



# people of and PERSPECTIVES

From the CEO

## TAKING STOCK: WHAT WHY AND WHAT NOW

**A**ll journeys involve a degree of course correction. It's a good idea therefore, to take stock once in a while and see if, where one is going is in synch with where one wanted to go in the first place.

When Praxis was born in 1998, as a subsidiary of ActionAid (India) its reason for being was fairly clear: to promote participatory development in all spheres of human development. As years passed it evolved into an autonomous organisation with a cutting-edge knowledge of participatory tools and an equally sharp understanding of poverty-related issues.

But dynamics of the development sector, as in any other, change with time. Participatory development may have been a novel concept at the turn of the century, today happily no one argues its importance. Having seen the concept of participation come of age, we are now evolving our stand into one of right-based participation.

The poor and the marginalised must be included at all forums of development not as a matter of policy but because, as members of a democracy they have a right to be consulted on decisions that involve them. In fact we now have an internal initiatives division, which works in a non-consultancy mode with like-minded partners to further this belief

Over the year much has changed at Praxis. We are a larger organisation with offices not only in Patna and Delhi but Chennai as well. But what has not changed is our focus on taking the voices of the poor and the marginalised to relevant forums. We have now added impetus to this activity by opening a Praxis office in the UK. The purpose of Praxis UK is to bring the realities of south nearer to the North.

## 2005-2007 : A year of and for the people

We were engaged in several projects, sometimes professionally, sometimes wearing our activist hats. Here is a quick lowdown on the major projects that defined 2007 for us.

### Land mapping in Bihar

Land has been at the crux of inequity ever since man started equating it with power. Bihar, with its semi feudal make up, is in an unfortunate example of severe land-based disparity. 75% of the rural poor are landless, working on leased land and handing over more than half their gross output almost double of what is normally paid elsewhere.

There is little scope to question the system. Most of the land records dating back to before the independence, the bureaucracy consists of land owning gentry and what's more, the system itself is informal. There is very little scope therefore for the tenant to get legal protection. Centuries of ex-

ploitation has left the landless poor too weighed down by debts and poverty to have the strength to change their circumstances.

The state is in urgent need of political will to make the land reforms that exist on paper, account for something. Despite the Bhoodan Yagna Committee, despite the Bihar Zamindari Abolition Act, despite the Land Ceiling Act, Bihar stands as a caricature of democracy, where the lives of the landless majority depend on the whims of the few who do own land.

Since, landlessness and its related consequences on the lives of the



poor and the marginalised has always been an issue dear to Praxis it undertook a land mapping activity in the districts of Western Champaran, Gaya, Nawada, Jamui and Patna along with Ekta Parishad to identify specific issues relating to land distribution and prospects relating to allotment of land to the huge number of landless households in the state. Outcomes of the exercise are expected to help in effective campaigning for land rights of the poor with the backing of hard data relating to availability of distributable land in areas selected for mapping.

The exercise has so far been undertaken across over thirty five panchayats drawn from five districts of Bihar, including Gaya, Jamui, Nawada, Patna and West Champaran, and includes the following steps:

1. Identification and training of a village level team of cartographers, mostly agricultural labourers or sharecroppers familiar with the distribution of land in their village
2. Mapping of land holdings in terms of location and boundaries, legal ownership, actual control, nature of disputes, type of land, duration of control, productivity and plot no. as per government record ("Register 2")

etc.

3. Verification of the contents of the map in a public forum, whereby about fifty adult villagers endorse the veracity of the map by formally approving it;

4. Digitization of land records, giving each recoded plot a unique number and entering corresponding records in an electronic database,



along with digital copy of the map

Specific insights that the process of land mapping seeks to capture are following:

Identification of villagers owning more land than permitted by the amended version of Bihar Land Reforms (Ceiling, Land Allocation and Surplus Land Acquisition) Act 1961.

Identification of Bhoodan / Gair majarua / other forms of government land that can be made available for distribution to landless households

Identification of homeless households, for pushing for their legal entitlement of homestead land.

Identification of villagers whose longstanding occupancy of disputed land holdings calls for formalization of the holdings in their name.

Praxis will soon publish the experience of undertaking land mapping in Bihar and organize debates around issues and prospects identified

through the exercise in the days to come.

## Dalit Watch

The year 2007 was a particularly bad one for rural Bihar. The dams around several rivers broke, pushing 10,000 villages across twenty-two dis-

tricts in a quagmire of ruined livelihoods and consequent debts. Yet another episode, to be borne stoically, in the lives of the millions, that are indescribably poor and powerless.

In the aftermath of the floods emerged a forum that can be described only as a welcome float: Dalit Watch. The mandate of this forum is to fight against the deliberate exclusion of dalits from relief and rehabilitation processes. In a larger context it is a fight to give dalits their right to participate in the process of development.

Several organisations like National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), Bachchan Bachchao Andolan, Dalit Samanvay, Nari Gunjan and Lok Shakti are a part of this forum.

One of the initiatives that this forum has taken is to produce a critical mass of 10,000 dalit leaders. These individuals will be picked up from the absolute grassroots and empowered to act as opinion makers and influencers of their community.

Praxis has been a part of this forum as a facilitator and mentor, helping with capacity building programmes, strategy formulation and helping the forum in the all important task of taking into account the community perspective.

## Mid Term Review Report on Southern Collective for New Initiatives on Childhood (SCNIC):

Southern Collective for New Initiatives on Childhood [SCNIC] is a consortium of three NGOs namely Victory Trust, Navajeevan Educational and Welfare Society (NEWS) and Centre for Education, Development Action and Research (CEDAR). Formed in 2001, SCNIC operates in Virudhu-



nagar, Tuticorin and Tirunelveli districts of Tamil Nadu, South India. This network is co-ordinated by CEDAR.

SCNIC is now partnered by ActionAid India on long-term development initiative that centre around mobilizing the, communities, civil organizations, NGOs and state bodies to work in tandem in order to make childhood a joyful experience for children.

Over the last six years SCNIC has been able to address the issue of child rights through several micro and macro initiatives. In 2005 for example, an education campaign on prevention of child labour was carried out in 240 villages by building alliance with 12 local NGOs.

These initiatives have also been accompanied by introspection to keep the projects in perspective. Praxis was called upon to conduct a mid

term review to analyze and assess the efforts made, outlay the findings and learning to enable planning for the future and to review the direction, strategies and activities of the organization to make the interventions effective and relevant.

The areas reviewed were programmes and performance, human resources and organization development and finally partnership relationship.

## Community Led Action Research on the issue of Animal Welfare

This project undertaken on behalf of the University of Bristol, involved training community facilitators. This project proved to be an interesting one because Praxis was able to shift the focus of the community from the well-being of the animal to that of the keeper. Several factors that determine the welfare of the keeper become indirect factors that dictate the well-being of the animal. This one workshop led to a series of others with a big workshop being scheduled in the coming months at UK.

## Dalit Mannurimai Kootamaippu Mid Term Review

Dalit Mannurimai Kootamaippu was established in the year 2001 by 16 NGOs and Community Organisations in six Northern districts of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. The broad objectives of the network are –

- Proper implementation of Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
- To get due share to the Dalits in the Common Property Resources.

- Reclamation of Panchami land and other accessible landed resources, which are under the control of the Caste Hindus.

ActionAidIndia's partnership with Dalit Mannurimai Koottamaippu –DMK, was initiated in March 2001. It has been supported since June 2001 through a start-up initiative under National Fund, focussing on reclaiming the Panchami land, Common Property Resources and Social discrimination/untouchability practices. In order to address the structural issues, the



Regional office of AAI made it a long –term development initiative in January 2003. IRDS is the lead agency for the network.

The various initiatives undertaken by the network appear to have made a positive impact on the Dalits. But DMK and the AAI were keen to assess and understand the impact of their initiatives so as to inform further decisions. Which is why, Praxis was called in to conduct a mid term review. The purpose of this review was:

- To analyze and assess the efforts made
- To prepare future plan in line with the findings and learning.
- To review the direction, strategies and activities of the organization to make the interventions effective and relevant
- To show how each programme will achieve its own goals and contribute to the relevant country strategy.

The areas reviewed were:

1. Programmes and performance
2. Human Resources / Organization Development
3. Partnership relationship (AA and Partner organization)

## Review of interim outputs of strengthening rural decentralization programme:

The government of West Bangal has been working with DFID since 2006 on the Strengthening of Rural Decentralisation Program.

This programme aims at devolving power to the Panchayat level and empowering them to become both sensitive as well as responsible bodies of self governance. The programme involved capacity building of the panchayats at one level and the mobilisation of community opinion on the other, focussing on people's participation in the process of self governance.

Praxis, because of its wide and varied experience in the field of participatory development was called upon by DFID to conduct an interim review of the programme.

The purpose was to evaluate the initiatives from a people's perspective and gauge if the programme was delivering. Praxis was able to add new perspectives to the programme and further enrich its content.

## Meeting science/technology information needs in the policy community of developing countries:

Sci.Dev.Net - a web-based organisation which aims at providing reliable and authoritative information about science and technology for the developing world, commissioned a short research project to ODI in order to get inputs for the implementation of its next Strategic Plan (covering the period 2008-2012) on how its website can respond most effectively to the

information needs of its users/stakeholders in the policy community.

ODI structured the research on 7 developing country studies, one of which was India. PRAXIS was contacted by ODI as local partner. Praxis selected potential key informants conducted interviews and FGDs finally submitted the findings . This was followed by another project International Survey on the Science Development Policy Interface.

Carried out in Delhi, this project was a continuation of the previous survey and involved meeting policy makers as well as policy advisors at the state and local level, directly connected to science & technology or even otherwise.

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# Praxis UK: Taking the southern perspective up north.

**E**veryone wants to end poverty in South East Asia . But how is one going to? Is there any one hetrogenous manner in which this can be done.

The truth is each region in the south has its own realities that makes it impossible for any generalisations to be made.

While some parts of Maldives, Sri Lanka and Indian states have already “eliminated” abject poverty (poverty rates below 10 percent), other parts such as Afghanistan or Northern Sri Lanka are so entrenched in violent and escalating conflicts that bringing in peace is a much more important exercise than throwing out poverty. It’s also true that the south is a region of great disparities. Closest home, one can look our very own country to see that a quarter of our population is reaching for the skies by stepping on the remaining three fourths.

There is no one reality in India. The world’s richest man is here,



chances are the poorest lives across his street. This is true for most countries down south.

Sustained economic growth is creating large sections of middle class but it is doing nothing to change the lives of the illiterate, poor and ill of health population that, continues to exist only at the periphery. class disparities, religious and geographical conflicts, a history of subjugation have all created a situation where all development sector workers need to look at the situation in parts and not attempt a paint a larger picture. Fir those who have access to basics like food and shelter, development is about good schools and better livelihood options.

For those who do not have access to the basics, food and livelihood is far more important than theories and technologies.

It is to bring these realties nearer to the funding agencies and INGOs that we set up shop in London, UK. Having worked long years in the thick of people has give us a perspective we feel must be shared to influence and inform those at the helm of affairs.

Praxis UK presently is a two-member team that has Joshu Levene as the country head and Sowmyaa Bhardwaj as a Programme Officer.

This team will be working to enrich Praxis's perspective by working on Projects related to Africa.

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## 2007 : The financial picture