

## ORISSA INDIA – DIVERSITY AND UNIFORMITY IN THE INDIAN FEDERATION

*A report compiled for SDI by Dr. Diana Mitlin*

Orissa feels extraordinary but I think that just reflects my ignorance about change in India. I am left with a set of juxtaposed impressions. A growing town, Bhubaneswar, with an active and ongoing set of road improvements that are recreating urban space even as we move about within the city. Then an older city, now flooding with the tail end of the monsoon rains, lying beyond an immense river – Cuttack. As MonaLisa talks, I have an image of a population moving from the countryside in waves. Years of dispossession now brought to what?

They have kept coming from the countryside, MonaLisa explained, for reasons that have more to do with push rather than pull factors. Tribal forests are being reclaimed by the state for public management, and there is less space for the tribal groups to find their traditional means of subsistence. The sweet waters of the lake have turned to salt and the small holders farming alongside the lake have found their land becoming infertile. The richer farmers switch to prawn cultivation but this requires investment and those with lower incomes and fewer assets cannot manage. Then there were cyclones and floods, other natural disasters, which mean that just managing becomes non-managing. So people move to the city.

A few years ago, the city, when it had a view, thought that they should go back. NGOs were mostly working with rural groups, whatever their physical location. DAWN was such an NGO. Work with urban groups was only a remote possibility. Then there was a demolition on DAWN's doorstep – a thousand families, 10,000 people, were evicted. The compensation was slight, just 10,000 Rps given to the male member of the family. Mostly it was spent on alcohol and the women struggled to manage. They were moved to new land which was on the boundary of a wildlife sanctuary. They had no water, no toilets and there were snakes on the ground. The people feared invasion from the elephants in the sanctuary. They could not go back to the rural areas, but they had no idea how they could improve their situation.

DAWN helped the community organise a rally – they complained about their situation to the municipal government. Some words and even a few resources were forthcoming but what then? Even more difficult for DAWN was the fact that a political grouping had taken over the rally – the community and NGO were accused of working with a local political faction. The voice of the people themselves was being lost. DAWN helped the community draw a map of the land they had been moved to. Helped them work out who might be allocated to which plot. But still there was a question about what should happen next. How could the community begin to realise a process to secure tenure, services and housing?

The staff of DAWN wanted to carry on working with this group because they recognised that the community needed assistance. There were lots of other NGOs doing work with tribal groups. There was no other agency who was interested in urban issues. There were NGOs such as World Vision in the urban areas but they just provided services to low-income settlements and moved on to another place. They did not want to work with the women to empower them to improve their lives and find new and better opportunities. Other NGOs mocked DAWN and said that they just wanted to work with this group because it was on their doorstep, because it was easy. "In fact", said MonaLisa, "it was much more difficult. It was not at all clear what could be done." The problems were all around. The state and municipal governments had little money to improve the situation of such groups. But, additionally, the problems went well beyond finance. Even if the state declared a new programme, they had no way of making sure that the people who participated were those who were the entitled beneficiaries. Local strongmen may control the lists providing access to new land. There were no guarantees about the quality of improvements that were made, either to new or existing land. Nor were there any guarantees that the solutions would be relevant to people's needs. And who was going to maintain the investments, once they were made?

Then, in 2000, there was a further crisis in the resettlement community. A cyclone with 200 km winds swept through the area. All the shacks were destroyed. The staff of DAWN asked themselves "who can guide us?" They had been told about the work of Jockin, NSDF and SPARC. MonaLisa phoned Jockin and he told them to come to a house modelling exhibition in Hyderabad. DAWN staff and

some of the women from the first location went together to Hyderabad. The process that they observed made sense to them. They could see how savings would help the women to be organized, how maps and enumerations would further a dialogue with the city, how concrete processes like house models would help the community to define its aspirations and enable negotiations with the authorities.

The resettlement women came back from Hyderabad and started a savings scheme. They began moving around to different settlements inside and beyond the city starting more savings schemes. Staff from DAWN followed them and began to help with surveys and enumerations.

The NGO quickly faced a new challenge in Cuttack. A group of tribal people were living on central city land surrounded by high-income households. They did not even have water. They were under pressure to move but the question was how and to where. The city officials were nervous even to contact the group. They feared the tribal people and their weapons, knowing that they mistrusted the authorities. One of the administrator officers in the city found alternative land, further from the centre of the city but with a promise of secure tenure. DAWN had already begun to work with this group and, with the help of women in the city, build savings schemes and look at alternative land options.

Land is hard to find in Cuttack as the city is squeezed between two rivers. The land around the city is used for agriculture and privately owned. After looking at 2 to 3 plots the tribal community decided on one and prepared for the move. The government sent trucks and it was completed in one or two days. The land was sold for Rps 4000 for a 300 square feet plot. The families had five years to pay the government and have almost fully paid these costs. They received hand pumps and a well and ration cards. A sanitation block has been constructed and a sewerage pipe is now connecting the settlement.

As DAWN have continue to work in urban areas, they are treated with greater credibility by other professionals however, the substantive problems have remained. Politicians traditionally work through male neighbourhood committees. They exchange partial improvements and access to government for votes. For example, the new basic poverty line lists would be compiled by the local community leaders and teachers. Only some of the poor would be included. It was the same with the last slum designation process. (The Mahila Milan groups now challenge these practices. The women in the savings schemes prepare lists and the council verifies these lists.)

From the beginning, these male committees were suspicious of the women's led savings schemes. In one community the men told the women they had to leave the money with them. The women kept their savings hidden from the men and refused to say who had it. They knew that the men would spend this money on alcohol no matter what they promised. Some women reacted and one was beaten up. Then the men backed down and said that they would simply maintain the books – "we are more literate than you". The women just told the men to come to the meeting but none of them came. Eventually they gave up this attempt to control the women.

### *Cuttack*

In Cuttack I was taken to visit Sali Choura and speak to the leader, Rymon Bibi. She explained the census that they had carried out which had identified 189 structures and 195 households. During these rainy months, a significant number of the dwellings lie partially under flood water. I asked how the residents managed and was told that they carried on living in the houses, building bamboo platforms for sleeping. "There is no where else that we can go." The flooding is now much worse as high-income developments have taken place on adjacent plots. The increase in buildings has raised the water table and increased the flooding ...

"DAWN came and asked us to save and organize ourselves. We make 1 Rps a day savings, deposited here and with the city funds. The office supports with business loans and crisis loans. Now the community repays Rps 300 a month and holds Rps 42,000 in current loans. We are holding ourselves together since three years ago. We have completed this map to show how many houses are here. We showed this to the collector of the city. We know that political groups are organizing against us and we have to be strong to keep the [resettlement] land. Some of our members will find it

difficult to pay the money - Rps 20,000. They will have to pay 300 Rps a month for the deposit (5000 Rps). So far we have collected Rps 35795. We will take everyone and we will borrow to help them pay their deposit, borrow from our fund and the city fund.”

Ananda Shial is the Project Officer for the Urban Slum Community Office. He met with DAWN and the Federation (during my visit) because he was worried about the lists of beneficiaries for the land resettlement project. In total there are 1025 names that the Federation has identified. There are all families located on land around the ring road in Cuttuck; planned expansion of the ring road makes the families vulnerable to eviction and the authorities have agreed to a resettlement programme. Following negotiation, the families are giving up 28 acres of land with insecure tenure in return for a 14 acre site. But political factions are already questioning their legitimacy to define who is included. Local politicians are looking for ways to add names to the list.

The new land for the 1025 families is about 10 or 12 acres. Whilst the total site is 14 areas but some 90 plots are for middle income housing to help affordability. The cost of the units is 80,000 Rps and the state will pay a subsidy of 80 per cent. The higher income housing will provide a further subsidy. The infrastructure costs Rps 40,000. It is anticipated that the average contribution will be about Rps, 10,000 but the group has agreed, advised by DAWN, to pay Rps 20,000 to cover shortfalls and additional costs (from a lack of affordability by the poorest).

We went to the office of the City Federation in Cuttack. By now it was about eight o'clock at night and the city centre was busy with people. The community leaders wanted to show me the maps and talk about their city. We worked through some of the settlements, all ones that were around the ring road and to be included in the new land (due to the threats of eviction that they faced). Minimum monthly incomes in the settlements are about 600 Rps. Daily wages for unskilled labourers are about 75 Rps a day but people did not find work every day. They are rickshaw and trolley pullers and repairs, small vendors. Maid servants earn maybe 150 to 300 Rps a month from each household (depending on the class of household) and most manage to service two or three households. Often only 50 or 70 per cent of the residents in each area were members of Mahila Milan although all would be included in the move. To reduce the financial risk to the federation, a housing cooperative would be formed and this would be the vehicle to take the loan and manage individual loan obligations. Some of the families are currently renting rooms in the settlements (costs of Rps 2-400 a month) as there is no more room to put down shacks.

The city leaders sometimes find themselves arguing with the local leaders who come to the office to deposit monies. The leaders are worried about inadequate loan repayments, no monitoring reports and that the local leaders sometimes keep cash for too long. Of the savings, half is kept by the scheme and half goes to the city fund. Of the city monies, half is sent to the state funds and they can draw on double this amount as a long, in fact, more than double. Their city fund presently has Rps. 370,000 or 380,000, and they have a Rps 400,000 loan from the state. In addition, they have borrowed 600,000 Rps from the state for the housing development at Mononish. For a long time, the families could not find new jobs and their livelihoods suffered. Despite this, they are pleased they moved as they now have land tenure. They have adjustment problems (as tribals) and alcoholism is a big problem. The plan is now to form a housing cooperative so that a local committee can take responsibility; they will know when people have funds and when they don't.

### *Leadership*

DAWN's work is to support the federation groups in the field, linking with the Indian administration, helping them assess strategies to influence the political situation, assess possibilities for land and infrastructure, monitor the loan flows and prepare individual information on loans to go back to groups, liaise with other professionals in respect of shelter developments, and influence the Federation's development. Leadership styles within the Federation are a particularly challenging issue for the staff to explore within the community process. As city and regional leaders emerge, they may be more concerned with their leadership status than the principles of the Mahila Milan process. Such leaders may begin to relate more to higher levels, the political systems and other leaders, rather than their local members. They may start to control their local groups through a mechanistic operation of the rules, establishing themselves as the "ones who know" and hence creating a group of members with a lower status. This leadership style emerges for many reasons. First, it is the practice of leadership

that has emerged through the political systems and hence the model with which people are most familiar. Second, external groups work with the leadership that emerges, subtly drawing them away from their membership even if this is not what is intended. Third, members themselves may want a strong leader that promises success and “rescue” rather than one that urges self-reliance and action.

DAWN staff try to help the Federation observe these processes and reflect on their implications. They seek to discuss the issues, showing the Federation leaders that such practices undermine their collective process and exclude members of the Federation. Through this and other support, they have to empower other leaders, particularly women active within their savings scheme, to challenge this behaviour. A difficult situation emerged in Paradip where one male leader established a position of considerable dominance (although this is not only a gender issue). However, over time and with such discussions, practices changed and alternative leadership styles emerged. The process in Paradip is now strongly centred on local savings schemes, perhaps because of the women’s earlier experiences with alternative approaches to leadership.

### *Enumeration*

In respect of enumeration data, DAWN staff work with local communities who gather the core information about their settlements. To date they have collected information in about 25-30 settlements and processed this information for ten settlements. In some cases settlements refuse to participate in the enumeration as they are organized by political groups that wish to control the process (maybe one or two out of every 15 settlements) or they are in a high-risk area and worried about eviction. There is a recognised need to work with the local leadership so that they reach out to the political groupings within the settlement and avoid getting into competition with them. Attention may also have to be given to slumlords who control the area. In terms of information, people are nervous because the enumeration process collects income data and land information. In 2000, the mayor in Bhubaneswar became involved in one settlement because he feared that DAWN was working with higher levels of government to change the land allocation process. Land is a very sensitive issue as it is a very valuable resource.

Now DAWN have evolved a process in which Mahila Milan groups collect the data and government offices attend to verify the data collection process. This prevents the state from treating this simply as another NGO process. In some cases individual households may refuse but generally the settlement takes a collective view about whether or not they will participate.

### *Politics and the State*

DAWN regularly work with the Indian administration who are no longer concerned about DAWN’s work and its legitimacy. Some officers are not very proactive and may be reluctant to be involved as it can result in tension with political groupings. However other officers are grateful for their assistance in completing tasks that are difficult for the state but which are required. Initially DAWN had no credibility and it was hard to work with the administration. Some NGOs dedicate staff members just for this work but DAWN did not have the finance or inclination for this strategy. Now officials have come to understand that DAWN staff are very serious. Recently the Commissioner asked to meet informally with them. “What is your interest?” he asked, unable to understand why they should be involved in the resettlement land as they did not receive any direct benefit from it. It was difficult for him to work out what was going on because DAWN were to get nothing from the project, not even an office. Without DAWN, the Federation would not have been allowed access to the higher level officials, although they might be allowed to talk to the lower levels. Now the leadership get status through their association with DAWN and access is granted. With officials, there is a clear need to work at all levels of the administration.

The political groupings remain anxious about the Federation. They do not like the idea of people being organized by anyone other than themselves (in the case of each political party). They are used to having the role of being representatives of the poor. In general women are less involved in politics so there are fewer strong affiliations among the women leaders in Mahila Milan. With the strong level of local organization, councillors and other local politicians stay silent but behind the Federation’s back they try to organize against it and test the strength of the process.

Senior politicians were initially a problem but this is not so much the case now. The Mayors of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar have been exposed to NSDF through exchanges to Mumbai. They are not that helpful, especially in the case of Bhubaneswar, but they do not create obstacles. It is difficult for such senior politicians to assess their best position. On the one hand, they have their own vested interests and would like to capitalise on any construction process. And they are, in a real sense, accountable to councillors and have to address their needs and views. However, they also want development to take place and want to be associated with activities to improve people's lives.

In the beginning, political parties strongly tried to own the process. Some of the leadership, such as that in Paradip, sought political alliances around their own ideas about the best interests of the poor. Now the Federation leaders understand the advantages of independence from the political system as it enables them to work with whoever is in power.

#### *City Federations of Bhubaneswar - In Their Own Words*

"The Federation has made a big difference to our lives. Now women are outside and together. We have money and savings groups, we have learnt how to save. Before we were dependent on husbands to give the bindi. Now we sit together and work out the problem together."

"Before Mahila Milan we were never together. Our husbands worked, were always drunk. Now we fight against that. Our group, we decided to teach the men. We collected rope, bamboo sticks, brooms and when they came back drunk we bind them and beat them. After that they are never drunk. When they drink they stay outside [do not come back to the neighbourhood]. Now when we have meetings, the men stay away. Mahila Milan, they taught us to save money. Now we have nine houses."

"No-one of us are involved in political parties. Mahila Milan is an 'outside' organization. Politics is outside of us. If we are strong, political parties come to us. They only come at election time to ask for our vote. There are lots of election promises but very little comes to reality. And the BJP they will not do stuff for people from the Congress party and vice versa."

"We need to be independent and stand on our own legs. Then we can go into negotiations with government, for water, sanitation, electricity, rehabilitation and resettlement. This demolition that is now threatened, in Shantipur, we have already been to the Minister who has promised to provide land. Now we go to the minister and are well received; before we were not there, we were not welcome. They must find alternative land. The revenue inspector has to find an alternative (they are on revenue land).. Already they have been lised. They are giving assurances but not progressing this work. We are already in touch with the revenue inspector. It is not easy. They want to officiate the process. So negotiations are going on. But we stopped the demolition by another part of government because the minister has promised them alternative land."

"Why am I part of this group, even though I have land? Because we want to belong to a bigger group. We still need many facilities. And we have to protect our land, now we are more confident of protecting our land. (You have to be careful of your husbands' deals.)"

"At another settlement, Kalpana Labour Colony and Telqu Sana, we have a stay order and there is no possibility of being evicted. [But this is a difficult strategy, it is necessary to go the courts every three months and to pay Rps 10,000 in legal fees.]"

"At Samagariah, there has been a settlement there since 1972 but it was not in the list of designated slum settlements in 1992. The land has not been verified or processed properly 'til today. Then a builder came and started construction. The 35 households were threatened with eviction. Mahila Milan groups came together and made him leave. We do not just protect our members, we protect all households in the settlement".

"We meet monthly to decide loans. Some groups meet more often, all give loans immediately. Small loans, between Rps 200-2000. Our group, it has a loan of Rps 15,000 for water and electricity. There

is no interest charged. There are many sources of loan finance, group, city, OSDF and DAWN. Repayments are difficult – people do not give the total but they give something.

A visiting exchange visit from other cities in Orissa provided additional information about ongoing activities:

“In Puri, we have 34 groups across the eight settlements. We have Rps. 1600 in the city fund. We also work in Konak in the only large settlement with 1060 households. There is a group there. The savings groups they are active in collecting savings and giving loans. We also give loans for toilets, housing repairs and electricity. We have a 20 seater community toilet at Penthakata. One settlement has land ownership and now wants housing loans. In Koank there are two model houses. We are working with 500 households and 145 have succeeded in getting some kind of legal title, not a freehold title but a lease. We built the model houses to show people, to push the government to give us more land.”

“We do not do so much with the government but we have been involved in a programme in garbage management. The fisheries department is very active and provides some housing loans. It is willing to support our work. The PKDA has provided land for the toilet block and also offers some dilapidated houses. They have provided a room to store construction materials. We would like to demonstrate with some more houses before we make a really big push for land.”

“The men they are not so involved, despite our friend here [the only man attending the meeting]. They do not want to be controlled by us. The OSDF is dominated by women but at the cluster (lower) levels the men are more of a part of it.”

“In Paradip, there are 38 groups in ten low-income settlements. We have 105000 Rps in the city fund. We have constructed 27 houses and a community toilet. We have done 21 households surveys, almost all of Paradip and are now cross checking this data. To build to our house design costs 42,000 Rps. There are two bedrooms and a toilet and kitchen area. There is a staircase to the roof.”

“The group received government land through a legal process which started early on with the women organizing. In 2000 the residents on the land, 1,700 families, negotiated the right to the land. They now number 7,000 families. When they started organizing there were just 500 families in Mahila Milan but now everyone wants to join. They have to save Rps 10 a day to prepare for the deposit and then the repayment process. Everyone can afford this. But you have to go door to door. The houses are 20 feet by 5 feet.”

“Nine other slums in Paradip have won the right to stay. This is not housing but the land. It means they will not be evicted. There are 1,382 families on these areas. And they secure water through a tube well. Now eight of the settlements are going to get piped water – we really had to pressure the city council. We also got some solar lights, these are really cheap to maintain.”