Empowering Communities through Farm and OFF-Farm Livelihood

Avani Mohan Singh

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

The project aims to enable convergent community action through the provision of services and resources to overcome the inertia that has been caused by the long spells of marginalization and deprivation suffered by rural communities. It also aims to transform the momentum created through such community action into sustainable community-owned and managed development systems.

File attachments:

- rural innovation project.doc

About You

Location

Project Street Address
Mahoba road

Project City
Nowgong

Project Province/State
Madhya pradesh

Project Postal/Zip Code
nil

Project Country

Your idea

Country your work focuses on:
Bundelkhand, India

Website URL
http://www.haritika.org

YouTube Upload
What stage is your project in?
Operating for 1-5 years

What is the average monthly household income in your target community, in US Dollars?
<$50

Innovation

Describe your idea in fewer than 50 words.

The project aims to enable convergent community action through the provision of services and resources to overcome the inertia that has been caused by the long spells of marginalization and deprivation suffered by rural communities. It also aims to transform the momentum created through such community action into sustainable community-owned and managed development systems.

What makes your idea unique?

Haritika facilitate the process with the help of local institutions plans to embark upon a mass mobilization programme and step up advocacy & networking efforts with the objectives of building an institutional framework that would foster gender equity in all major civil institutions such as panchayati raj, economic and community organizations in which, because of the patriarchal nature of society, there exists a well entrenched tradition of marginalizing women in the project areas. Haritika will take up access to natural resource management for women and other weaker sections as the main issues for advocacy & networking.
so as to sensitize civic institutions.

Haritika & its network partners now seek to build on the strength it has acquired in the areas of water resources management, women’s empowerment, and institutional capacity building. The focus will be on building federations of women and men’s groups, strengthening, involving and sensitizing PRLs, educational, social, and cultural and community organizations as also such financial institutions as banks and cooperative institutions.

Basic Philosophy /idea of the Proposed Project: Haritika envisions itself as a facilitator of a strong and growing social movement in Madhya Pradesh focusing on gender issue, building grass-root level organization for just policies on critical development issues on NRM, through partnership, collaborations and networking.

The approaches followed in implementing the project will be an issue-based approach and area-based approach. In the area-based approach, specific geographical areas will be identified where a process of social mobilization will be initiated. Social mobilization must lead to a process of formation of women organizations, leveraging stakeholder resources and implemented by the community institution for effective use of local resources.

What is your area of work? (Please check as many as apply.)

What impact have you had?

An in-depth analysis of the situation of women farmers in dry land agriculture has emerged from the work of the District Poverty initiative project of Madhya Pradesh. This organization is working since 2001 at the village level to organize women from socially and economically marginalized groups. In Madhya Pradesh, MPDPPIP has initiated active women’s groups (CIGs) in over 2100 villages of 47 Blocks in the 14 districts Chhatarpur District of Bundelkhand region proposed in the project are semi-arid and rank low on the Composite Index of Development (CDI), but show some significant variations in conditions affecting agriculture. Chhatarpur is drought-prone, with only about 700 mm of rainfall in a year. The natural resource base in these districts is highly degraded.

Given the project focus on marginal and deprived groups, MPDPPIP Common interest groups members are predominantly women from SC/ST communities. The majority of these women belong to landless or marginal farmer families, and their main source of income is wage labour in agriculture. In drought-prone areas and in drought years, small farmer families also join the agricultural wage labour force. The availability of work depends on rainfall, and migration of agricultural workers to other districts and States is a common phenomenon. During good rainfall years, families migrate only for the duration of the lean season, but in drought years, the entire family leaves the village for months together. Cumulative indebtedness is a defining characteristic of life for these families. The cycle begins with loans taken from landlords and moneylenders to buy food grains in the lean season. In order to repay these loans, these families mortgage their labour, their only asset, to labour contractors in return for a cash advance that is used to partly repay the earlier loan. Since they have no bargaining power, the contractors underpay them, with women being paid as little as one-third of what the men are paid. Even if they own some land, these families are forced to sell off their produce immediately after the harvest at a low price to meet the loan repayment, and therefore are unable to survive the lean season without another loan. While landless families and men are free to migrate in search of work, women from marginal and small farmer families remain tied to their landholdings, which are too small to be viable. Also, their lands are semi-degraded due to lack of moisture, soil erosion and over-use of chemicals. Repeated droughts lower productivity even further. Over-exploitation of groundwater by rich landlords depletes the water table and accelerates the process of land degradation. Small and marginal farmers cannot muster up the resources required to cultivate their holdings, and so are forced to leave them fallow. There is an increasing trend of rich landlords buying up such fallow lands, or acquiring them through mortgages, rendering these families landless.

Describe the primary problem(s) that your project is addressing.

Chhatarpur district are situated in the semi-arid region of the VINDHYA region in MP. Low and erratic rainfall, coupled with severe deforestation, have resulted in significant lowering of water table in the area, which was once covered with thick deciduous forests with abundant biodiversity. Now gong Block in particular has a major problem of low water tables and increased levels of hard water. The decreased water availability and hard water has had an adverse impact both on drinking water and agriculture. Consequent decrease in agricultural productivity and fodder availability has completely eroded livelihood opportunities leading to migration from the areas of up to 70 to 100 per cent of the population.

The area has two major communities – the Sahriya/Ahirwar(ST/SC), who constitute 60% of the population and are primarily subsistence farmers in the plain areas, and the (OBCs) comprising 25% of the population who live in the backward areas and are engaged in animal husbandry. There are few completely landless families (mainly belonging to SC population), with the average landholding being around 1.5 acres. Besides subsistence agriculture, the forests, grasslands and animals make up the food security system of the area. These are considered as common property resources and were traditionally managed by a set of strict rules, which ensured optimum utilization, preservation of biodiversity and regeneration. With the takeover of forests by the government, these systems are breaking down. Over the years, these sustainable means of livelihood have been systematically destroyed in the various developmental initiatives. Industrial processes initiated by the state and the central government led to excessive mining and the consequent large-scale deforestation for timber resulting in severe land degradation, which increased the frequency of flash floods and unnatural droughts. Migration was the end result.

In the course of evaluations, it has emerged that women have been the primary beneficiaries of the regeneration of water sources and forests, and there have been improvements in the conditions of their lives. However, their position and social status continues to be defined by traditional norms, as is evidenced by their lack of access to education, poor health and exclusion from decision-making on ‘public’ issues. In spite of the fact that women are the primary managers of natural resources, particularly water and forests, they are still seen as consumers and users of natural resources, rather than as planners and managers.

The issue of gender equality is critical to the vision of equitable and self-reliant communities living in harmony with nature. The experience of the organization has demonstrated that sustainable resource management demands equity in access and control, with all sections of the community taking informed and responsible decisions. Empowering women to come together and take an active role in management of natural resources is therefore an essential prerequisite for sustainable resource management.

HARITIKA has started some preliminary work in taking up issues of water, sanitation and health with women’s groups and integrated water resource development. The need is now to build on the gains of the earlier work in order to ensure that women become active participants in the entire resource management process. Their traditional knowledge of biodiversity and herbal lore can become a valuable resource for the community, and a good starting point for women’s empowerment.

Another problem has been that the existing groups do not have strong linkages with the panchayats. It is critical that these women groups (Women SHG) formed in the area with HARITIKA support be linked more closely to the local government, which would be to the advantage of both. Panchayats would become more accountable to the local community and through panchayats, the community could access more resources from other departments and institutions. This would also serve as a platform for the emerging women role in the development process.

As in all such situations, women are the worst affected by the conditions of chronic hunger and poverty. While they spend far more time in agricultural activities than men, they are paid much lower wages for the same work. Since they do not have legal title to land, and since they do not control the “breaking in” activity of ploughing, women are not given the status of farmers in their own right. This situation continues even though the high rates of male out-migration in the dry land areas have made women’s role in agriculture more visible than before.
The overall objective of the project is to support state efforts toward empowerment of women for poverty alleviation through a process of
deriving benefits from the local institutions at and village level and would build on the successful initiatives from the state and outside. The Project seeks to
develop capacities of the people in villages for regeneration of natural resources, local level planning, and undertaking entrepreneurial activities in
addition to enabling backward and forward linkages for sustainable livelihoods through Natural Resources management.

Adopting a flexible approach, the Rural Livelihoods Project emphasizes exploitation of local opportunities leading to optimum use of local
resources, enhancement of skills and inculcation of entrepreneurship among the poor. The fulcrum of all activities of development and capacity
building would be the Gram Sabha (assembly of all voters in the village) under overall guidance of Gram Panchayat (the elected grassroots tier of
Panchayat Raj).

The project is not in a prescriptive mode and seeks to evolve its building blocks from the village level itself. By stressing on local resources, skills
and institutions, the HARITIKA Empowering Communities Through Farm and OFF-Farm Livelihood Initiatives in Bundelkhand. project is an
endeavor to create a genuine bottom-up approach for rural development and livelihoods. The underlying philosophy of the project assumes that if
people themselves cannot find the best solutions for their needs and problems then merely pumping in of more and more funds into a deterministic
system could hardly ever do so.

This overt reliance on the innate wisdom and capabilities of local communities has its flip side too, as there are risks involved in terms of
cornering of benefits by a select few, marginalization of issues of salience for the poor and sharpening of existing social divide among communities
in the village, which may pose a threat to the very premise of decentralization. However, the strategy and approach to the Project have been
designed in such a way so as to minimize these risks. The learning cycle of the project would contract the space for such aberrations to occur at
local levels, as it would be run on a self-corrective mode.

Bearing this in mind and following the detailed discussion held with beneficiaries (Women) and some officials of Govt/NGO department. The project
has been designed to identify an appropriate process for killing the root cause of poverty by achieving active participation of local people (women)
in identifying their local issues and addressed the same by planning and implementing appropriate project at village level.

Under the proposed project the following needs of the development processes will be covered:

- Active participation of local women in planning, implementation, monitoring individual as well as community development projects and
documenting the process.
- Up date information easily available at village level regarding local resources including human and current sate of the development activities
under NRM carried out in the village
- A group of trained JANKAR/VRP organizing individual as well as community development work through panchayat /VDC in collaboration with
Different department.

2.3 Objectives:
The overall objective of the project is to support state efforts toward empowerment of women for poverty alleviation through a process of
mobilization and people-centered development.

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What will it take for your project to be successful over the next three years? Success in Year 1:

Social mobilization and people’s empowerment are relatively long-term processes. Nevertheless, at the end of the project it is expected that:

- About 150 women’s groups would have been formed (about 25 group in each village).
- Women’s control over community resources would have been enhanced by 50% and participate in planning and management of community
development program (education, health, bio-diversity conservation, watershed development and forest conservation.)
- Increase in income would have been achieved by 75% per family per annum due to agriculture and livestock development.
- Acreage productivity would have improved by two times through soil water management & improved agronomic practices
- Availability of drinking water would have improved to cover 70% of the population and availability of irrigation facility to cover 80% of small
and marginal farmers (average landholding size is 1.5 acres).
- Migration rate would have decreased by 50%.
- Panchayat Raj Institutions would have been strengthened with an average increase in participation of community in gram sabhas to 60 %
with at least 40% of women participants.
- Network of line department and other NGO partners would be established and standard model for Bundelkhand evolved to, and motivated to
replicate people-centered approaches in the ongoing project for women empowerment.
- The local women will avail the facility of seed bank/different cooperative, established in their village, for getting information regarding detail
procedures of various development projects. The information from blocks, districts, state and nation level institutions collected and updated is
helping the local people. In the bank various information of the village as well as villagers and current situation of various development activities
Which are being organized in the village, will also be kept in forms of charts and posters. Most information will be painted on walls of the bank
so that it will be available at village level as live record for one who wishes to know. Cluster level information bank is providing details of
development projects regarding procedures and application format.
- Enhanced food security, nutrition and health of approximately 5000 women from economically and socially disadvantaged groups in the
project area.
- Increase in gross cropped area amounting to approximately 2000 acres, with a corresponding decrease in fallows.
- Increase in productivity of marginal and degraded lands covered under the project, by at least 50% of biomass.
- Increased availability of local food grains and commodities in local markets in project villages.
- Broad-basing of livelihood opportunities available to women in agriculture in project areas.
- Increase in cultivation of dry land crops, and adoption of technologies and agronomic practices appropriate to rain fed dry lands by small and
medium farmers in the project area.
- Increased resource support to women farmers and dry land farming

Provide To deliver sustainable health and hygiene benefits to the rural population especially women through improvement in water supply and
environmental sanitation services, which will increase rural incomes through time savings and income opportunities through possible Public
Civil Society partnership” for women, test an alternative to the current supply driven service delivery mechanism and promote sanitation and
gender awareness.

To promote the long term sustainability of the rural water supply and sanitation sector in project villages

Success in Year 2:

describe above
governments, it is expected that such convergence will be possible. The project will, however, provide direct support to women farmers to set up horticulture. Attempts will be made to mobilize resources for these activities from other schemes and programmes of the Central and State It is expected that, as women build their competence in agriculture, they will feel more confident in diversifying into animal husbandry and

pecans and pulses, is another possible initiative. Several CIGs have experimented on a small scale with such activities. The project will support compost and other bio-fertilizers that can be sold to farmers in the same village. Cultivation of traditional cereals for seed, and operation of seed

term objective of regenerating the natural resource base. Wherever appropriate, federation will be helped to take up the production of vermi-

For poor women to address their livelihood and food security concerns, or to use natural resources in a sustainable manner. Since the main motivation behind this model is immediate profit in terms of cash, it is oriented to commercial crops rather than staple crops, and has led to excessive exploitation of natural resources. The non-cash natural resource economy, which is central to women’s livelihood, is therefore being rapidly eroded, as is evidenced by the increase in the area of uncultivable wastelands. 

• The dominant model of agricultural development is male-dominated, market oriented and largely unsustainable. It offers little space or scope for poor women to address their livelihood and food security concerns, or to use natural resources in a sustainable manner. Since the main motivation behind this model is immediate profit in terms of cash, it is oriented to commercial crops rather than staple crops, and has led to excessive exploitation of natural resources. The non-cash natural resource economy, which is central to women’s livelihood, is therefore being rapidly eroded, as is evidenced by the increase in the area of uncultivable wastelands. 

• Given the low wages and declining productivity of agriculture in the rain fed dry lands, it is not possible for women to break out of the declining spiral of indebtedness and poverty in which they are trapped. The increasing trend of payment of daily wages in cash rather than in kind, combined with the increasing prices of food grains, has aggravated food insecurity for landless agricultural workers.

What are the three most important actions needed to grow your initiative or organization? STEP 2:

describe above

What are the three most important actions needed to grow your initiative or organization? STEP 3:

describe above

Describe the expected results of these actions.

HARITIKA will carry out participatory resource mapping to identify lands available for women to cultivate. These may include privately owned fallows, village common lands, government or panchayat lands and even family-owned marginal holdings or homestead land of CIGs members. Wherever family-owned holdings of CIGs members are taken up under the project, provision of inputs will be conditional on re-registration of the land in the joint names of the concerned woman and her husband. 

Once lands have been identified and accessed, the HARITIKA will assist CIGs/SHG to prepare and implement seasonal plans for cultivation. The Farmer’s Training Centers and Krishi Vigyan Kendra’s at the Block level, will jointly facilitate this process. Training programmes in sustainable agriculture will be organized at the at the village levels, for groups of women farmers. Rather than relying only on formal and structured training programmes, the approach will be centered on creating opportunities for different stakeholders – women farmers, functionaries of the Department of Agriculture, technical experts and Mahila CIGs/ HARITIKA personnel – to interact at different levels. The emphasis will be on learning from each other’s approaches and perspectives in an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. Joint meetings, workshops and exposure visits within the district will provide platforms for such learning, apart from field training programmes. Experienced personnel who have been involved in other project on dry land agriculture and women in agriculture will be involved as trainers and resource persons wherever possible. 

The project will focus on increasing the productivity of dry lands through a package of practices for soil conservation, water harvesting and management, crop optimization and promotion of horticulture and agro-forestry alternatives. In the first year, the emphasis will be on land upgradation and construction of water harvesting structures. Mixed cropping of traditional local cereals and drought resistant oilseeds and pulses will be taken up in the second and third years. During the first year, and where land is too degraded to support other activities, fodder crops will be cultivated. The project will support these activities with micro-credit through a revolving fund to be administered directly by the CIGs in accordance with project norms. This fund will be used for land development and for provision of agricultural inputs including seeds, fertilizer and technologies. Wherever necessary, CIGs will be supported in buying or hiring machinery and equipment, or setting up specialized infrastructure like check dams and drip irrigation systems, with the proviso that such long-term investments will be made only where land has been registered in the name of the CIGs members. Technical support will be facilitated through linkages with resource institutions having expertise and experience in dry land agriculture, such as the Jabalpur Agriculture University, ICRISAT , IGRRI, NRCAF and NGOs. 

In order to help women to break out of the harvest-to-harvest cycle of indebtedness, as well as increase local availability of food grains at affordable prices, the project will support CIG/SHG federation in setting up grain banks. Scientific grain storage structures will be constructed by CIG Federation with technical support from the Department of Agriculture, and will be used to store grain contributed by members in the harvest season. This can be drawn upon in the lean season and replenished with ‘interest’ after the next harvest. Alternatively, or during drought years, federation can buy and store grain from the local market using the revolving fund or the accumulated interest on previous transactions. This grain can then be sold back to members at cost price or on credit in the lean season, thus reducing dependence on local traders/moneylenders (both these functions are usually combined in the same person).

Given the vagaries of the monsoon, broad-basing of non-farm opportunities for income generation is necessary to reduce women’s total dependence on agriculture. In most cases, the approach has been to support women in setting up small enterprises and business ventures using their traditional skills. The present project will, however, attempt to create off-farm income generation opportunities that are congruent with the long-term objective of regenerating the natural resource base. Wherever appropriate, federation will be helped to take up the production of vermi-compost and other bio-fertilizers that can be sold to farmers in the same village. Cultivation of traditional cereals for seed, and operation of seed banks and seed shops will also be taken up. Processing and local marketing of locally-grown food crops, Vegetable and spices particularly oilseeds and pulses, is another possible initiative. Several CIGs have experimented on a small scale with such activities. The project will support these federation in up scaling these initiatives and developing them. It is expected that, as women build their competence in agriculture, they will feel more confident in diversifying into animal husbandry and horticulture. Attempts will be made to mobilize resources for these activities from other schemes and programmes of the Central and State governments, it is expected that such convergence will be possible. The project will, however, provide direct support to women farmers to set up

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backyard poultries and small vegetable gardens to provide supplementary food for their families. Any small surpluses can be sold in the village market, or exchanged among CIGs members. Conservation and management of water resources will be central to all interventions under the project, since water is a scarce and precious commodity in this region. The project area has an extremely fragile ecosystem and the project will encourage sustainable and rational utilization and protection of water resources. The people of this area have evolved their own coping and risk minimizing strategies, and the project will attempt to document, promote and revive traditional A major area of focus in this project will be in evolving appropriate methodologies to meet the information needs of women farmers. These will range from information concerning agronomic practices and farming methods, information on how to access and use new technologies, market news and agricultural commodity prices, weather predictions and rainfall patterns, recommended crops for the season and information on meetings and workshops on relevant issues. Women farmers generally remain isolated from the mainstream of agricultural training, research and development. Their limited literacy levels make it difficult for them to use printed materials and they lack opportunities to participate in formal training programmes.

What was the defining moment that led you to this innovation?
We are working in bundelkhand region which is one of the most backward district .looking the problem ,we have started the initiative

Tell us about the social innovator behind this idea.
Avani mohan singh,a post graduate student trainee from CEE,Gujrat has started this organisation and rainfed farming initiative for communities

How did you first hear about Changemakers?
Google

Sustainability

What would prevent your project from being a success?
As it is a participatory in nature since formulation of the idea. The project is formulated after detailed discussion with the local people(women),institutions and govt. official. All the stakeholders are considering it a very important project for initiating a participatory planning & implementation of different schemes and develop a live model. So the risk factors are minimum. Other factors are not effective in the project area as it is politically free zone so no external interferences

Financing source
If yes, provide organization name.
Haritika

How long has this organization been operating? (i.e. less than a year; 1-5 years; more than 5 years)
1-5 years

Does your organization have a Board of Directors or an Advisory Board?
Yes

Does your organization have any non-monetary partnerships with NGOs? (yes/no)
Yes

Does your organization have any non-monetary partnerships with businesses? (yes/no)
yes

The Story

Does your organization have any non-monetary partnerships with government? (yes/no)
yes

Please tell us more about how these partnerships are critical to the success of your innovation.
Technical support will be facilitated through linkages with resource institutions having expertise and experience in dry land agriculture, such as the Jabalpur Agriculture University, ICRISAT, IGFRI, NRCAF and NGOs.

How many people will your project serve annually?
5000

What is your organization’s business classification?
Non-profit/NGO/citizen sector organization

What is the total number of employees and total number of volunteers at your organization?
30

Have you received funding from any of the following groups? (Please check as many as apply.)
United Nations Development Program (UNDP) .