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Economic Development in a Tribal Village of Bankura, West Bengal

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Abstract

Studying the agricultural conditions of the past and present in Javi, a tribal village of Bankura, West Bengal have led to gauging of the food and livelihood security issues of the tribal dwellers. The nature of government interventions has been scrutinized through the lens of the affected people and the gaps identified based on their needs. For the holistic study qualitative and quantitative means of data collection through multiple methods of Focus Group Discussion, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Participant Observation, Questionnaire instrumentation, with relevant and appropriate case studies have been applied and analysed. The study reveals that in 1971 almost half of the village area was forested. With degradation of the forests its dependency has been reduced and the tribal economy which was mostly hand to mouth economy is changing. Strands of development with shift to agro based economy are perceived here. Green revolution took place in India in the late sixties and early seventies also have an impact here. Farm inputs like chemical fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides have recently been put into use but mechanization is still a distant dream. Rural development programmes and incorporation of the Tribal Sub Plan is slowly having an impact. Increasing literacy and awareness, albeit slow, with the improvement in infra structure, could be felt. The reduction in migration in search of temporary bread earning means, thanks to MGNREGA, has been reported by more than 90% of the residents. This has lessened the burden of the women who otherwise have to shoulder the responsibility of collecting fuel wood as well as cultivating on their little plots for their own sustenance besides their household chores. Yet additional income needs to be generated through creation of

more community assets and provisions at the individual-household level to come out of poverty. Incorporating more of these villagers into the mainstream of development is the need of the hour.

Key Words: poverty, vulnerability, inclusive, tribal, rural livelihood programmes.

Introduction

More than two-thirds of India's population is rural of which about one-third is below the national poverty line. Hence rural development accounts for a large sectoral outlay in the Government of India budget including agricultural and animal husbandry schemes. This development expenditure is channelled through a large number of centrally sponsored schemes and additional programmes sponsored by state governments. The ministries are implementing a wide range of programmes to address different dimensions of poverty and deprivation. The stated vision of the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17) document is "of India moving forward in a way that would ensure a broad-based improvement in living standards of all sections of the people through a growth process which is faster than in the past, more inclusive and also more sustainable". Particular attention needs to be paid to the needs of the SC/ST and OBC population it said. Literature across several countries and disciplines identified some of the vulnerability indicators in several communities. These include food and nutrition insecurity; social category, chronic illness, old,

disabled in the family; literacy status, housing number of bread earners; landlessness, high indebtedness, etc. The most vulnerable sections/households are the food insecure households. They include women headed households, persons with disability, landless or marginal farmers owning tiny parcels of land, most farming and non-farming households in rural dry land areas, migrant labour, isolated communities and those living in disturbed areas and households engaged in declining occupations. The most common livelihood activities of the poor are wage labour, small and marginal holding cultivation, land leasing, tenant cultivation, cattle rearing, forest produce, weaving, fishing, etc. Vulnerability reduction can be through access to services, safety nets and entitlements. Reducing poverty is a key element in our inclusive growth strategy. The earlier (Eleventh) Five Year Plan had already given a special impetus to several programmes with the objective of increasing inclusiveness and reducing poverty as inclusiveness is a multidimensional concept.

Issues of food security have moved to the forefront of international discussions in recent years. Within the farming sector, rain-fed agriculture is a major constraint in raising overall agricultural growth and bridging regional inequalities. Some 200 million hectares constituting 62% of the total geographical area of India fall in this category spanning several agro-ecological regions. Some of the most important programmes relevant to food and nutrition security are the employment ingredient in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGA), the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and the Annapurna scheme; the Mid Day Meal (MDM) programme and the National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS). The provision of food subsidy in the union budgets is based on allocation of food grains to different sections of the population, i.e., Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), BPL (Below Poverty Line) and APL (Above Poverty Line). The launching of National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in 2011 needs also to be mentioned as it has an impact.

In West Bengal different rural livelihood programmes have adopted administrative units, rather than physical units, as the basis for planning. Here the focus on decentralised governance and capacity building is stronger and planning is focused on gram panchayat and subordinate village assemblies that are able to access an untied poverty fund to support livelihood enhancement activities. The village of **Javi** was selected on the basis of three criteria - less than 1,000 population, proportion of Scheduled Tribes or adivasis over 50% (i.e. high concentration of scheduled tribe) and female literacy rates of less than 33% (i.e. with poor social indicators) as against the national average of 64.6 % in 2011.

Research Objectives & Methodology of the Study

Study of an identity-based group, notably, tribe and women have been ventured upon in a village in close proximity to the forest. The design of the study is based on intensive field work. Participation with respect to whether households got work or did not get work and if they did get it then the number of days of work, the days of work received, total person days of employment provided under the flagship programme of MGNREGS and its coverage across the neighbourhoods is the focus of this paper. The nature of other government interventions has been scrutinized through the lens of the affected people to know about their physical and economic access to food. The gaps have been identified based on their needs.

Several government reports were consulted in context to this study: being accessed through the concerned websites. Objectives and nature of relevant schemes such as that of MGNREGS and NRLM were studied before framing the questionnaire. Views expressed by authors of several published peer reviewed articles were taken into consideration. Background information of the area and status of the tribal people of their socio economic lives was obtained from the decadal Census reports and Statistical Handbook of Bankura district. The Topographical Sheet (73 J/9) published by Survey of India in 1979 was also studied. For the holistic study qualitative and quantitative means of data collection through multiple methods of Focus

Group Discussion, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Participant Observation and Questionnaire instrumentation, with relevant and appropriate case studies have been applied with the assistance of the students who were pursuing their masters' degree in the department of Geography, West Bengal State University in February 2014. Detailed and intensive micro level survey at the household level of each para (neighbourhood) was done in March 2014 by Asim Kisku, a then pursuing PG student of the department who belongs to this village. The data was then compiled and analyzed by the author.

Background information

The state of West Bengal had 5.08% of the total ST population of India in 2011 as per the Census of India. The scheduled tribes comprised of 5.80% of the total population of the state. The district of Bankura had recorded 10.25 % of its total population belonging to this category which was above the state average. The literates of the district comprised of 62.08 % of the total population which is below the state average. Bankura happened to be one of the 200 backward districts of the country identified for implementation of the MGNREGA in its first schedule. This district had, as per WBHDR 2004, been in the eleventh position amongst the 18 districts of West Bengal with regard to HDI: the health index being 0.67, income index 0.26, education index 0.62 and the human development index being 0.52. Regarding per capita income district wise ranking of the state, the position as in 2000-01 was seventh. The rural poverty figure was alarmingly high as learnt from the report.

Natural resources, such as water, land and forests are fundamental to the livelihoods of the rural poor. The district has the severe problem of soil erosion. Forest resources provide part of the subsistence and cash livelihoods to several millions of rural poor in the country. The gradual depletion of forest cover and increasing dependence of rural folk has given rise to conflict of interest among diverse user groups and associated management problems. The primary stakeholders happen to be the forest communities or people living in and on the forest fringe areas earning

substantial part of livelihood in the form of fuel wood, fodder, fruits, flowers, fencing materials, etc. The secondary stakeholders happen to be state/district forest department, NGOs, plantation companies etc. The traditional right and interest of forest communities, and their livelihood and primary stakeholder concern were hardly addressed to in the forest management policy before and immediately after independence. In developing countries degradation of common property resources (CPR) has often been associated with high rate attached by the poor in discounting future flow of benefits, improper property right, economic insecurity, regulation failure and relative ability of local institutions that shape the degree of collective action. The problem gets added importance when studied in respect of CPR region inhabited mostly by backward communities who are usually supposed to be highly dependent on nature for their survival. West Bengal is the pioneer state in India in initiating Joint Forest Management (JFM). Thanks to the Forest Protection Committee (FPC) the district of Bankura had recorded a gradual increase in forest cover. Since the enunciation of Forest Protection Act (1990), the traditional community access and control has been substantially wrested by the forest department in West Bengal with only specific duties and functions reserved for the FPC formed of the villagers. However this has hardly reduced the poor people's dependence for collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) or minor forest products (MFPs) that provide a substantial part of their livelihood in the regions that are less agriculturally intensified. Prior to the enactment of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, the easiest way to procure land for different non-forestry activities viz.: creation of human settlements, agriculture, construction of dams, bridges, roads etc. was through diversion of forest land. In order to check further depletion of the forest cover and protect the forests, the Govt. of India enacted the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and amended it from time to time with insertions of stringent stipulations. As per the Act, any such diversion requires prior approval of the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India. As a result, the quantum of diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes has dwindled appreciably. The National Afforestation Programme (NAP) has been formulated by merger of four centrally sponsored

schemes of the Ministry of Environment & Forests viz. Integrated Afforestation and Eco-development Project (IAEDP), Area Oriented Fuel wood and Fodder Project (AOFFP), Conservation and development of Non-Timber Forest Produce Scheme (NTFP) including medicinal plants scheme and Association of Scheduled Tribes and Rural Poor in Regeneration of Degraded Forest (ASERP). The objectives of this scheme includes employment generation for the disadvantaged section of the society, particularly women, SCs/STs and landless rural labourers and conservation and improvement of NTFP.

Equity & inclusiveness is crucial for the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of the society to have the opportunities of well-being along with the mainstream society. (Basu 2014). The process of land redistribution which has disappeared from the national policy agenda still continued in this state. Regarding the land reforms programme of West Bengal the pattern of land distribution weighted in the favour of the SC and STs either as *pattadars* or *bargadars*. The land reforms were effective in terms of redressing certain social inequalities; the programme is estimated to have covered 41.3% of rural population of the state by 2002. Distribution of homestead land to agricultural labourers was also included. The programme had a significant impact on reducing poverty and lesser incidence of social oppression and conflicts are reported here compared to other parts of rural India (WBHDR, 2004). However the small size of the holdings can't bring about self sufficiency from agricultural activity alone and so calls for seeking of alternate sources of income.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, also known as the "Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act", and abbreviated to MGNREGA, is an Indian labour law and social security measure, a workfare scheme that aims to guarantee the 'right to work' and ensure livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The statute is hailed by the government as "the largest and most ambitious social security and public

works programme in the world". The main objectives of the Scheme include besides supplementing wage employment opportunities, creating of sustainable rural livelihoods. Targeting poverty through employment generation using rural works has had a long history in India that began in the 1960s. After the first three decades of experimentation, the government launched major schemes like Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, Employment Assurance Scheme, Food for Work Programme, Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana and Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana that were forerunners to MGNREGA. The MGNREGA has been highly inclusive, as is evident from the fact that the share of SC/ST families amongst beneficiaries has ranged between 51.0-56.0% and 41.0-50.0 % of workers have been women. It has also promoted financial inclusion since over 100 million bank/post office accounts have been opened for the poorest segments of our population who comprise of the MGNREGA workforce. There has been much public debate about India's MGNREGS ever since its introduction. Poorer states tend to have a higher percentage of households who want work (i.e. demand) on MGNREGS, as one would expect the poverty rate will fall with higher participation. This reflects the scheme's built-in "self-targeting" mechanism, whereby non-poor people find work on the scheme less attractive than do poor people. Targeting performance improves as the programme expands. The targeting of disadvantaged castes improves with programme expansion. Based on evidence from the National Sample Survey for 2009-10 it is evident that participation rates on the scheme are higher for poor people than others; the scheme being more pro-poor and reaching STs and OBCs more effectively in states with higher overall participation rates. Nationally, almost half (48%) of the employment as registered in the administrative data for 2009-10 go to women. The female share in MGNREGS work is greater than their share of the work in the casual wage labour market in all states, but the gap tends to be larger in states where women participate less in the casual labour market. The scheme is clearly bringing women into the paid workforce, but more so in less poor states and continues to reach out to the poor and vulnerable people.

It is against this backdrop I have chosen a village which is ST dominated, is near the forest with many being marginal workers having little land or are landless who have been seeking job opportunities from neighbouring districts.

Findings on the village

Javi village is under the jurisdiction of Rudra Gram Panchayat, Khatra Subdivision of Bankura District, West Bengal. It is 7 K.M from Ranibandh Block Headquarters and 4 k.m. from the gram panchayat. Ranibandh is considered to be one of the major forest produce growing areas of the district. The total area of this village is 513 acres of which almost half (43.86%), was forested in 1971. The total population of Javi as in 2011 Census records was 442 of which 224 were male (50.68%), the rest 49.32% being female. The male female population is thus almost balanced. The STs were 294 in number (66.52% of total population), 196 were literates (44.34% of total population) of which only 62 were female literates (31.63% of total literates), 164 were workers (37.10% of total population): hence there is a high dependency ratio. There is one primary school and two ICDS centres in the village. All the children depend upon other villages for their secondary education. There is no primary health centre, and for health facilities they are to venture out of the village. In this area electricity is available since 2005 and majority of the houses (80%) are having it. Wood is used as the main type of fuel by all which is collected from the nearest forest. The source of drinking water is mainly tube well and well. There are at present 5 tube wells and 3 wells of which two are no longer being used. All the people in this village follow the open privy system. There is no septic tank or community toilet.

The village can be divided into five paras or neighbourhoods: *Sabar Para*, *Pal Para*, *Kumar Para*, *Parasia Para* and the *Batdanga Para*. The oldest para is the *Batdanga para*, happens to be located on the higher lands occupied by the Santhals, the number of households being more (39) and the diversion of economic activities also happens to be more. About 15% of the residents are with the service sector, the level of literacy being higher. There is larger retention of youth

in education here. The Santhals also have a larger share of the agricultural land with variety of agricultural lands as well. On the other extreme is the *Sabar Para* with 26 households, with only one family owning agricultural land (*gora*) of less than 1 acre obtaining it from vested land -given by the government.

Regarding livestock farming it is the general opinion that there is shortage of grazing lands, lack of herder, less requirement of natural manure application with rising consumption of chemical fertilizers. All these are responsible for a fall in domesticating of animals and birds and hence fall in supply of diet with no additional source of income generated from it. Earlier they were part of the assets besides the land. Milk (from cow) was for personal consumption; goats and ducks were reared for household consumption and buffalo served as draught animal. Rearing of goats was through animal husbandry schemes availed of by some.

The nearest forest is 'Baro mile forest' which is only 1 kilometer away from the village. The villagers reported of declining dependency on the forests with the changing time, yet minor forest products (MFPs) do play a significant role. The MFPs consists of nuts, fruits, flowers, leaves, stems, roots, tubers, babui grass, etc. The villagers turn to the forest for food which adds to their nutritional requirement, more so in the bad agricultural years. Mainly women collect sal leaves from the forest. With twenty leaves they make one *tari*, by selling 10 such *taris* they earn 75 rupees. In normal season 1 bundle of 'sia patas' rate is 10-12 rupees and in the marriage season this rate is 16 rupees. This information was extracted through the FGD carried out with the members of the Javi Bono Committee. The MFPs are available to the tribesmen at the cost of labour hours put in. Hence the economic value is the value of labour time involved in searching, plucking, weeding and collecting from the forest and carrying the same to the market or home (Thakur & Thakur, 2009). Even if it is for own consumption it does have some linkage with the issue of food security.

Almost three-fourth of the households (74%) of the study area are residing in kucchha houses, all the families have been enlisted as being below the poverty line.

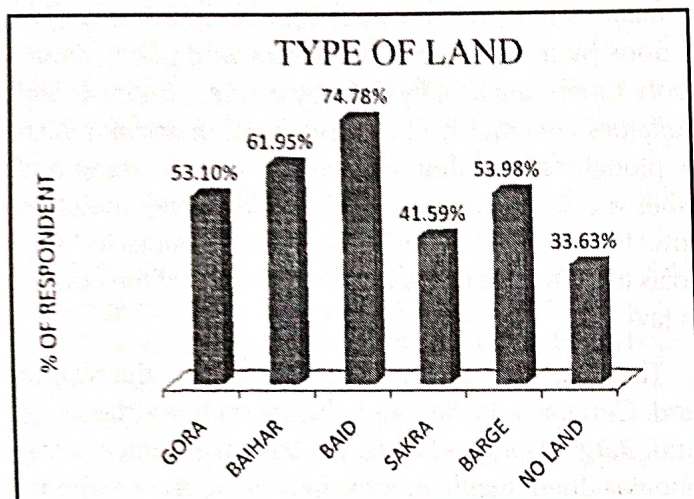
Some aged persons are enjoying old age pension while some are still working as labourers/farmers in the agricultural lands. It was seen that those with greater variety and quantity of agricultural land worked as farmers on their own land and also as labourers under MGNREGA scheme to supplement their income. Those without any agricultural land worked as labourers in neighbouring fields, some said that they migrated to nearby districts particularly to Bardhaman and Howrah during the harvesting season of paddy and potato. Short-term migration was a fixed trend for them.

A majority of the households are enjoying the employment opportunities provided under the MGNREGA scheme, the number of days worked/ household varied from less than 10 to a maximum of 85. All the 26 households in *Sabar Para* are enjoying the employment opportunities provided under this scheme. There are three families whose members worked for 4-20 days; six families with man days of 30-45; ten between 51-75 man days and seven with >75 man days; the highest being 85 man days availed by two households. In *Pal Para* there are 25 households out of which 24 are beneficiaries of this flagship scheme. There is one family whose adult members worked for 10 days and another for 49 days; rest of the families had man-days of 50 and above, the highest being 85 man days. All the four households of *Kumar Para* earned man-days of 10, 40, 57 & 61 respectively. There are 19 households in the *Parasia Para* out of which 17 are being benefitted by the scheme the other two are employed as teachers. There is one family whose members worked for 15 days and another for 25 days; six of the families had man-days between 26-50 and nine were above 50, the highest being 80 man days. *Batdanga Para* has 39 households out of which 33 are reaping the benefits of the scheme. There were three families whose members worked for less than 10 days and another five for less than 20 days, rest enjoyed 35-45 days and only two were above 70, the highest being 75. The joint secretary MGNREGA had announced (in January 2014) that the Ministry has decided to increase the central funding for securing up to an additional 50 days of wage employment beyond the stipulated 100 days per Scheduled Tribe households living in the forest areas. So there is scope for further pulling them out of their poverty.

Rainfall, which occurs mainly within the short monsoon season, is of high temporal and spatial variability that makes rain-fed agriculture risky. Javi is having little of irrigation facility thus increasing the risk. Here food crops are still mainly cultivated for their own sustenance. Agriculture is a labour based enterprise in which most of the agricultural operations like ploughing, levelling, sowing, weeding, spraying, sprinkling, harvesting and threshing are carried on mainly by human hands. The machinery such as tractors is still not used here. Both men and women take part in agricultural operations. However, there is a division of labour on the basis of sex. The heavier work such as cleaning forests or ploughing or constructing a *bundh* (i.e. an embankment across a natural depression for irrigation) is done by men; while collection of wild plants, fruits, roots, tubers, are usually done by women. Bullocks and buffaloes are employed in agricultural operations such as ploughing, levelling and weeding; cow- dung and ashes are used as manure. The field survey indicates cows to be kept in 52% of the houses, buffaloes in 14%, goats in 42%, pigs in 4% and ducks in 3% of the houses in Javi.

The cropping pattern varies according to the type of land. Generally the Santals cultivate on three classes of land: *Barge*, *Gora* and *Khet*. On the *barge* which is the land near their dwelling, especially in the rear sorghum, maize, certain winter legumes, beans and vegetables of different kinds are cultivated. More than half of the households in Javi have this type of land on which is now cultivated maize, *raher* and other seasonal vegetables the production being about 20 kg/acre. *Gora* the second category is on a higher land located at a little distance away from their dwelling, where different varieties of millet, several varieties of pulses are cultivated. More than half of the households (53%) have *gora* land. *Khet* comprises of rice fields and in Javi three kinds of rice fields are distinguished by three different names: (i) *baid*- at the upper level, (ii) *Sakra* -the middle level & (iii) *baihar* -lowest level. About one-fourth (24.78%) of the households have *baid* land. On this land is now cultivated rice viz *khandagiri*, *bankura-1*, and vegetables viz bringin and tomato etc. This land produces rice of 250-300 kg/acre. High yield variety

(HYV) rice viz lalat, 64, kalakandhi etc are grown in addition to seasonal vegetables on the sakra owned by about 40% of the households. High yield variety of paddy such as sarna is now being cultivated on the baihar land, the yield being 200 -250 kg / acre. The classification is thus based on their relative positions on an inclined land surface. Of these, the plots lying on the lowest level i.e., the baihar land are regarded as the best and more than 60% are having this type of land. Rice is evidently the staple crop. Several of the indigenous breeds have become extinct mentioned the senior farmers. From the figure given below it is clear that almost one-third are landless and hence more vulnerable.



Source: Based on Field survey

The villagers are enjoying some rural development schemes like MGNREGS under which pond construction and its renovation, construction of embankment (*bundh*), fruit plantation, land levelling etc. is being done. Other facilities provided by the government include seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, agriculture related machinery like pump set, supplying goats for rearing; Indira Aawas Yojana (IAY) for housing facilities, Annapurna Yojana, Old Age Pension for these rural tribal people. The MGNREG scheme is being enjoyed by a majority (92%) of the households. This has increased the income and reduced seasonal migration to a great extent.

Challenges

Tribals are in the early stage of economic development compared to other communities in the

country. They depend on forest for food, fuel, house building material, agricultural implements and with degenerating of such forests they are to cope up with the situation. There is lack of sanitation facilities and hence the people are prone to diseases. Lack of secondary education in spite of several schemes/opportunities of availing from the nearby villages, leads to drop outs.

Scope for improvement

Many workers are engaged in more than one occupation. Many tribal groups as elsewhere in the country have got transferred into agricultural communities and with modernization (which has started to show up here) if irrigation facilities are provided the yield will increase. Rising literacy, greater number of days of wage employment beyond the stipulated 100 days, and other schemes implemented based on local potentiality and needs will definitely improve the lives of these marginalized sections of the society. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) among the members of FPC in some areas have been formed to take up various vocational and income generation activities utilizing fund from their own savings as well as bank loans where necessary and available. This can be done in the village especially among the women. "Javi Bono Committee" comprises of all adult members of the village and from each para one or two members join the village meeting & after the discussion take the collective decisions relating to forests. So vocational trainings for income generation activities such as mushroom cultivation, sal leave plate making, pisciculture, sericulture, bee-keeping, etc depending on the natural local resources can benefit the community.

Conclusion

Studying the agricultural conditions of the past and present in Javi, a tribal village of Bankura, West Bengal have led to gauging of the food and livelihood security issues of the tribal dwellers. The study reveals that in 1971 almost half of the village area was forested. With degradation of the forests its dependency has been reduced and the tribal economy which was mostly hand to mouth economy is changing. Now dependence on forests for food, fuel, fodder and medicines has been forcefully reduced. Their economy has become commercialised: depending on agriculture. Strands of

development with shift to agro based economy are perceived here. Green revolution took place in India in the late sixties and early seventies. In agriculture and animal husbandry, it popularized the use of conventional hybridization to increase yield by creating "high-yielding varieties". Farm inputs like chemical fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides have recently been put into use but mechanization is still a distant dream. Javi is having little of irrigation and so rain water harvesting is required. Shortage of common grazing land has limited the raising of livestock.

Development aims at creating a suitable and enabling environment for promoting long, healthy and creative lives. In India large resources flow from the Government to the poor households in the form of entitlements like Public Distribution System (PDS), pensions, MGNREGS, social insurance, health services; and by enhancing capabilities, creating livelihood opportunities along with physical infrastructure schemes. Together these services can strengthen the household economy in the form of additional incomes and savings on expenditure, resulting in increased consumption. Rural development programmes, incorporation of the Tribal Sub Plan is slowly having an impact. Increasing literacy and awareness, albeit slow, with the improvement in infrastructure could be felt. The reduction in migration in search of temporary bread earning means, thanks to MGNREGS, has been reported by more than 90% of the residents. This has lessened the burden of the women who otherwise have to shoulder the responsibility of collecting fuel wood as well as cultivating on their little plots for their own sustenance besides their household chores. It is my view that since tribal women are engaged in casual labour, etc even before MGNREGA came into force, their high work participation is seen here. It is vital to mention that when the scheme was first implemented on 200 backward districts of the country Bankura happened to be one of them. The impact of this scheme can hence be strongly felt in the positive. The number of employment days have increased as it includes the own agricultural employment days, wage labour employment on a daily basis, economic value obtained from labour input in relation to the forest related activities along with the employment days from the MGNREGA. Yet additional income needs to be

generated through creation of more community assets and provisions at the individual-household level to come out of poverty. Incorporating more of these villagers into the mainstream of development is the need of the hour. For development of the area, community oriented development schemes can benefit maximum number of people, lead to infrastructure development, and help in creation of assets for sustained income generation and lead to all round development of the village.

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