a Naxalite insurgency. The Naxalites are a violent Maoist uprising seeking a class-less society. Immediately after my arrival I was taken to the local police station to inform them of my presence and intentions. The following day, a man from the CBI (India's premier investigative agency) came to the organization's office to interview me. This conversation was probably one of the most awkward of my life. The man would not identify himself except as a 'friend', although I knew he was an intelligence officer. Also, he continually tried to provoke a debate concerning American foreign policy, a conversation I am not averse to having, but prefer to avoid if it appears to be confrontational. After finishing the Baihar story I moved northwest to the capital of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal. This would be my last stop before returning to Delhi. Once I got back to Delhi I spent a week editing the stories with Mr. Hasrat Arjjumend, and got ready for my next trip to Uttar Pradesh.

This issue of GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY contains some of the stories I documented. I hope my experience in India's remote rural areas will be a lesson to westerners living unaware of some the harsh realities of our world.

*Christopher Connolly* ◀◀

## Devastation at Work in Paradise

✉ Christopher Connolly

Chamba is a district located in Himachal Pradesh known for its enchanting beauty. It is an area of dense forests, green peaks and valleys, snow tipped in the winter, all of which reside around the Rabi River and its tributaries that give life to the people of the area. In this same district there is an initiative to implement three major power projects: Chimera-1, Chimera-2 and Chimera-3. Chimera-3 is in progress along the Rabi basin. There are some forty micro-hydroelectric projects to be implemented, which use the flow of water to derive energy. These projects are at different stages of implementation. Some are still in the planning phase; others under construction and others have been completed. Hul-I and Hul-II are two micro-hydroelectric projects still in the planning phase, much because they have encountered resistance from the inhabitants to be affected. This article focuses on the Hul-I project to better examine the situation.

Hul-I is a micro-hydroelectric project, meaning it creates less than 5 MW of power. However, this identification is debatable as it has been found that many of the micro projects create 5 MW or more, but due to political loopholes they are still considered 'micro'. The project requires the construction of a canal that diverts water from a tributary of the Rabi River in the Saal Valley into several power stations. These canals will be 6 meters wide and 11 meters deep. With the use of dynamite and extensive human traffic during construction, they will cut into the Saal Valley surrounding the tributary.



Micro-hydro electric projects are said to be less damaging to the environment than, for instance, thermal-electric projects because of less pollution. However, they may still just as adversely affect the inhabitants, and provide just as negative consequences on the surrounding environment.

The most damaging effect is the diversion of water. The canal takes water out of the river for kilometers at a time in order to move the water in such a way that creates more velocity when entering the power plant to turn the turbines. Needless to say, this creates some serious issues for a population that considers the river its lifeline. Without it, much of their livelihood will be gone. The company has responded to this complaint by promising 15 percent of the water will remain in the river. However, this does not correct the amount of damage it will continue to cause, not to mention it is difficult to measure and therefore prone to future conflict.

Hul-I will affect villages of 2 panchayats, some 6,000 people. All of these people will be affected either directly or indirectly. Many families have fishing licenses and rely on the fish from the tributary for income. Even more unlicensed families also rely on fishing for food. Possibly most adversely affected are the 26 traditional watermills in the area. The watermills are used for grinding wheat, corn, etc. Without the flow of water the mills will be useless. This will directly affect the income for some 150 families. Not to mention the people who rely on the mills for grinding their grains will have to go elsewhere. Most will need to resort to electric grinding, which costs more. Watermills generally charge one kilo for every ten, while electric mills charge two. Moreover,

a recent study has found that the grains crushed from the electric mills have a much lower nutritional value because of the excessive force used. Irrigation of agriculture around the tributary will also be affected. Without water from the river, irrigating the land will become extremely difficult, if not impossible.

The consequences to nature and wildlife will also prove disastrous. As of now, the wildlife such as deer, bear, goat, tiger and peacock do not enter the fields of farmers. However, it can only be assumed that once the construction commences, the resulting disturbance will influence the wild animals to venture into the fields. Deforestation and soil erosion are even more devastating. Few forests have such a mixed vegetation of pine, oak, fruits, etc. The construction would surely take away from this natural beauty.

Making the situation even more absurd is that the benefits of these power plants will not be going to the community suffering the consequences. Instead, the power is sold to private companies and distributed all over India for an incredible profit, none of which the locals will see. Amongst the leaders of the communities it is agreed that even if compensation was given, though it has not been as of yet, it could never replace their livelihood. For this reason, the Gram Panchayat has set forth four resolutions to the central government denying the continuation of the project. However, all have been over turned. It seems the need for energy in the eyes of the government prevails over any consideration of the consequences it may have on the population it affects.

The people of Chamba feel they have already contributed to the development of India with other energy projects. They clearly state that they are not against development. But if it were up to them they would much rather contribute more by conserving the natural beauty of the area for tourism. The question is: is it up to them? Are natural resources the property of the local people? They simply believe the interests of India are better served by preserving its natural beauty instead of destroying it for energy purposes.

◀◀ Photos by Christopher Connolly

## Training Completed ▶



### IVth Residential Training on 'Process Documentation & Communication'

08-12 April 2007, Varanasi

A 5-day training, organized jointly Grassroots Institute and Grassroots India Trust, was held at Parshavnath Vidyapeeth (an affiliated research centre of Banaras Hindu University). In the training important topics taught were: Process Documentation: Theory & Practice; What should be documented and why; Types of Documents and Reports of NGOs/Development Projects; General Techniques of Documentation and Communication; Techniques of Writing Quarterly/ Annual Progress Report of a Project/ Organization; Techniques of Writing Annual Report of Organization; Techniques of Writing Study Reports; Techniques of Preparation of Leaflet/ Folder of Organization; Techniques of Good Presentation of Documents/ Reports; Demonstration of Making Good Documents on Computer; Power Point Presentations; Photography and Photo Documentation; Video Documentation: Steps of Pre-Production, Production and Post-Production Phases; Importance of Case Story in Process Documentation;

Difference between Case Story and Case Study; Techniques of Case Story Writing; Photo Presentation with Case Story;



Outreach Tools; Techniques of Dissemination of Documented Information; and 20 Ways of Communicating the Results/ Organization.

The participants came from the following organizations: ICIMOD, Kathmandu; Guria, Varanasi; Gene Campaign, New Delhi; Akshay Pratishthan, New Delhi; Adivasi Sevasharm Trust, Indore; SAATHI, Chennai; MITTRA, Nasik; Centre for Environment Education, Lucknow; SHARA, Kullu; PARA, Mandi; Navjyoti Development Society, Delhi; YASHADA, Pune; CREATE, Lucknow; Nav Bhartiya Nari Vikas Samiti, Ballia. The training was facilitated by Mr. Hasrat Arjjumend, Mr. Kamlesh and Mr. Ashendra Singh. The feedback of the participants was very appreciating, as they found the training useful, skill-enhancing and momentous.



## Mainstreaming Children Voices in Media: Pilot Phase was incredibly successful

With the support of Plan International, the Grassroots Media Initiative had been implementing a project on 'mainstreaming the children's voices in media', popularly known as 'CPS Project', since November 2006. In June 2007, the pilot phase ended with the following landmark achievements:

- Stories/articles got placed/published in mainstream Hindi newspapers: 32 as against target of 15.
- Writing Skill Development trainings were organized for the children in Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Orissa states. Intensive follow up support was given to the child reporters.
- To sensitize the media persons, interactive workshops were organized in Delhi, Dehradun and Lucknow.
- 2 issues of Journalist Alert were released and distributed among journalists and others.
- The press has appreciated the initiative very much.
- To expand the reach of Children Press Service worldwide and give opportunities to the child reporters for submitting news or features they write, a web-based Children Press Service has been created, which is available at: [www.childrenpress.org](http://www.childrenpress.org).
- CPS is expected now to take fairly large shape with extended scope and space for children to express.



## Fertilizer Giant to Displace Tribal Farmers

✎ Christopher Connolly

One thousand eight hundred and forty. This is the number of families that will be displaced as a result of an energy complex created by IFFCO, authorized by the Government of Chhattisgarh. Given no clear explanation, and relying only upon what they hear in the media (where there is already little information due to the corporate influence in the media), these families of some 31 villages are staving off disaster. Worse than exploitation, these people are being rooted out of their homelands.

IFFCO, Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Limited, plans to build a series of dams, coalmines, and 1000 MW power plant in the Surguja district of Chhattisgarh. "Contrary to its name, it does not have the interests of farmers on its agenda. The agenda, instead, is to destroy the livelihoods of some 18,000 villagers and become a cancer in Chhattisgarh, the lung of India", said Mr. Menhdi Lal of Margdarshak Sansthan.

A publication of Department of Public Relations, Chhattisgarh in August 2006 asserted that they have "no patience with red tape" that may hinder investment,



dismissing the livelihoods of thousands with a few simple words. The red tape appears to have been cut by disregarding an Act of constitution protecting tribes and their respective land and natural resources. The Act, called as Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 or PESA, was created to preserve the tribal rights by giving them power over their natural resources, conservation and protection of customs and traditions, management of community resources, resolving disputes through customary methods, among other things. Surguja district is fully under Schedule-V of Constitution of India where PESA is enacted. The PESA rules that without consent of gram sabha no land can be taken over by any agency or person for any development purpose or whatever. People cannot be dispossessed of their lands against their will.

Is the PESA Act completely inept? Clearly, displacing people from their homes violates not just one, but many of the Act's clauses. If this Act is incapable of being enforced to protect the tribes in the Surguja district, what other districts fully under Schedule V may be adversely affected? How vulnerable is the entire constitution if one Act can be so easily dismissed? It seems the very thing the Act was created to protect against is stronger than the Act itself. It is unfortunate that this stronger force may be nothing short of greed; greed in the pursuit of being competitive; greed that allows unjust sacrifice for numbers that represent a prosperous state. Numbers (growth) that tribal people simply cannot contribute. It seems this government has chosen, instead, to invoke (follow) an earlier Act: The Land Acquisition Act of 1894, which was introduced by the British in order to legally confiscate any land the government deemed appropriate for the development of the nation or in public interest. Are the people of India willing to sacrifice more than 100 years of hard lessons to gain a fraction of the growth of the state of Chhattisgarh?

A woman named Jugadevi from Prem Nagar spoke to me about the absurdity of being displaced. As she spoke, her hands shook from the fear of certainty. Those rough and weathered hands told the story of a life as much a part of the land as the Mahua tree which supports much of her livelihood as a source of food, oils, and alcohol. Her whole body shivered to hold back tears. Then, with fists clenched and jaw locked, determination followed. As if speaking aloud the thoughts of displacement made it more of a reality, her resolve was clear. "This is our land. Not given to us by the state or any man, but by nature itself." Her village, along with the many others, has existed for centuries. Long before the British laws of land allocation and long before the PESA Act. Nothing short of complete cancellation of IFFCO's plans will be accepted. Their voices can be heard in unison, and as one the statement is as clear as it is bold, "There will be no compromise."

And why should there be? In a humourless irony, people who live completely off the land, with no reliance upon industrialized energy, are being displaced by a polluting monster whose sole intention is to create energy and better the livelihoods of other people. The intentions of government may be honourable: "uninterrupted electricity" in the future "power hub of India", but at what cost? And have the people truly given their consent and acceptance of these costs fully aware of the dire consequences? For the villages of Sarguja, the cost is steep. Times like these we must ask ourselves, *what really matters?*

There is a saying: *A bird's eye view turns a blizzard into a breeze.* What the government sees as a small breeze is actually a blizzard ripping whole populations out of their beloved homes. What good is the unquestionably astounding leaps the government has made with infant mortality rates, woman's rights, and education, if the people can so easily and unfairly be stripped of their homes? This administration's proposed growth rate of 10 percent by year 2010 means little to someone without a home.

◀◀ Photo by Christopher Connolly

### Regional Consultation on



PEOPLE'S



RIGHTS TO



FOOD &



ACCOUNTABLE

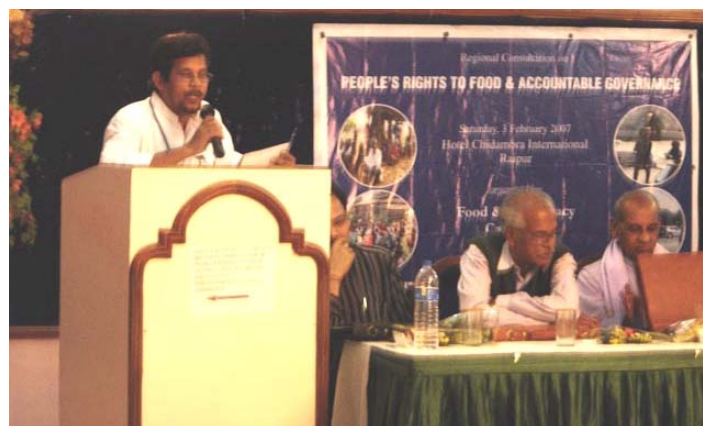
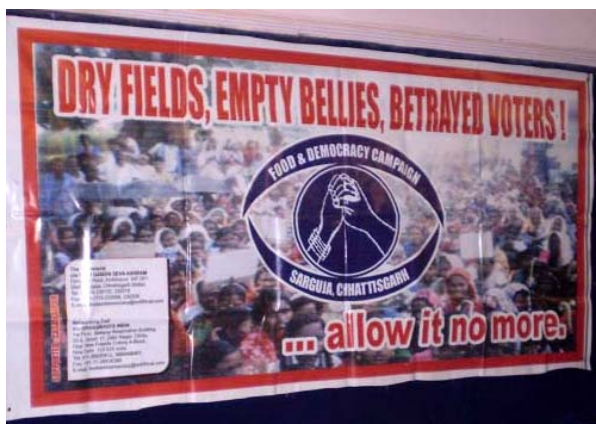


GOVERNANCE

Shri Gandhi Seva Ashram (SGSA), Sarguja and Grassroots India Trust, New Delhi have been advocating the people's rights to food and accountable governance for about 2 years through systematically designed "Food and Democracy Campaign". After organizing a Cycle Rally and a Satyagrah Rally with great success and sending Memorandum to the President of India, the Governor and few others, this Regional Consultation on People's Rights to Food & Accountable Governance was organized on 3 February 2007 at Hotel Chidambara International, Raipur. In a bid to intensively focus on the issues concerning hunger, poverty and mis-governance, and to galvanize collective action in Chhattisgarh state and in neighboring central Indian states, the Regional Consultation had the following objectives:

- To debate the issues and concerns covered in Food and Democracy Campaign, and to share the findings of PDS, PESA and Accountabilities studies.
- To discuss intensively the issues, dimensions of problems, and policy updates and its implications on tribes, poor and marginalized.
- To discourse the collective ways of action on common areas of concern.
- To evolve the collective action strategies at state and regional level.

After the inauguration of the program by Retd. Justice of Calcutta High Court, Mr. S. K. Tiwary, the Program Intern, Ms. Jana Wendler, presented her findings of the study she did on PESA and its status of implementation in context of people's access to food & resources. Mr. Bartosz Arabic, another Program Intern, also presented the findings of his study on accountability of public representatives and servants. Noted professional, Mr. P. S. C. Rao, then presented the state of affair on Food Security in central India and the challenges ahead. Several eminent speakers gave their deliberations on cross-cutting issues. They included: Keyur Bhushan, former MP and freedom fighter;



Professor Balchandra Kachhwaha; Professor S. Trivedi, Mr. Basant Bhai, Mr. Aditya Patnaik, Ms. Shalini Samvedna, Mr. Jayant Verma, Ms. Sadhana Pathak, Mr. Lakhpat Singh, Mr.

Yogesh Diwan, Mr. Menhdi Lal, Mr. Naresh Sharma, Ms. Hemlata Sahu, Mr. Sushil Sharma, Mr. Bhupesh Tiwari, Mr. Chunnilal Sharma. Participants represented various states of central India like Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Bihar. Almost 100 people participated the program. Civil Society magazine of Delhi sent a reporter to cover the program. The Church Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) supported this program, and the Grassroots India Trust contributed.



## POST CARD CAMPAIGN for new National Rural Housing & Habitat Policy ►►

◀ New Project

BASIN, Development Alternatives, PACS and other partners have drafted new National Rural Housing & Habitat Policy 2007 with the assistance of UK's DFID and Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC). In a bid to get this draft policy adopted by the Rural Development Ministry, the DA and PACS have engaged Grassroots India Trust to execute a post card campaign in 20 provinces of India. 500,000 post cards have been printed and posted to rural areas through some local NGOs. The villagers from across the country have to be contacted and mobilized to sign the post cards and send them to the Prime Minister of India.

## Adolescent Health Education: Teaching whom and why?

✎ Leonoor Wijnans

It's Wednesday afternoon at a school in Kuthera, a small village in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh. Whilst children are playing outside, a classroom full of boys looks attentively at Ratti Ram, a field worker from a local NGO, the PARA. He is explaining what today's extra lesson will be about. This is no ordinary lesson, today the health workers from the nearby clinic, Santosh and Nagesh, will teach this group of boys about their health. They will cover topics such as nutrition and personal hygiene, discuss how their bodies will change during puberty and how they need to deal with that, but also they will discuss sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS.

Earlier the girls had their turn. Thirty minutes long Nagesh talked about things that should be important to them, however most girls seemed to lose interest quite quickly. It was hot and stuffy in the room. Nagesh's humming voice puts one to sleep easily. And besides, last year they had exactly the same talk. Notes were being passed around, girls were whispering amongst themselves, some were simply dosing off. When the word AIDS is mentioned there was a slight giggle through the classroom, suddenly something interesting? Or is it that they haven't heard people talk about AIDS openly that often?

For them this is just another 30 minutes they have to endure in a day filled with lessons where they sit still and listen. For Nagesh and Santosh however, it is important to get their message across. In this area, an estimated 70% of women have a reproductive tract infection (RTI) or a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Although these children will be at limited risk of STIs, improved personal hygiene can prevent a big proportion of the RTIs. Most of the children have anaemia. Simple changes to their diet can prevent this, and can give them more energy to do their chores and pay attention at school. It is important to get this message across. The question however is how.

The way Nagesh and Santosh are teaching is not working great. We came back one month later and asked the children some simple questions regarding their health and puberty. The girls knew very little about their menstruation, a majority of the boys could not recall that a condom can prevent STI infections if used



correctly. Most children did know you could not get HIV/AIDS from sharing a glass with an HIV-positive person, however only 30% understood that it is still possible to get infected when you have only one partner.

Another problem is that reproduction cannot be discussed here. Yet teaching about reproductive health without giving children understanding on reproduction is not effective. Teachers and health workers here find the children too young to discuss these sensitive issues. They need to wait until they are 18, when most will be out of school and unreachable for the messages of the health workers.

So how can we teach adolescents these lessons that will help them take care of themselves and make the right decision regarding their health and sexuality? A first step in the good direction would be advocating its need with the local educational sector and parents. Adolescents are at a vulnerable stage in their lives and knowledge and understanding can help them prevent coming into risky situations. It will not lead them into risky situations. Secondly, an approach should be adopted that is more adolescent centred. Right now it is the health department that decides what needs to be told, and this is done in a rather boring and straightforward manner. Make it interesting to them because it is of great interest to their future. They know that, they want to learn, let's make it possible and prepare these children for life.

◀ Photo by Leonoor Wijnans

## Communicating the Voice of Voiceless

People at the grassroots level desperately want to express and communicate their sufferings, problems, despair and grievances, and tales of injustice, exploitation, struggle, failure and success as because being having equal citizenship rights they feel that they must also be heard and respected. Originating from inequitable, pseudo-democratic, racial and class-captured milieu of governance systems and society structures, countless barriers work together that disallow the voices of poor, disadvantaged, marginalized and 'endangered' people to surface into power corridors, ruling class mess, policy cooking chambers and elitists' luxury offices, cars or bedrooms. The rich and rulers at their dining table must taste tears of unlucky majority suffering or dying unattended.

When conventional media is tightly packed of politics, glamour, celebrities and sex, and has no or least space for truth of our 'soil', the Grassroots Media Initiative (GMI) strives to prick the original voices of the (made) voiceless from remotest areas of South Asia and communicate to 'powerhouses' and to all those who, being important link of change process, can influence the public opinion in people's favour. Grassroots Media Initiative (GMI) looks forward to build on back-forth linkages of development communication and information flow under the project "Communicating the Voice of Voiceless", which was formally launched from January 2007. Focus areas include: (1) agriculture and livelihood; (2) tribal issues and ethnic identity; (3) land, water and other natural resources; (4) food and hunger; (5) displacement and eviction; (6) health and education; (7) forests and environment; (7) dalits and human rights; (8) development action; (9) labour and migration; (10) globalization and poverty; (11) law and governance; (12) women & children; (13) other relevant areas. We reach the communities in remote areas and interview the people who suffer. The voices of the interviewed people are recorded on voice recorders. Later these voices reflecting the direct opinions, views of the people are put in a form of complete story on that particular issue. We communicate these stories through various new media instruments like **GRASSROOTSSPEAK south asia [www.grassrootsspeak.org]**, **GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY**, and other web publishing sites and e-magazines. Some of the stories get space in mainstream newspapers or magazines. So far GMI has documented field stories in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Nepal. Sub-Editor of this newsletter, Mr. Christopher Connolly, and other Program Intern, Ms. Mladjana Mladjenovic, have worked on documenting the stories from far interiors of rural areas.

## Training Completed ▶



### 3rd Residential Training on 'Project Planning, Proposal Writing & Resource Mobilization'

25-29 May 2007, Sai Ropa, Kullu

Project planning is an essential step before submission of a written proposal to an agency. Planning and writing of the proposals are critical components of project management. Today perhaps there is no agency that does not seek written proposal before sanctioning a project. Thus project planning and proposal writing are extremely important for NGOs and

Mobilization; Role of Dissemination, Publicity and Networking.

Resource persons were: Mr. Hasrat Arjjumend and Dr. S. S. Samant, Scientist-in-Charge, G. B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment & Development, Kullu. The



Government agencies that seek sponsorship, funding or just support from national or international support agencies. The topics of deliberations were: Steps of Project Planning; Preliminary Information Gathering; Structure of Project Proposal: Discussion on Components; Techniques of Writing of Various Components; Preparation of Budget; Essential Precautions before Project Submission; Logical Framework Analysis; Classification of Funding/ Donor Agencies; Ways of Long-Term Resource

venue of the training was famous community education center of Great Himalayan National Park. On 4th day, the participants went on excursion into beautiful jungles of Great Himalayan National Park. There was additional excursion to Manali organized on 30 May 2007. Society for Human Awareness & Rural Action (SHARA), Banjar did all logistic and guiding arrangements during the training.

Participants of the training came from different countries of South Asia: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and India. States that represented were Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya

Pradesh. One representative of Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) also participated, apart from a batch of participants sponsored by Water Aid India. In total, 20 people attended the training.



🔊 *New Project*

### **Survey and Documentation of Art & Craft in Western Himalayas**

Since ancient times the techniques of handicrafts have been handed down from parents to children preserving the artisan families' traditional ways and wisdom. The innate strengths of handicrafts have withstood the onslaught of mechanization and globalization. The mountainous state of Himachal Pradesh in the Western Himalayas can proudly boast being part of the sub-continent wherefrom the Indian civilization developed and proliferated to the Pan-Indian dimensions. It has generated a variety of paintings, wall paintings, jewellery, temples designs, wood carving on houses, music instruments, woolen clothes, which are still highly popular, both nationally and internationally. Moreover, the region is known for typical folk dances and songs also. Keeping this background in view, the SHARA and GIT have been doing documentation and survey on the rich heritage of a variety of arts and crafts prevalent in the Western Himalayas region of Himachal Pradesh (Kullu, Chamba, Kinnaur, Kangra districts).

Sponsored by union Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, the project has 3 members execution team: Mr. Chunnilal, Director of SHARA and Regional Manager of GIT; Mr. Virendra Aryan, Researcher; Ms. Sinthya Rubio, Program Intern.

🔊 *New Project*

### **Training of Community Groups on Leadership Skills and Legal Literacy**

To sharpen the leadership and literacy skills of Gram Shakti Sangathans constitute by SGSA, Sarguja and adopted under Food and Democracy Campaign, New York based A. J. Muste Memorial Institute has provided support. The training project is expected to have a positive impact on a variety of aspects of people's lives. First and foremost it will lead to more awareness and activity at the village level. This in turn will equip people to successfully challenge all forms of injustice they daily face. The benefits will be visible in many areas of their lives. Specific improvements expected to follow from the projects are: improvement of food security, labour conditions, community spirit and public awareness. This project is small one year project to be implemented jointly by Grassroots India Trust (GIT) and Shri Gandhi Seva Ashram (SGSA) by involving the representatives of Gram Shakti Sangathans and Sawangin Mandals, both the community groups. The project is expected to result in strengthening of capacities of community groups to furthering the campaign works.

## People Behind Competence of Grassroots India

### Dr. Basudev Besra

Eminent lawyer, scholar and a tribal leader. Serving as Chair of Board of Trustees, and Faculty, he is leading the tribal lands recovery movement in Santal Parganas in Jharkhand. He himself is a tribe.



### Dr. Aslam Ansari

Associate Professor of Communication at G. B. Pant Univ. of Agri. & Tech. has served in academics, government, non-profit and corporate. He was Post-Doc Fellow at University of Leicester, UK. He is Trustee and Faculty at Grassroots.



### Mr. Chunnilal

Retired from Army, an eminent farmer is Regional Manager of Grassroots' Himachal operation. He is also the Director of SHARA. He is expert of organic farming. He has long experience in participatory development.



### Mr. Hasrat Arjjumend

Known professional, journalist, trainer and field activist is Chief Executive of Grassroots India. He is currently the Commonwealth Professional Fellow in UK, and is on sabbatical from September 2007. He is co-founder of Grassroots.



### Mrs. Sabiha Haleem

MSW, BlibISc is the Trustee, and Administrator at Grassroots India, controls all administrative decisions of the organization. Contributes in various actions internally. She also takes care of Urdu content in all media related communications.



### Mr. Ashendra Singh

Master of Journalism from M.C. National Univ. of Journalism, Bhopal, with long experience of radio, newspapers and television, he is Editor of GMI and CPS. He is trainer of media writing skills and radio scripting. He is also Trustee of Grassroots.



### Ms. Sinthya Rubio Escolar

National of Colombia, and BA in International Relations from Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, has worked on domestic violence in India and rehabilitation of displaced persons in Colombia. She is Program Intern in "Survey & Documentation of Art & Craft of Western Himalayas" project in HP.



### Mr. Virendra Aryan

An MPhil on Archaeo-history of Malana, he is Researcher in "Survey & Documentation of Art & Craft of Western Himalayas" project in HP. He is currently also a PhD scholar at H.P. University. He is also engaged in chain marketing of agro-produce.



### Ms. Madara Maurina

National of Latvia, and BA in International Studies from Minnesota State University, USA, she worked with Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia before joining "Dalit Human Rights Program" in Banjar, HP as Program Intern.



### Mr. Lal Chand

Popular face of Himachal Literacy Campaign, he is Deputy Director of SHARA, and contributes part-timely to the "Health & Gender Program" in Banjar area, HP. He is also the logistics incharge for eco-tours.



### Ms. Eliane Jenny

National of Switzerland, and MA in Social Anthropology from University of Zurich, has earlier worked in Indonesia. She stayed with Samvedna at Panna (MP) for mapping the declining sex-ratio, and is currently researching on 'women and democracy issues' attached with Food & Democracy Campaign/ SGSA as Program Intern.



### Mr. Onkar Singh

Professional with MA in International Affairs in Economic and Political Development from SIPA, Columbia University, New York, is Ford Foundation Fellow. He is Trustee, and Peace Consultant; is currently on assignment of South-East Asia for Tokyo Foundation, Japan.



### Ms. Sarah Jane Cooper

National of England, and MSc in International Natural Resource Management from University of Wales, Bangor, has previously worked in Ethiopia and Australia. After getting sponsorship of Tropical Agriculture Association, she joined "Agro-biodiversity Conservation Project" in Great Himalayan National area, HP as Program Intern.



### Ms. Tullia Gillary

National of Australia, and Master in International Development & Environmental Analysis from Monash University, Clayton, has previously worked with Monash Governance Research Unit and World Vision Australia. She has joined as Program Intern in "Agro-biodiversity Conservation Project" in Jibhi Valley, Banjar (HP).



### Ms. Kamala Sharma

Having passed Higher Secondary from Banjar school, she joined as Field Worker. She looks after office work in Banjar and contributes "Health & Gender Program" in Banjar, HP. She is studying BA at Banjar College as part-time.



### Mr. Shiv Pratap

With Master of Journalism from M.C. National Univ. of Journalism, Bhopal, and long experience in press and NGOs, he has joined "Post Card Campaign for new Rural Housing Policy". He is delivering networking functions too.



**Mr. Baldev Singh**

Having experience of field work with World Vision India, he joined as Field Worker in "Dalit Human Rights Program" in Banjar, HP. Currently he is organizing the Dalit youths in 3 panchayats coving 21 villages in Banjar area.



**Mr. Tilak**

Having experience of field work with World Vision India, he joined as Field Worker in "Agrobiodiversity Conservation & Organic Foods Project" in Banjar, HP. Currently he is assisting Ms. Sarah Cooper.



**Ms. Leah Layman**

US national, and BA in International Affairs & Russian from Florida State University, Tallahassee, has worked previously with Center for Participant Education, USA, and Society for International Development, Washington. She has joined as Program Intern in Fundraising & Networking Cell.



**Ms. Amanda Strauss**

US national, and BA in Biology from Colorado Colege, Colorado Springs, has worked as Intern in America with Development Associate, Eisele-Davis Farm, etc. She has joined as Progam Intern in Fundraising & Networking Cell. She is also expected to engage at Communication Deptt., G. B. Pant University.



**Ms. Leonoor Wijnans**

Dutch national is MSc in Biology from Wageningen University, and MSc in Public Health in Developing Countries from London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London. Previously she worked at International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Cameroon, Plant Protection Service of the Netherlands, International Water Management Institute, Sri Lanka, and Ministry of Health, Brazil. She is Program Intern in "Health & Gender Program" associated with PARA, Mandi (HP).



**Mr. Vasilis Gazis**

Belonging to Greece and MA in International Development Studies from Universiteit van Amsterdam, the Netherlands, he has previously worked in the Philippines on coastal resource management. He is engaged as Program Intern in Documentation and Promotion of Livelihoods Development Action made among Artisan Communities by Saathi Sanstha, a Grassroots partner in Bastar.



**Ms. Luckshmi Sivalingam**

National of USA, an MSc in International Development Management from London School of Economics & Political Science, London, is co-founder of Amnesty International at University of California Los Angeles and of Youth for Human Rights, USA/Sri Lanka. Previously she worked with International Relief & Development in Lebanon and Jordan, Fund for American Studies in Washington, Overseas Development Institute in London, Democracy Council of California in Sri Lanka/ East Timor, and many others. She has joined as Program Intern in "Dalit Human Rights Program" in Banjar, HP.



**Ms. Iballa de la Horra Veldman**

Spanish/Dutch national with MSc in International Relations from Universiteit van Amsterdam, Holland, and BA in Social Anthropology from University of Kent at Canterbury. Has worked previously with Trajectbegeleider, Stichting Vluchtelingenwerk Amsterdam, Interim Project Vluchtelingenwerk, etc. She was technical consultant to Hewlett Packard, and Country Specialist Sudan for UNHCR. She went on Malta to Thailand Panawina Anthropological Expedition also. She has joined as Program Intern in "Dalit Human Rights Program" in Banjar, HP.

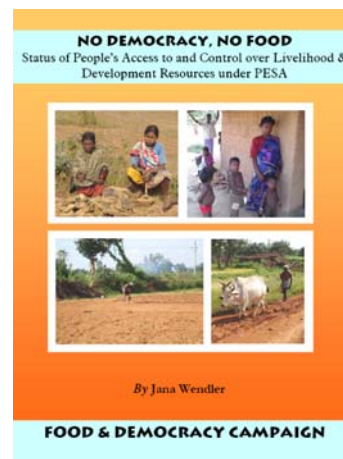


**Outgoing Personnel and Their Contribution**

**Ms. Jana Wendler**



She is a German national and studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford University, UK. She joined as Program Intern in September 2006 and completed her tenure in February 2007. She worked intensively in Food & Democracy Campaign in Sarguja (Chhattisgarh) with Shri Gandhi Seva Ashram, the partner organization of Grassroots. After doing very interesting research in sample villages of Sarguja district she produced a wonderful report "No Food, No Democracy: Status of People's Access to and Control over Livelihood & Development Resources under PESA". Her report is based on empirical field studies and is revealing. She presented her study in Regional Consultation on People's Access to Food and Accountable Governance held on 3 February 2007 at Raipur (Chhattisgarh). Her work in Food & Democracy Campaign was partially supported by CASA.



She also worked on few project proposals. Most importantly, she studied the status of agriculture and horticulture including traditional farming practices and the organic agriculture being promoted by SHARA/GIT in Himachal Pradesh. Occasional Paper No. 7 entitling "Agriculture and Horticulture in Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh: Practice, Problems and Progress" has been published based on her study, and includes some very interesting findings. This paper has been available in e-library of Asia-Pacific Mountain Forum (APMN).

### Mr. Bartosz Arabik



A national of Poland who was educated at Johannes Kepler University at Linz, Austria and University of Wroclaw, Warsaw. He joined as Program Intern in October 2006 and completed his tenure in March 2007. He worked on understanding the macro issues of governance in context of people's access to food and human rights. After studying he wrote a report "Examining the Accountability of Governance Systems in Sarguja, Chhattisgarh". He presented his study in Regional

Consultation on People's Access to Food and Accountable Governance held on 3 February 2007 at Raipur (Chhattisgarh). Her work in Food & Democracy Campaign was partially supported by Church Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA). He stayed with Shri Gandhi Seva Ashram, the partner organization of Grassroots.

### Mr. Christopher Connolly



A US national with degree in International Business from San Diego State University, USA, and studied International Relations at Oxford New College, UK. He joined as Sub-Editor of Grassroots Media Initiative in the project "Communicating the Voice of Voiceless". He traveled Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh for documenting the problem and success stories. The NGOs that participated in the process were: Shri Gandhi Seva Ashram, Ambikapur;

Margdarshak Seva Sansthan, Ambikapur; Mahila Shiksha Kalyan Evam Prashikshan Parishad, Bilaspur; Gram Vikas Mandali, Mungeli; Sankalp, Raipur; Saathi Sanstha, Kondagaon; Apna School (Shyam Bahadur Namra), Anuppur; Dalit Sangh, Sohagpur; Pararth Samiti, Chhindwara; Baihar Nari Utthan Samiti, Balaghat; Nav Bhartiya Nari Vikas Samiti, Ballia; Rural Technology & Development Centre, Palampur; National Himalayan Policy Campaign, Chamba. During his stay with GMI, he produced many good stories that are being sent for publishing.

### Mr. Mahendra Singh

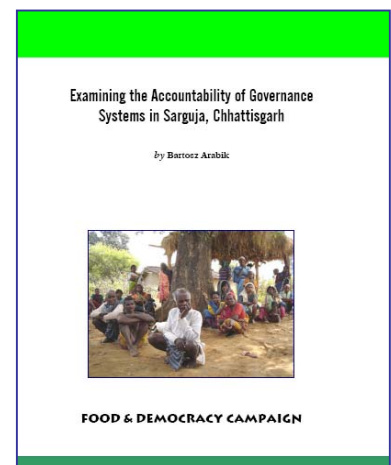


He is +12 local young boy who was involved in Study on Dalits in Banjar area and in organizing the Dalit youths in 20 villages. Himself a Dalit, he mobilized Dalit youth and formed their groups at villages level. He left the organization due to excessive burden of farming at home.

### Ms. Mladjana Mladjenovic



A national of New Zealand and former Yugoslavia, Mira graduated from University of Victoria, Wellington in International Relations, and Business Management. She joined as Sub-Editor at GMI in 'Communicating the Voice of Voiceless', and traveled Chhattisgarh for field stories documentation.



### Website of Children Press Service Launched

Web version of Children Press Service is ready for launch. With the successful completion of Pilot Phase of CPS Project, the web version has to give easy access to children who are interested to submit their written stories or news online. Moreover, people worldwide may access children's stories and publish in magazines, newspapers, portals, blogs, etc. To access the website, please log on at: [www.childrenpress.org](http://www.childrenpress.org).

## Going Back to Traditional: reviving sustainable agricultural practices

✎ Sarah Cooper

While working on 'Agro-biodiversity Conservation and Organic Foods' project in Tirthan valley of buffer zone of Great Himalayan National Park, Kullu district, the mapping of cultivars grown in rural areas seems to me of paramount importance, as it will determine the current status of agro-biodiversity and establish where extension interventions are to be targeted. Till end June, 17 villages have been surveyed and 145 respondents interviewed. Although the data collection is yet to extend significantly, there has been an emerging scenario concerning current levels of agro-biodiversity. So far the research provides evidence that there is little diversity of crops cultivated in the region and generally the preferred cultivars are limited to the cash crops wheat, maize, etc. The socio-culturally significant crop of barley is also prevalent. Both high yielding (HYV) and local varieties are used for the wheat and maize, local varieties are more commonly grown of bean and barley. It is common practice to grow these cultivars as a monoculture with exception to the beans, which are often intercropped with the maize.

Such minimal diversification in crop production can have significant implications on an agro-ecosystem. HYVs are resource inefficient and need large amounts of water and nutrients. This can increase livelihood risk in a rainfed agricultural system where poor rainfall can seriously affect yields. The high uptake of nutrients by HYVs also accelerates reduction of soil fertility affecting prospective production. Growing such few crops also exposes the farmers to fluctuating market prices, land degradation and decrease in food security, and limits nutritional availability.

One of the main solutions to mitigate these risks would be to re-introduce traditional cultivars that are now rarely used, and to increase the number of cultivars on-farm. Traditional crops indigenous to the area are more ecologically adapted to local environmental conditions, so are less vulnerable to fluctuation and they have better resource efficiency than the HYVs. Increasing crop diversity will enhance food security, reduce farmer's vulnerability to market uncertainties, and also preserve genetic resources for future generation. Persuading the farmers to adopt these new techniques will prove to be a tough task as they subsist in very harsh, isolated conditions and they may be reluctant to risk amending their current practices. To offset this, participation will be encouraged with appropriate extension and compensatory measures which if successful will result in an increase in the agro-biodiversity of the region. Intervention at the level of market of agro-biodiverse foods and elevated economic gains underlie the solutions of replacing or reducing chemical-intensive food production.

◀ News from 'Agro-Biodiversity Conservation & Organic Foods' Project

### Participation ▶

- Paper presentation on "Empowering Dalit Women in Mountains of India: Towards Surmounting their Marginalization," in *Rooms of Their Own* conference held at Telus Centre of University of Alberta, Edmonton on May 3, 2007 by Ms. Alicia Cristina Gallardo Barrera.
- 2nd Short-term course on "Environment and Rural Development: Concepts and Debates for Practitioners, Policy Researchers and Policy Makers" was attended by Mr. Hasrat Arjjumend at Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Environment and Development, ISEC Campus, Bangalore during 13-23 February 2007.
- FIAN International, Germany and FIAN India – AP organised the Workshop on "Combating Hunger: The FAO Right to Food Guidelines and their concrete implications for the right to food in India", which was participated by Mr. Hasrat Arjjumend on 14-15 March 2007 at Hyderabad.
- 'Human Rights Litigation' course was attended (on sponsorship of *Charles Evans Hughes Foundation*) as Auditor by Mr. Hasrat Arjjumend during 14 February - 7 May 2007, which was organized by Human Rights Education Associates (HREA), USA
- 'Networks Meet' organized by PACS Program at on 20 February 2007 at New Delhi was attended by Mr. Hasrat Arjjumend
- Mr. Chunnilal and Mr. Bartosz Arabic participated 'National Consultation on Self-Help Groups, Gender and Development' organized by Nirantar (New Delhi) on 22-23 February 2007 at YMCA, New Delhi
- 'Interaction between National Knowledge Commission (NKC) Chairman Sam Pitroda and Indian Children' was attended by Mr. Ashendra Singh on 13 January 2007 at Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi
- Workshop on 'Grassroots Communication for Telecentres' organized by IDRC, Canada was participated by Mr. Ashendra Singh on 12-13 March 2007.
- Workshop 'Towards the validation of the Guidelines based monitoring tool on the Right to Food' organized by FIAN International, Germany & German Agro Action, Bangalore was attended by Mr. Avanih Kumar on 16-18 May 2007 at Bangalore.
- 'Spreading the ICT Revolution to Rural India' organized by NASSCOM Foundation on June 13, 2007 at IHC, New Delhi was attended by Mr. Hasrat Arjjumend.

## Deliberate Disenfranchisement: Showing the Way Out

✎ Madara Maurina

Dalit Human Rights Program of Grassroots India Trust (with the local facilitation of SHARA) is operational in Banjar area of Kullu district. I have been involved in action research in 3 gram panchayats namely Mangalore, Chanon and Palahch. Till end June, I have covered all 7 villages of Chanon panchyat: Magdool, Ropa, Dhoru, Mathiana, Shajhuli, Oridhar and Mahala. I also have been to 2 villages of Palahch panchyat: Sityaogi and Guladhar. The problems faced by Dalits today seem to be a consequence of a long history of the caste system, which are visible through the spectrum of economic situations of the families in these villages. The land they had been allocated long time ago is now impairing them to rise economically. The land is of poorer quality, needs good irrigation systems that are expensive to build and require natural water source in the vicinity. The economic issues are not so much a result of today's deliberate unfair social order but rather a consequence of unjust actions taken in distant past. Most prevalent problem the surveyed Dalits indicated is the disrespect they get from higher castes. According to Chunnial, Dalits are often called on the back as Dagi (person who eats beef) which is an offensive word for any Hindu. Youths of higher castes are also seen not respecting the elders of scheduled castes. Most disgracing to Dalit family is that the higher caste man openly approach girl/woman of Dalit family right in front of father, brother, etc. once the social code forbids it. In my opinion, the most humiliating and discriminating social practice is that higher caste person does not accept any water or food served by a Dalit. Dalits are not even allowed to enter main parts of the house of higher caste.



Today the government has developed protectionist legal instruments for Dalits, beginning with equal representation in elected governments and ending with protection against the use of derogatory names, which is an offence punishable with imprisonment. The hindrance is that people of the scheduled caste have no knowledge of these rights, and therefore our main goal is to empower them so that when a situation of discrimination occurs or when someone tries to take advantage of their 'inferior' status, Dalits would be able to voice their grievances and assert peacefully for their (violated) rights.

◀ News from 'Dalit Human Rights Program'

### Chief Executive's Forthcoming Visits Abroad

✎ Mr. Hasrat Arjumend has been invited by half a dozen organizations in Finland and Sweden, including Sida/Grolink. Apart from meeting these organizations and presenting the work the Grassroots has done in last few years, he shall participate Organic Agriculture Development training in Karlstad, Sweden. He will stay there for a month from 25 July 2007.

✎ Mr. Hasrat Arjumend is visiting UK from September 2007 onwards on Commonwealth Professional Fellowship. During this visit he shall stay in Wolverhampton and London. He is expected to explore new partnerships with European organizations, and possibly also pay visits to Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, etc.

✎ Mr. Hasrat Arjumend shall be traveling Thailand during 17-31 January 2008 with a possibility of traveling to Malaysia, Laos and Singapore in early February 2008.

### To be in Spotlight ▶▶

Grassroots India has been operating an e-group "GRASSROOTS-in-action", which is one of the largest e-groups in the world. It currently has about 10,000 e-mail IDs in database receiving regular postings. Seeing the popularity of the group and effectiveness of debates and communication of critique-based material, an *International Desk for Policy Debates & Action* has been created in February 2007 for the purpose of documentation & web research, e-xchange and e-publications. The Desk works compiles knowledge on the issues related to: (1) *Agriculture, Environment & Globalization*, (2) *Globalization and Gender*, and (3) *Human Rights and Peace*. This Desk will be more active and visible since 2008 onwards.

## Political Empowerment of Women is Inevitable!

✎ *Eliane Jenny*

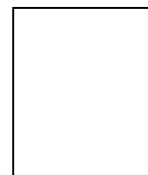
In order to achieve sustainable economic and social development to take place, it is necessary that people participate in the political process. Women face multiple hurdles and find it difficult to participate in the political process that has hitherto been a male bastion. There are historical prejudices in which women are seen as being incapable of managing political affairs. In north Chhattisgarh, large proportion of women is illiterate and their knowledge about the political institutions, processes and their political rights is limited. Women are less mobile than men because they have domestic responsibilities, which limits the time they can spend in political meetings. Recognising these limitations, India has passed laws that make it mandatory for local governments to include women. One third of the seats in political bodies are reserved for women. A certain quota of seats in constitutional bodies doesn't mean that women have real political power. In a patriarchal society, many elected women representatives feel ashamed to raise their voice in the meetings of panchayat bodies. And if they speak, attention is often not paid to their voices and demands. Women also experience rejection and non-cooperation by their male counterparts. Another common occurrence, where the elected woman can't exercise her power, is the *sarpanch pati*. In such occasions the husband takes all the decisions. His elected wife is just a "puppet" who fills the seat reserved for women. There is a strong need to inform the women about the political institutions, processes and their political rights, to encourage them to actively participate in the political processes and institutions and to fight gender discriminating behaviour in the PRIs. Only then the women can exercise their political right and shape their economic and social development. Based on such observations in Sarguja district, the Food & Democracy Campaign has recently started discoursing researching and acting on 'women and democracy' aspects in context of food security.

◀ *News from 'Food & Democracy Campaign'*

### *Update from* Gender Resource Centre

GIT supports the local partner Samvedna Integrated Development Association for executing activities of Gender Resource Centre. GRC focuses on resolving the matters of women who are victims of domestic violence or violence outside. GRC provides legal advice, counseling and moral support to the women or guardian families of girls, and does advocacy on their behalf. Till June 2007, total 255 cases embodying violence against women and domestic violence have been registered. A long-term strategy has been formulated to sensitize and educate the key government officials about the gravity of problem of violence against women in Panna district. Apart from police, revenue, judges and others, the lawyers will also be sensitized.

### BOOKPOST



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*For further information, please contact:*

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