



ऑक्सफैम इंडिया  
**OXFAM**  
India

# OXFAM INDIA NEWSLETTER

## APRIL 2014

Demanding Rights for All

## CALLING ON THE REMOTEST AREAS IN CHHATTISGARH



Community members use Mahatari Swara for recording information.



A voice forum directly connected with people in remote areas

Accessing medical certificates, healthcare and even complaining regarding non-performance of a hospital is just a call away and mundane for most of us. But think about someone who once had to walk 25 km to simply report a birth in the community and can now use the interactive voice recording (IVR) technique to inform and record her experiences in her home. Isn't it absolutely exciting?

Jan Swasthya Sahyog (JSS) one of Oxfam India's partners has proved that innovation can have a life changing impact by introducing the audio-based software named *Mahatari Swara* to capture and record telephonic messages using the IVR technique. Through this software, community members can not only provide information regarding births and maternal health issues, but also record their experiences of receiving health services in public health institutions.

*Mahatari Swara* provides a voice forum and platform directly connected with people in remote areas which lack access to basic healthcare services. In Chhattisgarh which is known for its dense forests and a tribal population, accessing healthcare has been challenging so far. This innovation brings light to many people who walked many miles just to report a birth in the community.

It is a simple technology. Rekha Prasad from Devanpur, Bilaspur says, "I used this system for reporting a birth in my community which helped a lot. Earlier it was difficult to report and even get help or counselling. With this system the experts are providing help in conducting pre-natal and neo-natal care. Also, this system saves time and expenses. It is easy to operate and doesn't bring any barriers related to literacy."

Since *Mahatari Swara* is not an emergency help line, the calls that require action are addressed either by providing information or counseling over the phone and also through home visits if and when required by the village health worker.

**Over 30,000 people living in 54 villages will benefit through this system.** Many people have already started using the facility for collecting and exchanging information on government facilities, informing about disease outbreaks and keeping a watch on the activities of the organization.

JSS is taking the media's help to spread awareness about this innovative scheme. For people living in the remote areas of Chhattisgarh, Mahatari brings hope; the hope of accessing healthcare with just a simple phone call.

[preeti@oxfamindia.org](mailto:preeti@oxfamindia.org)

### THE "BRAINS" BEHIND MAHATARI SWARA

*Inspired by his tribal classmate, a journalist has given voice to the people who didn't have a voice before! This is truly called a revolution! Shubhranshu Choudhary is the "brains" behind CGNET and Mahatari Swara (Voice of Chhattisgarh) a mobile-phone service, which has recently been selected for 2014 Digital Freedom Award. This innovation allows citizens to upload and listen to hyper local reports in their local language, circumventing India's strict radio licensing laws and creatively providing an outlet for overlooked people on the wrong side of the digital divide.*

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## DO WOMEN NEED A QUOTA TO LEAD AND SUCCEED?

On the eve of International Women's Day, a charged panel discussion at Oxfam India's Inequality Townhall held in New Delhi's British Council debated if women need a quota to lead and succeed. The question touched at the very core of a campaign that Oxfam India and several other organizations, activists and political think tanks have been leading to get the 33 per cent Women's Reservation Bill passed.

The Inequality Townhall on Women's Leadership is an extension of the 'CloseTheGap Campaign' started by Oxfam in 2013 around the issue of social, economic and political inequality. It focuses strongly on the absence of women leaders from our public and private institutions.

At the Inequality Townhall, the participants got a chance to interact with a high-profile panel consisting of Ms Nandita Das (actor, director, activist and a champion of women's rights), Mr Kiran Karnik (Chair, Oxfam India), Dr Ranjana Kumari (Director, Centre for Social Research), Ms Rumjhum Chatterjee (Group Managing Director & Head, Feedback Infra Pvt Ltd.), Mr Grant M. Eldred (Human Capital Management, Goldman Sachs India) and Mr Martin Rama, Chief Economist, South Asia, the World Bank. The discussion was moderated by Ms Nisha Agrawal (CEO Oxfam India).

Pointing out the need for a shift in attitudes and relations within the family, actor Nandita Das stated, "Often husbands hold back their wives in multiple ways, even within



RTL – Kiran Karnik, Chair, Oxfam India Board; Mr Grant M. Eldred Human Capital Management, Goldman Sachs India; Rumjhum Chatterjee, Group Managing Director & Head – Human Capital, Feedback Infra Pvt Ltd.; Dr Ranjana Kumari, Director, Centre for Social Research; Ms Nandita Das, actor, director, activist and a champion of women's rights; Mr Martin Rama, Chief Economist, South Asia, the World Bank and Nisha Agrawal, CEO Oxfam India addressing questions on women's leadership

the 'educated, working middle-class' families. I tried exploring the subtle inequalities that exist in the educated affluent classes in my play 'Between the Lines'." These subtler forms of discrimination are harder for women to confront. Even if a woman is heading a big company, she is still expected to follow the unstated traditional role of 'holding back'. The time has come for this to change," she added.

Industry veteran and Chair, Oxfam India Board, Kiran Karnik said: "Companies are expected to have at least one independent women on the board. But that is bare minimum. There is no shortage of women with exceptional record and skills waiting to swell the ranks of corporate leadership. The companies must be more proactive as the required minimum should be 50 percent."

Ranjana Kumari pointed out that there are barely 3-4 per cent women members across political parties, which is a serious issue that needs to be looked into.

Nisha Agrawal added, "With close to 50 per cent as a voting population, merely 10 per cent participation in Parliament is absolutely not enough. Across the globe there are examples of how affirmative actions have led to increase in women's political leadership. Rwanda despite its history of struggle has over 50 per cent representation for women," she added.

The discussions established the need for women's economic, social and political leadership as the need of the hour. The panelists drew from their extensive experiences and personal journeys to engage with the audience leading to an enriching and informative discussion.

Oxfam India's Inequality Townhall was shared widely on the social media through a live webcast. An online audience participated in the discussions through Twitter, Facebook and the youth centered community website Halabol. The serious discussion ended on a happy note with an electrifying performance by activist band Swarathma.

[parvinder@oxfamindia.org](mailto:parvinder@oxfamindia.org)



Electrifying music concert by Swarathma...



# STATE LEVEL DIALOGUE ON CHANGING THE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM IN UTTARAKHAND

Nearly a year after massive flash floods in Uttarakhand in June 2013, people in 13 of the state's 14 districts are still trying to cope with the loss of life and property and trying to rebuild their lives.

Besides the heavy loss to life and personal property of those living in these areas, the flood waters also destroyed main roads and bridges, subsidiary road networks and pathways to the villages thus cutting off the area from the rest of the country. The unprecedented scale of devastation caused also led to a nation-wide debate on the development model adopted in the state since its formation.

The disaster and the nation-wide debate led Oxfam India to also think about the unsustainable development activities in the state and whether they had aggravated the impact of the disaster.

Hence, Oxfam India commissioned a study by well known development professional and Director of the People Science Institute, Dr Ravi Chopra to study the reasons for the disaster and chart out a future course of action not only in Uttarakhand but also in other parts of the country. The report on development and ecological sustainability covered aspects which are useful for a wider canvas among the key stakeholders including government officials, policymakers, civil society organizations, activists and the media.

After the study, Oxfam India organized a state level dialogue to discuss the ideal in an ecologically sensitive Uttarakhand and for sharing the findings of the report and its recommendations. Over 75 participants representing civil society organizations, development activists and campaigners, government officials, thematic experts and practitioners and media personnel participated to discuss and deliberate on the causes of the disaster and to find avenues for better preparedness in the future against such natural disasters.



RTL – Dr. Ravi Chopra, Director, People Science Institute; Nisha Agrawal, CEO, Oxfam India; Dr. Harak Singh Rawat, Minister of Agriculture, Govt. of Uttarakhand; Nand Kishor Singh, Regional Manager, Oxfam India

Many dignitaries, including Padmshree Dr Shekhar Pathak, an expert on Himalayan states and its issues, Dr S. P Singh, Ex-Vice Chancellor, Garhwal University and Padmshree Dr Suman Sahai, a well known scientist and expert in climate resilient agriculture were part of the consultation.

*The disaster and the nation-wide debate led Oxfam India to also think about the unsustainable development activities in the state and whether they had aggravated the impact of the disaster.*

## Some of the major highlights:

- Climate change: The effects of the changing climate are high on the fragile ecology of states like Uttarakhand.
- Anti-environment and unsustainable development of the industrial sector in the state, as in the rest of the country, coupled with an unequal distribution of growth and the expansion of physical infrastructure.
- Deforestation to give way to roads, dams power generation and transmission, also impacted the geography of the state.
- Poor governance which meant that weather alerts were not

given adequate attention and a dysfunctional disaster management system

## A few recommendations:

- Expanding the forest cover in a manner that enables livelihoods to grow. Strengthening Van Panchayats and implementation of the FRA Act.
- The state should focus on developing fodder and dairy, cultivating horticulture high value crops, integrated farming and off farm income generating activities
- Generating sustainable hydro power, earthquake safe construction and green roads.
- A functional State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA), promoting community based disaster preparedness, preparing and implementing the state disaster management plan as per the Disaster Management Act (2005).

It took a disaster to awaken people's conscience and make them ready to adapt to change and technologies. People are ready to adapt to change and technologies. It is now time to introduce climate resilient techniques of farming to promote sustainable development and reducing disasters. Oxfam India has initiated the first step towards preparedness. Would you like to join?

[nand@oxfamindia.org](mailto:nand@oxfamindia.org)

# TEACHING THEM TO FISH FOR MORE



Hugh Davidson celebrating Samudram's success with its members

His connection with India goes back years, when one of his aunts followed Mother Teresa to Kolkata and stayed back to work with street children.

Hugh Davidson with his wife Sandra and son Bruce visited the H&S Davidson Trust<sup>1</sup>-supported 'Samudram', a project for fisherwomen in Odisha.

The H&S Trust has been supporting Oxfam India since 2009 which in turn supports Samudram through its partner, the United Artists Association.

<sup>1</sup> The H&S Davidson Trust is a charity based in the Isle of Man, United Kingdom that through grants and expertise, works to transform the prospects of children on a sustainable basis. Its mission overseas in countries like India and Vietnam is to provide education for children, especially girls, from low income families.

It has built a collective of 3,800 fisherwomen in four coastal districts of the state. Hugh and Sandra were happy to see Samudram's members earning almost double the incomes that they did earlier.

Group members have also evolved as a strong collective which raises social issues like school drop out rate and domestic violence.

The Davidsons are convinced that the collective can tide over the situation caused by Phailin through enhanced incomes and are ready to extend further support for net and boat repairs.

[ranjana@oxfamindia.org](mailto:ranjana@oxfamindia.org)

## AGENT OF CHANGE

K. Sukuriama, a widow fisherwoman from Bandar village in Ganjam district is a mother of four children. Sukuriama faced hard times when her husband died. She had already sold off all her assets for his treatment.



Sukuriama borrowed money to start a fresh fish business for which she travelled daily to the Berhampur market. But she faced a lot of harassment when she travel led by public transport. Often her fish was also stolen, with the result that she was unable to earn as much as she could have.

Not one to give up easily and forced to look after her family, Sukuriama realized that there were many like her who too could do with some help and so she decided to collectivize fish vending women from her village and started a Support Help Group (SHG) with support from a local NGO. Sukuriama found out about Samudram's initiative and took the lead in organizing women fish workers in her own and in neighbouring villages. With support from Samudram, Sukuriama established 45 SHGs and linked 498 women fish workers. Because of her continuous guidance and leadership supplemented with support from Samudram, the SHGs accessed benefits of government welfare schemes and also got formal credit from local banks. The federation has since been recognized for its contributions in the interest of small scale fisher folks.

As a tribute to her work for Samudram, Sukuriama was elected as President in 2012.

## BECOME A 'FRIEND OF OXFAM'!

Donate Monthly to empower the lives of poor and marginalised and bring a lasting change. Your monthly contribution will help us continue in our mission to create a more equal, just, and sustainable world.



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