

# Making of a model village through Community Based Development: a case of Ontimamidipally village, Telangana

Dr. Sonal Mobar Roy,  
Assistant Professor,

National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Hyderabad, India

## Abstract

According to Census 2011, there are around 649,481 villages in India and almost all of them are in dire need of growth accelerators. With distraught conditions, including poverty, the people in rural areas struggle for the basic amenities and are overly dependent on government interventions. However, there is a village in Telangana, named Ontimamidipally, wherein the community has identified the gap areas and has come forward with certain actions that have helped the village deal with abject poverty and scarcity of resources. In this paper, the author discusses the cases wherein a school was re-opened by the community people and is now at par with the neighboring Private Schools. Another initiative taken by the farmers who were facing the problem of low yields and poor sale of products was to take-up organic farming and reap good results. Lastly, to overcome the problem of water scarcity, the people in the village, through crowd sourcing, de-silted a tank and resolved the water scarcity problem. Riding high on social capital, the people in the village have been able to over-ride the bottlenecks and have successfully emerge as a growth model. The author discusses the various enablers and bottlenecks in detail in the paper.

**Keywords:** *Community Based Development, Rural, Model Village, Organic Farming*

## Introduction

According to Census 2011, there are around 649,481 villages in India and almost all of them are in dire need of growth accelerators. With distraught conditions, including poverty, the people in rural areas struggle for the basic amenities and are overly dependent on government interventions. Developing human resources in the country is the need of the hour and education has emerged as a key instrument for the same. Be it the sectors of health or education, the development discourse covers almost all dimensions under the sun. In this paper, the author describes evolution of a village through community mobilisation and overcoming challenges that proved to be hurdles on the road to development.

In the words of Chambers (1987), “*Rural development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. It involves helping the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas to demand and control more of the benefits of the rural development. The group also includes small scale farmers, tenants and the landless.*” When we talk about Community Development, we focus on turning the tables-the onus of control and accountability- from that in the

hands of government to that of the hands of community. The community development programme initiated in the year 1952 made an attempt to increase involvement of rural people in the process of development. It laid emphasis on building of infrastructure in rural areas with the active involvement of people through organizational set up of National Extension Services. However, currently the whole focus of rural development programs is on poverty alleviation, better livelihood opportunities, provision of basic amenities and infrastructure facilities through innovative programmes of wage and self-employment. These goals can only be achieved when there is support pouring in from the community, the final stakeholders. The Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj is responsible for the implementation of various rural welfare schemes and also assists Panchayat Raj Institutions to discharge their duties and functions as effective Local Self-Government entities. But the role played by the communities cannot be undermined.

There are certain prerequisites for community development to be successful:

1. Commonality of interest is pre-emptive.
2. The input of costs should be equally or proportionally be shared by all in the community and the benefits drawn should outweigh the cost incurred.

There should be a rigorous framework to guide and control the processes involved. Appropriate measures should be taken for resolving conflicts because if once the crisis escalates, it leads to collapsing of the whole plan.

In this paper, the author describes the case of Ontimamidipally village of Telangana. Ontimamidipally is located in Warangal district and is about 140 kms from the State capital of Hyderabad. It is situated in Inavolu Mandal in Warangal district of Telangana State and is supported by an NGO, Bala Vikasa. According to the Gram Panchayat office data, the village has about 350 households. The male to female gender ratio is a little lopsided with the village having more males than females. The main subsistence of the people depends on the locally available water resources such as wells, ponds and bore-wells for cultivation. The people mainly speak Telugu.

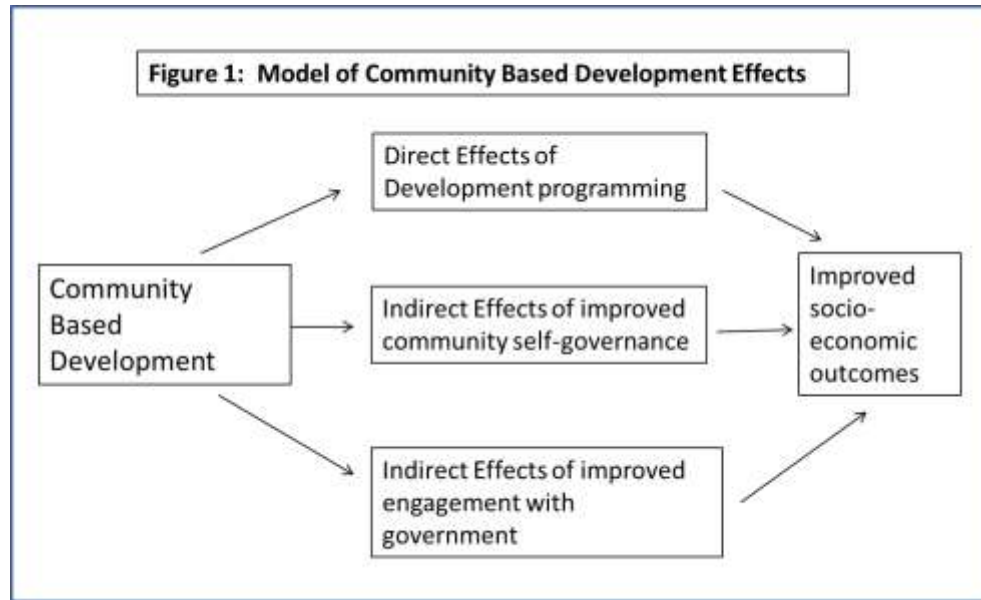
### **Community Mobilization**

Community based development is basically an approach to implementing local development projects that advocate for community participation in decision-making and management, with a goal of using local knowledge and resources to run more effective projects. The Community-Driven Development (CDD) programs operate on the principles of transparency, participation, local empowerment, demand-responsiveness, greater downward accountability and enhanced local capacity. As per Baldwin et.al. (2016), "Community Based Development (CBD) programs typically include both resources to improve local public goods as well as activities to engage and empower local citizens, with an aim to giving citizens voice and control over how resources are spent."

Once the community is able to identify the priorities and is able to address local problems, they are able to plan accordingly. All they need is transparency in rules and standard operating procedures and smooth access to information. They can then effectively organize the roadmaps for development. An arc of the above mentioned approaches that has recently pushed through the discourse is that of Community – Driven Development (CDD). It

can be seen that the CBD and CDD are among the fastest growing mechanisms for channeling development assistance.

Local collective action is the key to success of any project. Moreover, strong leadership skills, civic norms and institutions along with government investment and non-governmental hand holding result in catalyzing the process of development.



Source: Baldwin et. al. (2016)

### Snippet One

Education is not only a mechanism of enhancing efficiency, but is also an effective tool of broadening and augmenting democratic participation and upgrading the overall quality of an individual and the society at large. The State of Telangana emerged as a separate State in 2014 and has treaded on the path of development at a stupendous rate. While the State of Telangana is making fast strides towards overall growth and development, education emerges as one of the key factors for its success.

The literacy rate of Telangana State is 66.54 per cent in 2011 as against 58 per cent in 2001, whereas that of the district is 47.9 per cent, as reported in Census 2011. During the past decade, when poverty and its aftermaths hit hard the people of Ontimamidipally, the community people came together to identify the causes and resolve them. They sought mentorship from Bala Vikasa team, an NGO working in the area. It came to light that the local government school was not performing to the mark. Similar to the state of government schools, this school also suffered from disadvantages such as lack of minimum infrastructure, inadequate teachers and poor sanitary conditions that keep the children away from schools. It was seen that in the past few years, the government schools were closing down one by one due to low strength and poor infrastructure. To take advantage of this grim situation, some private schools started attracting the masses through colorful campaign flyers, multistoried buildings, children in uniform attires of a tie, belt, shoes, school buses, etc., thus casting a shadow on government schools.

Hence, with a consensus in the community, it was decided to re-open a government school which had been shut down from 2011-2015 due to poor infrastructure, lack of teachings staff and apparently a high drop-out rate of students. One reason was that the school did not offer English as a medium of instruction. English is considered as a pre-requisite for most white-collar jobs in India. The people thought that the school was not meeting the needs of students as it was unable to give the cutting edge over other students who had the opportunity of availing education in English medium. This resulted in people sending their wards to other schools, which were at a considerable distance. Apart from that, there were gender concerns. For girl students, safety was a concern which in turn led to them staying back at home rather than taking the risk to reach schools. Also, the other schools available had a high cost of education which again was a deterrent for many people of the village but since the main attraction for the people was the medium of English, they were ready to go to any extent. The people who were really keen to send their wards to such English medium elite schools were ready to mortgage their lands, sell their property, and borrow large funds at a high interest rate. The situation seemed dismal. Hence, a solution was found in crowd-funding. All the villagers contributed ₹ 3,000 per household and created a School Development Fund (SDF). They also formed different types of committees to take care of the school activities, such as: **School Management Committee** – 21 Members; **Parents Committee** – 7 members and **Students Committee** – 3 members and delegated roles and responsibilities for timely monitoring. From preparing the School Development Plan and budget, the committees decide on all the important issues that can help the school function in a better manner. Gradually, they increased the intake of staff as the enrolment rates increased. The infrastructure of the school was also improvised like benches; library and dustbins were also contributed from different sources and crowd-funding. Especial interest was taken to develop the soft skills of the students. Moreover, they were motivated to participate in sports and academics at district level competitions too. The local administration also pitched in its support for a smooth running of the re-opened school.

Innovative methods were adopted by the management such as changing of school timings to help the weaker students after regular classes. Writing essays, practicing arithmetic and reading books was practiced almost every day. Comprehensive Continuous Education (CCE) assessment method is used to evaluate the performance of students. Students are made aware of the issues related to the usage of plastic, sanitation and hygiene. Digital mode of teaching was also practiced intermittently to familiarize students with usage of technology. Students are encouraged to address public by practicing speech giving during daily assemblies. Other good practices include students maintaining a diary, teachers writing homework in the daily diary, and the students are expected to get their parents to sign it regularly. There is an inspection by the Parent's Committee whenever they want to and also evaluate the students now and then to check aspects related to understanding and comprehension.

## Snippet Two

Apart from the case of re-opening of a school, the community people identified another issue that had been bothering them for a long time and was affecting their livelihoods. Due to shortage of ground water, their yields were low and thus, their economic condition was deteriorating. Hence, they took resort to the practice of Organic farming which is discussed next.

As is evident, agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy and India ranks second worldwide in farm output. In the past, Green revolution helped the country beat the droughts and come out with agriculture flourishing all over. But on the hindsight, it left the farmers dependent on chemical fertilizers and pesticides and degraded soil fertility and environment. The high usage of modern fertilizers and pesticides for the high production of grains, resulted in negative effects like reduction in productivity and deterioration in the quality of natural resources. This resulted in looking out for an alternative system that could lead to win-win situation for both farmers and the eco-system. The solution was found in traditional methods of farming which is purely organic in nature and is best for reducing adverse effects caused by chemical inputs.

According to the Bureau of Indian Standards-2016, "*Organic agriculture is a system of farm design and management to create an ecosystem, which can achieve sustainable productivity without the use of synthetic external inputs such as chemical fertilisers, pesticides and synthetic hormones*". Organic farming is rapidly growing across the globe. After a tumultuous use of pesticides and fertilizers, people have come to realize the harm that was done in the long run. Organic farming refers to agricultural production systems reliant on green manure, compost and biological pest control and crop rotation to produce crops, livestock and poultry. It is dependent on developing ecological biodiversity, and ensuring meaningful maintenance and improvement of soil fertility. By all necessary means, organic farming does not allow the use of synthetic chemical fertilisers, antibiotics, herbicides or pesticides.

*"Organic farming is a holistic production management system which promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It emphasises the use of off-farm inputs, taking into account that regional conditions require locally adapted systems. This is accomplished by using wherever possible, agronomic, biological, and mechanical methods as opposed to using synthetic materials, to fulfill any specific function within the system." (FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, 1999).*

It is known that there are various advantages of organic farming that include maintaining environmental health by reducing the level of pollution, improving soil health, ensuring optimum utilization of natural resources for short-term benefit and helps in conserving them for the future generation. Not only does it improve granulation of soil, good aeration, easy root penetration but also reduces erosion.

In Ontimamidipally, it was seen that 15 farmers started organic farming with 0.5 acres of land per person by seed production in the village and within six months, they had started paddy cultivation in one acre of land per person.

They formed six groups, including both males and females. Farmers were encouraged to take up organic certification and were facilitated with forward and backward linkages in sustaining and expanding organic farming. Gradually, the yields improved and more people joined in using this method of farming. Now, they collectively make the fertilizers and distribute amongst themselves.

The community people came together to prepare organic manures on their own such as ghana, dhraavajeevamurtham, gajaamrutham, and bio-pesticides like peda mutra dravanam, with leaf extracts of neem, ipomoea, vitex, custard apple, pongamia, as well as a growth promoter called panchagavya. Ghana Jeeva Amrutham is one of the organic manures used commonly in the village. And is made of cattle shed wastes/dung, unsprayed soil, pulse flour, neem paste, jaggery and animal urine. Once it is mixed properly, it is used in the field at regular intervals. By using both, Ghana jeeva amrutham and Neemastram, the farmers have reduced their input costs and increased their profits. The farmers are now able to produce a variety of crop like paddy, turmeric, cotton, maize, chilli, nuts and vegetables (tomato, okra, cluster beans and chickpea).

### Snippet Three

Telangana lies in Deccan Plateau which is at +110.00 metre level above the Godavari river flow and is geographically located in a semi-arid area. The State receives an annual rainfall of 700mm to 800mm, and 65 per cent of the population depends on agriculture. Over 85 per cent of the farmers belong to the small and marginal category with an average landholding size of 1.11 ha. And mainly depend on rain-fed agriculture. They are dependent on various irrigation sources like minor irrigation ponds, bore-wells and dams among all these. Minor tanks have played an important role here. In Telangana, there is a chain of tank systems, wherein the surplus water from the upstream tank flows to downstream tanks in the chain. Irrigation tanks are one of the major water and common property resources in India, especially in the southern part. There are frequent droughts leaving the farmers dismal, who mainly depend on surface and groundwater for their irrigation needs. Thus, old irrigation tanks emerge as crucial sources of water for such farmers. However, the silt deposits at the bottom of the tanks through the years significantly reduces the storage capacity of these tanks, while preventing the recharge of groundwater tables. This hds affected food production as well as the environment, and the issue needed redressal.

In order to tackle the situation in an effective manner, Bala Vikasa initiated a community-centered tank de-siltation activity in the late 1990s using modern machinery to connect communities with traditional practices of fixing soil fertility. The farmers were asked to procure required tractors at their own cost and transport the silt to their own farms. To encourage the active participation of the farmers, Bala Vikasa provided free excavation machines. In this village, there is an irrigation tank called “*Ellamma Cheruvu*” for water supply. The tank depends only on rainwater, as there is no other source of water. Every year, the tank is filled with rainwater during the rainy season, usually during the months of June to August. Farmers would cultivate their fields with this tank water, but after successive years of usage, the tank got silted and farmers faced severe problems of water scarcity with the drying up of

groundwater and bore wells. They were forced to cultivate only one crop per year that too, only during the rainy season. The village has a separate five-member committee for the field channel, including two tractor owners and four farmers. There is another committee called “*Ayyacuttu Sangham*” for maintaining the irrigation tank. Supplying water to the fields from the tank and repairing the feeder channels is the main duty of the Sangham. All those farmers who benefited from the field channel pay four bags of paddy per acre of land. Currently, 100 acres of land is being irrigated by *Ellamma Cheruvu*. This is the first step to carve their success for integrated watershed development in the village. When the situation aggravated, the villagers approached Bala Vikasa for help. The excavated silt, an organic nutrient-rich soil, known for its manure like the capability to optimise crop production, is transported to farmers’ fields. This has resulted in preserving the environment and maintaining ecological balance.

### **Role of Bala Vikas**

Looking at the works done by Bala Vikasa in neighboring villages and especially in Warangal, the people of Ontimamidipally approached the NGO to help them overcome the issues related to development of the village. Bala Vikasa’s team took stock of the situation and motivated the villagers to start a school in their own village which they could monitor, further facilitating quality education to their wards at a lesser cost. Through various rounds of discussions, the people in the village realized that they could come together and mobilize the functioning of the school. The Gram Sabha passed a resolution wherein it was decided not to send their children to private schools up to 7<sup>th</sup> class. As a result, the school was reopened and also upgraded to 9<sup>th</sup> class. It happened to be the first English medium government school from nursery to 9<sup>th</sup> class in the district. As a result of this unity and Bala Vikasa facilitation, currently 400 children joined the government school not just from Ontimamidipally, but also from the neighboring villages. The opening of the school was celebrated as a festival. Moreover, through support drawn from Bala Vikasa, the agricultural sector improved manifold by usage of silt from the tank that was de-silted and also by usage of organic farming practices. The whole process received constant hand-holding by Bala Vikasa. The de-siltation of the tank has brought about an increase in agricultural production through improving groundwater recharge and consequently improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of the rural people. The problem of low yields was also taken care of by the interventions of Bala Vikasa team.

### **Impact of Community Mobilization**

There are two pillars of community mobilization: *Solidarity* and *Reciprocity*. One is incomplete without another and the two together are the key to success of any intervention planned. The people of Ontimamidipally have shown presence of a strong social capital that exists with them. They have displayed shared responsibility and cooperation and fruitful outcomes of their collective actions. Be it the issue of re-opening of a school and bring it at par with a neighboring private school, practicing organic farming, or de-silting a tank and increasing the fertility of the soil, the community has proved collective action and crowdsourcing at its best. The villagers have been able to save their expenditure on private schools. Their children are receiving good-quality education at a low cost. The students are exposed to State-level educational and sports competitions. The school has been upgraded to a high school and it

attracts special interest from the government. Appreciating the unity and efforts of the villagers and Bala Vikasa, the Deputy Chief Minister of the State, sanctioned an English medium school with seven teachers and four additional rooms. This school has become a model school that can inspire other villagers in Telangana to make their Government schools useful and effective.

Through organic farming, farmers are able to increase productivity as well as their incomes. As organic farming uses organic manures which cost less as compared with the modern fertilizers and pesticides, the cost of cultivation incurred by the farmers reduced by a great margin. Organic manure is produced using locally-available resources. Due to the reduction in the cost of cultivation, an increase in productivity and the premium price for their organic products, the farmers are able to increase their net profits. Increase in productivity proved that soil fertility has been increased and there is no secondary pollution as a result of this method. Though the people were initially resistant in adopting organic farming methods, after a pilot test, they agreed to expand it in their farms. Attitudinal change and risk-taking were key indicators in this exercise. Though the economic returns were slow and acted as a dampener, over a period of time, high productivity with better market opportunities made the farmers quite confident. The farmers are now linked to e-commerce platforms like Big Basket, and have realized that crops grown through organic farming methods yield higher prices. De-siltation of *Ellamma Cheruvu* (irrigation tank) has had farmers benefited in two ways. One, they had sufficient water for cultivating two crops per year (kharif and rabi), and the other is that the excavated soil is deposited in their fields resulting in high yields per hectare.

### **Conclusion**

Improving accountability among all the stakeholders is a must. Rising educational levels have led to an improvement in skills, particularly amongst females (from 32.1 per cent in 1993-94, to 53.3 per cent in 2009-10) in India. As Drèze & Sen (2002) remark that the approach is essentially a ‘people-centered’ approach, which puts human agency (rather than organizations such as markets or governments) at the centre of the stage. They stress on the factor of freedom and concern themselves with social opportunities that are influenced by social circumstances. Through positive interventions, collective action and crowd sourcing, it is evident that problem can be overcome. It is suggested here that social capital needs to be harnessed at micro levels so that all the stakeholders are on the same page and share the idea *in toto*. Good leadership along with participation of community is equally important. The same has been proved in the case of Ontimamidipally that has taken leaps on the road to development and is on the way of progress. It is very much evident that community based development does empower citizens to achieve better socio-economic outcomes.

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