

Rahrai Project — Getting closer to its people

Since the inception of our new project in *Rahrai* last year, we have been working closely with the villagers, to make a significant difference in their lives. Here is a close look at what we have been doing in this region during this period.

The field staff have selected 7 villages with an approximately 35 thousand population and began to conduct socio-economic development programs at the grass root level. The initial phase was to visit each house in these villages and to understand their real living condition.

Background

Most of the villagers depend on agricultural land for their livelihood. This land is divided among the male children and the new generation don't have enough income to sustain their families. The increasing number of children and child marriage make it even worse. Joint family system exist in these villages and the larger the family, the lower the standard of living. Low agricultural productivity due to climatic factors are also affecting them. An average 50 % of the villagers don't have enough



means to buy a cow/buffalo which could bring some additional income to them. They really struggles to meet both ends. A minority of the villagers have income from the land, however, they too are part of the culture and tradition and have no opportunity to provide quality education to their children in the locality. A few who can afford it send their children to the near by city schools. Each of these villages has a public primary school where children from 4 to 10 years of age get free mid-day meal. Children are registered in this schools to get mid-day meal. Quality of education in these schools is very low. Very few continue in higher school.

Though the government has appointed health workers, they hardly reach the villages. Each of these villages has three to four people running small medical shops. When the villagers get sick, they buy medicine from these shops. The medicine given by these shopkeepers further destroy their health. Most of the villagers cannot afford to go to city hospital where the expense is exuberant. A few who get treated end up in selling their piece of land to pay the hospital bills. Any added misfortune is taken in faith that it is their fate or the will of God !



35 young girls and women started tailoring classes. Their trainer ? One of our SHG member who took training from *Dugawar* project and now married to a man near *Rahrai* !

Without access to electricity they are stuck in the dark, denied of all the benefits and opportunities that come with power. Most of their houses are made out of mud and bricks. 90% of the villagers defecate in the open. No drainage in these cluster villages. Cast system is highly prevalent. An increasing number of families that have no land or no job migrate to big cities in search of labour. In the cities, they stay in slums or in open fields. It brings a big imbalance in the lives of their children who also fall in to child labour.

Child marriage has been an issue in India for a long time. Because of its root in traditional, cultural and religious practices, it has been a hard battle to fight. Besides that, marriages in India are often unregistered and it is really hard to get the real picture of the percentage of the child marriages. Girl children in this area get married at the age of 14-15. Married women are confined to their houses and have children even before they are adults. Majority of the men in these villages stay idle and are addicted to home made alcohol from sugar



Hamadin, opened a shop in her house to fight poverty. She is a pioneer among women.

cane. Women are badly treated and they have to work whole day to take care of their children and their family.

In short, we are in the middle of a community which cannot afford to build up a normal life within their given condition. Though the government of India has many project to help the villagers, hardly any reaches the grass root level and the villagers are ignorant about them. Step by step, we will be address-

ing many of these issues and take them forward. From our experience in *Dugawar*, we have seen the positive changes happening in a decade's time thanks to our projects.

Micro-Credit Program

Micro-credit through *Self Help Groups* is the best tool known to us to help people come out of their



A new beginning... Around 400 women have started learning to write. First step is to write their own name.



abject poverty. However, this process is challenging when the community we work with are very poor, because, for the system to work, they have to deposit a weekly amount of money. We take special steps to help those who are the poorest of the poor. In *Rahrai* region, the villagers already had some bad experience with the government run micro credit program where they got cheated by outsiders. Having had that experience, they were very suspicious about our motive. After being constantly in contact with them, we are gaining their confidence now.

To open bank account, 3 SHG members have to sign the document. Hardly anybody in the group is able to write her name or sign. Through *Adult Literacy Programs* we teach them to read and write. Hundreds of women participate in this program.

So far we have registered 34 SHG in the bank, with around 400 women. 15 of them have taken a loan of 10 thousand each from the bank to start shops and to buy buffalos. Small amounts are also taken from the group as inter-loaning program to meet their immediate needs.

Each SHG has a president and a secretary, who have to lead the group with the guidance of our field staff. Initially they need a lot of support and learning. Leadership training

programs are conducted for them regularly to empower them. Resource persons are invited to give them orientation classes. Bank people are often present in many of our common meeting to explain to them different possibilities they can benefit through SHG group. Our new school building is used as the centre for these activities.

Women's Day in Rahrai !

« It is first time that I hear about women's day, I feel so happy to be part of this group ».
« It looks like our world is opening up » and *« when we share our struggles, it gives us courage and strength to face it »* this are the spontaneous response of many women after the celebration !

Women who have been confined to their houses step out of their village and celebrate Women's day... It was a significant event for all of them ! There was a lot of enthusiasm.

On this occasion, we also invited the village leaders from around, so that they get to know about our work and our mission. A group of children and women from *Dugawar* project participated in the program and presented cultural program.

Hamidan and her husband *Sirajudin* have 6 children, two girls and 4 boys. Both girls and one son are married. They have only 0.3 acre



Empowering women. The first meetings in the new St-Anthony's school of *Rahrai* were successful.



Training program for the village women has already started in the newly built class rooms. The construction work of the ground floor is at the final stage.

land. Her husband goes out to do manual work with her older sons. *Hamadin* is the first person who came forward asking to take a loan of Rs.10000 from the bank through SHG and start a shop in her house. She is happy with the shop. There are many others who have started different income generation activities in these villages.

A group of 40 women started their tailoring training for two months in our school building.

St-Anthony's School, Rahrai

St. Anthony's School Rahrai is ready to open its door to the children of the region! The well coordinated work of the contractor, architect and our field supervisor made this work progress efficiently in 10 months time ! The ground floor has administrative block and 8 class rooms which will be enough to accommodate 320 students. We expect this 8 class rooms to be enough for the first two years and

eventually we will have to get the first floor ready to accommodate children starting with the academic year 2018.

However, the accommodation for the teaching staff from out station is one of our concerns. Houses in the villages don't have flush toilets and the surroundings are very dirty. At present we plan to convert one or two class rooms as dormitory until we have a better provision.

Transportation for children from remote villages is another concern. We plan to hire one mini bus and eventually find a more reliable solution.

This year the school will welcome children in Nursery, LKG, UKG & Class 1. Since the locality doesn't have children whom we can admit in higher classes the admission will be limited up to class 1. The admission process has been started from the beginning of march.



The Prime minister *Narendra Modi* has openly recognized that, for a country which aspires for superpower status, lack of toilets is an enduring shame. He had promised, « *Toilets first, Temples later* » and initiated different project to promote toilets.

« *An elderly woman of 104 years who stays in a remote village, does not watch TV or read papers, but the message of building toilets under clean India mission somehow reached her. She sold off her goats to build toilets at home and also encouraged others from the village to build toilets,* » Modi said. To build toilets at her residence, she had sold-off her 8-10 goats and then urged villagers to build lavatories too.

In the 7 villages in the Rahrai area, where we are working now, only 10 % have toilets. Most of the villagers defecate in open. One of our main target is to improve the situation.