



Asia Good ESD Practice Project

Samvardhan Building Cadres
for Sustainable Development

2007

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India

SAMVARDHAN

Building Cadres for Sustainable Development

Asia Good Practice ESD Practice Project (AGEPP)

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Natural resources are the most important accessible livelihood resource for the rural population. Since the rural communities live with and are most directly affected by nature, it is only prudent to think that for the success of any development effort in the rural areas, their direct involvement in the implementation process is essential. This has been widely realised today, paving the way for large-scale adoption of ‘participatory’ approach in development projects.

However, the participatory approach, though most desirable, may neither be efficient nor effective if the local people (participants) are not adequately and appropriately equipped with the skill and knowledge needed to partner and manage such an initiative (by the government or NGOs). In such a scenario, the initiative may be no more than a spoon-feeding exercise – futile in essence — failing to have any worthwhile impact on the lives of the stakeholders/ target beneficiaries.

Recognizing the immense significance of capacity-building (through education and training) in bringing about sustainable development (SD), the *Samvardhan* (meaning ‘nurturing’) initiative builds a cadre of sensitive and competent rural development workers, called the Community Entrepreneurs (CEs), and goes a step further in modeling its unique education and communication approach, to make the CEs the agents of change – actually implementing the project’s developmental activities infused with sustainability dimensions. Gradual but eventual transfer of understanding and skills to the people – who themselves are the other important and accessible livelihood resource -- is in-built in the implementation design of the project

The project endeavors to operationalise SD in locale specific realities by bringing environmental understanding to the stakeholders, and introducing the concept of Sustainable Natural Resource Management (SNRM) at the grassroots level. It aims at improving the quality of life of the tribal communities in the southern belts of Gujarat, through the trained human resource (CEs), focusing on safe drinking water, natural resource productivity, animal husbandry practices, income generation opportunities, and access and effectiveness of primary education. Substantial effort is made by the project to empower village level self-governance towards SD, *regardless of the project’s existence.*

Samvardhan, therefore, envisages effecting a change in the awareness, the attitudes and the understanding of village communities that ultimately reflects in the behaviour, leading to sustainable living. It does this by nurturing the people through education and training (thereby building human and social capital), rather than solely through external inputs which, in the long-run, remain piecemeal.

B. ATTRIBUTION

Set-up (Funding and Implementing Bodies)

Role	Organisation/Individual	Contact Details
UK Funding Partner	Big Lottery Fund (BLF)	
UK Overseas Partner	Field Studies Council (FSC)	
Implementing Agency	Centre for Environment Education (CEE)	CEE, Nehru Foundation for Development, Thaltej Tekra, Ahmedabad 380054, Gujarat India.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CEE Support Team at Ahmedabad ➤ CEE Project Support Unit 	<p>1 Programme Coordinator & 2 Programme Officers</p> <p>1 Project Officer & 2 Project Associates</p>	<p>CEE Bilpudi Project Office, Varseva mahavidyalaya Campus, Bilpudi AT & PO, Tal: Dharampur Dist: valsad 396068 Gujarat India</p>
Partner	Rural higher Education Institutes (RHEIs)	
Project Keystone	Community Entrepreneurs (CEs)	
Village decision-making body and implementers	Village Committees	

C. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Title: *Samvardhan* – Building cadres for sustainable development

Background:

For the village communities of the southern belt of Gujarat – the project region, agriculture is the primary (and often the only) source of livelihood.

However, the availability of water for irrigation is very poor, and farming is possible only in the rainy season which is from June to September, locally called the *chaumaasu* (period of four months). Even during this season, there is shortage of water for irrigation for lack of proper ways to harness the rainwater for irrigation. The methods and means, where available, are not accessible to all. Since there are not many alternatives available for earning a living, a vicious cycle -- of over-dependence on agriculture that in turn is dependant on a resource (water) that is scarce in the region – sets in. While non-availability of livelihood options obstructs the economic development of the people, over dependence on agricultural puts tremendous pressure on land, endangering it ecologically.

In such a scenario, efficient and sustainable management of natural resources assumes critical importance for the region and its people. It is crucial that they possess adequate knowledge to make cause-and-effect linkages in any activity, with regard to environment, so that their practices and actions don't harm it.

Samvardhan, meaning 'nurturing' in Gujarati, endeavored to nurture the potential of the faculty and the students of the Rural Higher Education Institutes (RHEIs) who would, in turn, nourish the understanding and skills of the people of the project region for managing natural resources sustainably.

The foundation of *Samvardhan* was laid in 1994, when a workshop conducted by the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) for the faculty of Rural Higher Education Institutes (RHEIs) or *Gram Vidyapeeth* (as they are locally known) stimulated thinking among the participants on the need for addressing the issues of environment and development within the RHEI curriculum. The curriculum, though multi-disciplinary, was unable to connect environmental concerns with rural development. It was envisaged that if the knowledge and skills learnt at the *Gram Vidyapeeth* have an environment and sustainability perspective, the students could introduce it at the village level through their rural development work. From this emerged the idea of *Samvardhan*.

The Rural Higher Education Institutes (RHEIs) are unique to the state of Gujarat, having originated from the Gandhian philosophy of village reconstruction, dignity of labour and education rooted in the reality of rural life. The RHEIs use the distinct methodology of mixing theoretical understanding and practical training, involving a variety of area-specific need-based community projects. Over 500 students graduate from the RHEIs every year.

Samvardhan envisioned tapping this vast human resource (with huge potential for rural development) for bringing about significant and sustained improvement in the quality of life of the tribals who largely inhabit the southern belt of Gujarat -- the project region. For this, it initiated efforts in 3 RHEIs in southern Gujarat – Lokseva Mahavidyalaya-Lokbharati, Sanosara, Bhavnagar; Mahila Gramvidyapeeth, Nardipur, Gandhinagar; and Vanseva Mahavidyalaya, Bilpudi, Valsad – to equip the students with knowledge and understanding of sustainable natural resource management, so that they become better managers of natural resources. It would also give them the ability to perceive holistically the implication of any development initiative, so that the (environmental) dangers that sometimes come with such initiatives can be identified and guarded against.

Implementation Philosophy:

The project was implemented in two phases, essentially demarcated in terms of prioritizing the actions required for, and leading to, the fulfillment of the ultimate goal – that of improving the quality of lives of the tribal community of project villages.

The **first phase** – Samvardhan I (August 1998 to July 2001) aimed at nurturing institutions, faculty and students to raise a cadre of competent and environmentally sensitive rural development workers, and the **second phase** – Samvardhan II (July 2003 to June 2007) sought to nurture nature and the tribal community *through* this cadre for creation of enterprise among community members, leading to the desired change.

The phases were defined only by the processes undertaken (for completion) within the set time period. The overall aim remained the same for both the phases. Thus, in essence, the two phases were two steps in the same direction, and the second had to be preceded by the first --- only after having built the cadre that was envisaged as being the change agent, could the process of bringing about the change be initiated.

Samvardhan I began with the following objectives:

- Increase knowledge base of the students of RHEIs regarding sustainable management of natural resources, as well as improve their skills to use this knowledge in their work as rural development facilitators.
- Strengthen the institutional mechanism for effectively delivering sustainability orientation by infusing the SD perspective into the RHEI system (curricula and field work).
- Develop learning resources which the students can use on their own for enhancing their abilities to manage natural resources productively and sustainably.
- Demonstrate and transfer the enhanced knowledge about natural resources and its sustainable management practices to the villagers through implementation of micro projects in the project villages.

- Share information, knowledge and experiences from other countries as well from other parts of India, about suitable and useful conservation technologies and practices, as well as on how rural people learn and adopt new ways of doing things.

The approaches and methods used to meet these objectives included trainings and exposure tours for faculty and students; talks, field visits and activities like villagers' survey and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA); workshops including those on material development, curriculum analysis; and demonstration units of sustainable natural resource management practices through micro projects.

The effort made in the first phase of *Samvardhan* towards integrating the SD perspective in RHEI system, and equipping their students to infuse sustainability orientation in their rural development work, built the trained human resource, which was to be the keystone of the next phase of *Samvardhan*.

Samvardhan II, therefore, had its genesis in phase I – which built a sound threshold to permeate sustainability orientation in education for rural development. Phase II aimed at a holistic operationalisation of the concepts and methods infused and imparted in Phase I, by locating the CEs in the villages for intensive action.

An amplifying effect in terms of reach as well as intensity of initiatives undertaken was envisioned in this phase.

Samvardhan II, in its four-year implementation period, aimed to achieve:

- improved access to safe drinking water
- improved natural resource productivity and animal husbandry practices that are sustainable
- income generation opportunities/alternatives increased access to, and effectiveness of, primary education
- empowerment of village local self-governance for sustainable development that addresses the natural resource management and livelihood needs of the community

It had three essentially interlinked focus areas – drinking water, education and livelihoods, which, for the purpose of project management, were identified as separate operational areas.

It was expected that, through the project, both men and women of tribal communities would have access to safe drinking water and improved natural resource management practices that will enhance the quality of life, quality of environment, income generation and primary health. While children of community members would benefit through greater life opportunities as a result of better education, communities would gain through improved governance of village committees as a result of their own enhanced confidence, competence and desire to participate in local governance. Further, both men and women of tribal communities will gain through improved services provided by government and NGOs.

These effects were seen as leading to certain cross-cutting outcomes like reduction in inequalities in access to resources, increased participation of women and girls in decision making, improved capacity of local communities, partner organisations and other stakeholders to address case of poverty effectively and sustainably, and improved response of policy makers to the needs of the communities.

Beneficiaries and Stakeholders

While *Samvardhan* I covered 15 villages, working closely with the faculty and students of the 3 RHEIs, *Samvardhan* II covered 24 villages in 3 districts of south Gujarat – Valsad, Dang and Surat. Selected carefully through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), these project villages were divided into four clusters namely Kaparada, Mamabhacha, Subir and Hindla-- each comprising of 6 villages. Besides villagers, teachers and students, the CEs – now centrally involved with the project – were the stakeholders in the second phase.

Community Entrepreneurs –The Pivots of Samvardhan II

The critical common link between the two phases of the project was the trained human resource –alumni of the RHEIs involved in Phase I. Twelve candidates were selected from among the alumni, who were to play a pivotal role in achieving the time-bound objectives of Phase II. They were the Community Entrepreneurs (CEs).

The selection process was careful and detailed, comprising of a written test, speaking extemporaneously on a given topic, and a group discussion, with the criteria for selection being general knowledge, rural development skills, and aptitude for working under harsh conditions, in addition to preference of belonging to the villages where the project would be implemented.

Developing the CE cadre

The cadre of CEs was envisioned to take up project activities with independence, responsibility and effectiveness. It was, therefore, essential that it be developed to possess the required knowledge base and skills, and an enabling attitude, to embrace this challenge confidently.

The four-month intensive residential training programme for CEs, conducted in 2003, aimed at fulfilling this requirement, by imparting communication, training, documentation and project management skills; ability to work independently in the field, generate and manage funds, develop rapport and build trust in the villages; and most importantly, knowledge about water management and conservation, natural resource management, agriculture and animal husbandry, and income-generation activities for implementing need-specific micro projects in villages.

The training was meticulously designed and delivered to raise a cadre of young and spirited individuals with the right kind of development orientation and the skills needed to efficiently handle the project, including the ability to:

- think globally and act locally vis-à-vis environment and ecology

- assess the needs and analyse the complexities of village issues, so as to figure out and provide viable solutions
- empower village institutions and communities to anticipatively plan activities complementary to the project activities, review implementations and modify them
- correspond and liaise with agencies and establish networks at various levels, and formulate systems for the smooth functioning of the project

Expeditious methods were used in the training to graduate the CEs, in these four months, to a level suitable for initiating project activities independently. Besides the modules on personality development, value education, and rural development, a module on Indian administrative system and developmental schemes of the government was included to provide an overall view of the real scenario in which projects are implemented, so that they are able to shed their assumptions before going to the field. Assignments and exercises were made a regular feature of the training to ensure that they are able to appropriately use the knowledge and skills acquired for developing plans to address the issues of the project area.

Implementation Approach and Strategy

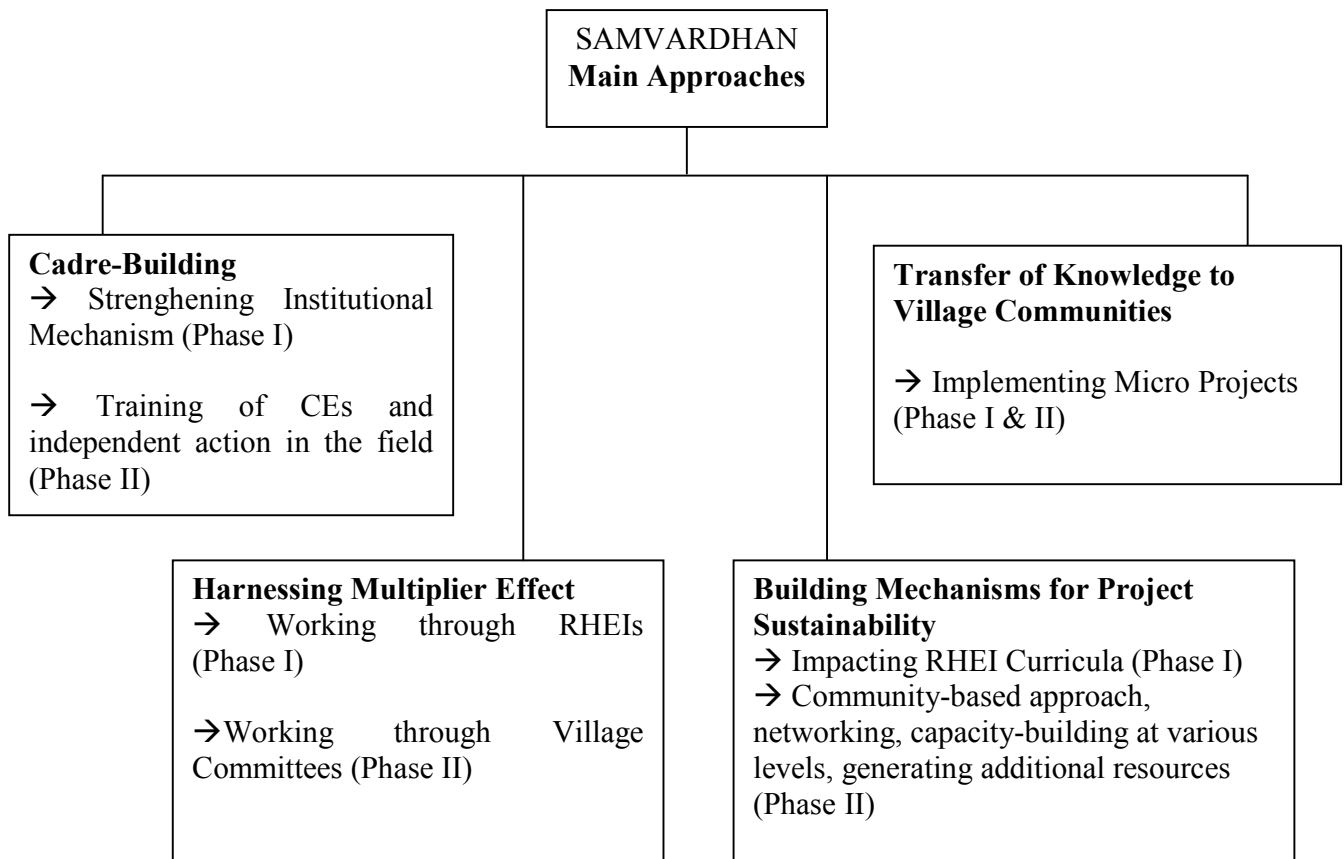
The project assigned immense importance to building the capacity of the villagers for improving their lives on their own, but also recognized that while this capacity is being built, meeting their immediate needs (through project activities) was important. To take care of both these concerns, the project adopted a thoroughly participative approach for carrying out any development activity, be it constructing Roof Rain Water Harvesting Structures (RRWHS) under drinking water initiative, or framing internal management mechanisms for the Self Help Groups (SHGs) under livelihood options initiative. This approach not only harnessed the power of collective action, it also imbued the villagers with the spirit of enterprise.

A highlight of Samvardhan is that it didn't take with it a pre-determined fixed package to deliver. Instead, it considered certain thematic areas for conducting development activities. The specific needs under the broad themes were identified by the villagers, making the process participatory from the word 'go'.

A thorough participatory approach demands a high degree of transparency. The formation of Village Committees (or *Gram Samitis*) for identifying local needs, the act of the CEs living with the community and working, and the involvement of villagers from the planning stage and throughout the implementation of activities largely met this demand. The transparency, in turn, aided trust-building between the CEs and villagers.

To attain a multiplier effect in the activities undertaken, the project worked with existing institutions (RHEIs) and formed groups (Village Committees), rather than employing only the core project team and the CEs for implementation.

The Micro Projects, through which activities were carried out, were the knowledge and skill transfer mechanism (from the CEs to the village community) of *Samvardhan*. They were also the instruments for developing the CEs further professionally, since they provided the opportunity to gain first –hand experience on comprehensive project planning and implementation.



Activities

Focusing on the interconnected and complementary areas of drinking water, livelihood options and primary education, *Samvardhan* undertook different types of activities and also organised various events.

The interventions under **drinking water** were largely infrastructural but involved social processes. Every village developed a Village Water Action Plan (VWAP) focusing on the yearly need of the village. The activities aimed at enhancing the quality and accessibility of drinking water, and included construction of Roof Rain Water Harvesting Structures (RRWHS), repair and construction of wells, and renovation of hand-pumps. These were carried out in villages and schools. Interventions were also made towards improving sanitation habits - which directly affect the quality and availability of water. Campaigns to construct low-cost and user-friendly sanitation units were undertaken in the villages.

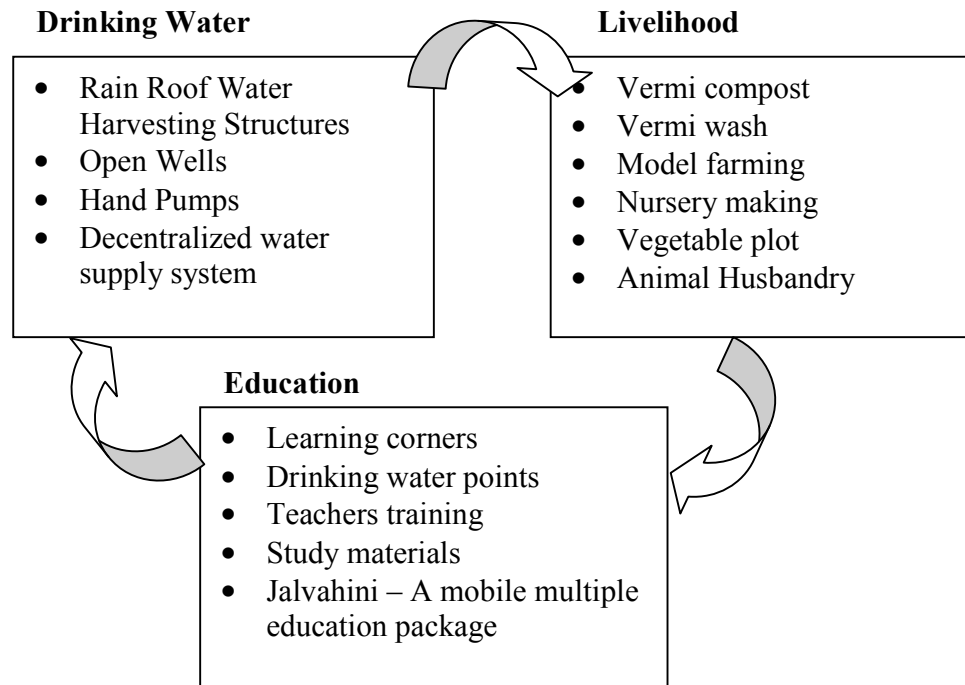
Activities and events to create awareness, to sensitize and to influence opinion on water and sanitation issues were also undertaken on a large-scale.

Interventions under **livelihood options**, which primarily aimed at augmenting family income, took the route of SHG (Self Help Group) formation. Developing saving habits among SHG members, and creating a mechanism for internal lending preceded initiation of livelihood activity by them. Most livelihood activities were farm based, since that was what the majority of villagers -- having agriculture land – preferred, though some non-farm based activities were also implemented. The main initiatives included Vermi Compost, Vermi Wash, Vegetable cultivation (individual and community-based), Animal husbandry, Fish culture, Floriculture (rose farming) and Trading (seeds and other agriculture inputs).

Educational interventions were aimed at primary schools of project villages, but also included educating the stakeholders, and endeavored to make education accessible and ongoing by reducing drop-out rates, increasing enrollment rates, mitigating effects of factors that lead to discontinuation (like migration of villagers for earning), and promoting education of girls. Activities included creation of a “learning corner” in primary schools to make learning more interesting and interactive, material development, teacher training, and organizing educational events like Children’s Fair or *Balmela* to combine learning and enjoyment through interactive activities like face painting, action songs etc. Such events also served to create a keenness to learn among children and elders. Interventions to improve the infrastructure of schools and to make them greener were also made. To make education more accessible geographically, hostels or *Chatralayas* were set up.

Education interventions always have greater reach in terms of desired result. An instance of education’s crosscutting outcome was the whole-hearted participation of all villagers in the large-scale construction of user-friendly sanitation units – a direct result of education and awareness campaign on sanitation habits.

“ENTERPRISE PROFILE”



Implementation Mechanism

After training, the CEs were placed in the four clusters – Subir, Hindla, Mamabhacha and Kaparada to initiate project implementation while living with the village communities. To support, monitor and facilitate the project processes, a Project Support Unit was established at Bilpudi. A three-member support team at CEE headquarters at Ahmedabad provided further guidance and support.

Village Committees (VCs)

The operationalisation of community-based approach required that appropriate structures be created to initiate, continue and sustain participation of all stakeholders. The oft-proved competence of village level institutions in enhancing the effectiveness of participative processes and collective action made formation of Village Committees or *Gram Samities* the obvious choice.

The Village Committees (VCs) were comprised of villagers identified by the CEs considering a number of factors, mainly representation of all communities and inclusion of women. The VCs could accurately identify local needs and concerns requiring the project’s attention. Since the members have complete knowledge of the existing social hierarchies and equations of the region, they could also anticipate and identify possible obstacles posed by such equations.

Formation of VCs was preceded by a series of meetings that focused on the history of development in villages highlighting the role strong grassroots leadership can play to bring better developmental inputs to the villages. It took almost 10 months to create the VCs.

The VC has 11 members, of which three have to be women. As a principle, the president of the VC is a woman, with male or female member as secretary. Every VC has a bank account with 3 co-signatories, of which any two are authorized to withdraw money. However, the signature of the president is mandatory for any withdrawal. The project grant is transferred to the VC's account before starting the implementation of an activity.

The Village Committees played a significant role in the implementation of all project activities. The final decision to undertake an activity (under the central themes of drinking water, primary education and livelihood) in terms of its need and utility for the villagers was taken by them. They also helped in building the trust of villagers in the project, and made their participation systematic, comprehensive, meaningful and sustainable.

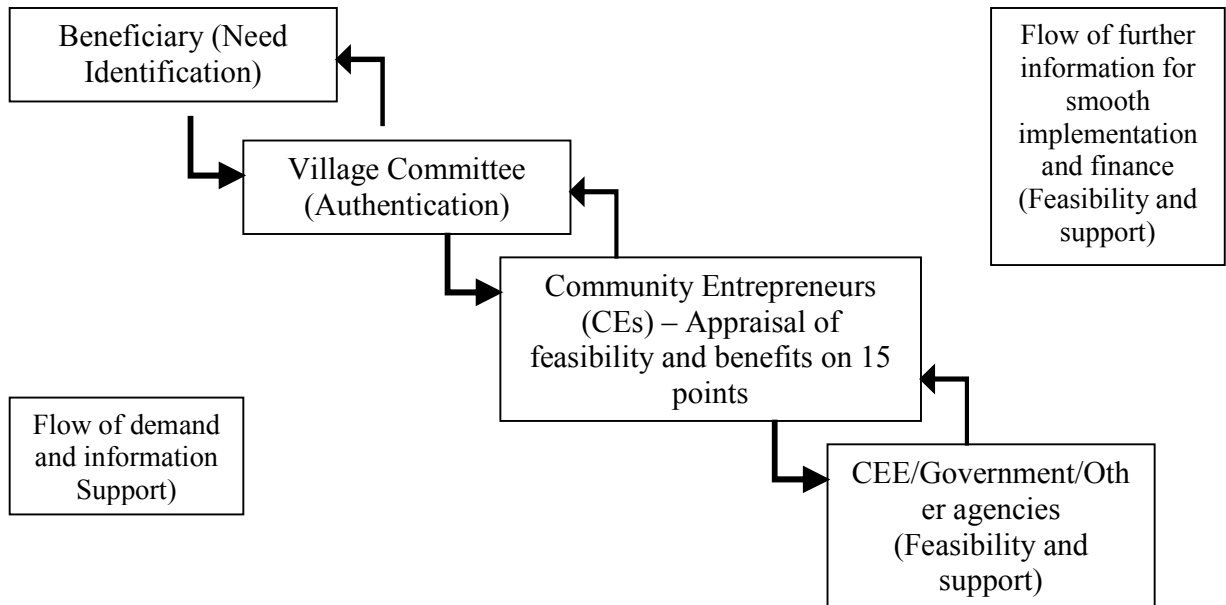
Micro Projects: Infusing the spirit of enterprise:

To maintain a bottom-up approach throughout, *Samvardhan* stipulated implementation of most activities through need-specific micro project prepared by the CEs in consultation with and using inputs from the stakeholders.

The starting point in the process are the villagers who figure out and convey their needs to the Village Committee. The Village Committee, through a consultative process, assess the suitability and urgency of the need, and also prioritise the various needs conveyed to it. In case of livelihood options, the Village Committees also authenticate the beneficiaries. The Community Entrepreneurs (CEs) --with knowledge and understanding of natural resource management and environmental concerns – then undertake a thorough feasibility analysis of the expressed needs, evaluating the benefits in the light of sustainable rural development, and formulate a micro project for submission to the implementing agency [Centre for Environment Education (CEE)/Government/Other].

This structure, comprising of all the stakeholders – villagers/teachers/students, Village Committees and CEs maintain the flow of further information required for effective implementation and completion of the micro project.

“ENTERPRISE CREATION MODEL”



The practice of implementing activities through micro projects was largely responsible for successful completion of *Samvardhan* activities. It fostered drive in all stakeholders in various ways.

The villagers started identifying their needs properly, and in the later years of the project, took considerable initiative in analyzing and voicing their needs.



E.g. The women SHG members in Hadol village of Subir cluster decided that as livelihood option, they would open a grocery shop because their village happened to be the venue for the weekly market or *haat*. Clearly, this decision was backed by logic, which showed that there was an improvement in their way of thinking. They had information earlier also, but now they were able to draw interconnections.

The consultative and decision-taking role given to Village Committees in the micro project mechanism brought to them a feeling of ownership, and they felt responsible for successful implementation of micro projects.

The CEs, through this mechanism, gained confidence in independent project planning, formulation and writing. Their analytical skills were honed when they undertook the feasibility analysis for micro projects, leading to their professional development.

Thus, the micro project, while creating enterprise (“a project undertaken”), infused the spirit of enterprise (“readiness to take up new ventures”) among stakeholders. Also, the collective effort involved fostered the spirit of unity among them.

Pillars of Project Implementation Design:

Some elements in the implementation design of *Samvardhan* emerged as its strength in terms of attaining the goals of the project. The main among them were the practice of the Community Entrepreneurs (CEs) living with the village community, the provision of People’s Contribution or *Lok Phada*, and the involvement of stakeholders from the planning stage.



CEs living with the village community: The CEs who were placed in the four clusters for implementing the project, were to live in the villages, among the community members for the entire project period.

The impact of CEs staying with the community to work, as opposed to visiting the community while living away, is best reflected in the statement by *Kalpeshbhai*, a CE at Mamabhacha cluster. When asked if living with the community has had an effect on how the villagers perceive them, he nodded emphatically, and said:

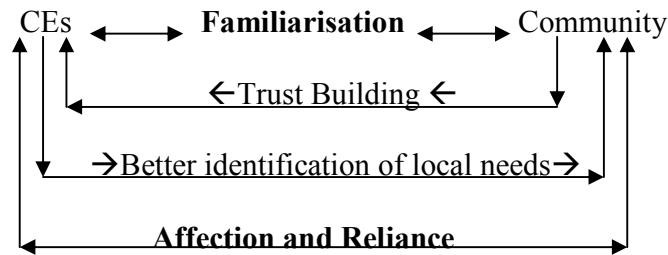
“ *Pehle hum unke liye ‘saheb’ the, ab ‘bhai’ hain* ”

(“Earlier they used to think of us as sahibs/bosses, now they consider us their brothers/friends”)

Clearly, the idea worked well to open up the village communities to the CEs and hence to the project. It conveyed that the CEs were not outsiders, but were one of the community members, working for the betterment of the village communities. This encouraged sharing of problems and concerns with the CES by the villagers. On the other hand,

living with the people and in the project area, the CEs were able to *feel* —and not merely know-- the local issues and problems. The mutual feeling of togetherness won the confidence of the villagers, who, in the later period of the project, relied on the CEs' guidance even for issues out of the purview of the project.

The unique approach of the CEs living with the community had a favourable two-way effect that permeated all project processes, easing and expediting them:



People's Contribution or Lok Phada: To emphasise that the nature of development initiatives under *Samvardhan* is *not* that of an external aid, but of an enabling mechanism that would ultimately lead to self-sufficiency of the village communities, the provision of people's contribution was created in the project's implementation design. It conveyed to the villagers that the project activities are to be done *with* them, and *not for* them (by the CEs and project team).

People's contribution largely took the form of Shramadaan (voluntary labour/contributing free labour), in construction activities, though people also contributed money/funds, especially under the livelihood options initiative.

The provision, which later emerged as a strength of the project, faced considerable resistance initially. The village communities, habituated to receiving free external help (under various government schemes and NGO initiatives) —in the form of free distribution of seeds and equipments, free construction of structures (wells, toilets) etc.— refused to contribute labour, demanding wages for work done by them. The CEs, showing commendable perseverance, kept meeting the villagers to make them understand the sustainability rationale of this exercise vis-à-vis the piecemeal nature of free aids, and with time, were able to convince them.

Once accepted by the people, *lok phada* succeeded in instilling a sense of ownership of the activity among the villagers. When people contributed labour, they started considering the structure as 'their own', and took care that its construction is completed properly and on time. After completion too, they maintained it as their own property, making efforts to prevent it from getting damaged.

Lok phada also proved to be an effective means to generate additional resources that would lead to eventual tapering off of *Samvardhan's* contribution to micro-projects, making them self-sustaining.

D. PROJECT REVIEW

Social Relevance and Cultural Appropriateness:

The forest is the natural habitat for the majority of the population of project villages, providing for most of their needs. An initiative that endeavours to improve the quality of life of the resident population *through* restoration, conservation and sustainable management of natural resources is, then, suitably located socially and culturally.

Nature and people are the two most important and accessible resources in the region that can be nurtured to effect sustainable development there. They are also in a relation that is very direct in terms of affecting each other, as well as depending on each other. It is, therefore, important to treat both these at par in a development initiative if its goals have to be meaningfully achieved. *Samvardhan* essentially takes an eco-centric as well as anthropocentric approach – which not only lends it social and cultural relevance, but also makes it contextually viable and sustainable.

Further, in a region where there is heavy dependence on agriculture (that is irrigation-dependant) but not enough water for irrigation, neither many alternatives for earning a livelihood, an initiative involving direct efforts to diversify occupational practices through creation of new livelihood options has considerable utility for the people. *Samvardhan*, with its inherent sustainability orientation also envisioned bringing ecological benefits to the region and its people through reduced pressure on land and organic ways and inputs of farming.

A region is marked by a distinct culture that is largely a result of, and governed by the geographical location, occupation patterns, the social hierarchy -- including class and caste dynamics, and the inherited or prevalent customs and traditions. The southern belt of Gujarat is largely inhabited by tribal communities who have their set of beliefs and practices. *Samvardhan* tried to bring about the desired change in the thinking and attitudes of communities *without* interfering with their culture. During the selection process of CEs, preference was given to candidates belonging to the project region, considering the role of cultural and social factors. As a result, many of the CEs were from the same region and so were culturally attuned to the needs and aspirations of the communities. Also, all project processes were consultative (and not just participatory) giving due recognition to, and keeping ample space for inclusion of the indigenous knowledge and practices. Exposure tours were used extensively as a tool, realizing well that the communities in these remote areas had not witnessed the practices that were being followed elsewhere (relating to livelihood, education, natural resource management, rainwater harvesting etc.), and therefore, it was essential to show them the various ways in which things were happening in similar settings, and by people like them, so that they open up to try them. Thus, consideration of social and cultural factors was inherent in the implementation design of *Samvardhan*.

Degree of Satisfaction of Stakeholders and Target Beneficiaries:

Voices from Stakeholders:



“Learning corners have brought considerable change in our thinking regarding the ways of teaching.”

■ **Primary School Teacher** (Subir Cluster)

“A lot has to be done for our villages, and we will do it.”

■ **Raghubhai Lakshmanbhai Raut (Village Committee Vice-president)**
Mamabhacha Cluster

Community Entrepreneurs(CEs): *Samvardhan* envisaged improving the quality of life of villagers, as well as developing the CE cadre professionally. The satisfaction of CEs as stakeholders, therefore, has to be considered in terms of the effect they had on the region and its people, and also the professional and personal development they underwent.

“People’s enhanced participation has been a reward.”

■ **Manisha Patel (CE), Mamabhacha Cluster**

“I obtained new approaches to solving problems.”

■ **Babubhai Baria (CE), Mamabhacha Cluster**

“Because we plan and implement activities independently, their success and failure- both- are ours”

■ **Manisha Patel (CE) Kaparada Cluster**

Social Impacts

Being extremely participative in nature, the processes and mechanisms of *Samvardhan* fostered a feeling of togetherness among the village communities. When they met during the meetings and events organized under the project, and shared their experiences and opinions, they realized that they had common problems. This led to a willingness to come together and cooperate to address such problems, as they understood the benefit it had for them. Collective involvement in activities over a long period of time instilled a feeling of oneness, and their successful completion made the village communities realize that they were more effective when united. When an activity failed to give desired results, the ‘group’ feeling of shared responsibility lessened the feeling of disappointment, and enabled them to make fresh attempts. Thus, meeting each other and exchanging views resulted in enhanced social relations (lacking earlier), essential to build a social movement of any kind.



A noticeable manifestation of the strength of collective action was improved response of government functionaries to the local issues. The *Gram Panchayats* also started taking greater cognizance of needs of the communities – which were now more frequently and confidently voiced—and became more cooperative.

The integration of SD perspective in RHEI curriculum during the initial phase of *Samvardhan*, its application by the CEs in the field, and the ensuing visible impact, led to two universities (in South and North Gujarat) integrating the inputs in their rural development curricula.

E. ESD IMPLICATION

Environmental Implication: The rationale for sustainable management of natural resources (SNRM) has to be understood by those who manage it, before they are provided with the knowledge and skills for such management. The rural poor who depend heavily on natural resources need to be aware that they are most vulnerable to environmental degradation. They also need to know that their relation with nature is essentially two-way, and their actions have a direct bearing on nature's health and wealth (resources).

The anchors of *Samvardhan* were the CEs who had a strong environmental and sustainability orientation, which they strove to transfer to the village communities. How an activity will impact the environment of the region was shared with the villagers in most instances. Every educational and communication tool (awareness campaigns, meetings, events, trainings, demonstrations, exposure trips etc.), while focusing on the specific purpose for which it was being used, sought to bring environmental understanding to the stakeholders in some way.

The initiative to create sustainable alternative livelihood options for the resident population had immense environmental implication. The region, due to its undulating terrain, faces severe soil erosion resulting in low quality of agricultural land. Shortage of water for irrigation reduces the agricultural yield further. Despite these hardships, agriculture is the primary occupation here, essentially for lack of income-generation alternatives. This occupation pattern is dangerous for the regional ecology, as it puts tremendous pressure on land, worsening it further, and putting it at the risk of becoming totally barren one day. Diversification of livelihood options served to reduce the pressure on the natural resources (land and forest). Though most livelihood activities undertaken by SHGs were still farm-based, they were imbued with sustainable-agriculture principles and practices. They were in fact, seen as an effective way to introduce and propagate the use of vermin-compost and other organic inputs in agriculture.

Socio-cultural Implication:

In *Samvardhan* processes, people formed the core. Their in-depth involvement was especially important to address the social concerns, because these cannot be addressed by any external input or agency independently. The dynamics that make the social fabric of a place are governed by the people, and, therefore, cannot be altered without their active involvement. The participatory processes, besides fostering the spirit of unity and cooperation, broke some biases that certain communities had about certain others, reducing chances of conflicts on these lines. While people gained confidence in themselves through actually doing things, they also gained confidence in each other, and realized that a support system existed.

The principle of having a women president for every Village Committee, and the special efforts for encouraging girl education (A hostel for girl drop-outs – the *Van Chetna*

Kanya Chaatralaya -- was set-up in Dabkhal village of Kaparada cluster) had strong socio-cultural implications.

More than 80 percent of the all SHGs formed under the livelihood initiative comprise of women. In Mamabhacha cluster, where livelihood initiative has had the maximum reach and impact, 26 of the 30 SHGs formed are women SHGs. This reflected the potential and initiative of the women in this region. The realisation itself has social implications for the community. The ability to augment family income through SHG activity brought a feeling of security to the women and improved their status in the family, and led to their economic and social empowerment.

For most of the villagers, the other option for earning a living (besides agriculture) is through migration to neighbouring towns and states to work as daily wage labourers, mostly in sugar mills. The practice of migration causes discontinuation of the education of children, who migrate with their parents. It also lessens the migrants' attachment to their region and breeds community isolation. New livelihood options led to reduction in the need, and hence in the frequency, of such migration, bringing indirect but substantial social benefits.

Economic Implication:

An activity for earning income, though carried out with skill and hard work, may not be successful if there is lack of sound economic decision-taking ability. The primary focus of livelihood initiatives was augmenting incomes of households, but the emphasis on 'learning by doing' approach and the consultative processes involved led to the creation of economic prudence among SHG members. When they calculated the expenditure and other variables for the livelihood activity undertaken, they understood the inter-relations between the variable that helped them develop the judgment ability regarding decisions of economic nature.

The members were given passbooks and other documents, and were to maintain records of economic transaction, with guidance from the CEs. They operated bank accounts on their own, after being properly oriented towards it. They can open and operate accounts efficiently in the future.

Creation of sustainable livelihood options improved the economic status of village communities by increasing their income. Providing market linkages for sale of produce, wherever possible, motivated the SHG members to scale-up their activity, thereby fostering entrepreneurship.

Since the benefits of livelihood activities were shared equitably among members, reduction in income inequalities was an indirect but important outcome.

Implication as Effective Communication and Decision-making:

Self-reliance is a prerequisite for sound decision-making. When village communities carried out activities, they not only learnt the proper ways of doing it, but also realized

that they *could* do it. They, therefore, started placing a higher degree of reliance on their own abilities, which gradually led them to take better decisions.

Implication as Transformative Education:

Affecting a change in behaviour is a goal of education. An education that does not reflect in the way people do things isn't meaningful education. Perceivable transformations in attitudes, mind-sets and behaviours indicate that much of the education imparted has been internalized.

Being involved in activities from the planning stage, and sharing all information about the activity, the stakeholders developed a healthy sense of inquiry. In the later years of the project, they displayed considerable curiosity in asking questions and seeking information.

Further, when empowerment happens, decisions and practices are questioned. With the backing of reasonable awareness and confidence, the reluctance to demand explanations for acts that don't seem right is also reduced. A marked transformation in behaviour was seen when villagers began questioning the long-existing bribery practices prevalent in the region.



Laxmi Mahila Vikas Mandal is a women's SHG in Mamabhacha village. When it was being formed, some (government) officials of the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), with the intention of misappropriating the funds allotted for creation of the SHG, tried to integrate it with their own watershed scheme. They met the SHG members under the pretence of visiting at CEE's behest and took their signatures on a blank paper. When the members discovered the reality, they went to the district/block (taluka) office and demanded return of the signed sheet, and threatened to report the matter to the police if the sheet was not returned. Thus they managed to retrieve the paper. This is an illustration of the personality development and empowerment of women in the region. More importantly, it reflects a new attitude – of finding out the wrong done, and standing for their rights.

Implication as Learning Process: *Samvardhan* sought to be a mutual learning and learning to learn process. The learning happened in the form of gaining insights into the local issues through meetings and discussions with village communities. People often

provided inputs of indigenous knowledge during consultation which proved to be quite useful for implementations.

More importantly, learning happened when reasons for failures were examined. An important learning was that implementing maximum activities (which was not done) through SHG formation could have fetched better results. The realization that success of an activity, to a great extent, on what the beneficiaries want, and if initiatives that are suitable for them have to be undertaken, creation of willingness among them was extremely important, was also a learning.

F. FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Next Step

Samvardhan needs to be seen as part of a continuum: where Phase I was the first step and Phase II was the second step. However, the steps towards improving the life of the tribal communities in a sustainable manner cannot end yet, and therefore *Samvardhan II* cannot be the last step.

Fostering active participation among the village communities for making them competent partners, and ultimately able entrepreneurs-- leading development initiatives for their community and area – has been realized by the project. The spirit of entrepreneurship has permeated the majority, paving the way for effective and enthusiastic local leadership.

A sound foundation for transformation of people from mere beneficiaries to leaders who understand and solve their own problems, therefore, has been laid. The people are not only ready but *eager* to take initiative.

Several positive effects – that would facilitate this process-- have already been attained, in the form of enhanced recognition by local government officers of the *Samvardhan* initiatives, establishment of strong networks between project team and certain government departments, efficient functioning of the Village Committees etc.

However, to make the local leadership meaningful, and to ensure that efforts made by people for their improvement are self-sustaining, institutionalization of informal structure is essential.

A rights-based approach, which would enable the communities to recognize and stand for their rights is the need of the hour. As the communities are ignorant about laws and provisions that have crucial implications for them [like the Forest Bill (and its provisions for Tribals)], it is essential that they be guided to take the benefit which is due to them.

Samvardhan looks forward to:

- A right-based approach to bring to the village communities due to them

- Federating the SHGs so that they can harvest the benefits of formal organisation including marketing, branding, accessing the market, negotiating prices etc.
- Institutionalizing other informal groups to give them a platform to voice their concerns at a larger level, as also the collective power to demand their rights.

Self-sufficiency is a synonym for sustainability. Whatever is self-sufficient will last because it will sustain itself without any external assistance, and because it is effective, efficient, resilient and complete within itself.

Samvardhan envisages that by organizing informal groups into federation, and infusing awareness among villagers about their rights in its next step, such self-sufficiency will be attained.