

Experiences with Tuver Dal Project

Swati & Michael, Juna Mozda, April 1993

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Juna Mozda

Dear friends,

It has been another nine months of interesting experiences here. Our lives are very close to the nature - we feel it most when they are guided by change of seasons. It has taken us longer to send you this letter/report than we thought. In the last nine months Michael has had two severe attacks of malaria. Also, we have had a great flow of guests during November to February. These took a lot of our energy and time.

As always there is a lot to say this time too but to put it in one sentence: it is wonderful being here. The news of violence from Bosnia and parts of India makes us concerned and sad. We pray and hope for peace from deep in our hearts.

Wishing you all a peaceful 1993,

yours,



A Good Monsoon

The extension to our house had no roof-tiles yet. We tried very hard for the indigenous (homemade) roof-tiles but we were not able to find any. Before we could buy roof-tiles from the market, rains started and lasted for 90 hours at a stretch. After staying away for over 20 days, rains started again. Most of the crops were quite good, though maize suffered a bit with too much water. We worked quite a bit in the fields in monsoon this year. Michael also learned to till the land with a pair of bullocks.

A lot of land in the forest does not grow any fodder, only a leguminous plant that the cattle do not eat. So we tried to plant a type of grass which has very good soil holding properties (anti-erosion). But the seed we received was probably spoiled as the seeds on experimental plot also did not grow. We also gave people some mango and lemon saplings. Together with a group of children we planted seeds of about eight varieties of vegetables on the borders of the fields and so this year people from our hamlet and in about seven other villages had more vegetables than usual. Next monsoon we plan to give more saplings and various seeds as there was a good response.

Because of heavy rains in the beginning (when there were not many plants to hold the topsoil), a lot of topsoil was washed away and the traditional bunds to prevent soil-loss broke. Even in heavy rains we saw young and old people working to repair the broken bunds. This prompted us to think on what could be done to improve the traditional bunds and to make them more effective. More about this in our next report.

Health Activities

We could motivate a local young man to undergo primary health training so that he can also treat some patients when we are absent. In the beginning he was quite enthusiastic about the training, however as there is no regular flow of patients and that he is a teenager, it is quite difficult for him to be regular. We are trying to work out a system by which we can regularise primary health care.

We underwent further training at ARCH (Mangrol) on commonly occurring diseases in children and women. This helped a lot in expanding the range of diseases we could treat and to properly identify patients to be referred to hospitals.

We also organised a one day diagnostic camp to find the real ailments of patients we could not treat. Three doc-

tors and health workers came from ARCH. It was very helpful for the people as 26 patients with chronic illnesses could be treated.

One of our problems, probably faced by all such workers, is that often patients expect miracle treatments that would cure the illness within hours, otherwise they seem to mistrust us! In such cases we do try health education.

With Children Here

In June '92 we began with story-telling, songs and painting, together with playing games regularly. Like all children, the children here enjoy stories very much. When we have guests children will not let them go without a story or two and a song of course! Drawing, we noticed they did not like very much, but painting they do. For two months they also came to study, but it was too much for them after six hours in school.

As the children also have a special task to perform in everyday life, it is difficult to have more time to play, to read, to learn other things than "normal" for them. There has to be a balanced schedule where they can also help their parents as well as learn something new. Sometimes we think that only if they stop going to school they will have a lot more time to really "learn". We have also started discussing with the schoolteachers whether Swati can go to the school once or twice a week and do some extracurricular activities with the children. Another thought is to go with the children wherever they are going (in the forest and have some programmes there). But we haven't been able to spare so much time so far.

Tuver Dal Project

Like many other crops the yield of pigeon peas (tuver) was good in our area. As the harvesting began we could see up to 20 bullock carts a day of peas going to Dediapada to sell. We had seen the labour they put into growing these peas as well as care they had taken to grow this crop as it is a special food for them. These peas are organically grown

and of indigenous variety. So for us (not to mention the people) they were more than just 'peas'. Because of our experience in Mangrol, where Swati helped coordinate a cooperative that processed pigeon peas, we knew that it was viable to process peas with local labour and sell the dal (final product). We tried to tell some of the neighbouring farmers that if they would process peas and give us dal, we would market them and farmers would get at least Rs.16.00 per kilo (the peas then fetched around Rs.9.50 per kilo in Dediapada). But this sounded too far-fetched and alien concept to them. So as an experiment we bought 2000 kilos of peas at the highest rate they could get in Dediapada. Women from neighbouring houses processed the peas to make dal.

It was an educating experience for all of us. Neither the women nor we had made such dal before. We observed that the tribal culture, specially people who live in forest are not used to deal in minute details. It was quite difficult to train them to make dal comparable to urban market though some women tried their best. The project enhanced our friendship with some women. It also showed true nature of people. Their cooperation at times was just amazing, or sometimes just the opposite. This type of work is appropriate for women with small children. They told us it was good because they could earn something together with looking after their children and being at home.

Out of 2000 kilos of pigeon peas, 1340 kilos was dal. As we also managed to sell other by-products as cattle-feed etc. the project was economically viable. Seeing this some old men of the village said, "We will not let a single bag of peas go out of our village next year."

Other Activities

As more people know about us, we are being involved in more instances of anticorruption. We pursue only those for which people are prepared to be active. Right now we have one such incident and we are seeking the right way to deal with

it. We feel that going to court should be used as a last resort, before that all possibilities of discussion and mutual agreement should be explored. Sometimes we fail to understand, why even here, people who are at an advantage cheat their own.

In our previous report we had written about the possibility of irrigation and whether we should initiate it. Many of our friends responded to our dilemma. Thank you very much for actively sharing your ideas with us. Whenever we talked to farmers who had the possibility to irrigate their fields, their reply was positive. So we had a meeting with all the concerned farmers and we discussed that we would bring a diesel pump which would be available on rent and the maintenance would be generated from the rent and that people would have to bring their own pipes. At the end of second meeting it was agreed upon that the people could raise only half the pipe investment and we would arrange for a loan for the other half. However we also began getting a feeling that some of people's questions about the yield, profitability, sustainability of irrigation were not satisfactorily answered. So the people decided not to invest in pipes and to go for irrigation, though they had the money. We agreed and decided not to go ahead with the proposal though we had already received a used pump from a well-wisher.

We feel that apart from unanswered questions, the people do not probably need the irrigation so much - so they did not want to risk investing.

A young man from the village learnt to use sewing machine. He has learned to mend and sew some simple things. Now he mends clothes of villagers and earns a little.

Another young man learnt embroidery from Swati. He has started doing it quite well. We plan to send him for further training and help market things he embroiders. Would you like to get something embroidered?

We spend about two to three months making cards every year. This depends

on the number we can sell. This is part of our bread-labour. Tell us if you want some cards.

In the last nine months we also spent considerable time outside Mozda taking part in various activities: in May we attended a training camp for trainers in Vedchhi. We participated in a youth camp at Moral Rearmament Center in Panchgani. It was interesting to see how the friends at MRA tried to emphasise the importance of values in life to the youth. In June we took part in a conference called 'India—I Care' also organised by MRA. People from all over the country met together to discuss and understand what each one could do to care for our country.

In July we were invited to join the executive committee of Sarvodaya Mandal of Gujarat. Our group of friends was given responsibility to coordinate the committee on TransNational Corporations (TNCs).

August brought another meeting at district level to discuss the dreams we all have about future society and how we can go about working to achieve that. One of the major outcomes of the meeting was a decision to work on water harvesting, soil conservation and other such projects which would have a long term positive environmental impact.

We went to the Gir forest to attend a gathering of like-minded friends working on similar issues all over Gujarat. It is always a nice time together catching up with each other every year. We discuss and try to help each other if there is any problem.

In November, Michael attended a youth camp organized by Gujarat Sarvodaya Mandal to talk about the experience of socially responsible work and why we choose to do it.

In February as a part of a group of about thirty activists we went to Surat—the worst affected city in Gujarat during the December riots. A citizen's committee was already doing peace work. We felt responsible for what had happened. The group tried to make efforts to maintain peace that still did not seem natural

and wanted to help bring back the goodwill and friendliness that actually existed—albeit suppressed by fear.

We went to a small town of North Gujarat (Chanasma) to campaign against TNCs. As a part of a group of eight people we talked to shop-owners, women, school children and other people from all walks of life. As a result of three days of work 75 individuals and three shop-owners agreed not to use or sell soaps and toothpaste manufactured by TNCs.

Thoughts and Experiences to Share

We had to go out of Mozda a lot because of various reasons. It has been a disturbance for the work here and our minds. The days when we are here are the ones we enjoy the most. We feel more at home with the way of life as the days go by. Since last October we have had a lot of guests. It is nice to know that so many people are interested in our activities/lives. At the same time, this has kept us so busy that it has been difficult for us to keep up with the people and work here. But we also realize that if we were to stay here and not go out much and not have friends visiting us, that would also be an imbalance.

We were caught unawares by a small peaceful action in the village. There is a public distribution system (PDS) for essential commodities. A man who had a

shop in Mozda for many years managed to get the local retail outlet for PDS. He had a history of exploiting and misbehaving with the villagers. So people refused to accept government's decision. People of Mozda and Bal (adjacent village) did a complete boycott, nobody bought anything whatsoever. Some people nearly went hungry as last year's crop was not so good.

One fine morning nearly thirty men had gathered in front of our hut. We had no idea why. Upon asking, they told us the story of the ration shop (PDS) and asked to write an application to the district administration to change the man. We did so as per their "orders" and posted the application. To our surprise the arrangement was changed within a fortnight. People's action was successful. This incident was a pleasant surprise educating us about people's strength.

The days when people did not bring grains from the ration shop were really very difficult for some families. This prompted us to bring some rice from Baroda and sell it at a subsidized rate. We were glad that grain merchants' association of Baroda donated some rice. We bought some more and sold it to people in need. We took help of village people in managing this. People were happy to have this facility as during summer the rates of foodgrain in Dediapada reach the sky!

