

CASE STUDIES: OBSERVATIONS ON OPERATIONALIZING SEN'S CAPABILITY APPROACH

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“Development initiatives thus far have recognized only one half of our humanness”
-- Secretary of the Village Development Committee, Chizami, Nagaland, India

ABSTRACT

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach helps us understand well-being or poverty as being more than just the adequacy or inadequacy of income. He presents a pluralistic and open-ended framework, that provides room for a value based conception of well-being. The framework takes into account the freedom that people enjoy to achieve the 'beings' and 'doing' that they value. A tool developed and used in these case studies, to operationalize Sen's approach, has shown promise for use in evaluative exercises. Due to existing exploitative power structures, in many instances, the full use of this tool requires considerable assistance from 'outsiders' to balance power inequalities that limit the ability of local individuals to participate fully in a public discussion of values.

Further, for communities to conceive and effect holistic, self-sustaining and representative development in the long-term, they will have to do so without the constant help of 'outsiders'. Development must be relationally sustainable. This outcome is also partially dependent on attitudes. To the extent that the prevalent power structures instead sustain attitudes of inadequacy or hinder initiatives that try to address these deprivations, they will need to be addressed. Otherwise they will render development politically unsustainable. It is critical that those within the development community also recognize this deeper attitudinal challenge facing people who have been historically exploited. Designing specific initiatives and institutional arrangements, to create political and relational sustainability and combining values work with such initiatives might prove to be more effective in facilitating holistic and representative development.

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes three case studies from India. The work on which this paper is based took place between December 2002 and February 2003. The fieldwork supported by the World Bank and von Hugel Institute, University of Cambridge, UK was an essential part of the project “*Responding to the Values of the Poor: Participation and Aspiration*” and partnered with three grassroots NGOs working in three different states of India. These groups included Agramee based in Kashipur, Orissa; North East Network (NEN) based in Guwahati, Assam and SUTRA based in Jagjitnagar, Himachal Pradesh. We gratefully acknowledge their support as well as assistance from the ‘World Bank Netherlands Partnership Program’ (BNPP).

The case studies piloted a community based participatory planning tool that ‘operationalizes’ Amartya Sen’s capability framework for human development. The tool will be included in a

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module of training material for facilitators of community development planning and evaluation activities. There was also an *a priori* recognition that without addressing the stifling influence of power hierarchies that operate in participatory activities the effectiveness of any participatory planning exercise would be considerably compromised. Thus, learning how grassroots groups address these power dynamics was also a priority.

THEORY AND BACKGROUND

The present exercise evolved from a critique of mainstream development and its dominant belief that income is an *adequate* measure of human well-being. In his book *Inequality Reexamined*, Amartya Sen argues for reducing the emphasis prevalent in development thinking, of focusing on maximizing utility or income or primary goods as the meaning of well-being. Sen convincingly argues for a more human-centered, pluralistic and open-ended conception of well-being. The “space” that he proposes for human well-being and the basis for moral evaluation is that of the ability “to *do*” and “to *be*” in ways that one has reason to value. A more basic, but critical component of this idea as framed by Sen, is the freedom or ‘capability’ that people have to achieve these valuable functionings (beings and doings); thus, the name ‘Capability Approach’. This line of argument is a fundamental departure from the conventional understandings of well being as defined by preference satisfaction or consumption of commodities, which have predominantly shaped the political economy of development policy.

Sen’s arguments suggest that for purposes of evaluation and policy formulation, there needs to be a shift in the ‘information base’ from per capita income to valuable functionings. Eliciting such information, essential to operationalize the capability framework, poses a significant challenge. Policymaking and evaluation needs a tool that can answer the following questions. What do people value as regards their states of *being* and *doing*? Which do they value most? How do we get information about values in a manner amenable to critical analysis? How can we accommodate the diversity of values that occurs at various levels of social organization i.e. starting from the individual to communities and larger aggregations? How do we prioritize values? How do we ask these questions across cultures?

Vox populi!

As opposed to having experts identify and prioritize values for communities and across cultures, Sen argues that a process of debate, deliberation and discussion about the underlying social concerns and values of a society should be used to identify and prioritize them. He argues that using experts (which arguably is an easier way out) has two significant limitations. 1) Such a list could be overly influenced by *a particular metaphysical or ideological worldview* and 2) ‘expert lists’ could also be *over specified* and thus deprive the capability approach of its distinctive feature and an important contribution it can make to policy making and evaluation i.e. being able to accommodate the diverse and multidimensional conceptions of well-being in the world.

Sen’s emphasis on democracy, public debate, and discussion, as processes by which people’s values emerge - directs us to an eminently useable and well-documented body of experience in development practice that has evolved in the past three decades. As a response to the frustrations of ‘expert’ led development, the 1970s witnessed a growing sentiment in favor of participatory development. This sentiment has come a long way; and today participation, in its various

practical morphs, has grown into development initiatives across the world. But despite their many benefits, practices like Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) or other open menu participatory exercises, have some drawbacks that need to be recognized and tackled before they can fulfill the role of facilitating ‘value evaluations’.

One drawback is that these approaches do not explicitly capture all of the areas of people’s lives that people value and would like to see as part of their development. For instance, in addition to obvious values like work, health and security, people’s values may include cultural dimensions, relationships, aesthetics, spiritual practices, self-expression, recreation etc.²

A second drawback is that although we want to hear and respond to the values of the poor, open-ended participatory discussions may not be a reliable way of doing so. Robert Chambers coined the phrase “inadvertent ventriloquism” to suggest why. This is essentially a situation where the participants intuit the opinions of the “facilitator” in order to get development funding. For example, if the facilitator is a veterinary doctor, participants may intuit that her passion is for animals and so ask for a livestock project not because it is most important to them but because they think it is most likely to please the facilitator and get funding.³

A third key drawback is that even if groups of people identify and rank their development priorities in an open and equitable manner, this is not the end of the planning and execution process. Local elite or even powerful interests from outside, who have a stake in the region, often disregard or alter the priorities that were arrived at, whether in the midst of a meeting or afterwards, so that their own interests are better realized. Therefore, it would be naïve to look only at values and not at the dynamics of power that operate during and *after* the participatory process.

Towards developing a tool: the idea of ‘Dimensions’

The central idea, on which the tool used in this exercise rests, is that of ‘dimensions’.⁴ Given that every person can potentially have a unique set of values, there can potentially be an infinite set of values from which to select and prioritize. Imagine a town meeting with the objective of understanding and prioritizing peoples values. Where do we start? What areas of a human being’s life should we focus on? What are the values? What values do we count? Without a structure to address these questions, the meeting might not to be very productive. So what we need is a method, a ‘something’ that can serve as a framework on which to build, but one that is not colored by a particular worldview or one that is not over-specified – but is yet – explicit and comprehensive⁵ in its coverage of the various areas of human life.

Alkire (2002) identifies a conceptual ‘something’ that fits Sen’s specification and can serve as the template we’re looking for. This is a concept that she calls ‘Dimensions of Human Development’.⁶ She develops it by building on work done by John Finnis. As Finnis notes,

² Alkire 2002b P 220 - 221

³ Alkire 2002b P 222, also in Chambers 1994b as quoted in Alkire 2002b

⁴ See Alkire 2002a and 2002b

⁵ As already noted, while arguing for publicly created lists of values, Sen notes that expert lists run the risk of being over-specified and subscribing to a narrow set of worldviews.

⁶ Alkire (2002b)

dimensions are essentially ‘basic human values’ or we can also understand them as the “most basic reasons for doing what we do.”⁷ For instance, if I were to ask myself ‘why do I do what I do’ – the most basic reasons that will come up - beyond which there are no further reasons are these dimensions or my basic human values. Consider the following as an illustration. Why did Calvin go to the concert last week? Well to listen to Mozart’s music. Why did Calvin want to listen to Mozart’s music? Because it is a form of recreation that Calvin enjoys greatly. Why does he enjoy it so much? It’s that particular style that entralls him aesthetically. Why so? Well... because it does! As you can see, there may be no further reasons, for why Calvin enjoys Mozart’s music – other than the aesthetic value. But nevertheless, one could persist and ask why *else* did Calvin go to the concert? “To meet Hobbs!” Calvin might say, ever so gently. Why did Calvin want to meet Hobbs? Well...because they are very good friends. Why are they very good friends? Again one comes to a point where there may be no further reasons. So Calvin’s basic values expressed through a ‘valuable doing’ like going to the concert were ‘aesthetics’ and ‘friendship’.

Therefore, the idea behind dimensions is that we have the potential to crystallize a vast, possibly infinite set of specific values into a basic set of their constituent values. Finnis has the following to say about the list of basic reasons that he proposes. “...There is no magic number” of basic reasons and there is “no need for the reader to accept the present list, just as it stands, still less its nomenclature.”⁸ But “the idea is that if people from any culture, in any language, went through this introspective process, they would come up with a set of these reasons that are roughly similar.”⁹ So, what we have is something that we can start with and improve upon if and when additional dimensions are identified.

Below is the list of basic human values, proposed by Finnis as adapted for our work.¹⁰

1. *Life*- its maintenance and transmission – health and safety
2. *Knowledge* - Knowing reality
3. *Aesthetic experiences* – Appreciate beauty and whatever intensely engages our capacities to know and feel
4. *Some level of excellence in work* – The transformation (or partnership with) of the natural world to create value and meaning
5. *Recreation/Play* – Relaxation, resting, entertainment etc.
6. *Friendship* – Various forms of harmony between and among individuals and groups of persons – living at peace with others, neighborliness.
7. *Self-integration* – The harmony of one’s inner feelings with ones judgments and choices is inner peace
8. *Self-expression or practical reasonableness* – The harmony between one’s judgments, choices and behavior – or the consistency between one’s *self* and its expression
9. *Religion* – Attempts to gain or improve harmony with some more-than-human source of meaning and value and can take many forms. This can be manifested in numerous ways, for instance - nature worship, idol worship, worshipping a god or many gods, or other beliefs, institutions or practices etc.

⁷ A quoted in Alkire 2002a

⁸ As quoted in Alkire (2002a), P185

⁹ See Alkire 2002a, P 185

¹⁰ See P 186, Alkire 2002a for a the original version of the list

The Tool

To create a useable tool we grafted the dimensions onto the human needs matrix pioneered by Manfred Max-Neef.¹¹ Retaining Max-Neef's existential categories of Being, Having, Doing and Interacting, we replaced his list of axiological categories¹² with Finnis's list, to create a practical tool on which a process of identifying values can be undertaken and one that meets the requirement of a) not prescribing to a particular metaphysical worldview or way of living b) not being over-specified c) being explicit and comprehensive with respect to the various areas of a human life. However, the success of this tool in dealing with 'Inadvertent Ventriloquism' and 'Power Hierarchies' will depend on the conduct of these exercises and the social and political relationships surrounding the exercise.

✍ The 'Finnis – Max-Neef – Alkire' (FMNA) Matrix

	Being (<i>attributes of the person, group, village, community etc.</i>)	Having (<i>non-material tools, norms, institutions</i>)	Doing (<i>Various individual or collective activities</i>)	Interacting (<i>Social and political context</i>)
Life				
Knowledge				
Aesthetic experiences				
Some level of excellence in work				
Recreation/play				
Friendship				
Self-integration				
Self-expression or practical reasonableness				
Religion				

The idea now is to fill out the columns through a process of open discussion about the different dimensions. As we do that we will identify the valuable functionings that people associate with each of the nine dimensions and the four existential categories. It must be noted that the 'method' or way in which the facilitator engages with the community in working through the matrix is informed by the basic tools of participatory development. *Viz.* attitudes (listening, humility, simplicity), principles (triangulation, handing over the stick, meeting where and when is convenient), exercises (as in PRA - timeline, mapping, and so on), and strategic mobilization processes (networking with organisations, teaching a advocacy, building partnerships).

CONDUCT OF FIELD VISIT

Contacting Partners

India's long experience with democracy and the presence of a very active grassroots movement provided an ideal setting to do this work. Being from India myself proved to be beneficial to the

¹¹ See Max-Neef 1991 – Manfred Max-Neef is a Chilean economist who pioneered the idea of 'Human Scale Development'. To operationalize this idea he developed a matrix with a list of nine human 'needs' (listed in the following footnote) and used the existential categories that we have retained here. The idea is to go through the matrix and identify 'satisfiers' for each of the needs and the corresponding existential categories.

¹² Subsistence, Protection, Affection, Understanding, Participation, Leisure, Creation, Identify, Freedom

extent that I was familiar with parts of the country and one of the many languages of the regions that I visited. Further, India was on the list of eighteen countries provided by the funders. Having decided on India our next step was to identify development NGOs working in India who were interested in our work and supporting us in field-testing the module. It was very important that the organizations had a proven track record of deep involvement and work with rural communities. Two organizations, Agramamee and SUTRA were contacted through a request sent out on the email list serve called DNRM (Decentralized Natural Resource Management) hosted at <http://www.panchayats.org>. The third organization, North East Network, was contacted through the Association for India's Development (AID). The initial step was followed by a period of correspondence to further clarify ideas and expectations on both sides.

Meeting with NGOs

Even with all the email correspondence behind us, the best way to convey ideas were face-to-face meetings. These meetings were used to build a rapport with individuals within the organization. To share ideas and chalk out a plan on how to best use the time at hand. The most effective way to communicate the idea was to state that we were trying to develop a method, a tool, which people can use to identify the non-economic values for use in development planning and evaluation. An effective follow up was to give an illustration of why we need to look beyond traditional measures like income for planning and evaluation of development initiatives. After a few iterations the modus operandi was as follows. Upon visiting a project office the first task was to get to know people and then organize to work with the NGO's local staff and conduct a workshop to introduce the concept of the "Capability Approach", why 'capabilities approach', discuss what we mean by values and dimensions, and work through the exercises in the module as a group. This process of introducing the idea was usually a pre-planned session, lasting between two and five hours. This approach was found to be an effective way to convey what this particular tool could be used for.

Village Visits

During the first two days in Orissa we spent between one and two hours in a village. While this was an insufficient amount of time to spend in any village with the intention of understanding values, the variety of villages and settings visited greatly helped to reveal the local context. Having learned a little something about this context, we subsequently tried to have a minimum of two visits to each village or atleast spend a couple of days in a village. The first visit was a rapport building exercise. It was also used to identify people who could spare time for a longer session and fix a time for such a session or session(s). The approach in nearly all villages¹³ was an open-ended discussion about the organization's interventions and how these interventions had impacted their lives. Following these discussions we referred back to the notes to identify the different dimensions that were directly or indirectly talked about during the meeting. With this information we tried to fill out the "Max-Neef-Finnis-Alkire" matrix. Language and getting the right local words to refer to the various items on the matrix are critical to the effectiveness of this matrix. Himachal Pradesh, was convenient in this regard, given my familiarity with Hindi. In Orissa, the project relied on an interpreter to help with this task. In Nagaland, the meeting was conducted entirely by volunteers from the community who knew English and the locally spoken Naga dialect. Lastly, the need for being accompanied by people the villagers are familiar with and trust cannot be emphasized enough. Typically if there is an NGO that has been working

¹³ Exceptions were *Kajret* village in Himachal Pradesh and *Chizami* in Nagaland

closely (thus the importance of working with genuine grassroots groups) with the villagers then their person who interacts most with the village would ideally be the most qualified person to accompany during the visits.

The following section presents three case studies, one each from communities in Orissa, Nagaland and Himachal Pradesh. Each case study has two subsections. The first subsection contains an overview of the local context and the role and activities of the partner organization. Given the importance of understanding power and its dynamics for the success of a venture such as this, this section has gone into some detail to outline the local context to provide a sense of the local setting to the reader. The second subsection presents the matrix that was developed with the community. Finally the feedback, comments and suggestions from all three cases and from development workers are included in a later section.

CASE STUDY 1: AGRAGAMEE, Orissa, India

The Local Context

Orissa, lies on the eastern coast of peninsular India and is a state that is abundantly blessed with natural resources. Yet, it records some of the lowest quality of life indices in the world. The UNDP reports that 60 (NHD2001 reports 49 percent for the corresponding period¹⁴) percent of the rural population in Orissa lives below the poverty line.¹⁵ Further, 74 percent of Orissa's rural *adivasi* (*adi* – first, *vasi* – settler, used to refer to indigenous tribal people) population was below the poverty line in 1999-00. The state of Orissa has one of the highest Infant Mortality Rates (IMR) in the world at 124 per 1000 live births.¹⁶ The southern district of Ganjam has an IMR of 164 per 1000 live births.

Demographically *adivasis* constitute 22 percent of the state population. They are mostly landless (23 percent) and small marginal farmers (40 percent). *Dalits*¹⁷ constitute 15 percent of the total population and 43 percent of them are landless and 36 percent of them are small and marginal farmers. Other Backward Castes (OBCs) belonging to farming, artisan and small trader communities constitute 50 percent of the population and are mostly small and marginal farmers. The landholding pattern in Orissa is very skewed – 6 percent of the population controls 30 percent of the land (mostly irrigated). 42 percent controls 54 percent of the land. Higher castes own more land and give that for sharecropping. As these numbers reveal, land reforms were never implemented effectively here (Ramachandran 1994). “Official figures show that every year the number of landless in the country (India) increases by two million. A well known study, relied upon by the a Steering Committee of the Planning Commission for the Tenth Five Year Plan, points out that in four districts Dhenkanal, Ganjam, Koraput and Phulbani in Orissa about 56 percent of the total *adivasi* land was lost to non-*adivasi* over a 25-30 year period.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Table 2.20 P 165, Planning Commission of India 2002

¹⁵ Online at <http://www.undp.org.in/report/IDF98/idfgrow.htm>

¹⁶ Table 3.1 P30, in Derez and Sen (1995)

¹⁷ *Dalits*, formerly known as untouchables, are ‘considered’ as the lowest rung within the Hindu caste hierarchy. *Adivasis* usually do not fall within the caste hierarchy.

¹⁸ Videh Upadhyay, March 2003, online at <http://www.indiatogether.com/2003/mar/vu-adivasilands.htm>

A Brief History of Land Alienation

As we will discuss later, political power impacts the ability of people or communities to affect outcomes they value through development. To the extent that the lack of control over resources leads to disempowerment – the present exercise of reviewing the historical context vis-à-vis control over resources is important.

*“...The first cause of their (adivasis) depression was the loss of their land and forests. This had the effect of so enervating the tribal organism that it had no interior resistance against infections by a score of other serious evils”. “To the adivasi mind, government’s attitude about land and forests is as important as any scheme for development and education”.*¹⁹

These lines of received wisdom strongly suggest that land is the most crucial issue in any scheme of *adivasi* development. Juxtapose this with recent trends discussed above where about 56 percent of the total *adivasi* land was lost to non-*adivasis* over a 25-30 year period. How did something like this happen? How does development in such a context stimulate and assist such a society “to find its highest self-expression, which only can make a society proud of itself”?²⁰

It is understood that even when the Mughal’s annexed Orissa to their empire they left the western parts of the state, home to the bulk of the tribal population, to be ruled by indigenous chieftains.²¹ However, with the advent of the British colonial administration the situation of the tribals took an about turn.

A potent tool in the British approach was the process of commercialization of resources, particularly natural resources that the *adivasi* societies had known and treated as a common pool. This process of commercialization was a result of measures implemented by the colonial administration to maximize land revenues. There were two key aspects to these measures: a) Encourage the settlement of outsiders in tribal areas b) making increasingly stringent laws for forest and revenue administration. These outsiders were appointed as landlords or *zamindars* and took control of *adivasi* lands (land was a common pool resource in the prevailing *adivasi* system and thus people did not have deeds of ownership). The *zamindars* and their appointees, either from the non-*adivasi* population or higher classes from within the *adivasi* population, helped establish a deep and wide network of revenue collection for the administration. In support of the *zamindars* the colonial law courts gave legal recognition and legitimacy to the bonds and books they maintained forcing the tribals into submission. In a society that was already stratified socially and economically based on caste, these changes laid the foundation for the expansion and establishment of feudal interests that have continued to plague Orissa and indeed many parts of the country till this day.²²

¹⁹ As quoted from Verrier Elwin’s *A Philosophy for NEFA (1949)* in Sharma (2001)

²⁰ P 153 Rahman, M. A. (1995)

²¹ Das (Struggle for Survival), Sharma (2001) and references therein, Ramachandran *et al.* (1994) among others.

²² The most recently reported incident being the deaths of 5 *adivasis* in Kerala in a standoff with the police over land rights on 19th February 2003. See archived press reports in various national dailies (The Hindu, Times of India, Indian Express, The Pioneer etc.) and magazines for more details. Also see Google - search string “Mutanga + Killings”

The Impacts of Land Alienation

The topography of this region is quite gentle, characterized by rolling hills and numerous perennial streams that crisscross the area. This presents a picture of a region that should in theory be quite affluent - certainly not have people dying of starvation.²³ So what is amiss? When one first arrives in Kashipur the most striking feature of the landscape is that all the surrounding hills are completely denuded. One quickly notices patches of shifting cultivation or '*podu*', as the practice is locally known, on all the hills. From this observation to the conclusion that the tribals, practicing a 'primitive form of agriculture' -- have denuded the forests -- is usually a quick, and I might add, convenient step. To stop here is useless because shifting cultivation is only the proximate reason for the denudation. Conversations with development workers in the area suggest that the root cause of the denudation are processes like the exploitative (local money lenders reportedly lend at rates between 100% and 300%!) debt cycle and consequent land alienation of the tribals.²⁴

In this process when an *adivasi* mortgages his land for a loan (at the above rates) he is almost certain to lose his land to the moneylender. Most of the arable lands in the valleys with the perennial streams have now been alienated from the tribals. Thus the loss of lowlands and population increase has gradually forced the *adivasis* to intensify their practice of *podu* on the hills. In large parts there is no significant fallow period to facilitate forest regeneration. Continuously cultivating barren hills year after year has eroded the topsoil and severely degraded the land. This in turn has set in motion a cycle of falling yields, which has resulted in even lower yields and incomes. Additionally the forests, which were the *adivasi*'s 'security deposit' - are no longer there and so during the lean season, the range and quantity of foods that were once available, are absent. Further with the forests gone the ability to harvest and sell minor forest produce, which used to supplement family incomes, has become limited. In some instances they have been reduced to eating mango kernels and tamarind seeds to survive. In 2001 people died in these parts because they had no food or more accurately, they did not have entitlements to food, as Sen might say.

Vidya Das²⁵ succinctly describes the deeper psychological tragedy that has partly manifested itself through these deaths.

“Centuries of suppression, alienation and repeated onslaught on their land, polity and culture have done much to erode the positive self-image of tribal communities. Today it is not uncommon for a tribesman to describe himself as an incompetent fool, very conscious of his lack of education and the poverty stricken image that he and his brethren present. But underneath there is a simmering discontent that is given expression whenever situations cross the limits of endurance. The state needs to look into why and how of these expressions and address their underlying causes rather than just reacting to the various crises”.

²³ Kashipur suffered a series of starvation deaths in 2001

²⁴ Personal communications and observations from various people I met with during the visit.

²⁵ P67 in Struggles For Survival

In an illustration from Peru, a land very distant from Orissa, Paul L. Doughty while commenting on the movement there toward ending serfdom and referring to the mechanics that perpetuated serfdom (*hacienda*)²⁶ notes that in:

“... a very real sense, the hacienda molded them (the Andean Indians) to its interests, systematically denying the people any options to change and thus preserving a particular kind of native culture and society that was introverted, riven with fear and deprivation, and ignorant of alternatives.”

Both of the above observations have a subtle difference, but arrive at the same conclusion. While Vidya Das uses the phrase “erosion of positive self-image”, Paul Doughty uses the phrase “preserving a particular kind of native culture...” So, while both authors recognize different starting conditions for these vastly distant communities, Doughty explicitly states and Das alludes to a common theme: both these communities, however progressive or regressive were their earlier conditions, have been systematically deprived of the freedom (understood broadly and including the circumstances that support various freedoms) to make the choices that define themselves.

This historical process of ‘disempowerment’ of a large section of the local population and their present self-image have to be understood and kept in mind when initiatives about identifying values are put into practice. Further, a criticism of participatory planning initiatives discussed earlier was that irrespective of what was arrived in a participatory session, the powerful go ahead and do what suits them. While it might be possible, with the presence of an outsider, to partially mitigate unequal power in the actual running of the meeting -- the understanding of this study is that addressing power has to be a process-oriented exercise, involving structural change through mass-movements fuelled by people’s initiative. The learning about this issue from the different NGO partners is presented in a later section.

Aragamee

Aragamee has been working in the tribal areas of Kashipur for over twenty years. Today, the organization works in ten districts of Orissa with initiatives in nearly 600 villages. Early in its existence the group realized, as recorded by Mr. Achyut Das: (Aragamee’s director)

“...that the structural issues were the priorities rather than running residential schools, opening a dispensary, rehabilitating leprosy patients or joining the govt. for family planning drive. We realized that tribal communities need *food as an entitlement* and *voice of empowerment* as a tool to fight exploitation.”²⁷

Since then Aragamee’s interventions have taken on a holistic approach that includes interventions ranging from non-formal schools, to grain banks, watershed development, legal literacy, vocational training, self-help groups, among many others.

²⁶ Haciendas are estates owned by families of the regional and national upper classes, in this century by corporations and mining companies or agribusiness operations. Acquired and aggregated through inheritance, purchase and often through fraud, all of these properties included not only former Indian land but also the people who had always lived there. The hacienda system with its tradition of control and subordination through peonage and servitude was a major hall mark of Peruvian and South American society in general. (As noted by Doughty)

²⁷ Das 2002, P6

The Matrix

Kudkitunda Village: This is a tiny tribal hamlet in Mallijharan Block of Rayagada District in Orissa. It is a homogenous *Kandha* (a locally dominant adivasi group) village with 60 households and a total population of 251.

Over a period of fifteen years, Agramee has had a series of interventions in the village. In 1988 night school was started that still continues to function in the village. In 1991 the grain bank was started. And between 1993 and 1999 Agramee invested in various watershed initiatives. There are still various small interventions going on in the village, but Agramee has phased out of its intensive interventions. The grain bank and the night school still function and along with the watershed are now maintained and developed by the villagers who have constituted different committees in charge of education, watershed and grain bank. The long association with Agramee, numerous capacity building activities undertaken in the village and assistance provided to the village, have won their trust and confidence. *This goodwill directed toward Agramee was critical for our relatively brief interaction.*

Entry: the ‘village animator’ who is employed by Agramee was previously informed of our visit and this was conveyed to the villagers. We first arrived at about 5:30 pm, but most of the people had not yet returned from their fields. So we visited the fields, accompanied by a local boy, to learn about the impacts of Agramee’s watershed development interventions in the village. We returned to the village around 6:00 pm to start the session.

Since it was winter and the region gets quite cold, some men were huddled around the fire on the main and only ‘street’, chatting and smoking their locally made ‘cigars’. We approached one such group sharing a fire and started by making casual conversation. The women were collectively absent since it was evening and they were preparing dinner. This is the reason the men gave us, and Agramee’s field coordinator confirmed it. We too stood around the fire or squatted. We asked for some more people to join our group and more men joined the group. Somebody brought a ‘cot’ for us to sit on and insisted that we sit on it. In this way we commenced. Our interpreter from Oriya to English also needed the of the local field coordinator to talk to some people who could only speak in the local ‘*kui*’ language. To break the ice we asked people to tell us their names. This way everybody spoke at least once, and the process of speaking out their names was marked by laughter, smart comments and jokes, which helped to open up the environment. We rounded up this session by telling them our names, introducing ourselves and explaining the purpose of our visit.

Method: We relied on open conversation guided by questions about how Agramee’s interventions (understood as development here) in the village might have impacted the dimensions identified by Finnis. The responses were mostly in terms of actual tangible changes that these interventions have brought about in their village. The follow up questions were whether they liked or disliked the changes and why? On the day after the village meeting, we invited about 10 – 15 villagers to come to Agramee’s local center nearby (a place they had visited many times and where they were apparently at ease) for a meeting. Since this was the harvest season only 5 people could make it - four men and one elderly woman. We repeated the exercise but this time with questions targeted at each person or a combination of people. The

exercise was punctuated by breaks for translating the ongoing conversation. The matrix below consists of values identified during both the sessions.

	Being (<i>personal or collective attributes</i>)	Having (<i>institutions, norms, non-material tools</i>)	Doing (<i>personal or collective actions –verbs</i>)	Interacting (<i>social and political context</i>)
Life	Physically healthy (e.g. TB free), Self confident, <i>Living together (i)</i>	Health, Strength to Work, Access to land, Access to health care, Kin or community support during sickness	Work, Thinking about the future of their children	<i>Living environment, social setting,</i>
Knowledge (ii)	Wise/Aware	Capacity to educate their children, access to school, <i>Teachers, method,</i>	Going to school	School, Visits to the ‘outside world’, various settings where interaction with outsiders is possible
Excellence in Work	Healthy, Aware	Knowledge/Awareness, technical information	Plough land with bullocks instead of spade	
Self-Integration, Inner Voice, Peace of mind	Fulfilled aspirations, <i>Relaxed</i>			<i>Conducive socio-political and economic structures</i>
Self Expression/ Empowerment	Confidence, courage,	Education/Knowledge of outside language/ Awareness, food security, financial security,	Going to government offices, Addressing outsiders, lodging complaints,	Participatory fora, women’s groups, village development committee.
Relationships		Accepted by community, familial bonds, gender, normal personal and community life after being widowed	Marrying within the caste, caring for parents, caring for grandchildren	Community space, personal family space,
Beauty/Envt.	<i>Harmony with nature (iii), well dressed</i>	Lush and abundant forests, good clothes	Revive the forests, Wearing better clothes	Natural environment,
Religion	Blessed (iv)		Appeasing the gods	Place of worship, forms of worship, <i>legal environment</i>
Recreation/Play	<i>Free of care (atleast momentarily)</i>	Informal discussions around the fire,	“Sitting around the oven and listening to each other’s groan”, merry making with friends near bathing site (women), Celebrating festivals, playing with children	Various settings where people can interact, in groups, couples, intergenerational (parents – children, grandparents - grandchildren)

Ranking of Values
Jagish –

1. Knowledge/Awareness
2. Work = self confidence/courage
3. Self – reliance (not relying on money lender)

Yogendro –

1. Income and Knowledge/intelligence – “two pillars of success”
2. Unity and Integrity in the village
3. Did not mention anything else

Dhurlab

1. Teach his children/education/knowledge
2. Health

Manglu –

1. Intelligence
2. Income
3. Sound mentality

Sattai –

1. “Intelligence, everything else will follow”

¹ When queried about why they opposed mining they said that “life will be scattered”, “family will be scattered”

ⁱⁱ Knowledge – is mostly used to refer to outside knowledge. I did not notice much talk about their traditional knowledge. The following are two probable reasons for the low emphasis on traditional knowledge 1) Their responses could be a direct functioning of our questions – which were largely in the context of Agrabamee’s interventions which has introduced ‘outside’ knowledge 2) They probably don’t find much relevance for their local knowledge in the outside world and hence are not very keen about developing it.

ⁱⁱⁱ There is a certain sense of nostalgia among the older generation when they talk about the forest during their childhood. They talk about jungle being lush and they found wild fruits, abundant with animals. They said that they are trying to regenerate the old scenery. The younger generation said that even though they have not seen the old forest they “feel happy” when they see the forests being revived.

^{iv} When queried about why they prayed and made sacrifices to the gods, they said that if they did not there would be fever and other health problems or trouble with agriculture in the village.

CASE STUDY 2: NORTH EAST NETWORK (NEN), Guwahati, India

The Local Context

The case study presented here is from one of NEN’s project villages in Nagaland, one of the seven states in Northeast India. ‘North-East India’ lies, east of Siliguri in West Bengal, north and east of Bangladesh, South of Tibet and China and North-West of Myanmar. This region is home to some of the most spectacular, topographical, climatic, cultural and biological diversity. It reportedly has 300 ethnic groups.

Nagaland is a relatively small state in this region with a population of just under two million. The history of the state and its present circumstances within India is very interesting, but quite complicated. The state as it exists today is home to sixteen tribes and their sub-tribes with as many languages and dialects. It is not unusual in Nagaland to travel to a neighboring village, atop a hill range opposite the one you live on, to find that they speak an entirely different language. The Naga people are of Indo-Mongoloid descent and according to oral traditional history they migrated to their present location from Mongolia passing through China and Myanmar.

Their contact with other people prior to the 1830s, was mostly through trade with the Ahoms of the Brahmaputra valley. During the 1830s they first came in contact with a British survey party surveying for a road between the Brahmaputra valley and Manipur. It is believed that up until that time Naga society was extremely independent and was organized on the basis of a number of

self-governing village ‘republics’. This suggests a strong history and culture of autonomy and self-rule. Each village was considered an independent unit in the tribe and was managed by a Council of Elders and men of influence elected by the people. The communities still retains some aspects of their ancient laws and customs and some families are still practicing animists. But a vast majority has adopted Christianity, introduced among them by American Baptist missionaries in the early decades of the last century. The education and health infrastructure that has been put in place by the missionaries have visibly served the Naga society very well. The impact of the missionary activity on the changes brought about in traditional Naga lives has also been tremendous. But whatever the deeper merits or otherwise of these changes, most of the people (speaking for Chizami) themselves appear to have accepted Christianity and did express their appreciation of it.²⁸

The recent history of the Nagas has been an almost continuous fight for self-rule, first from imperial Britain and later from independent India. The period from 1832 when the first British survey teams encountered and fought the Nagas and until this day, the question of a Naga homeland has remained unresolved. There have been excesses on both sides. Chizami, the village in Phek district that I visited, was set ablaze and raised to the ground by the Indian army in 1964 as part of its ‘counter–insurgency’ operations against ‘insurgents’ fighting to secede from India. This part of the history pertaining to the relationship between British India and later Independent India, with the Nagas is, as one might imagine, extremely contentious. The history and reasons for these conflicts are important to understand but, for want of expertise and space, are not being discussed in more detail presently, save for some observations that are considered to be very relevant.

Finally, an observable feature of Chizami is the absence of feudalism. As a generalization, tribal communities are inherently more egalitarian than caste based communities. This is true of the intra community relationships of tribal hamlets in Orissa, among the Mishing tribes of upper Assam²⁹ as it is with the community in Chizami. However what appears to differentiate these regions, in particular Orissa from the other two, is the interaction with the kind of historical outside world and the extent to which communities have been able to assert themselves. As discussed above, in Orissa, recent history has been marked by the amplification of a feudal culture of landlords and moneylenders, with the above-mentioned consequences. In the case of Chizami however, the strongest outside influence has been that of missionaries who clearly did not have feudal intentions. In consequence a) people have not been deprived of land, indeed in Chizami land still continues to be owned by the community and shared between families according to the collective decision of the community b) education and health investments by the missionaries and the government have benefited the community c) people have evolved their identity to accommodate the different influences but they have retained a confident attitude.

North East Network

NEN came into being during the preparatory phase of the Fourth World Women’s conference held in Beijing. It served to document the issues of women in the northeast. Even after the conference NEN continued its coordinating role and continued to provide the forum for women

²⁸ Personal communications and anecdotal accounts from others who have also worked in this region suggest that this perception is shared in other parts of the Nagaland and also some neighboring states like Mizoram.

²⁹ A Mishing village was visited during the trip but has not been included in the present case study.

from the region to interact with policy makers and with women from outside. While NEN focuses on a wide range of issues pertaining to women's rights, legal safeguards and organization building – their major focus and point of entry into communities has been reproductive health care and making health care services readily available to women. An innovative strategy used by NEN was to create 'Community Health Workers' (CHWs) where there are no doctors. This is a strategy that has had multiple payoffs, where in addition to the health services that they provide, CHWs also act as catalysts of social change within the community.

The Matrix

Chizami village is a settlement of 360 households. The inhabitants belong to the Chakesang tribe, one of the 16 tribes (the tribes are comprised of sub-tribes and clans) of Nagaland. Christianity came to the village in 1931 and presently nearly the whole village except for seven families practice Christianity. Before Christianity the people practiced animism. The village has two churches, three high schools (up to class 10), a primary health center (PHC), a police station and a Border Security Force (BSF) outpost. It is also 100% electrified, although actual power supply is erratic.

The visit was arranged through the North East Network (NEN). NEN has a base in this village and has been active here as well as in nearby villages since 1998. Prior to NEN's entry there was already a Public Health Center (PHC) run by the government (still functional) with a resident doctor (something that is unheard of in *all* the villages I visited in Orissa.) and a dispensary run by the sisters of the Sacred Heart convent. NEN's entry point into Chizami was through the Women's Health Center (WHC) – aimed at *spreading awareness* about basic health issues like hygiene, nutrition, reproductive health, child health, sexuality to the adolescent population and HIV/AIDS awareness.

Method

The first contact was made with the village's Community Health Workers (CHW), a group of twelve youth who work for the WHC. In addition to the health center they are also very active in other aspects of the community's life.

Familiarization with the Community: I traveled to Chizami with the coordinator of the Health Center who is a resident of Chizami. Coming through NEN and being accompanied by the coordinator was a very effective way of meeting people in the village. For me as an outsider, this connection greatly facilitated the process of entering the community. After the initial round of introductions, a meeting of all the CHWs was organized for the following day. During the meeting we discussed the idea of values in development and the broad theme of the theory behind our work. The group also worked through the matrix. This meeting lasted about four hours, split into two sessions of two hours each. Seven of the CHWs could participate in the first session and five in the second session. All the twelve people could not participate because of the death of a senior person in the village, who was the father of two of the CHWs. Because of the death the venue and time of the meeting had to be changed. Given the situation – I mentioned that we should proceed with the meeting only if it was 'okay' and that it would be fine to postpone it for a day. This would have meant that the meeting with the community, planned for the next day, might have had to be dropped. It was then *collectively* decided that we should go ahead, but with a smaller group and a changed venue. Following the meeting the CHWs put

together a list of people from the community to be invited for the village meeting, scheduled for the following day. They were contacted and invited in person to attend the following day's meeting.

The community members invited included a fair mix of youth and seniors, men and women and people from different socio - economic strata. The meeting was organized in the Women's Health Center building. Instead of discussing the matrix directly with the community, we decided to use the History Wall, to foster discussion and understand values. The CHWs had already used the History Wall exercise before and were familiar with it. Ms. Tsuhuh facilitated the exercise and summarized the discussion that was entirely conducted in the local language.

The history wall is a simple matrix with columns representing recent history broken into 10-year intervals. In Chizami we looked at the period between 1920 to the present. There was one more column titled 'future/aspirations'. There were three rows that completed the matrix namely, personal, organizational and village/tribe level. The group of twenty people who came to the community meeting was divided into two. Each sub-group spent about thirty minutes to identify important events in the village since 1920. The groups then nominated a person to present the events they had identified from the past and present and their aspirations for the future. Ms. Tsuhuh summarized the opinions expressed during the exercise (*as quoted in the note below the matrix*). This matrix was derived from that summary.

	Being (<i>personal or collective attributes</i>)	Having (<i>institutions, norms, non-material tools</i>)	Doing (<i>personal or collective actions – verbs</i>)	Interacting (<i>Social and Political context</i>)
Life	Simple, generous, honest, hospitable, hardworking, self-reliant	Food self sufficiency, economic self-sufficiency, employment,	Practicing ones beliefs,	Gender roles defined, observing village laws and taboos
Knowledge	Empowered, able to realize full potential within themselves, aware of larger world	western education, exposure to new places, new ideas	Basic education, interacting, traveling to new places	
Excellence in Work	Hardworking, employed	Traditional dormitories ¹ where traditional skills are taught, employment opportunities	Helping each other, Hard work,	Corruption free society
Self-Integration, Inner Voice, Peace of mind	Being content			
Self Expression/ Empowerment		Traditional social institutions, practices	Revitalize traditional social events, festivals, games, songs etc.	
Relationships	United in the community, caring, loving, generous, helping	Dormitories, respect for each other, trust, relationship with other communities,	Contributing service to community in times of need, Respecting elders	
Beauty/Envt.				

Religion		Having richer faith ²	Living the life of a Christian, cultivate the qualities of love, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, righteousness, humility, truth, respect and hope	
Recreation/Play		Games and sports facilities, traditional dormitories for young adults		

1 A very important aspect of life at that time was ' Morung Life ' or Dormitory Life. There were separate dormitories for the girls and the boys. The houseowner where they stayed acted as the warden. It prepared them to take up their responsibilities as adults in the society. They learned all the essential skills there, including the customs and traditions of their ancestors. There was a lot of socializing among the boys and girls, and boys often went in groups to the girls' dormitories to court them. There, they talked, joked and sang songs together. They formed groups and went to work in each other's fields turn by turns until the turn was completed. This had many benefits as it provided relief from the monotony of working alone, ensured safety from wild animals and also helped the weak and the poor during the cultivating season. They also acquired other qualities like love, courtesy and respect for each other including courage and bravery

2 Selhinyi Lasuh, the Head G.B. of the village thinks that Christianity being a foreign religion written in a book, which is totally foreign to the people, might be the reason of dry faith.

A young man ranked the changes as follows:

1. Education, Knowledge, Wisdom
2. Health
3. Economy
4. Peace of mind

Opinions expressed in community meeting as summarized by Ms. Seno Tsuhuh

Past: People led a very simple life. They were generous, hardworking, honest, hospitable etc. Sense of self-reliance was strong with our people in those days; both rich and poor strove to have self-sufficiency in food. Men and women knew their respective roles well. They all contribute their services to the community in times of need. The healthy and rich helped the weak and the poor. The elders were respected. As for Religion (Animism), our ancestors were very particular about the observance of Village Laws and Taboos. They prayed to their god for good health, climate, crops, in order to invoke His blessings upon them.

Social life was active. Young boys and girls lived in the Dormitory where different skills were imparted - traditions, history, warfare, cultivation and crafts. Young boys and girls used to court each other. They sang songs together, joked, talked etc. The synopses of the songs were mainly of appreciating the beauty of his/her admirer, nature, and also on social life of man. There was a strong community feeling.

Present: (1) With the coming of western education, people started to come in contact with the outside world. Mrs. Mesetsolo-u, a woman leader stated that it has resulted in dividing the community into two classes i.e. the educated and the illiterate groups. Where, the former started looking down at the weaker section, thus widen the gap of relationship amongst the people. However, some of the participants stated that education has made the people aware of the larger world and has paved a way to make the best use of potentials within a person. It has helped the people to be more broadminded, confident, assertive etc.

(2) There is no respect for each other. Distrust, discontentment etc. are increasing. Unlike in the olden days, people are far from practicing what they believe. Selhinyi Lasuh, the Head G.B. of the village thinks that Christianity being a foreign religion written in a book, which is totally foreign to the people, might be the reason of dry faith (nominal).

(3) The Cultural values and active social life of the past is fast fading. Strong sense of community feeling is losing its face. People are less caring, lazier, cunning and selfish. Unemployment is on the rise. Problem of drugs and alcoholism is on the rise. Kewete Lasuh, a youth leader stated the difficulty in tackling this problem is that this has linkage with the Military Supply (Army).

(4) Impact of NEN's intervention: - More aware of health issues, linkage with other communities/organizations, exposure to new places, new ideas, employment opportunities, empowered and empowering.

Future Visions:

1) A world of equality - (a) Knowledge/wisdom (b) Health and(c) Economic Self -sufficiency (voiced by the group).

2) Rebuild Cultural values/Revitalizing traditional social events like festivals, games, songs etc. (voiced by the elderly group).

3) Resources for the youth - Games & Sports facilities; employment opportunities, corruption – free society. (Voiced by the youth)

4) Living the life of a Christian - cultivate qualities of love, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, righteousness, humbleness, truthfulness, respectfulness, hope (Voiced by the group)

CASE STUDY 3: SUTRA, Jagjitnagar, Himachal Pradesh

The Local Context

Himachal Pradesh (HP) is a moderately affluent state in the Indian context, with a relatively small population of a little over six million people. Agriculture, increasingly of cash crops, and government employment forms the backbone of the state's economy. It is reported that the government employs 1 in 4 people of working age in the state who form an important political constituency. Similar to Nagaland, Himachal too is cent percent electrified. Being a hilly district there is a great reliance on rains for irrigation. Anecdotal accounts, expressed with concern about decreasing precipitation (rain and snow) in the recent years, abound. There is also an undercurrent of apprehension about the 'big moneyed outsiders' moving into the region. This influx it is alleged, is drastically altering the price structure in the region, placing some kinds of labor and material beyond the reach of the local residents.

Development workers, who have been associated with the region for a long period of time, recognize two broad trends with great concern, viz., falling sex ratios and a growing culture of 'politics of patronization' (PoP culture). The declining sex ratios have been attributed to two broad underlying social trends. 1) The 'sanskritization' of the state over the past 300 – 400 years has seen a steady flow of caste population from the plains replacing the original tribal settlers, who are considered to be less male biased. The various practices that manifest this gender bias include dowry deaths, female feticide and an overall tendency of neglect toward the girl child and woman in the family. 2) It is alleged that mainstream education that is imparted has diminished the status of women to merely that of an instrument for reproduction. For instance mainstream education has allegedly inculcated the patriarchal values of the plains among the girls. Or for instance, in the *Pahari* (hill) culture women would confidently walk away from their husband's house if atrocities were committed against them. However, increasingly among the 'educated girls' – they seem to believe that only living in their husband's house will bring them salvation.³⁰

³⁰ From conversations with Mr. Subhash Mendhapurkar, SUTRA's Director. Personal conversations with villagers have also underscored this strong trend of male preference.

The 'PoP' culture it is said is ironically the result of the relative absence of corruption. In HP unlike in other parts of the country, about two-thirds of the money sanctioned for development work does indeed reach the village and it is also properly utilized. In this context, the observation is that governments show a tendency to overspend in order to please political constituencies and thus eliminate the element of local contribution that is important for fostering a sense of ownership among the community. An alleged 'wedge' such as this, between development initiatives and people, is likely to result in projects that are further alienated in their ability to reflect local values and priorities.

SUTRA

Social Uplift Through Rural Action (SUTRA) has been working in HP since 1977. SUTRA functions, to varying degrees of involvement, in four districts of HP. SUTRA is guided by the conviction that "...all the democratic institutions created under the Constitution of India shall fulfill their constitutional obligations toward citizens only when people are collectively empowered and the state evolves all its policies based on principle of Gender & Equity".³¹ Guided by this philosophy the organization's focus has widened to include, initiatives targeted at bringing about structural changes, from its initial focus on micro-credit. The range of programs today include, capacity building for elected representative of Panchayati Raj (local governance institutions) bodies, formation of collectives that serve to empower and organize, efforts to create an environment for transparency and accountability amidst the gram panchayats, awareness creation camps for rural women, women's health, discussion and awareness groups for adolescent boys and girls, microcredit, food security and water management issues.

The Matrix

Kajret Village: This is an intercaste village, comprising Schedule Castes, Brahmins and Rajputs. There are twenty-one households in the village. SUTRA first started work with the village in 1979 and the Kajret *Mahila Mandal* (women's group) was formally registered in 1984.

Over the past two decades SUTRA has made many interventions in the village, of late however, SUTRA has almost completely phased out of Kajret. More than two decades ago when SUTRA first started work in the village, 'empowerment' had a distinctly economic ring to it. This was indeed important and, the initial interventions were primarily microcredit initiative through Self Help Groups for women. Gradually, with feedback about the successes and failures of the pursued path of economic empowerment, SUTRA's interventions began to evolve to address structural issues. Programs for legal training, training about local governance and institutions, women's health, etc. were instituted. These have borne significant visible results, but more needs to be done.³² The long association with SUTRA, numerous capacity building activities undertaken in the village and various forms of assistance provided to the village, have won their trust and confidence. This goodwill directed toward SUTRA was critical for our interaction.

Method: A senior staff member who has been with SUTRA since its inception accompanied me on my first visit. She was familiar with Kajret from the beginning of SUTRA's interventions in the village. Women's empowerment being SUTRA's focal point, we requested a meeting with

³¹ SUTRA Annual Report 2000- 2001

³² For instance SC women participated with Brahmin women during our meetings. They even entered the house and were served tea. However, the SC women remained silent.

the members of the Kajret *mahila mandal* (women's committee). We first arrived in the afternoon on a cold and rainy day. It was very refreshing to note that some of the women who were present were very vocal. They even expressed displeasure about a researcher who visited the village recently and allegedly asked insensitive questions! The first visit was a rapport-building visit. The members nevertheless shared some of the changes in the village and their achievements. An added convenience in Himachal Pradesh was the fact that we could freely interact in the same language – Hindi. We relied on open conversation guided by questions about how SUTRA's interventions have impacted the life in the village. The responses were mostly in terms of the changes in women's participation in public life, stature of women in the village and illustrations of instances where the *mahila mandal* has taken on corrupt officials or dowry cases or intervened in village politics. This meeting was also used to fix an appointment for a second meeting and invite more participants.

We met with the women's group once more on the next day. The group was slightly bigger with seven participants compared to five during our first meeting. Since it was a small group and some of the participants could read and write we decided to discuss the matrix directly with the participants – instead of the open conversation as tried out elsewhere. The matrix below was developed in Kajret. Another change incorporated in Kajret was not to confine the discussion to 'non-economic' values.

	Being (<i>attributes of the person, group, village, community etc.</i>)	Having (<i>non-material tools, norms, institutions</i>)	Doing (<i>Various individual or collective activities</i>)	Interacting (<i>Social and Political Context</i>)
Life	Well fed, clothed, money, information, health, house	Peaceful family, health and education institutions, mahila mandal (social institutions), farming, cows, grass/feed, veterinary clinic, tools for farming, training institutes, road, vehicle, water, employment, energy	Political pressure, work in societies/groups, unity, end of social ills (exploitation, rape, dowry etc.), women to recognize their strength, respecting elders	Environment devoid of identity based exploitation, equality, financial help
Knowledge	Sharing one's knowledge with others, self-confidence, speaking without fear, opposing wrong	Opportunities to practically try out the information we acquire, discussion, information, opportunity to sharing opinions, unity, mutual trust, instructions institutions, information camps	Go to school, participate in group activities, organize instructions institutions, awareness camps for girls and boys, men and women	System that is to everybody's benefit, no pressure, no difference b/w boy and girl, treating DIL as daughter, equal opportunity to access information.
Aesthetic experiences				
Some level of excellence in work	Informed, willing	Attempt to share information, patience,	Participate in camps and discussions, do your work yourself,	Practice begins at home, resist exploitation,

		willingness, understanding one's responsibility	communication with society, going to village meeting (panchayat), increase political understanding	encourage others, constructive criticism, keep up mutual contact
Recreation/play	Peaceful, happy, happiness for the mind, healthy, mentally balanced	Television, good books, friends, neighbor and family	Sit together, finding time for entertainment, sans impediments, celebrate festival and birthdays, song and dance, traveling, shopping, get good education	Mutual coordination, reduced 'groupism', control on "wrong advertisement" (eg. Advertisement with meagerly dressed women), ban on "wrong" posters and films
Friendship	Manners, mannerisms, respect everybody	Mutual coordination, strong group, opportunities to meet, place to meet	Respect everybody, right mutual coordination	No discrimination
Self-integration				
Self-expression or practical reasonableness	Self-confident, self respect, determination	Encouragement, unity, information, strength to undertake (political) struggle, opposing "wrong"	Increase information, participate in struggles, strengthen groups, increase mutual trust	No bribery, no discrimination, open environment, equality (<i>ek saman</i>)
Religion				

Some of the dimensions from the above matrix have been left blank. This was because of two factors. A) The participants wanted to finish soon as they had to tend to household chores and B) given the limited time, I think, the group chose to 'skip' the dimensions that they did not readily relate to. With more time and interest, these dimensions could have been dwelt upon.

FEEDBACK

While discussing the matrix and the idea behind it, there was a ready appreciation of the need for such a tool from Achyut Das, the director of Agrabamee. Quoting Paulo Freire's visualization, "the more people become themselves, the better the democracy" in an introspective essay about the present status of the tribals of Orissa, Mr. Das laments that the "tribals are forced not to be themselves in every respect". This was an insight that readily lent itself to recognizing the potential of this tool to further the cause of holistic and 'representative' development. However, there remain many challenges in using this tool to its full potential. What follows is a compilation of reactions, concerns and suggestions about the tool from various people.

Off the cuff responses

The matrix does provide a good format to collect 'soft' data. It was also noted that the utility of such an exercise was that it helps personally get in touch with issues that are typically not considered when thinking of development. Some people, especially staff members of the different NGOs, noted that the matrix provides a good format for thinking about values in their own lives. The secretary of the Village Development Committee in Chizami remarked that

understanding our values would help us to be complete people. Development initiatives thus far have recognized only one half of our humanness, he said.³³

How do you elicit values?

A somewhat prevalent opinion is that people will not be able to relate to questions about values. This is based on the premise that values are abstract concepts (true, there is abstraction) and that most people (rural and even urban folk) who live and deal in a very physical world, will not be comfortable answering questions such as these. One way to avoid this, it was suggested, is to conduct a discussion on definite development interventions, probe the impacts of these interventions on the community, or what the community would like to include in possible future interventions and then to pluck out the 'value laden' responses. The matrix for Chizami village developed in the above case study for Nagaland, demonstrates this method. The matrix for Kudkitunda village too was developed in this manner. In the case of Kajret, the matrix was directly presented to the participants who filled out the values that they thought corresponded to the different dimensions.

People may not know what they want

In the context of exploring livelihood options, it was noted that often, poor people might not know what they want. Therefore when people working on poverty alleviation projects using PRA techniques ask poor people what do they want or to do or can do, responses have often been: long pauses, blank looks, "some work on a regular basis". Even prodding them some does not change the situation much "the net quality of response remains the same." It was noted that this type of response is "not because the professional lacks interviewing skills or is considered an outsider - this happens even if the professional has been part of their lives for quite some time."³⁴

If the above observation about more tangible (relative to values) issues like livelihood options, holds, then a reasonable assumption could be that asking questions about values, even with a tool such as this matrix, might not be fruitful.³⁵ This is a serious blow to the "Achilles' heal"³⁶ of the present endeavor. The suggested "way out" of this was that anybody trying to identify people's values for development planning or evaluation must first spend considerable time in a village without any agenda to get some sense of the reality of their lives. Only after having gained this sense of the reality, would it be appropriate to design methods and embark on collecting information, especially on a topic like non-economic values.

Further, it was observed that the matrix "presupposes a solid understanding of the field". Given that "whatever we infer is to some degree colored by our perceptions, then let it be colored by our perceptions of the field"³⁷. The suggested "way out" has a valid point. In any society there

³³ Personal communication during workshop at Chizami

³⁴ Prof. Somanth Ghosh - personal comments

³⁵ Can we apply an observation made in the context of livelihood options, to values? True, they are indeed different levels. But, to the extent that values are connected to livelihood choices, in that they inform such choices that people make, I think a case of inability or otherwise to articulate livelihood options could reasonably mean the same for values.

³⁶ P 199 Alkire (2002) – "is the assumption that poor people can articulate and analyse their poverty and their valued freedoms in multiple dimensions, and further if they do so the resulting analysis will be different from a sophisticated but narrower analysis that uses income as a proxy for poverty and freedom"

³⁷ Personal Communication Prof. S. Ghosh

are a lot of things that remain unsaid, things that are difficult for a relatively new visitor to discern during an interaction that lasts a few hours or a few days even.

People **may know** what they want!

Discussing the dimension of “Work and Play” in Dengaguda Village, Orissa – the villagers told us that they dance and play every night and that they would like to retain this because if it was discontinued then village unity (a recognized value) will be lost.

In Kudkitunda Village, Orissa, while discussing the impact of Agramee’s work on the dimension of Knowledge, Narsinghbhai Maji stated that he prefers education to agriculture, but his circumstances do not favor education. Education makes them wise he said, they could do business. And he wants his children to do business after getting educated.

These remarks suggest that people **do know** what they value and why, unless of course if this is something they said just to please us. I think it was not for the following reasons. Kudkitunda already has a functional non-formal school started by Agramee in 1988. The school fund also has a substantial sum for maintenance. Further, by reasoning that education will enable his children to do business, Narsinghbhai confirmed that it was a well-thought out statement as opposed to something that was stated just to match the NGOs preference. Further, Agramee’s interest is that the children grow up and become engaged in some activity that they and their community can benefit from without falling into the trap of exploitation that has haunted their parents and generations before. It is unlikely, that Agramee would have a preference between business or agriculture or some other trade. Further, in the ranking of values done with five participants, all of them ranked education/ intelligence/ knowledge and teaching their children - as the most important non-economic change brought about in their village.³⁸

In anycase – these statements are presented to highlight what is implicitly acknowledged in the previous section, i.e. it is likely people *may not know* what they want as it is likely that people *may know* what they want! Thus, the onus falls on the facilitator to be perceptive to this and adapt to the situation, depending on what presents itself. Blindly assuming one or the other *a priori* must be avoided.

People *may not be able to articulate their values*

If we assume people know what they value, then reluctance to articulate might partially be a power issue. A participant asserted that “empowerment does not allow people to voice” – “this is a myth”. He noted that even in situations where chances of retribution are low people fear that voicing something will lead to nothing; people may hurt me; or my group might be hurt more and thus, silence is preferred. “The researcher will ask questions and go away, the poor will be left to face the ire of the village *pradhan* (landlord).”³⁹

It must also be borne in mind the villages referred to above (*Dengeguda and Kudkitunda*) have benefited from prolonged and all around interventions by Agramee. Agramee has nurtured a solid reputation among tribals and won their trust. Some of the staff are local people and/or have spent extensive periods of time with the villagers. It was through a prolonged process of

³⁸ Refer Kudkitunda Matrix presented above.

³⁹ Personal communication Prof. S. Ghosh

interaction, learning and trial and error that many of their initiatives were conceived, designed and implemented. And these interventions have contributed toward the realization of the constitutive and instrumental roles of the freedoms identified by Sen. Given that I did not visit a completely 'fresh' village, it is not possible here to make a first hand comparison. But anecdotal accounts and comparisons with "before Agramee" stories - suggests that Agramee's interventions have considerably empowered them, which in turn has positively impacted their ability to articulate their values.

Time spent in a village

A follow up to the previous sections, and a consideration critical to scaling up this initiative, is a question that remains unanswered at this juncture. What will be the nature and duration of a process of relationship building and familiarization?

It is likely; I believe, that the issue of people expressing their values is less of an all or nothing outcome. Even in relatively empowered settings like the better off villages there will be issues that people are not too comfortable talking about, while even in extremely deprived circumstances there will be certain non-economic values that people might recognize and even articulate. This 'non - crisp' reality, does not lend itself readily to relatively quick interventions of going in, collecting the necessary information and coming out. The need for cultivating an organic relationship between the insider and outsider is what comes to my mind. If facilitators cannot spend a sufficient amount of time in the villages, then is the idea of training thousands of facilitators *en masse* and sending them out to villages the best way to proceed?

"Analytical rigour of methods like this"

Different people argued that exercises like the matrix and talking about values suffer from being too "touchy feely". Given that the matrix does not rely very much on 'objective' practices like enumerating, this is a fair comment. There are two responses to this challenge. Yes, we should explicitly incorporate measures to check for various biases, *where possible*, that might be induced. Random selection of participants for the group meetings, using different facilitators with the same group are some measures to check for biases. Visits could also be spread out in time to identify the time-induced variation in lists and prioritization of values. Given that values are dynamic some of this will be expected and some of it might pertain to 'inconsistencies' during data collection. However, we should be careful not to get carried away in trying to completely eliminate the 'touchy-feely' aspect of this work. A quote from Sen's 'Inequality Reexamined' does a good job of telling us why.

"It is important not to see the use of the capability approach as an all or nothing exercise. Indeed, the nature of interpersonal comparisons of well-being as well as the task of inequality evaluation as a discipline may admit incompleteness as a regular part of the respective exercises. An approach that can rank the well-being of every person against that of every other in a straightforward way, or one that can compare inequalities without any room for ambiguity or incompleteness, may well be at odds with the nature of these ideas. Both well-being and inequality are broad and partly opaque concepts. Trying to reflect them in the form of totally complete and clear-cut orderings can do less justice to the nature of these concepts. There is a real danger of overprecision here".⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Sen 1992, P 48

Why do we need one more tool?

It was argued that social science research already has many exercises that recognize non-economic aspects of development. Therefore, do we really need to add one more tool to the kit? We felt that the advantage of using this dimensions based method is that it provides an approach that explicitly touches upon values related to a comprehensive list of dimensions that cover human life and yet leaves the space open to actually define the actual values that people hold.

Women's participation

Depending on the context there are barriers to women's participation. They can be overcome if that facilitator is conscious of them.

a) Language: In some of the places visited because women interact less with outsiders they are less familiar with the outside language. If this is the case, it is best to accompany a staff member of the NGO who knows the language.

b) Women tend to be shy: Many women in the villages we visited tend to be shyer than men and thus tend to speak less in a mixed group or with strangers. The practice of organizing separate groups for men and women is an effective way of addressing this challenge. The facilitator's familiarity with the community is also very important and having women facilitators to facilitate women's groups would be ideal.

c) Busier than men: After working in the fields during the day women come back and prepare dinner for the family or attend to other household chores, so their representation in evening meetings was always less, very limited or nil in a number of cases. Prior appointments with the women's group and scheduling meetings at convenient times of the day or on weekends were ways to significantly increase their participation.

Action Items

After a group has identified its values, selected and prioritized them, creating a column titled 'Action Items' corresponding to the 'doings' and 'beings' should be created. Doing this will engage people in a process of discussing the specifics about the action items that need to be carried out and assigning responsibilities for these concrete measures. This reality check, it was suggested, will help separate the wish list from what is actually feasible. Further, assigning responsibilities to the players in a public forum helps (Individuals, Mahila Mandals, Gram Panchayat's, NGOs etc.) to develop leadership in the community and make the actors accountable.

Participation fatigue and loss of interest

The question of how to justify the time of the participants is something that people involved in developing participatory training or research face. In Himachal Pradesh the women of the *mahila mandal*, who met with us had developed an interesting way of addressing this. Kajret village is located very close to SUTRA's campus and most visitors and researchers who visit the organization are taken to Kajret for their work. Seeing this high demand on their time, the members of the mahila mandal decided that an outside group, which needs to meet with the women must make a token contribution of Rs. 250 to the *mandal's* fund, for each session. To the extent that this serves as a gesture offered in good faith of appreciating the time spent, this is a useful idea. But it is conceivable that such a practice could result in meetings devoid of content and indulged in just for the money.

However there is another lesson for the eager researcher or development worker. The visitor must always be conscious of the fact that people value their time and they must not feel that the exercise was a waste of their time. Thus making expectations clear from the beginning, about whether the exercise is going to lead to specific projects in the village, or whether the exercise is 'just' a research or training exercise must be made known. Also making appointments, requesting people to volunteer their time and being genuinely grateful for their time are important. This does raise questions about the use of stand-alone community meeting for training purposes. As far as possible every effort must be made to collaborate with actual community development activities so that the time spent on trial and research exercises can be mutually beneficial.

THE ROLE OF POWER

Why does power play such an important role while discussing values?

Before we proceed we must elaborate on why this question is, as has been alluded to earlier, critical to the success of a values venture. There are three broad answers that readily come to mind.

✍ Power and expression of values?

The first step toward operationalizing a value based, holistic conception of development is being able to record what people value across the various dimensions of their lives. For this people have to articulate what they consider their valuable states of 'being' and 'doing' to be. At this level we are concerned with a basic ability like having people to publicly speak their mind. Speaking in public is a challenge that all of us face or have faced at some point, often out of the fear of embarrassing ourselves, more than anything else. But in many instances it is not so much fear of embarrassment as it is about *fear* of graver consequences like physical harm or other serious social and economic consequences. For instance, consider a woman who values going outside the home and working, in a context that forbids this. There could be dire consequences if she defies the writ of her family and community and chooses to find employment. This fear is very often enough to keep women from asserting this value. Or consider a bonded laborer who values being treated with respect and not having to touch the feet of the landlord. It is very unlikely that such a value would not find public expression as long as this person lacks the power to be atleast economically independent of the landlord.

✍ Power and the selection and prioritization of values?

A participatory exercise is likely to result in a list of values that are important, to different degrees and to different people. Collective action, or evaluation or planning of development initiatives or policy making, requires aggregation from a long list of values identified by participating individuals. Further, limitations in terms of resources, necessitates the selection of values that are most important to the community and prioritization among those that have been selected. In this process of selection and weighting there is a need to guard against the process being overly representative of powerful interests. Indeed this challenge is a universal problem; it exists amidst the opulence of the US Congress as much as it does amidst to the penury of a bonded laborer's village in Orissa. To expect a perfect resolution to such power play, I think, is utopian⁴¹ Nevertheless, initiatives by civil society and effective citizen's participation in governance, have greatly contributed to keep such tendencies under check.

✍ Power and reflecting values in definitive action?

The next step of the process after conceiving development in terms of values, as with conceiving it in any other framework for that matter, is to identify and implement action items that achieve the fruition of the identified values in real life. Again, as with the process of selecting and prioritizing, this process too is influenced in numerous ways by the powerful, sometimes to the detriment of the less powerful.

⁴¹ See Crocker 2003 and literature that applies principles of Deliberative Democracy like reciprocity, transparency and accountability to the process of selection and weighting of values. This literature, as is acknowledged therein, is premised on the participation of '*free and equal individuals*'. This is a utopian ideal, nevertheless – it sketches a situation that can be used to benchmark the functioning of participatory processes in governance.

Addressing Power

Extant participatory methods that use facilitators have ways of addressing local power hierarchy, for instance, by separately working with groups of women and men, rich and poor, landlords and laborers, upper castes and lower castes etc. Further, field workers who have worked with communities for a long time have also developed their own repertoire of ways and mannerisms for addressing power, based on their intricate knowledge of the local dynamics.⁴² There are exercises where the 'stick' is handed over, literally and figuratively, to hand over power from the outsider to the insider. There is also an acknowledgement of the need to radically revisit the role of the outsider in development.⁴³ However, what is still in its infancy is the issue of tackling power after the outsider has left the village. I.e. how can a *self-sustaining culture* of open and effective participation in governance be fostered? The success of any tool to identify values and effect changes accordingly depends critically on the success of addressing this issue.

In *Development As Freedom* – Amartya Sen identifies five kinds of freedom as being both the means as well as the ends of his conception of development that sees poverty as being multidimensional. He identifies Political Freedom, Economic Facilities, Social Opportunities, Transparency Guarantees and Protective Security as being both *constitutive* of and *instrumental* for his conception of development.⁴⁴ These freedoms are constitutive of development, in that they are intrinsically valuable capabilities to have. And they are instrumental in that they give people the freedom or capability or *power* to impact, a) their own lives b) other causes that they value, in ways that they reason are valuable to them. The recognition of this instrumental role of these freedoms is paramount to tackling power.

There are initiatives underway where facilitators are trained in dealing with villagers and ways of recognizing and dealing with the power issues. But missing among these initiatives are efforts to break into the 'chicken and egg' situation of the *instrumental* and *constitutive* freedoms. If the emphasis is to create institutions that guarantee the *constitutive* freedoms without creating the local capacity to utilize their *instrumental* role – then the success of the initiatives might be short-lived or even imaginary. To utilize these freedoms it is key that people have a positive self-image (specially in light of the generations of exploitations they have suffered), information about their legal rights and obligations, confidence to organize politically and fight for their rights and freedom from the cycle of exploitation that force them to submit to the powerful and exploitative.

In some of the regions visited during the trip (most prominently in parts of S.W. Orissa) most if not all of these above freedoms are absent to varying degrees for sections of the population. Breaking this vicious cycle poses the biggest development challenge. This challenge involves taking on structural issues like land alienation, illiteracy, subjugation and even bringing about an attitudinal change in the minds of people who have been oppressed for generations.

Lessons from partner organizations

There is a clear recognition in these organizations (between them, Agramee and SUTRA, have forty-nine years of experience of working on development issues at the grassroots) that

⁴² Personal Observations

⁴³ See Chambers 1997

⁴⁴ Sen 1999, P 38

addressing structural issues is crucial to the long-term success of development initiatives. And there is a clear acknowledgement of the role of fighting power hierarchies to take on this kind of development. As noted above, Achyut Das says "...the structural issues were the priorities rather than running residential schools, opening a dispensary, rehabilitating leprosy patients or joining the govt. for family planning drive. We realized that tribal communities need *food as an entitlement* and *voice of empowerment* as a tool to fight exploitation." Further, similar to Sen's sentiment about people being agents of their own development, instead of recipients of "cunning" development programs, Achyut Das notes "...in order to change the socio-economic and political environment in which the poor of this country live, it is necessary for them to mobilize resistance *on their own*".⁴⁵ The need for structural change and the role of power, in bringing this about, is also acknowledged by Subhash Mendhapurkar of SUTRA. Starting from the premise that the process of empowerment starts only after a person develops a positive self-image; he suggests four questions to help think through power and how to tackle it.⁴⁶

1. Understand what is their self-perception?
2. What are the impediments, social, political and economic that need to be addressed for a full and complete self-expression?
3. Classify these impediments and identify the ones that are the easiest to break.
4. The group is now posed with the question – can we break them? If so what are the strategies, what is the enabling community environment that is needed?

A further issue is how do we understand power? "There is nothing called absolute power or 'depowerment'". Mr. Mendhapurkar notes that when one thinks about initiating a process of empowerment one has to strategically choose a context that can provide the sense of empowerment. To develop such a strategy one has to understand what and which aspect of day – to – day life will give the members a sense of empowerment. Why do they feel empowered in a particular context? Can this be developed for other aspects of life as well?

Obviously, the answers to these questions would vary depending on the context in which they are asked. In the case of SUTRA in Himachal Pradesh, the challenge is not of poverty and starvation as it is in S.W. Orissa, but a severe gender bias against women and the consequent exploitation, apathy and ill-health of women, despite the overall affluence of the state.⁴⁷ Therefore SUTRA's interventions are focused on gender issues, while Agramee's interventions are focused on the development of the severely deprived tribal populations.

Nevertheless, it is very important to note that a common thread, i.e. a fundamental appreciation of the role that unequal power structures have played, to create the present situation, informs these separate areas of focus. Their prolonged association with the communities has enabled these groups to engage in a process to understand the edifice that sustains the exploitative power structures and use that understanding to design appropriate interventions. In this light both

⁴⁵ Achyut Das, 1995, welcome address delivered at the National Symposium on Education for Social Change, A Draft Report. Symposium organized by Agramee, Orissa.

⁴⁶ Personal communication

⁴⁷ In Himachal Pradesh despite its affluence as compared to Orissa, the Sex Ratios for rural and urban areas are 917 & 877 females per 1000 males. Corresponding numbers in Orissa are 971 & 971. Per capita Net SDP for HP and Orissa are Rs. 2556 and Rs. 1666, respectively. (National Human Development Report, 2001)

groups are increasingly moving away (have been doing so for some time now) from service provision (usually thought of as the function of NGOs) to issues of local governance and more subtle but critical issues like attitudes.

CONCLUSION

The idea of dimensions and the matrix developed and used in these case studies shows promise for use in systematically and comprehensively identifying and documenting values for evaluative exercises. Its use for planning initiatives could not be studied for want of time and also real-life project initiatives that would have justified participation and created interest among participants.

We recognize that addressing unequal power hierarchies have two options. Given the participatory and public nature of this tool (indeed of development!) its use requires considerable assistance from 'outsiders' to mitigate inequalities in the ability of some individuals to fully participate in a public forum. Means to achieve this kind of intervention by 'outsiders' are already part of the much-evolved participatory planning repertoire.

However, regarding the ability of communities to shape their development in accordance to their values in the absence of outsiders, this study has documented learnings from three grassroots NGOs in India. The essence of this learning is that holistic, self-sustaining and representative development is also critically dependent on the ability of individuals within a community to tackle unequal power hierarchies and its consequences. To the extent that prevalent power structures sustain attitudes of inadequacy or hinder initiatives that keep deprived people from realizing their agency, it needs to be addressed through peaceful and innovative initiatives. A greater recognition within the development community of this deeper challenge facing people who have been exploited in the past is critical.

Designing specific initiatives with an overall recognition of exploitative power inequalities, and *then* introducing values work to partner with it, might prove to be more effective in facilitating true development or, 'development as *freedom*'.

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