Breaking the *Daridrata Chakra* Building Capabilities of Vulnerable Groups in Odisha

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Introduction

Identifying root causes of poverty, and building capabilities of people are central rights-based activities to break through the daridrata chakra, or the cycle of impoverishment. In this paper, we analyse root causes of poverty identified by non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers in Odisha, and capability-building activities adopted by NGOs to alleviate vulnerabilities associated with poverty.

Non-state organisations, and their active engagement in development activities, are crucial for people's rights to entitlements to become a reality. Scholars (Dreze 2002; Sen 2004; Sengupta 2007; Bebbington et al 2007; Nelson & Dorsey 2008) have discussed in detail the important role of non-state organisations in furthering the cause of a human rights' approach to development. Sen (2004) argues that human rights induce obligations on agents who are in a position to help, promote or safeguard the freedoms of human beings. Furthermore, "some recognised human rights are not ideally legislated, but are better promoted through other means, including public discussions, appraisal and advocacy" (Sen 2004: 319-320). Public discussions, which are unobstructed, and an interactive process, is possible in a political environment where a reasonably free flow of information and uncurbed opportunity to discuss differing points of view can be achieved. Such an environment, Sen contended can best flourish in democracies.

Elsewhere, Dreze (2002) argued that in spite of strong institutional foundations, an absence of public discussions on social issues can make a mockery of democracy. Public discussions are central to a robust democracy, and all agents with the capacity to support human rights must do so through advocacy, open discussions and information sharing. Society, according to

Sengupta (2007), consists of many interacting agents such as corporation, non-government organisations, community-based and faith-based organisations, women's groups, and international bodies, all of which are duty-bearers and share the obligation of the State to ensure rights of rights-holders. Furthermore, Sengupta argues that although the state is the primary duty-bearer, "it cannot deliver the right on its own without taking into account the actions of all concerned social agents" (2007: 329).

In our analysis of development activities undertaken by NGOs in Odisha, we have selected two rights-based development activities of NGOs, namely, identifying root causes of vulnerability of marginalised groups, and capability-building for empowerment. For a detailed discussion on a longer list of elements of rights-based approaches to development, refer to Uvin (2004), and Gready and Ensor (2005). The two development activities were chosen after a careful examination of the above-mentioned discourses on the basic elements of rights-based approaches to development. It was important to highlight why and how NGOs chose certain development activities based on their understanding of the root causes of vulnerabilities in the regions where they were working, and who the most vulnerable and marginal groups were. Once the marginal group, and the primary cause of its vulnerability, both, were identified, it was then possible for the NGO to initiate other rights-based development activities.

Selected non-government organizations

There were two aspects in the selection of NGOs for the study which were important for the study. One was the type of development intervention undertaken by the NGO which ranged from actions in response to a natural disaster, or development projects. The second was their geographical location in order to be able to cover rural and urban areas in the study.

The six state level NGOs selected for this study were Peoples Cultural Centre (PECUC), Right to Food Campaign (RtFC), Society for Women Action and Development (SWAD), Vasundhara, RUCHIKA, and Centre for Action Research and Documentation (CARD). RUCHIKA works with urban slum-dwellers (also termed as villages of Salia Sahi, and Dumduma). Vasundhara is based in Bhubaneswar and works on issues related to forest rights with forest-based communities across the state. CARD works with the women in the villages of Tangi block of Khorda district, and SWAD works with communities in Satyabadi and Gop blocks of Puri district. PECUC has been engaged in

processes of empowering women for two decades through networking amongst different communities across Khorda district. The Odisha Campaign office was set up by the independent Commissioners appointed by the Supreme Court of India in Bhubaneswar, Khorda district with the aim to review and monitor the implementation of the provisions under the food entitlement programs in the whole state. In addition, interviews with development practitioners working with international NGOs (especially Action Aid and Practical Action) provided significant information on how rights-based activities were operationalised by their partner local NGOs in the selected districts.

The primary causes of vulnerability differed with the context in which an NGO was working, and it ranged from landlessness, lack of access to basic public services such as potable water, toilets and sewage disposal, child abandonment, an absence of conflict resolution bodies at village level, to social inequalities based on caste and gender. The ultimate aim of the development intervention of the NGOs was to build capabilities of the vulnerable poor so that they would be able to undertake the responsibilities of the tasks themselves in the near future.

Urban slums

As a result of poverty, and landlessness, there is an increase in seasonal migration of the poor in Odisha. Most poor migrants travel to neighbouring states with the help of contractors to work as brick kiln labourers and on construction sites. The seasonal migrants are some of the poorest and the most vulnerable, and according to Action Aid program officer Nayak, they bear a triple burden being landless, migrants, and susceptible to exploitation by unscrupulous human traffickers. Others such as program coordinator of Jal-Jungle-Jameen, Sahu said that if the seasonal migrants were given land rights, it would be the first step in addressing the problems of bonded labour or selling children to human traffickers to feed the rest of the family.

Evidence from the field suggested that the main reasons for a move to urban slums are: the possibility of daily wage labour; immediate cash payment for work which may not be the case in villages; facilities such as electricity in urban areas; and respect for labour compared to villages where caste and class restrict poor families from engaging in traditionally different labour. According to RUCHIKA community mobiliser Senapati, in 2000, RUCHIKA surveyed the living conditions of slum dwellers in Dumduma, Kargil basti, Salia Sahi, Maali Sahi and Shikharchandi bastis, and concluded that one of the primary

reasons of vulnerability to communicable diseases was open defecation due to a lack of sanitation facilities.

> The State has no welfare programs on water and sanitation facilities for slum dwellers similar to those in rural areas. It is difficult to initiate and maintain toilets, sanitation and water projects without continuous funding, which leaves poor slum dwellers vulnerable to poor undignified living conditions. This is especially challenging for women. (Senapati)

A second reason for being vulnerable in urban slums was the fear of constant eviction from urban lands by private and state agencies. Discussing the complexities involved in owning land in urban slums, RUCHIKA program officer Dwivedi said that although landownership was crucial for poor people for survival in urban slums, it was unfeasible for the state government to grant land pattas to everyone who demanded it.

> Land ownership is a complex issue in Odisha, and the increasing number of slum dwellers, for example, from 50,000 families to 75,000 families in 2010 has made it difficult for the State to concede to their demands. However, the ownership of land is central to food security and well-being for poor urban slum families, and they are demanding patta for the land where they are living. And why not? After all they, not the Sarkar, cleared the forests and settled there. (Dwivedi)

In urban slums, capability-building activities thus ensured people's engagement in the construction of roads, management of the waste-management centres, filling and repairing water tanks, administering sewage and drainage systems. In some cases, poor communities themselves were encouraged by NGOs such as RUCHIKA to invest a small amount of money to maintain and cover the costs of repair to infrastructure that was essential to their daily lives. Through contributions of materials wort0 Rs.1400 from the community, the construction of toilets in the primary school in Salia Sahi slum with an overhead rainwater harvesting tank was completed. Following the success of the project, the 60 families residing in the slum expressed an interest in having piped water to their homes, and collected Rs.1000 from each family to have taps and pipes linked to their homes from a communally owned water tank in the slum. According to RUCHIKA development practitioner Rashmi, the residents also pay a sum of Rs.20 per month per

household as a contribution towards the maintenance and usage charges of the water services. In 2007-2008, a committee was established by the women of the local Self Help Group (SHG) to take overall responsibility for decision-making on all matters related to the maintenance of the water tank.

According to Dwivedi, building capacities also involved training community members to repair and maintain hand-pumps, water tanks and use the tool box, to use sensors which signal the level of water in the tank well in advance before it is empty. In 2010-2011, RUCHIKA organised a series of workshops to help communities comprehend the complex nature of building and maintaining sanitation and waste disposal systems (see Box 1). The workshops emphasised good hygiene practices, and the reasons behind the spread of common diseases.

> RUCHIKA was instrumental in initiating discussions on the links between sanitation and health of the slum-dwellers. An important factor was the availability of running water, and building capacities of the community in technical repairs. With the help of our donor Practical Action, we have been able to train locals as technicians and do other odd jobs themselves. (Dwivedi)

Box 1

Dukhini Hasada is a Santhal tribeswoman from Mayurbhanj district, and had been a resident of SaliaSahi slum for the last 27 years. In the initial years, she contends that life was very difficult because her family was displaced from the forest lands, and as a migrant living in the urban slums which were not recognised as a legitimate homestead grounds by the State. In 1995, she joined a local self-help group (SHG) which the NGO Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD) had initiated to support women's income-generation efforts through savings of Rs.20 per month to be able to fund for immediate family needs. Eventually, through her perseverance, she became the president of many SHGs, and of the SHG federation of (145 SHGs), and maintained their cash register. She organised women locally for many social causes including the anti-arrack events. She also became a social worker, stood for elections to become Ward Member of the slum, and eventually bought 5 guntha land in the slum, and has given many homes on rent for Rs.1500 per month. She has also constructed public toilets in her block of small houses, and is vigilant about the water tank overhead which was constructed with the financial and technical support of

RUCHIKA.We are trained to repair taps, tube wells and water tank leakages. The slum owns a toolkit box for repairs, and is easily accessible to us if there is a breakdown. (Hasada)Challenges remain as the land Hasada owns, and rents out to tenants, belongs to the state government, namely, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation, and she does not have patta or deeds to the land, according to Senapati. Other slum dwellers in Salia Sahi have also made written requests to the government for homestead plot on the land they were already settled in. Training and enabling vulnerable people to identify, and find solutions to, problems strengthens peoples' decision-making capabilities, as well as provides a sense of ownership over communal resources.

Natural disasters

Natural disasters such as floods and cyclones in coastal Odisha impact upon the vulnerability of poor landless communities. Most NGO activities in the coastal regions were initiated in response to the devastation followed by the 1999 Super Cyclone. In their activities towards building disaster risk reduction (DRR) capabilities of villagers facing floods, PECUC field officer Upma narrated how their first reaction to the 1999 cyclone was to dam the overflowing river and create shelters for the displaced people. This was done by involving women's self-help groups to dam the river with sacks of sand and planting fruit trees. Shelters were created in common spaces such as schools and panchayat offices where meals were communally cooked and shared. The second concern was to create alternative livelihoods especially for the landless as those with land could go back to farming eventually and make themselves food-secure. Landlessness in many cases led many families to start trucking, and get involved in other local businesses. Panchayat ward member Archana Sahu said that her family had wished to get involved in plantation work but the Horticulture department asked for land pattas which they didn't possess. As a result, her family begun looking for alternative sources of livelihood, and members of the extended family got involved in setting up cycle shops, paan (betel nut) shop and truck loading business.

> We were ruined by the cyclone. When the Horticulture department demanded proof of land ownership, we realised we had none, and therefore had to figure out how to earn a livelihood. We were devastated but slowly got involved in small businesses locally. (Sahu)

Other international NGOs such as Concern Worldwide intervened by building local capacities, providing a link to government development activities,

and coordinating with all stakeholders to sustain its efforts in DRR (Bhatt e al 2010). It partnered with the Odisha Institute of Medical Research and Health Services in an 18 months' project to strengthen disaster preparedness of panchayats in Cuttack district. 300 villages and 60 SHGs were trained in First Aid use, and 10,000 saplings were planted to counter a cyclone impact.

Describing their strategy to facilitate capability-building of communities in Satyabadi block, SWAD official Bandhu said that building mutual trust amongst villagers, and with SWAD, was their foremost concern. Trust was achieved through the formation of governance forums, and discussions within the forums. According to farmer Laxmidhar Palle, through the meetings in the governance forums, members began a dialogue with each other on their basic needs, and with SWAD, to find innovative solutions together for increasing food security and to find long-term solutions to reduce impact of annual floods.

> When the annual floods came, we had to wade through the water for 2 kilometers at least to reach a dry area. The nearest safe space at Balibaata village used to get very crowded, and with the help of SWAD, we decided that we needed to build local community shelters from incessant rains, cyclones, and raise our homesteads to higher levels to protect against floods. In these governance meetings of the Forum planned by SWAD, we also decided we must have more than one crop a year to increase food security, and therefore it was decided to have a rabi crop. (Palle)

Disaster management activities of SWAD meant enabling people to cope with annual floods, lessen losses incurred by floods, and learn to be resilient to natural disasters. In terms of activities, it meant preparing them to evacuate to safer spaces such as raised mounds of earth, high lands, and create floaters made of plants. It also meant, according to Bandhu, that there will be a plan to deal with post-disaster impact which was shared with the communities through model demonstrations, plan preparation and implementation on a participatory basis by taking villagers into confidence, and ensuring their interventions were village specific, and in accordance to what the priorities outlined by the communities. For example, in Sakhigopal, the stems of sturdier plants were tied together as rafts, and kept in homes for use during floods to enable people and their cattle to keep afloat. In schools such as Padmapur Prathamic Primary

School (PPS), based on their meetings with the school authorities, SWAD initiated planting of Bangeria plants to promote soil conservation and lessen erosion during and after floods.

> People should know, be able to voice their needs, and their own level of involvement. Simple steps such as raised mounds were created in the villages where people and cattle could perch themselves during floods. Common community spaces such as schools and panchayat offices were also built on higher land patches for purposes of shelter during long term floods, or cyclones. (Bandhu)

In Gop block, the issue of potable water was a central concern for the communities because the annual floods led to an increase in groundwater salinity, and made it muddy. Through detailed discussions and studies on feasibility, for instance in Gabadiha village, in response to village needs, SWAD initiated a lift-irrigation project. This was directed towards solving problems of irregular supply of electricity, drinking water, clearing the drainage system, supply water to the closest points to people's homestead land and to the school building. The proposal and the feasibility study were submitted to the Odisha Lift Irrigation department through the gram panchayat of Gabadiha village, which gave the responsibility to the community. In Achutapur Kandisahi village, SWAD tackled the issue of salinity and traces of iron in drinking water by first organizing a village meeting and then reaching a solution whereby the villagers dug a well with a depth of 40ft to access clean water. In another instance, under the Sujaldhara Project for accessing drinking water for Satyabadi village, people dug bore-wells, and piped the water to water points built in common spaces (instead of connecting it to homes) where households collect water according to their needs.

One of the important characteristics of sustainable and capable communities is being able to generate finances locally with the ultimate aim of becoming self-reliant. Livelihoods interventions are crucial in disaster preparedness. With the help of SWAD, Sakhigopal village community created the grama kotha Fund (village building funds) which enables them to collect funds to clean their ponds, plant coconut plants on community land for local use, and organise cultural activities to keep the community together. The gram kotha fund also mobilizes farmers to plant lentils like muga daali, biri, and kolata between paddy seasons to improve food security in the lean season and

to cope with food needs during heavy monsoons. According to farmer Palle, the community decided to invest in coconut plants which is native to the region and is also widely cultivated by the community, by planting it alongside paddy crops. The wide palm leaves of the coconut plant are used for thatched roofs, fodder and fuelwood, and its fruit shell has varied uses such as capturing moisture and as protection against silting on river banks.

Caste-based vulnerabilities

In parts of Odisha, vulnerability of the poor had a caste dimension. In Sakhigopal village of Gop Block, for example, all land is owned by Brahmins (high caste), and the farming is done by the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Caste (OBC) groups. Sakhigopal is close to the temple town of Puri, and land around this town is owned by the priestly caste (Brahmins) which was given to them for services rendered to the Jagannath temple by the erstwhile Rulers of Puri. According to Bandhu, land ownership by the dominant priestly caste also has implications on access to water points, wells, agricultural subsidies, political power, and social status which meant that the lower castes were discriminated against. Furthermore, the proximity to the sea makes it vulnerable to the impact of the super-cyclones, especially flooding (as occurred in 1999, 2012 and 2013). For the SC and OBC communities, flooding meant no work, and thus led to migration in search for livelihoods. Community mobiliser Behera said that SWAD worked at two levels to address vulnerabilities, namely, enabling communities to be flood resilient, and challenging prevalent caste related land ownership and social inequalities.

> Being landless and belonging to the lower caste was a double-whammy for those affected annually by floods, and periodically by cyclones. (Behera)

Grassroots workers in urban slums contend that rural areas are still governed by social taboos revolving around caste, class, gender and ethnic orientations, and this can be challenging for poor families. One of the chief motivating factors for the lower caste communities' migration to the urban slum is to escape caste-based discriminations. Citing the example of Mochisaahi (cobblers' slum), Ruchika worker Rashmi argued that the cobbler community decided to shift from the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh to live in dignity, and earn a decent living. While traditionally, making and mending shoes was a lower caste occupation, the cobblers decided to migrate to spaces where caste will not restrict their livelihood options.

> On the one hand, moving to urban lands to get rid of caste-labels was progressive, whereas on the other hand, living in situations of absolute poverty was an anti-thesis to such progress. However, the mochis' seemed to prefer the move to slums anyway. (Rashmi)

Caste-related vulnerabilities have many dimensions. In areas such as in Tangi block, vulnerability intersects between caste- and gender-based discrimination. For example, in Badapokhara gram panchayat of Tangi block, a member of Ma Nagajhara SHG referred to the alcohol sellers by their caste, i.e., as Khandayat people, selling local arrack illegally in their panchayat. The women of the SHG came together and searched for the hidden arrack-making apparatus and bottles of arrack, which were eventually found by the women in the local pond. In another instance, the caste of the men involved in the illegal arrack business was given prominence by the women in group discussions to discuss its violent impact on the women in their villages. According to the CARD official Prabha, the Sabara tribe, having moved from the forests to the plains, have made ganja (cannabis) farming their livelihood, and sold it to the villagers in the plains. Although the SHGs and the panchayat leaders have been successful in stopping the cropping of ganja, and have shut down most of the local ganja outlets, the illegal selling of ganja continues.

> It is interesting to note, however, that the SHG women belonged to the Other Backward Castes (OBC), Khandayat caste are lower castes, and the Sabaras' are Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities. The impact of the anti-arrack actions taken by the OBC women meant loss of livelihoods for the lower castes and the STs which may have had greater impacts on the women of those communities. That is unknown to us because we have not looked into it. Thus in many instances, the possibilities of reinforcing existing social biases and inequalities is prevalent. (Prabha)

In the narratives discussed above, caste played an important role in the lives of the women. The blame for gender-based violence, in terms of being physically abused by their drunk husbands, was laid at the doorstep of men of other castes. While recognizing the importance of addressing GBV as a root cause of vulnerability poor women face, this study directs attention to a related issue, that of livelihoods of forest-based scheduled tribes [Sabara tribe in this

case] which have been displaced multiple times rendering them vulnerable to caste and ethnic discriminations in the plains.

Vulnerable children

In cities such as Bhubaneswar, marginal social groups include children abandoned by families due to extreme poverty, and migration. Drawing attention to the need to invest in protecting, promoting and capability-building of abandoned children, RUCHIKA decided to rescue, feed, and rehabilitate abandoned children.

> To kill hunger, and escape from their living conditions, many abandoned children are addicted to a glue-like substance which is used to patch and mend punctured cycle tyres because this substance gives a nasha (high). Rehabilitating abandoned and orphaned children by providing safe spaces, meals, and livelihood skills is one of the ways this dependence on substance abuse can be tackled. (Dwivedi)

The vulnerability of orphaned children is influenced by attitudes and social taboos attached to rehabilitating abandoned children. RUCHIKA faced many problems in housing the rescued children in different localities of the city because social taboos attached to orphaned and destitute children.

> There are many difficulties in rehabilitating orphaned children, and social attitudes of ordinary people is one such challenge. In 16 years of operation, the Shelter has moved 17 times because neighbours did not want to have street children living amongst their colonies. RUCHIKA is working to transform the attitudes of ordinary people to become empathetic. (Dwivedi)

After identifying migration and abandonment as a cause of vulnerability of poor street children, RUCHIKA started "Platform Schools" at railway stations. RUCHIKA started 11 such schools, and initiated six crèche programs in the urban slums of Bhubaneswar with an aim to facilitate a safe environment, encourage children to join their classes, and to provide 'running shelters' (open shelters) for those who are willing to stay. According to Dwivedi, there was a critical need for a child-rights-based intervention, because the poor, abandoned children were susceptible to different kinds of abuse, and therefore the first

step in the capability-building of such children was to rescue them and rehabilitate them.

> Abandoned and orphaned children are poor, hungry and are traumatised by their circumstances. Many children are addicted to a glue-like substance used to patch and mend punctured cycle tyres because it kills hunger and gives a nasha (a high). Rehabilitation of abandoned and orphaned children by providing safe spaces, food, and livelihood skills is one of the ways this dependence on substance abuse is tackled. (Dwivedi)

RUCHIKA established remedial schools to build capabilities of reading and writing for orphaned children where drop-outs from schools continued their tuitions in subjects such as English, Maths and Science, with funding from various donors. Citing individual cases, Dwivedi described how a boy called Sushant used to sing and beg on the streets till 1990 when he was given shelter and vocational training as a bell boy and room boy in hotels. He was later trained to drive vehicles, and is now a driver for the UK development agency DFID, and saved enough to start his own taxi service. Another boy, Giridhar Rane, was brought to the Running Shelter following the 1999 cyclone where he was provided with food and shelter, and he was able to use the educational facilities provided by the NGO, and eventually joined the Indian Air Force as an officer. A disabled child, Jaani Dushman, with third degree burns was left at the doors of the Shelter. Under the Rehabilitation Scheme of RUCHIKA, he trained in gardening and cane chair making, and is now a gardener at Mayfair Hotel which is a 5-Star hotel in Bhubaneswar. Now, he owns a house and has been able to finance plastic surgery of his face. Another boy opened a stationery shop in Puri town, and according to Dwivedi, such rehabilitation schemes are rights' based as they build capabilities through facilitating rights to education and livelihood of poor destitute children, most of whom have been rag pickers and beggars.

> Sometimes, poor families leave their children at the doorsteps of the Shelter. Any number of reasons can drive poverty-stricken families to take such a harsh step. Our interest lay in providing protection to these abandoned children. (Dwivedi)

> There is a daridrata chakra (a cycle of impoverishment) because lack of food makes people migrate, and migration in turn leads

to further impoverishment and denial of basic rights to their children. (Mishra)

Gender-based vulnerabilities

Interviews with NGO workers direct attention to the multiple forms of gender-based vulnerabilities. This section analyses women-specific issues which grassroots NGO workers were actively engaged in during field research.

NGO PECUC began working on gender-based violence in the 1990s, based on the belief that the root cause of vulnerability which women in Balianta block faced was their inability to voice their concerns. Once women were able to voice their concerns in public spaces, they will be able to tackle other socio-economic problems. The founder-director of PECUC, Anuradha Mohanty said she envisioned a community where women could sit at par with men in meetings at panchayat levels and where a woman could safely raise her voice.

> The task was to mobilize women to collectively demand their entitlements, and therefore we decided to organize them around issues such as domestic violence, conflict resolution, sharing child care responsibilities, and community governance. (Mohanty)

An important step in advocacy on GBV, for PECUC field coordinator Upma, was the organisation of the first monthly Special Mahila Gram Sabha on 29-30th November 2013 in the Jagannathpur Panchayat of Balianta block. At this meeting, according to field coordinator, Upma, village women collectively, for the first time, demanded that the state government must step-up its action against gender-based violence such as falling child sex ratios, female foeticides, and dowry related deaths. Their demands ranged from deployment of women officials at local police stations to ensuring that free medicines were made available to people. Collective leadership and collective responsibilities of women were primary strategies, used by PECUC, to reinforce social dignity and to challenge existing inequalities.

> 800 women congregated to discuss and take action on gender based violence, female-foeticide, female specific health challenges, and dowry demands. They put forward the daavi/ prastaav that they wanted female police officers in the local police station, and a female Protection Officer at the Block Office. The women also demanded that free medicines be

> made available in the local hospitals, especially for women, and the list of these medicines be hung in the walls of the panchayat office for people's information and benefit. (Upma)

Discussing in detail on the reasons behind setting up PECUC, Anuradha said that one of the chief tasks PECUC decided to undertake was to support women's need to generate income for their families, especially in the aftermath of the cyclone. Economic empowerment of women through formation of self-help groups was an important strategy to achieve empowerment.

> PECUC came into existence to enable women to understand self-respect, to make women self-sustainable by giving goats and supporting vegetable farming for own consumption and selling the surplus, to enable women to deal with financial debts, negotiate less interest rates on loans, to take responsibility and get involved in cyclone relief activities instead of waiting for state help, to enable women to participate in local panchayat elections, and encourage them to participate in the local palli sabhas. (Mohanty)

Self-Help-Groups are used by the state and the NGOs in development activities for communities for spreading information on services and entitlements amongst the people. Getting the women involved in advocacy through trainings on government guidelines and policies related to infrastructure services and relating it the wider SHG federation at the block level is one of the strategies used by SWAD (SWAD 2012). NGO PECUC encouraged and enabled women in Balianta block to form self-help groups in order to generate income to help each other during times of needs such as weddings, hospital expenses etc. According to key informant, Upma, the positive impact of PECUC's advocacy is evident in the in the fact that the Women and Child Development department decided to grant subsidies and contracts to self-help groups created by PECUC because of the sustainability of those groups. Party politics was also a reason behind state support for SHGs, and PECUC made the groups aware of the politics around funds.

> Sarkaar is running after the SHGs we created in the 1990s to be able to showcase them as examples of empowerment. For instance, the Maa Tarini Nari Shakti Swasahajya Goshti (MTNSSG) in Khunkar hamlet was created by PECUC, but now funded by the State under the Mission Shakti scheme.

> An added bonus was that during elections, the MTNSSG members received Rs.5000 each from the current Chief Minister before elections. It was common practice for political parties to tie up with different SHGs for votes by giving monetary donations under the guise of economic development funds. It was an added bonus for the women, an incentive to do better. (Mohanty)

According to CARD director, Manju Prabha, gender based violence was most visible in the practice of female foeticide, which had led to a declining sex ratio in the Tangi area. The preference for a male child by many parents had led to the practice of sex determination tests, and female foeticides. Therefore, CARD directed its strategies towards changing attitudes of families towards raising a girl child to tackle gender based discriminations. One such strategy to tackle gender-based violence was to link with international celebrations of women's rights. For instance, the chief motive behind organizing the One Billion Rising (Umadte Sau Karod) event in Tangi in February 13th, 2013 was to link with women's organisations internationally to raise local awareness on issues of gender-based violence (GBV), especially female foeticide, child trafficking and dowry-related deaths. CARD had invited young school girls who argued for their right to life, education and employment in a public debate. At the event, the sub-collector of Tangi block furnished the numbers of dowry related deaths of newly married women and argued for the need to educate young girls and see girls as kanyaratna (girl gems), stressing the importance of investing in the education of the girl-child instead of investing in dowry collection.

An analysis of this submission shows that CARD gave importance to the finer details of their advocacy such as how and when issue-based events should be organized in order to have maximum impact on the community. According to Prabha, it was important to time the One Billion Rising public event at 2pm because the women would have completed their morning household tasks, the young girls had finished school hours, and the bazaar area was quieter. It was also a low cost meeting because public space was used. A marquee was used to provide shade, as well as created a landmark in the bazaar area. As observed during field visit, the event attracted a lot of attention from the passersby and the school children returning home after school. All women panchayat leaders participated in the event although it took them more than an hour to walk from their villages to participate in the event. The event had

numerable slogans on combating gender-based violence, songs stressing the importance of the girl child, and rewards for school girls for their achievements in sports and other activities in the local school. I found it significant to include such details of CARD activities to reflect upon the details which NGOs have are involved in while organizing an event. CARD was also engaged in conducting in trainings for landless women to find courage to speak in their meetings with tehsildaars for access to land pattas, according to CARD activist Giti.

SHGs have led women to become economically self-reliant, and has also led many to get involved in local political processes such as panchayat elections. Many others have joined the government administration as anganwadi workers.

> Mulyapari re aasi jaayi thantu jadi eh scheme na thanta. Ebe saahajya paauchu. Kichi sanchay karuchu [we would have become daily waged labourers if it weren't for this scheme. Now we get some help. We are saving]. (SHG member)

In the villages of Tangi block, most women panchayat leaders trace their entry into political forums to their prior memberships of self-help groups initiated by NGOs like CARD. According to Sarpanch Mina Behera, Jaripada GP and Kalakaleshwar GP of Tangi Block, both have all women panchayats since 2012, and most panchayat members have been members of Self Help Groups initiated by CARD. Linking the initial formative years of the Maa Tarini SHG when the women were unsure of their SHG activities to recent panchayat elections, Behera said that their beginnings were humble but it led to long-term transformation of the lives of the women in the group.

> We began with collecting a handful of rice as membership fees, and gradually collected cash (Rs.10 earlier, and now Rs. 100 per member annually) which enabled us to set up different businesses such as tailoring, pickle making, and other local food business. I remember when SHG Maa Gopaladev took a bank loan and bought goats to rear them for milk and other dairy products, but the goats died and they incurred heavy losses. However, we women never gave up. Maa Tarini SHG joined CARD in 2012, and has been actively participating in all its activities. I was a member of Maa Tarini SHG before becoming sabhamantri of the panchayat, and it is the active engagement in mahila goshti sahayaks (or SHGs) which has

provided me and my saathins the opportunity to understand
the process how to claim entitlements (Behera)

Discussions with CARD and panchayat members at Tangi raised the subject of the need for public toilets for women in rural areas. It was evident that through their political role in the local panchayats women found their voice, and courage to act collectively and demand state-funds for investing in gender-specific needs such as toilets and rest-houses. According to Sarpanch Behera, It also gave them the courage to act collectively against gender-based violence especially combating female foeticide. This is evident in the women-led panchayats specific demand to build toilets and rest houses.

We have decided to use the state government funds to build
two Rest Houses with latrines in each panchayat for the use
of women, and ensure these are safe for us to use when we
have to go to a different village for a meeting. Building rest
houses will mean that we do not have to travel back home
on the same night worrying about the night commute,
safety and tiredness. (Behera)

CARD is involved in creating sustainable women's livelihoods by encouraging poultry, goat and sheep rearing which has created valuable assets for the villages. Women have also been trained in alternative medicine practices using herbs, and have formed an organization, Satej. Satej runs a health clinic and has been able to check the spread of many local health problems like diarrhoea. The creation of livelihoods from locally available resources focuses on women's capability-building to generate income, and expand their capabilities to healthcare for immediate relief.

We have encouraged the plantation of fruit trees and sustainable
horticultural practices. For example, we have promoted
agricultural practices such as land plugging, seeding, use of
organic fertilizers and pesticides using fish tonic which have
enabled poor farmers to harvest crops on time. (Prabha)

CARD has been instrumental in forming women's groups and training them to stand for elections in the local panchayats. Trainings included confidence building exercises to articulate demands of communities in political forums as leaders of panchayats. The underlying motive that if women in rural areas are not trained in politics and administrative affairs, the constitutional

reservation of 50% of panchayat seats for women will become meaningless, according to CARD district coordinator. Evidence from the field shows that empowering women with political authority as panchayat leaders has led to an impact on specific gender-based violence issues such as female foeticide, and domestic violence arising out of excess consumption of local arrack (alcohol). For instance, the women leaders of Jaripada panchayat intervened and saved five female foetuses in 2012 through dialogue with the families of the pregnant women, and by reporting the errant clinic to the police authorities. In another incident of gender-based violence, in 2011, the women of Maa Tarini SHG got involved in an anti-arrack incident whereby they tied up the husband of one of their members as a warning to stop drinking and physically abusing his wife.

> Poor village women have been given constitutional rights to run village administration, and we think it is our primary duty to support them through trainings on what such a responsibility entails. (SHG member)

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed identifying root causes of poverty was a core concern of all non-governmental organisation workers. NGOs were specifically concerned with those sections of community that were marginalised by dominant groups. Root causes of poverty are contextual, complex and multi-dimensional. Food poverty, in urban slums, was combined with low levels of living conditions and this makes marginal communities such as migrant labourers more vulnerable to health risks. The vulnerabilities associated with children and women have been identified by other NGOs as more significant in their regions, and in need of long-term rights-based solutions. RUCHIKA focused on child rights to basic needs of food, health, safety and building capabilities to enable abandoned children a chance for a secure future. Evidence from the field points to multiple dimensions of caste related vulnerability of poor people in rural areas and in urban slums as well. In Tangi block, NGOs decided that the root cause of poverty was related to women's subjugation, female foeticide and gender-based violence. During the course of its development activities, the NGO discovered that the intersection of caste, tribe, and gender, complicated the issue of vulnerability. NGOs constantly discovered invisible links between different causes of vulnerabilities of marginal communities.

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