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**A Score of Existence - Context, Path and Work: Reflections of a
Development Worker**

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Me and Vasanthi

1997 - I was at Anand, it appears now, to meet Vasanthi. She was a young friend who joined the ranks of my inspirers. By then, I had another young inspirer, Anuradha, who came into contact with me, as if Guru comes in search of the disciple, in the true Sanatana tradition, for a while - mere one year. I am leading the path shown by her in her own way before her demise.

Before I discuss about the development worker, we need to appreciate the development context.

Development in the past 60 years in general and last 20 years in particular

Gandhi was the inspirer extra ordinary. He continues to inspire most of us. Most early civil society organizations sprung up after Independence inspired by Gandhi around voluntarism - charity and seva. The philosophy was to share what we got with others who were not so fortunate. Vinobha's Bhoodan (42 lakh acres) and later Gramdan, Manibhai's BAIF, Baba Amte's Anandavan, Sarvodaya, AVARD etc., have similar genesis. Khadi and Village Industries Commission and Boards became part of the government. There are others which had genesis in famine work like SWRC, Gram Vikas etc.

Innovative organizations to reach out to the poor inspired by the realization by the founders after high-end education include Ekalavya, Jamkhed Health Experiment, BCT, Sodhana etc. Some others have genesis in their leftist ideology. Donor-inspired agencies doing 'Food-for-work' programs, community assets etc., have come up. Some inspired by the suffering have come up like Ramakrishna Mission's Lok Kalyan Parishad, Missionaries of Charity, VRO, CROSS, RDT etc.

State on its part thought growth will take care of the problems including poverty. Went on to build industry, irrigation dams and so on. India was, unfortunately, saddled with famous Hindu growth rate for a long time. It also thought that some of the less fortunate require some 'charity' or doles. This required targeting. This required defining poverty line. Unfortunately, this poverty line was defined taking only the calories required to survive, as if people did not require nutrition, clothes and shelter. These calories loosely linked to income, the poverty line was arrived at and revised periodically. For some unknown reason, It was not revised since 1991. For a family of 4, it was Rs.11600. With 17 years passed, now it can be some Rs.36000 per year.

Public Distribution System, Cluster/Block Development in 50s, Five-year Plans, state-supported cooperatives (primary agriculture cooperatives in particular) etc., began in 50s. 60s saw District Rural Development Agencies/Units coming up to focus on all rural development efforts. After Amul's success, 60s began diary cooperatives movement. Operation Flood and Operation Golden Flow have made big difference to the poor in 70s and 80s. This has encouraged to begin the state-supported wasteland development efforts in 80s and 90s.

Nationalization of Banks, 20-point economic program in 70s focused on targeting the welfare schemes to the poor. Green Revolution in the 60s addressed large food shortages crisis in the country. This has willy-nilly given way to losing multiple cropping patterns thereby food security of small and marginal farmers.

Mahila mandals, youth clubs, village associations, tailoring trainings, cleanliness drives etc., were slowly giving way to groups and group enterprises. This is also the time Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (1976) came in.

Student's unrest (Nav Nirman movement) and Total Revolution movement spearheaded by JP, movements at Naxalbari, Srikakulam and later at Indravelli have led to land reforms, and tribal development initiatives - integrated tribal development projects/agencies, monopoly non-timber forest product operations, credit delivery etc.

Dravida Movement and linguistic states in 50s, 60s, and 90s saw and this decade is seeing waves of separate statehood movements, basically as a response to regional inequalities.

Janata Government launched food for work program. Community Health Workers Program, National Adult Education, National Child Labour Reduction Program etc., were also launched.

80s saw the establishment of CAPART. DRDAs started using NGOs. In 90s, NGOs started to receive substantial funding from state and outside. Specialist organizations like AFPRO, VHAI, BAIF, SPWD, PRADAN, PRIA etc., emerged.

NTR coming to power in 1983 marked a significant milestone in National Politics and development. His Rs.2 a kg rice has changed the way the poor eat. Multi-crop food-security oriented agriculture gave way to mono-crop commercial agriculture. Nutrition was lost. Dependency increased. Diversity is lost. Water inefficient farming has taken its roots firmly. Small administrative units, mandals, have brought the government closer to people. Restructuring the village administrative system has made a huge difference to the poor. He was a bit short on this agenda. The districts could not be made smaller. Smaller districts have received district administration's attention in ample measure and the progress is there to see in states with more districts like Tamil Nadu.

The new 1995 Cooperative Act for Mutual Aid has heralded possibilities for a truly member-driven collectives. These acts, now in 16 states, and a friendly central act and a provision in the company act to have producers' companies that work like member-controlled collectives have provided examples of what it means to be independent of state control and regulation.

There was a spread of movements like Swadhyay (self-study) to keep aside part of the earnings for the poor/community, and to do shramdan for community work.

Integrated Rural Development Program in 80s gave way to DWCRA and DWCUA in 90s. Individual support gave way to group support. Asset provision gave way to skills and self-employment, Jawahar Rojgar Yojana and later Swarna Jayanti Swarajgar Yojana. Groups were formed with matching grant to savings as a bait, later with revolving fund support and finally with bank linkages. PRA and Participatory Processes became popular and mandatory in almost all projects. Self-help movement picked up momentum. Tribal Development Projects, South Asia Poverty Alleviation Project, Watershed Plus (meaning livelihoods for the landless), River Basin Projects, Urban Services Projects etc., promoted collectivization of the communities and built institutions of the poor. Sustainability of the results saw emphasis. We also moved towards total literacy and universal primary education. Rights-based advocacy and organizing the poor has begun. Organizing the vulnerable including disabled began on a scale.

Finally, every child out of school is considered as 'child labour'. Child labour eradication movement has picked up. A national commission has come into being.

Fights against large dams have intensified. National Alliance for People's Movements has been formed. Watershed Development took centre stage across the country. Economic Reform processes began, initiated by PV Narasimha Rao and his team. This was also the time human development came to limelight.

73rd and 74th amendments to Constitution (in 80s) to transfer 29 subjects to Panchayat Raj Institutions with powers and responsibilities is making progress rather slowly. The task of building the communities to seek accountability from the local governments and the poor to share governance responsibilities equitably require readiness and wider acceptance and willingness. This is hard work. As Dr Kurien says - if democracy is not working, promote more democracy. In addition to PRIs, promote more institutions/forums, more CBOs, more advocacy associations and unions and so on. All these add to accountability. They will also provide examples of governance that can be adapted in the political arena. They also provide training and practice.

This decade also ended with the beginning of increasing emphasis on Corporate Social Responsibility, Payback to the Society and NGO, CBO and Civil Society Networks. Gender Sensitization and Gender Balance made inroads, with 'feminism' ideology found acceptability. It has also seen impressive progress on the information technology, computerization, enterprise wide resource planning, communication technology etc. Telephone and mobile density has increased. Channels are increasing. We have exclusive 24-hour channels for news, for 'bhakti', for 'fun' and so on. FM Radios and Community Radios are burgeoning. We have moved from reporting to online coverage. Connecting roads, community halls, village level infrastructure facilities were also made available. Community budgeting and community contracting was also attempted in a small way. On the other hand, Golden Quadrilateral Project for Highways, Modernizing Airports and Ports began.

The drives for bringing in appropriate technologies to the poor gained prominence.

Institutes like IRMA, organizations like PRADAN, AKRSP, MYRADA etc., and CAPART started bringing professionals into the sector. The professionalism into development ushered in 80s gradually raised remuneration in sync with the mainstream remunerations particularly with the donor organizations, large development organizations and projects. Some professionals could establish and run grassroots organizations. Sanjoy Ghose, who established URMUL Trust and later worked in Majuli island, Assam, is an outstanding example of this. A tendency to flaunt ego as 'professionalism' on the upper sleeve has replaced the 'sacrifice' and 'generosity' one-upmanship. Free-lancing, training and consulting organizations are growing in number although quality remained a casualty. Still there is a huge gap in the availability of professionals and paraprofessionals.

This decade - The first decade in the 21st century

This decade in our tumultuous times has seen significant changes in the context, in the country and in the world. Some of the changes that began more than a decade ago as a trickle have become avalanches now. It is a mixed bag of trends for the poor: some disturbing and some encouraging.

This decade is taking us through high growth. Rich and middle class are increasing the riches and the numbers. The differences between the poor and the rich are widening.

Climate Change which affects the poor more adversely has come to centre stage. Increasing water levels in seas, melting glaciers, drying ground waters, rising/fluctuating temperatures etc., affect the poor more severely and the poor need to get ready. The realization that with no real increase in land, water, trees

etc., the population dependent on them has increased 3-4 times in 60 years, far beyond the capacity of these resources, has dawned. Only way out is to help withdraw significant numbers out of this dependence and rehabilitate them in alternative off-farm value-addition and non-farm services and products. Fortunately, the youth want to get out and most families are looking for alternatives.

With increased life expectancy at birth and life expectancy at 60, the aged population is increasing. More than a half of them are active and working. With universal pension for the poor aged above 65 years, travel being 50% cheaper for them, the need is to promote 'ageism', promote oldage as a stage in life we all look forward to fondly.

As the proponents of Green Revolution themselves realizing and advocating new sustainable agriculture, and agriculture itself is going through a crisis - non-remunerative, debt-mounting, and suicides becoming the order of the day. This is compounded with the threats of globalization and liberalization impacts. There are harbingers of hope, however. The cashew and other horticulture orchards in the tribal areas are showing us the way towards dry-land horticulture. Vegetables (and flowers and fruits) cultivation, like an industry, is picking up. The direction is - Integrated pest management to Non-pesticides based management to organic farming. Consumers are showing preference for fertilizer and pesticide-free produce. Incidentally, this kind of farming is low on input costs without compromising on the productivity. This trend is further fuelled with fair trade and organic trade both in food and other commercial crops. We need to put our lot behind this.

Now, urban is more than rural in the world. India is fast catching up. The divide between rural and urban is blurring. We need to gear up for this shift. Satellite townships, regional planning in stead of urban planning, providing urban facilities in rural areas and 'rurbanization' are being considered as ways to organize this not-so-organized urbanization. Pull migration to tap opportunities for better life and livelihoods and Push migration for mere survival are aiding the pace of urbanization.

Unfortunately, the situation in the migration sites is not very hospitable and some times despicable. Also, the migration within the rural clusters is not uncommon. And there is seasonal migration and there is temporary migration. The migration leaves the aged at home, the children out of school. Further, the migrants have difficulties in sending the money home.

Longitudinal studies spanning 20+ years have revealed that the single largest contributor to poverty reduction on a more permanent basis has been education and skill development. All others have temporary effects. World offers more than 3000 vocations to learn, India is still below 300 trades.

We see drying of money for the sake of poverty reduction and development. We see the money flowing for disasters and emergencies. Tsunami and other large-scale disasters have taught us the importance of disaster preparedness and readiness templates to reach out to the donors in a jiffy.

We are in waves. We went through a wave of hunter-gatherer life for more than a lakh years, through another wave of agriculture of more than 10000 years and the third wave of industry for hundreds of years. Information wave is just 10s of years. Next wave will be still shorter. The waves are shorter but sweeping. Their pace is fanatic. The pace of decision-making has become rapid. Our grandparents could learn from their parents and practice the livelihoods for life. Our parents needed to go to school to learn and retire more or less with that learning. We need to constantly update ourselves to be relevant, to be in the reckoning and to keep our jobs. And I am sure, our children have to live

'insecure' and 'on the run' lives and livelihoods. A farmer of Netherlands has succinctly summarized this changing pace - 'my grand father used to take decisions 2-3 times a year; my father 2-3 times a month; and me once a day. I can't keep my mobile switched off.'

'Self-help Groups' movement has covered millions of women in SHGs and their higher order institutions. Women have become the centre of the development context now more clearly. Banks are increasing credit to SHGs and their federal structures significantly. Most micro-finance institutions are growing at 100%+ growth rate. With increased assurance and mechanisms for accessing credit for the poor, the issue has now shifted to IDEAS from finance. While the business approach to livelihoods is gaining currency, the realization is universal that we need to go beyond income generation and micro-finance, for Livelihoods Promotion. Even in forestry, Joint Forest Management gave way to Community Forest Management reinforcing the usufruct rights for the community collectives - Vana Samrakhsana Samitis.

A lot of people are talking about livelihoods, like the way 'participation' was talked about a decade ago. Authentic livelihoods appreciation can be a casualty, unless one is very conscious.

South Asia Poverty Alleviation Project experiment has grown into a giant project, Velugu (now Indira Kranthi Patham) in AP, which is being replicated throughout India and outside. Even in AP, the third phase with huge Rs.5000 Crore outlay is on the anvil.

By now, a new paradigm to address poverty reduction (new paradigm - Prosperity Paradigm) - where we need to work with the poor who have just graduated out of poverty; where we need to work with the poorest, marginalized, vulnerable and left out very differently - is unfolding. The contours of this new paradigm need to be evolved. These may include stronger organizations and solidarity groups of the poor; and more partnerships and collaborations between 'Poor' and 'Non-poor'. Thus, Poverty Alleviation gave way to Poverty Reduction and it is giving way to Prosperity of the Poor. Further, income generation gave way to working on the entire Livelihoods Arena.

As a country, we have started appreciating the need for collectivization, although we need to develop more models of collectivization. Yet we have failed to provide a favorable legal space for them. We need to work for ensuring that the new act in the offing for micro-finance regulation do not control and stifle collectives of the poor. At the same time, there is an increasing realization that we need to work on more businesses for poor and by poor, collectives or otherwise. We need to encourage and support business/service-based Enterprises and entrepreneurs. We need to facilitate businesses that service the needs like Fluoride Free Water.

It is no longer enough to go from 'fish' to 'fishing'. We need to go further to 'beyond fishing' and meta-fishing. Globalization and liberalization are unfolding. This would mean, from a livelihoods lens, what is working now or earlier, may not work in future. For example, a dairy sector which appears competitive may lose its competitive edge. Then, the moot question arises - what is the competitive edge for our poor. We need to figure this out. A quick guess is the services - knowledge based services. But the poor are not getting their share of the ICT-based Livelihoods.

While Comprehensive Livelihoods Thought is still evolving, the need for dissemination at various levels, from community to policy makers, is acutely felt. Thus, there is a need for a massive drive for Livelihoods Orientation across. Livelihoods of the poor have to be understood through the integration of the knowledge of the six blind ('as they observe, feel and experience the elephant');

the poor themselves should have access to this integration; and finally, the poor should call all the shots regarding their lives and their livelihoods, after all they are their lives and livelihoods.

Government(s) are taking the space of NGOs and creating Government NGOs (GONGOs). Corporate Social Responsibility Foundations and initiatives are growing. Government Projects, Corporate Foundations, Large NGOs, and CBOs are edging out small NGOs. The flow of charity through the NGOs, by and large, is reducing. Donors and philanthropists are routing their donations for micro-finance and other priorities or working through their own foundations and trusts. More and more development activities are happening through CBOs. Even advocacy is through the CBOs.

However, the organizations and projects that have been facilitating the CBOs and People's Collectives are reluctant to let control shift fully into the hands of the people and their true leaders. On the other hand, the managers in their organizations have to learn that they remain accountable to their Boards. At the same time, we see the staff of NGOs, in large numbers, are moving out. Simultaneously, partnerships, collaborations, leveraging, networks etc., are the new ways forward. The sector needs to learn this management.

Government of India is discouraging small bilateral and other donors from outside. Within the country, the funds are attracted to North. Only disasters are attracting some funds in the South and West. At the same time, rupee is appreciating against the dollar. It has ramifications for development funding. Amidst all this, charity gave way to Venture Capital. Some others are keen to leverage their investment and provide venture capital.

On the other hand, the 100-days per year employment guarantee act is universalized in the country; watershed-based natural resource management has covered most watersheds in the country; Pensions are increased to cover all the aged above 65 years with Rs.400 per month; free electricity is being made available to farming; Rs.2 kg rice up to 16-20 kg per family/month is being extended to some 18 million families in AP alone; Articulated intention to let Rs.100,000 million rupees flow for large scale irrigation; similar amounts for housing to poor; etc.

An historic Right to information (RTI) that has the potential to revolutionize public accountability and transparency practices, an ill-thought attempt to bring legislation for MF Regulation, threat to/luke-warm response to self-regulating mutual aid cooperative acts, promises of Land, Shares and Jobs for the displaced by Special Economic Zones, possible transfer of powers in about 30 subjects to PRIs, etc., offer both promise and frustration at the same time.

The decade saw the debate and practice of various roles of NGO/Voluntary/Civil Society Sector. These roles included public service contractor, collaborator of government and private sector activities, social innovator (new technologies, new services, new methodologies), social critic and policy advocate, and building civil society institutions including CBOs, networks and support organizations. NGOs themselves are undergoing changes in terms of defining their own roles. CBOs are taking over many of these roles.

We have estimates of decreasing number of poor; yet we have farmer suicides and weaver suicides. We have people finding none of their traditional livelihoods promising and migrating out of their livelihoods and villages. Yet many do not know where they can migrate to/into.

We see the growing 'organic'; retail boom; telecom - cell phones and internet - spread; plastic money; real estate activity; e-services; low cost airlines; rising fuel costs and use of bio-fuels etc.

We are living amidst paradoxes - credit (more savings of poor in banks than their credit from them); jobs (we have unemployment/under employment and employers have vacancies); infrastructure (unused infrastructure yet we go for new infrastructure); market (market wants what we can not produce and does not want what we produce); size (big is desirable and small is beautiful); philosophy (consumerism, street smart, ends only etc., and Gandhigiri, simple life, spiritualism, means matter etc.)

Attention to Climate Changes, and link with Development/Poverty Reduction to Peace, set by recent Nobel Prizes, our commitment to Millennium Development Goals, etc., push us forward, I guess. We have growing movements and conflicts around livelihoods resources. New power politics and social equations are emerging. Politically, Culturally, Economically and Socially, we are in a boiling pot.

We live in interesting times. Promising times. Conflicting times. Frustrating times. Context is dynamic with multiple hues, shades and dimensions. These change too quickly and sharply, sometimes.

In this background, poor/marginalized need skills and help in analyzing their general and livelihoods situation and take decisions - even if we think of providing a professional per 1000 families, India with 80%+ as poor (with per capita 2\$ poverty line) would mean a gigantic 2 lakh generic livelihoods professionals. Sector/livelihood-specific experts and functional specialists are not included here. A community level facilitator per 100 families would mean 20 lakh of them. Further, the existing People's Institutions need staff in large numbers. WHERE ARE THEY? This is a HUGE GAP.

The sector not only needs human resources in huge numbers, it also needs the best of the brains work for such an important and complex livelihoods agenda. But the remuneration is not attractive for some. The disparities and variations are huge. For some, the work is not so modularised.

But they need to be recruited, inducted; and existing human resources need to be oriented and their capacities need to be built towards this. This should be the BIG DRIVE.

I guess these challenges are acute. I am sure working on them will be exciting, frustrating, satisfying and rewarding. Importantly, the world will be a better place to live. We may also satisfy our selfish need to see happiness in the eyes of the people we live amongst. And we will be partners in India's transformation into a developed India where all its people have decent portfolios of livelihoods, and lives worth living with space for learning, love, leadership and fulfillment. Let us move towards this.

We at Akshara have been at the fore front of the 'future' and the transitions towards 'future' [These include Participation and Community-driven projects; SHGs and their federal structures; Micro-finance; Livelihoods; Collectives; Visioning for new context; Community Foundations; Movements for better Governance etc.].

Livelihoods Framework

Overarching Vision - across the themes: Every individual poor family is able to have a portfolio of decent livelihoods so that they can lead a decent quality of life.

Overarching principles

The Elephant and Six Blind Men: Individually, we know a part of the livelihoods of the poor. We need to come together and understand the livelihoods to get the complete picture.

Seven Fish: We need to go deeper into the issue, understand it and then suggest improvements.

Meta fish/skill: 'Teach fishing - don't give the fish' is an old adage. But what if the fish in the pond decline or the pond dries? They should learn the skill of finding new areas of work. Meta-fishing skills - skills of identifying opportunities and equipping oneself to tap the opportunity

Equity

Contribution/Repayment: This is the only guarantee that the people have considered the value of the intervention and believes that the intervention is to their advantage.

Institutions - social animals: Therefore, several institutions are needed and should exist together, mutually supporting each other.

Sustainability of Purpose of better portfolio of livelihoods

Livelihoods Framework indicates that Livelihoods are a Play of Six Capitals Towards Four Arrows within Four Contexts. A household makes a living using six capitals, owned by it or present in the community to which it belongs to, resulting in four elements - income, expenditure, days of labour and risk. The four contexts in which the household and community are present offer scope and limit the options available to the household to pursue the set of activities to make a living. Any household's endeavor would be to improve these four elements or to work towards four arrows.

The Six Capitals

The six capitals used by the household to take-up a set of activities are: Natural, Physical, Social, Human, Financial and Spiritual.

The **natural** capital comprises all the assets naturally occurring in the surroundings. These include the forests, wild animals, natural water bodies, the lands, the minerals, the precipitation (rain, dew, fog, hail), air flow, the local flora and fauna, etc.

The **physical** capital is all that is man-made. The house, the roads, electricity connections, water supply and sewerage, irrigation systems, schools, libraries, etc., fall under this category.

Social capital is support that a family gets from others in the society. This could be in the form of encouragement and caution, the feeling of binding that exists in the community/network to which the household belongs to, the relationships, and the enforcement of social norms like repayment of debt and completing the agreed work by the community. Such support, if proper, equitable and democratic in nature, contributes to household achieving the development aims in a just manner.

The **human** capital is all the strength, skills, knowledge, experience, attitude and aptitude of the human beings present in the household and in the community.

Financial capital is comprised of the savings held as cash, bank deposits, amount lent to others that can be called up on any time and liquid assets like livestock and jewellery. In addition, the credit standing of the household and the community to which the household belongs to, the credit that can be accessed by the household and the source of savings/credit existing in the community, the mechanisms providing insurance support, the regular cash flows that are not a

result of present work (like pensions, monthly/quarterly interest received from long term savings, etc.) etc.

The **spiritual** capital is the most important capital and denotes the spirit to survive, improve upon the present conditions and fight back in the case of shocks. Thus, the presence of this capital can take care of and get all the other capitals. And conversely, an absence of this capital would result in the household not using even the best of the capitals it can access or provided by development actors. The presence of this capital contributes to an active search for alternatives and opportunities to improve upon the present and work towards self-actualization. The presence of spiritual capital at the community level provides it with visionary and inspirational leadership and a competitive environment with a good cooperative spirit. This capital can make structural changes easier.

The Four Contexts

The household uses the capitals to take-up a set of activities in its pursuit of four arrows. However, the use of capitals and processes by which the capitals can be converted into four arrows is dictated to some extent by the context in which the households and the community finds itself in. There are four such contextual variables, which together enable us to understand the scope for and limits to the process of conversion of capitals into development outcomes. The four contexts are: Ecological and Environmental; Techno-Economic; Patterns of Distribution; and Patterns of Expenditures and Investments.

The **ecological and environmental context** is the natural regional characters in a situation.

The **techno-economic context** comprises the availability of technical know-how and the economic institutions present. It offers scope as well as limits the possibilities for effective and efficient use of the resources in the production of goods and services and create wealth.

The **patterns of distribution** of capitals obtained in a particular context determines the scope and limits of activities possible. The distribution could be related to wealth, existing resources, know-how, access to energy, technology, market, information, education, skills, social status, or political power among the households in the community, or the issues like age structure of the community. A highly skewed distribution limits a lot of possibilities, but encourages others. Of importance is not only the distribution of existing wealth, but also the wealth that get produced and shared.

The **patterns of expenditures and investments** in securing food, clothing, health, housing, education, credit, insurance, production and employment differ between communities. These differences not only cause different possibilities in the present, but also indicate the potential possibilities that could be taken up in future. The differences ultimately impact demand generation and investment and thus offer scope as well as limit the possibilities of further progress.

The Four Arrows

Increasing the income

Decreasing the expenditure

Increasing the number of days of work available

Decreasing the risk

The **increase in income** could be the result of an increase in the share of worker in total value of production,

the productivity of the worker, resulting in a higher wage, or the days of work available to the worker.

The **decrease in expenditure** (money, time, energy and drudgery) should not be at the expense of essential consumption and quality of life. The decrease in expenditure could be brought about by

bulking up the purchase of productive inputs and consumption items,

improving the productivity of inputs in the production process, and

changing the production process/adopting new technology and drudgery reduction equipment.

Increasing the days of work available to the poor can improve their conditions and quality of life. While increase in the number of days of work can directly impact their income in present or in future, increasing the days of work available (productive engagement) could be goal in itself.

Decreasing (and diversifying) the risk - both that are peculiar to a household (idiosyncratic risks) and/or that generally affect the entire community, village or a region (covariant risks). Risk reduction, risk prevention, risk coping and risk mitigation efforts help in this. Increasing the work days, improving access to services, improving social security support systems and institutions help in reducing the risk.

The Interventions

The community and development agent identify gaps and opportunities after having understood the present set of activities taken-up by the households in the target communities, their present income, expenditure, days of labour available and risks, the capitals that they use and can access, and the contexts. Analysis of these gaps and opportunities results in the formulation of a set of mutually reinforcing interventions.

The gaps and opportunities could relate to:

the present situation of income, expenditure, days of labour and risk.

the present level of asset utilization and access and their augmentation.

the factor productivity, i.e., techno-economic context.

any of the contexts.

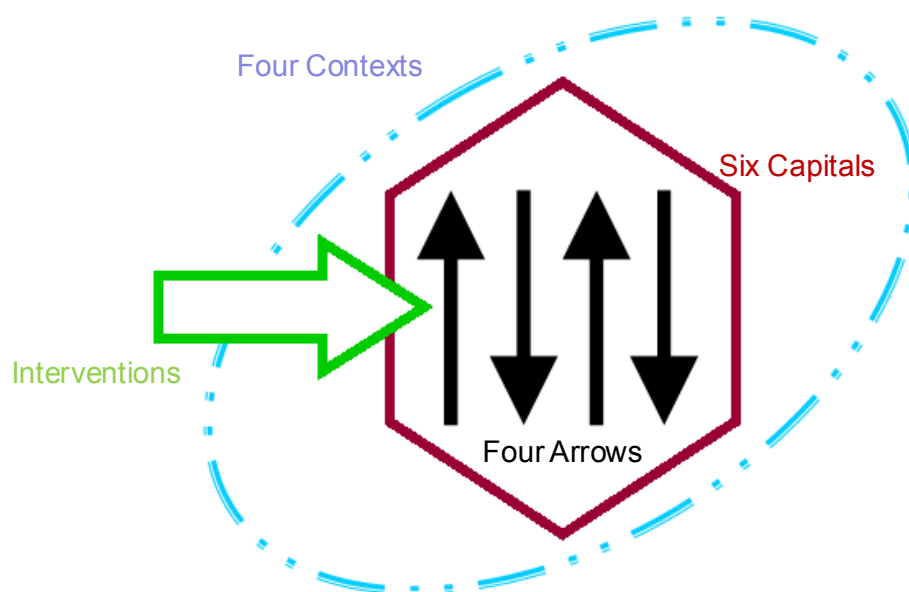
Thus, the interventions would try to fill-up the gap or realize the opportunity.

This can be depicted as mathematically as a formula (Livelihoods enhancement formula) as below.

$$Y = \sum_{i=1}^n (g_i - c_i) * r_i * d_i - \sum_{j=1}^m c_j * r_j * d_j - \sum_{k=1}^l c_k$$

Livelihoods Framework can be depicted diagrammatically as:

Livelihoods Framework



Four Contexts – Ecological, Techno-economic, Distribution Pattern, Investment-Expenditure Patterns
Six Capitals – Natural, Physical, Social, Human, Financial and Spiritual – Knowledge-Skills-Resources
Four Arrows – Income, Expenditure, Employment, Risk - Outcomes

The critical concepts within the livelihoods framework are as follows:

Existing Livelihoods First; Existing First (Revive); Optimise Resource use

Least Cost Interventions First (saturate NTFP...); Skills First

Address the entire value-chain; at least the critical part of the chain

Collective vs Individual; Partnerships

Wage Labour - focus (CPRs, NTFP, Lease...)

PK+OK+OK+? in the Knowledge-Skills-Resource system

Best Practices within

Market (particularly local market) First

Micro-Macro Play

Feasibility, Viability, Cost-effectiveness; Productivity, Equity, Sustainability

Community Contribution; Repayment

Livelihoods Enhancement Action Plans in village and at higher levels (LEAP Processes)

- Social and Resource Maps
- Traded-in and Traded-out Items; Income and Expenditure patterns of the poor
- Livelihoods of the poor in the Village; Value-chain analysis for the significant livelihoods ... input, pre-production, production, harvesting, post-harvesting, local value-addition, marketing: producer-to-consumer chain

Constraints, Gaps, Credit (terms and tie-ups), Uncertainties/Risks, Best Practices, Meaning of correcting the imperfections and implications

- Farming System Analysis
- Opportunities for Wage Labour, CPRs, NTFP
- Discussion on Local Opportunities - new items but known already and new products/services, opportunities and Enterprises

Carried out by Community with support from CLFs/Activists and Professionals

People's Projects - People themselves plan and implement; Independent Appraisal; Environment Assessment; Institutional Capacity

The People's Project Process (Timeline) [Iterative Process, with technical support at every stage]

- Community Organised →
- Exploring People's Project ideas (LEAP-Project ideas) →
- Prioritisation using Productivity, Equity, Sustainability and significance criteria →
- Proposal Evolution →
- Proposal to use resources/potential funders →
- Appraisal (Yes, No, Modify) →
- Sanction →
- Linkages, Community Getting Ready →
- MoU (and first installment) →
- Implementation - Milestones - Releases →
- Linkages (Bank, Technology, Market, CB etc.) →
- Joint Evaluation (and final installment) →
- Follow-up (+use of repaid amounts/leveraging)

'Support' throughout (technical ...); Multiple doses of support

The Contours of livelihoods framework are:

Poor are both consumers and buyers: Reduce the Costs of Consumption and inputs and avoid spurious quality items; Reduce Expenditure

Poor are Producers: intervene in pre-production, production, harvesting and post-harvesting stages (value-chain) with appropriate technology, resource augmentation, and improved practices

Poor can add value: Move to the right on producer-consumer chain (aggregation, local value-addition etc.)

Poor are Sellers: Augment returns from goods/services; increase Income; Build market savviness

Poor can add new lines: Increase utilisation of resources; Provide new sources of income ... skills, assets, opportunities

Livelihoods of the Poor are Risky: Reduce Risk and/or diversify risk ...

Science can help Poor: Develop new products and markets applying science and technology

Poor can be de-skilled and re-skilled

Poor need Market Intelligence Systems, Bulletins ... Knowledge Dissemination Systems

Poor need support of Activists/ Paraprofessionals

Build Infrastructure to increase capacity to hold (where required/feasible, revive the existing)

Some Poor can be entrepreneurs

Some Poor can venture into New Micro-enterprises: based on local resources (off-farm, non-farm) and third party contracts

Some others can take up New Service-based enterprises

Meet the Credit needs (break the credit-purchase-sales vicious cycle; thrift-credit-bank credit-insurance; consumption and investment credit)

Group/Collective Enterprises of the Poor

Livelihood Support Finance Mobilisation - support required per family Rs. 100000-200000; Savings - CBO Funds - Bank Linkages; People's Bank(s)!?

Partnerships - Market Linkages; Services & Employment Generation; Banks; Media; Individual Volunteers; Professionals and Eminent Individuals; NRIs; Agencies/Education & Management Institutes/Companies/Chartered Accts - External agencies for technical support

Sub-sector Expertise

LF Interventions need not wait for the complete sub-sector understanding for intervention. 'Endogenous' interventions can take off

Institutions and institutional mechanisms around livelihoods activities

Human Resources for LF and their capacity building

Promotion of Training Institutions at Sub-district level as Livelihood Schools for business enterprise or Vocational training

State Support

- Support Prices, Market Support, Regeneration, Inputs, Seed, Extension, Research, Storage, Procurement Centres, Processing Infrastructure
- Market Intelligence, Futures, Insurance
- Community Organizations around produce, Training, Paraprofessionals, Professionals for these activities
- Leveraging Finance

Some Paradoxes

- Credit; Infrastructure; Commodity Markets; Jobs

The following elements should form a necessary part of way forward:

Fine-tune LEAP Processes framework so that it becomes robust enough to suit various contexts and support the processes for tapping gaps and opportunities and implementing the LEAP-based action plans (in select sites) including processes for various backward and forward linkages

Watch dynamic local, national and global political, economic and ecological changes in environment and disseminate implications

Help the poor to analyse their situation and take decisions

- LEAP; PK+OK+OK+?; Best Practitioners; Value-chain Analyses; Appropriate Technologies
- Look at Existing Livelihoods First; Skills First; NTFP and Low Cost Livelihoods First
- Remember Multiple/Portfolio of Livelihoods
- Remember Productivity, Equity, Sustainability
- Household, Group, Village, Cluster (and so on) Plans
- Sub-sector expertise; Sub-sector Interventions

Look at Livelihoods for marginalised, go 'beyond fishing' and be anchored in Prosperity Paradigm

Support Livelihoods Support Organizations to develop various modules/kits for undertaking livelihoods support activities and transfer these modules (related to LEAPs, LEAP follow-up, linkages, market analysis, intelligence and marketing support, financing etc.,) to others

Go beyond income generation - other arrows; 'Jobs'; 'Vocations'; Coaching; Reduce Costs - Shops - Margin Free Shops; Mutual Support - Risks - Life, Wages, Accident, Livestock etc.

Work to bring in Livelihoods Finance - beyond the micro-finance and Finance for various needs - Skill Development, Jobs, Self-employment; Consumption, Health, Working Capital, Bridge Capital

Seek the ideas that needs to be promoted; look at ICT-based Livelihoods, rural-urban continuum

Businesses for poor and by poor; Collectives; Producers' Companies and Marketing Organizations; Business/Service-based Enterprises; Businesses that service the needs like Fluoride Free Water

Support Livelihoods Advancement Schools for building skills for productive engagement

Induct new livelihoods professionals and build skilled paraprofessionals; orient existing development professionals including staff of CBOs towards livelihoods

Induct livelihoods volunteers and livelihoods life workers to contribute time in livelihoods domain in a variety of forms/services and in a variety of livelihoods in various contexts

Non-poor forums and forums for non-poor livelihoods that have a bearing on poor; partnerships

Support field partnerships in pursuing livelihoods agenda; support their visioning and planning

Partner/collaborate with government and large development/livelihoods projects/agencies

Work on corporate partnerships and corporate social responsibility structures/processes

Facilitate PRIs for meeting infrastructure needs

Differentiate Non-profit and not-for-profit and build income streams beyond MF for sustenance

Livelihoods Orientation - DRIVE

Human Resources at various levels - BIG DRIVE

Slowly build mentors, to mentor existing and additional LSOs and the professionals in these LSOs

Build certifying/accrediting processes, quality standards, scaling-up/replication protocols, and integrated network(s) of/for LSOs

Support in Livelihoods Project Design (large projects) to bring in the livelihoods agenda upfront

Support livelihoods fellowships (short-term and long-term)

Facilitate Livelihoods Website/portal/database

Publish Livelihoods Books - Booklets - Learning Material including e-learning/e-sharing

Build Platforms/Congress for Development (Livelihoods) Professionals/Organizations

Facilitate associations/societies for learning (of development professionals)

Finally, get going on this path further, deeper, higher, wider and so on.

The Critical Agenda within the Framework

From the framework emerges the agenda for the livelihoods work. The poor themselves have to take informed decisions about their way forward. As this is not one time affair, particularly in this dynamic age, they should internalize the processes themselves. At least, they should have access to a system or an institutional mechanism that provides support in these processes.

Most livelihoods organizations/projects focus on just the 'results' by providing certain inputs (these inputs sometimes include institution building). There are individuals and organizations involved in enhancing the livelihoods of the poor - but they may be short in adequate orientation, knowledge, skills, and resources. They need to be supported. There are some elements of the livelihoods spectrum, not attempted adequately - and some are not even considered crucial for livelihoods development. New initiatives in this area need to be attempted. Further more and more people have to be working on the complex but critical issue of enhancing livelihoods of the poor. These have to be brought in a variety of forms including professional full-timers, volunteers, staff with the communities/their organizations, paraprofessionals, community livelihoods resource persons and best practitioners from community.

There is an enabling environment in terms of Millennium Development Goals (particularly to halve the extreme poverty by 2015) globally and we need to cash on this quickly. The self-help movement of women has reached a stage to move on to livelihoods from the micro-finance/micro-finance+. They are willing to experiment with various collectives that could meet their livelihoods needs.

On the livelihoods front, we only have sporadic examples here and there on a limited scale (except of course, White Revolution - in Milk). It has, now, become clear that poor have multiple livelihoods; they live in diverse contexts with diverse capital composition to result in a pattern of their four arrows. Livelihood options of the poor have to meet the key criteria - feasibility, viability, sustainability, productivity and equity. This has become paramount, of late, in the natural resource front, as we are reaching ecological remits/limits on many

fronts. Also, special attention/effort is called for looking at the livelihoods of the disadvantaged/marginalized groups/communities.

The time has come for the community to move beyond taking 'fish' to learning 'fishing' to learning 'the skills to identify and learn the skills that can fetch a livelihood dynamically' (meta-fishing skills). This would require handholding support for a while. Community would also require service providers. They would require backward and forward linkage providers and marketing supporters.

Therefore, we need to think about decentralized but widespread/replicable/scalable/self-replicating systems, processes and structures so that we move beyond one more or two more additions to these sporadic examples. That may mean a network(s) of Livelihoods Support Organizations anchored by committed, talented, bright and passionate social/development entrepreneurs/professionals or their groups, instead of organizations with centralized pools of professionals may be the way forward.

People - the bright and young minds - make all the difference and therefore, working on them matters. The need is huge. Therefore focus is on identifying, inducting, training, mentoring, encouraging them to be entrepreneurs/volunteers/staff/field practitioners and ensuring quality support to community. Our critical appreciation is that the bright and young minds like to get freedom and independence, not bound by bureaucratic chains to be in development. They need to be handled with care and mentored.

Gradually, advocacy towards mainstream institutions responding positively to support poor in their endeavors to enhance their livelihoods in terms of policy, design (of poverty reduction/livelihoods projects), infrastructure, regulation, market access, partnerships, financing, jobs etc., has to begin.

And some organization(s) has to anchor this agenda. Its role is facilitating individuals and organizations to take up parts of the agenda and the processes to integrate these different parts.

It is time to discuss the path and work of the development worker.

Where am I after 20 years in Development ?

Lots of unfinished agenda.

Figuring out the agenda took its own time. I have a dream that the development sector professionalizes and the society at large looks at development profession as a desired profession. In my dream, the parents, teachers, and society at large encourages the child to become a development professional as a priority. Some of the best brains apply their minds to unravel the complexities of development. People with passion enhance their competence to be relevant and minds with talent and insights get direction and orientation.

Towards this dream, the agenda that I am pursuing is in applying management concepts, tools, techniques and processes in development, professionalizing the development sector, improving the livelihoods of the poor and creating wealth for them.

Equipping to lead the agenda took most of the balance time. Been an engineer, teacher, development professional, analyst, community coordinator, coordinator of multiple teams, trainer/ recruiter of development professionals, project coordinator, project manager, strategist, facilitator, adviser and mentor and have liaised/have been familiar with a few development organizations, development professionals, training institutions, government organizations/ departments and financial institutions. Building human and institutional resources, systems and solutions has been my internal focus. Worked intensely with diverse marginalized

groups and their needs, products and services. Traveled frequently and widely in India in general and in rural/tribal areas in particular.

Now, I am a livelihoods worker and a social entrepreneur. Livelihoods domain and development sector is looking towards me as a promising mentor for livelihoods workers, entrepreneurs and organizations. I think this has been an awesome responsibility I have to cope with.

My essential work is in Development and Livelihoods Management Praxis. We are referred to as Livelihoods People due to the efforts in spreading ***New Thinking and Practice in Livelihoods Domain*** including Livelihoods Framework. Some of the other concepts that gained currency include Community Coordination Teams, Marginalized for the Marginalized, Natural Resource Accounting, Institutions for Development, Participatory processes for livelihoods, Competency-based selection etc. 25+ Visions and Plans, 25+ Value chains, 10000+ livelihoods learners, 2 magazines, Key support to development projects in 12 states, with Rs.10000+ Crore outlay influencing 20+ million families has been our humble contribution. All this has culminated in *Akshara Network*.

Personally, I have become purer. I am on course to learn the 'art' of loving. I am learning to appreciate the second, third and fourth hand results and derive that vicarious pleasure. I am realizing that my duty begins and ends with 'doing' what I am supposed to do. I am realizing that I am a vehicle (or call me an instrument) and my job is to provide service as an instrument.

What am I after?

As a livelihoods worker, I apply management concepts, processes, tools and techniques in the development sector/livelihoods domain. Essential job is in mentoring Livelihoods Support Organizations and Individuals. Key goal is to ensure availability of reliable and affordable quality livelihoods support. One of the key strategies is to build integrated network(s) of self-reliant and viable Livelihoods Support Organizations. These LSOs would meet the needs of the communities, community organizations, development organizations working for them, the Government and Panchayat Raj Institutions/projects and the corporate bodies in the livelihoods domain.

These LSOs would either be around a geographic location/area or around a livelihood/livelihood sub-sector(s) or both. These LSOs would be like franchisee centers involved in one or more of a range of livelihoods support services. They support in the LEAP (Livelihoods Enhancement Action Plan) processes at the village upwards. These include mapping the current livelihoods reality of the poor around their capitals and four arrows, in their specific contexts, integrating the people's knowledge-skills-resources with that of the support organizations and outside of these, livelihoods analysis (identifying gaps and opportunities), value-chain and sub-sector analysis for the significant livelihoods, market opportunities analysis etc. This leads to the evolution of LEAP by the community in a participatory manner. Further support from LSOs would be in establishing backward and forward linkages including marketing. LSOs would also support in building the paraprofessionals and community livelihoods resource persons (CLPs). LSOs would support in jobs training to certain of the community members who do not want to be entrepreneurs. LSOs may also handhold some of the micro-enterprises of the individuals and collectives of the poor. LSOs may also be like field partners/stations and demonstrate some of these aspects on ground, in addition to partnering with field partners/stations. Some LSOs may specialize in one or more select aspects.

Some of these LSOs will be facilitated and managed by Livelihoods Life Workers drawn from the mainstream (after their long innings, or who would like to take a

break), and/or from the disadvantaged who would like to work for their co-disadvantaged (now or earlier).

Some others can be fair marketing and business organizations that take the baton from the collectives in their effort to reach the consumers/producers as directly as possible. They may also reduce the risks of the community and/or their collectives and bear the risks of business themselves. They are characterized by the fair practices in the market place.

Yet some others may be mobilizing the volunteers to give time, energy and expertise towards one or more amongst the various efforts to better the livelihoods of the poor and reduce poverty. Some may specialize in building the professionals and skills of the professionals who work with other LSOs and other Community Organizations and Development Organizations.

I am after a dream. In ten years from now, we reach out to at least 50 million poor families; 5 million with skills for productive jobs; a quarter of 500,000 volunteers mobilized provide one-day a month towards enhancing livelihoods of the poor; 100,000 paraprofessionals/community livelihoods resource persons from diverse livelihoods situations/backgrounds, 10,000 livelihoods professionals (created afresh and/or upgraded from the existing development workers' pool) service the poor directly/ indirectly through LSOs; 100 LSOs with 1000 livelihoods professionals service the poor in their livelihoods domain; 600 CBOs/Development Organizations/PRIs as field partners/stations in livelihoods domain; 10 large Collaborators (Government, Corporate Bodies, Donors etc.) in livelihoods domain. This scaling-up and replication for significance begins by the end of 2010.

The path I have taken

Who am I - why am I in this pursuit? Some thing has been troubling me from inside and I think it is troubling still. In search of reducing the pain, I have been/am going through, I have been/am on this path. It defied traditional development worker's trajectory, in a significant way.

I come from a not-so-poor family in the dry land areas. My grandparents pursued one of the traditional artisan livelihoods. The prospects of this livelihood were declining day-by-day in terms of market and consumer preference. Starvation was chronic in these households. As a result, migration was acute and common and mostly in desperation for survival. The condition at the sites of migration was pathetic while the wages were for hand-to-mouth existence. Thankfully we were not starving. Yet it was a great effort on the part of my parents to let me study, some 40 years ago.

As literacy trickled to majority of the poor, the young generation is reluctant to pursue these livelihoods - not just the artisan livelihoods but also the farm-based livelihoods. While resources are used sub-optimally, the employers are not finding the employees with skills, consumer market needs are not met, the poor are not getting jobs, their products/services are not in demand, some other products/services are in demand but not able to provide remunerative prices/wages. It appears, with hindsight, this paradox and the resultant unhappiness/frustration has been driving me in the background. My search for ways to resolve these paradoxes, has led me on to the livelihoods path.

Joined school late but directly in class 2 to fail; My teachers have promoted me with grace marks. Then, I have recovered to be top in the class till Class 7. My father was in politics. Poverty and Welfare were discussed often at home. I gained more insights into the sufferings of the people.

By a stroke of luck, otherwise I would have dropped out, I received the call letter for the entrance of AP Residential Schools. Scored well, stood second in

Telangana Region and got admission in Sarvail, first of the three schools in the state then. Now we have more than 600 such schools in AP. More than 600 Jawahar Navodaya schools have come up in the country modeled after them.

Surely, my course began to change. Another set of accidents - I could not write the entrance to APRJC, Nagarjuna Sagar, only one such college in AP then. I did not get a state rank in SSC, only other way to enter the college. I was sad and joined a local college in Hyderabad. Meanwhile, I got National Talent Search Scholarship (National 2nd) and 2nd rank in Mathematical Olympiad. The society of residential educational institutions (Late Mr Venka Reddy) got upset that I was not in APRJC and they moved heaven and earth to ensure that I got the admission in APRJC. The mandate given was simple - get state rank. Thankfully, I got. The transition to English Medium and catching up with the environment late could not get me a top rank in IIT-JEE. I could not consider taking up some course. But the EMCET, then, was little easy and I could get state 2nd mark and 15th rank so that I could join Electronics and Communication Engineering in NIT Warangal (then REC Warangal).

As I progressed, as I invested in catching up with English, as I cope with extra-curricular needs, it occurred to me very early in Engineering, that we are part of a course destined. So far, we made no choices really. Like many of us, I had to make my first real choice after my B. Tech. I concluded that there was a lot of demand for Engineering and the bright were invariably getting attracted to it (the other careers being medicine, chartered accountancy), the Technology domain would not suffer really, if I was not there. With that realization, I zeroed on two alternative career options - journalism and development. Both of them were not able to attract enthusiastic committed bright young men and women. I was not sure which to choose, notwithstanding my early placement offers from ITC and SHAR Sriharikota. My father, later, was commenting that I took more than 10 years to catch up with the level of remuneration they were offering at that time. This decision did not affect my performance in academics. I remained a top ranker throughout. Indian Express was quick to offer sub-editorship. I could not make up my mind. I took up an assignment to teach in an Engineering College in Guntur. I bought time to think and choose. My classmates and friends were after me to take up further studies in Technology at IIT or abroad. I could not consider. Finally, I opted for rural management, due to my perception that development work required me more and probably I could do justice. As I inched towards 'development', I felt the acute need, in the absence of a mentor, for a license which any social work or management institute including IRMA, could offer. I went to Institute of Rural Management, Anand to get a license to continue to work in this domain. In two years at IRMA, apart from the much needed license, I could read 500+ books of consequence in development. And I was ready to 'practice'.

Thereafter, my experience progression was towards acquiring adequate understanding of diverse livelihoods situations/interventions and applying the same for enhancing the livelihoods of the poor.

Again an accident. In stead of the traditional route in development of starting from the grassroots work, I started at the apex. I got the opportunity to work with the development worker with no parallel, Dr Verghese Kurien and his deputy, Dr RP Aneja. It gave me an opportunity to work on a historic opportunity as part of the core team that managed the national market intervention operation in edible oils/oilseeds to maintain the prices of edible oils within a price band. This massive Rs.1000+ crore megaoperation with direct cash credit from RBI could maintain the prices within the band, clean up the edible oil industry substantially and convert it into mostly organized sector. It was estimated that the producers and consumers got the benefit amounting to Rs.10000 Crore/year, benefiting

more than 10 million Indian Farmers and almost all the consumers (i.e. entire India). DHARA became a well-known brand. Importantly, the sector drastically changed its character, thanks to our MIO work.

Then, I spent a year with IRMA doing three things - leading the national estimate of edible oilseeds, travelling across the country stopping at each kilometer, looking at the field, counting groundnut pods and tasting seeds, and later with mustard. It used 46 parameter model. And the estimate was within the +/- 1% range of the final figures of Government of India; second - part of the Brains Trust to feed the Planning Commission on Agriculture and Rural Development, in leading the arguments in favor of the community collectives for developing themselves (poor) and development organizations supporting these collectives. Of course, there was usual research and teaching responsibility.

There was increasing pressure from within oneself, to spend and do something at the grassroots. At times, we felt at a loss to appreciate the indirect support that benefited the common man. One was not ready for a vicarious pleasure. To become ready, we thought we should look at poverty from close quarters armed with 'lenses' and 'tools' and take up/help taking up micro-level development initiatives as per the need of the micro-level situation. This forced me to look at the tribal areas.

I moved to Girijan Cooperative Corporation to work as a direct grassroots worker called Community Coordinator in the forests of Adilabad. I was part of the evolution of a new path breaking concept of Community Coordination. We were instrumental in conceptualizing and managing the concept of Community Coordination Teams (working in small homogenous clusters of about 3000 families) led by Community Coordinators. The worker becomes part of the people's institution which was nurtured by her/him. It was an 'enriching', 'rewarding' and 'soul cleansing' experience. It laid the foundation for what I am today, in a true sense. As I was settling down, I had to take up the role of Coordinator of Community Coordinators. After more than a decade, Community Coordinator concept has stood the test of time. In many a project, the grassroots cluster level cutting-edge professional is the Community Coordinator. Her/his induction process, to a large extent, has been adapted from the induction in GCC, where we evolved it over a period of time.

In due course, this pushed me into top management in an organization that engages 2500 staff servicing 25 lakh tribals. Thus, a development professional arrived! Constant search for new ways of doing, dealing with international donors, recruiting professionals, inducting them, nurturing them, managing businesses of the tribals and their produce and so on. We were chewing more than what we could. We were in a hurry. We were into research, frontier research, we were into building people's institutions, we were into restructuring, we were into bringing systems, we were trying computerization, we were offering credit, we were talking conservation, we were building tribal resource persons for tribals, we were kidnapped, we were harassed, we were praised and eulogized. For many of us, we found an inspiration, a sustaining inspiration - Anuradha.

Building Indigenous Trust for Research on Sustainable Technologies (that matter to them - NTFP harvesting, value-addition, quality control, product development, regeneration etc.) at the state level was another effort with a lasting influence to NTFP collectors. Most of this work was voluntary and outside the work frame in GCC.

But it was time to move on. I moved then back to national level as part of the core management team in the Natural Resource-based Common Properties domain. Back to Anand to work with National Tree Growers' Cooperative Federation - NTGCF, now called Foundation for Ecological Security (FES). The

mandate was simple – build shared vision. NDDDB made an exception to allow me to come back to NDDDB network to work in NTGCF. Commons, wasteland development, watersheds, cooperatives and collectives institutions around commons. Those were the key aspects in shared vision. Organizational restructuring/redesign around the shared vision processes was in-built. Building pioneering systems agenda including GIS, computerized office systems etc. – particularly building the natural resource accounting system that takes the ball away from the traditional business agenda to a more sustainable natural resource-based human coexistence was also attempted with reasonable success.

This was the time when Vasanthi was in IRMA. We were staying in IRMA Campus. I recollect, Vasanthi and her parents coming to our quarter after the convocation. Then, she joined Gram Vikas.

After a brief while, on completion of the mandated agenda, I wanted to get back to AP on a permanent basis. Only three organizations could be considered – BASIX, DHAN and OUTREACH. Opted to be with OUTREACH and got wedded to the idea of participation deeply.

It was the time, corporate social responsibility was just around the corner and Naandi Foundation founded by four corporate giants asked me to be their first staff. That gave me opportunity to understand the philanthropic world, donor perspectives etc. ‘Funds’ is an important aspect in development of the poor. When I accepted the responsibility to initiate the programs at Naandi so that NRIs and Corporates could come forward to donate, the key critical concern was how to ensure that the most deserving programs (from the point of view of the poor/community) get highlighted/ showcased so that the fund mobilization could be for them. Building the fellowships for the fellows from the marginalized, for new development professionals etc., the irrigation renewal fund, the revival of lift irrigation projects etc., were evolved because of this concern. Mobilizing grant funds to identify and mentor poor-friendly programs for showcasing, ISO certification, web-based program experiencing and tracking the grants to the last mile etc., were also attempted with some success.

I came to Kakinada at that time to be part of this annual event.

Soon, the largest poverty reduction project of the world, Velugu (now Indira Kranthi Patham) started to take my services and I went on to serve the project as its State Project Adviser – Livelihoods, once again into Government for a while. I was leading the livelihoods agenda – livelihoods - a new wave in development in the making. Could influence towards redesigning the poverty reduction projects to livelihoods-centric projects in Andhra Pradesh, this design becoming the basis for new projects that are coming up within and outside etc. In the process, LEAP Processes framework came to the center-stage. A new cadre of Livelihoods Associates at the cutting-edge level and District level Livelihoods Resource Groups became a reality. Community Livelihoods Resource Persons are there for us to see them helping the poor. The induction process that was evolved is unique and coupled with mentoring, this has become almost like a technology that can be applied.

Gathered more insights into enhancing the livelihoods of the poor. These insights helped to figure out that people’s knowledge-skills-resources have to be synthesized with outside knowledge-skills-resources and the same has to be available to the poor for them to make informed choice(s).

Finally, I have taken the full-time responsibility at Akshara as its Chair and Chief Mentor. We have deliberately chosen the less preferred ‘support’ function. It neither guarantees us to see the ‘spark’ in the eyes of the poor directly nor offers credit for the work on ground. But that is one of the deepest needs of the domain and we are there to meet it in a modest manner in our own way.

Some footprints alongside the pathway

Regulated Market for edible oilseeds/oils across the country; National Oil grid; famous DHARA brand

Methodology to estimate oilseeds/oils production for the country

The concept of Community Coordination Teams led by Community Coordinators

An independent Sahayog Community Coordination Network (CCN) to manage the concept further

A trust by indigenous people for Research on Sustainable Technologies (called Kovel Foundation)

Natural Resource Accounting System for Common Property Resource Regeneration and Utilization

Application of Participatory processes in a variety of contexts

Programmatic Agenda for Community Public Trust

Fellows from the marginalized for the marginalized; Fellowships for new development professionals

Irrigation development/renewal fund

Quality System (ISO 9002) for Development Organization (pioneered); Benchmarked website

Computerization in Development Organizations

Cooperative Development Organization(s) around the commodities of the poor

Competency-based selection process for recruiting the development professionals

Livelihoods Enhancement Action Plan (LEAP) processes and tools to support the community

Cadre of livelihoods associates as the cutting-edge professionals

Village level community livelihoods professionals (CLPs)

Rs.1300 Crore Community Investment Fund

Visioning of 25+ organizations; Livelihoods Support Individuals (10000+)

50+ field partners; an intensive Field Pilot at Pochampally; Livelihoods Support Organizations (10+)

Robust Livelihoods Framework

Critical Livelihoods Orientation in poverty reduction projects, at the design stage itself

Gurukulam - a Development Management School for Enhancing Livelihoods of the Poor (D-School)

Programs in Livelihoods Management (1-year, 2-year, 3-year); 6-month PLM; Weekend PLM; Curriculums finalized and tested. First batches are well-received

6 - 12 weeks management programs for livelihoods professionals

Basic books in livelihoods

A budding campaign for a 1.0 lakh+ livelihoods volunteer force; Livelihoods Life Workers

Chelama Livelihoods Professionals' Collective for solidarity, security, and learning
SAGURWA (an association for alumni, teachers and other associates of AP Residential Schools - representing more than a million alumni from these schools) spreading the message - Pay Back

SAGA that runs Pragna Gurukulams

Challenges in making choices and what has been driving me

- The need and importance of identifying the right people for the development/livelihoods agenda and inducting them
- Sustainability has been underscored in all the efforts and the realization is that we are actually after the sustainability of purpose, rather than the activity, institution or intermediate results
- The classic livelihoods paradoxes - credit, jobs, infrastructure, market etc., and addressing the resultant unhappiness/frustration
- The following aspects have been found to be crucial in livelihoods domain:
 - a. informed choice to the poor (integrating all knowledge-skills-resources);
 - b. working on the four arrows of livelihoods, rather than income alone;
 - c. building on the existing first;
 - d. concentrating on the local markets first (and therefore, market/market access first);
 - e. least cost interventions (like skills, renewal, non-timber forest produce, organizing etc.) first;
 - f. collective ownership of demand and supply;
 - g. best practitioners within and around;
 - h. meta-skills to meet the dynamic changes globally/locally;
 - i. poor/community utilizing the opportunities for them in the economic growth and global integration processes while taking guard against the grave risks they have because of the competitive advantage/disadvantage-based situational realities; and
 - j. Support/service providers at various layers and their networks are important in ensuring the above crucial aspects in the livelihoods domain.
- Thus, livelihoods agenda of the poor, and the frustration, restlessness and dissatisfaction with the current reality of the livelihoods of the poor has been driving me and this drive has been influencing me the way I work and the work I do and so on.

Personal Challenges faced in transforming into a Development Worker

De-learning, learning and keeping pace with change; getting the pulse of the community

Interacting with communities, as you move away from the communities

Realization that you are blind and realization that you are a vehicle or an instrument

Handling Mediocrity and Brightness together and having tolerance for slow 'progress'

Ability to smile when some others take credit

Keeping time sense intact and coping with community's sense of time and timings

Agreeing to deadlines beyond one's ability and cope with the reality as they expire

Differentiating information, knowledge, skills, competencies and wisdom and working accordingly

Career versus Community's progress

Merged Professional and Personal Lives

Days filled with variety in transport, food, activities, people etc., and surprises

Planning and Planning

Mentors and Mentees

Tackling Dilemmas: Need vs. Popularity; Small vs. Big; Action vs. learning vs. participation; Creative vs. Systematic; In-charge vs. Facilitator; People not meeting commitments

Shared Vision, Leadership and Legacy

Life without security, financial and physical and comparisons with other colleagues

Family needs and concerns

Not understood by the parents, family, neighbors, friends, mainstream; Forever a need to explain

No personal time and lost social skills

It is time to spend a minute about Akshara itself.

Akshara Network

1998 -reinforced realization that professionalism was still the critical gap in the development sector. There were not many support organizations. In response, on 2 October 1998, five of us got together to found Akshara and signed the articles.

Akshara grew up - slowly but surely. It took six months for it to get registered (17 March 1999). We took a year, thereafter, to open a bank account. Most of us were giving time as volunteers while in our regular jobs. One paid staff used to take care of all and sundry. Small activities/ tasks in the nature of providing professional support to development organizations were taken up initially. Gradually, activities/assignments that made a difference have flowed through Akshara.

Personally, I moved from Outreach to Naandi to Velugu. Being known as 'Livelihoods Person', finally in January 2004, I have taken full-time charge of Akshara as its Chief Mentor. Gradually, Akshara gained recognition as 'The Livelihoods People' and emerged as the leading Livelihoods Thought Leader. Apart from consulting, most of its ideas took the form of initiatives. And some of them could take off as independent entities. Akshara-Gurukulam could successfully develop the curriculum for its unique long-term Programs in Livelihoods Management and test some of them. Akshara Livelihoods Private Limited is beginning to spearhead the livelihoods consulting support activities.

Akshara Sakthi, an independent livelihoods volunteer force with more than 2000 volunteers from various walks of life, has begun a slow-spreading campaign soliciting 'time' from people for the poor in whatever way they can. Chelama Livelihoods Professionals' Collective emerged as a MACS of the professionals to meet their security, solidarity and learning needs. Akshara Jobs has just been launched to help the youth to be engaged in productive jobs. Community Livelihoods Facilitators' Forum, an informal collective of the grassroots livelihoods workers, is being built as a pool of resource persons for livelihoods support. Most of the Livelihoods Support Organizations facilitated/inspired are moving towards their self-reliance to begin with and then growth.

Our widely appreciated newsletter has prompted us to launch a self-supporting livelihoods public print/e-magazine ['livelihoods' (English) and 'Jeevanopdhulu' (Telugu) - generic livelihoods magazines, first time ever in India]. Livelihoods Orientation Campaigns and Livelihoods Yatras have begun to disseminate Livelihoods Thought widely. Livelihoods books are on the anvil. Still the book on livelihoods (by me and Bhargava; courtesy: SERP, 2002) is the most read livelihoods book in AP.

More than 100 partners, clients and collaborators [CBOs, NGOs, Networks, Government Projects, LSOs] and a field station at Bhoodan Pochampally provide the platform for praxis. A collective (producers' company or a MACS) is being facilitated there. We are now gearing up for an independent unit (a trust/foundation) for field activities.

Akshara itself is transforming to be a true network of these independent units, LSOs and the partners. With mentoring as its main activity, Livelihoods Life Workers and Volunteer Mentors drive the network and the units become autonomous and take over its various other activities fully. Many alumni of Akshara have taken the entrepreneurial path and serving the purpose of Akshara in their own ways. Akshara acknowledges their contribution as alumni and feels proud.

Akshara's turnovers were modest but its core associates' volunteer time was significant - for ex. in 2006-7, the turnover was Rs.3.5 million as against the volunteer time of core associates was 1000 person-days of Rs.5 million in value. Collectively, we could delve into eco-fragile, marginalized, tribal, rural and urban areas, with significant insights into a variety of livelihoods enhancement processes including micro-finance and micro-enterprise promotion, collectives, visioning, planning, projects (design, management, monitoring and learning) and learning processes/ programs.

Akshara is on top of the mind when some body looks for livelihoods Is (ideas, initiatives, interventions, individuals and institutions) and Ls (life, livelihoods, learning, love and leadership). Our initiatives focus on meeting the need for Livelihoods Support Individuals, Organizations and platforms at various levels, in addition to supporting various players in the livelihoods domain.

Its outreach of influence is 20+ million poor families and 100+ organizations. Akshara and its associates have inducted 10000+ individuals into livelihoods thought and practice, facilitated LEAPs in 100+ sites and explored 25+ value-chains and subsectors, supported with visioning of 25+ organizations, and project design of poverty reduction/livelihoods projects with a total outlay - Rs.10000+ crore.

Identifying, inducting and building competent mentors who in turn mentor the anchors/leads of the LSOs (and the teams in LSOs) in particular and the professionals - LSIs - working in the larger domain of livelihoods of the poor in general, is the key part of its game plan.

In the end

I believe, if all this works, the poor move into prosperity, knowing how to analyze their situation, identify gaps and opportunities and acquire skills to tap them. Adequate quality reliable and affordable quality support will flow from livelihoods support individuals, livelihoods support organizations and other service providers that service them, their organizations and the organizations that work for them. The interventions cutting across the contexts, the capitals and the arrows that meet their higher order needs, beyond physiological, security and social needs.

In the process, development profession graduates into a mainstream preferred profession.