

SHREYAS: AN ORGANISATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Eldho Puthenkandathil

Introduction

Development is a much used term in recent times. Now a days development is carried out by both the government and the non-government organisation (NGO) sectors. Each of these sectors has its own strengths and weaknesses and collecting the strengths of each of these sectors is good for every developmental intervention. Government has already recognised the NGO sector as its partner for development. The 10th five year plan devotes a special chapter to the NGO sector. NGOs' collaboration with the government for the implementation of the world bank assisted drinking water projects is an example of this change in the attitude of the government to the NGOs.

Shreyas, managed by the Malankara Catholic Diocese of Bathery, is a leading NGO in Kerala. We have been working for the last 26 years in active collaboration with the government and other development agencies. At the early stage we started working with a charity approach as most of the activities were of that nature. As years passed by we moved to a more effective development approach in tune with the changes happening all over the world. Now we practise a strategy more of decentralised development where our approach is integrated, multi-disciplinary and participatory. Our philosophy of development is people-led, people-based and people-centred. By working through this crystal clear approach and philosophy we are trying to fulfil our vision of becoming an excellent facilitating organisation through participatory approach. Shreyas always looks development in a "holistic approach" that is evident from the different sectors of its intervention. Our mission statement is also holistic and secular which runs as: *"To create a more human and just society based on human values irrespective of religion, sex and colour"*. In order to achieve this mission Shreyas has been constantly trying to identify and develop new areas of intervention.

Shreyas is working in eight districts spread over three states in India – Kasargod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram and Wayanad in Kerala, Shimoga and South Canara in Karnataka, and Nilgiris in Tamilnadu. The participants in the programmes of Shreyas include families and individuals belonging to the different religious communities.

Table 1
Social Composition of the Participants in the Programmes of Shreyas in 2005

Community	No. of Families	%	Adults		Children		Total	%
			M	F	M	F		
Hindu	16109	35.49	22483	23991	11885	12010	70369	35.19
Muslim	6494	14.31	9718	10118	6786	6912	33534	16.84
Christian	19098	42.08	25192	24699	14154	14120	78165	39.13
Tribal	3678	8.12	5964	5913	2815	2906	17598	8.84
Total	45379	100	63357	64721	35640	35948	199666	100

Shreyas has been striving to achieve its mission through various programmes of development for the vulnerable sections of the society. It believes in the active participation of the people in all its programmes. People's participation in the developmental programmes is facilitated by the grassroots level organisational structure of the people.

People's Organisation

In Shreyas we consider people's organisation as the most important grassroots level structure where all the developmental initiatives start. We have gone a long way in the formation and strengthening of self help groups (SHGs) and their federations. Now we are giving greater emphasis on the sustainability of these structures by introducing grading of the SHGs. The grading process is already on and through this we identify the stronger and weaker SHGs. We use the stronger SHGs to facilitate the task of strengthening the weaker groups.

Shreyas: An Organisation for Sustainable Development

For the past many years we have been facilitating the formation of men and women groups. As Shreyas views development in a holistic approach, we look for development of the entire population. In order to do that we have widened our vision and added new and separate groups for children and senior citizens to our existing SHGs. As all of us know that children have to be brought up with due care, Shreyas is giving utmost importance to the moral and spiritual guidance of children. A series of activities are being implemented in the children's group aimed at character formation, personality development and career guidance of children.

Everywhere in India we can see that the elder generation is being isolated from the society. The society considers the persons of this group as a liability. For making a change in this attitude Shreyas has initiated a new move for bringing the senior citizens together and started facilitating the formation of senior citizen groups in its operational area. A number of activities like medical camps, annual get-togethers, cultural and experience sharing sessions, and exposure visits have been carried out through the senior citizen groups.

Table 2
Profile of the Self Help Groups

Type of Groups	Number of Groups	Membership
Women Self Help Groups	1375	22381
Men Self Help Groups	607	8498
Tribal Self Help Groups	160	3678
Children Groups	236	9912
Senior Citizens Groups	16	910
Total	2394	45379

People's Bank

People's Bank, promoted as a platform for savings and thrift, has been a major activity of Shreyas in its SHGs and federations. Over the years we have refined the people's banking system and made it more effective by promoting project oriented savings. Special emphasis is given on this activity with a vision of ensuring economic

stability of the partners. During the year of 2004 Shreyas' partner families could mobilise more than Rs.13 crore through the people's bank system. Besides the people's bank system we promote programmes related to other banks as per need.

Natural Resource Management

The declining per-capita land and fresh water availability, coupled with soil erosion and land degradation, are posing serious threat to environment and thereby to food, social and economic security. Shreyas as a social development organisation has formulated certain intervention strategies for the conservation of our mother earth.

As land and water go together, their preservation and development cannot be considered independent of each other for sustainable development. Our intervention in this sector is mainly through watershed development and management programmes. Watershed management has emerged as a new paradigm for development. The management of land, water and biomass with the focus on social and institutional aspects, apart from bio-physical aspects, follows a participatory "bottom-up approach". At present we implement four watershed programmes for productivity enhancement and eco-restoration.

Shreyas has been organising various programmes to facilitate the development of proper water conservation and management skills and habits among the rural poor. Alternative energy conservation and management also come under the purview of the natural resource management sector.

Development of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

Achieving sustainable progress in agriculture is a major objective of Shreyas. The thrust is on the right combination of modern and traditional technologies in agriculture with a view of increasing production. The farmers have been made effective participants in the formulation and implementation of our agriculture development programmes at different levels. This department of the Shreyas is taking every care for the promotion of sustainable agriculture practices among the marginal farmers. Agriculture seminars and trainings are arranged at regular intervals for promoting sustainable practices through various farmer groups. The department focuses on the production of organic inputs and their distribution to the marginal farmers. Since animal husbandry is considered as an integral part of agriculture

development, Shreyas follows an innovative scientific approach for the promotion of the same. Credit facility is made available for the promotion of this sector.

Promotion of Organic Farming

Modern farming systems and practices are basically non-sustainable. They are oriented towards achieving higher levels of farm income without due regard to today's or tomorrow's ecology. The inevitable result of this approach has been the degradation of land and damage to environment. Modern farming is based on the use of chemical inputs such as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides and of fertilizer responsive hybrids. In the intensive farming systems synthetic fertilizers are used in large quantities, whereas the need for safeguarding the ecological base of farming is neglected. As a consequence, the yield response achieved in the initial years of fertilizer use is not sustained, which necessitates adopting the use of larger quantity of fertilizers in subsequent years to prevent yield decline.

The productive capacity of soil is linked with its health, which in turn is dependent on the organic matter content. The soil organic matter is the most dynamic component of cultivated soil and has a profound influence on the physical, chemical and biological properties of such soil. The regular replenishment of soil organic matter and its maintenance at optimum level are of primary importance in sustaining the productive function of the soil.

Shreyas promotes organic farming through various interventions. We give importance to the formulation and strengthening of organic farmer groups. As a result, there is now a growing awareness about the importance of conserving natural resource base for the attainment and continued satisfaction of human needs of the present and future generations. This realisation has led to the development of organic farming system. Production and distribution of bio fertilizers and pesticides are given due importance. We have a bio control lab for the above purpose. Participatory Technology Development (PTD) is one of the major programmes in the process of agriculture development, adopted by Shreyas. It involves the integration of traditional and scientific knowledge with a research outlook.

Malabari Goat Breed Improvement Programme

Majority of the farmers in the area covered by Shreyas participate in the Malabari Goat Breed Improvement programme with the objective of producing high breed Malabari goats as a supplementary source of income. As a result of this programme, there has been enhancement in the quality and quantity of milk as well as the weight of goat. This programme is implemented with the active participation of selected farmers especially women. The farmers are classified into four clusters for effective participation and monitoring. This programme also has a research component.

Azolla Cultivation

Azolla is a fresh water free floating fern which is a good and low cost organic manure and nutritive cattle feed. Shreyas promotes azolla cultivation through various programmes. Azolla is used as an alternative feed for cattle, goat, pig, fish and rabbit. By using azolla as feed the health and weight of the cattle as well as the quality of milk are improved.

Gender in Development

The phrase “Gender in Development” denotes that women and men have equal role in the process of development. Based on this principle women and men are treated as full partners in their home, neighbourhood community and society. Most often the existing social system favours men against women, which leads to tension and conflict at the individual, familial and societal levels. Systematic efforts are needed to uplift the status of women to have better opportunities, access and control over the resources. Therefore this department of Shreyas addresses such issues through a package of programmes.

Gender equality creates equal opportunities for men and women to participate at all levels as equals in formulating their own priorities and decisions. This allows essential dignity to women as well as men. Gender equality requires being fair to both men and women and adoption of unbiased social and cultural traditions and customs.

Increasing the productive opportunities for women is seen as a major tool for the development of the community and the region at large. Realising this fact Shreyas

tries to change the existing gender relations by integrating gender concerns in all our developmental interventions.

The ultimate goal is to promote, support and strengthen the process that builds the institutional capacity of marginalized sections, so that they are empowered to significantly increase their overall status in both the family and the larger community. This also includes their meaningful involvement in economic and political decision making and the ability to take collective action to secure their long term well being.

Family Support Service

Since 1979 the family support service has been functioning in Shreyas mainly to uplift the most deserving families. It has been designed under the vision of supporting the poor and the down trodden with concrete efforts to bring them into the mainstream of development. This programme has also been known as sponsorship or “Save A Family Plan” programme which aims at sustainable family and community development.

The programme helps the poorest of the poor in their basic individual and community needs, such as shelter, employment, sanitation, drinking water, social security, economic sustainability, environmental conservation, gender equity etc. At present Shreyas has 700 families under support service and it supports them to start economically viable livelihood programmes, and to have proper housing, sanitation facilities and safe drinking water.

Education Support Programme

Education determines the prosperity of a society. Every intervention in the education field can contribute to sustainable development. Realising this fact Shreyas has been putting much emphasis on the education sector since the beginning itself. We have given importance to both formal and non-formal education programmes through providing financial support for education and conducting awareness programmes. Besides, we provide career guidance, vocational trainings and tuition facilities. A considerable portion of the loans from the people’s bank and SHGs is utilised for the education purpose.

Shreyas pays special attention to promote income and employment by providing education support to the poor partner families. We have launched an employment oriented education support scheme for our partners. We are in the process of raising local funds to support the scheme. We also award scholarships to the SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) top scorers. The students are selected from the partner families of all the regions for giving this award.

Housing and Sanitation

The spiralling cost of building construction has made liveable dwelling place unreachable to the common people. In India the problem of shelter is immense, compounded by fast growing population, unemployment and rising external debts. More than 40 per cent of the people in urban areas live in slums and in informal settlements. Sanitation facilities are lacking in most of these shelters. In Kerala 5.33 lakhs of families are estimated to be without liveable houses. Liveable housing is one of the key manifestations of dignified human life, which enhances positive self-image and self-identity of the individuals in a family.

Shreyas has been supporting the partner families to construct their own houses with guidance and financial assistance from the various development agencies. More than 5000 houses could be promoted for our partner families. In order to improve the health status we give priority to sanitation and smokeless choolah. We aim at providing quality, cost effective and eco-friendly housing to citizens, especially the poor and other vulnerable groups.

Tribal Development Programme

Wayanad has the largest tribal settlement in Kerala and tribals constitute 17.2 per cent of the district's population. There are different communities among the tribals, such as Paniya, Naika, Urali, Kuruma, Kurichiya, and Adiya. Right from the beginning Shreyas started to intervene in the tribal sector by conducting the Adult Education Programme in 1980. Non-formal education centres in large numbers were established throughout the tribal colonies. Apart from providing literacy programmes, these centres functioned as the basic units for colony level development and various issues were brought under their consideration.

The foremost complaint of tribals world wide can be broadly defined as the story of loss. This is also echoed in the case of the tribals of Wayanad. They find the very sand beneath their feet is flowing away and they are powerless to seek a stable ground. They have no leaders to protect them. The political parties rather than protecting their interests consider them merely as vote banks or cheap manual labourers.

Realising the pathetic condition of the tribal communities Shreyas has been giving due importance to the integral development of the tribals. Our tribal development programme spreads over 120 tribal colonies of Bathery taluk in Wayanad district. The main tribal groups with whom Shreyas is associated are Paniyas, Naikas, Kurumas and Ooralies. Besides, Shreyas promotes separate SHGs for tribal communities and supports them to take up income generating activities using local resources. We attend to the needs of children, youth and adults with different developmental activities. The ultimate goal of Shreyas is qualitative improvement of all facets of tribal life. It is our conviction that the tribals should live with access to social rights and social institutions free from exploitation and hardships.

Entrepreneurship Development Programme

The socio-political empowerment of the poor, especially women, is not possible without economic empowerment. Right from the beginning Shreyas has been taking deliberate and systematic effort to equip our partners for finding sources of supplementary income. Shreyas always tried to convince the people to reduce their over dependence on agriculture and to initiate entrepreneurial activities for economic well being.

Wage employment is a dream of every individual though it is a distant possibility. Self-employment or entrepreneurship is the last mantra for career option. The myth that “entrepreneurs are born” has been broken. Entrepreneurs have been created by a well tested and validated training programme.

Shreyas with the strong intention of developing the capacity of people engaged in production process came out with a variety of training programmes for the promotion of self-employment. These training programmes emphasised imparting skill and

technical know-how to the poor, especially women. We assure financial support to the needy people and help them tap various sources of funds.

The selection of potential entrepreneurs is the critical phase of an entrepreneurship development programme and the success of the programme depends upon how many sustainable and viable units were set up after the programme. It is therefore necessary to select suitable candidates.

Since rural entrepreneurship has already been identified as an effective way of poverty eradication, Shreyas gives much importance to the promotion of small sustainable and viable income generation programmes. More than 700 individual or group ventures are functioning in our operational area, which are in the three sectors of small scale industry, service and agriculture. The service sector refers to enterprises that deliver services such as telephone booth, photocopying, repair of home appliances, laundry, etc. As far as the sector-wise distribution is concerned, industry, service and agriculture account for 37 per cent, 36 per cent and 27 per cent respectively of the enterprises promoted by Shreyas.

Community Based Rehabilitation Programme

Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programme has a systematised approach whereby persons with disabilities are enabled to live a fulfilling life within their own community with the best use of local resources, and the community is made aware of its responsibility in their regard. Persons with disabilities themselves are also made to assume responsibility, as they are part of the community. The CBR programme is more than an institutional rehabilitation approach for persons with disabilities, and is rather a comprehensive rehabilitation process with the active involvement of the community. The CBR programme aims at overcoming social discrimination against the disabled persons by giving them confidence and enabling them to live in the society as citizens with equal rights. The work with the persons with disabilities is therefore to empower them in all spheres of their life.

Empowerment is a movement from a feeling of “I/We cannot” to that of “I/We can”. It is a sense of being able to do something towards improving oneself as opposed to a sense of helplessness, powerlessness, apathy and inertia. The CBR programme involves an approach in which disabled people are encouraged to value their own

experiences and share them, to recognise common issues, to analyse their own situation with regard to its underlying causes, and to articulate their knowledge and develop confidence in their own individual and collective capacities to change their situation. The key element in this strategy is to build up the self-image of the members and enhance it so that they discover their strength as individuals and as a community.

Based on this concept Shreyas started the CBR programme in Bathery and Nenmeni Panchayaths in Sulthan Bathery block of Wayanad district. We could identify 655 persons with different disabilities for whom various awareness and rehabilitation programmes are being carried out. We initiated special and integrated SHGs for the persons with disabilities. Through linkage and collaboration with the PRIs (Panchayat Raj Institutions), government departments and other developmental agencies Shreyas could mobilise resources for the rehabilitation of the disabled. The ultimate goal of CBR programme is to ensure enhancement in the quality of life of the persons with disabilities through a decent income, increased mobility, participation in community atmosphere and responsibility for decisions affecting their lives.

Human Resource Development

Human resources are the greatest resource in the world. Developing human resources for the society is a key function of every NGO. Keeping this point in mind Shreyas has developed a full-fledged Human Resource Development department. The well established training centre of Shreyas provides a platform for training and workshops. We have a qualified and experienced faculty team to train people from different sectors of the society. We give importance to TOT (Training Of Trainers) for our staff. Moreover we engage the services of guest faculty for various training programmes.

Shreyas also offers block placement services to students from various institutes and universities within the state of Kerala and outside. During this period the students get organisational and field exposure in different intervention areas of Shreyas. Besides the students from reputed institutes of India, a number of foreign delegates come to Shreyas for research works. The field exposure and the well equipped library of Shreyas help them in carrying out their studies effectively.

Research and Documentation

All good practices are the result of research. The process and result of social research are to be documented for the future generation and for the like minded community. NGOs have to conduct social research for creating and experimenting models. We at Shreyas have got a separate department for research and documentation. Participatory action research has been conducted on several topics, like natural resource management and housing. Moreover we are conducting a lot of studies for different funding partners which will help them identify new avenues for development intervention.

Linkages and Collaborations

As indicated earlier, many of the development interventions are now carried out through the collaboration between the government and the NGOs. Shreyas has been collaborating with the government for a number of projects. The government of Kerala is implementing a world bank assisted rural drinking water and sanitation project, “Jalanidhi” with the active involvement of the local people and NGOs. Shreyas has functioned as the supporting organisation for this project in the Grama Panchayats of Puthuppady (Kozhikode district), Nannambra (Malappuram district) and Nenmeni (Wayanad district). The project demands community participation in all respects. We are also collaborating with the Kerala State Nirmithi Kendra and the Swiss agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) for the construction of cost-effective and eco-friendly houses in selected Grama Panchayaths. Now Shreyas is selected as the District Implementation Institute (DII) in the decentralisation process in Kerala for providing training to the elected members and government officials in collaboration with the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA).

Conclusion

So far we have been discussing the various development activities of Shreyas, which contribute to the sustainable development of the society. Shreyas follows a right based approach in the development sector. Economic development contributes only a part to the community development. A “right based social development” approach is the need of the time where there is due respect for the total development of all living beings. Rather than “human centred”, a “life centred ” development concept is being promoted by Shreyas which is evident in the above discussed sectors of intervention.

This life centred development approach really contributes to the sustainable development.

Eldho Puthenkandathil, Executive Director, Shreyas, Post Box No. 77, Sulthan Bathery, Wayanad – 673 592. Email: info@shreyas.org
