

KUNO INITIATIVE : AN UPDATE (V)

Samrakshan Trust, March 2002

The current situation in relocated villages

- So far, out of the 24 villages that lived inside the sanctuary, 23 have shifted out to the relocation site near village Agraa.
- The sanctuary management is now in the process of clearing and deep ploughing the additional land that had been dereserved last year by the Ministry of Environment & Forests. Agricultural plots would be carved out of this land after land preparation is complete.
- Work is ongoing with the 16 villages that had shifted out earlier for providing additional facilities apart from agricultural land and money for house construction.

Wage Works

A number of public works have been initiated to provide wage employment to families that had suffered yet again from a poor harvest in the last monsoon rains, and had been facing a high level of economic distress. These wage works include.

- An earthen pond near village Paira (Adivasi): Work on the pond is almost complete except for pitching on the bund, which is ongoing.
- A *rapta*-cum-stop-dam on Paira nallah near village Paira Adivasi: Work on this structure is nearly complete.
- Four plantations of Amla at villages Durreddi, Palpur, Meghpura and Ahirwani: The total area covered in first phase of plantations is 20 hectares. Boundary walls for all plantation plots have been erected, and villagers are now working on digging pits for planting amla saplings.
- New school buildings at villages Badi Khajoori and Chak: The building at Badi Khajoori is almost complete, while the one at Chak has been initiated recently.
- An approach wall on the Kushwaha dam near village Agraa.
- Drinking water wells at villages Khallai, Nayagaon and Meghpura.
- Irrigation Wells: Work has been initiated by villagers in groups of three families each, for construction of shared irrigation wells for their agricultural fields. The villagers are being paid according to depth of well, and a total of 152 wells have been started in the relocated villages till date. These include wells that were started last year, but for which payment was pending, as well as new wells started after the last monsoons.

As a consequence of these wage works, there has been a marked decline in the level of economic distress in all the relocated villages. This is especially true for the five villages that had taken out a protest march to the district headquarters in September 2001, to highlight their problems like poor quality of land, and slow speed of delivery of other rehabilitation benefits. An important indicator of this, in our opinion, is the pattern of seasonal migration that has emerged this year. Like in the past, a number of displaced families went out to nearby areas like Pohri, Karahal, Shivpuri and Bairad for working on groundnut harvesting, in November. However, the important point is that many of these migrants had started returning to their own villages by December 2001, possibly because of availability of wage employment within the relocation area. The availability of funds for irrigation wells is also likely to have contributed to the return of the migrants.

Irrigation

A total of four lift irrigation works (in villages Palpur, Laddar, Durreddi and Badi Khajuri) had been operationalized by December 2001, where the participating farmers had started lifting water from the river Kwari to irrigate their fields for the rabi (winter) crop. Villagers in Durreddi and Laadar have formed water user groups and have worked out norms of water sharing among the participants. They have also opened accounts in the nearby post office to collect maintenance contributions from individual users. To facilitate further implementation of lift irrigation schemes, Samrakshan arranged a 2-day visit by a team of experts from the Gwalior Field Unit of the non-government organization AFPRO (Action for Food Production) in January 2002. The team visited the existing lift irrigation structures, and made various recommendations for improvements in these structures, which have forwarded to the sanctuary management for their consideration.

The sanctuary management has also made around 26 diesel pump sets available for shared use among the relocated farmers, for lifting water from wells or directly from the river for the winter crop. With this, according to our rough estimates, nearly 20 per cent of the relocated families have been able to cultivate the second (winter) crop this year, resulting in a perceptible improvement in livelihood opportunities.

Watershed planning

Since the previous update, Samrakshan has facilitated (in collaboration with the sanctuary management) two more expert visits to the relocation area. The first was by Dr. Jagdish Krishnaswamy of the Bangalore-based organization ATREE, in December 2001, and the second was by Shri Sanjeev Jain of Action Aid Gujarat, in January 2002. Detailed recommendations from both are being processed, but in the meantime, both visits resulted in valuable inputs to the sanctuary management regarding the location, design and other details of existing, ongoing and proposed structures meant for rainwater harvesting and improved water management. Meanwhile, the Samrakshan team continues to work with the villages to mobilize them for undertaking construction of small water harvesting structures through community contribution.

Land clearing and distribution

The process of land clearing and land distribution has made significant headway since the last update. Six bulldozers are at work in two compartments of forestland being cleared and deep-ploughed for re-settling villages Nayagaon, Basantpura, Bamanpura and Padri. Nayagaon and Basantpura have been allotted household plots too, and some residents from village Padri have opted to accept unoccupied agricultural plots across the road from village Paira Kushwaha. Village Ahirwani, where land distribution for around 14 families is pending, would also be covered once the land clearing process is complete.

Land changing

To redress complaints from a number of villagers who claim to have received poor quality land, the district collector had set up a committee in September 2001. The *samiti* consists of district officials like patwaris, revenue inspectors, and two experts from the district department of agriculture, as well as the concerned Range Officer from the forest department. Initially, there was provision for including nominated members from each relocated village in the committee, but this has since been modified, to allow any number of interested villagers from the concerned village to accompany the committee on its land survey rounds.

The committee has already covered 10 villages and conducted detailed visits to each agricultural plot for which complaints have been received. The Samrakshan team members have also accompanied the committee in most of these visits, and we are told that a report by the

committee has already been submitted to the office of the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM). Further action is likely to be taken on the recommendations of the committee before the onset of the monsoons in 2002, so that the affected families can resume agriculture at the earliest.

Education

Samrakshan has set up 10 informal schools in the relocated villages to provide stop-gap education facilities till the time that government schools become operational in or near these villages. These schools became operational in January 2002. Ten persons (5 tribals and 5 non-tribals) from the displaced community have been selected for teaching in these schools, which at present cover around 500 children, mainly tribal, between the age groups of 5 and 15 years. The village community has provided basic infrastructure for the schools, while Samrakshan has provided some of the larger resources like blackboards, study material, and teaching aids acquired from organizations like Eklavya, Bhopal.

In January 2002, a three-day training of the schoolteachers was undertaken by a team from Eklavya, which provided valuable inputs to the teachers relating to teaching methodologies, and development and use of innovative techniques and resource material.

Coordination between stakeholders

As a consequence of a meeting held by the office of the PCCF and Chief Wildlife Warden in Bhopal, and in response to a long-felt need of the relocation programme, a monthly information sharing mechanism has now been set up. Under this, every month, the representatives of each village, members of the sanctuary management, and the Samrakshan field team would meet on a pre-determined date. The group would discuss progress of the village rehabilitation process, major problems and grievances, and areas of common action for achieving mutually agreed upon targets. Minutes of these meetings would also be shared with the office of the CWLW and the district administration. Thus far 3 such meetings have been held and the 27th of each month has been fixed as the date for these meetings.

Developments inside the sanctuary

- As a result of the deployment of a flying squad in the sanctuary, it is reported that illicit grazing in the sanctuary has reduced considerably. A number of illegal graziers have been apprehended and action initiated against them. This has acted as a deterrent for other potential graziers.
- Construction of 2 patrolling camps and 2 wireless stations has been initiated. This is another step towards enhancing the sanctuary infrastructure.
- The fire protection mechanism has been strengthened with improved maintenance of existing fire lines.
- The demarcation of the sanctuary using boundary pillars is nearing completion.