



## Shramik Abhivrudhi Sangh

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### SAS 2018-19 Notes on Activities

**Shramik Abhivrudhi Sangh** completed in June 2018, 40 years - 40 years of empowering the rural masses. All through these years it experienced the warm friendship, tender care and generous support of many people. It has been a remarkable journey.

Major initiatives of SAS were adult education, pre-school education, work among the power-loom and other industrial workers, traditional shepherds, SHG movement, tailoring classes, training in *panchayati raj*, community health, educational assistance to students, watershed, biogas plants cum toilets and the Xavier Farm project. Each of those initiatives had their own interesting stories and achievements. SAS and its staff, over the years, transformed themselves from service providers to organization builders. SAS is a story of teamwork, high motivation, dedication and commitment of its staff, each of them has beautiful experiences of empowering people, of building harmonious communities of diverse peoples, religions, languages and cultures. They helped people to avail of government entitlements. Often each staff is an institution engaged in multiple tasks. Each one lives a purposeful life, knowing that the ultimate purpose of life is 'to serve and not to be served'. What is presented below is a brief note on the major initiatives of SAS during 2018-19.

#### I. Integrated Rural Development

The target group of this initiative is women and rural households. They are mostly farmers and are victims of illiteracy, general socio-economic backwardness, inadequate and inefficient finances and marketing services. The size of their land holdings is very small and are often over-manned resulting in low productivity of labor. They are not able to make use of modern agricultural practices hampered by ignorance of such practices, high costs and impracticality due to small land holdings. Irrigation facilities are inadequate and dependent on rainfall. Many of them are indebted.

The two components of the initiative are '*Women Empowerment*' and '*Functional Vocational Training*'. The geographical extension of the project is limited to Belgaum District of Karnataka, and the adjacent Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. *The overall objective* of the project is to help people of the project area build strong local communities that are capable of playing an active role in the planning and implementing programs for creating socio-economic, political and cultural conditions that enable them to have access to basic necessities of life in a clean and healthy environment by using local resources in an eco-friendly manner. *The specific objective* is to plan and implement two complementary activities in the field of Women Empowerment and Functional Vocational Training.

**Women Empowerment through SHGs and related activities:** Self Help Group is a socio-economically viable group. It is a small group of 15 to 20 persons. Each member of the group

participates in all the group activities and in the decision making process. They take, in common, full responsibility for all their actions and decisions. Shg is a model group in a village. It leads members to self-reliance. It makes them courageous and self-assertive. It enables them to discover their human dignity and self-worth. The core values of the group are self-help, self-reliance, and concern for social justice, and mutual help. Shg responds to the social, economic, psychological needs of its members. It empowers them to fight for their rights and to fight against socio economic injustices. Organization and empowerment, especially, of rural women speed up the process of socio-economic development. They initiate and take forward the process of societal transformation.

SAS's direct beneficiaries of accompaniment were 974 SHGs with 15672 members as on 31-12-2018. Indirect beneficiaries were 15672 members\*4 family members = 62688 persons and the general public across 8 revenue blocks. The shg movement has made a lasting impact on the lives of the women in the following areas: *Economic* - women got easy access to money through their shgs. They developed their skills and abilities in various income generating and productive activities. *Social* - the notion that women were to be confined within 'the four walls of their houses' were slowly done away with. Women's mobility improved beyond expectation. They went to attend seminars and training programs, engaged in off-farm income generation activities. They widened their social horizon and they had greater respect within the family and outside. *Political* - women stood for local elections, they brought pressure on the panchayat at various levels and demanded proper implementation of government's poverty alleviation schemes and other enactments and entitlements for benefit of women, children and other weaker sections. *Psychological* - women became bold and faced people in authority and spoke in public meetings and expressed themselves without fear. *Health* - many women grew food/vegetables without the use chemical fertilizers and insecticides. They became health conscious. *Customs and Traditions* - prior to the shg movement, women hardly had any role in the family decision making. They became proactive and had greater say in the family matters. The illiterate and semiliterate women got a sense of achievement and progress. The improvement in women's economic opportunities and their ability to act collectively had a lasting impact in changing oppressive customs and practices. In short, shgs were instrumental in bringing women to the mainstream society. SAS staff monitored monthly the SHGs and conducted 10261 group meetings. They looked into their accounts and book keeping methods. They provided them with guidance and bank linkage.

*Thrift and Credit Situation of SHGs:* 15672 members of 974 SHGs engaged in savings, availed loans from their groups and banks for their various needs including income generation initiatives. Their total saving amounted to Rs. 221,980,145/-. *Employment Guarantee Act:* SAS staff conducted during the year, trainings on MGNREGA rules & regulations for 6350 members from 575 shgs of 115 villages. The training was not limited to SAS guided shg members but was open to the people of the villages and the officers and members of the *gram panchayats* in the area. The outcome was remarkable - 22967 members applied for work and 19711 members managed to get work. They worked for 1,035,271 man-days and earned Rs. 268135189/- as wages. During the year SAS motivated from 99 villages of 56 *panchayats* of 6 *taluka* another 3089 members to get job cards under MGNREGA.

*Organic Farming:* Along with motivation for organic farming SAS gave financial assistance of ₹2000 each to 200 shg women who were keen on Organic Kitchen Garden. Majority of the shg women came from poor background and had very little area for cultivation. The financial assistance served as an incentive and helped them to start kitchen gardens and savour organically grown vegetables. Some women grew vegetables in their backyards for own consumption; others cultivated for selling in the market.

*Other activities:* The staff reached out to the needy whenever they got an opportunity and brought a smile on their faces. SAS staff conducted two days children's camp to inculcate in them love for nature and to introduce them to organic farming. They were taken to farm lands and enabled to interact with farmers and learn by themselves where their food came from. They could touch, smell and feel and play with nature. Many groups visited SAS and interacted with its staff and beneficiaries to learn from its best practices. Similarly many of SAS beneficiaries got opportunity to visit other villages and other initiatives of SAS and to learn from other's experiences. Some of them went for educational/cultural tours and visited distant places. Besides the regular monthly staff meetings, the staff came together for the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of service of four SAS staff and the great thanksgiving celebration at the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of SAS.

***Functional Vocational Training:*** Its target was rural girls, who were school dropouts, mostly in the age group of 15 to 25 from low socio-economic strata of society. Direct beneficiaries of the initiative during 2018 were 53 rural women who were trained and worked as guides of the FVT program and 587 girls who participated as trainees in the program. Indirect beneficiaries were the families of the 53 guides and 587 girls. The FVT centres enhanced student's personality and income generation capacity. They got opportunity for singing, dancing, public speaking, and learnt garment making skills. Through a process of animation and awareness building both the teachers and the learners were sensitized about gender discrimination. They were helped to critically examine and challenge traditional attitudes and practices regarding women's right, health, education, employment, mobility, women's status in family and society. They got inputs on health, hygiene, nutrition, marriage and family life, sexually transmitted diseases and socio-cultural taboos that affect girl children and women and ways to tackle them.

## **2. Organization Building of Nomadic Shepherd Community:**

Area of operation: 11 Districts of North Karnataka divided into 4 zones. These were covered by different Village Level Workers (VLWs). The coalition government in Karnataka allotted sufficient funds for the development of the shepherd community. SAS carried out its activities among the shepherds successfully and helped them benefit from the government schemes. The formation of an apex body of shepherds federation based at Bengaluru was the dream of SAS and it was realized with the support of many stakeholders. The shepherd community is highly satisfied and is reaping the benefits extended by the KSWDC. Our VLWs motivated and assisted the members of the community to modernize the shepherding profession and to evolve a strong leadership in the community. There were favourable developments all through the State with regards to shepherd welfare. Sufficient vaccines and dewormers were available.

*Strengthening and Consolidating the OB process:* During the reporting period SAS added 15 SHGs of women with 188 members and 2 SHGs of men with 28 members to the OB process. There was the joint effort of our VLWs and the SHG cadres to expand their activities and sustain the growth of the SHGs to bring the desired socio-economic, cultural and political development of the shepherd community. The OB process had 1081 women SHGs with 14392 members and 376 men shgs with 5456 members - cumulatively 1457 SHGs with 19848 members. The overall impact of strengthening the OB process was a strong bond that developed between the SHGs and other CBOs – Community Based Organizations of Shepherds. Some 173 Shepherd Cooperatives Societies with 41181 members, Rs.23.64 million share capital and 4.62 million sheep and goat of the project area are associated with the movement.

### **3. Biogas Plants cum Toilets for Rural Households**

*Location of the Project:* Belagavi, Khanapur, Bailhongal and Hukkeri Revenue Blocks of Belagavi District. The project contributes to Improving the livelihoods of poor rural households in Belagavi district in a sustainable way; Increasing gender equality; Safeguarding the environment through the protection of forests and the reduction of greenhouse gas through conversion of cow dung and human excrements to biogas, and Improving the soil fertility through the use of high quality biogas manure.

SAS constructed and commissioned 795 Biogas Plant cum Toilet Units in 2018 for 795 households. All of them now cook on biogas and use toilets. They know how the unit works. Ritual barriers in cooking on biogas were overcome through education/awareness. The households experienced that the biogas intervention reduced indoor air pollution caused by smoke and soot from the use of traditional ovens. Besides, the time spent on gathering fuel wood and cooking is greatly reduced. The hygiene in the kitchen, house and surroundings improved; women and children and other family members enjoyed better health; all of them were very happy to have their own toilet; they used it and kept it clean. 795 households cover at least 80% of their energy needs for cooking with biogas and in doing so save 1752 kg of firewood households/ per year. Deforestation, degradation and conversion of forest land for agriculture and settlement put tremendous pressure on forest. Thousands of tons of firewood are consumed for cooking and heating purposes. Biogas proved to be a viable alternative source of energy for cooking. The beneficiary households use biogas manure on their fields and save costs for chemical fertilizer and supply poison free agricultural products.

As the major benefit of biogas technology, the households feel that biogas cum toilet unit improved their standard of living and enabled them to live with dignity. Women in those households enjoyed the badly needed privacy and felt liberated from the curse of open defecation. Biogas is most valued for its time saving work efficiency. Most women expressed great satisfaction, particularly with the cooking aspects of biogas, indicating that biogas is quicker, easier and safer for cooking than firewood and it provided the additional benefit of a hygienic toilet. A large number of beneficiaries became aware of the role of biogas in the conservation of environment. Many of them pointed out the improvement of family health as a significant benefit. They backed that up by stating that biogas was smokeless and did not require constant attention or blowing to keep the fire burning. Some pointed out that introduction of biogas resulted in behaviour changes of the individuals regarding general cleanliness in the

residence, improvement in the toilet habits which ultimately minimized family health problems, indirect savings on health related expenses, and time allocation by women/girls in pursuing their education and leisure time activities. Many women stated that there have been positive changes on family relations after the adoption of biogas. Males in the households corroborated it by saying that many men and other elderly women started assisting in the kitchen because of the ease in cooking on biogas. That was a great help for women and girls and that also improved relation and team work in terms of gender division of labour at household level.

#### **4. Educational Assistance**

Started in 2004, the initiative completed 15 years. During that period it helped 281 students with their professional studies, and brought joy and gave wings to their dreams. During that period SAS reached out with gratuitous educational assistance to many other students to meet the expenses of their basic education. During the 2018-2019 financial year SAS made available the sum of Rs 2,125,200/- for Educational Assistance. Out of which the sum of Rs. 910463 was contribution/returns from the students who were helped by SAS earlier. Most of the students who benefited from the project repaid a small percentage of their earning to SAS to enable SAS to provide similar opportunity for other students. It is heartening to see the youngsters after their studies handling responsible jobs and taking care of their families. Initially SAS helped students who wanted to do courses like General and BSc Nursing, but later it reached out to students in other fields like fashion design, catering, hotel management, course in merchant navy, sea man's course, teachers degree, diploma in electrical, electronics and civil engineering, bachelors and master's degree in various other disciplines.

#### **5. Xavier Farm**

Nestled along the outskirts of Machhe, Xavier Farm is an ideal place to experience the marvels of nature and learn with Nature. Xavier Farm engages in ecological agriculture, horticulture and dairy management. The day-to-day care of the farm is entrusted to three husband and wife pairs. The farm nurtures many varieties of trees; cultivates sugar cane, maize, potatoes and sweet potatoes, fodder grass and a variety of vegetables. There are also mango, jackfruit, coconut, banana, papaya and medicinal plants. The fruits are ripened naturally without the use of chemicals. The Farm Project provides shelter and perennial livelihoods for three households and wage labour for persons from the neighbouring villages. The farm supplies fresh milk to a number of institutions and households at reasonable rates. The cow dung serves as feedstock for the biogas plants, which supply biogas for cooking to all the families that reside in the farm and rich biogas manure for farming activities. "*On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')*" Pope Francis invited "every person living on this planet" for an inclusive dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. Xavier Farm Project is part of SAS's concern for the '*Care our Common Home*'. The farm has been the venue for various meetings, training programs and outings for schoolchildren and families from Belagavi. SAS used the facilities in the farm for conducting training for the participants/beneficiaries of SAS initiatives in the area of Women Empowerment, Functional Vocational Training, Organization Building of Nomadic Shepherds and Organic Farming. It also provided lodge and board facilities during their field visits to Masters in Social Work of students and others who came to SAS for a lived in experience in the field of Integral Rural Development.

## **Conclusion**

SAS does its work among the shepherds in partnership with Andheri-Hilfe, Mackestrassse 53, Bonn, Germany. That partnership greatly enhanced SAS's capacity to reach out to shepherds across Karnataka State. The work made a great impact on the shepherd community. SAS constructed biogas plant cum toilet units for rural households in partnership with BMZ/Andheri-Hilfe, Mackestrassse 53, Bonn, Germany. That partnership greatly enhanced SAS's capacity to reach out to large number of poor households in the rural areas of Belagavi District. The initiatives made a great impact on the beneficiary households and other stakeholders. Since last many years Action Solidarité Tiers Monde (ASTM), 55, av de la Liberté, L-1931 Luxembourg, has been SAS's partner for its "Integrated Rural Development Program" which mostly deals with women empowerment. As SAS completes 2018-2019, it's deeply grateful to its funding partners and the Goa Jesuits, and the Catholic Diocese of Belgaum, for their generous support. SAS's sincere thanks to its Chairman and Managing Committee members for their continued assistance and encouragement! The unstinted loyalty, hard work and dedication of its office and field staff, continue to be SAS's strength at all times. May God bless them all, our partners, friends, benefactors, and well-wishers!

(Detail Report is available at: [www.shramik.in](http://www.shramik.in))

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For S A Sangh (Secretary)

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