

Report on AAJ visit 13th to 17th February 2023

Objective:

To assess the progress made over the last quarter, firm up the strategy and perspective and devise the agenda for the next quarter.

Assumption :

Phase 1 related to what constitutes local self governance, nature of blending of traditional knowledge with modern scientific knowledge has been completed and approach to decentralized governance firmed up.

Hypothesis:

Action research agenda on various fronts to translate approach/perspective into action.

Assessment:

Assessment done during the last visit indicated the following

- a. Need to develop clear strategy to realize the agenda related to getting CFR claims submitted, recognized and prepare further claims in other villages as well.
- b. Need for development of a five year programme for educating children incorporating local ethos and local perspective into the curriculum.
- c. Need for developing a two fold agenda for women relating to translating the Centrality of SDG 3 (Health and Overall Well Being) and its relationship to other SDGs and in particular local value addition and income generation into practise.
- d. Need for developing farmer perspective in relation to natural farming and proper assessment of the economic and environmental impacts of the same as compared to chemical based farming practices. Relevance of agroforestry models (based on local species) as a way to ensure sustainable management of soil and moisture regimes.
- e. Need to activate functioning of the gram sabha on the basis of the above four planks involving multiple stakeholders at the gram sabha level.

Quarterly report :

Detailed quarterly report in Hindi has been provided separately. During the meeting progress on the following aspects were reported along with the strategy for follow up of the same.

a. Community Forest Right claims:

At the call of Adivasi Ekta Parishad, a massive gathering of adivasis from across the country and Internationally representatives as well (about 7-8 lakhs) took place at Hamirpura near Kavant . Following this gathering, members of the National Commission on SCs and STs came to Chhota Udepur to assess the performance of recognition of FRA calims in general and CFR claims in particular. In preparation for this meeting, on 11th February, AAJ called representatives from the villages of Vadiya, Amta, Khokra, SAKribar, Khenda, Gariyarbar, Nisar, Pipalva and Chotunon for a meeting at Bhekadiya. The commission met people from Patadiya, Dhandaniya, Bopha, Simulkheda, Dhania Umarva, Vagurvva, Kamlavasan and Batuprasadi. The people highlighted that they have only been given rights to dry wood, wood for utensils, minor forest produce and fish. Rights to protect, develop and manage the forest have not been given. This issue will be followed up over the reaming part of this quarter with special attention to the villages of Wakaner, Ucheda and Kharamda where claims for CFR have not been filed. Pressure has been put by the Commission to issue form Kha so that the same can be done. In this regard, the Commission made it clear to the local administration that FRA 2006 is not a one shot exercise but a continuous process and that all eligible are entitled to file claims once they become aware of their rights.

b. Five year Environment and Social Education programme for children:

Following up on the submission of the report for the UPR , it was decided to develop a long terms plan for children so that they develop an enquiring mind and root their understanding to the surroundings they live in, begin to understand issues related to children's ecological rights and become responsible citizens of the future. Accordingly the teachers of the Ashram were exposed to concepts related education of children, relevance of development of observational abilities so that they could themselves seek answers to questions they were exploring. It was explained that a five year education programme was planned for children from classes 5 to 9. The first two years would focus on Fenai Mata region (for convenience this has been divided into Kanalva region, Manka region and Dharsimel. Since there are children from MP too at the hostel, a separate group will be formed for them too. The next year will be devoted to two aspects. On one hand, development of a perspective on tribals by relating to tribals of neighbouring regions, On the other a perspective on Gujarat State, namely understanding different eco-regions as well. The fourth year will be to develop a perspective on India (coastal, hill, plateau, plains and apart from tribals, pastoralists, fishers, small and marginal farmers and wage labour as well - a start having already being made while providing exposure to the State of Gujarat). The final year will be to develop an International perspective related to other countries and continents and to the five communities outlined above as well. The education process will not be a straight line as mentioned above, there will be overlaps, but main focus as above.

The above will also link up to engagement with the school and education system as well. A what's app group has been formed with the purpose of developing the education objectives and course curricula. Three villages Mandvada, Bhekadiya and Munglavat have been chosen to take this up more intensively.

c. Two fold agenda for women, centrality of SDG 3 - Health and Overall Well Being:

In response to a request from the Chairman of TRIFED Ram Singh Rathva, a proposal to process local biodiversity into food, medicine and other products is being explored. The preliminary discussion on the possibilities indicated the following issues

- Women are burdened with household tasks and other restrictions, which make the issue of quality control and market exploration a huge challenge.
- The destruction of the biodiversity and natural resources makes the availability of suitable raw material scarce. Separate efforts are needed for eco-restoration of appropriate local biodiversity.
- Upscaling current initiatives in the household industry require a huge effort.
- The existing programme of the Van Dhan Yojna involving 300 provides a potential which can be explored to mitigate the issues identified above. Women from the villages of Mandvada, Jamba and Chipa will be contacted in this regard.

Keeping the above in mind, issues related to eco-restoration, contribution of women to the mid day meal scheme and its potential for guiding the programme with schools in relation to issues concerning nutrition, health and overall well being is the second option to be explored in terms of activating the potential that women provide for introduction of real change in outlook ensuring equality for women at the work place and at home as well. Considering previous experiences, development of women teams is being explored.

d. Need for development of farmer perspective on natural farming and sustainable development:

While overall awareness of the relevance of the biodiversity and traditional knowledge exists, day to day economic and livelihood concerns force farmers to adopt sub optimal cropping patterns keeping market forces in mind. With the development and deepening of the understanding of the leadership in Fenai Mata Revakhand Jaiv Shristi Mandal, it is now possible to have deeper discussion with farmers on questions related to land use, options provided by natural farming, market potential of organic farming and the potential for substantial reduction of costs through collective efforts, recycling and proper treatment of organic waste like the Jeev Amrut process. How this will result in an alternate support and management structure and the new issues that need to be taken care of is now the subject of concern. Various discussions at Munglavat, Sodvad, Uchela, Dandaniya and Padvani covered some of the concerns. The issue of Forest fires, seed banks and other related issues will be taken up again after Holi.

e. Gram Sabha Jagruti Abhiyan

The question of empowering gram sabhas will be taken up in the villages of Dandaniya, Mandvada and Padvani keeping in mind an appropriate resource person from AAJ who are from these respective villages.

Participation in larger forums

The participation of Fenai Mata Revkhand Jaiv Shristi Mandal in larger forums like

- Samast Samaj; A forum involving all communities in the region, including the biodiversity of the region. This forum is undertaking the process of deeper human/ nature relationships.
- Adivasi Ekta Parishad : As pointed out earlier Adivasi Ekta Parishad organised a meeting at Hamirpura village a few kilometers away from Kavant. About 7-8 lakh people from different States of India and International delegates as well attended the meeting. As a result of this National Commission of SC and STs took serious note and organized a fact finding mission to the region.
- Adivasi Bharat Mahasabha (UF) : Participated in the meeting at Adilabad via zoom and Udaipur in September.
- ICAN: Regularly participating in the AGM and in the consultations.