

A PATH TO GUARANTEED SELF-SUFFICIENCY

On the livelihood opportunities in an Indian village

-Elvira Greiner

Of what help is an economic miracle when three quarters of the population do not benefit from it?

If you skim through the current media reports in India, you get the impression that in India, the economy is on an upward trajectory. If you look more closely however, you will notice the other side of the upswing: three quarters of the Indian population does not benefit from the economic development. According to the UN Human Development Report 2017, 30 percent of the population in India live in extreme poverty; especially, in the countryside, they live on less than a dollar per day. As much as 70 percent have to make do with less than two dollars. That's more than 800 million people, in total from these villages. The number of people who leave their homes out of necessity - and then migrate to a metropolis is rising year after year with the number of suicides of farmers as well. It is estimated that more than 130,000 smallholder farmers commit suicide in India because they have lost hope about their future.

Which "miracle" can really help the poor?

One of our big goals is to make these villages self-sufficient, so that people can find opportunities to earn their livelihoods in their own villages. It is a big challenge. However, it is possible, as our project in Jharkhand brings out the success of the goal mentioned above.

Sujaya Dangwar, the Jharkhand project manager of our partner organization Watershed Organization Trust (WOTR), reports: "In cooperation with Andheri Hilfe, we have developed a model project to help families in 16 villages. Years ago, the chances of earning a livelihood were negligible. Periods of drought and unsafe monsoon rains made the cultivation of the fields and livestock farming increasingly impossible. There were no opportunities for alternative income. Many families had to leave their homes. Now, many have returned. This is because, they are able to find work because of our project interventions and build their futures with their own hands."

Traditional practices are merged with modern knowledge and practices to build structures in villages. Everyone participates to offer voluntary contribution to build structures. They build walls and pits that prevent rainwater and the fertile soil from getting eroded and washed away. Farm ponds are deepened and trees are planted too. In the months when it does not rain, fruits, vegetables and cereals can be cultivated. The interventions have had a positive influence on the diet of these people as well. The diet of these families has changed sustainably - and with it their health has also improved, especially the health of the children.

Ravi, one of the beneficiaries of WOTR's work, speaks with pride about a small farmers' cooperative that was started with WOTR's assistance. "It was hard work to get state recognition for our cooperative. But now we can jointly buy cheap seeds and we can also market our earnings together - at a much better price than before!"

(Text near the map of India) The Indian state of Jharkhand is slightly larger than Bavaria, however the population of the state is 3 times that of Bavaria.. About a quarter of the population is Adivasi, comprising of various indigenous population groups. Their survival is threatened, both by climate change and by unscrupulous deforestation of the forests. These forests of Jharkhand in India are rich in natural resources.

Vimala, another beneficiary, laughs as she tells the story of her ploughing machine: "This profession of operating the ploughing machine was dominated by men. Hence, our women's self-help group decided to purchase a diesel-powered ploughing machine and offered our services to the small-scale families who had to toil with the ox before. Our ploughing machine is in demand now."

Vipin Singh, agronomist in WOTR Jharkhand, explains the processing steps for making lac "Making lac is an art in itself. The lice that secrete this varnish live on certain trees and in certain determined conditions. Here with us, it has been a tradition to remove the varnish. But now, we also have machines for the initial processing steps as described above. These were provided to us by the government - free of charge. Our revenues have increased enormously since then."

Savita, on the other hand, is an entrepreneur. "I could get training as a seamstress. Then, I built a store right next to our house to stitch clothes. We can find customers easily as it is located on the road. I thought to myself, I can

expand my business: I now sell everything that is needed daily for consumption in our homes in the same store. I also sell sweets for the kids! ”

Self-sufficiency guaranteed, on the livelihood opportunities in an Indian village. Help us by with the following costs:

- *490 euros- are enough to build a common well which is shared by 5-7 small farmers.*
- *30 Euros -The cost of building walls to prevent erosion on a hectare costs € 30. The fertile soil can be collected and the water slowly seeps away if walls preventing erosion are build.*

Ramu is about to turn a piece of fallow land into a mango plantation: "I have never been able to cultivate anything on this piece of land. But now, with support from this project, I've cleared it, planted mango seedlings and installed drip irrigation. I have pioneered this irrigation method in our villages. "

These are just a few encouraging examples of my project visit at the beginning of 2018: People are starting to earn their own livelihoods, thus creating opportunities in their home country with our initial help.

(Translated from German by Pragati Khabiya)